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 mind-sets 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.

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.

Martina Kessel

Bielefeld University

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

combined intellect and education would save the day. Forced into exile in 1933, he argued that the impossibility of understanding each other's humour signalled the total breakdown of relations.

A different paradox characterized the work of the visual culture historian Eduard Fuchs. This avid collector of caricatures defined Jewish wit as a minority tactic to defuse hostility. But as a convinced neo-Marxist, he saw class conflicts instead of racializing practices at the root of antisemitic caricatures, asserting that they would disappear with capitalism instead of realizing their affective power. Alfred Wiener, a high-ranking representative of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, in Kaplan's eyes went too far in the other direction by fearing that any self-ironical joke might produce prejudice in otherwise unprejudiced readers. Kaplan traces how the Central Association accused the Jewish-German comedians Kurt Robitschek and Kurt Morgan of distortion in the mid-1920s because they told jokes about immoral or shifty Jews, while the two artists pleaded for free speech. Kaplan criticizes Wiener as a censor-mongering "watchman" (96) who missed out on any comic ambivalence in a drive for self-censorship. Historically, though, the conflict sharply illuminated how the pervasive antisemitism of Weimar society turned freedom of speech in a democratic system into a double bind for Jewish Germans, which they could only counter by not censoring themselves but could not solve because the majority society kept tightening it.

The chapter on Siegfried Kadner demonstrates that, indeed, it made no difference for National Socialists how Jewish Germans themselves defined their jokes. In his 1936 book *Race and Humour* (2nd ed. 1939), Kadner distorted Jewish self-irony into allegedly true statements of Jews about themselves. Introducing the chapter with telling quotes about how laughter in Nazi Germany was understood to bolster feelings of non-Jewish superiority, Kaplan might have explored in greater depth how such mockery systematically served to undercut democratic argument, instead of only mentioning that Kadner never gave any arguments to justify his misrepresentation of Jewish jokes.

The analogous post-Holocaust desire to avoid argument and deny responsibility fuelled the hugely favourable West German reception of Salcia Landmann's collection *Der Jüdische Witz*, first published in 1960. Even the more thoughtful non-Jewish voices that Kaplan quotes welcomed the book as comic relief, permitting them to sidestep feelings of awkwardness after persecution and genocide. To allow Jewish wit back into German culture provided a double-edged restitution by making Jewish jokes "good again" and inviting feelings of having done enough reparation. The book explores the acrimonious debate among Jewish intellectuals, some of whom feared that the earlier misrepresentations had not disappeared. While Landmann defined her publication as a mourning tribute to a cultural practice that, in her eyes, also had been murdered in the Shoah, Friedrich Torberg condemned her as only catering to the ideas average non-Jewish Germans had about Jews. It would have been fascinating to learn even more about the different ways non-Jewish Germans appropriated the book, to avoid responsibility for the Holocaust but also to shift attention away from the cultural violence their own joking had been during Nazism.

Overall, while this point could have been expanded, the analysis offers many other insights into a topic that reveals how undemocratic narratives are woven. By unpacking essentialising appropriations that denied the inherently unstable character of identity projections, Kaplan impressively shows how the toxic misuse of Jewish wit as a key concept reflected the desire to determine Jewish identity. A short afterword about the Jewish joke in Trump's America reinforces the message that until today the fate of any (ethnic) self-irony depends not only on the self-reflectiveness among the jokers but also on the (un)willingness of societies to allow for truly democratic argument, including self-irony that makes exclusionary self-aggrandizement implode.