André Eckardt. *Im Dienst der Werbung: Die Boehner-Film 1926-1967.* Berlin: Cine-Graph Babelsberg, 2004. 157 S. EUR 14.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-936774-01-6.

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Micro-study of a Middle-class/Middle-sized Advertising Film Company

This slim and instructive book by André Eckardt presents the history of the Boehner-Film company, a medium-sized firm specializing in advertising films, which produced thousands of advertising, industrial, educational and cultural films from 1926 until 1967– materials largely neglected by scholars. The customers of Boehner-Film, which until 1945 was the leading German advertising film company, consisted of major companies as well as state agencies. Instrumental to the success of Boehner-Film was the intense and tireless work of its founder, Fritz Boehner, who, by combining different functions, acted as a mediator between the advertising trade, companies and politicians. Boehner endeavored not only to harmonize and improve the film advertising trade but also to control it and to promote the success of his own company. Using the story of Boehner-Film, the book attempts to make a serious contribution to the history of the German film economy as well as the film history of the city of Dresden, but its narrow focus and limited space only allows the author to make general and superficial connections to broader topics.

The first chapter summarizes the history of the company, from its founding in 1926 in Dresden to its dissolution in 1967. From the beginning, Boehner utilized his contacts as a businessman to promote the film advertising trade and his own company. He arranged, for example, to have the offices of the Verband Deutscher Reklamfachleute (VDR), of the film department of the Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit Dresden, as well as of the Verbande Sächsicher Industrieller and the Sächsicher Einzelhandelsgemeinschaft in the Dresden buildings of Boehner-Film, securing close contacts to these vital political and economic agencies.

Starting with the production of slides for film theater advertising, the company grew in 1929 to make cultural and industrial films for famous brands such as Volksfürsorge Versicherungen, travel company Hamburg-Amerika-Linie and German Shell-sister Rhenania. The company took an "affirmative stand towards the NS-regime" (p. 12), and, from 1933 on, one can observe stronger *völkisch* ideas and an embracing of the national spirit in the films. In the 1930s, Boehner-Film's growing success made it the leader in the German market. Moving to the Dresden city center, along with the acquisition of land for filming and an exhibition center, allowed the company to produce films independently from script to final copy, cutting costs and strengthening its position in the market. The company compensated for the outbreak of the war and the worsening economic situation by fulfilling numerous contracts for Sparkasse. Boehner-Film was entrusted with the production of educational films for the Navy, for example, and later with sensitizing the audience to topics such as espionage. The company was classified as a "kriegswichtige Unternehmen," which allowed it, through funding and support from the National Socialist state, to employ up to 150 workers throughout the war and achieve a profit of 1.4 million RM in 1944. In 1945, the company moved away from the front line to Wirsberg, near Neumarkt in Oberfranken. (Due to its collaboration with the National Socialist regime, the company's materials and archives in Dresden were expropriated in 1945; its resources in

the Soviet Zone became part of the Deutsche Film AG [DEFA]). In the west, after the American occupation Boehner used his contact to Erich Winzel, who in December 1945 had opened the Institut fÃ¼r wissenschaftliche Filme in Zusammen mit der UniversitÃ¤t Erlangen, to receive a contract for producing medical films for the university. In the wake of the currency reform of 1948 and the resulting flow of products and capital, Boehner was allowed to reopen his company officially (now called "Boehner-Film Fritz Boehner") with his wife as the CEO. The postwar Boehner-Film production facilities were located in Hamburg. The company specialized in industrial and educational films for the top twenty companies operating in Germany, such as Shell, Volkswagen, Daimler-Benz and Lufthansa. In addition, Boehner-Film produced cultural films that dealt with the issues of war refugees and the division of Germany. The death of Fritz Boehner in 1959 foreshadowed the downfall of the company, which failed to make a transition to television film production. In 1966, Boehner-Film closed its doors after forty-one years of being the major producer of German film advertising.

The second part of Eckardt's book treats different aspects of the company's history. Boehner's engagement in promoting film advertising is delineated. His efforts to establish film advertising as a valuable advertising method and to improve the quality of the produced material are illustrated through his numerous articles in the publications of the VDR (from 1929 on the Deutsche Reklame-Verband or DVR). In addition to his participation in, and reports about, international advertising conferences such as one in London in 1924, Boehner gave and organized lectures and seminars as well as screenings in the company's facilities to promote and educate business people about the potential of film advertising. He also worked to create the necessary economic and political structures and networks to achieve his goals, occasionally participating in lobbying in connection with regulation of advertising. In 1933, Boehner became adviser to the Werberat der deutschen Wirtschaft. The model he tried to pursue was that of American economic life, which he had encountered during his participation in the 1928 International Advertisement Fair in Detroit and about which he reported lengthily and enthusiastically. Boehner continually built up a network of connections between businesses and state agencies. As the organizer of the film exposition during the Jahresschau Deutscher Arbeit Dresden, Boehner managed not only to provide his own company with massive public work and secure contracts, but convinced and impressed many visitors of the powerful effect of film advertising.

Boehner's readiness to work with and within a National Socialist structure is ascribed by Eckardt to his engagement in promoting film advertising. Economic, not ideological motivations, are mentioned. Eckardt states that neither racist nor war-mongering films were made between 1933 and 1945 but notes the intensified *vÃ¶lkisch* tone during the war (pp. 32ff). Boehner's participation in the Werberat der Deutsche Wirtschaft, a German government agency, is justified in pragmatic terms.

The organizational side of the company is then described, stressing the patriarchal structure of Boehner-Film, with Boehner its leading personality in charge of acquisition and contacts. No one was able to fill this role after his death, leading to the slow downfall of the company. Eckardt emphasizes the artistic and technical qualities of the produced films as fundamental reasons for the firm's success. The talented and flexible Boehner team was small and could accomplish many tasks in a relatively independent way for low wages. This fact contributed to the low prices of the Boehner films and kept them competitive. Some of these workers later participated in the influential first generation of DEFA film production. Moreover, Boehner was aware of the centrality of the distribution system and secured a presence in 800 film theaters by 1927, though he could not break the monopoly of UFA in many theaters. He was also engaged in bringing films to the people by participating in many regional fairs throughout Germany. A further sub-chapter describes Boehner's attitude to technical innovations, always understood in terms of utilizing them to promote advertising of specific products. While the company itself did not initiate technical innovations, it helped present them to a broad audience. Thus Boehner helped popularize the use of color and audio films. In 1937 Boehner-Film presented the new techniques of the *Raumfilm*, the first German stereoscopic sound film (a type of three-dimensional film).

The last chapter of the book offers a more detailed overview of the company's four decades, stressing the variety of topics covered in its films. Boehner films can be characterized by a balance, a mix of cultural, advertising, industrial and educational films (p. 64). In addition to numerous films about the increasingly modern city of Dresden; proper nutrition and hygiene; and films that present the works and goals of a consumer society, one main genre of Boehner films was that of industrial films, detailing the different phases and aspects of the produc-

tion of a particular product, such as drills or chocolate. A more slowly developing sector of Boehner's film production was that of short advertising films, which soon replaced the initial use of slides in movie theaters. After 1930, short advertising films constituted the lion's share of Boehner-Film's productions, creating over 80 percent of its business after 1934 and serving regional customers as varied as fashion, furniture and retailing companies. The production of industrial cultural films, on the other hand, was contracted by nationwide firms. Although the numerous travel cultural films were not void of clichÃ©s, Eckardt recognizes in the educational films, commissioned by the Reichstellle fÃ¼r den Unterrrichtsfilm (RfdU), signs of prevalent contemporary ideologies such as emphasis on belonging to the *Volksgemeinschaft* and being ready to sacrifice for it.

As part of its cultural program, beginning in 1934, the Nazi regime imposed rules on the screening of cultural films. The impact of such regulation is briefly mentioned in Eckardt's account and needs to be further developed (see p.74ff). In a similar fashion, the author attempts to imbed in his analysis an evaluation of the aesthetic of some Boehner films, mentioning, for example, a connection to the work of Walter Ruttman and the cult of technology that prevailed during the Nazi period, but he does not follow up these fascinating leads (pp. 75-76).

The outbreak of the war drastically reduced the business of Boehner-Film. Thematically, the Werberat der deutschen Wirtschaft asked that, in light of declining supply, advertisers avoid advertisements for luxury items. Boehner-Film maintained its position in the film advertising branch through contracts for Sparkasse, whose films invited the German population to deposit their money in savings accounts designed to bring victory closer. In addition, Boehner-Film produced educational films for members of the Navy and for the Reichsluftfahrtministerium, securing its status as a "kriegswichtige Unternehmen." During the war, the cultural films of Boehner-Film enhanced *vÃ¶lkisch* aspects, stressing regional and small-town life and local customs and ignoring the reality of occupied and annexed countries. As Eckardt mentions, the political aspects of film are hardly ever reflected upon by workers, who "just kept

on working," safe from the reality of the war and the draft, oblivious to (or in denial of) the fact that their work propagandistically supported the German war and its expansionist politics.

After the war and a five-year work prohibition for Fritz Boehner, the company started again in Hamburg, focusing on industrial films, but the company, which missed the jump to television, was never able to approach its wartime and prewar success. The disappearance of state funding (especially prominent during the Nazi period), as well as postwar tax regulations and, most importantly, the diminishing role of advertising films in theaters, worsened the situation. Despite these conditions, Boehner-Film produced numerous cultural films after 1950, especially about regional cities and the problem of exiles, as well as the division of Germany. Eckardt notes a sharpening of the discourse of the films in the late 1950s, with a slide of the cultural films towards political propaganda, and identifies Boehner-Film as an active participant in the "cold war of film images" (p. 97). Boehner-Film also participated in the education of the German population through the production of "economic films," aimed at introducing and educating people about the new market economy.

This review, which follows the book's structure, should suggest its repetition and overlaps. Eckardt's study is detailed in terms of the structure and functioning of the company. Beyond a few cursory attempts, however, the author hardly utilizes the material at hand for a closer textual reading of the films themselves. Such reading should be carried out not only from a technological point of view, but thematically, by looking at issues of representation of *vÃ¶lkisch* ideology, gender and class, consumerism and representation of war time. The historical context of the company is often frustratingly underdeveloped. Whereas broader developments are (necessarily) mentioned, their more concrete effects on the company needed to be explored. As touched upon by Eckardt, the materials of the Boehner-Film company, due to its status, longevity and productivity, deserved indeed to be better utilized. The detailed appendices will provide researchers with a good starting point for future work.

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