



Editor's Remarks: Rethinking Radio

Phylis Johnson

To cite this article: Phylis Johnson (2016) Editor's Remarks: Rethinking Radio, Journal of Radio & Audio Media, 23:1, 1-3, DOI: [10.1080/19376529.2016.1156393](https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2016.1156393)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2016.1156393>



Published online: 04 May 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 83



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Editor's Remarks: Rethinking Radio

Phylis Johnson

I open this issue with what many thought would never happen—a restructuring of the British Broadcasting Communications (BBC). It is definitely a historical moment, and such a shift would ultimately rock its radio infrastructure as we know it, being perhaps “the largest major organizational overhaul of the broadcaster’s 93-year history” (Khoury, 2016). The BBC’s 16th Director-General, Lord Tony Hall (of Birkenhead), had already made some major staff changes prior to the St. Valentine’s Day announcement, with the intent toward “blurring the boundaries between television, radio, and the Internet” (Khoury, 2016). That will take quite a bit of unravelling, and certainly will prove interesting to watch from this side of the Atlantic.

It is amazing how sometimes we are surprised by such news, when we know change is always within earshot. It’s the 52nd anniversary of the offshore station Radio Caroline and 36th anniversary of Radio Day in Netherlands. Radio has experienced some major policy and technology challenges through the decades. Eventually, when we don’t pull up the anchor, listeners find a way to do radio their way. Some of those listeners become the new radio entrepreneurs.

This *JRAM* issue—Breaking Tradition—is simply a challenge to rethink radio—historically, politically, economically, and socially. What is core to the listening public? As a broadcaster, what will someone else deliver to your audience, if you don’t? I will not provide the answers in this brief essay, but I will lead you to the questions, and advise you to tune in to what is being said in this issue.

Digital is the Future—And the Now: EmPosium on Digital Platform Listening Trends

How better to introduce an issue that seeks to challenge tradition than with an emposium (symposium by email) led by Ian Punnett, *JRAM*’s associate managing editor. I asked him, as a fairly recent, former industry professional to head out to the super highways and byways online to find and invite professionals and academics to come into discussion on some key issues concerning radio’s future. He did just that, and called it: “Digital is the Future—And the Now;” it is an “EmPosium on Digital

Platform Listening Trends.” This symposium sets the stage for further discussion we believe should happen within the pages of *JRAM*, as well as online in our related social media sites, such as our Facebook Group Page. Too often we are all too busy following tradition, rather than forging our future. This emposium is perhaps a reminder of those opportunities (and lost time) to stop and listen to radio, as it was, as it is, and to imagine where it might be in the next few years. Thank you so much to those who took Ian up on his offer, and shared their views. They should be commended for their willingness to participate in such highly significant discussions!

I also applaud the diversity of the voices represented in the emposium—as well as within the larger scholarship represented in this issue, more generally.

Research Around the World

In this issue, you will note scholars across the world sharing research and practice from the Middle East, France, Ireland, and Germany, and so forth. You will also discover some notable case studies from the American Heartland to the Upper West Coast to my very own downstate Carbondale, Illinois, USA (where we find “Celtic Connections” Host Bryan Kelso Crow, who discusses his 25-year retrospective of his long-running syndicated public radio show). What’s the secret? Empower yourself and your listeners by finding and sharing great content. People listen to people. The Crow retrospective by Alex Kirt is the closing feature piece to a mini-symposium on “Radio of Irish Tradition” that includes research articles—“‘A Uniting Force:’ Irish Music on U.S. Radio” by John Mark Dempsey, Marc Geagan, and Rory Corbett and “BBC Radio Ulster: Public Service Radio in Northern Ireland’s Divided Society” by Phil Ramsey.

There’s plenty of research in this issue to savor with a cup of coffee that might inspire a few long-overdue conversations—on new ways to think about streaming audio (J. Steven Smethers; Mark Glantz), understanding social media audiences (Ahmed Al-Rawi), and challenging the personality myth—Benedikt Spangardt, Nicolas Ruth, and Holger Schramm tell us why personality still matters! In our section “Localism in Radio: Reconsidered,” you are offered an opportunity to experience radio with the gift of hindsight. Two articles, Helen Morgan Parmett’s “KVOS in the Local, Public Interest: Early Broadcasting and the Constitution of the Local” and Mark Poindexter’s “Towards a Democratic Public Sphere: A History of *Radio FreeDom* in Réunion” share two intriguing cases, respectively, that take different spins on what localism can mean for a community.

Conversations and Commentary

Consider dropping in to Ian Punnett’s “A Conversation With Liz Dolan—Satellite Sisters: Conquering Every Audio Platform . . . One Cup of Coffee at a Time.” She has

been busy collaborating on a book and doing a little thing called podcasting in a major way. Lessons learned during her journey may take you on your own adventure.

A commentary by media scholar Lady Dhyana Ziegler shares insight into “Radio as Numbers: Counting Listeners in a Big Data World.” If radio’s challenges have not become complicated enough, now there’s all this talk about big data. Dr. Ziegler tells us why we must get a handle on the changing marketplace, and the sooner the better.

The books selected for this issue primarily focus on various histories of radio; Mike Adam’s *The Radio Boys and Girls* (reviewed by Charles W. Thomas) covers the period 1890 to 1945, and a well-known scholar wrote the foreword. Gayle Jansen Brisbane’s review of Brenda Stevenson’s *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins* presents a timely selection, given 2016 marks the 25th year of the tragedy that set into motion a series of events that would change history. A powerful read comes from three time Peabody award winner Sonja Williams, author of *Word Warrior: Richard Durham, Radio, and Freedom*, reviewed by Josh Shepperd, who contextualizes it within Williams’ other bodies of work, as well as that of Durham’s civil rights struggles and challenges within an often contrary media industry.

Leave the Radio On

Don’t forget to leave the radio on, and really listen to what you hear – and what you don’t hear.

Alternatively turn on your digital devices to hear what you are missing. Then remember, ah yes, to rethink radio—while not being afraid to break and remake some traditions, and heck—even think about what if —if—That’s for you to imagine.

Reference

Khoury, A. (2016, February), Is the BBC dropping its television and radio divisions? Retrieved from <http://www.digitaltrends.com/movies/bbc-dropping-television-and-radio-divisions/>