Spiel

Transnational Broadcasting in Europe 1945–1990

Herausgegeben von / edited by Christoph Classen

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Behind the Ironic Curtain: Surfing the Western Airwaves between 'Pirate' Radio and Public Service

Abstract: This article examines the rise and fall of the first wave of offshore broadcasting in Europe in light of enduring tensions of the medium conceived of as a territorialised medium on the one hand and an interface for international exploration on the other. It argues that the mobilising radio's transnational qualities during the Cold War ironically undermined the position of public service broadcasters in the West.

1 Introduction: Mediating Borders

In films that remember the Cold War era in the Soviet sphere of influence, borders are never far from view. In perhaps the most interesting twist, the internationally renowned *Goodbye, Lenin!*[1] even reworks the border for audiences, as the protagonist shows his invalid mother doctored news footage of Westerners flocking Eastward over the Wall. While narratives from the Cold War era in the West do not seem to involve similar interests, it is actually a question of where we look – and how we listen. I would argue that Michael Curtis's 2009 comedy *The Boat That Rocked* (hereafter TBTR, also known as *Pirate Radio* in North America) set around the British offshore 'pirate' radio wave of the 1960s can also be read as a border narrative that, while not explicitly referencing the Cold War, describes historical struggles of over space that were partially defined by it.

The opening sequence of *TBTR* in particular sets out this border exploration. Overlaid with a montage of staid-sounding programmes of the BBC, the visuals zoom in on a suburban neighbourhood. As the scene shifts to the interior of one of the houses, the sound also shifts to a diegetic position becoming the boring background music to a middle-class family sending their young son to bed. Once in bed with the light out, the boy digs a portable radio out of a nearby drawer which cues a montage sequence of Philip Seymour Hoffman as the American DJ The Duke, and listeners of various ages across the nation. In effect, the film performs the well-rehearsed articulation of the bounded space of the family household with the bounded space of the nation which broadcasting has sought also to multiply.[2] Told from the point of view of the younger generation, however, both boundaries are

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1 Cf. Becker 2003
2 Cf. Morley 2000: 105 ff.

more trap than secure space, and the radio becomes a means of transgressing or transcending its boundaries. Making the link between this repressed home scene and the repressive nature of the state more explicit, a few scenes later, the government minister Dormandy who is charged with outlawing the offshore station, asserts to a young staffer "that's the point of having a government – you can outlaw the things you don't like" before proceeding to chide the young man about his haircut. Comparing *TBTR*'s construction and use of the domestic sphere with *Goodbye, Lenin!* also reveals a peculiar irony. Where the latter used the familial sphere to express an attachment to the national state normally perceived as oppressive, in *TBTR* the domestic sphere routinely symbolises the oppressive nature of a state normally viewed as 'free' at least in relation to the East.

In different ways, both films also highlight the material aspects of the past they represent. While *Goodbye, Lenin!* foregrounds East German consumer goods and standard interior decorating in *TBTR* the focus is on radio technology. The film embeds its situational farce in full-colour wide-screen imitations of the publicity materials developed by the offshore broadcasters and their fans since the 1960s not to mention using some of the actual equipment from the 'pirate' boat *Ross Revenge*.[3] In so doing, the film developed coming-of-age and youthful rebellion narratives that could reach effectively across generations. As Matt Mollgaard observes, the film's detailed and in many ways accurate portrayals of life and practice on board the offshore stations mirror the ways that the station's self-promotion opened up normally hidden aspects of production technology and practice to public view.[4] Indeed, in narrative and iconography, *TBTR*'s opening sequence closely resembles non-fiction descriptions ranging from a 2006 BBC television feature which includes the home movies shot by offshore DJ Keith Skues, to ITV features shot during the 'pirate' era itself.[5] Mollgaard argues that "pirate radio reversed this opaqueness of practice by promoting the devices and work patterns that got them to air".[6] In the scenes described, the technology is repeatedly foregrounded: the microphones, dials and knobs of the mixing desk (complete with requisite jokes about men with small knobs) but also the technologies of listening such as the portable radios and tuning dials that emphasise the haptic experiences of tuning in. This is not merely a visual cue to a new generation well-accustomed to seeking out global content on portable devices but a strong echo of the way in which offshore broadcasters are remembered by those who experienced them in their heyday[7] as well as the ways in which

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3   Cf. Skues 2009: 612–613
4   Mollgaard 2012: 55–56
5   Cf. 'Inside Out' 2006
6   Cf. Mollgaard 2012: 56
7   Cf. van der Hoeven 2012

radio listening has been preserved in popular culture.[8] In short, the film is – among other things – about the tools and skills of border-walking.

These observations about memory documents return us to the question of offshore radio and the experience of borders in the Cold War itself. Just as in memory, border stories have been far more integral to scholarship about the East, and particularly broadcasting, than they have in the West. The often-triumphalist narratives of Cold War broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe have stressed the 'natural' ability of radio waves to transcend and categorically de-legitimate the national boundaries of Eastern broadcasters and the dividing line between the blocs.[9] By contrast, both scholarly and popular accounts of offshore 'pirate' broadcasters in the West have focussed mostly at the individual and national level, and tend to be more concerned with the ways the stations broke new ground in broadcast content that ultimately re-shaped the sound of radio.[10] Like *TBTR* accounts of radio listening and youth culture in the West generally tend to highlight the role of radio in personal emancipation from parental circles and a conquest of public space outside the home.[11] In doing so they overlook the ways in which the territorial control of the airwaves in the West was also shaped, and ultimately challenged, by similar Cold War structures. I have argued elsewhere that, seen from a long-term and transnational perspective, the offshore stations appear not so much as a radical break with European broadcasting history but rather a peculiar continuation of tensions that took on new shapes within the forces of the Cold War.[12] Taking the idea of radio 'piracy' as an framing device to explore how 'legitimate' uses of the airwaves are codified[13], I argued that from its institutionalisation in the 1920s through to more or less the present day radio broadcasting in Europe has been characterised by a tension between regulatory systems that have sought to make radio into a service for covering – and not interfering with – national territories on the one hand and individual, commercial and political projects that have embraced radio's transgression of national boundaries as part of its essence on the other hand. The global forces of the Cold War, specifically Western efforts to broadcast across the Iron Curtain, helped to change these dynamics, opening up new non-territorial spaces into which the so-called 'pirates' quickly stepped, thus dramatising – and questioning – the territorial claims of public service broadcasters.

I will, necessarily, retrace some of that story of the (partial) regulation of transmissions here. In this article, however, I will follow the trail of the

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8   Cf. Fickers 2009: 130–131
9   Cf. Johnson 2010; Nelson 2003
10 Cf. Skues 2009; Kemppainen 2009; Kok 2008; Harris 2001; Chapman 1992
11 Cf. Fickers 1998; Hilgert 2015
12 Cf. Badenoch 2013
13 Cf. Johns 2009: 6–7

memory crumbs highlighted above through that story to trace the way in which radio listening, as social practice and technical skill, configured and was configured by struggles over the airwaves in arenas from the international conferences to local conditions of reception. As I will show, as with the spaces of transmission, the configuration of radio listening was also fraught with tensions between an idea of a disciplined listener, making discerning use of national content, and a liberal listener using the radio device to explore the open space of the airwaves. This long-term approach allows us to look beyond the moment of a medium's initial social embedding where a dominant set of meanings emerge and are ultimately encoded through a series of struggles in a range of arenas[14] to show on the contrary how certain tensions and uncertainties continue.[15] In taking up this approach, I will mostly bypass consideration of radio as a sound medium and the way in which sound helps to structure the apparatus, spaces and practices of reception and production. Instead, I will engage with its aspects as an electro-magnetic medium, and the ways in which the sending and receiving of radio signals have been conceived of and governed in the shifting political and social structures in Europe since the inception of radio. In addition to documents from the regulatory process of the airwaves, this account will also draw on the material and visual aspects of radio, drawing on some of the rich if not always critical documentation of the offshore stations which have proliferated in recent years as well as radio set design and advertisements.

2 Bordering the listener

In his 1995 acceptance speech as Nobel laureate in Stockholm, the poet Seamus Heaney reflected on how he had first come to know of Stockholm from the radio dial in his childhood home in Northern Ireland. As he describes, even before it was a question of sound, the visual and material aspects of the radio device itself suggested imaginative travel:

> Now that the other children were older and there was so much going on in the kitchen, I had to get close to the actual radio set in order to concentrate my hearing, and in that intent proximity to the dial I grew familiar with the names of foreign stations, with Leipzig and Oslo and Stuttgart and Warsaw and, of course, with Stockholm. I also got used to hearing short bursts of foreign languages as the dial hand swept round from BBC to Radio Eireann, from the intonations of London to those of Dublin, and even though I did not understand what was being said in those first encounters with the gutturals and sibilants of European speech, I had already begun a journey into the wideness of the world beyond.[16]

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14 Cf. Wurtzler 2007: 15
15 Cf. Tworek 2010 raises a similar point
16 Heaney 1995

Heaney's experience is echoed in a number of private and popular memories of radio[17], and indeed in the opening sequence of *TBTR* cited above where the young boy uses the radio in this case to bring in the American accent of Philip Seymour Hoffman's Duke. What is vital to note here is the way in which the cities printed on the dial first seemed to inscribe the use of the device for imaginative travel – and in this case to cities on both sides of the Cold War divide. It appears as an entry into a borderless world even as the young Heaney shifts between the problematic territorial poles of Northern Ireland, Dublin and London. Even though, indeed, radio emerged and was rapidly incorporated into an era of nationalisms, institutional, technical and discursive[18] a closer look at the apparatus, and indeed the configuration of the airwaves, tells a more complex transnational story that must be considered when understanding the role of radio in the Cold War airwaves.

Radio historians have long highlighted the important role of so-called radio amateurs in pioneering and popularising radio broadcasting before its institutionalisation. The process of institutionalisation which in Europe especially was also largely a process of nationalisation was in fact one of constant struggle. As Susan Douglas has argued for the US, such radio amateurs were often involved in practices of 'exploratory listening', closely engaged with the device of radio and listening out for signals from near – or preferably far.[19] Such practices went against an idea of radio broadcasting where only a small number of licensed authorities send signals to a large number of receivers. Indeed, it is within this struggle surrounding the BBC's institutionalisation that the notion of "radio piracy" first emerged in Britain, not to describe acts of illicit transmission (as it did in the US, and later in regard to the offshore stations) but illicit reception by those who had constructed their own sets and not paid license fees.[20] To an extent, such activities were part and parcel of radio use in the early years but the BBC's initial ambition to be the sole purveyor of broadcasting equipment, and also gather fees for listening to its programmes, put it on a collision course with radio 'experimenters' who had a genuine interest in the technology. At international level as well, the first president of the International Broadcasting Union Arthur Burrows also recommended to the League of Nations Consultative Committee on Communication and Transport Technology that there be strong controls on amateurs who were not 'serious' experimenters.[21] Attempts to make the distinction raised a number of important issues surrounding the access of citizens to

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17 Cf. Falkenberg 2005: 186–187; Fickers 2009: 127–128; Fickers 2010b
18 Cf. Hilmes 2004
19 Cf. Douglas 2004
20 Cf. Johns 2009: 357–358
21 Cf. Lommers 2012: 85

scientific knowledge, as well their rights within the wall of their own homes. The result, ultimately, was a campaign to combat oscillation, a side-effect of inept radio practice by which radio receivers also began transmitting. The campaign instead focussed on creating a disciplined listener – who would also, ideally, tune in to the home station.[22]

These examples from Britain notwithstanding, Douglas Codding's assertion that before the Second World War "the listener's right to receive from abroad seems generally to have been assumed, since it was never actually questioned"[23] is mostly accurate if in need of some nuance. Efforts to stop or curtail broadcasting from overseas were largely focussed at international level to prevent the broadcasting of 'hostile' signals rather than aiming at a populace that might listen in to them.[24] For those looking to bring new (paying) listeners to the medium, that is to say, both national broadcasters and especially manufacturers of receiving sets and parts, the amateur's fascination with tuning in distant stations was mobilised as a key selling point. Starting in 1924, the BBC produced as special *World Radio* magazine, designed especially for the listener who wanted to follow "dominion and foreign programmes". It included special rubrics for exploratory listening including "Stations Worth Trying For" with instructions for tuning in certain foreign stations and another called "What Station Was That?" which, conversely, helped listeners to identify the stations they had tuned in. Programme guides in most European countries printed schedules from neighbouring countries and sometimes from the US. After the Second World War, international increasingly associated with shortwave listening to the extent that the wavelength has become synonymous for the practice: As a 1987 shortwave guide argued, the 'shortwave listener' refers to someone who seeks for distant content "regardless of the particular wavelengths they listen to".[25] In the early decades of radio, such practices were neither marginal in terms of waveband nor indeed to the use of the device at all. As radio became an increasingly national institution, the international affordances of radio remained problematic.

In his discussion of the development of the radio dial in the 1920s and 1930s, Andreas Fickers shows how the precondition for developing such an easy navigation interface was the establishment of an international regulatory regime for the airwaves.[26] Only once agreements were reached for optimising non-interference between broadcasters was it possible to 'fix' frequencies. He presented a version of what Thomas Diez calls the "subversion paradox"

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22 Cf. Johns 2009: 369 ff.; Geddes and Bussey 1991: 17–18
23 Codding 1959: 70–71
24 Cf. Codding 1959; Lommers 2012
25 Helms 1987: 1
26 Cf. Fickers 2012

of borders – that to transcend a border, it must be acknowledged.[27] Legal scholars noted even before the First World War the creation of a broadcasting regime in which a large number of stations could function and thousands of individuals could maximise their listening choices would involve cooperative, communal regulation of radio frequencies.[28] Starting in the mid-1920s, a series of international agreements, laid out by post- telephone and telegraph administrations (PTTs) and broadcasters set out to regulate the use of radio frequencies. Prior to these processes, tuning in could be a difficult experience, given the noise of interference between transmitters, especially before transmitters were terribly stable.[29] The allotment of medium- and long-wave bands for state-based broadcasters and their division into regularly spaced (9 kHz apart, set in 1927) frequencies was meant to minimise interference at receiver level and political friction at the level of broadcasters and governments.[30] While actual regulation of the airwaves came under the remit of the national PTT administrations, the expertise for measuring and mapping ideal frequency allocations was developed by the non-governmental International Broadcasting Union (IBU), a federation of broadcasters founded in 1925.[31] The IBU's engineering chief Raymond Braillard established a monitoring station in Brussels to register the strength and wavelength of broadcasting stations throughout Europe. Armed thus with both technological and diplomatic expertise, with Braillard the IBU became the foremost technical expert on the European airwaves, and the only authority competent to issue recommendations for – and monitor violations of – international agreements on use of the frequency spectrum.[32] Ultimately, this process in the airwaves ended up as a kind of mirror-image of the oscillation campaign on the ground in Britain – but here it was the broadcasters and not individual listeners who were aided, cajoled and shamed into making disciplined use of a common good.

One of the key 'violators' of this territorial order was Radio Luxembourg which was set up in the early 1930s with a powerful transmitter for sending messages over the borders of the Grand Duchy. Jennifer Spohrer argues convincingly that while technical arguments advanced against Radio Luxembourg these were ideologically tied to normalising national, territorial broadcasting.[33] As national uses of the radio spectrum became codified in the international arena, they were by no means universally adopted. Both at

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27 Cf. Diez 2006
28 Cf. Laborie 2010: 185
29 Cf. Fickers; Lommers 2010: 227
30 Cf. Wormbs 2011
31 Cf. Lommers 2012
32 Cf. Wormbs 2011; Lommers 2012
33 Cf. Spohrer 2008: Ch 3

the level of transmitting and receiving, struggles over 'legitimate' use of radio waves ensued. At that time, the International Broadcasting Company set up by British entrepreneur (and later member of Parliament) Leonard Plugge was forming alliances with authorised amateurs particularly in France but also as far away as Madrid and Ljubljana.[34] The international process of negotiation also provided national bodies with an arsenal of technical arguments with which to argue against 'unruly' broadcasters.[35]

Returning to the radio interface itself, Fickers rightly argues that the tuning dial was an unintended consequence, and indeed a materialisation of radio frequency allocation[36] but in taking this idea on board, it is important to recognise that radio dials also captured the tensions and contradictions surrounding this process. First, it is important to note the relationship between the artefact and the frequency allocations: while they were agreed upon, there was no legal means of enforcing them. This is as true of transmitters as it is of receivers. While set makers may have depended on regulations of frequencies to a certain extent, they were by no means bound by them. In other words: Whether or not a station was sanctioned by international treaty had no direct bearing on manufacturer's inclusion of them on the dial. Manufacturers could respond to the perceived demands and interests of their customers. Second, while it may be an artefact of the 'black-boxing' of radio receivers as technical objects, the printed cities on the tuning dial ironically entrenched the *idea* of the radio as a device for international exploration. Even as the processes of frequency allocation were largely marginalising amateurs, receiving sets were at least partially underlining one aspect of their practice. This contradiction between the symbolic promise of the device as gateway to transnational airwaves and radio's material, institutional and discursive embedding in national territory is, I would argue, one of the defining traits of radio in Europe in the 20th Century and one which the Cold War re-configured in peculiar ways.

3 Hybrid airwaves and divided skies

The Second World War mostly put paid to the involvement of commercial broadcasters in Europe, as governments felt less secure in the face of broadcasters they did not control. Radio International, a new service for the Allied Forces from the IBC station at Fécamp in Normandy was shut down in January of 1940 under pressure from both the BBC and French authorities.[37] Perhaps most dramatically and symbolically of this shift, Radio Luxembourg

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34 Cf. Johns 2010: 40 ff.
35 Cf. Spohrer 2008; Johns 2010; Tworek 2015
36 Cf. Fickers 2012
37 Cf. Street 2006: 187–188

shut down in October of 1939, was taken by the Germans and turned into a Nazi propaganda station in May of 1940 and was then re-taken by the Allies in September of 1944 where it did double-duty as a service for Allied troops during the day and as a 'black' propaganda station by night.[38]

From the perspective of listeners, the fronts expanding both in the airwaves and the ground both dramatised radio's territorial connections as well as its border-crossing aspects. Propaganda broadcasting was no longer a matter for diplomatic negotiation but warfare by other means, and increased accordingly.[39] Whilst there were some attempts to stop foreign broadcasts via jamming, attempts at defence were mostly focussed on persuading or coercing listeners. Citizens on all sides of the conflict sought information and even entertainment from the programming of enemies and allies. In occupied countries, clandestine radio receivers became symbols of resistance, now proudly collected and displayed in museums, and broadcasters in exile such as the Dutch Radio Oranje have achieved legendary status.[40] The now-famous case of the song 'Lili Marleen' which became a multi-language hit with soldiers on both sides of the conflict is perhaps the best-known indicator of a transnational culture of radio listening that emerged during the war.[41]

Especially as what would become Cold War tensions began to flare in the second half of the 1940s, efforts to re-establish peace and order in the European airwaves after the Second World War did not entirely achieve either goal. In terms of order, re-allocating radio frequencies in keeping with the new, but still uncertain, borders of Europe quickly became a struggle over scarce resources. The International Radio Conference in Atlantic City in 1947 delegated the task of re-allocating the European frequencies to a special conference in Copenhagen that began in June of 1948. From the start, the conference was strongly marked by the Cold War, in tension with the efforts of the large nations of France and England to re-assert their influence on the continent. Germany at that time divided and under military occupation could not vote and though the US occupied one zone it too was present as a non-voting observer only. US delegates used their presence to lobby not only for allocations for its German stations within its occupation zone but also for the Voice of America as well as its forces network (AFN) both of which the US State department saw as key to counteracting Soviet influence.[42] At a conference where 500 requests for 256 frequencies would be considered, the results left few happy and with British observers remarking that the Soviet

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38 Cf. Briggs 1970: 679
39 Cf. Briggs 1970; Bergmeier; Lotz 1997
40 Cf. van den Broek 1947; Sinke 2009
41 Cf. Erenberg 2003; Falkenberg 2005: 96–103
42 Cf. Craig 1990

Union had been the victor of the proceedings.[43] Denied the frequencies it had requested, the US made good on their assertion that they would not be bound by the agreement, setting up stations in their zone of occupation, violating particularly Eastern allocations.[44] Ultimately, the Copenhagen plan served not so much to lay down a rigid set of allocations but rather to give rise to a more informal regime of "legalised squatting".[45] In Western Germany which had lost most of its frequency allocations, commentators spoke of the 'dismantling' of their airwaves parallel to the dismantling of industry on the ground[46] and noting that not only had Germany's frequencies been allocated elsewhere but that many of the stations operating within Germany – most notably the American Forces Network – were not German stations either.[47]

Not only in terms of technical order, but more directly in terms of peace, radio became a source of struggle and uneasy compromise in particular with regard to the individual right to listen. As Jennifer Spohrer shows, radio listening was a key focus US and British diplomats worked to establish "freedom of information" within international law, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[48] The concept was initially launched during the war by Kent Cooper of the Associated Press and aimed as much at challenging European press cartels as it was to combatting authoritarian societies: Both were placed on the same sliding scale. As such, it was also greeted with hearty scepticism from countries in Western Europe, in addition to the Soviet bloc. One British official described Cooper's efforts as "making the world safe for Associated Press".[49] Within the atmosphere of the Cold War, however, the concept was adopted into diplomatic efforts not least as a means of securing a basis for international broadcasting from the Voice of America and the BBC. This agenda was pushed in particular into the agenda of United Nations, which held a conference on "Freedom of Information" in 1948. Within the resolutions passed, a "right to listen" was explicitly embraced and this even included resolutions for ensuring that all would have access to the technical means – cheap radio sets.[50] The conference further submitted draft language that was adopted as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas

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43 Cf. Henrich-Franke 2011: 116
44 Cf. Craig 1990; Henrich-Franke 2011; Schwoch 2008: 30
45 Henrich-Franke 2011
46 Cf. Rhein 1949; *Die Zeit* 1950
47 Cf. *Der Spiegel* 1951
48 Cf. Spohrer 2013
49 Spohrer 2013: 40
50 Cf. Whitton 1949: 74

through any media and regardless of frontiers"[51] adopted in December of 1948, again over Soviet Bloc objections but not as a binding treaty as the US had proposed.[52] Ultimately, while it had been aimed largely across the "Iron Curtain," in embracing principles of "Freedom of Information" Western European governments – at least in theory – signed up to and supported principles that would also challenge their own territorial monopolies of broadcasting at least from the point of view of the listeners.

The idea of the free listener was also explicitly adopted into the goals of UNESCO and their policy of free flow of information. Here, too, trans-border radio was seen as central. In 1948, the same year that the Copenhagen conference was attempting to regulate the medium waves in Europe, a similar conference to regulate the high-frequency (shortwave) band was taking place in Mexico City – but with far less success.[53] As talks were beginning to break down, UNESCO director-general Julian Huxley sent an urgent telegram, insisting that "long distance broadcasting on high frequencies is uniquely adapted free flow of ideas across borders […] Universally accepted high frequency broadcasting plan is prerequisite to right of listeners everywhere to be informed about each other".[54] Similar to the medium-wave, the high-frequency spectrum appeared as a scarce resource with too many demands, but unlike the medium wave conference for Europe where at least an ostensible agreement was reached, an agreement on higher frequencies simply could not be reached. The US once more refused to sign the proposed plan in Mexico City – where, as a potential signatory, such action held more weight than in Copenhagen – and so official allocation did not happen for many years.

By 1950, the European airwaves showed the curious tensions between postwar and Cold War eras. While neither peace nor order was fully restored to the European airwaves within international arenas, a series of cautious compromises and stalemates had created a measure of stability by the start of the 1950s. The military infrastructures of wartime and particularly military radio stations were not so much dismantled as entrenched while, particularly in the form of Radio Luxembourg, the cross-border commercial broadcasting that that been part of the European airwaves before the war was re-established. Even while territorial principles largely guided frequency allocations, the medium and longwave bands in Europe remained decidedly hybrid in many parts of Europe. This enduring weakening of territorial regime in the airwaves was further compounded by the adoption, though far from complete or universal, of the right of individuals to information from beyond their territorial borders.

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51 *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 1948
52 Cf. Spohrer 2013: 42–43
53 Cf. Hamelink 1994: 76
54 Huxley 1948

4 Cracking the airwaves: Between Cold War and commerce

If US-based commercial interests had been re-purposed by Cold War diplomats into the 'Freedom of Information', it was non-commercial US Cold War interests that set a key precedent for the start of commercial offshore broadcasting in Europe. In 1952, the ship USCGC *Courier* set anchor in the Eastern Mediterranean (mostly in the port of Rhodes) to broadcast the Voice of America into Southeastern Europe from a very powerful 150kW transmitter with a balloon-borne antenna. In keeping with US practice after the Copenhagen agreement, the ship operated on a Polish-allocated medium-wave frequency (1295kH), but also a shortwave transmitter.[55] Unlike its commercial counterparts that started off of Europe's Northern coasts, it operated not on the high seas but rather in the territorial waters of Greece, which had that year also joined NATO. Second, it broadcast from a ship belonging to the United States Coast Guard therefore placing it under the auspices of a nation rather than a private enterprise. Discourse surrounding the ship, just as surrounded the other US-sponsored stations, was in the mode of 'war' being packaged as a mobile tactical weapon for wielding 'truth' against regimes of Soviet control.[56]

The next crack in the European airwaves had less to do with Cold War tensions and far more to do with exploiting the French market for commercial broadcasting. If France had been a major 'exporter' of commercial cross-border broadcasting before the war[57] in the 1950s it had become a major importer. Besides Radio Luxembourg, small 'peripheral' stations in the small kingdoms of Monte Carlo and Andorra also had also targeted the large republic with commercial broadcasting since the 1940s. In 1953, the entrepreneur Louis Merlin left Radio Luxembourg to start a new venture, the commercial long wave station 'Europe No 1' (now simply called Europe 1) which began broadcasting at the end of 1954 in the Saar.[58] The special status of the Saar between France and Germany had created a situation whereby French commercial interests could take over from Radio Saarbrücken (formerly under the control of French government) to establish commercial broadcasting for the region. The goal of the radio station was officially to provide revenue to Telesaar, the commercial TV broadcaster that was established at the same time by broadcasting commercial radio to France. Using a squatted frequency with a power of no less than 400kw. French press commentators announced that French territory was "surrounded" by threats and that "the new Wehrmacht" was at the gates.[59] The politically

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55 Cf. Nelson 2003: 59; Cummings 2010
56 Cf. Cummings 2010
57 Cf. Street 2006
58 Cf. Fickers 2010a
59 Cf. Maréchal 1994: 158

well-connected Merlin had considerable support in the French government, which in turn also had a direct interest in most of the other 'peripheral' stations via its company SOFIRAD through which it bought controlling shares of many of them.[60]

Daniel Lesueur argues that that Europe No 1 was part and parcel of the same trend as the offshore stations that started a short 3 years later.[61] In particular, he highlights their internal role in targeting youth audiences for radio and challenging other competitors within France, particularly the state broadcaster RTF. If Europe No 1 was largely focussed inward toward France, in spite of its daily greeting of "Bonjour l'Europe"[62], its geographical and legal position – not to mention its key competitor in Luxembourg – meant that response to it was international. The Luxembourg PTT echoed without irony 1930s BBC accusations against Luxembourg in a note to Merlin saying Europe No 1 was "nothing but a pirate station"[63], a term echoed later in German reporting on the station.[64] In the months leading up to the start of the station, there had already been protests from a number of Nordic countries that the station would interfere with their transmissions as well as intense diplomatic negotiations with Luxembourg[65] and in 1955, the EBU's administrative council took up the cause as well, again citing (potential) technical interference as the main problem.[66] By 1957, however, the station had established a legal basis, and efforts to combat it slowly faded.

In light of this longer history, it would be easier to argue that the start of commercial offshore 'pirate' broadcasting was inevitable than to call it a radical break in history. It seems a particularly small development when considering the relatively scale of operations at beginning of the 'pirate era'. A young Danish entrepreneur named Peer Jansen, backed by the owner of a local silverware company, took advantage of the 'holes' in the broadcasting order that Cold War considerations had left to start up a service more or less aimed at the Danish metropolis. On August 2, 1958, Radio Mercur started in international waters between Copenhagen and Malmö with a relatively weak signal on 88 MHz (FM) and plagued by technical difficulties. Its studios and offices were on land, and recordings were flown out to the vessels for broadcast. Like its commercial example, as well as its public service rival, the station even had its own big band which played light jazz tunes, as well as

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60 Cf. Boyd and Benzies 1983
61 Cf. Lesueur 2009: 43
62 Cf. Lesueur 2009: 44
63 Maréchal 1994: 158
64 Cf. *Der Spiegel* 1958
65 Cf. Fickers 2010a: 26–29
66 Badenoch 2013: 304

the station's identifying jingle.[67] Within a short time, Skånes Radio Mercur which broadcasted in Swedish to the opposite coast also began broadcasting on FM. Danish Commercial Radio (founded by a break-off group from Radio Mercur, that later merged back with the station), started up in 1961.

In spite of the small splash it made in the airwaves, Mercur nevertheless caused perhaps even bigger international waves than the far more powerful Europe No 1 had three years previously. Its timing within the Cold War played an important role, coming as it did less than a year after the first Soviet Sputnik had been an international sensation broadcasting from extremely non-territorial space. Radio enthusiasts all over the world tuned in the faint beeping sounds from the tiny orbiting device. Four months after Mercur began broadcasting, the US had launched the SCORE satellite, one-upping Sputnik's beeps by broadcasting a pre-recorded message by US president Eisenhower to earth. Mercur's timing also put it swiftly on a collision course with the 1959 World Administrative Radio Conference of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in Geneva which was undertaking a revision of the international radio regulations, not least in view of the untenable crowding of the airwaves in Europe. The Nordic countries explicitly invoked the possibility of sharpened East-West propaganda wars from satellite broadcasters as a reason also to combat offshore broadcasters off their own coasts. By contrast, the US delegation, which did have voting rights in Geneva sought to downplay the situation and argued that more regulation was not necessary.[68] Ultimately, in spite of US aims, language was adopted making such offshore broadcasting illegal under international law.

If national delegates to the ITU convention had cited political chaos as a reason to combat commercial pirates, the public service broadcasters united in the European Broadcasting Union instead resorted to their old repertoire of citing technical issues and potential interference in the airwaves. As its processor the IBU had done before the Second World War, the EBU once more cited first technical 'chaos' and second the potential for political propaganda broadcasting as the greatest threat from the offshore stations. In reporting to the Administrative Council in 1960, the EBU's technical committee

> […] was unanimously of the opinion that situations such as that created by the vessel moored off the Danish coast were likely to produce chaotic overcrowding of the ether, to injure legally established broadcasting organisations and to lead to political complications if, instead of giving commercial broadcasts, such stations were to transmit news and propaganda programmes.[69]

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67 Cf. Norgaard 2008
68 Cf. Henrich-Franke 2006: 182
69 European Broadcasting Union 1960a: 16

Danish cartoon from 1958, showing Radio Mercur as peaceful, piano-playing pirate, confronted by heavily armed, yet ageing and deaf state powers. Image courtesy of the Soundscapes Archive, University of Groningen http:// soundscapes.info/
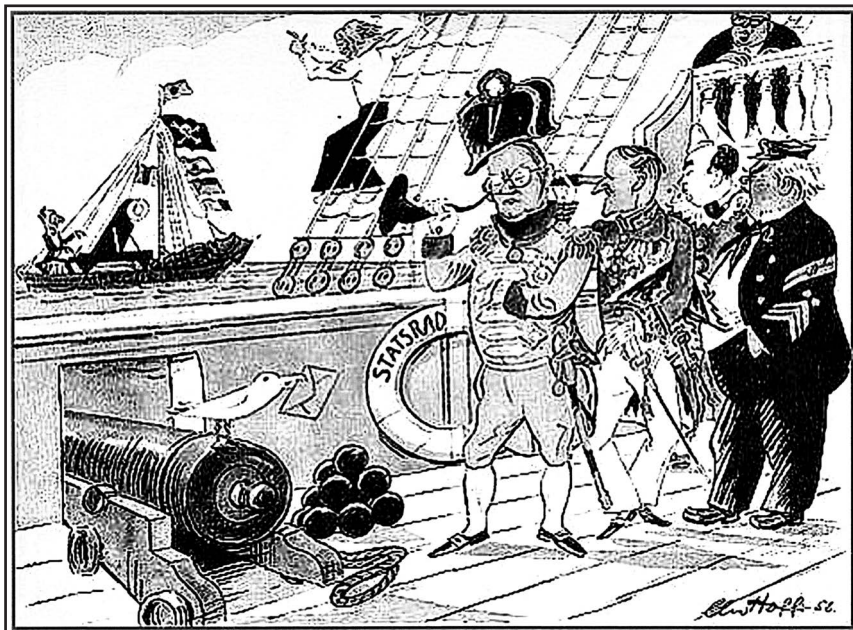
In spite of the alarm, none of the scenarios envisaged during the ITU delibera-tions had actually materialised, at least not from Mercur. The FM stations did not pose a threat to the crowded MW and LW spectrum that were the focus of anxiety, and other than self-advocacy, the content of Mercur was not overtly political. Very soon, however, new offshore vessels did make the move into the medium wave to take advantage of the greater spatial coverage possible, which made the stations more attractive to advertisers. In 1960 Dutch Radio Veronica, which had supposedly come upon the idea of offshore broadcasting separately, started on medium wave. The Swedish Radio Nord, which began broadcasting in 1961, also set up an operation with a broader focus on the medium wave. In the process of establishing themselves on the medium waves, the 'pirates' soon discovered for themselves that the spectrum in Europe was crowded. Quite apart from struggles and negotiations among themselves, they were also contending with established stations on land. Radio London, which like Radio Nord was backed by US entrepreneur Gordon McLendon, also began on a frequency allocated to Zagreb (266 m), and often faced interference at night.[70]

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70 Cf. EBU Monitoring Centre 1965

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the various international responses of national bodies to the offshore stations was how much they were signs of powerlessness. ITU regulations carried no mandate for enforcement outside of national territories.[71] As German authorities responded, faced with the prospect of a German offshore station (which never materialised), "we don't have a gunboat available to shoot them out of the water".[72] The EBU listed the stations in their monitoring report of the European airwaves but could merely point out that they were in violation of the radio regulations.[73] The EBU's legal committee pushed harder to find a means of enforcement encouraging its members to lobby their governments for legislation making it illegal to "aid and abet in the operation of such stations, whether by providing supplies, victuals, technical services, capital, advertising matter or programmes, or by performing work or services".[74] Eventually the matter was handed over to the Council of Europe where it was debated until 1965.[75] Eventually, the Council of Europe passed "European Agreement for the Prevention of Broadcasts transmitted from Stations outside National Territories" in January of 1965, adopting very similar language to that suggested by the EBU.[76] Not all governments were equally swift to act. The Dutch government, in particular, raised very particular objections to enforcing the statute with regard to ships due to issues with freedom of the seas[77] – an idea that had its origins in Dutch jurisprudence surrounding its imperial expansion in the 17th Century.[78] Radio Veronica remained at sea through the middle of the 1970s not least after its management was caught bombing its rival Radio Northsea International that had begun a new wave of offshore stations in the 1970s.

With both the new ITU regulations and the recommendations of the EBU in hand, the Nordic countries passed legislation that would effectively ban the offshore stations. In a meeting at the start of July, ministers of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Norway harmonised the laws to go into effect at midnight of 31 July 1962.[79] Radio Nord dutifully went off the air in advance of the law (as did the American entrepreneur's Gordon McLendon's next venture, Radio London, when Britain passed similar legislation). Radio Mercur defied the law briefly but was boarded and forcibly impounded by the Dan-

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71 Cf. van Panhuys; van Emde Boas 1966
72 *Der Spiegel* 1964
73 Cf. EBU Monitoring Centre 1962: 64
74 European Broadcasting Union 1960b: 7
75 Cf. Henrich-Franke 2006
76 Cf. Council of Europe 1965
77 Cf. van Panhuys; van Emde Boas 1966: 327 ff.
78 Cf. Brilmayer; Klein 2001: 707
79 Cf. Kemppainen 2009: 128–129

ish police two weeks after the law went into effect. Radio Syd's owner Britt Wadner took a far more idealistic line and continued to broadcast, having been fined and even sent to prison briefly in 1965, before the station finally closed down in 1966.

Though perhaps best known internationally, offshore broadcasting targeting Britain did not begin until 1964, until after most of the Scandinavian pirates had ceased, and not long before the European Agreement outlawing them was signed. As more critical accounts have shown, the British offshore vessels varied widely both in scope of operation and in ideological position.[80] Like Britt Wadner, and to a lesser extent Radio Mercur in Scandinavia, some of the offshore vessels had an ideological stance far more aimed at creating free spaces in the airwaves for new performers. Radio Caroline founder Ronan O'Rahilly was initially seeking not to circumvent the BBC but rather Radio Luxembourg, which only played records by the large labels that bought airtime on the station.[81] Others were aimed far more at breaking open the public service monopoly to allow for commercial broadcasting on land and as such sat somewhat uneasily with the label of 'pirate' even while it cast them as heroes in public discourse. An appeal that went out on Radio Caroline as the British Marine Offences Act was being debated in Parliament made this explicit: "Remember, we are not fighting to remain pirates. We are fighting for free radio in Britain. For an alternative to the BBC. For licensed commercial radio stations operated from shore."

As the Western radios had in the East, the offshore stations in the West questioned not only the territorial limits but also the moral limits of state power. The helplessness with which broadcasters and governments reacted in international forums was also apparent to their own citizens. On the other hand, the measures they did eventually appeared to many as an unwarranted overreach. Newspaper cartoons in the various countries conjured remarkably similar imagery in portraying the situations. The offshore stations, usually festooned with iconic imagery of 18th century sea pirates though made to look harmless, are positioned beyond territorial reach. By contrast, the figures of territorial authority, usually government ministers, though in one case the BBC are seen dressed in showy uniforms or making threats with weapons that are as disproportionate to the threat as they are ineffective to stop it.[82] As they were being shut down, the offshore stations also appealed to their place on the 'free' side of the Cold War. When Radio 390 was closed, owner Ted Allbeury referred to his broadcasting "in good company" with other unli-

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80 Cf. Chapman 1992; Johns 2010
81 Cf. Chapman 1992
82 Cf. Skues 2009: 372; Knot 1999; van Elteren 1994: 108

censed stations such as Voice of America and the American Forces Network.[83] Perhaps the most apt portrayal of the confusing conflation between freedom of broadcasting and the discourse of the Cold War was a pathos-filled spot on August 14, 1967 called "Man's Fight for Freedom" assembled by DJ Johnny Walker most of which was set to the pro-US military "Ballad of the Green Berets"[84] – before finishing with "We Shall Overcome" – the anthem iconic of the US non-violent civil rights movement.

5 A symbol in search of substance: The portable radio as personal tuner

For setmakers and publishers in the West, incorporating the rapidly changing geography posed far less of a challenge than it did broadcasting authorities: The names and locations of new stations could simply be included in station scales and programme guides whatever official sanction might be. This especially easy given that the cities on the dial did not necessarily need to correspond to the situation for the listener on the ground. Based on her interviews with listeners from post-war West Germany, Karin Falkenberg noted that radio dials with multiple cities in Germany were oriented mostly toward show. "For radio listening they were simply useless optics, empty promises and 'pseudo-offerings', as radio listeners quickly and accordingly disappointedly realised".[85] In fact, the so-called "Iron Curtain" was more or less absent from radio dials on either side of the Cold War divide. Sets made in the West routinely listed cities in the East and although listening to Western stations was hardly encouraged in Soviet Bloc countries cities in the West nevertheless appeared on the dials.[86]

The links between the radio set industry and offshore stations also became visible on the devices themselves, as the offshore stations were literally inscribed on many radio receivers. Radio Mercur soon appeared listed on FM dials in Denmark and the offshore stations similarly began appearing on radio dials across Europe not long after their appearance. In Britain, Germany and elsewhere, a new sort of model receiver with a better-differentiated "bandspread" in the area around 199 meters (and the 208 of Luxemburg) – as well bringing back shortwave in West German sets[87] – had already been developed and 'Caroline' was added to the scale of a number of these in Britain. Adverts

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83 Cf. Chapman 1992: 177

84 R. Moore; B. Sadler 1966

85 Falkenberg 2005: 186

86 Cf. for example Badenoch 2012; Similar collections of Western stations are visible the author's collection of photos of radio dials from Soviet-era Russia, Bulgaria, and Poland, as well.

87 Cf. Diefenbach 1961

for portable transistor radios in magazines such as *Practical Wireless* in the UK specifically highlighted the models ability to bring in "BBC, pirates and Luxembourg", as well as "extra band for easier tuning of pirate stations".[88]

Besides the flexibility of the tuning dial, the new portability of receiving sets also became a key symbol of radio coming unstuck from national territories. In popular memory as well as advertising of the time, 'pirate' radio is almost synonymous with the light, portable transistor radio. Chapman argues that with its increasing mobility by the early 1960s the radio set – particularly the portable radio – "was a symbol in search of substance"[89]. The first such portable sets which also became a key marker of youth culture and consumption appeared on the market around the same time that Radio Mercur first appeared.[90] The portable device quickly became iconic not just for a leisured, mobile lifestyle in general but particularly for youth a mobility of realms of cultural consumption outside of domestic and familial spheres.[91]

This association of the offshore stations with (mobile) receivers was complex, though not often contradictory. The Dutch offshore station Veronica was started by radio retailers and set manufacturers both bought advertising time and used the offshore stations to promote their products.[92] The electronics giant Philips bought advertising time on both Dutch Veronica and the British pirates. The British electric and electronic goods retailers Curry's even had a sponsored show on Radio Caroline called "Call in at Curry's" taped on location at stores within range of the station. On the show, members of the audience were invited to give sales pitches for products on sale in the store in order to win prizes in a way publicly performing both technical mastery and the consumer behaviour both the offshore stations and their sponsors sought to promote. In the branding of radios as well the influence of the pop-oriented stations was also clearly of importance in selling small radios to youth. In response to the new availability of pop stations, Philips introduced the "Popmaster" model portable radio in 1965 and in 1966 Bush produced the "Caroline" model radio which could be ordered at a discount via the offshore station. Even before this, Radio Caroline used to intersperse its programmes with the jingle "take a lively companion wherever you go, take a portable radio" (heard, for example on the Emperor Rosko show, Caroline South 13 August 1966).

The irony of this strong association between the portable radio and the offshore stations is that, very often, the signals from the stations were weak

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88 November 1966 issue: 6, 17
89 Chapman 1992: 26
90 Cf. Weber 2008
91 Cf. Fickers 1998; Weber 2008
92 Cf. Kok 2008

enough that additional help was required. Mercur's signals were initially so weak that shops sold special "Mercur antennas" so that listeners could pick them up.[93] In Britain as well, the relatively weak medium-wave signals of the pirates were easier to pick up on larger high-powered home sets with aerials, or with special devices such as the Dewtron wave trap that could be added to the receiver.[94] Paul Harris whose first book documenting the offshore stations came out while the ships were still at sea also emphasises the work involved in tuning in the offshore stations:

> I could not receive radio Caroline from my home in the North of Scotland on a transistor radio but, being something of an aficionado at the tender age of 15, a former Bomber Commando radio receiver (type R1224A, if my memory does not deceive me) lurked in the attic and was connected to a 120 foot-long wire antenna in the garden below. I was not altogether sure why at the time, but I felt a very distinct thrill of excitement as I turned the dial and heard for the first time 'Good morning this is Caroline on 199. Your all day music station'.[95]

This disconnection between the material realities of actually tuning in offshore radio and the symbolic association between offshore stations and the portable radio as a personal tuning device only serves to reinforce our understanding of the power of the latter. By harnessing this image, offshore stations were able to effectively appropriate the idea of the free and mobile listener as part of their claim to serve their respective publics better than their official "home services." Such notions have been reinforced in both popular and private memory by re-emphasising the work of tuning in.

The symbolism of the device as consumer good and point of personal liberty also crossed the Cold War divide and in many ways highlights the parallel position between national broadcasters on both sides of the divide with regard to rivals from beyond their territory – not to mention strategies for their incorporation. Broadcasters in both East and West reacted to external broadcasting by trying to set up new programmes or stations that would incorporate the new styles. In the West, Melodiradio in Sweden (1961), Hilversum III in the Netherlands (1965) and BBC Radio 1 in the UK (1967) were each more or less a direct response to 'pirate' competition.[96] In the German Democratic Republic, the youth station DT64 was started with a strong compliment of Western music because if the youth were going to listen to the Beatles "they should hear it from us".[97] In describing to OIRT colleagues their attempts to make contact with their audiences, the Hungarian state broadcaster pointed

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93 Cf. Norgaard 2008
94 Cf. Chapman 1992: 49
95 Harris 2001: xv
96 Cf. Franzén 1963; van Elteren 1994; Chapman 1992: Ch 7
97 cited in: Stahl 2004: 234

to factors requiring change: "It was also necessary to consider listening to western radio stations, which at certain time [*sic*] was fashionable among secondary school pupils".[98] The result, notably, was a programme called "The Portable Radio Set," that would start to meet these needs.[99]

6 Conclusion

While comparing recent memory documents offers a compelling path back toward comparing pasts in Eastern and Western Europe, I would be given to doubt that radio would ever form an effective visual or narrative building block in a European 'cinema of consensus'.[100] As noted at the start of this article, popular memory seems, if anything, to be diverging and emotional attachment to everyday culture in the East is not being met by a parallel nostalgia in the West. But this divergence can perhaps best be seen as the latest in a series of ironies highlighted by following the parallel development of radio and territory during the Cold War: In spite of strong historical parallels and an intertwined history, the differing valence of these structures seems to make them infertile ground for comparing experience.

As tracing the development of radio has shown, the international pressures of the Cold War not only had strong ramifications in the East but also in the West. A key aspect of these developments was the unsettled tension in the apparatus of radio itself which was embedded in the earliest days of the medium and continued at least into the 1970s. In arenas ranging from international negotiations to the design of receiving sets, radio was both conceived as a territorial medium which unsurprisingly was reinforced in negotiations between individual nations in Europe and as a medium of free circulation to which all listeners are entitled. Embraced particularly within the idea of the "freedom of information" and in fact the freedom to listen, such notions were key to transforming the radio into a weapon of Cold War. What was meant to have highlighted the differences between a 'free' West and a restrictive East in fact inadvertently highlighted the similarities between national broadcasters on both sides.

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98   Baráth 1967: 3
99   Cf. ibid.
100 Cf. Rentschler 2000

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