

PLASTICS AND DICTATORSHIP IN THE GERMAN  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC:  
TOWARD AN ECONOMIC, CONSUMER, DESIGN, AND  
CULTURAL HISTORY

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In choosing to write a dissertation that viewed aspects of East Germany through the prism of a material, plastic, I was consciously choosing a material for its “interstitiality.”<sup>1</sup> Everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and worthless, a model of self-negation, I thought that perhaps plastics could serve as the connecting tissue of the “anatomy” of the East German dictatorship, touching everything and thus constructive to an interdisciplinary interpretation of East Germany. “Everywhere and nowhere,” however, is not a friendly concept to archivists, librarians, and museum directors, or for that matter interview subjects. I was often told by archivists that there simply was not anything on the subject in the archives and that I would have to find a different topic; or I was told by former East Germans that there was so much East German plastic—“*Plaste, das hat es überall in der DDR gegeben, das war ja kein Thema*”—that I would have to find a different topic. I hoped however that such source confusion might be a clue that plastics were important. The story of sources in this case is an introduction to the wider stakes of a dissertation on East German plastics.

In the very recent field of East German history, a considerable debate has developed that has been characterized somewhat simplistically as one between historians who practice or write top-down history and those who write bottom-up history. The selection of sources, of course, has a great deal to do with this debate.<sup>2</sup> The histories of the SED, the major ministries, and the Stasi, for example, are shaped by the records kept by those organizations. Equally, the histories of ordinary people, workers in a particular factory for instance, are shaped by the surviving complaint letters of unhappy consumers. The stakes of the debate are no less than the meaning of the Cold War, because top-down histories usually interpret communist East Germany as primarily top-down oppression, while so-called bottom-up or *alltagsgeschichtliche* histories emphasize the normality of life. For most East Germans, life went on under slightly changed circumstances: People still fell in love, got married, had children who had

birthday parties, and so on.<sup>3</sup> In other words, was life in East Germany all that bad? Alternatively, one could see this as the second iteration of the *Normalisierung* and *Alltagsgeschichte* debates concerning the Third Reich—a second *Normalisierung* debate for the second German dictatorship. It comes down to a legitimacy debate, or as some would prefer, a stability debate.

The reason for an entire dissertation on plastics has to do with the relationship of sources to this debate. In my view the bottom of society is connected seamlessly with the top, but finding a way to connect them is difficult because the sources lend themselves often only to pure *Alltagsgeschichte* or *Parteiengeschichte*. Plastics were a material that pervaded everyday life in the GDR, that in many ways defined life in the GDR, but that also held significance at the highest levels of party and government in East Germany. Moreover, in and of themselves, in the aesthetic meaning that they imparted to their surroundings, they not only represented but actually *were* a historical phenomenon. I term this phenomenon “centripetality,” or confluence: a growing together out of economic, political, and pragmatic necessity of the values of the commonplace and the ideological initiatives of the Party and the government. This centripetality is my answer to the legitimacy debate, because it posits an *Aufhebung* of sorts—the creation of a third form that is neither the “*Eigensinn*” of the *Nischengesellschaft* nor the *Herrschaft* of the *Diktatur*.<sup>4</sup> Plastics are a window to, as well as a piece of, this process of *Aufhebung*. By looking top-first at the different angles, we can better understand the injection of meaning into an object and the way in which a material object subsumes, in our understanding and in history, these different influences.

The ideology of Stalinism proved terribly unsuited for the postwar world. This ideology relegated the needs of consumers to dead last on the priority list, demanding sacrifice in all areas of life in the interest of building heavy industry based only on primary and secondary production. Clothes, toys, combs, laundry baskets, and cars were all considered by the SED to be wants, not needs. In 1953, as the West German economic miracle was in full swing and the screw was being put to East Germans ever harder, East Germans rose up, demanding more attention to consumption and then more democracy and freedom to travel.<sup>5</sup> The SED under Walter Ulbricht realized that the two were connected: If people were deprived of the nice things (nylons, cars, decent food) that they saw in the West, they would end up demanding not just nice things but political change as well. To hold on to political power was therefore a question of improving material conditions, which, as many scholars from Ina Merkel to Katherine Pence have documented, led to the forced creation of a kind of socialist consumerism that really took off after 1958.<sup>6</sup> The problem for the SED was that East Germany was a Soviet satellite

with few natural resources and was thus cut off from many of the materials it needed, either through embargo or because non-COMECON countries demanded hard currency for raw materials, such as cotton from Egypt, cork from Portugal, oil from Iraq, or lumber from Sweden.<sup>7</sup>

How could a country like East Germany then replicate even a part of the Western consumer society its citizens viewed with envy? The answer was one that had presented itself to autarkic and dictatorial German governments in the past, which was to synthesize the goods that were only available from abroad. From the Kaiserreich to the Third Reich, from BASF to Benzine to Buna, the GDR had inherited the so-called Chemical Triangle near Halle, and as of 1958, the GDR had the world's seventh largest plastics industry.<sup>8</sup> In 1958, the Party called a chemistry conference to announce a grandiose "Chemistry Program" that would lead to improvements in industry, especially in consumer products.<sup>9</sup> Great increases were seen for plastics, especially the newer thermoplastics like polyethylene, polystyrene, polyamide, and polypropylene.<sup>10</sup> The building of a new pipeline straight from the Soviet oil fields that Hitler once coveted—the "Friendship Pipeline"—was announced by the regime as part of a "Soviet Union Special Program." In fact, the Chemistry Program unfolded in an era of official and popular enthusiasm regarding the ability of socialist science to engineer the perfect utopian society, catalyzed by the success of the Soviet space and atomic programs.<sup>11</sup>

The big problem facing the government was to convince the population that the fact that many GDR goods were made out of plastic was not a sign of inferiority vis-à-vis the West, but a sign of superiority.<sup>12</sup> To this end, numerous sources throughout society, from special plastics stores such as *Chemie im Heim* on the Stalinallee just south of Alexanderplatz, to women's home decorating magazines such as *Kultur im Heim* and *Für Dich* to youth magazines such as *Jugend und Technik* sought to explain the practical benefits of plastics not only to the consumers but also in terms of the overall "people's economy."<sup>13</sup> East German TV shows like *Prisma* extolled the virtues of the miracle material plastic. A 1970 *Prisma* show entitled "The Plastics are Coming" sought to convince viewers that plastics were the wave of the future, not only for themselves, the consumers, but also for the new, technologically sophisticated *Volkswirtschaft*. "One even speaks of a corresponding 'plastic age' as similar to the historical stone and bronze ages," reported the narrator over panned shots of a plastic camera workshop at the VEB Pentacom factory.<sup>14</sup> Magazines explained in careful detail how plastic was made, and explained the pragmatic advantages of plastic in everyday life, especially for women.<sup>15</sup> Laminated tabletops and presswood shelving units called *Schrankwände* were easier to clean, polyester clothes needed no ironing,

polyethylene laundry baskets were lighter, plastic cups and plates never broke.<sup>16</sup> Plastic consumer goods enabled one of the great pastimes of East German life—camping, a vital outlet for East Germans who were not allowed to travel. Plastics provided camping utensils, beach balls, portable radios, sandals, and soft-boiled egg holders. A 1960 issue of the beloved comic book *Mosaik* depicted a scene, entitled “Summer Joy Through Plastics,” featuring frolicking East German campers (clearly identifiable by their Trabant parked nearby) using a palette of various plastic products, each one marked with a star.<sup>17</sup>

Most of all, however, the aesthetic design of plastic goods mattered and came about as a result of the rising influence of a group of designers who traced their heritage to the veritable inventors of modernism, the Bauhaus school. Led by Martin Kelm, a student of *Bauhäusler* Mart Stam, these designers rose from being practically banned under the Stalinist regime of anti-modernist aesthetics to leading a very powerful office in the government by the beginning of the 1970s, the Office of Industrial Design (*Amt für industrielle Gestaltung*).<sup>18</sup> This office had control over the design of many products made in the GDR, including most of the plastic products, because it was within the very powerful German Office for Measurements and Goods Testing (*Deutsches Amt für Messwesen und Warenprüfung*).<sup>19</sup> Because of this group of designers, such as Kelm, Horst Michel, Günter Reißmann, Hans Merz, Werner Laux, etc.—most of whom were involved with the College for Art and Design at the Burg-Giebichenstein in Halle—plastics came to symbolize the modern, practical, and valuable rather than the cheap, kitschy, and disposable.<sup>20</sup>

Also important is the *way* in which modernist designers like Kelm and Reißmann came to have such power—this helps decode the aesthetic meaning that plastics carried in the everyday world of the GDR. The regime had been against modernism, it favored historicism in product design, and thus was against the use of plastic because of its modern aesthetic. During the initial phase of the GDR, architecture and product design were dominated by an official Stalinist aesthetic. According to Kurt Liebknecht, the head of the main architectural body of the GDR, the *Deutsche Bauakademie* (DBA), this meant that the products of socialist industry and construction should reflect the cultural heritage of Germany, imitating styles such as baroque, rococo, Chippendale, Gründerzeit, and others.<sup>21</sup> “National in form, socialist in content” was the official Party slogan for how to produce goods as well as places. The corollary to using traditional aesthetics and building materials was that modernism was unacceptable. At the Third Party Congress of the SED in 1950, a so-called “formalism debate” ended with the denunciation of the Bauhaus legacy and the SED officially declaring that modernism, or “formalism,” was “alien to the people” (*volksfremd*) and even “hostile to the

people" (*volksfeindlich*), and that the Bauhaus style was international, cosmopolitan, and a weapon of imperialism.<sup>22</sup> The Stalinallee project was the culmination of this kind of aesthetic, not only in its monumentality, but also in its choice of building materials. The marble, stone, and wood used on the exteriors and interiors of the Stalinallee were meant to have an impressive effect on visitors from East and West Germany and recalled impressive cultural overtones, but they were not cheap, and certainly they were not in any way practically suited for mass reproduction.<sup>23</sup>

After the events of June 1953, and after Khrushchev's rise to power a year later and his exhortation in 1956 to build "better, cheaper, and faster," the Stalinist aesthetic and its proponents were forced to give ground to a number of forces both from the outside but especially from below.<sup>24</sup> The housing shortage that had existed since the end of the war remained particularly acute in East Germany, as did the general lack of consumer goods. The SED now realized it needed to quickly begin producing both housing and consumer goods in large quantities. The pressure that this economic and political situation put on politicians meant that they had to lift the official ban on modernist design. "Modern" design was born of the desire to unify form and function, and the goods produced by modern designers could more easily be mass-produced, whereas traditional or historicist goods such as Chippendale furniture could not be mass-produced, at least not with the technology available to the GDR at the time. Economic necessity and political pressure thus combined to force the SED to accept modern design in its economic program. In one instance, in a debate about the future of furniture design at the DBA, some designers clung to the notion that mass production did not preclude the abandonment of historicist aesthetics, claiming that in Western countries renaissance and neo-classical styles were mass-reproduced. Nevertheless the tide inside the DBA had changed, and most designers and architects now realized that for the GDR to begin the mass production of furniture and consumer goods it would have to forgo imitative historicism in favor of functionalist modernism.<sup>25</sup>

Outside the DBA, ordinary East Germans exerted pressure on the Party to abandon its anti-formalist stance and adopt their version of practical functionalism in design. There are numerous occasions in which the SED had to back off its anti-Bauhaus line because letters to newspapers and the Party from ordinary East Germans demanded pragmatic, modern styles, not outdated, impractical products, and many of these letters demanded modern, sleek, hi-tech, and eminently practical products made from plastic. In 1962, a set of sleek, cylindrical vases designed by Hubert Petras of the Burg School for Art and Design in Halle, an ally of Kelm and Reißmann and others, was denounced as "formalistic" by the official Party organ, *Neues Deutschland*. In response, the Party had to

register a tide of angry letters sent in by ordinary East Germans defending the vases and functionalist modernism as “exactly what they wanted and needed.”<sup>26</sup> By 1958, Liebknecht was out of power and Gerhard Kosel, former *Bauhäusler*, was in charge of the DBA, which was helping to produce new block-style housing projects such as the “P2,” which were functionalist, modern solutions to the housing problem. These mass-produced housing units required plastics such as PVC flooring and polyurethane and other plastic construction materials, but more importantly the speed at which they were produced demanded an equally speedy production of consumer goods that could only be achieved with plastic, not real wood or real tile.

Most important, however, is that these modernist designers gained control of the aesthetic discourse in the GDR, and imparted their design philosophies to the myriad plastic products that came to be mass-produced in the GDR. Rather than using plastics to produce a cheap, kitschy imitative historicism, they used plastics under the aegis of the unity of form and function, only using the plastic that fit the functional needs of the product, rather than using plastics in an attempt to cut overhead and increase profits. It was largely because of this that plastics came to be seen in the GDR by the majority of the population as a quality material and a sign of technological progress, not a cheap imitation. This could only have happened with the confluence of a pre-existing desire among the population for pragmatic and modern design and mass-produced consumer goods; the pre-existence of the Bauhaus tradition that had an answer to the population’s demands when the SED did not; and the co-existence of a mass push to chemicals and plastics as a response to a number of factors, mentioned above.

I started my dissertation research with the idea that I would find a government that attempted to gain the support of its citizenry through synthesizing a world of socialist consumption. What I found instead was that the creation of plastics, their aesthetic meaning in everyday life, was a product of centripetal forces drawing from a demand for modern pragmatism from below, the pressure of economic necessity exerted from above, and the pre-existence of certain inherited conditions, such as the Bauhaus and the Chemical Triangle. It became clear to me that a distinctly East German mainstream culture came into existence in which plastics played an integral role, and it was not created simply by the “*Herrschaft*” or “*Erziehung*” of a dominant force from above, nor purely in spite of or in defiance of the regime, but rather as a confluence. Thus, plastics everywhere, polyester clothes everywhere, PVC flooring everywhere—but this was not simply taken as another in a long string of insults by the East German populace. Instead one finds a general acceptance and even pride

in the clever use of plastics to make socialism work even when resources were tight.

To end with the question of sources: Because so much of what constitutes a mainstream culture is resistance to *Erziehung* and *Herrschaft*, it is no surprise that archival sources, and some archivists, might not be entirely accommodating to a project on plastics in everyday life. Equally so, it is very much the combination of the needs of *Herrschaft* that illuminate the meaning of everyday things. Thus, a former East German citizen—like the many whom I interviewed regarding their memories of plastic things—who only recalled the omnipresence of plastics in everyday life in the GDR but had gone through the archives, might not understand the relevance of a dissertation on plastics, as many did not. The meaning of plastics as a constituent of the mainstream culture of East Germany subsumes and supersedes both of these positions, and so my ultimate contention is therefore that the reason for describing the centripetal nature of this culture is that it was something viable under its own power, with its own gravity, a product of the population and of the SED and of the larger historical context but *not* the same as them, with the power to pull top and bottom along with it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the members of the GHI's Fritz Stern Prize Committee, Kees Gispén, Doris Bergen, and Edward Ross Dickinson, for granting me this honor. I would also like to thank Christof Mauch, Gerald Feldman, David Lazar, and Richard Wetzell of the GHI, and of course Dr. Stern himself. Most of all my thanks go to those without whose help my dissertation would not have come to fruition: Karin Goihl of the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies, Konrad Jarausch of the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Andreas Ludwig of the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR Eisenhüttenstadt, and most of all, my dissertation advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Rudy Koshar.

<sup>2</sup> Corey Ross's recent *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London, 2002) is an excellent discussion of this problem that avoids falling into the top-bottom trap.

<sup>3</sup> There are numerous works that might roughly fall into this category, scattered and somewhat discontinuous as they are. Among those that stand out the most is the work of Alf Luedtke, including Alf Luedtke and Peter Becker, eds., *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte: Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin, 1997) and Alf Luedtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton, NJ, 1995). Alf Luedtke's "Alltagsgeschichte—ein Bericht von unterwegs," *Historische Anthropologie* 11–2: 278–295 is also helpful. Andreas Ludwig's work as the head of the Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR in Eisenhüttenstadt is also highly valuable to this viewpoint; see Andreas Ludwig, ed., *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn: Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR* (Berlin, 1999), published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name at the Dokumentationszentrum. The most synthetic and ambitious large work of *Alltagsgeschichte* in the GDR is Dorotee Wierling's recent *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin, 2002). Also excellent are slice-of-life studies such as Judd Stitzziel's *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics*

and *Consumer Culture in East Germany* (New York, 2005) and Rebecca Menzel's *Jeans in der DDR: Vom tieferen Sinn einer Freizeithose* (Berlin, 2004). On the other side, there are numerous accounts of the party and the state, and especially of the Stasi. See for example Wolfgang Weber, *DDR—Vierzig Jahre Stalinismus* (Essen, 1993) and Harold Hurwitz, *Die Stalinisierung der SED: Zum Verlust von Freiräumen und sozialdemokratischer Identität in den Vorständen 1946–1949* (Opladen, 1997). Jeffrey Kopstein's *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945–1989* (Chapel Hill, 1997) stands out, as do Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr, eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart, 1994) and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Legitimation eines neuen Staates: Parteiarbeiter an der historischen Front: Geschichtswissenschaft in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961* (Berlin, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> The idea of a history of the middle in regards to the debates over micro- and macrohistory in GDR historiography, similar to this idea of a third form, has been proposed already by Thomas Lindenberger, one of the foremost cultural historians of the GDR. He has called for a "theory of middle breadth" that encompasses a number of social and cultural praxes and institutions. See Thomas Lindenberger, "Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung," in Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur* (Cologne, 1999), 18. Jacques Revel has developed a similar phrase, "jeux d'échelles," to describe a similar idea of a "history of the middle." See Revel, *Jeux d'échelles: la micro-analyse à l'expérience / textes rassemblés et présentés par Jacques Revel* (Paris, 1996) and *Histories: French Reconstructions of the Past* (New York, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> An excellent study of the complex relationship between the SED, East German consumers, and 1953 (as well as other events in the first two decades of East Germany's existence) is Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005). In addition, there are numerous publications that have documented the June 17, 1953 uprising. Among the most comprehensive are Manfred Hagen, *DDR—Juni '53* (Stuttgart, 1992); Volker Koop, *Der Juni 1953: Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin, 2003); Hubertus Knabe, *17. Juni 1953: Ein deutscher Aufstand* (Berlin, 2003); and Christian F. Ostermann, ed., *Uprising in East Germany 1953: The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval Behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Ina Merkel's work has come to define the field of East German consumer history, beginning with her Projektleitung of Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, ed., *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne, 1996), and including most of all her *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> See Ralf Ahrens, *Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe?* (Cologne, 2000) for a good overview of the difficulties of the COMECON system.

<sup>8</sup> An excellent overview of the use of synthetics in the Chemical Triangle is Rainer Karlsch and Ray Stokes, *The Chemistry Must Be Right* (Halle/Saale and Leipzig, 2001). For more depth on the history of the Chemical Triangle, see John Joseph Beer, *The Emergence of the German Dye Industry* (New York, 1981); Gottfried Plumpe, *Die I.G. Farbenindustrie AG Wirtschaft, Technik und Politik 1904 bis 1945* (Berlin, 1990); Fritz Welsch, *Geschichte der chemischen Industrie* (Berlin, 1981); Anthony Travis and Carsten Reinhardt, *Heinrich Caro and the Creation of the Modern Chemical Industry* (Boston, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> There are not many works on the Chemistry Program in East Germany, and even fewer of these are in English. The most comprehensive work, by the most distinguished expert on the Chemistry Program, Rainer Karlsch of Berlin, is "Das Chemieprogramm der DDR von 1958: Hintergründe, Ziele, Resultate" (Berlin, 1990). It is unfortunately an unpublished manuscript. The best English language source I have found is Raymond Stokes, *Constructing Socialism: Technology and Change in East Germany, 1945–1990* (Baltimore, 2000). A concise version of Stokes's chapter on the Chemistry Program is Raymond Stokes, "Autarky, Ideology and Technological Lag: The Case of the East German Chemical Industry 1945–1964," *Central European History* 28 (1995): 29–45.

<sup>10</sup> Numerous archival sources attest to this. See for example Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld (BArchBL) DY30 IV/2/603/69–78, "Chemieindustrie und Chemieprogramm der DDR, Berichte u. Information 1958–1962," 48; see also Walter Ulbricht, "Chemie gibt Brot-Wohlstand-Schönheit," in ZK der SED, *Chemie gibt Brot, Wohlstand, Schönheit*.

<sup>11</sup> Stefan Wolle describes this nicely in “Chemie gibt Brot, Wohlstand und Schönheit: Das Chemieprogramm der DDR—ein mißglückter Laborversuch,” in *Künstliche Versuchung: Nylon-Perlon-Dederon*, ed. Eva Rommerskirchen (Cologne, 1999), 116.

<sup>12</sup> Stokes, *Constructing Socialism*, 49. See also Peter Kirchberg, *Plaste, Blech und Planwirtschaft: Die Geschichte des Automobilbaus in der DDR* (Berlin, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> See *Neues Deutschland*, 7 October 1959 and *Die Berliner Zeitung*, 7 October 1959 for the announcement of the opening of *Chemie im Heim* that lays out the mission of the store. Among many examples of *Jugend und Technik*'s extolling the possibilities of plastics for creating a futuristic socialist utopia, see: “Ein Blick in die Zukunft,” *Jugend und Technik*, no. 9 (1969): 782; “Blühende Städte im Polargebiet,” *Jugend und Technik*, no. 2 (1962): 14–15; “Städte von Morgen und Übermorgen,” *Jugend und Technik*, no. 10 (1966): 986.

<sup>14</sup> BarchDH DE 3 132 Vorlage 1.9.1970, “Die Plaste Kommen,” 137, 139.

<sup>15</sup> Among the numerous examples: “Mit dem Plast auf du und du,” *Guter Rat*, no. 2 (1966): 18; “Haushalts-Lexikon: Plast,” *Kultur im Heim*, no. 3 (1968); “Formschön, Zweckmäßig, Farbenfroh: Plastartikel für den Haushalt,” *Kultur im Heim*, no. 3 (1966): 26; or *Kultur im Heim*, no. 4 (1961)), with the entire issue devoted to plastics.

<sup>16</sup> See for example the entry on plastics in Irene Uhlmann, ed., *Die Frau* (Leipzig, 1964), 328.

<sup>17</sup> “Sommerfreude durch Plaste,” *Mosaik*, no. 40 (1960), back cover.

<sup>18</sup> An excellent source in English on the Bauhaus in the GDR is Paul Betts, “The Bauhaus in the German Democratic Republic—Between Formalism and Pragmatism,” in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend (Cologne, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> An excellent description of the rise of modern design in the GDR is Günther Höhne, *Penti, Erika und Bebo Sher: Klassiker des DDR-Designs* (Berlin, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> The history of the Burg-Giebichenstein school is fascinating. The two best sources are *75 Jahre Burg Giebichenstein 1915–1990: Beiträge zur Geschichte*, ed. Renate Lückner-Bien (Halle, 1990) and *Burg Giebichenstein: Die halle'sche Kunstschule von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Halle, 1993). Two central texts written by designers in the GDR describe this attitude toward plastics quite well: Heinz Hirdina, *Gestalten für die Serie: Design in der DDR 1949–1985* (Dresden, 1988), and Horst Redeker, *Chemie bringt Schönheit* (Berlin, 1959).

<sup>21</sup> Hirdina, *Gestalten*, 47

<sup>22</sup> Hirdina, *Gestalten*, 43.

<sup>23</sup> Joachim Palutzki, *Architektur in der DDR* (Berlin, 2000), 116.

<sup>24</sup> Petra Gruner, “P2 macht das Rennen: Wohnungsbau als sozio-kulturelles Programm,” in *Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt, Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR*, in conjunction with Andreas Ludwig and Mario Stumpfe, eds., *Tempolinsen und P2: Alltagskultur der DDR* (Berlin, 1996), 89.

<sup>25</sup> BarchBL-SAPMO DH2 VI/61/12, “Konferenz über Fragen der Gestaltung von Typensatz- und komplettierungsfähiger Einzelmöbel,” 415.

<sup>26</sup> The criticism of Petras' cylinders was made by Manfred Hagen in the Party organ *Neues Deutschland*. See Manfred Hagen, “Hinter dem Leben zurück,” *Neues Deutschland*, 4 October 1962. The guest books of the conference were overwhelmed with support for Petras, with comments such as, “I saw the exhibit of industrial design and liked it. The article from Mr. Hagen is... too subjectively colored. He does not take into consideration enough the requirements of industrial form under socialist conditions.” See Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfeld (Barch-BL) DR 1 (Ministerium für Kultur), “V. Deutsche Kunstausstellung: Vorbereitung, Durchführung” 81, “Bemerkungen zu den Gastbüchern.”