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**East German Television and the Unmaking of the Socialist Project,
1952-1965**

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**East German Television and the Unmaking of the Socialist Project,
1952-1965**

by

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East German Television and the Unmaking of the Socialist Project, 1952-1965

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Supervisor: David Crew

This dissertation examines the emergence of television between 1952 and 1965 as an important locus of social and political power in the German Democratic Republic. In 1952, television was the least important medium of communication in the GDR: newspapers, literary works, film and especially radio overshadowed television. The medium had no audience and few advocates: most SED leaders were indifferent to television, and television workers were uncertain of what the technology could or should do. Yet within five years, television had differentiated itself as an apparatus of topical reportage that, unlike film and radio, could transmit images of events, apparently unmediated and as they were happening. Within a decade television had proven that it could harness this power, disseminating its narratives to an audience outnumbering that of other media and, therefore, could be an important instrument in the regime's campaign to effect social change. Yet just as television came into its own, the revolutionary cultural project of the 1950s was giving way to a more conservative program. The

construction of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of a new approach to cultural nation-building in the GDR. The transformative idealism of the early East German regime fell increasingly into an “exhausted compromise” with its organs and its citizens, mediated in part through the television screens. Television was never an instrument of revolutionary transformation: Instead, it was a medium of a nominally “socialist” culture, dependent on the revolutionary legend of the early postwar years, but deeply entrenched in the values of bourgeois culture that predated the GDR.

The dissertation deepens our understanding of the practice of power in the GDR during the Ulbricht period. Television responded to the state’s cultural project, but also to the audience, the imperatives of the Cold War, and television workers’ own visions of the world. It performed an important cultural role, perpetuating *and* challenging the power of the state. More important, the dissertation demonstrates the fundamental importance of visual culture: not simply a repository of memories and ephemeral images of the past, it was also constituent of historical actors’ understanding of the world in which they lived.

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Introduction

On October 3, 1952, representatives of the Postal Ministry met with Berlin's Chief Architect Hermann Henselmann to discuss the possibility of setting up a television antenna on the rooftop of one of the apartment buildings that would line the premier East German boulevard, Stalinallee.¹ Still under construction in 1952, Stalinallee was conceived as the centrepiece of a new, socialist East Berlin. For contemporaries and present-day observers alike, such reconstruction projects symbolized the cultural and political transformation of the GDR itself. The move was crucial for the Postal Ministry's plans to develop: for several months prior to the October meeting, television technicians had been trying to improve transmission and reception of television signals between the television centre in southeast Berlin and the city centre. A newly built high-rise apartment building on Stalinallee seemed the perfect location. But Henselmann rejected their request as "out of the question." The building in question could easily house the equipment, but "the antenna would completely destroy the architectural view and the harmony of the overall view of the Stalinallee."² What is more, the antenna would interfere with the reception of radio signals. Unlike radio, television did not yet fit into the socialist master plan.

Six years later, however, the situation had changed. At the Fifth Party Congress, in July 1958, the SED initiated a campaign to transform socialist consciousness in the

¹ The Postal Ministry (MPF) was the body responsible for developing television technology in the GDR.

GDR and television emerged as one of its most important political tools. At that time Postal officials presented Walter Ulbricht with a set of commemorative blueprints of their newly-minted plans for an enormous transmission tower that would rival existing towers throughout the world. Alexanderplatz, at the intersection of East Berlin's cultural, economic and governmental centres of power, was the projected site. Eleven years later, the tower and its broadcasting transmitters, observation deck and revolving restaurant, opened to the public to much fanfare. Although the television tower was just one aspect of the development of the infrastructure of broadcasting in the 1950s and 1960s, it was one of the most well-known and visually compelling examples of the political and economic power of the socialist state. Indeed, the tower is a synecdoche of state's project to build socialism. While, in 1952, the state authorities had refused to build the tower on the preeminent architectural boulevard of high Stalinism, by 1969 it loomed over another showcase of socialist culture, and a hub of political and social power in East Berlin. Yet this centre of socialism was not defined by the legacy of Stalin; instead it was an urban landscape defined by a pastiche of cultural styles and messages.³ Television took its place in this environment, contributing to the compromise between competing visions of the socialist national project that had emerged by the end of the 1960s.

² SAPMO-BArch (Dahlewitz-Hoppegarten, DH), DM 3 BRF II 637, Ministerium für Post und Fernmeldewesen, Bereich Rundfunk und Fernsehen (MPF-BRF), [Abschrift], 6 October 1952.

³ Brian Ladd, "East Berlin Political Monuments in the Late German Democratic Republic: Finding a Place for Marx and Engels," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1, (2002): 91-104, here page 91.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of East and West Germany opened the floodgates of historical research on the GDR. These events encouraged some historians to reassert the fundamental illegitimacy of the East German state, a position that had been challenged during the era of Détente.⁴ Early works revived totalitarian theory to explain the emergence, persistence and subsequent fall of the GDR, and focused in particular on the repressive apparatus of power (*Macht*) as well as political decisions taken on high.⁵ Increasingly the GDR came to be understood as a “second German dictatorship,” comparable with Nazi Germany in the goals, means and practice of power. Such studies often were driven by the ideological commitment to delineating the boundaries between the “democratic” Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the East German “*Unrechtsstaat*.”⁶ Not only the Nazi state, but also the Soviet Union, have figured prominently in studies investigating the administrative and cultural origins of the

⁴ Jens Hacker was particularly critical of Détente-era accounts reevaluating the GDR. Jens Hacker, *Deutsche Irrtümer: Schönfärber und Helfershelfer der SED-Diktatur im Westen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992).

⁵ Eckhard Jesse, “War die DDR totalitär?” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 40 (1994): 12-23; Horst Möller, “Der SED-Staat – die zweite Diktatur in Deutschland” in *Lexikon des DDR-Sozialismus. Das Staats- und Gesellschaftssystem der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, ed. Rainer Eppelmann, (Paderborn: P. Schöningh, 1996); Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Anatomie der Staatssicherheit: Geschichte, Struktur und Methoden* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1995) and Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Totalitarismus: sechs Vorträge über Gehalt und Reichweite eines klassischen Konzepts der Diktaturforschung* (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt Institut für Totalitarismusforschung, 1999). Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1998).

⁶ This is noted by Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), Mary Fulbrook, “Approaches to German contemporary history since 1945” *zeithistorische Forschungen*, no. 1 (2004), <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de>, (accessed 4 April 2006) and Geoff Eley, “The Unease of History: Settling Accounts with the East German Past” *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 175-201, here page 188. The work of the Enquete commission also exemplifies this tendency.

East German state, with early works presenting the East German state largely as a product of the aims and intentions of the Soviet Union.⁷

More recently, as German and Anglo-American historians have mobilized the methods and interpretive frameworks of social history and *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) to study the GDR, this top-down narrative of repression and dissent began to give way. The rhetoric of “dictatorship” shifted as social historians considered the ways in which the regime attempted to build consensus for its rule. The GDR came to be understood variously as an “education dictatorship,” a “modern dictatorship,” or a “welfare dictatorship,” for example.⁸ By the late 1990s, scholars had begun to delineate the “limits of dictatorship,” including the difficulties East German authorities had in overcoming the traditions and continuities of the past, as well as the problems posed by the collapse of the Nazi state and postwar social upheaval.⁹ The work of researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Historical Research (ZZF) in Potsdam was pioneering in this regard. Building on the tradition of the history of everyday life, and the important work of Alf Lüdtke, these scholars investigated the “social practice of authority,” revealing the complicated ways in which the regime and its citizens exercised power.¹⁰

⁷ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-9* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1995) and David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁸ Hartmut Kaelbe, Jürgen Kocka and Harmut Zwahr eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994). Jürgen Kocka and Dorothee Wierling, “Die Jugend als innerer Feind. Konflikte in der Erziehungsdiktatur der sechziger Jahre,” in Kaelbe, Kocka and Zwahr, *Sozialgeschichte*, 404-425; Konrad Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship” in *Dictatorship as Experience: towards a socio-cultural history of the GDR* ed., Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

⁹ Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1996).

¹⁰ The study of “Herrschaft als sozialer Praxis” was the guiding principle of four projects undertaken at the ZZF in the late 1990s, published in Thomas Lindenberger ed., *Herrschaft und Eigensinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999) and in Konrad Jarausch, ed.,

The concept of *Eigensinn*, first developed by Alf Lüdtke to describe the “willfulness” of an individual even when operating in an ostensibly controlled environment such as the factory floor, or Nazi society, seemed an important way of understanding the practice of power in the GDR.¹¹ At the same time, Anglo-American research began to appreciate the contingent nature of the development of East Germany both before and after the establishment of the Republic in 1949.¹² While historians agree that the regime can be described as a “dictatorship,” the rhetoric of totalitarianism has begun to recede. Indeed, Mary Fulbrook has called for historians of the GDR to move beyond the framework of dictatorship to suggest ways in which the GDR fits in to the larger framework of the history of modern industrial societies.¹³

While social history and *Alltagsgeschichte* have offered insights into the practice of political power, recent studies on mass culture, consumption and the media in a variety of geographic and temporal contexts have broadened our understanding of what constitutes social and political power. In particular, studies of consumption have established the centrality of the consumption of cultural goods, such as advertising, film

Dictatorship as Experience: towards a socio-cultural history of the GDR (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

¹¹ Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experience and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitserfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse-Verlag, 1993).

¹² For the important development of German communism see Eric Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: from popular protests to socialist state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). For works looking specifically at the development of the GDR see Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR: from antifascism to Stalinism* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the grass-roots: the transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond, eds., *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-71* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002).

¹³ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 11.

and rock music, to the political (re)construction of the nation.¹⁴ As a result of studies of the cinema including, most recently, Joshua Feinstein on filmmaking in the GDR, we now recognize the deep political implications of film.¹⁵ Finally studies of German radio show the dynamic process of negotiation between the state, its citizens, and the media system itself.¹⁶

A growing body of literature seeks to take an “(audio-)visual turn” in the study of (especially) twentieth century societies, and Germany in particular. For Thomas Lindenberger, for example, it simply is no longer enough to undertake a narrow, political history of a society, without considering the “audiovisions” of that political and social world.¹⁷ Not only are the audio-visual media important as historical “texts” and

¹⁴ Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things: gender and consumption in historical perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), and Victoria de Grazia, “Mass Culture and Sovereignty,” *Journal of Modern History* 61, no. 3 (1989): 53-87; Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999); Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit, Glück: kleine Konsumgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 2001). American media scholar Eileen Meehan has demonstrated that television reception similarly can be understood as “consumption.” Eileen R. Meehan, “Conceptualizing Culture as Commodity: The Problem of Television” in Horace Newcomb, ed., *Television: the Critical View*, 5th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 563-72. See also the contributions in Alf Lüdtke, ed., *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997).

¹⁵ Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing German National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Leonie Naughton, *That was the Wild East: Film Culture, Unification, and the “New” Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949-1989* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio and the Public Sphere* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Adelheid von Saldern and Inge Marssolek eds., *Zuhören und Gehörtwerden: Radio im Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Edition discord, 1998.) and Adelheid von Saldern and Inge Marssolek eds., *Zuhören und Gehörtwerden: Radio in der DDR in der fünfziger Jahre. Zwischen Lenkung und Ablenkung*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Edition discord, 1998).

¹⁷ Thomas Lindenberger, “Vergangenes Hören und Sehen: Zeitgeschichte und ihre Herausforderung durch die audiovisuellen Medien” *zeithistorische Forschungen*, no. 1 (2004), <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de>, (accessed 4 April 2006). Here Lindenberger borrows from Siegfried Zielinski. Please see

repositories of historical memory, but they are and were themselves constituent of contemporary history. In the twentieth century, the media, including radio, the print press, film and television, among others, increasingly saturated peoples' waking lives, and thus were an increasingly important means by which people ordered and understood their own world.¹⁸ Moreover, and as I have argued in this dissertation and elsewhere, historians must move beyond the framework of traditional media criticism, which simplistically casts the media as a tool of ideological manipulation.¹⁹ Instead, for Lindenberger, manipulation and *Eigen-sinn* are both present in (audio-)visual culture, and employed by both propagandists and the audience alike. In the same vein, Adelheid von Saldern insists that historical research go beyond the "real" level of historical events traditionally examined by historians, to recognize the importance of "media realities."²⁰ Brian Ladd's work on public art and architecture in central Berlin also serves to remind us of the importance of visual texts. He argues:

(w)hen we compare this visual evidence with our (still fragmentary) knowledge of what leaders hoped to put on display, we can begin to understand the particular combination of changing taste, crumbling cultural authority, hollow revolutionary posturing and official timidity that transformed the centre of East Berlin...²¹

Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions: Cinema and Television as Entr'actes in History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999); originally published in German: Zielinski, *Audiovisionen: Kino und Fernsehen als Zwischenspiele in der Geschichte* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989).

¹⁸ Indeed, the saturation of our lives with television is the subject of a study of "ambient television." Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Heather Gumbert, "Split Screens: Television in East Germany" in *Screening the Media* Corey Ross, ed., (London: Palgrave, forthcoming).

²⁰ Adelheid von Saldern, "Entertainment, Gender Image and Cultivating an Audience: Radio in the GDR in the late 1950s," in von Saldern ed., *The Challenge of Modernity, 1890-1960* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

²¹ Ladd, "East Berlin Political Monuments," 91.

This dissertation takes up and seeks to deepen this area of inquiry by suggesting ways in which television shaped the lives and worldviews of Germans living in the Democratic Republic. Since reunification the historical literature largely has dismissed television as an institution of political repression: the most significant, and yet insignificant, organ of a propaganda machine. But its history cannot be reduced to one of deep unpopularity and unrelenting repression. The power of television lies not in indoctrination, but in its ability to familiarize and normalize a particular ideology for its audiences. East German audiences were not passive vessels for state propaganda, but rather they resisted overt propaganda while welcoming programming that corresponded to their own notions of the world in which they lived. Through television then, we can see the contingent development of an ideological vocabulary of visual representation that responded not just to “orders” from above, but to the complicated interactions among television producers, SED officials and audiences.

This dissertation examines the emergence of television between 1952 and 1965 as an important locus of social and political power in the GDR. In 1952, television was perhaps the least important medium of communication in the GDR: the print press, literary works, film and especially radio all overshadowed television. The medium had no audience and very few advocates: most SED leaders were indifferent to television, and most television workers were uncertain of what the technology could or should do. Yet within five years, television had differentiated itself from other established media as an apparatus of topical reportage that, unlike film and radio, could transmit images of events, apparently unmediated and as they were happening. Within a decade television had proven that it could harness this power, disseminating its narratives to an audience

outnumbering that of other media and, therefore, could be an important instrument in the regime's campaign to effect social change. Certainly, between 1960 and 1965 television eclipsed other media in terms of its social and political importance.²²

Yet just as television began to come into its own, the revolutionary cultural project of the 1950s was giving way to a more conservative program. The construction of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of a new approach to cultural nation-building in the GDR. The transformative idealism of the early East German regime fell increasingly into an "exhausted compromise" with its officials, its organs and its citizens, a compromise that was mediated in part through the television screens of the nation's living rooms. Television was thus never an instrument of revolutionary transformation. Instead, it was a medium of a nominally "socialist" culture that was dependent on the revolutionary legend of the late 1940s and early 1950s, but deeply entrenched in the cultural values bourgeois culture, a much longer tradition that predated the foundation of the Republic in 1949.

The persistence of cultural continuities was not restricted to the depiction of the bourgeois values of family, *Heimat* and nationalism, hard work, and loyalty to the regime, but also in the resurgence of cultural forms and genres such as melodrama. Certainly, when television was under construction in the 1950s, television workers relied on familiar forms, in part because just figuring out how to represent things visually was a process that was difficult enough without having to develop a wholly new set of cultural

²² The gradual emergence of television as the preeminent medium of information and entertainment in the GDR can be dated to the early 1960s. Radio historian Adelheid von Saldern asserts that this process undermined radio by 1960, and GDR film historian Joshua Feinstein indicates that film has lost ground to television by 1965. Feinstein, *Triumph*, and Von Saldern, "Entertainment," 348.

forms. But by the 1960s, the problem of visual representation largely had been solved, and television workers began to experiment with the language, form and content of television programming. These experiments were short-lived: they did not fit in the increasingly conservative vision of East German society advocated by the SED and welcomed by the audience. State authorities as senior as the Walter Ulbricht and the Agitation Commission of the Politburo circumscribed such experimentation, and audience research suggests that even audiences preferred the mass spectacles celebrating “socialist” hard work and loyalty.

The story of East German television reveals the failure of the cultural mandate of the Ulbricht regime to transform the expectations, ideas and mentalities of the people. By 1965, this battle was lost. The cultural values normally associated with the onset of the Honecker regime had already begun to appear.²³ This story closely approximates the cultural development of the Soviet Union at a similar point in its development. Indeed, it seems that the GDR can be considered a “Stalinist” regime, but perhaps not for the reasons that we might expect. The regime was most “Stalinist” not in the repressive apparatus of the Stasi (East German Secret Police) or the revolutionary transformation of agriculture,²⁴ but in the adoption of the culture of late Stalinism: a culture that had retreated from its earlier idealism to rely on the unifying impulse of bourgeois values.²⁵

²³ Monika Kaiser has posited that the transition from Ulbricht’s regime to that of Honecker is underway in 1965. Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen* (Köln: Böhlau, 1997).

²⁴ For interesting recent work on the transformation of agriculture see Greg Witkowski, “On the Campaign Trail: State Planning and *Eigen-Sinn* in a Communist Campaign to Transform the East German Countryside,” *Central European History* 37 (2004): 400-422.

²⁵ See, for example, Vera S. Dunham on the “Big Deal” between the Soviet state and its “middle class” after the Second World War: Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass values in Soviet Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990); or Sheila Fitzpatrick on Stalin’s “great retreat” which

The study of the emergence of television in the first decades of the GDR reveals an important tension in the East German nation-building project. Here we see that just as television was coming into its own in the GDR, the revolutionary project was coming apart. During the 1950s, the Ulbricht group and many East German citizens were determined to remake everyday life and construct a truly socialist, communitarian state. Yet by the mid-1960s, a half decade before the transition marked by Honecker's rise to the head of the GDR state, the revolutionary project was dead. Socialism turned from a revolutionary movement to a conservative regime, and with that, state-initiated cultural transformation ceased.

ORGANIZATION

Only recently has the field of television research taken a "historical turn." The overwhelming majority of television studies examine the period since the 1980s. Most scholars of television are interested in deconstructing television narratives,²⁶ investigating audiences,²⁷ understanding media effects, or even theorizing how television (and other media) have transformed our understanding of and approach to the world around us.²⁸ Early historical television studies were rather more concerned with tracing the emergence

she dates as early as the 1930s in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁶ See the work of cultural studies scholars' such as Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Routledge, 1996), 128-138.

²⁷ See for example, the work of David Morley or Ien Ang. David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992) or Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (New York: Routledge, 1985); *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (New York: Routledge, 1991); *Living Room Wars* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

²⁸ Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information: poststructuralism and social context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions* or Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the extensions of Man* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994).

of the medium and focus primarily on explaining the invention of the technology and its spread into (primarily American) living rooms.²⁹ Only recently have studies interested in the cultural and social history of the (European) medium begun to emerge, most notably the work of Jason Jacobs on early British television drama.³⁰ This is partly due to the fact that researching early television production and reception is quite difficult. In the GDR as elsewhere, few efforts were made to preserve the artifacts of early television. In the

²⁹ Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television*, 2nd revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Albert Abramson, *The History of Television, 1880-1941* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1987), and *The History of Television, 1942 to 2000* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2003). The exception to this focuses on the Nazi period; see William Urrichio, ed., *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*: special issue, *The History of German Television, 1935-1944* 10, no. 2 (1990).

³⁰ Jason Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). In the field of GDR television, the earliest account was written by in the early 1960s, when the West Germans still referred to the GDR as “the zone.” Karolus-Heinz Heil, *Das Fernsehen in der Sowjetischen Besatzung zone Deutschlands, 1953-1963* (Bonn: Deutsche Bundesverlag, 1967). Media researcher Heide Riedel published a broad institutional account of radio and television for the German Broadcasting Museum in 1977: Heide Riedel, *Hörfunk und Fernsehen in der DDR* (Köln: Literarischer Verlag Braun). Similarly hampered by access to East German sources is Rolf Geserick, *40 Jahre Presse, Rundfunk und Kommunikationspolitik in der DDR* (München: Minerva, 1989). Gunter Holzweissig has written extensively on GDR media policy, always from the perspective of the program-makers: Gunter Holzweissig, *Die Schärfste Waffe der Partei: eine Mediengeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002). Thomas Beutelschmidt explores GDR media culture in Thomas Beutelschmidt, *Sozialistische Audiovision: zur Geschichte der Medienkultur in der DDR* (Potsdam: Verlag Berlin-Brandenburg, 1995). There is a burgeoning amount of scholarship, coming primarily from twenty scholars working on the state-financed research project “Program history of GDR Television,” initiated in 2001. The first phase of their project focuses on simply cataloguing the programming produced by the DFF (no small task). Some senior media researchers are involved in the project, including Knut Hickethier, Rüdiger Steinmetz and Reinhold Viehoff; in 2003 the research community lost the “dean” of GDR television studies, Peter Hoff. The standard text on the history of (East) German television is Peter Hoff’s chapters in Knut Hickethier, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998.) In the future, the project promises to delve further into the social and cultural history of the medium. For some early results, see the special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (volume 24, no. 3) published in August, 2004. German historical television studies generally adhere to the traditional political periodization of the GDR regime. As a result, the overwhelming focus is still on the period since 1971, although quite recently scholars have begun looking at the late 1960s. See for example, Claudia Dittmar and Susanne Vollberg, eds., *Die Überwindung der Langeweile: zur Programmentwicklung des DDR-Fernsehens, 1968-74* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002). A major exception is the interesting work of Michael Meyen on reception and, in particular, entertainment programming in the 1950s and 1960s. See, for example, Michael Meyen, *Hauptsache Unterhaltung: Mediennutzung und Medienbewertung in Deutschland in den fünfziger Jahren* (Münster: Lit, 2001); “Der Siegeszug der Fernsehens in Deutschland. Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Medienwandel und gesellschaftlichem Wandel in den 1950er und 1960er

first few decades of television service in the GDR, the only documents the DFF kept were lists of shows transmitted on any given day. Few production documents still exist, and only a fraction of the mail that the DFF received from viewers still survives.³¹

Yet after 1956 in particular, the DDF cultivated relationships with *Fernsehteilnehmer* (television participants) that led to the emergence of audience research, though it was first formalized in the 1960s. In 1960 DFF employees also began to collect and publish an internal journal of methodological essays discussing the specific characteristics of television production. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, it also became possible to *watch* some East German programming again: West German broadcasters had begun filming DFF broadcasts from their television screens in the early 1950s. This was done in part to allow authorities to see what was going on the other side, but the films were also excerpted for use in West German programming such as *Rote Optik* (Red Spectacles), for example. These films (and later, videos) were “returned” to the department of DFF programming in the German Broadcasting Archive in Berlin after reunification.³²

I should also point out that, in the dissertation, I often refer to specific programs as examples of “drama,” “entertainment” or “political” programming. These categories

Jahren” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 44, no. 3 (2002): 119-146; and Meyen, “Fernsehtuben in der DDR und anderswo” *Rundfunk und Geschichte* 25, no. 2/3, 1999.

³¹ In my examination of televisual experiments from the early 1950s I rely heavily on evidence taken from *Experiment Fernsehen*, published by the Association of Film- and Television Artists in 1984. By the late 1970s, members of the association realized that the ‘pioneers’ of DFF programming were getting old. The Association began an oral history project, conducting interviews of those who had worked in the 1950s, in the hopes of collecting and remembering that history. The book excerpts those interviews, framing them with commentary written by Hans Müncheberg and the late East German media historian Peter Hoff. The interviews still exist, albeit under lock and key in the “Müncheberg Archive” <http://www.archiv-muencheberg.de/>.

³² The East Germans did this as well.

replicate those used by the television service and thus reflect the ways in which television workers understood the programming they were creating. These categories are not irrelevant, because a program defined as explicitly political, particularly before 1961, often commanded more resources, as well as greater respect from state representatives, than other types of programming. But the study of media history demonstrates how liminal the boundaries between “entertainment” and “political” television actually are. Thus, in the dissertation, these categories serve not as interpretive categories, but as a reflection of the administrative taxonomy mobilized by historical actors.

The first three chapters examine the development of three different aspects of early television broadcasting. First, I explore the Postal Ministry’s important work in developing the infrastructure of broadcasting. The successful broadcast of television signals depended upon the ability of the Postal Ministry to harness the airwaves, construct a reliable transmission network and make receivers available to the population. The Cold War played an important role in early technological development, sparking the state’s early investment, but also making it more difficult for East German engineers to develop television technology. The technological basis of East German broadcasting hardly kept up with that of the West Germans, which was painfully clear in the early 1950s. By 1958 though, West German commentators began to warn of a “television offensive” from the “Zone.” East German television had become an important actor in the German-German Cold War.

Second, I discuss the development of the institution responsible for television programming: the DFF (Deutscher Fernsehfunk, or “German Television”).³³ The DFF introduced its ‘regular program’ in June 1952 and survived until the service was dismantled and folded into the broadcasting system of the Federal Republic in 1991. The service offered black and white programming on one channel until 1969, when it introduced a second, colour channel to the airwaves with the opening of the television tower.³⁴ When the television service went on the air in 1952, television employees were few in number and inexperienced. Moreover, they faced the process of “inventing the medium” – figuring what to do with a new and unfamiliar technology. Their early experiments with the medium were initially defined by expectations they had taken from existing media: radio, film, the print press or theatre, for example. Yet by 1955 they had discovered and begun to mobilize the specific characteristics of televisuality. The acquisition of a transmission truck even allowed them to transmit images from outside of the studio.

The third chapter examines the SED’s response to the medium. Party purges resulting from Stalinization in the GDR expelled the medium’s strongest advocates in the early 1950s. Consequently, television received little attention from the upper echelons of the SED (the communist Socialist Unity Party). One earlier pioneer recalled that SED Central Committee members advised him to “Keep his hands off television ... that’ll

³³ In its earliest incarnation the DFF was referred to as the “Central Television Laboratory” and later, the “Television Centre.” After 1972, reflecting the cultural demise of the SED’s ‘one Germany’ policy, the DFF was renamed “Television of the GDR” (Fernsehen der DDR). In the interest of clarity, though, I refer to the television service as the DFF throughout the dissertation.

³⁴ Of course, by the mid-1960s most East Germans could receive programming from the West German channels ARD (established in 1951) and ZDF (introduced in 1961) as well.

never become anything.” But it did: just as television workers were beginning to develop ways in which to represent the world, the crises of 1956 – especially the Hungarian uprising – led the SED to reassess the value of television. During the November uprising, the DFF remained silent, broadcasting no pictures from Budapest or commentary on the events. Their silence drew the ire of the SED, which began to understand the potential power of the medium. In their first explicit discussion of television programming, the Central Committee demanded that the service take its place in the propaganda war against the West.

These three chapters demonstrate that the story of the early development of television was not a simple tale of a medium growing into maturity, but rather that of different groups attempting to create a viable system of television broadcasting, sometimes at cross purposes, in the context of the Cold War. The final two chapters look more closely at programming and its function in the GDR. In the late 1950s, television programming worked its way into East Germans’ everyday lives, offering a fuller, more differentiated schedule of regular (rather than experimental) programming. Through programming it is possible to trace the evolution of SED policy: programs such as *Aktuelle Kamera* (*Current Camera*) closely approximated the Party line, from early efforts to work towards German reunification to the later shift towards demarcating the boundaries between the Federal Republic and the GDR. But more important, we can begin to see how television constructed narratives that shaped the ways in which East German audiences understood and explained the world they lived in. My examination of television crime thrillers during the period of the Berlin Crisis on the one hand, and television news programs in the summer of 1961 on the other hand, demonstrates that

there were clear continuities between the narratives of programming crudely defined as “fiction” and “fact,” or alternatively, “entertainment” and “politics.” Moreover, we can already see the fissures in the SED’s cultural project.

The final chapter examines the development of television programming, production and reception between the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Eleventh Plenum in 1965. During this time television became the key medium of information and entertainment in the GDR and proved central to the SED’s campaign to create a socialist culture. Yet in the aftermath of the Wall, television programming began to reflect a compromise between previously competing visions of “socialism.” The SED rebuffed experimental efforts of the DFF to explore the boundaries of socialism and televisual representation, while the audience flocked to television dramas and new entertainment shows that suggested that loyalty and national pride were more important than self-exploration and ideological transformation. Rather than creating new, thoughtful “socialists” then, the television program instead responded to the popularity of (generally escapist) entertainment programming that allowed the persistence of cultural values and expectations that predated the emergence of the GDR. As a result, television programming participated in the death of the utopian cultural project first undertaken by the SED in the early 1950s.

Chapter One: The Spread of Television Technology in the GDR

INTRODUCTION

Above all, authorities in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) feared losing airwaves to the West. Thus, East German television broadcasting began as little more than an afterthought on 3 June 1952. The night before the Director of the State Broadcasting Committee (SRK) Kurt Heiss called the recently appointed head of the provisional television centre Wolfgang Kleinert to impart the news: “We must start broadcasting tomorrow!”³⁵ These first broadcasts were not intended to transmit a coherent political message, cultivate an audience or provide such an audience with an alternative to West German programming. Neither did they reflect a dramatic increase in the production of television shows or access to television receivers. The decision to begin television broadcasting was taken instead in response to international conventions governing the allocation of the European airwaves – especially the condition that countries had to use their allotted frequencies, or lose them. In other words, the decision to begin broadcasting television signals in East German had nothing to do with the artistic, communicative or even propaganda value of the medium of television; it

³⁵ Peter Hoff in Hans Müncheberg, ed., *Experiment Fernsehen. Vom Laborversuch zur sozialistischen Massenkunst* (Berlin: Verband der Film- und Fernschaffenden der DDR, 1984), 14-15. Wolfgang Kleinert recalled: “‘Wir müssen morgen anfangen zu senden, so, als ob wir ein richtiges Programm haben! Wir müssen jetzt jeden Tag mehr als einer Stunde ‘draussen’ sein, zu einer feststehenden Zeit, um die Frequenz zu belegen, die uns auf der Internationalen Wellenkonferenz zugeteilt worden ist.’ Fakt war, dass kurz vor uns in Westberlin ein Fernsehsender zu strahlen begonnen hatte.”

reflected instead the increasing importance of the airwaves in the context of the German-German Cold War.

In the early 1950s, the SED's interest in television remained limited to the problems of technological development geared towards ensuring nation-wide and even pan-German reception of television signals. The SED leaderships' initial lack of interest in the medium of television is surprising to many, not least because of how entrenched television has become in our own world, fifty years on. Yet those working in television in East Germany spent much of the 1950s inventing the medium. Television workers focused on one of two things. Technicians and engineers focused on developing the technology of transmission and reception, including cameras, television receivers and transmitters capable of spreading television signals across the country. On the other hand, the difficult problem of creating a viable program and constructing the norms of a new medium faced writers, directors, actors and cameramen. Though these two groups often worked in isolation from one another, television only emerged as a viable medium as a result of their efforts to invent a new medium. This chapter traces the work of the technicians and engineers who created a system of distribution that allowed television to catch and ultimately overtake radio as the preeminent medium of information, entertainment and propaganda in the GDR, while the following chapter focuses on those who created a new system of production, in- and outside of the studio. In the first years of service, television was a medium under construction. Only by the end of the decade did the system emerge as a widespread and increasingly popular medium, after television workers largely had resolved these two fundamental sets of problems.

One might ask how it is possible that television technology was relatively unknown to German technicians in the early 1950s; after all, television technology had been under development for some time in Germany and elsewhere in the world. German scientists and enthusiasts had undertaken initial experimentation in television in the 1920s. Under the National Socialists, the German Postal Ministry continued developing the technology in the 1930s, introducing a “regular service” in time for the Berlin Olympics of 1936. Nor were the Germans alone: the British and the Soviets were also developing television during the 1930s, as was the United States. But most European governments shelved their plans for television development as a result of the Second World War. Soviet television, which fleetingly provided a home for the German communist emigre and first director of the DFF Hans Mahle, broadcast briefly in Moscow in the late 1930s before it was interrupted with the onset of war in 1941; the BBC quit broadcasting in 1939. But these were largely hybrid mechanical-electronic systems and differed substantially from the all-electronic systems that came into widespread use only after the war.

While the onset of war effectively ended European experimentation, the development of television in the United States proceeded apace throughout the war and into the postwar period. Even though American television, often believed to have been able to provide a model to which communist propagandists could have looked to understand the possibilities of the medium, had somewhat of a head start, it developed in no less haphazard a way than GDR television did a decade later. By the early 1950s, only the Americans could boast of a well-established service with reasonable reception

(in 1952 over 34% of American households had a television set)³⁶ and a full program day.

But this was far from where American television had begun. In the 1930s it was American radio manufacturers that developed television, intent on capitalizing on the potentially lucrative new market in television receivers and maintaining (or expanding) their market share.³⁷ As a result, consumers found television receivers in stores before there was any programming to tune in, or even an inkling of what that program might look like.

Television also developed unevenly in America. Not only were there important regional differences, but each broadcaster – NBC (owned by RCA), CBS and Dumont – used distinct broadcast standards and required their own receivers; television sets could not receive all programming broadcast in a given area. American television programming was also produced and consumed locally, not nationally.³⁸ In the 1950s, key Federal Communications Commission (FCC) decisions standardized broadcast norms. At the same time, television broadcasters began to introduce massively popular programs such as “I Love Lucy” that were televised and simultaneously filmed on the East coast, then immediately flown to the West coast for broadcast later that day. These two developments contributed to the emergence in the 1950s of a nationally significant

³⁶ Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995), 262.

³⁷ Most scholars of American television agree upon this point. See Raymond Williams, *Television : Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975); William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); or Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁸ See for example Douglas Gomery, “Rethinking Television History,” in Gary Edgerton and Peter Rollins, eds., *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 282-308, and Michael Curtin, “Organizing Difference on Global TV,” in Edgerton, *Television Histories*, 335-356.

television service.³⁹ Thus it is unclear that American television could have modeled effectively the political or aesthetic uses of the medium, even *if* the East Germans had had the opportunity to study it.

In mid-1952 East German television broadcasting (DFF) had little to offer the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) or the public. It had at its disposal only a rudimentary staff, made up for the most part of technicians who had helped develop television under the Nazis, some obsolete technical equipment also dating from the Nazi period and little sense of what an effective television program might look like. More important, East German broadcasters could not yet transmit signals across Berlin, much less the entire GDR, and receivers were not yet available for purchase. Within a decade, though, this picture had changed dramatically. By 1960 television had become a mass medium in the GDR: television signals reached across the country and into the Federal Republic (FRG) and there were over one million licensed television sets. This chapter explores this remarkable expansion in the technology of television broadcasting over the course of the 1950s, which was an essential precondition for the emergence of television as a potent social and political force in the postwar period. In particular I demonstrate the ways in which GDR authorities sought to solve the technological difficulties of distribution and reception of a new and unfamiliar medium. Television, like other aspects of the socialist administration in East Germany, grew hesitantly and haphazardly in the first decade after the war. It was never simply an instrument of dictatorial rule.

³⁹ Gomery, "Rethinking Television History."

TELEVISION UNDER THE NAZIS

Before the Second World War television technology was little suited for broad use as a medium of entertainment or propaganda. Scientists across Europe had begun experimenting with television transmissions in the late nineteenth century. By 1914, they had invented a variety of systems that could transmit little more than indistinct shadows transmitted across a room.⁴⁰ The first public exhibitions of television transmissions, undertaken at technological fairs such as the Berlin Radio Exhibition in the 1920s, introduced mechanical television to the public,⁴¹ exciting amateur imaginations about the possibilities of the new medium.⁴² Enthusiasts could buy kits to build television receivers, and at least one devotee called for others to “build television communities.”⁴³ By 1929 the mechanical-electrical hybrid television system could transmit relatively

⁴⁰ Boris Rosing appears to have had some of the earliest success, transmitting in 1911 and image described as “dim and not well focused.” Richard C. Webb, *Tele-visionaries: The People behind the Invention of Television* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Interscience, 2005), 13. Also in Abramson, which is essentially a patent history of the medium. Albert Abramson, *The History of Television, 1880-1941*, 29-36. The first demonstration of television transmission for the public was undertaken by John Logie Baird in England in 1926 in which “gradations of light and shade were reportedly visible, as opposed to only crude outlines.” A. Michael Noll, *Television Technology: Fundamentals and Future Prospects* (Norwood, MA: Artech House, 1988), 6.

⁴¹ Mechanical television used cameras with rotary, transversely perforated, scanning discs mounted in front of a photoconductive “eye:” the eye could only “see” whatever appeared through the holes of the disc as it quickly spun. The camera eye transmitted the television picture as a set of lines. Yet due to ‘persistence of vision,’ that is, that the human eye transmits to the brain not the individual fragments but an image that reconciles the fragments into a recognizable whole, we see not the still fragments but an image in perpetual motion. Electronic television used a beam of electrons, rather than a chemical element, to scan the image. The major advantages of electronic over mechanical television was the relative lack of light sensitivity and the ability to produce much higher definition images. One could say that mechanical television produced an image that was more of a shadow of the object, while electronic television had a much more nuanced vision of the interplay of light and shadow.

⁴² In the mid-1920s, technological fairs across Germany drew up to 300 000 enthusiasts a year. William Uricchio, “Envisioning the Audience: perceptions of early German television's audiences, 1935-1944,” *Aura Filmvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 2, no. 4 (1996), 2. Available at <http://www.let.uu.nl/~william.urichio/personal/SWEDEN1.html>, accessed 8 March 2006.

⁴³ Monika Elsner, Thomas Müller and Peter Spangenberg, “The Early History of German Television: the slow development of a fast medium” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 2 (1990): 196.

recognizable images.⁴⁴ But the complexity of solving the problems of early television technology – poor picture quality and limited-range transmission – dampened popular enthusiasm.⁴⁵ In 1931 the Berliner *Tageblatt* reported:

It was not long ago when one heard almost daily about some kind of ‘completely revolutionary’ television invention, whose introduction would occur in only a few weeks. But the weeks became months and the months became years and then everything became quiet...⁴⁶

It was not until the late 1930s that these problems were solved when the transition from mechanical to electrical television began to revolutionize the way that the images were produced, and thus, what people could see.

The massive investment of European governments, especially in Germany (through the German Postal Ministry) and the United Kingdom, as well as some private capital, that made this relatively quick transition from experimental technology to viable system possible. By 1931 the German postal service had spent over two million Marks on television technology, without ever introducing the medium to the public.⁴⁷ The rising interest in television technology lay primarily in the promise of huge profits to be had:

⁴⁴ This hybrid system consisted of a mechanical camera and an electrical receiver – the cathode ray tube – which reconstituted the picture by means of an electron beam.

⁴⁵ Unlike the technologies of cinema or radio, the principles of television technology were never really accessible to the average amateur enthusiast. Precursors to modern film, such as the projections of the magic lantern made later technical developments of the medium easier for its audiences to grasp, while early radio buffs found great amusement in building their own transmitters and receivers. Television technology, on the other hand, was too complicated and expensive to allow widespread amateur experimentation.

⁴⁶ Berliner *Tageblatt* cited in Elsner et al, “Early History,” 200.

⁴⁷ Elsner et al, “Early History,” 200.

fresh from their success in marketing radio receivers, the German electronics industry held out similar hopes for the German television receiver market.⁴⁸

After their rise to power in Germany in 1933, the National Socialists continued to develop television technology. For the National Socialists, television technology was integral to economic policy, military preparedness, and of course Nazi cultural politics. Nazi economic plans for the development of television included subsidies and tax incentives for production of television receivers, which served as a symbol of German technological superiority, as well as a 'boon' to the business community.⁴⁹ But the commercial model advocated by the Postal Ministry – the development of private reception in the interests of selling receivers – conflicted with the National Socialists' own, more narrow goals for television. The Nazi government privileged military applications of the new technology for example, investing in the development of television-related instruments of warfare such as guided bombs, radar and radar detection systems, and as a means of visual reconnaissance. The Propaganda Ministry also worked towards introducing public viewing facilities, hoping to disseminate propaganda in what it perceived as the more politically reliable environment of public reception.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ William Urrichio, "Introduction to the History of German Television, 1935-1944" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 2 (1990) pg. 172-3. William Urrichio "High-Definition Television, Big Screen Television and Television-Guided Missiles, 1945" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 3 (1990): 312.

⁴⁹ William Urrichio, "Television as History: Representations of German Television Broadcasting, 1935-1944," in Bruce Murray, ed., *Framing the Past: the Historiography of German Cinema and Television* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 176. Also Elsner et al, "Early History," pg. 207.

⁵⁰ Urrichio; "High-Definition Television," 311-315; Manfred Hempel, "German Television Pioneers and the Conflict between Public Programming and Wonder Weapons" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 2 (1990): 123-62. William Urrichio argues that there was a considerable power struggle between industry and the Postal Service, which wanted to introduce home reception, and the Propaganda Ministry, which favoured the ostensibly politically more valuable reception conditions of public viewing; William Urrichio, "Envisioning the Audience."

Public viewing began in Berlin in 1935. On the occasion of the first German television broadcast, the Nazi official responsible for television development, Eugen Hadamovsky, wrote to Hitler: “Now, in this hour, broadcasting is called upon to fulfill its greatest and most sacred mission: to plant the image of the Führer indelibly in all German hearts.”⁵¹ Yet only 200 receivers were sold, mostly to television facilities in Berlin.⁵² The invasion of Poland cut short the further spread of television; government plans for mass production of the “Unity Television” (*Einheitsfernseher*), scheduled to begin September 1, 1939, never transpired. Public viewing in Germany ended, and most of the extant television receivers ended up in the hands of government officials. Though television became a fixture in military hospitals in Berlin and in occupied Paris (broadcasting from the Eiffel Tower), Hadamovsky’s vision of widespread political agitation remained unfulfilled.⁵³

Mechanical-Electrical Hybrid Technology

In 1935 German television technology was state-of-the-art. Contemporaries lauded the broadcasts from the 1936 Berlin Olympics as a real televisual coup. “If the transmitter radiates the picture in the so-called ‘180 lines manner,’ as is done in Berlin, not only heads, but the entire body may be seen,” American journalist William Schrage

⁵¹ Eugen Hadamovsky cited in Uricchio, “Television as History,” 173. Also in Helmut Kreuzer, “Von der Nipkow-Scheibe zum Massenmedium” in Helmut Kreuzer and Karl Prümm eds., *Fernsehsendungen und ihre Formen: Typologie, Geschichte und Kritik des Programms der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1979), 10.

⁵² Uricchio, “Television as History,” 172.

⁵³ Although he made great use of film appearances for propaganda purposes, television not nearly well developed to be used in the same way. Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 37.

wrote in *Radio News*: “entire scenes with all movements are easily recognized.”⁵⁴ The scenes from the Olympics, however, were not “true” television broadcasts. Cameramen caught the events on film stock, rapidly developed the film, and then broadcast the projected film over the airwaves.⁵⁵

True television – the mechanical-electrical hybrid system – relied on technology developed in the late nineteenth century and had two major shortcomings. First, it was extremely sensitive to light. Mechanical cameras depended on an “eye” made of the photoconductive chemical element selenium. The selenium reacted to reflected light, transforming it into electrical charges, while a transversely perforated disc (the Nipkow Disc), first conceived in 1880, scanned the electrical elements of the picture. Second, the system could transmit only weak, low-resolution signals – 180 lines, as opposed to the postwar European standard of 625 lines.⁵⁶

Mechanical television’s problems with light sensitivity and resolution made the technology an improbable medium for mass entertainment. The sensitivity of the selenium eye meant that studios had to be small and pitch black. As a result of the

⁵⁴ Wilhelm Schrage in *Radio News*, July 1935 posted on the web at Antique Radios: The Collector’s Resource, <http://www.antiqueradios.com/features/germantv.shtml> (accessed 22 April 2006).

⁵⁵ This does not lessen the achievement of the Olympic broadcasts: they were extremely popular. Due to the cost of film stock though, this method of broadcasting could not be pursued for long. A cheaper solution needed to be found. It was not until 1957 that the technology became available for “taping” live events and television plays. Some developed an extremely quick processing film to that within seconds could be shot, processed and broadcast. Little of this film stock has survived: the harsh nature of processing deteriorated the film. Uricchio, “Television as History.” For a discussion of the Olympic broadcasts see Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 41-2.

⁵⁶ By the 1940s German picture definition had risen to a 441-line standard. The standardization of picture resolution was a significant issue because television receivers could only receive signals that were transmitted with the same definition. In 1952 Western Europe seemed to resolve this problem rather amiably, settling on 625-line standard in 1952. The situation was much more cutthroat in the United States, where commercial interests (such as RCA: commanding radio presence, owner of NBC and manufacturer of television receivers) lobbied for acceptance of their proprietary standard. In 1947 the FCC settled on a

Nipkow scanning disc, cameras cast only a thin stream of light on their subjects; the selenium eye reacted to the light to create the image.⁵⁷ One contemporary actor described the experience of staging a television production during what media scholar Knut Hickethier has described as the period of the “Dark Stage,” before the introduction of electronic cameras in 1938⁵⁸:

We gave a whole variety show of about one hour in duration... The dancers... had enormous difficulties with the perception of space... Paul Nipkow’s ray of light was so thin that the two women had to dance in the dark most of the time, and on the screen the spectator could possibly see only a leg or a feather from their hats.⁵⁹

Contemporary cameras could not “see” the parts of the show that fell outside of field of light, rendering a somewhat incomplete spectacle. It was the evolution of television technology from the hybrid mechanical-electrical systems of the early twentieth century to all-electronic systems in the late 1930s that transformed television’s possibilities. The introduction of an all-electrical camera required not pitch-blackness but rather bright light: the new system could transmit scenes from well-lit sets and even out-of-doors.

425-line standard, a lower resolution that often led those abroad to deem American television aesthetically inferior to that of Western Europe. See Boddy, *Fifties Television*.

⁵⁷ In an article exploring the early history of the tele-play (Fernsehspiel) media historian Knut Hickethier described the technical limits of early studios and the mechanical camera: “The studio was the size of a telephone booth, so that only a shot of one person... could be taken. ... The subjects had to act in complete darkness while a ray of light was sent through the rotating Nipkow disc with its spirally arranged holes...” Knut Hickethier, “The Television Play in the Third Reich” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 10, no. 2 (1990): 166.

⁵⁸ Hickethier, “Television Play,” 166-170.

⁵⁹ Axel von Ambesser cited in Hickethier, “Television Play,” 167.

RECONSTRUCTING THE MEDIA UNDER OCCUPATION

By the time the Germans capitulated to the Allies in May 1945 the media system was either in ruins or so thoroughly intertwined with the Nazi regime that Allied authorities believed that it would have to be rebuilt completely. The postal and telegraph systems had collapsed, and Allied authorities closed down other, more politically-suspect elements of the media system such as radio broadcasting, the print press, film production and cinemas. But the media played an important role in the postwar occupation, and reconstruction began immediately. Allied forces seized extant media facilities across Germany, in some cases haphazardly repairing damaged transmitters and equipment to get their message out to Allied troops and German citizens alike. The British launched radio service from the Hamburg transmitter with a broadcast of their national anthem on 4 May 1945.⁶⁰ That same day Wolfgang Staudte had received permits to begin filming *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers are Among Us*) in the rubble of East Berlin.⁶¹ On 13 May the Soviets began broadcasting radio programming using a captured transmitter near Tegel airfield in Berlin. And by November the American authorities had established DIAS, later expanded into RIAS (Radio in the American Sector).

While the reconstruction of radio broadcasting, film and even the print press began immediately at war's end, television received little attention before 1948. This was partly a practical matter: most of the fledgling television infrastructure had been destroyed during the war; re-development would prove both costly and time-consuming.

⁶⁰ Hans Kleinsteuber and Peter Wilke, "Germany," in *The Media in Western Europe: the Euromedia Handbook* (London: Sage, 1992).

⁶¹ Sean Allan, "DEFA: An Historical Overview" in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992* edited by Sean Allan and John Sandford (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 3.

More important, the postwar media system served two purposes for the Allied authorities: it could facilitate the military occupation of Germany, and it would play an important role in democratizing Germany, one of the stated goals of the Potsdam Conference.

Television could not yet accomplish either of those aims. Thus the Allies used film, press reports and especially radio to publicize information on the occupation, organize teams of “rubble women” who cleared the debris from German streets, and broadcast reeducation programs that both explicitly reminded Germans of their defeat and attempted to reinforce democratic thought.

Though the occupation authorities of all four Allied powers agreed that the media could be the cornerstone of democracy in Germany, the liberal-democratic principles of freedom of speech and information were hardly the guiding principles of the media systems they created. Instead, a fundamental desire to achieve a balance between freedom and control over broadcasting motivated the approaches to the media in each of the four zones of occupation. Each hoped to inculcate democracy by allowing some freedom of information, while at the same time maintaining strict control over the kinds of things that could be broadcast over the German airwaves. The Allies prohibited criticism of the occupation for example, and sought to keep the language and values of National Socialism out of radio, film and the print press. Moreover, Allied authorities sought to purge those associated with the Nazi regime from the German press and broadcasting. New screening procedures denied press licenses to anyone who had been involved with the Nazi Party, for example.⁶²

⁶² John Sandford, *The Mass Media of the German-Speaking Countries*, (London: Wolff, 1976), 19-25. Norbert Frei, “Hörfunk und Fernsehen,” in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik*

If the Allied authorities could generally agree on the goals of the postwar media – to democratize Germany – they differed on the kind of media system that could achieve those goals. Unsurprisingly, each favoured their own media system as the model for postwar Germany. American civilian officials attempted to export American commercial broadcasting to Germany, while the British strongly advocated replicating their own model of public service broadcasting. On an administrative level, American officials introduced a decentralized system in which the four American-occupied postwar German states operated their own broadcasting services, while the British, French and Soviets implemented much more centralized systems of administration in their zones of occupation.⁶³ Each of the four occupation authorities' major concern at this early date was simply to resurrect a viable media system, yet to accomplish this, they often worked at cross-purposes. The decentralized broadcasting system operated by the Americans for example required more, weaker transmitters (and thus more frequencies), leading to quarrels among the Allies regarding the distribution of broadcasting frequencies.⁶⁴ French administration officials fought against the encroachment of the Allied Control Council to keep exclusive control of their zone's broadcasting system. Therefore, the resulting regional disparities in media structure were not "East" or "West" German, but characteristic of the idiosyncrasies of four separate zones of occupation.

Deutschland: Geschichte in drei Bänden (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983), 419.

Humphreys, *Media Policy*, 24, see also 25-43.

⁶³ Steven Craig, "Medium-Wave Frequency Allocations in Postwar Europe: Us Foreign Policy and the Copenhagen Conference of 1948," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 34, no. 2 (1990): 122. Also available at Craig's webpage <http://www.rtvf.unt.edu/people/craig/pdfs/COPNHAGN.PDF>, accessed 8 March 2006.

⁶⁴ Craig, "Frequency Allocations," 121.

The decisions that the Allies took in 1945-1948 laid the foundation for the disparate media systems found in postwar Germany. In 1945 the goal of ‘one Germany’ established on the basis of liberal democracy was still possible. By 1947 the boundaries between the East and West Germany had begun to harden as Cold War conflict began to transform Allied plans for the postwar German state. The Bizone Agreement between British and American authorities in January 1947 moved towards merging the economies of their zones and included provisions for amalgamating their media systems, a step that began to establish boundaries between their zones and, in particular, that of the Soviets.⁶⁵ By 1949 French occupation authorities joined the Bizone, which became the basis of the West German state. The resulting media system retained a regional structure that was relatively free of the control of the federal government.

Authorities in East Germany, by contrast, inherited a media system that had been built by Soviet occupation authorities alone. In their zone of control Soviet authorities attempted to impose their own vision of democracy through a tightly managed media system that would broadcast a centrally controlled message, root out National Socialism and instill radical antifascism.⁶⁶ The Soviet imposition of control over the media in 1945-8 thus was not out of line with the approach of other occupying powers and was not intended to establish a “dictatorial” broadcasting system. Like the American or British authorities, the Soviets adapted their policy to postwar conditions in Germany – the administrative chaos, economic devastation, conditions of scarcity, and collapse of the

⁶⁵ Frei, “Hörfunk und Fernsehen,” 418.

⁶⁶ The long tradition of media control under the communists informed the Soviet policy. In 1901 Lenin had deemed the newspaper a “collective agitator and organizer.” In 1921 he referred to the new medium of radio as “a newspaper without paper or distance,” which could educate [*erziehen*] and mobilize the people.

German state – while pursuing their fundamental aim of creating a stable, passive and antifascist Germany. This was particularly true of the early phase of the occupation, before the onset of the Cold War, when the Soviets’ still envisioned Germany’s postwar democracy along the lines of a bourgeois-liberal state.⁶⁷ Thus the distinct differences in media structure in East and West by 1948 resulted not from an inherent political divide between liberal democracy and communist dictatorship, but rather reflected the exigencies of the emerging Cold War.

BROADCASTING AND THE GERMAN COLD WAR

By 1948 the emerging Cold War superseded the spirit of cooperation that had characterized the Potsdam Conference and changed the character of broadcasting on both sides of the border. The Marshall Plan, which offered aid to war-torn European states while attempting to suppress left-wing political activity, and the “Truman Doctrine” typified growing antagonism between the American and Soviet “Allies.” The Anglo-American allies took measures interpreted by the Soviets as steps towards the permanent division of Germany, such as the Bizone Agreement and subsequent currency reform in the western zones, that exacerbated Cold War conflict and led to the Soviet blockade of Berlin (1948 - 1949). By this time, the goals of the Allied authorities and the Germans they administered had become more consistent. Anglo-American authorities increasingly viewed a strong, liberal-democratic West Germany as a bulwark against communism in Europe, while Soviet authorities, previously focused on denazification and instilling anti-

⁶⁷ Martin McCauley, *The German Democratic Republic since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 7-8. WEitz, *Creating Communism*, 323.

fascism, became much more interested in supporting German “Muscovites”’ goal to establish communism in Germany.⁶⁸

The Cold War was fought not on the traditional battlefields of European wars, but rather increasingly through the ether. Over the postwar period, the capitalist and communist worlds advertised competing visions of economic power and political freedom – the achievements of western consumer society and liberal democracy set against communist successes (in the space race or arms production, for example) and anti-fascism. But the propagation of these competing visions could not succeed without the incredible expansion of the technology of broadcasting – harnessing the middle and very high frequency waves, setting up a network to distribute those signals and, finally, enabling reception. Thus the propaganda war was not just about programming, but also about constructing a viable system of distribution. Between 1948 and 1952, European broadcasting and especially the German airwaves became a new and unprecedented battleground.

Harnessing the airwaves

Since the popularization of radio broadcasting in the 1920s, Europeans had struggled over the expansion, dissemination and use of broadcasting frequencies.

⁶⁸ The term “Muscovites” refers to (German) communists who emigrated to the Soviet Union during the Nazi period, most of whom returned with the end of the war. Eric Weitz reminds us that during the early occupation period the Soviets worked towards denazification and the spread of anti-fascism, while conservative “Muscovites” of the so-called “Ulbricht Group” instead worked toward realizing their goal of establishing communism in Germany. Moreover, documents that surfaced after the collapse of the GDR have “more fully demonstrated [that]... KPD/SED leaders sought the establishment of a separate socialist state in Germany far earlier, far more completely than their Soviet mentors.” Not until the outbreak of the Cold War in 1948, did Soviet and SED interests become much more consistent. Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 341.

Germany – the Weimar Republic and later the National Socialist state – had enjoyed a disproportionately large share of the airwaves. In 1926 the first European regulatory plan gave Germany a large share of European frequencies, because of its relatively well-developed broadcasting apparatus. After 1939, when the Nazis went to war to expand their “living space,” they also claimed the remaining airwaves and could broadcast across most of Europe. In 1945, the defeat of Germany opened up the European frequency spectrum, making it available to other countries that had since developed their own broadcasting systems. Yet the task of finding an equitable way to distribute frequencies and avoid massive interference problems in the crowded area of Continental Europe had yet to be tackled. In 1948 European broadcasters convened the Copenhagen Conference to redistribute long and middle wave radio frequencies.

The conference was very much a product of the period of transition between the end of the war and the beginning of the Cold War. European authorities were most interested in increasing their share of the airwaves and had little desire to restore Germany’s disproportionately large share of the frequency spectrum. The goals of the Allied authorities, on the other hand, were shaped by the emerging Cold War: by this time cooperation among the Allies had broken down so far that they left the Allied Control Council (ACC), which still held responsibility for the administration of broadcasting in occupied Germany, powerless to advocate for Germany’s long-term interests. Instead, delegations from all four Allied authorities participated in the conference – the American delegation as a non-voting observer – and independently

sought frequencies in Germany for use within their own zones of occupation.⁶⁹ The American delegation requested fifteen frequency bands, almost three times as many as the British or French authorities and almost twice as many as the Soviets. They earmarked eight of those frequencies for American forces radio and the propaganda broadcaster Voice of America.⁷⁰

Much to the dismay of the American authorities, the conference allocated just two frequencies to each zone; the Americans received one extra, to be used for military broadcasts. They were not alone in their disappointment: many European states were unsatisfied with the results of the conference – Greece, Portugal and Luxembourg, among others, refused to sign or adhere to the agreement.⁷¹ Rampant disregard for the provisions of the conference followed and, by 1954, illegitimate use of European frequencies had affected forty-five percent of European middle-wave frequencies.⁷² In particular, American authorities developed a plan to meet their broadcasting needs by persuading friendly neighbours to ‘lend’ their frequencies to the US, through the application of economic pressure if necessary. Thus conflict over the airwaves was yet another aspect of the emerging Cold War. Ultimately, the limitations of the middle-wave frequency spectrum led Europeans to develop the use of the very-high frequency spectrum, which made television transmission possible.⁷³

⁶⁹ Heide Riedel, *Hörfunk und Fernsehen in der DDR* (Köln: Literarischer Verlag Braun, 1977), 116.

⁷⁰ Craig, “Frequency Allocations,” 124.

⁷¹ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 116. Craig, “Frequency Allocations,” 119.

⁷² Riedel argues that the major offenders were the Americans and Soviets, but that illicit use had been instigated by smaller states unsatisfied with their own frequency allotment. Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 117. The decisions of the Copenhagen Conference were revised at the Geneva Conference in 1974-5. Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 118-19.

⁷³ Craig, “Frequency Allocations,” 128-9.

FROM *FUNKBRÜCKE* TO *FERNSEHOFFENSIVE*: COLD WAR AND THE EXPANSION OF TELEVISION SIGNALS

During the crucial period of 1952-1958, tensions rose between the two German states. Founded in 1949, by 1952 the two nascent states had achieved a greater sense of sovereignty and were beginning to delineate the boundaries between “East” and “West” Germanness, while still maintaining ideological adherence to “one Germany.” For their part, the East German Central Committee had embarked on a program of building socialism in the GDR. At the Second Party Conference in July 1952, the SED announced their nation-building plans and embarked on a stepped up program to reshape East German politics, society and culture. In particular, the Party asserted that, “ideologically, it is the most important task to fill the working class and the masses of workers (*Werkstätigen*) with a socialist consciousness, while at the same time conducting a consistent battle against bourgeois ideology.”⁷⁴ Integral to the campaign to construct socialism was the centralization of state and Party power. The government introduced, for example, the principle of ‘democratic centralism’ within the Party and redrew the administrative boundaries of the GDR.⁷⁵

Although radio remained the preeminent medium of communication, East German broadcasting authorities became concerned about the possibility of losing ground to the West in the development of television technology.⁷⁶ The growth of television was

⁷⁴ Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, 152.

⁷⁵ Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, 155. Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 24.

⁷⁶ Media scholars such as Peter Hoff have long recognized the importance of the emerging Cold War in driving the development of television in the GDR. Certainly, the potential loss of the VHF frequencies allocated at the Stockholm Conference was a decisive moment, which convinced Kurt Heiss of the SRK that the DFF needed to go on the air. And as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, it was the Hungarian

gradual and fraught with difficulties in both German states. By the early 1950s though, the West Germans were clearly winning the race to offer a viable television service. In East Germany, the basic infrastructure for East German television had been under construction since 1949, but the only picture the service had broadcast before 1952 was an experimental transmission of the groundbreaking ceremony for the Television Centre at Berlin-Adlershof. By contrast, the area around the port city of Hamburg in the former British zone of occupation in West Germany, had become a media powerhouse. In 1950, NWDR (North West German Broadcasting) successfully broadcast the first postwar German television picture. That August the regional directors of West German broadcasting founded the ARD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands*), a federal institution to coordinate regional television production and broadcasting across the Federal Republic.⁷⁷ The following year NWDR began broadcasting test signals on an experimental basis, and even had begun to produce a television program.⁷⁸

More important, West German broadcasting soon began to encroach on East German territory. In anticipation of the introduction of television service by the DFF, NWDR began operating a second program from Berlin in 1951. As a result, while the DFF was still in the planning phase, NWDR was broadcasting a (test) program to limited audiences in and around Hamburg and Berlin. NWDR's decision to undertake the Berlin

uprising of 1956 that finally convinced the Central Committee that television was a medium worth their attention.

⁷⁷ Frei, "Hörfunk," 428.

⁷⁸ The first broadcast was a television play based on the Prologue to Goethe's *Faust* that was broadcast on 2 March 1951. Holger Briel, "The Media of Mass Communication: the press, radio and television," in Eva

program was consciously ideological: the program would reach audiences in Berlin that NWDR could not hope to reach from Hamburg and could act as a sort of “display window of the West” in the GDR.⁷⁹ It was a decision not taken lightly since it involved an expensive replication of services, because the Hamburg transmitter was too weak to transmit signals into Berlin. Thus West German television workers such as Heinz Riek had to go to Berlin and build an entirely new program. This program was at least as limited as the test program broadcast in Hamburg and consisted primarily of topical reports recorded on 16mm film. The Berlin transmitter broadcast the program both to the local Berlin audience and, since it was much stronger than the Hamburg transmitter, back through the West German transmitter relay to Hamburg.⁸⁰ East German authorities referred to this system as the *Funkbrücke* – a broadcasting bridge – and, in the early 1950s, spent much effort trying to manage its influence on the GDR.

If East German authorities had good reason to fear the broadcasting successes of the West in the early 1950s, by 1958 Western commentators were warning of an East German *Fernsehoffensive*. Commentators believed that DFF television was not only reaching West German viewers, but seducing them with an appealing program. This section will explore the problems faced by the Postal Ministry and East German authorities in expanding the distribution and reception of television signals.

Kolinsky, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern German Culture* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 331.

⁷⁹ Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 76.

⁸⁰ Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 78-79.

Solving the Problems of Distribution

In contrast to the apparent steady development of NWDR, broadcasting in the GDR began haltingly. Soviet authorities had first taken the decision to develop television technology in 1949.⁸¹ Director of Broadcasting Hans Mahle began assembling a staff of experienced broadcasting personnel. Many were technicians who had begun working in television under the National Socialists, such as Ernst Augustin and Walter Bruch. In 1950, the government approved plans to build the *Fernsehzentrum* (Television Centre) at Berlin-Adlershof. Yet by June 1952, East German television broadcasting consisted of little more than a few test signals transmitted by a lone transmitter standing in Berlin. This ‘Berlin Transmitter’ broadcast notoriously bad pictures and was so weak that it could broadcast signals only between the Television Centre in Adlershof, in southeast Berlin, and the city centre.⁸²

Over the next few years, television officials within the Postal Ministry were preoccupied with the expansion of the transmission network. They allocated funds to develop television technology and signed agreements with East German industrial partners to build and deploy transmitters around the country. Yet several structural problems hampered their efforts and led to unexpected delays in the expansion of the system. First, in the early 1950s, it was difficult for television technicians to access the technical research that would help them construct a viable system. The Cold War had isolated East Germans from the resources of the international scientific community,

⁸¹ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 35.

⁸² This is corroborated by the State Broadcasting Committee: “Der derzeitige Versorgung der Bevölkerung in Berlin mit Programm (sic) leidet darunter, dass der Sender “Berlin Stadthaus” eine sehr schlechte

preventing them from attending international conferences on television technology, and exploring the advances made in a rapidly changing field in more developed centres, such as Britain or the United States, as the West Germans had.⁸³ East German television technicians were able to visit the Moscow television centre in July 1951.⁸⁴ But unlike the Russian system, the East German broadcasting system was built on the basis of VHF broadcasting; this was a norm left undeveloped by the rest of the East European community to which the GDR belonged.⁸⁵ GDR technicians could only replicate outmoded Nazi transmission technology such as the iconoscope, an early electronic camera, or experiment on their own with newer technology until embargoes against the GDR were lifted, allowing the import of newer equipment.

The construction of new transmitters also consistently fell behind schedule. In 1953 for example, the Postal Ministry contracted the construction of several transmitters to expand the network. They were able to erect transmitters of increasing strength that expanded broadcasting throughout Berlin and beyond. Through one transmitter relay they were able to broadcast to Leipzig by August 1953 and had planned to introduce broadcasting to Thuringia and central Germany at that time as well. Located in the mountain ranges of the Harz and the Thuringian Forest, the transmitters ‘Brocken’ and ‘Inselberg’ were the crucial link between these areas and the Berlin broadcasting centre, and could even reach parts of the Federal Republic. At 10 KW, they were also much

Qualität aufweist... und nicht auf einem Band arbeitet.” SAPMO-BArch, State Broadcasting Committee (SRK), DR 6 279 “Darstellung der derzeitige Lage im Fernsehen der DDR,” 20 November 1953, pg. 3.

⁸³ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, Ministerium für Post und Fernmeldewesen – Bereich Rundfunk und Fernsehen (MPF-BRF), “Technische Entwicklung von 1950-1955” [1955].

⁸⁴ Peter Hoff, “Fernsehen als kollektiver Organisator: Anfänge des DDR Fernsehens, 1947-1956” in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 98.

stronger than the Leipzig Sender, could broadcast farther, and proved much more valuable components of the transmission network. Yet production delays thwarted the Ministry's plans. The State Planning Commission had incorporated the transmitters into the production schedule, only to eliminate them later.⁸⁶ It took considerable correspondence among the responsible parties – which included the factory 'Sachsenwerk Radeberg,' the State Broadcasting Committee, the Ministry for Mechanical Engineering,⁸⁷ and the State Planning Commission – before production could be rescheduled. The transmitters then were slated for completion in October and December of 1954, but those deadlines also passed without delivery.

By the time that Brocken and Inselberg were up-and-running in 1955, the Postal Ministry was convinced that East German industry was completely unprepared to develop the requisite technology for a domestic television service. The contractors had not been able to deliver the Brocken and Inselberg transmitters, as well as other technology the Ministry had ordered for the Television Centre, in a timely fashion. Officials further claimed that, "after small successes in 1950-1, industrial interest in our developmental task essentially plunged to zero."⁸⁸ They traced the lack of success in developing television technology to the fact that "the economic importance of the industrial production of radio and television equipment is not appreciated..."⁸⁹ The development of radio and television was not the highest priority of industrial planners,

⁸⁵ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II 633, MPF-BRF, Untitled, December 1955, pg. 2.

⁸⁶ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über die Schwierigkeiten der Fernsehsenderbau im Planjahr 1954," 29 September 1953, pg. 3.

⁸⁷ Ministerium für Maschinenbau.

⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Zusammenarbeit mit der Industrie," [1955], pg 1.

⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II, MPF-BRF, "Zusammenarbeit mit der Industrie," (1955) pg 1.

because East German industry had other, often more pressing, problems. Contractual obligations to the Soviets often took precedence over domestic production. The Sachsenwerk Radeberg for example, was only able to build the Brocken and Inselberg transmitters after Soviet authorities withdrew orders placed at the factory in fulfillment of reparations obligations stemming from the Second World War.⁹⁰ And by 1956, Postal officials noted that *Republikflucht* (flight from the Republic) of workers with specialized skills had taken its toll on the technical development of the service.⁹¹

The supply of equipment, as well as the technical expertise and productive capacity required to build that equipment, remained a persistent problem throughout the 1950s, and the inability of East German industry to develop television technology meant that the GDR had to rely on imports. When an economic embargo against the GDR, in place in the early 1950s, ended, the East Germans bought most of this technology from the West. In 1956 for example, the decision of the Council of Ministers to expand television could, in the estimation of the Postal Ministry, only be achieved through the procurement of technology such as transmitters and transmission trucks (used to broadcast signals from locations outside of the studio) from outside the GDR. In September, the Central Committee approved the purchase of a transmitter from the West German firm Siemens, in order to improve television reception in the area around

⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, “Bericht über die Schwierigkeiten der Fernsehsenderbau im Planjahr 1954,” pg. 8.

⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 6341, MPF-BRF, “Republikflucht im Funkwesen,” 1 December 1956.

Berlin.⁹² By 1959 the Ministry still found it had to import technology from antennas to entire transmitters from elsewhere, including Czechoslovakia.⁹³

An equally important hindrance to the development of the transmission network was the apparent lack of direction in this state-controlled *Planwirtschaft*. By 1955 television officials warned that television technology was developing “along the lines of least resistance.”⁹⁴ A report before the State Broadcasting Committee described lack of coordination among the responsible ministries and, unsurprisingly, accused those ministries of *Betriebsegoismus* (selfishness.) Their lack of communication, for example, had resulted in the construction and deployment of a haphazard network of mismatched transmitters. Television sets that were built to receive a specific frequency could receive signals from one or another of the transmitters, but not all of them.⁹⁵ To East German officials this was no small problem, since it hindered reception of East German signals. But their concern was not limited to East German reception: in particular, officials noted that the standards of the newer transmitters made it impossible for West Germans to tune in the East German television program.⁹⁶

The haphazard development of the transmission network complicated the development of reception in the GDR. This was exacerbated by the existence of the so-called *Funkbrücke*. The West German transmission relay was a communication network

⁹² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 530, ZK SED, “Protokoll Nr. 32/56,” pg 6-7.

⁹³ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 1786, MPF BRF, “Über den technisch-wissenschaftlichen Fortschritt 1959,” (1959) pg. 4-5.

⁹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Darstellung der derzeitige Lage im Fernsehen der DDR,” 20 November 1953, pg. 3.

⁹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Darstellung der derzeitige Lage im Fernsehen der DDR,” 20 November 1953, pg. 3. SAPMO-BArch (DH), “Technische Entwicklung von 1950-1955,” (1955) pg.5.

for various West German agencies, the Postal Ministry of the FRG, and Allied troops stationed in Germany, as well as a means of broadcasting radio and television programming across East German territory to West Berlin. The strength of the *Funkbrücke* interfered with East German signals broadcast from the Müggel mountains in southeast Berlin, making reception all but impossible west of Potsdam and affecting signals as far south as Leipzig.⁹⁷ One solution was to build small transmitters and place them strategically to interfere with West German transmitters, thus freeing up Berlin airspace for East German signals. But to have implemented this plan, East German officials would have had to give up the possibility of reaching a pan-German audience. Ultimately, they worked instead toward a coordination of German frequencies, converting East German transmitters to the West German standard.

Reaching the Audience: early reception

Once the transmission network was in place, the problem remained to equip and mobilize audiences in both East and West to tune in. In 1952, television workers could not reach more than a handful of viewers. This was partly due to the limitations of the transmission network. But even if television signals could have been broadcast widely across the GDR, there were few television sets to receive those signals. In July 1952, the East German television audience was so few in number (there were seven registered viewers), that when technical problems forced the DFF off the air, DFF employees could

⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Technische Entwicklung von 1950-1955," (1955) pg 1.

⁹⁷ Along the North-South axis of Oranienburg-Beelitz. Officials estimated that any strengthening of the signals would even interfere with their own transmitters in Bremen.

inform each by telephone that there would be nothing more to see that evening.⁹⁸ Within six months though, there were seventy regular viewers; a year later, at least 600. By 1960, one million people had registered receivers in the GDR. This remarkable expansion of reception was essential for the development of television as an important tool of communication in East German social, political and cultural life.

By the time the television program went on the air in 1952, the Postal Ministry had been developing the technology of transmission for several years, but few had thought much about what a television program would look like, nor spent many resources making sure that, when the time came, East Germans would get the message. In the early 1950s, East German industry was manufacturing thousands of television sets: the Leningrad T-2 receivers followed a Soviet design and were destined for export eastward. But before 1953, they produced none for the domestic market.⁹⁹ Those who could boast of early access to East German programming often had one of the few remaining Nazi-era television sets, had procured one from the black market, or had bought one in the West.

The initial structural limitations on the growth of the audience persisted for some years as East German industry struggled to produce enough sets to satisfy East Germans' demand for them. Receivers were expensive: the outmoded Leningrad T-2, with a tiny screen and bulky casing, cost more than DM800 to produce. The Leningrad model was manufactured primarily for Soviet consumption, so those that were diverted into the East German market had to be reconstructed to receive signals in the East German frequency

⁹⁸ Günter Puppe cited in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 26.

range, which officials estimated to add up to DM500 to their expense.¹⁰⁰ When they hit stores in 1953, they were sold at the incomprehensible price of DM 3,500. East German authorities encouraged manufacturers to cut the cost of producing televisions to make them more affordable, hoping to drop prices to not more than DM800.¹⁰¹ Alongside the inexpensive receivers, they mandated the production of a more expensive “luxury” model. In January 1954, the Council of Ministers contracted the Sachsenwerk Radeberg to provide fourteen thousand of the new “Rubens” television sets, which cost the consumer DM900 (only DM120 more than it cost to produce), and five thousand of the “Rembrandt” model, for about DM1,300 apiece.¹⁰²

Receivers were expensive, and they were of a relatively lower quality than one would have found on the international market. By 1953 television screen size had grown to 22 inches in the West. Yet, East German television officials were skeptical that GDR televisions would reach 16 inches that year, and the common Leningrad model was about

⁹⁹ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 604, MPF-BRF, letter from Sachsenwerk Radeberg to Ministerium für Maschinenbau, Abt. Elektrotechnik, 16 April 1952.

¹⁰⁰ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 633, MPF-BRF, “Fragen des Genossen Horn,” [20 December 1954]. The average monthly salary was about DM 256 in 1950, rising gradually to about DM 354 by 1955. Dietrich Staritz, *Geshichte der DDR* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), 55.

¹⁰¹ DM800 was considered ‘affordable’ in part because and analysis of receiver prices internationally showed that it should be possible to manufacture sets cheaply enough to offer them at this price, though it took East German industry some time to bring the costs per receiver down. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, “Beschuß über Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” [January 1956] pg. 3. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 604, MPF-BRF, “Bericht über die Tagung der Kommission ‘Fernsehempfänger’ am 13.5.1953,” 14 April 1953. West German sets cost between DM700 and DM 1700 at this time. The difference between the two markets became clear by 1957, however, when West Germans could choose from 130 different sets. Knut Hickethier, “Der Fernseher: zwischen Teilhabe und Medienkonsum” in *Fahrrad, Auto, Fernsehschrank: zur Kulturgeschichte der Alltagsdinge*, edited by Wolfgang Ruppert (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993), 172.

¹⁰² SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 49, MPF-BRF, “Entwurf einer Vorlage an das Ministerrates der DDR über Ausbau und Verbesserung des Fernsehprogramms,” 14 January 1954.

8 inches – not much larger than a contemporary postcard.¹⁰³ Moreover, television reception was certainly not what we are used to today. Weaker transmitters meant weaker signals that were more vulnerable to interference. Contemporary viewers complained of frequent service outages and variable reception. Many who could receive signals described the picture as “*leicht verrauscht*” (noisy or snowy.) The weather seemed to interfere easily with reception: “in humid weather – without rain – the picture and sound are good; with rain or dry, clear air there is bad reception.”¹⁰⁴ Passing trucks could also disturb reception. Some of the viewers’ problems were clearly the result of their unfamiliarity with the technology: one director of a public viewing room complained that the picture “was always distorted towards the vertical.”¹⁰⁵ It was difficult for people to fix these problems themselves, in part because so few had any experience with television sets at all. If a receiver ‘broke down’ – whether the fault of the viewer, the receiver or the transmission network – the television often ended up sitting in a corner, unused. Repair shops were overwhelmed with work orders, many of which went unfulfilled for months, due to the difficulty of acquiring replacement parts.¹⁰⁶

Despite the price of the sets and the conditions of reception, demand for receivers remained high. Liaisons from the television service were pleased to discover a sort of

¹⁰³ Screen size is measured on the diagonal. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Darstellung der derzeitige Lage im Fernsehen der DDR,” 20 November 1953, pg. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv (DRA), H074-00-02-0002, “Zur Situation der Fernsehstuben im Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder,” 23 June 1956, pg 1.

¹⁰⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Darstellung der derzeitige Lage im Fernsehen der DDR,” 20 November 1953, pg. 5.

¹⁰⁶ See complaints in audience “research” including DRA Babelsberg, H074-00-02-0002, “Erfahrungsaustausch mit Berlin Fernsehstuben am 27.9.1956.”

“*Fernsehunger*” in Frankfurt/Oder.¹⁰⁷ Yet, the limited production of sets could not hope to keep up with domestic demand.¹⁰⁸ By early 1956, manufacturers estimated that ten thousand sets had been sold, though according to government statistics, there were more than thirteen thousand televisions in the GDR.¹⁰⁹ Over the next few years, television officials found that demand grew in direct proportion to the availability of receivers and tried in vain to meet it through the expansion of production and the introduction of imported receivers.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, the audience grew from over 13,000 television owners in 1955, to over 300,000 in 1957. Between 1957 and 1959 television ownership almost doubled to just less than 600,000 sets. In 1960 television became a “mass medium” in the GDR, when ownership rose above one million sets.¹¹¹ Despite the high prices and relatively low quality of East German receivers, television ownership rose sharply, even more so than in West Germany.¹¹²

The Politics of Reception

Despite the cost of producing receivers, as well as the problem of affordability, there was little debate among East German authorities about the merits of encouraging

¹⁰⁷ DRA, H074-00-02-0002, “Zur Situation der Fernsehstuben im Bezirk Frankfurt/O,” 23 June 1956, pg 1.

¹⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 2431, MPF-BRF, “Jahresbericht für den deutschen Post für das Jahr 1959,” Article 2.131 ‘Hör- und Fernsehrundfunk’. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 9, SKF, “Bericht über die Verkaufslage von Fernsehgeräten” [1957].

¹⁰⁹ DRA, H074-00-02-0003, “Entwicklung des Schriftwechsels mit Zuschauern,” [1956]. Hoff, “Auf dem Wege zum Massenmedium: Der Ausbau des DDR Fernsehen von 1956 bis 1961” in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 186.

¹¹⁰ DM 3 BRF II 2431, “Jahresbericht für den deutschen Post für das Jahr 1959.”

¹¹¹ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 186. Media scholars have historically, and rather arbitrarily, understood the one million mark as the point at which reception becomes a mass phenomenon.

¹¹² With four times the population, West German reception reached the million mark in 1959. Of course viewership always exceeds ownership, since we can estimate that at least two and perhaps as many as four people watched any registered television set.

public, instead of private reception. Under the National Socialists, audiences had watched television in a number of public viewing facilities in Berlin for not more than DM1 per visit. Public viewing may have been a more politically reliable environment for reception. But, as noted above, it is also true that only a paltry number of receivers were ever produced and sold. In postwar East Germany, public viewership was only ever considered as a means to overcome the difficult problem of providing the public with receivers. For example, postal officials considered the possibilities of *Blockempfang* (apartment house reception), the provision of television to a number of people through the deployment of a central antenna – perhaps on top of an apartment building – that fed individual receivers within the building. Planners imagined putting such receivers in places such as hospitals as well, but soon decided that the price relative to the production of individual receivers was prohibitive.¹¹³

A second, much more widely-supported alternative was the placement of individual receivers in public buildings, such as in the workplace break room, the community clubs of the National Front or *Volkseigene Betriebe* (People's Enterprise, VEB), or in the vacation lodges of the national trade union, the *Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (FDGB).¹¹⁴ In August 1952, the Central Committee prioritized the individuals and organizations who should receive television sets, starting with the

¹¹³ One of the reasons for this was to avoid the proliferation of “Antennenwälder” on Berlin rooftops. Certainly, this could have been a means of restricting group reception to East German signals. This did not seem to concern officials much in this early period of television broadcasting and, as we will see in a moment, East Germans were resourceful enough to subvert that kind of control. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II, MPF-BRF, “Protokoll über die am 5.12.1952 im Hause des Ministeriums für Post und Fernmeldewesen durchgeführte Besprechung über Fernsehempfänger,” 5 December 1952. See also SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 604, MPF-BRF, “Bericht über die Tagung der Kommission ‘Fernsehempfänger’ am 13.5.1953,” 14 April 1953, pg 5.

Politburo and members of the Central Committee, followed by large businesses, hospitals, universities and the party academy, “Karl Marx.”¹¹⁵ Many East Germans saw television for the first time in one of these centres. Yet officials never seemed to question the supremacy of private reception and the goal of making available affordable receivers that East Germans could buy for their homes. East Germans had their own plans for television though, that government agencies could not have anticipated. People often asked their neighbours to open their homes so they could also watch television. Sometimes tenant committees appealed to the television owner in their apartment building to allow the group to use their television on a specific day of the month.¹¹⁶ Some enterprising television owners held regular collective viewing sessions, charging perhaps DM1 for admission.¹¹⁷

Authorities had just as little control over the programming that East Germans watched on their television sets. The Leningrad receiver distributed in the GDR had been reconstructed from Soviet standards to receive three television frequencies (channels). Manufacturers configured other models to receive just one frequency. As we have seen, however, NWDR often came in more strongly than the East Germans’ own signals, in Berlin and elsewhere. Moreover, television distributors reported that customers often requested that their expensive sets be configured to receive NWDR also. Those who

¹¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 604, MPF-BRF, “Plan zur Entwicklung des Fernsehens in Berlin für 1952,” 31 July 1952.

¹¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 318, SED Sekretariat, “Protokoll Nr. 189/52 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 21. August 1952,” 21 August 1952, pg. 2.

¹¹⁶ DRA, H074-00-02-0002, “Bericht von der Dienstreise nach Erfurt, Suhl und Landkreise vom 26.3.-30.3.56,” 3 April 1956, pg. 1.

¹¹⁷ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, “Feststellung über die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich,” [1954], pg. 2.

could not buy new sets that could receive Western channels could turn to a burgeoning cottage industry based on the reconstruction of existing sets for this purpose, a service that cost about DM300. Of two hundred sets sold in the Werder section of Potsdam in 1953, Postal officials estimated that all of them had been reconfigured to receive NWDR.¹¹⁸

Postal authorities identified several shops in the Berlin area, including two in the centre of Party strength, the Stalinallee, that specialized in reconfiguring television sets. One Guild Master in Potsdam had cornered the market on reconstruction there, and charged the exorbitant rate of DM540 for the service. Guild Master B. was not running a secretive, underground operation either. He went to the Party school in Klein Machnow to quarrel with Party members over the configuration of GDR receivers, arguing that all sets should receive NWDR, because “one can’t get any [East German] broadcast station in the GDR.”¹¹⁹ Postal workers characterized the practice as ‘illegal,’ but also recognized that there was no legal regulation that prevented the practice or punished people for doing it. Herr B. went so far as to launch a court case against himself to legitimize the service by establishing legal precedent.¹²⁰

A much more visible symbol of West-reception had also begun to appear. In 1953 Postal officials began to notice the 200 MHz antennas popping up on East German houses. They were easily recognizable by their short length and perfect for receiving

¹¹⁸ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, “Feststellung über die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich,” [1954], pg. 2.

¹¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, Ministerium für Post und Fernmeldewesen, Bereich Rundfunk und Fernsehen, “Feststellung ueber die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich,” (1953), pg. 2.

¹²⁰ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, Ministerium für Post und Fernmeldewesen, Bereich Rundfunk und Fernsehen, “Feststellung ueber die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich,” (1953), pg. 2-3.

television signals in VHF Band III. Since the GDR could not yet transmit signals in this frequency range, the Postal Ministry could conclude only that these had to be used to receive West German television.¹²¹ Some officials worried that other East Germans were hiding their antennas, by installing them under the eaves of their houses. In the end however, authorities perceived this as a matter of competition. In Schwerin, for example, there were twenty television owners, but authorities estimated that many times that number were tuning into West television.¹²² They concluded that if the Marlow transmitter, slated for construction in 1954, was strong enough, it would divert viewers back towards the GDR's program.¹²³

The Fernsehoffensive

In 1957 basic problems of transmission and reception persisted, and areas remained that still had no television service. The most important problem was cross-border interference. East Germans on the periphery of the DFF coverage area still complained of "snowy" pictures due to interference from Polish, Czech or West German signals.¹²⁴ Interference in the western areas of the GDR, largely the result of differing broadcast frequencies, was most troublesome for GDR authorities. They were concerned

¹²¹ "...It appears, that the small antennas everywhere in the GDR serves the reception of transmitters in Band 3. Those kind of transmitters are not yet up and running in the GDR. Despite this, there are a whole bunch of this type of antenna...." SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, "Feststellung über die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich," (1953), pg. 1.

¹²² GDR tv licensing system.

¹²³ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 74, MPF-BRF, "Feststellung über die Fernsehversorgung im Grossberliner Bereich," (1953), pg. 3.

¹²⁴ In December 1954 the Secretariat of the Central Committee began to negotiate with Poland and Czechoslovakia regarding the airwaves. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 449, Sekretariat der ZK, "Protokoll Nr. 27/54 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 15.12.1954," Article 23 'Fragen des Rundfunks.'

that interference on East German frequencies would result in the loss of East German viewers to Western signals and hamper West Germans' reception of GDR programming.¹²⁵ In 1957, in an effort to ameliorate cross-border interference, improve the picture quality in the GDR, and win viewers from the Federal Republic, the Postal Ministry undertook a time-consuming and costly conversion of the broadcast standards of their equipment to the 5.5 MHz Western European standard. The government even paid for the conversion of existing television sets to the new standard.¹²⁶ The GDR was the only Eastern European country to adopt the Western European standard in the postwar period. In the late 1950s then, GDR authorities took measures to get their programming out to the greatest number of Germans in East and West.¹²⁷ They were successful enough that West German commentators began warning of a "Television Offensive."

The conversion of broadcasting standards in the GDR is evidence, on the one hand, that the state was unenthusiastic about repressing reception of Western signals in the GDR in the late 1950s;¹²⁸ on the other hand, it exemplifies the SED's fervent belief that GDR television could and should compete with Western broadcasting for the pan-

¹²⁵ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Technische Entwicklung von 1950-1955," [1955]. Already in 1955 NWDR officials had begun to discuss the possibility of lining the border with small transmitters in order to protect their signal, a situation that would have saturated the border regions with ARD programming. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 633, MPF-BRF, [Beobachtungen in Westdeutschland], 8 November 1955.

¹²⁶ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, "Abschlußbericht über die Änderung des Frequenzabstandes der Bild- und Tonträger der Fernsehsender und Empfänger im Gebiet der DDR auf Grund des Beschlusses des Ministerrats Nr. 51/9 vom 24.1.1957," 13 February 1957.

¹²⁷ Significantly, this conviction had faded a decade later when GDR authorities were faced with a similar decision, this time regarding the introduction of colour programming. Thus West German viewers, who by the 1970s were largely ignorant of DFF programming anyway, would have to watch DFF programming in black-and-white; more importantly, East Germans would have to do the same of the more colourful West German television program.

¹²⁸ Political scientist Joseph Naftzinger has written more extensively on SED policymakers' desire to compete with Western broadcasting: Joseph Naftzinger, "Policy-making in the German Democratic

German audience. Certainly state authorities were much more concerned about Western reception of DFE signals. By 1957, Western commentators had identified what they perceived as a “*Fernsehoffensive*” (television offensive) against the Federal Republic. In January 1958 the newspaper of the West German Social Democratic Party *Vorwärts* published a report that claimed that television was now taking its place alongside radio in the “war of the airwaves.” In the GDR

television towers are supposed to shoot out of the ground like mushrooms along the borders (of the Zone,) and in the television studios the first Propaganda-cadres of this ‘airwave offensive’ are being educated. Instead of ‘steamroller tactics,’ [they] will henceforth attempt to fascinate the West German television audience with humour, sex and jazz.¹²⁹

The commentator warned the rules were changing: no longer was the GDR acting defensively, by trying to keep Western signals out of the GDR, but going on the offensive. The GDR had built new, stronger transmitters and was positioning them to broadcast signals into Hesse, northern Bavaria and Lower Saxony. Soon, communist signals from the GDR and their allies, the Czechs, would cover the entire area of the Federal Republic. Indeed, a *Spiegel* commentator claimed that, “even half of the East-Zone’s transmitters would be enough, to provide the so-called GDR with a television program. All of the other transmitters in the Zone are positioned so that they can deliver the East-Zone program to the entire zonal border area (*Zonengrenzgebiet*).¹³⁰ For these

Republic: the response to West German trans-border Broadcasting” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1994).

¹²⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, Transcript of “Sowjetzonalen-Regierung startet Fernsehoffensive: Es begann in Schwerin; 60 Millionen DM-Ost fuer di Bildschirm-propaganda” (from *Vorwärts* 31 January 1958), 11 February 1958.

¹³⁰ *Spiegel* commentator cited in Rolf Geserick, *40 Jahre Presse, Rundfunk und Kommunikationspolitik in der DDR* (München: Minerva, 1989), 74.

commentators, at least, television in the GDR was now ready to take its place in the propaganda battles of the Cold War.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of the 1950s East German technicians transformed the possibilities of television technology in the GDR. Their work laid the foundation for television as not only an important tool of information and propaganda, but a veritable social force in East Germany by the early 1960s. When the GDR was founded in 1949, television in the GDR consisted of a few leftover bits of Nazi-era technology. National Socialist television, American and Soviet television, understood to be important precursors that blazed a path for early television elsewhere, were not effective models for the East German service. Nazi television was based on an earlier technical standards that were hopelessly outdated by 1949. The Soviets hindered, rather than helped, the development of early television in the GDR: their own television was based on different technological specifications. More importantly, Soviet policy privileged the fulfillment of post-WWII reparations, draining the resources of the nascent television system. Certainly, the policies of all four of the occupation authorities demonstrated a significant lack of coordination in the reconstruction of the postwar media system in East and West. Decisions made before the foundation of separate German states did much to shape the regional peculiarities still evident by 1991. But another aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the importance of the technology of the medium of television. Even before the introduction of programming, television played an important role in the Cold War battle between the German states. The technology of dissemination had to be developed

before any message could be successfully received by the audience. East German technicians had to solve the difficult problems of distribution and reception, a process that was fraught with difficulty. Ultimately, they made important decisions that shaped the GDR's television system, privileging, for example, the competition for a pan-German audience over securing a broadcast network that could reach only East Germans.

Chapter Two: “Was ist eine Sendung?” Inventing Television in the GDR

INTRODUCTION

One day in mid-1952 a young television worker arrived for his first day of work at the East German television service (DFF) and was thrown into producing the news. Günter Hansel, one of the service’s first employees recalled experiencing “torturing uncertainty” when meeting television director Wolfgang Kleinert for the first time. Kleinert “threw a stack of pictures [at him and asserted,] that’s tonight’s show... [Hansel] stared at the pictures ...what is that supposed to be? ... What is Television?”¹³¹ In the early 1950s, television workers in the GDR were just beginning to explore the potential of the new medium of television. At this early date, they had yet to figure out how to use the specific characteristics of the medium with the resources available to them. In essence, they had to “invent” television. Not simply a question of discovering technology – building television towers, improving signal reception or revising broadcast standards – this was an aesthetic and political question as well. Above all, early television workers at the DFF had to forge a television program when no one was quite sure what that might look like.

The development of programming allowed broadcasters to harness television broadcasting technology, establishing the medium as an instrument of social, political and economic power. In the GDR, as elsewhere, the development of programming began

¹³¹ Günter Hansel cited in Hans Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder aus Adlershof: der Deutsche Fernsehfunk – Erlebtes und Gesammeltes* (Berlin: Das neue Berlin, 2000), 13.

only after the introduction of broadcasting. In the early 1950s, DFF staff experimented with the technical and aesthetic dimensions of television transmission and representation. They had to figure out not just how to put images across television screens, but they had to develop ways to represent the world televisually. To some extent, these early experiments involved “reinventing the wheel.” Television had no innate purpose beyond transmitting electrical charges that represented images from one place to another. But the basic, fixed characteristics of the medium did constrain the development of programming, and television producers in different cultural and geographic contexts often developed programming that looked quite similar. Jason Jacobs’ work on early British television drama (circa 1940s and 1950s), for example, demonstrates uncanny similarities to the conditions and experiments of early GDR television.¹³² Similar formats emerged on television screens in the GDR, the Federal Republic and the United States, due in part to the persistence of older formats (such as radio shows), but also to the specifications, even limitations, of early television.

This chapter explores the development of the DFF during the crucial period between 1952 and 1956. During this period, DFF staff faced difficulties, the most important of which was the conceptual challenge of their unfamiliarity with the medium. Many of them had left work in other media forms and brought their preconceptions with them. Thus the expectations associated with radio, film, theatre, and even Nazi-era television were initially very instrumental in shaping television workers’ visions of the medium, as well as the administrative structure, conditions of production and early

¹³² Jacobs, *Intimate Screen*.

programming of the DFF. In the first two years of service, broadcasts remained little more than experiments in form and content, as inexperienced staff learned the possibilities and limitations of television. Yet early experiments soon moved away from the ideas and expectations of older media to explore the particular characteristics of television. This was especially true after the introduction of direct transmission equipment liberated television from the studio. By 1955, this effort included codifying the lessons learned during the early period of televisual experimentation in reports meant to demonstrate that this new medium could both produce effective messages and appeal to the audience. This also reflected an attempt on the part of the television leadership to much more closely control the “messages” of television programming and sideline aesthetic experimentation. Television would not be “artistic,” or simply a medium of entertainment; instead it would work actively to transform the ideas and values of the East German audience

CONDITIONS OF EARLY TELEVISION

By the 1930s and late 1940s television broadcasting could be seen in Britain and the Soviet Union, and the United States could boast receivers in 34% of households by 1952.¹³³ But for most states in Europe and elsewhere television broadcasting first began in the 1950s.¹³⁴ At that early date, television was still a limited medium compared to the existing media of radio and film. While radio had accustomed audiences to understanding the home as a locus of reception, television faced problems radio had

¹³³ Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten*, 262.

already conquered: radio broadcasting reached across the GDR and into the Federal Republic; radio technology largely had resolved the problems of signal interference; and receivers were inexpensive and ubiquitous. Similarly, film already had familiarized audiences with moving images synchronized with sound, but on a much bigger screen with much better resolution than television could offer. Yet television overtook both cinema and younger medium of radio within a decade, spreading rapidly and (thus far) irrevocably into the homes of the industrialized world.

For most early viewers, including many television staff, the novelty of television lay in the prospect of *Aktualität* (visual simultaneity, topicality, and verisimilitude.) Unlike film, radio, theatre or literature – all media to which television has been compared – television held out the promise that viewers would be able to see things they never could have before, in other parts of the world perhaps, and *as they were happening*. Even before viable television technology became available, scientists and lay people alike made much of *Aktualität*. As early as 1878 the British satirical magazine *Punch* caricatured Thomas Edison inventing the “Telephonoscope” through which people would both watch and talk to one another.¹³⁵ Fifty years later, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* published an illustration with the caption:

Marvels which we might still experience: viewing the world from bed through television. The apparatus above the bed serves to operate, by remote control, an airplane which carries the filming apparatus and provides, via radio transmission,

¹³⁴ By 1952 Canada, East and West Germany, Czechoslovakia and Japan had all introduced state-run television services.

¹³⁵ Abramson, *History of Television, 1880-1941*, 5.

views of the areas above which the airplane soars. With the map in front of the viewer, he or she can control where the airplane is located.¹³⁶

Finally, in 1935 the German Imperial Postal Ministry patented a “seeing bomb,” the idea for which had been under development by German state and industry since the 1920s.¹³⁷

Television’s most novel characteristic was also its most limiting feature during the early period of the broadcast era. Television’s live-ness was a function of the fact that the broadcast and reception of any given programming was virtually simultaneous.¹³⁸ Television pictures were always ‘live,’ in that the transmission and reception of the images happened almost simultaneously; whether or not the action represented in the pictures was also happening at the same time is a whole other question. Recognizing this helps us to understand the possibilities and limitations of early television. Television technology in the GDR in the early 1950s could not escape or even manipulate its live-ness. Before late 1955, the East German television service (DFF) did not own any television cameras that could be used outside of the studio. The DFF only acquired television recording technology in the early 1960s, almost a decade after its introduction in the United States and elsewhere in 1956. Before the emergence of recording technology, the only way to preserve “live” television was to capture the production on film, either simultaneously during the performance or from the screen of a television receiver.

¹³⁶ BIZ cited in Elsner et al, “Early History,” 199.

¹³⁷ Hempel, “German Television Pioneers,” 126, 133. Also Urrichio, “German Television,” 180, and Urrichio, “High-Definition Television,” 312.

¹³⁸ This has changed since the introduction of videotape and transmission delays (used to censor inappropriate language – or wardrobe malfunctions!)

Often understood as a primarily visual medium, television's impact derives not solely from its images alone. Writing about the early expansion of television, Raymond Williams described it as a poor-man's cinema – a vastly inferior technology that could not begin to approximate the visual experience of film.¹³⁹ Contemporary receivers certainly confirmed this assessment: though the television cabinet was often quite large, the screen through which the television broadcast appeared was quite small. But television narratives were also very unlike film narrative. Film can rely heavily on both visual scale (as seen in epic films such as *Lawrence of Arabia*) and in-depth detail. Television pictures, on the other hand, depend much more on close-up shots and “inductive visual sequences ... (that) move from close-up to close-up,” relying more on signification than representation of detail.¹⁴⁰ Herbert Zettl, scholar of media production, maintains that television space is both two- and three-dimensional: two-dimensional space is what happens in view of the camera, but that which happens in television's third dimension – off-camera, visualized by the audience – is just as important in constructing the action.¹⁴¹ Over time, the precision of television narratives has allowed the audience to effortlessly “fill in the blanks.” In reference to American television, for example, media scholar Horace Newcomb has argued that understanding programming formulas is essential to aesthetic analysis of television. For Newcomb, television is not subversive, because that would impede the audience's ability to read the action. Instead television

¹³⁹ Williams, *Television*, 28. But television has much in common with other media as well. Horace Newcomb argues that television narrative is most similar to that of the novel. For Newcomb television and literature share the same kind of narrative continuity, which neither radio nor film can claim. Early television was often much closer to theatre than film, radio or literature.

¹⁴⁰ Herbert Zettl, “Aesthetics of Television,” in *Understanding Television* ed., Richard P. Adler, (New York: Praeger, 1981), 120.

relies on formulas that become “a particular way of ordering and defining the world.”¹⁴² East German television workers only began to explore the creation of such conventions after the emergence of DFF broadcasting in 1952.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE DFF 1952-3

In June 1952 the East German television service hardly seemed prepared to launch a television program. The television studios, located in the southwest Berlin neighbourhood of Adlershof, were still under construction. The employees were both young and few in number. The editor Wolfgang Stemmler arrived at the studios for his first day of work in mid-November 1952 to find that he was one of only thirty employees of the new Television Centre, a number that included the kitchen and wait staff in the Television Centre’s cafeteria.¹⁴³ As late as the winter season 1954-1955, he alone comprised the department of entertainment programming at the DFF.¹⁴⁴ For many of the small staff, working in television was their first real job. Otto Holub, who became a fixture of GDR television, was only twenty-four in 1952; he reported a sense of panic when he discovered that he had been hired, not as a director’s assistant as had been his impression, but the service’s first director.¹⁴⁵ Most arrived to fill positions with vague job descriptions and often had to take on multiple roles.¹⁴⁶ Maria Kühne, one of the

¹⁴¹ Zettl, “Aesthetics,” 121.

¹⁴² Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Garden City: N.Y. Anchor Press, 1974), 6-28.

¹⁴³ Wolfgang Stemmler, “Bemerkungen über die Unterhaltungssendungen vom Beginn des DDR-Fernsehens bis zum Ende der fünfziger Jahre,” in *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit: 40 Jahre DDR-Medien*, ed. Heide Riedel (Berlin: Vistas, 1994), 77.

¹⁴⁴ Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 79.

¹⁴⁵ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 20.

¹⁴⁶ This was also the case in early postwar radio. Adelheid von Saldern, “Radio in the GDR,” .

DFF's first announcers, also performed in early dramatic pieces and worked as an editor for the service.¹⁴⁷

Most of the staff had never worked in television, though a few had had some previous experience with the medium. The Head of the Television Centre Heinrich Zilles, for example, formerly had worked in radio. Screenwriter and dramaturge Hans Müncheberg came to television from film. Director Hans-Erich Korbsschmitt had worked both in film and theatre. Hans Mahle, former Head of the Television Centre had worked at the television broadcasting centre in Moscow while in emigration during the war. Upon his return after the war, SMAD (Soviet Military Administration in Germany) charged him with reconstruction of the media in the Soviet zone. He hired Nazi-era technicians, such as Ernst Augustin and Walter Bruch, to help with development of television. Their expertise was integral to early GDR broadcasting: for example, Augustin built the television cameras used in the studio during the first two years. Then there was Walter Baumert, screenwriter and dramaturge, who recalled being fascinated the first time he had seen television, as a child in Nazi-era Berlin.¹⁴⁸

The widely varying backgrounds of the new television staff meant they had very different expectations and ideas about the kinds of things that television could (and should) do. Augustin, for example, took his lead from his experience with television during the Nazi period. The primary function and understanding of television at that time was as a medium of (ostensibly) direct and immediate transmission of live events, ranging from variety programming, to sporting matches (most famously of the Berlin

¹⁴⁷ She played the title character in "Bianca Maria and the Dripping Dagger," for example. Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 46.

Olympics 1936,) to transmitting from the sidelines of Nazi parades. In his capacity as chief engineer overseeing the development of the studios' technology, Augustin had some authority over the construction of the Adlershof studios. Ultimately, his plans for the GDR studio replicated the Nazi-era television studio the *Deutschlandhaus*.¹⁴⁹ Nazi producers had conceived television primarily as a variety program, in which various acts – a ballerina, a singer with accompanist or a juggler for example – performed for the camera. Coming out of this tradition, Augustin understood television as televised theatre and built the DFF studios to incorporate a set of stages.

DFF employees who came from other media imagined television quite differently. Indeed, by 1955 the service had decided that variety programs with several numbers, as had been the rule during the Nazi period, did not make effective television.¹⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, those who came from radio were more comfortable with the audio than the visual dimensions of the medium. Meanwhile, former film workers Hans Müncheberg and Wolfgang Luderer began producing elaborate stage plays much more

¹⁴⁸ Walter Baumert in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ In his work on Nazi-era television plays Knut Hickethier describes the Nazi conception of the *Deutschlandhaus*: “With the construction of the large round studio in the *Deutschlandhaus*, it was generally believed that the ideal type of studio for television production had been achieved. The studio was five metres high, with a circular floor plan, and situated at its outer edges were five single stages passing into one another, all illuminated by a fixed lighting system. The middle was left free for the cameras. The stages were 13 centimetres higher than the centre, so that the cameras could only record the action on stage from the front. This construction reflected the stage-bound conception of the tele-play (and therefore the term “television stage.”) A contemporary television cameraman, Herbert Kutschbach, looking back on the period wrote in 1956, that ‘one wanted to make the viewer of the television image believe he saw the picture from the point of view of a theatre spectator sitting in the parquet.’” Hickethier, “Television Play,” 172.

¹⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” [Oktober 1955]. This is replicated in SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955].

along the lines of the film narratives to which they were accustomed.¹⁵¹ Thus in the early years of DFF programming, there was considerable tension among differing expectations of the medium. Television workers also faced the difficult process of reconciling those expectations with the conditions and limitations of early television, which could only be achieved through practice.

Early Experiments

DFF programming in the early 1950s bore little resemblance to television as we know it today. Broadcasts lasted not more than two hours a day and transmitted only five days a week in the first two years. Television transmissions did not reach very far, and viewers who lived outside Berlin only gradually began to receive them. Early broadcasts were stultifyingly mundane. In the first few months, broadcasts consisted simply of the DFF's station identification or the image of a clock. Gradually the service began to include some filmed material, but broadcasts remained short, utilitarian and repetitive. For example, the service procured three films produced by DEFA for broadcast. The films, including one entitled "Horses," and another on the subject of tooth care, were shorts of little more than several minutes of material each and were transmitted in perpetual rotation.¹⁵² It was not long before the service exhausted the appeal of these

¹⁵¹ Müncheberg, *Experiment*, esp. 94-103.

¹⁵² Film could be shown on television through the use of the "telecine" (*Filmgeber, Filmabtaster*). The telecine shone light through the film, turning the light into the electrical charges that could be read by the television transmitter.

films. Hermann Axen, Central Committee member responsible for Agitation and Propaganda soon demanded that television workers seek out other material.¹⁵³

One option for television employees was to create programming themselves. Broadcasts of “original” programming – content made specifically for broadcast using television technology – in the first few months were experiments in form and content, as inexperienced staff struggled to transmit words and pictures over the airwaves.¹⁵⁴ Most early experiments focused on developing the “slide series.” Producers made slides from still photographs and transmitted them over the airwaves with accompanying voiceovers. The television service used the slide series with varying success for early news programs and the first children’s show. A photo-reporter provided enough stills for a daily ten-minute news “show;” this was the genesis of *Aktuelle Kamera* (Current Camera), which in an altered form became the nightly-news program that survived until the end of the Republic.¹⁵⁵ Similarly *Stories for Bärbel* consisted of stories read from illustrated children’s books with accompanying slides made from the original illustrations.¹⁵⁶

The high point of the slides series on East German television was a piece of sports commentary transmitted in 1952. Günter Puppe recalled how the process worked:

[We] made, developed, copied and searched endless numbers of photos, to put together an extensive slide series. Then Wolfgang sat down in front of the monitor and began to describe the match, which was already over, with bombastic pronouncements, with great speed and fervour. At the same time slide after slide of grim, sad-looking, frozen boxers flickered over the screen. The whole

¹⁵³ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 16.

¹⁵⁴ According this report from 1955, the DFF produced no original programming before December 1952, but they discounted the slide series. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” [Oktober 1955].

¹⁵⁵ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 15.

¹⁵⁶ “Für Bärbel erzählt.” Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 16.

enterprise was rather tragi-comic, because we were deadly serious. We actually believed that if one put together enough slides, with a moving commentary, one could bring still pictures to life.¹⁵⁷

The slide series proved prohibitively expensive for the television service in the long term, due to the number of stills required to put together a moving reportage.¹⁵⁸ More important, it was ill-suited to the medium of television. The concept – animated audio reportage with a visual element tacked on – was wholly dependent upon the model of radio. Thus the slide-series was a stopgap measure that was a simple means to transmit images and information over the airwaves. Most important, experimentation with the slide series demonstrated the technical and conceptual challenges television posed to those working in the medium.

From its inception, the television service suffered from generally inadequate financial and structural support of television programming: it operated with outdated equipment and through chronic shortages of production materials. By January 1953, eight months after the inception of the program, but less than one month after the “official” beginning of the test program, the DFF owned just one television camera. It was an “iconoscope,” technology made obsolete by the development of the orthicon in the late 1940s, which did not require such high levels of light to “see.” Deceptively mundane problems also plagued the service. DFF department heads met in January to

¹⁵⁷ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the slide series’ was as close as the service got to achieving *Aktualität*, the characteristic that, at this early date, differentiated television from radio and film most. This state of affairs did not last long; a report from ca. 1956 had to explain what the slide series was. DRA, H074-00-02/0003 “Zur Entwicklung des Programms im Fernsehzentrum Berlin von 1953-1955,” 1.

discuss the problem of a paper shortage that made duplication impossible;¹⁵⁹ this could affect everything from memos to rehearsal schedules to scripts and disrupt every department of the DFF. At the same time, government plans to provide the service with at least one thousand television receivers in 1953 never materialized, making it difficult for television workers to watch television. None of them owned their own sets. Anyone who wanted to see the program had to return after their shift to watch it on a set in the DFF cafeteria, at a public viewing room just outside of the DFF campus, or watch the set at the House of German-Soviet Friendship in the centre of East Berlin.¹⁶⁰ Yet neither the DFF nor the State Broadcasting Committee had enough receivers to use, either as monitors during production or for training purposes, or even to keep an eye on what the DFF put out over the airwaves. Even the group responsible for developing “studio technology,” which needed sets both in order to replicate existing technology and improve upon it, did not receive any, leaving them unable to meet their Plan obligations to develop the technical foundation of the television service as a whole.¹⁶¹

Early television productions also had to negotiate the space of the television studios at Adlershof. Construction of the studio complex at Adlershof had broken ground in 1950, but, by 1952, only one of five planned performance spaces was near enough to completion for use as a broadcast studio. This space was small, only four square metres in size, and sparsely furnished with two tables, a monitor, and a large television camera.

¹⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die Abteilungsleiter-Besprechung am 26.1.53” 26 January 1953. Although paper “rationing” can be politically motivated, as when regimes withhold paper from organizations that threaten the regime, that does not appear to be the case with respect to the DFF.

¹⁶⁰ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 38.

¹⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die Abteilungsleiter-Besprechung am 26.1.53” 26 January 1953.

A grey curtain hung in the background, hiding a wall upon which production staff could paint the only possible set dressing.¹⁶² The camera consumed one quarter of the room, allowing only a few people to fit into the remaining space at one time. Yet the camera's large size was inversely proportional to its utility. It had an extremely limited view. Bolted to the floor, it could not be swung left or right and could capture only close and medium shots of its subjects (in other words, transmitting pictures of the head and torso).¹⁶³ It was also quite insensitive to light, and the spotlights used to illuminate the stage generated excessive heat, making the room quite uncomfortable.¹⁶⁴ Again, the studio complex had been planned and mostly built before the GDR had developed television programming, designed in accordance with archaic expectations of television. Television workers later recalled feeling that the entire complex had been misconceived. They found the studio spaces were too small and there were no designated (or otherwise available) spaces for rehearsal, make-up and costume changes, or set design and construction. Hanna Christian lamented that construction of the television theatre – the centerpiece of the studio complex, where the DFF hoped to invite the public for broadcasts of live events – did not include space for television cameras, lights or sound equipment.¹⁶⁵

The technology of television further complicated early programming. Television was a “live” medium. The lack of recording technology, as well as the DFF's incapacity to broadcast from outside of the studio limited the possibilities available to television

¹⁶² Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 77.

¹⁶³ Herkner cited in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 30.

¹⁶⁴ Media scholar Knut Hickethier describes the quite similar conditions of the Nazi period. Knut Hickethier, “Television Play,” 166.

producers. They could broadcast productions or, as above, “slide shows” from the studio, or transmit productions that first had been recorded on regular 16- or 35-mm film. Film stock was expensive, though, as was investment in feature films that could be shown on television. The DFF had an extremely limited budget forcing programmers to be resourceful. Where possible, they sought older feature films that could be acquired on the cheap.¹⁶⁶ One employee “bought” a Soviet film for two bottles of vodka.¹⁶⁷ Hiring contract actors also cost precious money, and the service employed only fourteen salaried actors and actresses. Constrained by these choices, it was difficult for DFF employees make enough programming to fill the schedule.

For most new television workers, nothing in their previous work had prepared them for the live nature of the early medium. Television was at once unforgiving and ephemeral: “second takes” were impossible, but at the same time, once transmitted, the image and sound vanished. The viscosity of the medium proved particularly unexpected, even for television workers who came from film or theatre backgrounds. All DFF staff had to learn to “transmit for the eyes.”¹⁶⁸ Television’s visual field proved much smaller in scale than that of film or theatre, and much narrower, though deeper, than theatre.¹⁶⁹ Television workers also had to take into account the small size of contemporary screens. The small screen limited the kinds of programming, as well as the representational imagery that could be interpreted successfully by the viewer. In general, television workers began to discover that less detail meant a greater intelligibility of image and

¹⁶⁵ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 18.

¹⁶⁶ Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 16-17.

¹⁶⁷ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 14.

¹⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” 1955, pg. 9.

message, and a greater impact on the audience.¹⁷⁰ These characteristics of the medium, along with the conditions of production outlined above, shaped the kinds of programming that could be successfully transmitted over the airwaves.

It took some experimentation for television workers to learn to work with televisual space and time. One contemporary recalled that the DFF went on location to film performers of the Friedrichstrasse circus. Despite the small dimensions of the medium, they shot the action in extreme long shots. When transmitted, the figures were so tiny that the program “gave [the viewer] the impression of sitting in the last row.”¹⁷¹ But DFF directors soon learned that they could also manipulate this sense of space. Preparing to broadcast an opera performance, Otto Holub realized he could create the illusion of space in a cramped studio. They built a stage in the small studio and placed a variety of props to make it appear as a small concert hall, including a set of theatre seats. Holub positioned the camera as far back in the studio as possible. During the broadcast, the conductor directed the performance while kneeling in front the “stage” – on camera he appeared to be standing in an orchestra pit. The whole illusion gave the impression of much greater depth than there existed in the studio.¹⁷²

One sure means of manipulating both space and time during a live broadcast was through the incorporation of film clips. Film offered television producers several advantages. Filming outside the studio, television workers could begin to represent a world that the small studio spaces would not allow. Incorporating filmed excerpts also

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of this see Zettl, “Television Aesthetics,” 115-142.

¹⁷⁰ Günter Kaltoven cited in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 85.

¹⁷¹ Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 78.

¹⁷² Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 74.

offered live performers and set dressers a window of opportunity to make costume and set changes in the studio during the broadcast.¹⁷³ The live, studio performances would have been easily distinguishable from filmed excerpts, however, because of their spartan sets, flat two-dimensional space, and the inability (with only one camera) to cut between perspectives. This was a conceptual divide that contemporaries sought to bridge by experimenting with creating a new, more dynamic visual style under the conditions of live television.¹⁷⁴ Hans-Günter Böhm recalled the introduction of the so-called *Körperblende* (body blend). This was a means of transitioning from one scene to another through a modified fade-out: an actor approached the camera, darkening the shot; in the next scene the action began with the actor (or a different one) walking away from the camera “fading” the action back in.¹⁷⁵ This technique could both “cut” the scene and change the camera’s perspective on the action – by allowing an opportunity for minor changes to the set or costume – creating a greater sense of motion, space and elapsed time than normally allowed by one-camera, live productions. Through such experiments DFF employees not only learned what could be done on television, they also could begin to develop their own televisual style.

The conceptual learning curve of early televisual experimentation reached even deeper into the development of a language of representation. Television workers had to develop a visual grammar of television representation in order to make their programming – which, like all television, was composed essentially of images devoid of

¹⁷³ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 97.

¹⁷⁴ Percy Dreger in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 67. Patricia Holland, *The Television Handbook* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 91.

context – intelligible for their audience. Sound narrative on television was an important component of creating meaning out of disjointed images, but meaning also had to be created visually. In order for the viewer to understand the visual message of a particular scene, much less an entire show, it had to be constructed on the basis of an intricate web of visual conventions that were shared by television producers and their audiences. These conventions were not instinctive but had to be developed. It was not until 1955, when the service finally acquired the technology to broadcast from outside the studio, that camerawoman Hanna Christian discovered an important visual convention that still governs sports broadcasts and interviews today – the *Bildachse* (or *Achssprung*) or “180 degree rule.”¹⁷⁶ The principle of the *Bildachse* was that the cameras had to be positioned in such a way that cutting between perspectives did not disrupt, but rather reinforced the audiences’ perception of the scene. In the case of an interview or a sporting match, for example, the perspective of the camera had to closely replicate the point-of-view of someone in attendance. No one would watch a tennis match from both sides of the court; representing the game that way on the television screen immediately would violate the reality effect and confuse the viewer. Yet this is just what Christian did. She prepared to film her first sporting event, a soccer match on 13 November 1955, by positioning cameras on either side of the centre line, which is normal for sports coverage, and on either side of the field, which crossed the imaginary line of perception.¹⁷⁷ Players running toward the goal on the field appeared on the monitor to be running every which

¹⁷⁶ Patricia Holland explains the rule as such: “Crossing the imaginary ‘line’ which runs between characters in a scene and the observing camera will involve a sense of discontinuity, as the person facing right will suddenly appear to be facing left....” Holland, *Television Handbook*, 63.

way. Cutting between these points of view produced contradictory images, distorting the viewer's point of view and garbling the "visual grammar" of the broadcast.

If Christian's initial placements of the television cameras seem an egregious "mistake" to us today, it only demonstrates how well-entrenched conventions of visual representation have become in our own world. But, for example, it took some time for television routinely to frame sporting events in the "correct" way described above. During the Berlin Olympics in 1936, for example, the Nazis used film to transmit soccer matches. Extant film clips suggest, however, that their approach was to position the cameras at one end of the field, behind one team's goal line, and film the action from there. Their cuts also garbled the visual grammar. It is not too far-fetched to claim that those transmissions were intended less to provide an intelligible representation of the game though, than to exploit the shock value of visual simultaneity – simply to provide moving images for those who were watching from public viewing rooms in Berlin.¹⁷⁸ But it demonstrates that such conventions were not "natural," but had to be learned.

Finally, the success of televisual representation also relied upon those who worked the control desk, in the studio or transmission wagon. They too, had to learn the possibilities and limitations of their equipment. Some production technicians found it difficult to achieve seamless, or even steady, soft fade-outs and quick transitions between cuts, for example.¹⁷⁹ Technicians also had to be prepared to deal with the idiosyncrasies of their machines. They constantly had to monitor the quality of the picture, with

¹⁷⁷ Hanna Christian cited in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 112. Cited also in Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 80.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Kloft, *Television under the Swastika: Unseen Footage from the Third Reich* (Chicago: International Historic Films, 2001).

attention to the fact that early electronic cameras transmitted colours “unpredictably,” resulting in ghastly shades of grey appearing on the television screen.¹⁸⁰ Telecines – the machines that turned filmed images into the electrical charges enabling television transmission – had to “warm up,” taking twelve seconds to begin transmitting images, making it difficult to coordinate the image with the speaker in the next room; meanwhile early television cameras had to “cool down” between rehearsal and show-time so they could reliably transmit the evening broadcast.¹⁸¹

These were lessons that could only be learned through experimentation. A group of television workers, including Ernst Augustin, was able to attend the filming of a soccer match in 1951 while on a trip to the Soviet Union to view the television centre in Moscow. But Augustin, and those who accompanied him, were technicians who went to Moscow to learn about technology, not programming. Nor did they involve themselves in programming after their return. By the same token camerawoman Christian had had plenty of opportunity to work with television technology in the studio. Yet there were too few cameras and small studio spaces: before August 1954, there had not existed a studio large enough to get a 180-degree view through the camera.¹⁸² Television workers took seriously the task of learning the medium through experimentation, though. As early as 1952, DFF employees from all branches of the service began every week with a day-long workshop. This “Day of Theoretical Work” on the transmission-free Mondays predated institution of the Television Council, which became the administrative (and

¹⁷⁹ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 40.

¹⁸⁰ Hickethier, “Television Play,” 173.

¹⁸¹ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 40.

¹⁸² Hanna Christian in Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 72.

political) head of the television service in 1953. Each Monday, technicians, writers, camera operators and others met to exchange information and test new ideas and equipment, sharing their experiences with others in a semi-formal work setting. This included such practical work as overhauling and testing the new equipment and working on stage design. Such mutual exchange of information informed creative staff, many of whom came from other artistic fields, about the technical limitations of the studio, allowing them in turn to create more viable shows.¹⁸³

Yet, for most early television workers, the decisive shift of their young careers came when television technology evolved enough to allow them to leave the studio. The DFF acquired two transmission trucks in 1955, allowing the service to transmit live programming from elsewhere, including the soccer field, the State Opera, the National Gallery, the Peoples' Enterprises (*Volkseigene Betriebe*, VEB) and the *Volkskammer* (Peoples' Chamber). The trucks were equipped with orthicon cameras – the industry standard – and could transmit much clearer, sharper images with less light than those in the studio. The mobile cameras proved so superior to the studio cameras that directors of studio productions tried to appropriate them for use inside the Adlershof studios. At the same time, newer receivers came on the market, with larger screens and better resolution, making the transmission of scenes from the out-of-doors, the stage of the State Opera or meeting halls the size of the Peoples' Chamber a more visually appealing experience than

¹⁸³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, "Protokoll über die 1. Sitzung des Kollegium," 3 December 1953. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, "Protokoll über die 2. Sitzung des Kollegiums des Fernsehentrums," 8 December 1953. By the mid-1950s the DFF had decided to produce a 'theoretical' journal in which contributors discussed their own experiments and experiences, as well as the 'rules' of television production. The first edition appeared in 1960. Full run held at the German Broadcasting Archive in Babelsberg. DRA, Methodisches Kabinett der Deutschen Fernsehfunke, *Diskussionsmaterialien zur Theorie und Praxis des Fernsehens*.

it had been on the tiny Leningrad. Taken together, these two developments effected a sea change in the possibilities of early television production. Without these changes, popular programming such as the variety show *The Laughing Bear* (*Da lacht der Bär*), which the DFF televised from the 2500 seat Sport Hall in the Stalinallee, were unlikely to have been so successful.¹⁸⁴

DEVELOPING TELEVISION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL POWER

In the first few years of service the DFF gradually began to expand the kinds of programming it transmitted over the airwaves. By December 1952, the DFF's program had expanded to include on-air addresses, excerpted performances from films, operas and the circus, and dramatizations of novellas.¹⁸⁵ Increasingly the service experimented with programming that consisted of mixed forms – live performances intermingled with filmed excerpts of their own programming, theatrical or feature film performances. The show “Theatre and Film Mirror,” for example, used filmed excerpts of theatrical performances along with live discussion to advertise contemporary productions of Berlin's cultural scene.¹⁸⁶ Other television forms emerged as well. In January 1953, the service broadcast its first quiz show. And in April, the DFF presented its first film series, broadcasting old silent films the West German actor Ludwig Trautmann had found in his

¹⁸⁴ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 109-114.

¹⁸⁵ Dec. 21 1952 marked the begin of the “official test program” in the GDR. Some make much of the fact that the program debuted on Stalin's birthday; others concentrate on the fact that the DFF began broadcasting “official test program” only 4 days before the West Germans began their own official program. I have found no evidence that celebrating Stalin's birthday drove the DFF to begin on Dec. 21; more likely, it was a matter of fortunate coincidence. Beating the West Germans to the punch was perhaps far more important, but still, the test program was hardly a viable competitor for the far more developed West German program.

¹⁸⁶ Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 78.

basement.¹⁸⁷ Although DFF programming was increasingly variegated and entertaining, the television service had not yet proven its mettle as an instrument of social and political power. Broadcasts remained short, experimental and, in the first two years, available to less than a two thousand viewers in the GDR. Yet as DFF workers began to define the peculiarities of the televisual medium these experiments gave way to the development of enough regular programming to fill the broadcasting schedule. Moreover, as productions became more proficient, they increasingly developed a political voice.

While they worked on developing an effective visual grammar, DFF workers increasingly faced the pressure simply to come up with enough programming to fill the schedule. Caught between these two imperatives, television workers experimented with adapting programming from more established media such as theatre while at the same time creating new television-specific programming. The most important types of programming that emerged in the first year of service were television drama, topical television and entertainment. At this early date, dramatic programming was the most well-developed aspect of the program; it was not yet “television-specific drama” but rather adapted from theatre, film and even radio. Topical television was the most explicitly televisual aspect of the program, and seemed to have the most potential, rooted as it was in the immediate and seemingly unmediated “transmission” of everyday experiences. Yet it was also the type of programming with which the DFF enjoyed the least success. Finally, the television service had its most uneven experiences with “entertainment” television, which combined elements of the dramatic tradition and the possibilities of topical television (*Aktualität*). Yet “entertainment” television proved to

¹⁸⁷ Stemmler, “Bemerkungen,” 78-9, and Müncheberg, *80 Blaues Wunder*, 16-17.

be particularly important. Even early on, viewers flocked to entertainment programs. Television workers already could perceive that this type of programming would raise the profile of the television service in the GDR.

Television Drama

Television drama was the most abundant type of programming to be found on the DFF schedule in the early years of service, including both guest productions and increasing numbers of original DFF productions. One of the reasons there was so much of it was that television workers thought dramatic pieces from theatre, film and even radio seemed readily adaptable to the technical conditions of early television. The DFF hosted numerous theatrical ensembles, including the companies of the *Deutsches Theater* (German Theatre), the *Volksbühne* (Peoples' Stage), or the *Staatstheater Dresden* (Dresden State Theatre), among others, which would perform excerpts from their own repertoires in the studio.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the television service was producing a new play each week; actors generally performed each play live two or three times for television audiences over the course of a week. Television writers wrote scenes based on material taken from literature, theatre and operas – from contemporaries, such as Brecht, but also classics of the German canon, from Goethe or Schiller, or the Russian tradition, such as Alexander Popov or Alexander Pushkin.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 14 November, 1955, pg. 20. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Dramatische Kunst," [1955,] pg. 6-7.

¹⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," [October 1955,] pg. 27. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 14 November, 1955, pg. 5.

While the conditions under which studio productions had to broadcast made dramatic pieces seem well-suited to adaptation, they generally failed when they were conceived simply as theatrical pieces playing before a camera. If it was often difficult for television to do justice to the artistic conceptions of guest productions – as exemplified by the DFF's experience with circus acts – it is also true that guest productions rarely took into consideration the fact that television was a medium with different rules. Unfamiliarity with the medium, and the technical conditions of the studio, led to confrontations between theatre artists and television producers, for example. During the rehearsal of a guest performance of the Berliner Ensemble in 1953, Helene Weigel insisted that, in keeping with the principles of Brechtian realism, the audience be able to see the actors' feet, a feat that proved complicated, since long shots that would include the whole of the scene in front of the camera were extremely difficult at the time.¹⁹⁰

Due to the conditions of the studio, original DFF productions were small in scale, short and took place on sparsely dressed sets. Most shows included only two actors, who were forced to perform as closely together as possible while attempting to avoid the creaking floorboards.¹⁹¹ Such conditions even constrained special broadcasts that were created to showcase the television service and win audiences. For example, the DFF created a television version of *Boris Gudonow* for broadcast during the 1953 Leipzig trade fair, where GDR television was on public exhibit for the first time. DFF director and novice producer Hermann Rodigast tried to create an entertaining piece of only five

¹⁹⁰ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 44.

¹⁹¹ Stemmler, "Bemerkungen," 79.

scenes.¹⁹² But the paucity of available resources led to such improbable interpretations of scenes as this onscreen battle:

The austerity to which we were forced went so far at that time that ...we could only hire 7 extras for this production. With these seven actors we had to – there were huge battle scenes in Gudonow – stage the army advancing in the Müggel Mountains. I still remember how Tittert¹⁹³ constructed the scene so that the actors ran out of the different forest paths towards the camera, then disappeared behind a thick tree, put on another wig, grabbed a different gun, to appear as a mass of fighters. With these men we were able to portray two fighting armies. It was more than comical and quickly almost became bad theatre.¹⁹⁴

Despite the absurdity of this scene, Rodigast evaluated its appearance on the television monitor as “astoundingly good.”¹⁹⁵

The Gudonov production demonstrates the technical difficulties of early television in a particularly entertaining way. Since the DFF’s only television camera was still bolted to the floor of the smallest studio and could not be moved into the larger studio needed for the production, television workers had to film this hour-long show. More importantly the entire concept ignored the fundamental realities of nascent television: the material was simply inappropriate for the medium. Rodigast – like the authors of the original play (Puschkin) and opera (Mussorgsky) – conceived the opera as big, political, theatrical show thematically centred on an enormous battle. Yet for the production Rodigast could command only a small studio and no more than fourteen actors; meanwhile, viewers had to watch this improbable scene on tiny screen. It is only

¹⁹² Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 50.

¹⁹³ Tittert, a director’s assistant at the Comic Opera in Berlin, directed the piece.

after television workers could work out these kinds of problems, that television could become more than a curiosity, and, finally, able to take a place alongside radio and film as an important medium in the GDR.

Topical Television: Capturing the ‘Live’

If it took some time for principles of dramatic theatre to be adapted appropriately to dramatic television, topical television seemed to emerge directly from the television-specific characteristic of *Aktualität*. But even though television was simultaneous, or live, transmission, only some programming was conceived specifically to engage with the “live.” Topical television, represented by programming such as *Aktuelle Kamera* and, later, *Telestudio West* (Tele-studio West) or *Schwarzer Kanal* (The Black Channel), exploited the exploration and presentation of current events, demonstrating one of the important roles that television could play in East German propaganda efforts. The nightly news program *Aktuelle Kamera*, for example, was “... the topical-political editorial department of the Television Centre. It reports continuously on the events of the day and, in that way, fulfills an important task of agitation in the television program.”¹⁹⁶ The DFF modeled the program closely on the DEFA *Wochenschau*, a newsreel series that film audiences saw before feature film presentations in movie theatres. The television version of the newsreel had an obvious advantage: broadcast four times per week on Tuesdays, Thursday, Saturdays and Sundays, the show could present much more current

¹⁹⁴ This was performed in a newly-finished, larger studio than the one described above though. Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 52. It is apparent from a photo of the set that there were at least 12 actors working on the opera.

¹⁹⁵ Müncheberg and Hoff, *Experiment*, 52.

information. Unlike most other television programming in the GDR, the show's purpose was explicitly political, intended to function as a "transmission-belt" between the Party and the state on the one hand, and the people on the other:

The political objectives of the work of the editorial department are communicated by the decisions of the Party of the Working Class and the government of the GDR. It is their task, to explain these decisions to the people and fill them with enthusiasm to put them into practice. This happens through regular reportage about topical events in the area of politics, economics, culture and sports.¹⁹⁷

Authorities mandated that topical television, such as *Aktuelle Kamera*, should report on current events *and* engage the audience in contemporary issues.¹⁹⁸ As such, they understood *Aktuelle Kamera* not simply as a source of information, but rather as an important medium of communication and education as well. By familiarizing East Germans with not just the political machinery of the state, but also developments in culture, sport and other areas of East German social life, television could help to draw East Germans into the state's program to build socialism and inculcate socialist values in the GDR.

The DFF often failed to realize effectively their intent to exploit televisual topicality in service of the SED, however. First, planning for each installment of the

¹⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Einige Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der aktuell-politischen Redaktionen," [1955] pg. 1.

¹⁹⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Einige Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der aktuell-politischen Redaktionen," [1955] pg. 1. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 14 November, 1955, pg. 4.

¹⁹⁸ These goals were the organizational principle behind the creation of each installment. Each show consisted of two news items at the top of the show that displayed current events, and five or six others that concentrated more on deconstructing contemporary problems. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der DDR," 14 November, 1955, pg. 4-5. SAPMO-

Aktuelle Kamera began six weeks in advance of the actual show. At that time the members of the department met to formulate a set of general ideological questions that would guide show. The final conception for the show normally would be set as early as three days in advance.¹⁹⁹ Visually, it was difficult for the service to present current events reportage, since they could not transmit pictures from outside the studio until late 1955. Yet the service did not necessarily have to provide instantaneous images to fulfill the viewer's expectation of immediacy. One filmed segment that reported on Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov's quick stop in Berlin was first broadcast on *Aktuelle Kamera* several hours later. The DFF concluded that "recordings with original sound, which give the viewer the impression of original reports achieve the greatest effect."²⁰⁰

Viewers may not have expected absolute immediacy, but the service found it difficult to achieve even limited *Aktualität*. Viewers complained not just about the lack of current pictures, but rather what they perceived as the service's indifference to *Aktualität*. As late as 1956, L.S. from Kleinprausitz wrote to the DFF:

For those of us who work in agriculture, your weather service is more valuable than the radio reports, because the weather situation is elaborately explained in depth on the weather map. Would it not be possible, in the interest of agriculture, to transmit the weather service daily and, best ... shortly before the beginning of the evening program?²⁰¹

BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Einige Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der aktuell-politischen Redaktionen," [1955] pg. 1.

¹⁹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 14 November, 1955, pg. 5. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Einige Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der aktuell-politischen Redaktionen," [1955] pg. 2.

²⁰⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, "Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 14 November, 1955, pg. 5. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Einige Erfahrungen aus der Arbeit der aktuell-politischen Redaktionen," [1955] pg. 2.

²⁰¹ DRA, H074-0002-0003, "Analyse der Zuschauerpost im Monat April 1956," under Sendeablauf.

Helmut H. from Leipzig sent a letter of complaint to the service defining his own conception of topicality: “I say, current is what has happened in the last 48 hours – that’s what we want to see, but there’s still so little. On Sundays you always only transmit repeats. Sport reports are current on Sunday evenings – not when first broadcast on Tuesdays... .”²⁰² Topical television seemed most likely to win viewers due to its reliance on the new televisual characteristics of topicality and immediacy, but manipulating this characteristic proved as difficult as learning the rules of representation in television drama.

“Entertainment” Programming

The third area of extensive experimentation in the period before 1955 was entertainment broadcasting. The department of “entertainment” adapted programming from radio – *The Laughing Bear* was simulcast on radio and television, for example – and invited artists from around the Republic, such as the *Berliner Distel* and newly-created *Leipziger Pfeffermühle* cabaret ensembles, to appear on television. Like the department of drama they also began to create new programming, developing game shows, musical revues and variety shows. Entertainment programming also most readily adapted to the conditions of early television production. Often small productions, they fit easily into the smallest of the DFF studios and were transmitted readily by the iconoscope camera. Moreover, they offered viewers the sense of the “live experience,” although the shows never left the studio. Yet entertainment programming enjoyed uneven success. DFF

workers judged *Ablaufprogramme*, or variety programs in which several acts were introduced one after the next by an emcee, to be “boring” and not at all suited to the medium of television because they did not involve action.²⁰³ On the other hand, entertainment programming attracted an audience, and, increasingly important, these shows often disseminated explicitly political messages in an entertaining, satirical and non-threatening manner.

The pedagogical potential of entertainment programming is underscored by the examples of early game shows and musical revues. By 1956, game shows were especially popular, and the service consistently received mountains of viewer mail in response to questions or puzzles posed in DFF programs.²⁰⁴ The service introduced the first in a series of game shows, *Wer rät mit – wer gewinnt* (Who guesses, who wins) in January, 1953. The novice DFF announcer Maria Kühne and Chief Director Gottfried Herrmann quizzed the audience for forty minutes on a variety of simple topics. The moderators asked viewers to identify slides of well-known German landmarks, such as the cathedral in Ulm or the Zwinger stately home in Dresden. But it also tested their knowledge of the young GDR – requiring its audience to identify the new East German Wartburg automobile, for example. Though there were few viewers, the DFF even awarded prizes.²⁰⁵ The musical revue *Aus unserer Wunschmappe* (Out of the Request File) appealed even more directly to the audience. The DFF publicized each show several

²⁰² DRA, H074-0002-0003, “Analyse der Zuschauerpost im Monat April 1956,” under Sendeablauf, punkt d “Aktuelle Beiträge.”

²⁰³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der DDR,” [October, 1955], pg. 36.

²⁰⁴ See, for example, DFF reports on viewer mail. DRA, H074-0002-0003, Audience Research, 1956.

²⁰⁵ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 28.

weeks before it aired, calling on viewers to request their favourite tunes. The requests ranged widely “from operette to *Schlager*.”²⁰⁶ On the air, the show cultivated a familiar mode of address: the moderators spoke in a conversational style and sent greetings to those who had requested material, as well as workers from specific factories or firms around the Republic, and wished them success at work. But the DFF did not air music indiscriminately. Moderators poked fun at requests for “kitschy *Schlager* melodies,” and substituted “a good beloved melody” as a replacement for “unsuitable” requests.²⁰⁷

The initial goal of these two programs was to provide entertainment that could fill the broadcast day, but increasingly programming emerged that intended to facilitate the revolutionary transformation of GDR society. The DFF conceived two series in particular that they hoped would serve the purposes of *belehrende Unterhaltung* (didactic entertainment) or political agitation. The first, a film series, incorporated excerpts from old and new feature films to “demonstrate the path from manuscript to script to finished film.”²⁰⁸ One of the innovative concepts of the show was the inclusion of “*Fernsehteilnehmer*” (television participants), or viewers who had established a friendly relationship with the television service. According to the show’s conception, these viewers would offer opinions on the films that, along with the criticism of

²⁰⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” 14 November, 1955, pg. 12-13.

²⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Einige Erfahrungen der Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” 14 November, 1955, pg. 35. Diese Wunschsendung findet eine grosse Resonanz im Kreise unserer Zuschauer. Sie ist ein wichtiges Bindeglied zum Fernsehpublikum und ermöglicht durch das Niveau der künstlerischen Aussage geschmacksbildend zu wirken, weil wir etwaige Wünsche nach kitschigen Schlagermelodien in satirischer Form ablehnen und dafür "als Ersatz" eine gute beliebte Melodie senden.

²⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die 1. Sitzung des Kollegium,” 3 December 1953. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die 2. Sitzung des Kollegiums des Fernsehentrums,” 8 December 1953.

“*Nachwuchsauteoren*”, or up-and-coming (socialist) authors, would be incorporated into each episode. Television authorities hoped that the combination of film excerpts, expert criticism and lay commentary, would draw pointed conclusions about “good” and “bad” creative forms.²⁰⁹

A second show, conceived in 1953, further explored the ideological task of television. This conception – formulated long before the “Bitterfeld Conference”²¹⁰ – called for a show in which lay “actors” could entertain a specifically working class audience. The show, they mandated,

...must be entertaining through the use of humour. Two workers should be found to dramatize typical goings-on in the factories in front of the television camera. In the filmed shows, popular-scientific films about production methods etc should be broadcast, if possible no feature films, but rather films from culture groups and lay artists. Special attention should be paid to cultivation of the cultural heritage (*Kulturerbes*) in this show.²¹¹

Tentatively titled “From the Factories – for the Factories” the Committee conceived the show to appeal to workers who would view the program in the collective space of their factory’s television room. The plan further required those who had worked on the show to attend the broadcast in order to observe the show’s affect on the workers, and lead a concluding discussion of the show with the audience.

²⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die 1. Sitzung des Kollegium,” 3 December 1953. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die 2. Sitzung des Kollegiums des Fernsehentrums,” 8 December 1953.

²¹⁰ The Bitterfeld conference marked the beginning of a cultural campaign to bring lay and professional artists into dialogue in order to create a new, socialist culture that was imbued with and reflected the peoples’ lives. For a more extensive discussion, please see the end of Chapter 3.

²¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 1, SKF, “Protokoll über die 1. Sitzung des Kollegium,” 3 December 1953, pg. 2-3.

The trend towards didactic entertainment was the Television Committee's attempt to do two things: win viewers and mandate a steadfast political direction for the future programming. The Television Committee conceived shows that experimented with the medium of television as a means to appeal to, and even create, a specifically "socialist" audience. They coached the television audience in the fundamentals of the socialist cultural heritage, first by illustrating "good" and "bad" cultural products; and second, by modeling "typical" behaviour in order to cultivate a community of like-minded workers. The shows were not simple tools with which to manipulate the audience; one cannot overlook the real desire on the part of the television service to reach out to its audience.

CODIFYING TELEVISION

After three years of experimentation with the medium, the television service anticipated the introduction of the "official program" in 1956. In preparation for the regular program, the Television Committee commissioned a set of reports summarizing the lessons that television workers had learned in the first years of television broadcasting at the DFF. In his "Thoughts on the Dramaturgy of Television," the head of the department of Television Drama, Werner Fehlig outlined the ways in which television had begun to be understood as a new and distinct communicative technology within the universe of the existing "media" forms of radio, film and theatre. While each medium had its own specific and valuable properties, television, he wrote, "stands between film

and radio as something completely new, the perfection of the invention of broadcasting.”²¹²

For Fehlig, four characteristics of the medium differentiated television from the other media, and made it an important means of political agitation. First, television was a *visual medium* that fulfilled its audiences’ desire for the extraordinary and unmediated experience of witnessing social, cultural and political transformations unfold. Television workers needed to learn “*Fürs Auge senden*” – broadcast for the eyes.²¹³ Second, television was a medium of *Aktualität* (topicality or immediacy), and allowed the audience to experience the event *as it happened*.²¹⁴ Third, each piece of television programming was only a small part of a larger, perpetually changing, television “flow” (*Programmgestaltung*.) Individual parts of the daily schedule could be wrapped in a variety of programming that helped the audience to interpret contemporary events.²¹⁵ Finally, television enjoyed a privileged mode of reception: the audience tuned in to television in their homes, where they were most vulnerable to a persuasive, personal address, and would allow television to connect with their “inner essence” (*inneres*

²¹² SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 3-4. “Jede dieser Gattungen, ob wir vom Theater, dem Film, dem Rundfunk oder dem Fernsehen sprechen, verfügt über eigene besondere Ausdrucks- und Gestaltungsmittel. Wenn wir zunächst festgestellt haben, daß jede dieser Gattungen die objektive Wirklichkeit widerspiegelt, müssen wir jetzt sagen, daß dabei doch jede ihre eigene Methode hat. Einmal wählt jede Gattung jene Seiten der Wirklichkeit aus, die in ihr besonders gut zu gestalten sind. Zum anderen verlangen die verschiedenen Ausdrucksmittel der Gattungen eine gänzlich verschiedene Art der Darstellung und Gestaltung. Diese wird auch wesentlich bestimmt von der Art und Weise, in der das Publikum (Theater-, Kinobesucher, Rundfunzhörer und Fernsehzuschauer) die Werke dieser Gattungen aufzunehmen gewohnt ist.”

²¹³ Fehlig distinguished this experience from that of theatre, which could establish a strong personal relationship with audience over the course of a specific play. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 8-9.

²¹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 7.

²¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 10.

Wesen).²¹⁶ The trick simply was to draw an audience to television by offering an intense viewing experience.

Fehlig thus began to codify the important lessons of television production. These included some of the lessons outlined earlier in this chapter, but also a few that reflected the ongoing challenges television workers faced in grappling with televisual representation. For example, he noted the popular appeal of *Aktualität*, or the “coincidence of event and experience” that the audience expected from television. He emphasized the fundamental importance of the close-up and integral role of the spoken word in contextualizing the televisual narrative. Fehlig also warned against “mass scenes, excited... plots, quick scenes and sudden cuts.” Instead, the conditions of reception called for a “more contemplative tempo.”²¹⁷ But he also called for in-depth attention to detail in television set design, though experience had begun to show that too much detail often obscured, rather than clarified, the televisual message.

More important, Fehlig’s report marked a turning point in the television leadership’s vision of the television program, which, after years of experimentation, had become more coherent and clear. And, since such reports also made their way up through the bureaucracy of media control, to the State Broadcasting Committee and perhaps even the Agitation Commission of the Central Committee, they also represent an attempt on the part of the television leadership to entrench television in the minds of the authorities as another important part of the East German media universe. Fehlig

²¹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 6.

explicitly defined television as an important political tool that could serve the socialist revolution in Germany: it would not simply reflect reality, but rather present the dynamism of revolutionary development in the GDR.²¹⁸ Indeed, Fehlig argued that “where the struggle between the New and the Old is seen, where the first indications of the new, better and more beautiful life can be found, which claims victory over the Old, the television cameras of democratic broadcasting also must be there.”²¹⁹ Television, therefore, was a medium of revolutionary transformation, cultivating the new values and culture in the East German audience.

CONCLUSION

Developing television as important communicative medium required not only the development of the technological foundation of the service, but also the creation of a notion of what television could be. In the first several months of service, the DFF program consisted of experiments in form and content, as inexperienced staff learned the possibilities and limitations of television. The difficulties they faced included chronic supply problems, but also the conceptual challenges posed by a medium with which few East Germans had had any real experience. In 1952 expectations of television were still shaped by preexisting media: theatre, film, radio and even Nazi-era television. By 1956, the experimental years had begun to pay off, as television workers were able to begin codifying the lessons they had learned about the new technology. As DFF workers

²¹⁷ All quotes from SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 6.

²¹⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 3.

‘invented’ television, they became more adept at creating effective programming and reaching out to the small, but growing, audience.

Although television was not yet nearly as powerful as radio or film, DFF workers had established that it was a very different kind of medium. And, for the DFF leadership, at least, television promised to participate in the revolutionary transformation of East German society. Still, at the outset of 1956, television remained the stepchild to radio broadcasting and the press, especially in the estimation of the SED. It was not until the SED’s vision of television changed that television became integral to SED politics. This happened in November 1956 following the revolt in Hungary. During the following two years, television emerged as one of the most important political tools of the SED.

²¹⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Gedanken zu einer Dramaturgie des Fernsehens,” [1955], 3.

Chapter Three: Revolutionizing Television – East German Television and the SED in November 1956

INTRODUCTION

In November 1956, an East German broadcasting enthusiast wrote to the head of the State Broadcasting Committee, Gerhard Eisler, to express his dissatisfaction with the East German press and broadcasting services. Heinz D., a self-described “*Arbeiterjunge*” (worker’s kid) and the deputy director of a medical training facility, criticized the broadcasting apparatus for neglecting current events coverage and for reacting too slowly to international events. He complained that East German broadcasting was not doing enough to “[expose] these enemies of the working class,” “the Liars and Hypocrites” of RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) and the SFB (the television and radio broadcaster “Transmitter Free Berlin.”) This was particularly dangerous, he claimed, because many East Germans received their news from both East and West German broadcasters and came to the conclusion that “the truth lay [somewhere] in the middle.”²²⁰ H.D. warned in particular that “we can no longer allow ourselves such gross mistakes as the initial silence in the press and broadcasting about the events in Poland and Hungary. What was the result? everything oriented itself around the Western broadcasters...”²²¹

H.D.’s criticisms, which would have been important enough under normal circumstances, took on a whole new dimension of meaning in the context of November 1956. The Hungarian uprising, which had seen increasingly significant demonstrations

²²⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/84, Agitation, Briefwechsel Eisler-Sindermann, 27 November 1956, pg 1.

by students, intellectuals and other protesters by the end of October, was suppressed brutally by Soviet troops in the first week of November. The autumn of 1956, encompassing the uprising and resulting Soviet intervention, represented one of the most significant moments of the Cold War. It clearly delineated the boundaries within which Eastern European countries could “experiment” with varieties of communism and exemplified the limits of Soviet tolerance of dissent within the Warsaw Pact. For NATO countries, the uprising represented a sort of line in the sand, which they were unwilling to cross. The concurrent development of the Suez Crisis occupied the attention of the United Kingdom, which declined to interfere in the Soviet sphere of influence, in return for the same favour in Egypt. The United States, often cast as an important instigator of the uprising as a result of Radio Free Europe broadcasts encouraging Hungarians to revolt, also declined to upset the European balance of power. The crises of November 1956 demonstrated the reluctance of either side to revise the geopolitical balance through force, which made the propaganda war that much more important.

The Hungarian uprising also represented the first significant political test of the East German television service and, in the estimation of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), television failed. As the Soviets moved into Hungary, the East German Television (DFF) remained silent. Paradoxically, it was the failure to respond to the uprising that propelled the medium into the forefront of the cold war battle for the German airwaves. Television, previously underestimated by the SED, abruptly became at once a conspicuous liability and a potentially powerful weapon in the battle against the

²²¹ Emphasis in original. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02/84, Agitation, Briefwechsel Eisler-Sindermann, 27 November 1956, pg 2.

West. Although cold war conflict over the course of the 1950s had been instrumental in shaping the television service, the crisis of 1956 led to an emerging perception of television as a potentially important political force in East Germany. As a result of the Hungarian uprising, the SED took notice of television, defined a much narrower vision of its political purpose, and circumscribed the acceptable field of televisual representation. Indeed, the Hungarian uprising, most often considered as an example of the importance of radio for cold war propaganda, was perhaps the first televisual battle of the Cold War. By the Fifth Party Congress of 1958, when the SED launched a new campaign aggressively geared towards developing socialist citizens, television had become an indispensable medium for the new message.

THE SED AND TELEVISION BEFORE 1956

As we have seen in the previous chapters, there were many reasons why few East German leaders in the early 1950s had thought much about television. Television was relatively new and unknown. When the television service began broadcasting a test program in 1952, it could not reach across Berlin, much less the country, and no one had thought yet about what a program might look like. Indeed, by the end of the year most SED leaders had never seen a broadcast.²²² In August 1952, just two months after the introduction of programming to the East German airwaves, the Central Committee mandated the distribution of television receivers among members of the Politburo, the

²²² In general, the only opportunities for most East German leaders to have seen the medium would have been at technical fairs demonstrating mechanical television in the late 1920s, public viewing rooms in Berlin and Leipzig in the 1930s or in exile in the United States, London, or Moscow in the late 1930s.

Central Committee and other representatives of the East German state.²²³ By January 1953 though, it had become apparent that even members of the State Broadcasting Committee (SRK), which was the body responsible for the development of the program, were not watching television. In their first meeting of 1953, an SRK member criticized the television program, but few of the members had noticed any problems. The committee ordered its members to “get to know” the program. To this end, SRK required its members to watch the program over the subsequent week and to participate in a special tour of the “Central Laboratory and Television Centre.”²²⁴

In the broader scheme of things, television programming was unimportant to the SED. The SED underestimated television and, considering the state of the service in the early 1950s, they had good reason. Consequently there were real limits to the Central Committee’s practice of, and interest in, control over television broadcasting. It should not be surprising that the SED could not control every aspect of East German society. In the first decade of the GDR especially, the SED faced too many challenges. The Central Committee sat through long meetings and “grappled with dozens of agenda items,” addressing everything from party discipline, to foreign policy, to Party members’ health issues and vacation plans.²²⁵ Instead, they held the Postal Ministry and ultimately the Council of Ministers responsible for the development of the broadcasting infrastructure,

²²³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 318, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Protokoll Nr. 189/52 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 21. August 1952,” 21 August 1952, pg. 2. “4. Die Aufstellung der Fernsehempfänger geht in folgender Reihenfolge vor sich: a. Mitglieder und Kandidaten des Politbüros des ZK; b. Mitglieder des Sekretariats des ZK; c. Staatsfunktionäre; d. Großbetriebe und Institute. 5. Die Bezahlung der Fernsehempfänger übernimmt bei den Mitgliedern und Kandidaten des Politbüros sowie bei den Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des ZK die Hauptkasse des ZK. Bei den Staatsfunktionären erfolgt die Bezahlung aus eigenen Mitteln, bei den Betrieben aus den Direktorfonds....”

²²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, “Protokoll der Leitungssitzung am 2.1.53,” 2 January 1953, pg. 1-2.

²²⁵ Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, 138.

while the State Broadcasting Committee (SRK, founded in 1952) supervised the television service proper. The Central Committee exercised its power over broadcasting only by broadly defining the political agenda; it depended upon politically reliable cadres to toe the Party line. The SED defined television (rather vaguely) as “a political institution like the press and radio, [which] serves the consolidation of the workers’ and peasants’ power and, as a result, the keeping of the peace and the creation of a unified, democratic Fatherland...” and left the rest to the supervision of the SRK.²²⁶

Before 1954, the SED’s interest in and impact on television had come mostly as a result of larger political shifts in the GDR. Between 1949 and 1954 an increasingly bitter ideological struggle fought against the West led to a dramatically shifting vision of East German state and society and heightened attention to ideological clarity. Radio broadcasting played an important role in transmitting political discipline. By the early 1950s, the SED was directing nation-wide radio campaigns, fine-tuned daily on the basis of SED analysis of the western line of argument.²²⁷ But television remained outside of this campaign. In pursuit of Stalinization, the SED purged the broadcasting apparatus in 1948, 1949 and 1951; their efforts hardly reached as far as the nascent Television

²²⁶ It should be noted that similar language prefaced many decision papers written at the Television Centre, giving one the impression that it was often typed out word for word from one document to the next. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, State Committee for Television (hereafter SKF), “Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der DDR,” [October, 1955] pg. 1. It should be noted that although the holdings of DR 8 are attributed to the the State Committee for Television, between 1952 and 1968 this body was actually the Television Council that included members of the television leadership, which was a liaison between television and its overseer, the State Broadcasting Committee. The SED established the State Committee for Television in the context of wider social and political upheaval in Europe in 1968, reflecting the desire for increased control over the organs of communication in the GDR.

²²⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/2 187, Politbüro des Zentralkomitees, “Anlage Nr. 4 zum Protokoll Nr. 87 vom 15. Januar 1952,” 15 January 1952, (Blatt 27) pg 4.

Centre.²²⁸ Television broadcasting even became the destination for disgraced Party members, as demonstrated by the exile of Hans Mahle to Adlershof in 1949.

Stalinization and the Media

The most prominent features of Stalinization included the rejection of “national roads to socialism,” the hunt for so-called “cosmopolitans,” and Party investigations that led to Show Trials similar to those undertaken by Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1930s.²²⁹ This spelled the end of the relative political diversity that had been, if not encouraged, then at least tolerated by the Soviets in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Between 1948 and Stalin’s death in 1953, Eastern European communist leaders began to enforce a narrowed range of acceptable political thought. Investigators sought out those who had contact with the West, or espoused positive views toward the West or against the Soviet Union, most of whom were high-ranking members of their national communist Parties. The turn from wartime cooperation in the interests of defeating the Nazis to demonization of the West represented an ideological about-face of the Soviet party line that caught many loyal party members by surprise. SED members of the Ulbricht faction condemned people for ideological weakness on the basis of their support for the Soviets’ wartime cooperation with the West, although many had supported the Anglo-American-Soviet alliance against

²²⁸ Ernst Augustin, an engineer for Nazi television in the 1930s, retained his position at the Television Centre into the mid-1950s, surviving the man who had brought him there, Hans Mahle.

²²⁹ For a discussion of “Purging Cosmopolitanism” see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided memory: the Nazi past in the two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 106-161. This chapter discusses trials in Eastern Europe, but especially the trial of Paul Merker in the GDR.

their own consciences. Now, their wartime allegiances made it difficult for them to defend themselves against charges of ideological deviation.

In 1948 the Central Committee established the so-called Party Control Commissions (ZPKK). The commissions investigated those who had spent the war years in West or too vigorously pursued a specifically German brand of socialism, but also those who had contact with foreigners, and those who criticized the Soviets, their occupation of Germany, or Stalinization. Yet the more the authorities sought to control East German political life, the more obvious the ideological fissures within German communism became.²³⁰ The Stalinization of the East German SED resulted in the expulsion of at least 150,000 communist party members,²³¹ most of whom were former Social Democrats who had joined the SED as part of the merger between the East German SPD and the KPD in 1946.²³² But the purges targeted orthodox communists as well, many of whom represented the left wing of the Party and who had sought a German road to socialism.²³³

By 1949 the Stalinization campaign had begun to affect directly the East German media. Accusations of *Agententätigkeit* (spy activities) and *Englischer Krankheit* (the “English disease,” or liberalism) began to fly, reflecting the Party’s turn against the West. In October, shortly after the foundation of the Republic, the Party began investigating “errors” that had emerged in the broadcasting apparatus. The Central Committee invited

²³⁰ Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 163.

²³¹ Weitz, *Creating Communism*, 360. Stalinization in East Germany was not as violent a process as elsewhere in Eastern Europe – none of its defendants were executed, for example. For a discussion of the relative lack of terror involved in the East German purges, please see Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, Chapter 7 “The Stalinization of the SED.”

²³² Herf, *Divided Memory*, 129.

Herman Axen, member of the Central Committee (1949/50-1953, 1966-89) and Director of the “Department of Agitation and Propaganda,” to discuss the problems of “nationalist deviation” and “erroneous personnel politics” he had observed in the Berlin broadcasting service.²³⁴ True to the principles of Stalinization, Axen ‘exposed’ broadcasting employees for ideological deviation. On the basis of his report, the Central Committee decided to terminate all employees who had fled to England during the war and advised the Politburo to investigate thoroughly all employees who remained at the service. Furthermore, they accused the director of the Berlin broadcasting service, Heinz Schmidt, of “experiments in form in [his] radio work that deviated from the Party line and ... too great political tolerance for non-communist editors.”²³⁵ As a result, both he and deputy director Bruno Goldhammer were removed from broadcasting and replaced by Kurt Heiss and Hermann Zilles respectively.

The investigation of so-called “Schmidt politics” at the broadcasting service resulted from the SED’s drive to instill Party discipline and centred on the question of loyalty to the Soviets. Investigators accused Schmidt of “nationalist arrogance,” a common charge against those who had supported too loudly a German road to socialism.²³⁶ The Central Committee accused three further employees of “ideological carelessness” and “un-comradely behaviour” towards their Soviet colleagues. These three were given the opportunity to defend themselves; one did so vigorously, further

²³³ Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 162.

²³⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/3 057, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Protokoll Nr. 57 der Sitzung des kleinen Sekretariats am 17.10.1949,” pg. 6.

²³⁵ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 22.

²³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/3 057, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Protokoll Nr. 57 der Sitzung des kleinen Sekretariats am 17.10.1949,” pg. 6.

implicating Schmidt in the process. E.H. insisted that Schmidt had kept her from reading the Soviet press and rejected her suggestion to introduce Russian language training to the airwaves. Further, she claimed she had persistently tried to bring attention to “these developments” and even told deputy director Goldhammer, “we are covering things up here that can no longer be covered up.”²³⁷ Her statement led Goldhammer to testify he “had not recognized the full significance of Schmidt’s politics” and accept his own dismissal from the service.²³⁸

The Schmidt investigation led to the purge of more employees beginning in November 1949, but the government drive to establish greater ideological control of broadcasting did not end there.²³⁹ The second highest-ranking SED member responsible for broadcasting – Director of Broadcasting Hans Mahle – introduced administrative measures in 1950 aimed at raising the “ideological clarity of all employees of broadcasting.”²⁴⁰ He required employees to participate in “national political” training – or schooling in the basic principles of the politics of the SED – and established more rigid rules governing the planning of radio broadcasts.²⁴¹ Within the year though, the ZPKK investigations had reached the highest echelons of the Party. Despite his efforts on behalf of the SED, Mahle himself came under scrutiny.

²³⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/3 060, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Anlage 2 ‘Die Lage am Berliner Rundfunk’ zu der Protokoll Nr. 60,” pg. 1. Corroborated by the Politburo in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/2/51, Politburo der SED, “Zum Protokoll Nr. 51,” Article 17 “Die Lage am Berliner Rundfunk, blatt 5.

²³⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30/ J IV 2/3/060, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Anlage 2 ‘Die Lage am Berliner Rundfunk’ zu der Protokoll Nr. 60,” pg. 2.

²³⁹ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 22.

²⁴⁰ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 23.

²⁴¹ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 23.

The Case of Hans Mahle

Mahle's case exemplifies the contradictions of Stalinization. Mahle was an orthodox communist who had spent the war as an émigré in Moscow.²⁴² He returned to Germany in 1945 with the "Ulbricht Group," the group of exiled German communists that came to dominate the postwar East German government. Mahle's original task had been to undertake youth work (*Jugendarbeit*) in the Soviet zone. Soon after his return though, SMAD appointed him the 'Director of Broadcasting' and ordered him to reconstruct broadcasting services in the Soviet zone.²⁴³ He quickly built a functioning radio system and, with the support of SMAD, began to build a television service as well. But by 1951, his work in broadcasting had convinced his critics of his "gradualist" tendencies: his pluralistic approach allowed non-communists access to the East German airwaves, and he was not above engaging the expertise of those who had worked under the Nazis.²⁴⁴ Compounding these transgressions, he lived in West Berlin, and refused to move to a villa in the East Berlin suburb of Pankow.²⁴⁵ While these proclivities had been in line with – or at least not transgressed – the priorities of the occupation in the immediate postwar period, they were unacceptable after the foundation of the Republic.

²⁴² In Moscow Mahle worked in Soviet television and, after the war began, radio broadcasting. Interview with Hans Mahle in Edith Spielhagen and Maryellen Boyle eds., *So dürfen wir glauben zu kämpfen--Erfahrungen mit DDR-Medien* (Berlin: Vistas, 1993), 35.

²⁴³ Hoff in Hickethier, 97.

²⁴⁴ Here I am drawing on Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 320-356. Weitz argues that there were two competing political agendas that had shaped the occupation in the Soviet zone before 1948. "Gradualists" drew on the wartime experience of the popular front, collaborating with non-communist groups against fascism in Germany. These communists were willing to pursue the 'gradual' expansion of socialism in Germany, privileging the immediate goal of antifascism. "Intransigent" Communists on the other hand, drew on the revolutionary experience of Weimar and the language of class-conflict and anti-imperialist struggle. Communists such as the SED leader Walter Ulbricht sought the immediate construction of socialism in East Germany through seizure of the state. During the early years of the occupation, the Soviets had supported the gradualists; after 1948 the "politics of intransigence" took hold.

Mahle's case also makes clear how uninterested the SED was in television in the early 1950s. In 1951 the ZPKK judged Mahle as ideologically untrustworthy, purged him from the leadership circle and demoted him within the broadcasting apparatus – to the leadership of the television service (DFF).²⁴⁶ With Mahle's demotion, the SED made their disregard for television clear. Yet Mahle's term of leadership of television lasted just one year. In 1952, the intensification of the Cold War and competition for the German airwaves raised the stakes for television broadcasting.²⁴⁷ In May 1952, SED leaders denounced Mahle once again and removed him from the service altogether.²⁴⁸

To June 1953

The Stalinization campaign came to a head in the June Uprising of 1953. The SED's attempt to strictly control East German society through purges, administrative centralization and, in early June, stringent economic reforms heated emotions to the boiling point. On June 16, the SED announced increased production quotas for East German workers and rising unrest gave way to mass demonstrations.²⁴⁹ Three hundred construction workers paraded down Stalinallee in East Berlin under the banner "We

²⁴⁵ Mahle in Edith Spielhagen and Boyle, *So dürften wir glauben zu kämpfen*, 29 and 33.

²⁴⁶ Mahle claimed, somewhat reasonably, in an interview in the 1990s that he had "built up the Television Centre at Adlershof against the will of the Central Committee..." Mahle cited in Spielhagen and Boyle, *So dürften wir glauben zu kämpfen*, 47. Cited in connection with the Paul Merker incident in Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 98.

²⁴⁷ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 24. According to Riedel the Agitation Commission fired Mahle on the pretext that radio listeners were bored with the program. Thereafter Mahle essentially disappeared from DFF television history. Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 98.

²⁴⁸ Riedel, *Hörfunk*, 24. Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 98.

²⁴⁹ Workers in Leipzig had begun striking already in May as a result of falling wages. Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 202. See also Weber, *Geschichte*, 164-5.

demand reduction of the [work] Norms.”²⁵⁰ Over the course of the day the demonstration grew to ten thousand people. The following day an estimated three to four hundred thousand people – younger workers, small farmers, and the rank-and-file of the SED – participated in strikes in 270 towns across the GDR.²⁵¹ Berlin came to a standstill.²⁵² Faced with several hundred thousand protesters, the Soviet authorities declared a state of emergency and rolled out the tanks. Fifty demonstrators died and, over the next two months, ten thousand were imprisoned in connection with the demonstrations.²⁵³ The uprising, often characterized as a “*Lernschock*” or traumatic learning experience, set the SED on a “New Course,” which rolled back some aspects of the drive for Stalinization, especially the economic reforms that had sparked the riots.²⁵⁴

The SED’s official interpretation of the events of June 17 described the uprising as an attempted coup against the government perpetrated by a small group of organized protesters with the help of Western secret agents. Although most government officials generally accepted the official interpretation of events, the uprising still led to turmoil within the SED. Party members criticized the conditions that had given rise to the uprising, as well as the government’s use of violence to end the demonstrations.²⁵⁵

Further, the Soviet leadership made it clear that it held the SED and their policies responsible for the uprising, and the East German leadership found itself under pressure

²⁵⁰ Weber, *Geschichte*, 164.

²⁵¹ Volker Berghahn, *Modern Germany: Society, Economics and Politics in the twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 219.

²⁵² Weber, *Geschichte*, 164.

²⁵³ Weber, *Geschichte*, 166.

²⁵⁴ The SED learned, for example, the importance of maintaining a minimum living standard for East Germans. For a short discussion of historiographical approaches to 17 June 1953, please see Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 206-224.

to correct its own mistakes. Consequently, by early autumn, when criticism was on the wane and party discipline had begun to recover, the Party undertook renewed efforts to purge the Party's ranks of ideological undesirables.²⁵⁶

The language of Stalinization – which shifted the burden of guilt from fascism to Western imperialism – became entrenched in state rhetoric in the aftermath of the June Uprising. The State Broadcasting Committee used this language to justify the purge of remaining non-conformists in late 1953:

There are clues that the American and American-allied spy agencies in West Berlin and West Germany realized with helpless fury that their attempts to seize the German Democratic Broadcasting in Berlin and its studios had failed in the face of the devotion of its employees to the government of the GDR and the Party of the Working Class, the SED. The readiness to fight for the great goals of our Republic, to achieve prosperity and happiness in the whole of Germany, to secure democratic unity, to strengthen the friendship with the Soviet Union and all peace-loving peoples, to let the voice of Truth ring loudly and undiminished has wrecked the plans of the mortal enemy of our people.²⁵⁷

With this report Heiss called for “increased vigilance” against the GDR's enemies – specifically Western spies and their accomplices. The shock of the June uprising, and subsequent repression of dissent in the GDR, had facilitated the transition from the antifascist program of the early postwar period to the anti-Western nationalism of the Cold War.

²⁵⁵ Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 208.

²⁵⁶ Pritchard, *Making of the GDR*, 208. Also W.R. Smyser, *From Yalta to Berlin: the Cold War Struggle over Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 125.

²⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, “Kommunique über die außerordentliche Sitzung der Leitung des Staatlichen Rundfunkkomitees am Mittwoch, 11. November 1953,” pg. 2.

The political fallout of the June uprising led to a new purge of the broadcasting apparatus and the removal of another of television's strongest advocates within the SED. The rhetoric of this case focused less on "ideological reliability" than the Schmidt case had, but rather implicated employees of the television service as active agents of Western intelligence agencies. In November, the SRK claimed to have uncovered an American plot to gain information about the GDR's broadcasting facilities and launched an investigation of the Television Centre. According to the head of the SRK Kurt Heiss, American agents had recruited a receptionist to explain details of the management and structure of the Television Centre, procure technical documents regarding the development of television in the GDR and, finally, recruited others for the same purpose. For this service, American agents paid the informant with 60 bottles of liquor and spirits, which she used to stage elaborate orgies (*Saufgelagen und Orgien*) with other television workers in her apartment.²⁵⁸

The investigation resulted in a prison term of almost four years for the informant and implicated five other employees of the Television Centre, including the director of the Television Centre, Hermann Zilles. The case against Zilles seems to have arisen primarily from the SED's desire to find scapegoats in the aftermath of the June uprising and remove the remaining non-conformists within its ranks. Zilles' crimes were not political, but ostensibly moral. Zilles, a lifelong communist, had been imprisoned in Buchenwald with other of the SED's top leaders, including the head of Agitation and

²⁵⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, "Kommunique über die außerordentliche Sitzung der Leitung des Staatlichen Rundfunkkomitees am Mittwoch, 11. November 1953," pg. 1.

Propaganda, Hermann Axen.²⁵⁹ He had been promoted through the ranks of broadcasting, holding positions under Kurt Heiss at Berlin Broadcasting, before taking up leadership at the Television Centre. Yet the accusations leveled against him attacked his “liberal views,” and lack of moral qualities. Zilles had displayed a “lack of moral steadfastness” and “lack of discipline;” he had engaged in the “excessive consumption of alcohol” and cultivated an “artistic atmosphere.” The SRK concluded that his leadership had led to “serious mistakes, defects and weaknesses” within the Television Centre. They removed him and installed the chief engineer of the State Broadcasting Committee, Gerhard Probst.

The quest of the SED to remove non-conformists from within its ranks had deprived the television service of its strongest advocates and had shaped the direction in which television would develop over the rest of the decade. In 1952, the SED removed Hans Mahle from broadcasting, one of the few leaders who had had real experience with television, but whose liberal approach to administration of the media became intolerable after 1948. In November 1953, the SRK replaced Hermann Zilles, whose “artistic approach” to television they found unacceptable. With the installation of the engineer Gerhard Probst, the SRK could now control television more firmly, but they did not use this power to develop the service in any meaningful way. Instead the SRK and the SED concentrated government resources on developing the technological foundation of the service. By 1954, the escalation of tensions between the two German states had

²⁵⁹ One contemporary has suggested to me that the case against Zilles was simply the result of personal animosity between Zilles and another faction within the SED. Personal communication with H.M. November, 2002. Also in Hoff “Der politisch-administrative Ausbau des DDR-Fernsehens” in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, pg. 185.

convinced the SED of the need to regulate the political reliability of the airwaves. The “*Kaderpolitik*” (cadres politics) of the SED had reached television, which previously had had much more freedom from this kind of manipulation than radio. The SRK then replaced Probst and set television on a new course.

Delimiting Television Politics: Heinz Adameck and the DFF, 1954-1958

In a special meeting on 28 June 1954, the SRK appointed Heinz Adameck as new director of the service, indicating the increasing desire to inculcate ideological homogeneity within the organs of state.²⁶⁰ Unlike Gerhard Probst, an engineer who had led the service since 1953 and had been most interested in developing the technological basis and infrastructure of the service, Adameck was much more ideologically inclined. He had been responsible for developing SED cadres, first in the East German province of Thüringen and later in the broadcasting apparatus as a member of the State Broadcasting Committee. He came to the service with no previous experience in media production. He was unconcerned with the creative element of television – DFF television would never be considered “art” – and hardly interested in entertainment programming. Rather he defined the role of television narrowly as a “political institution, like the press and radio, [that served] the consolidation of the Worker- and Peasant-power and with that the preservation of peace and the creation of a unified, democratic Fatherland.”²⁶¹ In order to accomplish the SED’s political objectives he had to, on the one hand, achieve political

²⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, “Beschlusprotokoll Nr. 18a/54 der außerordentlichen Leitungssitzung am 28.6.54,” 29 June 1954, pg. 1. Adameck remained director of the service until the end of the GDR.

²⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Über die Programmtätigkeit des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” [October 1955], pg. 1.

discipline within the workforce of the television centre, and on the other, figure out how to make television work as a medium of political ideology. In subsequent months, Adameck and his supporters transformed the political and professional basis of the service.

The first task of the new leadership was the attempt to build a politically reliable staff at the Television Centre. Between 1954 and 1956, Adameck established firm authority over the television workers. He took employees to task for relatively minor infractions, such as tardiness.²⁶² Television committee meetings took on a more political tone as Adameck elicited explicit political statements from committee members.²⁶³ But most important was his use of “personnel politics” to create a sound political structure – using the placement of politically reliable staffers to buttress the regular workforce. The “Adameck group” – people the State Broadcasting Committee (SRK) had assigned to the service at the same time as Adameck, including Werner Fehlig, Willi Zahlbaum, Dieter Glatzer and Ursula Priess, along with some ten other members of the SRK – composed the core of this new workforce.²⁶⁴ These people took up key positions in the service, in newly created positions, or by replacing existing employees. In January 1955, for example, Adameck censured the head of the department of cadres (*Kaderabteilung*) for

²⁶² See for example SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 11/54,” 18 November, 1954.

²⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 11/54 der Kollegiumssitzung des Fernsehentrums Berlin am 18.11.1954,” 30 September, 1954.

²⁶⁴ The SRK appointed Zahlbaum as Adameck’s deputy at the service; in 1953 he was charged with finding a way to ‘build’ propaganda shows into radio programming. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, “Protokoll Nr. 58 der Leitungssitzung am 3.11.1953,” pg 2.

performing “flawed work.”²⁶⁵ Within two months, Ursula Priess had taken the discredited manager’s place.²⁶⁶

While Adameck introduced seasoned SED members to strengthen the service politically, he also sought to raise the political consciousness of other television workers. He enthusiastically implemented “state-political training” that he, as a member of the SRK, had first mandated for radio employees in January 1953.²⁶⁷ A new directive just three months after Adameck’s arrival at the television centre reinforced this order:

The state-political and professional training fulfills an important task for the strengthening of our state. It contributes to empowering our colleagues to be able to explain the measures of the *Volkskammer* (People’s Chamber of government) and government and incorporate more and more workers in the solution of the task in front of us. It also gives each employee the ability to work scientifically in all aspects of the practical task.²⁶⁸

Every fourteen days, selected television workers received training to learn about the GDR and improve their ability to make clear and convincing arguments to the public on behalf of the state.²⁶⁹ Topics included the basic tenets of marxism-leninism and lessons on the state machinery of the GDR, along with more specific themes such as “The Alliance of

²⁶⁵ She had not informed Adameck promptly that a television worker had “left democratic Berlin.” “Zu Punkt 1: Die Kollegen Adameck, Glatzer, Zahlbaum und Hoffmann übten Kritik an der Arbeit der Kaderabteilung und brachten Beispiele dafür. Daß durch eine schlechte Zusammenarbeit der Kollegin Riedeberger mit den Leitern der Hauptabteilungen ernste Mängel in der Kaderarbeiter auftraten. Z.B. erfuhr der Leiter des Fernsehentrums erst einen Tag später, daß die ehemalige Mitarbeiterin Kienbaum den demokratischen Sektor Berlins verlassen hat...” SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF “Protokoll Nr. 1/55,” 28 January 1955.

²⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 6/55,” 31 March 1955.

²⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 1, SRK, “Beschlüßvorlage zur Durchführung der staatspolitischen Schulung.”

²⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Beschluss Nr. 2: Zur Durchführung der staatspolitischen und fachlichen Schulung der Mitarbeiter des Fernsehentrums Berlin,” 30 September, 1954.

²⁶⁹ Not all employees had to take part – cafeteria workers, janitorial staff and security personnel were exempt for example. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Beschluss Nr. 2: Zur Durchführung der

the working class with the class of working farmers in the GDR” or “The resurrection of reactionary, aggressive (*volksfeindlich*) militarism – a mortal danger for the people of Europe.”²⁷⁰

At the same time that Adameck tried to strengthen the political reliability of television workers, he tried to do the same for television programming. He made structural changes to the service, centralizing the artistic, organizational and especially political responsibility for the program. For example, he implemented the new “department of programming.” This department augmented the existing offices of editorial management (*Chefredaktion*) and program management (*Sendeleitung*), instituted by the Television Committee under Probst. The new department played a valuable political and professional role, taking responsibility for the daily “program flow” – coordinating everything that passed across the screen in the course of a program day. The department also included an administrator responsible for “analyzing the daily program from the political, organizational and artistic standpoint...” and reporting the results to the program management office.²⁷¹

If Adameck concerned himself most with introducing measures to improve the political reliability of the television service, he could not forget that, in order to be politically effective, television had to work as a medium as well. One of the DFF’s persistent problems was producing enough programming to fill the program schedule.

staatspolitischen und fachlichen Schulung der Mitarbeiter des Fernsehentrums Berlin,” 30 September, 1954.

²⁷⁰ “Folgende Themen wurden seit dem 1.11.1954 behandelt: ... 4. Das Bündnis der Arbeiterklasse mit der Klasse der werktätigen Bauernschaft in der DDR – 1 Schulungstag 5. Das Wiedererstehen des reaktionären, volksfeindlichen Militarismus – eine tödliche Gefahr für die Völker Europas – 2 Schulungstage...” SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Vorlage für die Kollegiumssitzung der 26.1.55: zum 3. Tagesordnungs-punkt, staatspolitische und fachliche Schulung,” pg. 4.

1954 saw the inauguration of a film library, allowing DFF workers to catalogue and more efficiently reuse material already in their possession.²⁷² They tried to negotiate film-sharing agreements with DEFA, which loaned visual material, equipment and studios only reluctantly before 1958. They began seeking film exchange agreements with the Soviet Union, other socialist countries, and West Germany.²⁷³ But the problem of supply persisted into the late 1950s. Indeed, in 1957 Adameck required all television workers who traveled abroad to carry cameras in order to take pictures that could be used as file photos for the service.²⁷⁴

Programming depended not just on technological and visual resources, but a regular supply of reliable workers. Over the course of the 1950s, the service had particular problems with departmental infighting over qualified creative staff. As a result, the Television Committee tried to streamline television operations by establishing ground rules for dealing with all television workers, including actors, writers, directors and cameramen. They introduced standardized contractual obligations and established a catalogue of “independent contractors” upon which the service could draw. The service had an especially hard time hiring actors. It had to compete with the Berlin theatre scene, DEFA productions and radio plays, all of which could offer actors both a higher profile and higher pay rates. Standardization of pay rates for actors across the arts, introduced

²⁷¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Beschlussvorlage Nr. 2,” 15 December, 1954, Article 3.f., pg 3.

²⁷² SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 2, SKF, “Beschlussvorlage für das Kollegium Nr. 5” 23 September 1954.

²⁷³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 6/55,” 31 March 1955. In this meeting the Television Committee decided to find someone to deal exclusively with film exchange with the “Eastern bloc” countries.

²⁷⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 7, SKF, “Entwurf: Auslandsreisen,” [January 1957]. A year later, the Television Committee established a photo library. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 12, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage nr. 39/58: Bildung einer Foto-Abteilung,” 24 May 1958.

first in 1958, reflected the increasingly important role of television and began to ameliorate television's hiring problems, but general workforce supply continued to be a problem into the 1960s. As was the case in the Postal Ministry, the television service had a difficult time retaining technical workers. In particular, low-paid, overworked cameramen began leaving for the West in the late 1950s, complicating television's technical problems with the government's fears of *Republikflucht* (flight from the Republic.)²⁷⁵

Between 1954 and 1956 Adameck tried to shape the DFF to fulfill an explicitly political task. He established political discipline among the workers and endeavoured to ensure a politically and professionally reliable program. Yet the transformation remained incomplete. In November 1956 the television service caught the attention of the Central Committee, when it failed to live up to the achievements of the West. Thereafter, Adameck had allies in high places, who increasingly believed in the power of television to influence political affairs, and began to throw their weight into developing the service.

TOWARDS NOVEMBER 1956

In the year preceding the Hungarian uprising, the television service underwent a number of transformations. In January 1956, for example, the television service had inaugurated its "regular program" mandated by the Council of Ministers. Though it was an important moment in the history of the DFF, the shift from the "test-program" to the "official" program was largely a semantic one. The service began broadcasting three

²⁷⁵ There are veiled references to the flight of technical personnel in SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 1823, MPF-BRF, "Kommunique" 1 September 1959.

hours a day, a slight increase over the daily two-hour broadcasts in 1953-5, but this was part of a more general trend in the expansion of broadcasting over the course of the 1950s and did not represent a sharp discontinuity.²⁷⁶ Nor did the official program represent a conceptual break with the experimental “test-program.” The decisive change instead involved the acquisition of technology that allowed the DFF to broadcast from outside the studio. In November 1955, the GDR imported a television transmission truck, thus opening up a whole new world – the out-of-doors – and a whole new set of conceptual and practical problems to television coverage in East Germany. Liberated from the studio, East German television could now begin to fulfill the promise of television as a medium that could offer the extraordinary and unmediated experience of witnessing social, cultural and political transformations unfold. After November 1955, broadcasts from sports fields, entertainment halls, chambers of government and other locations outside the studio supplemented studio productions.

Yet with new possibilities came new challenges. We can see some of the problems DFF workers faced by looking at the example of DFF television coverage of the 1956 winter Olympic Games in Cortina d’Ampezzo, Italy. These were the first Olympic Games to be televised, but they also represented a milestone in the history of the Cold War. For one, East and West Germany still competed as part of a pan-German team. More important, it was the first winter games in which the Soviet Union took part. Soviet athletes swept the standings, dominating speed skating events, the hockey tournament, and breaking the Scandinavian stranglehold over cross-country skiing. With

²⁷⁶ The DFF broadcast 4 hours daily in 1957, 5 hours in 1958 and 7 hours in 1959. By 1962 the daily broadcast had grown to 9 hours. Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 191.

this performance Soviet athletes began to emerge as dominant competitors in world sport, and their success helped to push the Olympic Games to become a symbolic battleground of the Cold War.²⁷⁷ The 1956 Olympics was the first live, international event covered by the DFF, and it exemplified the many remaining obstacles to the service's ability to transmit an effective program. The case of Olympic reportage also gives us a good idea of what we could expect of the DFF in November 1956, since it took place only nine months before the Hungarian uprising. First, it is important to remember that East Germans had acquired the necessary technology to broadcast outside of the studio only three months before, and they were still inexperienced broadcasting live outside of the confined (and controllable) conditions of the studio.²⁷⁸ The SRK took a last minute decision to broadcast television coverage of the Olympic Games, which meant that the DFF was caught off-balance from the beginning. Television workers quickly scrambled to get ready for the events. They had to prepare technical equipment, complete background research, and take care of important administrative matters, such as acquiring travel permits for DFF staff to enter Italy. Only one reporter covered the events; he learned of his assignment just days before the Games. Coverage of the Games proper was similarly impromptu. There was little uniformity among broadcasts since television employees working different shifts had not established a common procedure for Olympic

²⁷⁷ International Olympic Committee. http://www.olympic.org/uk/games/index_uk.asp (accessed 18 April, 2006.)

²⁷⁸ For example, they had difficulty with sound transmission: SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 484, MPF-BRF, "Tonstörung bei der Direktübertragung „Frohe Burschen - frohe Mädchen“ am 22.3.56," 28 March 1956. Moreover, although the MPF-BRF was separate from the DFF, they did have to work together to create the program. They had a troubled relationship that worsened as pressure on the television service grew more intense. By mid-1957 for example, the BRF sent a detailed letter of complaint with Adameck over conflicts between BRF and DFF staff over a broadcast from Leipzig. See for example,

reports. The lack of communication regarding the broadcasts also meant that television workers on different shifts did not learn from each others' mistakes, but often repeated them.²⁷⁹

Finally, it is important to realize that international broadcasts, such as the coverage from Cortina d'Ampezzo, were subject to the caprice of international cooperation. The DFF's Olympic coverage, for example, was dependent on the live feed provided by Italian television. Italian television provided both live telecast and filmed newsreel coverage of the sporting events, essentially free of charge to any service that wished to broadcast from the Olympics.²⁸⁰ Yet the DFF considered it a failure that 85% of their Olympic commentary was broadcast not from Cortina d'Ampezzo, but rather from the studio in Berlin.²⁸¹ At the same time, much of the DFF's commentary actually came from information gleaned from West German broadcasters' coverage of the events.²⁸²

SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRFII 484, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über den Einsatz des Ü-III vom 28.6.-1.7.1957," 3 July 1957.

²⁷⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, "Beschlussvorlage Nr. 9/56: Bericht über die Auswertung der Übertragungen von den VII. Olympischen Winterfestspielen in Cortina d'Ampezzo," 20 February 1956.

²⁸⁰ Italian television (RAI) did not charge licensing fees for the rights to coverage, but requested that foreign services cover costs for film processing and use of television transmission facilities. Stephen Wenn, "A history of the International Olympic Committee and Television, 1936-80" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1993), 43.

²⁸¹ "The task was particularly difficult in that the pictures were commentated from the studio. It was not possible to let the athletes speak about the own development in original interviews." But we should remember that today most coverage of European sporting events relies on the visual coverage provided by a host broadcaster, with audio commentary provided by the reporter of the network carrying the broadcast. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, "Beschlussvorlage Nr. 9/56: Bericht über die Auswertung der Übertragungen von den VII. Olympischen Winterfestspielen in Cortina d'Ampezzo," 20 February 1956, pg. 2.

²⁸² SAPMO-BArch, DR 8, SKF, "Beschlussvorlage Nr. 9/56..." 2 February 1956, pg. 2. It is not clear what exactly West German broadcasters did that made their broadcasts that much different from those of the DFF. Most likely, it was the result of, on the one hand, closer television exchange agreements between the FRG and Italy (both of which belonged to the European Broadcasting Union, which had developed both the tradition and infrastructure for programming exchange that went as far back as the coronation of Elizabeth

All of this meant that DFF workers had to be prepared to take spur-of-the-moment decisions in evaluating, interpreting and broadcasting the images coming at them from Italy. Assessing the successes and failures of the coverage after the Games, the DFF concluded that their coverage had lacked precisely that characteristic – the capacity for spontaneity – that could have prevented professional and political mishaps. For example, Soviet success at the Games had provided the perfect opportunity to illustrate the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Yet DFF coverage had not fulfilled the ideological potential of this success, in part because East German commentary had relied to a great extent upon information acquired from West German (radio) broadcasters “whose political message stands in contradiction to our own.”²⁸³ The DFF announcer often failed to respond to gaps in coverage that occurred through the failure of pictures or sound, leaving viewers to wonder what had happened. This was significant enough because it disrupted the broadcast; more important, such mistakes repelled German viewers from East German television, thus making it more difficult for the DFF to build an audience for the service. This was especially critical in the case of the Olympic coverage because, in the estimation of DFF television workers, television coverage of sporting events offered one of their best opportunities to build a pan-German audience.²⁸⁴

II in 1952, or the 1954 World Cup soccer game seen widely across Western Europe. On the other hand, West German broadcasters must have had a greater presence in Cortina d’Ampezzo, and thus more access to athletes, interviews and other material not part of the original Italian feed. I hope to further explore this in the future.

²⁸³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, “Bericht über die Auswertung der Übertragungen von den VII. Olympischen Winterfestspielen in Cortina d’Ampezzo,” 20 February 1956, pg. 2.

²⁸⁴ Television transmission of films also drew a West German audience. We can assume this had much to do with the distance of the programming from a specific mode of address. This also explains why entertainment programming did not enjoy much success – West German viewers were not so interested in quiz shows about Trabis and the East German work environment, as they were in DEFA films – in other words, in areas in which West German television could not, or did not compete. See for example, viewer

These were all skills that could be mobilized in a moment of political crisis, yet they were not to be learned before November.

THE DFF, THE SED AND THE HUNGARIAN UPRISING, NOVEMBER 1956

Before 1956, the SED concerned itself almost exclusively with East German radio broadcasting, but Cold War conflict pushed the Party to see television in a new light. Two incidents in November 1956 marked a crisis point in the Cold War and transformed the SED's approach to television. First, the French and British governments colluded to prevent Egypt's leader, Colonel Abdel Nassar, from nationalizing the Suez Canal. For the SED, the incident was a prime example of Western imperialism, and it fueled the increasingly anti-imperialist language of East German leaders.²⁸⁵ Second, and more important for our purposes here, the Soviets put down the Hungarian uprising. Soviet intervention in Hungary indicated that the modest "thaw" that had followed Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Soviet's Twentieth Party Congress had come to an abrupt end. East German television's failure to "properly" report the events of the Hungarian uprising caught the attention of the SED and drew television more closely into the East German apparatus of agitation. Both of these events led the SED to undertake an ideological offensive aimed at demonstrating the superiority of socialism over capitalism

mail from Niedersachsen: "Television has proliferated greatly in Lower Saxony, especially since (seit) one can get the television shows of the GDR. Especially loved are the films that are transmitted in the afternoons. Very unpopular are the quiz shows, and one is very exasperated with them. These shows are rejected as "idiotic kitsch." Well-loved are films and culture-films (Kulturfilme) from the Soviet Union. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 1824, MPF-BRF, Letter to Heinz Geggel (Deputy Chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee), [March 1958].

²⁸⁵ For a brief discussion of the Suez Crisis see David Armstrong and Erik Goldstein, "Interaction with the non-European World," in *Europe Since 1945* ed., Mary Fulbrook (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 256-59.

and cultivating 'socialist consciousness' among East Germans. Television emerged out of relative insignificance to become essential to this campaign.

1956: Hungary

In his 'Secret Speech' at the Soviet's twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin and initiated a period of de-stalinization in Eastern Europe. In Hungary, the Soviet Union allowed a new leadership under Ernő Gerő to undertake limited liberalization. By October, official reforms, including the rehabilitation of victims of the Hungarian show trials, led Hungarians to push for more concessions from the state. Demonstrators demanded democratic socialism, free elections, economic liberalization, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. As the demonstrations grew larger and more threatening, the Hungarian Central Committee appointed reformer Imre Nagy as Prime Minister. But, Nagy's pledge to pull out of the Warsaw Pact went too far for the Soviets and, on November 4, liberalization in Hungary came to a crushing halt when Soviet tanks arrived to restore order.²⁸⁶

The Hungarian uprising was a moment of crisis for the East German government. The desire for de-stalinization had caused dissent within the ranks of the SED. While some hoped for political and social liberalization, Stalinist SED leaders such as Ulbricht had approached de-stalinization with caution. The Soviet invasion of Hungary only reinforced their reservations. On November 5, the day after the Soviets arrived in Budapest, the East German Central Committee met to discuss how to respond to the uprising. They interpreted it as an attempted counter-revolutionary coup against the

democratic forces of Hungarian socialism and prepared to go on the offensive to disseminate this interpretation of events among as many East Germans as possible. To this end they directed local party organizations to undertake factory assemblies to “express solidarity for the revolutionary worker and peasant government in Hungary,” and to reinforce the message that, “the help of the Soviet troops, which occurred at the wish of the government, serves to hinder the white [counterrevolutionary] Terror and guarantee peace and democratic progress.”²⁸⁷

The November 5 meeting also marked the Central Committee’s first explicit discussion of television programming since the DFF had gone on the air in June 1952. For the SED leadership, the Hungarian revolt had tested the political mettle of the television service, and television had failed, revealing its technical and ideological weaknesses in the process. First, the leadership claimed that the television service had failed to exploit the medium’s most important trait – *Aktualität* (topicality, immediacy.) They complained that, “on Sunday November 4, 1956, our television lagged behind the reportage of the Western broadcasters” in both pictures and commentary. They demanded that the television service improve the immediacy and topicality of its broadcasts and mandated that the “necessary technical measures” be taken to ensure the transmission of “pictures of topical significance.”²⁸⁸ Second, the Central Committee criticized television’s political message. A meeting of the *Volkskammer* (People’s

²⁸⁶ Steven White, *Communism and Its Collapse* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001), 23-5.

²⁸⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 534, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, “Protokoll Nr. 36/56 der außerordentlichen Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 5. November 1956,” 5 November 1956, “Punkt 1,” pg. 1.

²⁸⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 534, Sekretariat des ZK der SED “Protokoll Nr. 36/56 der außerordentlichen Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 5. November 1956,” 5 November 1956, pg. 3.

Chamber) “had not been broadcast correctly.” Broadcasters had skipped over the most important speeches – counterrevolutionary connections between West German remilitarization and imperialist aggression in Egypt – in favour of an excerpt about German reunification. The leadership also noted that a roundtable discussion with Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, East German television’s most infamous political commentator, had been completely unsatisfactory, “although Comrade Schnitzler had been apprised of the significance of this broadcast.”²⁸⁹

The November 4 broadcast looked nothing like television news today. For instance, in the 1950s television news reports either replicated the style we normally associate with filmed newsreels, or they were static: a solitary announcer read the news, shot from one camera perspective. Broadcasts such as the latter incorporated some filmed material and a few graphics, often pictures of newspaper headlines. In either case, immediacy was not the central purpose of the news. Furthermore, on November 4 there were no pictures or commentary coming from the streets of Hungary due to the practical problems of the DFF. The service neither had their own correspondent in the country, nor could they rely on reports from Hungarian broadcasters. There were no television relay stations to provide live images from Hungary, and, although the service had begun to make film exchange agreements with socialist countries, by this time Hungarian broadcasters had been unable to produce much programming.²⁹⁰ In any case, the events

²⁸⁹ Schnitzler was a fervent advocate of socialism. He worked tirelessly in radio and television in the ideological struggle against the West, but he was also infamous for his penchant for expensive cars and a Western lifestyle. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 534, Sekretariat des ZK der SED “Protokoll Nr. 36/56 der außerordentlichen Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 5. November 1956,” 5 November 1956, pg. 3.

²⁹⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, “Beschlußvorlage Nr. 58/56: Bericht über den Filmaustausch mit den befreundeten Fernsehstationen,” 18 Oktober 1956. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRFII 6341, MPF-BRF,

in Hungary took the Warsaw Pact countries and the DFF by surprise. Eastern European revolts did not have a place in the official program of the SED, which seemed to lead to a sort of political paralysis at the service. The choice of excerpt from the “People’s Chamber” speech, for example, demonstrated that television workers were following the set agitation plan – to work towards German reunification – to the letter. In this case, it seems that the political agenda set for television workers actually made it more difficult for them to respond to the Hungarian uprising.

The Central Committee’s November 5 discussion of television is revealing. For the first time, we can see what their expectations for the medium of television were. For the members of the Central Committee, television was defined by its unique characteristic of visual *Aktualität*, and as such, was a medium of current events. But it was clearly difficult for them to see the problems faced by this new medium. As we saw above, it had not been long since the DFF had acquired the ability to effectively harness the characteristic of *Aktualität* and their first forays into televising live events outside the studio had been fraught with difficulties.

Their discussion of the television program also gives us a glimpse of the viewing habits of the Central Committee. It demonstrates that Central Committee members actually were watching television coverage, a clear shift from 1952, when they had to be directed to familiarize themselves with the new medium. Further, they were tuning in both East *and* West German broadcasters, perhaps to see images of the streets of Hungary. Indeed, for the SED, it was the contrast between East and West German

“Bericht über den Stand der Entwicklung der Technik auf dem Gebiet des Rundfunk, Fernsehens und Kommerziellen Funks auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses vom 23.2.1956” [1957] pg. 12-14.

television coverage of the revolt in particular that exposed the political and technical weaknesses of the television service. Even at this early date, West television had already become the standard for the Eastern medium to live up to, reflecting the emergence of television as an important tool of Cold war.

While the coverage of the revolt exposed the technical and ideological weaknesses of the television service, it also revealed the potential strength of the televisual medium. Television's failure to "properly" address the Hungarian uprising had proven that the medium of television could play an important role – positively or negatively – in the SED's agitation campaigns. It is a significant paradox that the popular belief in the communists' desire for tight control of information is not born out in the case of early television; in this case, the East German Central Committee clearly had much confidence in the truth power of *Aktualität*. They were not afraid of broadcasting topical pictures, but did fear the possibility that the only televisual images people would see represented the point of view of the imperialist West. Only by sending images across television screens could they exploit the power and appeal of the televisual image to tell their side of the story. Thus, in the Autumn of 1956, the SED discovered the importance of television just as they embarked on a new ideological offensive to prove the superiority of socialism, competing with the West for the 'hearts and minds' of East Germans. Significantly, the SED believed that, given the right argumentation and an effective television service, this was a competition they could win.

In the aftermath of the uprising, the Central Committee began to supervise the development of the television service more closely, a task that previously had been the province of the Council of Ministers. They commissioned a report to determine what

exactly had hindered the immediacy of television's coverage.²⁹¹ Many similar reports had been compiled over the course of the 1950s, which were brutally honest about the technical problems facing the television service. In one such report the Postal Ministry, which was responsible for developing television technology, identified the lack of available resources as the cause of GDR television's technical lag. The Ministry maintained that the decision to develop television technology in 1949 had not taken into account that indigenous East German industry could not yet develop or deliver the necessary technical equipment.²⁹² Furthermore, the report claimed that "after small successes in 1950-1951, industrial interest in our developmental task essentially plunged to zero,"²⁹³ and it traced the East Germans' lack of success in developing television technology to the fact that "the economic importance of the industrial production of radio and television equipment is not appreciated."²⁹⁴ But few, if any, of these reports had come to the attention of the Central Committee.²⁹⁵ It took the dramatic events of the Hungarian uprising to force the Central Committee to confront the state of television development in the GDR. In response, in late November 1956, they pledged to devote

²⁹¹ I have not been able to locate an extant copy of this report. The point I am making here is that television workers already had spent much time analyzing television's deficits. Yet it was only in aftermath of the Hungarian uprising that such information became important to the Central Committee.

²⁹² SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Technische Entwicklung von 1950-1955," [1955] pg. 5.

²⁹³ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Zusammenarbeit mit der Industrie," [1955] pg. 1.

²⁹⁴ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 465, MPF-BRF, "Zusammenarbeit mit der Industrie," [1955] pg. 1.

²⁹⁵ The Committee's discussions of *Rundfunk* ("broadcasting," later "radio") were restricted to the development of radio. For example, as late as June 29, 1956 they discussed a report entitled the "Verbesserung des Rundfunks", which outlined a program of general tasks for the State Broadcasting Committee, the radio stations Berlin I and II and the Deutschlandsender, but no mention was made of television technology or program. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 475, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, "Anlage Nr. 2 zum Protokoll Nr. 26/55 vom 29.6.1955," 29 June 1955.

more resources, including valuable Western currency, to the development of the television service.²⁹⁶

In particular, the Central Committee was interested in realizing the propaganda potential of television. For the Central Committee, this meant intensifying *Aktualität* in programming on the one hand, and expanding television's audience on the other. By early 1957, the Radio and Television Department of the Postal Ministry had begun to build television cameras and other equipment for television studios and planned to build new radio and television studios in Leipzig.²⁹⁷ But they still could not produce the technology needed to broadcast the all-important live event from outside of the studio and had to import two more broadcast trucks to meet this goal.²⁹⁸ Construction of the relay stations and other technology needed for live broadcasts from other socialist countries remained in the planning phase.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, in order to be effective, television had to have an audience. Previous television sales had demonstrated a high demand for television receivers among East Germans, leading the SED (through the

²⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 538, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, "Protokoll der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK vom 28.11.1956," 28 November 1956, article 2. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3, Sekretariat des ZK der SED, "Protokoll Nr. 32/56," 3 October 1956.

²⁹⁷ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRFII 6341, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über den Stand der Entwicklung der Technik auf dem Gebiet des Rundfunk, Fernsehens und Kommerziellen Funks auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses vom 23.2.1956" [1957] pg. 4.

²⁹⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DM3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, "Beschuß über Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Begründung" [December 1956] pg. 2. They did not expect to be able to produce this technology domestically before 1959.

²⁹⁹ For example, they were considering a cable link with Czech television and possibly Polish and Soviet television. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRFII 6341, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über den Stand der Entwicklung der Technik auf dem Gebiet des Rundfunk, Fernsehens und Kommerziellen Funks auf der Grundlage des Beschlusses vom 23.2.1956" [1957] pg 14.

Council of Ministers) to direct domestic industry to increase production of affordable receivers for the public.³⁰⁰

Despite the Central Committee's commitment to the development of the television service in the aftermath of the Hungarian uprising, the allocation of resources for television technology remained a consistent problem in the GDR. In a letter to the Politburo from December 1957 for example, the SRK expressed concern about the decaying support for technological development of television. They warned that financial support for the service was stagnating in the Second Five-Year-Plan (1956-1960) and asserted that if the television service continued at the current rate of development, by 1960 "GDR television would experience not only a relative decline compared with West Germany, but it is also not certain that the current capacity of television could be maintained."³⁰¹

Yet, as we have seen above, technological innovation by itself does not make for a politically successful service; rather, its success depended also upon the technical expertise and political reliability of its employees. The Postal Ministry, which was responsible not only for television but also for radio and other communications technologies as well, interpreted the Hungarian uprising as a test that had proven the reliability of the technical personnel working in broadcasting. One report asserted that:

³⁰⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 9, SKF, "Bericht über die Verkaufslage von Fernsehgeräten," [1957]. SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, "Beschluß über Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," pg. 2 and "Begründung," pg. 3. "Der Minister für Allgemeinen Maschinenbau wird verpflichtet: a. Bis 1960 insgesamt 1,2 Mio. Fernsehempfänger für den Inlandsbedarf herzustellen. 60% der Empfänger dürfen nicht mehr als 800 DM kosten..."

³⁰¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02, Abteilung Agitation, Brief an das Politbüro des ZK der SED, 10 December 1957, pg. 2.

In these moments, when our Republic faces certain tests of our endurance, such as on the 17 June 1953 and the counterrevolution in Hungary, it has been seen that the vast majority [of the workers] have stood strongly behind the government of the GDR. Therefore it can be determined, that in exactly these situations it has been proven that broadcasting as an instrument of Agitation and Propaganda is securely in the hands of the working class.³⁰²

For this official, the uprising had proven that the working class was in firm control of the East German communications infrastructure. But in the case of technical staff working on television, political reliability was not matched by technical expertise. Instead many of the engineers were relying upon years-old training that had not kept up with the fast-moving development of television technology. Some had not even had the training essential to their positions. Further, throughout the department high rates of turnover made it difficult to ameliorate these problems.³⁰³

At the television centre, by contrast, it seemed that the professional abilities of the staff were less of a problem than their ideological convictions. Adameck had worked at improving both the professional and the political reliability of the service since he took it over in 1954. Yet even his own leadership came under scrutiny. The Central Committee suggested establishing a new group of politically reliable staff to take responsibility for the television service under the leadership of the SRK.³⁰⁴ Despite the Committee's displeasure, Adameck retained his position as director of the service, and ultimately, accumulated more power as well. In December 1956, a new statute came into effect

³⁰² SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II, 6341, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über den Stand der Entwicklung der Technik auf dem Gebiete des Rundfunks..." [1957], pg. 20-21.

³⁰³ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II, 6341, MPF-BRF, "Bericht über den Stand der Entwicklung der Technik auf dem Gebiete des Rundfunks..." [1957], pg. 21.

³⁰⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 J IV 2/3 534, ZK der SED, "Protokoll Nr. 36/56 der außerordentlichen Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK am 5. November 1956" 5 November 1956, article 4.d. pg. 3.

governing the allocation of power and responsibilities at the service. While emphasizing the personal responsibility of every employee, it concentrated power in the hands of the Director.³⁰⁵ The Television Committee became an “advisory body at the side of the Director.”³⁰⁶

One of the first tasks of Adameck and the television committee was to evaluate the ideological condition of the service and its employees. They found political inconsistencies throughout the Television Centre. For example, technical workers at the service often ignored important political questions in favour of concentrating on their professional tasks. Some deliberately avoided political arguments.³⁰⁷ But the discussion of political questions could turn out to be more dangerous, as in the case of the Television Centre’s fire brigade, which undertook “heated discussion,” but from the wrong perspective.³⁰⁸ Some technical workers expressed “negative political opinions” due to their dissatisfaction with working conditions at the Centre. Especially younger staff complained of overwork and schedules that demanded they work an excessive number of overtime hours.³⁰⁹ These problems were part of a wider sense of dissatisfaction,

³⁰⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, “Beschlúßvorlage Nr. 66/56: Statut des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,” 17 December 1956, pg. 1

³⁰⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 4, SKF, “Beschlúßvorlage Nr. 66/56: Statut des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,” 17 December 1956, pg. 2.

³⁰⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 32/5656 der Kollegiumssitzung des Deutschen Fernsehfunks am 28.11.56,” 28 November 1956, pg. 3-4.

³⁰⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 32/56 ...” 28 November 1956, pg 3. “Innerhalb der Arbeitsbereiche der Produktion, der Technik, des Betriebsschutzes und der Feuerwehr werden Tagesfragen nicht genügend behandelt. Nach dem Beispiel der Feuerwehr wird stark diskutiert, aber oftmals falsch.

³⁰⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 32/56...,” 28 November 1956, pg. 4.

particularly among young technical workers across the GDR, which resulted in the large numbers of refugees that left for the West over the course of the 1950s.³¹⁰

Just as important was the political reliability of those who were responsible for creating television programming and representing the Republic on screen. Yet the Television Committee heard evidence that some of those who were responsible for the television program were displaying a distressingly “insufficient knowledge of [...] socialist journalism.”³¹¹ The Committee instructed department heads to undertake detailed discussion with their employees regarding the “principles of socialist journalism, criticism and self-criticism and the relationship between truth and *Aktualität*.”³¹² At issue was television workers’ own criticism leveled at television reports in the aftermath of the uprising. In particular, complainants noted that Yugoslavian President Tito’s speech addressing the Hungarian uprising had not been broadcast in its entirety, but rather excerpted. In the speech, given at Pula on 11 November 1956, Tito toed a fine line between the Soviets and the Hungarian reformers: he criticized the former, for intervening in what he characterized as a grass-roots revolution, and the latter for endangering socialism in Hungary.³¹³ We can assume that the DFF broadcast only

³¹⁰ Indeed, by 1958 the Television Committee had to address the problem of *Republikflucht* among DFF cameramen (in response to extreme overtime and low pay,) which had begun to threaten continued television service. Vorlage Nr. 42/57 discussed in SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 6, “Protokoll Nr. 18/57 der Kollegiumssitzung des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,” 26 June 1957. Also, in 1959 the MPF-BRF described occurrences of “technische Ausfälle” due to the fact that the “class enemy tries to lure away technical personnel.” Moreover, by this time they described television as the “most important tool (Werkzeug) of the government and Party.” SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 1823, “Kommunique,” 1 September 1959.

³¹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 32/56...,” 28 November 1956, pg. 3.

³¹² SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 32/56...,” 28 November 1956, pg. 3.

³¹³ Johanna Granville, “Hungary, 1956: The Yugoslav Connection,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, no. 3 (1998): 498.

remarks that suggested Tito was in favour of the Soviets and against the Hungarian “counterrevolutionaries,” omitting comments in favour of Hungarian liberalization.³¹⁴

Unfortunately, no further record of the Tito-broadcasts or debate among television workers themselves regarding these reports remains. Yet it is clear that, for the Television Committee and, ultimately, the SED, excerpting the speech was an editorial choice taken to properly interpret and report the event – in other words, to extract truth from topical/current pictures. In the months after the uprising, the SED’s vision of a counterrevolutionary putsch attempt *was* the “truth” of the uprising. In a meeting on 5 December 1956, for example, the Television Committee outlined the “talking points” (*Wochenargumentation*) to be followed in television coverage. On the matter of Hungary, the Committee directed DFF cameramen to focus on depictions of “the normalization of life,” “the relationships of Soviet soldiers with Hungarian citizens,” “senseless terrorist destruction,” “the return of refugees.” Through these pictures, the DFF could expose the inconsistencies of counterpropaganda from the West.³¹⁵

The crisis of 1956 began to reveal the extraordinary power that television would have over the course of the Cold War. As a result of the Hungarian uprising, the Central Committee of the SED began to take the medium of television seriously. Before this, their concern for television broadcasting had focused narrowly on the preservation and expansion of television signals within the GDR. But the crisis demonstrated that television programming was potentially a powerful tool of information, propaganda and,

³¹⁴ Tito expressed measured support for the Soviet intervention, asserting “We are against interference and the use of foreign armed forces... [but] if it meant saving socialism in Hungary, then [the second] Soviet intervention was necessary.” Cited in Granville, “Hungary, 1956,” 498.

³¹⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 33/56,” 5 December 1956, pg. 1-2.

especially, counter-propaganda aimed at ideas coming out of the West. The Central Committee criticized television for the lack of current pictures and information and for television workers' inability to make the right programming choices in the face of crisis. In other words, the Central Committee did not want to stifle information through television, but rather viewed it as a means to disseminate its own message in competition with the West. Consequently, television emerged to play a central role in a new ideological offensive directed both against the West and toward creating socialist citizens.

CULTURAL POLICY AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMING, 1957-8

The Hungarian revolution ended the period of modest “thaw” in East Germany that had followed the Soviets' Twentieth Party Congress, and the SED underwent an ideological hardening. During the SED's Thirtieth Party Conference in January/February 1957 – the first meeting of the SED since the cessation of protests in Hungary – the Party announced a change of course. The SED declared that the GDR belonged to the “socialist camp,” rejected further social or political liberalization, and called for greater *Parteilichkeit* (partisanship) among Party members.³¹⁶

The SED's ideological hardening found expression in a new agitation campaign introduced over the course of 1957. This campaign had two goals: to demonstrate the superiority of socialism over the West and to transform East Germans into socialist citizens by cultivating a socialist consciousness. The SED hoped to accomplish this through stepped up agitation against “Western imperialism,” renewed emphasis on the

lessons of marxism-leninism, and the creation of a new, socialist German culture. A “cultural conference” in October 1957 – convened under the slogan “In ideological struggle for a socialist culture” – disseminated the principles of the SED’s new agitation campaign among artists and cultural organizations.³¹⁷ Central Committee members denounced manifestations of (Western) “decadence” in East German art, and called on East German artists to create a “socialist German culture” following the principles of “socialist realism.”³¹⁸ This campaign continued into the Bitterfeld Conference of 1959, where the SED challenged artists and East German workers to “overcome the gulf between art and life.” artists needed to bring art closer to the people. This meant on the one hand, that professional art should reflect everyday life, and do so in an accessible way, thus proscribing the visual language of abstraction. On the other hand, it called for workers themselves to become producers of art.³¹⁹

The campaign to transform East Germans into socialist citizens reached its zenith at the Fifth Party Congress in July 1958. The “construction of socialism” was the main focus of the conference. The SED viewed this as primarily an economic problem – transform the economic foundation of society and social transformation will follow – and called for East German production to “overtake” and “outstrip” the West German economy by the early 1960s.³²⁰ But the Party was impatient and also concluded that “the socialist ‘education’ of the people [was] the key to solving the upcoming economic and

³¹⁶ Weber, *Geschichte*, 198.

³¹⁷ Jürgen Winkler, “Kulturpolitik,” in *Die SED. Geschichte, Organisation, Politik. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Andreas Herbst, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1997), 396.

³¹⁸ Weber, *Geschichte*, 211.

³¹⁹ Weber, *Geschichte*, 211.

³²⁰ Andreas Malycha, “Von der Gründung bis zur Mauerbau,” in Herbst ed., *Die SED*, pg. 3.

political tasks.”³²¹ They called for unification of entertainment and culture, which should be “put into service for the development of socialist consciousness.”³²² Television took its place alongside film, theatre and radio as a “new, significant political-cultural factor of our lives.”³²³

Over the next few months, the television service adopted the principal tenets of the SED’s campaign. After the Fifth Party Congress, Adameck reported that the SED had set two specific tasks for the television service. The Party called on television first to “more aggressively and true-to-life (*lebensverbundener*) intervene in the revolutionary process of socialist transformation” of East German social life, and secondly, to “push back the reactionary influence of West German broadcasting and win West German audiences” for East German television.³²⁴ To accomplish this, the television service had to pursue a two-pronged program: they had to incorporate more, explicitly political, current events reportage, as well as entertainment programming and television plays.³²⁵

Consequently, one of the first steps of the television service was to expand so-called current-political (*aktuell-politisch*) programming and exploit the political value of televisual immediacy. New programming aimed at incorporating neglected topics such as the anti-imperialist struggle in Africa and the Middle East and coverage of class

³²¹ This according to a contemporary periodical, *Neuer Weg*, cited in Weber, *Geschichte*, pg. 209. Also (uncited) in Jürgen Winkler, “Kulturpolitik” in Herbst, 396.

³²² SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes, massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm,” [1958], pg. 8.

³²³ Das in den vergangenen Jahren großzügig aufgebaute Fernsehnetz stellt einen neuen bedeutenden politisch-kulturellen Faktor unseres Lebens dar.” SED, *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den V. Parteitag der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Dietz, 1958), 126.

³²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes, massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm,” [1958], pg. 1.

³²⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes, massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm,” [1958], pg. 1.

struggle in the “NATO countries.”³²⁶ The service began broadcasting the “nightly” news program *Aktuelle Kamera* (“Current Camera”), which included topical, short-subject reportage five nights a week (excluding Monday and Friday), and hoped to introduce programming with deeper, investigative reportage.³²⁷ Moreover, the television service pledged to more vividly illustrate the advance of socialism across the world. This could not be accomplished only through reports of economic progress, but required depictions of the lives of real, socialist people. Newly conceived “*Reisereportage*,” (travel reports), with shows such as “On the streets of Stalingrad” or “From the riches of the Karakum desert,” would demonstrate the growth of the global socialist camp “in an enthralling, convincing way.” Programmers believed such shows could link narratively the anti-imperialist independence struggles of the Middle Eastern and African states with the success and peaceful nature of European socialism and, at the same time, reveal the “aggressive character” of NATO and the United States.³²⁸

Current events programming played a central role in the television program, but the SED’s call to reunite culture and entertainment in the service of developing a socialist consciousness required increased attention to “entertaining” programming. While Adameck could boast that the department of Dramatic Arts, which broadcast directly from Berlin theatres and developed (medium-specific) television plays, had produced some valuable “humanistic and progressive works,” youth programming had shown “no

³²⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes, massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm,” [1958], pg. 2.

³²⁷ Plans to improve *Aktualität* included expanding the network of DFF correspondents to five within the Republic, three in West Germany, and sending one each to the Soviet Union and China. SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Bericht über den Stand der Programmarbeit im Deutschen Fernsehfunk und einige wichtige politisch-ideologische Aufgaben in der nächsten Zeit,” 25 April 1957, pg. 5.

resounding success as yet.”³²⁹ Adameck could describe the success of entertainment programming (*Unterhaltung*) as inconsistent. Programs involving humour were ineffectual: “difficulties in the area of entertainment and satire across the Republic are reflected also in the television program. As yet we have not succeeded, either in cooperation with radio or with existing *Kabarett*, to make shows that are a sharp weapon in the battle against the enemies of socialism.”³³⁰ Yet other programs were both audience hits and political success stories. For example, the East German audience loved the musical variety show “Your request, please,” which aired interviews with East German workers about their lives, families and jobs, and then aired the interviewee’s musical request. At the very least, the musical requests appealed to viewers, while the service could fit in some agitation by means of the interviews, which focused on the life of the East German worker.³³¹ “Entertainment” was never apolitical programming, but the dual demands of the Party and the medium – producing socialists *and* producing entertainment – sometimes coexisted in an uneasy tension.

³²⁸ All quotes in this paragraph from SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes, massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm,” [1958], pg. 2.

³²⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Bericht über den Stand der Programmarbeit im Deutschen Fernsehfunk und einige wichtige politisch-ideologische Aufgaben in der nächsten Zeit,” 25 April 1957, 2.

³³⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Bericht über den Stand der Programmarbeit im Deutschen Fernsehfunk und einige wichtige politisch-ideologische Aufgaben in der nächsten Zeit,” 25 April 1957, pg. 3. This would be referring to the televised versions of the radio entertainment show “*Da lacht der Bär*” and the “*Distel*” Kabarett. May have been some fear of humour: Ley, head of the SRK asserted “the entertainment department must really support overtly political shows. Under no circumstances can one tear apart, that which the political shows are trying to make clear, through lazy and, effectively antagonistic, jokes. Satire and irony must strike the opponent, the political enemy in the West, militarism, and help the people of our Republic to differentiate between friend and foe.” SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 7, SKF, “Direktive des Komitees, 1. Halbjahr 1957,” 24 January 1957, pg.5. For more information on GDR cabaret see the work of Sylvia Klötzer, including (most recently): Sylvia Klötzer, *Satire und Macht. Film Zeitung, Kabarett in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005).

³³¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 279, SRK, “Bericht über den Stand der Programmarbeit im Deutschen Fernsehfunk und einige wichtige politisch-ideologische Aufgaben in der nächsten Zeit,” 25 April 1957, pg. 3.

The Fifth Party Congress represented the point at which television became an indispensable tool for the socialist state. The task set for television reflected the SED's new understanding of the possibilities of the medium in the aftermath of 1956. The SED cast television as both a defensive and offensive tool in the war against the West.

Television programming not only reflected socialist transformation, but it could also inspire East Germans to participate. Television could distract viewers – the Party could not fulfill their goal of building socialism if audiences were watching West German broadcasting – but the SED hoped it could win viewers on both sides of the border to the cause of building socialist consciousness.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1950s, the SED was little interested in the medium of television. They only peripherally exercised their control over the medium: early purges of television personnel resulted from larger political shifts within the SED that had little to do with the medium of television. Political decisions made in the early 1950s meant that television's purpose became ever more narrowly focused on the political task of agitation. But it was not until the Hungarian uprising in 1956, when the SED began to realize how important television could be, that television began to emerge as an important political and, later, social force in East Germany. The SED's conviction that it could and, indeed, must compete with the West, as well as East German television's failure to do so in the context of the Hungarian uprising, led the SED to more aggressively develop the service. In the aftermath of the uprising, the SED undertook a new ideological offensive directed outward against the West, but also inward, toward creating socialist citizens. By

the Fifth Party Congress of July 1958, the SED had turned to the previously insignificant medium of television as a central tool in the ideological conflict of the Cold War.

Chapter Four: Mediating the Berlin Wall – Television in August 1961

Radio and Television in our German Democratic Republic represent the world of ideas of our new socialist society... The ten commandments of socialist morality, which Walter Ulbricht established at the Fifth Party Congress, are our guide...

- Werner Ley, SRK

1958³³²

INTRODUCTION

In July 1961, the DFF presented the East German television audience with the case of five East Germans arrested for economic espionage against the GDR. The group appeared before the criminal court, accused of gathering information on members of the East German intelligentsia and convincing them by means of blackmail, or even just false promises, to leave the GDR for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The program described the ringleader of the scheme, Heinz Adamo, as a man of some privilege, with his own car and a monthly income of about 1,300 DM. Adamo revealed how West German agents had recruited him while he had been on a student exchange trip in West Berlin. He divulged further that the “East Bureaus” of the West German political parties – from the left-wing Social Democrats and the federation of German trade unions, to the more conservative Christian Democrats and the liberal Free Democratic Party – supported the entire operation, the purpose of which was to unleash chaos among both the intelligentsia and the people to undermine the East German economy.

Fact, or is this fiction? From our post-Cold War (Western) perspective, the story is, at best, a convenient plot for a Cold War crime thriller; at worst, perhaps the propaganda of an authoritarian regime. In fact, the above episode was both of those things. It was part of a special report on the problem of espionage and “people-trafficking” by the nightly news program *Aktuelle Kamera* (Current Camera) broadcast on 27 July 1961, less than three weeks before the construction of the Berlin Wall. Yet it also perpetuated for the audience a narrative familiarized by East German crime thrillers and other aspects of the television program since at least 1958.

The Current Camera report demonstrates just how liminal the boundaries between “political” and “entertainment” programming were. As Raymond Williams has shown, the significance of the television program lies not in the definition of specific genres or formats, but rather the “flow” of the entire program: “What is an apparently disjointed sequence of items ... is guided by a remarkably consistent set of cultural relationships, the flow of consumable reports and products.”³³³ Rather than approaching “news” programming as a discrete unit, we must understand it within the larger picture of the television program. To dismiss the program as little more than far-fetched propaganda would be to misunderstand the significance of television broadcasting: we should not be asking whether or how the SED “warped” television to inculcate their ideas in the audience, but rather try to understand the ways in which television as a new and powerful medium was able to visualize the social, political and economic ideology of the GDR and shape the worldviews of Germans living there. How did television mediate historical

³³² Werner Ley, Chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee (SRK) cited in Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 28.

events and help to construct the interpretive framework within which East Germans (and others) understood the turbulent political world in which they lived?

This is particularly significant because what we understand as the “Cold War” was not just a series of events, but rather a set of narratives mediated and disseminated in part by television broadcasting. Within these narratives there is an important relationship between fact and fiction. This chapter examines ways in which television programming, in particular crime thrillers and news reports, normalized East Germans’ everyday experiences during the Berlin Crisis (1958-61), and provided an interpretive framework within which they could explain the crisis of August 1961. First, I will trace the development of the DFF program after 1958, showing in particular how the program sought to become a part of East Germans’ daily lives. Then I will demonstrate how current events – the Berlin Crisis in particular – became central, not only to programming defined by its focus on topical events, but other elements of the program as well. In particular, the crime thriller series *Blaulicht* was an especially popular component of the DFF program that grappled with the issues central to the Berlin Crisis. When, by mid-July 1961 the East German press, and *Aktuelle Kamera* in particular, stepped-up the campaign against *Menschenhändler*, *Grenzgänger* and *Republikflucht*, they mobilized a language that audiences had already familiarized themselves with through the narratives of television crime thrillers since at least 1959.

³³³ Williams, *Television*, 105.

THE TELEVISION PROGRAM, 1958-61

During the period of the Berlin crisis, television became an important component of the propaganda war. This was especially the case after the construction of the Berlin Wall, when television became one of the few ways in which most East Germans could “visit” the other side of the border. By 1958 television workers had overcome many of the structural problems they had faced in earlier years. The acquisition of more cameras and direct transmission equipment, as well as the planned construction of regional studios ensured the supply of programming. Construction of a network of major and minor transmitting towers, [relay transmitters] especially in the southwest corner of the Republic, was nearing completion.³³⁴ A shift in the frequencies used to transmit East German television signals, undertaken in 1957, not only had expanded the viewing area, but also put an end to the shadowy images of West German, Polish and Czechoslovakian programs superimposed on the East German program.³³⁵ As a result, most East Germans and many West Germans who owned television sets could now receive East German television signals and enjoyed improved reception. Moreover, increasing numbers of East Germans were buying television sets. Between 1958 and 1961 television ownership in the GDR climbed even more sharply than in West Germany. By the end of 1959, West Germans had purchased over one million receivers; a year later there were a million sets in East Germany, a country with only a quarter of the West German population.

³³⁴ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 42-3.

³³⁵ Interference noted by Ministerrat in SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 724, MPF-BRF, “Beschluss,” 24 September 1956, pg. 12; Umstellung mandated by Ministerrat SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, “Beschluss über Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Begründung,” [1957] pg. 3.

The expansion of the program helped to encourage rising viewership.³³⁶ While in 1952 the DFF had broadcast about two hours a day several days a week, by 1959 the regular broadcast had grown to seven hours a day; in 1961, the DFF broadcast sixty-three hours a week, or an average of nine hours a day.³³⁷ The prime time schedule, that is, the program broadcast in the evening hours between seven and ten o'clock remained the focus of the program. But the DFF continued to broadcast test programs and, increasingly, repeat filmed shows and transmit children's programming during the morning and afternoon hours. After 8 October 1958, the DFF reached out to shift workers, repeating for them parts of the last evening's programming between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Monday to Friday. The DFF increased production of most types of programming to fill the expanded schedule, though some types of programming still were clearly more important than others. Television drama, entertainment and political programming remained the three most important aspects of the television program.

But intensive study of the successes and failures of the television service from 1956-7 had transformed the program. "Culture" programming, once thought a positive addition to the department of entertainment for example, had achieved little success in effectively catching viewers' attention or being politically valuable.³³⁸ Television workers conceived such programming to introduce East Germans to important cultural figures and works of art such as poetry and literature.³³⁹ By October 1957, though, the

³³⁶ East Germans' could receive an increasing amount of programming from both the GDR and the FRG, though, at this early date, DFF transmissions could still reach far more viewers than ARD.

³³⁷ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 93.

³³⁸ See, for example, SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 5, SKF, "Protokoll Nr. 10/56."

³³⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 6, SKF, "Protokoll Nr. 34/57 der Kollegiumssitzung des Deutschen Fernsehfunks am 9.10.57" 9 October 1957.

shortcomings of the department's programming led the Television Council to call for new ideas that would make the program more varied and interesting. New programs proposed in November included *Culture and Life*, intended to deal with the "important cultural-political problems ... of the exchange of public opinion..." (on the subject of the literary market, poets and readers or folk art, for example.) "In every case the treatment of the subject must be made to come alive, even visually."³⁴⁰ Yet as the program underwent a wider shift away from short, experimental formats towards longer, recurring shows that could function as program anchors, new and popular series did not come from the didactic department of culture programming. Instead, they were entertaining series produced by Television Drama, the Department of Entertainment and even the Department of children's programming. Series such as the children's program *Unser Sandmännchen* (Our little Sandman) or the crime thriller *Blaulicht* (The Blue Light) emerged in 1958 and 1959 and became long-running and well-loved components of the schedule.

The decisive shift in the amount and variety of programming was the result of the end of the "studio period" in late 1955. The acquisition of direct transmission equipment meant the DFF could broadcast from beyond the confines of the studio for the first time. By 1958 broadcasts from the East German theatres, culture houses, festivals, and other locations outside of the studio complemented studio productions. The planned construction of new broadcasting facilities in Leipzig and, later, Dresden, Rostock and

³⁴⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 9, SKF, "Beschlussvorlage Nr. 75/57: Programmperspektiven der Redaktion Kulturpolitik" 16 November 1957.

Halle promised to allow further expansion of the television schedule.³⁴¹ The ability to televise events outside of the studio allowed the tremendous expansion of topical programming in particular. The DFF was especially proud of their coverage of live events. In 1959, for example, they broadcast four special reports covering Khrushchev's brief state visit to the GDR, and sixty-eight from the Geneva Conference (convened to discuss the future of the two German states) at which both German foreign ministers participated. Yet the DFF devoted the lion's share of topical reporting (live transmission) not to political events, but to sports programming. The DFF broadcast twenty-three hours of sports in 1955, comprising only 2.9% of the program; by contrast, they broadcast 455 hours in 1960, making sports programming the fourth most important component of the program, after drama, entertainment and political shows.

TABLE 1: DFF PROGRAMMING BY TYPE, 1955/1960³⁴²

Type of Show	Hours 1955	Percentage of program 1955	Hours 1960	Percentage of program 1960
Television drama and feature films	362	46.1	690	22.9
Entertainment	129	16.4	491	16.3
Television journalism	113	14.4	390	13.0
Political shows	74	9.4	476	15.8
Children's shows	47	6.0	267	8.9
Sport	23	2.9	455	15.1
Youth programming	11	1.4	63	2.1
Bildung	n/a	n/a	89	3.0
Other	27	3.4	86	2.9
Total	786	100	3007	100

³⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM 3 BRF II 929, MPF-BRF, "Beschluss über Maßnahmen zur Verbesserung des Fernsehens in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," [24 January 1957], pg. 9. (Also in SAPMO-BArch (DH), DM3 BRF II 6337). Peter Hoff, "Das Projekt eines Fernsehseh- und Rundfunkstudios in Leipzig als erster Versuch einer Dezentralisierung der Fernseharbeit," *KultuRation: Online-Journal für Kultur, Wissenschaft und Politik* 2 (2003) <<http://www.kulturation.de/text.php?uebergabe=18>> (accessed 9 March, 2006).

³⁴² Source: Hoff in Hickthier, *Geschichte*, 192, 186.

The DFF was not producing just more programming, but also new kinds of programming, and not just sports. By 1960 the DFF had introduced *Bildung*³⁴³ (narrowly translated, education, but more expansively it means cultivation) to the schedule in programs such as *Der denkende Mensch, der schaffende Mensch* (Thinking Man, Creative Man) and *Unsere Dorfbakademie* (Our Village Academy). The latter, broadcast for an hour early Sunday afternoons, broadcast information on new developments in agriculture, vegetable production, and agricultural machinery.³⁴⁴ By 1960 the DFF hoped that programs such as these could become the foundation for a “television University” (*Fernsehakademie*), a series of education programs first broadcast in 1963.³⁴⁵ Youth programming and advice shows (*Ratgebersendungen*) directed at both youth and women also occupied a greater place in the schedule.

The Program in East Germans’ Daily Life

By 1958 the television program had begun to take the shape it would have throughout the 1960s. With a fuller schedule, a wider variety of (more popular) programming and the increasing availability of receivers, television could creep into viewers’ everyday lives. The rise of television reception, which contributed to the transformation of the rhythms of daily life across the industrialized Western world, represented no less of a transformation in the lives of the East German audience. By no

³⁴³ Bildung can be translated narrowly as “education,” but is much closer to “cultivation” or “cultural development”

³⁴⁴ This show emerged in the context of a concerted push to finally collectivize agriculture, a subject I will explore in the book. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation Kommission, “Übersicht über die Sendungen, die die Grundlage für die Schaffung einer Fernsehuniversität bilden können” [1960].

³⁴⁵ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 288.

means did television accomplish this on its own – economic expansion, widespread sales of automobiles and rising disposable income were other important factors. In the United States television helped to make postwar suburbanization possible, allowing people to move away from the centres of commerce and community, and yet still be “connected” to the world.³⁴⁶ Just as television allowed Americans to inhabit the circumscribed world of the suburbs (home, the commute and the workplace), it allowed the world of East Germans to become more circumscribed. The construction of the Wall limited East Germans to the world of the GDR and, for some, points east. Yet television widened this diminishing world, through programming from exotic places around the world and entertainment that,

could seemingly bridge distances of over hundreds and thousands of kilometres... (demonstrated not only through the use of) cars and highways, trains and train stations, ships and ports ... but also reports from a number of cities, domestic and international at a time, the contacts with Rotterdam, to the Antarctic-station...³⁴⁷

Following media scholar Lutz Haucke, the juxtaposition of the “remote” and “home” on television screens allowed the expansion of the East German mental world beyond their relative physical confinement.³⁴⁸

The scheduling of the DFF program both reflected and began to redefine everyday life in the GDR. Programmers carefully scheduled for their growing audience. For most East Germans, for example, the workday began and ended relatively early; so too did the

³⁴⁶ Spiegel, *Make Room for TV*.

³⁴⁷ Lutz Haucke, “Die Träume sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung in der DDR,” in *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente*, ed. Günter Agde (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 115-6.

³⁴⁸ Haucke, “Die Träume,” 111-121.

television program. The television weekend began on Saturday evening, since most viewers worked six days a week until 1965.³⁴⁹ Thus the DFF broadcast extravagant variety entertainment shows with live audiences after 8 p.m. on Saturdays. More sedate theatrical productions (DFF productions or direct transmission from Berlin theatres) appeared on Sunday evening.³⁵⁰ The DFF remained off-air on Monday evenings until the late 1950s, to avoid conflicting with Party and union meetings and events. For the DFF, Monday traditionally had been a “day of theoretical work,” when workers from all departments of the service would experiment with new and existing technology, and compare notes on past successes and failures – in other words, when they would practice making television. In 1955, the DFF introduced programming on Mondays 1:30-3:30.³⁵¹ Then in 1958, the DFF introduced prime time programming to Monday evenings: they broadcast “women’s programming,” followed by repeats of old films, such as *Der blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel), *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girls in Uniform), and *Battleship Potemkin*.³⁵² Media historian Peter Hoff suggested that the reason for this was that Party events were attended primarily by men;³⁵³ such scheduling could only have reinforced that perception, further marginalizing the political participation of women in the GDR. Not only is it clear that DFF programmers did not expect women to attend such events, but “their” programming also was scheduled for an evening “unimportant” enough that it became identified with the broadcast of repeat programming.

³⁴⁹ Hans Müncheberg cited by Hoff in Hickthier, *Geschichte*, 193.

³⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm” [1958] Graph accompanying. Müncheberg cited by Hoff in Hickthier, *Geschichte*, 193.

³⁵¹ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 92.

³⁵² SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, “Für ein interessantes massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm” [1958] Graph accompanying. Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 120.

Programmers also constructed the program with more didactic factors in mind. For example, the DFF broadcast the political propaganda program *Schwarzer Kanal* (The Black Channel) in the late evening, because it was more interested in reaching West German than East German viewers.³⁵⁴ During the week the greatest concentration of political programming, including *Schwarzer Kanal*, appeared on Wednesday evenings. Often followed by (or sandwiched between) game shows or popular music programs, these shows were both well-liked television genres in the GDR that could draw viewers to the more explicitly political shows. Furthermore, the DFF had begun to introduce recurring programming. But it broadcast such programs irregularly, on different nights of the week or almost a month apart, for example. Heinz Adameck, head of the DFF was somewhat suspicious of regular programming and the serial form in particular, fearing that regularly scheduled programming would discourage people from going to party rallies, union meetings or from engaging in other “important social tasks.”³⁵⁵

A few programs were broadcast as regularly as almost every evening. One such program was the news show *Aktuelle Kamera*. When first introduced in 1952, it was quite simplistic: broadcast irregularly, each “show” was about ten minutes in length and consisted of still pictures with voiceover commentary. By 1955, *Aktuelle Kamera* appeared four times a week, on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, for ten to

³⁵³ Peter Hoff, “Projekt eines Fernsehstudios,” Paragraph 16.

³⁵⁴ A letter from a school principal asserted that Schwarze Kanal was popular with children (ostensibly from re-broadcasts at mid-day for shift workers) and requested that it be broadcast earlier in the evening. The DFF response allowed that Schwarzer Kanal was popular in the East, but meant for the West. DRA Sammlung Zeitgeist (1958-60), Box 2 Section 8.

³⁵⁵ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 293.

fifteen minutes at a time.³⁵⁶ By 1958, *Aktuelle Kamera* expanded to about twenty minutes long and appeared six nights a week at eight o'clock. Then, in 1960, the DFF moved *Aktuelle Kamera* to seven-thirty and introduced a second, late, edition at ten o'clock.³⁵⁷ Moving pictures first appeared on the show in November 1954, when the DFF began broadcasting film segments with voiceover commentary. With the introduction of film, *Aktuelle Kamera* began to look very much like the *Augenzeuge* (eyewitness) newsreels projected in East German theatres before a feature film. This format survived into the early 1960s, when it was gradually supplanted by a more familiar format: increasingly, news anchor Klaus Feldmann read the news while seated behind a desk. Still pictures situating the story geographically (pictures of New York or London, for example) or thematically (images of newspaper headlines) appeared behind Feldmann. Despite this shift, the program still used filmed material extensively. Some segments simply broadcast excerpts of the People's Chamber, Walter Ulbricht's speeches, or speakers at party events such as the Youth Congress, while other filmed material continued to reproduce the style of newsreels.³⁵⁸

Another regularly scheduled show was the children's bedtime program *Unser Sandmännchen* (Our little Sandman), introduced to the airwaves on 8 October 1958. One of the most popular and well-loved characters on East German television, the Sandman arrived just before seven p.m. Monday through Saturday to offer his goodnight wishes to

³⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Beschlussvorlage Nr. 3/55" 18.3.1955, pg. 1. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, SKF, "Zur Beschlussvorlage Nr. 3/55" pg. 1.

³⁵⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DR 6 280, SRK, "Für ein interessantes massenwirksames Fernsehprogramm" [1958] Graph accompanying.

³⁵⁸ See for example Ulbricht's appearance at the Jugendkongress Leipzig, and especially the anti-Radio Luxembourg comments of one East German youth. DRA, "Aktuelle Kamera," OVC 1542 [date].

German children.³⁵⁹ The animated Sandman whisked children away on exotic adventures, before sending them off to bed with a puff of sand. Along the way he performed fantastic feats, met other fairy tale figures and traveled to the moon. But he was just as comfortable in a more familiar environment: driving heavy machinery, spending time at camp and playing sports with young East German figures, or flying over the Spreeinsel (central East Berlin), giving kids a birds-eye view of the newly built showcase of East German society and government.³⁶⁰

The Sandman and the nightly news appeared at the same time and in the same place almost daily in the program and could draw viewers to the other evening programming, which changed daily. In the early evening, between *Unser Sandmännchen* and the *Aktuelle Kamera*, the television service transmitted short thematic programming, geared towards specific audiences. Monday evenings it broadcast “women’s programming” for example, while Thursdays catered to the youth audience. After the Fifth Party Congress of 1958, propaganda programming – shows that dealt with questions of “political economy of the period of transition... the peoples’ democratic order, [or] the dialectical-materialist world view and the socialist cultural revolution” became an important component of the early evening program. The DFF continued with *Pro und Contra* (For and Against), which sought to bring dialectical-materialism to youths, while other programs demonstrated the transformation of a rural community into a socialist

³⁵⁹ It was popular also with West German kids and one of two East German shows to survive the Wende – if not completely intact.

³⁶⁰ For images of *Unser Sandmännchen* please visit the Sandman’s website: http://www.orb.de/~sandmann/fuererwachsene/index_jsp.html.

village, or sought to propagate atheism.³⁶¹ Programmers scheduled more elaborate shows, such as feature-length television films, DEFA productions or direct transmission of theatrical productions for the prime time slot between eight and ten o'clock.

PROGRAMMING AND THE COLD WAR

One of the cornerstones of the television schedule after 1958 was programming the DFF described as “aktuell-politisch” (topical political, or political current affairs programming.) For DFF programmers, *Aktuelle Kamera* was the most important of this type of programming; viewers, on the other hand, often preferred other shows such as *Telestudio West* (Tele-studio West), *Treffpunkt Berlin* (Rendezvous Berlin) and the more infamous *Schwarzer Kanal*. The format of each of these shows differed, but the central theme remained the same: examination of the “German Question” and reportage from the Cold War. Yet over the course of the 1950s, the position taken on these issues shifted according to the priorities of the state. During the first two years of *Aktuelle Kamera*, for example, reports on (and from) the Federal Republic and especially West Berlin comprised a significant share of each episode. By 1955, West Germany had begun to fade into the background, replaced by reports from the “People’s Democracies” of Eastern Europe, segments on the broader subject of international peace and topics from other, more popular, program areas such as sport.³⁶² During the period of the second

³⁶¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 11, SKF, “Beschlúßvorlage Nr. 32/58: Politischer Sendeplan bis zum V. Parteitag” 25 April 1958, pg. 2-3. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 10, SKF, “Protokoll Nr. 4/58” 13 February 1958, pg. 1.

³⁶² A report from the DFF Chefredaktion estimated that by 1955 the number of reports devoted to West German and West Berlin had fallen to eight percent; of that, 3% of the reports now focused on the “activities of the working class” in West Germany. By contrast, 37% of reports examined “questions of the development of the GDR” and reportage concerning the people’s Democracies had risen from two to ten

Berlin crisis (1958-1962), the news heavily favoured reports of interaction between the four powers, evidence of West German militarism, and the revelation of former Nazis in West German leadership positions, as well as the accomplishments of the socialist countries.³⁶³ By this time, the SED had begun to pressure the Soviet Union for a peace settlement that would solve the German question, preferably in favour of the GDR. These shifts in DFF programming, from pan-German issues to reports that emphasized the development of the GDR as a separate state with important relationships in the Eastern bloc, reflected the shifting priorities of the SED.

The Second Berlin Crisis

The first Berlin crisis of 1947-8 had resulted in 1949 in the establishment of two separate German states. Yet this alone did not rule out the possibility of German reunification. Indeed, over the course of the 1950s the diplomats, politicians and Germans on both sides held out hope for the ‘one Germany’ solution. At the same time, however, the ideological and territorial boundaries of East and West Germany were becoming more clearly drawn. The integration of West Germany into the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 and continuing debates about West German rearmament led to increased tension between the two states. In 1952, for example, the failure of the “Stalin note” – a plan proposed by the Soviet Union under which East and West Germany would be reunified as a neutral state in the middle of Europe – and Western European plans to integrate the West German state into the European Defense Community further

percent of AK reports. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 3, “Zur Beschlussvorlage Nr. 9/55: Aktuelle Kamera” 30 March 1955, pg. 1.

reinforced the division of Germany. The achievement of some sense of détente between the Americans and British on the one hand, and the Soviets on the other, at the Geneva Conference of 1955 was not matched by détente between the German states.³⁶⁴

Khrushchev's articulation of the "Two-State Theory" after that conference and the new condition of the primacy of socialism in any reunified state made German reunification even more difficult.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, passage of a law allowing West German rearmament in 1955 set the two states more aggressively against one another. Soviet and East German authorities alike feared the possibility of nuclear armament of the West German military.³⁶⁶

In 1958 Berlin became a central focus of the Cold War once again. On 27 November 1958, Nikita Khrushchev sent a diplomatic note to the Western occupation powers. The "Berlin Ultimatum" called for the removal of occupation forces from Berlin and the creation of a neutral "free city" in West Berlin. Khrushchev set a deadline of six months, after which, if their demands were not met, the Soviet Union would sign a separate peace with the GDR, recognizing East German sovereignty, and allowing state authorities to cut off allied access to West Berlin. The deadline came and went, but the

³⁶³ Soviet astronauts Titov and Gargarin enjoyed significant air time during during 1961 and after.

³⁶⁴ Weber, *Geschichte*, 177.

³⁶⁵ Weber, *Geschichte*, 177. J.K. Sowden, *The German Question, 1945-73* (London : Bradford University Press, 1975), 171. The Soviets two-state policy recognized that "two states had emerged during the postwar period, each with its own economic and social order," and asserted that it would be impossible to reunify them. After the Geneva Conference, the Soviet Union expanded the sovereignty of the GDR, disbanding the Soviet military administration and rescinding orders given by the Allied Control Council during the immediate postwar period. Sowden, *German Question*, 173.

³⁶⁶ Hope M. Harrison, "Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose': New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-61" *Cold War International History Project(CWIHP): Working Paper No. 5*. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, 1993), 6ff. Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-62)" *CWIHP: Working Paper No. 6* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, 1993), 7.

issue of a peace treaty governing the future of Germany led to a prolonged period of diplomatic wrangling that became one of the most important flashpoints of the Cold War, surpassing the Cuban Missile Crisis in its short- and long-term impact.³⁶⁷ Moreover, political scientist Hope Harrison has shown that as time passed the interests of the SED began to diverge from those of the Soviets and, by 1960, East German leaders had begun to act somewhat autonomously of Soviet policy and imperatives.³⁶⁸ By the time the crisis had passed, the SED had built the Berlin Wall and taken control of transportation corridors between the Federal Republic and West Berlin. Subsequently it was much more difficult for Germans to travel across Berlin, and many on both sides of the Wall had to give up jobs, apartments and even relationships with people on the other side.

The problem of the border had plagued GDR authorities long before the Berlin Crisis. Walter Ulbricht had warned even before the Fifth Party Congress of 1958 that, “it is necessary to carry out a great education campaign, that no citizen of the GDR allows himself to be induced to flee to West Germany. We must save all people from being exploited and degraded by West German big capital...”³⁶⁹ The language of this campaign focused less on the problem of people *fleeing* the Republic, casting the problem instead as a more criminal matter of the seduction and entrapment of otherwise loyal citizens of the GDR. Thus the state – and television narratives – mobilized the terms

³⁶⁷ Hope Harrison writes that although less-studied than the Cuban Missile Crisis, “...the Berlin Crisis lasted far longer than the Cuban Missile Crisis, witnessed the greatest post-World War II risk of direct US-Soviet hostilities, and had significant long-term effects on US-Soviet relations and on relations within the NATO alliance and the Warsaw Pact. Further, such observers as President Kennedy believed it may have been a key factor in the Soviet initiation of the Cuban Missile Crisis.” Hope M. Harrison, “Ulbricht and the Concrete Rose,” 5.

³⁶⁸ Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 139.

Abwerbung (enticement), *Menschenhandel* (People-Smuggling), and *Kopffäger* (head hunters) along with *Republikflucht*. Belonging to another category of “migrant” were the so-called *Grenzgänger* (border-crossers), who lived on one side of the border, yet traveled frequently to the other side. Border-crossing was legal, if discouraged by the SED.

By the summer of 1961, Ulbricht’s campaign to warn East Germans of the perils of Western exploitation had not yielded the anticipated results. True, *Republikflucht* had dropped after 1956, after reaching its second-highest point since the foundation of the Republic.³⁷⁰ But it began to rise again in 1960, in response to a variety of problems including economic crisis (particularly when it came to the supply of basic foodstuffs such as milk, butter and meat), discontent with collectivization, increasing centralization of political power (when Ulbricht abolished the office of the President upon the death of Wilhelm Pieck) and the ongoing Berlin Crisis.³⁷¹ In early July 1961, the Soviet Ambassador to the GDR Mikhail Pervukhin estimated that that perhaps 250,000 were crossing back and forth across the border each day. This problem made the border seem particularly porous since “the GDR police carry out selective checking of people crossing the sectoral border into West Berlin, but in practice cannot really arrest citizens illegally leaving the GDR.”³⁷² That month the SED implemented stricter policies dealing with border-crossing, such as registering *Grenzgänger*, demanding Western currency for rent

³⁶⁹ Christoph Klessmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1988), 320.

³⁷⁰ Only in 1953 did people leave the GDR in greater numbers (331 390). Between 1956 and 1960, the numbers of people leaving the Republic were as follows: 1956 – 279,189; 1957 – 261, 622; 1958 – 204,092; 1959 – 143,917; 1960 – 199,188. Weber, *Geschichte*, 220.

³⁷¹ Weber, *Geschichte*, 216-8.

payments and restricting consumption of desirable goods, such as cars, apartments and television sets to East Germans who actually lived in the GDR.³⁷³ This caused a spike in the number of *Grenzgänger* who left the GDR, which jumped sixfold by the end of July.³⁷⁴ Overall, in the first seven months of 1961 Germans left the GDR at a rate of almost one thousand per day.³⁷⁵ Against this backdrop the East German press had stepped-up the campaign against *Menschenhändler*, *Grenzgänger*, and *Republikflucht*.

If, during this crisis, *Aktuelle Kamera* sought to shift East Germans' focus away from German reunification towards the development of the GDR, some of the most popular current affairs shows continued to engage the German-German Cold War. The roundtable discussion program *Treffpunkt Berlin* invited prominent people from the GDR and the FRG, the United Kingdom, the USSR and even the United States to debate pan-German issues and was broadcast simultaneously on GDR radio.³⁷⁶ DFF head Heinz Adameck described the show as “a contribution to the peaceful reunification of Germany.”³⁷⁷ Audience research and viewer correspondence demonstrated that this programming was initially highly popular with East German audiences. Viewers liked the roundtable discussion format that allowed them to watch prominent politicians and commentators debating issues important to them. Some episodes even responded to viewers calls on the air – that is to say, a secretarial figure took viewer questions off-air,

³⁷² Harrison, *Driving the Soviets*, 184.

³⁷³ Weber, *Geschichte*, 219. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets*, 189.

³⁷⁴ Harrison, *Driving the Soviets*, 189.

³⁷⁵ Weber, *Geschichte*, 220. Between 1.1.1961-8.15.1961 it amounted to 159,730.

³⁷⁶ Indicated by SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 12, SKF, “Beschlussvorlage Nr. 40/58: Sendungen der Aktuellen Kamera und der Sportredaktion im Herbst- und Winterprogramm 1958/59,” 30 May 1958, pg. 2, which reminds the Kollegium that *Treffpunkt Berlin* is no longer simulcast.

³⁷⁷ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 104.

and then delivered them to the panel during the show. After the first show aired, WK from Leipzig wrote: “The show Treffpunkt Berlin should be continued; it’s great!” SN from Steinigtwolmsdorf declared: “if the show Treffpunkt remains as hitherto, then one really takes pleasure in it (sic).” Viewers particularly liked discussions on pan-German issues. One viewer wrote that “Treffpunkt Berlin is always interesting, when discussions slug it out between East and West.”³⁷⁸

Viewer comments preserved the character of the debate. “I never want to miss the show Treffpunkt Berlin,” wrote RS from Berlin Pankow. “I only recommend that [the moderator] let the guests speak more. It is more arresting for the viewer if one can correct an incorrect opinion, than when one always cuts the speaker off...”³⁷⁹ The tendency to control discussion became more pronounced over time. As early as July 1956, W.R. from Neupetershain wrote: “Treffpunkt Berlin was very good, that is to say when there were still real discussions. But discussions only come about when participants have different opinions. The last two were contrived. ... It’s too bad!”³⁸⁰ When it was introduced in 1956, it spoke to the issues that viewers held dear: in particular the future of Berlin and a (temporarily) divided Germany. As the border hardened though, so too did the propaganda campaign against the West and the ideology of the DFF’s topical current affairs programming. A product of its time, *Treffpunkt Berlin* became increasingly uncompromising, which the viewer from Neupetershain pointed out. As audiences declined, the DFF encouraged programmers in 1958 to publicize the topics

³⁷⁸ DRA, H074-0002-0003, “Analyse der Zuschauerpost im Monat Juli 1956,” 7 August 1956, pg. 6.

³⁷⁹ All quotes in this paragraph from DRA, H074-00-02-0003, “Analyse der Zuschauerpost Monat Mai 1956” Article d: Aktuelle Beiträge, 6 June 1956.

³⁸⁰ DRA, H074-0002-0003, “Analyse der Zuschauerpost im Monat Juli 1956,” 7 August 1956, pg. 3.

of discussion in advance, in order to attract more viewers. Yet with the construction of the Wall and the diverging social and political trajectories of the two German states after the Berlin Crisis, *Treffpunkt Berlin* lost its *raison d'être*. In 1964 the DFF announced plans to overhaul *Treffpunkt Berlin*, but, in the end, programmers abandoned the program, pulling it from the schedule in the mid-1960s.

During this period some shows were conceived explicitly – and even primarily – for West German consumption. An example of this was the “magazine” show *Telestudio West*, first introduced to the airwaves on 11 September 1957.³⁸¹ The series spoke explicitly to West German viewers, a conception that determined its subject matter, narrative style and even its late-night time slot – the DFF often broadcast it after most East Germans were already in bed. Each episode consisted primarily of filmed excerpts of news reports from the GDR and other socialist bloc countries or even feature films on pan-German themes from the East German film studio DEFA.³⁸² Increasingly, the show also rebroadcast excerpts from the West German evening news, re-narrated from the perspective of the GDR. This strategy was used to a much greater extent in *Schwarzer Kanal* (The Black Channel), for which political commentator Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler provided scathing commentary on the pictures televised by West German broadcasters.³⁸³ This “Cold War of the airwaves”— programming conceived for the other side – was by no means a one-way street, however; *Schwarzer Kanal* was a response to the West

³⁸¹ Heil, *Fernsehen der SBZ*, 106.

³⁸² See entry for *Telestudio West* in Anja Kreutz, Uta Löcher and Doris Rosenstein, *Von 'AHA' bis 'Visite': ein Lexikon der Magazinreihen im DDR-Fernsehen, 1952-1990/91* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1998).

³⁸³ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 283. Correspondence between viewers and the DFF indicated that *Schwarzer Kanal* was not initially intended for East German viewers. See note 22 above.

German *Rote Optik* (Red Spectacles), in which West broadcasters similarly “exposed” East German propaganda through re-broadcast of DFF programming narrated from the West German perspective.

Programs such as *Telestudio West* and *Schwarzer Kanal* were persistently and explicitly presentist and placed heavy emphasis on current events, so the important role of Cold War narratives should come as no surprise. But programs of all genres explicitly dealt with the developments of the Cold War and hoped to reach a pan-German audience while doing so. For example, the DFF conceived *Tele-BZ* to thematize current political events – especially West German themes – in the tradition of a political *Kabarett* (a sort of political variety show).³⁸⁴ Another component of the program that explicitly explored pan-German themes was the crime thriller *Blaulicht*. Television drama, and especially crime series such as *Blaulicht*, played an important role in the state’s representation of the Cold War. Crime thrillers were immensely popular and, though just as ideological, the genre could present social issues and a political agenda in a manner that was perhaps less threatening for viewers than more overt, politically-loaded, shows such as *Aktuelle Kamera* or *Schwarzer Kanal*.

BLAULICHT³⁸⁵

The television service introduced the series *Blaulicht* to the viewing public on 20 August 1959. It appeared irregularly, every month or two, though usually on a Thursday

³⁸⁴ See entry for *Tele-BZ* in Kreutz, Löcher and Rosenstein, *Magazinreihen im DDR-Fernsehen*.

³⁸⁵ “*Blaulicht*” or “Blue Light” is a reference to the flashing light on the roof of East German police cars.

night at 8 pm.³⁸⁶ In all, the DFF broadcast twenty-nine episodes before taking *Blaulicht* off the air in 1968.³⁸⁷ It was popular: each installment reached large audiences, often estimated to be fifty percent of the viewing public. The series' writer Günter Prodöhl previously had worked as a journalist covering court trials and used actual criminal cases as fodder for *Blaulicht* scripts. For some commentators, *Blaulicht* demonstrates that the DFF often simply copied West German programming, in this case, the crime thriller *Stahlnetz* (The Steel Net).³⁸⁸ Yet as I noted in Chapter 2, early television programs across the West looked relatively similar: simple programming such as variety shows, game shows and current affairs type programming, was followed by the introduction of more complicated programming such as live sporting events, dramatic crime thrillers, 'family dramas' and so on. Programmers borrowed formats, plots and characters from radio, even replicating whole programs for television. The crime thriller in particular was not an especially innovative form, in the GDR or the FRG. In 1958, for example, *Stahlnetz* went on the air, reproducing the American television show *Dragnet* for the West German audience. *Dragnet* had been popular with American audiences first as a radio show, then a television series. A short time later *Blaulicht* emerged on East German screens.

³⁸⁶ Andrea Guder, *Genosse Hauptmann auf Verbrecherjagd: der Krimi in Film und Fernsehen der DDR* (Bonn: ARcult Media, 2003), 81.

³⁸⁷ Andrea Guder has noted that one of the programs catalogued as an episode of *Blaulicht* – *Schüsse in Kabine 7* appears not to be part of the series. Guder, *Genosse Hauptmann*, 81.

³⁸⁸ See, for example, Jörg Lingenberg, "Der deutsche Fernsehfunk," in *Fernsehen in Deutschland: Gesellschaftspolitische Aufgaben und Wirkungen eines Mediums*, edited by Christian Longolius (Mainz: Hase u. Koehler, 1967), 40; Simone Barck, Christoph Classen and Thomas Heimann, "The Fettered Media: Controlling Public Debate," in Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience*, 221-222 and, more recently, during the panel discussion during the "Lange Nacht der Fernsehkrimis," Arsenal Berlin, 8 June 2002.

Such programs emerged because they were easy to produce, relatively popular and made good use of the televisual conditions of live action and intimate settings, thus it is unsurprising to see them emerge in the GDR as elsewhere.³⁸⁹ What is more important, is that in the 1960s, GDR television continued to rely on these formats. As we will see in Chapter five, both television and state authorities privileged mainstream formats over new, experimental forms that sought in part to undermine the power of bourgeois melodrama. Instead, the DFF harnessed the power of melodrama in a cultural compromise that allowed the persistence of a bourgeois mental world in a socialist German state.

During the Second Berlin Crisis though, *Blaulicht* emerged as an important and popular series that grappled with the German-German frontier. The series was preoccupied in particular with cross-border crime. In the period before the construction of the Berlin Wall, most plots focused on the liminal space between East and West Berlin. Tiring of this setting, Prodöhl put the show on hiatus in early 1961 and prepared to move the action of the show beyond the borders of Berlin.³⁹⁰ Despite the geographic shift, from Berlin to other cities of the GDR, the border and criminality arising from the German-German Cold War remained integral to the conception of the series.

³⁸⁹ Although the forms were similar, the content, or the world represented within those forms, was quite different. Programs defined people not by their family, neighbourhood or region, but by their occupation – encouraging them to identify with their class interests. Yet ultimately form matters when it comes to transforming values and mentalities: only when we no longer use older formulas or traditions to define our world can we begin to see it in a new way, and allow the transformation of consciousness to fully occur.

³⁹⁰ See, for example, articles collected in the press clippings collection of the DRA under the rubric “*Blaulicht*”: DRA Babelsberg, Sammlung Presseauschnitte, (*Blaulicht*), “‘*Blaulicht*’ wird unterbrochen: Gespräche bei Dreharbeiten,” *Der Morgen*, 26 February 1961; or “Krawalle in Schönefeld:

Blaulicht established the vital importance of the German border in the very first show, appropriately entitled “Tunnel on the Border.”³⁹¹ This episode dramatized the case of a jeweler who smuggled his wares, both stolen and legally obtained, out of the GDR to sell on the West German market. When discovered, the culprit attempted to flee the Republic by way of the defunct, but not yet obstructed, East-West subway tunnel under Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz. The depiction of economic crime, such as this jeweler’s attempt to smuggle goods out of the Republic for sale elsewhere, was a cornerstone of the series and established the interpretative framework within which crime could be understood to undermine the GDR.³⁹² Crimes against property were attacks on the Republic itself – as well as citizens loyal to it – who ultimately were the victims in every episode. In the episode “Antiquities” (November 1961) for example, the perpetrators are caught smuggling art out of the Republic in order to run up their value on the West German art market. Officer Timm visits the State Art Brokerage, where an East German art expert explains to Timm the “Western” method of inflating the price of artwork to make huge profits and instructs him as to how that trade damages the culture and economy of the GDR.³⁹³ Crimes against persons also played a role in the series including fraud and murder, but these crimes were also framed in terms of their ramifications for the Republic.

Pressekonferenz des Deutschen Fernsehfunks zur “Blaulicht”-Reihe,” *Neues Deutschland*, 27 February 1961.

³⁹¹ DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, “Tunnel an der Grenze,” DFF, 20 August 1959.

³⁹² See, for example, DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, “Butterhexe” (1960) or *Blaulicht* “Antiquitäten,” (1961).

³⁹³ The art expert explains to Timm: “You see, we buy up such pictures in order to sell them to capitalist countries abroad, to gain foreign currency for our economy.” See the ninth scene of the script for “Antiquities.”

The conception of the series established a clear framework within which viewers could understand the “true crimes” they were about to see. Only remnants of the first episode still exist, including the television script, which fails to include specific scenes that were committed to film. Yet we know from the script that at the beginning of the episode the director, Hans-Joachim Hildebrandt, appeared with the DFF advisor from the *Volkspolizei* (Peoples’ Police) and the actor Bruno Carstens (who played the officer Wernicke) to introduce viewers to the series. Hildebrandt described the development of *Blaulicht* as an “almost utopian undertaking”:

You see, in a country with a socialist social structure like the GDR, murder announcements, unlike the weather report, don’t belong to the daily repertory of the daily press. We know no Gangster nuisance, no corruption economy, no kidnapping, no drug trade and not even an armed bank robbery, which elsewhere almost belongs in the urban landscape [*wie er anderwärts nachgerade zum Strassenbild gehört*].³⁹⁴

All of these problems originated instead on the other side of the border; the series thus demonstrated the work of the *Volkspolizei* to protect GDR citizens from such pernicious influences. The conception of the show also drew clear contrasts between the *representation* of crime in East and West. For example, Hildebrandt explained the central role of the police advisor, who counseled the DFF on what policing was “really” like:

³⁹⁴ DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, “Tunnel an der Grenze,” DFF, 20 August 1959. The promotional material for this episode published in the television magazine *FF dabei* included this speech in slightly revised form, according to Guder, 82.

From him we know, for example, that members of the Peoples' Police don't get their pistols out of the drawer and cock them demonstratively when they go to arrest a perpetrator. He carries the weapon more likely with him, always ready for action, even if that doesn't suit the director of the crime thriller.³⁹⁵

This was a veiled barb at the West German crime program *Stahlnetz*. Viewers could easily distinguish episodes of *Stahlnetz* from those of *Blaulicht*, in part because *Stahlnetz* had inherited much more of the hyper-masculinity of the hardboiled crime thriller tradition.

Before 1961, the open border constituted a major source of criminal activity in *Blaulicht*. Crime most often originated in the Federal Republic and was “exported” to the GDR. The border also offered the opportunity of escape to criminals fleeing from the law on either side of the border. *Grenzgänger* (Border-Crossers) were common figures in SED propaganda and on DFF television, portrayed as people who took advantage of either the economy or the openness of the GDR. For example, some Berliners lived in the (cheaper) East, but worked in the (better remunerated) West. Some characters traveled East to buy cheaper goods, which they re-sold upon their return to the West. Criminals were sometimes *Rückkehrer* (returnees) – those who had left the GDR for the West, only to return later.³⁹⁶ More troubling were the so-called *Menschenhändler* (people-smugglers) who facilitated illegal emigration, or worse, kidnapped honest citizens into West Berlin. *Blaulicht* incorporated precisely these issues that most

³⁹⁵ DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, “Tunnel an der Grenze,” DFF, 20 August 1959.

³⁹⁶ Guder cites the example of *Schwarzes Benzin* (Black Gas or, as also connoted in German Bootleg Gas). Guder, *Genosse Hauptmann*, 87.

preoccupied GDR authorities during the Second Berlin Crisis and became integral to explanations of their solution – the construction of the Berlin Wall – in August 1961.³⁹⁷

The series' preoccupation with cross-border crime both entertained East Germans *and* served a pedagogical purpose by attempting to demonstrate that West Germans, and Western capitalist culture, were ultimately responsible for crime in the GDR. *Blaulicht* used dialogue, visual clues and plot structure to educate its viewers. For example, dialogue between East German characters lampooned Westerners who assumed the worst about the East German "police state." Rowdys, or *Halbstarken*, were clearly coded through their dress, reading habits and relationship to authority figures. Signs identifying rowdy youth were not simply embedded in the visual text, but emphasized through dialogue with peers and authority figures. In *Kippentütchen* (January 1960) a young man described to the police the kid they were looking for, making sure to point out that his jeans were real American jeans, not the East German variety: "Real American jeans! ...Original Texas. Made in the USA."³⁹⁸ The motives and moral fiber of adult characters were likewise encoded in the origin of the cigarettes they smoked: criminal characters smoked West or American, the police proudly smoked East cigarettes. Finally, Prodöhl wrote early episodes in such a way that viewers often knew the identity of the perpetrator from the beginning: thus messy plot twists could not divert the audience from the show's central (pedagogical) message. Audience research carried out in 1960 showed that this

³⁹⁷ For examples see the episodes "*Zweimal Gestorben*" (1959), "*Kippentütchen*" (1960), "*Ein gewisser Herr Hügi*" (1960), or "*Die Butterhexe*" (1960), DRA Babelsberg.

³⁹⁸ See the twenty-fifth scene of the script, page 68. In another exchange from the same episode, the fair and wise police captain, Wernicke (played by Bruno Carstens), scolds the youths for reading Western

narrative strategy failed to appeal to viewers because it detracted from the episode's level of suspense. In an effort to improve the series, the shows began to hide the identity of the perpetrator, as evidenced in the episode "Antiquities."³⁹⁹

Blaulicht could also help to legitimize the state for its audience, especially through the character development of representatives of the state. Each show focused on the police work of a trio of regular male actors, police captain Wernicke, and police lieutenants Thomas and Timm. A female forensics officer and the male public prosecutor also made appearances throughout the series. It comes as no surprise that the shows depicted these representatives of the state in a favourable light. In fact, one of the most favoured comic devices of the series was to put the police officials in situations in which their official identities were unknown; their foils' disrespectful or familiar attitudes quickly transformed when they realized they were speaking to none other than the Peoples' Police.⁴⁰⁰ Heinz Adameck, director of the television service, asserted in a letter to the leader of the Agitation Commission (and member of the SED Politburo) Albert Norden that the political value of the series lay in the popularity of the three actors: "In this way the creators of the *Blaulicht* series have been able to strengthen and reinforce the

criminal novellas that dramatize shoot-outs with police officers. DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, "Kippentütchen," DFF 14 January 1960.

³⁹⁹ DRA Babelsberg, H074-00-02/0004, "Auswertung zum Fragenkomplex Nr. 13," (Sendereihe *Blaulicht*), 26 September, 1960.

⁴⁰⁰ See for example the scene between Timm and the hotel concierge in "Antiquities" broadcast 12 November 1961. Timm can hardly get a word in edgewise when he is mistaken first for a doctor, then a British trade delegate, before he stuns the concierge with his police badge, who thereafter gives Timm his undivided attention. DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, "Antiquitäten," DFF, 12 November 1961.

trust of the people in the Peoples' Police.”⁴⁰¹ Audience research also suggested that viewers really did *like* these characters. A 1960 survey asked respondents whether the show should retain the characters of Wernicke, Thomas and Timm. One woman claimed that the characters were vital to the series: “(they) simply belong to *Blaulicht*.” A construction worker from Hoyerswerda reflected that the characters had become “like good, old friends.”⁴⁰² In order to achieve this kind of familiarity, the show capitalized in part on stock characters. Lt. Thomas was a tall, good-looking fellow, who could charm the ladies. Lt. Timm, on the other hand, was a shorter, more comical figure: he often lamented the legwork required for policing, but always came up with an odd and ingenious way of solving the case. Wernicke was the tough but fair, patriarchal figure, who kept the other two in line.

Twice Dead (*Zweimal Gestorben*)

The second episode of the series “Twice Dead” broadcast on 15 October 1959 is a good example of the kinds of themes and characters introduced by the series during the period of the Berlin Crisis. Familiar characters appear representing the state: Police officers Wernicke, Thomas and Timm, as well the State Prosecutor Siebert and the forensics officer Inge Martens. A large cast of additional characters, including the brothers Heinz and Peter Kosswig (played by one actor), Peter’s girlfriend Edith May and petty criminals Alfred Natke and Fiebach, also appear; the especially large cast is, in this

⁴⁰¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/2.028/92, Büro Albert Norden, “Begründung zur Auszeichnung mit dem Nationalpreis für das *Blaulicht*-Kollektiv,” 25 August 1962.

case, an indication of the convolution of the plot. The episode primarily dramatized murder, insurance fraud and *Republikflucht*, but this is intertwined with subplots about forged documents, smuggling, *Grenzgängertum* and American espionage.

The plot revolves around Peter Kosswig and his girlfriend Edith conspiring to kill his invalid brother Heinz, both to inherit his property in the GDR and to profit from a West German insurance policy. For some time, Peter has been leading a double life, posing as Heinz when living in West Berlin, while his brother is housebound in Rostock. After taking out an insurance policy in Heinz' name in West Berlin – payable to Edith, who poses as the imposter Heinz' fiancé – and preparing a funeral urn with fake ashes, Peter brings Heinz across the border. He sends the ashes to Rostock as proof of Heinz's death for the GDR authorities and claims the property; thereafter, Edith poisons Heinz. The conspirators dump the body in the remains of a bombed-out building in West Berlin that is scheduled for demolition the following morning. Edith tips off the West Berlin authorities to the body's location, but they arrive too late to recover Heinz's remains. Days later, Edith collects the insurance money, only to be murdered by the third co-conspirator Alfred Natke, who conveniently has denounced Peter to the East German Peoples' Police as the mastermind behind an operation to smuggle Meissen porcelain out of the GDR.

The episode begins by establishing the Kosswigs' relationship, as well as Peter's relationship with Alfred Natke. In a seemingly unrelated issue, the Volkspolizei are on the trail of a smuggling ring that hustles Meissen porcelain – which was both expensive

⁴⁰² DRA Babelsberg, H074-00-02/0004, "Auswertung zum Fragenkomplex Nr. 13," (Sendereihe Blaulicht), 26 September, 1960, pg. 4.

and understood as part of the East German cultural heritage and thus illegal to export – across the border into West Berlin. A shop owner foils an attempt to buy the porcelain under false pretences and wrestles the culprit “Fiebach” to the ground, allowing the police to arrest him. Under questioning, Fiebach eventually gives up his boss Natke and alludes to an elusive (American) figure by the name of Mister Joe. Two Rostockers appear at the office of the Volkspolizei with their own (again, unrelated) suspicions about Kosswig. With the help of one of them, Wernicke and Thomas are able to take Kosswig into custody quickly. Kosswig, secure in the knowledge that he is protected from undue interrogation, detention or incarceration (since he was a resident of West Berlin), has little to say until Timm discovers news of Edith’s murder (on West Berlin soil) in the newspaper. Told of her death, Kosswig realizes Natke’s betrayal and immediately tells everything he knows, insisting that the People’s Police make sure the West Berlin authorities prevent Natke from escaping to Canada on forged papers.

The plot of this episode was perhaps too complex to be a compelling piece of televisual storytelling. But it aptly demonstrates the centrality of the open border, and the importance and impact of cross-border crime. In the ninth scene, the first in which Volkspolizei appear in this episode, Prosecutor Siebert holds forth on the problems of border:

Siebert: You all know that what appears on this map as a harmless, black line, in a large city such as Berlin, passes through streets, sewers... even through houses. What did that old crook say recently... Comrade Wernicke?

Wernicke: He said, ‘I was born too late. These borders in Berlin are the most lucrative (seigniorage) creation of the twentieth century.’

Siebert: We don't share this opinion. But we constantly have to deal with people who do have such ideas. Now, I mean in particular the career criminal border-crossers, with residence and employment in West Berlin. ... The more criminological evidence we have against certain smuggling and spy rings, the better our chances become of getting to them. You know what I mean. Smugglers and Spies aren't understood as criminals by our colleagues in West Berlin. In cases of economic crime or espionage, we don't even [notify them over there.] ...⁴⁰³

The audience later discovers that Natke earlier had fled the Republic to avoid arrest for crimes committed in the GDR. He becomes a symbol of Western decadence, wearing flashier clothing than the other characters and meeting Peter for strategy sessions at a gambling hall in West Berlin. Indeed all three involved in the smuggling scheme profited repeatedly from the open border: they were all guilty of fleeing the republic (*republikflüchtig*), but they had no difficulty returning to the GDR at will. Peter had even smuggled his brother across the border.⁴⁰⁴

Yet the root of their crimes lay deeper than the culprits' own selfish interests. Fiebach testified, for example, that he (and, by implication, the others) had gotten caught up in an American crime syndicate while trying to enter the West. According to Fiebach, Natke had told him of a job involving porcelain smuggling. Fiebach decided to stay in the West:

Wernicke: As a refugee?

Fiebach: I wasn't yet recognized. The Mister...Mister, yeah, the Ami said I had to prove that I was for the West.

⁴⁰³ DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, "Zweimal Gestorben" 15 October, 1959.

⁴⁰⁴ In this case the authorities would refer to Heinz' crossing as people-smuggling, since he went against his will, preferring to remain in Rostock with his own doctors.

Wernicke: What did he demand of you?

Fiebach: Not him. He sent me to others. For them I had to go to Treptow every day and leave a letter....

Wernicke: And you also had to buy the porcelain for this man?⁴⁰⁵

The mysterious “Mister” compelled Fiebach and the others into a life of crime in return for recognition as refugees from the East – certainly not the warm welcome East Germans’ who might have been contemplating *Republikflucht* would have hoped to expect. It is perhaps in this regard that *Blaulicht* was able to wield ideological influence over its audience, despite the heavily ideological rhetoric expressed by some of the characters. Repeatedly *Blaulicht* put its characters in positions that were familiar to DFF viewers. In this case, Fiebach’s plight demonstrated the hidden dangers of allowing oneself to be seduced by the other side. We may find these situations and their resolutions implausible, but they carried a different weight during the uncertainty of the Berlin Crisis.

The Butter Witch (*Butterhexe*)

Broadcast on July 28, 1960, the eighth episode, entitled “The Butter Witch,” dealt with similar cross-border issues, but drew starker comparisons about crime and policing in East and West Berlin. In the episode, the eponymous culprit poses as a representative of the state social services department. After gaining her victims’ trust with promises of butter donations or coupons for coal, she robs several older women of their pension disbursements. She has stolen from hundreds of pensioners (all women) in the districts

of West Berlin, always using the same method, yet the police have no idea who the “butter witch” is, nor do they seem to care very much to find her. They ignore tips from witnesses, fight to shift jurisdiction over the case to other districts and, when one victim dies of a stress-related heart attack after her ordeal with the “butter witch,” decide that the police force is too busy with other things to pursue a case in which the victim and primary witness is dead. It is only when the “butter witch” starts to operate in East Berlin that any serious headway is made on the case.

The episode begins in a West Berlin garden community when the Witch (Lisa Wendler) approaches an older woman arriving home from the Social Services office. She wins her trust by giving her a pound of butter, but steals her wallet when the woman goes inside to put the kettle on for tea. According to the West press, this was victim number 370. In the next scene, Wernicke, Thomas, and Timm (newly promoted to Captain, Lieutenant and Sub-lieutenant) pore over a subsequent newspaper in which the total has come to 380; despite this, there are no leads and not even a reasonable sketch of the perpetrator. For the pensioner community, Wendler has become a phantom figure, hardly real. The VP decides to keep an eye on the case, and begin mobilizing all means possible to warn pensioners of the scam. After Wendler swindles a woman at an isolated cemetery in East Berlin, the trio dive headlong into the case, following a trail of paper evidence – old case files sent over from West Berlin, a mass transit pass used by Wendler, and the forged coal coupons, which are linked to an old ration card from 1955. They quickly establish a profile of the woman, trail her and catch her red-handed.

⁴⁰⁵ DRA Babelsberg, *Blaulicht*, “Zweimal Gestorben,” 15 October, 1959.

This episode, as was the case in most of the early episodes of *Blaulicht*, was a strong indictment of the conditions created both by the war and lack of a resolution to the question of the status of Berlin. Just as in “Twice Dead,” a case of fratricide, the dissolution of family ties came into stark relief in this episode. Lisa Wendler, “the butter witch,” had little control over or, seemingly, love lost for her wayward son. She bribed him to spend the night away from home, so that she could entertain her hoodlum boyfriend. The West Berlin police, acting on a bad tip they leave uninvestigated, arrest the wrong woman; her husband, a respectable businessman, hastily plans to divorce her before news of her arrest is released to the public, thus sparing himself the public shame. Moreover, communal ties and basic civility had been affected. Wendler preyed on the weakest in society, women over the age of 75 and went so far as to seek victims at a cemetery.

Blaulicht’s answer to these desperate conditions was to encourage the cooperation of citizens. Thus *Blaulicht* encouraged viewers to identify, not necessarily with the representatives of the state such as Wernicke or Timm, but with the cast of supporting characters who represented ordinary East Germans. In the Kosswig case, an ordinary citizen from Rostock approached the police with his own suspicions of shady, if not overtly criminal, behaviour. The shop employees were able to identify suspicious activity and intervened to prevent crime from occurring. In “The Butter Witch,” the People’s Police were able to mobilize a substantial number of ordinary East German citizens to prevent crime. By contrast, West Berliners who went to the police with concerns or information about the “butter witch” were ignored, or worse, did so only to collect rewards for the information. This strategy of encouraging viewers to empathize

and even relate to those characters and their situations was not only important in terms of building a loyal audience for the series, but also performed an important ideological function. In this case, it encouraged people in the GDR to think of themselves as “East German” and to identify people-smuggling as a legitimate problem and border-crossing as a crime. *Blaulicht* dramatized the issues of the Berlin Crisis, made them relevant, and offered East Germans ways of understanding the motivations and the impact of such crime long before such damning language became central to *Aktuelle Kamera*. The narrative strategies of so-called “entertainment” television gave ordinary East Germans a visual and narrative context within which to understand the subsequent political pronouncements of the Party and the State.

AKTUELLE KAMERA, SUMMER 1961

In early July 1961, the DFF leadership informed its members of new guidelines governing summer and fall programming. The driving force behind the new guidelines was the current political situation, that is, ongoing discussions about the status of Berlin as well as the upcoming elections to be held in September. The Television Council directed *Aktuelle Kamera*, “as the most important political show of the DFF,” to focus as often as possible in both the prime time and late editions on topics such as the negative achievements of West Germany, including a massive agricultural debt, high rates of women dying during childbirth, and a rising wave of youth crime. Similarly, the show broadcast the satirical segment “We have Adenauer to thank for that,” as well as “the most asinine lie of the week,” and stories on human-trafficking and border crossers. In particular, the news was instructed to demonstrate the role of West German militarism in

stirring up “war hysteria.” By contrast, reports should show the efforts of the East German working classes towards the success of the nation and the preservation of peace. *Aktuelle Kamera* was to propagate the peace plans of the Soviet and East German authorities and prove that “all peace-loving men will win through the implementation of our suggestions.”⁴⁰⁶

Even a cursory examination of reportage at the end of June and the beginning of August reveals a shift in tone. On 28 and 29 June, for example, reportage focused on international peace talks (including separate statements on the issue of West Berlin from British Prime Minister Macmillan and American president John F. Kennedy), international worker unrest (in France and England), and domestic issues such as the wheat harvest and meetings between Walter Ulbricht and GDR workers. *Aktuelle Kamera* also reported the ongoing detention of GDR citizens in the Federal Republic and denied “rumours” of a crisis of supply in the GDR, refuting an article in the West German newspaper *Bildzeitung* entitled “The Zone starves,” using pictures of East German markets stocked with cauliflower, tomatoes and at least thirty kinds of cake.⁴⁰⁷ By 2 August the tone had become much more strident: *Aktuelle Kamera* refocused on West German authorities’ revanchism and ties to Nazism contrasted with the strength of the socialist world, while “human-trafficking” and border-crossing crimes took centre stage. *Aktuelle Kamera* reported extensively, for example, on the five-day trial of Heinz Adamo and accomplices for human-trafficking, which began on 2 August 1961.

⁴⁰⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Plan der Arbeit des deutschen Fernsehfunks zu den Wahlen,” [6 July 1961], pg 1-2.

Penalties imposed on the defendants in the Adamo case ranged from two to fifteen years' jail time, court costs and loss of property in the form of two cars. A witness for the prosecution indicted a number of Western agencies in the scheme to smuggle people westward, including the American and British intelligence services, the West Berlin "political police," the East Bureau of the SPD, the Ministry of All-German Affairs, and RIAS (Radio in the American Sector.) During the report, a commentator identified as a West Berlin-based exporter and former investigator of the Marienfelde refugee camp in southwest Berlin discussed the process of people smuggling. He linked it to the West German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the West German Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*) and confirmed that smugglers targeted the intelligentsia in particular. Reports such as these fulfilled the Television Council's guidelines of 6 July to the letter. In the months leading up to the building of the Wall, the television service was already in the process of easing the way for the concrete and mortar division of the two German states. The kinds of issues raised in both "entertainment" programming and the nightly news provided a number of avenues that could be exploited by the SED as the Berlin Crisis reached its climax on August thirteenth.

"It was an entirely normal day..."

On 13 August 1961, Germans in East and West awoke to the news that the GDR authorities had closed most of the Berlin border to through-traffic. Throughout the night

⁴⁰⁷ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, "Die aktuelle Kamera," 29 June 1961, pg. 3.

East German soldiers had erected temporary barriers of barbed wire, which were soon to be replaced with less-permeable concrete pylons and, later, a full-fledged wall. That evening *Aktuelle Kamera* went on the air as usual at 7:30 for approximately twenty-four minutes. The news began with a recitation of the Council of Ministers decision (as it had been printed in the daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland*) that had led to the day's actions. The report expressed no criticism of the border blockade, reporting the events instead as something that had been looming on the horizon since the foundation of the Republic.⁴⁰⁸ At the top of the broadcast, the show transmitted images filmed at the border earlier in the day as well as street interviews eliciting opinions on the day's events from passersby. Thereafter, the announcer reported a variety of other news items, from the meeting between a Romanian delegation and Brezhnev in the Soviet Union, which resulted in a statement calling for the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany, to the visit of prominent Marxist Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah in Romania, to folk-dancing at a youth meeting in Arnstadt.⁴⁰⁹

The only remaining remnants of the *Aktuelle Kamera* reportage are some film fragments and transcripts of the broadcasts collected by the West German authorities as part of their ongoing project of recording East German broadcasts for their own use.⁴¹⁰ No documents remain that can illuminate the conditions of production for these installments of *Aktuelle Kamera*. We cannot know for example, whether the announcer's

⁴⁰⁸ See transcript: "Es war ein ganz normaler Tag... normal auch deswegen, weil sich etwas vollzog, was sich seit Gründung unserer Republik zu vollziehen pflegt...." DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, "Die aktuelle Kamera: Hauptausgabe," 13 August 1961.

⁴⁰⁹ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, "Die aktuelle Kamera: Hauptausgabe," 13 August 1961.

⁴¹⁰ Parts of some episodes are missing due to deterioration from mold or other conditions (13 August 1961 Hauptausgabe), while some episodes from August 1961 no longer have sound (eg 24 August 1961.)

claim that filmed excerpts of border crossings were taken earlier that day, or whether they were instead clips from earlier that year. In the same vein, we cannot determine the “truth” behind the street interviews with “passersby.” Were they individuals reciting a predetermined text, or genuinely concerned citizens? Even more important than these questions, though, is that these were the representational strategies of the television service at a moment of political crisis. Through its reportage the DFF tried to dispel the notion of a crisis, casting the border closure instead as a defensive measure that would strengthen the GDR state and its citizenry and weaken the power of the Federal Republic and West Berlin.

The regularly scheduled *Aktuelle Kamera* and the following special edition, as well as a third, late edition that evening emphasized the state of normality at the border. This message was expressed clearly and repeatedly by DFF announcers and through the use of filmed images taken at various border crossings. At the top of the regular edition, for example, the announcer set the framework within which the audience should interpret the images: “at all of the control points identified in the decisions, traffic proceeded today as on all days, as you can see in [these] pictures.” The film included images of checkpoints including the Brandenburg Gate, Sonnenallee, and Friedrichstrasse that suggested relative quiet on the streets of Berlin.⁴¹¹ Mixed in were other images that complicated the primary message, including pictures depicting traffic on inland waterways, the naval fleet, a zoo and a sporting event in Oberschöneweide. The primary images situated viewers on the front line of the Cold War – at the border in East Berlin.

Images of the naval fleet were representations of power that reinforced the primary message of state authority and strength. Yet the other images depicted sites that were perhaps less sensitive for the average viewer, focusing on leisure pursuits and the rhythms of everyday life. Moreover, *Aktuelle Kamera* reportage reinforced the impression of normality and stability by reminding viewers that other things were going on in the world. In the evening edition described above for example, *Aktuelle Kamera* took time to report not only on events in Berlin, but a state visit in Romania, Karl Liebknecht's birthday and tourism in Budapest, Hungary.

DFF reportage emphasizing normality and stability suggested the legitimacy of the action, an idea that the late edition expressed explicitly. Clips broadcast in the late evening took three approaches to the problem of the border: they examined the responses of authorities from the Federal Republic, the American state department, and ordinary Berliners. *Aktuelle Kamera* anchor Klaus Feldmann informed viewers of a conference convened "in feverish hurry" between Chancellor Adenauer, Secretary of State Hans Globke, and the Minister of All-German affairs, Ernst Lemmer. According to Feldmann, they had taken the decision to foment unrest in West Berlin. The overall impression left was one of impotent West German authorities, futilely trying to exert pressure on the GDR. The characterization of West German intent to encourage protests in the streets together with the evidence of existing relative calm suggested of course that any disturbances viewers might hear of were not protests undertaken by GDR citizens, but agents of the West in the GDR. The representation of West German rage and

⁴¹¹ We must keep in mind, however, that there were perhaps many who preferred not to venture out into the streets in uncertain times. At the same time, August 13 was a Sunday, and we should not expect to see

powerlessness contrasted sharply with *Aktuelle Kamera* reportage of the reaction of other Western leaders. American Secretary of State Dean Rusk lodged a formal complaint on behalf of the Western powers. Yet neither John F. Kennedy nor Charles de Gaulle had responded to the “crisis,” or even broken off their weekend vacation plans. Unlike authorities from the Federal Republic, other Western leaders appeared relaxed and unconcerned. Finally, Feldmann reported Berliners’ responses as uniformly supportive of the regime and *Aktuelle Kamera*’s reportage. A top story of the special edition, for example, could be summed up as “No more domestic servants from East Berlin.” Later in the broadcast this message was reinforced by a ‘man in the street’ interviewee, who asserted that the measures of 13 August would mean that the class enemy (West German managers) would no longer benefit from the labour of the GDR.⁴¹²

One of the most striking aspects of these first news reports on 13 August are the surprising similarities between the language of the news reportage and the language of the crime thriller as seen in episodes of *Blaulicht* since 1959. This is especially salient in the case of the street interviews conducted with passersby. One woman asserted:

...as a mother one lives lately in constant worry about one’s children. When one hears about human-traffickers and kidnappers, even the last example from Lichtenberg that was published in the press yesterday that, thank God, was unsuccessful, one also heard, [about] the children from Cottbus and the little girl from the Neustrelitz district, that the parents live in constant worry about their children and they are still so uncertain. And I find it so terribly mean and disgusting that one tries to kidnap children in order to induce the parents to flee

the kind of traffic one might see during the work-week.

⁴¹² DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, “Die aktuelle Kamera: Hauptausgabe,” 13 August 1961.

the Republic. Yeah, and that's why I welcome the measures of our government, which will finally bring forth normal circumstances in Berlin...⁴¹³

The rhetoric of criminality and smuggling was reinforced in interview clips with a soldier and Walter Ulbricht himself in the special edition of *Aktuelle Kamera*:

Ulbricht: Can we just let that happen, that people here loot and steal, like the West Berliner smugglers, etc.? The people work, and the others, they occupy themselves with speculation from West Berlin. That must come to an end.

Soldier: ... the entire public...is also really ready, to accept such measures like bad traffic [caused by the border closure – HG] ... but the basic principle is that finally this smuggling will come to an end.

East German reportage of the August 13 “crisis” played down the significance of the building of the wall. *Aktuelle Kamera* tapped into a vocabulary established long before in entertainment programming. The wall was built not to stem the tide of emigration, but rather to protect East Germans from the manipulations of criminals, human-traffickers, and the war-hungry West Germans.

CONCLUSION

The language of *Menschenhandel*, *Grenzgängertum* and other cross-border capers did not appear out of thin air on 13 August; it gradually emerged in news reportage throughout the Berlin crisis. Yet the stories reported in July and August of 1961 were more strident than earlier reports and comprised the framework within which the DFF explained the measures of 13 August. The narrative of these stories bore unmistakable

⁴¹³ Testimony of an unidentified woman broadcast on *Aktuelle Kamera*. DRA Babelsberg,

continuities with the narrative strategies of a series of East German television crime thrillers produced after 1958. In particular the focus on the investigation, prosecution and conviction of so-called *Menschenhändler*, on the *Grenzgänger* phenomenon, *Republikflucht* and other kinds of cross-border crime, all of which had been the major theme of the earlier crime thrillers, placed the crisis within a context already familiar to East German television audiences, ultimately reinforcing the state's justification of the Berlin Wall.

These issues were embedded in a wider vision that situated the GDR firmly in the camp of socialist superiority and against the corruption of the West. For example, DFF reportage followed the travels of Soviet cosmonauts Yuri Gagarin and German Titow, socialist heroes par excellence. Titow even visited the Wall on September 2, after returning from his August spaceflight and complimented state authorities on their efforts to strengthen socialism. Reportage depicted the Soviet Union as modern, industrial nation where “per-capita production would overtake that of the most powerful and rich country the USA.”⁴¹⁴ By contrast, stories about the Federal Republic focused on the revelation of war criminals in powerful positions of the government, militarism, corporate bankruptcies and massive layoffs,⁴¹⁵ and even health problems: on 4 August 1961 *Aktuelle Kamera* reported a ‘polio epidemic’ in the Federal Republic, implying a lack of basic social services.⁴¹⁶

Ostaufzeichnung, “Die aktuelle Kamera: Hauptausgabe,” 13 August 1961.

⁴¹⁴ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, “Die aktuelle Kamera,” 3 August 1961, article 5.

⁴¹⁵ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, “Die aktuelle Kamera: Sonderbericht – Menschenhändler vor Gericht,” 27 July 1961.

⁴¹⁶ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnung, “Die aktuelle Kamera,” 4 August 1961.

Popular (and in some cases scholarly) memory of the crisis of August 1961 has reduced the role of television to the notorious *Ochsenkopf* campaign, a symbol of state repression of television in East Germany.⁴¹⁷ I will discuss the function of this campaign in the next chapter. What this and the next chapter make clear, however, is that the real significance of television rested not in repression, but rather in its function as creator and disseminator of narratives that familiarized and normalized East German events such as the construction of the Berlin Wall.

⁴¹⁷ The *Ochsenkopf* campaign was a movement against the reception of western television signals in which youths scaled rooftops to turn television antennae eastward. Although it was a largely unsuccessful grass-roots effort of the state-sanctioned East German youth group (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, or FDJ), it is more often recalled as a symbol of state repression of television.

Chapter Five: From Repression to Representation

INTRODUCTION

In August 1961, just days before the construction of the Berlin Wall, the department of television drama of the DFF filmed the final scene of a new mini-series, *Revolt of the Conscience* (*Gewissen in Aufruhr*). Hans Oliva wrote the script based on a widely read memoir of the same name by Rudolf Petershagen, published first in 1956.⁴¹⁸ In five parts, the story followed the life of the Nazi officer Petershagen (Ebershagen in the series). The series begins with the battle of Stalingrad, which he barely survived, and proceeds through his decision to surrender the city of Greifswald in the spring of 1945 to the Red Army without a fight. His eventual return from postwar captivity to become a champion of German unity is followed by his subsequent arrest and ‘show trial’ at the hands of American intelligence officers, and, finally, his ideological conversion and decision to settle in the GDR.⁴¹⁹ The series aired in September 1961, one month after the construction of the Berlin Wall. It featured a large cast, including Bruno Carstens and Alexander Papendieck, familiar to television audiences from their roles in the crime thriller *Blaulich*. That may have helped to account for its wide popularity among East

⁴¹⁸ Rudolf Petershagen, *Gewissen in Aufruhr* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1956). The Verlag der Nation printed eight editions of the book before the premiere of the television series; it was released three more times in the 1960s and again in 1976 and 1983. B. Thurm “Die Massenresonanz von ‘Gewissen in Aufruhr’” in *Film- und Fernsehkunst der DDR: Traditionen, Beispiele, Tendenzen*, ed., Käthe Rülicke-Weiler (Berlin: Henschel-Verlag Kunst u. Gesellschaft, 1979) pg. 197. Also in Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 166.

⁴¹⁹ Peter Hoff, “Gewissen in Aufruhr: Kriegerlebnis und Kriegsdeutung im Fernsehen der DDR der fünfziger Jahre” in *Schuld und Sühne? : Kriegerlebnis und Kriegsdeutung in deutschen Medien der Nachkriegszeit (1945-1961)* ed., Ursula Heukenkamp, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik*, Bd. 50 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 787-788. Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 294 and B. Thurm, “Gewissen in Aufruhr,” 197-199.

German audiences. It also found acclaim among state authorities in the department of Agitation and Propaganda and the Politburo, and became the standard by which the value of other television programs was measured.⁴²⁰

Despite this evident approval, it had taken the author and dramaturge Wenzel Renner some time to find a home for the project. The East German film studio DEFA rejected the script. It was impossible for filmmakers to imagine shooting a story in which the hero was a (former) Nazi officer, when a similar narrative strategy had led to fierce discussions several years earlier with the release of DEFA's *The Devil's General*. The story also presented a situation in which viewers could identify with military insubordination – Ebershagen disregarded the Führer's order to defend German territory to the death – in an era in which GDR authorities were trying to build the National People's Army.⁴²¹ By contrast, the material interested television producers, who felt that it could appeal to the pan-German audience and had the relative freedom to make the decision to adopt such a screenplay. While in production, the series caught the attention of the SED's Agitation Commission. The DFF delayed the premiere, previously set for early spring, as they awaited the verdict. The Commission found nothing objectionable, and the series finally aired that September. Its broadcast became an event unmatched by any previous television program. *Revolt of the Conscience* even appeared in the cinema, despite DEFA's early fears: the DFF released a two-part version in movie theatres, in order to reach viewers who did not yet have access to a television set.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ It was also released in several countries in the Eastern bloc, in Cuba and even in Sweden and Austria. B. Thurm, "Gewissen in Aufruhr," 198.

⁴²¹ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 294. Also, in part, in Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 166.

⁴²² Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 294.

The making and ultimate success of *Revolt of the Conscience* is significant because it represented a watershed in the shifting political status of the television service in the GDR. By 1958 the SED had recognized that television was a “new and meaningful political-cultural factor” in the GDR and had begun to more deliberately incorporate it into the late 1950s campaign to “construct socialism.”⁴²³ Yet the steady development of the medium in the 1950s had done little to prove its ideological power in a palpable way. *Revolt of the Conscience*’s striking success made apparent in dramatic fashion that television could both reach and rally the masses. Over the course of the early 1960s, television became central to a renewed effort in the aftermath of 13 August to demonstrate the superiority of socialism over Western capitalism and cultivate a new, socialist consciousness among East Germans. In short, television became a key medium in the creation of a new socialist culture.

The SED had first delineated the contours of this culture in the late 1950s. At a cultural conference in October 1957 delegates renewed their call against “decadence” and the “uncritical attitude towards western culture,” and called for a “socialist German culture.”⁴²⁴ At the Fifth party Congress in 1958 Walter Ulbricht presented his “Ten Commandments,” including the directive that GDR citizens should work together to create socialism in the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect, and raise their children in the spirit of peace and socialism to be well-rounded, principled and physically-tough people.⁴²⁵ The Bitterfeld Conference held in 1959 encouraged the development of a new

⁴²³ Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, *Bericht des Zentralkomitees an den V. Parteitag*, 126.

⁴²⁴ Weber, *Geschichte*, 211.

⁴²⁵ Ulbricht’s *Zehn Gebote* are cited in Ulrich Mählert, *Kleine Geschichte der DDR* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 88-89.

socialist culture from the grass roots by bringing art and culture closer to the people.

This was both a literal and a figurative mandate: lay artists were to take up the pen, or in the case of the DFF, the camera. On the other hand, artists were to begin creating art that was reflective of “everyday life” and accessible to the average person.⁴²⁶ Inherent to this task was a rejection of the “formalism” and aesthetic experimentation of modern art in favour of the naturalist representation of socialist realism. The ambitious campaign introduced by the Bitterfeld conference sought to fundamentally alter social relationships by transforming citizens’ consciousness.

In the early 1960s, television became integral to the campaign. With *Revolt of the Conscience*, television’s advantages became clear: it could reach more people, more quickly than any other medium in the Republic. In fulfilling the mandate to bring art to the people and, more important, involve them in the construction of a new socialist culture, journalism remained important, especially in the new series *Prisma*. But the DFF was most successful on the level of entertainment, as is best exemplified by the variety show *With Open Hearts* (*Mit dem Herzen dabei*.) Yet when it came to television drama, engagement with life under socialism proved too problematic. In 1962, two shorter films that grappled with the contradictions of GDR socialism unleashed a firestorm of criticism and months of discussion across the DFF. The issue was never fully overcome until the broadcast of the mini-series *Dr. Schlüter* in 1965. This film, with a remarkably similar narrative to *Revolt of the Conscience*, made television a role model for other GDR media. Yet, by the time of the 11th Plenum of 1965, where Honecker and Ulbricht excoriated

⁴²⁶ Weber, *Geschichte*, 211. The SED had an ideal vision of what “everyday life” should look like; this did not include representations of the shortcomings of life in the GDR, as we will see in a moment.

GDR cultural institutions, television escaped relatively unscathed. Between the building of the Wall in 1961 and the 11th Plenum, television had transformed from an unreliable mass medium to a central aspect of political agitation.

Yet if television had become a reliable weapon of political agitation, it did so in the context of a campaign that had turned away from the Party's original goals. The utopian impulse of the Bitterfeld Path of the 1950s had sought to encourage the active participation of all East Germans in a new, vibrant and specifically socialist culture. But the campaign to transform the values and mentalities of Germans living in the GDR itself transformed after the construction of the Wall. Having isolated East Germans from their West German neighbours, the transformative idealism of the early years no longer seemed so important. After the Wall, the desire to promote ideological idealism relented, and vague notions of "socialism on German soil" gave way to the cultivation of a strong sense of political partisanship and national patriotism. Developments in television programming reflected this trend: the SED leadership unilaterally rejected television programming that sought to truly engage with socialist life in the tradition of the Bitterfeld Path. Instead, they acclaimed historical epics that entrenched the antifascist legacy of the 1940s and early 1950s, such as *Gewissen in Aufruhr* and *Dr. Schlüter*, while remaining disengaged with contemporary lives of East German socialists. Television, then, helped to bring forth a new, socialist culture, but one that no one had expected.

AFTER THE WALL: THE CONSEQUENCES OF 13 AUGUST

The crisis that led to the construction of the Berlin Wall did not come to an end on the thirteenth or fourteenth August. For weeks afterward, Berliners found themselves

living in one of two armed, hostile camps. In his speech to the city council of Berlin on 13 August, Willy Brandt referred to the provisional Wall as a “concentration camp” built by a “clique that calls itself a government.”⁴²⁷ GDR media and its preeminent propagandist Karl Eduard von Schnitzler characterized the Wall as an “anti-fascist protection barrier” and launched an acrimonious campaign against the Federal Republic and its leaders.⁴²⁸ In October, the Western powers came as close to armed conflict as they had yet been, when Soviet and American tanks faced off on either side of the infamous border-crossing between the Soviet and American zones, Checkpoint Charlie.

Yet GDR authorities felt they were in a position of renewed strength with regard to the West, a belief that also led to a shift in their relationship to their own citizens. The initial international diplomatic uproar over the Wall quickly faded, but 13 August marked the beginning of a battle against dissent in the Republic.⁴²⁹ In particular, the drive to identify and root out boarder-crossers (*Grenzgänger*) had not only continued but gathered strength since 13 August. In late August, *Aktuelle Kamera* reported the ongoing registration of former border-crossers:

Yesterday and today there were quite a few looking for honest work. Now those come too, who until now still believed in miracles and set all their hopes on [the American vice-president] Johnson’s visit with Adenauer in Berlin. They will all take up honest work that appeals to them and fits their capabilities in the numerous state- and privately-owned factories of our capital. The registration of

⁴²⁷ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “Erklärung des Regierenden Bürgermeisters von Berlin, Willy Brandt, auf einer Sondersitzung des Abgeordnetenhauses am 13. August 1961” [excerpts], http://www.bpb.de/themen/L55O78.0.0.Erkla%ung_des_Regierenden_B%FCrgermeisters_von_Berlin_Willy_Brandt_auf_einer_Sondersitzung_des_Abgeordnetenhauses_am_13_August_1961.html (accessed 20 April 2006).

⁴²⁸ Klessmann, *Zwei Staaten*, 322.

⁴²⁹ Weber, *Geschichte*, 223.

border-crossers must be completed by 26 August ... [by] those who have not yet registered or have tried to get around the laws of our state in other ways.⁴³⁰

This campaign expanded to include other enemies of the state including so-called slackers (*Bummelanten*). Those defined as “work-shy” could be detained by the State Prosecutor for evaluation and rehabilitation. State authorities had allies in pursuing people identified as slackers or dissenters. Loyal FDJ members purged their troops of those who openly criticized the Wall. Newspapers reported with approval malicious attacks on people for similar transgressions, at least one of whom had to be admitted to hospital. Some denounced their own coworkers for “insulting Comrade Walter Ulbricht” or calling for free elections.⁴³¹

Controlling the Airwaves: from Jamming Transmissions to “The Blitz against NATO-transmitters”

The television infrastructure became integral to this ideological battle. The Berlin Wall imposed a tangible barrier between the communist East and capitalist West, but one that did little to disrupt the transmission of ideas over the airwaves. Yet, by late 1961, media authorities sought to deepen the division by cutting off even this means of communication between East and West Germans. The DFF and Postal ministry pushed back their plans to introduce a second television channel, previously intended to directly address the West German audience. Albert Norden, head of the Politburo’s Agitation

⁴³⁰ DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnungen, “Die aktuelle Kamera,” [25. August 1961], pg. 3. The date on the transcript is 25. 9.1961, but this and other entries indicate that the show was actually broadcast in late August.

⁴³¹ Weber, *Geschichte*, 225-226.

commission, requested a report evaluating opportunities for further curtailing contact from the West, including the use of *Störsender* – transmitters that could jam television signals coming in from the West – and removing parts from existing receivers that allowed the reception of the West program.⁴³² In the subsequent report, technicians concluded that the *Störsender* had the greatest likelihood of success: it was the cheapest and potentially most effective option; moreover, it was least likely to elicit protest from – or even the attention of – the public.⁴³³ A cursory survey of public viewing facilities indicates that previous attempts to prevent viewers from changing the channel in the clubhouses of the National Front or factory break rooms, for example, persistently failed. In the end, plans to use technology to deny the West German program to people in the GDR remained largely unrealized due to the potential for provoking widespread unrest.⁴³⁴ The only real option for state authorities was to exert moral pressure on television audiences.

The moral campaign against Western broadcasting was embodied in the so-called *Aktion Ochsenkopf* or the Blitz against NATO Transmitters (*Blitz kontra NATO-Sender*), undertaken in the first week of September 1961. This campaign sought to create a mass movement of people mobilized against the West media. Activists made arguments that equated listening to and viewing West media with letting the enemy into one's own home:

⁴³² Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 284.

⁴³³ Peter Hoff, "Die Beziehungen zwischen den Fernsehinstitutionen der BRD und der DDR zwischen 1952 und 1989," in *Deutsche Verhältnisse: Beiträge zum Fernsehspiel in Ost und West*, edited by Knut Hickethier (Siegen: Universität Siegen, 1993), 45-46.

⁴³⁴ Hoff, "Die Beziehungen," 46. Barck, Classen and Heimann, "The Fettered Media," 223.

What do you do with a burglar, who sets your home on fire and after that still wants to abuse your brother? ... You wouldn't ever willingly open the door for these bandits, settle down with them over a glass of wine or cup of tea to a peaceful "briefing", knowing, as you do, their motives.... On 13 August we brought reason to the arsonists who wanted to transform our home into pile of ashes... Now that the front door is locked, they try to get in through the back door. Their lying transmitters and channels have increasingly taken over the task of further preparations for war among our people.⁴³⁵

The Department of Agitation coordinated publicity for the campaign, mobilizing every major media outlet, from newspapers to radio and television. District leaders of the national youth organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) received a set of "talking points" in preparation for upcoming discussions with local residents, as well as instructions to report back on the details of those discussions, especially regarding who had been in attendance, and the kinds of opinions that had been aired.⁴³⁶ FDJ members made the rounds of their communities talking to television viewers and distributing pamphlets against West television. In some places, leaders went into the schools and led discussions about West television and radio, agitating especially against listening to RIAS, and elicited pledges from schoolchildren to renounce West media. In extreme cases, youths scrambled across rooftops removing antennas or adjusting them to hinder reception of Western signals.⁴³⁷

Press releases from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda lauded the success of the intervention. They described the work of the youth brigade Steinach, which released a statement renouncing West broadcasting "because we know that the

⁴³⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, "Argumentation," 31 August 1961, pg. 1.

⁴³⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, "Plan für Durchführung der Aktion 'Blitz-contra-Nato-Sender' 5-9.9.1961" 31 August 1961.

class enemy wants to ideologically corrode the heart and brain through radio and television.” These youths’ antennae were, it was claimed, tuned to socialism.⁴³⁸ Elsewhere in the Republic several hundreds of antennae had been readjusted; television viewers who had proved incorrigible had their antennae forcibly removed. FDJ members in Gera distributed five thousand bumper stickers in support of the campaign with sayings such as “You’ll be smarter in a flash, if you try out our airwaves” (*Du wirst kluger auf der Stelle, versuchst Du es mit unserer Welle*) and “If you don’t want your soul to rust, turn your antennae to the east” (*Soll dein Geist nicht rosten, dreh Deine Antenne nach dem Osten*). In Frankfurt/Oder groups of FDJ youths sought out people known to listen to West shows and posted handbills on their front doors drawing attention to their habit. According to the press release, “these measures were met with great approval among the people.”⁴³⁹

But the campaign proceeded less fruitfully than press reports suggested. Reports of measurable successes at the very least were matched by incidents of lukewarm success and even complete failure. For example, some districts took the task more seriously than others. In some places, people enthusiastically participated in the campaign even if they understood neither the issue nor how to approach the public about it. Leaders complained that many participants never grasped the principal task of the campaign – to make clear through persuasive discussion the dangers of the West media to prevent “ideological border-crossing” – and instead approached it as the simple matter of

⁴³⁷ DY 24 512, FDJ, “Beispiele und Ergebnisse der Aktion “Blitz kontra NATO-Sender,” 6 September 1961.

⁴³⁸ DY 24 512, “Pressematerial zur Aktion ‘Blitz contra NATO Sender,’” 9 September 1961.

⁴³⁹ DY 24 512, “Pressematerial zur Aktion ‘Blitz contra NATO Sender,’” 9 September 1961, pg. 1-2.

repositioning antennae.⁴⁴⁰ In such cases, it should come as no surprise that most residents' returned their antennae to their original positions soon thereafter. Moreover, many of the youths *and* their mentors in the FDJ refused to take part in the *Aktion*, which both attacked their own leisure habits and violated their sense of ethics. In Neubrandenburg, for example, only 30% of the "troops" supported the campaign.⁴⁴¹ Some youths saw the campaign as an unnecessary attack on peoples' individual rights to property and privacy. FDJ members of the Freienwalde District asserted that, "we are not ready to help out in adjusting the antennae, because we can't change anything about private property." One youth from Halle asked: "How can I get to the antenna of someone who proves to be incorrigible? He could press charges against me. That is trespassing." Another young woman declared simply that, "whoever doesn't want to see or hear the West, won't turn it on."⁴⁴² Finally, radio, television and most newspapers, with the exception of *Junge Welt*, failed to report the campaign "adequately," if at all.⁴⁴³ In the end, the Department of Agitation concluded that the campaign had raised awareness and stimulated discussion against the reception of West media, but it had not unleashed the anticipated mass uprising against the threat of RIAS. Thus the campaign

⁴⁴⁰ As others have pointed out, including media historian Peter Hoff, simply turning antennae could not accomplish much some parts of the GDR where transmitters from East and West were very close and could be received no matter which direction the antenna was pointing. As we saw in Chapter 1, however, there were antennae that could receive only certain signals, many of them West and those would have been obvious to the naked eye.

⁴⁴¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, "Einschätzung über die Aktion "Blitz kontra NATO-Sender," 11 September 1961, pg. 4.

⁴⁴² SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, "Zusammenstellung von Argumenten und Meinungen zur Aktion 'Blitz kontra NATO-Sender,'" 6 September 1961, pg. 1-2.

⁴⁴³ DY 24 512 "Erste Einschätzung über den Verlauf der Aktion "Blitz-kontra-NATO-Sender" 7.9.61.

could only be seen as truly successful if it were understood as simply the beginning of a long-term operation.⁴⁴⁴

If the campaign itself proved relatively insignificant, it held substantial symbolic power. The public response to this campaign was so strong that today it resonates still.⁴⁴⁵ The Department of Agitation, which tried to keep tabs on the mood of the public, heard a number of arguments against the campaign. Some defended their television viewing “rights”: “That is limiting my personal rights,” or “You don’t have the right [to do this].” Others took positions that directly challenged the state: “Then make a law about it,” or “These are Nazi-methods.”⁴⁴⁶ Some criticized the East German “alternative,” claiming that, “GDR Television must be improved.” Still others appealed to reason, downplaying the threat identified by the state: “The broadcasters are not so dangerous. We just want to listen to music.”⁴⁴⁷ Or “one should be able to watch and listen to sports, music and entertainment,” and “one has to inform oneself from all sides.”⁴⁴⁸

DFF programmers respond to 13 August 1961

The events of 13 August caught the DFF by surprise. It was only in the weeks after the border closure that the various departments of the television service began to

⁴⁴⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, “Einschätzung über die Aktion ‘Blitz kontra NATO Sender’” 11 September 1961, pg. 4.

⁴⁴⁵ I had more than a few conversations with people who were quite reticent until they found out I was interested in television. Many had their own memories of *Aktion Ochsenkopf* to tell, all of which sounded quite familiar.

⁴⁴⁶ The report was compiled by the FDJ on 10 September and received by the Agitation Commission on 11 September 1961. SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, “Einschätzung über die Aktion ‘Blitz kontra NATO Sender’” 11 September 1961, pg. 3.

⁴⁴⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, “Zusammenstellung von Argumenten und Meinungen zur Aktion ‘Blitz kontra NATO Sender,’” 6 September 1961, pg. 2

produce revised schedules based on the new political situation. The new task of the DFF was to “deepen [the understanding of] the true power relationships, of the tangible [*empfindlich*] defeat of the German militarists,”⁴⁴⁹ and to emphasize the superiority of the GDR over the West.⁴⁵⁰ Thus the general themes of DFF programming demonstrate clear continuities with shows broadcast before the construction of the Berlin Wall, including renewed efforts to publicize the GDR’s peace plan and expose the Nazi pasts of powerful figures from the Federal Republic. But true to the aggressive campaign against dissent already underway, the tenor of programming changed. New, stronger language delineated the principles of a new program. Youth programmers noted this renewed strength, asserting for example:

...the impact of 13 August demonstrated the superiority of socialism, its power and strength to even the most backward youths. Youths, who previously doubted our strength, are beginning to reconsider, others seek further clarity, while most of the youths are following the call of the Central Council to protect and strengthen the socialist Fatherland.⁴⁵¹

They further noted:

The youths have plenty of questions... all of these questions... can and must be answered by youth television in a much more principled partisan, public and, most importantly, faster manner. Youth television’s principal task now consists

⁴⁴⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 24 512, FDJ, “Einschätzung über die Aktion ‘Blitz kontra NATO Sender’” 11 September 1961, pg. 3.

⁴⁴⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 51/61: Aufgaben der HA Dramatische Kunst nach dem 13. August 1961,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1

⁴⁵⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 48/61: Einige Konsequenzen für die Gestaltung des Unterhaltungsprogramms nach dem 13. August,” 6 September 1961.

⁴⁵¹ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 50/61: Massnahmen der Jugendredaktion, die sich für die weiteren Sendearbeit nach dem 13. August 1961 ergeben,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1.

of developing class-consciousness among the youth – without becoming in any way narrow and factious.⁴⁵²

Programmers mandated that youth programming should seek to address youths' concerns, which ranged from being cut off from the movies in West Berlin and the so-called *Schmöckerhefte* (pulp fiction, usually trashy crime novels), to questions about the military draft and whether or not they would be required to shoot their own relatives in the course of military service. The answers to these questions should seek to fight “ideological border-crossing” and develop class consciousness.⁴⁵³

These two, interrelated principles – preventing ideological border-crossing and inculcating class consciousness – became the cornerstone of the program. Programming finally moved away from the representation of pan-German themes⁴⁵⁴ (previously geared towards preparing Germans for reunification on the basis of socialism) and toward the creation of a new, specifically East German consciousness. The department of entertainment programming pledged to produce programming that among other things “developed a new *Heimatgefühl* (national pride, patriotism).”⁴⁵⁵ The department of television drama vowed to expose the “false ethos of general love of the Fatherland, togetherness, brotherhood and pacifism.”⁴⁵⁶ Television in the GDR began to turn

⁴⁵² SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 50/61: Massnahmen der Jugendredaktion, die sich für die weiteren Sendearbeit nach dem 13. August 1961 ergeben,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1.

⁴⁵³ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 50/61: Massnahmen der Jugendredaktion, die sich für die weiteren Sendearbeit nach dem 13. August 1961 ergeben,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1.

⁴⁵⁴ Also noted by Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 284.

⁴⁵⁵ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 48/61: Einige Konsequenzen für die Gestaltung des Unterhaltungsprogramms nach dem 13. August,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1.

⁴⁵⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 22, SKF, “Kollegiumsvorlage Nr. 51/61: Aufgaben der HA Dramatische Kunst nach dem 13. August 1961,” 6 September 1961, pg. 1-2.

inwards. The politics of demarcation and differentiation (*Abgrenzung und Verflechtung*) took over the airwaves, even before the explicit statement of that goal in the National Document of 1962 and, ultimately, in the new constitution of 1968.

Repercussions for Entertainment Programming

The repercussions of 13 August for the DFF amounted to more than just a sharpened ideological message. The service could not remain silent – and hardly did – about the events of the day and was under pressure to continue to provide programming in an uncertain political climate. The department of entertainment programming reacted quickly to events, putting together a special broadcast of more than two hours that incorporated “news, commentary, entertainment and film” transmitted that day. Later that week, it staged another elaborate entertainment program celebrating the construction of the Wall that was broadcast from multiple locations. At the *Berliner Volksbühne* (Berlin People’s Theatre, a symbol of the cultural heritage of the GDR), Heinz Quermann, the popular moderator of the variety show *The Laughing Bear*, interviewed construction workers who had helped build the Wall. Meanwhile, another well-known DFF personality Erika Radtke chatted with soldiers at the Brandenburg Gate, while perched on a tank of the National People’s Army.⁴⁵⁷ The department of television drama on the other hand, failed to adjust as quickly, hampered by its long production schedule. On the evening of the thirteenth, the DFF broadcast the department’s scheduled

⁴⁵⁷ Peter Hoff, “Von ‘da lacht der Bär’ über ‘Ein Kessel Bunes’ ins ‘Aus’: Politische Geshichte der DDR in Unterhaltungssendungen des DDR-Fernsehens,” in, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit: 40 Jahre DDR-Medien:*

programming from the comic opera in Moscow; later in the week they replaced scheduled dramatic programming with a filmed version of the television play *Flight from Hell* (*Flucht aus der Hölle*), first broadcast to critical praise in 1960.⁴⁵⁸

The spatial and political ramifications of the Wall jeopardized the program in other ways as well. Even as late as 1961, some DFF workers lived on the other side of the border in West Berlin. A prominent example was that of Gerhard Wollner, who portrayed one of the key personalities on the entertainment program *The Laughing Bear*. The longstanding program was one of the first shows transmitted from outside of the studio in the mid-fifties. First heard on the radio in 1954, it was simulcast on East German television after 1955. As a variety show, it featured artists from all over Europe and was moderated by the “three *Mikrophonisten*,” representing East Germany (Heinz Quermann), West Germany (Gustav Müller), and Berlin (Gerhard Wollner) respectively. Wollner, who lived in West Berlin and played the Berliner was replaced by Herbert Köfer after the building of the Wall. The original conception of the (radio) show from 1954 had been intimately tied to the political goals of the SED at the time: to work towards German reunification on the basis of (socialist) democracy.⁴⁵⁹ After August 1961, the entire thrust of the show fell afoul of shifting SED policy.

The loss of one of its most celebrated and well-liked characters was not the only difficulty the show faced in an atmosphere of greater political discipline and increased emphasis on partisanship that had become entrenched after the 14th Plenum of the SED in

eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Rundfunk-Museums, 25. August 1993 bis 31. Januar 1994, ed. Heide Riedel (Berlin: Vistas, 1994), 89.

⁴⁵⁸ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 165.

November 1961. By February 1962, for example, efforts were underway to discipline the humour of the moderators. One such incident involved the deletion of lines Quermann had written for a joke ostensibly on the subject of black ice. The joke is a play on the word *Streuung*. The primary meaning here is the spreading of salt on ice, but can refer to the spread of rumours and also means “deviation.” Quermann wrote:

Speaker 1: What do you think of the [Streuung]?

Speaker 2: Why, everything works out, what does Eberhard Cohrs say? A ship will come, and see there, it came.

Speaker 1: Wasn't colleague Cohrs criticized for that?

Speaker 2: Why, is he now working in Trade and Supply?

Speaker 1: Oh, you prankster. But I didn't mean the rumours, but rather the salting of the ice.

[Speaker 1: Was halten Sie eigentlich von der Streuung?

Speaker 2: Wieso, es klappt doch alles, wie sagte Eberhard Cohrs? Ein Schiff wird kommen -- und siehe da, es kam.

Speaker 1. Ist der Kollege Cohrs nicht deshalb kritisiert worden?

Speaker 2. Wieso, ist er jetzt bei Handel und Versorgung?

Speaker 1. Ach Sie Witzbold. Aber ich meine nicht die Streuung, sondern die Streuung bei Glatteis.^{460]}

The contemporary significance of the joke is perhaps lost on us today, since it clearly drew on incidents that have not been recorded.⁴⁶¹ But it clearly represents an opportunity

⁴⁵⁹ Hoff, “Von ‘da lacht der Bär,’” 86.

taken by the three emcees to draw attention to both Eberhard Cohrs' ideas and the regime's response. For the SED, Cohrs deviated from conventional standards of good taste defined as proper political partisanship. In the context of increased discipline, it was politically inopportune.

In any case, Heinz Quermann had not taken kindly to the new strictures and had begun to complain loudly about quitting the show. Herta Classen, director of the Berliner Rundfunk took the matter up with Quermann. In a "collegial" discussion Classen determined that Quermann was, in her view, protecting his reputation; she believed instead that Quermann was trying to raise his own profile at the cost of state policy.⁴⁶² In the course of the discussion Quermann revealed the fractures that characterized the visions of political reliability and correctness of the artist and the state:

You imagine it's so easy, to demand clarity and cultural-political progressiveness from the artists for [the show]. But these people travel the whole year long through the Republic and no state authority takes exception to the kinds of jokes they push out there. Now they say: [On the show] one has to have taken part in order to know, all that one isn't allowed.⁴⁶³

The standards of good taste and acceptable humour clearly varied throughout the Republic. In a study of cabaret and satire, for example, Sylvia Klötzer and Siegfried Lokatis demonstrate that the size of the audience mattered: the smaller the venue in the

⁴⁶⁰ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Letter from Herta Classen, director of Berlin Broadcasting (radio) to the Central Committee of the SED, [February 1962].

⁴⁶¹ I have found no other documentation of the incident, neither does it appear in the autobiography of Heinz Quermann. Heinz Quermann, *Ihr Heinz, der Quermann: meine bunten Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1993).

⁴⁶² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Letter from Herta Classen, director of Berlin Broadcasting (radio) to the Central Committee of the SED, 2 February 1962.

GDR, the greater the freedom for political humor.⁴⁶⁴ Yet by this time, the “venue” of television was expanding exponentially. As television’s audience grew, so did its potential for challenging the government. By the end of the 1960s, for example, television messages reached most East Germans and into the West. Political upheaval in 1968 in Prague, in which the “counterrevolutionary” message was not contained, but rather encouraged by Czech state television and radio, made the political danger of this new medium clear. Soon after, the DFF finally became a full-fledged organ of the East German state, with the formation of a new State Committee for Television that was safely under the direct control of the Central Committee.⁴⁶⁵

Quermann took up the problem of asking humourists to be politically reliable in a letter written to the Department of Agitation later that month. In it, he expressed concern for freelance artists without institutional support, who could not possibly be expected to keep up with the Party line. Indeed, given the speed with which that line could change, the request was not unreasonable. He suggested regular meetings to discuss current topics of discussion such as:

What must Humorists know in future when it comes to jokes about women, mothers-in-law etc. in line with the communiqué “The Woman, Peace and Socialism” [released by the Central Committee in January 1962]. ... Indications must be given to what extent humour (*heitere Muse*) can intervene helpfully in certain things (special problems of agriculture, trade or industry). Frank details

⁴⁶³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Letter from Herta Classen, director of Berlin Broadcasting (radio) to the Central Committee of the SED, 2 February 1962.

⁴⁶⁴ Sylvia Klötzer and Siegfried Lokatis, “Criticism and Censorship: Negotiating Cabaret Performance and Book Production,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 241-264.

⁴⁶⁵ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 303.

must also be given as to what topics at the time are best not dealt with publicly (for example problems of supply).⁴⁶⁶

Quermann did not challenge the right of state authorities to find certain jokes in poor taste; instead, he described the difficulties facing artists and state authorities in putting together a mutually acceptable, politically reliable program. Clearly this was not undertaken through traditional censorship but, in this case, through cooperation.

Quermann finally warned that the point of these discussions was not to homogenize art, but to inform artists about real social problems to avoid mishaps in the future.⁴⁶⁷ The Department of Agitation agreed with Quermann's suggestions and set the first meeting of the Central Committee and 25 freelance artists for the afternoon of April 5, 1962.⁴⁶⁸

In the meantime, the head of the Politburo's commission on Agitation and Propaganda Albert Norden had taken up the ongoing problems of *The Laughing Bear* with Gerhard Eisler, Chairman of the State Broadcasting Committee. In a letter from March 26 he wrote:

Dear Comrade Eisler!

We can't afford another appearance by Eberhard Cohrs in *The Laughing Bear*, as it happened last Wednesday. You know that I have discouraged the attempts to eliminate him. His current manner can only be understood as revenge for the attacks to which he was exposed. But it can't go on like this. If he wants to feature only unpolitical humour (like the successful business with his driving) – He's welcome! But when he shoots off political jokes and directs them exclusively against the GDR, then it's obnoxious.

⁴⁶⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Brief Heinz Quermann an Horst Sindermann (Agitation), 28 February 1962, pg 1.

⁴⁶⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Brief Heinz Quermann an Horst Sindermann (Agitation), 28 February 1962, pg 2.

⁴⁶⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation Brief Wagner an Heinz Quermann, 15 March 1962.

On the other hand, we should do everything to keep this so extraordinarily loved comic.

My suggestion: it would be great, if you would take a half an hour of your time to help him go beyond the tip of his nose to recognize the way things are (*den Verlauf der Dinge*) in the whole of Germany and the world...⁴⁶⁹

The confrontations revealed in these documents suggest several important points about the status of television entertainment in the GDR. State authorities and television personalities alike were clearly aware of the importance of popular entertainers – Quermann was reportedly willing to use his reputation to push through his artistic vision. On the other hand, authorities as senior as Albert Norden recognized the desirability of keeping popular personalities like Quermann and Cohrs on the radio and television and were sensitive to the scandal that could erupt from what would be a very public dismissal. Moreover, the incidents demonstrate the complicated nature of censoring a live medium. A producer caught one “error” before it went on the air, but several others had to be “corrected” after the fact. For television, this state of affairs changed later that year, with the broadcast of *Fetzer’s Flight* (*Fetzer’s Flucht*).

⁴⁶⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 84, Agitation, Briefwechsel Norden an Eisler, 26 March 1962. It goes on: “In any case, someone has to speak to him in the upcoming days or weeks, who he recognizes as an authority figure and whose advice he respects; in doing so it is advisable that (due to the impression on Cohrs) no party functionary should appear. If [one were to appear,] then he’ll stick to his opinion and will construct his future appearances accordingly, and it will then inevitably end in scandal, which will come down on Broadcasting and Television. Therefore I beg you, that a meeting with Cohrs be arranged as quickly as possible, in order to clarify these questions before the next “laughing Bear” (emphasis in original). The following day Heinz Adameck reported on Cohrs’ continued recalcitrance to the Television Council, further indicating that Cohrs would have to meet with the head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda Horst Sindermann on April 5. SAPMO-BArch, DR 8 24, Television Council, “Protokoll Nr. 10/62” 27 March 1962.

FORMALISM AND FETZER'S FLIGHT: CONSTRAINING THE TV SERVICE, 1962

In the early 1960s, television worked toward the goals of the SED's political program while retaining more freedom from the supervision of the Central Committee than other cultural organs. In part this resulted from the fact that the television leadership traditionally had sought to implement SED policy even before the SED had recognized television as an important component of the apparatus of ideological manipulation. Since 1954, under the leadership of Heinrich Adameck, the service had focused on the political function of television. For Adameck and those in his inner circle, television was not a medium of artistic expression, but an instrument of political agitation. The program had evolved accordingly: the DFF most closely supervised, but also provided more resources for, programming narrowly defined as "political," such as *Aktuelle Kamera* or *Schwarzer Kanal*. But it was also due to the fact that the program generally did not contravene the aesthetic rules of GDR socialism. Early television workers generally eschewed aesthetic experimentation in favour of developing an intelligible language of representation, which worked towards increasing the realism of the program. Finally, many of the programs broadcast on television had originated somewhere else: some had been conceived for radio, some were adaptations of works of literature, and films from DEFA and even UFA also found their place in the program.

Paradoxically, it was programming first broadcast elsewhere that brought the relative freedom of the DFF to an end. In December 1962, the DFF celebrated its tenth anniversary with a schedule of special programming. Included on the agenda were two short television plays resulting from the collaboration of Günter Kunert (author) and

Günter Stahnke (director.) The first to premiere on 13 December was a “television opera” entitled *Fetzer’s Flight*. The central figure of the play is a GDR border guard who flees the GDR in the 1950s, but must commit murder to do so. Haunted by his crime, he takes no pleasure in the freedom of the West and longs to the return to the GDR.⁴⁷⁰ The show was a television version of an award-winning East German radio play first broadcast in 1955. This version featured leading East German actors from the Berliner Ensemble and the “very best” musicians.⁴⁷¹ The DFF distributed an admiring press release publicizing the program: “The author tells an endearing story of the exciting and extraordinary circumstances of a rebirth. His lyrical ability promises a real Christmas story that is plucked entirely out of our life.”⁴⁷² Even before its premiere, the DFF version of *Fetzer’s Flight* was seen as a new kind of television programming. The author Günter Kunert described it as “nothing other than an attempt to get away from the conservative mode of making musical theatre.”⁴⁷³ Media critics Gisela Herrmann – spouse of Joachim Herrmann, member of the Agitation Commission of the Politburo – greeted the premiere with great admiration.⁴⁷⁴ Horst Knietzsch, correspondent of the national daily *Neues Deutschland*, visited the set while the program was still in production and perceptively wrote:

⁴⁷⁰ See brief references to the plot in Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 295; Peter Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum und der Deutsche Fernsehfunk” in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente*, ed. Günter Agde, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 102-3; Müncheberg *Blaues Wunder*, 176; Müncheberg in Riedel, 98; Günter Herlt, *Sendeschluss: ein Insider des DDR-Fernsehens berichtet* (Berlin: edition Ost, 1995), 77.

⁴⁷¹ Gunter Agde, “Fernseher Fetzers Flucht wieder entdeckt,” *Mitteilungen der Kurt-Schwaen-Archiv* 9 (December 2005): 8, <<http://www.schwaen-archiv.de/news/mitt/mitt19.pdf>> (accessed 22 April 2006).

⁴⁷² Fernsehdienst cited in Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 176.

⁴⁷³ Kunert in the television magazine *Funk und Fernsehen*, cited in Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum,” 102.

What this collective is presently developing will certainly result in fodder for the discussion of the theme film-opera. But not only that; questions about the presentation of conflict in television films, image composition and montage will be raised...⁴⁷⁵

Knietzsch intuitively identified the two most burning issues the program raised for the SED: the subject matter and the style of representation. Though the play ultimately condemned *Republikflucht*, it stirred sympathy among viewers for the plight of Fetzer in the process. East German media scholar Peter Hoff argues that the play's ambiguous message, acceptable in 1955, was untenable in December 1962, only sixteen months after the construction of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁷⁶ Moreover, the play's representational strategies were new and unfamiliar on television, though they had already been seen on film. Some scenes were shot slightly askew; in some shots, the actors' heads disappeared from view.⁴⁷⁷ The music was relatively conventional.⁴⁷⁸ Yet the SED criticized the play for its formalism – it displayed a “worship of Western modernism” and “snobbishness” towards the people.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁴ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 176.

⁴⁷⁵ Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 176.

⁴⁷⁶ Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum,” 101-2.

⁴⁷⁷ Müncheberg *Blaues Wunder*, 177.

⁴⁷⁸ A short clip (2:41) of the radio opera is posted on the web at the website of the Kurt Schwaen archive: <<http://www.kurtschwaen.de/audio/fetzersfl.mp3>>.

⁴⁷⁹ Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 295. In his memoir, DFF worker Hans Müncheberg has argued that Walter Ulbricht made an example of *Fetzer's Flucht*, having just returned from a visit in the Soviet Union, where debate had raged between state authorities and artists over Formalism. Tipped off by his wife, who had seen Fetzer's *Flucht* during his absence, Ulbricht saw this as an opportunity to introduce and discipline the formalism, according the Müncheberg. Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 177.

Despite widespread acclaim, some of which had come directly from the DFF itself, Heinz Adameck appeared on an episode of *Kleines Fernsehforum*⁴⁸⁰ just two days after the premiere to openly criticize the opera. He characterized it as an experiment that had failed because it provoked an immediate negative response from the audience: “Understandably, nothing unintelligible is desired, in the music, or in the whole method of composition.” Music, for example, “must stay in the ear...” It should be “folksy (*volkstümlich*) and melodic.” The press further dissected the play, and it was the subject of discussion in the Television Council.⁴⁸¹ In reaction to the furor, the DFF immediately shelved plans to air Kunert and Stahnke’s second television play *Monologue for a Taxi Driver* (*Monolog für einen Taxifahrer*).⁴⁸² The department of Agitation undertook in-depth discussion of both the opera and *Monologue* with the Television Council, intent on revealing the “reactionary message” and bringing the television leadership into line. They compared *Monologue* in particular to works of “bourgeois philosophy” and found it to be “objectively, a reactionary message directed against the state, which is no different from the bourgeois philosophers Jaspers or Heydecker (sic).”⁴⁸³ Kunert and Stahnke

⁴⁸⁰ Literally a forum in which Adameck and a moderator discussed the issues of the television service, oftentimes answering questions posed by viewer mail. DRA Babelsberg, Ostaufzeichnungen, “Kleines Fernsehforum,” 15 December 1962.

⁴⁸¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 120, Agitation/Norden, “Aktennotiz: betr. Fetzers Flucht/Monolog für einen Taxifahrer von Kunert,” 20 February 1963. A facsimile of the document is published in Riedel, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit*.

⁴⁸² Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum,” 103-4.

⁴⁸³ Clearly, they objected to the work of the existentialist philosophers Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 120, Agitation/Norden, “Aktennotiz: betr. Fetzers Flucht/Monolog für einen Taxifahrer von Kunert,” 20 February 1963.

iterated that they had not anticipated this kind of response and reportedly “distanced themselves from the film.”⁴⁸⁴

It seems, however, that it was not really experiments in form that had raised the ire of the SED, but rather an incremental, if ultimately fundamental, shift in the way dramatists had begun thematizing everyday life under socialism. The SED had appealed to artists to begin engaging with the conditions of socialist life, but it was receiving works it had not expected, works that dealt with the theme of alienation. *Monologue for a Taxi Driver* had pushed further in this direction. The film relates the story of a taxi-driver who picks up a young pregnant woman desperate to make it to the hospital for the birth. She begs him to find the child’s father, Engler. He tries in vain, before returning to the taxi shop. There he finds he must work overtime to replace someone who did not show up for work. He briefly goes home to explain the situation to his wife, which results in a fight between them. He then decides to pursue Engler in earnest: he goes to his workplace, his apartment and finally his parents’ home, only to be mocked, ridiculed and, in the case of Engler’s father, run out of the house. Defeated, he returns to the hospital only to find two other drivers with exactly the same story to tell, while Frau Engler is nowhere to be found. At the last moment, Herr Engler appears and clears up the misunderstanding.⁴⁸⁵

For media scholar Dirk Schneider, the film is about the lack of communication between people. Throughout the film, the driver is unable to achieve close contact with anyone,

⁴⁸⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.02 120, Agitation/Norden, “Aktennotiz: betr. Fetzers Flucht/Monolog für einen Taxifahrer von Kunert,” 20 February 1963.

⁴⁸⁵ Dirk Schneider, “Der Umsteiger,” *Augen-Blick* 25 (1997): 8-9. Available online at author’s homepage: <http://www.iminform.de/iminform/MitarbeiterInnen/d_schneider.htm>.

instead he is rejected by virtually everyone he meets. Only when Engler appears in the final moments does he overcome his isolation from the social world and, with that, “normality” returns.⁴⁸⁶ The social alienation of the character is intensified through the use of an interior monologue, spoken by an actor other than the one playing the role on-screen, a device that seemed to cleave the character of the taxi driver in two.⁴⁸⁷

The furor over *Fetzer's Flight* and *Monologue for a Taxi Driver* reverberated through the television service for several months to come as all departments of the DFF evaluated the ramifications of the scandal for their own program work.⁴⁸⁸ Yet just one month after the discussion in the Television Council, the Agitation Commission despaired that no one at the DFF really had comprehended the problem. On March 23 the commission reported that DFF employees repeatedly demonstrated their “lack of political instincts.” In this case, the commission was disappointed that:

After we led months-long discussions over Fetzer's Flight, the television features the Romanian film, “The Stolen Bombs,” which is inferior in the confusing form of ‘Fetzer's Flight’. Even if this film has been shown in the Republic's film theaters, German Television bears full responsibility for what it sends through the screen. The very next night, on March 16, they presented the French crime film, “On a Dangerous Mission”. This is one of the films, which run as a serial in the West, that we have identified as one of the origins of the rise in youth criminality in West Germany and West Berlin. The hero, an unsurpassed “superman”, is a drunk and disreputable womanizer, who picks up everyone from the general's

⁴⁸⁶ Schneider, “Der Umsteiger,” 9-10.

⁴⁸⁷ Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum,” 104.

⁴⁸⁸ The conclusions of the report were disseminated in modified form throughout the DFF, most notably during a five-hour assembly with DFF workers on March 30 and in a discussion with the Television Council on April 4. Thereafter, both of the Kunert/Stahnke plays disappeared from the canon of television history. Only the literary scholar Ingeborg Münz-Koenen tried to rehabilitate their efforts in her 1974 publication *Fernsehndramatik: Experimente, Methoden, Tendenzen; ihre Entwicklung in der 60er Jahren* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974). Agde, “Fernsehoper Fetzer's Flucht.”

daughter to the whore and emerges from every malicious adventure as a resplendent victor.⁴⁸⁹

The DFF had not yet recognized fully that the rules for television had changed.⁴⁹⁰ Where the television service had once been relatively free to find material wherever it could, now DFF employees had to be more careful about the choices they made. Feature films previously had been more closely supervised than television: in effect films were already “vetted” and ready for television transmission. This was no longer the case.

The Agitation Commission came to believe that there were far more fundamental problems at the television service than just a lack of political savvy. They concluded that there was a problem with the DFF leadership. They found the director of the DFF Heinz Adameck to be “self-important”; he usually made decisions himself outside of the framework of collective leadership, and often forgot to invite Georg Puppe, leader of the Party organization in the DFF to important meetings of the leadership, but at least he was politically competent.⁴⁹¹ Puppe was competent and commanded the respect of the

⁴⁸⁹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, “Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,” 23 March 1963, pg. 8.

⁴⁹⁰ The representation style of Fetzner’s *Flucht*, *Monologue*, or even this Romanian film were not exceptional for DFF programming, but took some time to subside. A scholarly work describing the development of socialist film and television published in the GDR in 1979 noted that: “What is remarkable is that in the majority of the television plays and television films in the first half of the 1960s the subjective narrative form is used. ‘Karin’ tells her story – as an interior monologue – through letters to her girlfriend in Berlin. In Pludra’s ‘Everyone has his own Story’ (Director: Heiner Carow, 1965) the youth Heini Tedke tells of his love for two girls. In ... ‘Her name is Meta Hall’ (Director: Ingrid Sander, 1965) ... the central figures address the viewers directly and thereby draws them into the action... Armin Müller’s ‘On the third Monday’ (Director: Horst Zaeske, 1965) also has a level of plot (*Handlungs-ebene*) and of reflection (*Reflexionsebene*), on which the action of the central female character is universalized through an interior monologue.” B. Thurm “Die erste Hälfte des Jahrzehnts,” in *Film und Fernsehkunst der DDR. Traditionen, Beispiele, Tendenzen*, ed. Käthe Rülicke-Weiler (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1979), 208.

⁴⁹¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, “Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,” 23 March 1963, pg. 26-7.

membership, but he was not a true representative of the Party's interests, instead toeing Adameck's line on most issues.⁴⁹² They later found that discussion of the weekly "talking points" disseminated by the State Broadcasting Committee did not make it past the television leadership into the individual departments of the DFF.⁴⁹³ The other overarching problem was that partisanship (*Parteilichkeit*) and "belonging to the people" (*Volkstümlichkeit*) were in short supply at the DFF, especially in the departments of International Relations (responsible for concluding agreements for film exchange and the like), Television Drama, Entertainment and even sports. The report criticized, for example, the "inadequate political-ideological" education of DFF sport reporters exemplified by the "one-sided admiration" and "obvious favoritism" of the Canadian hockey team in their World Cup match against Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹⁴ State authorities also wondered how DFF workers would be able to create inspiring works with such a weak knowledge of the principles of the SED's new economic plan NÖSPL (New Economic System of the Leadership and Planning).⁴⁹⁵

What the Agitation commission expected of the DFF then was nothing less than a full command of the theoretical underpinnings of SED ideology translated into

⁴⁹² SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks," 23 March 1963, pg. 28. This was taken up by Paula Acker again in SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Aussprache Agitationskommission mit Kollegium," 4 April 1963, pg. 4.

⁴⁹³ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Orientierung für die Arbeit des DFF nach der neuen Konzeption," 23 January 1964, pg. 1.

⁴⁹⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks," 23 March 1963, pg. 28

⁴⁹⁵ DFF council members retorted that dramaturges could not be expected to go out and learn economics. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Aussprache Agitationskommission mit Kollegium," 4 April 1963, pg. 7. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung des Entwicklungsstandes," 10 September 1963, pg. 6.

programming that could both model socialism for East Germans and entertain them. Programming that deliberated on particular aspects of socialist life, probed the limits of socialism or the television arts, or simply observed the everyday realities of East Germans' lives did not fit into this mandate. Thus the Commission exhorted television workers to get to know their audience. That meant working closely with socialist work brigades, specialists, and ordinary people from the various areas thematized by DFF programs and transmitting programming from the rural cultural centres.⁴⁹⁶ The Commission lauded the pact between the Department of Television Drama and the authors' collective of Neubrandenburg that would improve the representation of socialist agriculture.⁴⁹⁷ Soon a new generation of programming put the "peoples' socialism" on East German television screens.

Fallout from the scandal over *Fetzer's Flight* and *Monologue for a Taxi Driver* continued to affect the DFF for at least a year as the Agitation Commission, the Television Council and individual departments of the television service sought to sort out its ideological affairs. Several months later for example, the Agitation Commission returned to the DFF to discover that little progress had been made since its initial report. In the Department of Television Drama, in particular, nothing had changed. In the estimation of the Agitation Commission, neither had anyone felt pressure to make substantive changes before the new Fall-Winter program, due to the fact that "no one

⁴⁹⁶ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks," 23 March 1963, pg. 10, 18.

⁴⁹⁷ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks," 23 March 1963, pg. 7.

watches [television] in the summer.” Yet the Agitation Commission had increasing documentation from viewers discontented by that summer’s viewing schedule that proved otherwise.⁴⁹⁸ In the aftermath of the scandal, the SED brought television broadcasting more closely under the control of the upper echelons of the SED, most obviously with the appointment of DFF director Adameck to the Central Committee, a position he held until 1989. The television service, previously subject largely to after-the-fact censorship (criticism of shows that had already aired), now faced review of material before it went over the airwaves.

THE “PEOPLES’ SOCIALISM” ON SCREEN

In the aftermath of the scandal over formalism at the DFF, the Agitation Commission encouraged the DFF to create television programming that displayed greater political partisanship and do so in a manner that would appeal to audiences. The DFF developed two new programs that successfully fulfilled this mandate. A new “journalistic” treatment of the socialism in East German society, *Prisma*, emerged from the department of economics. A very different show was *With Open Hearts*, produced by the Department of Entertainment programming. Despite the differences between these programs, their significance for televisual representation was essentially the same: both encouraged audiences to understand themselves as part of a larger socialist collective, and each contributed towards shaping the ways of thinking and behaviour of viewers in the GDR.

⁴⁹⁸ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IVA 2/2.028 60, Agitation, “Einschätzung des Entwicklungsstandes des

Prisma

One of the programs that fulfilled the task set for the DFF by the Agitation commission during the formalism debate was the ‘investigative’ magazine show *Prisma* introduced in March 1963. *Prisma* was one of the most popular and long-running shows on East German television, ending only after the fall of the Wall and the dismantling of the DFF in 1991.⁴⁹⁹ Gerhard Scheumann, the founder and first moderator of the show (1963-65), unabashedly modeled *Prisma* on the format of the first West German political magazine *Panorama*, reportedly going so far as to analyze the timing of the show with a stopwatch.⁵⁰⁰ Yet the content differed dramatically: unlike *Panorama*, which dealt with “big political events” and often confronted prominent public figures on air, *Prisma* sought to delve into “the real problems... with which socialist society is grappling” – the problems of everyday life.⁵⁰¹ The *Prisma* editorial department cast the program as an intermediary “between the pinnacle and the rank-and-file” of GDR society that could also work to close the gap between the two groups.⁵⁰² DFF viewers actively participated in this project, posting letters to the editorial department with complaints, questions or comments on wide-ranging subjects, from work conditions, the environment, the

Deutschen Fernsehfunks” 10 September 1963, pg. 2-4.

⁴⁹⁹ That said, its popularity ebbed and flowed over the course of those decades. It was initially quite popular. Though it was never openly critical of the SED, by the 1970s it had become markedly docile. By the 1980s it focused increasingly narrowly on economic-political issues and lost the interest of the viewers. Susanne Pollert, “Wo Licht ist, fällt auch Schatten: das zeitkritische Magazin ‘Prisma’ im Kontext der DDR-Fernsehgeschichte,” in *Zwischen Service und Propaganda*, ed. Helmut Heinze (Berlin: VISTAS, 1998), 50. During the *Wende*, the DFF produced *Prisma* live for the first time since the 1960s and, in an atmosphere of openness and greater criticism, rapidly regained viewer support; see Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 507.

⁵⁰⁰ Pollert, “Wo licht fällt,” 19.

⁵⁰¹ Heike Hartmann cited in Pollert, “Wo licht fällt,” 19.

⁵⁰² Gerhard Scheumann cited in Pollert, “Wo licht fällt,” 19.

availability of consumer goods, or life in the socialist home.⁵⁰³ Viewer correspondence often asked *Prisma* to help expose the lived reality behind the triumphal rhetoric of socialist successes broadcast by shows such as *Aktuelle Kamera*.

From its inception the Agitation commission recognized the potential of the show to be both politically effective and widely popular. They praised the department of Economics-Science for:

...winning the hearts and minds of the audience to master the tasks in building the national peoples' economy, being for them aide and advisor, with particularly effective (*massenwirksam*) shows in the prime time program of the DFF.... These shows...[including *Prisma – Problems, Perspectives, Personalities* -- HG]... do not deal just with economic questions, but rather make the viewer aware what the all-embracing (*umfassend*) construction of socialism means. These series will without a doubt also contribute to facilitating the economic thinking of the people of the GDR... We are of the opinion that this series offers an excellent possibility to uncover the contradictions present in our social life and demonstrate means for their solution, to make clear the new relationships (*Beziehungen*) of the people and penetrate all life's social groups.⁵⁰⁴

Like the program's founders, the state also envisioned that the show would mediate between the Party and the DFF audience, helping them to understand the ideas and policies of the state and generally facilitating the development of socialism in East Germany.

But the viewers had much to contribute as well. The most cited example of *Prisma*'s effect on East German society is the show's intervention on behalf of a young woman who was denied entry into the teaching profession. As a young child, bullies had

⁵⁰³ Ina Merkel, *Wir sind doch nicht die Meckerecke der Nation! Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin: Schwartzkopf & Schwartzkopf, 2000), 34.

tossed her into deep water although she could not swim. The traumatic experience had left her terrified of water. At school she refused to swim in gym class and received a failing grade as a result. Though she had achieved high marks in all her other classes, this failing grade disqualified her from attending teacher's college. *Prisma* reported on her case and unleashed debate across the Republic. In the end the young woman went on to study education and become a teacher, a result directly attributed to the show. Yet that was not the end of the story. According to Scheumann, the country was divided as to whether the girl had been treated fairly or not, and this division was especially striking among teachers, many of whom felt that *Prisma* had undermined their authority to give grades.⁵⁰⁵

In the furor surrounding this episode of *Prisma* we can see the contours of three visions and (even if disproportionately influential) centres of power of the DFF program. The DFF itself, an institution standing between the state and the people mediated a vision of socialist Germany that coexisted uneasily with the vision of state authorities and the lived realities of East German citizens. Within the week Scheumann had to meet with the head of the DFF's Party organization and a representative of the Agitation Commission to discuss the show. Scheumann agreed to respond to the uproar during the next program

⁵⁰⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02 67, Agitation, "Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks," 23 March 1963, pg. 10.

⁵⁰⁵ Gerhard Scheumann, "Heikle Gratwanderung – Die Sendereihe Prisma" in Riedel, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit...*, 134. Also, in part, in Susanne Pollert, "Wo Licht ist," and Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*.

to reassure GDR educators of the DFF's support. In the 1990s Scheumann remembered it as one of many retractions the show faced during its DFF run.⁵⁰⁶

Prisma was critical of the SED, at least in a limited way, but officials gave the show some leeway over the course of the 1960s due to its popularity among viewers and the political advantage to be gained from supporting "critical journalism" on television.⁵⁰⁷ When he left the show in 1965 Scheumann left behind the so-called *Prisma Testament*, a document that he hoped would one day let loose open discussion of the difficulties of investigative journalism at the DFF, an institution that "(was) an instrument for the leadership (*Führung*) of society on the one hand (and) an institution of public opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*) on the other."⁵⁰⁸ In the Testament, he described the significance of *Prisma* in part as showing audiences the larger picture that helped explain policies that otherwise viewers would never have understood. He noted that this had been difficult when he had been faced with bureaucrats who advised him that some topics were better left alone. Defending the right of the author to "his own opinion," Scheumann asserted that it was often unclear "what leeway (*Spielraum*) institutions of public opinion had in relationship to officials of the socialist state apparatus."⁵⁰⁹ He concluded that:

It should be stated that no longer are there cases of direct regimentation of the editorial department from official agencies. Sure enough, attempts at 'pre-censorship' occur in other ways. The editorial department receives unsolicited "advice" ('We can't forbid you, but we would suggest to you...') that comes near to an indirect coercion to stay away from specific problems; as if in the open

⁵⁰⁶ Gerhard Scheumann, "Heikle Gratwanderung," 134.

⁵⁰⁷ Pollert, "Wo licht fällt," 37.

⁵⁰⁸ Gerhard Scheumann, "Prisma Testament" facsimile reprinted in Riedel, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit...* 136-8.

⁵⁰⁹ Scheumann, Articles 8 and 9, "Prisma Testament" in Riedel, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit...* pg. 137

treatment it is just ‘the topic’ and not the operational mode of concrete people and institutions that is at stake.⁵¹⁰

Clearly there was a gulf between the vision of *Prisma* producers and state authorities over the content and thrust of *Prisma*. What is perhaps more remarkable here is the very unstable nature of the expectations surrounding television programming during this crucial period in 1963, evident in the case of *Prisma*, but also *Fetzer’s Flight* and the debates raging at the DFF.

Yet to reduce the significance of Scheumann’s *Testament*, and thus the significance of *Prisma*, to a story of dissent and repression is to misunderstand the wider impact of the program itself. Though *Prisma* often presented a different picture of social problems than the authorities might have wanted, the program did not challenge the legitimacy of the state or prominent state authorities. Certainly *Prisma* cultivated more conformity than Scheumann’s *Testament* would suggest. Ultimately the show encouraged viewers to understand themselves as part of a socialist collective, working together towards the goal of improving everyday life under socialism. Moreover, Ina Merkel argues that the function of *Prisma* as a “critical” program not only eased the relationship between the audience and the state, but fulfilled a second role, as “a sort of buffer between viewers and a television service that hardly lived up to its role as a public (*öffentlich*) institution.”⁵¹¹ Though *Prisma* reporting challenged specific aspects of the

⁵¹⁰ Scheumann, Article 11, “Prisma Testament” in Riedel, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit...* pg. 137.

⁵¹¹ Merkel, *Briefe an das Fernsehen*, 44.

GDR society, it ultimately preserved the system by sustaining consensus among viewers based on the hope that, through the application of reason, the system might change.⁵¹²

With Open Hearts

Prisma's ability to encourage viewers to understand themselves as part of the East German community was surpassed in a new entertainment program *With Open Hearts*. For some time, the DFF and Agitation Commission had called for new ideas in the realm of entertainment, shows that could break the mold of the studio-produced game show. *With Open Hearts* fit the bill: it was a recurring variety show unlike anything previously seen on East German television. Like *The Laughing Bear*, the show originated on the radio, which is hard to imagine due to the extremely visual nature of the spectacle. The show was a sensation created to celebrate socialism and model socialists. Yet it had nothing to do with Hennecke movement (modeled on the Stakhanovite movement in the Soviet Union), which idolized workers who had broken records for worker efficiency for example. Instead, *With Open Hearts* sought to honour ordinary East Germans, representatives of the mass of working people in the GDR, often nominated by their co-workers and neighbours.⁵¹³ In 1966 moderator Hans-Georg Ponesky described the close relationship of the show to its audience:

...Our thanks (go out to) ... Party activists and independent citizens. Everyday heroes, who oftentimes anonymously and unselfishly established, developed and maintained our current condition, the advantages of socialism. In our show

⁵¹² Merkel, *Briefe an das Fernsehen*, 44.

⁵¹³ The moderator Hans-Georg Ponesky described the show as "honouring especially deserving workers before the entire socialist community of the GDR." Hoff, "Von 'da lacht der Bär,'" 90.

people who shrug off the doubtful, careful ‘But why me’ take centre stage, with the realization ‘I just did my duty, like any other’...⁵¹⁴

The show encouraged people to take pride in the routines everyday life. Ordinary citizens also took part in each episode of the show, sometimes numbering in the thousands.⁵¹⁵

Broadcast in front of a live audience in halls such as the large *Friedrichstadtpalast* in Berlin, but also from a countless number of locations around the Republic and even abroad, no two episodes were alike. The DFF broadcast the first episode of the series in part from a *Neubauwohnung* (new housing development) where the producers had modified the plumbing; the hidden cameras observed the residents as they discovered beer flowing straight from their taps. In another episode, a businessman arrived home from a trip to discover his house had been renovated. On another night, the moderator, speaking through a hidden camera, awoke a sleeping shift worker and invited him to join the broadcast from the *Friedrichstadtpalast*. He did not even have to get up, since a motorized bed met him at his door to chauffeur him to the show. In yet another episode, a traffic officer directing traffic in Magdeburg was suddenly surrounded by more than a thousand cars. Her commanding officer then arrived to promote her on the spot.⁵¹⁶ One show began before a live audience when the moderator blindfolded the episode’s lucky subjects. They climbed in to a new Trabant, which, unbeknownst to them, was

⁵¹⁴ Lutz Haucke, “Die Träume sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung in der DDR,” in Agde, *Kahlschlag*, 117.

⁵¹⁵ Haucke, “sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung,” 112.

⁵¹⁶ Hoff, “Von ‘da lacht der Bär,’” 90.

itself loaded in a helicopter. They were then flown to the highway and sent on their way for a vacation abroad.⁵¹⁷

The show celebrated ordinary people – and everyday life – in extraordinary ways and without a trace of intentional irony. It was a somewhat utopian vision of the GDR that represented a community of mutual cooperation and celebration – *Parteilichkeit* (Partisanship), the socialist duty – but in a way that drew upon and celebrated persistent cultural codes and values and, thus, appealed to a large audience. The show modeled socialism for ordinary East Germans, in a much more overt way than *Prisma*. But, like *Prisma*, its vision of socialism was not transformative: it did not ask East Germans to revolutionize the world they lived in, it celebrated and naturalized that world. One could even argue that *With Open Hearts* “advertised” socialism. Indeed, in the larger program, the show performed a similar function to the overt advertising program *Tausend Teletipps*.⁵¹⁸

Television entertainment programs like *With Open Hearts* marked the reemergence of escapist entertainment, shows that turned away from direct engagement with the issues of the day, like *Treffpunkt Berlin* or *Blaulicht* had done, each in their own

⁵¹⁷ Haucke, “sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung,” 113. A similar show entitled “Play Along!” mounted an episode in 1965 that they broadcast over the course of an entire day, from multiple locations and with a variety of scenarios including “exciting live reports from the D43 (highway) between Wittenberg and Jüterborg,” and reached the largest viewing audience yet for the Department of Entertainment at the DFF.

⁵¹⁸ *Tausend Teletipps* (1960-1976) consisted of commercial spots featuring both live and animated characters interspersed with ‘advice’ films that promoted East German consumer goods including (but in no way limited to) cosmetics, clothing, foodstuffs, leisure goods or household appliances. Simone Tippach-Schneider, *Messmännchen und Minol-Pirol: Werbung in der DDR* (Berlin: Schwartzkopf & Schwartzkopf, 1999) pg. 54-5. The SED leadership had embraced television advertising in 1960 as another aspect of its competition with the capitalist West: it could distract East German citizens from the excess of consumer commodities promised by West German advertising and provide a counter-model both of “better

way. They drew attention and motivation away from the utopian project of transforming values to one much more interested in reinforcing values viewers already had. For media scholar Lutz Haucke, such shows ultimately demonstrated the permeation of GDR culture with petty bourgeois values:

... with the 11th Plenum the tradition of revolutionary proletarian art of the 'twenties, with its conception of the organization of life and art by the masses was finally discarded in favour of the representational culture of a totalitarian state socialism... (one should) keep in mind, that in the middle of the 1960s the transition to a modern industrial society set new requirements for the cultural mandate in both eastern and western European states. The development in the GDR after the 11th Plenum proved that a continued development of the proletarian-revolutionary concepts of mass culture that had their origins in the 1920s was no longer possible under these new conditions. In the state socialism of the GDR leadership the favouritism of ... kitsch and sentimental edification, paired with the expansive growth of petty bourgeois ideology had prevailed.⁵¹⁹

Haucke's characterization of the regime as "totalitarian state socialism" should, in this author's view, be understood in the tradition of the "modern dictatorship" discourse, that is, that modern authoritarian power can survive only by cultivating the support of the people. What is more important is that the examples of *Prisma* and *With Open Hearts* demonstrate that representational culture does not necessarily function in the way that it is intended. Through such programming we can begin to identify the ways in which the complicated relationship between the East German audience, broadcasting and the state in the GDR created a new, socialist community that was much different from the larger

products" and socialism itself. Simone Tippach-Schneider, *Tausend Tele-tipps: Das Werbefernsehen in der DDR* (Berlin: Schwartzkopf & Schwartzkopf, 2004), 15.

⁵¹⁹ Haucke, "sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung," 115.

German cultural community, but also from the collective entity envisioned by the East German state.

THE 11TH PLENUM OF THE SED, 1965

In December 1965 the Central Committee convened a meeting to usher in the “second phase” of the New Economic System, but the contributions that have garnered the most attention, from contemporaries and historians alike, were the speeches disparaging the state of GDR culture. SED members denounced GDR media products as “dangerous,” including film, theatrical productions and even literary works that were found to “spread skepticism and immorality through the depiction of supposed failings.”⁵²⁰ Erich Honecker and other state authorities took well-known GDR citizens who were generally loyal to the state such as Wolf Biermann, Robert Havemann and Stefan Heym to task for bringing forth ideas that were hostile to GDR socialism.⁵²¹ Authorities condemned and then proscribed an entire year of DEFA productions, including *The Rabbit am I* (*Das Kaninchen bin ich*) and *Just don’t think I’ll cry* (*Denk bloss nicht ich heule*). Like *Monologue for a Taxi Driver*, the fault of these films lay in their representation of social alienation.

In this context the SED lauded the television film *Dr. Schlüter* (1965). The five-part mini-series depicted the life and political transformation of a chemist, from his collaboration with the Nazis to his eventual immigration to the GDR and acceptance of

⁵²⁰ Weber, *Geschichte*, 249.

⁵²¹ Weber, *Geschichte*, 249-50. Gunter Agde, “Eine Rekonstruktion,” in Agde, *Kahlschlag*, 184-5.

socialism.⁵²² The film denounced imperialism – “the greed of which led to the loss of humanist values” – and political detachment by depicting a man who is buffeted by historical forces and ultimately sees the value of political partisanship.⁵²³ For the SED then, this was a film that had overcome social alienation, depicting instead “the harmony of the individual and society,” a utopian relationship between the individual and the state.⁵²⁴ Unlike the forbidden DEFA films and very much in the same vein as *Prisma*, *With Open Hearts* and even socialist advertising, *Dr. Schlüter* focused on the subsumption of the individual into the collective and encouraged the audience to do the same. Yet the 11th Plenum held consequences for even *Dr. Schlüter*: the production team revised the last episode, still in production, to intensify Schlüter’s identification with not just socialism, but also the state.⁵²⁵

The achievement of *Dr. Schlüter* lauded by the SED – to depict a utopian harmony between the individual and the state – ultimately undermined television drama’s engagement with the lived conditions of socialism. For media scholar Peter Hoff, the film presented “knowingly, a false...picture of reality that, in their increasing

⁵²² See brief references to the plot in Müncheberg, *Blaues Wunder*, 200; Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 302. Here from Käthe Rülicke-Weiler, *Film- und Fernsehkunst der DDR* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1979), 212-13. Also Erich Selbmann, *DFF Adlershof: Wege übers Fernsehland; zur Geschichte des DDR-Fernsehens* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1998), 85-86.

⁵²³ Rülicke-Weiler, 213.

⁵²⁴ Hoff, “Das 11. Plenum,” 108.

⁵²⁵ Rülicke-Weiler, *Film und Fernsehkunst*, 212. Selbmann, *DFF Adlershof*, 87. Rülicke-Weiler and Selbmann interpret this as the direct result of the influence of the 11th Plenum. Yet in a speech he gave to journalists shortly before the Plenum on 9 December 1965, Adameck called on viewers to “express their opinion on the theme (*Problematik*) of the piece. After the fourth part of *Dr. Schlüter finds Germany* [the original title – HG], they should suggest ways to achieve resolution in the fifth part, which will be broadcast later....” I have yet to explore the extent to which this program in particular was shaped by the state *and* the audience, since this is the only fragment of evidence I have to support a conclusion other than that raised by Rülicke-Weiler and Selbmann.

estrangement from social reality, the state leadership of the GDR took to be true.”⁵²⁶ In his study of East German film, Joshua Feinstein has identified a similar discursive shift, exemplified by the transition from *Gegenwartsfilme* (“films of contemporary life”) to *Alltagsfilme* (“films of everyday life”). *Gegenwartsfilme* evoked a society in transition from the present to the (in this case, utopian) future, while *Alltagsfilme* represented a world outside of time. For Feinstein, the increasing emphasis on *Alltagsfilme* after the Eleventh Plenum indicated that an increasingly conservative notion of the GDR that “depended less on the future promise of universal emancipation and more on the cultivation of a collective identity...” was rendered on East German movie screens.⁵²⁷ Television drama thus followed the same trajectory, though earlier and more irrevocably than film.

CONCLUSION

Between August 1961 and December 1965, television played an ever-increasing role in the creation of the new socialist citizen. In 1961, the “Bitterfeld Path,” which sought to create a new socialist culture through the engagement of socialist life especially through the integration, active cooperation and even guidance of the people, was the basis for this mandate. The DFF took its task seriously, developing new programming that grappled with socialism and its contradictions in the GDR. Yet television drama, much praised for its contribution to strengthening socialism in November 1961, soon found itself censured with the emergence of *Fetzer’s Flight* and *Monologue for a Taxi Driver*.

⁵²⁶ Further, “...with the Eleventh Plenum of 1965 began the ‘Aufbruch in die Illusion’ of Honecker’s politics, an illusion that burst [when faced with] reality in Fall, 1989.” Hoff in Hickethier, *Geschichte*, 302.

The films set off a lively debate in the DFF that demonstrated both the power of representation and the absence of direct and infallible political management of the service. Where the state had sought out repressive measures in the autumn of 1961 – exploring the possibility of jamming transmitters (*Störsender*) and encouraging campaigns to exert moral pressure on East Germans to give up western programming – they found by 1965 that television policy instead succeeded best where it appealed to the audience. Model television shows appealed to audiences in a variety of ways: through the limited criticism offered by the “investigative journalism” of *Prisma* or the outright appeal to a nominally socialist audience in *With Open Hearts*. Gradually the utopian vision of the Bitterfeld Path, gave way to a new vision of a more unified, more stable and ultimately more passive collectivity. By 1965 television had become popular, the most important disseminator of “socialist” values. Yet it had achieved this by embracing entertaining genres and melodramatic morality plays such as *Revolt of the Conscience* and *Dr. Schlüter*, transmitting a vision of East German society and values that had left the original idealism of the 1950s, the Bitterfeld Path and Ulbricht’s nation-building project in the dust.

⁵²⁷ Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 6-7.

Conclusion: Television, Technology and Cultural Consensus in the GDR

The study of television in the early decades of the GDR contributes to, and challenges, our understanding of the “second German dictatorship” in two important ways.⁵²⁸ First, the model of dictatorship assumes that the media (and television in particular) were the tools that fortified the rule of an authoritarian regime. But television was not simply a political tool. It emerged and grew in a way that was not exceptional for modern, western, industrial societies. Television in the GDR developed unsystematically in the early 1950s, at about the same rate as other countries across the industrialized West. Its emergence and history was shaped by Cold War competition with the West, however, and it was in this context that the SED first appreciated the power of television. Television broadcasts in November 1956 raised fears that the East German television service could not compete with West German broadcasting for East *or* West German viewers. Thereafter the SED took a greater interest in the development of television technology until, by the Fifth Party Congress of 1958, the Party determined that television would play a much more important role in the East German “construction of socialism.” Though programming was still not as important to the SED as the expansion of transmission and reception, the DFF was able to produce some early popular ‘hits’ such as the crime thriller *Blaulicht, Treffpunkt Berlin*, or the children’s bedtime program *Sandmännchen*, which was popular on both sides of the border. These coexisted with programs of overt political propaganda, such as Karl-Eduard von

⁵²⁸ For a discussion of the “second German dictatorship” please see the Introduction.

Schnitzler's infamous *Schwarzer Kanal* and, of course, the nightly news program *Aktuelle Kamera*. Despite the apparent differences of form and content, such programming worked in tandem to reinforce the messages of the overall program.

Second, the study of television reveals the difficulties inherent in campaigns geared towards the revolutionary transformation of society. Television established itself as one of the most important ideological weapons of the SED, overtaking radio and film in power and popularity by the mid-1960s. Television's political value seemed to lay in its technological particularities: it was visual medium that could engage current affairs more quickly and with greater emotional impact than other media. Over the course of the early 1960s, the regime sought to harness television to achieve its ideological goals, both in the propaganda battle against the West, as well as the cultural project of building an "East German" nation. Television programming, though relatively free of political direction by the early 1960s, generally cooperated with both of these agendas, deliberately incorporating the ideological language of the Cold War and attempting to project the SED's vision onto East German television screens. But the DFF reached the limits of televisual representation with the broadcast of *Fetzer's Flucht* in 1962, after which the SED circumscribed the exploration of alienation in modern (socialist) society, as well as the implementation of non-naturalistic representation. Yet television continued to appeal to viewers with "hits," such as *Revolt of the Conscience* and *Dr Schlüter*, as well as *Prisma*, a magazine show driven by viewers' own mail-in complaints and questions about everyday life in the GDR, or *With Open Hearts*, the entertainment program that celebrated ordinary East German citizens. Through such programming television mediated a cultural compromise between the state and its "audience:"

television programming reproduced a world in which the political allegiance of its viewers to the socialist state was implicitly understood, despite the persistence of pre-GDR cultural norms. By December 1965, Honecker and the SED hailed television as a model for other media at the Eleventh Plenum of the SED.

Though television was clearly incorporated into the larger program to transform East German society, upon closer examination it becomes clear that television's function within East German state socialism was not that simple. Instead, television – the technology, the programming and its vision of the world – was the product of complicated, competing and often unstable expectations. State officials from the Politburo to the Council of Ministers, employees of the DFF, the Postal Ministry, the State Planning Commission and East German industry, and, finally, the audience, all played parts in shaping the medium of television in the GDR. This was particularly true in the early years of television, when development of the technology was both hesitant and haphazard. Even in the 1960s though, when the state finally seemed to have tamed television, the medium remained in dialogue with its audience.

What this study makes clear, is that television certainly played a part in ensuring the stability of the SED regime, but at a cost that no one was willing to admit. By 1965 the DFF had emerged as a model for other media, it had done so by resorting to popularly appealing programming in which ideological transformation had yielded to 'political partisanship:' in exchange for adherence to the increasingly vague values of the socialist project, audiences could watch programming awash in the (bourgeois) values of *Heimat*, loyalty and hard work. Ultimately, East German television transmitted a worldview that

was at odds with the revolutionary promise of Ulbricht's program, prefiguring the exhausted compromise of the Honecker's "real existing socialism."

Thus the study of television deepens our understanding of the practice of political and social power in the first decades of the German Democratic Republic. East German television responded to the state's cultural project, the audience, the imperatives of the Cold War, and television workers' own vision of the world. It performed an important cultural role, both perpetuating *and* challenging the power of the state. It reveals that, by 1956, the SED became aware that the campaign to build socialism, first initiated in 1952, had not been able to effect the revolutionary transformation of the ideas, expectations and mentalities of those living in the GDR. A second campaign, introduced in 1958 was an attempt to shore up the flagging fight for the hearts and minds of East Germans. The last gasp of this campaign came in September 1961, with the battle against "ideological border-crossing." But already the transition to an inward-looking, insular and nationalist society had begun.⁵²⁹ The construction of the Wall had established a modicum of social stability in the GDR that was reinforced by the development of cultural interiority on East German television screens over the course of the decade. The picture that emerges of the early Ulbricht period reveals a regime working towards the revolutionary (and idealistic) transformation of society. It appears that if a calculating dictatorship emerged it was not before the 1960s, and the roots of such a regime are perhaps to be found in the 1950s (and not the 1940s). Thus this study challenges the traditional periodization of the "second German dictatorship," for which the high political and crises moments of 1949,

1953, 1961 and 1971 figure prominently. Indeed, the cultural politics traditionally associated with the beginning of the Honecker regime seem to have appeared long before 1971.⁵³⁰

Television was not a medium of revolutionary transformation, because by the time television had emerged as an important social and political force, the revolutionary impulse had given way. Instead, we see the emergence of a culture that was nominally “socialist” and dependent upon the legacy of the revolutionary transformation of the later 1940s and early 1950s, yet tolerant of the persistence of cultural norms, values and expectations that predated the foundation of the Republic in 1949 and even the Nazi state. Thus we can explain the emergence of a new, socialist community that was at odds with both the West German cultural community and *the* East German state.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Joshua Feinstein has identified a similar transformation of representation on film. Feinstein, *Triumph*. Indeed, this author has found the numerous parallels to the study of film and also radio (for example, the work of Von Saldern, “Radio in the GDR.”

⁵³⁰ Thus this study supports the conclusions of Monika Kaiser, who argues that policies associated with Honecker were already emerging by 1965. Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*.

⁵³¹ Christoph Klessmann speculates that the concurrence in the 1960s of improved provisioning of the population, along with an abatement of political pressure and rising tolerance of “private niches” allowed the emergence of a “limited loyalty.” He writes “if and when this developed into the desired socialist national consciousness is hard to assess. The beginnings for that lay in the sixties.” Klessmann, *Zwei staaten*, 336. This study suggests that this process was underway by early 1960 and did manage to effect a socialist national consciousness, if not the one desired by the SED.

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