

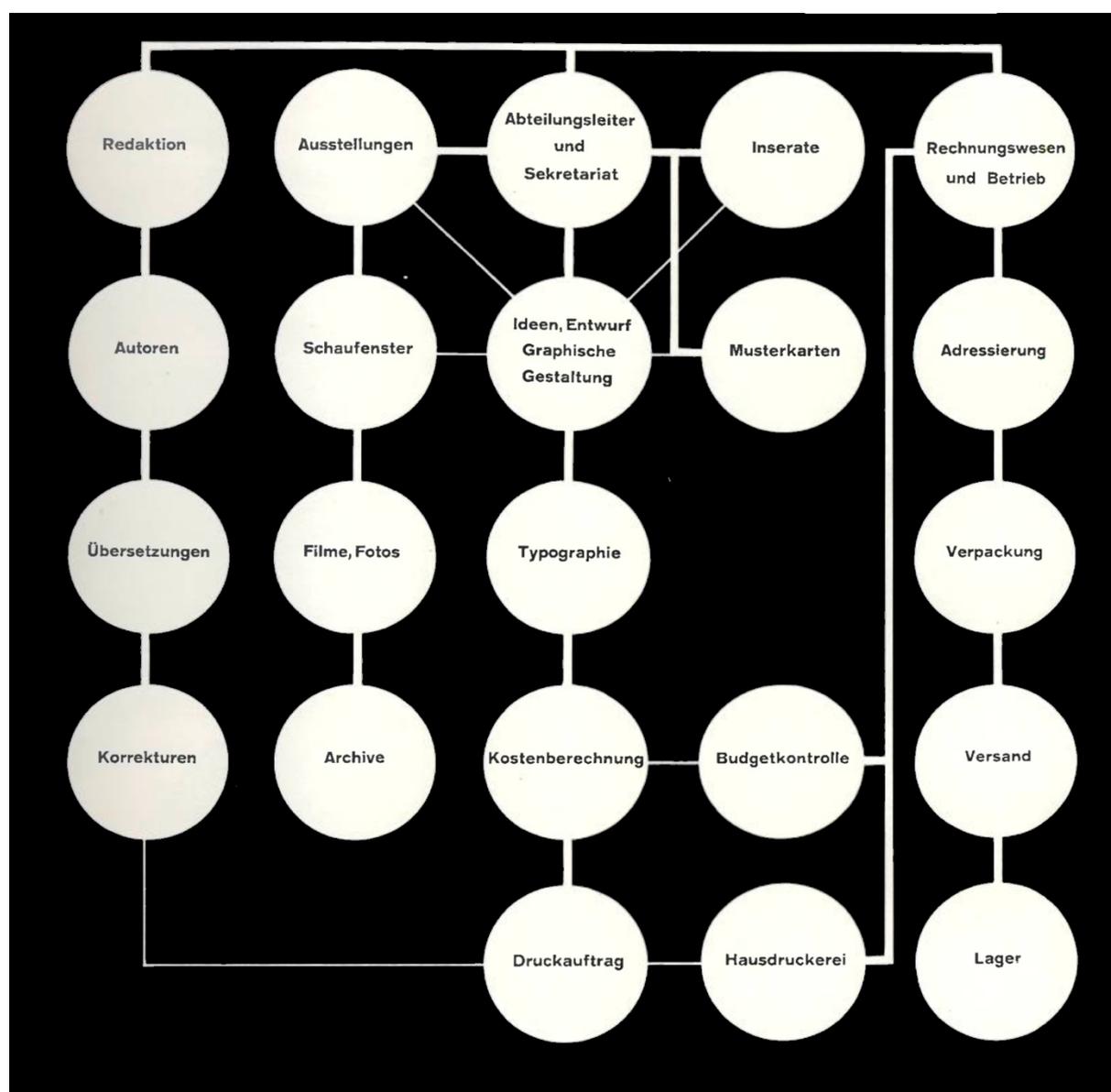
Call for Papers

Promotional Practices and Swiss Companies in the 20th Century

Conference hosted by Gabrielle Duboux and Arthur Michelet

University of Lausanne
26 September 2025

Keynote speaker : Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel (Sciences Po, Paris)



Schematic representation of the services and work functions of Geigy's propaganda department, 1954, illustration taken from A.C., « Was tut die Propaganda? », *Werkzeitung Geigy*, 1955, no 11/12, p. 267. © Firmen Archiv Novartis

Motivation

Swiss companies maintained a presence in public and private spaces throughout the 20th century. Their promotional or publicity practices, which we understand as synonyms, encompassed activities using various tools and methods, which spread and supported companies' products, values and image to wide or targeted audiences. Propaganda, advertising, marketing, public relations, communication and even lobbying were all terms and categories used at different times, by different players, sometimes as synonyms, sometimes to refer to distinct practices and materialities. Nevertheless, they all served to promote or improve businesses' publicity. They contributed to their growth and participated in their global commercial and political strategies. In that regard, this conference aims to explore promotional practices of companies and multinationals operating in Switzerland in the 20th century.

Since the early 2000s, corporate publicity has been covered by a variety of approaches in several disciplines (media history, political history, media sociology, marketing history, etc.). However, the topic remained largely uncharted by Swiss historiography, except for content analysis of specific campaigns. By contrast, we wish to address the functions and organisation of corporate publicity within Swiss businesses. This conference examines the structures and evolution of promotion departments within companies in various sectors (pharmaceuticals, banks, food, tourism, etc.) or interest groups (such as business associations). It seeks to highlight their global strategies, infrastructures and day-to-day practices. The goal is to map out the players involved in promotion and their roles, whether it consisted of partnerships with commissioned companies (PR agencies, graphic design studios, film production companies, etc.), networks formed within employers' associations or ties with media institutions (press, radio, television). The focus is on both internal factors, such as company organisation and restructuring, and external factors, including available technological processes and economic, political or cultural frameworks. In this perspective, it seeks to understand in what ways Swiss companies adapted, modified or discontinued their publicity policies. Researchers are encouraged to integrate analysis of the financial and accounting aspects of publicity departments, and to examine interactions between media, technologies and strategies, as well as the content and medium of campaigns.

Practical information

Keynote speaker	Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel (Sciences Po, Paris)
Working languages	French and English (speakers are invited to have slides in the other language)
Location	The conference will be held at the University of Lausanne. If speakers' home institutions cannot cover travel and accommodation costs, partial or full support may be available depending on the number of requests. Please submit an explicit request for this funding.

Submission procedure and important dates

5 March 2025	Abstracts (max. 500 words) should be submitted in Word or PDF files, together with a selective bibliography and a short biography. Abstracts should be sent to arthur.michelet@unil.ch
Late March 2025	Notification of acceptance after a selection process
Early September 2025	Publication of the conference program
26 September 2025	Conference at the University of Lausanne, followed by <i>apéritif</i>

Selective bibliography

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