

The promotion of “Volk”, „Heimat“, and “Nation” in the literary programme offers by the “Norag” and the „Reichssender Hamburg“ in the 1930s

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Mass Medium Radio in Germany

The proposal at hand takes as a starting point the mass medium radio, which had its break-through at the beginning of the 1930s and in the years of the “Third Reich“. Of special interest is primarily the twofold tension that shaped the face of radio in those days: a) the struggle between regionalism and centralism and b) the tension between references to the respective regional cultural areas and the establishment of an overall national identity.

a) In the 1920s the broadcasting system in Germany was built up by different regional stations. Opposing this organisation, there was an ongoing process of centralisation. With the broadcasting reform of the “Reichskanzler” Papen in 1932 and the new-established control system of the “Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda”, there was a shift towards central state control. But the individual “Reichssender” remained mainly in charge of their programmes and were given decided region-related tasks (this was often referred to as special “Landschaftsarbeit”). – Whereas a lot of research has been done on the institutional and political circumstances of the broadcasting system at the end of “Weimar” and in Nazi Germany as a whole, there are only few studies focussing both on these special tasks of a regional station.

b) In the German tradition broadcasting is a cultural phenomenon, i.e. it is inextricably linked to regional cultural areas. It however also takes up the role as a mediator of national identity. Cultural studies have been engaged with this mass medium both as a mirror and moulder of social developments. Broadcasting has played an important part in the process of mediatisation, and especially the radio was engaged in this process from the 1930s to the 1960s (in Germany the period of the ‘radio-boom’ or the ‘radio-times’). Media history therefore has to analyse public spheres as crucial social categories which are constituted by public communication. Due to this fact, we have to deal with various actors, e.g. the producers, the programme offers, the users – to name only a few.

Programme analyses and cultural studies

How to tap information of mediated experiences of spaces? Within the approach of programme history we analyse programme offers as bearers of meaning (“Träger von Sinnangeboten”). In this case they constitute representations of “Volk”, “Heimat”, and “Nation”. They build up and transmit regional and national narratives that (re)act on different experiences of crisis. These programme offers are at the centre of medial and social processes. On the one hand they are medial reflections, on the other hand they respond to social developments. In consequence, the results of a detailed programme analysis can perfectly be fitted into cultural studies, especially dealing with the tension of nation and provincials (Celia Applegate) or “nationale Zugehörigkeit” and Heimat” (Alon Confino).

Cultural studies on German broadcasting in the “Third Reich” are rare. The volume “Zuhören und Gehört werden. Radio im Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Lenkung und Ablenkung“ by Inge Marszolek and Adelheid von Saldern (1998) offers an intriguing study on the utilisation of the radio during the Nazi regime. A groundbreaking study on the issue is given by Adelheid von Saldern in her article “Volk und Heimat in Radio Broadcasting during the Period from Weimar to Nazi Germany”, published in the “Journal of Modern History” (2004). But here the remarks on the “Third Reich” are rough and the data base, she had, was rather limited.

Why Hamburg?

The programme offerings of the “Reichssender Hamburg” between 1933 and 1940 will be taken as a case study. The paper will operate on the grounded base of data (see preliminary work below) as well as on the original files and the sound documents in the German archives. There is a landmark position of the “NORAG” as a centre of the “Volk- und Heimat”-Movement in Germany (see also A. von Saldern, 2004). This invites further research for the continuities or ruptures, for the breaks and transition of the anti-modern regional and the ideological national movements within a medium that is regarded as a medium of modernism.

Basic and preliminary works

The proposal is based on some current sub-projects conducted by the “Research Center for the History of Broadcasting in Northern Germany”.

- In 2009/10 the Research Center has started a research project on the “Nordische Rundfunk AG” (NORAG). It focuses on the growing importance of this broadcasting station as an influential actor in the cultural field of the metropolis Hamburg. The results will be published in April/May 2010 in a catalogue titled: “Himmel auf Zeit”. Kultur der 20er Jahre in Hamburg. They will lay down the groundwork for questions for continuities and ruptures around 1933.

- In 2009 some preliminary studies have been conducted as a preparation for a larger project dealing with the literature programme offers of the “Reichssender Hamburg” 1933-1940. Most notably, a data base of 4.989 radio segments has already been established.

- In May 2010 a paper will be given for the workshop “Space, Identity and National Socialism” at Loughborough University/University of Leicester. It focuses especially on space-related identities in the “Third Reich”.

Hans-Ulrich Wagner is head of the Research Center for the History of Broadcasting in Northern Germany, a co-operative project of the Hans-Bredow-Institute for Media Research with the University of Hamburg (Department of Language, Literature and Media I / Media Culture) and the publicly funded Norddeutscher Rundfunk.