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Stéphanie Le Gallic, *Lumières publicitaires: Paris, Londres, New York*. Preface by Dieter Neumann. Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2019. 384 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €24.00. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7355-0892-1.

Review by H. Hazel Hahn, Seattle University.

The key strength of Stéphanie Le Gallic's *Lumières publicitaires: Paris, Londres, New York* lies in the exceptionally thorough archival research carried out in multiple French and British archives, including some private archives such as Gaumont-Pathé Archives and Archives JCDecaux. Archives in the US were not utilized, making the coverage of New York necessarily not as in-depth as those of Paris and London and also methodologically different. Le Gallic approaches the history of illuminated advertising through the lenses of the history of communication, technology, and business. At the same time, the analysis is strongly contextualized in urban, social and cultural history, with regard in particular to the evolution of the centers of outdoor advertising, such as Piccadilly Circus in London and Times Square in New York. Wide-ranging in themes, the book presents an exciting and rich array of new material that are extensively analyzed, providing a remarkably substantiated history of illuminated advertising and its multiple contexts.

The introduction covers the relevant historiography, which is extensive, as indicated in the helpful bibliography as well, although with some gaps.[1] Also laid out here are the central themes of investigation. Le Gallic notes that no collection of illuminated advertising exists, in contrast to posters, due to their size and fragility, underlining the ephemeral nature of the material. Used in show windows of department stores and large businesses, the author points out, illuminated advertising was conceived to be modern, utilizing electricity when it was uncommon and new materials like glass tubes. While illuminated advertising contributed to the circulation of techniques and brands, at the same time, Le Gallic argues, it participated in the individualization of cities. Why Times Square--the prime model of an urban center of outdoor advertising--or Piccadilly Circus were not reproduced in Paris is a question the author seeks to investigate.

The first chapter is distinct from other chapters, in that it explores broad changes in the evolution of the night urban landscape of Paris and London in particular, and secondarily New York, that culminated in the use of electric lighting so that, by the 1880s, the most frequented streets of Paris were lit by electricity. The chapter shows that while night lighting was initially developed for safety, it quickly also became a window to luxury and modernity. This chapter synthesizes mostly from secondary literature, and while the breadth of coverage enables seeing a big picture,

sometimes details are lacking. For instance, when Le Gallic notes that by the 1840s London's streets were brightly lit, especially on Saturday evenings, it would have been helpful to elaborate if this was the case mostly in the West End or also in the East End. The commercial importance of Regent Street in the West End is mentioned, but one wonders if any parts of the East End were well lit. "Light architecture" is an interesting concept of Joachim Teichmüller's that is briefly discussed [2], an idea that Le Gallic argues can be applied to the second half of the nineteenth century, when light began to be associated with particular buildings or activities, notably at world fairs and other exhibitions.

Chapter two treats the production of the nocturnal urbanscape in the 1890-1930 period, charting the evolution of illuminated advertising from textual to visual and static to animated. The chapter describes a number of striking examples of electric advertising; the first one in New York, in 1892, created with 1,457 flashes of light, was manually operated from dusk until 11 pm on the roof of the adjacent building. Le Gallic notes that advertising developed without restriction in New York, especially at Times Square, during the 1910s. Rayograph, which was applied to advertising, is one of the techniques producing aesthetically captivating images that are briefly mentioned. A fascinating archival finding is a camouflage defensive plan developed during World War I. The plan—which was not put into practice—was to create a false potential bombing target, to obscure the exact location of Paris. Moving lights were to create an illusion of trains, factories, and urban sites like the Champs-Élysées, the Champs de Mars, the Grands Boulevards and train stations through intensive lighting.

One advertisement in the 1920s on the façade of the Louvre Department Store of Paris created an illusion, accompanied by sound, of multicolor fireworks lit by 15,000 light bulbs controlled with 35 machines. At the same time, Le Gallic shows, vocal criticism of advertising prevented a rapid spread of such advertising. Another fascinating example discussed is when the Eiffel Tower was used as an advertising medium, spelling "Citroën" with 200,000 bulbs in 1925 at the occasion of the Exposition des arts décoratifs. The media criticized it severely, although it was a public success. Gustav Eiffel had forbidden all advertising on the Tower but, after his death in 1923, the company managing the Tower sought lucrative ways to use the Tower. For the city administration of Paris, Le Gallic argues, electric advertising was above all a source of revenue through taxation, and efforts to curb advertising came, not from public institutions, but from private sources in both Paris and New York. Les Amis des Champs-Élysées lobbied to ban electric advertising on the Champs-Élysées in 1927. In New York, the Fifth Avenue Association sought to prevent 42nd Street's rambunctious aspect from spreading to the east. Both the city's view of advertising as a source of tax revenue and the private sector's criticism of advertising that seemed to mar urban spaces have been forces shaping the use of outdoor electric advertising since the late nineteenth century.[3]

Chapter three provides an absorbing history of the development of neon lighting, first as a form of artistic decoration, and then as a form of advertising, in the 1910-1939 period. Invented by the French chemist Georges Claude, neon, a gas that separates a red-orange color under the influence of electricity, enabled the creation of glass tubes for ornamental and artistic illumination at the Grand Palais, the Cooper Hewitt, and cinemas. Claude, working with Paz et Silva, developed neon advertising, which spread around the world from the 1920s. Several companies, including General Electric and Aktien Gesellschaft für Elektrizität Industrie based in Hamburg, played major roles. Le Gallic emphasizes that, in spite of the involvement of large companies, there was a significant artisanal aspect to neon lighting, in that glass tubes had to be blown individually by

experienced glass blowers. The term “neon,” the author notes, began to be used by the public to refer to all colored lighting, not just ones created by other gases, but also to fluorescent lighting. Indeed, “neon signs” is a term used in much of the world even today to refer to all forms of colorful illuminated signs. The majority of the public are probably unaware of the scientific origins of the term “neon,” which has taken on new meanings. Chapter four, on the 1939-1970 period, begins with a description of the near-total blackout of illuminated advertising during the Second World War. After the war, criticism of illuminated advertising accelerated. Moreover, the development of television and other audiovisual media from the 1950s contributed to the decline of theater and cinema districts. TV advertising soon rivaled outdoor advertising. The accelerated pace of life made illuminated advertising seem outdated, in that it could not be changed fast enough.

One of the key themes of chapter five, which covers the 1970s to the 2000s, is the emergence from the 1970s of the *boulevard périphérique* circling Paris, a “*non-lieu*” on which 42 percent of Parisian traffic passed, as a prime location of lit advertising (p. 254). This roadway, distanced from historic centers and literally and figuratively marking the margins of Paris and therefore overlooked for aesthetic concerns, would remain the only major center of illuminated advertising in Paris. Le Gallic notes that the oil crisis of 1973-1974 led to a policy to reduce energy consumption. Criticism of illuminated advertising continued after the crisis, spurred by the establishment in 1971 of the French Ministry of Environment, marking a turning point in the evolution of advocacy for environmental protection. In London and New York, the author states, the architectural, moral and social degradation of Piccadilly Circus and Times Square led to a reduction in advertising although, as neon advertising declined from the 1970s and was replaced by LED, certain neon pieces, such as one for Pepsi Cola in New York, acquired the status of cultural patrimony as a form of Pop Art. The chapter ends with a discussion of the renewal of advertising at Times Square from the 1990s, and the continued concentration of advertising at Piccadilly Circus. Chapter six treats developments at the end of the twentieth century, including the multiplication of video screens, and a brief story of DÉFI, the French electric advertising company, which expanded through branches established in Morocco, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

Some of the book’s conclusions, that it was in Paris where architecture and advertising seem to have been the most incompatible, given the lack of a clear center of advertising, and that London, with Piccadilly Circus that evokes Times Square, was in some ways an intermediary between Paris and New York, are not particularly innovative and need further substantiation. Perhaps an important part of the answer as to why there has never been anything like Times Square or Piccadilly Circus in Paris has to do with the fact that the population and surface area of Paris are very small compared to those of London or New York. The sheer discrepancy in the sizes of the cities could signify that there is necessarily less urban diversity within Paris compared to London or New York. The relative homogeneity of Paris also has something to do with the absence of a clear class-based division within the city comparable to the division between the West and East Ends of London, or the class-based divisions in the boroughs of New York. And in this regard, by “New York,” Le Gallic seems to actually mean Manhattan; a clarification is called for. Indeed, the emergence of the *boulevard périphérique* as the Parisian center of lit advertising seems to corroborate the idea that relative homogeneity and the small size of Paris might help explain the seeming strength of architectural protection within Paris, in drastic comparison to the banlieues, underlining the class-based division being not within the city, but rather between “within” and “without.” More fully convincing are the author’s conclusion about the non-linear characteristics of technological innovations and the conclusion that commercial uses of the building façade,

constituting an intermediary between the public and private, led increasingly towards the privatization of public space.

A number of captivating images of advertisements, including some in color, are peppered throughout the book. Visual analysis is not the book's strong suit, nor does the book claim that it is. When Le Gallic turns attention to visual imagery she does share some strong insights, but most images are under-analyzed. The best-analyzed advertisement is for Cuisine électrique designed by Jean Carlu in c.1937. Le Gallic provides details of the design concepts and construction methods, as well as extensive contexts including a survey of poster artists in regard to their visions and attitudes about the future of advertising. Le Gallic writes that this advertising appears "increasingly like a singular object, profoundly anchored in its period through its themes (the light, the neons, the electric range...), yet at the same time situated outside its period through its decidedly iconoclastic side," the experimental methods of construction and illumination (p.178). Yet, Le Gallic does not seem to notice or problematize that the image seems to clearly represent an Asian maid, with straight black hair neatly tied back in a chignon, in a maid's outfit, therefore connoting latent racism and colonialism.

References to influences or interactions with other cities besides the three cities treated are scant. The establishment of DÉFI's branches in various locales abroad and the exportation of neon technology to Latin America and Asia are some of the few instances in which other countries are cited. In addition, foreign influences are rarely mentioned. The placement of a Sony Jumbotron in Times Square in 1990, Samsung's publicity in Piccadilly Circus about breast cancer in 2009 marking the first non-profit illuminated advertising, and Samsung's interactive advertising campaigns for cellphones are such examples. This is a minor criticism, as it would be unfair to criticize a book that does not claim to cover global developments of communication and advertising. At the same time, it would have been helpful to at least provide some explanations on the cause of the relative absence of foreign influences and cross-cultural currents besides the trans-Atlantic connections, especially influences from East Asia, a major source of technological innovation and manufacturing in regard to digitization and electronics. Does this absence--until the 1990s--reflect the contents of the archives, or is the author sidestepping available sources in order to concentrate on the three cities that are the focus? Where should researchers look to in order to investigate such influences? Is the author arguing that the three cities were really largely autonomous from the rest of the world in this regard, in spite of the fact that London and Paris were capitals of colonial empires? The author states that these cities were "new centers of the world" in the nineteenth century. Would the author state the same about the late twentieth century? These are some questions that the author could have answered succinctly, but that the book elicits many questions for new research paths is also indicative of its richness.

Lumières publicitaires makes an important contribution to the fields of communication and history of technology and advertising, as well as urban, social, and cultural history of Paris, London and New York. The book covers a great deal of ground, and a lot of different themes, including the history of the use of electricity and other technologies of lighting, history of businesses and brands, reception and criticism of advertising, regulations and taxation, and the evolution of urban spaces used for advertising, based on amply voluminous archival and published sources. While the book's prime focus is not on visual analysis, it provides crucial contexts for topics on visual and related themes, such as the use of Art Deco and other styles, color theories, psychological theories on advertising, and the relationship between advertising and cinema.

NOTES

[1] David Henkin's *City reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), and Ruth Iskin's *The Poster: Art, Advertising, Design, and Collecting, 1860s–1900s* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2014) are two of the titles that should be added to the bibliography.

[2] Dietrich Neumann, *Architecture of the Night: The Illuminated Building* (New York: Prestel, 2002), p. 28.

[3] See H. Hazel Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity: Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), chapter 7.

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