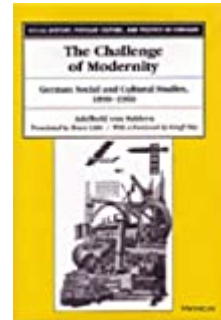


Adelheid von Saldern. *The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890-1960.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. xxii + 383 pp. \$64.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-10986-9.



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Modernity and Everyday Life

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Over the past two decades, both historians of Germany and increasingly those working in other geographical contexts have become interested in approaches informed by historians who have sought to write histories of everyday life, in order to create new histories of the places and periods on which they work. This book presents a selection of essays by the historian Adelheid von Saldern, who counts as one of the pioneers of this approach. While all of the essays presented will be familiar to those who have worked seriously on the social and cultural history of twentieth century, all but one are being published in English for the first time. Therefore Geoff Eley, who edits the series in which this volume appears, deserves praise for making a representative sample of von Saldern's work available to an English-speaking audience. It is to be hoped that historians working in contexts other than that of German history will read this book, as most historians of twentieth-century Europe will find much that is both useful and relevant for their own work.

At first sight, the essays presented in this volume are

diverse. The first two essays deal with the evolution of the German labor movement and its culture, using the methodology of the history of everyday life to show how the Social Democratic Party and later the Communists evolved in communities and related to society outside the party during the period between 1871 and 1933. Micro-historical method and concepts focusing upon the cultural, and owing a great deal to anthropology, help the author to shed new light on a path well trodden by historians. In the middle section of the book are five essays which show von Saldern at her most innovative. During the past two decades as gendered approaches to history have led historians to focus on the private sphere and to interrogate critically the impact of social policy on ordinary people, the field of cultural studies has led scholars to examine the material as part of the social. In these five essays von Saldern shows herself as both deeply sensitive to these shifts and actively engaged with them as a historian. Taken together, the studies that constitute the middle section of the book are an important and highly original contribution to the history of the Weimar Republic, of twentieth-century German social policy and to the history of notions of gender in Europe during the

past century. The final section of the book contains four further essays that represent von Saldern's engagement with and application of concepts derived from cultural and media studies to the writing of the cultural history of twentieth-century Germany. She explores the development of the mass media in Germany, concentrating on phenomena such as the rise of radio and of cinema as social experiences. National Socialist attempts to appropriate these and other modern forms and use them for their own purposes are also closely analyzed, while the transformation of radio in the hands of the authorities of the German Democratic Republic is also considered.

From what is written above, it will be clear that this book is a must buy for those writing on and researching German history, as well as the social and cultural history of Europe more generally. The significance of the book is far greater, however, as the essays, when taken together, transcend their immediate geographical contexts. The great strength of von Saldern's work, as it is presented here, is that she suggests perspectives of general applicability, which means that social and cultural historians as a whole ought to take note of her ideas. The real theme of major significance throughout the book is her approach to the issue of modernity, and of how social and cultural historians ought to approach the concept. Von Saldern argues that modernity encompasses a range of programs that sought to reshape social relations in new, radical ways. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century a range of groups from artists through to state officials, from businessmen to political activists, and from health-care professionals through to architects, moved to re-shape the texture of daily life. In so doing they constituted modernity as a cultural practice profoundly affecting social relations on an everyday level. As the pressures

of modernity impacted upon the everyday they generated complex patterns of consent, accommodation and resistance that in turn re-shaped the direction and nature of "modernity." To some extent all of the essays in this volume engage with the issue of modernity and its impact in the German context, whether they focus on the left and radical right-wing politics, the home, the child welfare agencies, the cinema, or the radio. This perspective suggests stimulating ways of re-thinking power and agency in twentieth-century Europe. Not only is von Saldern able to suggest perspectives to help historians re-think their own theoretical practice, she also suggests ways in which the writing of such a history can be approached on a methodological level. Her work on model housing in chapters 3 and 4 are especially good in this regard, in that they point the way to a history that considers the discourses of professionals engaged in both the construction of and regulation of behavior within model housing. This is, however, not done merely in isolation, but professional discourses are analyzed together with the responses of tenants.

In short, therefore, this is a highly stimulating collection of essays that deserves not only to be read by historians of modern Germany, but has much to offer social and cultural historians working in other contexts—one that deserves a wide readership.

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