

TECH[NOCULTURE

Podcast preservation

Episode 21

Full transcript

Guest: Mary Kidd [Mary]

Host: Federica Bressan [Federica]

[Federica]: Welcome to a new episode of Technoculture. I'm your host, Federica Bressan, and today my guest is Mary Kidd, who works as the Systems and Operations Coordinator at the New York Public Library and who has previously worked in digital audio preservation at New York Public Radio. Welcome, Mary.

[Mary]: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[Federica]: This will be a bit of a special episode because we talk about podcasts, so it's a podcast episode about podcasts, and in particular about a specific aspect of podcasts, and that is their preservation, so something that is not often discussed because podcasts are still relatively new, and because they are out there now and still growing as a phenomenon. The Apple Podcasts platform alone — this is a figure from last year — provided access to over 400,000 shows in over 100 languages. What happens to this wealth of data, which ultimately is voices, it's stories of people and communities around the world? What happens in 2, 5, or 10 years down the road? As a podcaster, like many others, I admit that most of my energies now go into the production of the podcast, in putting each episode out there every week or other week and reaching as many people as possible. Not much energy is devoted, not much action, to preserving the podcast 4, 2, 5, and 10 years in the future, but this is precisely the concern of a grant funding from the Andrew Mellon Foundation to the Metropolitan New York Library Council that deals with the preservation of podcasts and in which Mary is involved. So can you tell us a bit more about this project about preserving podcasts?

[Mary]: So the idea was conceived by myself, Molly Schwartz and Dana Gerber-Margie a

couple of years ago. We were all kind of working in the audio preservation field, and Molly was getting especially interested in producing a podcast about kind of the world of librarianship and libraries in New York City, and she also worked on a podcast called Library Bytegeist, which I highly recommend you listen to if you ever want to learn or hear about libraries and archives in New York City. So she approached me at a conference and heard about my work with the XFR Collective — and just a little bit about that: The XFR Collective is a nonprofit organization that partners with artists, activists, individuals to basically provide a low-cost transfer service (and by “transfer”, I mean transferring things from audio into digital format). So I was working with them as a volunteer outside of my day job, and Dana was working at the Wisconsin Historical Society doing analog-to-digital tape transfers. And we all kind of got together, and we saw a lot of parallels between podcasts, which, you know, we can all kind of agree that podcasts are kind of going through this explosion. There’s just podcasts about everything, and everyone seems to be making a podcast, which is great, and we saw a parallel between that and kind of older formats that we had encountered in our jobs. So what comes to mind is the VHS tape. So at one point, you know, in the ‘80s and ‘90s, people were making videos of their families using VHS recorders and, you know, not really thinking too much about whether or not they would keep for the long term. You know, you were just a mom, or a dad, or brother, or sister, and you were recording whatever you were seeing, and that was kind of that. But now, it’s the 2000s, and we’re seeing that tapes are degrading, they’re losing content, and that is kind of in part of the nature of the physicality of the tape, but also just because you know, people haven’t considered these things to be very important, or they’re kind of mundane materials or whatever, but now people are saying, “Hey, this is a video of, you know, my loved one,” or, “I captured something that was really exciting that I didn’t realize was very exciting.” And so that’s the parallel that we made between things like VHS and podcasts. You know, podcasts are everywhere and they’re capturing what we think is a very important kind of cultural phenomenon, and they’re being made by people with very little money and very little resources, but in that sense, it makes the podcast very special because they’re being made outside of, you know, traditional institutions. So to me, they’re capturing kind of a lot of nuances about our culture, about humankind all around the world, but kind of the, you know, horrible part about that is that, you know, they’re being made as digital files. And if you look at kind of early podcasts, you know, podcasts started coming out, becoming popular, in the early 2000s, you’ll see that a lot of the early podcasts that came out, a lot of them cannot be found, and that’s something that we go through in, you know, first couple episodes of our podcast that we’re releasing in March. We looked at what is called a core sample of podcasts, so this guy, Jason Scott, who works for the Internet Archive, he took a core sample of podcasts in 2005 and made that available on the Internet Archive, and so Sarah and Molly took that core sample and started comparing what was in that core sample and trying to find whether or not they could, you know, find those episodes online. And they were finding that it was very hard to find early episodes of podcasts.

[Federica]: What makes podcasts a unique type of material to preserve? I ask because audio preservation is an established field, be it digitization, analog to digital, or digital preservation, retrieval, archiving, metadata, all of that is an established field, and podcasts are mostly audio, although there are some video podcasts, so why do they require special attention now? Is it about preserving the media files (that is, the audio) or aspects of the chain of distribution that occurs, especially through this RSS feed, which we are going to explain later, this snippet of code that carries some core metadata and that kind of links the listener to the media file that is hosted somewhere in some platform? So it is about the media files or parts of this chain of distribution.

[Mary]: Now, that's a really good question, and I would say all aspects that you just mentioned. So the actual file format. So most podcasts are either an MP3 or WAV file or some other audio file. And then, you know, the RSS feed and kind of everything that goes into a podcast, whether that's a transcription or, you know, an image that you submitted alongside your upload to an RSS feed, all of those things are kind of at risk, and the thing that's interesting about podcasts is, because they're in what I call a born-digital medium. . . So, you know, they didn't start off as tape; they're born as digital files. And there's this notion that things that are digital, you know, they'll stick around longer than a tape, so that's kind of a common misconception that people have is, because it's here today it's going to be here forever. And as an archivist, you know, it's hard for me to embrace that notion, because a lot of people thought that about, you know, things like the cassette tape or the VHS tape, or even, you know, early digital works like, you know, software and things on floppy disks and so forth. Everything has kind of a lifespan, and whether or not, you know, the MP3 is going to stick around forever, that's something that I wish I could say would be true. I wish I could look into a crystal ball and tell you that that's true, but, you know, it very well could shift. The tides of technology and popular formats can shift, and that, I think, is the greatest threat to podcasts. But also, I just think people, you know, they have these files and they tend to think, "Oh, if I put this up on, you know, a hosting platform or if I tuck this away in my Google Drive or if I put this on my hard drive, it's going to be safe," but everyone also knows and probably has a, you know, a compelling story to tell about, you know, a hard drive failing or, you know, a platform suddenly disappearing because they're not economically viable, or getting shut out of their Google Drive. So there is kind of the greater threat is, is really just digital platforms and how, once you kind of put your file up on a digital platform, it kind of becomes less yours and is more owned by that platform, and anything that happens to that platform will happen to those files, so that's kind of where we're coming from.

[Federica]: I assume that people who are listening to our voices right now know what a podcast is because they're listening to one, but regardless of the app or other service that they are using to listen to the podcast, they might not be all familiar with this RSS feed we just mentioned. This is this snippet of code that in fact you don't see. It's not that that you

manipulate. So it's a hidden element of the chain of distribution that, if broken, compromises your ability to get to the podcast you want to listen to. So, can you explain a bit better how this RSS feed works, what it is, what about its longevity, and what are the consequences if it breaks? Of course, so to speak, the code doesn't break, but what if it's not available anymore, if it disappears?

[Mary]: Now, that's a really good question, and it's a really good thing to start thinking about, especially if you're making podcasts and thinking about preservation. So RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication, and it's a type of web feed and serves as kind of the distribution backbone for all podcasts, and it's written in Extensible Markup Language or XML. If you've ever seen XML language, it's less kind of like a programming language and more of a way to structure data. So if you look at an XML file, it kind of looks like HTML, where you have kind of these opening and closing tags, and in structuring data, whatever is interfacing with that XML file (in this case, you know, an RSS feed), it knows where to look for data. So basically what an RSS feed does is it tells you, the user, what is the newest piece of content. Right? So if you are using an RSS feed and you are interested in reading blogs every day, the RSS feed tells you, "Hey, this person that you followed just posted something new." And similar for podcasts, it also kind of understands what you listen to, you subscribe to certain things on an RSS feed, and based on what you subscribe to, it tells you, "Hey, here's a new podcast that was posted by this person that you follow." So that's basically what an RSS feed is, it allows the user a way to understand what is newest [unclear 00:12:40] the content that they subscribe to.

[Federica]: So what happens if something goes wrong with the RSS feed? Maybe the audio media still exists, and it's even online; you just can't get to it. You can't get to it through the apps you've been using so far. I mean, what are the consequences of problems with the RSS feed?

[Mary]: I think what's interesting about RSS feeds is, they're kind of a contextual expression of podcasts, meaning the podcast itself is an audio file, so it's probably an MP3, and so if you preserve the MP3 and you preserve the integrity of the file of an MP3, you know, you've preserved that, obviously, and that kind of lives alongside the RSS feed. But if something were to happen to the RSS feed... Let's say... I mentioned before that the RSS feed is written in XML, and let's say XML goes out of favour and it gets replaced by some other sort of structured data language, like JSON has been suggested as something that may one day replace XML or be favoured over XML. Then you'll be losing not the file — if you preserve the file, it's fine — but you will be losing kind of the contextual information of the podcast as it was released and subscribed to by people, so you'd lose kind of what I would call contextual metadata about that file, and how it was consumed, and when it came out, so you would lose something, but as long as you kept the actual file preserved, you wouldn't lose it all.

[Federica]: So this grant funding from the Andrew Mellon Foundation contributes to finding new ways to preserve podcasts. It's a two-years project. When did it start, and do you know if this is actually the first project that deals with the preservation of podcasts in particular?

[Mary]: So the project started in February 2018, so just about a year ago, and it will end in January of 2020. Whether this is the first of its kind...I would say it's one of the first. I will say that there is another project called PodcastRE, and you can visit their website at podcastre.org. And this is a website where someone who, if they have a podcast or know about a podcast, they can essentially upload podcasts to this website, and then it will essentially take the metadata and keep it in this sort of archive of podcasts. So I'm just going to literally read from the website just to make sure that I'm not misrepresenting this project. So it says: "Our search engine lets you search by show title, episode title, or keyword and display the results by grid or list," and, let's see, it "allows the general public and researchers to search and research hundreds of thousands of podcast episodes. All users can freely search the database, analyze the metadata and stream audio provided the original feed is still available online." So that's interesting that, you know, the original feed has to still be available. So it's kind of a research project as much as it is kind of an archiving project. It was started by Jeremy Morris at the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and he works with a variety of people on his team, but that's a project that comes into mind that is also looking at podcasts and kind of trying to centralize podcast metadata into one space so that researchers and other people interested in researching podcasts, they can go here and do that research and analyze data there.

[Federica]: If I understand correctly, unlike this project that builds an archive of podcasts, what your project does is to build and share knowledge on how to preserve podcasts so that podcasters themselves can get active and do it. Is that correct? And besides the knowledge, do you also provide services, for example, tools, to help us do it?

[Mary]: Well, this kind of ties back to your previous question about whether or not there are other projects that address podcast preservation. No, there are not a lot of podcast preservation projects that have been or are out there, but this is kind of a branch off of a more general sort of effort in the archives and preservation community to teach specific communities how to safekeep and preserve their personal files. So you'll see a lot of talk in the archives field specifically about community archiving, and that really is an effort to reach out to a specific community and say, you know, "Hey, we recognize that you are making something that is not being collected actively by a large institution. You know, not everything in the world will be collected by a place like the New York Public Library or the Library of Congress or whoever, but we still think that this stuff that you were making is worth preserving for the long term." So then we have to ask: "What are your specific needs? What are the things that are going to

be your greatest challenge in, you know, establishing a preservation plan for yourself?” And these needs differ from one user base to another. So a podcaster is going to have very different needs from someone who, say, is making video games or someone who is making music. There’s obviously a lot of overlap between, you know, anyone creating, you know, digital files, but I think it’s very important to have projects that speak specifically to very kind of narrow slices of the community, because I think kind of the way that this works is, community feels heard, and if they feel like their kind of needs are being met and being listened to, they will more likely respond with wanting to kind of take action and want to put a plan in place. So that’s kind of where we’re coming at with this project is this effort to really hyperfocus on podcasters and understand what their needs are and then teach them not only that there is a need for them to put a preservation plan in place, but then to teach them skills and about tools and techniques to, you know, put together a preservation plan that works for them.

[Federica]: Can you already give some example of these tools and techniques, or because the project has one year to go, it’s still kind of a work in progress?

[Mary]: Yep, so we have three main deliverables for this grant-funded project. The first and kind of foremost is the podcast that we are releasing in March, and this podcast will be a miniseries, meaning it’s five parts, and it will kind of go into the history of podcast technology and talk about the problem of, you know, disappearing podcasts and kind of, you know, speak in the language of the podcaster to convey the importance of why a preservation plan is necessary for podcaster.

[Federica]: Wait, so this is a podcast episode where we are talking about the release of a new podcast series on podcasts?

[Mary]: I know. It’s [unclear 00:20:43] meta and I don’t know if there’s another word to describe meta meta, but that’s basically what just happened here.

[Federica]: Sorry for interrupting.

[Mary]: No, it’s fine! It’s fine, and it’s great, because we actually, we joke about that too, my team and I. We talk about how our podcast is a meta podcast. So we have a podcast that’s coming out, and what lives alongside the podcast is what we’re calling an educational zine. So a zine is essentially. . . Are you familiar with what a zine is or have encountered zines?

[Federica]: I’m afraid not.

[Mary]: Yes, so I always like to ask because not everyone is familiar with what a zine is. So essentially a zine comes out of, I would say, a specific kind of movement in the early ‘90s, or at

least when I encountered zines in my youth — that’s when I encountered them was in the early ‘90s — they came out of sort of punk communities and the riot grrrl community, and they were a way for people to create little booklets, and they would fashion them into, you know, kind of independent of big publishers. You know, they were made using a photocopier machine and staples, and they’re very kind of handmade and sort of homegrown, and, you know, you would see them at shows or your friends would hand them out to you, and they were kind of this way to distribute knowledge and information sort of independent of kind of the greater system of publishing. And zines have kind of now become a little more popular, and you’ll see that a lot of libraries and archives have started collecting zines. They’re kind of seen as part of this greater historical movement. And what’s great about zines is, they’re a great teaching tool. I started to make some zines when I was, you know, involved with the XFR Collective. I made some zines to help convey information about what we were doing and how to work a transfer rack and explain the technology, and they’re very well received, and so I, as part of this project, illustrated the educational zine that will kind of go along with the podcast that people listen to. And the zine is structured around a curriculum to teach people about what preservation is and what a preservation plan might look like and kind of offers resources and tools to whoever is reading it. So that’s what the zine is in this project. There’s a paper copy which I should send to you in the mail, Federica, because I think, you know, you should check it out and look at it, but it’s also available freely online. So if you go to preservethispodcast.org, the online version of the zine is there, can be found there.

[Federica]: Cool, be more than happy to receive a copy of the zine. How do the zine and the podcast complement each other in this project?

[Mary]: So the zine is a little more, I would say practical and hands-on. So the zine has, it’s basically structured in three parts to do with kind of file management. So, looking at the files that you output as a podcaster and then putting an organizational plan in place, because knowing what you have, especially if you’re producing digital files, which, you know, oftentimes we never really take into account how many files we are creating for any given project that we are making, and a lot of people find that, “Whoa, I’m actually creating, you know, 10 or 12 different files every time I make a podcast,” for example, so being able to kind of wrangle that is what we suggest is the first step. And then we talk a little bit about metadata and how that’s important to podcast files, and we also talk about backing up your files using hard drives or cloud services. So that’s what the zine is structured around is kind of these three sort of practical steps that a podcaster can take, and they are stemmed. . . The podcast itself is a little more kind of focused on history and interviewing people about the problem of, you know, podcasts disappearing, but they do complement one another, and I would say, you know, before you dive into the zine, to listen to the podcast when it’s released and then do the exercises via the zine.

[Federica]: You mentioned that the podcast will be released in March.

[Mary]: The podcast will be released in March, so we are having a launch party in March. Let me just bring up the date here. March 21st. It will be at the Metropolitan Library Council, which is at 599 11th Avenue in New York City. We're going to have a lot of great speakers at this launch party, and that will officially mark when the podcast will be released.

[Federica]: Is this podcast only targeted at podcasters, or because you also tell some stories about how podcasts evolved and the technology, how they work, you actually aim to talk to a larger public?

[Mary]: Absolutely. I think there's a lot that really anyone who is creating anything digitally can take away a lot from this project. What comes to mind is musicians, especially musicians who are recording and producing things digitally. I'm thinking of another zine created by a person who used to be my mentor. Her name is Jessica Thompson, and she is an amazing audio restorer, used to work for The Magic Shop, which was a recording studio in New York City, and she took on her own sort of endeavour to teach musicians how to preserve their files. And a lot of what she covers in her zine is very similar to what we cover in the podcast zine. You know, the content is a little bit different, right, so musicians are often, you know, producing an amazing amount of files and they may kind of use different terminology to describe those files, but again, I think they have a lot in common, a podcaster and a musician, and again, you could say this really about anyone, who's creating any sort of digital file, to get organized and to think of a backup plan and to think about metadata, Those are three core concepts that I think if anyone were to kind of consider them and embrace them and put a plan in place, they'd be a lot better off than if they didn't.

[Federica]: Something that I really like about this project is that it gives value to podcasts. It recognizes that they may have a cultural significance today and in the future. This is not obvious, I think, because podcasts are such a democratic format, because it doesn't take much money to set one up, and it can give a voice to so many diverse groups of people, and it has done so, it's what it's doing, and this is its strength. It's amazing, but most podcasts are born outside of institutional environments. Therefore, they're not automatically taken care of, and that's why, with your project, you actually encourage podcasters themselves to take action and preserve their podcasts, but I really like that this project implicitly gives value to podcasts. I would like to ask if giving this attention and this value to podcasts was a no-brainer from the beginning, or this project is also a bit provoking in that it says, "You know, we should pay attention to this lesser format that's out there now," and someone is still skeptical and thinks, "Are podcasts worth preserving?"

[Mary]: Well, you know, that's a really good question that I think especially any person

who identifies as an archivist or worked in the archival field should ask themselves, especially if they're situated within a great institution. So, you know, by day I work at the New York Public Library. The New York Public Library collects an immense amount of materials, you know, spanning a variety of creative outputs and, you know... But even the New York Public Library, with seemingly a huge budget for acquisitions, they're never ever going to be able to collect everything. It's just impossible, and with things now being created in a digital medium by artists and activists and other individuals and groups, there's just no way that any one or few institutions can collect everything. Now, you can argue that a place like the Internet Archive where people can go and upload their files, their audio and video files, for free that that could become kind of the people's archive, if you will, or a digital archive, but again, sometimes I think the risk is less about whether or not an institution will collect your files and whether or not the person or the group that made these files even has kind of a conception that what they are making is important. Now, obviously, it's not an archivist's job to tell people what is important, but often that is the notion that people have is, "Oh, if you're collected, like if New York Public Library collects your work, therefore you are someone important, and you are someone special," but there's a lot that goes into kind of an institutional decision to acquire something, and their priorities and their goals may not align with kind of what someone else thinks is very, very important. So I think kind of laying out the tools for people to make these decisions on their own to say like, "Hey, I don't think I'm ever going to be collected by any major institution, but I think my work is important enough to put this plan in place and make sure that it can be played in 20 or 50 or 100 years," in a way, that's kind of almost a radical idea for someone to have. But again, you know, I think that's kind of where I see a lot of these projects that are sort of community-centered or whatever you want to call them. That's what we're doing is kind of putting the power of deciding that something is important out of the hands of large institutions and into the hands of the creators.

[Federica]: What an interesting shift! Having worked with sound archives for many years, I realized that it is true that, although all audio documents degrade with time, those stored in small to medium archives and archives that store materials of genre or repertoires less on demand, so folk music and research material, field recordings of linguists or anthropologists, those are at high — higher — risk...

[Mary]: Yes.

[Federica]: ...than the documents stored in the very large and institutional archives, like the RAI in Italy or the BBC. I can think of these very large archives. And that somehow corresponds to the paradigm that applies to basically anything that has survived through the centuries that I may express as the stuff of kings and popes.

[Mary]: Yes.

[Federica]: That survives because, of course, because it goes hand in hand with where power is, but in this case the shift is from the institution to the individual, meaning the podcasts that will survive are not necessarily the best and are not those who are born in an institutional environment, but are those of the people who were most proactive. That's interesting.

[Mary]: Yeah.

[Federica]: It is also interesting to observe that it has never been the case that the best things survive. If there is a connection between the value of something, how good it is and its chances for survival, that's definitely just one aspect, one factor, in a way more complex equation. I may have a beautiful podcast, but if I don't take action and preserve it, it may be gone in two years' time. So it's a shift from this determining factor in the survival of something that goes from the institutional where the big money is and already policies in place and this non-standardized world of independent podcast producers, but who are now in charge of the destiny of their own podcast.

[Mary]: Exactly. Yes. It is kind of a prompting of people to reconsider that what they have is at risk and that there are certain things that they can do to safeguard what they're creating. The thing that can be a problem is, you know, putting a preservation plan in place. It does require a certain amount of time, labour, resources, money that, you know, some people don't have time, resources and money, or their time, resources and money are inconsistent. So, for example, someone may put into play, you know, they'll buy cloud storage, they'll buy Dropbox for a year, and every month or every year they have to pay for that Dropbox. And that's fine as long as you're paying for the Dropbox. But let's say one day you lose your job and you're unable to fit that into your personal budget for, you know, personal archiving or personal preservation. Then that may very well put your work at risk once again, so to kind of place the emphasis on the individual to be proactive and take this action, it's kind of a double-edged sword because on one hand, yes, if they have all the time in the world and money in the world to do this, then their stuff has a greater chance of living, you know, for a very long time, but one little thing can kind of throw it all off. So we try to emphasize solutions that are low-barrier, that are cheap, you know, that don't cost a lot of money or any money at all and that have a low impact on people's time and resources. And I think that's another key to a successful preservation plan is to make sure that it's, you know, low-barrier.

[Federica]: Where does the knowledge that is structured and then delivered in this project come from? Did you involve podcasters themselves, or what kind of experts did you involve?

[Mary]: So in the podcast itself, we are focusing on podcasters, so we have four indie podcasters that are involved in our project, so I'll name them. We have Alice Y. Hom, who is an

oral historian who produces a podcast called *Historically Queer*. We have a fellow named Dan Weissmann, who produces a show called *An Arm and a Leg*, which is focusing on, you know, healthcare in the United States. We are also interviewing Amanda McLoughlin, who produces *Spirits and Multitude*, and then Kaytlin Bailey, who produces *The Oldest Profession*, which is a podcast about sex work historically and the state of it today. So they will be involved and featured in the podcast as kind of our test subjects, if you will, in implementing a preservation plan based on the curriculum that is in the zine and as well as in the workshops that we are teaching. So we're asking the four podcasters to do the lessons that are in the educational zine and then give us feedback about, you know, how it went for them. You know, and so, "You've taken the steps now. How did that work out for you? Were you able to do them? Were they too hard? Were they hard to understand?" And so they will be giving feedback to us and feature prominently within the podcast to kind of give an example to those who will be listening to this, and hopefully a lot of the people who are listening to the podcast will be podcasters themselves, you know, they can listen to this and say, "Hey, you know, this person, they make a podcast, they don't have a lot of time and they were able to take these steps and put together a preservation plan." So, you know, that will be a very practical way of us demonstrating that the lessons that we put forth do work.

[Federica]: In the definition that UNESCO gave of preservation of documentary heritage, permanent accessibility is a requirement for any action of preservation. So I wonder if you share this definition in this project, meaning: If I preserve my own media files on a hard disk drive at home, and I'm a good girl and I check the data regularly, chances are then in ten years from now, I am still going to have those data, but that's no good for the community, because only I have them, so when you encourage podcasters to put a preservation plan in action for their own podcasts, do you mean in a shared way, so that in five and ten years from now the podcasts don't just exist but are findable, are available?

[Mary]: Now, that's a great point, especially because podcasts, you know, they're meant to be listened to. They're, you know, distributed widely, and people want as many people listening to their podcast. So one of the things that we recommend is that people consider the Internet Archive as a sort of final resting ground for their podcasts so that if the platforms that they originally hosted their podcasts were to go down, you know, the Internet Archive very likely will still be around, I [truly think 00:39:30] so, and what's great about the Internet Archive is it's free, so you can be anyone anywhere and you can upload your files to the Internet Archive, and that will be a way for future listeners to be able to pop in and listen to your work fairly easily.

[Federica]: Even if this is a New York or an American-based project, I assume that you don't just target American podcasts. Do you think that podcasts around the world, as a format, regardless of the different categories they're in, they are equal enough to be represented

in the knowledge base that you're building in this project, so actually this project will benefit podcasts all over the world, it's not targeted to a specific subgroup?

[Mary]: Yeah, absolutely. I would say the focus, especially for our travels over the next year, we're primarily, actually only traveling, to conferences and workshops in the United States, but for the future — and, you know, this is kind of a future dream of mine is that, you know, our podcast, for example, could be transcribed into different languages and that it could be widely prescribed to people anywhere. Because again, I don't think there will be a huge difference between, you know, someone in the United States and someone in Europe taking these steps. But, you know, you can't always assume that people have steady access to internet or have specific, or certain time, certain resources and money and so forth. So, you know, it would be great to get feedback from international podcast producers, especially those who are working independently, but I think in general the lessons that we're putting forth could be adopted pretty universally across the world.

[Federica]: For those who are listening and may be interested, I don't know how many podcasters among my listeners I have, but if someone has a friend who has a podcast, let's say, anyone who wants to stay in touch learn more, can they go to your website? Is there a newsletter to subscribe to, even if the podcast is not out yet and the zine the same? Is there a way to keep in touch?

[Mary]: Absolutely, yeah. I would encourage anyone listening to this to go to our website. That is preservethispodcast.org. That's all one word, preservethispodcast. And the website has our information, a little bit about the project. It has the zine, so an electronic version of the zine is available online and is free for anyone to read. It also has a list of our events, so if you are based out in the United States and want to attend one of the events that we are hosting, definitely look at our schedule. We're probably, you know, hitting most of the major metropolitan cities in the United States, and hopefully we'll see you there. And another thing that I'll mention about our website that I think would be very interesting to listeners is our third deliverable. So I mentioned our first deliverable is to make a podcast, the second is to make the zine, and the third was to create a survey and have podcasters take this survey. And this survey is basically an attempt for us to collect data about how people preserve their work now, or if they even have a conception of what preservation is, or, you know, or anything like that. And we collected about 550 survey takers, and we are going to publish the survey results shortly, and those survey results will be freely and openly available on our website as well. So I would say, keep checking our website, and you'll see, you know, all kinds of information pop up there in the next year.

[Federica]: I realize now that for the entire conversation I've been wearing my podcaster's hat, but I'm also a podcast listener, and as a listener, I think that I would also be sorry if one

of my favourite programs were not available at some point. So listeners have a stake too. It's not just podcasters, because they care about their own. Actually, listeners sometimes get very attached to some series and even to the podcaster. They become followers. So is there anything that listeners can do to encourage the preservation of podcasts? If not even concretely, can they contribute to the preservation of podcasts?

[Mary]: That's a really, really good question that I have not been asked, but I think it's an important question because most podcasts are listener-supported. What I think is great about podcasts is these really great ways to support what you like to listen to. So what pops into mind is Patreon. That's, you know, a way for people to contribute small amounts of money to the things that they enjoy listening to, and that may be a way for podcasters to, you know, engage with, and, you know, solicit their listeners for resources that can make their podcast, you know, readily available in the future. So I would say to the podcaster: if you're setting up a Patreon (and, you know, sometimes people who have Patreon have kind of different categories of things that you can donate to), so consider setting up a kind of a Patreon category for preservation of your podcast, and maybe, you know, someone listening to it will say, "Hey, yeah, you know, this is important to me [unclear 00:45:22] listen to right now, but maybe down the line I'm going to want to share this with people or I'm going to want to relisten to it again, and, you know, I'll pay you a buck or two a month to do that." So that's one way I think that you can kind of engage your listeners in the active preservation of your work is through a model like that.

[Federica]: I think that involving the listeners in this awareness campaign and asking also them to be active, could be a great thing, because there are only so many podcasters out there but way more listeners, so it's a critical mass of people who have a stake in this and could be involved.

[Mary]: Yeah.

[Federica]: So is there anything else that you would like to share about this project, about the upcoming podcast?

[Mary]: Well, I will ask you a question, Federica, because again, we're talking in a meta way about this podcast, and so I'm wondering, now that you've talked to me and heard a lot about my project, will this prompt you to perhaps read the zine and listen to the podcast in the next couple of months and put together a preservation plan, or do you have a preservation plan in place for your podcast?

[Federica]: Well, of course I'm going to listen to the podcast. I actually look forward to, and when it's out, I will also let my own listeners and my circles know on my own social media. So, secondly, about the preservation plan, if I have one in place. Well, I have been professionally

involved with audio preservation for a while now, so it's always in the back of my mind. It's an issue that I cannot disregard. Am I active? Well, locally, I keep not just the compressed version, but also the high-quality file on my local disk, and I do not keep all the uncut and previous, like working materials. But most importantly, I think that a bottleneck that I have experienced is the hosting platform, because I depend on the hosting platform. I have to upload my media files to them, I pay for the service, and through them, I get the RSS feed, and the survival of the feed depends on them. And I will also say that I have asked them if it's possible at any given time to have a full backup or to download, like in a batch, my own media files and the metadata, and I have not really gotten any response. So if you ask me today, I can tell you that I experience the hosting platform to be a critical point. It kind of stands in the way of my best effort to preserve my podcast. You also have to think that if one day I can upload the media files that I kept on my local disk to a new platform for long-term preservation that makes the media files available, I will have lost all the counters and the new metadata that were produced as the program was out. What about ratings on iTunes? What about the comments of the users? Where are they on all of these different platforms? I think it's important to keep all those data because they provide information on how the podcast did, the communities that were reached, and you see how all of these things do not depend on the podcaster. So I think that the platforms too, very generically speaking, now, platforms, should contribute and specifically the hosting platform, because kind of everything goes through them. And if you ask me, in my attempt to safekeep Technoculture for the future, the hosting platform, the hostile platform, is the most critical point.

[Mary]: Yes, yes. I don't think [you're? 00:49:19] the only one who feels that way, though, and it's one thing to consider is the dependency on platforms and how that can be a huge hurdle for a podcaster to sort of take back control of what they've created. And there is so much information that it doesn't just boil down to an audio file. Like you've mentioned, there are things that you would like to keep, like counters and so forth. So, you know, I don't think this is the only time I'm going to hear about this complaint, and it's something that I think podcast platforms should reconsider, especially if they want people to use their platform. If there was like a true way for you, for example, to click a button and to get an export of all of this data very easily, you know, that would probably inspire you to want to use a platform that does that over one that does not.

[Federica]: For sure. If my hosting platform provided such service, like a button that says, "Archive your data" or "Download a complete backup copy", I would definitely do that, and I'd be happy to keep paying a monthly fee if I knew that they keep maintaining my podcast online, because I have to say that, besides not being obsessed with how many listeners I have every single day, how many times a single episode has been downloaded, I do believe in Technoculture kind of mid-to-long term as a resource that stays online. So when somebody googles a few keywords to learn something about a specific topic, I think that podcast episodes, my

own as well as any other, should show up in the results along with YouTube videos, websites and PDFs. You know what I mean? I mean, it's a knowledge resource out there, and on top of that, I also believe that podcasts should have a sort of permanent identifier so that they could be referenced. If there is a notable guest on some podcast and they say something that's worth quoting because it didn't appear anywhere else, then I think that a scholar who is obliged to always provide full reference for his or her quotes, he or she should have this way of referencing the podcast episode. After all, we have been fighting so hard to make audiovisual material gain the same status as book material, precisely in scholarly words, so referencing to an audio recording today should be respected equally as a reference to a book, because it is a historical document. Hence all my obsession with digital philology and the authenticity, faithfulness, reliability of these audiovisual sources, so I do see this podcast as existing long term. And yes, now the hosting platform kind of gives me some worries about that. So I think that with your project, you should definitely go and talk to these people from all the different hosting platforms. They might be interested because they don't provide services for free. I pay a monthly fee, so they could actually make profit on a preservation service.

[Mary]: Yeah. Absolutely, and I think the only place that we really truly trust is the Internet Archive, because they are kind of a certified library, a digital library, by the state of California, and they have kind of this commitment towards the user. But you really can't say that about any commercial platform.

[Federica]: It sounds like there's need for a project on these things, so very good that we have a project now, thanks to you and your colleagues. Good luck with that. I think that it's still a young field, and we are seeing it grow. So let's keep in touch. I want to see how this evolves. I look forward to listening to the podcast, and thank you so much for being on Technoculture.

[Mary]: Thank you.

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