

troisième section, « Femmes hors norme : les prostituées ». Annarita Buttafuoco rappelle l'existence du refuge Mariuccia à Milan pour les prostituées en 1902, refuge où on incitait les pensionnaires à prendre conscience de leur déchéance par le récit de leurs expériences et où les militantes, féministes « normales » sont confrontées à des femmes « marginales ». L'article de la québécoise Andrée Lévesque sur le mouvement des réformes sociales et la marginalisation des prostituées à Montréal décrit les efforts, les objectifs et les biais idéologiques des réformateurs sociaux, y compris les féministes, après la grande guerre, sur le problème aigu de la prostitution. Ces trois chapitres autour de la prostitution permettent de souligner, en dépit d'observations novatrices (la prostitution peut être une marginalisation positive [Frédéric]; la prostitution oblige les féministes italiennes à s'interroger parfois cruellement sur la nature du féminin [Buttafuoco]; la réforme sociale à Montréal dissimule l'hypocrisie foncière du double standard sexuel et oblitère les facteurs économiques [Lévesque]), de souligner donc à quel point toutes les études sur la prostitution semblent négliger ce paramètre indispensable : les clients.

La dernière section du volume, « L'enseignement ménager, vecteur de la norme », permet des comparaisons intéressantes. Gubin expose le modèle de la femme au foyer, en Belgique avant 1914, en se concentrant sur l'idéologie destinée aux classes laborieuses. Cet angle inédit permet de mesurer l'importance du contexte local dans l'expression d'une norme apparemment univoque pour le monde occidental. Nicole Thivierge résume ses recherches sur l'enseignement ménager au Québec. Ces propos nous sont davantage familiers mais illustrent le cadre ménager/féminin/familial qui a servi si longtemps de carcan idéologique aux femmes québécoises. L'auteure, toutefois, a omis de rappeler que cet enseignement formel ne rejoignait, en fait, qu'une minorité des adolescentes aux études.

On peut s'interroger sur le fait qu'on ait confié à Jean-Pierre Nandrin le soin de conclure le colloque. Il se demande si « le sujet » historique femme existe avant les combats féministes (p. 136) ? Il s'étonne de la nouveauté du concept de déviance (p. 138). Il affirme que la famille est une donnée fondamentale de l'histoire contemporaine (p. 136); il parle du travail des femmes comme d'une marginalité (p. 138), de la « problématique féminine » (p. 140). Bref, en dépit de remarques judicieuses sur des points de détail, Nandrin illustre à quel point une authentique perspective féministe n'est pas véritablement prise en compte. Il ne faut pas saturer le sens (p. 140), dit-il. Et s'il fallait, au contraire, déconstruire le sens ?

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Wolfgang Sachs – *For Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of Our Desires*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Pp. viii, 227, illus.

Despite its importance in the shaping of work and leisure, given its mystique as fetish-object, it is puzzling why the automobile has been the subject of little scholarly analysis. In Canada this lack of attention is especially apparent. The

existing literature has generally concentrated on the American influence on Canadian manufacturing. With few exceptions, the most notable provided by Gerald Bloomfield, an historical geographer, scholars have ignored the motorization of Canadian society. We have yet to produce a study comparable to Wolfgang Sachs's examination of the automobile as an evolving cultural symbol in Germany, linking the history of technology, the history of the environment, and the history of mentalities.

Sachs, a Fellow at the Institute for Cultural Studies in Essen, Germany, provides historians with a compelling thesis, arguing that technological innovations are the products of specific historical eras, that

technology does not simply fall from the sky; rather, the aspirations of a society (or a class) combine with technical possibility to inject a bit of culture into the design like genetic code. Yet, neither do lifestyle and desires emerge from the thin air of culture; instead they coalesce around a given technology. (p. 92)

Roland Barthes once commented that automobiles, like the Gothic cathedrals of an earlier age, can be studied as cultural representations. As Sachs reads them, automobiles have mirrored collective desires for speed, fashion, freedom, control, individualism, and national progress.

Sachs concentrates on the German experience. Beginning with the early 1890s, he describes the way in which the automobile became an object of self-recognition, restoring the independence lost to the train and offering mastery of time and space to the traditional elite and the newly mobile upper-middle classes. Despite the initial opposition by those concerned with safety, road costs, and the perceived urban-based technological domination of rural areas, the automobile was widely embraced. It was a profit-making commodity, one whose markets German manufacturers could ill afford to abandon to foreign interests at the turn of the century.

The 1920s brought technological improvements – hydraulic brakes, electric lights, battery power, independent suspension – all of which helped make the automobile a consumption commodity instead of a plaything. Automobiles became especially attractive to the middle classes, both as a tool of convenience and as a status symbol. By 1932, one per cent of the German population owned an automobile, a considerable proportion given the economic depression that followed the First World War. Most of the smaller cars in the 1920s were imports, a point Sachs attributes to the inability of the German manufacturing sector to regain its stride until later in the decade. Low tariffs after 1926 opened the small car market to men like Henry Ford. Technological availability coupled with Adolf Hitler's nationalistic appeal for democracy through motorization ensured sales stirred by emotion as the German economy accelerated toward a freer circulation of capital. The National Socialist German Workers' Party's motorization policies provided the infrastructure, constructing 3,500 kilometres of "autos-only" highway in the 1930s; Hitler himself provided the vision of outfitting every German worker with a cheap, reliable, efficient, and "classless" vehicle for a mere five marks a month for four years and seven months of savings. In light of the failed economic policies of the Weimar

years, Hitler saw an opportunity to empower those with lives of limited opportunity. His vision was to make German society more homogeneous; in the process he hoped to avoid economic interference from unions, communists, or conservative-minded rural communities. Beginning in 1938, the German workers' leisure organization "Power Through Joy" offered a savings plan to reserve a Volkswagen in one's own name. In 1938–1939, 336,668 citizens paid 280 million marks into the fund in anticipation of vehicles that were never delivered. Nor did anyone ever recoup the loss.

The Second World War interrupted the motorization plans of the Third Reich. Superhighways became military transport routes and jeeps rolled off assembly lines in place of cars. Marked by a buoyant economy riding a wave of reconstruction-era optimism, the early post-World-War-II years witnessed the emergence of the "people's car" first promised in the "reasonable" period of the early Nazi regime. The 1950s, argues Sachs, were marked by an eagerness for freedom, an emotional void that could be filled by the promise of consumption and leisure. The automobile provided the basis for the transformation into a consumer society. The lower-middle class sought out the Volkswagen in the 1950s and 1960s, while more sophisticated offerings by BMW and Mercedes marked the continuity of leading social contingents displaced by the "stolen eleven years". Internationally, adds Sachs, guilt enthusiastically drove Germany into the export market, offering the German people renewed prestige in exchange for German technological advancement. Finally, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a hierarchy of automobile models to meet the pocket-books of all consumers. Purposely designed for short market lives, these more recent models allowed consumers to experience the "rewards" of built-in obsolescence, necessitating an updated version every few years to stay current with changing tastes.

Sachs concludes with a retort that discloses his underlying environmentalist convictions, so trendy when he was researching the work in the early 1980s. Having warned the reader of his present-mindedness in the introduction, he returns in the final pages to the question of loyalty to a technology whose negative environmental impact has driven both the car and the planet to the brink of extinction. Sachs sees the answer as foregoing our use of motor cars. The problem remains that automobile owners will be reluctant to give up their prized possessions, and Sachs is perhaps a little hasty in eulogizing the car's passing. His own work underlines that conclusion, although he is reluctant to admit it. Despite our knowledge of "carbon monoxide and decibel ranges, dying forests, lung cancer, and accident casualties", we continue to drive. Love is blind, Sachs reminds us early in the text, when human needs and preferences are at stake. As a symbol, the automobile easily avoids the reality of false independence, traffic congestion, and fabricated happiness. Sachs needs to make more of a distinction between man's handling of the automobile, which has been far from perfect, and the innovation itself, which has been nonetheless welcome. Without that distinction Sachs is merely pining for an ideal past, one that historians have been hard-pressed to document.

Sachs has done a commendable job of integrating a wide variety of divergent sources, a reflection of the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies. The respect-

ably written and translated narrative is woven around a potpourri of photographs, cartoons, promotional literature, newspaper reports, and governmental propaganda. However, the reader cannot help wanting more. The use of printed and official sources eliminates vital discussion of specific convictions held by consumers regarding the sanction and use of their purchases. The problem might be corrected with an examination of diaries, memoirs, personal correspondence, and the records of legislative lobbying groups. This additional knowledge would better account for the early opposition and only gradual acceptance of automobiles in rural areas, a subject given little attention in this book. Recent scholarship of the acceptance of the automobile in the North American countryside suggests that, despite the increasing hegemonic social order emerging at the beginning of this century, rural consumers acted on their own terms within that system.

Rural or urban, Sachs makes little attempt to distinguish between consumerism as exploitation and the more complex process of consumption as a reconstitution of needs within a particular social context. Furthermore, while the study is persuasive, one cannot help wondering if there are times when the automobile is simply a means of transport and not an ego prosthesis. It is possible that the rise of the German automobile industry was the result of a well-managed, well-advertised sector that offered increasingly sophisticated and satisfying products to increasingly sophisticated and satisfied consumers. Is there a limit to exactly how much theory we can superimpose on the act of purchasing a particular product? If so, where do we draw the line between perceived needs and aesthetic appeal? Of course this is not an attempt to deride the work in question, only to suggest that there is a fuller picture to be drawn.

More conspicuous is the absence in the chronological section of the book of a chapter dealing with the First World War. I would think it important to consider the war's impact on German society and on the apparently rapid acceptance of technological innovation in order to understand more fully post-war dreams and desires. Finally, a comment: originally published in German in 1984, the book's research ends in the early 1980s. The recent unification of West and East Germany would provide a fascinating comparative study of the motoring aspirations of two very different sections of the country. It is hoped that Sachs will take the new political context into consideration in future research on the motorization of Germany.

Despite the aforementioned reservations, this remains an informative, well-written, lavishly illustrated, and intelligent tome. Sachs has added to our knowledge of the history of social values and provided historians with questions for future study. The work should hold appeal for scholars and a more general popular audience.

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