

**THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO RADIO AND PODCAST STUDIES,
MIA LINDGREN AND JASON LOVIGLIO (EDS) (2022)**

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Reviewed by Paul Atkins, University of the West of England

The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies is the first significant collection of articles to bridge the divide between radio and podcast scholarship. In their introduction to this expansive 502-page volume, editors Mia Lindgren and Jason Loviglio explain that when Routledge approached them back in 2018, the plan had been to publish a companion to radio studies alone, with the addition of podcasting coming during the process of reviewing submissions. This undoubtedly makes for a more rounded and conceptually diverse publication. Lindgren and Loviglio set out their stall early, noting their ambition to adopt Michele Hilmes's broader definition of radio, podcasting and streaming technologies as 'soundwork' (2013: 44). Hilmes's own contribution to this collection ('But is it radio?') makes a particularly persuasive case that digital technology, far from diminishing the power of radio as a medium, has actually expanded radio's reach and allowed it to become even more effective as an inclusive communicative mechanism. Whether this is the resurrection of formats which appeared to be almost extinct on broadcast radio (such as sound documentary and audio drama) or the emergence of highly niche, intimate forms of storytelling, podcasting arguably extends the horizons of radio. No longer hampered by the limited affordances of airspace and the need to attract mass audiences, radio can finally begin to live up to its early revolutionary promise.

Aware of the trepidation of scholars on both sides, especially between those who view podcasting as its own discrete medium, deserving of its own scholastic language (Spinelli and Dann 2019: 2) and those who wish to emphasize continuity with traditional radio (Lacey 2008, 2014) the editors have carefully chosen works which tease out the similarities, differences and contradictions of both forms. Whilst never ignoring technology and the ways in which innovations in production and content delivery have birthed new formats and aesthetic approaches, the best articles in this collection focus on radio as cultural practice, rather than as a set of distribution technologies. As Lindgren and Loviglio note:

The debate about what is and isn't radio may not be terribly compelling, but questions about these continuities and ruptures have much to tell us about what we believe, how we listen, and what endures in our relationship to crucial genres like journalism and documentary as well as equally vital forms of cultural expression, like popular music.

(2022: 3)

Picking up on many of the themes outlined by Hilmes, Tiziano Bonini's 'Podcasting as a hybrid cultural form between old and new media' attempts to propose a 'third way' (Bonini 2022: 19), drawing parallels between the early history of radio and the ways in which podcasting has increasingly become professionalized and monetized by large media organizations. Whilst there are undoubtedly continuities between radio and podcasting, Bonini wants to highlight the hybrid nature of the medium and the ways in which podcasting, as a cultural form mediated through screen technologies, might benefit from a more robust engagement with broader debates in digital media scholarship. Conversely, Dario Llinares's

work examines the way in which the burgeoning field of podcast studies has been shaped by ‘techno-social’ (2022: 408) discourses, which often result in a conceptual conflation between technology and medium. Mirroring Raymond Williams’s arguments against such ‘homological slippage’ (Jones 1998) and attempting to advance his own definition of podcasting, Llinares suggests that:

Technical inventions morph into mediums that then define social organisation, structures of communication and aesthetic form [...] it is perhaps incumbent on a fledgling discipline to be more precise or at least reflexive as to the complexity of techno-social discourses at work in the function of a medium. Here’s my attempt: Podcasting is a concert of technologies activated through a specific configuration of practices (audio production, systems managements, listening consumption, marketing and sharing), the outcome of which is a socio-cultural-aesthetic phenomenon that communicates information and organises experience: a medium

(2022: 415)

Across the collection as a whole, authors have made a concerted effort to analyse the history of radio scholarship from a critical perspective. Susan J. Douglas’s contribution is as concise a re-telling of the emergence of ‘radio studies’ as you are likely to find. Still, there is also a sense that the contributors are keen to re-energize the field, examining shibboleths and pointing the way to future areas of research. Of particular note here is Britta Jorgensen and Mia Lindgren’s work on practice as research methods and Caroline Mitchell and Peter Lewis’s encouraging article on the response of younger listeners to the innovative Radio Garden app.

Like many other books in the Routledge companion series, *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies* provides a well-rounded introduction to the field. For those working within radio scholarship, many of the contributors will be familiar, that said, this publication does a good job of drawing together both established and emerging scholars to explore some of the most interesting debates and themes within radio and podcast studies. Everything from the role played by radio in the decolonization of the Caribbean (Alejandra Bronfman) to an examination of representation of structural violence in the true crime genre (Neroli Price) this companion cannot be faulted for its scope and ambition.

The task of editing a work of this breadth and depth is no mean feat. Despite this, the book remains remarkably balanced. This is no small part a function of the way in which the different sections are structured around core themes, beginning with a section entitled ‘Understanding Radio and Podcasting’ and ending, perhaps deliberately, with a series of chapters on markets, platforms and technologies. Along the way, Parts 2–4 explore the history of radio, the emergence of formats and genres and radio’s connection to its various publics. Within these sections, chapters on live radio are interspersed with studies on podcasting, streaming and other soundworks, allowing the reader to draw connections between different debates around practices, industries, policies, resources and relationships with audiences.

The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies is a timely collection of articles which explore many of the key questions and core debates in this expanding field. A significant work, which will undoubtedly age very well and prove to be extremely prescient in the coming years.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Paul Atkins is a senior lecturer in the School of Arts at the University of the West of England and programme leader for the BA Media Production course. In addition to this, he is also a part-time Ph.D. researcher in the School of Media, Communication and Sociology at the University of Leicester.

Contact: School of Arts, University of the West of England, Bower Ashton Campus, Kennel Lodge Road, Bristol, BS3 2JT, UK.

E-mail: paul.atkins@uwe.ac.uk