

**ANTOINE, F. (ED.) (2016). ANALYSER LA RADIO.
MÉTHODES ET MISES EN PRATIQUE. LOUVAIN-
LA-NEUVE: DE BOECK SUPÉRIEUR.**

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For an artist – a painter, sculptor or writer – the point of view is the place from which a real object is observed, examined, contemplated and understood. It is the place from which reality offers itself to be seen and felt, at a distance. According to current definitions, the point of view thus corresponds to a specific way of seeing or judging reality, encompassing everything implied by observation, in terms of judging, evaluating and conception. In a purely visual meaning of the concept, Teresa Mendes Flores recalls that “the point of view expresses the relationship established between the represented object and the position from which it is seen or viewed by its producer or spectator” (Flores, n.d.). It is the physical and / or symbolic place, from which the artist constructs the notion of perspective, frames the work, and perceives the composition as a whole. At the limit, it is the position that engenders a kind of *Weltanschauung*, a vision of the world orientated by cultural values, and by a certain mapping of prior knowledge that determines, at each moment, what the eye brings to the image of the object.

As with art, science is also a form of highlighting specific points of view. For the scientist, as for the artist, the object takes shape and is knowable at a distance, from a specific observation point. All scientific work, therefore, is based upon choosing not only the object to be studied, but also the point of view. As a result, all research work presupposes consideration of a theme or a subject from its specific context, i.e., the circumstances in which it exists, in order to decide how to access it, or what methods should be used to approach it and demarcate it. In the scientific field, the notion of point of view is therefore equivalent to relativisation of experience, the awareness that the object can never be understood as a whole, but is always taken from a constructed angle.

Analyser la radio. Méthodes et mises en pratique is, first and foremost, a book about points of view, the perspectives that can be traced by the gaze of the social scientist, in the framework of Communication Sciences, when analysing radio as a means of content production and diffusion. Assuming that “studies in the field of radio are currently enjoying renewed interest, both in the academic world and among students and industry professionals” (p. 14), Frédéric Antoine, who edited this collective work, classifies this publication as a manual or instrumental book: “the goal of this work isn’t to present research results, but rather to state how research into radio may be conducted” (p. 13). Perceived as a response to a global gap – “the lack, at least in the French language, of a specific methodological manual for research into radio” (p. 15), this book presents itself

as a “discovery of the specific horizons of research into the world of radio and its modes of appropriation in the framework of a scientific procedure” (p. 18).

Structured into eight chapters, the various contributions from the 16 authors who responded to the challenge of systematising the themes and methods used in scientific analysis of radio broadcasting highlight the diversity of interests that may be associated to this medium. Without an exact equivalent, because “it does enter into redundancy with any other academic work” as Jean-Jacques Cheval suggests in the preface (p. 7), this book not only represents an exercise in epistemological reflection on the scientific status of radio but also an inventory of the palette of colours and thickness of the lines that researchers can use when analysing the radio broadcasting sector.

Although it is often seen as an unknown (Fau Belau, 1981), forgotten (Pease & Dennis, 1995) and neglected medium, thereby motivating a kind of “secret pleasure” and simultaneously timid public attention (Lewis, 2000), the phenomenon of radio analysed in this book is not an object of recent research. As Jean-Jacques Cheval, Christophe Deleu and Albino Pedroia, point out in the introductory pages, “like all other media, radio broadcasting is a domain, an object, in which all the problems of media and communication studies, and more broadly the Social and Human Sciences, may be placed and encountered in a pertinent and productive manner” (p. 29). In addition, although radio has been relegated to a secondary position, firstly due to the emergence of television and then to the fascination of the internet, Frédéric Antoine and Laurent Gago consider that it is “a medium that has not lost its force (radio audiences testify to this fact) and has been able to adapt to technical developments”, which is why “it can/should be studied today ... with scientific creativity” (p.31).

It is true that study of one of the main dimensions of radio involves a unique peculiarity in the field of communication – the fact that the material underpinning the expression of this medium is defined by an intangibility, and consequent impossibility of “suspension” in time. Hence, “due to difficulties, inclusively of archiving and manipulation, sound offered little attractiveness as a research subject”, which rendered radio “a fragile medium for empirical incursions” (Oliveira, 2013, p. 84). However, for the authors of *Analyser la radio. Méthodes et mises en pratique*, the prototypical empirical methods most frequently used in the Information and Communication Sciences have been useful in analysis of radio broadcasting, and have been used by the various disciplines of the Social and Human Sciences that have conducted studies in this domain. Focusing on history, the technological dimension, socio-economic and socio-political approaches, the relationship with the notion of public space, the association with experimental principles of psychology, articulation with sociolinguistic interests, pragmatism and the conversational perspective, artistic and cultural exploration, the educational field and the perspective of communication for development, this book considers that study of radio is logically inscribed “at the heart of the Human Sciences” (p. 35).

Without trying to systematically recall the specific approaches of each of these disciplines, the book’s chapters and sub-chapters propose to identify different ways of looking at radio, beyond the impassioned discourse of professionals and scholars who are

seduced by its emotional character. All the sections observe a more or less common structure, and are aligned around three main points: the object of study, disciplines and methods and the applications suggested from each path of analysis. This conveys the supposedly didactic character of the book, that includes the option of using an explanatory language that does not dispense with the need to consider the specific questions associated to the entire research process. How to delimit the object? What methods will be most appropriate to analyse it? What research questions should be formulated?

Chapter one responds to these questions from the perspective of the actors operating within the field of radio. In the case of structural actors – encompassing radio broadcasters – a multidisciplinary approach is proposed, ranging from technological aspects to regulatory issues facing the sector. By contrast, for so-called in-house actors – including animators, sound designers and journalists – the authors recommend recourse to the sociology of the professions, including texts from the field of sociology of work – to the extent that they discuss the relations between professional groups and their working conditions.

The book suggests that radio broadcasting is another thematic vector around which research work can be organised, dedicated in particular to broadcasting and listening formats, the typology of radio stations and programming schedules. This chapter considers the legal structure of broadcasters, their economic and governance model, or the structuring of programmes, and then examines the potential of the typological method, suggesting that the production of scientific knowledge is also based upon classifications and categories – techniques used to understand reality. According to Étienne Damome, the author of this specific section, “the typology has a dual interest”, because “its discrimination criteria enables us to focus upon the inherent tensions associated to the studied field” and because, on the other hand, “classifications make it possible to identify the proximity or distance between the different elements and, thereby map out the different cases in hand” (p. 74). The book’s editor also focuses upon the classification and categorisation, considering them to be important steps for comparison between different radio stations and for analysis of their programming strategies.

Another way to study radio is through analysis of the production devices. Based on ethnographic analysis of radio work, this approach benefits from methods such as interviewing, document analysis, conversational analysis, and recording of photographic or video images. Notwithstanding the “invisible” nature of radio production – defined by the fact that the medium does not provide visual images of the things to which it refers, as Guy Starkey and Andrew Crisell (2009, p. 102) recall – the proposal of this kind of ethnographic research into the preparation and production of programmes is based upon observation as a research method, even using the hypothesis of participant observation. For analysis of discursive interaction, a more psychological and sociological approach is suggested, including use of surveys, questionnaires and comparative tests.

Chapter four, that is longer than the previous chapters, offers an inventory of radio material, i.e. the elements underpinning the diversity of sounds in radio broadcasting, such as music and voice. Focusing on how radio produces meaning, the chapter’s

authors suggest that “it is a matter of understanding radiophonic discourse not only as a verbal discourse, but “in accordance with the proposal of a socio-semiotic approach, “as a set of messages, mediations, objects, situations, meanings, whose understanding cannot be dissociated from their conditions of production and reception “(pp. 99-100).

Recognized as “a medium that is particularly well suited to storytelling” (p. 105), radio also lends itself to narratological analysis, focused on genres (fictional, dramatic and informative); structure, marked by temporality and spatiality; and characters. “Telling stories radiophonically”, the authors note, “is also a matter of style” (p. 108). That is why radio is also a tool that can be used to analyse the evolution of language, inclusively because “radio stations provide connections within the model of circulation of neologisms” (p. 115). Considering, on the other hand, that “the voice is loaded with expressive meaning” (p. 117), the section dedicated to this privileged instrument of radio communication suggests valorisation of vocal qualities, such as intonation, intensity and rhythm, in terms of both production and reception, with a view to describing the identity of a radio station. But the authors return to the field of semiotics to address the materiality of sound and its meaning. Without contradicting the technical dimension of sound, Christophe Deleu and Hervé Glevarec recall that sound can also be understood in its imaginary dimension, because “the radio listener is in an acousmatic situation, i.e. he does not see that which is producing the sound”, is immersed in a kind of auditory hallucination, or “phantom sensorial vision” in the words of Michel Chion (1994).

Chapter five proposes to divide radio broadcasts in terms of genre, conditions of production and the disseminated content. In a return to categorization as a tool of scientific work, this section admits that “analysing broadcasts in terms of genres requires a rigorous methodology” (p. 136). To classify using certain criteria is, however, a task that “relies on human decisions” and “carries an element of arbitrariness”, inclusively because “belonging to a specific genre is not a biological fact”. On the basis of this finding, reaffirming the pedagogical vocation of the book, the reader is warned that

the researcher must display some caution and a certain distance to define a genre and classify broadcasts in such or such a category, even in situations where there seems to be a consensus, both in terms of the conditions of production and reception. (p. 136)

Regarding the conditions of production, the contribution of *Analyser la radio. Méthodes et mises en pratique* is presented in the form of questions (e.g. which radio station broadcasts the programme, who it is targeted at, and the respective economic constraints?), suggesting use of field observation and survey techniques (structured interviews, semi-structured interviews ...) with industry professionals. If this proposal seems to be relatively vague, or insufficiently enlightening, for a junior researcher, in terms of content, the methodological indications are underpinned by relatively well established practices in the field of the Social and Human Sciences. In this case Étienne Damome and Séverine Equoy Hutin focus upon content analysis, which is considered to be an “effective method for analysing sound documents” in both quantitative and

qualitative terms (p. 147), and discourse analysis, which “aims to study a document in its articulation with the context and socio-historical conditions in which it is produced” (p. 148).

Digressing from the exclusively acoustic framework of radio, chapter six suggests analysis of the visual and audiovisual content associated with radio. Although the book is largely silent on the issue of sound design, in a chapter dedicated to the expression of internet radio, Laurent Fauré and Laurent Gago discuss web design, and note that “filming radio constitutes one of the innovations introduced by web resources” (p. 162). A study conducted between 2012 and 2015 on how Portuguese radio have hosted their services on the internet concluded that, contrary to expectations, radio is not very sound-orientated on the web (Oliveira, 2016). However the authors of this sub-chapter, state that study of the *mise en scène* of radio on the internet, which may include elements drawn from the sociology of innovations contribute, allows us to discover new media modalities. In an article published in 2011 in *Comunicação e Sociedade* Juan José Perona mentioned the concept of the digital sonosphere (Perona Paez, 2011), to talk about how radio has adapted to mobile devices. However, he almost exclusively referred to the field of listening. By contrast, Faure and Gago, expand their interest in the web to other forms of interaction explored by radio, e.g. the language of social networks.

Focused on the concept of audience, the book’s penultimate chapter, written by the researchers of the Group de Recherche et d’Études sur la Radio includes analysis of radio uses and audiences. From a quantitative perspective, the methodological formula classically used in this field is once again applied: questionnaire surveys. Interviews and observation of listening and listening devices, as well as data analysis are proposed for the qualitative analysis, focused on the question “why do you listen?” Studied since the early decades of the twentieth century, the influence of radio on public opinion is combined with analysis of the effects, using the framework available in the field of psychology, in terms of experimental methodologies that implement observation protocols.

Whereas the aforementioned chapters correspond to proposals for building a scientific discourse in relation to radio, the book’s final chapter focuses on a meta-discursive study, a kind of critical category that is extremely useful in order to identify the representations produced by other media in relation to radio, in the form of meta-journalism, to reflect on the journalistic practice (Oliveira, 2004). Using content analysis methodology, this type of research – which takes radio as the subject of other cultural media productions, such as the press, television, cinema, comics or literature, as well as its own specific productions – ultimately suggests that the creative industries continue to be interested in the radio medium. By reinforcing the entire book’s central argument, this final suggestion of analysis also supports the idea that “research into radio, in any case, offers the promise of a beautiful future” (p. 207). ✍

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