

Projecting England, Selling Germany: Propaganda, Public Relations and Advertising after the First World War

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At the World Advertising Congress in Berlin in 1929, the assembled delegates and dignitaries were told in no uncertain terms that

if we do not wish to decline as a people, then we must make our home within the new and ever-changing world. Advertising is a language of this new world. We want to learn from other countries that already possess a greater familiarity with this language. We also want, however, to develop the German dialect of this language and to do this with a German sense of intellectuality and art appreciation.¹

Such exhortations could be heard fairly frequently in Weimar Germany. They formed a standard refrain in the various treatises on publicity that appeared in the 1920s, and the underlying issues were continually discussed in advertising trade journals. Yet what is particularly interesting about the above statement is that it did not emanate from one of the usual sources, whether a leading ad-man such as Hanns Kropff or Ernst Growald, a commercial patriarch like Christian Kupferberg, or even one of the growing number of communications 'scientists' based at various commercial colleges or universities. Rather, these were the words of Hans Luther, former Reich Chancellor and mainstream career politician, soon to become president of the *Reichsbank*.

As such, this statement illustrates a number of fundamental characteristics about the German engagement with advertising and 'propaganda' during the 1920s and 1930s. First, it demonstrates that the entire discourse about communicating with 'mass publics' after the First World War was by no means confined to the advertising world in a narrow sense; nor, for that matter, to the so-called propaganda 'experts' working in academia or in government agencies. It was an issue that cut across many different areas of debate, and which concerned many different groups. Second, advertising is posited as an integral part of modernity itself. There was a broad consensus in Weimar Germany that a modern society must 'speak this language', and speak it well. Third, there was a clear recognition that other countries were better at it, or at least more experienced. Although Germans drew publicity ideas and inspiration from various places, including the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy and France, the primary focus was always on the United States of America and Britain.

¹ Quoted from Alfred Knapp, *Reklame, Propaganda, Werbung. Ihre Weltorganisation* (Berlin: Verlag für Presse, Wirtschaft und Politik, 1929), 3-4.

There can be little doubt that, after 1918, the United States was regarded as the chief embodiment of economic and technological development in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe. The 'visions of modernity' that it furnished were an object of intense fascination during the Weimar years, and remained so during much of the Nazi period.² If the inter-war buzzword 'Americanization', which had been coined by journalist William T. Stead in the early twentieth century, was applied indiscriminately to almost all manifestations of the 'new', then it was particularly overused in the sphere of communications and commercial advertising. Indeed, innovations or influences from Britain were often simply subsumed under this wider 'Americanization' category, as it was widely assumed that British and American practices were one and the same. Yet despite the immense cultural and economic influence of the United States after the First World War, Britain still occupied a central place in German perceptions of modern publicity and communications, and was in fact the primary reference point during the immediate aftermath of the war, and especially in the genesis of the wide-ranging discourse about advertising and propaganda that followed into the 1920s.

The following chapter will briefly survey the influence and perception of British publicity in inter-war Germany. Although the two realms of political and commercial publicity were integrally related, we will turn first to the sphere of political propaganda, where Britain featured most prominently, before considering developments in commercial advertising.

Britain and the 'Weapon' of Modern Propaganda

In Germany as elsewhere, the First World War marked a crucial watershed in the relationship between political leadership and public opinion. As war henceforth encompassed both the military and civilian spheres, controlling information and influencing public opinion became an integral part of armed conflict. The unprecedented growth in efforts to influence public opinion marked a significant shift towards new governmental mechanisms of persuasion and seduction in place of the panoptical and disciplinary practices of the nineteenth-century. The experience of 'total war' meant that public opinion mattered as never before.³

² See Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich. Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung 1933-1945* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997).

³ See Jeffrey Verhey, "Some Lessons of the War: The Discourse on Propaganda and Public Opinion in Germany in the 1920s", in: Bernd Hüppauf (ed.), *War, Violence and the Modern Condition* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 99-118; also Corey Ross, "Mass Politics and the Techniques of Leadership: The Promise and Perils of Propaganda in Weimar Germany", *German History* 24, 2 (2006), 184-211.

Nowhere was this fascination with the problems of communicating with mass publics more acute than in Germany. Granted, the notion that propaganda was both a necessary and powerful weapon of war was a matter of international consensus after 1914. But in Germany the engagement with propaganda was both more intense and more directly politicized than in the Allied countries. After all, many Germans attributed their country's defeat primarily to a collapse of the home front at the hands of enemy propaganda, in particular that of Britain.⁴ 'Propaganda was an old and powerful weapon in England's hands' asserted Ludendorff in his memoirs. 'England was the only country that long ago had employed this weapon of politics and war with a clear vision and on a really large scale, in the service of its national world-encircling policy'.⁵ According to the 'stab in the back' myth, this was the 'weapon' that really defeated Germany by fomenting resentment and defeatism in the hinterland.

While on the field of battle we held the initiative almost to the very end, the enemy carried on the psychological war campaign from the start with a united front, attacking along the whole line, and finding auxiliaries in the many deserters in the neutral states, and also, alas! support in Germany.⁶

Although such claims were transparently self-exculpatory, many who rejected the 'stab in the back' nonetheless agreed that the collapse of morale was a crucial factor in Germany's defeat. The notion that troop morale was affected no less than the home front, and that the military government was itself to blame, stretched across the political spectrum, even reaching into SPD. As the liberal journalist and political scientist Edgar Stern-Rubarth put it in one of the seminal post-war works on the topic:

only an insufficient understanding of the ultimate causes of this victory could unleash the fierce controversy over whether the front was 'stabbed from behind' or collapsed of itself. For in reality we were defeated by enemy propaganda, by the struggle of words and thoughts.⁷

What, more concretely, did Germans see in British propaganda that was allegedly lacking in their own? In essence, its effectiveness was attributed to its allegedly 'scientific' and 'professional' character. According to Friedrich Schönemann, a political scientist at Johann Plenge's *Staatswissenschaftliches Institut* in Münster, the success of British and American propaganda was due precisely to its 'ice-cold deliberation' and 'sole concern with exerting an effect' on public opinion unencumbered by

⁴ For a general account of British wartime propaganda, see Michael L. Sanders, Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁵ Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919), 366.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁷ Edgar Stern-Rubarth, *Die Propaganda als politisches Instrument* (Berlin: Trowitsch & Sohn, 1921), 3.

unscientific moral scruples.⁸ In turn, this 'scientific' approach was predicated on a firm understanding of 'mass psychology'. As Gustav Le Bon and other crowd psychologists had long argued, the 'masses' were incapable of rational thought or differentiation. On this point, Hitler's views were fairly representative of a broad swathe of opinion. Popular sentiment, he argued,

does not have multiple shadings; it has a positive and a negative; love or hate, right or wrong, truth or lie, never half this way and half that way, never partially, or that kind of thing. English propagandists understood all this most brilliantly—and acted accordingly.

Unlike their German counterparts, they supposedly demonstrated a 'brilliant knowledge of the primitive sentiments of the broad masses', especially in their atrocity propaganda and the image of the barbaric 'Hun'.⁹ In sum, according to Hitler, 'what we failed to do, the enemy did, with amazing skill and really brilliant calculation.' 'There, propaganda was regarded as a weapon of the first order, while in our country it was the last resort of unemployed politicians and a comfortable haven for slackers'.¹⁰

As this last comment indicates, the 'scientific' application of mass psychological techniques was seen as a direct result of professional involvement. According to the two most influential books on propaganda in post-war Germany, the British and American authorities had undertaken 'an intensive cultivation of public opinion in support of foreign and domestic political goals via means that we had previously only used in pursuit of commercial aims', whereas German wartime propaganda was characterized by 'dilettantism, incompetence in both application and execution'.¹¹ This purely instrumental approach was epitomized in German eyes by the British press baron Lord Northcliffe (Alfred Harmsworth) and his 'Enemy Propaganda Department' at Crewe House, whose anti-German leaflets, sketches and independence-proclamations were widely (though mistakenly)¹² credited with the collapse of Austrian troop morale in 1918.¹³ This view was strongly

⁸ See generally Friedrich Schönmann, *Die Kunst der Massenbeeinflussung in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1924). Quotes taken from Schönmann's contribution to 1925 conference: StA Hamburg, 135-1, Staatliche Pressestelle I-IV, 7973, 8.

⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim, introduction by D. C. Watt (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 167.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161, 169.

¹¹ Stern-Rubarth, *Die Propaganda*, 7; Johann Plenge, *Deutsche Propaganda. Die Lehre von der Propaganda als praktische Gesellschaftslehre* (Bremen: Angelsachsen-Verlag, 1922), 70.

¹² See the myth-bashing account by Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

¹³ This view was strongly reinforced by the German translation of Sir Stuart Campbell's *Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920): *Geheimnisse aus Crewe House. Die Geschichte eines wohlbekannten Feldzuges* (Leipzig:

reinforced by the German translation of Sir Stuart Campbell's *Secrets of Crewe House* in 1922, which detailed the Enemy Propaganda Department's dealings in half-truths and exaggerations.

Whereas the British in particular had appointed veteran newspapermen like Northcliffe and Lord Beaverbrook (Max Aitken, Minister of Information) to oversee their propaganda campaigns, and thus 'treated the general and the reporter as equally important factors in the war', the German military authorities stood accused of 'initially wanting to pursue the war by themselves. By the time they recognized their mistake, it was too late'.¹⁴ In short, successful propaganda needed to involve professionals. It was a grave mistake 'to leave it to those who viewed matters on the world-political stage from their narrow "Prussian-official-military horizon"'.¹⁵

It was widely agreed that the British government had unleashed this new 'weapon' of propaganda and used it best. Its success in swaying public opinion in the United States and its multi-faceted domestic campaign against the bloodthirsty 'Hun' were, alongside the putative undermining of the Austrian army, considered by many to be the greatest propaganda accomplishments of the entire conflict. Accordingly, German observers continued to look to the United Kingdom as a primary foil for comparison long after the armistice. Throughout most of the 1920s, however, there was precious little to observe in Britain by way of a coordinated state publicity campaign. Under considerable public pressure, the British government quickly disbanded its propaganda agencies at the end of the war, with the Foreign Office inheriting the few remaining leftovers. In the post-war period, Britain spent considerably less on state publicity than its rivals, and there was certainly no Whitehall equivalent of the *Maison de la Presse* or, for that matter, the German *Presseamt*.¹⁶

But the British reputation for skilled propaganda nonetheless persisted; as a central element of the mythology of Germany's defeat, it scarcely depended on actual circumstances. In the absence of a centralized communications apparatus in London, German journalists and public relations experts still looked with considerable interest to Britain's elections and to the passionate, humorous campaigning style that appealed more to the emotions than to intellect.¹⁷ Compared to the

Weicher, 1922). See also the anonymously authored pamphlet *Northcliffe. Die Geschichte des englischen Propagandafeldzuges* (Berlin: Mittler & Sohn, 1921).

¹⁴ Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer, *Propaganda, Agitation, Reklame. Eine Theorie des gesamten Werbewesens* (Berlin: Stilke, 1923), 34.

¹⁵ This and the preceding quote from Hermann Schmidt, "Nationale Propaganda", *Die Reklame* (hereafter DR) 11, 9 (1918), 129-36, here 132, 134.

¹⁶ Philip Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), 11-12.

¹⁷ See, for instance, "Englische Wahlkampfreklame", *Seidels Reklame* (hereafter SR) 7 (1922), 272; "Propaganda im englischen Wahlkampf", *DR* 16, 167 (1923), 350-1.

popular electioneering tone in Britain, the campaign styles of the mainstream parties in Germany were deemed to be 'dragged down by the lead weight of old-fashioned, hollow ideas from the realm of higher education and suffered from officialese (*Papierdeutsch*).'¹⁸ Even the undeniable achievements of Soviet propaganda were in large measure attributed to the lessons learned by Lenin and Trotzky during their exiles in the United Kingdom and the United States, which supposedly convinced them of the need to imitate 'the huge extent and ineffectiveness of commercial propaganda' and 'transfer it to the political sphere'.¹⁹

The continuing admiration for the perceived skill of British propaganda increased substantially with the launch of the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) in 1926. Under the direction of Stephen Tallents, the EMB launched a relatively innovative publicity campaign, borrowing the latest techniques from the US and using a wide array of media outlets (press adverts, posters, lectures, exhibitions, broadcasts, film) to publicize empire goods. The EMB was not only a chief sponsor of the documentary film movement (associated above all with John Grierson), but also launched the 'Buy British' campaign and furnished the principal template for subsequent semi-official publicity efforts such as the Travel Association and the British Council.²⁰ The German advertising journals were full of praise for the EMB, in particular its use of eye-catching facts and statistics ('£1,000 per week is spent on food from abroad') and its well-conceived message of self-help: 'Empire contract at these works', which succinctly argued that the more one bought Empire goods the more such contracts would be available. Not only were its techniques and slogans up to date, but its status as an official organization opened certain avenues for publicity that would otherwise be closed off, including the assistance of state facilities overseas. The EMB thus also served as a model of public/private partnership that the German advertising industry had long advocated.²¹

What most impressed German onlookers was, however, the EMB's conception as a co-operative venture that focused on shaping demand instead of merely flogging individual goods. Its overarching aim was, in the context of wider trends towards economic autarky, to rationalize production within the Empire and to generate new markets for goods. Towards this end it printed calendars indicating when certain fruits were harvested across the Empire, published recipes using only 'Empire ingredients', coined the very notion of 'Empire fruit' and devised the pithy slogan 'Empire Buying Begins at Home'. This was presented in the German advertising press as a prime example of co-operative advertising

¹⁸ "Von der Werbearbeit der politischen Parteien", *DR* 12, 111 (1919), 58-60, here 59.

¹⁹ Georg Urbat, "Russland und die politische Propaganda", *DR* 19, 8 (1926), 393-5, here 393.

²⁰ Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 104-5.

²¹ H. Auspitz, "Das Empire Marketing Board und seine Werbearbeit: Amtliche Wirtschaftsförderung in England", *DR* 22, 17 (1929), 660-4.

or *Gemeinschaftswerbung*: propagating the very *idea* of empire, mutuality and prosperity through 'buying British'.

Although the actual impact of the EMB campaign was judged soberly, there was a clear sense that its example should be followed:

Although our economic circumstances fundamentally differ from those of England in most respects, we can nonetheless learn much from this English propaganda organization, above all in relation to advertising technique and rational, unified and centralized working practices.²²

And learn they did. The model of joint advertising and public/private co-operation was especially attractive during the crisis of the early 1930s, as various German organizations deliberately looked to the 'Buy British' campaign for their own 'national propaganda' efforts conducted under the motto '*Der entscheidende Augenblick – Deutsche Ware oder Auslandsware*'. At the same time, they also studied British techniques in response to frequent criticisms that Germany's 'national propaganda' had hitherto been too brash and overt.²³

While such recommendations were, at one level, little more than self-serving arguments advanced by a group of self-styled 'experts' keen to gain social and professional recognition, they nonetheless carried conviction because they squared with many people's experiences and perceptions of propaganda matters. Again, one of the primary 'lessons of the war' was that German propaganda—both at home and overseas—had been self-righteous, strident and off-putting while that of the Allies was more subtle and compelling. There was, indeed, a kernel of truth to this view. Even foreign observers commented that 'what not to do has been nowhere better illustrated than in Germany.'²⁴ The policy of the British War Propaganda Bureau was to base its material (however tendentiously) on facts and to present its arguments in a measured tone, thereby avoiding what they, too, perceived as inappropriate German methods.²⁵

Moreover, this deliberate adoption of low-key tactics continued to characterize the British approach to 'national projection', or overseas propaganda, during the inter-war period. As Stephen Tallents stated in his 1932 book *The Projection of England*, modesty was the key: 'neither self-advertisement, as distinct from honest self-expression, nor self-righteousness, as distinct from honest confidence.'²⁶ Such gentler rhetoric was

²² H. Auspitz, "Neues aus Englands National-Propaganda", *DR* 23, 19 (1930), 610-12, quote 612.

²³ H. W. Placzek, "Propaganda der Not!", *SR* 16, 1 (1932), 5-7. See also H. Auspitz, "Amtliche Exportförderung in England. Das Department of Overseas Trade", *DR* 23, 6 (1930), 163-5.

²⁴ Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War 1*, reprinted (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1971), 32; originally published as *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927).

²⁵ Sanders, Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 41.

²⁶ Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932), 37, quoted from Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 111.

deemed especially attractive in the Hobbesian-looking world of the 1930s, within which the UK's more restrained manner of self-presentation was designed to capitalize on the attractive image of stability and civility that it already possessed:

In international affairs—a reputation for disinterestedness; in national affairs—a tradition of justice, law and order; in national character—a reputation for coolness; in commerce—a reputation for fair dealing; in manufacture—a reputation for quality; in sport—a reputation for fair play.

Accordingly, the 'positive' aspects of England that were deemed to appeal abroad included not only the monarchy, parliament, Dickens and Shakespeare, but also the Grand National, Test Matches, London omnibuses, countryside and villages, gardening and tailoring.²⁷

Tallents essentially sought to present a cultured, middle-class, home-counties view of England designed to generate a sense of trust and familiarity – precisely the same sense of familiarity that brand-name advertising aimed to achieve. The attraction of such an image was summed up by Rex Leeper, one of the founders of the British Council:

There is a widespread feeling that in an age of instability England alone is stable, and that the secret of this stability deserves careful study and attention. [...] It is time that this nation of shop-keepers did a little stocktaking to see how far our contribution to civilization is understood elsewhere and to decide how best we can satisfy this new demand for fuller information about almost every aspect of our national life, character and institutions.²⁸

If Leeper and Tallents were concerned about how Britain's relative domestic stability aided the 'projection of England' abroad, many German observers were primarily interested in how it was achieved in the first place. Throughout the 1920s there were endless calls for greater unity at home as a precondition for international success. More or less typical were the views of Ludwig Roselius (founder of Kaffee Hag and chief financial backer of Plenge's *Staatswissenschaftliches Institut*): 'it is a historical fact that Germany has never achieved anything as long as it was not united. This must be hammered into people's heads. [...] Only a forceful propaganda campaign in Germany can remedy the matter'.²⁹ Such *Staatspropaganda* was widely seen as an elemental part of modern politics, and as Britain, Russia and the US were perceived to demonstrate, 'the new state needs new forms of publicity that it has unfortunately failed to develop so far'.³⁰ But what kind of propaganda could help? On the one hand, the *Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst* (founded in 1918, the direct ancestor of the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*) already existed as a tool for general 'political education', though it focused overwhelmingly on lectures and civic

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15, quoted from Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 119-20.

²⁸ Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 122.

²⁹ Ludwig Roselius, "Aufgaben für deutsche Propaganda", *DR* 17, 8 (1924), 422-4, here 423.

³⁰ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB) R43/1/2493, Krohne (*Industrie- und Staatspropaganda*), to Pünder, 20 May 1932, fo. 23.

education courses for 'social multipliers' such as teachers, professionals and business leaders, and by and large preached to the converted. As its critics pointed out, the *Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst* made almost no attempt to appeal directly to the masses, and the relatively cerebral nature of its material hardly lent itself to this task anyway. On the other hand, the 'forceful propaganda' currently emanating from the radical right on the very theme of national unity seemed equally inappropriate, as it visibly exacerbated rather than ameliorated Germany's political polarization.

Perhaps the key lay not in 'forceful propaganda', but rather in subtle image-engineering, what in the United States increasingly came to be called 'public relations' as practiced by gurus such as Edward Bernays.³¹ This was certainly the conclusion of Hans Domizlaff, Germany's foremost 'brand technician' (who developed the Reemtsma cigarette brands in the 1920s, and later engineered the corporate image of Siemens). In a widely-read 1932 tract entitled *Propagandamittel der Staatsidee* (it is said that Hitler himself penned its positive review in the *Völkischer Beobachter*), Domizlaff argued that 'a people can never maintain long-term enthusiasm about an abstract idea such as the state commonwealth if the idea is not objectified by symbols perceptible to the senses'.³² Given that the great mass of the people was assumed to be clueless about the business of governing, he claimed that rational appeals in the realm of politics were pointless. Rather, as enemy wartime propaganda had clearly demonstrated, 'very simple ideas – that by no means need to be sensible, but which match the psyche of the masses in such a way as to arouse psychoses—will always render the most clever and honest government declarations ineffective.'³³ The key, Domizlaff argued, was to develop what he called a 'uniformity of style' (*Stileinheit*), which generated a sense of commonly held values and provided a clear sense of what the state represented. Only through such commonly shared symbols would it be possible to overcome the 'disastrous spiritual disunity of the German people'.³⁴

Towards this end he offered a number of concrete suggestions, including a new Reich flag, the bestowal of state honours and the achievement of stylistic consistency in all communication by the state to its citizens (forms, letterhead, coins, deeds). Most interesting for our purposes here, England was singled out as the model. In its honours, orders, uniforms and courtly traditions of political intercourse,

³¹ See Thymian Bussemer, *Propaganda. Konzepte und Theorien* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), esp. 79-83; Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown, 1998).

³² Hans Domizlaff, *Propagandamittel der Staatsidee*, (Leipzig: Poeschel & Trepte, 1932), 35. See also Rainer Gries, Volker Ilgen, Dirk Schindelbeck, "Ins Gehirn der Masse kriechen!" *Werbung und Mentalitätsgeschichte*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), esp. 45-73.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35, 87, 89.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

England can probably be described as the most stylistically powerful country of the last few decades. This typifies a kind of spiritual uniformity of style and a suitable form of dealing with other people of all classes. This stylistic strength could be sensed by any foreigner, and within it lies the secret of the lengthy political steadiness and calm of the English people.³⁵

By contrast, Domizlaff regarded the utter lack of a guiding style in Germany as a primary reason for its political instability. 'In Germany there are almost no style devices of the state as psychological supports. This, along with the current economic distress, is the chief cause of the volatility of political views.'³⁶

Regardless of the accuracy of such observations, they reflect a somewhat different formulation of conclusions that government officials and social scientists were themselves reaching at the time: namely, that propaganda and public relations were not merely a form of self-interested representation but rather an indispensable part of modern politics. Indeed, they were increasingly presented as nothing less than a particular means of managing the centrifugal forces of modern society. The growing complexity of social relations and progressively more individualistic cultural orientation necessitated new means of forging social and political cohesion. According to the sociologist Johann Plenge, author of an influential 1922 book on 'German propaganda', propaganda functioned essentially as a lubricant for the smooth functioning of social organizations.³⁷

From this point of view, propaganda was essentially, in the words of the American political scientist Harold Lasswell, founder of the academic study of propaganda, 'a reflex to the immensity, the rationality and wilfulness of the modern world. It is the new dynamic of society, for power is subdivided and diffused, and more can be won by illusion than by coercion.'³⁸ And of all the countries subjected to these centrifugal forces, many Germans tended to think that Britain, through its skilful propaganda and self-branding (or 'uniformity of style'), had managed them best.

British Advertising and 'Americanization'

This post-war fascination with propaganda helped to generate, and was simultaneously reinforced by, an unprecedented degree of interest in the closely related world of commercial advertising. Widely perceived as flip sides of the same coin, commercial and political 'propaganda' (the term was commonly used for both at the time) were seen as a key to Germany's post-war recovery. The military limitations imposed by the Versailles

³⁵ Ibid., 71, also 60-4.

³⁶ Ibid., 95.

³⁷ Generally, Plenge, *Deutsche Propaganda*.

³⁸ Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, 222.

Treaty meant that propaganda represented one of the few remaining 'weapons' that Germany wielded in the international arena. At the same time, Fordist notions of high wages and demand stimulation were touted as the key to regenerating the German economy, in particular in the context of rationalization efforts during the latter half of the 1920s. Unsurprisingly, advertisers seized upon the opportunity to legitimate their often derided 'profession' in the eyes of Germany's economic and political elites. Despite its lingering connotations of swindle and deceit, advertising – whether for goods or ideas – was posited as nothing less than an expression of open competition and freedom of choice. Both the political and economic reforms after 1918 gave individuals new powers of discretion that – so the argument went – required new forms of communication. If political propaganda could be presented as an outgrowth of democratization, commercial advertising was also increasingly seen as a primary symbol of the 'democratization of consumption', of a prosperous society of consumer choice.³⁹

Without a doubt, it was the United States that served as the primary model of a modern consumer society in the inter-war period, and it was therefore American advertising that aroused the most attention. As the journal *Seidels Reklame* succinctly put it in 1919, 'America is the acclaimed land of advertising'.⁴⁰ Yet the buzzword 'Americanization' should not be taken too literally, for many of the techniques and principles with which it was associated were practiced quite widely in the UK. Since before the turn of the century, Germans tended to throw the two countries into the same pot as far as advertising was concerned. In both Britain and the US 'advertising has assumed a scope and form that is difficult for us to conceive', noted a practitioner in 1892. 'In this respect they have far exceeded Germany and Austria, also France and Russia.'⁴¹ The two countries were still instinctively associated in the 1920s: 'We are nowadays surrounded by advertising to a far greater degree than in previous eras', remarked Viktor Mataja in his standard advertising treatise. 'It flourishes especially in the countries inhabited by the English-American peoples, whom certainly no one would describe as especially inexperienced and naive in commercial matters.'⁴²

Indeed, during the rapid economic expansion of the United States into European markets during the 1920s, large American companies and their advertising agencies tended to set up first in London before moving to the

³⁹ See, for instance, H. W. Brose, "Die Königin unter den Werbeträgern", *DR* 22, 24 (1929), 908; also Frhr. v. Freytagh-Loringhoven, "Werbung und Politik", *DR* 25, 6 (1932), 192-3.

⁴⁰ Arthur Stamper, "Der demokratische Geist in der Reklame", *SR* 4, 14 (1919), 300.

⁴¹ C. von Dillmann, "Die Presse im Dienste des Kaufmans", in: Robert Exner, *Moderne Reklame* (Zittau, 1892), 21-27, quoted from Christiane Lamberty, *Reklame in Deutschland 1890-1914* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000), 445.

⁴² Viktor Mataja, *Die Reklame. Eine Untersuchung über Ankündigungswesen und Werbetätigkeit im Geschäftsleben*, 4th ed. (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1926), 25.

continent, where many of their agency staff was English. The Berlin, Paris and Stockholm offices of J. Walter Thompson, the largest advertising company in the United States, were all staffed with English-speaking assistants trained in London (and at the same time they brought artists from Germany and France to work in England).⁴³ Among its Berlin staff was an English art-director, an Oxford-educated German, an Oxford-educated German-speaking Russian expatriate and a German graphic artist who had studied in the United States.⁴⁴ The slogan 'advertisers, learn English!', though chiefly an admonition to study American techniques, thus entailed a sideways glance to the United Kingdom while gazing across the Atlantic.⁴⁵ In other words, in the field of commercial advertising, Britain was to some extent a bridge to the United States, a transition zone between the different consumption regimes in North America and continental Europe. Not only did the development of advertising in the two countries show certain similarities, but also the deliberate appropriation of American techniques and organizational models began earlier and went further in Britain than elsewhere in the 1920s.

What most Germans perceived as 'American' advertising in the inter-war period comprised two principal elements: first, its forms of commercial organization, and second, the application of 'scientific' methods of marketing. As for the former, German firms tended to produce their advertising 'in-house' through their own sales departments, separately hiring artists or consultants as necessary. By contrast, the large North American advertisers functioned as full-service agencies that managed all of the marketing needs of a particular firm or product for a set fee, including design, placement, even price negotiation. By the 1920s this agency model, which had also been developing in Britain since the 1890s, was widely seen as the future of European advertising.⁴⁶ When Germans sought to 'modernize' the organization of the trade, they naturally looked to the large and renowned US agencies such as J. Walter Thompson, McCann and Erwin & Wasey. Yet they also looked to British firms such as Charles Higham, Mather & Crowther or especially William S. Crawford.

It was not long before the Germans could observe these agencies first hand. After economic stabilization in 1924-5, many of them set up shop in

⁴³ J. Walter Thompson Company Archives: Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University (hereafter JWT), Staff Meeting Minutes Collection, 1927-1938, Box 1, Staff Meeting 8. Aug. 1928, fo. 44-5.

⁴⁴ JWT Newsletter Collection, Main Newsletter Series, JWT Newsletter, 12, 51 (June 1930), 7-8.

⁴⁵ Max Adler, "Reklamefachleute, lernt Englisch!", *DR* 19, 22 (1926), 113-4.

⁴⁶ See, generally, Alexander Schug, "Wegbereiter der modernen Absatzwerbung in Deutschland: Advertising Agencies und die Amerikanisierung der deutschen Werbebranche in der Zwischenkriegszeit", *Werkstattgeschichte* 34 (2003), 29-52. See also Terry R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 101.

Germany, by far the largest being J. Walter Thompson, but one of the most successful being William Crawford, whose Berlin staff numbered some 67 employees by the end of the 1920s.⁴⁷ In spite of the understandable focus on Madison Avenue, it was the London-based Crawford who, probably more than any other individual figure, represented the epitome of the 'modern' ad man in German eyes. He not only enjoyed considerable commercial success, but was also renowned for his involvement in official government publicity campaigns that attracted the praise of the German trade press: the Ministry of Health in 1923, the Imperial Economic Committee in 1925-6, the EMB from 1926-31, the Ministry of Agriculture from 1929, and chairman of the 'Buy British' Campaign in 1931.⁴⁸ In addition, Crawford was perhaps favoured because of his distinctly modernist artistic inclinations and close German connections. He had actually studied in Germany before the war, attracted by the reformist ideas of the *Werkbund*—which, in a preceding instance of cross-channel fertilization, was partly inspired by the English artist William Morris. This exerted a strong influence on Crawford's advertising art, whose singular and unmistakably modern look was one of the reasons for his success.⁴⁹

More important than the agency model itself, however, was the kind of market for which it was conceived: namely, selling branded products to an increasingly national 'mass' market that transcended both social and geographic barriers. In this respect the United States was viewed quite literally as a sign of Germany's own economic future, and American marketing practices were naturally studied in considerable detail. The elemental differences between the German and American consumption regimes were clearly reflected in their prevailing advertising techniques. At the risk of oversimplifying what was a complex mix of styles and tendencies, it is useful for analytical purposes to associate European advertisement with the poster-style ad, characterized by a striking or 'yelling' image geared towards grabbing attention and devoid of much or any explanatory text apart from the brand name. This technique, designed to publicize a firm or product to passers-by in crowded areas, was highly suitable to a consumer economy based mainly on bourgeois consumption and centred by and large on urban areas.

By contrast, American advertisers had since the turn of the century developed a new editorializing style for the mass circulation press that relied as much on textual argumentation as on imagery—a style often

⁴⁷ Godfrey Hope Saxon Mills, *There is a Tide... The Life and Work of Sir William Crawford* (London: Heinemann, 1954), 85.

⁴⁸ Nevett, *Advertising*, 148.

⁴⁹ Dan L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 210-11.

referred to as the 'reason why' approach.⁵⁰ Sometimes called the 'combination announcement' in Germany (due to its three components: pictorial image, slogan and ad text), the 'new advertisement', which 'the Americans have developed into a fine art', was deliberately geared towards a far more socially and geographically diverse consumer public.⁵¹ Essentially it was aimed at the mass of sub-bourgeois and predominately use-oriented consumers to whom, it was believed, it was easier to sell the usefulness of a product rather than merely its image. In terms of its delivery it was also geared to the new markets of first-generation consumers in the far-flung provinces best reached by the mass press, especially national weeklies like the *Saturday Evening Post* or *Ladies Home Journal*.

Such 'persuasive' (as opposed to 'suggestive') advertising essentially represented an attempt to create new consumer needs and demand beyond the limited social and geographic reach of the poster. Although the United States was clearly the home of such 'mass' marketing, these methods were also relatively common in the United Kingdom by the 1920s. This was related to, among other things, the very different press structure in Britain, which was far more suited to large-scale advertising campaigns than the press in Germany, where average newspaper circulation was only half that of England and where there was only one genuinely mass-circulation 'national' publication, the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*. In addition, the British press was somewhat easier to do business with given the existence of more accurate circulation figures and price structures (though it was only in 1931 that an audit bureau, modelled on that in the United States, exercised reliable control over circulation figures).⁵² The decidedly commercial orientation and popular appeal of much of the British press also lent itself to large-scale advertising campaigns aimed at the lower-middle and working classes.⁵³ Popular mass-circulation papers such as the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* had for decades operated as decidedly pro-active agents of mass consumption through innovations such as the women's page, which was very much conceived as a forum for advertising.⁵⁴

Early on, British advertisers had also embraced the principles of US-style market research and more systematic attempts to 'target' certain

⁵⁰ See generally the discussion in Victoria de Grazia, "The Arts of Purchase: How American Publicity Subverted the European Poster, 1920-1940", in: Barbara Kruger, Phil Mariani (eds.), *Remaking History* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), 221-57, here 230f.

⁵¹ Quotes from F. Godbarsen, "Das neue Inserat", *DR* 19, 13-14 (1926), 651.

⁵² Nevett, *Advertising*, 155. See "Grundsätzliches über die Werbung in Großbritannien", *SR* 13, 12 (1929), 626f; "Die Wahrheit in der Auflagenennung", *SR* 9, 7 (1925), 297-8; "Der VDR nimmt zur Auflagenennung und Auflagenkontrolle Stellung!", *DR* 19, 3 (1926), 119; Hans Traub, "Auflagenkontrolle und Leseranlyse", *DR* 23, 20 (1930), 626-8; Fritz Wille, "Die Auflagenkontrolle und ihre Durchführung", *DR* 24, 1 (1931), 27.

⁵³ Fernand Marteau, "Die Presse von Großbritannien", *SR* 11, 11 (1927), 519-22.

⁵⁴ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, 33-43.

groups as consumers. Detailed market analysis was to a large extent imported into Britain by American firms, above all J. Walter Thompson, which in 1924 published *The Population Handbook of Great Britain and Ireland*, the first market survey of its type, and later organized the British Market Research Bureau as a subsidiary company.⁵⁵ By the time such market research was picked up in Germany it was firmly rooted in the UK. As Armin Kiehl, author of the first book on market research specifically related to Germany, remarked in 1926, 'organization is the basis of all successful advertising—and organization is one of the most striking capabilities of the English. [...] Even the planning of a large-scale publicity campaign in England is—as in America—carefully prepared in a way that is still hardly known in Germany: the exhaustive analysis of general market conditions.'⁵⁶ In Kiehl's 1929 book *System der Markt-Analyse* he approvingly cited William Crawford's pronouncement that 'Awakening demand is the task of advertising, searching it out is that of market analysis. Market research must therefore proceed hand in hand with advertising work'.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, one of the keys to awakening demand was appealing to women, who at the time were estimated to purchase around 75–80 per cent of all retail goods. By the latter half of the 1920s, there were frequent suggestions that more women should be employed in the male-dominated advertising trade as a means of effectively targeting the millions of housewives who were believed to 'think in very personal terms' and 'love simple and personal speech'.⁵⁸ British advertising firms had long recognized this issue. As the renowned women's campaigner Viscountess Rhondda (Margaret Mackworth) remarked in 1924, advertising

is just about the one profession in which women have equal chances with men. There is no difference in prospects and salaries, especially in the higher branches. At one time advertisers did not care to deal with women, but that prejudice has almost entirely disappeared.⁵⁹

When German advertisers visited the 1927 advertising exhibition in London's Olympia Hall they were astonished by how many women were present. Around 600 of the 2,000 delegates were women, and most startling of all, some of them were in leading positions, including the

⁵⁵ In 1924, the *Daily Sketch* also published a "Survey of the British Market": Nevett, *Advertising*, 150.

⁵⁶ Armin Kiehl, "Grundzüge englischer Reklame", *SR* 10, 12 (1926), 573-4, here 573.

⁵⁷ Armin Kiehl, *System der Markt-Analyse. Die Praxis kontinentaler Untersuchungen* (Lübeck: Coleman, 1929), 15.

⁵⁸ Quotes from Hanns Kropff, "Frauen als Käuferinnen", *DR* 19, 13-14 (1926), 649-50. See also Clarisse Meitner, "Die Frau als Käuferin und Verkäuferin", *DR* 22, 2 (1929), 55-6; K. Kurtzig, "Die Gleichberechtigung von Mann und Frau in der Reklame", *DR* 22, 19 (1929), 742-3; Leo Laps, "Frauen bevorzugt?", *SR* 15, 11 (1931), 479-80.

⁵⁹ Quoted from Nevett, *Advertising*, 148-9.

current director of Crawford's office. 'Women in advertising! That, above all else, was the lesson of this exhibition!' exclaimed *Seidels Reklame*.⁶⁰

Another primary method of generating demand was the use of co-operative advertising whereby a group of producers would promote not only their own products but an entire category of goods. This 'parallelism', as Kiehl called it, was viewed as a particular strength of the British advertising industry, and was specifically designed to create new consumer needs and expectations (and thereby new manufacturing opportunities).⁶¹ For instance, co-operative ads for electricity and gas in England were regarded as exemplary in their combination of factual information, 'reasons why' and American-style persuasive copy.⁶² So, too, were the efforts of English mustard producers, whose 'Join the Mustard Club' campaign, led by Colman's since 1926, was renowned for both its humour as well as its mobilization of spurious medical evidence about the supposed benefits of mustard for digestion and general health.⁶³ Indeed, it was even suggested that the American soap industry had actually copied the 'mustard club' idea in its own co-operative ad campaign of 1927-8, which subtly sought to persuade millions of recent immigrants and upwardly-mobile workers that bodily hygiene was a hallmark of civilization and the American way of life.⁶⁴

The point is that this 'US-style' advertising, which had increasingly found a home in inter-war Britain, played an integral role in the Fordist visions of a mass consumer consensus that German publicity experts so strongly advocated after the First World War. The creation of new mass consumer markets involved nothing less than the management of new desires. In the words of Hanns Brose, a leading German advertiser who worked with Erwin, Wasey & Co., it no longer made sense to focus on 'a limited number of so-called transport hubs, while the bulk of the millions living in the small towns and the countryside are neglected and in some cases totally excluded'. The envisioned downward and outward expansion of the market for consumer goods implied a clear shift of focus towards 'the millions of future purchasers who have yet to be won over and persuaded':

The aim is to open up new markets and win over new segments of society, to penetrate regions which have yet to see the light as to how important proper bodily hygiene, hair care, dental and skin care are for the well-being, self-improvement and personal performance of the individual.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ "Englands grosse Reklameausstellung", *SR* 11, 10 (1927), 449-51.

⁶¹ Kiehl, "Grundzüge", 573-4.

⁶² See Fernand Marteau, "Gemeinschaftspropaganda in Großbritannien", *SR* 11, 7 (1927), 316-20. Marteau was the British Honorary Representative of Continental Advertising Association.

⁶³ "Join the Mustard Club", *SR* 12, 5 (1928), 209ff.

⁶⁴ See *SR* 12, 3 (1928), 139.

⁶⁵ Brose, "Die Königin", 908.

The promise of material abundance and 'democratization of consumption' that such advertising methods reflected was in many eyes the very epitome of modernity. Although the United States undoubtedly provided the bulk of inspiration, Britain served in some ways as a half-way house on the road to this vision.

Conclusions and Outlook

The fascination with British and American publicity methods in inter-war Germany was due not only to the self-exculpatory mythology about the defeat in the war, but also to the fact that journalists and advertisers there had, at this time, more experience than their German counterparts in communicating with mass publics. Their techniques and practices were observed with interest because they represented, at least in many eyes, the future of publicity, in both the political and commercial spheres. Simply put, advertising and propaganda were increasingly regarded as integral parts of modern society. At base, their purposes were viewed in similar terms: namely, to make way for and manage the new political and economic forces of modernity.

Looking ahead, it is worth pointing out that many of the public relations experts who had long promoted a vigorous engagement with propaganda as a necessity of the modern world welcomed the new state under Hitler and the establishment of Goebbels' ministry as both a confirmation of their arguments and as an antidote to the centrifugal forces of mass politics.⁶⁶ By structuring the content and flows of information, so the argument ran, it would be possible to harmonize the views of the broad masses with the prevailing economic and political system. But there was a glaring irony here. What they and so many others failed to see at the time was that the Nazis' charismatic solution to the problem of mass politics was actually both weaker in its fundamentals and ultimately, as events would prove, more threatening to the integrity of the modern state than anything that preceded it. Thus what appeared to some as a means of achieving the kind of stability that England supposedly enjoyed actually had profoundly de-stabilizing effects.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Peter Schlenzka, "Nationalsozialistische Staatspropaganda 1933", SR 17, 12 (1933), 391-9; see also the editorial comments in "Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda", SR 17, 3 (1933), 77. Generally: Dirk Reinhardt, *Von der Reklame zum Marketing. Geschichte der Wirtschaftswerbung in Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 446f.

⁶⁷ For a comparison with Fascist Italy, see Waltraud Sennebogen, "Propaganda als Populärkultur? Werbestrategien und Werbepaxis im faschistischen Italien und in NS-Deutschland", in: Sven Reichardt, Armin Nolzen (eds.), *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland. Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 119-147.

Further ironies abounded in the realm of commercial advertising, where the dominant rhetoric after the Nazi takeover of power quickly became unambiguously anti-American and anti-foreign. There were some efforts at turning back the clock, reintroducing *Fraktur*, and encouraging a supposedly 'German' form of advertising whose precise definition remained hazy at best. 'In the future there will be no place for thoughtless imitation of foreign advertising that does not correspond to the German character', proclaimed *Seidels Reklame* in May 1933. 'Thank God that the times of uncritical adulation for American "models" are over'.⁶⁸ But in the event National Socialism proved in some ways to be a modernizing force in the sphere of commercial advertising, looking explicitly to the United States and Britain for ideas, introducing regulations much as these countries had earlier established, and greatly expanding the infrastructure of market research (though more for autarkic than Fordist motives).⁶⁹ Moreover, it was under the Nazis that the US-style 'editorializing ad' really made its breakthrough. The 'service before self' conceptualization of advertising in the Third Reich explicitly encouraged a prioritization of sales 'persuasion' over manipulative 'suggestion'.⁷⁰

The Nazis, more than any other political movement in inter-war Germany, placed special emphasis on propaganda and presentation. 'After my entrance into the German Workers' Party, I at once took over the management of propaganda', noted Hitler in *Mein Kampf*. 'I regarded this department as by far the most important.'⁷¹ They believed that their party had successfully learned the lessons of the legendary British wartime propaganda effort. As Goebbels proclaimed to radio executives on 25 March 1933,

the spiritual mobilization of the people is just as necessary, perhaps even more necessary, than their material fortification. The proof: in 1914 we were materially prepared as no other nation was—what we lacked was spiritual mobilization [...] We did not lose the war because our cannons failed, but rather because our spiritual weapons would not fire.⁷²

The Nazis were not only convinced of the central importance of mass communication, but also deliberately cannibalized the insights of current

⁶⁸ Quotes from *Schriftleitung*, "Deutsche Werbung für deutsche Arbeit!", *SR* 17, 5 (1933), 145; W. Lüders, "Sünde wider die Natur!", *SR* 17, 6 (1933), 194.

⁶⁹ See Hartmut Berghoff, "Von der 'Reklame' zur Verbrauchlenkung. Werbung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland", in: Hartmut Berghoff (ed.), *Konsumpolitik. Die Regulierung des privaten Verbrauchs im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 77-112, esp. 87-92.

⁷⁰ See, generally, Corey Ross, "Visions of Prosperity: The Americanization of Advertising in Inter-war Germany", in: Pamela Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, Jonathan Zatlin (eds), *Selling Modernity: Advertising and Public Relations in Modern Germany* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006), forthcoming.

⁷¹ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 527.

⁷² Quoted from Helmut Heiber (ed.), *Goebbels-Reden, vol. 1: 1932-1939* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1971), 90.

commercial advertising. Undoubtedly their propaganda efforts, which were widely praised in the advertising press during the early 1930s,⁷³ were a key to their electoral success.

It is therefore worth mentioning a final irony. In 1939, Lord Lloyd, the director of the British Council, had reached the conclusion that Nazi efforts to win over foreign opinion were benefiting Britain more than Germany. Everywhere one looked, he remarked, one saw 'people turning in relief from the harshly dominant tones of totalitarian propaganda to the less insistent but more responsible cadences of Britain.'⁷⁴ In terms of projecting an image to the rest of the world, throughout the latter 1930s and 1940s Whitehall officials consciously moulded their own publicity efforts in antithesis to the loud and strident tones of Goebbels, which in many ways seemed to repeat rather than avoid the mistakes of German propaganda in the First World War. The legendary skill of Nazi propaganda appeared, even at the time, to be a piece of propaganda itself.

⁷³ See, for instance, Erich Kwilecki, "Die Propaganda für die Präsidentenwahl", *DR* 25, 9 (1932), 269; I. G. Faber, "Nationalsozialistische Werbung", *SR* 16, 8 (1932), 299; Ernst Growald, "Reklame-Fetische an die Front!", *SR* 16, 9 (1932), 319.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, 177.