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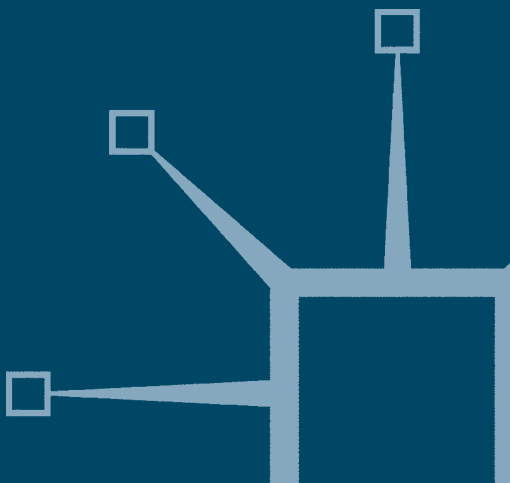
Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany

Edited by

Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross



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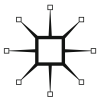

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Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross

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1

Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany: An Introduction

Karl Christian Führer & Corey Ross

In January 1932, a journalist who had set out to report on modern aspects of everyday life took the unusual step of visiting the Sunday matinee shows in two movie theatres in Hamburg, Germany's second largest city. As was then customary, the audience of both matinees consisted almost exclusively of children under the age of 14. Despite this basic similarity, however, the show took on a very different character in these two cinemas. Throughout the screening, the children in one of Hamburg's working-class districts were very active viewers. Again and again, they commented noisily on the proceedings that they saw on the silver screen. Much to his surprise, the reporter learnt that this was true not only of the feature film but also of the preceding newsreel. According to the journalist the *Wochenschau* was heavily biased, offering a right-wing view of Germany's political and social situation, but this left the assembled working-class youngsters completely unimpressed. They laughed and whistled during footage showing a solemn memorial service for former *Freikorps* soldiers who had fought against Polish troops in 1921, and when Chancellor Brüning appeared on the screen the whole audience exploded with catcalls the Hamburg reporter thought unfit to print. Disruption soared once again when the newsreel finally offered pictures of German traditional dances (*Volkstänze*): 'What a load of rubbish!' (*'So'n Quatsch!'*) was one of the more moderate comments emanating from the youthful audience.

The second cinema was situated in a well-to-do neighbourhood of Hamburg. In this theatre the young patrons behaved very differently from their working-class counterparts despite viewing the very same programme: during both the feature film and the newsreel this audience remained quiet and was impeccably behaved. At one point during the newsreel a boy tried to make a political comment, shouting 'Heil Hitler!', but this exclamation did not catch on and was greeted only with silence. The journalist (who wrote for a liberal newspaper) concluded: 'The young members of the middle class are much less inclined to protest against what they see than the young proletarians.'[1]

At first sight, this document may appear to offer little more than an amusing anecdote illustrating the unusual degree of working-class political passion in late Weimar Germany. Yet from another perspective it is arguably of much greater historical importance, for it not only reminds us how popular the cinema as a social institution already was in 1932, but it also clearly demonstrates that audience reactions are not solely determined by media content. In so doing, this inconspicuous newspaper article leads us directly to some of the most fundamental questions we can ask about the history of the mass media, their reception and their wider social impact.

Research in this field, it has to be said, is still relatively new. Though it might seem foreign to us in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it was not so long ago that the vast majority of historians showed either outright disdain or at best indifference towards the mass media, considering them either too recent to warrant their professional attention or as little more than epiphenomena that reflected the truly important developments of the past. In comparison to high politics, economics and social movements, the mass media simply did not feature as objects worthy of serious scholarly study – not even, apart from the occasional use of newspapers, as sources of information.

This widespread lack of professional interest is not very likely to have kept historians from being avid newspaper and/or magazine readers, from going to the cinema, from listening to radio or watching television. In this respect historians have differed little from people in all other walks of life. Indeed, the fact that all social groups have played a part in the rapid and continual growth of the media is one of the clearest expressions of their enormous importance in the twentieth century. Media use has become the dominant leisure activity in modern industrial and post-industrial societies, and in Germany (as elsewhere) ranks behind only sleep and work as a proportion of most people's time budgets. The media have been an integral part of the 'affluent society' as well as a driving force behind its advance, filling increased leisure time, creating new 'needs' and constantly offering new ways of satisfying them. Above all, they have both cultivated and sought to fulfil a seemingly insatiable appetite for entertainment, in the process introducing a variety of new norms and role models that have profoundly shaped individual and societal self-understanding. They have, in addition, transformed the nature of politics, prompting an intensive cultivation of popular appeal on the part of would-be leaders, exposing real or imagined scandals, and helping to set the parameters of political debate. In international perspective, however vague and diluted the buzzword 'globalization' has become, nothing to which it might refer is conceivable outside the context of the modern mass media.

There are, then, many reasons why one might dub the twentieth century the 'century of the mass media'.[2] While this notion makes no claim to be the basis of any new 'metanarrative', the enormous and wholly unprecedented expansion of the media is nonetheless absolutely central to the social, cultural and political history of the twentieth century. The revolution in

communications, especially the rise of electronic media since the First World War, is one of the factors that most clearly distinguishes this epoch from the ages that preceded it. Few, if any, areas of life have escaped their influence.

Yet if the ubiquity of the mass media has made their study important, it has also made it rather complicated. Not only does the daunting flood of information (at least in some areas) present the researcher with hard choices, but the multifaceted nature of the media has resulted in a plethora of different theoretical and methodological approaches. Numerous studies have engaged with the aesthetic development of the new media, focusing, for instance, on the emergence of new genres in film and radio, or the interaction between traditional arts and the new media.[3] The commercial organization and political control of the media has also been a focus of attention, and has long accounted for the bulk of historical research on the media in Germany, as in most countries. A more recent strand of cultural-historical research has focused on either the role of the media within wider societal 'discourses' or on the discourse surrounding the media themselves, especially during the cultural fermentation of the Weimar era.[4] Although the actual audiences have sometimes tended to fall between these stools, media reception has nonetheless been a subject of research and debate within sociology and cultural studies for several decades.[5]

While we therefore know quite a bit about the history of aesthetic movements in the German media, about production conglomerates, state censorship, the cultural pessimists who decried all of what was happening and the 'progressives' who celebrated it, historians have only recently begun to address how the media and their rapid growth fit into the wider history of twentieth-century Germany.[6] To be fair, historical overviews and syntheses have rarely failed to mention this in some form, whether under the rubric of 'modernization', 'Westernization', or more general social and cultural homogenization with the rise of 'mass culture'. But generally speaking, such observations have not only been necessarily brief and superficial, but also at times somewhat misleading, due to the questionable assumptions on which they are based.[7]

If the notion of the 'century of the mass media' is to become anything more than a convenient label, it seems necessary to adopt a 'societal history' (or what the Germans call *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) approach to the media: one that firmly embeds them within their wider social, cultural and political context, that pays attention to their individual specificities, and that is alert to how their social roles changed over time. Over the last decade there has been a clear trend in German historiography towards supplementing the existing structural focus of 'societal history' with more serious consideration of the values, meanings and mentalities that both shape and are shaped by these structures.[8] An important part of this 'cultural expansion of social history' is to study the means by which such values and meanings are formulated, disseminated and reinforced. Quite obviously, the mass media play a central role in this process; studying them is an indispensable part of a culturally oriented social

history. This approach not only promises valuable new insights into the history of the media – and of the twentieth century more generally – but also furnishes the best guarantee against it becoming simply another sub-discipline encapsulated by its own particular interests and esoteric debates. In many ways Germany represents an especially fertile field for such research, above all because of its unique role as a laboratory of modernity that has witnessed all three of the dominant political systems of the age: liberal democracy, fascism and communism. This volume seeks to present some of the latest research on the media in twentieth-century Germany, and approaches them as an integral part of this most tragic and eventful period in Germany's history.

Mass media and 'mass culture' in Germany

Arguably the central question when examining the history of mass media as 'social history' is the impact they had on existing social structures, mores and cultural traditions – and, in turn, how the expectations and assumptions of producers and consumers shaped the media themselves. It has generally been assumed that the mass media have played an important role in the wider process of social 'levelling' and cultural 'standardization' in twentieth-century Germany, eroding traditional social milieus and flattening class hierarchies. They are commonly seen as the primary vehicle of modern 'mass culture' by dint of their sheer dissemination. The millions of readers, listeners and spectators partaking of the cultural products churned out by a highly commercialized entertainment industry are often perceived as conclusive evidence of a 'mass culture' and its levelling effects. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that the existence of widely used mass media alone does not necessarily denote a universal 'mass culture'. For one thing, even at the most basic conceptual level, such ideas collide with the realities of media reception. Audiences were (and are) not passive recipients of media 'content'.[9] Quite the contrary: as numerous studies have shown, media reception is a highly variegated and 'creative' process in which much of the ultimate meaning of media messages lies in the eye of the beholder. Reception is therefore shaped by a wide range of factors such as generation, gender, class, region and education. Moreover, the particular media that one uses, and the way one uses them, are not simply *reflections* of such existing social distinctions, but indeed help to produce and reproduce these distinctions in the first place.[10]

While this was of course not a fundamentally new phenomenon in the twentieth century (literacy and what one read had long been a highly significant social marker), the vast proliferation of new media since the 1890s has dramatically increased their potential to shape social identities. Whereas there existed two genuinely 'mass' media around the turn of the century – newspapers and magazines – a series of technological innovations throughout the twentieth century vastly expanded the media ensemble in Germany, as elsewhere: cinema from 1895, recorded music from the 1890s onwards, radio

from 1923, television from 1954 (following an experimental phase in the later 1930s).

Yet it is worth emphasizing that the path to media 'saturation' such as characterized the latter decades of the twentieth century was a long one, with each of the different media undergoing their own particular twists and turns. Cinema, a regular feature of itinerant fairs and variety shows soon after its invention, first established itself as a permanent part of the urban entertainment scene after 1905. Although it was already a highly popular leisure activity among city-dwellers in the 1920s and 1930s, its real 'golden age' in terms of admissions was the 1950s – cut short by the meteoric rise of television after 1955–56. Recorded music developed at roughly the same time as cinema, and experienced its greatest growth in Germany in two phases, first during the 1920s and subsequently in the 1960s, when it first became an indispensable item of the modern household. Radio, first introduced in Germany in 1923, underwent extraordinarily rapid growth during its first decade, even through the acute economic crisis of 1930–32. Although the National Socialist government actively, and quite successfully, encouraged radio use, it should not be overlooked that roughly one-third of the German populace still did not have immediate access to radio at the end of the Second World War. 'Saturation' for radio came first in the 1950s, during the 'economic miracle' of the Federal Republic and the 'golden age' of cinema. In contrast to cinema, however, radio was not an obvious victim of the rise of television, at least not in terms of quantitative usage. The changes were rather qualitative, namely the emergence of new modes of programming and new patterns of everyday use – in particular the shift from radio as an object of concentrated attention to a provider of background music and 'ambient' entertainment.

As in all other industrial societies, television became the dominant medium in Germany from the mid-1950s onwards, and indeed in both a quantitative and qualitative sense. As for quantity, it is the only medium that experienced constant growth over the latter half of the twentieth century; use of all other media remained static or sank. As for its qualitative predominance, it seems clear that television engendered a unique fascination among its users. Its seemingly addictive attraction was manifested most conspicuously in its extraordinary power to shape everyday routines, ranging from patterns of familial intercourse to eating times and the wider unwritten laws of sociability: it was (and still is) bad form to phone someone during the main evening news. Television's predominance was further reinforced by the switch from black-and-white to colour in the Federal Republic in 1967 (and on the GDR's 'Second Programme' in 1969) which, like the introduction of the sound film – the 'talkies' – during the late 1920s and early 1930s, significantly increased its verisimilitude and, after initial technical shortcomings, also enhanced its popular appeal.

A further watershed in the Federal Republic was the licensing of private broadcasters from 1984–85, which broke the monopoly of the public service

broadcasters and greatly expanded programme choice in both radio and television. This was nothing short of revolutionary for German television, and (in so far as television was the dominant means of communication) marked an important shift in German society. Not only did it alter the discussion of political issues – indeed, the very definition of what constituted a 'political issue' – but it also created a new group of media celebrities, stretched the limits of what could legitimately be reported, and broke a variety of social and sexual taboos. At the same time, the social function of television changed. Whereas public service television had hitherto functioned primarily as a form of family entertainment, the new commercial programmes were geared above all to young people and therefore became an integral part of youth culture, functioning to some extent as recorded music had since the 1960s. The amount of time spent by the average German in front of the television also increased dramatically from two hours per day in 1985 to over three hours in 2000 – an increase that seems relatively small in view of the explosive growth of new broadcasters and programmes over the same period, but which nonetheless denotes a major shift in patterns of leisure activities. Overall, there can be no doubt that the expanding ensemble of mass media has engendered an ever-increasing 'medialization' of everyday life. Media use has been (and still is) an increasingly important component of people's free time.

The question of whether this immense media growth has rendered a 'mass culture' befitting its 'democratized' (or 'homogenized', depending on one's point of view) audiences has been a matter of considerable debate, both within and beyond the ivory towers of academia. This has been especially true in Germany, where the mass media and their usage have frequently been associated with 'manipulation', 'massification' and a decline of cultural standards. Significantly, such criticisms have been voiced from both the Right (conservative cultural pessimists) and Left ('Frankfurt School' of socio-cultural analysis) of the political spectrum. Above all, the 'Frankfurt School' and its spiritual forbears have exerted an immense influence on scholarly perceptions of the media as a 'culture industry' in the twentieth century. Cultural histories of the Weimar period in particular draw heavily on the writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, often in a fairly uncritical manner. As a result, the media of the 1920s – widely understood as a heyday of cultural modernization in Germany – are therefore generally cast in a negative light, with repercussions for their perception throughout the twentieth century.

By contrast, the chapters in this volume belong to a relatively recent strand of research showing that such critiques have more to do with elite perceptions, fears and anxieties than with actual historical developments. If one dispenses with the assumptions of contemporary cultural critics and looks more closely at the available evidence, the question of whether the mass media have had the 'standardizing' and 'levelling' effects so often attributed to them appears far more open. There is, it now seems clear, no simple answer and no singular formula that is equally valid for all media at all times. This is not to

discard wholesale the notion that the mass media, in their combined long-term impact, helped to erode traditional and more strictly hierarchical forms of cultural activity, and in this sense contributed to the emergence of a more widely shared 'mass culture'. The point is rather that the media could have integrative as well as divisive effects; they could both unite and divide audiences. Put differently, if broader dissemination of media products meant greater cultural commonality, wider choice of what to read, listen to or watch meant greater differentiation. As Anton Kaes has remarked, 'The differentiation of the audience is the inevitable consequence of the broadening of the market.'[11]

Even more importantly, the fact that the media propagated 'standardized' cultural artefacts (by virtue of their mass production and dissemination) does *not* mean that they necessarily exerted standardizing effects, as the reception of these artefacts in public and in the home was by no means uniform or predictable. To take newspapers as an example: whereas some readers focus their attention on the political news, others buy them chiefly for the sports pages, still others for the entertainment listings or the personal ads. Subscribers to the same newspaper are not necessarily reading the same things at all.

Gender has frequently been regarded as a primary dividing line for media use and reception, especially before the 1960s. Here, too, the example of newspapers is instructive: it was long assumed that women were primarily interested in entertainment, local news and advertisements, whereas men tended to read about politics and sports in addition to these other sections. Although such perceptions clearly resonated with (and were partly rooted in) common patriarchal prejudices, statistical surveys of the 1950s showed that they were to some extent based on fact.[12] Gender has, in other words, clearly been an important factor shaping media use. Yet it is worth emphasizing that this relationship worked in the other direction too: gender roles were also fundamentally influenced by the growth of the media. Private life – traditionally the 'feminine realm' – has undergone fundamental change over the course of the twentieth century, and the media have played a central role in this process. The introduction of radio and television in particular blurred the border between the public and private spheres, transforming domestic life by 'bringing the world into your living room'. Although newspapers had long conveyed public matters into the private domain, the electronic media greatly intensified this phenomenon. In principle, at least, the private household was henceforth in continual – not just sporadic – contact with the outside world, and indeed in 'real' time. The 'private' realm of the housewife was never quite the same again.

Taken together, the chapters that follow demonstrate that the social impact of the media varied greatly according to the specific nature of individual media, how they related to existing traditions and expectations, their economic organization and political regulation, as well as how these factors changed over time. For Germany in particular, the extent to which they changed over time deserves special emphasis. Given its traumatic and politically volatile history,

Germany represents a unique case for investigating how the mass media function across deep social caesura and under vastly different political regimes.

Mass media between integration and fragmentation

In spite of these national peculiarities, however, the history of the mass media in Germany was nonetheless very much a part of broader international trends. Film, for example, was from its very beginnings international in scope. In the years before the First World War, French and Scandinavian films constituted a large portion of the German market. During the 1920s it was American films that accounted for the bulk of foreign imports, while German films were simultaneously making a significant impact in other countries, above all in continental Europe. It was only during the Second World War that Hollywood films were forcibly excluded from German cinemas, signalling the high point of German film producers' international reach as they effectively cornered the market throughout occupied Europe. Along with film, the recording industry had a similarly international remit. Many of Germany's leading firms were jointly owned by British companies, and vice-versa. German recording firms (such as 'Deutsche Grammophon') have been leading players on the international market ever since the development of recorded sound, indeed even more successfully than German film-makers.

Yet the extent to which the media became truly 'internationalized', let alone acted as conveyors of a standardized 'international' mass culture, is open to question. Once again, there are no simple or universally valid answers. To take the example of film once more, the large number of Hollywood films imported during the 1920s – the peak of US film imports – appears to have had little 'Americanizing' influence on Weimar society. Hollywood films were, as a group, by no means the most popular in Germany. Mega-hits such as 'Ben Hur' or 'Anna Karenina' were very much the exception. The bulk of mediocre Hollywood films fared remarkably poorly at the box office in comparison to most German films, and often faced stinging criticism by German commentators.[13] Far from serving as a trojan horse of foreign cultural imperialism, it might even be said that the very presence of these films acted as a challenge to national culture and identity and actually encouraged a keener sense of 'Germanness', at least during the inter-war years. Yet over the longer term, the traumas of the Second World War and Nazi crimes tended to reduce such nationalistic sensitivities, and by the 1950s the barriers against the 'Americanizing' impulses of Hollywood film (or, for that matter, American rock-'n'-roll) were no longer so high as before, even if they never completely disappeared.

This tension between processes of cultural 'globalization' (in some eyes simply 'Americanization') and the persistence of national or regional particularisms has profoundly shaped all of the media in Germany. The first 'mass media' to emerge, newspapers, were in fact decidedly local in terms of both distribution and content. This was true even of the large Berlin dailies, which

were seldom read outside the capital. To some extent this local orientation of newspapers is rooted in the nature of the medium itself, in the difficulties involved in non-electronic distribution. Yet it also reflects the cultural expectations of readers: namely, the continuing demand for local news, advertisements and announcements (obituaries, births, marriages, etc.). Indeed, the first truly 'national' paper in Germany, the *Bild-Zeitung* (1952), began very quickly to cater simultaneously to regional interests by introducing local editions. Today the paper appears in 24 different editions.[14]

Regional concerns similarly moulded the development of German radio. The political architects of German broadcasting deliberately sought to avoid the spread of 'Berlin culture' via the new medium, and the foundations that they laid in the 1920s shape German radio to this very day. The various regional broadcasters have not been – apart from under the Nazi and SED regimes – part of a tightly centralized system, and have retained a great deal of autonomy in their programming, which explicitly serves regional interests. Although television in the Federal Republic was, before 1985, based on the same regional structure, in practice it worked quite differently due to a much more elaborate system of co-operation that gave rise to what was effectively a 'national' television service in the ARD (1950) and ZDF (1963). Moreover, West German television (and even more so the centralized East German service) were 'national' media not only in terms of their supra-regional character, but also in the sense that they were explicitly conceived as public service broadcasters capable of withstanding the commercial pressures of international (often American or British) pop culture and therefore of maintaining higher standards of programming.

If newspapers have tended to be local, radio regional and television national in scope, film has historically been the most decidedly international medium in Germany. Even the GDR film scene was enriched by foreign imports, most of them from other Eastern Bloc countries, though including a handful of Western and even Hollywood films during the more liberal Honecker years. Yet even in the case of film, the tension between 'globalization' and 'localism' was by no means absent. Especially in the first third of the twentieth century, film sometimes catered to local interests and served to maintain regional identities and allegiances. A prime example were the many 'Berlin films' of the 1920s and 1930s, which were highly popular in proletarian areas of Berlin and all but unknown elsewhere.

Despite the persistence of such regional and even local influences, many aspects of the mass media were nonetheless international in the sense that they could be observed across much of the industrialized world. This was not least the case in terms of their effects on everyday lifestyles. The massive expansion of the media and the huge proliferation of cultural artefacts that they offer have continually opened up new horizons for social behaviour and interaction. Every new medium brings new experiences for its audience, experiences that help to shape social roles and to promote new values, expectations and

identities. This has arguably been especially true for women, whose gradual entry into the 'public sphere' over the course of the twentieth century has been intimately related to new forms of media-based cultural activity. As scholars have long remarked, cinema in particular widened the cultural opportunities for women and young people beyond the narrow confines of hearth and home. Going to the cinema quickly became a 'respectable' way for women to participate in public amusements without male accompaniment. As such, it was an important structural element in the wider 'emancipation' of women. At the same time that it provided women with a new cultural 'space' in which to pursue their own interests, it was also a significant source of new ideas about gender roles – for example, the celebrated/vilified 'New Woman' of the 1920s. Although this 'New Woman' was by and large confined to the silver screen and pages of illustrated magazines, the fact that the vast majority of women's lives bore little resemblance to the screen ideal is arguably less important than the very existence of the icon itself, which was 'experienced' by millions of German women as a new and attractive form of femininity. The same argument applies to any number of new youth subcultures, whether the 'Swing Youth' of the 1930s and 1940s, the '*Halbstarken*' of the 1950s or the 'hippies' of the 1960s, all of which were either defined by specific forms of media use (especially particular music styles) or were deliberately modelled on media images.

The fact that many of these media 'images' were literally images in the pictorial sense is by no means coincidental. The oft-cited 'visualization' of modern popular culture has been another of the fundamental trends in the history of mass media. Beginning with illustrated magazines in the late nineteenth century, this trend was greatly enhanced by the rise of cinema and then further accelerated by the breakthrough of television. As a seemingly faithful and accurate reproduction of 'reality', the visual media have generally been regarded as a more powerful means of conveying messages than the spoken or written word. In addition, as 'the genuine mother tongue of humankind',[15] pictures were easily accessible to everyone regardless of education, and therefore lent themselves ideally to mass dissemination. For these very same reasons, the process of cultural visualization was also subjected to continual attacks from intellectual elites mindful of their traditional role as custodians of literate culture. Yet such rearguard actions of cultural defence have signally failed to halt the trend towards visualization. By the 1960s at the latest, the longstanding intellectual anxieties over the displacement of text by pictures were in fact wholly overtaken by reality. Nowhere has this been more clearly manifested than in the influence of television on the print media, especially on the layout and picture/text ratio of newspapers. Despite their best efforts, not even the most traditional broadsheets have been able to escape these developments. And as for tabloids, many nowadays make no bones about describing themselves as 'printed television'.[16]

The analogy of newspapers as 'printed television' is a particularly glaring – though by no means the only – indication of yet another fundamental trend

in the history of the mass media: namely, their ever-increasing self-referentiality. There are a number of aspects to this phenomenon. At the most basic level it reflects a self-induced form of media expansion, whereby media innovations beget other new media products or interrelationships. A primary illustration of this process was the introduction of radio broadcasting, which was perceived with great trepidation by newspapers, publishers and recording executives alike. Despite fears about the displacement of their own products by the new medium (as a new source of information and advertisements that also threatened to bring 'too much music into the world'[17] for the good of the recording industry), in the event radio created a range of synergies and new opportunities for cross-fertilization. Publishers were not only relieved to find that radio users continued to buy newspapers much as before, but also took the opportunity to supplement their product ranges with new radio 'programme guides'. Recording firms similarly found that radio increased rather than decreased demand for records by helping to popularize 'hit' tunes. The introduction of the sound film from 1928/29 greatly accelerated this trend, creating a qualitatively new media nexus in combination with radio and recording. It is in this sense significant that most of the 'hit' tunes of the 1930s and 1940s were 'sound film hits' (*Tonfilmschlager*), the film functioning as publicity for the record, the record for the film, the radio for both. At the same time, the increased popular interest in the sound film prompted newspapers to cover new releases and the activities of movie 'stars' as important news items – quite apart from the proliferation of special film magazines.

At one level this increasing self-referentiality can be seen as a pragmatic survival technique on the part of existing media producers when confronted by new competitors. Yet at another level, it also reflected the emergence of new desires for entertainment and a heightened demand for information on the part of consumers. People wanted more information about what was playing on the radio; they wanted to know more about personalities seen on the silver screen or heard on the airwaves. The existing media recognized this new demand, stimulated it and sought to fulfil it. This has been a general pattern throughout the twentieth century, conspicuously accompanying the rise of television and, more recently, the internet.

Yet once again, the rise of television was uniquely influential in this regard. Not only did it have a powerful impact on newspaper layout, it also greatly affected newspaper content, above all the inclusion of much more information about itself. Indeed, the expanding coverage of television by the other media occurred at a number of levels. While tabloid newspapers became packed with television celebrity gossip, 'serious' broadsheets and radio commentators became engaged time and again in lengthy debates about what was appropriate to show on television and when it should be shown (violence, sexuality, voyeurism) – questions which have justifiably been regarded as a key barometer of changing social values. It is not unfair to view these developments as the crystallization of an increasingly self-encapsulated 'media reality' in which media content is

to a large extent about media content. Although this process began in the first decades of the twentieth century, the unprecedented dovetailing of private television and tabloids since the 1980s has nonetheless marked a qualitatively new phase of self-referentiality.

In the light of all these changes, there can be no doubt that the 'public sphere', structured as it is by the media, has been dramatically transformed over the course of the twentieth century as the media ensemble itself has evolved. As even these preliminary comments demonstrate, it is not especially helpful to conceive of these changes as part of a one-way process of 'modernization' involving a gradual trend towards cultural democratization and the emergence of a universal, socially levelling 'mass culture'. For one thing, as the German case shows especially clearly, mass media can flourish under dictatorial systems as well as under liberal ones. Not only have the media been mobilized in support of dictatorships, but dictatorial regimes have also gone out of their way to foster greater media use – not just as a means of crude political 'indoctrination', but also as a more subtle conveyor of propaganda *qua* entertainment. Moreover, although the mass media can justifiably be seen as a structural precondition of a 'mass culture', it is highly misleading to view them as two sides of the same coin, since the expansion of media use can also encourage social and cultural fragmentation. This ambivalence between integration and fragmentation is precisely why it is impossible to carry out an empirical study of 'the public sphere' in itself. Rather, the best one can do is to analyse concrete media 'semi-publics' (*Teilöffentlichkeiten*) and how they functioned in practice. The abiding task is therefore to enquire into how the modern media unite and divide, how they can simultaneously exert both a homogenizing and a differentiating influence on the society and culture of which they form an integral part.

This book and its contents

This is clearly a huge and complex task, and one to which historians have only recently turned much attention. The vague but unmistakable sense that this attention is overdue has been reflected in a veritable boom in media history in Germany over the past several years. Yet despite all this recent industry, our ignorance still vastly outweighs our knowledge. The present volume can naturally only tackle certain aspects, emphasize certain themes, draw attention to certain issues. Yet taken together, the following chapters demonstrate the fruitfulness of approaching the history of the media as an integral part of society at large. In so doing, a number of central themes and questions emerge, albeit in different ways depending on the medium in question as well as the time frame of analysis. The volume thus seeks to highlight some of the overarching questions that historians face when reconstructing the history of the media in Germany, yet at the same time attempts also to paint a differentiated picture that eschews assumptions about a standard pattern of development and that does justice to the many complexities of the rise of the mass media.

The history of German radio, long dominated by organizational studies, has attracted especially keen interest over the last decade.[18] The recent expansion of research beyond the formal institutions of broadcasting is clearly reflected in the chapters by Kate Lacey and Konrad Dussel which engage with two very different but fundamental issues. As Lacey argues (Chapter 4), the constitution of a new 'radio public' in the early years of broadcasting was far more open than is often assumed. Although the paradigmatic 'private listener' eventually became the dominant form of radio reception, this was neither an inevitable nor uncontested outcome. The fact that 'collective listening' and the encouragement of the 'interactive listener' remained explicit goals of radio enthusiasts into the 1930s raises a number of questions about the relationship between an 'audience' and a 'public' – two quite different things that are often conflated. Konrad Dussel (Chapter 5) addresses the basic question of continuity and change in radio programming across the deep historical divides of twentieth-century Germany's turbulent political history. During the 'radio years' from the 1920s to the early 1960s (before the dominance of television), the balance between education, information and entertainment shifted greatly due to a variety of economic, political and ideological factors. Entertainment was, perhaps predictably, triumphant in the end. Yet somewhat less predictably, Dussel shows that entertainment made its greatest advance during the years of the National Socialist regime. While elites in both of the two post-war German states deliberately sought to develop their programmes in contrast to National Socialist radio, there were in practice a number of striking continuities across the caesura of 1945, especially in the GDR's understanding of radio as a medium of propaganda and diversion.

In contrast to radio, recorded music has attracted very little scholarly attention apart from a handful of mostly antiquarian and highly specialized accounts. Corey Ross (Chapter 2) surveys the relatively uncharted social and cultural history of recorded music from its origins in the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. Although the rise of recorded sound was widely perceived as a threat to both the social function and even the very nature of music, in the event its impact was highly unpredictable, shoring up or reviving some cultural traditions while undermining others. As Ross argues, the Nazis seem to have recognized this ambivalence, which helps explain why the recording industry escaped the level of micro-management imposed on all other media. Another reason for this relatively 'light touch' was of course that recorded music was less widely used in the 1930s and 1940s than radio or cinema. In this respect the 1960s were a different matter entirely. Indeed, as Detlef Siegfried (Chapter 3) emphasizes, records constituted a crucial element in the seismic cultural shifts of that decade, shifts in which the public broadcasting services of radio and television played, by contrast, almost no role at all. The importance of records to the counter-culture of the 1960s rested on a number of factors. First, the recording industry was by this time uniquely international, and therefore ideally suited to the import of American and British music and

clothing fashions – indeed to generating demand for such fashions in the first place. In addition, the very nature of the medium (that is that it did not have to rely on a broadcaster's repertoire) readily lent itself to a highly individualized form of reception, and therefore served as an expressive means of social distinction and lifestyle choice.

Literature on the history of German film is impressively broad, but at the same time also rather one-sided. Most studies in this field are concerned with cinematic art and cinema as an expression of allegedly characteristic traits of German society. In comparison, the history of cinema as a business, as a social institution and as popular entertainment is considerably less well researched.[19] Taking his cue from these gaps, Karl Christian Führer (Chapter 6) tries to assess the popular appeal of Hollywood movies for German audiences during the Third Reich. His findings demonstrate that reactions differed between the various strata and milieus constituting German society. While Hollywood films formed an indispensable part of urban culture and urban leisure activities, rural audiences were anything but enthusiastic. Führer also argues that American movies should not be regarded as 'counter propaganda' that undermined the ministrations of Joseph Goebbels. On the contrary, Hollywood films were not only remarkably compatible with National Socialist ideas about social integration in the 'national community', but were also held up as a model for the creation of a genuinely popular yet artistically valuable culture for the masses – masses who, for their part, may have 'read' American movies very differently from the way their producers or the Nazi authorities might have expected. Adopting a similar social-historical approach to post-war film, Thomas Lindenberger (Chapter 7) demonstrates that West and East German movies during the height of the Cold War both reflected and themselves contributed to the growing divide between the two societies. In the GDR, all interested parties (media users, producers and the SED as the monopolistic commissioner and censor of media products) were fixated on the West. Whether it served as the measure for good entertainment unspoiled by political indoctrination, as a source of aesthetic and technical innovation or as an ideological opponent and 'fifth column' within the regime's own sphere of domination, in the long run it was Western consumer and media culture from which the criteria for the success of the socialist project were ultimately derived. However, this fixation on the West was not reciprocated in the Federal Republic, which was characterized instead by an ever-decreasing interest in the East as German division became seemingly definitive over the years. As the cinema continued to lose ground to television in both Germanys, it was eventually on the television screen, and predominantly in documentary formats, that the reality of German division and the East–West confrontation was dealt with as far as audiovisual representation was concerned.

Despite its close technological relations to radio broadcasting, the field of TV history has been far less dominated by organizational studies than have writings about radio. The historical development of German TV programmes

can nowadays be regarded as a well-researched area, though much less has been written on the social effects of television as a new and particularly suggestive medium.[20] Tackling this question, Knut Hickethier (Chapter 8) presents West German television as a uniquely effective motor for social change since the early 1960s. As an agent of social transformation, television helps to shape the perception and expectations of the viewer to the requirements of society, thus contributing to a new socialization of the individual, and indeed one in which the world appears in 'real time' from a plurality of different perspectives. As Judith Keilbach and Markus Stauff show (Chapter 10), sports played a special role in these developments. Not only were most technical and aesthetic innovations introduced for the broadcasts of sports events, but also televised sport has generally served as a 'test case' for many legal and social issues surrounding television. In particular, the broadcasting of international soccer has been a forum for negotiating a sense of national identity, and also a battleground for competing visions of the role of television in society at large – the extent to which it is a public medium for the common good or a private enterprise in pursuit of maximizing profits. Looking eastward, Heather Gumbert (Chapter 9) surveys the development of television in the GDR as an instrument of both political propaganda and entertainment. Her essay corrects two common assumptions about GDR television. For one thing, the bulk of East German TV-viewers did not, despite the persistent and extremely widespread misapprehension to the contrary, tune predominantly into 'the West'. Rather, many GDR entertainment series were highly popular among East German viewers since they were regarded as a better reflection of their own lives. Second, West German television, in particular news stories about the East, was not generally perceived as any more 'truthful' or any less ideological than East German news coverage. Both these findings raise fundamental questions about media power in dictatorial systems (a question that is also tackled in Karl Christian Führer's chapter on Hollywood movies in the Third Reich).

Despite the predominance of the print media throughout the early part of the twentieth century, research on the history of the German press is surprisingly thin, largely due to the shortage of sources beyond the actual newspapers and magazines themselves. The destruction of many of the most important press archives in Allied bombing raids of the early 1940s is only partly to blame for this state of affairs, for sources pertaining to the post-war press are also remarkably sparse. In so far as such material exists at all, it is to a large extent controlled by private firms that show little interest in divulging the contents of their archives to historians. The resulting reliance on sources produced by the state has strongly influenced historical research, as has historians' natural interest in the many political upheavals in twentieth-century Germany. The overall result has been a tendency to focus on the 'political' history of the press, and in particular on a number of relatively well-worn themes: the empire of right-wing media magnate Alfred Hugenberg, Nazi control and manipulation of the press, and the emergence of the so-called 'licence press'

in the Western-occupied zones after the Second World War.[21] There are, however, also a smaller number of business histories, and more recently a handful of studies addressing the wider role of the press in society.[22] So although some aspects of the German press are therefore well known, other areas are nothing short of *terra incognita*. To cite merely the most glaring example, the history of the Springer Verlag, publishers of the *Bild-Zeitung* (by far the most important tabloid in Germany, and by the 1950s already one of the most widely circulated periodicals in Europe), is still largely unresearched, as are the bulk of illustrated magazines in post-war Germany.[23]

For a number of reasons, most scholarly interest in the history of the press has focused on the period before the Second World War. The half-century after 1890 witnessed a fundamental recasting of the print press in terms of both the character of the medium itself and its role in society at large. It was, simply put, over these decades that the press became a truly 'mass' medium. Gideon Reuveni (Chapter 12) considers the expansion of newspaper reading during this period within the twin contexts of the decline of the *Bildungsbürgertum* and the development of an increasingly consumer-oriented society. Newspapers and magazines carried more and more advertisements and also became financially dependent on them. This new synergy between advertising and newspapers not only contributed to the growing consumption of newspapers and the products and services they publicized, it also marketed consumption itself as a new lifestyle befitting a modern society. Reading became a form of 'consumption through the eyes'; leafing through the pages of a newspaper or an illustrated magazine became a kind of virtual *flânerie* not dissimilar from window-shopping, which played a significant role in transforming consumption from a purposeful activity to a purpose or end in its own right. Newspapers, Bernhard Fulda reminds us (Chapter 11), remained the most widely and intensively used mass medium during the first third of the twentieth century, in spite of the disproportionate amount of attention paid by both contemporaries and historians to radio and film. Focusing on the nexus of entertainment, sensationalism and politics in the Berlin tabloid press, Fulda emphasizes the socially and politically divisive role of these papers, especially during the Weimar years. Far from serving as a vehicle for a unifying 'mass culture', these tabloids – and even more clearly the 'traditional' broadsheets – were constituent elements of a highly conflict-ridden political landscape and represented deeply fragmented networks of communication. Photography and photojournalism were, as Habbo Knoch's chapter (13) shows, central to many of these developments, and implied a number of fundamental changes to the activity of 'reading', and how readers perceived the world. In conjunction with the rapid expansion of cinema in the early twentieth century, photography was a driving force behind the oft-cited visualization of culture in the spheres of entertainment and politics. By contrast, Patrick Major (Chapter 14) traces some of the reactions against the ongoing changes to reading and print culture in Germany through the

example of youth comics. At various points in the twentieth century, such youth literature was the object of far-reaching moral panic about the supposed 'Americanization' and 'brutalization' of young people, and prompted numerous attempts to create a more 'edifying' and 'German' version in the cause of cultural defence.

Further avenues of research in media history

As with all scholarly publications, this volume is conceived as part of an ongoing discussion. It therefore seems appropriate to close the introduction with a few remarks about certain themes and topics in media history that will hopefully be the subject of future research. In terms of specific 'gaps' in our knowledge of German media, arguably the most glaring is the history of the popular press, above all the proliferation of tabloids (not least the *Bild-Zeitung*) after 1945. Bernhard Fulda's chapter bears evidence to the rising scholarly interest in the popular press for earlier periods. It can only be hoped that similar research on post-war tabloids – which would be greatly facilitated by more open access to publishers' archives – will soon shed more light on this important chapter in media history.

On a more general level, there are also a number of wider themes that promise new insights and perspectives on media history, and on the history of twentieth-century Germany more generally. In the attempt to write media history as social history, it would be fruitful to pay more attention to the close interconnections between mass media and urban life, for the modern media of the twentieth (and, for that matter, the nineteenth) century were first and foremost urban phenomena. Large urban centres were – and for the most part still are – the site of media production and the home of most people who work in the media. In comparison to rural areas or small towns, the city is also characterized by the densest concentration, the broadest palette and the most up-to-date forms of media production. The newspaper stands in city railway stations, with their sprawling supply of local, national and international papers, can serve as a symbol of the close relationship between the modern media and the metropolis. In many ways the nature of life in the modern city – tempo, constant change, fleeting impressions – is identical with the essence of the media; much of what makes the big city what it is developed alongside and through the media. To this extent it makes sense to pursue the history of the media and changing public sphere as a part of urban history, and vice-versa.[24]

This seems all the more important in view of the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century the relationship between the media ensemble and urban life underwent significant change. The rise of television provides the most compelling evidence that modern mass media can also undermine urbanity. Television brought about a huge decrease in cinema attendance and the number of cinemas, which had constituted a central element of urban