Gender and Archiving: Past, Present, Future
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# Contents

*Editorial*  

**Introduction**  
RENÉE RÖMKENS & ANTIA WIERSMA  
The Archival Turn: Archiving as a Tool for Empowerment  

FRANCISCA DE HAAN  
Archive Fever, Resistance, and Loss: A Rereading of the IAV's Early History  

*Archival practice*  
ASLI DAVAZ  
The Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation in Istanbul, Turkey  

KATE EICHHORN  
Past-Futures: The Temporality of Feminist Archives  

*Archival practice*  
JANET OLSON  
Research Resources at the Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives  

MOLLY BOWER & TASHINA BLOM  
Social Media Archiving: Cultural Memory and Digital Community Activism  

*Archival practice*  
ADELE PATRICK  
Glasgow Women’s Library  

ROSE MARY ALLEN  
‘Nothing about us, without us’: Constructing Women’s Historical Knowledge, a Case Study of Curacao  

*Archival practice*  
C.S. LAKSHMI & SRUTI BALA  
No more sewing machines! The Challenges of a Women’s Archive in India  

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CAROLYN BIRDSALL
Divisions of Labour: Radio Archiving as Gendered Work in Wartime Britain and Germany

Archival practice
WENDY E. CHMIELEWSKI
Swarthmore College Peace Collection

RIA VAN DER MERWE
Democratizing the South African ‘Memory Bank’: Embroidering Black Women’s Voices on the Archival Canvas

Interview
SYLVIA HOLLA & NOORTJE WILLEMS
Creating Archival Sources
Reflections on an Innovative Feminist Oral History Approach, an Interview with Evelien Rijsbosch

Summaries

About the authors
Divisions of Labour

Radio Archiving as Gendered Work in Wartime Britain and Germany

CAROLYN BIRDSALL

Cultural and media histories, as feminist scholar Tara Rodgers has observed, tend to cite innovations as ‘originating from male homosocial audio engineering and electronics tinkering culture.’ In her work on the electronic synthesizer, Rodgers has argued for the urgency to ‘tinker with’ highly-gendered accounts of male pioneers and early adopters of sound technologies. In response, this article takes its cue from Rodgers’ call to reaffirm the presence of women as ‘active participants in audio-technical cultures, despite their routine omission from historical accounts.’ I propose to investigate the recording, editing and archiving of sound as gendered labour within radio broadcasting. These roles have largely remained among the ‘hidden professions’ of media production histories, even though the recording, storage and re-use of radio innovated creative practice, and facilitated historic preservation of this ephemeral, ‘live’ medium.

Gender has been a significant lens for recent cultural and social histories of radio during the twentieth century. Wireless radio technology was the product of a particularly gendered imaginary, and its domestication - in both North American and European contexts - has been characterized in terms of a gender crisis, which had a variety of manifestations in the first decades of radio broadcasting. While early studies of ‘women in radio’ often tended to emphasize the work of women as announcers and performers, there has been a growing interest in the contribution of women to roles beyond those ‘on the air.’ Nonetheless, the ongoing tendency to emphasize women’s contribution as ‘pioneers’ and ‘innovators’ within broadcasting sometimes runs the risk of shining a spotlight on more well-known figures, with the potential to reinforce a persistent narrative of the ‘lone female pioneer’ in the broader domain of ‘soundwork.’

This article therefore builds on recent efforts to reveal a broader perspective on gendered labour within broadcast institutions, which has shown the diversity of roles
and potential career advancement, as well as the limitations, if not formal restrictions, encountered by many women within the workplace. While it will still be necessary to acknowledge 'pioneers,' the aim of the paper is to establish such broader insights about early radio recording and archiving as gendered work. The particular focus will be on two national contexts during World War II – in Britain and Nazi Germany – in which the contribution of women to broadcast recording, editing and archiving was made more visible, particularly in media discourse. In both countries, radio broadcasting was framed as a crucial area of the war effort, and archival processes were posited as essential to wartime broadcast production and for national 'memory work.' Accordingly, the first part of the article will specify the institutional context and (gendered) framing of archiving and technical work during and after World War II, noting the similarities and differences between broadcasting in Britain and Nazi Germany.

Following historians of gender who have emphasised the 'lateral thinking' necessary for the challenge of 'locating women in the archives,' the analytical sections will attend to the few occasions in which archive work as gendered labour was put on display. The two analytical sections will examine various portrayals – in text, photography, film and radio reportage – of women's work 'behind the scenes' in national radio institutions. The first part of the analysis zooms in on how the entry of women into technical and archiving roles was articulated through textual descriptions and photography, with particular attention to how these depictions conformed to broader discourse of women's labour as a 'temporary necessity' during World War II. The analysis therefore firstly deals with dominant tropes in the representation of young women in technical and archiving work: as temporary 'helping hands' for the (masculinized) technical culture of radio, contained within indoor spaces, and as ideal types in their physical appearance. Comparing two short 'behind the scenes' films – Rundfunk im Kriege/Radio during War (1943) and Museum of Sound (1943) – the second part of the analysis further develops these 'socio-material' perspectives on radio archiving as gendered labour, treating the films as potential, if not speculative, entry points to past configurations of touch, embodiment and space. As such, the close analysis approach to these depictions of gendered labour will be expanded to acknowledge a 'more-than-representational' emphasis on affect, sensation and materialities, with close attention to atmosphere, corporeal habits and dispositions, and relations between bodies, technologies and spaces of work.

A dead end? Women's work in recording, editing and archiving broadcast sound

From the perspective of the present, if we compare the cases of Britain and Germany, there are a number of differences in the narration of 'pioneers' in the recording, editing and archiving of radio. In Germany, it is Hans Flesch, artistic director of the Berlin Funk-Stunde station, who is credited with initiating a dedicated sound archival space in January 1930. These early activities – and the expansion of radio archiving after the National Socialist takeover in 1933 – has been treated in recent scholarship. Yet there
has been no equivalent acknowledgement in public discourse or institutional accounts of Flesch as an ‘archive pioneer,’ let alone official recognition of subsequent radio recording and archiving staff under National Socialism, such as Konrad von Brauchitsch or Eduard van den Valentyn. Finally, it has not (yet) been possible in this research to identify the names of female staff depicted in archive and technical work during either Weimar or Nazi-era radio.

In the British case, the figure most frequently cited today as a ‘pioneer’ is Marie Slocombe, on whose initiative a collection of ‘historic’ BBC recordings was inaugurated from 1937-38 onwards.13 Slocombe, usually cited as joining the BBC as a summer ‘temp’ worker, features prominently in a 2009 web portal ‘Archive Pioneers: Saviours of Sound at the BBC,’ which includes recordings of a 1986 personal interview, a 2007 radio feature, and a photo gallery.14 On the portal’s front page there are several images of Slocombe, along with fellow ‘archive pioneers’ at the BBC: Lynton Fletcher, Timothy Eckersley, Arthur Phillips and Ludwig Koch, all of whose activities have been well-documented in scholarly and non-academic accounts.17

Most of the fifteen photos on the portal’s photo gallery depict recording technologies or the abovementioned male colleagues working with such technologies. Along with Assistant Librarian Aline Carter, Slocombe is named in the captions, but the remainder of ‘her staff’ are described as ‘unidentified’ in a 1942 image in the gallery. The photo captions are thus revealing of how institutional archives render some staff as ‘pioneers’ with others listed as unnamed.18 Moreover, the only photo of men and women working together shows Timothy Eckersley working at a desk in the Recorded Programmes Department in 1937, while an ‘unidentified colleague’ holds out a recorded disc in a pose that suggests that she is helping him with his work.19 The caption points out that ‘Eckersley was one of the first to help establish the BBC’s Permanent Library, which housed historical sounds.’20 Even though this same woman is pictured here and in other publications performing sound technical and archiving work, her positioning in this (staged) photo is consistent with common tropes of gendered hierarchies within modern office spaces, in which women’s technical expertise was often characterised as sub-professional clerical labour.21

These narratives about a handful of early ‘pioneers’ serves as a prompt to outline the respective institutional contexts of British and German broadcasting, and overall status of sound recording and archiving within national broadcast institutions, and to specify similarities and differences in women’s labour in general, and in archiving and technical work specifically.

In terms of institutional framing, public broadcasting in Germany had been inaugurated in 1923, and reorganized in 1925 under the governance of the National Radio Board (Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft, hereafter RRG), which oversaw regional stations, the national Deutschlandsender (from 1926) and overseas broadcasting (from 1926). In mid-1926, new radio laws tightened state control over broadcast production, amidst frequent political attacks on a number of broadcast staff, including Hans Flesch, who was forced to step down in August 1932. The National Socialist takeover in 1933 lead to further purges of staff, particularly Jewish employees and those considered to be as-
associated with the Weimar-era 'system' (Systemzeit), and increased centralisation over regional stations. The centralized, state institution that female wartime recruits entered – and actively contributed to – was therefore explicitly defined as 'Aryan' and invested in the circulation of a specifically racist ideology.

In the context of National Socialist Germany, too, the activities of recording, editing and archiving was also privileged during World War II, heightened by the notion of radio as mediating historically-important events that necessitated sound archival preservation for the future; nonetheless, during the first part of World War II, there was some initial reluctance about emphasising the use of archive recordings, due to Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels concern that this would detract from the image of wartime radio as live, spontaneous and unrepeatable. The depictions examined in this article necessarily raise questions about the politics of working within institutions like National Socialist radio that partook in the radical exclusion of social others from the public sphere, and how those carrying out this work contributed to institutional gatekeeping, and the absences, silences and exclusions of the audio-visual archive. During World War II, there was both a 'predatory expansion' of German media archives, with collections looted from across Europe, but also major reorientation of archival paradigms in line with the National Socialist worldview. As such, researchers examining this material must be aware of the compromised records produced and acquired during National Socialism and the 'broken' archives left in its wake.

While the BBC was originally founded as a private company, it was reformed, in 1927, in line with a concept of public broadcasting in the form of a non-commercial public monopoly, based on a national programme from London, and the development of a BBC Regional Programme (from 1930). In late 1932 the BBC also launched its English-language Empire Service, with an explicit mission to reach the British colonies, which expanded in scope during World War II, as the BBC Overseas Service, with special European Services to occupied Europe. In her comparison of 1930s British, German and American broadcasting in the wake of the Depression, radio scholar Kate Lacey has noted the persistence of anxieties about national and cultural identity, with radio 'seized upon as a to that could bind the various constituents of the national together. Already a site of nation-building, during wartime, there was strong symbolic investment in broadcasting in terms of a strong home front, with depictions of male and female labour in radio offered to national publics as an embodiment of the war effort. In the case of the BBC, the historic archive curated by Marie Slocombe was also narrated in terms of national prestige during wartime, with recent research detailing how Slocombe's participation in discourses of 'audio nationalism' became further pronounced after 1945, due to her expanded role as a gatekeeper of the BBC archive's selections of national culture. As we will see in the analysis, during wartime, too, Slocombe voiced selective views as to which voices and sounds were worthy of recording and archiving.

If we consider staffing policy, the National Socialist 'Reich Radio Chamber' (RRK) was determined, in 1935, to be over-represented by female staff, leading to employment guidelines that favoured men; this proportion of staff within national radio administration only shifted in 1942 as part of the effort to release male staff for war-re
lated positions. In the case of the Reich Propaganda Ministry (RMPV) during wartime, the effort to transfer men to war-related duties led to roughly one-third of the male employees being replaced by early 1942, which resulted in a proportion of 450 men to 950 women. In this same period, an effort was made to recruit (young) women into audio engineering and other technical roles, although the exact numbers have not yet been verified. In Britain, women comprised roughly one-third of all BBC staff prior to 1939, with most entry-level roles for young women as administrative and secretarial staff requiring recruits to have attended secretarial college and gained some prior work experience. The expansion of the BBC’s wartime services and staff numbers, combined with one-third of the 1300 pre-war male engineers serving in the British military, were instrumental factors for the opening up of engineering and technical roles to female staff members.

In terms of continuities in Germany, the available records suggest the presence of women in radio library and archival work, but not in sound technical positions during either the Weimar Republic or first years of the National Socialist regime. If we turn to the immediate post-1945 period, it would seem that a substantial number of women were recruited for a range of technical, archive and documentation roles, but this has been less systematically studied. At the Soviet-controlled Haus des Rundfunks, for instance, the presence of women in radio production was praised in 1946, with the implication that technical tasks like recording and editing radio sound deserved equivalent credit as that received by (male) programme directors and reporters. Despite such efforts in the early, transitional stage of radio broadcasting under the Soviet-control, technical and engineering work was later articulated as a male-dominated domain in the German Democratic Republic. The narration of radio production in terms of male creative production was underscored in popular publications, as can be found in the 1961 memoir of a ‘radio man’ employed by East German radio from 1947 onwards; the cover visualised the book’s title, ... bitte schneiden! (... cut please!), in terms of a male producer’s instructions to a female employee editing tape recordings (Fig. 1). While there are fewer photos of West German radio production in the early post-war period, radio engineering culture remained largely male dominated, with occasional images of library and archival roles largely dominated by scenes of women at work.

In her study of gendered labour in 1920s and 1930s British radio, Kate Murphy has shown how the BBC, as a new media institution, allowed for a number of (middle-class, white) women to attain important positions, often in positions that were either new or not clearly gender-typed. Despite possibilities for career advancement (for some) within the organization, there were still manifold hierarchies, and entire departments and work spaces that were demarcated as male domains (such as Engineering, Post Room) or for women (the General Office, Registry, Duplicating Section, Telephone Exchange). In 1932, moreover, the BBC introduced a ‘marriage bar,’ yet it appears that a number of women circumvented this regulation, which was not universally enforced and eventually during World War II.

In addition to the various forms of office ‘paperwork’ and ‘soundwork’ performed by female support staff at the BBC – answering phones, typing correspondence,
duplicating and filing forms – the departments related to archives and documentation were also initiated or headed by women. This included the Library (Florence Mines), the Archive (Kathleen Edwin), the Photographic Section (Kathleen Lines), the Gramophone Library (Anna Instone) and the Sound Archive (Marie Slocombe), with many of these figures not only establishing departments, but also maintaining multi-decade careers in these roles, until as late as the 1960s and 1970s.42

In Britain, we can also find an equivalent shift by early 1942, with new regulations paving the way for the wartime recruitment of women in technical work, a development which also led to initial resistance among a sizeable portion of engineers accustomed to the (masculinised) technical culture of BBC Engineering.43 In 1941, an Engineering Training School was established, starting with a handful of female trainees trained for technical work, primarily in programme production and maintenance.
rather than outdoor broadcasts or mobile stations. During the war, approximately 800 female and 1600 male trainees passed through this workplace training, with a manual developed in 1942 to formalize the ‘tacit’ knowledge and skills of radio engineers.44 By late 1944, the BBC staff numbers reached over 11,000, with 5,700 women employed, of which nearly 1,000 were working for the Engineering division.45 Nonetheless, a BBC Resettlement Officer was appointed by 1944, to make plans for the ‘reabsorption of established staff’ and to consider whether or not to give permanent posts to wartime staff that the broadcaster wished to retain.46

The conditions following 1945 make it difficult to ascertain how many of these employees remained in broadcast employment immediately after 1945, with a survey in the early 1970s showing that only a small number of female recruited in wartime were still employed by BBC Engineering.47 The training and engagement of women in sound technical roles provided an avenue for at least some women into longer-term employment in engineering and archiving roles.48 One such example is Daphne Oram, inventor of the Oramics sound synthesis technique, and the first director of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, who in 1942, at the age of 17, began employment at the BBC as a Junior Studio Engineer and music balancer.49 While less is known about the career paths of other (young) women who had a similar recruitment, this example suggests that wartime technical and archivial work at least potentially allowed for some women with an interest in creative sound production and music to engage with new technologies and techniques in the context of broadcast work.

The above has drawn comparisons between the wartime recruitment of women, yet it has also sought to highlight the marked differences between British and National Socialist institutional contexts, particularly given the exclusionary definition of Nazi radio production (and its ‘national community’ of listeners), and its circulation of racially discriminatory content. In terms of recording and archiving services, the above has revealed a more prominent stress on ‘archive’ services in the training of German recruits in recording and editing skills and work procedures. This serves as a contrast to the BBC, where producers and engineers registered complaints about the Recorded Programmes Department in the period around 1942; in internal review documents, the latter's recording and archiving efforts were cited as an unnecessary nuisance to producers and engineers, with a complaint from engineers that the BBC should leave archiving and documentation to state institutions, as per the US example with the Library of Congress.

The institutional conditions specified here are not only crucial for the status of sound archival practice, but also in informing ‘tacit narratives’50 about the content and priorities of wartime sound archival collections. In what follows, I will investigate publications that highlighted women’s work – by means of textual descriptions and photographic depictions – as a means of identifying dominant tropes in the depiction of radio technical and archive work as gendered labour, in particular with regard to (young) female recruits in wartime Germany and Britain.
‘Lending a hand’: Making women's labour visible during World War II

In terms of public discourse, ‘behind the scenes’ reporting on BBC broadcast production prior to 1939 had included occasional stories in newspapers and periodicals, detailing, for instance, ‘Women of the BBC’ or ‘The Silent Women of the BBC.’ Many of these accounts focused on programme announcers and directors, rather than addressing the work of women in the domains of archiving, librarianship or audio engineering. In Germany, one of the few early reports on the Berlin sound archive in 1932 informed its reader that the sound archive had made approximately 9,000 off-air recordings since its foundation two years earlier; the accompanying image looks across the shoulder of a female employee, dressed in plain clothes, and consulting the sound collections of the RRG radio board and Berlin Funk-Stunde station, which were housed together in the purpose-built Haus des Rundfunks complex. Following the National Socialist takeover in January 1933, a similarly-priced photograph from 1934 gazes over the shoulder of a female employee playfully holding up a disc from a flat archive drawer.
while in the background an engineer in a white coat is shown consulting with another employee in Nazi uniform. These images not only signpost the politicization of the institution, but also serve as reminders of a general tendency to present women at work either in a sexualized manner, or in the case of the former, in a desexualized manner consistent with the 'bun-lady' stereotype that has been analysed within feminist library and archivist scholarship.53

If we turn to World War II, a number of German and British examples of publications drew attention to the rapid and expanding recruitment of women in broadcasting, particularly in technical roles. In Germany, a 1942 article in the trade publication Welt-Rundfunk, for instance, included four images under the heading 'Women are helping in radio' (Fig. 2).54 A centrally-displayed photo depicted a male teacher instructing approximately twenty students who were described as 'radio technicians in war deployment' (Rundfunktechnikerinnen im Kriegseinsatz), which suggested the provisional nature of their employment in the context of war. In the three other photos, the image is composed by looking over the shoulder of these technicians at work, with their hands on the technical apparatus: two women adjust sound levels of loudspeaker output, another woman examines the grooves of a recording on a disc cutter, and is shown again in the final image operating a playback desk with two discs. The caption for this final image, 'the creation of a sound recording also has to be practiced,' also implies that women need additional training for technical 'sound work,' and underscores the novelty of women technicians.55

In this period, a 1943 article detailing 'radio technical professions' was authored by Eduard van den Valentyn, head of the central technical department of the RRG national radio board between 1938 and 1945.56 Van den Valentyn's article appeared in the Funkschau: Zeitschrift für Funktechniker, whose title was gender-coded with the subtitle 'Techniker' rather than 'Technikerinnen'; the cover of this issue, however, is emblazoned by an image entitled 'Women in War Deployment,' with the photo caption stressing that women were learning to operate 'delicate' factory machines for producing sensitive high-frequency measuring instruments (Fig. 3).57 Van den Valentyn's own article describes possible radio technical roles at the national broadcaster RRG, and details possibilities for career progression. He notes how the new hires started in the switching and control units, where they gained an overview of National Socialist radio organization and learned how technicians should collaborate with engineers and programme producers. Following this training, most would start by serving in the sound recording service (Tonträgerdienst); in addition to servicing recording machines, this department was responsible for recording events on discs and tape, as well as cutting and pressing discs, preparing 'archive-worthy' (archivwertig) discs for preservation, and re-recording excerpts for programmes comprised of pre-recorded items. In this role, new hires would learn the functions and use of various types of sound formats (e.g. long-play records, flexi discs, Magnetophone tape) and how they were used within radio.

The priority for women training in these roles, as Van den Valentyn indicates, was the development of 'a certain light-fingeredness when operating the machines;' this quality is deemed essential since the (male) engineers were described as having
a ‘virtuosic’ control of the sound recording and playback devices. Van den Valentyn closes his article by reflecting on the possibilities for career development beyond these entry-level positions. In his differentiation, assistant technicians and audio engineers could be male and female, with the possibility of audio engineers advancing to head engineer (using the masculine form); all other positions described (for departments, workshops and laboratories) were phrased in the masculine form, thus making clear that only a portion of these technical positions would include young women, for whom career advancement would not be possible.

There are similar discourses in evidence at the BBC about the expectation that the contribution of (young) women to technical operations within wartime broadcasting; this was cast as a temporary measure, rather than an avenue to a long-term career. A 1943 article by Noel Ashbridge, head of engineering between 1929 and 1952, is illustrative in this regard. In ‘Manning the Stations in Wartime,’ Ashbridge describes the twelve-week intensive training that male and female recruits had to follow, with a manual written in 1942 to help the speed of knowledge acquisition during the course. In the first, four-week course, the recruits were given an overview of the organization.
and its activities, with general technical principles imparted during lectures by the department heads within the BBC Engineering division, and hands-on practical training in which recruits would play-act as announcers, performers, producers, and as studio and programme engineers. Depending on their performance, recruits would then follow the second course, spending a further eight weeks – either at a studio centre, recording centre or transmission station – learning the principles and the hands-on skills of studio work, recording or transmission respectively, with a final exam deciding if they could start in a specialized position. Ashbridge goes on to highlight the particular success of training women as operators and in recording work, though he regards this as dependant on their ability to sufficiently assist the (male) conductor or producer, to be dedicated, methodical and to have a careful, light ‘touch.’ Here, women’s technical labour is conditional on the expansion of BBC’s operations during war, with ‘some three thousand records a week’ being produced.

While the article does not make gender differentiations explicit, Ashbridge’s comments on women’s work in programme production highlights the notion that they were better suited to indoor, studio work. In a similar vein, a 1945 summary of ‘landmarks’ of World War II broadcasting, authored by BBC Engineering controller Harold
Bishop, also reaffirmed the presence of women in indoor, studio-based production. Mobile reporting, by contrast, was offered as a privileged site of radio production for capturing world history during 1944-1945, citing the landmark of a portable disc recorder, created by the BBC research department, 'which since D-day has captured for listeners so many sound pictures and war reports from BBC and other war reporters.'

In this article, and the other photographs surrounding it, outdoor reporting was almost exclusively performed by male staff, often as a solo effort, without the presence of an engineer.

A useful illustration of the visual presentation of women's work can be found by looking at photographs reproduced in the annual BBC Handbook publication (titled BBC Year Book from 1943 on) for the period 1939 to 1946. In 1940, for instance, the handbook is dominated by photographic images of men, in particular for all images depicting the handling of technical equipment: at a transmission station, in selecting an extract from a sound recording (Fig. 4), and in mobile recording. In 1941, there is one image (without a caption) of a woman handling machine equipment, and in 1942, an image is captioned 'BBC women operators receiving instruction in the use of a steel-tape recording machine' (Fig. 5). While the annual publication continued to mention and praise the contribution of (young) women to engineering, through to 1946, all further photographic images depicting war-time engineers were exclusively of men. A photo caption in the BBC Year Book 1946, for instance, informs its readership of the 2,500 recruits trained at the BBC Engineering Training School, 'including over 800 women,' but only depicts a classroom setting for disc recording with a male teacher and students (Fig. 6).

The previous has sought out similarities in various representations of this work, with all these examples reveal the dominant discourses in the description and repre-
representation of women in wartime recording and archiving work: as temporary ‘helping hands,’ contained within indoor spaces, and as ideal types in their appearance as white, able-bodied, wearing neat and modest dress, yet marked as feminine. The following zooms in on two short ‘behind the scenes’ films in wartime Germany and Britain, both produced and made in 1943, at a moment in which the influx of wartime recruits was most pronounced, and the gendered labour of technical and archive work was arguably most visibly rendered for the general public. This small corpus allows for a comparison of two similar texts that position its viewer (or listener) is privy to ‘behind the scenes’ of wartime radio production, in particular in the recording, archiving and re-use of radio content. These enactments, however staged, will also be considered from an expanded perspective as entry points for considering this gendered labour in terms of configurations of touch, embodiment and space.

The ‘light touch’: Embodied practice and the spaces of gendered work

*Museum of Sound* (1943) and *Rundfunk im Kriege* (1943) are two striking performances of broadcast recording and archiving as gendered work during the war period. They were both produced in 1942-1943, when the influx of wartime recruits was most pronounced, yet the context of each film is strikingly different. *Rundfunk im Kriege* was explicitly signposted as a propaganda short – commissioned by the German Ministry of Propaganda – premiered in 1943 amidst a growing public awareness of military losses following the German surrender in Stalingrad. By contrast, *Museum of Sound* is one of several productions in this period that proudly put the work of the Fletcher, Slocombe and their colleagues on display, despite the presence of serious internal divisions as to the mandate of the Recorded Programmes Department for the recording, storage and re-use of broadcast sound.
I will first examine *Rundfunk im Kriege*, since this film has a broader scope and embeds recording, editing and archival practice within a multitude of indoor and outdoor activities of the German national broadcaster in Berlin. The genre of the ‘radio film’ was already well-established by this time, from the early silent promotional films through to longer documentary and feature-length films in which radio production was a central theme. This cultural film, thirteen minutes in length, runs the course of a broadcast day. It shows various staff entering and exiting the Berlin broadcast building Haus des Rundfunks (with their staff cards checked by a uniformed soldier), but only records one staged conversation between two male staff members discussing the 24 hour operations of German radio during wartime. While the film underscores the live nature of broadcast programming, it also depicts the studio use of pre-recorded sounds on disc as a segway between spoken announcements in the studio, with recorded sound playback serving as an important bridge or mediating factor in German radio production.

There are several striking scenes in which the gendering of recording, editing and archival labour is evident, both in terms of embodied touch and spatial configuration. In one instance, the viewer is shown the large ‘black discs’ (Schwarzplatten) of the historic archive: a male employee, coded as a manual labourer by his plain workshop uniform, wheels a trolley of approximately 20 black discs and 10 white boxes containing magnetic tape recording, from the archive basement rooms, either for storage or
for re-use in production (Fig. 7). Subsequently, the viewer is shown, for the first time, one of the female audio engineers described by Eduard van den Valentyn in 1943. Leaning forward, she quickly attends to a disc-cutting machine in operation, tapping her fingers on the bench while waiting for the copying to be completed, while the camera pans to a control room where a white-coated male engineer adjusts the transmission switches to ‘Speaker 1.’ On this cue, another young woman, also in a white coat, places a cable switch to ‘Speaker 1.’ At this interval, the upbeat popular music that began as the trolley with archive recordings were wheeled out stops, and the young woman is heard calling out ‘Abfahren!’ (‘Start!’). This is the only time a female member of the technical production staff is heard speaking, although a range of female announcers are heard presenting in German, Persian and Russian as part of a montage sequence that locates the various languages of Nazi-era international broadcasting within a propaganda discourse concerned with both European and global influence.  

The next depiction of female labour starts with a zoom out from two hands on a noisy typewriter, which is shown to be a typist being dictated to during a meeting between three producers deciding on the programme order of war reporters from across German-occupied Europe, with a portrait of Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler hanging on the wall above the three men. In a subsequent scene a male announcer’s voice (transmitting from Lisbon) introduces a sequence and calls out – via an internal speaker – ‘attention, cut please!’ (Achtung, bitte schneiden!), upon which a woman’s hands are shown promptly reaching forward, with one small lever lifted to release the disc cutter’s rotation wheel, and another lever is pulled down to enable the cutting to begin. The viewer never sees this audio engineer’s face, with camera panning instead to another studio in which a male announcer introduces a male speaker and calls for a recording to start in ten seconds. With this instruction, the next shot depicts a close up of the Magnetophone tape recorder, with another woman’s hands moving to the device, with her poised finger pressing down on a button that starts the recording on this state-of-the-art device.

On the subsequent and final instance in which female audio engineers were depicted in relation to recording and playback devices, the camera pans across the climactic end to a orchestra performing on stage (with soloists and full choir). The next shot shows a young engineer, with her left hand on a control and right hand on the play button of the tape player. She leans to see the signal indicating the end of the performance, and then quickly looks down to cue up the tape recording, upon which time a smaller brass ensemble is shown on the same stage playing upbeat ‘German swing’ (Fig. 8). The final scenes depict three sequences of women as radio listeners: while operating machinery in the workplace, as a mother watching over her sleeping child, and, finally, as a young woman gazing at a bedside photo of her loved one in uniform, who is subsequently shown to be a listening to the same programme with several members of his military unit. The viewer is invited to observe a multitude of operations across a broadcast day, designed to be illustrative for the German broadcast effort during war, with the viewer encouraged to sense the busy atmosphere of Haus des Rundfunks, and the dedication of its staff.

In terms of the spaces of the workplace, in one scene a pan across the ‘radio canteen’ (*Rundfunkkantine*) depicts male and (mainly young) female staff sitting together, which is suggestive of the radio as a work environment in which mixed gender work and interactions took place.72 However, in all other scenes, it is male announcers, producers and technical staff who exercise (creative) agency and decision-making, while the women are depicted as part of the in-between mediation performed by recording and playback media within broadcasting, acting as switchboards and sorting bodies.73 Indeed, in practice, the portrayals of (young) women's labour in recording and archiving was restricted to the operations of the sound recording service (*Tonträgerdienst*), which serviced machines, recorded excerpts for programme production, and prepared archive discs for preservation. In conducting this technical work, as van den Valentyn had also pointed out in 1943, they were imagined as learning ‘a certain light-fingeredness’ when dealing with various recording, editing and archiving tasks.

Overall, the ‘historical significance’ of wartime radio is located in its liveness, as well as through the creation of a materially-inscribed artefact on disks and tapes. Here, the German-developed Magnetophone technology, as an essential means of recording programmes and replaying excerpts, is itself posited as intrinsic to the German war effort. As such, the viewers of *Rundfunk im Kriege* were offered an ideal image of National Socialist propaganda during World War II about the archive as facilitating production and generating a historical repository for future memory work.
Museum of Sound (1943) is similarly situated in the capital city of both England and the British Empire, for which the broadcasting house is also rendered as one of the important 'mediated centres of power' during war. In contrast to Rundfunk im Kriege, however, this short film is focused solely on the re-use of recorded sounds within wartime radio production. The film, 7 minutes in length, revolves around workplace interviews with the heads of the BBC Recorded Programmes Department (Lynton Fletcher) and Engineering Department (Martin Pulling), who are described as responsible for the recording and technical operations of the BBC.

The film opens with an image of a BBC announcer, followed by the exterior of Broadcasting House in London, with the well-known Pathé narrator Bob Danvers-Walker reading the text 'Old Sounds are Kept Safe and Sound in the Recorded Programmes department.' In this film, women's labour in recording, editing and archiving broadcast sound is certainly more visible than in Rundfunk im Kriege, but it is entirely framed by the voices of Fletcher, along with Pulling and Danvers-Walker: none of the female employees are heard speaking, nor are any ambient sounds from their office space audible.

Seated at a desk, Fletcher explains that there are two main dimensions to recording, editing and archiving radio at the BBC. On the one hand, he describes the Programmes Library, which has recordings of events when they happen, mostly for later transmission, and from recording cars used to reach events beyond the reach of the studio (for which male staff are depicted stepping into a vehicle). One the other hand, he notes, there is the Permanent Library, which strives to preserve recordings for future re-use, as emblematic of 'some of those things that characterize our life and times.' Fletcher points out that the Recorded Programmes department has to respond to all requests that come in, often needing to edit and rearrange material, due to the different needs of programming for home listeners as opposed to overseas services.

Fletcher describes how – following recording procedures – the records 'pass through our libraries where they are indexed, cross-indexed and filed'. During this description, the viewer is shown an office space with three desks facing one another, and three women work amidst piles of paper, including one woman who is on the telephone and accepts a delivery of a BBC disc (Fig. 9). Subsequently the viewer is shown a woman with glasses sorting a card catalogue box, with other staff members shown holding paper lists, in order to quickly locate discs in the Gramophone Library and then bring these to a disc player for a quality check. While no on-location sound is audible, there is off-screen playback of an Edison recording of former UK Prime Minister William Gladstone, which leads into a sequence about the voices of present-day leaders like Stalin and Roosevelt, is cited as useful for national memory work for future generations. While the work of women in the Recorded Programmes Department and Engineering Department are shown performing 'hands on' work, it is ultimately Fletcher and Pulling who position themselves as sound recording and archiving directors, with all other staff situated as having support roles.

In this same period, there is one notable exception to the tendency in the depiction of recording and archive work, with a four-part series titled 'You Have Been
Listening to A Recording,' which featured Marie Slocombe as ‘the compiler and curator’ of the historic archive. This series, aired to the Forces broadcast service on Saturday afternoons in March-April 1942 similarly gave the pretence of a ‘behind the scenes’ exploration of Broadcasting House, with three episodes delivered by Fletcher about the Recorded Programmes Department, with a final episode devoted to the practical work of audio recordings, with Pulling as main speaker. From this series, one 16-minute recording is available today in which Fletcher and Marie Slocombe give listeners a ‘guided tour’ of the items in the Permanent Library.76

Two scenes are illustrative for the inclusion of women’s voices in a male-dominated episode, in which mainly archival recordings of men’s voices are featured. In the opening sequence, Fletcher illustrates to the listener which procedures would take place if a producer would want to find a recording in the Recorded Programmes Department. As a moot example, he ‘play acts’ what would happen if one were to search for recordings of Socrates prior to his death. Fletcher is heard indicating how he would go to the Recorded Programmes Department and ask one of the librarians ‘Socrates please, last conversations and trial.’ The rapid sounds of typewriter keys are heard, accompanied by a woman’s voice calling out keywords until she says ‘Ah yes, here it is, Socrates.’ Fletcher suggests that the librarian would then pull out half a dozen records and escort the producer to the listening cubicle. The librarian is positioned in this scene as a helping aide that enables programme producers to easily find, listen to and subsequently use recorded extracts from the Permanent Library.

The ‘archive pioneer’ Slocombe is allocated around four minutes of this programme to provide a sample from several hundred recordings of ‘ordinary’ men telling stories, chosen as illustrative of ‘the spirit of our times.’ While the selections made by Slocombe are designated as ‘ordinary,’ a number of them include testimonies of armed force and others about military attacks in the context of World War II. The final clip chosen by Slocombe is described by Slocombe as a ‘truly modern love poem’ inspired by
the recent activity of women during the war. The poem ‘She walks in Battledress,’ written by a soldier and published in *Punch* magazine is read by a male speaker. Referring to the work of women in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the first verse reads states: ‘My love in her attire / As Number One / On the Predictor team / Blasting the Hun, / Helmeted, dauntless, / Slightly hoarse, in slacks / Though not perhaps / The stuff to spin / A poet’s dream / For me no beauty lacks.’ After the poem is read out, Slocombe disappears from the programme, and only Fletcher’s voice – and several examples of ‘old customs, dialects, statesmen and artists’ – can be heard in the remainder of the recording. The poem, therefore, asserts the gaze of a soldier on a woman working in a male profession during the war, while the *BBC* programme reinforces a dominant notion of male staff within the *BBC* as decisive agents, with a ‘tacit narrative’ whereby the historic sound collection was defined almost exclusively in terms of male voices. While this example creates a space that foregrounded Slocombe, it serves as a reminder of how prominent staff – including female pioneers like Marie Slocombe – articulated archival practice within dominant gender discourses of wartime Britain.

The previous analysis has drawn attention to how gendered labour within wartime broadcasting was presented via the bodies and hands of production staff performing archival and technical ‘sound work’: patching cables, recording sound, mixing and cross-fading sound, and in indexing, filing, sourcing and dispatching recordings. The two films discussed here each acknowledge the expanded presence of female staff during wartime, offering embodied performances by women inhabiting these workspaces, albeit with restrictions on their voices. In both films, moreover, it is indoor spaces of (national) broadcaster buildings that are deemed as suitable locations for (young) female recruits to work, rather than in transmission centres or mobile reporting, which was repeatedly stressed as the domain of male action.

Both films reinforce a perceived ‘historical significance’ of radio during war, which is explicitly linked to sound recording and preservation. Yet they both gloss over internal divisions, material shortages and various limitations encountered by those carrying out this ‘nationally significant’ work. An important difference is that German radio practice had a more pronounced archival system, based on explicit ideological priorities and institutional support, while at the *BBC*, the Recorded Programmes Department faced several major challenges to its mandate during World War II, with both producers and engineers criticizing their work during internal reviews. From the perspective of the present, moreover, these cases require close attention to the selection priorities and ‘tacit narratives’ underpinning the politics of archiving in national radio institutions, particularly in the exclusionary context of broadcast production in *Haus des Rundfunks* under National Socialism.

The representations examined here also explicitly perform fictions, since both *Rundfunk im Kriege* and ‘You Have Been Listening to A Recording’ include scenes in which female clerical staff ‘play act’ workplace relations in which they type out directives from male staff, which emphasises their intermediary role in facilitating the work of male producers. While the enactments of archival and technical practice discussed here are highly staged, they nonetheless reveal ambivalent traces of gendered work in
the historical archives of broadcasting during wartime Britain and Germany. The previous analysis, furthermore, has sought out scenes of embodied presence, touch and spatial configurations as a way to tease out some of these traces of women's technical and archiving work within wartime radio, which have been mostly downplayed within both popular and institutional accounts of radio history. This is in keeping with Tara Rodgers' call for feminist media histories to 'tinker with' established narratives and cultural memory, with the two parts of the analysis here identifying common tropes in the representational regimes of this gendered work, and enquiring into possible entry points via the 'more-than-representational', namely, in enactments of touch, embodiment and the relations between bodies, technologies and spaces of work.

As Maria DiCenzo has pointed out, feminist media history seek to 'gaps in history and media studies, but also rewrites and reconfigures their assumptions and narratives - whether it be to problematize assumptions about the past, or to expand the historical dimensions of issues assumed to be relevant only to contemporary media. Indeed, the overall task of investigating women working in broadcasting necessitates a piecing together of 'scattered fragments' and challenging 'masculine-orientated' records, which tend to affirm pioneers of audio engineering as all male, with archive and technical work by women as merely 'operational' or 'subclerical' office work. Accordingly, the present essay has specified the institutional context and (gendered) framing of archiving and technical work in the 1930s and 1940s, developing 'socio-material' perspectives and seeking to compare and contrast the cases of Britain and Nazi Germany.

More broadly, however, the two cases examined here point to marked differences in the availability of information about archival work as gendered labour. As such, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of prominent 'pioneer' women in British radio and its recent historiography, as well as the print-based archival records - particularly staff records at the BBC Written Archives Centre - that have allowed for this renewed attention to women in British radio production to take place. Resources such as staff lists may therefore offer a useful starting place to further investigate the 'unnamed' female staff on display in the BBC Archive Pioneers gallery. Nonetheless, for both wartime Britain and Germany, more extensive research will be necessary to flesh out this initial analysis of wartime archive and technical work, and uncover further details on the scores of individual women who worked 'behind the scenes', for which too little is known and whose work the present essay has provided a first, speculative engagement with.

Notes


8 See Murphy, Behind the Wireless.


12 Sara Malou Strandvad, 'Analyzing Production from a Socio-Material Perspective', in: P. Szczepanik

13 For the theorisation of the 'more-than' or 'non-representational' turn, in particular within feminist scholarship, see Nigel Thrift, 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect', *Geografiska Annaler* 86 (2004), 57-78; Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, 'Questioning Affect and Emotion', *Area* 38 (2010), 333-335; Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, 'Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory', *Feminist Theory* 13 (2012) 2, 5-29. In a similar vein, on the formation of 'emotional communities' within broadcast institutions, see David Hendy, 'Biography and the Emotions as a Missing "Narrative" in Media History: A Case Study of Lance Sieveking and the Early BBC', *Media History* 18 (2012) 3-4, 361-378.


18 My observations are not intended as direct criticism of the BBC Archive team, who I have been told took much care in preparing this portal based on the materials and information at their disposal. For the difficulties in trying to piece together information about female staff at the BBC, based on written documentation, see Murphy, *Behind the Wireless*, 1-2, 9.


Birdsall, 'Sound and Media Studies', 137-138.


For film collections during National Socialism and World War II, see Rolf Aurich, 'The German Reich Film Archive in an International Context', in: M. Hagener (ed.), The Emergence of Film Culture: Knowledge, Production, Institution Building, and the Fate of the Avant-garde in Europe, 1919-1945 (London/New York: Berghahn, 2014), 306-338. For radio collections during and after World War II, see Birdsall, 'Sound and Media Studies'. For archivists and archival records during National Socialism, see Astrid Eckert, 'Managing their Own Past: German Archivists between National Socialism and Democracy', Archival Science 7 (2007) 3, 223-244.

Fritzschke, 'The Archive and the Case of the German Nation'.


Lacey, 'Radio in the Great Depression', 29.


Lacey, Feminine Frequencies, 142-143.

Lacey notes that men were still dominant in 'salaried' (Angestellte) roles, and many of the appointments filled by women were defined contractually as temporary in nature.

'Staff Recruitment', in: bbc Handbook 1939 (Norwich/London: Jarrold & Sons, 1939), 138-139, here 139.

See Pawley, BBC Engineering. 71-78; Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 26.

Nonetheless, there are a few examples of women who had gained university-level education in radio studies – and sometimes employment – during National Socialism, who continued to work in related fields following 1945. One example is Dr. Rosemarie Rossbach, who worked in National Socialist radio (1937-1944) and defended her doctoral thesis in 1944, and later served as the head of the WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) historical archive in Cologne between 1964 and 1976. For other examples of radio careers across the 1945 divide, as for example Hans Joachim Weinbrenner (employed by the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv), see Carolyn Birdsall, 'Radio Documents' (forthcoming).

This is evidenced in radio and television technical central office (Rundfunk- und Fernsehtechnische Zentralamt or RFZ), whose monthly publication between 1962 and 1989 exclusively profiled male engineers and acoustics researchers. See the publication Technische Mitteilungen des RFZ (1962-1989).


A number of publications attest to the male-dominated radio engineering culture of the early post-war period. For the UK, see, for instance, the documentation included on the BBCeng.info website, as well as reports like D.E.L. Shorter, 'Visit to Vienna, Hamburg and Cologne – November 1955. BBC Research Report. Published January 1955', http://www.bbc.co.uk/rd/publications (Accessed 1 May 2017). For West Germany, see the trade publications Technische Hausmitteilungen des Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunks (1949-1956) and the Rundfunktechnische Mitteilungen (1957-2001), and the overview publication: Hans Rindfleisch, Technik im Rundfunk: Ein Stück deutscher Rundfunkgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der achtziger Jahre (Norderstedt: Mensing, 1985). For the field of radio archiving in Germany, see the activities of the archive professionals subgroup 'Fachgruppe 7: Medienarchive', http://www.vda.archiv.net/fachgruppen/fachgruppe-7-medianarchiv.html, and the commemoration of the early media archive pioneer Marianne Englert, active from the late 1940s onwards, http://www.vfm-online.de/weblog/vfm-aktuell/marianne-englert-90/.

Murphy, Behind the Wireless.


Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 123-124.

Pawley describes the resistance of several Engineers-In-Charge to women recruits, who 'sought to limit their activities as much as possible, relegating them to such tasks as control room operations'. See Pawley, BBC Engineering, 302.


'Staff', in: BBC Year Book 1945, 138.

Pawley cites a count in 1971 that found 'seventeen survivors of the war-time women staff in engineering operations.' See Pawley, BBC Engineering, 302. As Kate Murphy has pointed out, no female engineers were recruited after World War II: 'Women engineers who wanted to remain, although no longer employed at transmitters, were retained for studio work but with limited options for promotion because "they generally did not possess the necessary technical qualifications",' Murphy. Behind the Wireless, 259. One exception Murphy cites elsewhere is Kathleen Stevenson, a war recruit who was named Technical Operations Supervisor in 1965 for the Manchester Control Room. See Kate Murphy, 'Women at the BBC', http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/culture/women (Accessed 1 May 2017).
Pawley describes the resistance of several Engineers-In-Charge to women recruits, who 'sought to limit their activities as much as possible, relegating them to such tasks as control room operations.' See Pawley, BBC Engineering, 302.

Ultimately, however, Oram resigned from the BBC in 1959 and went on to develop a home-studio space according to her own blueprint for an electronic music studio as a 'sound-house.' See Laurie Waller, 'Rediscovering Daphne Oram's Home-studio', in I. Farías and A. Wilkie (eds), Studio Studies: Operations, Topologies & Displacements (Oxon: Routledge, 2015); http://daphneoram.org/daphnej (Accessed 1 May 2017); Jo Hutton, 'Daphne Oram: Innovator, Writer and Composer', Organised Sound 8 (2003) 1, 49-56.


Ruth Maschwitz, 'Women of the BBC', Weldon's Ladies Journal (September 1939), n.p.; 'Silent Women of the BBC', Everywoman's (February 1935), n.p. Kate Murphy has documented the important role of Elise Sprott, employed at the BBC from 1924, and as Women's Press Officer from 1931 onwards, in promoting the work of women at the BBC. See Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 1-5, 8, 9, 12, 116, 189, 251-2. During the war, Sprott continued to give her regular 'Behind the Scenes at the 8.8.C' lecture in and around London, using slide projections to show photographic images of announcers, technicians and war reporters. See details in the Middlesex Chronicle, 11 May 1940; 3; Middlesex Chronicle, 8 July 1944, 7.


'Frauen helfen im Rundfunk', Welt-Rundfunk: Internationale Zeitschrift für Rundfunk und Fernsehen 6 (1942) 6, 17.

'Frauen helfen im Rundfunk', 6, 17. Original: 'Auch das Herstellen einer Schallaufnahme muss geübt werden.'

Eduard van den Valenty, 'Rundfunkspracheln als Beruf: Die rundfunksprachlichen Berufe beim Reichsrundfunk', Funkschau 14 (1943) 6, 61. See also Eduard van den Valenty, 'Die Entwicklung der Schallaufzeichnung im Grossdeutschen Rundfunk', Reichsrundfunk, 31 August 1941, 234-239.

Van den Valenty, 'Rundfunkspracheln als Beruf'. Original: 'Der Kriegseinsatz der Frauen'.

Van den Valenty, 'Rundfunkspracheln als Beruf'. Original: 'Dabei steht die Forderung nach einer gewissen Fingerfertigkeit bei der Bedienung der Maschinen im Vordergrund.'


Ashbridge, ‘Manning the Stations in Wartime’, 89.


BBC Handbook 1940 (Norwich and London: Jarrold & Sons, 1940), n.p.


For a discussion of the appearance, clothing, and use of cosmetics amongst female staff at the BBC, see Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 33-37.

The film Rundfunk im Kriege can only be viewed with permission of the Bundesarchiv-Filmstelle in Berlin, whereas the second film, Museum of Sound (1943) is currently readily available online via British Pathé (and Youtube). See http://www.britishpathe.com/video/museum-of-sound/ (Accessed 1 May 2017).

The premiere of this film as took place in November 1943, with censorship clearance on 1 March 1944. See http://www.filmportal.de (Accessed 1 May 2017).

Some early examples include Ein Tag im Funkhaus (1928, silent), Rund um den Funk (1929, silent), Der aktuelle Rundfunk (1930, silent) and Rundfunk einst und jetzt (1932, synch sound). For a comparison of Germany and British wartime films, albeit focused on feature-length films, see Jo Fox, “‘The Mediator’: Images of Radio in Wartime Feature Film in Britain and Germany”, in: M. Connelly and D. Welch (eds.), War and the Media (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 92-111.


For a discussion of ‘German swing’ and jazz, see Birdsall, Nazi Soundscapes, 84-87, 168-169, 212.

Kate Murphy provides examples of the BBC during the 1930s, which suggest that ‘while male bosses had a preference for working with male clerks, female managers were more open to working with a mixed staff.’ For further discussion of mixed-gender workspaces in the BBC context, see Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 22, 46, 69.


In addition to his work for Pathé, between 1940 and 1970, Danvers had also been active for the International Broadcasting Company and, between 1943-1945, in BBC wartime programming. See Séan Street, Crossing the Ether: Pre-war Public Service Radio and Commercial Competition in the UK (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006).


Murphy, Behind the Wireless, 8, 9.