Final Report
After Utopia: Radio Free Europe and Cold War (Neo)Liberalism, **1956-1972**
October 26 - December 9, 2022

"Liberalism was never permitted to come to full fruition," lamented Ludwig von Mises. Writing from the vantage point of 1920s Vienna, one of the originators of neoliberalism witnessed the vast and multicultural Austro-Hungarian Empire reduced to a landlocked nation-state.[1] Having lost its agricultural hinterland as well as access to the Adriatic Sea, post-World War One Austria was isolated from the global markets it had enjoyed throughout the nineteenth century. This geographical state of affairs, the numerous socialist projects across Vienna, and an almost successful revolution in Budapest signaled for Mises the end of nineteenth-century liberalism. The conflict which began in Sarajevo, a periphery of liberal Europe, resulted in a surprisingly violent overthrow of European imperial regimes that kept the continent locked in an international system of economic and political dominance scholars termed "the liberal world system."[2] Although Mises was a self-proclaimed anti-imperialist, he was uneasy over interwar Europe's political vacuum.[3] If classical liberalism was defeated in the conflict, Mises contemplated, what other system would emerge to take its place?

This question is crucial to understanding the broader history of twentieth-century (neo)liberalism. As a political and economic system born out of post-imperial dissolution in Vienna and London, (neo)liberalism emanated from a global community of classical liberal thinkers committed to rethinking new structures of power following the failures of the nineteenth-century world system. For these liberals, the point was to find an ideal economic and political system, supported through a network of highly-active institutions, that would help

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[1] "One day, as Mises looked out of the window of his chamber offices onto Vienna's opulent grand boulevard (Ringstrasse), he told Machlup, 'Maybe the grass will grow there, because our civilization will end.'" Jessica Whyte, *The Morals of the Market: Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism,* London, and New York: Verso, 2019, 55.

[2] Certainly, the term was influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory; I adopt the term "liberal world-system" from Lee Grieveson (2018). It describes nineteenth-century's hegemonic order based on nineteenth-century liberalism and capitalist production depended on a robust media network.

[3] Mises criticized imperialism not because it devastated foreign lands and communities. Rather, Mises saw imperial countries misusing technological innovations for destruction rather than wealth accumulation. The fact that two are often connected did not seem to trouble Mises. While capitalism is sometimes destructive, he argued, in the end it creates a free society. Mises' views on imperialism continue to be debated. Most recently, the Mises Institute's Fellow David Gordon rebutted Quinn Slobodian's recent accusations. David Gordon, "The Anti-Imperialist Ludwig von Mises," Mises Institute, March 12, 2021, https://mises.org/library/anti-imperialist-ludwig-von-mises.

inoculate the new liberal world system from political instability. To be sure, Mises' question motivated me to think about larger social, economic, and political structures that had been instrumental in devising this new system of power. While historians of neoliberalism such as Philip Mirowski, Quinn Slobodian, and Jessica Whyte have written excellent books on liberalism after World War One, the question of culture and cultural production has been curiously missing from these recent accounts. As a media historian, my doctoral research sought to complement these histories of (neo)liberalism by looking at the role of media institutions in supporting the (neo)liberal world system. Indeed, I explored Mises' question in my doctoral dissertation "Screening the Invisible Hand: State-sponsored Documentary Media, (neo)Liberalism, and the Riddle of Politics, 1918-1980" which, among other things, argued for the historical, intellectual, and political entanglements between (neo)liberal internationalism and the beginnings of documentary cinema in interwar Britain and elsewhere. For instance, I focused on "the father of documentary cinema" John Grierson, and his interwar career to argue that his film-making practice contributed to the contraction and trivialization of mass politics at a moment when socialist movements were blossoming across the world—from Tokyo to Budapest. I began this comparison between Grierson's work and the international (neo)liberal movement to suggest that we cannot write histories of (neo)liberalism unless we also stay attentive to the imbrication of culture, mass politics, and twentieth-century liberal ideology.

When I applied to OSA's Visegrad Fellowship Program in November 2020, I imagined my research trip in Budapest to complement my doctoral dissertation's overwhelming focus on Britain; the research at OSA was supposed to expand and complicate my project's Chapter Two. Indeed, this chapter investigated how liberal propaganda changed during World War Two at the British Ministry of Information (MoI). As I have argued throughout this chapter, the war years were crucial to reimagining and devising a new strategy for propagating the benefits of liberal governance. At that time, bureaucrats working on liberal propaganda were worried that their ideological enemies—Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union—were misusing mass media to further their political goals. And yet, the desire to build new media experiences was not a strictly British phenomenon; novel approaches to liberal propaganda were part of a broader shift in the history of liberal thought. Consider, for example, Fred Turner's argument about how interwar

American intellectuals and policymakers were increasingly worried that modern mass media communication, exemplified by a centralized apparatus, would turn liberal citizens into passive subjects that authoritarian regimes could exploit.[4] Akin to the British context, Nazi German propaganda was invoked by these U.S. scientists and intellectuals to illustrate how centralized mass media communication obliterated "individualism." The figure of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, exemplified for soon-to-be wartime allies—the U.S. and Britain—mass media's entanglement with political illiberalism.[5] Like the MoI bureaucrats, American wartime intellectuals sought to devise a new form of wartime communication supported by a new understanding of human personality. As Turner argued, this new liberal subject was envisioned as "highly individuated, rational, and empathetic… committed to racial and religious diversity… able to collaborate with others."[6] To build such a subject, liberal states had to rely on wartime experiments in communication which resulted in the creation of a multimedia form Turner termed "the democratic surround," or a multimodal environment that allowed citizens to experience reality from multiple perspectives.

After completing part of this research, I was eager to use Radio Free Europe's archival documents and investigate ways in which these wartime trends in communication have continued into the post-World War Two period. It is a common trope to assert that the Cold War was equally a conflict of words, ideas, and concepts as much as it was a conflict that involved the newest military gadgets from American and Soviet scientific industrial complexes. My greatest methodological hurdle was how to think about the concept of multimodality through radio—a medium that is ultra-centralized and, at the same time, ephemeral. To be sure, an ideal multimodal media experience was the modern art installation like *The Family of Man* exhibit at

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[4] "Some argued that mediated images and sounds slipped into the psyche through the senses, stirred the newly discovered depths of the Freudian unconscious, and left audiences unable to reason. Others claimed that the one-to-many broadcasting structure that defined mass media required audiences to turn their collective attention towards a single source of communication and so to partake of authoritarian mass psychology. In the late 1930s, if anyone doubted the power of mass media to remake society, they only needed to turn to Germany." Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013, 2.

[5] The British newspapers described Nazi propaganda as "Goebbels' cacophony and barkerian methods of a regimented Totalitarian machine." "Ministry of Information Sponsors British Production Scheme," *Kinematograph Weekly*, January 11, 1940, 4.

[6] Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties,* 3.

MoMA.[7] As the included images show, the idealized layout suggested multiple perspectives that citizens would be urged to consider in their appreciation of the exhibit. (Fig. 1) But how does one recreate this experience through sound?
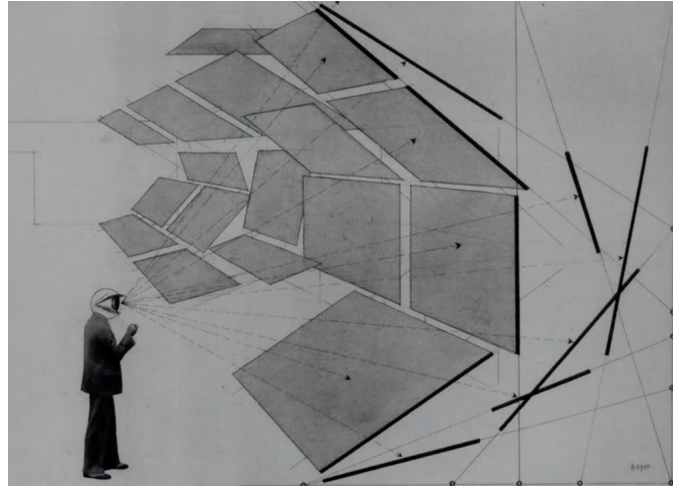

Figure 1: *The Family of Man* exhibit at MoMA

Scholars have already remarked on radio's propensity for inciting imagination. This is because the medium has been tied to domesticity from its earliest incarnations. Indeed, even when totalitarian regimes urged people to consume radio broadcasts in a collective setting, say, at a factory or commune, radio broadcasts have been mostly listened to in the comfort of one's

[7] What was referred to as "cultural programming" was an overwhelmingly successful strategy to those working on liberal propaganda in the U.S. and Britain. By the mid-1960s, RFE included regular radio shows on modern architecture, music, cinema, and literature. This was greatly appreciated by their Soviet listeners. Consider how one listener from Estonia acknowledged the difficult task of producing cultural content: "The propaganda of modern art, as that of art in general, is a noble and not an easy task. I wish you strength and energy in this field." (HU OSA 300-6-2, Box 2, "Analysis Report no. 2-65, February 9, 1965, page 12)

private sphere. Secluded from the public, the radio listener would often be in the dark, preferably with eyes closed, while her ears would absorb the radio waves. Unlike television, Cold War radio traveled with great ease, even though radio signals were being jammed daily by Communist authorities. Moreover, radio programming was cheaper to produce than television. As archival documents from the Research and Evaluation Department suggest (HU OSA 300-6-1), RFE was particularly aware of radio's unique characteristics. More than once, RFE employees remarked that radio waves would reach Soviet listeners in their domestic setting when presumably these audiences would be more relaxed and, most importantly, not forced to perform their public function.[8] But the way RFE went about this was unusual. Inciting imagination on parts of those living across the Iron Curtain, as RFE projected, was to be done scientifically. Not only were the producers interested in using "natural language" for Soviet audiences, but they were also equally invested in accumulating an astounding amount of data on these listeners.

And yet, RFE radio programming was never solely about consumption even though this media organization based its audience research on methods developed by highly-commercialized U.S. broadcasting. Unlike their colleagues in the States, those working at RFE cared little about finding the right sponsorship. Because RFE was heavily supported by the U.S. government and individual donations, it operated with enough funding so as not to worry about advertisers which have been central to radio and television broadcasting in the U.S. and elsewhere. Indeed, I discovered that RFE's desire to build an imagined community, or what in marketing is often termed "target audience," went beyond pure practicality; finding the ideal listener was a matter of ideology. In a way, understanding how RFE devised this individual stands as a surrogate for how the radio organization comprehended its historical role in preserving liberalism. Consider how in 1965, those working at the RFE reflected on their position in radio broadcasting vis-à-vis Western media organizations such as the BBC and Voice of America: "Radio Liberty operates under several special difficulties not experienced by any other free world station. A major

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[8] And yet, RFE was sometimes reminded of this commitment by those who were invited to comment on the programs. Consider how "Listener E" commented on a program while urging the RFE to take a more pro-active stance in their broadcasts: "…in what [sic] did this talk differ from a Western station's account of the year 1960 intended for ordinary Western listeners?… that was the mistake. RL didn't take the trouble to put himself in the listener's place, did not try to imagine the listener's viewpoint on this or that event." (HU OSA 300-6-1, Box 7, "Comments on Program for January 1, 1961," Listener E, page 2)

problem is the dearth of two-way contacts with target area listeners… Censorship, mail interception, and jamming also contribute to this lack of contact."[9] According to cybernetics, the leading scientific discipline under the Cold War, feedback was necessary for successfully communicating and producing knowledge; without this returned information, communication was seen as incomplete. As it's well-known, cybernetics provided the basis of our modern digital systems of communication.[10] Indeed, the first computers were built by the application of cybernetic ideals. Most recently, scholars have shown how this interdisciplinary science of cybernetics had a lasting influence on the imagination of neoliberal thinkers and economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Kenneth E. Boulding.[11] To compensate for this lack of feedback, RFE organized various "mock" activities including interviews, surveys, and discussions with recent emigres from the Soviet Union and elsewhere. And yet, "the RFE method" still utilized parts of repetition, trial, and error, so central to cybernetics. This is how RFE described the approach: "This method is closely related to methods of investigation used in the natural sciences, where an experiment is repeated time and time to preclude chance results. Our 'experiment' is a single sample that is repeated many times, using different interviewees, institutes, etc... Leading authorities in the field of opinion research who have examined our methods and techniques consider them the best and the most feasible for the conditions under which we operate."[12]

I spent my final weeks at OSA researching the Free Europe Committee files because I wanted to know how those running the organization at the highest level conceived of their political goals within FEC and RFE. For this purpose, I focused on a small collection that was part of the FEC's President's Office. Although this collection mostly consisted of random correspondence because it had been already severely "cleaned up" from any potentially

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[9] HU OSA 300-6-2, Box 2, "Analysis Report no. 9-65, August 24, 1965—The Story of an Unusual Dialogue"
To make matters worse, the jamming of RFE's programming continued well into the late-1980s. As RFE's President John Richardson remarked, Soviet jamming against the BBC and VOA ceased by the mid-1960s. (HU OSA 298-1, Digital File 3_1492, Letter from John Richardson to Crane, January 8, 1965, page 1.)

[10] Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

[11] F. A. Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society," *The American Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (September 1945): 519-530.; Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1956.

[12] (HU OSA 300-6-1, Box 13, "Radio Free Europe Audience Research: RFE Listens to its Listeners," 1964, page 3)

problematic material, there were still useful snippets and documents that complicated the question of politics at RFE. I expected to find a plethora of documents on strategy and program goals, but I found John Richardson's personal and professional communication; this was a serendipitous discovery so unique to historical research. Indeed, it was paramount for me to read Richardson's correspondence in the mid-1960s because he served as RFE's President at a time of great sensitivity. To be sure in 1965, the RFE was still not internationally reprimanded for being an instrument of the Central Intelligence Agency, but the 1960s were a period of great political turmoil in the U.S. and elsewhere; especially since Communist propagandists heavily exploited racial tensions and direct violent outbursts during this era to discredit Western ideals of democracy and liberalism. Although RFE's broadcasting headquarters were in West Germany, Richardson was based in New York City and was directly involved with the Civil Rights Movement in the State of New York. His activism within the decade's political movements was not directly related to his professional career and yet, it should be seen as a useful historical entanglement. Not least because the issue of racism in the U.S. was reflected, per Soviet propaganda, through American foreign policy.[13] When Richardson spoke about issues at home, his words reverberated across the RFE in the 1960s.

Reading and understanding Richardson's position and historical role in the Civil Rights Movement was not an easy task for me. As I have already mentioned, the papers in the President's Office are incomplete after having been purged and selected by previous rounds of archiving at the Hoover Institution before the documents were sent to OSA. More than once, I caught myself trying to re-imagine and piece together what was already missing and, perhaps, forever lost for contemporary researchers. And yet, I was also aware that Richardson had to walk a thin line between direct political involvement and the RFE's commitment to avoid direct politics ever since the Hungarian uprising in 1956 when the broadcaster was reprimanded by the Soviet bloc for inciting violence. Perhaps, it does not come as a surprise that Richardson

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[13] This was how Richardson reflected on the 1965 Bronxville Hospital strike: "Incidentally, Bernie and I are in it up to our necks, mostly on the side of the strikers because of our interest in the human rights aspect. We are currently about as socially acceptable in Bronxville as a couple of scorpions in the salad." (HU OSA 298-1, Digital Files 3_1416 and 3_1417, Letter from John Richardson to R.B. Perkins, February 23, 1965)

resigned from the Bronxville Committee on Human Rights soon after the hospital strikes began, but these documents raise the question of politics *and* liberalism during the Cold War period.[14]

The issue of politics and political involvement was central to post-World War Two liberals. As Judith Shklar in her 1957 book *After Utopia* wrote, Cold War liberals' loss of faith in the political process became post-war liberalism's dominant characteristic. Shklar traced a form of reactionary liberalism within the works of Friedrich Hayek and other (neo)liberal thinkers.[15] This was a prescient analysis of (neo)liberalism and it would take almost half a century for modern-day historians to grasp the importance of anti-politics to the neoliberal thought collective. And yet, I wonder whether a certain kind of political malaise signified a broader shift in Cold War liberalism that echoed throughout Western democracies. My upcoming monograph *The Cinema Order*, based on my doctoral project, will argue that if we want to understand the broader shift in liberal propaganda and liberalism, we have to turn our attention to culture, cultural production, and liberal media organizations. Although I focus on cinema and the role of cinematographic imagination within the works of (neo)liberal thinkers such as Joseph Schumpeter, Michael Polanyi, and Friedrich Hayek, my research at OSA will inform much of the book. More concretely, thinking about the history of liberalism through the challenge of radio broadcasting has opened methodological avenues in my work that transgress simple or "clean-cut" distinctions between mass media. While they can be described as "hot" or "cold," media have played a vital role in how liberal societies think about the limits of politics and collective action.

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[14] HU OSA 298-1, Digital File 3_1367, March 24, 1965.

[15] "All this amounts in the end to a rejection of purposeful social thought and action. For, ultimately, society is too complex and human knowledge forever insufficient to allow men to alter their social environment with any degree of success." Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith.* Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 2020, page 238.
This was why Hayek and (neo)liberal thinkers found cybernetics and early computer communication so appealing because it promised to by-pass human rationality by enacting a system of supra-human cognition.

OSA Collections

HU OSA 298-1, Digital Files, years 1960, 1961, 1962, 1965, 1968, 1970, and 1971

HU OSA 300-6-1-1, 300-6-1-2, 300-6-1-4, 300-6-1-7, 300-6-1-9, 300-6-1-10, 300-6-1-11, 300-6-1-12, 300-6-1-13,

HU OSA 300-6-2-2

HU OSA 300-10-2-1, 300-10-2-27, 300-10-2-29, 300-10-2-76, 300-10-2-90, 300-10-2-90, 300-10-2-109, 300-10-2-110, 300-10-2-245, 300-10-2-261