
When Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio’s The Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio was published in 2002, the massive collection’s mission was to address the lack of scholarly attention radio had thus far received, despite a few notable efforts. The remedy was primarily administered by reconsidering American cultural history as American radio history: the Great Depression, the development of networks, the propulsion of consumer culture, race and the adventure serial, and propaganda were just a few of the topics covered by contributors. Some attention was paid to radio’s persistence in the age of digital convergence, most notably in Michael P. McCauley’s “Radio’s Digital Future: Preserving the Public Interest in the Age of New Media,” (Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002, p. 505), but the project of radio studies nonetheless seemed mostly of interest to historians and archivists of media and culture.

A sequel of sorts, Loviglio and Hilmes’s Radio’s New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era (2013) is an indispensible map to the even more multifaceted (and, frankly, cool) object of study contemporary radio has since become, even as the discrete status of the medium has been called into question by mobile and digital communication technologies, as Loviglio and Hilmes point out in their introduction. Deploying a range of methodological and theoretical tools, and digging into an array of global and historical contexts, these essays examine the “remediation” (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) of an old medium by a constellation of new ones—and they offer some new, transnational takes on radio history. It is an illuminating and eclectic book, featuring work by leaders in the field, and it is very much worth reading.

“Section 1: The Digital Soundscape” probes questions of form by also taking into account ethical, political, economic, and technological dimensions. Kate Lacey starts by fruitfully exploring differences between “listening in” and “listening out.” Whereas the former act involves individual proclivities and preferences, the latter takes listening to be a potentially world-altering way of relating to others: “The openness of listening out, then, is about keeping channels of communication open across ongoing difference and conflicting interests” (p. 20). Lacey’s article offers a useful framework for critical analysis of the proliferation of online sound culture—a theme further explored by Elena Razlogova in her genealogy of musical selection gatekeepers. Razlogova hears the tradition of freeform radio as a radical challenge to for-profit programming models. Examining the institution’s discursive history and some of its recent hit programs, Jason Loviglio, for his part, positions NPR as an exemplary yet conflicted institution of neoliberalism: “The story of public radio ... is the tiny vibrating crystal through which can be heard the death rattle of liberalism and the first vocalizations of the neoliberal order” (p. 25). And Michele Hilmes offers a highly recommendable essay on the rich materiality of Radio 2.0. Opening up the medium with the expansive concept
of “soundwork,” Hilmes charts the *longue durée* of radio practitioners’ desire to give ephemeral broadcasts durability, which more recent digital screen cultures have addressed in various ways.

Whereas Section 1 is interested in the complexities of radio’s new media ecology, “Section 2: Radio’s New Sounds” expands the discussion to issues of globalization and place, migration and labour, disability, and genre. Ece Algan examines the deleterious effects of the mobile phone—short message service (SMS) technology in particular—on the participatory character of youth radio in Turkey, challenging claims of “technological evangelists” (p. 88) by way of a long case study. According to Algan, whereas during the nineties radio stations in Şanlıurfa, Turkey, offered young listeners a channel for the expression of their voices (through which they could play music, sing, discuss culture, politics, and relationships, and more on the air), the move since 2003 to the texting of requests into radio stations has eliminated this rich tradition, just as it has excluded some listeners from participating entirely. Dolores Inés Casillas thinks about the articulation of identity, focusing on both race and class, in contemporary Spanish-language programming in the United States. Bill Kirkpatrick’s essay “Voices Made for Print” is a novel engagement with disability, performance, and sound studies that explores why “Crip” voices have been excluded from, and marginalized on, the air. Virginia Madsen provides a history of the radio documentary feature from its emergence in the 1930s to more recent online variations, including the fascinating work of ARTE Radio.

The final section offers fresh insight into radio history. Focusing on global exchanges, Alejandra Bronfman, David Goodman and Susan Smulyan, and Derek W. Vaillant contribute complementary studies: of Caribbean broadcasting in the context of Empire, of the rewriting and re-performing of American serials for the Australian market, and of U.S. radio broadcasts in France in the twenties and thirties, respectively. In the book’s finale, Alexander Russo takes us back to American radio’s golden days—but to an understudied portion of the programming schedule—in an analysis of “time discipline” and the musical clock genre of early morning programming. In Section 3 the editors seem to have made a conscious effort to move radio studies even further beyond the confines of the United States (as promised by the volume’s title)—or at least to highlight how radio productions of the United States have existed in relation to a global audience of both listeners and makers. It is worth pointing out that the particularly interesting Canadian context is not given attention, which is only to suggest there is work to be done. This book seems less intent on finishing any discussions than it is on starting new ones, implicitly acknowledging that there are indeed many to be had.

A lifeboat with which to explore radio’s new swells and surges, *Radio’s New Wave* is an important work not just for radio and sound scholars. These essays, particularly those in the excellent Section 1, might be of use to anyone interested in digital culture more broadly. The fact that Sarah Koenig’s 2014 podcast, *Serial*, apparently attracted one million listeners per episode suggests that we are not dealing with an antique curiosity any longer. As Loviglio and Hilmes put it in their introduction, “sound is now cutting edge” (p. 2). An increasingly loud and vibrant corner of the media landscape, radio is back; it is everywhere, and it deserves to be thought about. The concise and diverse contributions in *Radio’s New Wave* will help us to do that.
References

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