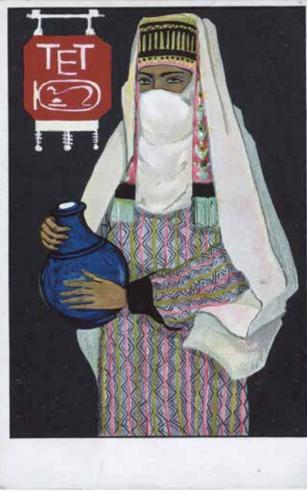## The Evolution of Design as Shown on German Advertising Postcards

Joseph Sullivan

Germany was critical to the development of modern graphic design in the 20th century. "German graphic design was a miscellany of intersecting ideas and styles influenced by the demands of industry and commerce. Under the rubric German Modern, numerous graphic styles comprised a national aesthetic."[1] Germany's designers pioneered a simplified approach to graphics and typography. Progressive Werbekunst (pictorial advertising) developed, which rejected academicism and ornamentation in favor of aesthetic economy. Bold clean graphics conveyed advertising messages in a fast-paced modern Germany.

Though German stamp design lagged behind the modernist movement by decades, innovative trends in design can be found on German commercial mail. This article will examine some of those design developments using advertising postcards spanning the years 1877-1937.

In the late 19th century there was no such thing as a graphic designer. Printers designed what they printed. However, as the 20th century began, with expanding economies across Europe, population migration from rural areas to cities to take advantage of employment opportunities, and the emergence of a

TET-Turkoman Woman-Leibniz Biscuits, a WWI Feldpost advertising postcard exemplifies the new, bold early 20thcenturyapproach to graphic promotion with minimal text. The word TET and the icon graphic below would have been immediately recognizable as promoting Leibniz Biscuits, a treat that many a service person was thrilled to receive by return mail from home. The Turkoman Woman was a striking imageusedtograbthe viewer's attention. Imageryofbiscuitswould havebeenextraneous.

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middle class, the need for effective advertising was created. Graphic design became a profession, and effective design strategies developed.

The earliest German business postcards that can be said to incorporate advertising used seals or rubber stamps (figs. 1 & 2) for the business name and location, type of business, and sometimes a brief description. Letter mail was expensive, so postcards were often used as an economical substitute. Multicolor printing was also quite expensive, so business postcards were normally printed in a single color—generally black.

The earliest German postcards with printed advertising often employed a mixture of typefaces and sizes: Blackletter (Fraktur), ornamental, serif, and occasionally sans serif. The result could be a challenge to read. Beginning about 1910, a "cleaner" and simpler approach began to appear—sans serif type, limited type sizes, and rules to organize areas of printed graphics. This modernization was not universally adopted in Germany, but these modernist trends in German design had worldwide influence.

At the turn of the 20th century, many businesses began to adopt progressive advertising ideas, and this included the design of their mail, including the simple postcard. Art Deco style took hold in Germany in 1896 with the advent of Jugenstil (Youth Style), a variation of French Art Nouveau. Jugenstil rejected the constraints of academicism and the use of excessive ornamentation. This new approach to design replaced the strictures of 19th-century Wilhelmian style with color, geometry, and even humor. Its vibrant and illustrative style altered the course of design practice. Jugenstil was the vital pathway from a conservative past to a dynamic design future. Two

Illustrations at right: Top to Bottom:
Fig. 1. *Postcard mailed by Max Cohen & Son, Antiquarian Book and Art Dealers (as identified by attached seal) to Paris. Postmarked in Bonn on March 31, 1877.*
Fig. 2. *Postcard mailed by Friedrich Albeck, Printer. Postmarked on obverse in Frankenthal on March 9, 1887. The three lines of text at the center of the rubber stamped imprint on the card translate: Publisher of the Frankenthal Newspaper and the Oggensheim Advertiser and Lambsheim Advertiser.*
Fig. 3. *Günther Wagner postcard postmarked May 25, 1900 in Hannover. Note the mixture of typefaces and sizes used.*
Fig. 4. *Günther Wagner postcard postmarked December 1, 1921(?) with a Palermo, Italy arrival stamp of December 5, 1921.*

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advertising postcards from the firm Günter Wagner illustrate this transition (figs. 3 & 4). Wagner, a firm tracing its origins to 1838, manufactured inks and artists' paints. Its flagship product, Pelikan Ink, was the first ink that did not fade and became the world's best seller and a favorite of graphic artists.

Expositions historically relied on eye-catching graphics for promotion and generally were in the vanguard of progressive design. Also, expositions were among the earliest and largest users of poster stamps as promotional devices. Another example of the significant transition in design styles is illustrated by postcards from the 1906 Dritte Deutsche Kunst-Gewerbe-Ausstellung (Third German Arts & Crafts Exposition) with its decorative painting and the 1919 Art Nouveau graphic used for the Einfuhrmesse Frankfurt (Frankfurt Import Fair) (figs. 5 & 6).

By no means did all, or even most, German advertising postcards embody the trends described in this article. Cards ranged from do-it-yourself, like the Waffeleisen postcard (fig. 7), which utilized rubber stamps for imagery, to elaborate, full-color artwork, as exemplified by the Intag-Phobus insurance company card (fig. 8). Traditional blackletter typography is used on the Intag-Phobus card, possibly to indicate the insurer's conservative business practices. Interestingly, Lentz Waffle Irons are still popular, while the Intag-Phobus Insurance Company, with its elaborate postcard, terminated its business in 1930.

Poster stamps, as mentioned earlier, were a popular early form of advertising, being an economical way to obtain color printing. They were attached to outgoing mail (fig. 9), generally bland in appearance, to enhance the message of the sender. Their use as the main advertising graphic on postcards was not uncommon. They also became a very popular collectible.

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Illustrations at right: Top to Bottom:
Fig. 5. *Card postmarked January 21, 1907 in Dresden. Artwork by Otto Gussman (1869-1926)—also used for a poster stamp and poster.*
Fig. 6. *Postcard mailed for General Delivery (Postlagernd) to the Fair Office (Messamt) and postmarked on reverse side October 10, 1919.*
Fig. 7. *Postcard postmarked in Zella-Mehlis on November 27, 1920. Drucksache (printed matter) is stamped over Postkarte to qualify for lower postal rate.*
Fig. 8. *Postcard postmarked on April 17, 1923. 40m paid non-local postcard rate at this point in the German inflation period.*

A "classic" German advertising postcard layout in the early 20th century featured a promotional graphic on half of the address side of the card. (Several examples accompany this article.) The back of the card was devoted entirely to the mailer's message. The artwork for the SENKING card (fig. 10) was created in the "poster style" (Plakatstil) that arose in the early 1900s in Germany; and the postcard artwork likely closely resembled an actual poster. Plakatstil relied on a strong central product graphic and minimal text to reach viewers in an increasingly fast-paced society.

As World War I evolved into a multi-year conflict, the production of postcards, though still robust in quantity, shifted its graphic imagery. Images of vacation destinations and frivolous messaging were no longer appropriate, giving way to postcards with patriotic and humanitarian aid messages, and especially to huge quantities of Feldpost postcards—correspondence between members of the military and their families. Feldpost mail was free of postal charges.

Advertisers seized this opportunity to provide free postcards, in large quantities, to the military that included product messaging, increasing their products' visibility with a patriotic touch. The Asbach Cognac card shown here (fig. 11) employed Plakatstil principles combining a bold graphic with minimal text; however, a product graphic was replaced with patriotic imagery.

Artwork for advertising postcards often included illustrations bordering on fine art, like the Asbach Cognac card. These illustrations were commissioned by advertisers who knew the value of highly engaging artwork. The Kurpfalz Riesling card (fig. 12) uses a sophisticated fashion-like illustration by Ludwig Hohlwein, with product name and wine glass appearing somewhat

Illustrations at right: Top to Bottom:
Fig. 9. *Postcard postmarked Coln Rhein Hannover Bahnpost (railway mail) December 14, 1914 and mailed to Sulzbach, Bavaria.*
Fig. 10. *Postcard promotes SENKING burners. Postmarked in Siegen on May 20, 1913 and addressed to Ernsdorf.*
Fig. 11. *Feldpost postcard postmarked March 6, 1916 and addressed, surprisingly, to the Asbach firm. The message, "Thank you very much for the unexpected joy," perhaps refers to relief goods sent to soldiers.*
Fig. 12. *Postcard mailed by Johannes Schollenberger, purveyor of wine and spirits, to Augsburg. Postmarked in Munich on March 25, 1925.*

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Illustrations at right: Top to Bottom:
Fig. 13. *Card mailed via pneumatic mail (Rohrpost) from Berlin W to Steglitz. Postmarked November 3, 1922. Nine marks postage paid the pneumatic mail postcard rate during this phase of the inflation period. Note SKF perfins and Durch Gilboten (Special Delivery) sticker.*
Fig. 14. *Postcard mailed by Friedrich Palm, electrical supplier, to Nürnberg. Postmarked in Cham July 12, 1935.*
Fig. 15. *Postcard mailed to Oberlungwitz and postmarked with special cancel from the Berlin-Wilmersdorf stamp show on April 4, 1937.*

secondary, to convey its "life-style" message—a very modern approach.

While the use of anthropomorphic imagery in German advertising, including postcards, was limited, its effectiveness was often remarkable. For SKF-NORMA (fig. 13), a ball-bearing company, the card's designer was obviously a "full speed ahead" modernist!

I consider the coming of the Third Reich as the end of the early German postcard advertising era. The design progression that began with advertisers' name/address stickers and rubber-stamped messages progressed through graphics influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement followed by Jugenstil and Plakatstil styles to, in some cases, a sophisticated modernism. The Third Reich in many ways smothered the modernist movement. The Friedrich Palm/OSRAM card's (fig. 14) illustration and design have veered away from modernest trends and exhibit artistic conservatism often identified with the Third Reich era.

It's true that Third Reich propaganda graphics, including postcards, were influenced by earlier developments in design and were highly effective, but the beneficiary was a totalitarian regime whose policies harmed countless numbers of people. Designers were no exception. Some leading designers perished in concentration camps while many left Germany and spread German modernist design ideas throughout the world.

The Ausstellung Der Deutschen Textil und Bekleidung (Berlin Textile and Clothing Exposition) card (fig. 15) is a fitting end to this article. Exquisite fashion imagery is presented in a Plakatstil-influenced style, but subtly lurking at the bottom corners of the card are banners of the Third Reich.

Endnote:
[1] Heller, Steven & Fili, Louise, *German Modern, Graphic Design from Wilhelm to Weimar*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books. 1998. p 6.