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National College of Art and Design
Faculty of Design
Department of Industrial Design

Made in GDR:

Product Design in the German Democratic Republic (1949 – 1990)

By

Katharina Pfützner

Submitted to the
Faculty of History of Art & Design and Complementary Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Design
1998

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Introduction

In November 1989, the German Democratic Republic, or the GDR as the East Germans with their fondness of acronyms called the socialist part of Germany, opened its national borders to West Germany. A deluge of small East German cars, the *Trabants*, poured onto West German *Autobahnen*, as suddenly released East Germans set out to explore the other German country on their doorstep. Perplexed West Germans shook their heads at the *Trabant*. It was slow, technically outdated, environmentally hazardous and known to be ridiculously expensive when compared to East German income figures as well as unavailable to the ordinary citizen before a waiting period of up to 15 years. For most West Germans, the *Trabant* was the first item of GDR everyday product culture they came in contact with, and it at once became a symbol of how successful and advanced the western system was, and how unsuccessful and backward the eastern one. Without second thoughts it was dismissed along with the rest of the 41-year-old GDR product culture, which at first glance did not seem to contribute anything to society. The equation seemed so simple and obvious, that nobody even once paused to question the social contribution of 200km/h cars with built-in £2,000 stereos, sunroofs and electric windows, or the trend towards having two or even three cars per household.



Fig.1 The Trabant P 601 (in production from 1964 to 1991)

The immediate rejection and ridicule of the GDR product culture and the Western lack of self-criticism are contrasted with *Ostalgia*, a nostalgia for everything from the *Osten*, or east, and the revival in east Germany of a GDR specific identity, which finds physical expression in the form of books, exhibitions and even card games featuring representatives of the vanishing GDR product culture. The cultural phenomenon of *Ostalgia* inevitably throws up questions about the alleged superiority of the western system, just as the cult around GDR products fuels an interest in the origin and nature of the appeal they have today, almost a decade after the wheels of socialist production in the GDR came to a halt.



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GDR design was measured against west German design and thereupon found to be inferior, without the realisation that it was rooted in such extremely different circumstances, that it cannot be measured by west German standards, because the different economic and social structure of the country gave rise to different product requirements, and because design was not seen as a means of increasing a product's sales value. The context within which GDR design evolved and existed, was never thought about and taken into consideration. The function of design in the GDR was never investigated, the origins of the frugal product aesthetic were never analysed. The realisation was never made, that GDR design and the GDR product culture are two related but distinct issues, as for various reasons in the GDR they were not a true reflection of each other.

Such an omission is quite remarkable, as through the division of Germany we have been given the unique opportunity to investigate the pure, undiluted effects of one single factor on design in a highly industrialised country; the ideological and associated economic system within which it evolved. Between 1945 and 1990, the two parts of Germany shared a common cultural heritage, a language, a geographical position in the heart of Europe and even a similar level of industrialisation, while the only separating barrier was the difference between the two ideological systems; capitalism in West Germany and socialism in the GDR.

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industrialized while the only socialist state was the German
between the two ideological systems, capitalism in West Germany and
socialism in the GDR.

By taking a closer look it will become apparent, how design is influenced by a centrally planned, but highly industrialised economy, and what effects, positive or negative, constant government interference has on design. It will be revealed how 'green' design is in 'real' socialism, and whether or not the politically controlled environment allows design to reflect processes and changes within society.

Unfortunately, neither GDR design nor the GDR product culture have received much attention from Western design critics since their demise, except for the occasional citation of GDR products as bad examples for their perceived lack of sophistication (see fig.2). Three books, all originally published as literature to accompany three separate exhibitions of GDR products, are notable exceptions. *SED* (Bertsch, 1994) was written for the identically-named exhibition, which opened on 27 August 1989 in the Galerie Habernoll near Frankfurt/Main. *Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld – 41 Jahre DDR Design* [From Bauhaus to Bitterfeld – 41 Years of GDR Design], (Halter, 1991) complimented an exhibition of the same name, which was shown by the *Deutsche Werkbund* from 15 December 1990 to 2 February 1991, also in Frankfurt/Main. *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* [Miracle-Economy: GDR Consumer Culture in the 1960s], (NGBK, 1996) was published in conjunction with the exhibition *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur und Produktdesign in den 60er Jahren* [Miracle-Economy: GDR Consumer Culture and Product

By taking a closer look at well-known, popular, new designs
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and how design is affected by processes and changes within
society.

Consequently, central GDR design and the GDR design of the
past and future design from a socialist design perspective
and will explain the occasional error of GDR design as well as
examples for their perceived lack of sophistication (e.g. 1970s
books, as originally published as literature to accompany the
series of exhibitions of GDR products, the notable exception, 1980)
(Klein, 1984) was written for the first, all-around exhibition which
started on 27 August 1982 in the GDR's Humboldt Hall
Humboldt-Halle, from 1982 to 1984 - 41 years of GDR design
from 1945 to 1984 - 41 years of GDR design (Klein, 1984)
concerned an exhibition of the same name. When was it open?
The exhibition was from 12 November 1980 to 2 February 1981
in the Humboldt-Halle, which was the GDR-Konsumgüter-Expo-
sition (Mittel-Economy, GDR Consumer Culture in the 1980s)
(Klein, 1984) was exhibited in conjunction with the exhibition
Kunstwirtschaft, GDR-Konsumgüter-Exposition in der GDR
Jahres-Mittel-Economy, GDR Consumer Culture and Product

Design in the 1960s] shown in the *Stadtmuseum Berlin* from 17 August 1996 until 12 January 1997.

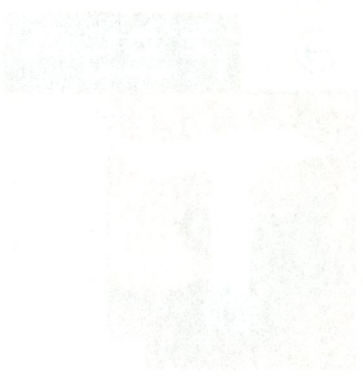


Fig.2 Advertising for subscription to *Design Report* (First Page: Do you find these [GDR] weighing scales attractive? Second Page: Or do you prefer 'Letter Balance' as a reward for subscribing to *Design Report*?), 1997

Bertsch, a West German design critic from Frankfurt/Main wrote the introduction to *SED* in December 1989, in a time when the future of the GDR and its design movement was still uncertain. Having recognised the significance and potential of GDR design in a time, when "...we can observe a shift away from surplus and over-production towards a 'new modesty'" (Bertsch, 1994, p. 37) and when "concern for the environment and new technology are combining to produce a new simplicity" (Bertsch, 1994, p. 37), he enthusiastically prophesises about its future development. Although history has proven him wrong, it is an interesting account of what could have been

Design of the 1900s shown in the table below. It is a very simple design.

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and of what was positive and socially worth holding on to. Although he delivers a comprehensive illustration of the political background to GDR design, which has influenced the first and second chapter of this thesis, his analysis of GDR design and product culture are by no means complete. He does not deal with the role of the product designer in the GDR, nor does he write about the development of GDR design theory. Furthermore his selection of products photographed for the book, is based on the principle 'the stranger the better', and gives therefore no true balanced account of the GDR product culture. He generally lacks the insight, the understanding and the feeling for the subject matter, exhibited by other writers, most notably Hein Köster, Heinz Hirdina and Jörg Petruschkat, who as former GDR designers and historians had first-hand experiences with it.

As if to rectify his omission of GDR designers from his introduction to *SED*, Bertsch interviewed hundreds of former GDR industrial designers for his contribution to the second book *Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld*, a compilation of essays and interviews, written and conducted by both west and east German designers and critics, none of which are in any way comprehensive, but all of which somehow compliment each other to deliver a broad picture of GDR design.

In the same book, Gert Selle's chapter "*Die verlorene Unschuld der Armut – Über das Verschwunden einer Kulturdifferenz*" [The Lost

and of what was positive and negative about product design. The book
 delivers a comprehensive illustration of the product design process.
 While the book is not as interesting as the first and second factors of the
 design, this analysis of GDR design and product culture are of no
 interest at all. He does not deal with the role of the product
 designer in the GDR, nor does he write about the development of GDR
 design theory. Furthermore the selection of product photographs and the
 the book is based on the principle 'the stranger the better', and gives
 a distorted and true balanced account of the GDR product culture. The
 book only takes the weight of the design and the feeling for the
 product, which is often omitted by other writers, most notably Heide Koster.
 The book is written by Jörg Reinhardt, who as former GDR designer
 himself has had first-hand experience with it.

As to rectify his omission of GDR designers from his
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 Reinhardt is also Reinhardt, a collection of essays and interviews, written
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in the same book, Jörg Reinhardt's chapter 'Die deutsche Design-
 Kultur - Über das Verhältnis von Kunst und Design' (The German

Innocence of Poverty – About the Disappearance of a Cultural Difference], (Selle, 1991, pp 54-66) on the lost cultural identity of the former GDR and its effects as well as on *Ostalgia*, is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and consequential analysis. It has therefore greatly influenced the fifth chapter of this thesis. It should be noted that Selle is neither a former East German, nor a designer, he is in fact a professor for didactic and practical-aesthetic education at the University of Oldenburg in western Germany, and as such shows a remarkable understanding of the post-unification climate in east Germany.

Two former East German designers, who contributed to the same book, must also be mentioned; Hein Köster, former chief editor of the East German design magazine *Form+Zweck*, wrote about functionalism in the GDR in his chapter "*Vor-zurück-zur Seite-ran! Oder: Was sollen wir tun?*" [Left-Right-Left-Right! Or: What should we do?], (Köster, 1991, pp 68-73) and Jörg Petruschat, a Berlin design critic, gave an exhaustive account of the Chemistry Programme and the subsequent advent of plastics in "Take me plastics" (Petruschat, 1991, pp 108-114), which provided much of the information for the third chapter of this thesis.

All of the individual contributions are excellently researched and informative essays, however, the book does not constitute an in-depth analysis of GDR design, as each topic is treated separately and

...of the GDR as well as on GDR's...
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Germany

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...in his chapter "Vorzeichen des Sozialismus" (Signs of Socialism)...
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...of the ideological conditions are especially researched and...
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...of GDR design, as each topic is treated separately and...

nothing ties them together to form a bigger picture, in which they are related to each other.

The third book *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (HGBK, 1996) deals with the GDR consumer culture and product design during the 1960s, the most productive era in the existence of the GDR, and is structured similar to the previously-mentioned book *Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld*, i.e. it consists of numerous contributions written by GDR designers, design historians, economists and students of European ethnology at the Humbolt University at Berlin.

In this book, Ina Merkel, a cultural historian from Berlin, wrote an essay called "*Der aufhaltsame Aufbruch in die Konsumgesellschaft*" [The Escapable Advent of the Consumer Society], (Merkel, 1996, pp 8-20) and Andre Steiner, an economic historian also from Berlin, wrote a contribution called "*Zwischen Frustration und Verschwendung. Zu den wirtschaftlichen Determinanten der DDR Konsumkultur*" [Between Frustration and Wastage. About the Economic Determinants of the Consumer Culture of the GDR], (Steiner, 1996, pp 21-36). Both pieces of text give a good illustration of the history of the GDR economy and consumer culture, a familiarity with which has proven to be vital for an understanding of GDR design.

Heinz Hirdina, professor of theory and history of design at the College of Art at Berlin Weißensee, contributed a critical retrospective

nothing that can be taken to form a bigger picture, in which they are related to other things.

The book 'Konsumentenkultur in der DDR' (Consumer Culture in the GDR) (1996) deals with the GDR consumer culture and product design during the 1960s, the most productive era in the existence of the GDR, and is structured similar to the previously mentioned book. Vol. 1 consists of numerous essays written by GDR design historians, economists and students of European ethnology at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

In the book 'Der Konsum', a cultural historian from Berlin, wrote an essay 'Der Konsum als Aufbruch in die Konsumgesellschaft' (The Consumer: A View of the Consumer Society) (Merkel, 1996, pp. 8-20) and Armin Böhner, an economic historian also from Berlin, wrote a contribution titled 'Zwischen Fixierung und Verschiebung: Zu den wirtschaftlichen Determinanten der DDR Konsumkultur' (Between Fixation and Wavering: About the Economic Determinants of the Consumer Culture of the GDR) (Gäster, 1996, pp. 21-35). Both pieces of text give a good illustration of the history of the GDR economy and consumer culture, a familiarity with which has proved to be vital for an understanding of GDR design.

Heinz Hilde, professor of theory and history of design at the College of Art at Berlin Weisensee, contributed a critical retrospective

analysis of GDR design with his essay "*Gegenstand und Utopie*" [Object and Utopia], (Hirdina, 1996, pp 48-61), which is remarkably broad and thought-provoking.

Finally, the essay "*Schmerzliche Ankunft in der Moderne. Industriedesign auf der V. Deutschen Kunstausstellung*" [Painful Arrival of Modernity. Industrial Design at the Fifth German Exhibition of Art], (Köster, 1996, pp 96-103) delivers a very informative account of political interference in action. It describes how product designers were publicly criticised and renounced for exhibiting products perceived to be too modern by members of the ruling party, including the then-president Walter Ulbricht, at the Fifth Exhibition of Art at Dresden in 1962.

Horst Oehlke, a prominent GDR design critic and professor at the College of Art and Design in Halle, who also wrote an essay on GDR design history for the previously mentioned book *Vom Bauhaus bis Bitterfeld*, wrote an article called *Formgestaltung* [Form-giving or Industrial Design], (Oehlke, 1987, pp 225-226) for the chapter on industrial design of the book accompanying the Tenth German Art Exhibition of the GDR in Dresden in 1987/1988 (*Ministerium für Kultur der DDR*, 1987). It serves to illustrate the social responsibility of industrial designers in the GDR.

Peter Hans Göpfert in an article called "*Hier ruht die gute Form der DDR*" [Here Rests the Good Form of the GDR], (Göpfert, 1992, pp

88-93), for the magazine *Art*, writes about the Collection of Industrial Design in the GDR, which is managed by the previously mentioned Hein Köster, and describes how much of the identity of the GDR lies in its products, which are the contents of this collection. He also briefly touches on GDR design history. The collection has also been mentioned by Kai-Uwe Scholz in an article about *Ostalgia* called “*Entschwundene Welten*” [Vanished Worlds], (Scholz, 1996, pp38-42) for the design magazine *Design Report*. Unfortunately this article limits itself to a brief description of the physical forms of *Ostalgia*, and to an even briefer reference to GDR design history with a call for more emphasis on the perceived influence of West German design on GDR design.

Two books, which deal with the GDR as a country and are published in the English language, can provide the reader with valuable background knowledge on the state's history and people, its government and economy. Michael Simmons, an experienced British reporter on East Europe wrote *The Unloved Country* (Simmons, 1989) in 1989, just before the GDR opened its national borders to the West. Dan van der Vat, writer and former correspondent in Germany for *The Times*, provides an account of the state of the former country since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the unification in 1990, in his book called *Freedom Was Never Like This* (Vat, 1991), which was published in 1991.

88-92) for the magazine that writes about the Collection of Industrial Design in the GDR. It is managed by the previously mentioned [...] and describes how much of the identity of the GDR lies in [...] and the contents of this collection. He also briefly touches on GDR design history. The collection has also been mentioned in [...] in an article about Ostalgie called 'Einschneidung des Ostes' (translated: 'Cutting the East') (Scholz 1999: pp. 39-42) for the design magazine 'Design Report'. Unfortunately this article limits itself to a short overview of the physical forms of Ostalgie, and to an even shorter overview of GDR design history with a call for more emphasis on the long-term influence of West German design on GDR design.

Two books, which deal with the GDR as a country and are published in the German language, can provide the reader with valuable background knowledge on the state's history and people, its government and economy. Michael Simonson, an experienced British reporter in East Europe, wrote 'The Untold Country' (Simonson 1989) in 1989 just before the GDR opened its national borders to the West. Dan van der Vat, writer and former correspondent in Germany for 'The Times', provides an account of the state of the former country since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the publication in 1990 in his book 'called 'Rückblick: Was bleibt? (This Year 1991)' which was published in 1991.

The list of published text on GDR design is much shorter than one might expect, as GDR products do have a story to tell and GDR design may have some of the answers to ethical questions arising within the current design-theoretical debate relating to the throw-away society, mass-consumerism and surplus production. It needs to be investigated critically, not ignored. To understand GDR design, to evaluate it and to assess what it might have to teach Western designers, one has to come to understand the conditions under which it flourished.

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Chapter 1 – State Control of Design

In the German Democratic Republic, a centrally governed state, where absolutely everything was run and controlled by the government in Berlin, state control in its various forms was the biggest influence on product design. Not only did it have an indirect effect, such as through the prevailing centrally planned economic system, which will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter, it also took a direct interest in art and design theory and 'prescribed' trends and styles which were to be followed by artists, craftsmen, architects and designers.

Such active interference was particularly strong in the 1950s, when what is now called product design and was then merely called *Formgebung*, or form giving, began to establish itself after a period of recovery from the war and emergency production to supply the population with badly needed necessities. State-run educational institutions were set up rapidly to train the next generation of designers; the College of Applied Arts at Berlin Weißensee formed its Department for Industrial Design in 1953 and Burg Giebichenstein at Halle, formerly a craft school, became the home of the College of Industrial Design in 1958. *Form+Zweck* [Form and Purpose] was first published as a yearbook in 1956 and later in 1964 became the most influential design journal, the East German equivalent of the West German design journal *Form*.

In the German Democratic Republic, a centrally governed state where absolute state planning was run and controlled by the government in Berlin, state control in the various forms was the biggest influence on product design. The state could have an indirect effect, such as through the prevailing political and economic system, which will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. It also took a direct interest in and design theory and in the design results and styles which were to be followed by artists, architects and designers.

Such a direct influence was particularly strong in the 1950s when what is now called product design and was then merely called 'Formgebung' (shaping) began to establish itself after a period of recovery from the war and emergency production to supply the population with badly needed necessities. State-run vocational institutions were charged with the task of training the next generation of designers. The College of Applied Arts at Berlin-Weißensee formed as Department for Design in 1953 and Burg Giebichenstein at Halle for many years a school became the home of the College of Industrial Design (Hochschule für Gestaltung) which was first published as a yearbook in 1956 and later in 1964 became the most influential design journal, the East German equivalent of the West German design journal 'Form'.

In those early days it was attempted to define a German 'socialist' style, a product identity, which differentiated GDR products from West German products and, more importantly, reflected the new social system and life style. This was the setting for the first big political design debate, the *Formalism* debate, and subsequent rejection of the Bauhaus. The rejection of the Bauhaus style and ideology until its rehabilitation in 1964 has often been misunderstood:

That a left-wing institution, which was closed in Weimar in 1924 by conservative politicians and in Dessau in 1932 by the Nazis, was rehabilitated this late in a self-proclaimed 'Workers-and-Farmers-State', deserves a special footnote in the ideological history of the GDR, which in fact is full of such political contradictions (Hotze, 1995, p. 69).

The cause for distrust was not the political past of the Bauhaus, but rather the question of the political tolerability of its former members. A lot of former Bauhaus architects and designers, such as Gropius, Moholy-Nagy and Mies van der Rohe had emigrated to the United States – the declared political enemy, the country with the most pronounced symptoms of imperialism. It was generally felt that they had betrayed their socialist ideals. Indeed the social aspect of their work had become over-powered by technical aspects; all that remained was a Bauhaus style, an aesthetic, because there was no room for social experiments in the cut-throat capitalist environment of the States, which became all the more evident, when several attempts failed to revive the Bauhaus. Mies van der Rohe's buildings became monuments to modern capitalism, and as such in the GDR caused

In those early days it was attempted to define a German socialist style, a broad concept, which differentiated GDR products from West German products and, more importantly, reflected the new social system and its values. This was the setting for the first big political design debate, the 'GDR style' debate, and subsequent rejection of the Bauhaus. The rejection of the Bauhaus style and ideology until its re-evaluation in 1964 has often been misunderstood.

That a left-wing institution, which was closed in Weimar in 1924 by conservative politicians and in Dessau in 1932 by the Nazis, was rehabilitated in 1945 as a self-proclaimed 'Workers and Farmers School' is a special footnote in the ideological history of the GDR, which in fact is full of such political contradictions. (Kasper, 1985, p. 68)

The cause for closure was not the political past of the Bauhaus but rather the question of the political loyalty of its former members. A lot of former Bauhaus architects and designers, such as Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, had emigrated to the United States - the political enemy of the country with the most pronounced anti-communist orientation. It was generally felt that they had betrayed their political beliefs. Indeed the social aspect of their work had not been overlooked by technical aspects. All that remained was a capitalist style, an aesthetic, because there was no room for social expression in the capitalist capitalist environment of the GDR, which was not at the time evident, when several attempts failed to revive the Bauhaus. Mies van der Rohe's buildings became monuments to modern capitalism, and as such in the GDR caused

much of the scepticism and aversion towards modernism, which because of its international tendencies, in the context of the political atmosphere of the beginning cold war, was interpreted as an imperialist art form.

One has to ask oneself: Where are the architects today, who once stood for the Bauhaus, like Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Martin Wagner and others? They are in America and seem to be pretty happy there, and we can thus conclude that they have made a conscious decision in favour of American imperialism (Köster, 1991, p. 72).

Two further reasons for the rejection of the Bauhaus, were firstly its intellectual experimental attitude, which was too independent for the liking of a government as obsessed with control as the government of the GDR was, and secondly its functional minimalist style, which was considered unsuitable for the ruling class of the 'workers-and-farmers-state', who after a day of work would want to come home to a cosy and ornamented house. The unique opportunity to educate the buying public in matters of taste, and gradually improving cultural standards in an economy, where everything that came on the market was sold, was never even considered, and the Bauhaus and all it stood for in terms of styles and ideas was criticised as 'reactionary' and worker-unfriendly. In a strong contrast to the minimalist International Style, which by then had a foothold everywhere else in the world, ornamental motifs on absolutely everything from china sets to cars (see fig.3) were strongly encouraged in the GDR, and designers were recommended to explore the national cultural heritage for motifs and stylistic references. Such

'force-feeding' of a style was very controversial among GDR designers, who were not less conscious of the enormous Bauhaus legacy and of current international stylistic developments than their West German colleagues. How disheartening it must have been, to face the choice of either adopting the so-called *Neuer Deutscher Stil* [New German Style], demanded by the ruling party, the *SED*, or designing products, which would never have been produced!

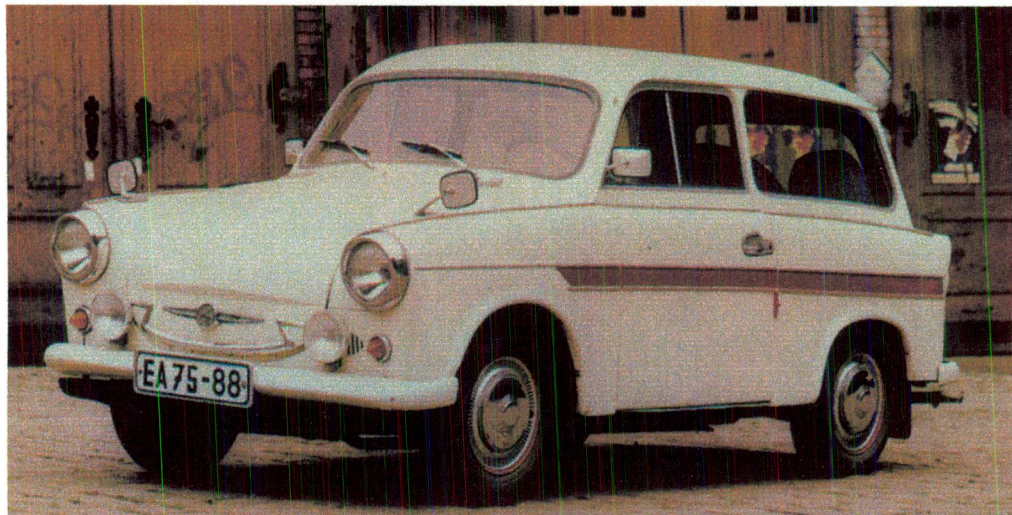


Fig.3 The Trabant P 50 (produced since 1958), here with decorative stripes along its sides according to the New German Style (photographed in 1991)

Although the official line softened considerably during the 1960s mainly for export reasons, subsequently giving the industrial design profession more self-control, the rejection of formalism until its last public onslaught at the Fifth German Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1962 and the denial of the Bauhaus until its rehabilitation in 1964, had disastrous consequences for the development of industrial design in the GDR.

The first noticeable effect was the emigration of a lot of prominent designers, who felt disillusioned and discriminated against. Mart Stam, former Bauhaus designer and probably the most significant figure on the GDR design scene at the time, was a convinced communist and had consciously chosen to live in the new socialist part of Germany. He had helped to set up various schools of art and design, but when he saw his functionalist designs rejected as "decadent bourgeois degeneracy" (Scholz, 1996, pp 38), he left the GDR for Holland in 1953. Not everybody left, however; other artists and designers of world acclaim, who had decided to stay despite similar treatment at the hands of the ruling party in the early years of the GDR's existence, did not regret doing so, as the situation improved immensely in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The artist and convinced communist John Heartfield, for example, who is well-known for his political photomontages with which he attempted to warn German proletarians of fascism and Hitler's true intentions, found himself

...accused of cosmopolitan formalism because, in giving socialism a sensual countenance by means of avant-garde art, he contravened the know-it-all state ordered doctrine of art, according to which the artist could make himself comprehensible to the man on the street only in the form of nineteenth-century genre painting (Pachnicke, 1992, p. 10).

when he returned to the GDR from exile in Britain in 1949. In 1957, when political changes in the USSR following Stalin's death in 1953 led to admissions by the ruling socialist party of the GDR of mistakes also

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with respect to discrimination against artists such as Heartfield, he was eventually politically recognised and honoured. That same year saw the first public exhibition of his works in the GDR and his election as a full-time member of the German Academy of Arts in Berlin.

The second effect was the fact that GDR designers began to lose touch with international trends. This effect was intensified even more by the erection of the Wall in 1961, as described in the following chapter, but initially the categorical rejection of everything from the West and especially from America led to a self-exclusion from international design developments, as the world's leading industrial designers, i.e. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Raymond Loewy were now settled in America. How could a state allow its product designers to borrow from the West, when it even considered the wearing of jeans objectionable, because they were seen as symbols of America, until somebody clever realised its saving grace – the fact that they were workmen's trousers – which allowed GDR citizens to also wear denims, although made in the GDR.

Finally, the third effect more immediately concerned the products themselves. Since both the state and the industry initially failed to understand the importance of product aesthetics, and the product designers themselves were not yet integrated in industry and caught up in theoretical debates about what socialist design ought to look like, most product development was done by engineers. This

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mainly concerned technical consumer products, which were going into production for the first time, such as hair dryers, toasters and kitchen mixers. These products (see fig.4) clearly bore the signatures of engineers, who with a functional-minimalist approach but without any feeling for aesthetics, developed products, which became the foundation for the austere GDR style and established the reputation of GDR products, as objects which lack styling, but promise quality and durability because of their mechanical simplicity. According to Georg C. Bertsch it has been speculated that two thirds of all products at the time were developed by engineers and workers rather than by product designers (Bertsch, 1994, p. 23).

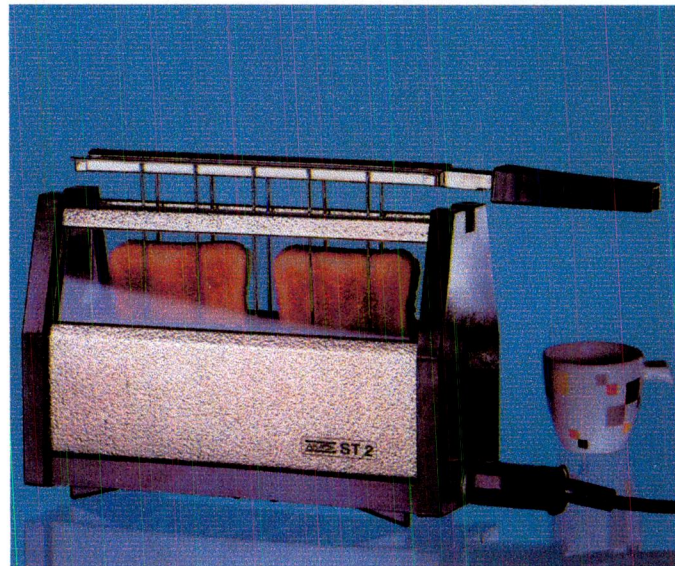


Fig.4 Toaster ST 2 by AKA – a product designed solely by engineers (photographed in 1989)

The entire controversy as to how formalism should be handled, collapsed in the early 1960s, a period of political stabilisation and rapid economic development, resulting in improving living standards.

Exports now became a big concern for economic planners and it was realised that in order to sell in the Western world, GDR products needed to be of a high standard, technically as well as aesthetically. The idea of a national style was abandoned in favour of hard currency. Product designers, by now mostly directly employed by factories, were suddenly expected to forget the disputes of the previous decade or so and design products, which would sell on an international market. At the same time, however, any type of exchange with Western colleagues was very much discouraged and international trade shows for orientation were completely taboo for the ordinary non-party citizen since the erection of the Wall in 1961. In attempting to conform with what the state asked them to do, industrial designers in the GDR had to deal with a patient suffering from what Bertsch very aptly called "ideologically and economically determined schizophrenia" (Bertsch, 1994, p. 22).

Maybe the sudden ease of tension between state and designers, which led to the rehabilitation of the Bauhaus in 1964, was not so erratic after all, if one considers two more factors, which undoubtedly contributed to it. The first factor is the launching of the 'Chemistry Programme' by the then-president Walter Ulbricht in 1958. The subsequent advent of plastics as a new material and the new production processes associated with it, had a huge impact on the product culture of the GDR, which is why it will be dealt with in more depth in another chapter. Here it should only be said that the

Exports now became a big concern for economic planners and it was realised that in order to sell in the Western world, GDR products needed to be of a high standard technically as well as aesthetically. The idea of a national style was abandoned in favour of hard currency. Product designers, by now mostly directly employed by factories, were suddenly aware of the need to forget the dictates of the previous decade or so and design products which would sell on an international market. At the same time, however, any type of exchange with Western colleagues was strictly forbidden and international trade shows for designers were completely taboo for the ordinary non-party official. In 1961, in attempting to conform with the demand of the West in 1961, in attempting to conform with what the West had from to do, industrial designers in the GDR had to deal with a design situation from what Bartsch very aptly called "technological and ideologically determined aestheticism" (Bartsch 1994, p. 25).

Although the authors stress the tension between state and designers, it is also the rehabilitation of the Bauhaus in 1984, was not an end in itself. If one considers two more factors, which undoubtedly contributed to it. The first factor is the launching of the German Democratic Republic by the then president Walter Ulbricht in 1955. The second factor is the launch of plastic as a new material and the new material was associated with it. This had a huge impact on the design of the GDR, which is why it will be dealt with in more depth in another chapter. Here it should only be said that the

production processes did not lend themselves to a subsequent application of ornament, nor did plastics have a past or any cultural connotations, to encourage designers to deal through it with national cultural traditions. Plastic was the material of the future.

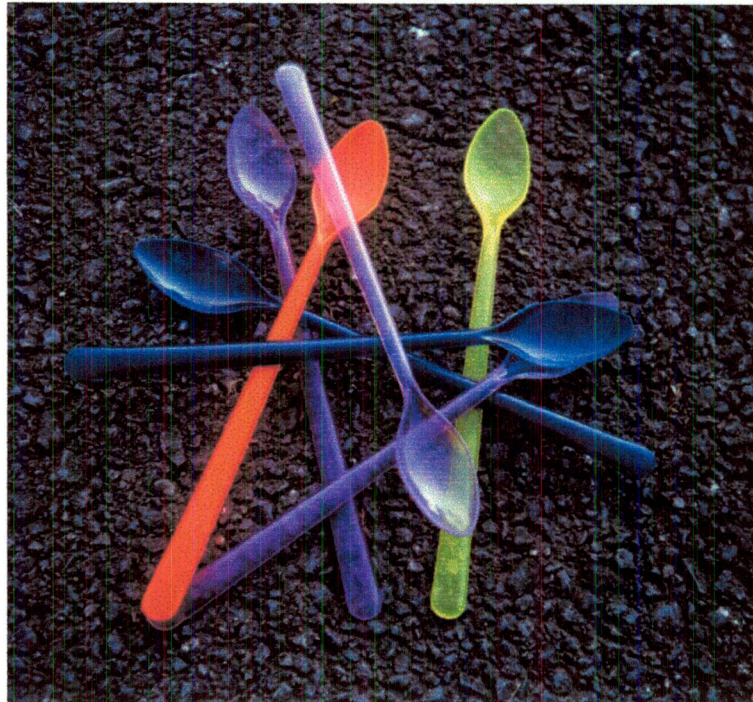


Fig.5 Colourful Plastic Spoons (purchased ca. 1980)

The second factor also has to do with looking into the future and parting with the past. The political period of de-Stalinisation began in 1961. Throughout Eastern Europe a new liberalism filled the air. Mistakes were admitted, more so from the side of the Soviet Union than from the side of the GDR government or the ruling party, who had based so much of their thinking on Stalin. Maybe rehabilitating the Bauhaus ideologically and modernising the Bauhaus building in Dessau in 1964 was their way of admitting fallibility.

Despite the general reduction of actively pursued state control in the later years, it seems the system sometimes suffered a relapse, like for example in 1973, when a plain china set designed by two GDR designers, Margarete Jahny and Erich Müller, almost received an overdose of decorative bands at production level (Göpfert, 1992, p. 93). However, the far more consequential event that year, was the passing of a law, which demanded the dissolution of all employment contracts between designers and industry, by the *Amt für Industrielle Formgestaltung*, the newly found State-Office for Industrial Design headed by Martin Kelm, whose personal ambition made him eager to enforce the state's will. Factories were required to send all work to the *AIF* in Berlin, who would then relegate it to the designers, who were to be direct employees of the *AIF* and received a fixed monthly salary. This move, obvious in its aims to control all design work and to prevent freelancing, was not well received. The GDR designer Heidrun Randel summed up her time working in the Central Design Office for Radio and TV in the late 70s as follows:

...our concepts went, being mutilated on each step of the ladder, from the designer to the team leader, from there on to the department leader, then to the main department leader, and subsequently to the director for research and development or the technical director. He then sent it to the company and its board. From there it went to the *AIF*. It was a ladder the end of which we as designers couldn't see anymore. And then, after a while, a sheet of paper landed back on our desks. And we wondered: 'Was this my design?' (Bertsch, 1991, p. 103).

This arrangement lasted until the beginning of the 1980s, despite its negative effects on both; efficiency, as jobs usually got delayed in the offices, and creativity, as designers adopted a passive and indifferent approach to their work. In those seven years a lot of designers left the country or devoted themselves to other areas of design, such as various crafts. Some others tried to bypass the new regulations by selling their models and concepts to companies as unique items of craft and refusing to take responsibility for 'what they do in industry with it afterwards'. A lot of old connections between designers and industry were severed.

Political ideology continued to affect GDR design in various ways throughout the 1970s and 1980s. There was, for example, the point of view that trends and fashions were tools used by manufacturers in capitalist societies to increase sales and consumption, as stylistically outdated products would be replaced sooner. Subsequently an anti-fashion attitude was adopted, international trends were rejected and products were either given a timeless visual appearance (see fig.6), or they retained the form and style they had obtained in the 1960s. Such moral convictions in conjunction with economic limitations led to a product culture at the time of the German unification, which was partly reminiscent of the 1960s. The exterior of the Trabant 601 (see fig.1), for example, did not change until 1990 since it first came out in 1964.

This movement lasted until the beginning of the 1930s, despite its negative effects on both efficiency and job satisfaction. In the 1930s, as designers adopted a passive and more systematic approach to their work, in those seven years a lot of design was still a curiosity or devoted themselves to other areas of design, such as various crafts. Some others tried to bypass the new requirements by selling their models and concepts to companies as independent work of craft and refusing to take responsibility for what they do in reality with it afterwards. A lot of old connections between designers and industry were severed.

The new ideology continued to affect GDR design in various ways throughout the 1970s and 1980s. There was, for example, the point of view that needs and fashions were tools used by manufacturers to manipulate societies to increase sales and profits. Soon, as stylistically outdated products would be replaced by new ones, an anti-fashion attitude was accepted. In the 1970s, fashions were rejected and products were either given a time- or neutral appearance (see fig. 6), or they retained the form and style, which had obtained in the 1930s. Such moral convictions in design, which with economic limitations led to a product culture at the end of the German unification, which was partly reminiscent of the 1930s. The cultural of the Third Reich (see fig. 7), for example, did not change until 1990 since it first came out in 1934.

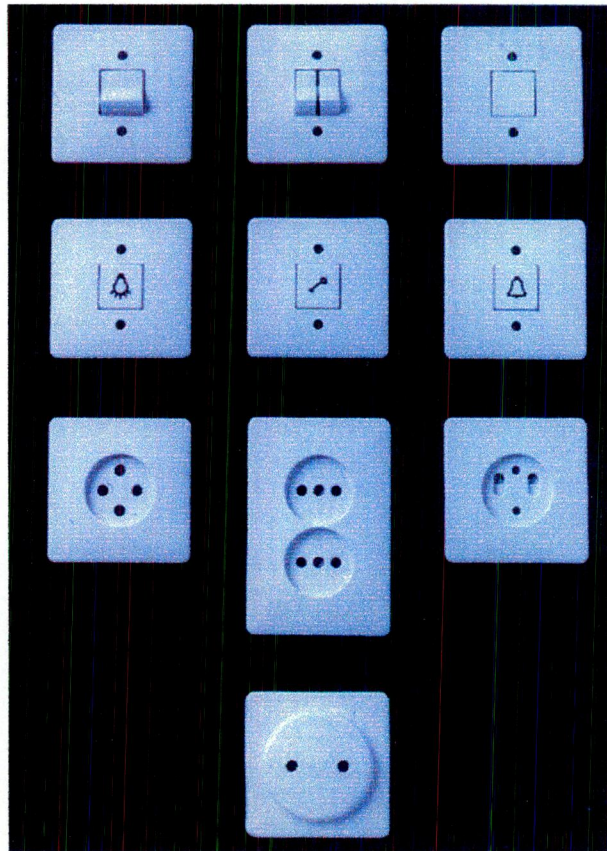


Fig.6 A timeless and omnipresent set of light switches, sockets and doorbells designed by Wolfgang Dyroff in 1966

In the last few years of the existence of the GDR, there were hardly any formulated design doctrines, except for occasional polemic against post-modernism - pluralism was also seen as a threat to total control. Excessive state interference and the attempt to bring creativity completely under state control did nothing for GDR design but damage and inhibit its development.

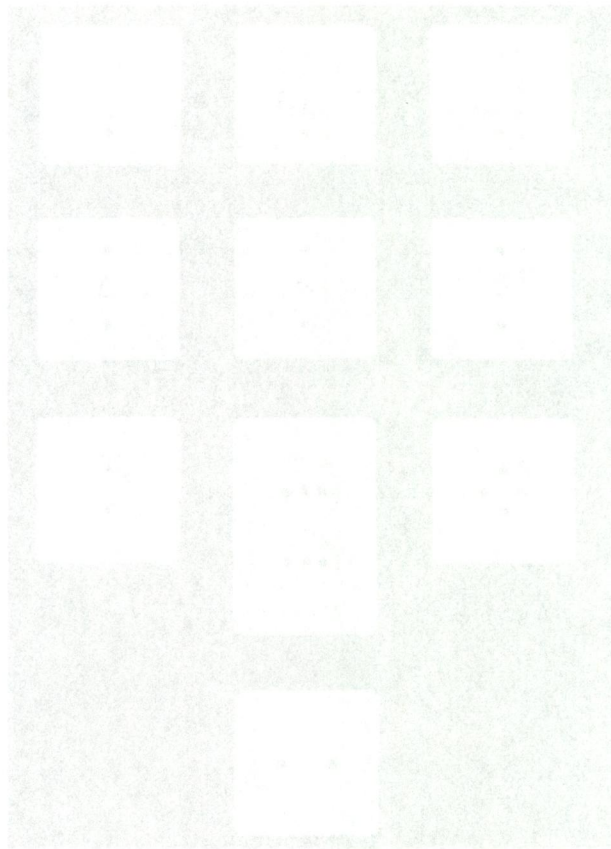


Fig. 3. A 3x3 grid of nine small, square, light-colored tiles or panels, each containing faint, illegible markings or text. The tiles are arranged in a uniform grid pattern.

In the last few years of the existence of the GDR, there were hardly any more state design studios, except for occasional projects against post-modernism - pluralism was also seen as a threat to total control. Creative state interference and the attempt to hang creativity on a leash, which state control did nothing for GDR design but encourage and hinder its development.

Chapter 2 – Design in a Centrally Planned Economy

The economic system of the GDR was based on the fulfilment of plans, which were set out by the central government at regular intervals, rather than on the achievement of equilibrium of economic forces as in capitalism. Such a system gave the state an enormous amount of control over the economy and helped the pursuit of aims such as the achievement of social justice and equality and the abolition of unemployment.

On the other hand, the system was already flawed at the planning stage, as almost no market research was carried out, the results of which could have provided the basis for realistic and successful planning. This led for example to the peculiar situation in the 1960s, during which the amount of roller-skates manufactured in the country greatly outnumbered the amount of children. Additionally, the system was extremely inflexible due to a high level of bureaucracy and the time lapse of several years between two successive planning stages.

By the time of unification in 1990, the economy was struggling badly, yet the economic achievements of the GDR in its forty-one years of existence should not be underestimated. The beginning for the East Germans had been tremendously more difficult than for their neighbours in the west, for various reasons. A new economic system was established, which had not evolved over centuries like post-war

capitalism had, and which, in retrospect can be said to have had many shortcomings, which greatly reduced economic efficiency.

There was also the question of war reparations to the Soviet Union. Up until the beginning of 1954

...hundreds of plants were removed, engineering workshops and mining installations were dismantled, mile after mile of railway lines were ripped up and taken away. Many of the Soviet zone's biggest manufacturers – in chemicals, machine making and shipbuilding, for example – watched as their production was loaded up and exported, for no return at all, to the Soviet Union (Simmons, 1989, p. 83).

And of course there was no Marshall Aid for the 'Soviet Zone'. Yet in 1970 the GDR reached the status of one of the world's top ten industrial nations (Simmons, 1989, p. 140), which was an enormous achievement, when all of the above is being taken into consideration, and has by some been referred to as the second German economic miracle.

Yet despite all these accomplishments, the very nature of a socialist, centrally planned economy has led to the evolution of completely different product requirements for goods destined for the home market, and subsequently to a unique every-day culture. As already explained in the previous chapter, sometimes the development of a product bypassed designers completely. This was mainly due to the fact that factory managers in industry, who had no personal gain from increasing profits, had no interest in design, just as they had no

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the fact that factory managers in industry, who had no personal gain
from increasing profits, had no interest in design, just as they had no

interest in innovation and technological progress and never had to think about the needs and demands of the users. Additionally, due to permanent shortages, the domestic market was never saturated and almost everything could be expected to sell.

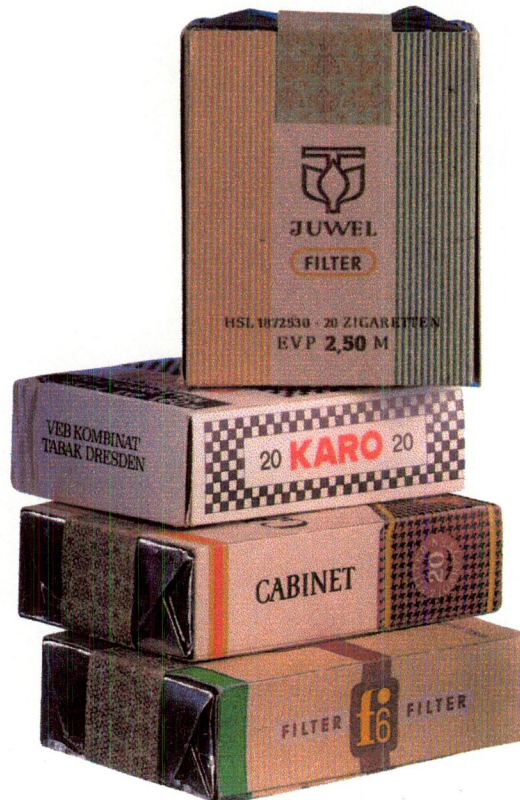


Fig.7 Cigarette Packages (photographed in 1989)

The resulting lack of competition was one of the main distinguishing and - regarding product design - consequential features of the East German domestic market. A product on the GDR market never had to be better, look more attractive or be packaged more appealingly than another (see fig.7), because in order to save unnecessary costs, there usually was no other of its type which it might have been competing against, and even if there was – being

unsuccessful in selling would have had no consequences. The mercantile value of the visual appeal of a product was not realised, because nobody had to think about mercantile values. Such economic conditions resulted in products, which did not look appealing, but to the eyes of the experienced Western visitor, they looked refreshingly unpretentious. Hartmund Grün, a hard-boiled Frankfurt advertising executive, said when visiting an exhibition of GDR design in Frankfurt in 1989: "It seems to me, that the exhibits here possess a totally original vitality, the power of innocence and naivety" (Bertsch, 1994, p. 37).

However, from the 1960s onwards, when industrial designers eventually began to be employed to develop new products, genuine shortcomings of the economic system caused a lot of obstruction in almost all stages of production. Senior managers, for example, were usually chosen for their party membership and not for their entrepreneurial or technical skills. This had the double negative effect of having people in key positions, who may not have been the most competent candidates, and who may have been afraid to report inefficiencies and complain about shortages in fear of losing any little privileges, which their party membership may have provided them with.

Permanent shortages and bottlenecks were also deeply anchored within the system of central planning. It was virtually impossible to realise the planned coincidence of the various stages of

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In 1987, Hartmut Görtz, a hard-boiled Frankfurt advertising
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however, from the 1980s onwards when industrial designers
increasingly began to be employed to develop new products. Despite
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competent candidates, and who may have been afraid to report
mistakes and concerns about shortages in fear of losing any future
privileges which their party membership may have provided them with.

Permanent shortages and bottlenecks were also closely
connected with the system of central planning. It was virtually
impossible to realise the planned coordination of the various stages of

production with distribution and of distribution with consumption. The system was not flexible enough to cope with fluctuating factors, such as consumption. Additionally the target figures published in the plans were unrealistic, because they were badly researched. Shortages of resources were also a chronic problem, especially when they had to be imported. Pride and the wish for economic autonomy were often the cause, but even more often it was the lack of hard currency.

Although some economic circumstances remained unchanged throughout the existence of the GDR, others changed for various reasons, such as specific events within the country or outside influences. The most influential single such event was the erection of the Wall in 1961 under President Walter Ulbricht. In the short run, it led to economic reforms and an economic boom during the 1960s, but in the long run it was the deathblow to the future development and production of competitive capital and consumer goods for the world market. The subsequent government policy of industrial autonomy towards western countries and increased trade with the Comecon countries, of which the GDR was the most technologically advanced, and the new travel restrictions and lack of communication with capitalist countries caused an increasing information deficit. The technological gap grew, diminishing all hopes of finding export markets for certain GDR products such as electronic goods in the West, which would have brought badly needed hard currency. By the time of the unification in 1990, most electronically based companies had to close

production with the intention and or desire to be consistent with the
policy of the government to cope with fluctuating factors such
as the weather. Additionally the larger figures published in the press
were unrealistic because they were badly researched. Shortages of
resources were also a chronic problem, especially when they had to be
imported. Prices and the wish for economic autonomy were often the
cause of a crisis more often a war, the lack of hard currency.

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for GDR products such as electronic goods in the West, which
had to be found badly needed hard currency. By the time of the
first election in 1960, most economically based countries had to close

down, having reached a standard of development about ten years behind west German competitors.



Fig.8 GDR Computer Technology in 1991

On unification, product designers were unfamiliar with the latest stand of technology, both in the area of consumer goods, which they were supposed to design, and in the area of production processes, with the limitations of which they are supposed to be familiar, in order to decide on the optimum way of manufacture. Furthermore in the GDR they had not had the opportunity to use computer technology in the design process. Such technological backwardness made the new beginning in the united Germany very hard.

Yet the increasing backwardness was a slow process and none of it was felt initially. Politically the 1960s were a period of stabilisation. De-Stalinisation was underway and responsible for the omnipresent

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dream of a new beginning. Since the erection of the wall, economic planners could count on a steady workforce and a series of economic reforms were launched, which also adapted the industry for the production of goods for export purposes. The aim was to become the main supplier of plastics products to the Comecon countries and already in 1964 the GDR was described by the Soviet Union as “one of the strongest states in Europe” (Simmons, 1989, p. 102).

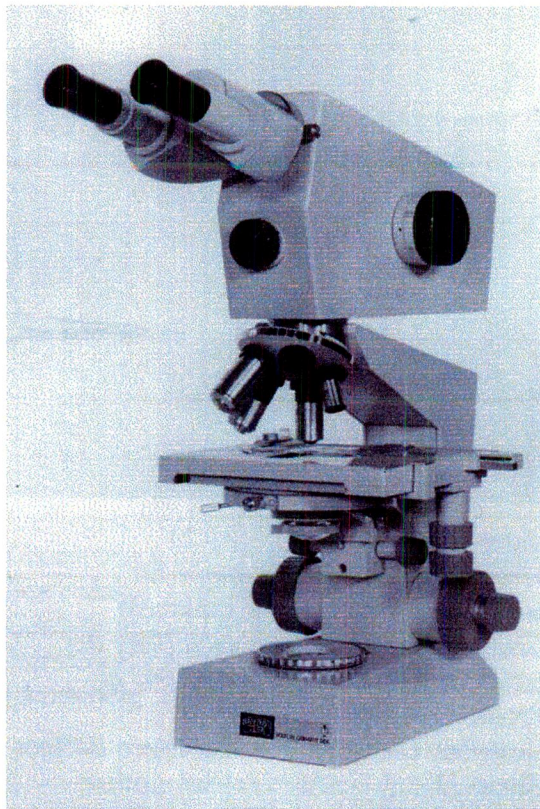


Fig.9 Ergaul Microscope developed and manufactured by VEB Carl Zeiss Jena ca. 1965 – a typical export product

Unfortunately the improvement of the technical and visual quality of products destined solely for export was not accompanied by analogous improvements of products destined for the domestic market.

dream of a new beginning. Since the election of the new economic
 government, the country has been on a steady upward trend and a series of economic
 reforms were launched which also adapted the industry for the
 production of goods for export purposes. The aim was to reduce the
 dependence of plastic products on the domestic market and
 thereby in 1984 the GDP was exceeded by the Soviet Union as one of
 the largest states in Europe (Grunert, 1989, p. 102).



Fig. 2: Typical Moldovan developed and
 manufactured by VPS (Central Bank, 1985 - 86)
 typical export product

Consequently, the improvement of the technical and visual
 quality of products destined solely for export was not accompanied by
 a reduction of products destined for the domestic market.

“Machine tools, laboratory plants, construction vehicles and precision mills flooded onto the export markets, whilst at home streaky plastic pots and radios with faulty knobs were the order of the day” (Bertsch, 1994, p. 27). The user abroad was the only customer, whose needs were respected and taken serious, as exports brought hard currency, needed to pay for imports of scarce raw materials.

Such hypocrisy did not go by unnoticed by the East German consumers, because products destined for the export market were designed by East German designers, produced by East German operatives and seen by East German visitors at occasional exhibitions, such as the German Art Exhibitions, which were held in Dresden every few years. Yet they were never seen on East German shop shelves. GDR citizens began to ask questions, which could not be answered. How does a government explain to its people that the products, which were desired and which resembled the products seen on West German television, were actually in production, but would never be for sale on the domestic market because such sales would not be as lucrative as they would bring no hard currency?

The GDR products, which were exhibited in trade shows, such as the Dresden exhibitions mentioned above or the annual Leipzig Fair, were never part of GDR everyday culture and were conceived and developed for different markets, and therefore under different economic circumstances. Yet they serve to show what GDR designers

and the native industry could have achieved under a different economic system.

The idea of Green Design did not evolve until the 1980s, and in the GDR it was, like most international developments, a few years late. In fact it was so late, it almost cannot be associated with the term GDR design. Nevertheless most GDR products were quite environmentally friendly, because they were made from recycled materials, albeit for economical reasons, not for ecological ones. Factories were also constantly reminded not to use up too many resources, especially energy, and every citizen was urged to use energy and water economically. To school children it was explained that it was important, that they fill up their copy books properly, as trees would have to die for them.

In fact, the sum of contributions towards minimising the wastage of resources made by each individual was enormous. There was an area in every shopping centre, where milk, lemonade and beer bottles, jam jars and other glass containers were brought back to, against the refund of a small deposit, which had been included in the price of the product. Old papers, broken or unbroken glass, metal, wood, rubber, plastic, rags and all sorts of reusable scrap were accepted at *SERO* branches against a small reward per kilogram. *SERO*, which is short for *Sekundär-Rohstoffe* or secondary raw materials, was a state-run enterprise concerned with the gathering of all reusable materials for

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not really intended not to use up too many resources, especially
energy. The energy crisis was a big factor in the energy and water
conservation. To school children it was explained that it was
important to keep their copy books properly, as these would
be used for them.

But the aim of conservation was not to minimize the waste
of resources made by each individual was enormous. There was a
lot of every shopping center, where milk, tomatoes and beer bottles
were taken to other glass containers were brought back to the store for
the use of a small deposit, which had been included in the price of the
product. Old papers, broken or unbroken glass, metal, wood, paper
products and all sorts of reusable items were accepted at 25¢.
In fact, against a small reward the program 25¢, which is the
first step in the history of economy law materials was a step in
the response concerned with the gathering of all reusable materials for

processing and recycling for the industry and for export. All lot of people actually went to the trouble of collecting and returning such used materials, and often school children went from house to house collecting the materials to earn a few *Pfennnige*. At an older age they did the same thing as members of the national youth organisation, donating the money to charity. The amount of rubbish produced by an average GDR household was a fraction of that of a West German household.



Fig.10 Recycled Paper Shopping Bags (photographed in 1989)

Recycled materials were used wherever possible, from books and toilet paper to the body panels of the *Trabant*. Throwaway cans, plastic bags, bin bags and until the last two or three years of the existence of the GDR even cling film did not exist. Lunches were wrapped in recycled wrapping paper; durable fabric shopping bags or

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Fig 10. Recycling Paper Shop in East Germany, 1980s.

Recycled materials were used wherever possible, from paper
 and lower paper to the body panels of the Trabant. This was why cars
 lasted long, the cars and until the last two or three years of the
 existence of the GDR even old film did not exist. Clutches were
 stamped in recycled wrapping paper, a stable fabric shoeing bags, a

string bags were used for carrying shopping home. Even if a West German plastic bag found its way into the hands of an East German, it was normally used repeatedly and after each use it was folded up neatly until it fell apart. It was a world unimaginable to anybody who grew up in the modern capitalist throwaway society. In West Germany, East German produce was usually assumed to be inferior because of its crude packaging, but packaging in the GDR really had no function other than protecting the contents. It never pretended to do anything else.

It would be all too easy, to say that the described recycling culture evolved, because it was encouraged by an environmentally conscious state. Unfortunately it was a coincidence that ecology and economy met so favourably. Had the state really been interested in environmental matters, it would have put economic considerations behind ecological ones and imported the technology unavailable in the GDR to clear up the notorious area around the town of Bitterfeld, previously site of such chemical giants as Buna and Leuna and probably the most thoroughly polluted spot in Europe.

Chapter 3 – The Advent of Plastics

The impact of the Chemistry Programme, which was launched by President Walter Ulbricht in 1958 and led to an increased availability of plastics, on the product culture of the GDR was strong and immediate. Suddenly the range and variety of consumer products available to the people of the GDR had exploded, and almost every single item was so cheap that it could be bought immediately by anyone. It most definitely was a contributing factor to the economic boom and the general contentment during the 1960s.

The new material began to symbolise the advent of a new era. It had all the appropriate qualities; it was new, modern, practical, durable, hygienic and lightweight, and it opened up vast areas for experimenting with new shapes and colours. It was hoped that through the creation of products with new fabulous colours and appealing forms, 'socialist life' would become more interesting and beautiful. They were not disappointed. The industrial designers of the GDR almost threw themselves at the chance to experiment without limitations except their own creativity, to explore the new material and all the new possibilities it offered; and the material itself in turn changed the way designers worked.



Fig.11 Square Plastic Plates and Bowls used in canteens, designed by Albert Krause in 1959 (in production until ca.1987)

Plastics, because of the way they are moulded into products, gave the designer a freedom he had never enjoyed before with any other material. For the first time in history the designer did not decide what path the tool would take; he decided the form of the tool itself. The visual appearance of objects was liberated from references to the process of their manufacture. Especially household items, such as bowls and plates, which with their uniaxial symmetry had always recalled the potter's wheel, were now given an oval or even square shape.

Shapes lost their solitary character, and were related to their space-saving being together in a greater whole, they became square and therefore capable of being lined up in rows space-savily or they were minimised in such a way, that they could be stacked into other forms... (Petruschat, 1991, p. 114).

Not only did product designers examine form-related issues by exploring the advantages of blow moulding and vacuum forming, they also investigated suitable uses of colour. At the time it was felt that the bright and strong colours, which now have become inseparable from the idea of GDR plastic products, reflected best the latest cheerfulness and optimism. The reason, however, that the colour schemes never changed in all those years was that bright primary colours were easier and less expensive to achieve.



Fig.12 Plastic Egg Cups (purchased ca.1980)

It seems that every chapter on GDR design has to have its section on political interference. This one is no exception, although in the following instance the development was influenced rather positively. First of all of course plastics put an end to government-prescribed additive form theories and ornamentalism, as already

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explained earlier on. This did not seem to diminish the government's enthusiasm for the 'Chemistry Programme'. The manufacture of chemical products continued to be strongly supported, especially in the consumer product sector. The assumption lies near, that the GDR government realised the kind of messages the new products with their vibrant colours were spreading in the rest of the world. A small bit of propaganda has never done any harm, and how better demonstrate a new affluence, success and happiness, than through consumer products?

The new plastic products not only reflected the new affluence experienced on all levels of society during those years, but also the transformed status of women in society. The achievement of social equality of men and women was one of the rather positive ambitions of the socialist government, and women in the GDR were a lot more equal to men than women in most other countries. Women were encouraged to go to university and to subsequently get a full-time job. The aim was self-realisation, not just a mere contribution to the family budget. Most women took the opportunity, and after four decades of women doing the same jobs as men, it had become such a normality, that East German women found it difficult to understand, how the average West German woman could be truly happy at home without a job.

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that East German women found it difficult to understand how the

West German women could be truly happy at home without a
job.

However, providing men and women with equal carrier chances did not yet constitute equality. The newly arisen problem was that of the double-burden, which the women had to carry, as men still left most of the housework to them. The government attempted to ease the burden on women, who were effectively doing two jobs, by introducing various alleviating measures. Kindergartens were set up, which looked after children during office hours, *Kinderkrippen* looked after babies and children still too young for kindergarten. Women were usually allowed half a year paid maternity leave after the birth of their first child, one year paid leave after their second child from the 1970s on and, from the early 1980s on, 18 months after their third child. Shopping facilities with suitable opening hours were set up on factory grounds and every woman was allowed an extra day off per month, the so-called *Haushaltstag*, or household day.

It was also attempted to offer a range of practical, time-saving and low-priced household appliances, such as pressure cookers, electric washing machines, vacuum-cleaners and refrigerators, to make work easier and less time-consuming for her, and thousands of little unbreakable, stackable, colourful and lightweight objects, to make life more beautiful. This explains, why most of the new plastic consumer products were household items, such as bread baskets, dishes, cups, egg cups, trays and buckets (see fig.13).

However, providing men and women with equal access to the household was not yet constitutional equality. The family system was still a male-dominated one, which the women had to carry as men still left most of the housework to them. The government attempted to ease the burden on women, who were effectively doing two jobs, by introducing various alleviating measures. Kindergarten was set up which looked after children during office hours. Kindergartens were after babies and children still too young for kindergarten. Women were fully allowed half a year paid maternity leave after the birth of their first child, one year paid leave after their second child from the 1970s on and from the early 1980s on, 18 months after their third child. Shopping facilities with suitable opening hours were set up on factory grounds and every woman was allowed an extra day off per month, the so-called household day, or household day.

It was also attempted to offer a range of practical time-saving and improved household appliances, such as pressure cookers, electric washing machines, vacuum cleaners and refrigerator, to make work easier and less time-consuming for her, and thousands of lightweight, stackable, colorful and lightweight objects to make the more beautiful. This explains why most of the new plastic household products were household items such as dried baskets, dishes, cups, egg cups, trays and buckets (see fig 13).



Fig.13 Brightly-Coloured Plastic Cups (purchased ca.1980)

Two other areas, where plastics found application, were in the manufacture of camping and leisure items (see Fig.14) and catering items. The importance of catering items can also be directly deduced from the new position women held in society. To relieve women of the chore of cooking a big meal everyday for the entire family, massive kitchens were set up all across the country, where one kitchen usually cooked for a number of company, school and kindergarten canteens. A transport system delivered the dinners at lunchtime. For such canteens huge amounts of plastic plates and cups were needed, because they were cheap, stackable and durable (see fig.11).



Fig.14 Plastic Camping Table Ware (purchased ca.1985)

The arrival of plastics and plastic products resulted in a small revolution. It changed the life of the GDR consumer, as well as the working practices of the designers. The plastic products developed in the GDR add another dimension to the term GDR product culture, and contest the current preconceived idea of GDR products as merely having an austere and bland appearance.

Because of their extreme durability and the innate east German resistance to throwing things away, which haven't served their time yet, it can be safely assumed, that even today in most east German households one will find the odd little confident-looking, brightly coloured plastic utensil. Given the political and social developments of the last few years in the united Germany, they will probably remain there for a long time as a symbol for what has been lost.



The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that this is crucial for the company's financial health and for providing transparency to stakeholders. The text then moves on to describe the various methods used to collect and analyze data, highlighting the use of advanced software and statistical techniques. Finally, the document concludes by summarizing the key findings and recommendations for future research.

The second part of the document provides a detailed overview of the company's current operations. It begins with a description of the production process, from raw material acquisition to final product distribution. This is followed by a discussion of the company's marketing strategy, which focuses on building strong relationships with customers and promoting the benefits of its products. The text also touches upon the company's human resources management, including recruitment, training, and employee development initiatives.

The third part of the document explores the company's financial performance over the past year. It presents a series of charts and graphs that illustrate the growth in revenue and profit, as well as the company's ability to manage its costs effectively. The text also discusses the company's investment in research and development, which has led to the development of new products and the improvement of existing ones. Finally, the document provides a forecast for the company's future performance, based on current trends and market conditions.

Chapter 4 – GDR Product Designers

The first school to educate product designers was the College of Applied Arts at Berlin Weißensee, which opened its Department of Industrial Design in 1953, but product designers played no important role in the development of products until the state initiative to integrate design and designers with industry in the years from 1957 until 1960. From then on East German product designers worked very closely with the industries up until 1973, when the *AIF* intervened to reorganise the design profession, as already described in the first chapter.

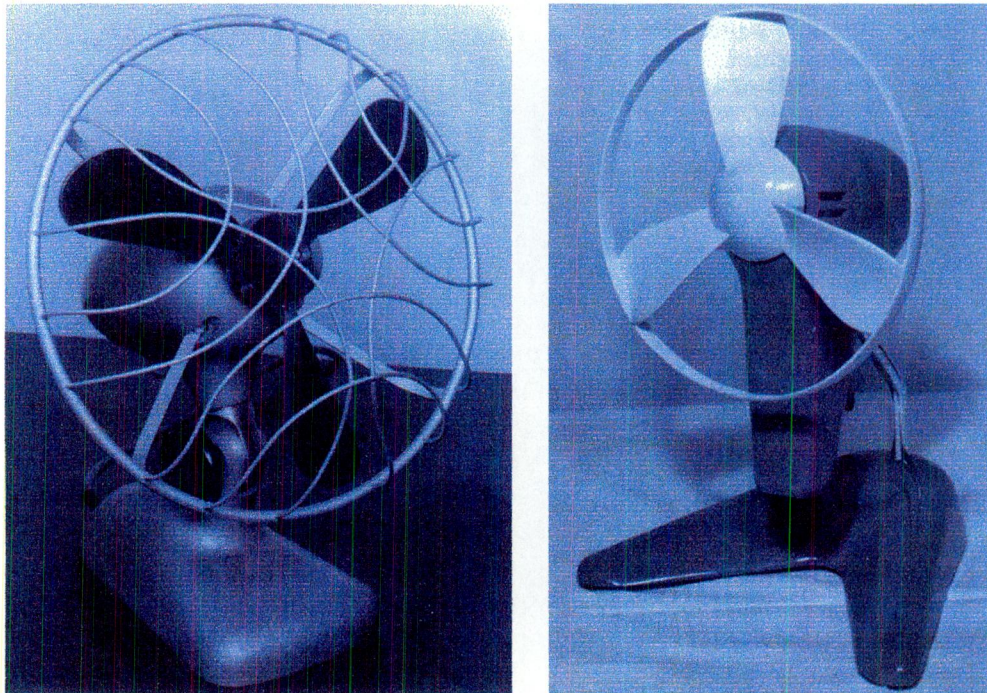


Fig.15 Table Fan in the early and late 1950s (left: cast iron fan designed by the manufacturer *VEB Elektromotorenwerk Dessau*; right: plastic fan designed in 1959 by the designer Hans Merz)

The resulting practical orientation had several effects. On one side, product designers were always faced with very restrictive

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technological and economical limitations, never got the chance to explore their own creativity and produced rather mediocre designs. Such lack of innovation was very inhibiting, in practice as well as in education, which also oriented itself on industry. The chance of the development of an avant-garde never arose. On the other side, concepts were always very realisable and there was a strong collective consensus; the designer never felt as part of an elite, he felt as part of the team, which had developed the product, just like an engineer, and as such obliged to society. Designers never had to market themselves and that is why the names of East German designers are rarely mentioned.

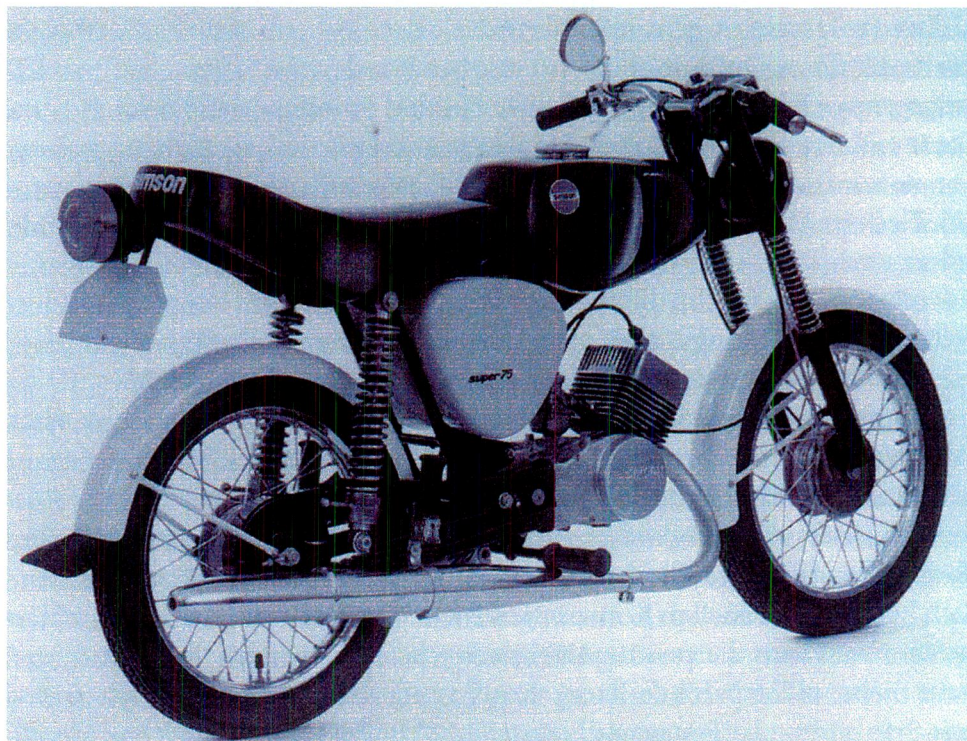


Fig.16 The Mokick Simson S 50 Motorbike, designed by Clauss Dietel and Lutz Rudolph in 1967-68

On the other hand, GDR designers followed a design theory, which was well developed and socially oriented. Unfortunately, the products they designed were not allowed to reflect this; economic and technological considerations dominated everything. There was always a strong interest in the old Bauhaus ideas, even before its official ideological rehabilitation in 1964. Consequently in the early 1960s, developments at the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* [College of Design] at Ulm were followed with great attention. East German designers had an interest not only in the functional aesthetic promoted by their colleagues in Ulm, but were also very concerned with the Ulm theory, which began to criticise the increasing affluence in the West and capitalism in general. Although the reception of the ideas of the *HfG* was neither directed nor supported by the government, it came to a long and strong coherence in methodological and stylistic questions in product design in West Germany and the GDR. Some GDR products reflect such inspiration. These products were the basis for post-unification speculations over who borrowed from who. With a particular reference to similarities between some Braun products and a similar range of products developed in the GDR, Kai-Uwe Scholz in an article for the western design journal *Design Report* wrote:

The impression given ... that GDR design developed relatively independently, based on the Bauhaus heritage, is only half the truth. The all too obvious influence of the West also should be documented (Scholz, 1996, p. 42).

On the other hand GDR designers received a design theory which was well developed and socially oriented. Unfortunately the products they designed were not allowed to reflect this economic and technological conditions dominated everything. There was always a strong interest in the old Bauhaus ideas even before its official ideological rehabilitation in 1984. Consequently in the early 1980s design events at the Hochschule für Gestaltung (College of Design) of Ulm were followed with great attention. East German designers had an interest not only in the functional aesthetic promoted by their colleagues in Ulm but were also very concerned with the Ullmann theory. We can regard to indicate the increasing influence in the West and in East in general. Although the creation of the ideas of the 1920s was rather directed not supported by the government it came to a point that strong coherence in methodological and stylistic questions existed design in West Germany and the GDR. Some GDR products were such inspiration. These products were the basis for post-modernist speculations over who borrowed from who. With a reference to similarities between some Braun products and a small range of products developed in the GDR, Kai-Uwe Scholz in an article for the western design journal *Design Report* wrote:

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The reference to the company Braun and their head of design Dieter Rams, who also taught at Ulm, however, suggests that GDR designers did not copy Western products, but were rather directly influenced by the *HfG* (see fig.17). It is more probable that both, West and East German product designers were influenced by the new ideas of the Ulm college.



Fig.17 Electronic Calculator (purchased ca.1988)

Nevertheless such aesthetic imports, if at all, usually arrived in the GDR with a noticeable delay, as new concepts not only had to go through the millstones of *Planwirtschaft* [planned economy], but also through the filters of ideological control. In contrast to practical design though, East German design theory was leading the way for quite a number of years, and East German literature was more intellectually demanding than West German design literature. Even though

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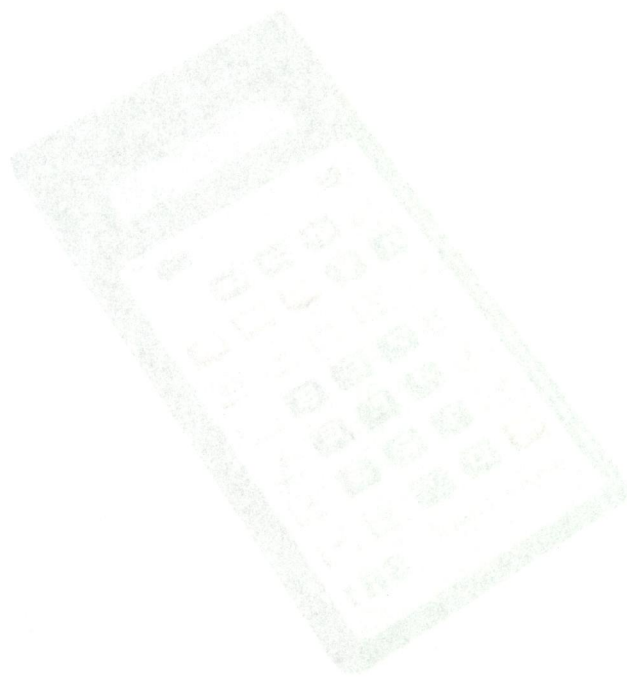


Fig. 17 Electronic Calculator (Göttsch, ca. 1968)

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theoretical text from the GDR has been described as “occasionally unbearable waffle” and “attempts to legitimise the prescribed opinions” (Selle, 1991, p. 62), GDR designers were very enthusiastic about their design theory, and the widely accepted view of design as a socially oriented activity was the basis for their arguments and their daily work. Gert Selle, a west German design historian, who visited the GDR said:

A lot of designers in the GDR actually thought and debated about the meaning and the reality of a humane socialistically shaped industrial culture, with an idealism, which did not exist anymore in the West (Selle, 1991, pp 61).

The result of the contrast between theory and reality was a growing gap between good design, as it was theoretically advocated by designers, the German Art Exhibitions and the insider journal *Form+Zweck*, and the products which were actually developed, distributed and bought, because neither the industry, nor the trade were interested in promoting good design to the consumer. How was the general public supposed to be educated in terms of taste and good design, when there was none available on the shop shelves, no media attention and no public dialogue on design? The initial failure of the government to accept the importance of product aesthetics, lead to aesthetics without products and to products without aesthetics.

Nevertheless, designers and design theorists were still hopeful about the possible realisation of the humane idea of modern designing in the 1970s, unlike at Ulm, where sceptical voices about the social

theoretical and even the GDR has been described as 'occasionally
 incoherent' and 'attempts to legitimise the prescribed opinion as
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 Gert Gatzert, a well-known design historian, who visited the GDR said:

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 a situation where products and products without aesthetics.

In contrast, consumers and design theorists were still hopeful
 about the role of the designer of the human idea of modern design
 in the 1970s, despite the fact that there were sceptical voices about the social

effectiveness of their concepts had been followed by the politically motivated closure of the college in 1968. The scenario was very reminiscent of the closure of the Bauhaus. History seemed to repeat itself to compound the message, that there is no room for ideological design experiments in capitalist industrialism. The closure of the *HfG* was regretted by almost the entire design profession of the GDR; but at the same time it gave designers more reason to fight, through theoretical debate, for the realisation of their own visions.

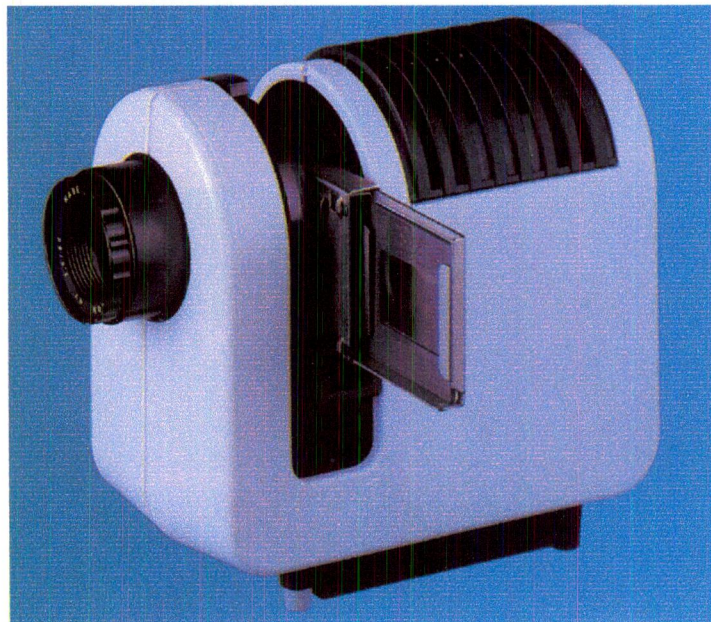


Fig.18 Slide Projector (photographed in 1989)

Disillusionment in the GDR eventually set in in the 1980s, when the continuous presence of double standards eroded the designers' motivation. While the idea of design as a socially responsible activity was still at the heart of most designers and design theorists, the often recited description of the 'designer as an advocate of the user' had

effective use of these concepts had been followed by the policy makers
 from the creation of the concept in 1950. The scenario was very
 important in the course of the German history, history seemed to have
 that role in the message that there is no room for ideological
 design exercise in a neutral industrial. The closure of the
 was regarded as a test for the design profession of the GDR. In
 at the end of the 1950s the design more is seen to fight through
 theoretical debate for the realization of these conditions.



Fig. 1. The design profession in the GDR

For the moment in the GDR eventually set in the 1950s, when
 the concept of design standards and the designer
 industry. A place of design as a social response activity
 was also found in the design and design theorists, the often
 tested, recognition of the designer as an advocate of the user, had

become a hollow phrase in government design politics. Economic, i.e. export considerations received much more priority, especially in the mid-1980s, when the economy slowed down due to a world trade recession.

Even when prizes were awarded by the AIF, such as '*Gestalterische Spitzenleistung*', or top design achievement, the cultural and social qualities of a product played an inferior role, despite official voices claiming the opposite. What really mattered, were the formal orientation on international design tendencies and a product's export chances (Kittel, 1991, p. 93).

Many industrial designers found it difficult to live with and work under such ambiguity. The limitations within which they were supposed to be creative, and which constantly changed during the forty-one years of existence of the country, making it even harder to adapt to the system, meant that the job of an East German product designer was very different from the job of a West German product designer. Despite the classification in the GDR of industrial design as an applied art, the work of a GDR industrial designer could not be more contrary to the work of an artist. Even industrial designers in West Germany received greater personal recognition and had more creative freedom than their eastern counterparts. The GDR designer in comparison remained an anonymous contributor, whose creativity was curtailed and whose vision of a socially responsible future of design was eventually undermined by a hypocritical and opportunist government.

became a major factor in government design policy. Economic
expectations were strong in the early 1950s, especially in the
mid 1950s, when the economy slowed down due to a world-wide

recession

5. In 1950 prizes were awarded by the AIF, such as
"Gestaltung der Zukunft" or "Design Achievement of the
Future" and a prize for a product played an important role
in the design process. The prize was called "What really
counts" and was the former orientation on industrial design
in the GDR and a product's export chances (Hilke, 1991, p. 197).

Design industrial designers found it difficult to live with and work

with a lot of uncertainty. The limitations within which they were
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government

On unification, GDR designers were not up-to-date on the world state of manufacturing technology or information technology, which is why it was extremely difficult for them to find work, when the companies they had worked for went bankrupt, or replaced them with western designers. Just like their products, GDR designers were often ridiculed by their western colleagues, because they had different approaches to design and because they were perceived to be less capable of designing. In order to survive under the new conditions, GDR designers had to adapt themselves quickly to fit in with competitors from west Germany. They had to get used to the new environment, which is almost free of ideological limitations, and catch up rapidly in order to become 'one of them'. The 'advocate of the user' had to become an 'advocate of the manufacturer'.

On the other hand, CDR designers were not up-to-date on the world
state of manufacturing technology, and this was
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company they had worked for went bankrupt, or replaced them with
western designers. Just like their products, CDR designers were often
dismissed by their western colleagues because they had different
approaches to design and because they were perceived to be less
capable of designing. In order to survive under the new conditions,
CDR designers had to adapt themselves quickly to fit in with
the market from west Germany. They had to get used to the new
conditions, which is almost free of ideological limitations and careful
upholding of the old to become one of them. The advocate of the east
had to become an advocate of the manufacturer.

Chapter 5 – The Demise of GDR Design in the United Germany

The *Wende*, or the change, as the former East Germans call the events, which took place in the time period prior to unification, and the unification itself on 3 October 1990 delivered the death blow to – among many other things – the manufacture of most GDR products. It meant an abrupt discontinuation of the East German design tradition, which had evolved over the last forty-one years. The irrevocable disappearance of the GDR product culture from the shop shelves and of GDR culture in general, had serious consequences for the population of east Germany, although this was initially not recognised. By denying the people its separate cultural identity and the evidence of product-cultural achievements, it contributed to the east German inferiority complex, which has its roots in the late diplomatic recognition of the GDR as an independent state and which has increased since the unification and the subsequently attained status as a second class people. Gert Selle described his observations in 1991 as follows:

Such a deep incision in the everyday cultural orientation, such a loss of familiarity to objects and traditional values, the general rejection of the once-wanted and once-approved-of – all that cannot turn out well without some grieving for what has been lost, without some remains of cultural pride, without the conscious realisation that the new achievements were accompanied by the loss of something irretrievable. The very least that will remain is an identity crisis... (Selle, 1991, p. 55).

It would be a mistake to assume that the demise of the GDR product culture was merely brought about by the lack of

Chapman - The Dances of GDR Design in the United Germany

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 of GDR design in general, had serious consequences for the
 post-unification East Germany, although this was initially not recognised.
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 was cut out without some grieving for what has been
 lost. Without some remains of cultural past, without the
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 often gained by the loss of something irreplaceable. The very
 reason of will remain is an identity crisis. (Gahr, 1991, p. 63)

It could be a mistake to assume that the demise of the GDR

product culture was merely brought about by the lack of

competitiveness under transformed economic conditions. In fact, manufacturers had produced competitive goods exclusively for the export market for decades, such as the *VEB Uhrenwerke Ruhla*, who had made watches to be exported to West Germany as well as watches for the home market. The first blow to GDR production was delivered by the east Germans themselves.

The majority of east Germans wanted full and instant consumer access to the free market. They wanted the products, which they had been looking at through West German TV, on their local shop shelves and they wanted the currency to pay for them; the *D-Mark*. GDR products had served their time. West German products, attractive-looking and well advertised, effortlessly caught their attention, and became symbols for a new beginning. GDR products could not compete against the other product culture and were rejected as reminders of the past, which had just been shaken off. In doing so, the east Germans abandoned their own culture, including their product culture, because of a deep-rooted insecurity about their own identity, and a dissatisfaction with the socialist system, the shortcomings of which by then had become all too apparent and the benefits of which in comparison to the capitalist system had not become apparent yet. GDR products simply lost their markets; by Christmas 1990, 80% of goods on eastern shop shelves were from the west (Vat, 1991, p. 97).

competition under transformed economic conditions. In fact, East German factories had produced competitive goods exclusively for the export market for decades, such as the VEB Uhrenwerke Rostock, who had made watches to be exported to West Germany as well as watches for the home market. The first blow to GDR production was delivered by the East Germans themselves.

For many years, East Germans wanted to buy and import consumer goods from the West. They wanted the products which they had seen in the West through West German TV or their local shop windows. But they had no money to pay for them, the D Mark (GDR currency) was not accepted in the West. West German products attracted them, but they could not afford them. They had to wait for a new beginning. GDR products could not compete with the other product culture and were rejected as inferior. The East German product culture had been shaken off. In doing so, the East Germans had abandoned their own culture, including their product culture. They had become a denigrated, passively about their own identity. The East German system, the socialist system, the shortcomings of which had become all too apparent and the benefits of which were not felt by the capitalist system had not become apparent yet. The East German supply lost their market by Christmas 1990. 80% of the East German shop shelves were from the West (Vat 1991, p. 27).

Consumerism erupted, as soon as economic union was implemented on 1 July 1990, when the GDR population went on a spending spree, blowing their savings on consumer durables, such as cars, hifi towers and furniture. Not used to so much choice, and innocent and vulnerable to western marketing strategies, they bought anything and everything, despite increasing unemployment. Maybe the looming unemployment and *Existenzangst*, or existential fear, were the reasons for the frantic urge to acquire prosperity for once. It got to a point, where irritated and frightened West Germans began to begrudge the East Germans access to such products, fearing scarcities in their own country. Such was the consumer demand in the East, that the West enjoyed a temporary economic boom, while all other western European countries experienced a depression. Cash profits and indirect taxes flowed into West Germany in huge amounts, and this still is the case, as the *Treuhandanstalt*, or Trust Corporation, an enterprise set up by the last GDR government to sell off all national enterprises, sold almost all businesses that were not shut down to Western German entrepreneurs.

In 1990, the year of the unification, the amount of rubbish produced by east German households reached an unprecedented record high. In comparison to west German households, where just about half a ton of rubbish was produced, the average east German household produced twice that amount (Scholz, 1996, p. 38). It seems that everything East German had to be replaced with West German

products and articles, but also adding to the rubbish problem were Western packaging and point-of-sale material, new Western throw-away cans, incredible masses of junk mail arriving in east German households daily and the collapse of the *SERO* system. GDR citizens tried to adopt a West German identity and to forget their own.

We are looking at an unusual phenomenon; an ethos, a people of educated consumers, treat its once marked cultural distinctions like dirt by identifying itself with the cultural aggressor ... The collision of the two cultures bear overpowering characteristics of late-Colonialism. One behaves like the rich, developed and powerful, while the other subjugates itself voluntarily to get rid of the smell of poverty and underdevelopment as soon as possible (Selle, 1991, pp 62).

It must be said in favour of GDR products, that their rejection was the result of their historical connotations at that time, rather than of actual product comparison. The West German body which monitors product quality, *Stiftung Warentest*, or Goods-testing Foundation, said on television in November 1990, that East German goods were much better than their reputation, and sometimes excellent (Vat, 1991, p. 97). The fact, that GDR products were found to be of acceptable quality is hardly surprising, considering that a lot of GDR products, through West Germany, had been selling on EC markets for years. Nevertheless they lacked the Western image and sex-appeal – and it is a well-known fact, that ugliness is hard to sell.

products on a shelf, but also adding to the rubbish problem were
Vaseline, Lescage and point-of-sale material, new Vaseline, glow-
sticks, and other materials that were not in East German
stores. In fact, the collapse of the GDR system, GDR citizens
now to create a West German identity and to reject their own.

The 1990s saw a rapid change in the way that people
of different backgrounds, from the former Soviet Union
and other former Soviet states, by identifying themselves with the culture
of the West. The collapse of the two cultures has
been a major factor in the development of the new culture. One behavior
the former Soviet Union and Germany, while the other is different
from the former Soviet Union, is the use of the word "newly" and
"newly" as soon as possible (Sells, 1997, pp. 63).

In the 1990s, the collapse of the GDR system, the new culture
was the result of their economic conditions at that time, rather than the
actual quality of the products. The West German body which produced
products, the Vaseline, Lescage, or GDR's leading brand, also
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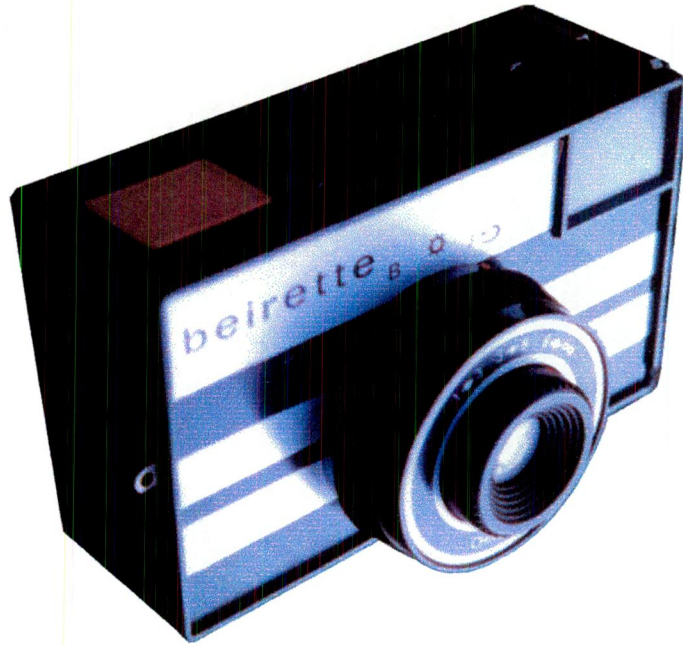


Fig.19 Beirette Camera (purchased ca.1986)

Another major reason for the disappearance of East German goods, was the speed at which unification was brought about – it was an economic as well as a political hijack. Chancellor Dr Helmut Kohl saw the chance of personal enhancement by becoming the ‘Chancellor of the Union’ and of giving his party, the *CDU* or Christian Democratic Union, the chance to win the up-coming elections. To achieve this, he promised unification without delay or tax increases, and an exchange rate of 1 GDR Mark to 1 *D-Mark* for the economic unification on 1 July 1990. This was exactly what the east Germans wanted to hear, and they paid no heed to warning voices from abroad and at home, that such promises could not be kept.

Some speak of “blandishments and opportunism of the ruling right-centre coalition in Bonn, which was determined to go all out for

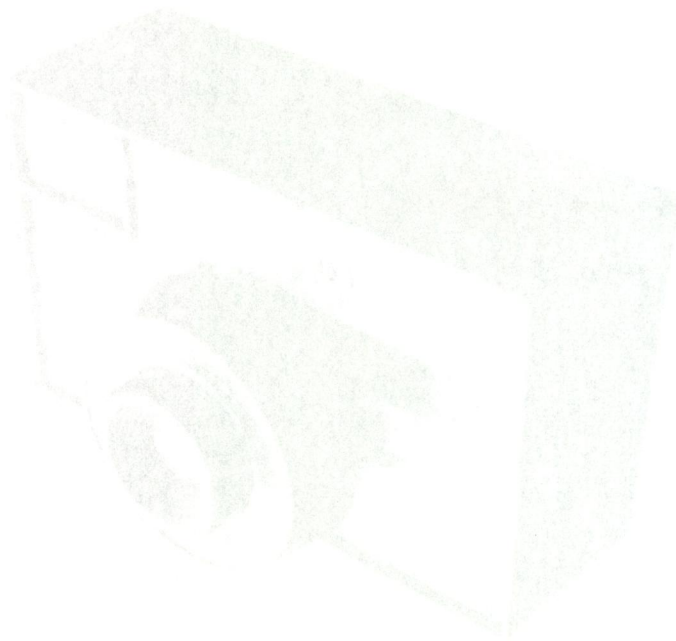


Figure 1: A vintage camera (Leica, 1950s)

Another main reason for the disappearance of East German goods was the speed at which unification was brought about. It was an economic as well as a political task. Chancellor Helmut Kohl saw the only way to ensure national unification by becoming the Chancellor of the first united Germany. He gave the CDU of Christian Democratic Union the right to win the upcoming elections. To achieve this he promised a number of a final delay of tax increases, and an exchange rate of 1 DM to 1 Mark for the economic unification in July 1990. This was exactly what the east Germans wanted at first and they continued to wait for voices from Berlin and at home that such a promise would not be kept.

Some years of disappointments and opposition of the ruling right-wing coalition in Berlin, which was determined to go all out for

unification” and of “awesome political possibilities in the GDR” (Vat, 1991, p. 37), and mention the missed chance of reforming and retaining the GDR as a separate state like a second Austria. It must be said for Dr Kohl’s credit, that he had to seize the unique historical opportunity to snatch the GDR from its obligations towards the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact at a moment, which only arose once and for a short time, when Mikhail Gorbachev was preoccupied with internal politics and instabilities. Yet, the unnecessary and “reckless, if not disastrous gallop to economic and then political union” (Vat, 1991, p. 41) after the signing of the treaty was mere electoral politics.

The political decisions were short-sighted not only from an economic point of view, it is safe to assume that nobody wasted any time considering if and how two cultures could fuse without one overpowering the other, and losses like in a symbolic war of conquest (Selle, 1991, p. 55).

Selle was not the only one, who spoke of a war of conquest, for although it seemed like the GDR population had a choice, events happened too quickly and people were too dazzled to reflect with calm upon what was happening. The GDR was overrun, annexed, the word *Beitritt*, or Accession, used in the Unification Treaty of 31 August 1990 left no doubts about that.

Finally, it was the way Dr Kohl handled the economic union, which killed the already crippled GDR economy, and with it the manufacture of GDR products. His laissez-faire policies left GDR companies exposed to western German competition without any time

to adjust to the new economic circumstances. Free market forces were supposed to take care of the merging of two economies, yet the free market, left to its own devices, could not save, only destroy the defenceless industries of the GDR. The monstrosity of such an omission only becomes clear, when the east German economy is compared to the Polish economy, which although the Poles do not have a 'big brother' looking after them, is recovering quicker and better, because it can be sheltered behind a national frontier. In the GDR, all enterprise was hopelessly non-competitive under the new economic circumstances and the previously mentioned *Treuhandanstalt*, or Trust Corporation, whose job it was to privatise the over 8,000 *VEB's* or *Volkseigene Betriebe* [companies owned by the people] let huge businesses go to the wall, with the losses of hundreds of thousands of jobs. For example Carl Zeiss Jena, a world-famous manufacturer of optical instruments, who had supplied the Soviet Space Programme as well as having Warsaw Pact defence contracts, with nearly 70,000 employees at its peak, was allowed with the blessing of the *Treuhand* to be swallowed up by the 32,000 employee strong company Carl Zeiss Oberkochen, the West German successor of the pre-war enterprise Carl Zeiss. The new east German branch was allowed to keep on 5,000 employees (Vat, 1991, pp 97-101).

to adjust to the new economic circumstances. Free market forces were supposed to take care of the merging of two economies, yet the free market left its own devices could not save or improve the deteriorating situation of the GDR. The monetary of such an operation only becomes clear when the east German economy is compared to the West's economy, which although it is not have a big market, looking after them is receiving greater and better. There was a gap between behind a national frontier. In the GDR, at least there was hopelessly non-competitive under the new economic conditions and the previously mentioned Treuhänder (Trust Corporation), whose job was to convert the over 800,000 in Volkseigenes Betriebe (companies owned by the people) to large concerns go to the wall, with the loss of thousands of thousands of jobs. For example, Carl Zeiss, a world-famous manufacturer of optical instruments, who had supplied the Soviet Space Program as well as having Warsaw Pact nations could not with nearly 10,000 employees at its peak, was allowed with the closing of the plant to be swallowed up by the 12,000 employee plant of Carl Zeiss Jena. The West German accession of the GDR was a triumph for Carl Zeiss. The new east German branch was allowed to keep on 5,000 employees (Vol. 1991, pp. 87-101).

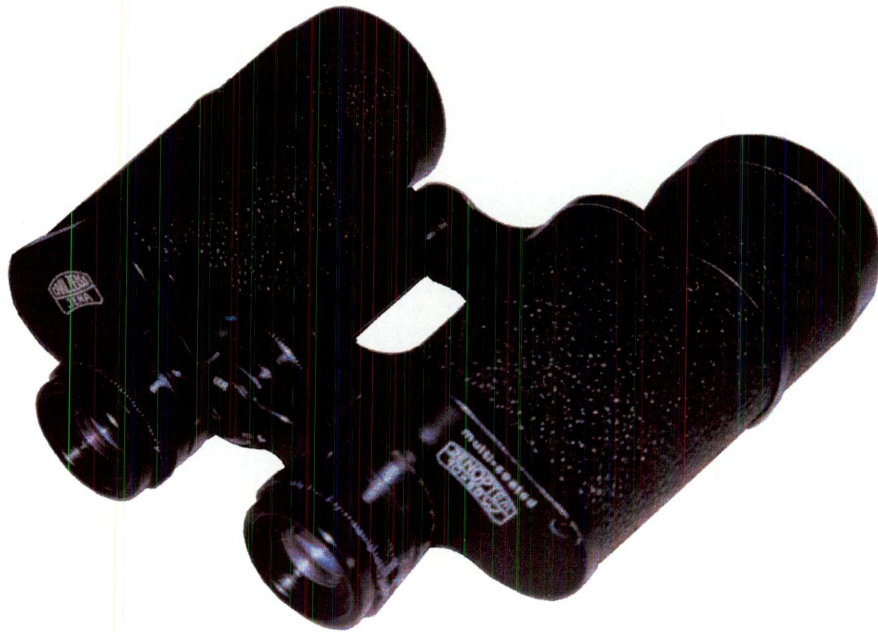


Fig.20 Binoculars manufactured by Carl Zeiss Jena (purchased ca.1985)

The reasons for the lack of competitiveness were manifold. An obvious one was the backwardness of technology; the microelectronics industry in Erfurt with 8,000 employees and the centre for the manufacture of electronic semiconductors in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder with also 8,000 employees, for example, had no chance of survival (Vat, 1991, p. 45). The loss of all Eastern European markets, where the now hard-currency prices were unaffordable, and on which the two companies mentioned above had been major competitors, also contributed to the bankruptcy of most GDR companies.

The behaviour of the *Treuhandanstalt* was symbolic for the behaviour of west Germans towards east Germans in general. Nothing was to survive, "...a conservative Federal Government in Bonn took the view, that in order to cure this patient, a society

diagnosed as terminally ill with 'Socialism' it was necessary to kill it" (Vat, 1991, p. 5). GDR design, like so many other ideas and institutions, did not have to vanish. In 1990 west German designers still had the hope, that "a new approach to design, based on durability, could evolve its own style of design for consumer goods" (Bertsch, 1994, p. 37). Yet the chance was missed, to adapt the GDR design approach to suit the new competitive environment, while maintaining the traditional emphasis placed on the social responsibility of the designer, just like the chance was missed to reform the country rather than give it all up to be swallowed by a bigger country. A deep-rooted insecurity and self-doubt within the east German people, a lack of national identity, due to living in one half of a divided country, and a lack of national pride, which was diminished at the end of World War II in 1945 and has never recovered, all led to the passivity and lack of resistance with which the east Germans watched the dream of a new beginning vanish. The East Germans "jumped to freedom and landed in the Federal Republic" (Vat, 1991, p. 199).

It was not long, before the east Germans we brought down to earth. Economic and political union was achieved. Dr Helmut Kohl had become a statesman. The *CDU* won the elections again. And all the election promises were broken. The on-setting economic depression, massive unemployment and rocketing prices contributed to wide-spread disillusionment among a people, which previously had not known unemployment or poverty. For the first time they had to pay

designers as a result of the Socialism it was necessary to kill it
and the GDR design like so many other ideas and
institutions did not have to exist. In 1970 West German designers
still had the feeling that a new approach to design, based on doubtless
could not be a result of design for consumer goods (Bentzen
1994, p. 2). But the chance was missed to adapt the GDR design
approach and the new competitive spirit in the West, while maintaining
the traditional approach placed on the social responsibility of the
designer. But the chance was missed to reform the country's interior
from the top down to be followed by a major reform. A deep-rooted
aversion to the socialist system within the East German people, a lack of
political loyalty, one to living in one half of a divided country, and a
lack of economic goals, which was diminished at the end of World War II
in 1945, had never recovered, led to the passivity and lack of
resistance with which the East Germans watched the creation of a new
regime in 1990. The East German pursued a freedom and freedom
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It was a long time before the East Germans we brought down to
ground. A political and political union was achieved. Dr Helmut Kohl
was elected Chancellor. The CDU won the elections again. And all
the old problems were broken. The existing economic
system of massive unemployment and skyrocketing prices continued
to exist and disorientation among a people, which previously had
known unemployment or poverty. For the first time they had to pay

for health services and medication. Taxes increased sharply on 1 July 1991 and so did rent, while the price of electricity, gas and water trebled on 1 January 1991.

The list of negative developments seems endless, however, the worst development, or rather lack of development, is the undiminished inequality between East and West. "The eagerness in Bonn to have the new states conform to the Western model virtually at once was not matched by similar zeal to equalise wages between east and west" (Vat, 1991, p. 44). To this day, almost ten years after the unification, the wage levels in the east still lie significantly below western wage levels and unemployment figures are still quoted separately because of the big discrepancy between the new and the old federal states, presently 20% and 11% respectively. How could the 16 million new citizens of the country not feel like second class citizens?

As a result, a lot of East Germans have migrated into the West; half a million people alone in the first nine months following the social and economic unification on 1 July 1990. Those, who have stayed, suddenly remember their GDR-specific cultural identity and cultivate it. An expression of the prevalent bitterness and unhappiness is *Ostalgie*, nostalgia for all things from the *Osten*, or East; a yearning for the socialist past. Since the manufacture of GDR products cannot be revived, they are commemorated in card and memory games, in exhibitions, and in books, such as the 'Little Lexicon of Eastern

for health services and medical care. Taxes increased sharply on 1 July

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As a result of the East German have migrated into the West

and 1991, 1992 and 1993 in the first nine months following the unifica-

tion and 1991, 1992 and 1993, indeed, who have stayed.

Another reason for the GDR's economic identity as a gift state

An explanation of the persistent differences and unpopularity is GDR's

nostalgia for change from the GDR, or East, a yearning for the

second year, that the manufacture of GDR products cannot be

replaced by the same manufactured in East and Germany games in

exhibition, and in books, such as the Little Exile of Eastern

Products". Even a museum housing an exhaustive collection of GDR products in the east Berlin district Prenzlauer Berg, managed by Hein Köster, who was the chief editor of *Form+Zweck* until 1984, has been opened. The role played by GDR products in this cult is crucial, for they "once as familiar props filled the stage for the ritual performance of their daily routine and which with their frugal charm remind of a departing culture" (Selle, 1991, p. 54). GDR products today are like a species about to become extinct – although still existent, they will never go into production again.



Fig.21 Ostalgia Games (produced in 1997)

Another reason for the idolisation of GDR products is the fact that the now experienced east German can appreciate the air of purity and innocence about them, which all the other products on offer around him lack. He has learnt to deal with the seductive advertising techniques he fell prey to in the early months of exposure to the free

market. He is not vulnerable any more to pretentious western product design, where the appearance of quality does not automatically guarantee high quality and longevity as it did in the GDR. He has realised that deception and seduction are socially accepted means, justified by the end; profit and wealth.

Interestingly not only former GDR citizens are disillusioned with the economic and social system of the united Germany and look back into the past with a feeling of *Ostalgie*. Some former West German citizens, mainly intellectuals, who are critical of their own system and had always seen the East as some kind of alternative, also feel that the demise of the GDR and its culture and design approach was a loss to all German people. A lot of people had thought that the alternative ideas of production, design and ownership might have been a starting point to a new approach to design.

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the German people. A lot of people had thought that the alternative
means of production, design and ownership might have been a starting
point to a new approach to design.

Conclusion

The extinction of GDR product design was inevitable as soon as it became clear that the GDR would have no future as an independent state. There seemed to be no room for the unusual product culture and the socially responsible design theory of the former GDR in the united capitalist Germany. They are shrouded in silence, ridiculed sometimes, but largely ignored by the old west German design elite, who was once the ideological counterpart, which countless arguments fought in form of articles in the two rivalling design magazines *Form* and *Form+Zweck*, which were read on both sides, stand testimony to. Ignoring GDR design is probably the most effective way of driving home the message of its defeat and the defeat of the system it served. Furthermore its critical evaluation would possibly entail the need to be self-critical and admit one's own weaknesses or weaknesses of the own system in comparison to the other.

In the meantime, the gloss and glamour of the Western product culture is losing its appeal for many east Germans, as it is beginning to reveal itself as a perfectly camouflaged time bomb. The newly adopted economic and political system is proving not to be so 'golden' after all. The alluring product aesthetic is stimulating an ever-increasing consumerism, utterly necessary for capitalism to function, but harmful to the ecosystem of the planet, as more and more natural resources are being used up. Every single consumer is to blame for

The intention of GDR product design was to make it as soon as possible clear that the GDR would have no future as an independent state. There seemed to be no room for the unusual product culture and the socially responsible design theory of the former GDR in the united capitalist Germany. They are abandoned in silence, without an outcry, but largely ignored by the old West German design world who was once the ideologically consistent which to almost significant extent was of advice in the two design design magazines, *Form* and *Form*, which were used on both sides and testimony to the fact that GDR design is indeed a most effective way of thinking about the message of its social and the context in the system is served. The intention is that evolution would gradually enter the need to be taken into account and state one's own weaknesses or weaknesses of the system in comparison to the other.

In the meantime, the glass and plastic of the 1960s, which was being used as a special for many east German, as it is beginning to be used as a perfectly camouflaged time bomb. The new, modern economic and political system is proving not to be as golden as it seems. The living product aesthetic is stimulating an even more serious consumer, utterly necessary for capitalism to function, but it is the economic system of the future, as more and more natural resources are being used up. Every single consumer is to share for

his contribution to this development through his irresponsible behaviour, but ultimately it is the entrepreneur, the capitalist, whom it makes rich and who encourages it even further by designing a life span into products, to ensure continuous profits through replacement sales. Not just in Germany, but almost everywhere in the industrialised world, rubbish dumps are filling up with used products, their replacements and replacements of replacements, as well as with completely unused goods, which were produced in surplus of what was needed - a result of overproduction. The throwaway mentality of the modern capitalist society is encouraged by the manufacturers' preference for making disposable products, which is more profitable but also more harmful to the environment, as more natural resources are being used and more rubbish builds up. "Companies exist to make profits for their owners, and long experience of the 'social market economy' proves that they show responsibility to society only if they are made to by law..." (Vat, 1991, p. 43). It is the personal interest of the manufacturer versus the communal interest of society, and as long as the politicians in Bonn continue to pursue their economic policy of laissez-faire, it is the interest of the manufacturer, which will dominate over the interest of society as a whole.

On the international design scene, there is a movement away from capitalist opportunism; ethical questions are moving into the foreground of theoretical debate. A well-designed product is no longer one, which generates as much profit for the manufacturer as possible;

his contribution to the development and through his responsibility
 beyond, and ultimately to the entrepreneur (the capitalist) who is
 the one who encourages it - by furthering the design of the
 new products to ensure continuous profits through research and
 sales. Not just in Germany, but almost everywhere in the industrial
 world, technical things are being put into use and products that
 are being put into use and replaced by new ones as well as with
 completely new goods, which are produced in surplus of what was
 needed - a result of overproduction. The throw away mentality of the
 modern capitalist society is encouraged by the manufacturers
 themselves by making disposable products, which is not only
 wasteful but also harmful to the environment as these natural resources
 are being used and then thrown away. Companies are not only
 interested in the expansion of the social market
 economy, but they also know how responsible to society only if by
 their actions they are in the interest of society. It is the personal interest of
 the entrepreneur to secure the personal interest of society, and as long
 as the entrepreneur is able to continue to pursue their economic policy of
 profit, it is the interest of the manufacturer, which will continue
 to be in the interest of society as a whole.

The traditional design is still there in a different way
 than in the modern era, which is moving and the
 traditional design is still there. A well-designed product is no longer
 one, which generates as much profit for the manufacturer as possible.

it is one, which serves not only the user well, but society as a whole. Such socially responsible products are user-friendly, durable and transgenerational as well as environmentally friendly. The idea of the designer as a person, who is responsible to society for the products he creates, is not new. Victor Papanek discussed it at length, but it probably also reminds the reader of the description of the designer used in East German design theoretical teaching as an 'advocate of the user'. The current attempt to gradually replace the 'throwaway society' with a 'recycle society' will also call to mind the East German *SERO* system and its sparing use of primary natural resources.

In modern capitalism, such developments have little effect on the actual products. Manufacturers have no interest in social responsibility, if it happens to conflict with their own personal interests. The problem is similar to the one faced by design critics in nineteenth-century England, although modern capitalism is already a much more social version of the cut-throat capitalism back then, when J.C. Roberts blamed the capitalist system for the deterioration of design standards, by placing the importance of quantity and profit over the importance of quality, by saying:

The great object of every English manufacturer is quantity; with him, that is always the best article to manufacture of which the largest supply is required; he prefers much a large supply at a low rate to a small supply at a higher... (Forty, 1986, p. 60).

It is a case which serves not only the user well, but society as a whole. Such socially responsible products are increasingly available and transgenerational as well as environmentally friendly. The idea of the designer as a person who is responsible to society for the products he creates is not new. Victor Papanek discussed it at length, but it

has only now found the reader of the designer. Last year's German design theoretical teaching as an advocate of the past. The current attempt to gradually replace the throwaway society with a recycle society will also call to mind the last German 20th century and its spending use of primary natural resources.

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It was claimed the capitalist system for the deterioration of design standards by placing the importance of quantity over quality and the loss of choice of quality by saying

It is a great object of every English manufacturer's ambition to sell more than he can make, and that is always the best mode for manufacture of which the world is capable. A great supply is required, he prefers a much larger supply at a low rate to a smaller supply at a higher rate. (Pope, 1812, p. 20)

A product will only reflect as much of the current design theoretical debate as its manufacturer allows it to, as long as he can pay a designer to do exactly what he wants him to do. This is probably what Penny Sparke meant, when she wrote: "Design inevitably perpetuates the ideology of the system it serves" (Sparke, 1986, p. 205).

Maybe, however, the new consciousness is strong enough to change the system; to replace capitalism, a system in which property, business and industry are owned by private individuals, who obviously pursue their own private interests, with a new system of social responsibility, in which increased control over the means of production could be given to society through consistent and intelligent intervention by a democratically elected government. Such intervention would entail the encouragement of recycling, and possibly the introduction of legislation against the artificial ageing of products. An entirely new economic policy and design policy could be developed, as an alternative to the polluting centrally planned *Planwirtschaft*, but also to the polluting free-market economy. Everybody would feel responsible to society, especially the designers, and consequently design and production would become 'nature-friendly' and 'human-friendly', while the technological and economical elements would lose their current dominance. The result would be a new product culture, with - maybe - a new *Trabant*. To yet again become the symbol of a product culture, the new *Trabant* would be a rather slow car, with a minimum of fuel

emission; it would be durable, easy to repair and recyclable. It would be technically and aesthetically up-to-date, without being fashionable or over-sophisticated. And it would not be a status symbol.

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Appendix A: List of Acronyms

<i>AIF</i>	<i>Amt für Industrielle Formgestaltung</i> (State-Office for Industrial Design)
<i>CDU</i>	<i>Christlich-Demokratische Union</i> (Christian Democratic Union, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's (West German) party, in power during Germany's unification)
<i>DDR</i>	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</i> (German Democratic Republic, socialist part of Germany until 3 October 1990)
<i>GDR</i>	German Democratic Republic
<i>HfG</i>	<i>Hochschule für Gestaltung</i> (College of Design at Ulm)
<i>SED</i>	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party – the ruling party in the GDR)
<i>SERO</i>	<i>Sekundärrohstoffe</i> (Secondary Raw Materials)
<i>VEB</i>	<i>Volkseigener Betrieb</i> (Company Owned by the People, or state enterprise)

Appendix B: Map of the GDR



