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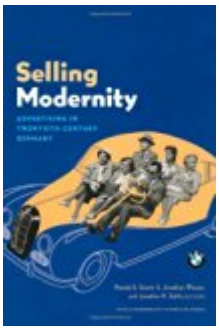

Pamela E. Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, Jonathan R. Zatlin, eds.. *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. xiii + 366 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-4069-0.

Reviewed by Paul Betts

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Advertising is one of the hallmark cultural forms of the 20th century. While its roots long predate 1900, the real industrial take-off of what is often described as capitalism's most inventive and intrusive medium belongs to the last century. According to 2004 statistics, advertising now accounts for roughly 1 percent of the world's gross domestic product, and it continues to grow. That said, the historical analysis of advertising as both economic asset and cultural "dream factory" is a recent development. Through the 1970s, the history of advertising remained marginalized from mainstream accounts of the so-called Age of Extremes; instead, its success stories were generally relegated to business school case studies or Frankfurt School-inspired polemics against the evil effects of the industry's subtle hucksterism. Since the 1980s, however, such simplified views have given way to more sophisticated accounts of advertising's central role in cultural production worldwide.

This has been good news for the historical profession, not least because histories of advertising have made their way into discussions of "visual cultures" in general. While good inroads have been made into American, British and French historiography, advertising has rarely been incorporated into broader understandings of modern Germany. "Selling Modernity", edited by North American historians Pamela Sweet, Jonathan Wiesen and Jonathan Zatlin, is a very welcome effort in this regard. What makes this volume distinctive – and especially fruitful for historians – is their concerted attempt to view advertising through a wide-angle lens, approaching the subject, as Victoria De Grazia puts it in her foreword, "as much as a cultural question as a business proposition" (p. xiv). In the book, the editors make a strong plea for considering Germany as a useful case study of the diverse manifestations of advertising over the course of the century, not least because each German state (whether fascist, liberal or communist) stylized itself as uniquely qualified to deliver dreams of the good life for all.

All of the essays are stimulating and consistently of high quality. Not surprisingly americanization serves as a key subtheme of the volume, as most contributors engage with Germany's am-

bivalent attitude toward the US and its advertising culture. (It would have been useful, however, to hear more about the GDR fascination with America as well.) Kevin Repp and Corey Ross's articles ably frame the discussion for much of the volume, showing as they do how Germany's modern advertising industry originated in the late 19th century and flourished in the interwar years, respectively. Repp provides a good analysis of how late Wilhelmine "advertising culture" was closely tied to the rise of the department store and the advertising poster, concluding that these "spokesmen for capitalist industry" were the real unsung artistic avant-garde of the late Kaiserreich. Ross in turn demonstrates how Weimar "admen" shrewdly adopted American advertising techniques (including the use of applied psychology), while still holding on to German cultural forms (such as poster graphics) in their own ways. Ross goes on to make the point that it was actually under the Nazis that American advertising style (having been successfully domesticated by their Weimar predecessors) enjoyed its real breakthrough in German culture.

Nazi Germany is the focus of three additional contributions. Michael Imort offers a highly original essay on how the vaunted "Volksgemeinschaft" found symbolic expression in Nazi Era forestry manuals. In particular he argues that the Nazis used images of the healthy and cultivated forest (straight, serried trees) as a visual metaphor for the idealized nation "precisely because it had been firmly established as a symbol of Germany and Germanness for more than a hundred years" (p. 114). Shelley Baranowski moves on to more familiar terrain, furnishing a well-written overview of the mass leisure organization, "Kraft durch Freude" (KdF). She shows that the Nazi regime was a kind of consumer culture in its own right, peddling dreams of prestige and plenty to hard-working members of the "national community." So much so that by 1938 some 43 million Germans enjoyed the weekend getaways, ski trips and Baltic sea cruises organized by KdF. In her words, Kraft durch Freude "conjoined claims to material luxury with the nonmaterial values of community, producing inexpensive products that preserved Nazism's economic priorities while simultaneously persuading its participants that the regime had improved their standard of living" (p. 128). Jeff Schutts then shifts the attention to perhaps the most well-known consumer story of the Third Reich, the regime's sponsorship of Coca Cola. For Schutts, this was a telling chapter of cultural "creolization;" indeed, it was precisely the successful German effort to sell and represent the US soft drink in traditional ways that made it palatable to a regime so hypersensitive to all things foreign.

Several others place the emphasis on revealing biographies. Holm Friebe recounts the influential career of the "godfather of German branding," Hans Domizlaff, and his interwar ideas about the power of "Markentechnik" as a marriage of marketing and industrial psychology. His work was even enlisted in the controversial "Flaggenstreit" during the 1920s, when state officials passionately sought to devise new and abiding symbols for the shaky new republic. By contrast, Elizabeth Heineman provides an excellent assessment of the savvy self-marketing of Beate Uhse as a key instance in the (West) German fusion of sexuality and commercialism after 1945, to the extent that the so-called Beate Uhse Myth became for many West Germans a usable "narrative about their path from Nazism, through hardship and recovery, to a world of pleasure" (p. 203).

Advertising in the Federal Republic is taken up as well. Guillaume De Syon discusses Lufthansa's struggle to develop a new corporate identity after 1945. To this end the airline company foregrounded certain positive images of Germany and Germans (precise, polite, modern) as a way of breaking from the trapping of the past. Robert P. Stephens dwells less on advertising success than failure, using the long-forgotten public health campaign comic strip "Wowman" as an in-

structive example of the West German government's failed effort to sell its anti-drug message to 70s youth. Advertising techniques may have been extremely effective at romancing commodities, but apparently had a much harder time when asked to curb consumption. (How dieting ads fared by comparison would be worth investigating here.) Rainer Gries explores another twist to the relationship between consumerism and everyday life: the advent of the self-service store. He makes plain that the modernization of shopping went far beyond simply removing the sales counter; the introduction of self-service stores meant that "unmediated" merchandise now had to sell itself, as package design and visual enticement replaced the seller-buyer nexus in German shops in both West and East Germany, marking a dramatic shift in German consumer practices from the late 1950s on.

As for the GDR, Anne Kaminsky neatly chronicles the SED's fitful attitude toward advertising itself as an unwelcome import from the West. While the state did found the Institute for Advertising Techniques in 1956 and the Institute for Consumer Needs and Market Research the following year, it remained deeply ambivalent about its place and power. By 1961 in the face of shortages of consumer goods and unfavorable comparisons with the West, the SED focused more and more on "consumer education" and promoting socialist lifestyle (notably health and leisure) instead, even to the point of abandoning advertising altogether in 1975 as wasteful and politically dangerous. Greg Castillo furnishes a well-researched and far-reaching essay on the famed Stalinallee as an advertising showcase for East German culture. He brings to bear a wealth of advertisements, film and literature to illustrate how Germany's "first socialist street" was marketed from the very beginning as an emblem of can-do socialism, at least until the political upheavals of 1953, which rudely put an end to this signification. In this sense, Castillo expertly shows how grand political projects – not just store-bought commodities – also became major advertising vehicles across Cold War Germany.

All told, this is a rich and suggestive set of essays on the history of advertising in Germany broadly conceived, which hopefully will invite historians to explore further how and why advertising and public relations occupied a central position in 20th century German political culture.

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