



**Stefan Kursawe.** *Vom Leitmedium zum Begleitmedium: Die Radioprogramme des Hessischen Rundfunks 1960-1980.* Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2004. 415 S. EUR 44.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-412-17903-8.

**Reviewed by** Alexander Badenoch (Subdepartment History of Technology, Eindhoven University of Technology)

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## Radio's Rebirth Rediscovered

The radio has long been the ignored stepchild of German cultural and media history. One can speculate as to what extent this neglect is owed to a general privileging of the visual both in culture and scholarship, but it was certainly not helped by the fact that for years, available historical scholarship on the radio was confined almost exclusively to its institutional and political history, while the broadcast program itself was virtually ignored. Beginning in the 1980s, the problems and possibilities of a *Programmggeschichte* began to be debated among a small group of media historians, and in the 1990s, the first works documenting and exploring radio programs began appearing. Until now, however, such works have been confined to the pre-television era, when radio listening was by and large done in the home, and was the dominant medium within the home. Stefan Kursawe's book is the first detailed study to focus on radio's transition, over the course of the 1960s and 70s, from the dominator of domestic free time in German homes to a service designed to accompany increasingly mobile listeners (and radios) unobtrusively through the daytime. The immediate focus of Kursawe's analysis is the Hessischer Rundfunk (HR) based in Frankfurt, but he makes clear from the beginning that the station is to be seen as exemplary of developments within the whole of Germany's public-service broadcasting network, the ARD. The overall goal of the book is to document what was broadcast on the station's two, and later three, channels, and why. In so doing it aims to shed light on the processes of "Americanization" and "Westernization" in West German radio

as well as West German society.

The book is a slightly revised version of Kursawe's dissertation, completed under the supervision of Konrad Dussel at the University of Mannheim, a leading figure in German radio history and author of one of the definitive works of program history, dealing with radio programming in Germany from its start until 1960.[1] The study clearly and consciously bears the mark of its *Doktorvater*, adopting more or less part-and-parcel his methodology and basic theoretical framework, and indeed is meant as a continuation of this documentary work. The program is viewed as emerging out of the tug of interests between government, program-makers, and audience, as well as technological and economic factors. At the root of such analysis lies a quantitative assessment of the program based around sampled schedule weeks, in which the relative number of minutes of programming devoted to information, education, and entertainment are measured. This assessment is then augmented with qualitative exploration of specific programs, station documents and correspondence, as well as lengthy interviews with two of the key programmers from the station.

Following its introduction, the book is laid out in two broad sections, which examine developments in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. Each of these sections is then subdivided into discussions on the conditions and assumptions of radio programming; quantitative analysis of the program; a more qualitative discussion of each of the informational, educational, and entertainment por-

tions of the program. These two main chapters are followed by two shorter chapters, one on reception, and a final one on “modernizing tendencies,” which offers the book’s summaries and conclusions. The work traces the development at the station from the “crisis” at the start of the 1960s, when the rise of television had definitively displaced the radio, until the end of the 1970s, when the radio of the HR, like all of the other ARD stations in Germany, had developed into the separate, “formatted” channels familiar to listeners today. Kursawe carefully charts the considerations and decisions as well as their practical consequences, which led to the “rebirth” of the radio as a medium designed to be backgrounded rather than foregrounded. He shows in particular how the deep-seated notion in public service broadcasting that programs should educate and elevate the taste of their audience slowly gave way to the idea that audiences could best be addressed and served by “giving them what they want,” which was, for the most part, “light” music and news. This move is marked by the structural change following which audiences that used to be addressed at different times on the same channel were eventually served by the creation of three channels, each with its own distinct character: a generally light program aimed at a general audience on HR1, a “cultural” program to address the audience for *Bildung*, and the “service wave” HR3, that offered youth-oriented music and short bursts of information.

With its detailed structural and content analysis, the study is of clear interest and value to the broadcast historians who are its primary audience. By taking into account so many different social, cultural, and political factors that have influenced the making of the program, Kursawe has produced a work that will be of potential interest to a wide range of historical scholarship. (Readers who are less directly interested in radio history may want to skim through some of the detailed quantitative program analysis, however.) The close interweaving of social, political, and technological considerations makes for a rich account. He shows, for example, how the attempt to create a specialized service for drivers failed initially to take shape due to the necessary frequency being used for programs to address guest workers, a content considered politically vital. The eventual creation of the “all-entertainment” drivers’ program became conceivable as the economic downturn changed the perceived need for such programs (pp. 105-106; 226-230). At another point, he shows how the much slower spread of the telephone in Germany (even by the mid-1970s, only half of German households had a telephone) led slowly, but eventually,

to the advent of the phone-in program, and so to a much greater point of contact between station and audience (pp. 204-205).

Particularly valuable are the analysis and discussion of music, both “serious” and “popular” (in broadcast jargon, *Ernste-* and *Unterhaltungsmusik* or, more often, *E-* and *U-Musik*), the latter of which Kursawe rightly points out is a field barely touched by scholarship on Germany. He describes how the various waves of Anglo-American music such as jazz, rock and roll, Mersey Beat, and so on were dealt with by the station, which, during much of the period described, played “Germanified” instrumental versions of this music (p. 144). As Kursawe notes at several junctures, the HR operated in an increasingly varied radio environment, with many of its listeners able to tune in some of the other ARD stations, as well as outsiders such as AFN and Radio Luxembourg. While pointing to the influence of these stations, both on the audience and on the radio programmers, there is limited information as to what these stations were broadcasting. While he justifies the somewhat shadowy existence of these stations at the outset, perhaps a little bit more information, such as a table showing what programs were running parallel to HR programs during key times of day or crucial periods of program development, might have helped to give the reader a broader overview of the radio landscape at the time.

Following as it does two lengthy, detailed sections on the program, the brief twenty-two-page chapter on reception (chapter 4) appears almost as an afterthought, and is limited to the mostly quantitative demographic research conducted on behalf of the HR. Such limited discussion is an understandable pragmatic decision for a book that is primarily focused on the program. Kursawe undermines his decision, however, by justifying it on the grounds that “the broadcast historian is dependent on the methods and results of contemporary audience research,” thus overlooking the broad palette of historical reception studies methodology that has been developed over the past decades (p. 317). The chapter does provide an overview of the changing conditions and demands of radio listening, as well as a reconstruction of the way program-makers imagined their listeners, but as Kursawe states in the closing sentence of the chapter, it is not possible to gain any real sense of the various audiences and publics for specific programs from this research (p. 339).

The limitations shown in the chapter on reception are ultimately indicative of the inherent, and largely acknowledged, limits of this sort of program history that

documents in detail the program of a single station. It is able to tell the story of the “what” and the “why” of the program, but it cannot yet address the questions of who was listening, how the various audiences of the various programs were addressed, and above all, what such programs meant to their various audiences. While the work does indeed stand on its own, perhaps the most important aspect of such a work is that it lays a solid foundation for

future research. In this regard Kursawe has opened up a wide field, and it can only be hoped that more will follow.

Note

[1]. Konrad Dussel, *HÃ¶rfunk in Deutschland. Politik, Programm, Publikum (1923-1960)* (Potsdam: Verlag fÃ¼r Berlin-Brandenburg, 2002).

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