

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Kate Lacey. *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Ppp. 299. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-09616-9; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-472-06616-2.

Reviewed by Stefana Lefko

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 1997)

K. Lacey: Feminine Frequencies

Kate Lacey's 'Feminine Frequencies' is an ambitious work which aims to recover a forgotten chapter in media history: the story of women's involvement in early German radio. Lacey is specifically interested in examining how the emergence of radio as a new technology converges with women's entry into the public sphere as citizens and workers, and how these modern occurrences influence one another. Separate departments for women's programming - with programs often conceived and executed by women - existed as early as 1924, providing women with an opportunity to shape women's programming as well as the overall character of the new technology. At the same time, the public medium of radio penetrated the private sphere in a way in which no other medium had, presumably influencing women within the home.

The result of Lacey's efforts is an interesting, complex, and well-documented work. Despite its somewhat idiosyncratic organization, 'Feminine Frequencies' presents an excellent overview of women's involvement in German radio from its birth to the end of the Nazi era. Beginning with a discussion of the importance of the media in creating discourses which shape the public perception of reality, Lacey demonstrates how radio passed by early opportunities to become a truly democratic modern technology of communication, and yet did help to mediate women's entry into the public sphere as producers, workers, and consumers. Although specifically political programming was not permitted throughout most of the Weimar Republic, programs produced for and star-

ring women contributed to both sides of the battle over women's "proper" role by portraying successful women in the public sphere in special programs or by highlighting female announcers, while at the same time addressing women primarily as housewives and consumers.

Lacey's research on the *Frauenfunk* is particularly interesting, as she hints at the progressive hopes for education and solidarity among women which existed in some regional programming, especially in Hamburg and Berlin. This glance at women's influence within programming is continued by a short excursus into the remarkable career of Carola Hersel, a young German woman who began a career with the *Deutsche Welle* after writing a letter complaining about a lack of suitable programming for girls and young women and offering her services to help remedy the situation. Lacey seems to feel, however, that the negative aspects of radio for women outweighed the possible positives: women were still addressed primarily as middle-class housewives and consumers in most of Germany, and not as citizens or intellectuals, and men were still generally in charge of final decisions on programming and policy. In addition, no attempts at supra-regional coordination of programs for women was attempted.

'Feminine Frequencies' continues tracing women's radio into the Nazi era, where an end was finally put to all progressive hopes for women's radio through government propaganda, quickly followed by the more palatable dance music popular throughout the Nazi era, and war

news. Lacey here demonstrates how the national listening community radio helped to create was taken advantage of for purposes of propaganda. Although she holds out hope for the democratizing potential of the media, few indications are given of any democratizing tendencies which radio actually brought to the Nazi era.

Lacey concludes with a discussion of public sphere theory within which her conclusions can be framed, finding Hannah Arendt's theories of performative politics and an agonistic public sphere more productive than

Habermas' more commonly used public/private distinctions.

Having managed to overcome the myriad difficulties involved in researching a work of this kind, Lacey's 'Feminine Frequencies' is an interesting and informative scholarly contribution to Women's History, Communications, and the study of the Weimar Republic.

Stefana Lefko
University of Massachusetts-Amherst

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Stefana Lefko. Review of Lacey, Kate, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=16093>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.