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Editorial

A new age for radio and sound studies

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The creation of a Radio Research Section within ECREA, as well as other groups and research projects, confirms “the sign of the revival of academic interest in radio” spotted by Peter Lewis in an article published by the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2000, p. 160). There is, among researchers particularly enthusiastic for audio production, a common feeling that radio has always been neglected by communication and media studies, which is quite true. For decades after the first studies on propaganda and public opinion performed by authors like Paul Lazarsfeld, communication research developed side by side with the increase of visual media and therefore was much more concerned with image than with sound. As a result, significantly more scientific discourse took place regarding television than regarding radio. The emergence of the screen quickly blinded audiences to the magic of radio and the power of imagination such a medium played in the first half of the 20th century was consigned to a marginalised idea of nostalgia in modern media societies.

After the boom of pirate radios in the 1980s, which generated a new impulse to radio production by expanding it to local contexts and by launching the concept of community media, a new wave of public discourse emerged announcing the death of radio. The apparently unsustainable dream of local broadcasting in scarce advertising markets condemned radio to a minor place in the fervent media studies field of the electronic age. Recognised as a fundamental medium in underdeveloped regions of the globe, where the access to digital media is still limited, radio is sometimes assumed to be a medium of the third world. Due to its technological simplicity and mobile character, radio in its traditional and Hertzian way continues to be the only medium able to cross the physical barriers of isolated places, the only medium able to connect remote communities to the global information environment. In a certain way, it was this generous nature that made radio a sector that could not be totally ignored in the media landscape and in the research/academic arena. But the level of scientific production was still disappointing, both in terms of thematic diversity and in terms of relevance and socio-cultural impact.

The expansion of the Internet represented a new threat, this time not only for radio, but for press and television too. Since the turn of the millennium,

mainstream media have faced a demand for deep reconfiguration and a critical moment of adaptation to new media consumption patterns. Press, radio, and television converged to the Internet, as well as with each other. This convergence paradigm has been provoking a new dynamism in the media landscape and animating a new range of studies specially dedicated to new devices, new business models, new languages, and new audiences' profiles.

The Internet and digital production represent today a new universe for content circulation. The Web became the centre of production and diffusion. In what regards radio, the World Wide Web is simultaneously a broadcasting extension and a new spectrum for what has been called *cyber radio* or *web radio* (Cébrían Herreros, 2008). Just as it has in other moments of the history of mass communication, radio in the age of the Internet has been confirming its resilient nature and its capacity to reinvent its original properties. With a wide range of new opportunities still unexplored, radio and the Internet frame nowadays the focus of challenges faced by the sector in technological, cultural, and industrial terms, as well as a renewed scientific interest.

For at least 10 years, a new stage of studies started to reinforce the position of radio and audio media within communication sciences. If previous publications and scientific work were focused on radio broadcasting in a more or less general sense, after the year 2000, new studies and approaches more focused on sound as a specific language appeared. This is probably why, for instance, the *Journal of Radio Studies* (launched for the first time in 1992 by Taylor & Francis) became, in 2008, the *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*. The sophistication in sound production made possible by digital editing raised

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awareness about the singularities of acoustic language and about how sound is ubiquitous in our relation to the surrounding world. In consequence, it is no longer radio as a medium that defines the territory of research on audio. The field was enlarged to include less conventional forms of sound content and to other perspectives such as sound art, sound engineering, semiotics of sound, language and narratives, and aesthetics.

Meant to reinforce the spirit of this recent movement, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* is a scientific publication promoted by the Radio Research Section of ECREA. It was intended to encourage a truly new age for radio and sound studies by sponsoring open-access publication. With no intention to compete with the already existing journals, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal*

is envisioned to be an alternative to other publications edited by commercial publishers. Addressed primarily to European researchers, as it is created in the scope of the European community of researchers on radio, this journal is, however, not restricted to the old continent. By choosing the theme of Latin radio for the first issue, the journal's editors expect to put in evidence the non-Europe-centred character of the journal. The scope of the project is much more concerned with the diversity of themes than with the geographical division of the world.

As is clearly suggested by the title, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* does not pretend to be a periodical on radio only. It was designed to welcome contributions on radio and on sound (whether sound content is produced specifically for radio or not), as well as theoretical and/or empirical approaches on the cultural and social status of audio media. Assumed to be a journal especially sensitive to vibrations and reverberations, this publication will not be worthwhile unless it inspires more thoughtful listening.

A thematic issue will be published each semester under the coordination of invited editors. Authors are encouraged to submit full-text proposals in five different categories: articles, interviews, reviews, commentaries, and multimedia formats (with a report on the content). Following the principle of ECREA, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* adopts English as its official language. Because the majority of authors will not be native speakers, all articles should be submitted for language review.

Nevertheless, like oral expression in a foreign language, articles written by non-natives will have inevitable marks of other idioms. The editors believe indeed that, though all efforts that can be made to assure the deepest respect for the English language, this will be a journal to be read

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by understanding readers. The highest standards of scientific quality are desired, but this will be a kind of low-cost project. It has no budget. It has no profit goals. It has no professional staff. It will depend on volunteer work and the best collaboration of researchers. The works published by the journal will be subject to blind review, but the quality level it reaches will be fundamentally dependent on the quality level of the work its authors will produce.

Published online only, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* will be available for free, based on the open journal system. An extended editorial board was constituted to assure the diversity of perspectives and the excellence standard intended. In a certain way, the journal is meant to be a collaborative or participatory project. If the concept is acceptable, it will be a kind of community journal, produced in a very horizontal way.



Radio is frequently felt as a passion. Sound is usually connoted with feelings. For these reasons, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* will be edited for people who might be interested both in objective information and in a kind of emotive knowledge, which is another valid way to comprehend what is apparently unknown. This periodical is not far from the purpose of Sean Street (2013). It invites researchers and readers to enjoy the *poetry of radio* and to appreciate the *colours of sound*. Following common sense, researchers have never explored sufficiently the sound dimension of our cultures. On the contrary, there seems to be no hesitation when recognising that contemporary societies are civilisations of image. By focusing on the acoustic dimension of life, the *Radio, Sound & Society Journal* does not disregard the visual surface of communication. By emphasising the power of sound, it also invites one to look for the *visualities* architected by sound effects.

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