

Russia in the Microphone Age: A History of Soviet Radio, 1919–1970. By Stephen Lovell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xi, 237 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$59.95, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2018.171

Stephen Lovell's *Russia in the Microphone Age* resonates, especially today, in our world of information wars, rapid technological change, and rising tensions between Russia and the west. This detailed and comprehensively-researched study shows how radio producers in the Soviet Union broke with old models of mass communication and reinvented the medium in terms of what made it unique and attractive to ordinary listeners. Ironically, this occurred just as television eclipsed radio as the new universal medium. Furthermore, even at its height, Soviet radio authorities struggled to propagate socialism within the USSR, while also preventing the infiltration of capitalist ideas from without. Still, Lovell argues that prior to this, and for most of its history, radio was an enormously important medium in the Soviet Union, entertaining citizens, defining rhetorical norms, and bringing a national community into being.

This book is about the relationship between people and new technology, but Lovell's focus is on the social and cultural dimension of radio broadcasting. In particular, he reveals how radio content was at various stages modeled on existing forms of cultural production. At first, radio was conceived as a loudspeaker, a "newspaper without paper," (21) and then in the 1930s as a source of live theater and literature. Although "literary reading" enjoyed some success, theatrical productions proved exhausting to listeners at home, and the stilted language of newsreaders, plodding through the dense language of Soviet newspapers, was equally unappealing. In each case, the potential to reach a mass audience motivated radio producers, but also impeded experimentation. For the Stalinist state, radio was not an entirely new type of cultural production: it was a mass means of disseminating information more efficiently. And by striving for a collective mode of address, broadcasters denied radio's potential for a more intimate, individual form of audience engagement.

These awkward first steps cast a long historical shadow. For example, during the war, the agitational style of Stalinist-era rhetoric crept into soldiers' letters from the front, submitted to broadcasters. Hoping to capture a more authentic *vox populi*, editors proceeded to rewrite these texts to make them sound more "literary," "straight-forward," and thus more "convincing" (125). Such attempts to police language were a recurring feature of Soviet broadcasting until the 1960s, when broadcasters adopted a more unscripted format and moved away from Soviet clichés of speech and public address. But, according to Lovell, radio producers continued to uphold strict linguistic standards well into the 1970s, often rehearsing proper diction and pronunciation with guest speakers. By then, penalties for on-air infractions were minor, but producing radio content that was both authentic and ideologically impeccable remained a perennial concern and challenge for broadcasters.

Technology, though of secondary importance, still features prominently in Lovell's account. But millennials beware: radio-specific technical knowledge is generally assumed of the reader. Here the author relates how specific infrastructure and equipment at first satisfied and then tested the limits of state control over access and programming. For instance, cheap and durable wired networks, built in the 1920s, afforded greater control of content, but reached only a fraction of the Soviet population. After the war, in order to expand access, Soviet industry ramped up production of wireless receiver sets and erected more powerful transmission towers. Still, technological shortcomings were legion, and no matter what improvements were made, the Soviets failed to keep up with the west. State authorities responded to the global range of western radio by jamming foreign transmissions, such as the BBC and Voice

of America, which “could be heard in any point in the USSR” (137). Alas, these efforts also managed to interfere with domestic transmissions; having adopted this defensive posture in the propaganda war, the Soviets suffered from the radio equivalent of friendly fire.

One gets the sense from Lovell’s book that Soviet radio peaked in the 1960s when listeners enjoyed a wide range of programs, including news, music, sports, radio theater, and children’s shows. Still, the lasting impression is of a medium singularly unfit to flourish in Soviet circumstances. The desire to create a collective form of national address hindered the development of something more intimate, authentic, and individual. Furthermore, the utopian potential of radio—its ability to cross borders and reach a truly global audience—seemed beyond Soviet broadcasters and only managed to frustrate the state authorities. In any case, this peak was also short-lived. With the invention of TV, broadcasters found a new means of capturing a collective audience that soon eclipsed the hard-fought accomplishments of Soviet radio.

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The Red Army and the Second World War. By Alexander Hill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xii, 738 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$34.99, hard bound.
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Shelves bend under the weight of books on the epic Soviet-German clash on the Eastern Front from 1941–45. In addition to older, rigorous scholarly accounts by John Erickson and Earl F. Ziemke, more recent books by Chris Bellamy, Stephen G. Fritz, David M. Glantz, Jonathan Mallory House, Ewan Mawdsley, and Geoffrey Megargee, to give an incomplete list, take advantage of new archival revelations to cover the Second World War in the east within the space of a single volume. Is there really room for another book synthesizing the voluminous secondary literature and selected archival material?

As it turns out, there is. Alexander Hill not only finds room to say something not covered in other synthetic works on the Eastern Front, but in fact he depends on those other books to make his points. His book does not pretend to be comprehensive, despite its length and weight. Instead, he looks at a particular theme: how “the Red Army was transformed into a more effective fighting force” (3). This is in itself not especially new. Indeed, an almost universal theme in recent literature on the Soviet military in World War II has been how almost all aspects of the Red Army’s military performance, from the lowliest rifleman to Iosif Stalin himself, displayed a clear pattern of increasing sophistication and effectiveness from the dark days of 1941 to the occupation of Berlin in 1945. Hill’s contribution is in focusing on specific aspects of that transformation.

In particular, Hill examines specific technical questions of military effectiveness in great detail. Both scholars and general readers with an interest in military history are likely reasonably well-informed about the operational and strategic history of the Eastern Front. They are familiar with the T-34 tank and the *Shturmovik* and other iconic examples of military technology which contributed to Soviet victory. Hill’s focus lies elsewhere, with communications technology, reconnaissance, intelligence, logistics, training, and organization, along with less glamorous weapons systems alongside tanks and aircraft. Indeed, Hill makes it explicit that he expects his readers to have read and become familiar with more traditional operational