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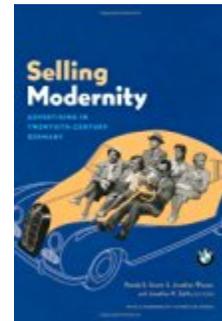
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Pamela E. Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, Jonathan R. Zatlín, eds. *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. xiii + 366 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4047-8; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4069-0.

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Producing Product Promotion

Until recently, advertising had been a relatively neglected topic in German historiography. With the exception of Christiane Lamberty's dissertation, with its extremely thorough treatment of the pre-World War I period, Dirk Reinhardt's broader and more theoretical work, and Uwe Westphal's survey of advertising under the Nazis, the study of advertising has been largely left to business and marketing researchers on the one hand and sociologists and communications scholars on the other.[1] The lack of critical historical work on advertising appears all the more peculiar given that advertisements have become such an integral part of daily experience, and since as an object of study, advertising has so much to tell us about late nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, about individual and collective identities and fantasies, about commodity culture, and about the place and power of business in people's lives. Indeed, the historical study of advertising is one way of bridging the gaps between the history of economic and commercial life and the concerns of cultural and social history. The history of advertising forces one to interrogate the boundaries between art and commerce and shows how those boundaries have shifted over time and across contexts. Studying advertising also helps historians get at relationships between business and the state, and it is of course closely intertwined with the history of consumer culture, an historical subfield which has taken off over the last decades. Furthermore, as a category of historical analysis, advertising can offer new methodological guideposts for bringing a degree of materialism into cul-

tural history and simultaneously for using the tools of visual and cultural studies to analyze business and the economy. As a distinctly modern and originally American business practice, and one that has aspired to scientific status and typically incorporated the latest technological innovations, advertising plunges its would-be historian into the historiographical minefield surrounding modernity, its onset and reception, and the related issues of "Americanization" and globalization.

All of these issues, as Victoria de Grazia notes in the forward to this volume, were particularly fraught in Germany in the modern period. De Grazia observes that guardians of German high culture (*Kultur*) must have seen advertising as an affront, viewing its images and ditties as a threat to the dignity of German cultural legacies. Turning to the Nazi period, she asks about the fate of advertising in a regime so obsessed with image production and propaganda and so determined to re-channel consumption. Finally, she adds that the postwar division of Germany provides a rare test case, where one can assess the differential development of two antithetical advertising cultures out of a common heritage and background.

To be sure, as the editors of the volume make clear in their useful and well-crafted introduction, the history of advertising provides extraordinarily rich perspectives on Germany's recent history. Indeed, the existence of five discrete regimes on German soil, each with a distinct political and commercial culture, makes the German

twentieth century an intriguing and unique case and an ideal terrain for investigating the kinds of issues outlined above. *Selling Modernity*, with its detailed introduction and twelve essays spanning the twentieth century, fulfills this promise and does an enormous service for German historians working in a variety of fields.

The volume arose out of a workshop organized by Pamela Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan Zatlin, which was held at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario in November 2003. Here I should note that I attended the workshop and commented on a panel on “Advertising and the Racial Community.”

In their introduction to the volume, Swett, Wiesen, and Zatlin stress their interest in the production of advertising; that is, they are less concerned with consumers or consumption than with the institutions, people and processes involved in producing advertisements. Thus the volume nudges its readers to pay closer attention to how things are produced—a welcome corrective to the discourse-historical emphasis of many consumer culture studies—though in this case, the concern is not with products themselves, but rather with the images and discourses created around products. The chapters, then, deal chiefly with companies, advertising professionals and state and occupational agencies that regulated or oversaw the advertising industry and its campaigns. While attentive to the cultural influences and meanings of advertisements, most of the authors here devote less attention to the semiotics of ads or their reception than the context for their production and dissemination. Because of the importance of the surrounding culture, economic conditions, and political administration, most of these essays focus on a particular regime.

The first three, by Kevin Repp, Corey Ross, and Holm Friebe, concern the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods, a time of intense debate about this nascent practice against the backdrop of broader controversies on economic modernization, on the search for distinctly German aesthetic modes, and on the value of America as cultural code and economic blueprint. Repp deals with department stores and advertisement posters, two lightning rods for early twentieth-century critics of Americanization and the concomitant changes to German retail. He convincingly portrays the Berlin Wertheim store on Leipzigerstraße, derisively nicknamed the Aquarium because of its enormous glass windows, as architect Adolf Messel’s attempt to forge a kind of “spiritualized *Sachlichkeit*,” that is, a distinctly German version of an American commercial form. Turning to poster art and the form of the *Sach-*

plakat, he treats the years before World War I as the moment for a fleeting fusion of modernism and commercial art.

Like Repp, Ross shows that America represented modernity in German eyes, but that Germans sought their own paths to modernity—rather than simply copying America or merely transposing American advertising styles and techniques, German designers adopted selectively and developed their own styles and approaches, and this in an era when the lines between commerce and art in advertising had not yet been clearly drawn. Ross contrasts the German style of advertising—images without accompanying text (*Sachplakat*)—with American, text-heavy advertising, or so-called editorial advertising. The legacy of the First World War, the influence of propaganda, and the popular field of mass psychology all worked against the spread of editorial advertising, and bolstered the belief in the power of images to manipulate, seduce, and sell. Surprisingly, Ross shows that the spread of American advertising techniques in Germany was halting in the 1920s when U.S. firms opened offices there, and actually only took off in the 1930s, as the Nazis tapped into American methods to spread their messages and reach new constituencies.

Holm Friebe covers some of the same territory in his contribution, a brief intellectual biography of the intriguing figure Hans Domizlaff. A pioneer of branding (*Markentechnik*), Domizlaff nonetheless rejected advertising, condemning it as a crass American import. Branding, on the other hand, was based on mass psychological ideas that depicted the public as a single organism, which could be appealed to through a combination of irrational manipulation and didacticism. Friebe treats Domizlaff as part of Weimar Germany’s conservative revolution, drawing on Jeffrey Herf’s influential notion of “reactionary modernism,” and concludes tantalizingly, by noting that Domizlaff’s ideas, which failed to win backers among the Nazis, came back into fashion in the consumerist democracy of the Federal Republic.

Although different in method and sources, these three chapters overlap and cross-fertilize each other in interesting ways, and taken together they provide a rich glimpse into the commercial, cultural, and intellectual history of early twentieth-century Germany. Each treats America as a symbol of the modern and as a screen onto which Germans projected their anxieties and ambivalence about the rapid cultural and economic changes of the early twentieth century. At times, as in Repp’s essay, this point is collapsed into too broad a dichotomy

between those who embraced modernity and its promises and antimodernist cultural pessimists who disparaged the department store and other commercial innovations. In a useful corrective to this schema, historian Uwe Spiekermann has pointed out that more traditional forms of retail modernized too and that a more nuanced breakdown is needed to characterize this era.[2]

The next group of essays deals with advertising during the Nazi period when the state established a central ad council to regulate and oversee the industry. In the first chapter on the Third Reich, Michael Imort analyzes advertisements that appeared in German forestry journals. At first glance this choice of subject might seem somewhat peculiar, but given the salience of the forest as a metaphor for the German *Volk* and the racialized *Volks-gemeinschaft*, these ads can tell us a lot about Nazi political culture, particularly in light of the presence of corporate leaders in state positions. In addition to pushing products, then, advertisements in forestry publications helped further Nazi visions of proper consumer behavior and the Nazis' organistic, hierarchical view of society.

In some ways Shelley Baranowski's chapter is a bit of an outlier. Instead of corporate advertisements, she devotes her attention to state promotion of Kraft durch Freude (KdF or Strength through Joy), the Nazis' leisure organization known chiefly for its organized vacations which, at least in theory, provided cruises and holidays for working-class citizens and sought to create a kind of communal consumption in opposition to the individualism and greed of American-style consumerism.[3] And as in her superb 2004 book on the same topic, Baranowski's essay uniquely documents the reception of advertising campaigns. She shows that this reception was indeed mixed, but ultimately her evidence points to the ways in which KdF advertising helped consolidate Nazi support and affirm the superiority of the German racial community.

In one of the volume's liveliest and most entertaining chapters, Jeff Schutts shows how advertising rendered Coca Cola, the most American of products, German. Schutts uses the concept of creolization as an alternative to notions of Americanization or globalization to argue that the spread of Coke in Germany should not be taken as evidence that country's increasing Americanization, but rather that products take on meanings from their contexts, and notably in this case, both the soft drink and its symbolism were being produced on German soil. Coke's adaptation to the German context was so thoroughgoing that German POWs, upon being shipped

to the United States, were shocked to find their favorite beverage there. Consistent with the conclusions of several of the other essays here, Schutts lays bear a German modernity that drew from the American model but articulated it in specifically German—in this case, Nazi—ways. Like KdF programming, Coca Cola offered Germans a pleasurable consuming experience that simultaneously reinforced their loyalty to and membership in the *Volks-gemeinschaft*.

The volume's remaining six essays concern the post-war period, and Guillaume de Syon, Elizabeth Heineman, and Robert Stephens cover advertising in West Germany from three original and fascinating perspectives. No company better symbolized West Germany than Lufthansa, and de Syon documents the ways in which Lufthansa advertising helped recreate the Federal Republic's image in the 1950s and early 1960s. He chronicles the company's tense relationship with the Central Office of Tourism, which was more concerned with selling Germany as a travel destination than with selling tickets on its national airline. Ultimately, Lufthansa advertisements tried to market an experience, specifically the experience of Germanness in the air—although a proposal to dress flight attendants in dirndls was quickly shelved—and the airline's success contributed significantly to Germany's distancing itself from its Nazi past and rehabilitating its image abroad.

Heineman focuses on Beate Uhse, West Germany's leading purveyor of erotica, whose founder made sexual consumption respectable for middle-class Germans in the postwar period. She asks why Uhse, whose earlier self-representations emphasized her solid family life, abruptly switched her narrative in 1963, and suddenly began promoting a different life story, one which put her husband and children in the background and stressed her adventures and achievements, including her role as a Luftwaffe pilot during the war. The answer, according to Heineman, is that the Luftwaffe story, along with other elements of her biography, established that Uhse belonged to the elite, that she came from a good family with high social standing, and this status ingratiated her with judges and lawyers in her courtroom appearances when she defended herself against obscenity charges. It also reinforced the notion that her marketing of sexuality and aids to sexual satisfaction were meant to contribute to the collective good rather than being driven by the pursuit of profit. Furthermore, this self-representation played upon the association between flight and pleasure or fantasy, and perhaps conjured up memories of erotic pleasure in the Nazi years. Finally, Heineman makes

the case that sexual fulfillment—of course within a respectable marriage—became part of West German liberal discourse in the context of the Cold War, as liberals depicted Communism’s anti-individualism as antithetical to individual (sexual) pleasure.

Robert Stephens also takes on more private and shadowy forms of consumption, and his essay concerns the Federal Republic’s clumsy and failed attempts to harness the power of advertising to discourage drug consumption through the character Wowman, a drug-sniffing dog and the star of a series of comic books. Like Stephens’s 2007 book *Germans on Drugs*, this essay investigates a subculture of consumption, a kind of rebellion from West German consumerist values through alternate forms of consumption.^[4] He argues that anti-drug advertising—created by the firm J. Walter Thompson and utilizing American techniques like market segmentation and social scientific analysis—fell into the trap of seeing consumers as rational economic actors who, when given the facts, would act accordingly. Thus the Wowman campaign and other attempts to advertise drug abstinence failed to have any impact on youth behavior.

Two essays, by Anne Kaminsky and Greg Castillo, deal with advertising in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the volume concludes with Rainer Gries’s comparative study of self-service in the two German states. Kaminsky provides an extremely useful overview of the GDR’s shifting approach to advertising over the three decades between the creation of the regime’s official advertising agency (DEWAG) in 1945 and its halting of advertising in 1975, when, it feared, product promotion only served to emphasize shortages and scarcities. Although initially treated as an undesirable outgrowth of capitalism, advertising was welcomed after 1953 when—in response to the June uprising—the GDR declared its intention of catching up with and overtaking the West German consumer economy. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 brought another turning point. Henceforth advertisements were to promote the socialist way of life and consumption habits based on need and the common good rather than Western-style commodity fetishism. These attempts to get people to buy what the regime needed them to buy never had too much success, as consumers generally formed their own ideas based, in part, on exposure to West German media and products. Socialist advertising stressed efficiency and sober, editorial-style product promotion, and it would have been interesting if Kaminsky had traced these motifs and styles back to their origins in the 1920s.

Castillo’s chapter, on GDR architectural style and the Stalinallee building project, although less connected to the volume’s central questions, raises fascinating issues. Castillo focuses not on advertising in a narrower sense, but rather on the selling of a socialist way of life and on the way that the Stalinallee project was meant to embody living socialism. Unsurprisingly, this is another story of failure, here a two-fold failure, as the regime oscillated between trying to best capitalist urban planning and design and trying to create appropriate aesthetic alternatives.

Gries’s concluding chapter is less concerned with the advertisements that surround products than with the idea of products speaking for themselves. He writes about self-service, the retail innovation that allowed consumers direct contact with goods and eliminated the need to ask a counter person for help. He then explores this product-consumer relationship in both East and West Germany and speculates about its future. In the West, self-service stood for the idea of limitless, unfettered consumption and served to distinguish the new Germany of the economic miracle from the scarcity of the wartime past. Self-service shops appeared in the East as well, but there the discourse on consumption was marked, above all, by limitations and shortages and once again the failure either to compete with the West at its own game, or to mount an alternative consumption regime.

As should be clear from this discussion, not all of the volume’s essays hew closely to the editors’ emphasis on the production of publicity and product promotion, but that scarcely diminishes the tightness and coherence of this fine collection. And while its chapters cover a great range of historical agents and topics, several major themes reverberate and intersect through most of them: the German path to modernity, the tenuous existence of independent advertising in the two German dictatorships, the ambiguous meaning and status of America as a cultural code and the mixed reception of American advertising techniques, the intertwining of commercial publicity and political propaganda throughout the century, and the endless ethical and practical debate about advertising and its power to suggest and manipulate. This volume brings the field of advertising history in Germany to maturity. It will also, one hopes, provoke further discussion and collaboration between cultural historians and scholars of German business and open up new ways of doing cultural history without losing sight of the agents, processes, and consequences of production.

Notes

- [1]. Christiane Lamberty, *Reklame in Deutschland, 1890-1914. Wahrnehmung, Professionalisierung und Kritik der Wirtschaftswerbung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000); Dirk Reinhardt, *Von der Reklame zum Marketing. Geschichte der Wirtschaftswerbung in Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993); and Uwe Westphal, *Werbung im dritten Reich* (Berlin: Transit Verlag, 1989). David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) appeared too late to be included in this review.
- [2]. See Uwe Spiekermann, *Warenhaussteuer in Deutschland: Mittelstandsbewegung, Kapitalismus und Rechtsstaat im späten Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994).
- [3]. Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- [4]. Robert P. Stephens, *Germans on Drugs: The Complications of Modernization in Hamburg* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

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