



Karsten Uhl. *Technology in Modern German History.* The Bloomsbury History of Modern Germany Series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Illustrations. 288 pp. \$103.50, e-book, ISBN 978-1-350-05321-2.

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Karsten Uhl's *Technology in Modern German History* serves as an excellent introduction to the history of technology in Germany. As Uhl notes from the beginning, modern German stereotypes are inextricably bound to ideas of technology. Germans are imagined to be master machine makers, with the label "made in Germany" meant to invoke precision, quality, and durability. Throughout *Technology in Modern German History*, Uhl reverse engineers these stereotypes, tracing their origins back to preindustrial Germany, into the void of Nazism, through the bifurcation of the Germanys at the end of the Second World War, up until the reunified Germany of today. In doing so, he seeks to sift out ideas of German-ness bound up with technological development in the modern world.

As Uhl also notes, this book is meant to serve as a general overview on the topic of German technological history. As a result, Uhl rarely stops to investigate a singular technology. Rather, he weaves a broader picture, focusing on how large technological shifts were interwoven with German culture. In lieu of a strictly temporal structure, Uhl groups different types of technologies together to trace their evolution over time. For ex-

ample, he considers German technologies in such categories as high tech, rural technologies, urban technologies, and industrial technologies. In doing so, Uhl stresses that no individual technology or group of technologies was alone in transforming Germany; rural technologies were just as important as high tech in carving out the Germany of today.

Where the book most excels, however, is Uhl's focus on the deep cultural ramifications of technology. For example, in the chapter titled "Visions of Progress," Uhl demonstrates the profound effect technology had on Germans' ideas of their own futures. According to him, images of the futures offered by technology served as cultural emulsifiers that allowed for the coalescence of different German political ideologies. For example, Uhl shows how the conservative reimagining of technology as "will embodied" folded well into the Nazi yearning for past pastoralism, free from the relentless hiss of modern city life, which may well have otherwise been hostile to technologies on the whole (p. 122). On the other end of the political spectrum, he also notes the importance of Karl Marx's idea of the linear evolution of technological progress, something that persisted throughout

the life of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and arguably continues in Germany today. Technology, then, is not just a product of culture but its co-creator.

Uhl also seeks to unpack the argument around an inherent German-ness of technological development in Germany. In doing so, the book necessarily deals with the persistent question of the *Sonderweg*, or Germany's supposedly unique path to modernity. Was Germany unique among Western societies in its pathway to the present moment, or was it a mere permutation of larger Western trends? The answer, as Uhl illustrates, lies somewhere in between. On the one hand, Germany of course took its own unique path to the present moment, but the same thing could be said about any place or state once the monolith of "modernity" is deconstructed. Yet, on the other hand, Uhl takes careful note of how the particular-

ities of German culture did indeed create uniquely German elements of technology. He speaks of course about scientific advancement in Germany before World War I, Nazi inclusion of high-tech development within a past-directed ideology, and the GDR's unique focus on technology in the creation of the "new socialist person" and progress toward a workless society.

In all, Uhl's *Technology in Modern German History* is an excellent text for those contemplating the broad history of technology's development in Germany. The book's secondary source materials explicitly build on foundational texts within the field of history of technology, thereby reenforcing the book's position as an overview resource, one that serves to introduce students not only to German history of technology but also to the history of technology as a whole.

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