

## Reflections on a Forgotten Past: Early German Television as a History of Absences

In the summer of 1999, Berlin's airways were filled with sounds and images that had not been broadcast there for over 60 years. SAT 1 re-broadcast fragments of television material that had last been transmitted over Berlin's airways between 1935 and 1944, this time, re-packaged as two episodes of *Spiegel TV Reportage*.<sup>1</sup> The program doubtless surprised those who associated the medium with the *Bundesrepublik*, and for whom television had not yet even reached its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In its initial promotion, *Spiegel TV* claimed that the program was based on 30 hours of »just-discovered« television footage from the vaults of the (former) *Staatliches Filmmarchiv der DDR* (a claim repeated two years later – in the summer of 2001 – by *Channel 4* in the UK). Moreover, *Spiegel TV* speculated that the material had long been repressed – cynically citing as a possible reason the DDR's fears of a similarity between its »dictatorship« and that of the Nazis.<sup>2</sup> This program material is now slowly winding its way across Europe in the form of locally re-edited television documentaries on »Nazi Television« complete with the mildly sensationalist tone of *Spiegel TV Reportage's* original efforts.<sup>3</sup>

It would be interesting to see what use the British, Dutch, and others have made of this early German television material together with *Spiegel's* interviews with specialists such as Klaus Winkler and survivors of the original broadcasting period.<sup>4</sup> Given their different historical and ideological agendas, not to mention their distinctive broadcasting contexts, these national re-tellings would offer compelling case studies in the construction of a history for a medium whose identity tends to be highly nationalized. Both the trans-national lessons drawn from this early chapter in German television history, as well as the way that an increasingly globalized medium has been deployed to reflect upon its own history, complicate the »local« lessons drawn from Germany's first nine years of daily television broadcasting. And while compelling, there is an even more fundamental set of questions bound up in this material. *Spiegel TV's* claims to have »discovered« the material traces of a »forgotten« chapter in Germany's cultural history point to the basic issue of popular memory. How could Germans (Berliners in particular) »forget« nine years of daily television, particularly when that television was so heavily hyped in its own time, and when it so dramatically set the stage for the re-launching of television in

the *Bundesrepublik*? And how could those inhabitants of other nations involved in the great race for television – Britain, the US, France, even Argentina – forget about developments that were widely publicized in their mainstream press and in electrical engineering journals? How could the television medium re-invent itself as a post-war technology in the popular imagination, and cut itself loose from nearly a decade of technological and programming practice? Was there anything specifically »German« about the medium's construction before 1945, and about the process of forgetting about it?

For the record, the 30 hours of material were not »just« discovered, nor so far as I know were they any more »repressed« in the former DDR than in the BRD (where early television images also exist and were – and are – also »forgotten«).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the story of the production of knowledge about German television offers interesting insights not only into the construction of popular memory of the NS-era – a particularly overdetermined cultural-historical moment, but into the very »taken-for-grantedness« of the medium's history as well. In the pages ahead, I'd like to explore in particular the intersection of popular memory and media history. This will not take the form – valuable though it is – of primarily considering the images and sounds that were broadcast and considering their relation to collective memory. Rather, I will focus on the medium itself as the object of memory and forgetting, and that memory's or absence's potentially determining role in informing the reinvention of the medium in the post-war era. This project brings with it a reframing of the more general relationship between popular memory and cultural history, and although I will make some comments on this, it will remain implicit rather than explicit in the present essay which is more medium-specific.

My contention is that – the important work of several scholars notwithstanding<sup>6</sup> – we have learned precious little from the medium's first decade; that the development of the medium within the context of the fascist state helped to shape – but failed critically to inform – the television that emerged after 1950. This may seem witheringly self-evident, but the reasons for this failure help to shed light on the way that popular memory takes form, and with it the ways that histories are written. The pages to come will attempt to bolster my focus on the medium rather than its program texts, give an overview of television's development and deployment between 1935 and 1944, and briefly reflect on the significance of forgetting. I will then explore three different arguments for German television's post-war marginalization: one, regarding fundamental conflicts in the medium's identity; a second involving the institutional organization of television in the NS-period and its implications for the post-war archival record; and a third, concerning post-war sensitivities by some of the corporations most centrally involved with the international development of the television medium. Each, I will argue, offers a way of understanding the gaps in popular memory and the post-war (re-)construction of broadcasting history both within Germany and without. To make this case, I will cover some ground that I have treated more extensively elsewhere, but the thrust of my

comments will regard the historiographic status of what is known about the medium itself.

Before moving on, I should perhaps better motivate my approach to this problem. As I will discuss in the pages ahead, German television during its first decade had something of a double life. On one hand, it was seen by relatively few Germans firsthand – estimates range from between 100,000 to 300,000 one-time viewers per annum – despite the fact that it was a functioning and reasonably innovative broadcasting service. On the other, the medium enjoyed a strong discursive presence: it was regularly reviewed (well outside the range of its broadcast area), heavily promoted as a triumph of national technology, and regularly promised as a soon-to-be-available domestic appliance. Its impact owed far more to its promise as a national medium than to the practice of program production and reception. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that German television was considered as more than a delivery system for programs. Rather, it was seen as offering a means of extending the national public (and conversely, of extending national event), of constructing a new electronically-enabled *Volkskörper*, leaving the details of programming in a distant second position. This reason, reinforced by the relative paucity of surviving programming (*Spiegel TV's* thirty hours notwithstanding), supports my shift of emphasis away from the program text (typical of most television studies) to the medium as text. The move away from an analysis of the images and narratives seen on television to the analysis of the medium itself as a way of addressing popular memory is driven by other factors as well. Post-war television emerged as part of a highly nationalized set of discourses, with different nations and national industries implicitly claiming the medium as their own. While this project most often played itself out exclusively within national borders, it nevertheless suggests the discursive importance of the medium, again in comparison to the more familiar debates over the programming of the medium. The conception of the medium provided the basis for national regulation (whether state, public service or commercial), economic model, and programming options, giving the memory (or lack thereof) of the medium's pre-1945 developments a special role in television's re-invention.

It is also worth saying something about the phrase »German television«. This can be taken to refer to the developments of a particular medium in a particular culture, but it is an identity complicated (as we will see) by the multi-national character of television's technology, by issues of cross-ownership and collaboration (with American, British, and French partners), and of course by the larger fabric of identity questions that pervade the construction of programming (can we nationalize conceptions of sport? drama? weather?). If there is a particular national identity that emerges, it relates to the particular administrative culture responsible for television's organization at a specific historical moment in Germany's history. It relates to a widely-publicized construction of the medium as »German« because of certain historical technologies (Nipkow's disk central among them) and certain strategies of deployment which will be discussed in the pages ahead. And it relates

to a highly specific vision of the medium's deployment as a definer of nation, one held in common with radio, that so far as I know is unique to the culture and moment under discussion.

One additional factor merits mention. Although many studies of the relationship between media and popular memory tend to focus on program texts,<sup>7</sup> the German case is particularly complicated. The popular cultural residue of Germany during the Third Reich has an uneasy status. Beyond the familiar erosion patterns caused by temporal distance and the selective reinforcement of certain memories, German culture of the 1930s and 1940s has also been subject to active repression and even pathologization. True, carefully vetted films from the period can be seen on television and Zarah Leander songs can be purchased on CD, but the nostalgia industry largely circumvents this difficult period when reiterating the past. Unlike the mania for the period in US culture where it is regularly celebrated as a mix of innocence and moral certainty, in Germany neither option is available and the period remains difficult.<sup>8</sup> One result with direct bearing on the topic at hand is the almost complete absence of references to German television between 1935 and 1944 in today's popular cultural imagery and nostalgia industry. The processes of maintaining cultural memory through reworking and refreshing it as nostalgia have failed the period generally, and television's part in it specifically.

#### Developmental landmarks

Early German television occupies a curious place in cultural and technological history. With nearly a decade of well-publicized daily broadcasting to its credit, and with over 160,000 television viewers of the 1936 Olympic Games and approximately 300,000 viewers per annum at the broadcasting exhibitions, somehow the very existence of German television before the 1950s seems to have eluded popular memory. Despite widespread and regular coverage in international newspapers and radio and electrical engineering journals, and despite shared licensing agreements for various television components with corporations in the US, UK, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and France, the broadcast histories of nations outside Germany routinely think of television's developmental legacy in terms that virtually exclude German developments. In the US, for example, England's broadcast start in 1936 is routinely heralded as a benchmark, even though Germany's service began one year earlier and continued well after Britain's cessation of broadcasts with the outbreak of war in 1939, indeed, nearly to the war's end. Moreover, few in the US or Britain seem to know of the licensing agreements between the *Radio Corporation of America* (RCA) and *Telefunken*, or Britain's John Logie Baird's partnership in *Fernseh AG*, or of cross-licensed German tube technologies used by television in the US, UK, and Soviet Union. Television, of course, was a fully multi-national medium, rendering any strict national identity (like the issue of ›firstism‹) routinely suspect.

In technological terms, German political and governmental representatives, industrialists, engineers and with them a small portion of the public explored many different notions of television. Initial service in 1935 relied upon Paul Nipkow's 1884 invention (the *elektrische Teleskop* better known as the Nipkow disk), and although countries such as Britain would quickly move ahead with fully electronic service, British technological observers at the annual broadcasting exhibitions in Berlin reported amazing results (upwards of 700 lines!) from their German counterparts who used super-vacuum environments for their otherwise »primitive« optical-mechanical disks.<sup>9</sup> Nipkow's disk, despite its clear limits both theoretically (in contrast to all-electric systems) and practically (in terms of deploying television as a mass medium), nevertheless permitted the medium to be described as a »German« invention. This discursive claim played a considerable role in encouraging engineers to converted its broadcasting format to 441 line electronic find a way to make it work. Nevertheless, by late 1938, Germany (iconoscope) service, abandoning Nipkow's system and instead licensing RCA (*Radio Corporation of America*) technology developed in part by the Russian American, Vladimir Zworykin. Although RCA's technology had been a part of *Telefunken's* television development from early on, in 1938 *Telefunken's* system emerged as the new national standard, and was shared with four other firms, including *Fernseh A.G.*, the primary supporter of the Nipkow system. Orders for the mass-production of some 10,000 relatively low-cost (650 RM) receivers were issued to this consortium of electronics companies. At the same time, construction was nearing completion on two additional large transmitter towers which would provide broadcast coverage to a significant portion of Germany.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately for these initiatives to transform television into a mass medium, the war disrupted the implementation of both developments. But technological innovation continued. Germany deployed television-telephone service; large screen projection television was available, with one television theatre having 400 seats; and successful experiments in high definition television yielded 1029 and 2000 line prototypes.<sup>11</sup> Even the military occupation of Paris provided television developers with an opening: *Fernsehsender Paris* was established, transmitting from the Eiffel Tower until several weeks before the city was liberated. The war encouraged other more predictable developments. Active steps were taken to use television in both offensive and defensive military applications. According to US and British intelligence, by the war's end, some 300 miniature cameras per month were being produced by semi-skilled slave labour at one site alone for installation as guidance systems in missiles, torpedoes, and rockets.<sup>12</sup>

Television programming was also reasonably well developed. In addition to broadcasting shortened feature films and documentaries, television's programming was constituted by live drama, news and public affairs programs, cooking shows, exercise programs, sports and political rallies, children's shows, and variety.<sup>13</sup> The broadcast day began with 1.5 hours in 1935 and steadily increased. During the

Olympics, for example, some 8 hours per day were broadcast rather than the 3 hours per day typical of 1936. By the early 1940s, the day could last up to 6.5 hours, of which 1.5 hours were broadcast live. Unfortunately, very little of this programming remains today (aside from *Spiegel TV*'s 30 hours plus a small amount of additional footage that I have located in the archives). Some drama, sports, and news programs were broadcast live, ruling out their survival. Much more material was filmed, quickly processed (usually within one minute of initial exposure), and broadcast as a television signal. But little of this inter-film material survives.<sup>14</sup> The result is that we are forced back to remaining filmed material (like *Spiegel TV*'s material, documentaries about television, and some amateur films of home television), programme guides, scripts, photographs, and other relevant materials to construct some sense of what was broadcast.

But for all of its technological innovation and programming efforts, for all of its plans, German television remained a system with a tiny audience centred largely in Berlin. Probably not more than 600 working receivers were ever available, with many being used for research purposes. Yet television broadcasting was public, and so too was its exhibition. Berlin had (depending on the period) up to 25 television halls, most seating 40 people (with several halls accommodating hundreds), which the public could attend free of charge. To give some sense of attendance figures, we might consider broadcast journal *Die Sendung*'s claim that in the month of January 1940, with only 6 television halls in operation, 10,604 people attended. By April, with 12 halls in operation, 16,908 viewers attended for the month.<sup>15</sup> But despite the public, collective reality of much television reception, broadcasting journals such as *Die Sendung*, as well as articles and advertisements in more popular magazines offered a more domesticated vision of television, showing couples or the family seated around the home receiver. This ›ideal‹ notion of domestic television as the new family hearth was in fact only experienced by a few television journalists and party functionaries. As we shall see, lurking behind the notion of collective, public reception and more atomized, domestic reception were a series of fundamental debates over the identity of the medium and its audience. The conflicting visions at the base of these debates would play a role in undermining the medium's place in popular memory.

Despite the modest number of overall television viewers, the German government expended sizeable resources to assure both technological and programming progress. The motives? Propaganda was certainly an incentive, although not propaganda programming so much as the very *existence* of German television as propaganda. And from the start, as evidenced by the extensive overseas marketing of German television technology (including intensive efforts in Latin America and eastern Europe), the potential economic benefits to the national electronics industry stimulated technological and programming development.<sup>16</sup> But a third and far more visionary motive may have played a crucial role in the Reich's investment in television, even during the extremely difficult period of ›total war‹. Plans were afoot to

develop a cable television news network linking greater Germany and the occupied territories, and forging a single reality, a single rhythm, that would televisually unify the Reich in post-victory Europe. We will return in particular to this third point and its implications for the relationship between television and popular memory.

### Reasons to forget

The point is that however extensive the material realities of this everyday practice, it was superseded by the discursive reality of Germany's efforts with television. The ability to demonstrate national technological superiority by inscribing the medium as »the world's first daily public« television service,<sup>17</sup> and to not only continue broadcasting after the British stopped, but to expand both the broadcast day as well as the markets served (Paris), did not depend on great numbers of television viewers. Instead, it depended on other media – the press, film, and radio – which could amplify the successes of the new medium to the vast majority of the public who never actually saw television. The Propaganda Ministry's (RMVP) eagerness to promote the medium was matched – for very different reasons – by the electronic industry's, which did its best to prepare the domestic public for a new appliance, and meanwhile attempted to cultivate markets for German television in Latin America and eastern Europe. And, as we shall see, the somewhat contested status of television with arguments over its audience, price, function, and future, all generated awareness of the medium even to those for whom it was little more than a new word.<sup>18</sup> How, then, did television slip from public memory? I do not mean to trivialize the much larger question of forgetting associated with the NS-era. Rather I seek to approach this complex and dangerous terrain by pursuing a limited case – television's place in popular memory.

Before considering the particulars of this question, it might be worth reflecting on the importance of forgetting to the larger project of constructing history. History, after all, is the residue of a culture's memory, seen with the advantage of hindsight and given meaning through the conjectures of an ever-changing present. Its raw material is constituted by what we remember and what we have struggled to discover about the past. But particularly in its tracing of memory, history tends to rely upon material that has become encrusted with meaning, material as important for its visibility and access, as for the reassurance it provides as we compare the latest insights with the inadequacies of previous interpretations.

The historical record's absences are every bit as compelling as the sediment from which cultural narratives are constructed. What historians lack determines the limits of what they have to work with, and in this sense, the project of forgetting is the reciprocal of that of remembering. In its moments of triumph, forgetting (like absence generally) evokes Wittgenstein's 7<sup>th</sup> proposition from the *Tractatus Logico-*

*Philosophicus*: »Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.«<sup>19</sup> That said, absence has its structures, its patterns, and limits (of which forgetting is but a small part). Although perhaps far less satisfying to grapple with than what we remember, it nevertheless enjoys a certain tangibility. There are many differently textures of absence: the ephemeral, too fleeting for attention; or the incoherent, outside comprehension; or the interests of social dominants, who inscribe their memories and assure their survival in archives at the expense of other voices; or the rigors of time, eroding traces of the past with its own haphazard logics. Yet absence, and particularly that associated with forgetting, also has surprising ways of being recovered. But lest this awaken teleological hopes of an eventual settling of the books in the favor of that which is recovered and fixed as part of the historical record, forgetting combined with the selectivity of attention will doubtless assure continued forgetfulness and thus the survival of the structuring absence.

How did German television disappear from popular memory? As suggested at the outset, there are a number of factors, some having to do with the contested identity of television in the period, others having to do with the institutionalization of the medium both in the NS-years and after, and still others having to do with a broad set of responses to NS-culture ranging from its exploitation as war-booty to its suppression as an indictment of multi-national corporate collaboration. The remainder of this essay will deal with each of these in turn.

#### Intermedial tensions

From a media historiographic perspective, identity is perhaps the single most important factor that might explain both the failure of German television to win mass acceptance and the ease with which the medium was forgotten. In fact, television's troublesome identity has had a long pre-history that extended outside of Germany. As early as 1883, the French author Albert Robida described in *Vingtième Siècle* a device that would help to characterize life in the next century – the ›telectroscope‹. By way of a flat glass screen, the ›telectroscope‹ could electrically extend vision, bringing distant events into the home. Robida details the device's use as a source of ›broadcast‹ entertainment, as a mode of point-to-point communication (a visual extension of the telephone), and as a means of surveillance. Like many pre-cinematic ideas about the moving image, Robida assumed two distinctive conditions of reception: an atomized, domestically-situated audience, and a networked audience linked together with simultaneously occurring events. The subsequent development of cinema in 1895 with its collective audiences and ›canned‹ programming went against the grain of both of these visions of reception, having an effect as well upon subsequent notions of television, where especially the idea of the audience became somewhat more contentious.<sup>20</sup>

The German situation provides an especially good example of the competing



views of television available before the advent of television as we know it in the 1950s. Debates over the aesthetic identity of the medium – its claims for uniqueness and thus some sense of its ideal direction, pervaded the period. As we shall see, these ideas had direct consequences for the structure of television's audiences, for the medial expectations of those audiences, and perhaps for television's mixed success among those audiences. Indeed, from about 1930 until 1944, a series of debates, technological developments, and public experiments offered at least three distinct visions of television to German viewers, derived from the telephone, radio, and cinema.<sup>21</sup>

Echoing an idea of television in place since nearly 1877, television was associated with the telephone in a service that linked Hamburg, Berlin, Nürnberg, Leipzig and Köln. As in Robida's portrayal, television was seen as the visual extension of a point-to-point, individual communication network already in place with the telephone. Although in practice centralized through its locations in post offices, the system was in principle capable of finding application on a household level.

A second conception of television saw the medium essentially as the visual extension of the radio. The basic technological framework and engineering talent for television derived directly from radio; the electronics industries active in the production and sales of radios stood behind television's development and marketing; and the governmental ministries charged with regulating radio broadcasts and collecting licence fees extended their purview to include television. But behind these rather pragmatic arguments for television as the visual extension of radio stood more profound implications. Would television be primarily aural in its idea of program production, relying on the visual only as a supplement? Certainly in the days of 180-line television (up until 1938), this offered a useful justification for poor image quality; moreover, to those critics who feared that housewives would put off their chores because of television watching, the medium's emphatically aural dimension assured that it would pose as little distraction as radio. Radio also brought with it an atomized notion of audience in which individuals could listen in the privacy of their homes, and a grass-roots level of the medium in which amateurs could supposedly create their own technology and programming.<sup>22</sup> A radio-inspired vision of television as a household commodity was especially interesting to German industry, which looked forward to sales on the scale of radio's, one of Europe's highest per capita ownership rates.

A third notion of television was decidedly more cinematic in character. Television's identity was located in its ability to carry image, and at a moment when filmed images could generally be transmitted more easily than live images, this view offered some solace to television workers who relied on the film medium. The development of television programming, especially in the area of dramatic production (which was often produced live), seems to have held firm to the conventions of cinematic depiction, and then like now, a large proportion of daily programming had been initially produced for the large screen. The cinematic notion extended to the

idea of audiences in the sense that they were seen as large, public, collective groups rather than atomized individuals or families. Even for those for whom ›live‹ imagery was preferred over filmed, the cinema homology held that television was a new delivery system for cinema-style mass audiences. Berlin's experiments with various large screen display technologies and with theatres seating up to 400 people typify this notion of exhibition.

After 1939, an additional notion of television became increasingly apparent for some within the engineering community (although it was generally withheld from public scrutiny). This idea sought to use the medium for purposes of telepresence. In concrete terms, this resulted in the deployment of guidance systems based upon miniature television cameras in bombs, torpedoes, and rockets.<sup>23</sup> These could be remotely steered, since a thin wire connection between a rocket and launching airplane permitted the operator to see where the projectile was headed and to keep it on course. Or they could be self steering as was the case with some torpedoes, using a system that would be the basis of later heat-seeking guidance technologies. As previously noted, one factory was producing 300 mini-cameras per month for these purposes, although as far as we know, they were used primarily for testing. Regardless, the telepresence use of television suggests a distinctive configuration of the viewer (and his object), again feeding into the fundamental ambiguity of what precisely television was.

The powerful role of these various media homologies (telephone, radio, film, and for some, even tele-presence) generated a fundamental problem regarding the audience. In part, this was a struggle to define the audience (as domestic, as collectivized, etc.) and its modes of reception, and to construct a recognizable institutional form for the medium and its public. And in part, it was a struggle for the imagination of the public, creating desire for a future medium that would variously stand as the fulfilment of radio, or as home cinema, or as an invaluable upgrade of the telephone. This struggle appealed to included both the public as consumer and the public as a definer of the quotidian. Obviously, the competing messages and developments muddied the waters rather than producing the hoped-for clarity that each camp sought. But there was a related problem. Television was evaluated by a public seeking acoustical qualities equal to or better than the gramophone or radio, and visual qualities equal to or better than the motion picture. But both sets of expectations were inevitably disappointed.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Monika Elsner, Thomas Müller and Peter M. Spangenberg have offered a compelling argument in this regard, suggesting among other things that the mis-match between expectation and reality led to a situation where the expressive capacities of competing media simply overwhelmed that of television, leaving the new medium in the shadows.

In terms of the general cultural debate, television was struggled over by various governmental ministries, industrial and political factions, each with different visions of the medium and its audience. This last point is crucial for the argument at hand. Although for some participants in the debate over television's form, the homology they selected may have shaped their views of the medium, for many others, specifically ideological and economic interest was at stake. For example, as suggested above, the electronics industry was eager to maximize its profits by replacing the word ›radio‹ with ›television‹ in the governmental campaign to place a ›radio in every German house‹. And although together with the active support of the Post Ministry, German industry developed a relatively low cost television (the *Volksfernsehempfänger*) along the lines of its radio equivalent (the *Volksempfänger*), it faced the opposition of the Propaganda Ministry and the left wing of the NSDAP. The Propaganda Ministry, and especially Goebbels and the initial director of broadcasting, Hadamovsky, both held the view that propaganda was most efficient when it could exploit the pressure and peer control that could only be generated in large collective audiences. This position of ›public‹ reception was developed in their theoretical writings and offers intriguing clues to period perceptions of reception. The NSDAP's left wing, although supporting the bottom line of collective television, did so from a very different position. It argued that the television medium should not be the plaything of the wealthy; instead, it should be commercially available only when it reached a market price within the reach of a broad social spectrum.<sup>25</sup>

The competing incentives of corporate profit, propaganda theory, and social egalitarianism thus played out over differing conceptions of the audience as customer, object of persuasion, and comrade. And these conceptions in turn brought with them differing measures of reception: sales, ideological conformity, and identity within a classless society. From the perspective of perceptions of reception – a guiding discourse for those most proximately involved in the debate over television – these divergent criteria fed directly back into the production process, shaping the conditions of audience reception.

The contested vision of the medium was compounded by its administrative organization within the Reich. Developments before 1933 tended to be orchestrated through the *Reichspostministerium*, which had both deep formal and informal relationships with the German electrical industry. Indeed, the strategic integration of governmental regulatory agencies and the telecommunications industry (whether conceived as hardware suppliers or program providers) was common to most nations, regardless of whether state-centric as in many European countries or commerce-centric as in the US. But after 1933, German broadcasting was reorganized along distinctive lines. The Propaganda Ministry assumed responsibility for programming, leaving the Post Ministry with technological standards and infrastructure. Television was further complicated by a third ministerial affiliation: Göring's

*Luftministerium* was responsible for the offensive and defensive uses of the new medium. This tri-part division speaks both to the malleability of television as a concept (its precise capacities remained the object of speculation, nowhere more so than in Göring's sector), and led to a contestation of power and responsibility that would last throughout the Reich.

The Post Ministry, populated by career bureaucrats and engineers, had a tradition of professionalism that contrasted sharply with the party hacks and ideologues who tended to populate the recently formed Propaganda Ministry. This cultural strife was exacerbated by Goebbels' powerful position, and by the fact that the Propaganda Ministry eroded both the responsibilities traditionally held by the Post Ministry, and the revenues generated by radio licenses. Not only did chronic bickering result (as well as an elaborate system of intermediary organizations which attempted to get on with the real work of broadcasting), but as just mentioned, fundamentally different agendas were pursued, further complicating any agreement about the precise nature of the television medium.

A lasting consequence of this division for post-war historians has been the compartmentalization of records implicit in the period's divided ministerial responsibilities. With some notable exceptions, those records having to do with programming and generated by the Propaganda Ministry wound up in western Germany; whereas the records having to do with technology and infrastructure and generated by the Post Ministry ended up in eastern Germany. The implications were profound. The West found itself armed with hard evidence that neatly fit the dominant post-war reading the NS period: the German people were tricked into supporting Hitler, brainwashed by Goebbels' propaganda machine (and of course, terrorized by the Gestapo, etc.). The quick repositioning of National Socialism as the structural equivalent of Communism through a Cold War discourse of »totalitarianism« needed evidence to fall back on. And the Propaganda Ministry files provided more than enough. In Germany's Soviet Zone, by contrast, a different analysis prevailed to the effect that National Socialism was capitalism run amuck. The fascist state, they argued, strove for a form of hyper-rationalized national capitalism, and what better place to look for the collaboration of state and (profit-producing) industry than in a ministry responsible for technology. The Post Ministry's files document the extensive collaboration of the Reich with corporations such as *International Telephone and Telegraph* (IT&T) and *Radio Corporation of America* (RCA), not only in the development of consumer-end telephone and television technologies, but as well in offensive military applications of television technology. Ideologues in the East thus had the evidence they needed to document a capitalist conspiracy.

Thanks to the mutual suspicions engendered during the Cold War, not only did the analysis of National Socialism emerge as a highly charged issue, but scholarly exchange between the two Germanys was minimized. Two largely self-contained ideological realities co-existed, and what little information leaked from one side of the border to the other was re-inscribed as little more than propaganda. Western

scholars simply lacked access to the vision of television embedded in the Post Ministry's files, as did Eastern scholars relative to the Propaganda Ministry's records. Whatever confusions dominated the NS-debates over television were simply amplified in the post-war years thanks to the division of Germany and its archives.

## Contexts

One last set of factors might be singled out for their role in helping us to »forget« about early German television. These factors are not so much specifically related to issues of media identity, nor to institutional (re-)organizations of television's residue in the archives. Rather, they concern post-war redefinitions of some of the period's artefacts, and a more general reshaping of cultural memory. They involved the sensibilities of both the victors and the vanquished, touching as they did upon acts of wartime collusion and collaboration. An extensive fabric of multi-national corporate partnerships shared information and resources between the Reich and other nations, particularly in Europe, North America, and South America. Whether through direct ownership, cross-ownership, shared boards of directors, or simply cross-licensing agreements, many multi-nationals perceived as »local« within national contexts pursued their economic interests in Germany – many continuing well after the outbreak of the war. These relationships touched television in two specific ways.

First, despite these relationships, Germany's technological sector suffered the same fate that it, in its time, had inflicted on occupied countries. Factories were often plundered in the final days of the war, providing an appropriately late-capitalist definition to war-booty. German chemical technologies, manufacturing techniques, aero-space technologies, and of course the electronics sector were appropriated by the Allies in the interests both of intelligence gathering and profit. In actions that nearly render Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* a work of documentation rather than fiction, specially trained technological intelligence specialists accompanied front line Allied troops as they fought their way through Germany. Their task was to enter factories and engineering centres and seize any material that might be of intelligence or commercial value. The significance of this activity is underscored by the fact that corporations such as RCA and IT&T had a number their top staff transformed into military officers in the final days of the war, and assigned to these to front line intelligence activities. The distinction between state and corporate acquisition of German intellectual property seems to have been blurred in the extreme, with military seizures ending up in corporate headquarters back home (as the experience of the aerospace and chemical industries attests).<sup>26</sup> Another indication of the importance of these operations is apparent in the charges exchanged among the Allies that each side's field intelligence operatives were hiding information from the other. The American *Field Intelligence Agency Technical Division*

(FIAT) and the *British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee* (BIOS) represented competing interests in the race for new patents and manufacturing techniques, and each was guilty of seizing information and sending it to their own national producers. Their clashes and the mutual suspicion they engendered finally resulted in the creation of the *Combined Objectives Sub-Committee* (CIOS) and the promise of full and fair information sharing. Soviet troops were even more thorough in their efforts, taking not only intellectual property but stripping the factories of all movable parts as well as in the case of a *Blaupunkt* television tube factory, taking all of the workers back to the Soviet Union.

These efforts specifically included television, and the intelligence reports by produced by these agencies created an important source of documentation about NS television activities. Unfortunately, television technology, although documented, was garbed in the secrecy of these missions. Indeed, their findings were fed back to electronics firms in Britain and the US and sometimes treated as if proprietary. German television technology was thus constructed as something of a trade secret, taken from the country as a right of victory, and fed into the process of industrial recovery which was beginning to be organized by the victorious. Like Germany's rocket program, certain technological developments (together with their developers) were simply transplanted and re-cast in the terms of a new national setting. Television, already inscribed in terms of nation before the war, found itself even more entrenched in nationalist discourses after.

Another contextual factor which bears heavily on our faint memory of German television also emerges from the involvement of multi-nationals in the German economy. Particularly those corporations such as RCA which licensed its television technology to Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union were reluctant to make this information public. When one considers that wholly-owned subsidiaries of multinationals such as IT&T were active in the development of television-based guidance systems for offensive weapons even after America's entry into the war, one can imagine the reluctance of these same corporations in the post-war period (and even to today) to make their activities known. These activities were not entirely unknown; for example, the US government sometimes monitored them, even tapping the telephones of IT&T's chairman for nearly two years. Indeed, shortly after the war, the US was ready to take action against IT&T for collaborating with the enemy. Fortunately for IT&T, its telephone holdings in eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland proved to be of even greater interest to a US increasingly embroiled in the Cold War, and charges were not only dropped, but IT&T received significant payments for war-related damages to its German properties (including those directly involved in weapons manufacture!). Again, both from the side of the government and the corporation, these complexities brought with them awkward details that were better forgotten than advertised.<sup>27</sup>

In short, it was to no one's advantage to publicize German television. Tainted as part of the Nazi propaganda machine, few in Germany were eager to celebrate their

role in building the television system. Seized as war-booty, few of the beneficiaries were eager to announce the source of their technological innovations. And owned or licensed by US-based multinational corporations, few spokesmen were willing to discuss the contradictions of a nationalist war and the logics of multinational economics. Germany's adventure with television, particularly at a moment of its reinvention as an instrument of the state (in nations like France), or of public service (in Britain), or of commerce (the US), simply raised more awkward questions than could be answered.

## Conclusion

Late in 1943 when optimists in the Reich still thought that victory was possible, a small group of engineers at the Post Ministry drafted a plan for television in post-war Europe. The plan was motivated in part by the intense rivalry between the Post and Propaganda ministries, seeking to take advantage of a loophole in the division of responsibilities between the two ministries. Although the Propaganda Ministry was responsible for most television programming, the Post Ministry could claim the right to produce live news. The plan called for the establishment of a live cable television news network linking Greater Germany and the occupied lands. The Ministry reasoned that the unification of the Reich through non-stop news programming would simply do away with the need for a Propaganda Ministry, since persuasive programming would be rendered redundant in the face of total information control.

But the plan also revealed a deep understanding of the television medium's potential. It built upon the already existing awareness that television could be used to construct the neural networks of a new *Volkskörper*, linking disparate individuals into a coherent body of experience. More than simply shaping the agenda by regulating what was and was not news, the developers of the plan seemed to appreciate the potential of the medium to embrace the present tense, and in so doing, to shape the flows and rhythms of daily life. I mention this anecdote because it speaks to a construction of television's temporality that has grown somewhat unfamiliar to us today, given our reliance on archived and pre-produced material. Television has become a time machine, allowing us to slide among competing temporalities – time-delayed »live« news intercut with taped, pseudo-live footage; materials from the past jumbled together in an indiscriminate manner; moments of synchronicity, as pre-recorded material is shared by a waiting public (the *Dallas* effect). True »liveness« is reserved for World's Cup matches and the opening, not-yet-digested moments of a crisis, and it is a rare thing indeed. But plans for the post-victory television news network were predicated upon liveness as a defining condition. The question is, how might we historicize this viewing experience? Its very flow, its embrace of the »now,« would seem to preclude the distance so central to the analytic,

historicizing gaze. Had it been developed, it would have offered a way to »plug into« the national experience, to *be* rather than to reflect upon being.

Radio far more than television realized this potential to link the nation through live events, and even in the case of radio, the historical imagination has thus far failed to come to terms with the medium as anything other than a set of institutional practices and texts. These are of course essential elements to understand, but one misses the ephemeral, experiential nature of a medium conceived precisely as a way to define and galvanize nation. My point is simply that one of television's (or radio's) most culturally specific and ideologically distinctive attributes is very difficult to pin down. Like other scholars concerned with the area, I have been forced to focus on what I can find, and to extrapolate a fuller sense of the medium as a social practice from that. But this difficulty of coming to terms with the ephemeral may be a contributing factor in our general failure to have learned from *Fernsehsender Paul Nipkow's* nine years of broadcasting.

That said, there is much that remains to be learned by the culture's larger project of forgetting. Patterned as it tends to be, forgetfulness offers ways of situating the past. Its explanatory power may not be particularly rich, but it sometimes proves useful as a means of sharpening what the culture does in fact know. And, if we are lucky, it reveals something about how and why cultures forget. As I've attempted to show in this relatively small case study of Germany's nine years of daily television broadcasting, one could point to the vexed identity of the medium; its contentious institutionalization (both before the war and after, in the form of archival records); compounded by a series of powerful context-specific sensibilities. Together, these factors have had a muting effect on television's history as a medium. But they also offer clues as a contemporary generation of new, unstable, and contentious media struggle for survival both as cultural technologies and as historical artefacts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 21 June 1999 at 23.00 and 28 June 1999 at 23.00. For details, see Nikolaus von Festenberg, »Jetzt hämmern wir ein Volk«, Spiegel On-Line, 12 June 1999 ([www.spiegel.de/spiegel/0,1518,26907,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/0,1518,26907,00.html))

<sup>2</sup> »Die DDR machte einen Bogen um die Bilder vom Leben in der Diktatur – aus Furcht vor Ähnlichkeiten mit der eigenen Wirklichkeit?« in: ebd.

<sup>3</sup> The latest iteration of the material appeared in a Channel 4 documentary entitled *Secret History: Television in the Third Reich*, broadcast on 30 August 2001 at 8 pm.

<sup>4</sup> Klaus Winkler, author of *Fernsehen unterm Hakenkreuz: Organisation, Programm, Personal*, Köln u. a. 1996, should be credited with bringing a much-needed insight and balance to Spiegel's rather sensationalist approach.

<sup>5</sup> See Manfred Hempel, *Fernsehleute im Spannungsfeld zwischen Fortschritt und Reaktion*, in: William Uricchio, *Die Anfänge des Deutschen Fernsehens. Kritische Annäherungen an die Ent-*



wicklung bis 1944, Tübingen 1991, 13-73.

- <sup>6</sup> I refer here to the important work of Klaus Winkler, Knut Hickethier, Erwin Reiss, Siegfried Zielinski, Manfred Hempel, Peter Hoff, Thomas Steinmaurer, and others. But by and large, the period has remained at the margins of investigation, as exemplified by its absence from Siegen's massive Bildschirmprojekt (which focussed on television post-1950).
- <sup>7</sup> I refer here to the tradition mapped out by such studies as Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, Minneapolis 1996; Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History*, Cambridge 1995; John O'Connor, ed., *American History/ American Television*, New York 1987; K. R. M. Short, *Feature Films as History*, Knoxville 1986, etc.
- <sup>8</sup> Detlev Peukert's *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde – Anpassung, Ausmerze, Aufbegehren unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, Köln 1982; like David Schoenbaum's *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939*, Garden City 1966; before it, offered a useful complication to such explanatory frames as the Sonderweg and pathologized modernity and their readings of cultural development.
- <sup>9</sup> Ernst Traub, *Television at the Berlin Radio Exhibition*, in: *Journal of the Television Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ser. 2.11 (December 1937) 289-97.
- <sup>10</sup> For an overview of German television's development, see Thomas Steinmaurer, *Tele-Vision. Zur Theorie und Geschichte des Fernsehempfangs*, Innsbruck 1999; William Uricchio, *Television as History: representations of German television broadcasting, 1935-1944*, in: B. Murray and C. Wickham, *Framing the Past: The Historiography of German Cinema and Television*, Carbondale 1992, 167-196; Uricchio, *Anfänge*, as fn. 5. Documentation for this section of my essay may be found in either of my above listed publications.
- <sup>11</sup> For reports on these and other technological innovations, see Combined Intelligence Objectives Subcommittee (CIOS) Report No. 28-41, No. 31-1, No. 31-8; and British Intelligence Subcommittee (BIOS) Report No. 876. Most high-definition developments were carried out as part of joint German-French initiatives.
- <sup>12</sup> British Intelligence Objectives Subcommittee Report No. 876, *Television Development and Application in Germany (1946)* 7.
- <sup>13</sup> See particularly Hickethier and Kahlenberg in: Uricchio, *Anfänge*, as fn. 5.
- <sup>14</sup> The rapidity of the film processing and fixing process may have contributed to chemical deterioration of the film stock, moreover recycling of used film stock to recapture the silver may have resulted in the systematic destruction of television material. Some made-for-television movies survive, as do photographs, scripts, and related production material. The Kulturfilm and specially abridged feature films that were regularly aired on television also sometimes survive. See for example, Friedrich Kahlenberg, *Von deutschem Heldentum: a 1936 compilation film for television*, in: *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio, & Television* 10:2 (1990), 187-192.
- <sup>15</sup> *Die Sendung*, 9 June 1940. As the war progressed, there is evidence to indicate that at least some of the public came less for television programming and more for the simple reason of keeping warm.
- <sup>16</sup> This would seem to support the view of those like R. J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery: 1932-1938*, London 1982; Peter Krüger, *Zu Hitler's »nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftserkenntnissen«*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2 (1980), 283-82; and others who argue that economic expansionism was seen as a primary means of recovery. Expansion into new technologies such as television would help to explain both the scale of the investments and energy with which markets in Latin America and Eastern Europe were cultivated.
- <sup>17</sup> Hadamovsky's much-repeated claim regarding the start of »official« service in March 1935 missed the fact that other nations such as the US, UK, and France had equivalent or even stronger levels of service, and yet were described to their publics as »experimental«. Germany's assertion was provoked in part by fears that the British were going to make similar claims, but in their eagerness to be first, German television developers were also forced to make the best of

existing and already obsolete 180-scan line equipment, whereas the British and Americans were »experimenting« with 400+ line systems. As noted, the German industry finally overcame the technological disadvantage caused by their premature announcement by late in 1938 just in time to face the restrictions of a war-time economy.

<sup>18</sup> One mark of this may be seen in cartoons referring to customer demand for television, but learning from the radio salesman that it is indeed a distant vision.

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1922), London 1956, 188.

<sup>20</sup> There is a striking difference between pre-cinematic visions of the domestically situated television audience, where the audience is usually seen in utopian terms as liberated from the nuisances and pressures of public life, and post-cinematic visions, where the domestic audience is seen in dystopian terms as alienated and fragmented. For more on the inverted developmental relationship between film and television, see William Uricchio, *Technologies of Time*, in: J. Olson, ed., *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital*, Berkeley 2002.

<sup>21</sup> As one example, consider Rudolf Arnheim's seminal essay, *A Forecast of Television*, in: *Inter-cine*, February 1935 (reprinted in: Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley 1957).

<sup>22</sup> The amateur movement, itself a good candidate for reception study in radio, failed to develop far with television. High-pressure tubes and high voltage levels combined to frighten off many home experimenters.

<sup>23</sup> See British Objectives Sub Committee Final Report No. 867: *Television Development and Application in Germany*, in: Uricchio, ed., *Anfänge*, as fn. 5, 320-327.

<sup>24</sup> Some had far more fanciful visions of the medium. In 1934, *Die Sendung* printed a full-page cartoon which showed three visions of television: direct (telephone, surveillance, card playing via tv), filmed (films from the archive, to the television laboratory, finally broadcast to the home), and interfilmed (filmed and broadcast with a one minute delay). On this, the eve of public television broadcasting in Germany, the accompanying commentary reported that »Fernsehen soll Wirklichkeit werden, aber nicht, wie der Laie es sich vorstellt, daß vom Empfänger aus die Beobachtung beliebiger Vorgänge möglich ist, sondern der Sendeleiter muß wie beim Rundfunk ein Programm zusammenstellen.« See *Fernsehen heute und morgen*, 22 June 1934, p. 507. For a well developed argument on this front, see Monika Elsner, Thomas Müller and Peter M. Spangenberg, *Der lange Weg eines schnellen Mediums: Zur Frühgeschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, in: Uricchio, ed., *Anfänge*, as fn. 5, 153-207.

<sup>25</sup> A typical expression of this view may be found in the pages of *Die Sendung* before the purge of the NSDAP's left. In an article entitled »Volkssender! Fernsehen! Volksempfänger!« (28 May 1935), the economic barriers to universal television ownership were put in the context of a »national Socialist Germany in which, as we all know, every cultural development is in the first place for the working man.« Broadcast director Hadamovsky, although actually an advocate of the collective audience from a propaganda theory perspective, made a strategic alliance with the left on this point, noting how England sought to restrict television to those with money, while in Germany »we opted to make it a popular medium, placing it in the workers districts and work service camps.«, see *Der Stand des Fernsehens*, 12 July 1935.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, Anthony Sampson, *The Sovereign State of IT&T*, New York 1973; and Robert Sobel, *IT&T: The Management of Opportunity*, New York 1982. The former, an IT&T critic, and the latter, an IT&T supporter, both offer overlapping testimony on the corporation's complex relations with the US government and seized alien property.

<sup>27</sup> The files of the US Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, a special court charged with resolving property disputes arising as a result of war, offer extensive details.