Ersatzstoffe und Neue Werkstoffe. Metalle, Technik und Forschungspolitik in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert

By Günther Luxbacher. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020. Pp. 477. Cloth €70.00. ISBN 978-3515127233.

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A possible pitfall in a book about the history of construction and manufacturing materials—especially metals—and materials science in Germany is that it might dwell exclusively on details of interest only to specialists. And there is a potential pitfall in a book published in the official historical series sponsored by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinshaft, DFG), in that it might focus exclusively on funded research projects and their outcomes. Günther Luxbacher's excellent history of metals and materials science in twentieth-century Germany manages to avoid both. Luxbacher provides a detailed study of developments over time that engages with two major interpretations from the history of technology in Germany, and he explores not only funded research but also applications, usefully bridging themes of relevance to the history of science and technology, industrial and business history, and general political history.

Luxbacher situates his story within two significant and overarching interpretations of German technological development in the twentieth century. The first is Ulrich Wengenroth's thesis that, for most of the century, German scientists and engineers operated within a "cage" (Käfig) that restricted their focus to the development of substitute materials. The second is Joachim Radkau's highlighting of the primacy of parsimony (Sparsamkeit) in German product design. Each more or less explicitly postulates a German special path (Sonderweg) in relation to the use of materials, materials science, and product design and development. Luxbacher decisively and convincingly rejects this notion, which, of course, requires him to venture beyond Germany to comparisons with developments in England (the term clearly should be Britain) and the United States. Here, he argues that the dominant interpretations are not correct. He admits that Germany did indeed go down a special path in this area, but the German path was remarkable more for its *lack* of planning and development with regard to substitute and strategic materials, compared to the Anglo-Saxon countries through 1932. He furthermore notes that, although the concept of Ersatz was first used in relation to substitute materials in Germany in the nineteenth century, it was not the primary driver in materials development and applications except in wartime. Indeed, already in the 1920s, engineers, designers, and manufacturers were talking about "new" rather than "substitute" (13–14) materials, an important distinction. Luxbacher makes the point, too, that Germany's continued fascination with plastics (not his main focus, but again an indication of the breadth of his research) after the Second World War, especially in the Federal Republic, involved a design aesthetic not of substitution but rather of embrace of new possibilities for design enabled by the new materials.

The German Democratic Republic was, of course, a different story, although here, again, Luxbacher is keen to ensure that important distinctions are made. East German designers pursued substitute materials such as Duroplast, which was used to make the bodies of Trabant automobiles, not because they wanted to, but because they were forced to, by virtue of lack of deposits of most metals domestically and shortages of foreign exchange. Thus, the apparent continuity of the pursuit of autarky from the National Socialist period—when domestic self-sufficiency was embraced as a precondition of war preparation—in fact involved a major break.

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It is understandable, although somewhat disappointing given the subtitle's reference to the twentieth century, that the bulk of the book focuses on the period through 1945 and becomes very thin indeed in regard to the period after the 1960s. Luxbacher provides useful comments and analysis about continuity and change in the FRG and the GDR, but these are much less in-depth than the material covered to that point. Did development really stop at some point well before the end of the century? What happened after reunification to mindsets about the design and development of materials that were established in the GDR? How did they change? The book contains a tantalizing hint about new and important trends affecting materials deployment and product design in a section on "the latest paradigm shift", which is guided by the principle of "the environment as a finite resource" (414–415), but the entire discussion is all of two pages. Similarly, there could have been much more discussion throughout the book (although it is mentioned from time to time) about the reuse of materials in design and manufacturing, in other words, what we could now call recycling.

All in all, however, this is a fine book. It is deeply and carefully researched and exhaustive in its treatment. At the same time, the author keeps his eye closely on the big picture, situating the German story of industrial materials and materials science in a broad context, not just in terms of historiography of technology but also in terms of other literatures and comparisons with developments in other countries.

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At Wit's End: The Deadly Discourse on the Jewish Joke

By Louis Kaplan. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020. Pp. 312. Paper $30.00. ISBN 978-0823287567.

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In this insightful book, Louis Kaplan shows how important it is to take seriously what societies think about humour. He studies what he aptly calls a discourse of "dejokification" (13), namely German-language authors from the early twentieth century to the 1960s, who defined the notion of "Jewish wit" as a trope signalling the broader state of Jewish–Gentile relations. Devoting each chapter to one author but bringing in other voices, Kaplan traces, on the one hand, heated debates among Jewish intellectuals, some of whom feared that Jewish jokes about supposed group characteristics might slip into self-accusation or otherwise play into the hands of antisemites. On the other hand, the book analyses exactly this misuse of Jewish self-irony by those who intentionally misread it as supposedly truthful Jewish self-allegation.

Kaplan demonstrates how self-evident the seemingly innocuous trope of "Jewish wit" has become since the early twentieth century, after German culture established already in the nineteenth century an imagined dichotomy between "German humour" and "Jewish wit" (16–17), insinuating a difference in identity. Authors with diametrically opposed views drew on this essentialising binary for conflicting purposes. The Jewish antisemite Arthur Trebitsch, an early Nazi sympathizer in Vienna, turned the dichotomy into a hierarchy in 1919, framing Jewish irony as proof of Jewish inferiority compared to an allegedly superior "Aryan" one. The historical sociologist Erich Kahler understood Jews and Germans in an equally essentialising manner as different tribes but hoped for a long time that their