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Derek W. Vaillant, *Across the Waves: How the United States and France Shaped the International Age of Radio*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xiii + 239 pp. Photographs, timeline, bibliography, notes, and index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl) ISBN 978-0-252-04141-9; \$29.95 U.S. (pb) ISBN 978-0252-08293-1; \$26.96 U.S. (eb) ISBN 978-0-252-05001-5.

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The foundational texts of the history of radio were primarily focused on the nation. This approach treated the establishment of national radio services as bound up with state power and with the visions of entrepreneurs, as well as with national traditions of oratory, entertainment, and journalism. Scholars have used this national lens to sketch out typologies of radio infrastructures, styles, and listening cultures. They sought to explain how the U.S. developed private, commercial, high-tech networks, the French plodded under an underfunded state monopoly, the British established a non-commercial authority dedicated to elite cultural programming, and the Germans pioneered an aggressive system of state propaganda. Every nation would have its own radio story.[1]

The national approach, and the research methods that support them, have much to recommend. Radio *does* reflect national political cultures and styles, at least to some extent. American radio developed mostly outside of government control, and the great broadcast corporations (RCA, CBS, NBC) consolidated power and eliminated upstarts through litigation and patent enforcement, growth strategies irrelevant to the history of France's state monopolies or to the BBC's non-governmental elitism. And, stylistically, consider how French campaign appearances on the radio for the 1936 legislative elections reproduced a sui generis rhetorical form known as the *profession de foi*, which had dominated open-air campaigning in the early Third Republic. Or, as Greg Goodale has shown, American ideals of masculinity and class were on display in the recorded 1912 campaign speeches of Howard Taft and Teddy Roosevelt that have little purchase on questions of gender in French politics of the same period.[2]

The turn toward empire and toward global perspectives in historical scholarship has pushed radio research beyond the nation.[3] In *Across the Waves: How the United States and France Shaped the International Age of Radio*, Derek Vaillant adds to this turn by powerfully arguing that a nation-centered approach to radio prevents us from seeing how international broadcasting—first in the form of short wave, then with transmissions of pre-recorded material—shaped national radio cultures. To support this methodological intervention, Vaillant focuses on the under-examined history of broadcasting between the U.S. and France, which began with regular shortwave broadcasts in 1931. More broadly, Vaillant explores how such broadcasting shaped political, social, and cultural relations between French and American media industries and radio listeners. “Transatlantic radio constituted a field in which modern U.S.-French relations could be instituted and transacted through the production, circulation, and consumption of forms of cultural capital” (p. 2). His transatlantic approach to media history will be of especial interest to scholars of the history of international relations, including those working on soft

power diplomacy, international economic and cultural exchanges between people and institutions, and dynamics of acculturation.

The book is divided into two parts, “The Rise of U.S.-French Broadcasting, 1925-1944” and “Shaping A U.S. Radio Imaginary, 1945-74.” Each part contains three chapters. The first chapter is entitled, “At the Speed of Sound: Techno-Aesthetic Paradigms in U.S.-French Broadcasting.” Vaillant uses the term “techno-aesthetic” to measure how different radio cultures “define excellence in production and on-air performance as well as the value of radio as an aesthetic form” (p. 10). Vaillant synthesizes secondary sources to show the different paths that U.S. and French radio took after World War I, but uses primary sources to frame this narrative transnationally. He shows that the internationalist vision of RCA chairman David Sarnoff, whose executives forged relationships with French production companies and with ministries in charge of radio, led to the establishment of shortwave broadcasts between France and the U.S. in the 1930s. These broadcasts in turn shaped the development of national radio cultures and, more broadly, of national attitudes toward modernity. Vaillant reframes, for example, the radically different growth of French and U.S. radio—by the mid-1920s the U.S. had hundreds of radio stations and France had three—by showing the discursive construct adopted by French elites in the face of such imbalance. “True, they argued, the U.S. broadcast system bristled with hundreds of high-wattage stations, but its announcers and programs rarely had something of significance to communicate” (p. 17). Vaillant claims, then, that French techno-aesthetic value was established or perhaps justified as a distinctive response to American power and style. ‘They’ have speed and power, but are superficial; ‘we’ have quality, managed scarcity, and depth.

The second chapter, “U.S. Networks in France and Europe,” explores the establishment of American radio journalism in Europe in the run-up to and in the first years of the Second World War. Vaillant reframes, from the national to the transnational, the origins of the “international roundup” transmissions from Europe to the U.S. and the famed reports from Munich in 1938 and the Battle of Britain in 1940. American media giants needed personnel in Europe to negotiate agreements with governments and production companies and to mediate techno-aesthetic differences, all while ruthlessly competing with each other. Vaillant argues that a negotiated melding of European and American techno-aesthetics made the roundup possible, not a simple implantation of American radio on European soil. Applying the transnational frame to individual trajectories, Vaillant focuses on the radio journalist Fred Bate, a society figure with no journalistic experience. Bate recruited local stringers and freelance reporters and developed the structures necessary for transatlantic transmission. The fact that his legacy was overshadowed by the arrival of Edward R. Murrow does not diminish Bate’s importance for the creation of the form and content of these nightly reports.

Part of the tension of this melding involved foreign journalists figuring out the rules by which they could operate. France, for example, squashed any radio reporting of the February 6, 1934 riots. How would those restrictions apply to foreign radio journalists and services? The anecdote of American radio men riding around in cars during the riots and finally negotiating with a producer to transmit coverage about the events via shortwave expands our sense of the riot beyond questions of state censorship of French radio.

The third chapter, “Voices of the Occupation: U.S. broadcasting to France during World War II,” expands the geographic frame of the famous radio war between the French service of the BBC and the radio of occupied France. Vaillant focuses on NBC’s shortwave broadcasting from America to France prior to the U.S. entry in the war and then on Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts, which began in late 1942. Vaillant effectively exploits two sources to understand the reception of American broadcasts to France throughout the war. The first are the letters sent from France to NBC’s international division, which showed how listeners drew succor from the broadcasts, took risks to listen to them, and engaged in abstract acts of resistance by doing so. The second source consists of reports from the wartime offices designed to disseminate information and to understand public sentiment during wartime, the ominously named Psychological Warfare Bureau (PWB) and the Office of War Information (OWI). These reports

showed how a structural distrust of America extended to what people heard on the radio and that the more patriotic VOA was less appreciated than the NBC broadcasts, which many listeners positively associated with prewar radio. One element that Vaillant does not explore might contribute to this transnational frame on wartime broadcasting. A freewheeling broadcast conversation took place during the war between the collaborationist Radio-Paris and several radio centers outside of the metropole, including Geneva, Algiers, Brazzaville, and Cairo. Many of the participants wrote about their experiences and a few of the broadcasts have survived.

In chapter four, “Served on a Platter: How French Radio Cracked the U.S. Airwaves,” Vaillant expands the history of Franco-American postwar radio beyond the well-trodden story of American interventions in French media as a response to global Communism. He focuses on a particular outcome of the U.S.-France alignment of 1947: the influx of Marshall Plan dollars to Radiodiffusion française (RDF), and advances in broadcast technology which led to the penetration of the U.S. radio market by the French Broadcast System in North America (FBS).

Instead of shortwave broadcasts, which were expensive and dependent on specialized receptors, the FBS distributed recorded discs of cultural programming, often for free, to the expanding public service networks in the U.S. The FBS’s programs had a certain political utility in the context of the Cold War; they helped shape the American imaginary of France as a politically stable, culturally sophisticated American ally. This projection complemented the RDF’s tone in their network reporting about the U.S. back to France. They portrayed Americans not as money-grubbing imperialists but as community-minded workers seeking stability for their families. Finally, by supplying culturally stimulating and depoliticized programming to the public service networks that were creeping up around universities and urban centers, the FBS contributed to a durable change in the American radio landscape.

In chapter five, “The Air of Paris: Women’s Talk Radio, Gender, and the Art of Self-Fashion,” Vaillant analyzes a fashion and women’s advice talk show broadcast in English from France to the U.S., *Bonjour Mesdames*. Vaillant seeks to complicate what he sees as over determined judgments about the Marshall Plan era’s influence on gender attitudes and discourses. Vaillant builds on Mary Louise Roberts’s notion of the “gender damage” experienced in France during the war and on Anne Stoler’s work on fashion as a force of cultural exploitation in imperial relations. He argues that rather than representing conservative, regressive attitudes towards women, the show instead reflected new postwar opportunities for women in the French workplace and voting booth and, for U.S. single women, the increased possibility of visiting and studying in France. Vaillant works with shadings of vocal tone to illuminate moments of self-parody and the subversion of reductive expectations for women’s careers and lives. He might have made more of the fact that the show was scripted, which clashed with the postwar zeitgeist of increasingly improvised on-air performance. For postwar listeners, a scripted show might have contained symbols of an anachronistic past and thus subtly trafficked more conservative messages.

In chapter six, “The Drama of Broadcast History after May 1968,” Vaillant uses a corpus of dramatized broadcasts about French history to show the effects of May 1968 on French radio in France and on France’s international broadcasting to America. The historical programs, produced by the French government for an American audience, were not as formulaic or tendentious as, say, a Bourdieusian framework might predict, but were often transgressive, satirical, and downright loopy. The shows included material critical of French imperial, racial, and gender norms, as well as references to the legacies of these problems for contemporary French society. The end of the book’s chronology is framed by the loosening of France’s monopoly over radio, by the expansion of periphery stations in French but operating outside of French jurisdiction, and, especially, by the economic downturn in France that began in 1973. France greatly reduced budgets for its international broadcasts in the wake of reduced state revenues but the political utility of these broadcasts was also less obvious. France no longer needed to “rebuild respect with America,” nor even seduce America audiences with a reconstructed image of itself. France enjoyed a solid political alliance with the U.S. and a tourist industry that could market a French imaginary more effectively than pre-recorded broadcasts of educational programming.

With its clear explanations of how radio's technological development shaped production and listening, *Across the Waves* will be of interest to scholars of journalism and communication technology. But the book will be especially useful to those scholars of international and transatlantic relations not fully versed in the theoretical literature of media and sound studies. In the notes and in the text, Vaillant fluidly frames his arguments around classic theoretical and methodological texts such as those of Bourdieu and Habermas as well as indispensable contemporary works by Kate Lacey and Michelle Hilmes. But his theoretical apparatus has a light touch; it gives depth to his story without driving it. The transnational nature of his training—an historian of American media who often works on France—has positioned him to analyze the processes by which radio reflected France-USA relations at the level of state, business, and the individual, and he gives us new ways to understand the significance of radio in subnational, national, and international affairs.

NOTES

[1] Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); René Duval, *Histoire de la radio en France* (Paris: A. Moreau, 1979); Cécile Méadel, *Histoire de la radio des années trente: du sans-filiste à l'auditeur* (Paris: Anthropos/Diffusion Economica, 1994); Tom Lewis, *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

[2] Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion. Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

[3] The Leverhulme Trust is currently funding a project entitled "Connecting the Wireless World: Writing Global Radio History," "to study the origins of transnational broadcasting." For a recent radio history that incorporates questions of empire into soundscapes and broadcasting see, Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For a treatment of radio and mass emotions using transnational comparisons, see Johanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005).

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