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Narrative Podcasting in an Age of Obsession



NEIL VERMA

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NARRATIVE PODCASTING IN AN AGE OF OBSESSION

Neil Verma

It has been a decade since *Serial* brought the narrative podcast to the center of popular culture. In that time, there has been an enormous boom in the production of podcasts that tell stories, particularly in the fields of true crime, storytelling, history, and narrative fiction. Now that the initial glow around the medium has begun to fade, it is time to reevaluate the medium's technological, political, economic, and cultural rise, in particular what types of storytelling accompanied that rise.

Narrative Podcasting in an Age of Obsession is the first book to look back on this prodigious body of material and attempt to make sense of it from a structural, historical, and analytic point of view. Focusing on more than 350 podcasts and other audio works released between *Serial* and the COVID pandemic, the book explores why so many of these podcasts seem "obsessed with obsession," why they focus not only on informing listeners but also dramatizing the labor that goes into it, and why fiction podcasts work so hard to prove they are a brand new form, even as they revive features of radio from decades gone by. This work also examines the industry's reckoning with its own implication in systemic racism, misogyny, and other forms of discrimination. Employing innovative new critical techniques for close listening—including pitch tracking software and spectrograms—*Narrative Podcasting in an Age of Obsession* makes a major contribution to podcast studies and media studies more broadly.

Neil Verma is Assistant Professor of Sound Studies in the Department of Radio/Television/Film at Northwestern University. His books include *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics and American Radio Drama* (2012) and, as co-editor, *Indian Sound Cultures, Indian Sound Citizenship* (2020) and *Anatomy of Sound: Norman Corwin and Media Authorship* (2016).

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