

CHAPTER 5

Mediascape and Soundscape

Two Landscapes of Modernity in Cold War Berlin

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The various zones of contact, conflict, and tension between publishing houses, television, and broadcasting stations in East and West Berlin determined Cold War Berlin's mediascape in the 1950s and 1960s. Arjun Appadurai uses the term *mediascape* to describe the production of media content, symbols, and narratives in a competitive setting of distribution channels, such as broadcasting stations (2000: 27–47, 33). The producer of content is keen on securing the transmission of an intended meaning to viewers and listeners without being distorted through acts of consumption or by adding additional meaning.

This essay examines these zones by discussing the organizational structure of radio broadcasting in Berlin in the 1950s and 1960s and by further focusing on the strategies of West Berlin broadcasting stations adapting to new kinds of programs, and realigning and modernizing specific areas of broadcasting, especially youth and music programs. The very sound of the music broadcast by radio stations provides a field in which they can claim a distinct identity, and in which the political purpose of a radio station must negotiate with its fundamental need to attract the majority of a target audience. This essay argues that the commercially competitive agenda of the media market is a crucial force that drives broadcasting institutions to redefine themselves in a constantly shifting environment of listening behavior. The consumption of music via small devices that are capable of receiving and replaying music is a prominent feature of popular culture. For the purpose of this argument, a *soundscape* is defined as a space in which melodies, tunes, and riffs are received and interpreted by audiences, and in which the location of the

listener shapes the interpretation of these sounds. The listener imbues the soundscape with individual meaning and relevance.

This understanding of the contest of meanings that takes place in a given soundscape can be illustrated by the historical account of radio broadcasting in Cold War Berlin. Radio stations in both West Berlin and East Berlin provided the soundtrack for everyday life, but neither faction could control the ways in which listeners appropriated the sounds of the broadcasts. West Berlin's Sender Freies Berlin (Radio Free Berlin, SFB), Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), and Berliner Rundfunk (Berlin Radio) in East Berlin aimed to defend their own territory against "competitors" based in the same geographical area, while simultaneously trying to attract listeners from the other side of the Iron Curtain. I do not intend to neglect the political dimensions of radio broadcasting in Cold War Berlin but will focus primarily on applying the concepts of mediascape and soundscape to the radio broadcasting milieu of the city at that time, which was a market characterized by the relations of competition between broadcasting stations that were offering competing acoustic and visual texts to their audience.

Taking a step back at this point to consider the wider mediascape of Cold War Berlin, it is possible to view this mediascape as a product of Allied decisions in the sectors of publishing, newspapers, and broadcasting—certainly for the first three years of occupation before 1948. During the decade leading up to World War II, the German mediascape had changed insofar as the medium of wireless transmission had become an increasingly significant means of disseminating information and promoting the *Volksgemeinschaft* (racial community) (Dussel 2002). Broadcasting was centralized in 1932 by the von Papen cabinet, which was to benefit the Nazi propaganda machine in later years, and Nazi rule was to develop the German mediascape significantly.

Berliner Rundfunk first began broadcasting at the end of May 1945, following the Soviet army's occupation of the premises of the Reichsrundfunk in Charlottenburg. Competition was to emerge in the form of RIAS in November 1946, which, within one year, would commandeer the strongest frequencies in the former capital for evening programming (Dussel 2004). Although the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR), or Northwest German Radio, was based in Cologne and Hamburg in the British zone of occupation, it also ran its own studio in Berlin. Its organizational structure was modeled on that of the BBC, and British journalists working for the British Military Administration in Germany were tasked with reeducating German professionals to promote the ethic of commitment to an independent public sphere on which their own training had been based.

There was no federal body to regulate the broadcast landscape of West Berlin, and local politicians pushed to establish a radio station under the supervision of the Senate of West Berlin toward the end of the 1940s (Schaaf 1971). Before June 1954, when SFB went on the air, the Allied Control Authority in Berlin denied several attempts by the Berlin Christian Democratic Party and Social Democratic Party to allocate a medium wave frequency, and to pass legislative proposals for public broadcasting. The opportunity to challenge political opponents, and dominate the agenda-setting process, proved to be excellent “selling points” through which broadcasting institutions negotiated with the agencies of the military administration that governed the media. After 1949, the Senate of West Berlin, various political parties in Berlin, and anticommunist humanitarian organizations in West Berlin (Heitzer 2008) used their on-air presence on RIAS to broadcast their messages to the Soviet sector. The stations offered slots of airtime for the specific purpose of disseminating political messages, which was referred to as either “information” or “propaganda” (Riller 2004; Galle 2003).

During the 1950s, the US State Department considerably reduced its financial support for RIAS (Riller 2004), but the Senate of West Berlin was prepared to keep the station running by any means possible. The reassuring existence of RIAS meant that the US Information Agency remained interested in Berlin’s affairs, despite ongoing negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States to close down RIAS as a symbolic action of *détente* in the run-up to the Geneva summit of 1958. The cabinet of the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly the Ministry for All-German *Affairs*, intervened by providing the funding for RIAS. Finally, in 1971, RIAS became a federal public broadcasting station that was partly funded by West German radio and television license fees.

Despite having been centralized under the administration of the State Committee for Broadcasting (SRK) in 1952, East Germany’s broadcasting stations underwent several major changes during the 1950s. The main focus was to diversify the range of programs targeted at East Germans as well as West German listeners. At this time, the party administration of the Central Committee (ZK) branch of Agitation/Propaganda was regularly negotiating strategies and schemes for future developments with the executive management of the stations.¹ The integration of television services into the GDR media landscape was defined as a crucial task, as shown by Heather Gumbert’s essay in this volume. The East German broadcasting media aimed at generating a mass audience in favor of socialist communication and education policies. Within the competitive media market of Cold War Berlin, however, the party functionaries at

the level of the Central Committee of the SED and the managing directors of the radio stations negotiated a compromise on what an entertainment and light music program had to include. Although the hierarchies in the centralized socialist state and in the East German State Committee of Broadcasting were asymmetric, they nonetheless demanded rather flexible reactions to set the pace in specific fields of broadcasting, or to keep pace with opponents' efforts in providing uncontroversial entertainment. It was the same basic need to compete for an audience that put all the major players and producers in East and West Germany under significant pressure.

The centralized broadcasting corporation of the GDR recognized the importance of successfully claiming a share of this mediascape, and was willing to demonstrate high levels of flexibility in giving this aim priority, alongside the goal of pushing a specific political agenda. This is especially evident in the entertainment programming, which boasted a significant amount of popular music; and there was no gap in the professionalism of the production to distance socialist "light programs" from those products recorded at West Berlin stations. The department of music at a broadcasting station generally had control over what kind of music was being aired. In his major thesis on the politics of music in postwar Germany, Toby Thacker has examined the cultural economy of attracting stars and reestablishing operas, theaters, and concert venues. Following Thacker's descriptions, I argue that of the sound of Cold War Berlin was shaped and largely dominated by high culture, characterized by classical music concerts in traditional venues such as the Komische Oper in East Berlin and the Städtische Oper, later known as the Deutsche Oper, in West Berlin, a point also made by Elizabeth Janik in her contribution in this volume. The contemporary soundscape of radio broadcasting in the city was dominated by popular dance tunes recorded by large orchestras, and radio stations in West and East Berlin did not differ at all in this respect. The banning of certain types of music from being aired was not exclusive to the centralized socialist broadcasting media in the GDR. The role model of public broadcasting, the British Broadcasting Corporation, also appears to have functioned rather convincingly in this aspect (Stanley 2008).

Light programs were aimed at imagined prototypes of typical male and female listeners and accordingly offered music genres that were deemed appropriate. The refusal to play rock 'n' roll music or specific free jazz styles was a core aspect of this consensus. Nevertheless, some prerecorded DJ sets played on the American Forces Network (AFN) provided a distinctly alternative sound to the mainstream of Germany broadcasts. Especially to young listeners, the AFN was an important dis-

tributor of contemporary sounds. Stakeholders in West German public broadcasting were successful in rebranding jazz as cool and rational, as well as an appropriate soundtrack for the young, academically inclined citizens of West Germany (Poiger 2000; Müller, Ortman, and Schmidt 2004; Schwab 2005; Scharlau and Witting-Nöthen 2006). The seven-inch singles available in jukeboxes in corner cafés or youth clubs dominated the soundscape in which teenagers lived (Maase 1992; Rauhut 1993; Siegfried 2006; Fenemore 2007).

A division between classical and light music in the broadcasting soundscape existed previously and proved to be formative for broadcasting music in general. The emergence and distribution of American and British pop music challenged this arrangement in the late 1950s and continued throughout the subsequent decade of surf beat and rock music. The producers of radio programs in West or East Germany expressed a deeply rooted disgust toward sounds and tunes that they perceived as foreign and non-German. But rock ‘n’ roll, free jazz, and beat, besides the media hype around juvenile delinquency, had already spread and were very much present on the streets of Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, Leipzig, and Berlin (Poiger 2000).

When SFB finally launched *sfbeat* in March 1967, its first daily program targeting young audiences, the show included explicit references to its socialist competitor, Berliner Rundfunk in East Berlin.² Its intention was to challenge an ideological opponent with programming deliberately targeted at the youth segment. Contributing to the so-called communist threat in the war on the airwaves, this line of argument was pushed by the general director of the station and the director of programming of SFB and successfully adopted by members of the program control commission. But it also facilitated the acceptance of new kinds of music, modes of presentation, and political reporting about the student movement or the vibrant alternative scene in West Berlin. Meanwhile in East Berlin, pop music from France, Italy, Britain, and the United States, including their East German cover versions, played a prominent role in such “attractive” programs as *Jugendstudio DT 64*, introduced nearly three years earlier in June 1964.

Although public broadcasting in West Germany had neglected the new aesthetic streams of pop culture during much of the 1960s (Gushurst 2000; Kursawe 2004), SFB and RIAS proved to be the forerunners in remedying the situation. For RIAS, the sound of the postwar decade was based on US swing band tunes, 1920s Tin Pan Alley productions, and new adaptations by domestic dance orchestras. Not forgetting, of course, the poignant sound of the Freedom Bell in the tower of the Schöneberg Town Hall that was rung daily to announce the station’s mission. There

were the notorious hit song broadcasts, such as *Schlager der Woche*, scheduled as part of RIAS's Monday evening programming, which avoided playing rock 'n' roll and Twist hits like Little Richard's "Good Golly Miss Molly." RIAS promoted predominantly white, male artists and supported those composers and authors who had contributed to the rebuilding of the West German music business.³ Noisy beat and rock music, American black urban soul released by Stax or Motown, and the international pop music of the decade reached the musical playlist at RIAS as early as 1968, when DJ "Lord Knud" began hosting the weekly pop music broadcast.⁴ Before becoming a radio presenter, Knud Kuntze had played bass guitar in the West Berlin beat band The Lords. When it switched from the summer to the winter schedule in 1968, RIAS relaunched its weekly youth program, *RIAS-Treffpunkt*, and consolidated its message by broadcasting in an education-oriented time slot every weekday afternoon.⁵

The Berliner Rundfunk was as reluctant to play pop music as its West Berlin competitors. The process of negotiating what socialist music, and especially light music, should be within the framework of the party's cultural policy⁶ triggered various internal disputes among the heads of the music departments of the GDR's broadcasting stations; the managing directors of the Association of Musicians and Composers; the state-owned record label VEB Deutsche Schallplatten; the branches of Culture, Youth, and Propaganda of the Central Committee; and the Politburo as the most important political decision-making body in the GDR.

During preparations for the 1964 Youth Gathering or *Deutschlandtreffen*, the State Committee of Broadcasting launched a broadcasting station called DT 64, the predecessor of *Jugendstudio DT 64* at Berliner Rundfunk; its purpose was to broadcast live reports and news from various festival sites throughout the East German capital. The State Committee of Broadcasting had no intention of continuing this service with regular broadcasts after the event. The Politburo, however, was extremely surprised that this presentation of key issues in domestic policies proved so appealing to audiences, including the catchphrases about liberalization and modernization. Thus the Politburo agreed that the Department of Communication at the Central Committee of the Party (ZK-Abteilung Agitation/Propaganda) should encourage the State Committee of Broadcasting to cooperate with functionaries at the Central Committee's Department of Youth and of the Free German Youth who were in favor of establishing such a program or maintaining the station on a permanent basis.⁷

Jugendstudio DT 64 first aired on 29 June 1964 as an extended version of an afternoon program that had already been running for several years and offered one way of coming to terms with pop music in the GDR. Its

programming was modeled on the SED's youth policy of 21 September 1963 that supported all reasonable approaches to playing British (Mr. Acker Bilk), French (Gilbert Bécaud or Jacques Brel), and Italian pop music—and even West German pop music and Afro-American jazz. RIAS examined its rival's program for two weeks in November 1965 and drew the conclusion that only a third of the music played on *Jugendstudio DT 64* was actually produced in the GDR or the Eastern Bloc. It was found that original songs from Western pop stars made up 29.1 percent of the show's content, while cover versions of Western tracks had a 38.2 percent share of airtime. This demonstrates the flexibility of the *Jugendstudio DT 64* music program, although it remained within the legal regulations that stipulated that 60 percent of the music on any program must originate from socialist countries.⁸

The production of light music in the GDR was a relatively slow process, and was hampered by numerous obstacles. A major issue was the fact that acoustic trends came and went faster than GDR composers or arrangers could write suitable pieces. Musicians were required to submit sheet music to the music departments of the broadcasting stations, which would then be evaluated by commissions formed by staff from these departments. Only a number of pieces were approved for recording in East German broadcasting studios and, even then, the facilities had to be prebooked and the dance orchestras or professional musicians working for the stations needed to be available for these recording sessions. The massive administrative costs of producing music in the GDR's broadcasting stations further hindered the development of the industry. At least the existence of this procedure assured some kind of opportunity for the music departments of the radio stations to react to current trends. The East German recording label, VEB Deutsche Schallplatten, which was the main producer and distributor of music for the domestic GDR market, was largely inefficient, but when trying to justify its lack of productivity to high-level party functionaries was quick to allocate blame to the State Committee of Broadcasting.

A report from the Ministry of Culture in 1965 stated that the West German music industry was releasing nearly four thousand titles a year, in comparison with one thousand produced in the GDR—a significant difference indeed.⁹ The figure for the GDR was reduced to five hundred songs annually in a second report, which reflected the changes that the Eleventh Plenary of the Central Committee in December had initiated in 1965.¹⁰ Broadcasters in the GDR were successful in mustering support for its initiatives to create a popular music profile. The branch of Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Commune supported them in opposition to the branch of Culture of the Central Commune in order

to block their initiatives and to gain more influence over what should be broadcast.

With respect to the production of media texts in the GDR, I have tried to outline that broadcasting stations pursued a pragmatic approach to inserting music in favor of attracting regular listeners and selling political programs. In 1965, the spin of political communication turned again and this approach was then considered counterproductive to the party's core message on the value of a socialist lifestyle. In support of this argument, I refer to a document published by the RIAS Department of Youth Program in November 1965, in response to a rival program broadcast from East Germany. This RIAS document implies that the sound of *Jugendstudio DT 64* was unique in comparison with other areas of socialist broadcasting, and I would argue that, while exposing the sound profile of the competitor, the program directors of RIAS should have been more aware of significant changes in the socialist mediascape. This could have negatively affected the relevance of RIAS, which defined itself as the most important station in Berlin's Cold War mediascape. This document outlines instances in which socialist broadcasting applied and incorporated trends into its youth programming that were characteristic of private and commercial radio with the aim of accommodating the tastes and expectations of young listeners. The advertising of consumer goods was, however, substituted by subliminal political advertising in the socialist broadcasts.

SFB launched a weekly program based on pop music and youth-related information in October 1965. This only lasted until 6 March 1967 when it was replaced by a program called *sfbeat*, promoting Anglo-American pop music, country, and soul, alongside news of the Berlin student movement and tidbits of travel advice for hitchhikers in West Berlin. Shortly before the regular broadcast started, members of the board of SFB were informed by its head of Radio and Television Programming, Eberhard Schütz, that the new youth program was necessary to reduce the impact of East Berlin's successful station.¹¹ The members of the board could only accept the changes in programming that the managing director of SFB had approved and initiated. The need to oppose a communist propaganda program that could be successful among working-class youths proved to be the best justification to bring about such a program, even if the autocratic way in which *sfbeat* was initiated in 1967 was to be cause of some dispute in subsequent years.

The producers of media in Berlin were reluctant to adopt pop music as a battleground in the Cold War. Finally, by the late 1960s, they selectively began to use the sound of pop music to challenge each other. Through these tactics, an acoustic setting that had been exclusively linked to ur-

ban subcultures at the beginning of the decade moved forward to claim relevance in mainstream broadcasting. From this perspective, the media in Berlin was not divided, but bound together by difference, the pursuit of distinction, and the struggle to adopt new styles of music and new ways of presenting broadcasts.

Notes

1. BArch B, DR 6/463 unpag., [Büro des Komitees] Beschlussprotokoll der Komiteesitzung am 21.4.1959, 1–23, here 7.
2. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, Bestand Sender Freies Berlin, Nr. 2016, Protokoll der Sitzung des Programmausschusses des Sender Freies Berlin, Berlin 27.2.1967, 1–4, here 2.
3. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, RIAS, A504–02–03, Light Music Program.
4. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, RIAS, A504–02–03/0010, Schlager der Woche, Fahrpläne der Musiksendung: “Schlager der Woche mit Lord Knud” 1.11.1968–31.07.1971.
5. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, Bestand RIAS, F 404–00–00/0023, Programmdirektion Kulturelles Wort, Herbert Kundler, [an Programmdirektion Bayerischer Rundfunk, Bogner], Jugendprogramm im RIAS, Berlin 19.5.1969, 1–2.
6. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/9.06/285, Sekretär des Verbandes Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler, Gerhard Bab, an Abteilung Kultur des ZK der SED, Peter Czerny, Betr.: Information in Zusammenhang mit den Problemen, die in der Zusammenarbeit des Koordinierungsausschusses für Tanzmusik durch das unverständliche Verhalten des Rundfunks entstanden sind, Berlin 8.6.1960, Bl. 75–76, Bl. 76.
7. SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV 2/2.028/90 unpag., Vorsitzender des Staatlichen Rundfunkkomitees, Hermann Ley, an Albert Norden, Betr.: Analyse unserer Musikarbeit, Berlin 3.3.1962. Anlage: Analyse des Musikprogramms des Deutschen Demokratischen Rundfunks, 3.3.1962, S. 1–5, S. 4.
8. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, Bestand RIAS, F 504–01–04/0001, RIAS Berlin, Kulturelles Wort, Abt. Jugend und Erziehung, Eckhart Bethke, DT 64. Eine Untersuchung des RIAS-Jugendfunks November 1965, 1–7.
9. BArch B, DR 1/8783 unpag., [Ministerium für Kultur] Abteilung Musik, Vorlage: Die Verbesserung der Lage auf dem Gebiet der Tanzmusik, Schlußfolgerungen für die Leitungstätigkeit und Maßnahmeplan, (3. Entwurf), Berlin 6.12.1965, 1–20, 3.
10. BArch B, DR 1/8783 unpag., [Ministerium für Kultur] Abteilung Musik, Vorlage: Die Verbesserung der Lage auf dem Gebiet der Tanzmusik, Schlußfolgerungen für die Leitungstätigkeit und Maßnahmeplan, (4. Entwurf), Berlin 18.2.1966, 1–26, 4.
11. DRA, P.-Bblg., Schriftgut Hörfunk, Bestand Sender Freies Berlin, Nr. 2016, Protokoll der Sitzung des Programmausschusses des Sender Freies Berlin, Berlin 27.2.1967, 1–4, 2.

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