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Rossol, Nadine, *Performing the Nation in Interwar Germany. Sport, Spectacle and Political Symbolism, 1926-36*. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2010. 226pp. £52. ISBN 978-0-230-21793-5.

Relating to Germany, historians are increasingly questioning established divisions into “eras” and doubt whether separations such as 1870-1914, 1918-1933 and 1933-1945 can be productive, particularly as they obscure political, cultural and socio-economic continuities. Reflecting these trends Nadine Rossol’s intriguing study cuts across different eras and includes Wilhelmine Germany, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.

Relating to Weimar Rossol refutes claims that Germany’s first democracy failed to appeal to ordinary Germans on an emotional level as its fusion of culture and politics as exemplified by symbols, monuments and spectacles “has been negatively contrasted to allegedly more successful Nazi festivities” (p. 1). Instead Rossol challenges the notion “that the Nazis invented the use of aesthetics for the staging of their mass events” (p. 2), and she discusses spectacles, parades, political assemblies and sports activities to substantiate her claim that “political aesthetics” belonged to democratic states as much as to totalitarian regimes.

In her first chapter Rossol concentrates on demonstrations of the “moderate left” (p. 13) and their claims on the urban space. Rossol points out that these demonstrations emphasized order and discipline (a fact which might seem surprising and invites comparisons to events in Nazi Germany) in a way similar to large-scale sporting events – irrespective of whether they were part of the left-wing Workers’ Olympics or the nationalistic *Kampfspiele* (chapter 2). In the

following chapter Rossol discusses the Constitution Day Festival in 1929, perhaps the most successful republican mass spectacle of the time, which cleverly claimed the remembrance of the war dead for the republic (p. 70) – a powerful signal towards the political Right who claimed this right solely for themselves.

With chapter 5 Rossol moves on to Nazi Germany. From the outset she makes it clear that the Nazi party rallies did not create “aesthetically original features” (p. 102) – and neither did the *Thingspiel*. Instead this form of open-air mass theatre linked to wider discussions in contemporary performance practice already well established in the 1920s. In chapter 6 Rossol makes clear that by the end of the 1930s the appeal of the mass spectacle had mainly faded away with a consolidation of the Nazi regime, and in local festivities the search for new ways of representation had hardly been reflected anyway. These festivities remained surprisingly traditional.

Unfortunately, the reader never quite knows how popular these events were. The supposed “strong link between sports and nationalism” (p. 34) is not clear either and would have benefitted from further explanation. The same holds true for the sudden end of performative experiments in Nazi Germany. Stating the importance of linking German developments to international trends before, it is surprising how little contextualisation Rossol attempts when relating to the “Death of the Spectacle” (title of chapter 6).

Overall, however, this is an exciting study which illustrates fascinating parallels between politically opposed movements in the use of spectacles and symbolism for political means. Rossol manages to establish a through line in terms of how spectacles were deployed; a through line, too, which successfully

questions established notions of “clear” divisions in contemporary German history.