

# “We want to live electrically!”

## Marketing Strategies of German Power Companies in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germans have turned into consumers of rapidly increasing amounts of energy in private households which became places cluttered with ever more energy-consuming gadgets. This development represents an important cultural process. Ever more mundane practices such as the storing and preparation of food or personal hygiene became dependent on the supply of electricity. Its introduction into private households and increasing consumption changed consumers' lives and environments as well as their routines. Thus, German households participated prominently in the transition towards a Western high-energy society which has gained momentum since the 1950s. But what and who contributed to Germans ending up consuming ever more electricity and adjusting their daily routines to the increasing consumption of energy?

In this paper I will argue that advertisements functioned as a crucial element and condition of the electrification and mechanization of households. According to the philosopher, sociologist and journalist Siegfried Kracauer, the analysis of advertising as

“the simple surface manifestations of an epoch can contribute more to determining its place in the historical process than judgments of the epoch about itself. [...] On the other hand the very unconscious nature of surface manifestations allows for direct access to the underlying meaning of existing conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 | Siegfried Kracauer: “The Mass Ornament”, in: *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), 67.

In this sense, advertisements are directly linked to society and their decoding leads to an understanding of societal contexts, although advertising cannot be read as a true or unbiased reflection of reality. But since advertisements have to be connected and communicated with society, there is a limit as to how imaginative they can be.<sup>2</sup> Following Kracauer's remarks, advertising is today perceived and accepted as an important source for cultural as well as economic and social history. It can be used as a crucial component of an interdisciplinary history of consumption. Although advertising is goal-oriented, it is, like mundane objects, a part of everyday culture and therefore a rich source for historians. For a consumer-oriented history of technology which focuses on electricity in private households, advertisements are in fact indispensable sources since they were a crucial component and condition of electrification and the mechanization of households which so far have been investigated predominantly from a technological and economical point of view. From a historical perspective, a comprehensive contextualization of electricity advertising in Germany is a relatively new field of research.<sup>3</sup>

First and foremost, historical studies show – hardly surprisingly – that energy suppliers aimed at profits. One way to increase them was to balance the load curves of power plants. For example, installment credits for white goods were supposed to generate additional purchasing power and cheap electricity prices were offered in order to extend the demand and thus the efficiency and profitability of power companies.<sup>4</sup> But the more important aspect for an analysis of advertising is that it is a means to charge the consumption of electricity with meaning and to make frames of meaning

**2** | Cf. Herbert Willems: *Rahmen und Habitus. Zum theoretischen und methodischen Ansatz Erving Goffmans. Vergleiche, Anschlüsse und Anwendungen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, 387.

**3** | For a first systematic outline see Peter Döring/Christoph Weltmann: "Die Erweckung von Stromhunger". *Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert*", in: Horst A. Wessel, ed. *Das elektrische Jahrhundert*. Essen: Klartext, 2002, 93-108 and Theo Horstmann/Regina Weber, eds.: *"Hier wirkt Elektrizität". Werbung für Strom 1890 bis 2010*. Essen: Klartext, 2010.

**4** | Ludwig Koch: "Die Haushaltsgeräte-Absatzpolitik in Elektrizitäts-Versorgungsunternehmen" (Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 1957), 11-12. Koch's work is one of the few contemporary studies on the marketing policy of electricity suppliers.

and action visible for consumers. Following the French cultural theorist Roland Barthes, there is not only the literal meaning of advertisements, but a secondary, connotative meaning which is perceived more unconsciously and emotionally by consumers.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, producers keep consumers in mind when creating advertisements and as a result, advertisements show designated user contexts and social as well as cultural values of a technology such as electricity.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, an analysis of advertisements also reveals which functionalities and meanings of a technology producers and consumers appreciated and which they ignored. For example, during the 1950s, the laborsaving effects of electricity had been appreciated but its ecological consequences were ignored until the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The symbolic value and cultural context of advertisements have to be decoded and interpreted by the beholder, and the advertised product – electricity and its use – has to be related to certain symbols.

Advertising has to be considered as a mediating code which represents consumers as well as producers. In other words, advertising is “not only an impulse towards society, but a reflection of this society itself”<sup>8</sup> or rather the reflection of the expectations of producers, advertisers and consumers and therefore it reveals predominant cultural ideals rather than social reality.

If we want to understand how German households contributed to the transition to a high-energy society and to explore the mediation processes between the production and consumption of electricity, the notion of ‘mediation junctions’ helps to examine the negotiation space in which utility companies, engineers, advertisers, politics and consumers shaped the development of electricity consumption during the 20<sup>th</sup>

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**5** | Roland Barthes: *Mythen des Alltags*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1964, 88-96.

**6** | Heike Weber: *Das Versprechen mobiler Freiheit. Zur Kultur- und Technikgeschichte von Kofferradio, Walkman und Handy*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2008, 78.

**7** | Weber: *Das Versprechen mobiler Freiheit*, 78-79.

**8** | Rainer Gries/Volker Ilgen/Dirk Schindelbeck, eds.: “Einleitung. Cursorische Überlegungen zu einer Werbegeschichte als Mentalitätsgeschichte”, in: *Ins Gehirn der Masse kriechen!* Werbung und Mentalitätsgeschichte. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995, 4. This and all following citations from German publications and sources were translated by the author.

century.<sup>9</sup> Advertisements show how electricity and its use are discussed among producers and became their most important means of technology mediation, created by engineers and electricity advisers before marketing specialists took on this task since the 1950s.

Consumers and especially housewives, however, were crucial actors in the process of domestic electrification and its marketing. At the dawn of electrification a knowledge gap concerning the unknown form of energy had to be bridged by electric companies. Energy suppliers ought to educate housewives about the advantages and the use of electricity in their homes. Their aim was to find out about the desires and needs of electricity consumers and to emphasize the users' viewpoint in the production and mediation of electricity.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, consumers developed special relations to electricity as a product. Because electricity is not storable, users satisfy their need for electricity when they actually consume it and thus determine the capacity of energy production and distribution. Their practices, the number of energy-consuming appliances they switch on, the moment when they do so and the duration of operation is reflected in the daily load curves of power plants. Therefore, producers and users of electricity developed a very specific dependence upon each other. Increasing the efficiency of energy production and thus their profits required the utilities to determine the daily routines of their consumers because not just the amount but also the time of energy use was important.

Assuming that advertisements draw a picture of the West German society which became inextricably linked to the use of electricity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I want to explore which methods and strategies of advertising existed and from which social and cultural contexts these advertisements evolved. Moreover, I will ask what advertisements reveal about the intentions and impediments of electricity consumption.

This article focuses on the specifics of advertisements as an important component of marketing strategies of power companies after 1945 and examines its characteristics compared to electricity advertising before

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**9** | Cf. Ruth Oldenziel/Adri Albert de la Bruhèze/Onno de Wit: "Europe's Mediation Junction. Technology and Consumer Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century", in: *History and Technology* 21:1 (2005), 107-39.

**10** | Carroll Pursell: "Domesticating Modernity: The Electrical Association for Women, 1924-86", in: *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32:1 (1999), 47-67.

1945. It will analyze material from Berlin's local electricity supplier Bewag, which was known by this name from 1934 to 2006. The predecessor had been founded as Germany's first electricity company in 1884 and Berlin's central power plant went into operation one year later. In its company archives, Bewag keeps a vast amount of advertising material, press releases and reports, photographic material as well as documents related to special advertising campaigns such as the rental of electric stoves. The material will be extended by an analysis of the magazine *Elektrizität*, a journal for electricity customer advice published by the 'Main Advice Center for Electricity Consumption' (HEA)<sup>11</sup>, to provide a more comprehensive insight into the advertising methods of energy suppliers.

## FOCUSING ON OBJECTS: METHODS OF ELECTRICITY MARKETING

Energy producers used diverse advertising methods, some of them including objects as significant agents of mediation, to promote electricity and foster customer relations. Mediation processes related to electricity, however, are different from other products because electricity does not directly appeal to the senses and we usually perceive it through devices and appliances. Today, we are especially familiar with marketing for electricity as a product in a liberalized market.<sup>12</sup> But during the early spread of electricity, the electricity and appliance industries recognized that they could benefit from each other since they shared the objective of the complete connection of households to the grid first and the all-electric household later on. In their joint advertising campaigns until the 1960s, their strategy of choice was to emphasize objects by advertising electricity-consuming appliances.

**11** | HEA saw as its purpose "to provide general education about the characteristics of electric energy and its rational use, to advise all members of the electricity industry and interested parties on this subject and to work towards the use of appliances that are technically and economically as perfect as possible", Hauptberatungsstelle für Elektrizitätsanwendung: *Satzung (Fassung vom 18. März 1952)*. Frankfurt/Main: HEA, 1952, Archiv der HEA, Berlin.

**12** | Cf. Regina Weber: "Elektrizitätswerbung zwischen Markt und Ökologie", in: *"Hier wirkt Elektrizität". Werbung für Strom 1890 bis 2010*. Essen: Klartext, 2010, 318-21.

Their cooperation aimed at increasing the number of electric appliances in households, an increase in sales for electric companies, and at establishing an extended electricity grid as a requirement and incentive for consumers to buy electric appliances for their homes.

In general, methods of advertising for electricity were more varied than advertising for other products and they were not limited to print, radio and TV campaigns. Advice and education complemented visual media such as posters and advertisements in magazines. Popular forms for Bewag's promotion campaigns, especially after 1945, were advertisements in newspapers and in public spaces, e.g. in subway stations or with the help of an advertising bus. Publications such as customer magazines and cookbooks brought the practical use of electricity closer to consumers. Installment systems, e.g. Bewag's "Elektrissima" as well as renting campaigns, were supposed to ease the introduction of electrical appliances into German households despite financial constraints. In information and advice centers, consumers could inform themselves about domestic appliances, their purpose, price, electricity consumption and handling and watch demonstrations of electric stoves, refrigerators and food processors. Training kitchens, where housewives could familiarize themselves with the efficient handling of an electric stove as well as refresh and extend their cooking skills during free cooking courses were popular. Some training kitchens were even designed to be relocated and moved from one newly-built residential area to another.<sup>13</sup> A significant advantage of advice centers and training kitchens was their proximity to customers and markets. Electric cooking training was also offered in professional schools in order to address future consumers. As will be shown, promotional electricity prices had been another main characteristic of the strategies pursued by power companies. By all of these means, it was hoped that consumers could be firmly convinced of the usefulness of electricity and, beginning with the late 1950s, the all-electric kitchen. In France, promotional films as another advertising method of energy suppliers were popular. As a fruitful source for historians, they also help to reconstruct the cultural representations of energy, its consumption and consumers.<sup>14</sup>

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**13** | Irene Krause: "Hausfrauenwerbung in Berlin", in: *Elektrizität* 9:5 (1959), 112.

**14** | Cf. the contribution of Yves Bouvier in this volume.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, joint advertising campaigns of the electricity and appliance industry gradually decreased. Electricity suppliers began to use direct marketing for electricity whilst appliance manufacturers continued to advertise via objects. But the advertising strategies and motifs of both industries remained similar. Since the early 1970s, they have concentrated their campaigns on the establishment of an ecological image.

## MAKING ELECTRICITY VISIBLE: ADVERTISING ELECTRICITY BEFORE 1945

In late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, entrepreneurs and engineers like the founder of the Deutsches Museum, Oskar von Miller, or Emil Rathenau, the founder of the famous producer of electrical equipment AEG, were among the first to popularize electric energy. In 1907, Emil Rathenau's son Walther stated in a letter to his father that the propagation of electrotechnical applications "has to be organized and forced on consumers by producers."<sup>15</sup> The protagonists of electrification realized that far-reaching information campaigns by electricity companies and appliance manufacturers were required in order to promote electrification and local power networks as well as domestic mechanization. In 1886, electric domestic appliances were presented at a sample exhibition of the AEG (then Deutsche Edison Gesellschaft) for the first time. In the following year, the BEW<sup>16</sup>, Berlin's public utility founded in 1884, opened its first permanent exhibition space with the aim of explaining electric lighting to potential customers and thus advertising it.

**15** | Qtd. in Jürgen Kocka: "Neue Energien im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Sozialgeschichte der Elektrizitätswirtschaft", in: Evelyn Gröbl-Steinbach, ed. *Licht und Schatten. Dimensionen von Technik, Energie und Politik*. Wien: Böhlau, 1990, 21.

**16** | Berlin's public utility A.G.StEW was founded in 1884, AEG took over its administration in 1887 and the company was renamed BEW. Beginning in 1923, Berlin's Municipal Electric Company (Bewag) operated BEW's plants and merged with Berlin Power and Light Corporation (Berliner Kraft- und Licht-Aktiengesellschaft) in 1934, renaming the company Bewag. It operated West Berlin's power network beyond the division of Berlin from 1948 until 1993. In 2003, the Swedish company Vattenfall bought the company, renaming it in 2006.

The invisibility of electricity created fear and mistrust among consumers and hampered the process of domestic electrification. Electricity suppliers had to work hard to convince skeptical consumers and to provide the necessary knowledge about the new form of energy.<sup>17</sup> In their advertising, companies therefore used anthropomorphisms such as magic fairies or helpful leprechauns in order to demonstrate the safe use of electricity in private households. Dancers with light bulbs and human candelabra presented the fascination of electricity at fairs and exhibitions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, luminous advertising on house facades promoted not only the advertised product, but the use of electricity as well.<sup>19</sup>

Early electricity advertising was confronted with two difficulties. Firstly, there was a strong competition with the petroleum, the coal and the gas industry. And secondly, private households were a new market that had to be conquered, while electrification had already found a firm footing in industry, trade, traffic and public lighting. Accordingly, the strategy the electricity companies pursued was to focus on pertinent consumer information. With the Bewag getting more and more customers, Berlin's electricity supplier published the first monthly customer magazine of a German electricity company as early as 1905. The first association for electricity advertising in Germany (Gefelek) was founded in 1911 by German electricity producers and electrical engineers. The Bewag inaugurated its first information centre in 1924 and added a training kitchen two years later, where the advantages of electric cooking were praised. Utilities began to advertise in cooperation with each other with the slogan "Electricity in every appliance" in 1927 and adjusted their campaigns to specific target groups, such as rural or urban households and craftsmen.<sup>20</sup> Until the 1930s, exhibitions, demonstrations, posters and advertisements in newspapers were in the focus of electricity suppliers' advertising efforts. They had consumers in mind who had to become aware of the safe and inexpensive use of electricity for household appliances.

**17** | Koch: *Die Haushaltsgeräte-Absatzpolitik*, 33-34.

**18** | Döring: "Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert", 93.

**19** | Döring: "Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert", 100.

**20** | Christoph Weltmann: "Elektrizitätswerbung in den Zwanziger Jahren. Landwirte im Fokus und 'Elektrizität in jedem Gerät' - eine Werbemarke für Strom", in: Theo Horstmann/Regina Weber, eds. *"Hier wirkt Elektrizität". Werbung für Strom 1890 bis 2010*. Essen: Klartext, 2010, 49.

Electricity advertising was not only supposed to generate a general increase in sales, but power companies also aimed at the balancing of power plants' load curves. But off-peak electricity was not yet easily saleable since refrigerators and hot water heaters, which are also operated during the night and therefore consume off-peak electricity, were still poorly engineered and hardly affordable before World War II.<sup>21</sup> But in the early years of the Nazi period, general promotion was expanded in another direction, namely electric cooking, popularized with means such as the cookbook *Das elektrische Kochen* ('Electric cooking'), which first appeared in 1936 and is still published today, meanwhile in its 53<sup>rd</sup> edition. In 1938, a non-linear rate system permitted an increase in electricity sales while entailing an automatic cost reduction for consumers.<sup>22</sup>

It was only during World War II that the advertising efforts were cut back dramatically: Trainings were offered only in exchange for food stamps and housewives were taught preferably at home.<sup>23</sup> Appliances were advertised according to the logic of war. The conserving characteristics of refrigerators should “fight the spoilage of food”, as the most important slogan pronounced, and electrical stoves were supposed to help saving solid fuels to the benefit of Germany's autarky.<sup>24</sup>

All advertising efforts of energy suppliers notwithstanding, the electrification of German households was not a smooth story of success. Especially the relatively high costs for power connections and electricity as well as consumers' skepticism hampered the comprehensive introduction of electricity before 1945.

## **“WE WANT TO LIVE ELECTRICALLY!”: PROMOTING ELECTRICITY AFTER 1945**

The transition to an affluent high-energy society in West Germany gained momentum after a period of energy scarcity after World War II. First of all, in 1945, energy saving became an important issue when the Allied Control Council passed Law No. 7, which determined the rationing of electricity

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21 | Weltmann: “Elektrizitätswerbung in den Zwanziger Jahren”, 54.

22 | Döring: “Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert”, 102.

23 | Krause: “Hausfrauenwerbung in Berlin”, 112.

24 | Döring: “Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert”, 102.

and gas due to the lack of coal and other fuels.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, from late 1946 till late 1948, energy production had to be cut back even more than during World War II. The law designated the amount of domestic electricity consumption considered acceptable, overconsumption was fined and the use of electricity for heating as well as for lighting shop windows and advertisements was banned.

Berlin's first information centre and training kitchen already reopened shortly after the end of the war in 1946, teaching consumers about appropriate energy consumption in times of limited electricity supply.<sup>26</sup> Hence, electricity companies did not advertise more, but less consumption until 1949, when the Federal Republic of Germany was founded and Bewag's most important power plant at that time, the power plant West, restarted.<sup>27</sup>

But as early as 1947, the Bewag used promotional cars even though Berlin was still in ruins.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, electricity companies already tried to catch a glimpse of their future. For example, in 1948, Hans Saran, a pioneer of German electricity advertising, made it clear that

“the electricity rationing, introduced by the occupying powers, still imposes restrictions on electricity consumers. But domestic appliances, especially electric stoves, are, after the currency reform and the end of rationing measures, available again today. Cooking classes and demonstrations have to be introduced again to teach housewives how to make advantageous use of ration cards.”<sup>29</sup>

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**25** | Cf. Allied Secretariat, ed.: “Law No. 7. Rationing of Electricity and Gas”, in: *Official Gazette of the Control Council for Germany* 2 (30.11.1945), 32.

**26** | Bewag: *Beratungsstelle Steglitz am 12.11.1955 wieder eröffnet*, 15.11.1955, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin. Although the Steglitz information centre was already provisionally reopened in 1946, its formal opening was only celebrated in 1955.

**27** | Cf. footnote 16.

**28** | Illustrations “Bewag-Werbung”, 1946; “Elektro-Material Transport-Wagen”, 1950, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

**29** | Qtd. in Hanno Trurnit: *Geschichte(n) hinterm Zähler. Die Beziehungen zwischen Energieversorgern und ihren Kunden*. München: Trurnit & Partner, 1996, 142-43.

As soon as the rationing of electricity had come to an end in 1948, utility companies aimed at broadening the market potential of domestic electricity consumption by promoting its use for more domestic activities such as heating water and space according to the slogan "Take advantage of electricity!" Moreover, architects and landlords became a new target group since old buildings had to be renovated and new homes were supposed to be completely electrified.

But for the post-war generation, thrift was still the first priority and consumers had to be convinced to invest in electric appliances for their homes. Therefore, Bewag emphasized that "'electric' has nothing to do with luxury. To give something electrical as a present will be rewarded. Electric appliances save time, money and work."<sup>30</sup> Energy suppliers soon intensified their advertising efforts in order to promote electricity for every consumer and boost its demand. In general, the advertising efforts of utility companies after the rationing of electricity had ended were built on strategies which had already been known before World War II. Earlier discussions about the rationalization of the domestic workplace and the kitchen in the interwar period had created desires for domestic appliances that embodied contemporary modern lifestyle concepts and cultural notions, even though most consumers could not yet afford them.

The first German postwar magazine for electricity customers, *Der Lichtblick* ('The Ray of Light'), was published by Bewag in 1950 and their fourth information center and training kitchen was inaugurated in the same year in Berlin's Gesundbrunnen locality.<sup>31</sup> For the Bewag, it was "an especially noble task to advise and educate our customers and thereby resume our promotional activities."<sup>32</sup> A lot of creative effort was put into the decoration of the window displays of Bewag's information centers. Rhyming slogans were popular as well as comparisons between the dirty and exhausting 'old times' and the modern, convenient and electrified 1950s. In advertisements, the housewives' 'revolution' was shown and their slogan seemed to express the claim of every consumer in the 1950s: "We want to live electrically!" (Fig. 1). Moreover, the Bewag was "happy that

**30** | *Der Lichtblick. Mitteilungen der Bewag 2* (1950), n.p.

**31** | The topic of the first course was how to cook fish and a cake at the same time. Cf.: "Schmeckt's bei der Bewag?", in: *Der Tag* 61 (12.03.1950), n.p.

**32** | *Betr.: Werbemaßnahmen und Werbeeinrichtungen*, 1950, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

posters shine from every advertising pillar, which assure us that electricity is available to us in any amount, at any time of the day.”<sup>33</sup> As Heike Weber wrote, advertisements in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century aimed less and less at mediating the understanding of a technology, and instead shifted towards abstract characteristics and emotional as well as experiential values.<sup>34</sup> In the case of electricity, the technological understanding was emphasized until World War II, whereas values such as modernity, freedom, leisure and progress were linked to electricity in advertisements during the 1950s and 1960s.



Figure 1: “Housewives’ Revolution – We want to live electrically!” – Window Display of a Bewag Information Center, around 1955.

But that electricity was available did not mean that it was affordable for everyone, even in Germany’s ‘economic miracle’ era. Therefore, consumer campaigns were initiated by German politics, such as the refrigerator campaign in 1953, which was declared the ‘year of the consumer’, followed, in 1955, by the campaign “Erhard helps the housewife”, launched by the then minister of economic affairs, Ludwig Erhard. German politics unreservedly embraced the American model of the resource- and energy-intensive Fordist consumption regime. Erhard proved to be one of the most fervent protagonists of a new social contract that was based on mass

**33** | *Der Lichtblick. Mitteilungen der Bewag 1* (1950), n.p.

**34** | Weber: *Das Versprechen mobiler Freiheit*, 78.

consumption and expected to provide the basis for a new German nation. Moreover, for political actors as well as electricity suppliers it was a foregone conclusion that ‘promoting’ electricity prices would “assure inexpensive electric energy for consumers which guarantees the best earnings for electric companies.”<sup>35</sup> Despite initial reluctance, utilities were eventually “willing [...] to make a contribution to the campaign. The electric industry supported the efforts of Minister Erhard” because they rediscovered private consumers and their energy consumption as a means to balance the daily load curves of power plants.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, they recognized that low electricity prices were the best way to promote private energy consumption and therefore increase their sales. Upper Bavaria’s electricity supplier Isar-Amperwerke

“realized early that the opportunities of electricity supply in general and its own development are not to be found in high but in promotional prices. The result of this tariff policy did not disappoint our expectations. Today, the best guarantee for inexpensive electric energy for consumers is the fact that electricity has to be as cheap as possible to ensure the highest profits.”<sup>37</sup>

Following this reasoning, Bewag kept their electricity prices steady from 1938 even into the 1950s, although the costs for electricity production and distribution had risen. The efforts of energy suppliers and politics had the desired effects. In October 1955, the weekly paper *Die Zeit* stated: “Earlier than expected, it shows that Erhard’s price-cutting campaign is successful. In the middle of an economic boom, these price deductions are relieving consumers’ purses.”<sup>38</sup>

Not least because of this strategy, the electricity sector became a growth industry par excellence. The German Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers’ Association (ZVEI) stated that further development hinged

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**35** | Isar-Amperwerke Aktiengesellschaft, ed.: *Die Isar-Amperwerke. 50 Jahre im Dienste der oberbayrischen Stromversorgung*. München: Isar-Amperwerke, 1958, 164-65.

**36** | Vereinigung Deutscher Elektrizitätswerke an Staatssekretär Dr. Westrick BMWi: *Betr.: Strompreissenkung*, 15.12.1955, B102/770, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch).

**37** | Isar-Amperwerke: *Die Isar-Amperwerke*, 164-65.

**38** | “Erhards Wunderkur hilft doch”, in: *Die Zeit*, 13.10.1955.

on the market for electric domestic appliances, which in turn depended on incomes and psychological factors.<sup>39</sup> To persuade consumers of the advantages of electricity, the industry founded an advice center for electricity consumption (HEA) in 1952 which resumed the cooperative marketing of the electricity industry of the pre-war period by offering educational work about the characteristics of electric energy and its efficient handling. Public relations in the electricity industry were supposed to create trust and to improve the relationship between electricity companies and the public.

In general, the need for domestic electricity increased, but the industry was convinced that electricity had to be promoted nevertheless to expand sales.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, in the business year of 1957/58, Bewag conducted 282 cooking courses with about 4,200 participants and almost 7,000 home visits.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when lighting and small appliances had been dominant, bigger appliances, such as stoves and refrigerators, were now the main focus of interest for consumers and producers. As electrification progressed, electricity networks expanded and newly built homes had more than one electric socket per room. As a result, while about 1,800,000 electric stoves had been in use in West Germany in 1949, this number tripled by 1960, not least because of power companies' massive advertising efforts.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, domestic electricity consumption in West Germany also more than tripled during the 1950s.<sup>43</sup> These numbers illustrate the emerging establishment of a high-energy mentality in Germany during the 1950s. This development was possible not least because discourses on modernity, prosperity and progress from the pre-war period were revived during the era of reconstruction and linked to the consumption of electricity. Whereas the production and distribution of domestic appliances had been supposed to compensate times of low load in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, utilities aimed

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**39** | Uwe Jönck: *Die Entwicklung des Stromverbrauchs in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis zum Jahre 1970*. Forschungsberichte des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963, 33-35.

**40** | "Werbung - eine ethische Aufgabe", in: *Elektrizitätswirtschaft* 54:21 (1955), 753-54.

**41** | Krause: "Hausfrauenwerbung in Berlin", 113.

**42** | Friedrich Bieling/Paul Scholl: *Elektrogeräte für den Haushalt. Ihre Entwicklung im Hause Siemens*. Berlin: Siemens, 1966, 9-13.

**43** | Jönck: *Die Entwicklung des Stromverbrauchs*, 77-78.

at an overall increase of electricity demand during the 1950s.<sup>44</sup> Massive advertising efforts for electricity and domestic appliances were supposed to transform electric energy into a cheap mass product and thus promote the boundless consumption of electric energy. For consumers, the 1950s were therefore a crucial decade for the development of long-lasting convictions and consumption patterns. One example of a successful advertising campaign involving objects is the renting of electric stoves by Bewag.

### “ELEKTROMIET”: BEWAG’S STOVE RENTAL

This campaign had been launched in 1934 on the occasion of Bewag’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an ingenious alternative to Bewag’s installment scheme “Elektrissima”. Since installment schemes were not particularly popular with consumers who worried about long-term risks and increased costs, Bewag stepped up their advertising efforts by renting out stoves. Whereas the renting of hot water heaters had been successful already in the 1930s, Bewag’s stove rental became popular in the early 1950s during a literal ‘consumption wave’ fostered by industry and politics.

In 1950 and 1951, 350 electric stoves were given free of charge to sales representatives and employees in West Berlin whose stoves had been destroyed during World War II to “support an increase in electricity sales.”<sup>45</sup> The appliance manufacturers AEG and Grätz collaborated with Berlin’s utility in providing the stoves. This sparked massive protests. Newspapers indignantly wrote: “Bewag gives away stoves for free – with ‘our money’!”<sup>46</sup> and even Berlin’s municipality was concerned, but this problem was overcome with the reference to labor law-related claims.<sup>47</sup> Bewag referred to the workers’ right to receive benefits from their employers.

44 | Heinz Weidauer: “Stromabsatzwerbung”, in: *Elektrizität* 4:8 (1954), 231.

45 | *Betr.: Elektroherdaktion*. 20.06.1951, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin; *Vorstandsvorlage. Betr.: Kostenlose Überlassung von Elektroherden an Bewag-Angehörige*. 05.09.1951, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

46 | “Bewag verschenkt Elektroherde. Für ‘unser Geld!’”, in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15.06.1952.

47 | *An die Mitglieder des Abgeordnetenhauses. Schenkungen der Bewag?*, 10.07.1952, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

When Bewag expanded their campaign in 1953, anyone could rent a stove, including electric circuits, pots and pans, but no longer for free.<sup>48</sup> Renters had to pay 3 Deutsche Mark per month, which was only about twice as much as the hourly wage of an industrial worker.<sup>49</sup> The campaign was advertised by 100,000 brochures, which were distributed by installers, specialized tradespeople and Bewag's information centers. An annual lease of 3,000 stoves was considered possible. But Berlin's electricity supplier was convinced that renters had to be supervised throughout the introduction to electric cooking: "In the case of dissatisfaction due to the incorrect handling of the stove, this discontent could be stirred up by competitors and the renter would terminate the rental agreement. Therefore it is necessary to arrange professional service at home with one 'lady' per household."<sup>50</sup> Eventually, Bewag considered their renting campaign

"one of the most successful advertising efforts. Not only does the higher electricity consumption of a household equipped with such a stove contribute to the economic improvement of our company. The stove is also an incentive for the employee's relatives and friends to buy a stove themselves because they get to know the true advantages of an electric stove in the private household."<sup>51</sup>

The examples of Bewag's stove rental as well as their cooking courses show that advertising after the currency reform concentrated on bigger appliances such as electrical stoves. One reason was that a lot of households would not abandon their coal fire stoves which heated their kitchens unless they had been convinced of the benefits of an electric stove. Gradually, fridges also received increasing attention during the 1950s. While in 1950, only 4 percent of German households kept their food in an electrical fridge, ten years later

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**48** | *Lieferschein für Materialbezug an Lager Schöneberg*, 27.07.1966, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

**49** | Ludwig Erhard: *Wohlstand für Alle*. Düsseldorf: Econ, 1957, 107.

**50** | *Betrifft: Herd- und Speicher-Mietaktion*, 24.06.1953, 4-5, 5/52, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

**51** | *Vorstandsvorlage. Betr.: Kostenlose Überlassung von Elektroherden an Bewag-Angehörige*, Bewag-Archiv/Vattenfall Berlin.

this figure had already reached 40 percent.<sup>52</sup> But first and foremost, this development was the result of consumer campaigns initiated by German economic politics to boost private consumption during the 1950s, e.g. with the help of installment rates and price cuts. At the same time, refrigerators served the interest of utilities in a rising electricity demand during daytime and nighttime hours, but while politics took over the task of promoting refrigerators, utilities such as Bewag continued to promote electrical stoves.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the strategies of politics and the electricity industry complemented each other to boost private consumption.

The strategies pursued by Bewag were exemplary for the 'economic miracle' period in Germany. Their advertising efforts concentrated on "a larger increase in sales, but preferably during certain hours; a differentiated price structure and its promotional effects; offering an incentive for consumers not by exhibiting electricity itself but appliances; making it easier to tackle the problem of costs; cooperating with appliance manufacturers"<sup>54</sup>, as an engineer summed it up in 1954.

Until the 1960s, the general electricity euphoria continued and even expanded in the context of the popularization of nuclear energy. Decreasing electricity prices, a wider variety of domestic appliances, increasing income, the rise in women's employment and more living space per person favored this development. By 1960, even electric heating became more and more popular, not least because off-peak electricity got even cheaper. Since more and more households came closer to the ideal of the all-electric household, the demand for domestic electricity increased dramatically. To be modern meant to consume more energy. The need to save energy was – if at all – remembered as a characteristic of a past and premodern era, characterized by deprivation.

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**52** | Ricarda Haase: *"Das bisschen Haushalt ..."? Zur Geschichte der Technisierung und Rationalisierung der Hausarbeit*. Stuttgart: Museum für Volkskultur in Württemberg, 1992, 24.

**53** | Hösel: *Vermerk. Betr.: Konsumfinanzierung von langfristigen Gebrauchsgüter*, 14.04.1953, B102/35963, BArch.

**54** | Weidauer: "Stromabsatzwerbung", 232.

## THE 1960s: AIMING AT THE ALL-ELECTRIC HOUSEHOLD

At the end of the 1950s when electricity sold effortlessly, the electricity industry specialized in what they called “accompanying advice” and Bewag’s promotion became more restrained. The electricity boom created new professional groups and fields, such as (female) electricity advisers for training kitchens and engineers who worked for electricity companies, supervising “customers in all aspects of electricity use in households, agriculture and trade.”<sup>55</sup> Bewag trained their employees, especially those in field service, in special courses since they embodied the exemplary electricity user the company had in mind.<sup>56</sup> However, appliance manufacturers began to promote their products on their own since the competition within their sector became stronger.

But the advertising strategies of appliance and electricity producers still strongly resembled each other. Both aimed at the all-electric household, recognizing that they “approach electricity advertising carefully, maybe sometimes even too carefully and humbly. Only now we propagate the all-electric supply including space heating.”<sup>57</sup> The serial production of electric appliances had gained momentum during the 1950s and their mass consumption was supposed to compensate for times of low load. Electricity had become a cheap mass product, which in turn stimulated appliance sales.<sup>58</sup> By offering electric heating, the industry aimed at increasing the peak load of power plants which provided an argument for the construction of new power plants, since West Germany’s power plant capacities were as yet sufficient for an all-electric nation.<sup>59</sup> “You do not heat, you make yourself at home” was the slogan of a large advertising campaign for night-storage heaters with reduced electricity rates in 1962.<sup>60</sup>

**55** | RWE: “Stellenanzeige Elektro-Ing.,” in: *Elektrizität* 23:2 (1973), A14.

**56** | Johann Dittel: “Die Bewag-Schule”, in: *Elektrizität* 7:7 (1957), 179.

**57** | “Auf dem Weg zum vollelektrischen Haushalt”, in: *Elektrizität* 13:12 (1963), 351.

**58** | Weidauer: “Stromabsatzwerbung”, 231.

**59** | Wolfgang Zängl: *Deutschlands Strom. Die Politik der Elektrifizierung von 1866 bis heute*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1989, 246.

**60** | Berliner Kraft- und Licht (Bewag)-Aktiengesellschaft, ed.: *100 Jahre Strom für Berlin. Ein Streifzug durch unsere Geschichte in Wort und Bild, 1884-1984*. Berlin: Bewag, 1984, n.p.

But while electricity became an affordable mass product, the anti-consumption and environmental movement of the 1960s emerged. Consumers began to worry about their health and deteriorating living conditions for them and their children.<sup>61</sup> Books like Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*<sup>62</sup> inspired this movement in 1962 and ten years later *The Limits to Growth*<sup>63</sup> reflected widespread social concern. Environmentalists even succeeded in delaying plans to expand power plants.<sup>64</sup> But consumers who began to critically assess their energy consumption in the 1960s were told by electricity advisers to reconsider their concerns in favor of electricity sales: “Urban customers enquire about the increased electricity consumption of quick freezing even smaller amounts of food. [...] Our standard answer was that those watt-hours are cheaper than the price of a frozen meal or cake.”<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, beginning with the 1966/67 recession in West Germany, power companies and appliance manufacturers were confronted with increasing market saturation. Indeed, most households were already equipped with white goods such as washing machines, electric stoves and fridges. Energy suppliers had to develop new strategies to tap into new markets and encourage even more energy consumption. One German electricity supplier from Nuremberg even awarded a medal for “exemplary electric facilities” – from a power company’s viewpoint – to eight households in their service area.<sup>66</sup>

Of major importance were the predictions of the electric industry, based on energy consumption statistics of the early 1960s, of an annual increase in private energy consumption of seven percent, blatantly negating the bad economic situation in the recession. According to them, an “energy

**61** | Cf. e.g. “Wir sind dabei, den Planeten Erde zu ermorden“, in: *Der Spiegel* 48, 24.11.1969.

**62** | Rachel Carson: *Silent Spring*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1962.

**63** | Dennis L. Meadows/Donella Meadows/Jørgen Randers/William W. Behrens: *The Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New York: Universe Books, 1972.

**64** | “Kraftwerke. Gedanken an Strom“, in: *Der Spiegel* 33, 07.08.1972, 56-57.

**65** | Gertrud Iven: “Antwort des Kunden auf unsere Werbung fürs Einfrieren“, in: *Elektrizität* 18:7 (1968), 185.

**66** | “Gold für vorbildliche elektrische Ausstattung“, in: *Elektrizität* 23:8 (1973), 256.

gap” had to be feared which would impact freezers, radios, TVs, heaters and so on. In advertisements, utility companies reminded their customers that new power plants and supply lines were necessary “to make sure you will always have electricity!”<sup>67</sup> The German weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* blamed power companies for having double standards. On the surface, they acknowledged the looming environmental crisis. But at the same time, they created fears of a gap in supplies among consumers while positioning themselves as reliable and trustworthy energy suppliers.<sup>68</sup> Actually, the predictions were excessive, but utility companies nevertheless managed to justify the construction of new power plants. Therefore, it became clear that despite all concerns, West German households were strongly integrated in large technical systems such as the power network, depending on high energy consumption and well-equipped kitchens. Despite some consumers’ concern and due to massive customer advice, the equipment of households with electric appliances increased rapidly until 1971. While 42 out of 100 households had owned an electric stove in 1961 and 47 had owned a refrigerator, these numbers rose to 64 electric stoves and 88 refrigerators in 1971.<sup>69</sup>

## **NEW CHALLENGES: CHANGING STRATEGIES OF UTILITY COMPANIES AFTER 1973**

The electricity industry was able to promote an increase in sales despite growing ecological awareness during the 1960s, but the situation changed fundamentally in the following decade. Beginning with the 1970s, ecology and energy became controversial topics for politics, the industry and consumers in most Western, industrialized nations.<sup>70</sup> The positive connotation of electricity as a modern, progressive and cheap form of energy was replaced by an ecologically harmful, expensive and, in the case of nuclear energy, health-threatening image. These developments led to widespread public opposition against the waste of resources and

**67** | “Kraftwerke. Gedanken an Strom”, 56-57.

**68** | “Kraftwerke. Gedanken an Strom“, 56-57.

**69** | Berliner Kraft- und Licht (Bewag)-Aktiengesellschaft: *100 Jahre Strom für Berlin*, n.p.

**70** | Cf. the example of France in Yves Bouvier’s contribution in this volume.

environmental pollution associated with electricity production and consumption. Electricity suppliers were increasingly criticized for their coal-fired power stations without filters, which caused air pollution and forest decline, and nuclear power plants became more controversial. Ecological concerns arose which concentrated not on the consumption, but on the production of electricity first. Bewag, for instance, reacted by beginning to inform interested consumers in 1972 about the air pollution control of their power plants.

At the same time, electricity had become an essential feature of consumers' lifestyles, but its consumption had not been critically reflected since energy suppliers and politics had promoted its unlimited consumption in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, consumers were aware of the tense situation in the early 1970s:

"Electricity has become indispensable for our everyday life. But the more natural something becomes – such as electricity – the less we think about it, its origin, its future supply and its consumption. It is handled too thoughtlessly. But it is worthwhile thinking about efficient consumption, since reserves will last for a limited time only. This concerns every electricity consumer! A process of rethinking is necessary. [...] But it is also obvious that we cannot abandon certain standards of supply and comfort."<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, starting in 1972, electricity suppliers began to realize that consumers might soon reflect about their electricity consumption because of an impending resource scarcity. Moreover, the first oil crisis in the early 1970s hit Bewag hard and "rational energy use" became an abiding topic of customer advice, using the slogan "Use electricity – do not waste it". The company called for an end to excessive electricity waste in private households and a reduction of pollution on their own part. In general, electricity companies recognized that they had neglected their public presentation and that it was hard to convince customers to opt for a judicious use of energy: "We have to assume that the advertising campaign

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**71** | Irmgard von Meibom: "Der Energieverbrauch aus der Sicht des Verbrauchers", in: *Elektrizität* 23:12 (1973), 385-86.

with the slogan ‘Do it right’ is characterized by a protracted and complicated process of rethinking.”<sup>72</sup>

Another incentive to advise electricity customers resulted from public protests against power plant constructions. The industry, which aimed at a further expansion in sales, assumed that the power plant opponents were poorly informed: “Consumers have to be more aware of their electricity consumption which has to be demonstrated in a way that is clear and easy to understand. [...] To provide an appropriate transition from the image of electricity as a bargain to a new campaign, the well-known symbols – a friendly socket and electricity symbol – should continue to be used.”<sup>73</sup> Image advertising was the most important means for electricity companies to retain and extend markets. But the 1973 oil crisis intensified the discussions about thoughtless energy consumption. Slogans like “Electricity makes everything easy and pleasant and it’s cheap too!” were soon out of date.

In the 1970s, utility companies took on a paradoxical role. On the one hand, they felt obliged to guarantee the future supply of more and more electricity and on the other hand, they were held responsible for environmental problems and climate change.<sup>74</sup> Because of increasing electricity prices and large profits, they had to face political and public criticism and were expected to take on social responsibility. They experienced a credibility dilemma: How could they recommend energy-saving while being dependent on high electricity sales? In fact, there was an argument for power plant operators to promote energy saving appliances since they were supposed to prevent the construction of new power plants which would have caused high investment costs.

But the public was becoming increasingly aware of its energy consumption and the electric industry’s former strategy of advising, educating and marketing to encourage electricity consumption had to be turned into the cultivation of a new image. It seemed to be the right moment to develop new advertising strategies. Acceptance and sympathy for the production of electricity had to be generated and information centers such as Bewag’s “Elektrotip” opening in Berlin in 1970 became energy-

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**72** | Wolfgang Dotzenrath: “Sinnvolle Elektrizitätsanwendung als Beratungsaufgabe der HEA”, in: *Elektrizität* 23:5 (1973), 108.

**73** | Dotzenrath: “Sinnvolle Elektrizitätsanwendung”, 108.

**74** | Weber: “Elektrizitätswerbung zwischen Markt und Ökologie”, 319.

saving advice centers.<sup>75</sup> The most popular form of advice were brochures containing instructions about the purchase of the right appliances and energy saving. Electricity suppliers published those brochures in order to educate consumers and, at the same time, to promote the industry’s responsibility by showing power plants or domestic appliances in settings showing customers and natural environments.

In general, electricity advertising decreased after the 1973 oil crisis and the minister for economic affairs, Hans Friderichs, even recommended being “more careful”<sup>76</sup> because of the strong public opposition against nuclear power. The remaining advertising efforts of utility companies continued to concentrate on brochures and advice in the 1980s (Fig. 2). Besides that, Bewag offered mobile information and rented out devices called “energy saving detectives”, which helped consumers to check the energy consumption of their appliances.



Figure 2 and 3: “Clean Laundry and Clean Environment – Is the Possible?” / “The Dishwasher – Economical and Environmentally Friendly?”, Brochures, Energieversorgung Schwaben, around 1990.

While Bewag had celebrated “electric parties” during the German Industrial Exhibition in 1969, they opened an exhibition entitled “Energy

75 | “Elektrotip’ nun auch in Berlin NW”, in: *Spandauer Volksblatt*, 05.11.1970, n.p.

76 | “Weniger Werbung für Strom”, in: *Der Spiegel* 33, 08.08.1977, n.p.

from the Environment – Used for Electricity” after the second oil crisis ten years later, where energy-saving technologies, heat pumps, heat recovery systems and solar panels were shown.<sup>77</sup> Street parties, painting and prize competitions were also supposed to increase customer loyalty after the crisis-ridden 1970s.<sup>78</sup>

Energy saving was elevated to a national virtue; even manufacturers apparently internalized the ‘eco paradigm’ during the 1980s. They committed themselves to produce more efficient appliances, which led to large savings in the energy consumption of the improved appliances<sup>79</sup>, but not of households in general. Nevertheless, ‘eco’-efficiency and the closeness to nature were the most important advertising strategies for electricity suppliers and appliance manufacturers after 1973. For example, the AEG was the first company which advertised its household appliance branch as explicitly ecological.<sup>80</sup> The advertising of efficiency and low electricity consumption became the most important selling and purchasing criterion in a highly competitive market.<sup>81</sup> Apparently, those strategies were successful. In 1987, a psychologist explained that even after the nuclear accident in Chernobyl, electricity as a whole retained a good public image, with only nuclear power plants and energy acquiring a very poor reputation. This was, in his mind, due to the fact that the marketing campaigns of the electricity industry concentrated on confidence-building

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**77** | Berliner Kraft- und Licht (Bewag)-Aktiengesellschaft: *100 Jahre Strom für Berlin*, n.p.

**78** | Berliner Kraft- und Licht (Bewag)-Aktiengesellschaft: *100 Jahre Strom für Berlin*, n.p.

**79** | “Sprechzettel – Zur Einleitung der Besprechung am 24.01.1980 mit den Vertretern der Hausgerätehersteller über weitere Energiesparmöglichkeiten”, 1980, B102/289597, BArch.

**80** | Cf. e.g. “Natürlich AEG. Ratgeber umweltfreundliches Haushalten”, 1990, I.2.060 P 1910, Firmenarchiv AEG-Telefunken, Stiftung Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin (SDTB); cf. “Umweltbelastung abbauen. Spargeräte einbauen. Ausgewählte Einbaugeräte für die Küchenmodernisierung“, Januar 1994, I.2.060 P 1816, Firmenarchiv AEG-Telefunken, SDTB.

**81** | Sylvia Wölfel: “Von der Werbung für Strom zur Werbung für Energieeffizienz. Umweltfreundliche Haushaltstechnik in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR”, in: Theo Horstmann/Regina Weber, eds. *“Hier wirkt Elektrizität”. Werbung für Strom 1890 bis 2010*. Essen: Klartext, 2010, 194.

and reassurance, thus propagating a sense of responsibility and proximity to nature. Power plant operators even claimed that it was the general public and its demand for energy that should be blamed for the construction of nuclear power plants.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Electricity companies contributed to the equipment of homes with energy consuming devices during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the development of German consumers' high-energy mentality since the 1950s. The foregoing analysis of electricity advertising is a contribution to the reconstruction of electricity-related discourses and has shown which image of consumers producers had in mind as well as the reasons and obstacles of electricity consumption.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, customers had been concerned about electricity and energy-consuming appliances. They had feared security hazards, a lack of space, excessive operating and especially purchasing costs and had expected marginal benefits. Against these low expectations, Walther Rathenau claimed that electricity should no longer be considered a luxury commodity and that its use had to be "forced" on consumers in order to create a market. But with its gradual spread, consumers were in need of advice concerning the use of electricity as a new form of energy and utility companies acted as their assistants and teachers. In the first twenty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, electricity was advertised as competing with petroleum, gas and coal, and presented as superior based on its cheap price and safety. During the 1920s, German electricity suppliers professionalized their advertising campaigns and in the subsequent early Nazi period they pursued marketing strategies that put appliances such as electric stoves center stage because they were supposed to save other fuels for Germany's autarky.<sup>83</sup> During World War II and in the first post-war years, campaigns for the saving instead of the consumption of electricity were common.

In the early second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by means of campaigns such as the rental of stoves, Bewag employees acted as a modern,

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**82** | Gerhard Hunnius: "Das Bild der Stromwirtschaft in der Öffentlichkeit 1986/87", in: *Elektrizitätswirtschaft* 86:16/17 (1987), 727-32.

**83** | Döring: "Elektrizitätswerbung im 20. Jahrhundert", 96.

progressive example for German consumers, even though the majority of West German homes were not yet equipped with an all-electric household. Electricity marketing experienced its successful peak in the 1950s, indicating the emergence of a high-energy mentality in Germany, although the origins of these promotional efforts date back to the beginning domestic mechanization before World War II. Power companies advertised by means of advising and educating consumers to popularize electricity in Germany. Due to their advertising efforts and supplemented by consumer campaigns of Germany's economic policy, the all-electric kitchen and a comprehensive democratization of electricity were achieved by the 1960s.

But contradictions soon emerged in the context of growing ecological awareness. Regarded as a problem solver and infused with great utopian expectations since its introduction<sup>84</sup>, electricity became a problem itself. Following the 1973 and 1979 oil crises, growing private energy consumption was criticized and electricity companies had to re-shape their image according to new paradigms such as ecology and sustainability. They had to develop new advice and education strategies to reinterpret their main business – producing and selling electricity – as an act of ecological responsibility. Electric appliances as advertising material became much less important for electricity suppliers over the years and marketing cooperation between utilities and appliance manufacturers diminished significantly. But although they went their separate ways, their campaigns have remained similar. Private households were still important settings for advertising and since the early 1970s, ecological values and abstract energy consumption data have characterized the advertising for electricity.

Today, we have a fundamentally new situation. Electricity has become an everyday commodity and since the liberalization of the German electricity market in 1998, strong competition has emerged because areas of supply are no longer clearly divided.<sup>85</sup> Due to the pressure of competition, utility companies have to position and profile themselves on the market with new and extraordinary advertising strategies.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the functional aspects of electricity such as its inexpensiveness and safeness that were the focus of electricity advertising. After World War II, emotional values such as

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**84** | Cf. e.g. Beate Binder: *Elektrifizierung als Vision*. Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1999.

**85** | Weber: "Elektrizitätswerbung zwischen Markt und Ökologie", 319.

modernity and progress as well as benefits such as more leisure were promoted and related to electricity. Consumers' responsibility to save energy was not discussed among electricity companies during the 1950s and 1960s and therefore not mediated via their marketing strategies. New images and forms of advertising had been in focus of electricity advertising since the early 1970s as a result of the oil crises and consumers' ecological awareness. An image of ecologically responsible energy suppliers and harmless electricity has been the most important motif of advertising campaigns for electricity since then, combined with the appeal to consume electricity sustainably.

This analysis of advertisements of electricity suppliers aims to contribute to the understanding of the fact that, despite the growing efficiency of appliances since the late 1970s, the total energy consumption of households has not decreased and electricity has retained a good public reputation despite its controversial role for the environment. Furthermore, this paper also shows that electricity advertising contributed to the fact that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but especially since the post-war era, German private households and domestic life have become inextricably linked to electricity, even though electricity production and consumption is meanwhile associated with environmental damage.

The foregoing analysis expects to broaden the view on the changing meanings of private energy consumption in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and especially after World War II by a study of changing electricity advertising, reflecting the transition to a high-energy society in Germany. For further studies, it would be worthwhile to closely examine electricity advertisements after 1990, in a united Germany, and to compare developments in Germany to electricity advertising in other countries.

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