

# H-Net Reviews

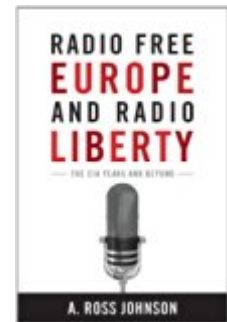
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, Christian Henrich-Franke. *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2013. 375 S. ISBN 978-3-8329-7225-7.

Richard H. Cummings. *Radio Free Europe's "Crusade for Freedom": Rallying Americans Behind Cold War Broadcasting, 1950—1960*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishers, 2010. 265 S. ISBN 978-0-7864-6207-0; ISBN 978-0-7864-4410-6.

A. Ross Johnson. *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. xii, 304 S. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-7356-0.

A. Ross Johnson, R. Eugene Parta. *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010. xxv, 586 S. ISBN 978-1-4416-7708-2.



Reviewed by Friederike Kind-Kovács  
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## Sammelrez: Cold War Broadcasting

The Iron Curtain has been approached as a political, ideological, mental as well as psychological border; from the perspective of media historians the Iron Curtain is also approached as an information border that aimed at the disentanglement of the Cold War world by means of its media systems. Yet, this “information curtain” (Johnson, p. 184) was unable to entirely seal off the Soviet Bloc societies from the so-called West: books, newspapers, television and radio perforated this Cold War border. Radio was a particularly powerful tool to reach audiences that appeared as otherwise inaccessible. In the last decade, research on radio during the Cold War has produced three different types of retrospective narratives: insider accounts, document collections and post-Cold War narratives. Already since the implementation of *Radio Free Europe* (RFE) and *Radio Liberty* (RL) in the early Cold War, key figures and employees of the radios themselves, and later on so-called radio veterans, have produced a great amount of celebratory recollections of their professional experiences at the radios in which they

stressed and still stress the radios’ power as ambitious instruments of this ‘Cold War of the ether’. A number of former insiders have given us an up-close and personal look at the everyday functioning of Western radio stations, providing much-needed knowledge about the internal structures of the stations and their extensive interdependencies with politics and intelligence. See for this: Cummings, *Radio Free Europe’s Crusade for Freedom*; Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. Lexington 2003; George R. Urban, *Radio Free Europe and the Pursuit of Democracy: My War within the Cold War*. New Haven 1997; James Critchlow, *Radio hold-in-the-head: Radio Liberty: an insider’s story of Cold War Broadcasting*, Washington D.C. 1995; R. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Empirical Assessment of Radio Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR During the Cold War*. Stanford 2007; Gene Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty. An Insider’s Memoir of Radio Liberty*, Pennsylvania State University Press 1999.

Recently, A. Ross Johnson, former director of *RFE* between 1988 and 1991 and former director of the radio's research institute until 1994, published a monograph on *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The CIA Years and Beyond*. Although having been part of the former radio industry himself, Johnson does not recount the story of *RFE* and *RL* in an autobiographical narrative, but instead relies on – until now – inaccessible, because classified, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) sources to rewrite the history of the first two decades of the radios' existence. While the CIA-funding of the radios until 1971 represents a highly problematic and controversial matter in their history, this work aims at identifying the CIA perspective, mostly by means of the CIA's own sources. Johnson decided to especially draw on declassified CIA materials to evaluate the particularly central role of the CIA in establishing the radios and keeping them running in the first two decades of their existence. Using archival material from the *RFE/RL Corporate Records* at Hoover and the Central Intelligence Agency Archives, Johnson aims at examining the role of *RFE* and *RL* as means of U.S. foreign and security policy. The book's main purpose is to draw final conclusions about the efficiency of the radios to fight and 'win' this propaganda war. It particularly aims at understanding the place of the radios in the various national crisis situations throughout Central Europe, reevaluating the ambivalent stance of the radios during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution as well as the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Acknowledging the institutional crisis of *RFE* after the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, which resulted from the encouragement that the US would also support the Hungarian revolution militarily, Johnson argues that the radios carried a "special responsibility to avoid encouraging violence" (p. 243). They only had "soft power" at hand in this media competition, instead of actually representing powerful means of "psychological warfare". Suggesting that "propaganda" was originally understood in positive terms, as a means to "promote freedom" and not "falsehoods", the monograph reproduces the often-formulated aim of the radios. Meant as surrogate broadcasts for unfree countries (p. 242), Johnson suggests, the radios' main task was to reinforce and to amplify the independent voices inside the repressive societies (p. 243). In targeting and trying to remain credible to its "skeptical audiences" in the Soviet Bloc, the radios could never have been "an overt or covert voice of the United States". Yet, its ideological independence was only possible through the CIA-funding. Thus, Johnson concludes that only the overt oversight and funding of *RFE* and *RL* by the CIA "made possible the investment in their capabilities that allowed them later to

contribute much to the collapse of the Soviet Union" (p. 245). Only by means of their financial (in-)dependence could they maintain objectivity. Frances Stonor Saunders, and many others after her, seriously questioned this kind of approach, according to which "the CIA's substantial financial investment came with no strings attached", which served to inscribe a "myth of altruism" to the CIA's sponsoring. Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper. The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London 1999, p. 4. Thus, it seems more appropriate to assume that financial aid of such sort surely affected the ideas and projects of the radios to a great extent.

The second type of insight into the history of the radios is provided through commented and contextualized document collections, which allow us to see radio veterans and scholars engage with materials of the time. Richard H. Cummings, the former director of security at *RFE*, gives an insight into the everyday (propaganda) work of *Radio Free Europe's* "*Crusade for Freedom*" in the 1950s. Although the reader is – particularly in the introduction – looking in vain for any research question or theoretical approach to the following assembled source material, the volume serves well in introducing the reader chronologically to the activities of the *Crusade for Freedom*. Citing immensely from and presenting many excerpts of unpublished sources, Cummings gives a detailed record of the radio's early fund raising activities, of which the *Crusade* appears to have been among the most successful one. The volume describes in perfect detail how this national fund raising campaign succeeded in gaining "moral and financial support" (p. 58) among the average American people. By means of its multimedia approach (as well as its very many advertising campaigns (via TV, Radio, Newspapers, Journals, Freedom Trains), the *Crusade* managed to raise an immense amount of money to "Help Truth Fight Communism", as the main propaganda slogan went (p. 87). In concrete this meant that the raised funds were used to establish radio stations throughout Europe behind the Iron Curtain and to fund their everyday expenses. As a means to prove the successful investment of the funds, "[p]rominent Americans were flown to visit Radio Free Europe (RFE) locations" on so-called "study trips" (p. 124). After their return, the "trippers" (as the participants would be called) were to report on the work of the radios that was much needed to prevent the further spreading of communism. By portraying the *Crusade for Freedom* publicly as the apparently only funding campaign behind the radios, the radio's CIA funding could be perfectly concealed from the American public for a very long period. Although

not specifically addressing this very central issue from a theoretical point of view, the author accomplishes to uncover one of the central cover actions of this fundraising Cold War and thus sets the historical record straight.

Another, more elaborate and extensive volume, entitled *Cold War Broadcasting* by Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, serves as a compendium of documents of the time as well as of today's narrative of (mostly) former employees of Western radios. The volume, however, does not only deal with *RFE* and *RL* but also includes studies on *VOA* and the *BBC*. Especially the final chapter, entitled "Cold War International Broadcasting and the Road to Democracy", rewrites the success stories of *RFE* and *RL* (p. 347), concluding, that "Western broadcasting contributed to fostering democratic change within the countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR" (p. 350). The preceding 16 chapters by former *RFE* or *RL* employees and historians, divided into four parts (Part 1: Goals of the Broadcasts, Part 2: Jamming and Audiences, Part 3: Impact of Western Broadcasts in Eastern Europe, Part 4: Impact of Western Broadcasts in the USSR), assess the impact of Western broadcasting on the Soviet bloc from various angles: 'Programming Policies and Contents', 'Jamming', 'Audience Research' and 'Official Reactions to Western broadcasting'. While already during the Cold War "measuring the impact of the private experience of listening to international broadcasts [...] was a constant preoccupation for politicians, broadcasters and researchers", as István Rév adequately observes in his chapter (p. 240), also this post-Cold War volume keeps attempting to reassess the radios' actual effectiveness. By means of a "wealth of detail on the impact of Western broadcasts", the volume aims to prove that the radios reached what they had wanted: mass audiences and key elites (p. 350). In order to do so, the volume covers the whole region and details the work and impact of the radios in all target countries. While most chapters tend – slightly too much – to join into the same heroic narrative of the radios' grandiose impact, the chapters individually taken serve perfectly as introductory chapters to the radios' history. It is a very valuable tool for teaching Cold War (media) history. The 2012 released online collection of related and newly declassified CIA-sources, entitled *E-dossier Nr. 32: Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* and published by Ross Johnson, gives insight into the CIA employment of the radios for U.S. political warfare. See for the e-dossier on declassified CIA materials about *RFE* and *RL*: <[\*liberty\*> /31.07.2013\). The collection of documents provides great detail on the objectives and propaganda strategies of the radio stations from their inception until their transition to public funding in 1971. Similar in content to the e-dossier, the last part of this edited volume, which comprises sources from East European Soviet archives, serves ideally the purpose to introduce students and young researchers to the archival responses to the broadcasting activities. In addition to the major bulk of chapters of former \*RFE\* and \*RL\* employees that evaluate the impact of the broadcast operations, a few chapters were written by academics whose contributions even go beyond reproducing the perspective of the radios. For instance, in his chapter on \*RFE\* in Hungary, István Rév suggests to re-read the 'noise' of jamming. Instead of just "overwriting the message coming from the West", the jamming noise was meant to "remind \[...\] the listener of the continuous surveillance" \(p. 244\). After a short disappearance of the noise in the Hungarian ether during the 1956 revolution, the quick and unexpected return of the noise reminded the listener: "Communism was here to stay" \(p. 245\). More of such critical approaches, that dare to focus on the difficulties, distortions and failures of the radios, would have turned this volume into a more balanced and neutral tool for the study of the radios.](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-32-radio-free-europe-and-radio-</a></p>
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While this collection reproduces much of the radios former rhetoric, a third type of narrative about media in the Cold War has recently started to appear, adding a different perspective to our knowledge of the Cultural Cold War. Volumes that aim to deconstruct ideas of ideological antagonisms, attempted isolation and disentanglement examine the field of Cold War encounters as well as of visual and audio media in terms of their contribution to the end of the Cold War. See on this the volume by Annette Vowinckel / Marcus M. Payk / Thomas Lindenberger, *Cold War Cultures. Perspectives on Eastern and Western European perspectives*, New York 2012, or the edited volume by Jessie Labov / Friederike Kind-Kovács, *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond: Transnational Media during and after Socialism*, New York 2013. The 2013 published *Airy Curtains in the European Ether* by Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers and Christian Henrich-Franke steps into the footprints of other recent works that lay their focus on Cold War entanglements instead of disentanglements. The volumes by Brendan Humphreys / Sari Autio-Sarasmo, *Winter kept us warm: Cold War Interactions Reconsidered*. Helsinki 2010, as well as by See Poul Villaume / Odd Arne Westard, *Perforating the Iron Curtain. European Détente, Transatlantic Relations*

and the Cold War, 1965–1985, Copenhagen 2010, focus on Cold War interaction; see now as well: Linda Risso (Ed.), *Radio Wars: Broadcasting during the Cold War*. Special Issue of *Cold War History* 13 (2013); Simo Mikkonen, *Exploiting the Exiles: Soviet Émigrés in U.S. Cold War Strategy*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14 (2012), p. 98–127 or his piece on “Stealing the Monopoly of Knowledge? Soviet Reactions to U.S. Cold War Broadcasting”, in: *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11 (2010), p. 771–805; Melissa Feinberg, *Fantastic Truths, Compelling Lies: Radio Free Europe and the Response to the Slánský Trial in Czechoslovakia*, in: *Contemporary European History* 22 (2013–2014), p. 107–125.

Stating in their introduction that “broadcasting both united and divided the Cold War blocs“, the editors of the present volume propose to approach radio during the Cold War rather as a zone of convergence than one of ideological antagonism and attempted isolation (p. 11). In this way, the volume questions the traditional approach to Cold War history and instead shifts its focus to the transnational character and potential of radio as a sound medium, reading it as “ping-pong” model of interactive communication” (p. 13). The volume is divided into four sections, dealing first with the “Regulation and Control of Broadcasting in Cold War Europe”, secondly examining “The European Communication Space and the Subversive Circulation Culture”, thirdly approaching “Connections and Spill Overs: Europe as a United Communication Space” and finally focusing on “Disconnections and Fragmentations: Europe as a Jamming Session”. Although the volume is missing a much-needed index and a coherent bibliography, the editors successfully brought more than a dozen articles together to study the connection between radio and its contribution to the process of “European integration” (p. 14). By assessing the “symbolic power of European broadcast events (and contents)”, that would be transferred across the Iron Curtain, the volume approaches media experiences that went beyond the “Airy Curtain” (p. 15). In their joint effort to examine the relationship between the cultural and technological dimensions of broadcasting, its material structures and institutions as well as its symbolic meanings, the authors provide a much-needed insight into this Cold War – yet already transnational – European space of interaction and communication (p. 15). In not only adding articles on tape recording (Karin Bijsterveld), pirate radio (Alexander Badenoch) and practices of clandestine broadcasting and listening (Trevor Hagen, Dana Mustata), but also including research pieces on color television (Andreas Fickers), the East-West exchange of television programs

(Christian Henrich-Franke, Regina Immel), song contests (Mari Pajala) and communication satellites (James Schwoch), the volume succeeds in broadening the perspective to other communication media. In this way, broadcasting is understood as only one – though important – part of a wider transnational and cross-Iron Curtain information system, which individual producers, users and listeners built and employed even beyond the historical caesura of 1989/1991.

While research on Cold War Radio mostly focuses on the flow of information from West to East, Jennifer Spohrer critically discusses in chapter 1 the ideological reasons for this historical reality. Simo Mikkonen goes even further and elaborates in his contribution on the mutuality of the interaction. He looks at Soviet international broadcasting *Radio Moscow*, which targeted Western audiences in the 1950s. Although the “Soviet Union was the most active and largest international broadcaster in the world” at the time (p. 242), the voice of Soviet authorities was poorly heard. In order to better propagate Soviet viewpoints in the global mainstream media and to support Soviet foreign policy objectives, *Radio Moscow* spread their broadcasts across the Iron Curtain. Similarly to *RFE/RL*, it employed the right type of Russian émigrés abroad to reach its target audiences. The East-West angle of broadcasting stands also in Nelson Ribeiro’s chapter at the center of attention, in which he analyzes the subversive power of *Radio Moscow*, and later of other exile stations, in Portugal under the dictatorship of Salazar. In adding a chapter that discusses how Soviet broadcasts served to encourage internal criticism of Salazar’s regime (p. 63), the volume allows for drawing interesting parallels between cross-border broadcasts in different historical contexts.

The volume equally sets great emphasis on taking into account the elaborate Soviet-type system of jamming as a means to regulate and counter unwanted cross-border communication and interaction (Christoph Classen, Andy O’Dwyer). As the chapter by Spohrer convincingly argues, national borders did not block the cross-border communication physically, but only legally (p. 30). In addition to this, as the chapter by Mustata suggests, the Romanian state security *Securitate* implemented an immense system of surveillance to control individuals’ listening behavior. For this end, the *Securitate* collected a great amount of private details on the individuals under surveillance (p. 166). Equally, the tape recorder was regularly used as a means of espionage and surveillance, recording phone calls and other private conversations (p. 113). At the same time, as Blijster-

veld shows for the case of Czechoslovakia, amateur tape recording also provided an instrument to enable “sound to travel easily across borders” (p. 102) and to make “people across the globe more knowledgeable about each other” (p. 105). However, the massive and largely unwanted flow of voices across the Airy Curtain made the implementation of an even more professional system of regulation and control necessary. From very early onwards, the “unwelcomed sound of jamming also inhabited the ether” (p. 138). As Classen shows for the case of the German-German broadcasting relations, jamming of the West-German capitalist media – in form of the *Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor (RIAS)* – became “increasingly questionable” and unacceptable in the GDR in the 1970s (p. 346). The relaxation on jamming visualized the social conflict between the ideologically motivated restriction on listening behavior and listeners’ increasing demands on their freedom to individually decide on their media consumption. That is why cross-border media consumption was slightly eased by the 1970s. But even before that, efforts to jam the transmission of broadcasts and to control individuals’ access to information

were never entirely successful. Nevertheless, whenever personal voices managed to cross the systemic divide, they turned into a “space and place of comfort, hope, memory and continuity” for the individual listener (p. 132). The chapter of Hagen explores the ways in which individual users in Czechoslovakia actually used the radios (p. 124) and what listening meant to them on a personal basis. The personal messages that were left by *RFE* listeners on the broadcasts’ answering machines provide us with a remarkable insight into the usage of and the emotional reactions to Cold War radio by its audiences. Without the listeners’ point of view, the volume would have missed the core of what Cold War radio was actually all about: individuals’ everyday experience of listening. Some more chapters with a bottom-up perspective on the experience of broadcasting and listening could be envisioned for future research on the radios. Yet, independent from this, the variety of perspectives united in this volume as well as the thorough introduction to the chapters by the editors offer a new path for better understanding the complex system of broadcasting in the Cold War.

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