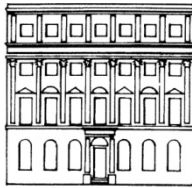


German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Christoph Classen:

Medialization in Opposing Systems: Approaching a Media History of Divided Germany

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 41, No. 1

(May 2019), pp19-49

**MEDIALIZATION IN OPPOSING SYSTEMS:
APPROACHING A MEDIA HISTORY OF DIVIDED
GERMANY**

CHRISTOPH CLASSEN

Late in the evening of 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall was opened. This abrupt and unexpected event, without which German reunification would not have been possible, was in no small part thanks to television. The East German border guards opened the Wall due to a misunderstanding. Speaking on behalf of the East German government at an international press conference, official spokesman Günter Schabowski introduced a new GDR regulation on travel. The hastily fudged together policy had been drawn up in a hurry by the new GDR leadership under Egon Krenz as an attempt to pacify the increasingly vociferous and widespread East German protest movement and at the same time to stop the mass flight of GDR citizens to the West via Czechoslovakia and Hungary. However, the details of the policy had not yet been made public and Schabowski mistakenly announced that it would come into force with immediate effect.

The press conference was being broadcast live on television and, as a result, Schabowski's error could not be prevented from swiftly taking on a seemingly unstoppable life of its own. No sooner had the press conference drawn to a close than a major news agency announced that 'East Germany opens its border', to be followed the same evening by a special report by *Tagesthemen*, one of the most important West German evening news broadcasts, that the gates of the Wall were now 'wide open'. Although neither of these reports reflected reality, they were soon spreading to East Berlin via West German television. As a result, more and more people arrived at the border checkpoints and demanded that these be opened, assuming that at other checkpoints this had already been done. No one had foreseen any of this, and so the border guards at the checkpoints were unable to obtain clear instructions from their superiors as to how to proceed. Eventually, not knowing what else to do, they gave in to the pressure of the crowds. Only then did the event reported by the media actual-

Trans. Emily Richards (GHIL).

ly take place. The border was opened, and from that moment 9 November took its place in history as the date when the division of Germany came to an end.¹

What happened on 9 November 1989 can therefore be viewed as a ‘media event’ in more senses than one. Firstly, it was electronically broadcast to a global public within just a few hours, creating a communications echo chamber that played a major role in transforming what was happening in Berlin into an ‘event’, that is, into something that is perceived as being of greater importance than the numerous other topics of the day.² Secondly, the way in which things unfolded is a direct illustration of the complex and ambivalent role that mass media play in modern societies; even if the media see themselves as mere chroniclers of history, they inevitably influence it as well. Reports on reform movements in other socialist states in 1989, for example, helped create support for the citizens’ movement in the GDR.³ And in the case of what happened on 9 November, it was television itself that set the dynamic of events in motion.

I have chosen to focus on this historical date, therefore, because I believe it demonstrates clearly the necessity of a media history from a German–German perspective. This is not only because the opening of the Berlin Wall played a direct role in the reunification of Germany, indeed, was its precondition; but also because what happened in Berlin on that date perfectly demonstrates how the media’s role in the twentieth century was significant in a way that transcended any single event or set of events. The media had influence, but of a unique kind; they were no mere observers and recorders of history,

¹ Hans-Hermann Hertle, ‘Der Fall der Mauer als mediales Ereignis’, in Eckhard Jesse (ed.), *Eine Mauer für den SED-Staat: Berlin 1961 und die Folgen* (Berlin, 2012), 199–224. The former director of the broadcaster Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), Günther v. Lojewski, by contrast, believed that the media (especially his own channel) were simply objective reporters on 9 November. Günther v. Lojewski, ‘Waren die Medien der Motor des Mauerfalls? Die Mauer fiel, die Kamera lief. Oder war es umgekehrt? Über die Rolle der Medien in der Nacht vom 9. auf den 10. November 1989. Ein Essay’, *Der Tagespiegel*, 30 Oct. 2016, 7.

² See Frank Bösch, ‘Europäische Medienereignisse’, *Europäische Geschichte Online (EGO)*, Mainz 2010, online at <<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/boeschf-2010-de>>, accessed 15 Dec. 2018.

³ Thomas Großmann, *Fernsehen, Revolution und das Ende der DDR* (Göttingen, 2015), 273–7.

yet nor were they decision-makers in a strictly political sense. The presence of a technological mass media informed (and continues to inform) politics, society, and culture in numerous and ambivalent ways, and the central importance and influence of the media cannot be overlooked by anyone who sets out to explain German history in the Cold War era.

With this in mind, it is astonishing how rarely this perspective has been adopted in historical studies to date, although modern historians have long since abandoned the discipline's former reservations in relation to modern media, which are now frequently discussed and referenced in academic research. Although this applies to both the historiography of the GDR and the FRG, in the GDR's case the historical 'Aufarbeitung' (the work of bringing hidden, problematic, or previously denied aspects of East German history to light after the end of the regime) has naturally tended to dwell on the specific role of the media in relation to the GDR dictatorship, rather than locating the history of East German media within a shared German post-war history.⁴ More recently we have seen an increasing focus on transnationalism and entanglement. Along with the question of what role the West German news media played in the collapse of the GDR in 1989,⁵ historians have been especially interested in the reception of Western (radio and TV) media in East Germany.⁶ Lastly, we can observe an interest in the trade and exchange of TV programmes across the Eastern bloc countries and in media policies at an international level.⁷ Yet no matter what their subject matter, these historical studies nearly always come back to East German history in isolation.

⁴ Gunter Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei: Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR* (Cologne, 2002); Stefan Zahlmann (ed.), *Wie im Westen, nur anders: Medien in der DDR* (Berlin, 2010); Rüdiger Steinmetz and Reinhold Viehoff (eds.), *Deutsches Fernsehen Ost: Eine Programmgeschichte des DDR-Fernsehens* (Berlin, 2008).

⁵ Großmann, *Fernsehen*.

⁶ Michael Meyen, *Denver Clan und Neues Deutschland: Mediennutzung in der DDR* (Berlin, 2003); Claudia Dittmar, *Feindliches Fernsehen: Das DDR-Fernsehen und seine Strategien im Umgang mit dem westdeutschen Fernsehen* (Bielefeld, 2010); Franziska Kuschel, *Schwarz Hörer, Schwarzseher und heimliche Leser: Die DDR und die Westmedien* (Göttingen, 2016).

⁷ Christian Henrich-Franke, 'Making Holes in the Iron Curtain? The Television Programme Exchange across the Iron Curtain in the 1960s and 1970s',

Research in Germany in the past three decades has been largely guided by the necessities and perspectives of the ‘Aufarbeitung’, as becomes apparent if we consider that the media history of West Germany before 1990 has received comparatively little attention. It is true that some studies do exist, even from a relatively early period, but these focus either on individual media,⁸ or discuss specific aspects and phases,⁹ while another notable research focus is the culture of memory.¹⁰ Those looking for an overview of West German media history outside of the more encyclopaedic studies will generally be disappointed.¹¹ Still more rarely do we find any study of media history from a German–German point of view, if we mean by this a perspective that consistently compares or relates the two histories. The few exceptions relating to specific aspects of history – such as the history of film festivals,¹² TV dramas,¹³ pop radio,¹⁴ media dis-

in Alec Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, and Christian Henrich-Franke (eds.), *Airy Curtains in the European Ether* (Baden-Baden, 2013), 177–213; Richard Oehmig and Thomas Beutelschmidt, ‘Connected Enemies? Programming Transfer between East and West during the Cold War and the Example of East German Television’, *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 3/5 (2014), online at <<http://viewjournal.eu/television-histories-in-postsocialist-europe/connected-enemies/>>, accessed 15 Dec. 2018.

⁸ Konrad Dussel, *Deutsche Rundfunkgeschichte* (Constance, 2010); Knut Hicke-thier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart, 1998); the GDR only appears in a short overview by Peter Hoff.

⁹ Jürgen Wilke (ed.), *Mediengeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Cologne, 1999).

¹⁰ See e.g. Mark Rüdiger, ‘Goldene 50er’ oder ‘Bleierne Zeit’? *Geschichtsbilder im Fernsehen der BRD, 1959–1989* (Bielefeld, 2014); Martin Stallmann, *Die Erfindung von ‘1968’: Die studentischen Proteste im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen 1977–1998* (Göttingen, 2017).

¹¹ Frank Bösch, *Mass Media and Historical Change: Germany in International Perspective, 1400 to the Present* (New York, 2015).

¹² Andreas Kötzing, *Kultur- und Filmpolitik im Kalten Krieg: Die Filmfestivals von Leipzig und Oberhausen in gesamtdeutscher Perspektive 1954–1972* (Göttingen, 2013).

¹³ Nora Hilgert, *Unterhaltung, aber sicher! Populäre Repräsentationen von Recht und Ordnung in den Fernsehkrimis ‘Stahlnetz’ und ‘Blaulicht’, 1958–1968* (Bielefeld, 2013).

¹⁴ Heiner Stahl, *Jugendradio im kalten Ätherkrieg: Berlin als eine Klanglandschaft des Pop 1962–1973* (Berlin, 2010).

courses,¹⁵ or the final years of the divided Germany and its transformation¹⁶—only serve to prove the rule. There is still no monograph that provides an integrated post-war history of Germany from a media perspective.

Medialization and Entanglement

With this in mind, the present essay is intended as a contribution to discussions on how such an integrated media history of the Cold War era could be written. In particular, it aims to move beyond the existing historiography that has, as shown above, tended to separate East and West German media histories, although without ignoring the central differences between the two. However, my interest lies not so much in providing a comprehensive overview of theoretical and methodological questions, nor necessarily in an entirely new approach. My goal instead is to work towards a synthesis of the various existing strands of historical research while bringing a different, broader viewpoint to bear upon them.

The theoretical framework for this discussion is shaped by the concept of ‘medialization’, which is here understood as an increasingly transnational pervasion of European societies by widespread, technology-based media together with their mass use and appropriation. My argument is based on the premise that this development played a major role in the rapid transformation of European societies in the twentieth century, comprehensively influencing political, social, and cultural developments.¹⁷ For our purposes, it is essential to understand that this ‘meta-process’,¹⁸ at least in its initial stages, was largely independent of any political and ideological conditions and transcended the borders that otherwise defined political geography in the Cold War era; it was something that all states, whether in the Eastern bloc or in the West, had to address. Different political fac-

¹⁵ Jens Ruchatz (ed.), *Mediendiskurse deutsch/deutsch* (Weimar, 2005).

¹⁶ Frank Bösch and Christoph Classen, ‘Bridge over Troubled Water? Mass Media in Divided Germany’, in Frank Bösch (ed.), *A History Shared and Divided: East and West Germany since the 1970s* (New York, 2018), 551–602.

¹⁷ Andreas Hepp, *Cultures of Medialization* (Cambridge, 2012).

¹⁸ Friedrich Krotz, ‘The Meta-Process of “Medialization” as a Conceptual Frame’, *Global Media and Communication*, 3/3 (2007), 256–60.

tions may have reacted differently to the challenge of medialization and found very different ways to engage with it at different times. Nonetheless, many aspects of the process could not be contained by political means in the long term. As a result, such a medialization perspective can help to turn our attention to similarities and shared experiences that up to now have largely remained unnoticed, but that were brought about by a secular development that affected socialist states no less than it did liberal democracies.

In turning our attention to such similarities, however, it is essential to bear in mind that 'the media' are not eternal entities. Like any other phenomena, they are subject to historical change and analysis. Television in the 1950s, for example, not only differed in content from that of the 1980s; it was also technically different and had a very different social significance. That television played a central role in the events of autumn 1989 was due in part to the fact that it had become the most important media format for news dissemination, but it was also thanks to technical developments that made it possible to broadcast events live (more or less) as they happened. In the 1950s, radio, rather than television, fulfilled these functions, and as a result, radio played a more significant role than television in media reactions to the 'People's Uprising' in the GDR on 17 June 1953.¹⁹

Secondly, this perspective can help to emphasize elements of entanglement more strongly than has so far been the case. In the history of the media to date, the histories of East and West have mainly been viewed as entirely separate from the very beginning, and even where they have not, research tends to discuss only the transfer of Western content and culture from the Federal Republic to the GDR. This is understandable in a sense, as not only Western goods but also Western cultural products were always seen as particularly desirable in East Germany, while GDR media were from the start viewed with a certain disdain in West Germany, a view that became more entrenched as the years went by.²⁰ Yet in fact, the transfer was not always simply from West to East. Instead, we can observe an inter-

¹⁹ Hans-Hermann Hertle, 'Volksaufstand und Herbstrevolution: Die Rolle der West-Medien 1953 und 1989 im Vergleich', in Henrik Bispinck, Jürgen Danyel, Hans-Hermann Hertle, and Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Aufstände im Ostblock: Zur Krisensituation des realen Sozialismus* (Berlin, 2004), 163–94.

²⁰ Cf. Michael Meyen, "'Geistige Grenzgänger": Medien und die deutsche Teilung', *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte*, 1 (1999), 192–231, at 210.

play or circulation of cultures as the result of a shared national culture and the movement of cultural actors between the two sides. Even in our initial and central example—the opening of the Berlin Wall—the dynamic of events would not have occurred without a double exchange of news between East and West. The West German media’s interpretation of the East German press conference travelled ‘across the Wall’ to East German homes, which in turn led to citizens in East Berlin going to the checkpoints to cross the Wall themselves. We should also note the way in which transnational influences made themselves felt in the media and in reactions to the latter. ‘Entangled history’ (like its close cousin, *histoire croisée*) therefore seems an appropriate theoretical perspective from which to approach this subject, allowing us to consider complex processes of transference, appropriation, and circulation in a way that cannot be done using traditional relational and comparative approaches.

Using the approaches described above, I now turn to three specific case studies to show how such approaches can reveal new aspects of media history. First, I look at the politicization of the media, its problems and limitations, in both German states. I then analyse the popular East German children’s television programme, *Unser Sandmännchen* (Our Little Sandman), as an example of the competition between East and West German media in their symbolic role as representative of two political systems and the resulting complex cultural appropriations. Finally, I focus on the challenge posed by the relentless spread of light entertainment programming in both states.

Politics and Propaganda in Opposing Systems

When historians turn their gaze to modern media, they are frequently interested in the media’s relationship to politics. Although in Germany this is no doubt partly a consequence of the country’s National Socialist past, the close relationship between politics and the modern media goes back to a time well before 1933. Political change in the twentieth century, whether of an emancipatory, democratic character or brought about by dictatorships and autocracies, occurred in the context of an ever-increasing mass media presence. The ‘socialization of politics’, which can be understood as the increasing inclusion of more and more sections of the population in political

discourse, largely came about initially thanks to the availability first of newspapers, then film, radio, and television to a mass audience. It is not surprising, therefore, that politicians attempted to control the media in order to use them to implement and legitimize their claim to power. This was especially the case at a time when the potential of the media to manipulate and influence the populace through propaganda was very much over-estimated.²¹

This was initially a universal development that did not respect political borders. Nonetheless, if one views the media systems in post-war Germany from a systematic perspective, there is a clear difference between the FRG and the GDR. The Federal Republic established a decentralized, pluralistic system that was not controlled by the state; instead, print media were owned by a variety of private publishers (as had always been the case in earlier times) while radio and television broadcasting was now modelled on the example of the BBC. Broadcasting in the new Federal Republic was regulated by public law and responsibility distributed between multiple federal establishments, as a way of ensuring that public broadcasting in the FRG, in contrast to broadcasting in Germany in the past, was kept at arms-length from the state. In the 1980s, privately owned radio and TV channels began to operate in addition to the public channels. It was clear that this model was based on the liberal, Anglo-American ideal of an independent media providing a public forum for debate, where opinions and ideas could be formed in a pluralistic setting. And indeed, the influence of the Western Allies played a major role in the establishment of the West German system, both in broadcasting and in licensing the press.

The GDR, on the other hand, was characterized by a centralized state monopoly on ideas and news where the media were subject to state and Party control on several levels. The state selected and trained journalists, told the media what they could say and how they could say it, and controlled licensing and distribution. This approach was explicitly based on an ideal not of pluralism and independence, but on their opposite: the media had a duty to propagate socialism as, allegedly, the best representative of the common interest. Given this standpoint, it was therefore only logical that the Socialist Unity Party (SED), as the official party of government, should also have the final

²¹ Thymian Bussemer, *Propaganda: Konzepte und Theorien* (Wiesbaden, 2005).

say when it came to the media. The pluralistic, liberal model prevalent in the West was supposedly nothing but 'the freedom of 200 rich people to spread their own opinions'.²² According to SED ideology, in a liberal system capital would always ensure that it controlled the media, in order to keep the workers in a state of dependency and oblivion to their true interests. During the Cold War, neither side denied that these two different systems represented two completely opposing concepts of what the media ought to do and be. The only thing they had in common was that each side believed that its own system was the best and only legitimate one.

But historical records of the first decades after the Second World War tell a rather different, far less idealistic story. In the early days of the Federal Republic, broadcasting in particular soon became a field of contention. Attempts by the Western Allies to create a politically independent broadcasting system on the British model met with huge resistance from all political factions in the Western zones. In 1950, for example, a memorandum drafted by the General Secretary of the then governing conservative party the Christlich-Demokratische Union (CDU), tellingly entitled 'Mass Government in the Federal Republic' ('Massenführung in der Bundesrepublik'), stated that 'there is no doubt that [broadcasting] must first and foremost be used as an instrument of political government'. Such basic principles as impartiality, independence, and pluralism 'might seem attractive to a few intellectual heavyweights, but they will simply confuse most listeners or even add to their ignorance'. 'Our first duty', the memorandum continued, '[must therefore be] to block the Allies' "Press and Radio Act".²³

²² Interestingly, this was not said by a communist, but by the conservative publisher and founding editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Paul Sethe, who had come to believe that he had been forced out of the editorship of the FAZ and subsequently that of its competitor *Die Welt* for political reasons. See reader's letter in *Der Spiegel*, 15 May 1965, 17–18. The correspondence between Fritz Erler and Paul Sethe that provides the source for this citation can be found in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 23/1 (1975), 91–116, at 109.

²³ Quoted from Rolf Steiniger, 'Rundfunkpolitik im ersten Kabinett Adenauer', in id. and Winfried B. Lerg, *Rundfunk und Politik 1923 bis 1973: Beiträge zur Rundfunkforschung* (Berlin 1975), 341–84, 347–8. Trans. Emily Richards.

Attempts to evade or to temper the Allies' insistence on national and party-political independence were characteristic of early broadcasting politics in the Federal Republic.²⁴ But the ideal of independent, uncensored media was also resisted in many other quarters, particularly when it was a question of the supposed threat from the East. Film producers and directors, for example, were placed under financial pressure if they were suspected of having communist sympathies or had worked in the GDR.²⁵ Even more worryingly, the law against censorship set out in the German constitution was often ignored. An organization operating more or less underground, the 'Interministerial Committee for East-West Film Questions' took control of all imports of films from the Eastern bloc from 1953 onwards without any clear legal mandate to do so.²⁶ Until this 'committee' stopped operating in 1966, it prevented the import of numerous films or decreed that they could only be viewed if certain conditions were met. Wolfgang Staudte's film of Heinrich Mann's novel *Der Untertan* (known variously in English as *The Loyal Subject*, *Man of Straw*, and *The Patrioteer*), made by the East German film studios Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) in 1951, was not allowed to be shown in West German commercial cinemas until 1957, and then only in its abridged version.²⁷ Despite its seemingly unofficial status, the committee not only included representatives of various ministries and of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, but also operated with the explicit permission and on the instruction of the first Chancellor of the FRG, Konrad Adenauer.²⁸ It was not until the mid 1960s that it was

²⁴ Dussel, *Deutsche Rundfunkgeschichte*, 185–201.

²⁵ Christoph Classen, 'Antikommunismus in Film und Fernsehen der frühen Bundesrepublik', in Stefan Creuzberger and Dierk Hoffmann (eds.), *Antikommunismus in der frühen Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Zur politischen Kultur im Kalten Krieg* (Munich, 2014), 275–95.

²⁶ Andreas Kötzing, "'Der Bundeskanzler wünscht einen harten Kurs . . .': Bundesdeutsche Filmzensur durch den Interministeriellen Ausschuss für Ost/West-Filmfragen', in Johannes Roschlau (ed.), *Kunst unter Kontrolle: Filmzensur in Europa* (Munich, 2014), 148–59.

²⁷ Weckel, *Begrenzte Spielräume*, 31–4; on the committee's motives in this particular case see also 'Plädoyer für den Untertan', *Der Spiegel*, 47 (1956), 59–61.

²⁸ For more on this see the database project set up by the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism (Dresden): 'Filmzensur West-Ost: Der interministerielle Ausschuss und die Filmzensur von DEFA-Filmen in

dissolved in response to increasing public criticism and changes in the political landscape.

The rise of television in West Germany also shows how little the early Federal Republic had taken on board the Allied model of a critical, arms-length media. The official German broadcaster and umbrella organization for the public federal broadcasting channels, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (ARD), was perceived by the conservative CDU party as too left-wing. To provide a political counterweight, Chancellor Adenauer pushed for the introduction of a second, more 'right-wing' channel in 1961. While potential private-sector operators were interested mainly in the profits to be made from advertising on the new channel, Adenauer's intentions were political rather than commercial; he hoped that the new broadcaster would offer a means by which the state could influence television output.²⁹ These hopes were ultimately dashed when the federal states saw in the government's plans a violation of federal principles and appealed to the Constitutional Court for help, eventually succeeding in stopping Adenauer's project almost at the last minute. Yet this was by no means the final attempt by a West German government to exert undue influence on public broadcasters. Such pressure merely became less obvious, from now on tending to take the form of more or less subtle attempts by the political parties to influence staffing decisions, and sometimes even programming content, via their 'cronies'.³⁰

Behind such attempts and strategies lurked an older, illiberal notion of how media should function, according to which it was not their independence that mattered, but their willingness to submit to political expediency when required. The idea of the media as a 'fourth estate' – that is, as a critical observer of politics and society, providing checks and balances – was as foreign to the first Federal Chancellor as it was to most of his contemporaries. The 'Spiegel Affair' of 1963, when the Federal Public Prosecutor attempted to

der Bundesrepublik', online at <www.filmzensur-ostwest.de>, accessed 15 Dec. 2018.

²⁹ Rüdiger Steinmetz, *Freies Fernsehen: Das erste privat-kommerzielle Fernsehprogramm in Deutschland* (Constance, 1996).

³⁰ Cf. Konrad Dussel, *Die Interessen der Allgemeinheit vertreten: Die Tätigkeit der Rundfunk- und Verwaltungsräte von Südwestfunk und Süddeutschem Rundfunk 1949 bis 1969* (Baden-Baden, 1995).

bring charges of high treason against the German political magazine *Der Spiegel* after it published an article criticizing the Bundeswehr, epitomizes this attitude. Ironically, the action of the Prosecutor's office was itself the cause of the subsequent governmental crisis, as it demonstrated all too clearly that the independence of both judiciary and government in the new Republic was by no means a given.³¹ This was one reason why the 'Spiegel Affair' to some extent marked the end of traditional attitudes to the media in West Germany.³²

In the East, by contrast, the ideal of an independent media never existed at all. Yet the media's centralization in accordance with Soviet principles, and their subjugation under the authority and control of the Party, were only achieved after many years through a process that was by no means straightforward. Rather, the 1950s could be described as an ongoing attempt to create functioning governance structures and authorities. After the founding of the GDR and the end of Soviet censorship, the respective responsibilities of the Party and the state tended to overlap. As a result, disputes over who was responsible for what, and the resulting counter-productive outcomes, were inevitable, and in fact it was not until the end of the 1950s that the 'agitator bureaucracy' of the GDR took its final form, closely embedded within the Party machine. The same was true of structural and personnel issues. Established structures, like the regionally organized structure of broadcasting in Germany and hierarchies that strongly privileged the respective directors of regional institutions, continued to exert a powerful influence and were difficult to break. This was especially the case in the beginning, when the experience and skills of long-term employees – the majority of whom had no particular party allegiance – were virtually indispensable. It took many years before these established employees could be replaced by a new generation of journalists who, brought up within GDR structures and trained by GDR officials, had more or less internalized the ideal that journalism should serve Party interests.

Television, the new dominant media for the masses, was entirely controlled by the existing regime from the early 1960s on. Yet it still proved difficult to make artists and scriptwriters toe the Party line.

³¹ Martin Doerry and Hauke Janssen (eds.), *Die Spiegel-Affäre: Ein Skandal und seine Folgen* (Munich, 2013).

³² Cf. Christina v. Hodenberg, *Konsens und Krise: Eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit 1945–1973* (Göttingen, 2006).

Their attempts to retain artistic independence and the incorrigible political ‘tendencies’ in their departments never ceased to be a problem for senior managers. One internal memorandum noted in 1986, for example, that the troublesome behaviour of scriptwriters ‘continually upsetting normal operations’ must be brought to an end.³³

It was not as easy as it might have seemed, therefore, to implement the goal of total politicization and control of the media in the GDR. But it would also be entirely wrong to fetishize the difficulties and dissent that the regime experienced at the expense of historical reality. In retrospect, it is far more shocking to see how comprehensive state control ultimately became. Despite all difficulties, the regime eventually managed to bring all East German publications under the control of Party institutions.³⁴ And while at first this was achieved through the violent repression of any dissent and the removal of individual journalists from their posts, coercion gradually became unnecessary as journalists became more loyal to the regime and internalized, or at least demonstrated the ‘correct’ political convictions.

Other problems proved less easy to deal with. In particular, despite all the GDR’s efforts, it was never entirely possible to prevent Western influence seeping into East Germany; while media pluralism may not have existed in theory, the impossibility of stopping Western radio and TV channels being received in the East meant that it was de facto present in the GDR. ‘The SED may have wanted total control, but it couldn’t always get it.’³⁵ One example is particularly noteworthy. From the 1950s, the GDR government decided to use jamming transmitters to block broadcasts by the American radio channel RIAS, which was hugely popular with the East German people but loathed by the regime due to its pronounced anti-communist attitude.³⁶ Up until the early 1960s, a huge amount of time and effort was devoted to installing a network of jammers to stop the RIAS

³³ Quoted from Franka Wolff, *Glasnost erst kurz vor Sendeschluss: Die letzten Jahre des DDR-Fernsehens (1985–1989/90)* (Cologne, 2002), 225.

³⁴ For a general overview see Anke Fiedler, *Medienlenkung in der DDR* (Cologne, 2014).

³⁵ Jens Ruchatz, ‘Einleitung’, in id. (ed.), *Mediendiskurse deutsch/deutsch* (Weimar, 2005), 7–22, at 21.

³⁶ Christoph Classen, ‘Jamming the RIAS: Technical Measures against Western Broadcasting in East Germany (GDR) 1945–1989’, in Badenoch,

broadcasts. However, the government's expectation that it would be only a matter of time until the jammers succeeded was destined for disappointment. From the very beginning there were problems, including internal conflicts. For example, it proved technically impossible to jam all the relevant frequencies, meaning that a large part of the population continued to be able to receive RIAS more or less undisturbed.

Soon questions were raised as to whether the significant resources already invested in the jamming project would not be better spent in improving the GDR's own broadcasting infrastructure, especially considering that the latter did not yet provide full coverage in all areas. More seriously, however, the jamming attempts had the effect of delegitimizing aspects of the regime, both in the eyes of the East German population and of foreign governments. Within East Germany, people soon became aware of what was going on. It was an annoyance, but worse than this, it made their government appear weak and dishonest as it continued to deny the existence of the jammers. Abroad, the project was seen as violating international treaties on the use of radio frequencies, making it more difficult for the GDR regime to gain the international recognition and reputation it had been trying to build. As television became more dominant, the attempts to block a single Western radio channel began to look even sillier, and at the end of the 1970s the project was dismantled in an operation as cloaked in secrecy as the operation to set it up had been twenty years earlier.

It was mainly because of radio and television that the FRG, as a symbol of what an alternative society could look like, remained a continuous presence within the GDR throughout the period of German division. The East German regime was aware of this, and undertook various attempts to immunize its population against West German attractions. One example of these attempts was a television programme, *Der schwarze Kanal* (*The Dark Channel*), presented by journalist Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler every week from spring 1960 until autumn 1989. The programme was based on the principle of counter-agitation; each week, it put together a montage of various scenes from West German television with a critical, often polemical commentary from a Party viewpoint. However, the idea of enhancing

Fickers, and Henrich-Franke (eds.), *Airy Curtains in the European Ether*, 321–46.

ing material taken from the ‘other side’ with an agit-prop political commentary was not originally an invention of communist propaganda, but of a West German presenter, Thilo Koch. Koch had suggested this idea in 1958 for his programme *Die rote Optik* (*The Red Gaze*), but it was actually based on even earlier productions such as the *Mitteldeutsches Tagebuch* (*Middle German Diary*) produced by Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), although the latter had been dependent on home movie footage smuggled over the East–West border.³⁷ But in West Germany, this kind of counter-agitation gradually lost its appeal from the 1960s on as the fear of communist infiltration lessened. The SED, on the other hand, deliberately kept up their *Dark Channel* programme permanently from 1960, knowing that the fantasy of a totally state-controlled public media presence was destined to remain an illusion.

This example of how a propagandistic TV format could travel from West to East sheds a further light on the premise of this essay: that despite the fundamental differences in their media systems, things were not as black and white on either side as they might appear at first glance, especially in the world of broadcasting. The politicization of mass media was a universal development, while the rise of television as the dominant mass medium led to politicians in both states becoming increasingly interested in its format and programming, even if outcomes differed. Traditional, diehard, or dissenting elements attempted to slow down these developments in West as well as East Germany. While in the GDR the conflicts were due to the SED’s desire to fully subjugate the media to state control, in West Germany it was the Western Allies’ ideal of an independent, arms-length media that conflicted, at least in the first two decades, with authoritarian, antiquated ideas about the function of the public sphere.

Competing Appropriations and Entanglement: The Sandman in the GDR and FRG

My second example is the popular television character, the Sandman, and his eponymous TV programme(s) for children. From the very

³⁷ Matthias Steinle, *Vom Feindbild zum Fremdbild: Die gegenseitige Darstellung von Bundesrepublik und DDR im Dokumentarfilm* (Constance, 2003), 158–66.

beginning of electronic broadcasting in the 1920s, programme-makers were aware that children and young people represented potential new audiences. The resulting programmes were not only popular with children but also with their parents; radio and TV shows fulfilled a dual function, giving the children something to do while also educating them in social values and norms. One particular aspect of programming for children also reveals a key function of the media in society generally. Children's programmes tended to be repeated often, at fixed times in the schedule, and this comforting regularity points to the ritual aspect of our relationship to media and the role they play in structuring our days. In the period under discussion, such rituals, especially bedtime rituals, played a particularly important role in bringing up young children; parents and children both knew that television would be followed by bedtime and that this heralded a period of 'child-free time' for the parents when they could be alone.

The fairy-tale figure of the Sandman, who traditionally appears at bedtime to help children go to sleep, was therefore a natural choice for children's television programmers. In Hans Christian Andersen's story, for example, the Sandman watches over the sleeping children to keep them safe from harm. The TV character of the Sandman sprinkles sand to make children fall asleep, which disappears when they wake up in the morning. Although the Sandman had appeared earlier in children's radio programmes, he only became really popular when he was given the form of an animated puppet in the show *Unser Sandmännchen* (*Our Little Sandman*), shown daily on GDR television from 1959. This Sandman even survived the downfall of the regime, and after East German television closed down in 1991, it was the only children's programme from the GDR to be granted a second lease of life on television in unified Germany.

The East German puppet was the very first Sandman ever to appear on German television screens. But strictly speaking, the first broadcast of *Unser Sandmännchen* on 22 November 1959 was actually an expanded version of a programme that already existed. East German television had beaten the West Berlin-based station SFB to the finishing post by just a couple of days, although the idea for the character did not originate with GDR television producers, but instead was a long-cherished dream of children's broadcasting pioneer Ilse Obrig. The first episodes had already gone into pre-production in

West Berlin in the summer of 1959 and were duly broadcast as planned from early December the same year on West German television.³⁸

The background to all this was a press release issued by SFB announcing that a ‘Little Sandman’ would form part of their children’s programming in the run-up to Christmas that year. The reaction to this in the East shows the extent of the SED regime’s paranoia during the Cold War. Less than three weeks after the press release, Walter Heynowski – at the time the deputy director of official East German television, Deutscher Fernsehfunk (DFF) – had fitted out DFF’s children’s programme *Abendgruß* (*Hello This Evening*) with an additional frame featuring puppet animations. Heynowski claimed that he saw in SFB’s actions ‘a hostile intention to steal our viewers’,³⁹ and if anyone was going to steal viewers, he clearly intended that it should be the DFF. East German television had developed sophisticated and expensive puppet animation technology, which, it was hoped, would give it the competitive edge when it came to children’s television.

But in the West, there was and never had been any intention of ‘stealing viewers’ from the East. Television producers were far more interested in turning Ilse Obrig’s dream – a Sandman on television – into a reality. But instead of the originally planned animation, SFB was only able to get the backing for a low-budget production with a simple hand puppet, and the show was cancelled after just two years. It was not until the autumn of 1962 that, now under the direction of the public service broadcaster NDR, several regional TV channels began to feature an animated puppet in their early evening schedules – a puppet who would become known in West Germany as *Das Sandmännchen* (‘The Little Sandman’). Although the West German Sandman never enjoyed the lavish financial backing of his rival in the East, he soon came to be loved just as much by his target audience.⁴⁰

It might be supposed that honour had now been satisfied. But just a few years later, in 1966, Werner Höfer – programme director of the

³⁸ For a detailed study of the rise of the Sandman, see Volker Petzold, ‘Unser ureigenes Sandmännchen: Eine deutsch-deutsche Kinderfernsehfigur in “Klassenkampf” und Politik’, *Kulturation*, 2/2003, online at <http://www.kulturation.de/ki_1_text.php?id=20>, accessed 15 Dec. 2018.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ ‘Telemann’ [Martin Morlock], ‘Sandmännchens Irrfahrt’, *Der Spiegel*, 3 (1963), 58.

German Television’s Little Sandman Puppets in the West (left) and East (right)



Das Sandmännchen

© Image: Norddeutscher Rundfunk



Unser Sandmännchen

© Image: Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv /Gerhard Behrendt

biggest regional station in West Germany, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) – attempted to buy up fifty episodes of *Our Little Sandman* from the GDR for his new Third Programme. His counterpart in the East, Hans Höschel, refused, on the grounds that the Sandman was ‘an absolutely original creation of the German Democratic Republic’s German Television Broadcasting’,⁴¹ which, given the Sandman’s history in both Germanies, was hardly a plausible assertion. The WDR’s response to this rejection was to create a third Sandman of its own, the *Sandmännchen International* (*International Little Sandman*) which this time took the form of a human actor in costume. But this third figure was never anything like as successful as his animated brothers from the East and the North, and he was banished from the screen at the end of the 1970s.

By the 1970s and 1980s, *Unser Sandmännchen* and *Abendgruß* had become a fixed institution in the GDR with a huge fan base that reacted angrily to proposals of even the smallest changes to the format.⁴²

⁴¹ Quoted from Petzold, ‘Unser ureigenes Sandmännchen’.

⁴² Cf. Jan-Uwe Rogge, ‘Der Sandmann in Ost und West: Kurze Anmerkungen

Clearly, the ritual had now transcended its purely pragmatic, structuring function and was being taken extremely seriously by numerous (adult) viewers, who refused to entertain the idea of any alteration to the programme they loved. In the West, of course, the introduction of a dual television system with private commercial operators had long since made it impossible for programmes and schedules to remain unchanged for long, and in the course of the 1980s, as the regional early evening schedules were restructured one by one, *The Little Sandman* gradually disappeared from the screen.⁴³ This was mainly because its primary audience – pre-school children – was not an attractive target group for early evening advertising. The East German Little Sandman, on the other hand, became a symbol of the much-cited ‘good side’ of the GDR after 1990, and any attempt to get rid of him met with outraged protest, mainly from parents and grandparents rather than from children. As a result, the Sandman lives on today and makes regular appearances on special interest channels for children.⁴⁴

As we can see, the history of the ‘Little Sandman’ figure is inextricably bound up with the history of the German–German divide. But in contrast to what was often believed even at the time, this was not simply an aspect of the rivalry between the two ‘sides’. A closer look at some of the protagonists in the drama shows how complicated the origins of the Sandman actually were. It is especially worthwhile taking a closer look at the history of Ilse Obrig, the children’s programme editor who came up with the idea of a television Sandman to begin with.⁴⁵

zur Geschichte, zur Form und zur Funktion’, in Filmmuseum Potsdam (ed.), *Sandmann auf Reisen: Eine Ausstellung des Filmmuseums Potsdam mit Unterstützung des Ostdeutschen Rundfunks Brandenburg und des Mitteldeutschen Rundfunks* (Berlin, 1993), 42–8.

⁴³ During the 1980s several ARD channels moved the Little Sandman to their non-commercial Third Programmes or, like the SFB, withdrew it completely. The producer with overall responsibility for the show, the Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR), stopped production in spring 1989. However, repeats of the West German Sandman continued to be shown on some Third Programmes until 1993. Petzold, ‘Unser ureigenes Sandmännchen’, n. 18.

⁴⁴ Cf. Christoph Classen, ‘Das Sandmännchen’, in Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (Munich, 2009), 342–50.

⁴⁵ On Ilse Obrig see Knut Hickethier, ‘Die Anfänge des deutschen Kinder-

Obrig's career began during National Socialism, when as an employee of the Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft she created the very first radio programme for children in Germany. After the war she continued her career at the East German Berliner Rundfunk, where she created the children's programme *Abendlied* (*Evening Lullaby*) which later, in the GDR, became *Hello This Evening*. Struggling with the increasingly difficult political situation, Obrig left the channel in 1950 and moved to the Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor (RIAS) channel in West Berlin while also working on children's programming for Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR). She had obviously spent a long time thinking about how the figure of the Sandman could be built into her television programmes for children before she was finally able to carry out the project in 1959. The similarities between the East German puppet, designed by Gerhard Behrendt, and its 1962 West German counterpart created by Herbert K. Schulz, was no coincidence; the two designers had both worked on the production of the East German Sandman at Dresden's 'Puppentrick' studios before Schulz later left the GDR.

The history of the television Sandman in the Cold War may be seen as a history of competing appropriations, with numerous actors changing sides throughout. But this competitive element should not distract us from an underlying shared cultural background, based on a tradition of national culture that was referenced by both sides in multiple ways. The figure of the Sandman has its roots in the nineteenth century and can be found in Romantic literature and in puppet theatre for children of that era. In creating a television Sandman, producers in both East and West were referring back to a pre-modern 'high' culture that was perceived in Germany as part of a national German cultural legacy. This legacy, as they saw it, transcended political zones and charged them, as its heirs, with passing on an aesthetic education to a new generation. Through this education, German children would be able to access the 'high' culture that underpinned civilized society. The Sandman's producers in East and West thus deliberately created a format that differed markedly from American comics and cartoons, which the SED and the West German middle classes each found equally repellent, believing that they represented both a cultural low point and a potential threat to children's moral fernsehens und Ilse Obrig's *Kinderstunde*', in Hans-Dieter Erlinger et al. (eds.), *Handbuch des Kinderfernsehens* (Constance, 1998), 129–42.

values. The Sandman also appeared to prove that contemporary fears relating to television—that it would bring about the death of culture or inflict long-term damage on children and young people—were unfounded. In East as in West Germany, ‘Americanization’ had become a synonym for the dangers and collateral damage that were feared could emerge out of the immense social change sweeping Europe in the first decades after the Second World War, a change which was due not least to the rapid spread of television.⁴⁶

The German–German history of children’s television shows that media relations during the Cold War cannot be reduced to mere propaganda wars. Instead, we can observe a process of competing conceptual appropriations, in which mutual plagiarism, staff continuities from the early era of radio, and staff defecting to the West all played their part. The remarkable rate at which the various Sandmen multiplied in German television from the 1950s to the 1980s was partly due to the fact that the new era of television was, as already mentioned, no respecter of borders, with producers in all zones facing similar challenges, such as how to create television specifically for children. But at the same time, the Sandman phenomenon reveals shared national–cultural roots and shared reactions to rapid cultural changes in the wake of the rise of electronic media after the Second World War.

Resolving these challenges through recourse to a nostalgic, anti-modern, and romantic fairy-tale tradition was clearly an attractive solution, for progressive socialism in the East no less than for capitalism in the West. But we should note that in the West, it was the introduction of private television and the resulting enforced commercialization of children’s television in the 1980s that brought an end, at least for the time being, to the Sandman.

Popular Culture and Light Entertainment: Loved and Hated on Both Sides of the Wall

From the above example, we can see that even in the world of children’s television, the media were perceived very differently by politicians and consumers respectively. While politicians saw the media as a tool to be exploited for their own ends, consumers turned to the

⁴⁶ Angelika Linke and Jakob Tanner (eds.), *Attraktion und Abwehr: Die Amerikanisierung der Alltagskultur in Europa* (Cologne, 2006).

media to fulfil other functions and needs. As early as the nineteenth century, mass literacy, along with improved printing and distribution processes, had led to the development of a market in literature, newspapers, and other printed matter that, like other markets, was characterized by supply and demand, so that the consumption of popular literature and theatre quickly rose to new heights. As the public realm became increasingly commercialized, the supply of popular entertainment in its various forms increased, and the advance of the new audio-visual media in the twentieth century (especially cinema, radio, and television) only served to intensify and accelerate this trend. In Germany, it was not only commercial interests that were behind the media provision of popular entertainment. The National Socialists, too, devoted extensive time and resources to developing forms of popular music and cinema that would serve to shore up their political power, and in particular, would increase support for the war.⁴⁷

The Allies—in all zones—who took control of the media straight after the war did not think in terms of commercialism, nor were they concerned with the potential of escapist entertainment to help stabilize the system. Their interest in the media at this point was entirely educational. Under Allied rule, the German media were dominated by explicitly didactic aims and objectives, as can be seen in the countless educational and informative campaigns that the Allies instigated at this time. Although it was not exactly implied that more popular forms of media consumption were undesirable per se, it was obvious that the primary aim of most programming of this period was to contribute to education and denazification. As a result, the US-controlled Berlin radio channel RIAS, which in contrast to the other broadcasters continued to favour a more commercial, American-style entertainment culture, very soon became the most popular channel in Berlin.⁴⁸

Even after the founding of the two German states, the principle that the media should inform and educate (in the German tradition of *Bildung*), continued to dominate perceptions. Both East and West

⁴⁷ Konrad Dussel, *Hörfunk in Deutschland: Politik, Programm, Publikum (1923–1960)* (Berlin, 2002), 218–31.

⁴⁸ Petra Galle, *RIAS Berlin und Berliner Rundfunk: Die Entwicklung ihrer Profile in Programm, Personal und Organisation vor dem Hintergrund des beginnenden Kalten Krieges* (Münster, 2003), 209–10.

Germany propagated the idea of 'raising up the masses' (*Hebung*) through education in the hope of persuading the people to adopt more highbrow cultural tastes. Outdated prejudices held by the educated middle classes against a mass culture perceived as 'trivial' continued to play a role in both political zones. In West Germany, the authority of the cultural elite had survived the war seemingly intact, and its representatives continued to see themselves as responsible for preventing 'the dictatorship of popular taste'. Discussions were held on the 'possibility of influencing and guiding the public in a discreet manner' towards more tasteful cultural offerings.⁴⁹ In radio, this took the form of an unofficial censorship that either excluded 'undesirable' popular hits (*Schlager*) entirely or banned them from certain slots in the schedule. Such actions were usually justified by referring to the broadcaster's duty of care to its audience; programmes must not fall below a certain 'standard of taste' and listeners must not be exposed to the 'depersonalization' that, it was thought, could result from hearing popular music.⁵⁰ Accordingly, programmes designed by public broadcasters continued to display a strong allegiance to highbrow culture until well into the 1960s. Meanwhile, commercially organized media like the film and record industries were far more attuned to the popular interests of German post-war society and its need to heal the wounds of the past.

But while West German rejection of popular culture was based on antiquated and anti-modern discourses, popular culture in East Germany was a burning political issue, seen – at least in many of its established forms – through the lens of a political system that insisted that the East must be utterly different from the West. In 1950, Maximilian Scheer, head of the 'Künstlerisches Wort' ('Artistic Word') department at Berliner Rundfunk, warned of 'a flood of American or Americanized printed products' that would wash away any attempts at creating a new culture. The aim of these products was 'to do away with a German national culture and open up society to American or Americanized mass production'. The cultural policy of East Germany

⁴⁹ Quoted from Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und Zeitgeist in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg, 1995), 244; Edgar Lersch, "'Wir sollten nicht spielen, was der Hörer will. Der Hörer will im Endeffekt das, was wir spielen": Leichte Musik im Hörfunk der 50er Jahre. Eine Diskussion in Stuttgart 1955', *Rundfunk und Geschichte*, 20/4 (1994), 204–10.

⁵⁰ Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*, 324–97.

therefore was based on what it saw as a duty to redirect these 'mental dregs' back to America.⁵¹ The cultural anti-Americanism revealed in such statements was by no means new in Germany and was based on a long-established stereotype of America as a 'cultureless' nation. But in contrast to the FRG, where the relationship to the USA now made such attitudes problematic, anti-Americanism fitted in perfectly with the GDR's Cold War policy of aggressive rejection of the West and its hegemonic power, the USA.

In the following years, however, the attitude towards youth culture and popular culture in both German states began to change. In the GDR, this was mainly as a result of the near-collapse of the regime that resulted from the People's Uprising of 17 June 1953. Following this event, the need for leisure time and entertainment, which up to now had been neglected in the effort to 'build a socialist state' with propaganda, began to receive more recognition, although the state's attitude remained highly ambivalent, with the regime viewing the media primarily as a means of helping to stabilize the system and create a more 'integrated' society.⁵²

Ambivalence was to remain the predominant attitude to the media in the GDR, where as a result, the state constantly veered between liberal phases and subsequent repressive interventions intended to support the enforcement of the socialist educational ideal. Such interventions tended to coincide with crises in the system. In 1957, for example, the uprising in Hungary resulted in a new clampdown on forms of 'western' entertainment and the introduction of a 60:40 East-West music quota for radio broadcasts. The Eleventh Plenum of the SED Central Committee in December 1965, where key decisions were made on policy, resulted in even more draconian measures. Although leading up to the plenum there had appeared to be a move towards greater liberalization, the Central Committee instead hardened its attitude to entertainment, singling out the media for special

⁵¹ Protokoll der Rundfunk-Tagung anlässlich des fünfjährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Demokratischen Rundfunks im Haus der Presse Berlin (Minutes of the Broadcasting Conference on the Occasion of the Five Year Anniversary of the Founding of the German Democratic Broadcasting Organization), 11-12 May 1950; Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv Potsdam (DRA), Historisches Archiv, Bestand Hörfunk, F 201-00-00-0001, fos. 311-545, at 454.

⁵² Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, *Unterhaltung als Eigensinn: Eine ostdeutsche Mediengeschichte* (Frankfurt/Main, 2012), 126-74.

criticism as being ‘in thrall to imperialism’ (‘vom Imperialismus manipulierte Medienunterhaltung’).⁵³

But in the long term, the system could not withstand the dynamism of popular culture and had to adapt. The main reason for this was the development of Western consumer societies. From the 1960s onwards, these became immensely attractive for the younger generation in the GDR. Their attraction for this age group was closely linked to the general development of a (mainly Anglo-American) youth culture that, despite intense conservative and ideological resistance, gradually spread first to West and then to East Germany.⁵⁴ This culture spoke to the need that young people felt to find their own generational identity, a need that could not be met through socialist ideals of conformism and collectivism. The regime’s rejection of Western youth culture on ideological grounds was bound to fail and only served to delegitimize the politics of the SED.⁵⁵ It was not until the 1970s and 1980s, under Erich Honecker, that the SED finally began to acknowledge the consumer needs of the East German population and as a result, to become more open to Western popular culture and entertainment. But although this new strategy might have seemed to offer greater chances of success, in fact the opposite was true; the more the SED’s popular culture programme came to resemble that of the West, the more difficult it became for the Party to justify its own, essentially unchanged ideological standpoint.⁵⁶

⁵³ Erich Honecker reporting on behalf of the Politburo at the Eleventh Plenum; here quoted from Dieter Wiedemann, ‘Politik und Unterhaltung in Jugendsendungen des DDR-Fernsehens’, in Louis Bosshart and Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem (eds.), *Medienlust und Mediennutz: Unterhaltung als öffentliche Kommunikation* (Munich, 1994), 484–90, at 485. See also Günter Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente. Mit einem Beitrag von Wolfgang Engler* (Berlin, 2000); Andreas Kötzing, ‘Sturm und Zwang: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED in historischer Perspektive’, in id. and Ralf Schenk (eds.), *Verbotene Utopie: Die SED, die DEFA und das 11. Plenum* (Berlin, 2015), 11–146.

⁵⁴ Christoph Hilgert, *Die unerhörte Generation: Jugend im westlichen und britischen Hörfunk 1945–1963* (Göttingen, 2015).

⁵⁵ Edward Larkey, *Rotes Rockradio: Populäre Musik und die Kommerzialisierung des DDR-Rundfunks* (Berlin, 2007).

⁵⁶ Christoph Classen, ‘Captive Audience? GDR Radio in the Mirror of Listeners’ Mail’, *Cold War History*, 13/2 (2013), 239–54.

Equally in West Germany, the transition from a post-war, shortage economy to a consumer society was the main reason that attitudes towards popular culture began to soften. The market for entertaining music, films, and literature with relevance to new generations and lifestyles grew hugely, supported by audio-visual technological advances that meant the media could be accessed in new, more flexible ways, such as the portable transistor radio or through the increasing availability of records and tapes. Public, non-commercial broadcasters found themselves having to adapt not only to these new technologies but also to the competition from other media – mainly television, but also new forms of entertainment in print and radio, such as Radio Luxemburg.⁵⁷

As audio-visual media underwent a transformation, broadcasters found themselves caught up in its momentum. Their initial reaction was inevitably to increase their programming, but this meant that they then had to work harder to acquire new productions on the commercial, international markets in order to fill their expanded schedules. As a result, radio and television in West Germany gradually became more and more open to American and British content, which was traditionally more oriented towards popular culture.⁵⁸ Although the ‘diktat of the educators’ (Axel Schildt) continued to make itself felt, particularly in public broadcasting, a self-perpetuating dynamic emerged in the FRG at the end of the 1950s that made it increasingly impossible to ignore or dismiss popular demands. As the 1960s progressed, the conservative voices of cultural criticism began to lose their hegemonic authority, although their diminishing power did not mean they went entirely unheard. The advent of a pluralistic consumer society continued to be seen by some as a threat.

If we compare developments in the two German states, we can observe more similarities than we might expect. Despite political concerns, the victorious advance of popular culture proved unstoppable on both sides of the Iron Curtain and was achieved relatively independently of the prevailing political system. Its eventual success in East and West was due not so much to politics as to the compre-

⁵⁷Anna Jehle, *Welle der Konsumgesellschaft: Radio Luxemburg in Frankreich 1945–1975* (Göttingen, 2018); Katja Berg, *Grenzenlose Unterhaltung: Radio Luxemburg in der Bundesrepublik 1957–1980* (Göttingen, forthcoming 2019).

⁵⁸Irmela Schneider, *Amerikanische Einstellung: Deutsches Fernsehen und amerikanische Produktionen* (Heidelberg, 1992).

hensive medialization and ‘consumerization’ of society and the sub-cultures that arose out of these, especially among the younger generation.⁵⁹ Likewise, a dislike and distrust of popular culture was shared equally by German political and cultural elites on both sides of the Berlin Wall.

On the other hand, it would not be true to say that ideological perspectives, along with the specific conditions and developments that arose in each of the two German states, had no effect at all. The permanent competition between the media in the West had the indirect effect of legitimizing popular entertainment culture in the GDR as well as the FRG, mostly because the regime, especially under Honecker, hoped that it would have a stabilizing effect. Popular culture in West Germany was not subject to this kind of politicization; instead, in its various formats it gradually became accepted through a long process of sometimes impassioned social debate. Acceptance in the West was largely due to an economic system based on market forces, meaning that producers generally based their decisions on a broad spectrum of public demand. Public broadcasters were not immune to such pressures, as even before the licensing of private commercial broadcasters in the mid 1980s, they had had to compete with each other and (at least implicitly) with commercial film and print media. Demographic research from the 1950s on also played its part in helping to erode traditional, education-focused prejudices in relation to the media.⁶⁰

Summary: Confrontations, Entanglements, and System-Specific Responses to the Challenges of Medialization

There is no doubt that the mass media played a key role in the antagonistic conflict of the Cold War. At the time, they were often viewed by the state primarily as instruments of political manipulation that could be used to influence their own respective populations as well as the ‘other side’. On both sides, propaganda and counter-propaganda were as much a part of the political media repertoire as the attempts

⁵⁹ Axel Schildt, *Medialisierung und Konsumgesellschaften in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Bochum, 2004).

⁶⁰ Michael Meyen, *Hauptsache Unterhaltung: Mediennutzung und Medienbewertung in Deutschland in den 50er Jahren* (Münster, 2001).

to block the influence of the enemy, such as the placing of propaganda stations and transmitters close to the border along with jammers, import prohibitions, and censorship. The factitious nature of the border in Germany until 1961 meant that the conflict took on a particularly extreme character during this period, because the population still saw itself as single cultural community; this was further underlined by the fact that there were no actual linguistic or cultural barriers between the two states, and that electronic media in the form of radio and television could cross the border relatively easily.

Perhaps this is the reason why one particular narrative about the media – that they were nothing but a tool of the state during the Cold War – still exists today in numerous forms. The present essay, on the other hand, is based on the premise that the increasing availability of mass media, especially of the then new medium of television, was a process that transcended political borders and contributed hugely to the social and cultural transformation of both German societies, which in turn affected politics in ways that were never envisaged. In fact, we can observe an increasing interplay between mass consumption and mass media. In the second half of the twentieth century, the media were no longer only a vehicle for cultural messages aimed at consumers. Media content (for example, in the form of magazines and light entertainment shows) itself became a consumer product. Consumers developed their own individual relationship to the media and turned to them to fulfil a variety of needs, such as to relax or to structure their days.

In this essay, I have attempted to integrate media structures with their content and their appropriation from a social and cultural historical perspective. Such an approach modifies perspectives that are based on a purely structural analysis. In fact, the differences between the dictatorship and the democracy were less absolute in practical terms than it might appear at first sight, given each system's very different understanding of the public sphere. Ideologically, of course, the two systems had two entirely opposed ideas of the media, with the West German liberal, pluralistic model based on a mixed public and commercial offer confronting the East German belief that the media should be the servant of a one-party state in a sealed-off public sphere (although thanks to the presence of West German TV and radio in the GDR, the East German ideal could never be realized entirely). But ideology and reality were by no means identical. As we

have seen above, the political independence of the media in the early Federal Republic did not come about overnight, but had to be fought for, and was not fully achieved in broadcasting for a long time. Likewise, changing and contradictory attitudes to popular and youth culture in the GDR show that the East German ideal of a distinctively socialist media culture never became a reality and under Honecker's leadership was eventually abandoned in all but name. By the end of the 1980s the majority of films shown on East German television were made in the USA, with East German and Soviet-made productions taking second and third place respectively.⁶¹

From the example of the Sandman and children's television, we can see that the complex relations between the two 'sides' were not simply a matter of propaganda wars and system conflict. We can also observe actors changing sides, numerous competing appropriations, and the recourse on both sides to a shared cultural heritage. Similarities between East and West also become disturbingly apparent when we consider how easily the fear of 'Americanization' – and the cultural disintegration that would allegedly follow in its wake – could be tailored to suit the different ideological requirements of East and West, at least in the 1950s. In later periods, the differences between the two political systems became increasingly distinctive; yet neither this increasing differentiation, nor the SED's preventive efforts in the GDR until well into the 1970s, were able to stop young people in both East and West falling under the sway of Western pop culture. This shows the huge power of this cultural transformation, a transformation which was driven by the rise of mass media. The development of medialized consumer societies seems to have set in motion a dynamic that no state authority could ultimately control, demonstrating the transnational dimension of media history. Post-war pop-cultural trends frequently originated in the USA or Western Europe before their reception and adaptation in national contexts, so that a German-German history of the media, despite its national premise, cannot ignore what was happening at the international level. This created a tension between on the one hand, the inherently transnational character of modern mass media and on the other, the need felt by both East and West Germany to establish a distinctive national identity reflecting their respective political systems. More extensive

⁶¹ Richard Oehmig, 'Besorgt mal Filme!': *Der internationale Programmhandel des DDR-Fernsehens* (Göttingen, 2017), 187–8.

research could help cast more light on this little-recognized aspect of media history.⁶²

The same goes for economic and technological aspects of media history, especially as these were also closely bound up with transnational processes. Audio-visual media, in particular, required considerable financial investment, meaning that states simply did not have the capacity to develop their own technologies or even their own content without input from ‘the outside’. This fact, however, was incompatible with ideologies that sought to create a hermetic public sphere or a purely national culture. New technological developments, such as satellite transmission, challenged the very idea of national sovereignty in relation to mass media. Nor did political, economic, and technological developments exist in isolation—they influenced each other and established the conditions under which further developments could occur. For example, the introduction of private broadcasting in West Germany in the 1980s probably could not have occurred without the invention of new distribution technologies such as cable and satellite. The possibilities resulting from these new technologies led to a breakthrough for the journalistic lobby that had long demanded licensing for privately-owned broadcasting companies, and gave impetus to conservative politicians looking to break the monopoly of supposedly ‘left-wing’ public broadcasting.⁶³

This initial attempt at an integrated German media and social history shows the complexity of the subject matter and the challenges it poses to historians. One way to approach it, as we have seen, is to start with case studies. But should such a history ever be successfully written, it could lead to new insights concerning the similarities and differences between two politically opposed societies and the transformation that they both experienced with the rise of modern media.

⁶² Christoph Classen (ed.), *Transnational Broadcasting in Europe 1945–1990*, special issue of *Spiel: Neue Folge. Eine Zeitschrift für Medienkultur*, 2/1 (2016).

⁶³ Frank Bösch, ‘Politische Macht und gesellschaftliche Gestaltung: Wege zur Einführung des privaten Rundfunks in den 1970/80er Jahren’, in Meik Woyke (ed.), *Wandel des Politischen: Die Bundesrepublik während der 1980er Jahre* (Bonn, 2013), 195–214.

MEDIALIZATION IN OPPOSING SYSTEMS

CHRISTOPH CLASSEN is a Senior Researcher at the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam. One of his most recent publications (with Frank Bösch) is 'Bridge over Troubled Water? Mass Media in Divided Germany', in Frank Bösch (ed.), *A History Shared and Divided: East and West Germany since the 1970s* (2018), 551–602.