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Journal

Room One Thousand, 1(1)

ISSN

2328-4161

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Publication Date

2013

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Sasha Rossman

Transitional Objects: The Postwar Werkbund and the Design of New, West-German Subjects (1948-1968)

“A people that cultivates its culture of daily life will not forsake itself”
– Joseph Thoma, 1949

To begin with, an inventory:

One white plastic milk frother, with extendable handle; two metal whisks; one cheese grater; one slotted spoon; one ladle; one oval double-handled polished metal serving bowl with fitted top; one stainless steel mixing bowl; one metal sieve with handle; one clear plastic cake form; one wooden masher; one pair of scissors with red plastic handle; one plastic measuring cup with red plastic top; one saltshaker; two rectangular plastic storage jars, clear with white tops for airtight closure; one electric meat grinder; one plastic funnel; one metal frying pan, with black plastic handle.

The goods listed above comprise a collection of utilitarian tools designed for use in a domestic kitchen. Yet this particular collection does not come from a kitchen drawer or shelf. These objects never touched food, never whipped eggs, frothed milk or absorbed the heat of an oven. Rather, the goods migrated from the conveyer belts of various West German industrial manufacturers in 1954, finding their way directly

from the factory floor into a brightly lacquered and tightly sealed plywood case, produced in Berlin Spandau (Fig. 1). Firmly embedded in grey foam cut snugly around their forms, the objects rested in this crate, cushioned and protected for safe transport. Once the crate's clasps were opened and the top removed, the exposed objects presented themselves to "astounded eyes," as one reporter exclaimed, "each in its appropriate place!" The contents of a fictive, well-stocked and perfectly ordered mid-century West German kitchen were stowed here securely for a peripatetic existence as a traveling pedagogical tool in postwar Berlin high school classrooms.¹

Crates like this Berlin example were part of what became a nationwide program initiated by the newly reformed German Werkbund in the mid-1950s to expose West German youth to examples of what the Werkbund termed good design ("*die gute Form*"). Carefully conceptualized and fabricated as pedagogical instruments, Werkbund designers conceived of these boxes as a means of bringing samples of industrial design and domestic consumer wares to secondary school students, in the hopes that exposing adolescents to "good form" would instill young West Germans with the critical acumen necessary to navigate an uncertain postwar world and, specifically, the vagaries of a burgeoning capitalist consumer market. Through the cultivation of a critical relationship to the object-forms of daily life, the renewed Werkbund—a loose association of designers, architects, politicians and industrialists—hoped to build a new generation of discerning consumers. Equating "good form" with "good people," the Werkbund conspired in this way to literally "form" a new nation and forge a West German cultural identity and subjectivity that would negotiate the multiple challenges of rebuilding postwar society.

This essay explores the context of this attempt to deploy consumer objects as a means of shaping national subjectivity, examining why

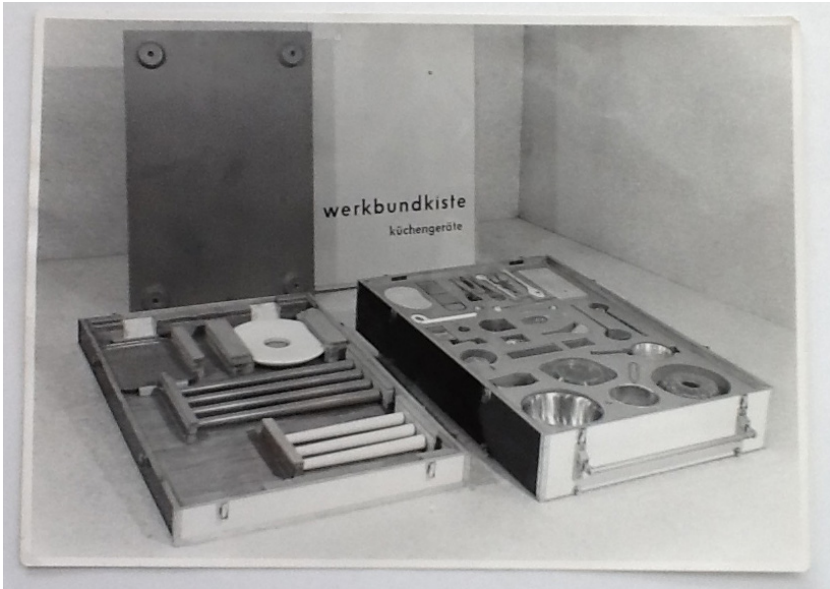


Figure 1: “Hauptschulamt, Werkbundkiste,, Küchengeräte” (Werkbund Crate ‘Kitchen Tools’) photograph by Willi Nitschke, ca. 1955 (Landesarchiv Berlin oder LAB/ Willi Nitschke, F Rep. 290, Nr. 37469)

a pedagogical program focused on the consumption of industrial design was developed at a moment in which West Germans still faced considerable material and philosophical challenges of constructing a new nation—conditions in which product styling would appear to be a curious locus of national scrutiny.² Yet, in the postwar years, industrial design played an absolutely crucial role in the physical and conceptual process of West (and East) German reconstruction.

In the context of the Cold War, the domestic realm was an internationally contested site of ideological and political conflict—as witnessed by high profile skirmishes like the “Kitchen Debate” between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the 1959 Moscow fair.³ Nowhere was domesticity more politically fraught than in the postwar Germanies, where both Soviet and American

propaganda devoted great attention to the image of the home as a means of political indoctrination. As German designers and politicians strove to adapt to new geopolitical alliances, they simultaneously deployed consumer design to stake a claim for German national specificity—a claim built upon domestic foundations in the sense that politicians and designers alike located the German nuclear family and the German home as the key social and economic kernel of the emergent Federal Republic: the slogan ‘*Made in West Germany*’ can be seen to refer not only to consumer products, but to subjectivity as well. Atop the charred ruins of German cities, design offered (West) Germans a means of not only rebuilding a material world but also setting a national moral and ideological agenda.⁴ “What a chance we have now,” Werkbund member Otto Bartning declared, “since not only houses, schools, churches, and theaters must be built, but also bowls and plates, clocks, furniture, clothes, and tools must be totally reconstructed!”⁵

In what follows, I suggest that the crates, as well as the objects they contained, serve as a material index of West German postwar social anxieties and dislocations related to the expansion of the postwar capitalist consumer society (*Konsumgesellschaft*). Their padded forms, which balance mobility and stasis, materialism and idealism, speak to the hopes as well as the fears of postwar West German cultural pundits and illustrate the dynamics underlying the West German fixation on sheltered domesticity. The crates also articulate specific historical narratives that connected pre- and postwar German culture in ways that elided the recent past: they present history in a box as a means of charting an uncertain present and building foundations for what designers hoped would be a “well-ordered” future through the medium of industrial design. Thus, unpacking these intricate boxes now provides a foundation not only for understanding the specific West German historical moment, but also for, more broadly, exploring the potential

and limits of design's social role(s) and the aporia inherent in the modernist ambition to deploy form as a means of "organizing" freedom.

Designing the Economic Miracle and Politicizing the Domestic: On the Importance of Design in the Early Federal Republic

It was industrial design's ubiquity in daily life that made it appear as a viable agent of social reform to postwar West German designers and politicians. Design could theoretically be found everywhere: in each room of the house, in stores, in offices, on the street. Yet in order to understand the cultural context of West German design pedagogy in the 1950s, one must understand that, in the postwar context, design's ubiquity could not be taken for granted. The physical destruction wrought by the war in Germany was spectacular. Over five million dwellings and their contents were destroyed and material resources were strained well beyond the 1940s. In the initial postwar years, "designed" goods were scarce commodities.

Postwar German descriptions of the contemporary environment tend to draw heightened attention to the emptiness of cities, frequently equating dereliction and material lack with existential emptiness. The physical scars left by the Third Reich were, contemporaries often implied, equivalent to the mental collapse that followed German surrender. Both defeats found symbolic expression in the trope of a dearth of domestic possessions. This invocation of material deprivation became a powerful mode of postwar German cultural self-imagination on both sides of the Iron Curtain (but particularly in the capitalist West) as Germans construed themselves as the victims of deprivation, punished by both Nazis and Allies through material lack.⁶ Design offered a powerful solution to this double-defeat on several interrelated levels.

Since domestic destruction came to symbolize German victimization, the physical reconstruction of domestic life through material plenitude

offered an opportunity to mark an intertwined moral and physical rebirth. In the wake of the war, Germans began to render the ruins livable with famous rapidity, filling in emptiness with material *fullness*. Carting away rubble with speed and determination, Germans embarked on rebuilding a clean, new, material world in which, Theodor W. Adorno pointedly argued at the time, the trauma of the war was wiped away and replaced seamlessly with material plenty, “as though the damage never occurred.”⁷ At the same time, the production of consumer goods and the literal process of physical reconstruction also became the motor of the fabled West German economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*), affirming the illusion of wholesale regeneration. Consumer culture played as vital a political role in the establishment of a new democratic nation as constitutional legislation—indeed, the two were often deeply intertwined.

This merger of material, consumer culture, and politics was most powerfully embodied in the figure of West Germany’s first economic minister, Ludwig Erhard. Erhard endorsed an economic policy built uniquely upon strengthening consumer industries—a plan facilitated by an educated labor force as well as by prewar and wartime policies that had built greater industrial capacity, the infrastructure of which survived wartime destruction surprisingly well.⁸ To promote consumption, Erhard implemented a currency reform in 1948, doing away with ration cards and coupons and setting up a new *Deutschmark* to replace the old devalued *Reichsmark*. The currency reform famously restored faith in the economy and shops that had been empty filled rapidly with consumer goods that had previously circulated through other channels.⁹

Erhard’s economic and ideological program explicitly emphasized the connection between the democratic values of free choice and material reward in the consumer realm. Freedom, he declared in his 1957 tract *Prosperity for Everyone* (*Wohlstand für Alle*), “rings hollow as

long as basic human rights” to *consume* freely “are not recognized.”¹⁰ Erhard elaborated on the connections between the implementation of democratic freedom and consumer choice, claiming that, “Every citizen must be conscious of consumer freedom and the freedom of economic enterprise *as basic and inalienable rights, whose violation should be punished as an assault on our social order. Democracy and a free economy belong as logically together as do dictatorship and a State economy.*”¹¹ West German democracy was thus to be realized in the intimate nexus between producers and consumers who could both make and purchase material goods “freely” through the mechanism of the capitalist free market.

The advanced nature of Germany’s industrial capacity, the success of the 1948 currency reform, and the influx of American dollars, provided by the Marshall plan, abetted these ambitions. Following the electric jolt of the currency reform, West Germans began producing industrial materials and consumer goods with breathtaking rapidity and unprecedented international market success.¹² By the end of the 1950s, Erhard’s efforts had literally paid off: West German industry and export potential topped that of the other Western European countries and, by 1964, West German wages had doubled, further enabling the consumer practices that fueled the so-called economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*).

Commercial industries and the tertiary sector were the fastest growing parts of the West German economy. Within the industry, the most rapidly expanding sectors were those of capital goods investment: oil refining, chemicals, production and processing of synthetics, the automotive industry, and electronics manufacturing. These were the sectors integral to the production of industrial design; their products came together in goods like home appliances and plastic consumables.¹³ In the absence of a military complex, the collective energies of this production potential were no longer directed towards arms production, but instead channeled into the production of consumer goods. These

products synthesized the various branches of West German industries, reinforcing the strength of the domestic economy through the space of the family home. The growth of the national economy looped directly from the conveyor belt to the living room and back.

As the production of consumer goods established itself as vital to West German economic reconstruction, design emerged as an important arena in which West Germans could build a new national identity both on the international stage and in the intimacy of the private dwelling. On the one hand, Erhard's politics bespoke a commitment to the terms of free market capitalism and symbolized West German allegiance to the West. Yet even as the United States blatantly attempted to use exhibitions of product design as a means of "soft" propaganda to curry popular support with the West German public, design proved, simultaneously, to be one of the few significant arenas in which West Germans were able to articulate a specific *national* cultural autonomy—an important task for a country that only came into existence in 1949.¹⁴ As opposed to other cultural sectors like the cinema, in which national production was subject to Allied control, West German product designers enjoyed a relative independence, perhaps thanks to the perceived neutrality of design objects that stemmed from their functional nature.

Designers and politicians recognized the potential that design offered in carving out a unique postwar identity that distanced the young Republic from its nefarious past as well as its rival in the East and allies in the West. Almost immediately following the war, West German designers and West German politicians like Erhard articulated the importance of the form and materiality of the consumer goods they were sending onto domestic *and* foreign markets in terms that reflected a desire to use product design as a means of cementing a positive image of West Germany abroad. Erhard noted, for example, that exporting "beautifully designed, manufactured equipment" would prove the West

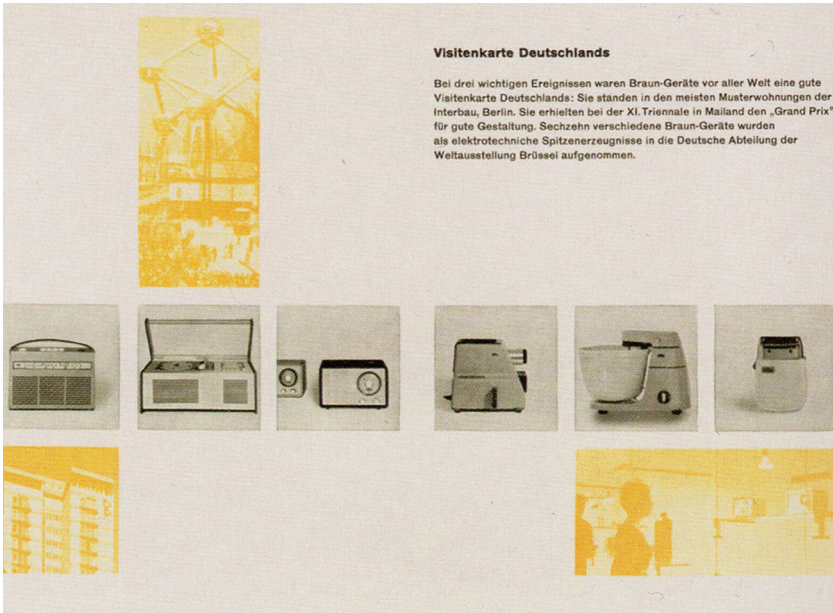


Figure 2: “Calling Cards from Germany” (from an advertising postcard produced by Braun in the 1960s). Printed in Gerda Breuer, ed. *Das Gute Leben: Der Deutsche Werkbund nach 1945* (Tubingen: Wasmuth Verlag, 2007), 134. Collection of Leif Hallerbach.

German commitment to capitalism on the international stage and project qualities of durability, trustworthiness and honesty.¹⁵ The industrial designer Wilhelm Wagenfeld, likewise, observed that quality consumer goods would serve as a “cultural mirror” (*Kulturspiegel*), which signaled West Germany’s renunciation of National Socialism—symbolically cleansed through “good” quality and sleek visual form.¹⁶ [Fig. 2]

The realm of private consumption thus became a particularly important site in the formation of West German identity. The private consumer became in many respects *the* West German subject and the education of these new subjects (in the home rather than the battlefield) became an issue of concern.¹⁷ As the consumer sector and the economy grew exponentially, so too did anxieties over this unprecedented

success—particularly among designers and politicians who feared that West Germans might fall prey to the seductions of materialism. Faced with the burgeoning array of consumer goods, expanded leisure time and a perceived increase in social mobility, afforded by the *Wirtschaftswunder*, social critics railed against the dangerous temptations of what they termed *Konsumterror* (“consumption terrorism”).¹⁸ The burgeoning economy had introduced hundreds of new products onto West German markets. These markets themselves were also changing as the introduction of American style self-service shopping altered the traditional distribution mechanisms of consumer goods.¹⁹ This new mode of distribution presented consumer goods as an unmediated wonderland of purchasable variety. Thus, if West Germans were increasingly “settling” in homes, thanks to the Adenauer administration’s policies that encouraged the purchasing of homes and home appliances, their society was simultaneously becoming more mobile and unsettled. More West Germans owned cars and were beginning to leave urban centers for the suburbs (*Stadttrand*) and the goods they purchased to fill their new dwellings were part of a fast-moving, free-market, consumer landscape; an anchored domesticity conjoined with new forms of mobility and consumer flexibility at the heart of West German democracy.²⁰

Under these conditions, new worries replaced the existential concerns of the immediate postwar years. How was one to ensure that customers could differentiate between good and bad quality goods, as the number of available consumer products skyrocketed? How were customers to be taught the value of purchasing “correctly,” that is to say, in a manner befitting the moral imperatives propagated in the new Republic, particularly as supermarkets eroded the direct contact between retailer and buyer that offered potential guidance? How would, and should, a West German learn to consume?

The Werkbund's Time

Design as Moral Imperative and the Education of German Consumers

Product designers were particularly attuned to the aforementioned concerns, especially those who saw themselves at the forefront of the design discipline, most of whom were associated with the *Deutsche Werkbund*. The Werkbund was founded in 1907 at the behest of Hermann Muthesius with the goal of reforming German industry in order to fight against what designers of the period viewed as the shoddy workmanship that characterized industrially produced German consumer goods.²¹ Disbanded under the Nazis, the Werkbund renewed itself in 1947 and, by the 1950s, perceived itself as confronting similar issues as earlier in the century: namely, how to steer a consumer-driven economy to produce quality consumer items. In the face of the tensions that resulted from the *Wirtschaftswunder's* expansion of the consumer universe, the Werkbund saw their social and aesthetic task renewed: the battle to associate Germany with quality design and thereby save the West German citizenry from the evils of materialism while not curtailing consumer freedom.

Erhard's liberal government was not prepared in any case to dictate consumer controls through legislation, an act that would have been anathema to a democracy predicated upon the exercise of freedom of consumption. Yet with so much attention focused on constructing a new material West German world, the Werkbund perhaps rightly recognized that a stage had been set in which *designers* could at last realize their full potential as cultural doyens and educators who would lead the new nation of consumers in navigating uncertain times and markets. In the words of member Otto Bartning, the Werkbund believed that its "hour" had finally arrived.²²

In the young FRG, where design played such a prominent role, the

Werkbund was one of several groups actively interested in controlling the quality of craft in design manufacturing and industry.²³ Yet of all the consumer-goods oriented design associations, the Werkbund exercised the most influence: it was an organization with an audience in high places that exercised an exceptional degree of social and political authority.²⁴ This authority can be understood in relation to the centrality of design in the formation of the FRG, but in large part it also had to do with the Werkbund's pre-war history. The Werkbund's past lent the organization's postwar incarnation political and moral clout, as the modernist organization of design reformers was dismantled by the Nazis and many of its members either chose to emigrate, or experienced difficulties in working under the NS regime. Its postwar incarnation could thus construe itself as an institution of opposition, particularly well qualified to steer West Germany's development both morally and, as designers, physically through the tensions of reconstruction in West Germany, since its members successfully styled themselves as free of Nazi taint—regardless of the accuracy of this projection.²⁵ As much as design played a vital economic role in the West German socio-economic arena, design education as well as design's formal attributes also became a site at which West Germans attempted to construct a “useable” past in order to build a viable future.²⁶

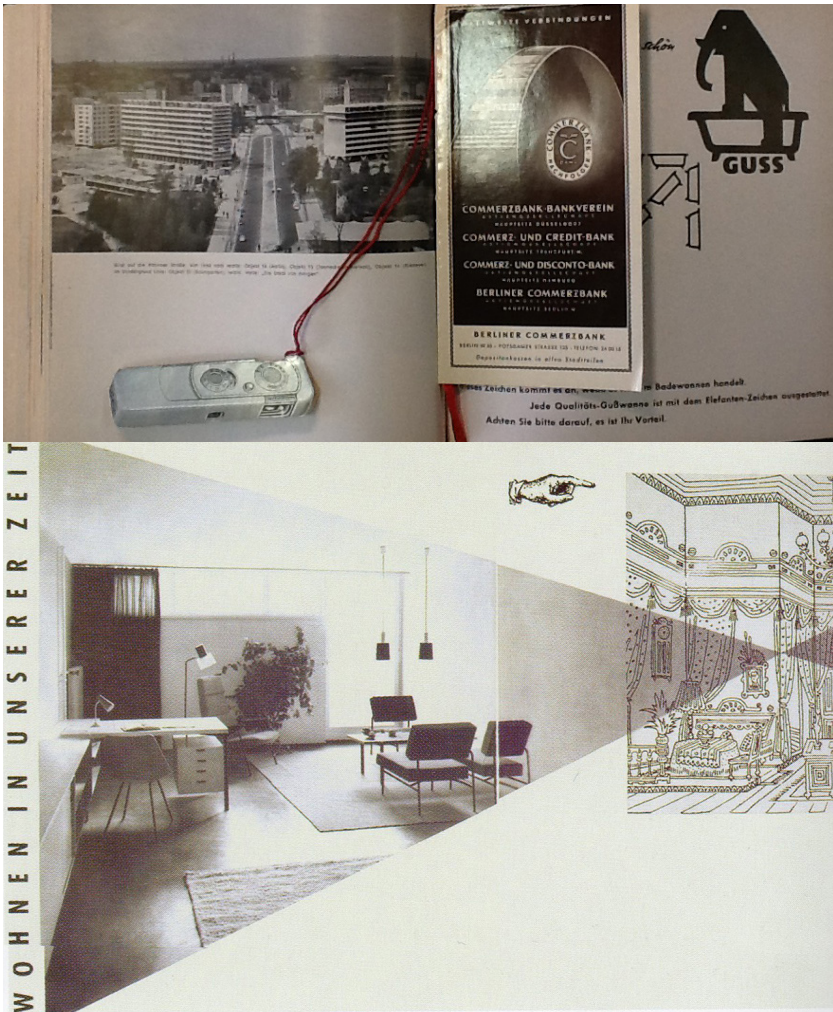
For example, in a 1947 manifesto, the Werkbund wrote collectively that, “The collapse destroyed the visible world of our lives and our work. With a feeling of liberation, we believed at the time, we could begin work again.”²⁷ In statements like these, the postwar Werkbund explicitly articulated a correlation between spiritual and material health. Cultural re-education, they asserted, would begin with the simplest objects filling the everyday environment. Wartime destruction would serve as a *tabula rasa*: following the Werkbund's logic, the bombs positively erased history and cleared a physical and psychological space to create

a new world. Equating an ascetic, functionalist aesthetic with purified moral values, the Werkbund posited that this new world ought to be filled with new “good” forms that resonated with the purging of the past in favor of timeless values of truth, as expressed formally through the design maxim of truth to materials.²⁸

This had been a theme of German modernism throughout the twentieth century. Yet in the postwar context, stripped-down functionalism offered the Werkbund a visual means to cleanse society of a Nazi taint *and* to provide a barrier against the materialist temptations proffered by increasing economic prosperity, both of which were, in the Werkbund’s eyes, associated with “bad” (i.e. non-functional), embellished form, as illustrated in Figure 4. For example, in his 1946 article, “The Hour of the Werkbund,” Otto Bartning declared,

The force of bombs was strong enough not only to destroy the luxury facades and architectural ornamentation, but also the foundations of the buildings themselves. No doubt we will build them anew, but without the former facades. Simple, economic, purposeful, functional – that is to build honestly. Here our material want can prove to be a virtue.²⁹

Bartning’s rhetoric draws on a long tradition of German design reformers’ opposition to architectural ornamentation, specifically ornamentation associated with a historical eclecticism that transposed historical motifs in an incongruous fashion onto present day objects and structures.³⁰ For Mutheius as well as for postwar Werkbund activists like Bartning, design that relied on ornamentation implied a conceptual flight from the present into a past. Plentiful ornamentation, the Werkbund argued further, also deceptively disguised a lack of competence and quality in craft, particularly in industrially produced objects. Bartning thus celebrates the wartime destruction of historicist building



Figs. 3-4 Advertising Materials for the 1957 Interbau exhibition in Berlin. In the official Interbau catalogue, pictures of the Hansa Viertel in ruins are juxtaposed not only with images of the building exhibition and advertisements for German synthetics, construction firms, and distributors, but also with ornate cut-out advertisements attached to the catalogue's book marks. These dangling objects present an image of material and spiritual regeneration via consumer culture, which operated in tandem with the re-formation of living conditions, improved

stock and their *deceptive* “luxury” facades, which he equates to a dishonesty that extended from the surface (the façade) to the foundation. The buildings’ disappearance harbored the opportunity to rebuild West Germany on multiple levels. For in assigning a human, moral characteristic to design—honesty and dishonesty—Bartning draws an implicit link between the architectural (or designed) body and the social body. Correcting one implied the correction of the other: “A redesigned social world steeped in the values of economy, honesty, and good form, which are the very witnesses of spiritual order.”³¹ At the same time, this order was one that distanced itself from the past by highlighting the present-ness of the designed form, a present-ness instantiated by a lack of ornamentation. With forms purged of the past, new users would spring from clean foundations like the phoenix from the ashes. The smooth surface and the smooth execution of a quotidian task, enabled by modern design, together bespoke a freedom from history as well as an unencumbered freedom of action in the present.

In foregrounding the present, the functionalist aesthetic therefore served the specific political purpose of distancing contemporary West German society from the Third Reich: the Werkbund’s neo-functionalism staked a claim for historical rupture by erasing the folksy kitsch associated with Nazi décor from view. At the same time, this aesthetic also deliberately linked the postwar period to prewar aesthetic movements like the Bauhaus. In doing so the blight of the Nazi era was doubly erased: denied through forms that foregrounded the present

(continued)along the lines suggested by the Werkbund and exemplified in the catalogue edited by Johanna Hoffmann (right), which accompanied exemplary interior designs exhibited within the Hansa Viertel site. Photograph 1, made by the author, is of Interbau Berlin 1957 : Internationale Bauausstellung im Berliner Hansaviertel, 6. Juli bis 29. September, ed. Ewald Weitz; photograph 2 (right), by the author, is from Wohnen in unerer Zeit, ed. Johanna Hoffmann (Darmstadt-Berlin: Deutscher Werkbund & Verlag Das Beispil, 1958).

as well as through a historical fiction that deleted two decades from German history.

Objects designed according to functionalist principle were, therefore, “nourishment,” as Bartning wrote, “for the soul” of a West German nation that appeared as simultaneously new and old, representative of both enduring values and a selective historical pedigree.³² Design that made use of certain formal principles thus carried within it the seeds of social spiritual regeneration, particularly as Werkbund designers like Wagenfeld tended to see design and people as reflections of one another. Wagenfeld wrote, for instance, that “things resemble the people that make them,” yet noted, at the same time, that consumer objects “either educate or confuse (*verbildet*) us.”³³

The Werkbund, therefore, espoused the notion that a world of well-formed, “honest” objects would serve as social prophylactics that would set off a chain reaction. If consumers could be made aware of the objects surrounding them, of their quality and its *social and historical* importance, then, the Werkbund hoped, producers would also be encouraged to produce quality goods and a type of consumption would emerge that did not damage the individual, but actually proved liberating.³⁴ But the erasure of the past and the refocusing of attention on the present bespoke the necessity of education. Wagenfeld declared, “We must first forget a lot, and then learn much in order to control the simple ABC of good taste.”³⁵ This was particularly true as economic recovery gathered steam and increasing numbers of goods entered West German markets.

Werkbund designers looked on anxiously as West Germans, eagerly gripped with “*Warenhunger*” (hunger for goods), embraced any number of design novelties instead of appreciating the virtues of ascetic neo-functionalism. Werkbund members remarked that in the growing market of goods, durability and quality were trumped by the whims of fashion and surface novelty, as embodied, for instance, in popular “Nierentisch”

design (named for the kidney-shaped table that was a staple of West German interiors in the 1950s).³⁶ Architect Hans Schwippert wrote in 1955, “We have a new situation today...Never before—that is now clear—has there been such a great variety of consumer goods. Previous generations of producer and consumer worlds never knew anything similar.”³⁷ The organization thus found itself confronting the dilemma of how to implement an aesthetic and philosophical program based on ideal concepts of form within the liberal, democratic capitalist economy that the organization both supported *and* hoped to build through its design efforts. To a certain extent, the Werkbund did succeed in gaining a governmental foothold in the implementation of standards in industrial design production when, in 1951, the Bundestag approved the founding of the *Rat für Formgebung* (the Council of Design) as part of the economics ministry.³⁸ Yet, increasingly, Werkbund leaders recognized the limits of legislation and acknowledged the necessity of educating Germans about good design.

If consumers could be equipped with an understanding of the ideals underlying Werkbund aesthetic and social philosophy, the organization hoped that consumers would make informed purchases in accordance with the recognition of their own importance as consumers in the construction of a new, improved West German everyday culture (*Alltagskultur*). Under the conditions of liberal democracy, the answer to engendering an improved society lay in consumer education as much as in consumer forms.³⁹

Accordingly, the Werkbund began to concentrate its efforts, through the late 1940s and 1950s, on the construction of subjectivity, as well as the production and design of things.⁴⁰ The Werkbund devised several outreach strategies to accomplish this goal. Having realized that simply purveying goods was not going to advance their aims, the organization strove to find ways in which to educate consumers outside of the

market, that is, to set up sites in which consumers would have access to information about “good form” free from the imperative of buying. What the Werkbund offered through these outreach projects was access to information, rather than products. An initial outreach strategy was the exhibition. Yet efforts like the 1949 Cologne exhibition, *Wie Wohnen* (How to Live), failed to draw audiences and sustained attention from manufacturers—perhaps because such exhibitions took place too soon after the war; consumers still struggling to keep their heads above water could scarcely devote attention to exhibitions of designs that were neither particularly affordable nor for sale on site. Exhibitions were, furthermore, of too limited duration to offer the possibility of long-term exposure.

Building on these experiences, the Werkbund realized that in order to cultivate a responsive audience over the long term, it needed to devise new strategies that would offer both prolonged access to design objects and a more interactive mode of exploring and learning about objects than simply seeing them on display. The Werkbund aimed not to convert consumers *mindlessly*, but rather to train potential consumers to understand the *critical* qualities of Werkbund-sponsored wares. In 1953, they opened their first *Beratungsstelle*, or advice center in Mannheim. The Mannheim advice dispensary was conveniently located in the city center, embedded within the urban fabric such that passersby could easily stop in, or look at the displays through generous plate-glass windows. Inside of the *Beratungsstelle*, visitors could explore models of domestic or work settings (living room, or office, for example) and directly interact with the exemplary furnishings. The Werkbund intended these to serve as non-elitist spaces, in which a direct interaction between people and objects could take place without the pressure to buy. Visitors could come again and again to *learn*.⁴¹

Here tactility and functionality could be tested and observed,

under the auspices of a trained “advisor” who could offer information. This advisor was not a salesperson, but was nonetheless equipped with information about where interested visitors could purchase the wares on display. Unlike the American style self-service stores that arrived in West Germany during the 1950s, like the chain of twenty-four Eklöh shops established by the supermarket entrepreneur Herbert Eklöh (who in part drew inspiration from his travels in America),⁴² this advisor could help visitors understand the goods that were on display. In self-service shops, sales representatives were sidelined at the cash register, meaning that customers increasingly encountered goods unaccompanied. As a result, packaging assumed a more active role. The package spoke directly to the consumer, enticing through its design and circumventing a potentially valuable, critical intervention: “impulse buying.”⁴³

For the Werkbund, the Advice Center offered a counter-model. The center’s mission was to educate, to have a knowledgeable representative elucidate the principles of the designs on view. This mediation took place alongside an interaction that offered direct physical contact with the exhibited designs. These were neither museums nor shops, a reporter wrote at the Mannheim Center’s opening. Here, a “direct interaction with the visitor can take place...the public, beginning with your school children, can be informed about the good things that are now available through serial production.”⁴⁴ These advice centers occupied a delicate position: on one hand one must underscore the pedagogical values that undergirded the Werkbund’s attempts to educate consumers, yet on the other hand one may well question the extent to which this education merely primed consumers to buy certain goods. In any case, the Mannheimer *Wohnberatungsstelle* was a success: a whopping 1,100 visitors visited the location within several weeks, spurring the development of similar centers in other West German cities. The reporter’s comments on the possibility of bringing school children

to the Mannheim Advice Center anticipated the Werkbund's next outreach strategy. Adopting Hans Schwippert's proposal to distribute the "leaven" to make the perfect West German loaf rise, the Werkbund began to conceive of ways to address the FRG's children, rather than focusing their attention on adults.⁴⁵

Whileschoolchildrenwereencouragedtovisitthe *Wohnberatungstelle*, the Werkbund figured that the distance between design and young subjects could be further minimized if design were to come directly to schools.⁴⁶ The crate project described at the outset of this article crystallized around this idea, as the Werkbund posited that connecting well-designed goods to young consumers-to-be would potentially form young subjects so that they might be equipped with the fundamentals of good taste before confronting the "confusing array of good and bad goods" that they would find on store shelves as adults.⁴⁷ These new West German subjects, they hoped, would not only be informed in terms of design options, but also in terms of life principles, recognizing the mutually constitutive relationship between the material world and those who create, consume and inhabit that world. At the same time, the children's youth promised that these new subjects would be unburdened from the weight of history. The Werkbund's crate project thereby conceptually conjoined the birth of the objects (like those inventoried in the introduction) on the factory floor to the birth of future consumer subjectivities in terms of the birth of a new, ideal nation.

Design within Reach

Bringing the Essential to School

The crate from Berlin Spandau whose contents I listed at the outset of this article was one of three *Kisten* designed in 1954 that heralded the Werkbund's postwar initiative to reform arts education in schools in such

a way as to bring both design into the curriculum and design objects to children in the classroom. This was to be the first of several such efforts staged around West Germany in the late 1950s and early 1960s, following the stabilized expansion of the West German economy.⁴⁸ With the cooperation of the West Berlin Senate for Education, the *Werkbund Nord* developed three thematic boxes containing elements of daily life: kitchen tools (*Küchengeräte*), the work table (*Arbeitstisch*), and the “set table” (*der gedeckte Tisch*, i.e. a table set properly for a meal). Just as Erhard and Adenauer sought to build the nation through domestic consumption, so too did these crates focus on the design of the domestic realm: raising children to attend to a well-equipped private world.

The crates themselves were designed with great attention to detail and, as much as the objects they contained, these boxes were the subjects of great admiration when presented to schools and the press in 1955. As Annemarie Lancelle extolled in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, the crates were plywood “*Wunderkiste*” whose ingenious design and production values harnessed “well ordered powers” (*ordnungsbeffissene Kräfte*) for the valuable cause of interesting young people in questions “pertaining to design and the cultivated shaping of their environment.”⁴⁹ Like a treasure chest, these portable units of dwelling accoutrements could circulate between West Berlin’s secondary schools, safely bringing the elements of the everyday domestic environment into the classroom. They were too heavy for one person to lift or transport alone. The apprentices at the Spandauer Practical School who built them, therefore, included lithe chrome handles on their narrow sides, so that five or six children could carry the box into the classroom together, making the ritual of the shipment and the unpacking of the crate a communal act (Fig. 5). If consumption bespoke privacy and individuality, the carrying of the crates by West German school children speaks to the ways in which



Fig. 5 Young Berliner students assembling the kitchen utensil crate. Publicity photograph by Bildbericht Orgel Köhne Berlin. Courtesy Werkbund Archiv/Museum der Dinge, Berlin.

the construction of the West German private sphere was conceived as a communal effort in the early years of the *Bundesrepublik*.

The size and weight of the crates corresponded to the extensive range of the objects contained within them. More than thirty kitchen

utensils, or a complete set of stoneware porcelain (including soup tureens), cutlery and glasses (for wine and water, as well as a tea set) all found a stable home in the well protected upper compartments of the various boxes, as did a table lamp and an exemplary collection of books in the “working table” set. Snapping open the crate’s clasps and lifting off the lid, an unobstructed overview of these contents greeted the users’ eyes. In Lancelle’s words, “everything which was normally spread about kitchen closets... is rendered visible.”⁵⁰ In order to prevent damage during shipping, the carpenters in Spandau isolated each object, cutting Styrofoam padding tightly around their individual shapes. This had the benefit not only of preventing collision during transit, but also of providing the order that reporters like Lancelle singled out as a noteworthy and valuable characteristic of the crates. Out of the disorderly kitchen drawer (in her words) or a consumer market overflowing with a “rapid succession of changing trends” (in the words of the Werkbund), these utilitarian objects appeared suddenly in a state of perfect order, rescued from hectic everyday life and the wiles of the blossoming free market economy.

The removal of the crate’s lid was only the first step in unpacking the box. For the topmost compartment containing the steadied objects could be lifted up as well. This exposed a further niche that sheltered a tabletop and four legs. These could be easily joined together and set up in the classroom, which transformed suddenly into a living room, kitchen, or den depending on which crate was in use. Each thematic crate had a correspondingly designed table: for the kitchen there was a varnished white table, whereas the *Arbeitstisch* crate contained a blacktopped, desk-like table with matching stool.⁵¹ As publicity photographs taken at the time indicate, the children were encouraged to unpack and assemble the furniture and then, as a group, arrange the contents of the crate in the appropriate manner on the tables. In this way, the children could

not only rehearse the daily ritual of setting the table, but could also take examples of domestic design that one might normally find reified in displays in shops, into their own hands. Thus, domestic consumer goods entered the classroom as objects that were both accessible and worthy of study. The consumer and the domestic worlds came in a box, which both protected them symbolically and also directed attention toward them, subjecting their contents to studious scrutiny.

These mobile, yet insulated objects echoed in material form the shifting dynamics that we have located as central to West German society of the reconstruction era. Their padded, well-insulated forms surrounded a buffered, but mobile vision of domestic life: a protected “nest,” drawn from the commercial market place, but stabilized in the four firmly sealed walls of the crate—a model, in other words, of the marriage between free-market circulation and domestic privacy propagated by politicians and social pundits like Erhard.⁵² As West Germans became increasingly mobile, they were simultaneously encouraged to seal themselves off from the public realm, as we have seen, by a regime that promoted insular domesticity as the building block of a new country. As photographed from above (Fig. 6) in 1955, the crates manifest this creation of stasis and insular order to an extreme. Against the unsteadiness and anxieties of a country struggling to manage the material and social inheritance of the war as well as the less dire chaos of nascent postwar capitalist plenty, these crates offered an embodied vision of future spiritual, social and material fortification.

The steadied contents of the crates, one contemporary enthusiast further observed, enabled students not only to engage in domestic role-playing, but also to explore more critically the “use value of a utensil” and to “grasp” (*begreifen*) both conceptually and literally the correspondence between the objects’ form, materiality, and function. The stilled objects—isolated in foam—offered a moment to slow down and reflect



Fig. 6 An image of the Berliner Werkbund's kitchen Utensil crate taken from above by Willi Nitschke, ca. 1955. Landesarchiv Berlin oder LAB/ Willi Nitschke, F Rep. 290, Nr. 37471.

on that which usually circulated with rapidity, either on the market, in the kitchen drawer or in the user's hand. The concrete skills to be gained from such an endeavor were a heightened faculty of judgment and an awareness of the "*eigene Lebenssphäre*" (living environment), which such object lessons clarified as a field that demanded close observation and consideration. These lessons transformed a traditional notion of art pedagogy, expanding "art" to include the practice of everyday life.⁵³ As Wilhelm Wagenfeld wrote in 1948, "an arts education must include the education of everyday life, just as educating people to live an everyday, worldly life must also encompass the realm of art."⁵⁴ With financial and structural support from the city senate and industrial manufacturers, the Berlin chapter was able to produce a small edition of the three crates

and offer these new pedagogical tools to schools free of charge.⁵⁵

The crate project in Berlin spawned follow-ups in other regions of the FRG, though each of the crate projects emerged within independent constellations since throughout the 1950s the Werkbund lacked a unified national umbrella organization. Instead, individual, regional chapters of the *Bund* organized and operated independently, though contact between them remained strong. Recognizing the potential of the Berlin crate project, Werkbund affiliates in Stuttgart, Munich and Hannover appropriated the idea and produced their own versions of the crates in the years that followed the Berlin debut.

In Stuttgart, Werkbund associate Rudolph Schnellbach expanded the initiative's reach by sending the crates to secondary trade schools (*Volksschulen*) as well as the more elitist *Gymnasien* (university track secondary schools) that constituted the audience for the Berlin project. The crates for the two educational tracks actually differed slightly. The crates for higher track students tended to be more typological, whereas those destined for lower track students at the *Volkshochschulen* were more environmental, "the breakfast table," for instance. As such, the latter tended to concentrate more attention on forms of social behavior and gatherings and less on the specificities of materials and production. Implied in this class division is the notion that the higher track students would be more likely to later partake in the production process as managers and designers. The Werkbund maintained this subtle type of class politics in spite of the fact that, officially, the crates and functional design, more generally, ought to be accessible to all and not dependent on social differences. Nonetheless, Schnellbach was a pioneer in postwar design pedagogy. In 1955 he founded an outpost of the regional *Landesmuseum* in Stuttgart, known as the *Geschäftsstelle zur Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts* (the Center for the Development of Art Pedagogy). As the name suggests, the *Geschäftsstelle's* mission was

to pursue experimental pedagogical projects that aimed to encourage young West Germans to concern themselves with the importance of a “sensible shaping of their own environment.”⁵⁶ The museum’s social function, he posited, was pedagogical. Its mission was to bring information and knowledge to society at large, not only to adults but also primarily to young people. “We want to *school* people’s eyes for the essential,” he declared, playing with the homonym between the words for “school” and “train” (*schulen*) to emphasize the necessity of addressing the broadest segment of German youth.⁵⁷

Thanks to technologies of mechanical reproduction, Schnellbach noted at the time, art history had made the move directly to the classroom in the form of photographs and posters. Design, however, proved more challenging, as Schnellbach argued that reproductions of utilitarian objects would not suitably engage and challenge the critical students’ critical faculties. In order to familiarize youth with the essential issues and principles of design, he insisted that students must be able not only to see but also to handle objects in person. They must be able to test their weight, to inspect their materiality, in order to understand the principles of form and function: to discern the properties of wood and glass and to grasp why certain diameters were appropriate for specific glasses or certain gradients appropriate for pouring, students needed direct contact with objects. In the context of the museum, Schnellbach resolved this issue by installing vitrines containing applied arts objects that opened and closed such that visiting classes could handle the objects directly (Fig. 7). Yet, as he noted, “It is impossible to bring *every* student to a museum.”⁵⁸

The crates devised in Berlin offered an answer to this problem, they would allow the “museum to come to the school” and enable curators, like Schnellbach, to work directly with instructors, furnishing them with the necessary materials for students to interact with exemplary



Fig. 7 An image of students “grasping design” in the brochure *Kunstunterricht und Umweltgestaltung: Programm und Bericht über die vom Badischen Landesmuseum durchgeführte Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen in Baden-Württemberg*, published by the *Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen in Baden-Württemberg*, Stuttgart in 1961. Photograph taken by the author.

design.⁵⁹ The emphasis for Schnellbach, as for the Berlin Werkbund members, lay on the “exemplary” nature of the designs they selected. The selection of objects was based on several factors including the material used, the function, appropriateness of the relationship between form and function, as well as the level of craft, and use vs. price value.⁶⁰ All selected objects, whether mass produced or hand-made, followed the Werkbund’s prewar modernist credo of truth to materials, high-quality production and an emphasis on reduced form with little decorative embellishment. Functionality was the ultimate aim of design, insisted Schnellbach and his colleagues, an aim that Werkbund proponents claimed one could “analyze with precision” and objectivity—hence the suitability of the program for the classroom.⁶¹

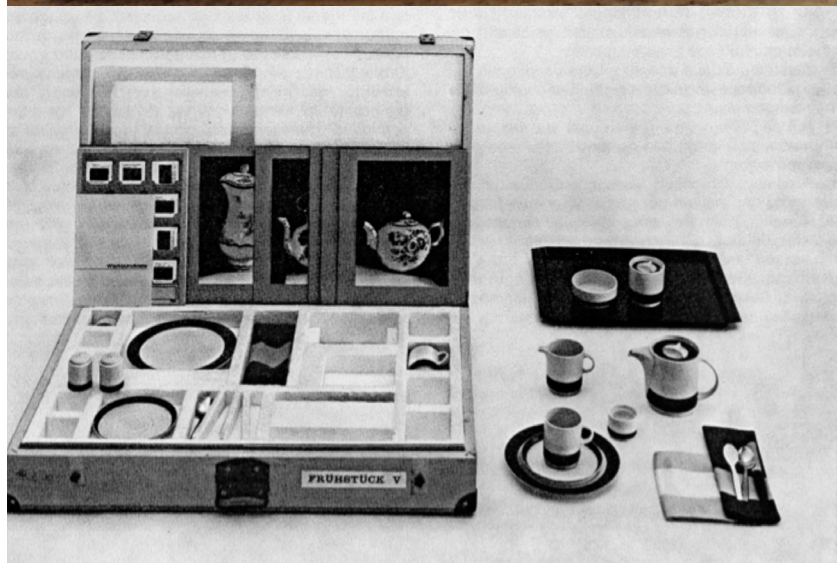
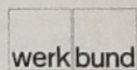
Whereas in Berlin, the focus of the crates had been situational (e.g. the “working table,” the “well-set table,”), Schnellbach’s crates were focused on typologies. Initially, the *Geschäftsstelle* sent out boxes to *Gymnasien* in the Stuttgart area that isolated specific groups of objects: “cups,” “pitchers” and “cutlery” were the first to make the rounds of Baden-Württemberg’s classrooms in 1956. These crates were smaller and simpler than their Berlin predecessors, and could be produced by the museum’s carpenters in larger quantities. Not only did Schnellbach fabricate them in greater volume than the *Werkbund Nord*, but his staff also continued to develop new sets of study-objects at a remarkable pace.⁶² Every four months, a new group of crates became available to the region’s schools. Following those listed above came “plates and bowls,” “vases,” and “well formed plastics.” Everyday life provided infinite possibilities for instruction. By 1958, participants from regional universities joined Schnellbach’s cause. Otto Habt, from Karlsruhe’s technical university, created a crate entitled “Construction principles of Today’s Architecture,” and the newly founded, highly regarded School of Design in Ulm provided a crate for “Good Typography.” *City Planning* (1959) and *Modern Chairs* (1960) further rounded out the project’s broad new scope.⁶³

This vast communal effort—which included politicians, designers, professors, teachers and bureaucrats—to revolutionize design education sprang from a historical circumstance in which material culture had come to carry a heightened political and social valence. In light of this, the crates also responded to the idea that design could create and communicate new historical narratives. In *Niedersachsen*, for example, the crates were developed with this aim specifically in mind. As in all the regions, *Niedersachsen*’s designers selected objects along thematic lines and embedded them securely in elaborately cut Styrofoam supports that protected the goods from transport damage, while also providing

Deutscher Werkbund
Niedersachsen-Bremen

Werkbundkästen
Aktion zur Unterstützung des Unterrichts
in Umweltgestaltung

Abschlussbericht



a clear organizational structure such that each object (or type of object) had its unmistakably designated place.⁶⁴ In addition, however, these Kisten were outfitted with eight mounted photographs of historical examples of “good form” (donated by Hannover’s Kestner Museum). West Germany’s young Design Council (*Rat für Formgebung*) also provided free slides of exemplary modernist industrial designs to put in the boxes (Fig. 8). The purpose of these images as well as accompanying handbooks was two-fold. For one, they provided detailed information about each object in the crate including useful synopses of material characteristics. They also constituted a means of building a historical trajectory that aligned the work of the Werkbund and its favored designers with prewar Werkbund affiliated movements, who worked in formal vocabularies that corresponded to the selections included in the crate (Bauhaus design and Jugendstil designers, like Henry Van de Velde, or Peter Behrens made frequent appearances).

In other words, the images linked the contemporary designs to the past pictorially, visually bolstering the Werkbund’s claim to an enduring and authentic connection to a pre-fascist tradition. The pamphlets and images made clear, moreover, that these continuities extended far beyond the twentieth century. Examples of seventeenth century, or even antique vessels, for example, found a place in the textual and photographic materials as a means of demonstrating that, in spite of superficial “decorous” changes, the principles of design had remained continuous throughout history. In this light, the “sometimes very elementary forms of modern design” would no longer appear to students and teachers

Figure 8 (opposite): History in a box: images reproduced in the Deutscher Werkbund Niedersachsen-Bremen-Werkbundkisten-Aktion zur Unterstützung des Unterrichts in Umweltgestaltung: Abschlussbericht, 1970 (the “final report” on the Niedersachsen Werkbund Crate project). The slides and the photographs place the contemporary design elements within a historical lineage. Here, old and new combine to legitimate the rhetoric of functionalism. Photographs by the author.

alike as “a return to the primitive, but rather manifest a continuity with the simple and lively craft of earlier epochs.”⁶⁵ In the Stuttgart pamphlet that accompanied the crate of wooden and wicker objects, for instance, the Werkbund authors begin their text by describing the lengthy history of “the oldest, yet still necessary material.”⁶⁶ Although in the postwar period, the authors continue, one might work with electric tools, the properties of wood had remained unchanged. Such descriptions emphasize the necessity of the crates’ pedagogical project in the sense that they ground the importance of learning about the material properties of everyday design as part of a historical narrative, but they also provide a legitimation for the stylistic program of the Werkbund. Though ornamentation may change, the pamphlet asserts, the grain and materiality of woods remains the same throughout the ages. In this manner, the Werkbund pursued the twin goals of teaching children about the properties of distinct materials (when one might use oak versus walnut, for instance, or how various types of glass are manufactured) while also inculcating students into the principles of a subtly naturalized aesthetic canon.

Moreover, in their selection of exemplary wares the crates also visualized an ideal world. This world was purged from the dangers of American materialism and bad taste. The material universe that they proffered was specifically *West German*. Though acknowledging West Germany’s alliance with the Allies through the deployment of an “international” functionalist formal vocabulary, the crates’ pamphlets and images formulated a uniquely German historical trajectory, one that joined the West German present with the past and affirmed German cultural traditions and values, posited through the lens of consumption (hence West German values, as opposed to the communist East where consumption was, in official terms, ideologically suspect). In one of the informational pamphlets accompanying the Stuttgart “breakfast”

crate, for example, a text informs students that while “in Roman lands, breakfast plays no role, in Nordic lands with their damp and foggy sea climate, breakfast has great importance...thus we should not eat our breakfast quickly, but rather comfortably on a happy and nicely set table in the company of the entire family.”⁶⁷ Such descriptions both confirmed German cultural singularity and also served to reiterate the current West German political discourse on domesticity. The boxes purveyed this discourse to the young users in texts and images as well as material objects: the new nation’s history came in a box.

The contents of the crates, therefore, constituted a carefully constructed, historically- minded body of information designed to instill Werkbund ideology and national values in a segment of the population not yet infected by materialist fever. Yet while the selection of the materials was thus proscriptively administered, their pedagogical deployment was relatively open. Teachers received the informational pamphlets in the days, or weeks before the crates were delivered to a school, leaving them enough time to familiarize themselves with the materials that were about to come. With this information as a foundation, teachers could devise a lesson plan. In an article written in 1959 for the Werkbund monthly magazine *Werk und Zeit*, teacher Alfred Fäustle described his deployment of the Munich “glass” crate in the following manner: first, the students took the glasses out of the crate and not only looked at them but handled them, such that the “notion of ‘grasping’ [the German *begreifen* implies both the physical gesture of grasping and the mental faculty of understanding] became literalized.”⁶⁸ On this basis, a discussion ensued in which Fäustle attempted to bring the students to understand how the forms of the various glasses related to their specific functions, why a “water glass will look different than a cup, or a wine glass, or a liquor glass.”⁶⁹ Likewise, the group discussed the physical properties of glass as a material, including its remarkable

transformability and the “temptations to which this can give rise.”⁷⁰ The direction of the lesson plan was thus set: having comprehended the principles underlying “form follows function,” students would be equipped to resist the seductive, but dysfunctional (in the moral as well as the physical sense) forms that glass and glasses might take.

The program demonstrates a remarkable interest in teaching students about the details of the fabrication process of consumer goods. In doing so, the consumer experience becomes increasingly connected to the mechanisms of production, such that buying no longer implies a distance from the craft of making. Indeed, the next step in the lesson plan was for the students to take up a pen and draw the glasses, on the basis of measurements they took from the examples. Marking the height and the diameter at the appropriate intervals on a blank page, Fäustle had his pupils fill in the gaps, connecting the diameters with curving vertical lines such that the shape of a glass emerged. The students then cut out their designs and, comparing them to the originals, continuing to shave away excess curvature, while remaining within the given dimensions. In doing so, the students gradually produced a series of variations that moved consistently towards the form of the original (“this is too plump, this is too swollen, too large on top, too thin...”). Through the process of making, they came, Fäustle asserts, to understand why the superior design of the original best corresponded to its particular function.⁷¹

The principle behind this type of lesson was that students come to understand how materials, function and form intersect, millimeter for millimeter. Control of the free market, capitalist world would begin in the classroom, where an intimate, hands-on awareness would grow regarding where materials came from and how and why forms *ought* to be manufactured. This would even, according to Fäustle, re-educate youth who might otherwise long for kitschy decoration reminiscent of the “cozy atmosphere of their homes,” as they would come to understand

why the enticing forms that “probably sell especially well” in fact “have nothing to do with today.”⁷² By deliberately omitting counter-examples of “bad” design, the Werkbund further hoped to avoid having children associate the evaluation of “good” and “bad” form too superficially. The goal was to have youth move beyond surface qualities toward thinking critically on the basis of first hand observation, a skill they would later need as adults when facing goods in a shop.

The responses to the *Werkbundkiste* initiatives were overwhelmingly positive. Polls administered to teachers who used the crates found that a substantial majority approved highly of the initiative.⁷³ As the director of the Niedersachsen program proclaimed, “The interest is so great, that we already cannot fill the great demand!”⁷⁴ Children also appear to have responded enthusiastically—perhaps in no small part because of the Werkbund’s effort to make such lessons casual, interactive and enjoyable, in contrast to the rest of the day’s schedule. One student wrote to Schnellbach’s *Geschäftsstelle*, “one can observe the objects from all sides, on top and on the bottom, which one can’t do with a picture. This means that one can build a relationship to form.”⁷⁵ According to Schnellbach’s estimations, in Baden-Württemberg alone, it was likely that 25,000-30,000 children were exposed through the program to “good form.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

Freedom as a Box?

The Werkbund’s crate project is infused with a tension that lies scarcely below the surface. For all of their popularity and notwithstanding the ways in which the crate project attempted to revolutionize how West German children saw the world around them, the endeavor is riddled with a central paradox: on the one hand, the project attempted to train young subjects in critical thinking in order to equip them with skills

to negotiate the *Konsumterror* of consumer capitalism, but at the same time, this critical freedom was a liberty predicated upon the extreme uniformity and control afforded by the four walls of the box. Indeed, although the Werkbund groups devised their crates individually, the products selected for inclusion were homogenous across the board. Most of the goods that traveled in the crates came from German manufacturers that had nurtured long-term associations with the Werkbund organization: porcelain by Arzberg and Schönwald, or glass from Zwiessel, Grawl, WMF and Süßmuth. Likewise, many of the models were products of Werkbund designers, like Hermann Gretsch who designed frequently for Arzberg.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the freedom of the young consumer, this implied, was one intended for a homogenous landscape of common designs and shared concepts.

The crate project's success manifested itself in its relative longevity, as well as its warm reception in the press. In Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Niedersachsen, Werkbund crates continued to circulate in high school art classrooms well into the 1960s. By the early 1970s, the situation had changed. New curricular impulses began to inflect arts education. These changes emerged in the context of the larger socio-political events of the late 1960s, as the young West German "68er" generation began to question the values that undergirded the construction of West German society following the war.⁷⁸ In the context of (arts and design) education, this encouraged a pedagogical orientation that distanced itself from adopting institutionalized views. The cultivation of "good" taste was no longer an acceptable goal. As the report marking the end of the Niedersachsen crate initiative constituted, "the education through and to art is experiencing a decisive transformation...[as] youth is skeptical of things that appear to be the expression of the establishment, which thereby loose their authority and even provoke angry rejection (*bekämpfung reizen*)."⁷⁹

This critique speaks pointedly to the aporia inherent in the notion of “organizing” freedom that lay at the center of the Werkbund project. If the Werkbund reluctantly embraced the “freedoms” of Erhard’s new social market economy, their efforts to negotiate democratic ideology remained burdened by their adherence to a strict aesthetic program, which disavowed individual judgment even as it purported to cultivate critical rigor. For the educational program, that they conceived to produce critical individuals was ironically predicated upon the adherence to one set of guiding principles: the same designs—if they were truly “functional”—had a universal validity.⁸⁰ In espousing such principles, the Werkbund ignored the relation of design to social practice: the ideal was not created, but instead existed as a set of rules that children could learn. The critically informed subjectivity that the crates cultivated was also a normative subjectivity. “The setting of the lunch table should be a small daily exercise of style and taste for us, the expression of our personality and attitude to life,” declared the pamphlet that accompanied the Stuttgart “lunch table” crate.⁸¹ Here, the pronoun “our” contrasts strikingly in the sentence’s syntactical structure with the word that follows, “personality.” For though personality is predicated upon the cultivation of individual difference, “our” refers to a collective subject, that is, a lack of individualized persona. The Werkbund’s critical subject thus reveals itself simultaneously as a pseudo-individual subject; the autonomy the organization claimed to support rested upon a non-autonomous foundation.

By the late 1960s, as the Werkbund correctly noted, critics were beginning to call this non-autonomous foundation into question—in part because of its failure to substantively address the Nazi past. For contemporary cultural critics like Adorno, the politics of reconstruction and the implementation of postwar democracy under the Adenauer regime had changed the *form* of German society, but had not con-

fronted the mechanisms that underlay the earlier embrace of fascism. The “fundamental structure of society,” Adorno wrote, “and thereby its members who have made it so, are the same today as twenty-five years ago.”⁸² Adorno argued that the formal repudiation of National Socialism was by no means commensurate with a “working through the past,” although the latter had become a popular catch phrase during the years following reconstruction. Indeed, he posited, the almost pathological focus of postwar politicians, designers and citizens on rebuilding—both literally and spiritually—the postwar *present* actively served to superficially efface the memory of the Nazi past. The supposition that the “healthy and realistic person is fully absorbed in the present and its practical goals,” he claimed, legitimized the preoccupation with rapidly building a new material society as a means of suppressing guilt, wiping the remnants of the past clean through the creation of sleek new surfaces, which formed a flimsy “reality...as though the damage never occurred.”⁸³ Adorno proposed education as a means of understanding fascism’s roots in non-autonomous thinking and “coming to terms with a past” in a way that would acknowledge past guilt while preventing a relapse into totalitarian barbarism. If children’s education can serve to reinforce “a person’s self-consciousness and hence...his self,” then children might develop the critical skills needed not to negotiate the “market,” but to negotiate the pressures that led, according to Adorno, to a lack of individual autonomy in thought and action.⁸⁴ “The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz” he writes, is the cultivation and preservation of individual self-determination.⁸⁵

This contemporary analysis of postwar West German democracy’s failure to meaningfully “work through the past” provides a trenchant lens through which to view the *Werkbundkisten* project. For, following Adorno, the Werkbund initiative fails on two fundamental levels as a means of building a “new” society. The Werkbund crates find themselves

trapped in the contradictory impulse to cultivate critical subjects while simultaneously inculcating subjects into a preordained set of beliefs, as we've seen, a duality that undermines the promise of self-determination. Further, the Werkbund's attempts to distance the West German post-war present from the Nazi past appear merely formal: the *appearance* of objects was thought to provide a sufficient means for engendering a spiritual and political regeneration of the German people. Yet this approach to social reform left the socio-economic factors that contributed to the Nazi breakdown of civilized principles glaringly unaddressed.

The Werkbund itself seems to have become aware, in the late 1950s, of the limitations of its ambitions, if not the fundamental paradox central to its program. Hans Schwippert wrote wistfully upon the occasion of the organization's fiftieth anniversary,

We designed a good glass. With this glass we wanted to help people lead a better, more beautiful life. This peculiar thought was motivated by the idea that we could not only improve people's lives by providing the glass, but also that the glass itself would improve the very person using the glass. An erroneous idea. The glass serves only indirect assistance. Instead, the task is to recognize the real human situation with humility.⁸⁶

Werkbund designers like Schwippert had come to realize that in the process of trying to (re)construct West Germany, the Werkbund had crafted new masonry, but not a new foundation. His comment appears to acknowledge the critique, mounted by Adorno, that in order to change society, more than the implementation of a formal aesthetic vocabulary would be necessary. By the 1970s, German educators concurred. One wrote paradigmatically in 1973, "Design is...not to be considered and pursued as an isolated practice, rather it always stands in relation to social relations of production."⁸⁷ The moment in which

the crate project ended thus coincided with a fundamental shift in the conception of design. The hopes and imperatives that fueled the Werkbund goal of creating a new spiritualized West German culture in the 1950s gradually waned, giving way to a new era of design practice and inquiry that placed greater emphasis on the interrelationship between form and differentiated social environments. The meticulously wrought, well-padded crates of the 1950s, however, serve today as time capsules. Their forms as well as the objects that they house eloquently invoke the hopes and anxieties of a transitional era in German history. They also recall the strength of the belief on the part of postwar German designers in the social relevance of their craft, as the Werkbund attempted to guide a nation by instilling children with the belief that form can change the world.

[Endnotes]

1. Annemarie Lancelle, “*Werkbundkisten für die Berliner Schulen*,” *Morgenpost*, January 23, 1955.
2. The list of these challenges is long; as the emergent Federal Republic struggled to overcome both the moral trauma of the recent Nazi past while coping with the intense physical aftermath of the war. In terms of housing alone, as many as five million homes were destroyed. Further exacerbating the housing problems were the twelve million refugees flooded into the FRG, moving westward from Eastern Europe, who needed to be housed and absorbed into broken institutional and material infrastructures. Three million were homeless, to say nothing of the displaced persons and victims of German aggression, whose psychological and physical arguably trumped German woes. On the issue of material lack under these conditions, see for instance Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 234. For a paradigmatic report from the period – from a design perspective – see

also Josef Thoma's introduction to Deutscher Werkbund, Eds. *Wie Wohnen: Gedanken und Bilder zur Ausstellung* (Stuttgart: Verlag Georg Hatje, 1949-50) unpaginated. The construction of the political economy, denazification and the formulation of a new civil society were further areas of physical, political and material concern. See for instance Konrad Jarausch, for an overview of this nexus in Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3. On the ideological role of design during the formative years of the Cold War, see Greg Castillo, *The Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) and Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). Texts on German domesticity in the 1950s are plentiful, particularly since the 1950s rapidly came to occupy a place of cultural nostalgia in the FRG. For a particularly detailed and balanced account of the myths and realities of consumer lives during the era, see Michael Wildt's *Alltagsgeschichte* of German consumer practices in postwar Hamburg. Wildt, *Am Beginn der "Konsumgesellschaft": Mangelserfahrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in West Deutschland in den fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg : Ergebnisse-Verlag, 1994).

4. It is beyond the scope of this article to contrast West German ideology vis-à-vis material culture to the relationship that people held to material culture in East Germany, which carried quite different ideological valences. The situation in East Germany was very different, of course, as East German socialist ideology maintained a political emphasis on collective socialization; although the 1950s also marked a period of economic expansion in the consumer sector in the GDR as well. For a multifaceted overview of the politics of daily life in the GDR, see for example the collected essays in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, eds. Paul Betts and Katherine Pence (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press) 2008. See also Castillo.

5. Bartning, cited in Betts, 76.

6. For example, the mayor of Bremen, Theodor Spitta, opined, "The houses are nearly all windowless; either they have gaping holes or their window openings

are boarded up... Shops are practically nonexistent; there are a few bakeries with long lines of people, otherwise, there's nothing to buy." Spitta's description of derelict postwar German cities draws an implicit connection between physical and moral destruction. Homes are broken shells and people waiting in front of empty shops will wait in vain, since there is "nothing" to reward their patience. Another German wrote characteristically, "Our ostracism is the result of our betrayal of human civilization." U.S. Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau initially proposed, in fact, to leave Germans in a state of material deprivation, reduced to agrarian subsistence in order to "have it driven home to them that the whole nation has engaged in a lawless conspiracy against the decencies of modern civilization." Morgenthau, cited in Jarausch, 6.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past" in *Critical Models: Catchwords and Interventions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 96.

8. Erhard called for an economic plan "that aims to promote consumer industries." "An increase in the production of consumer goods is vital," he claimed, "as people must be offered something in return for their labor." Erhard, 83. Regarding the wartime survival and expansion of the German industrial complex, see Jarausch, 87. The conditions for Germany's "miraculous," postwar consumer-driven economic recovery was, perhaps, as Jarausch has pointed out, not as dire as Germans perceived them to be at the time. The growth of the war economy throughout the 1930s and '40s had in fact significantly expanded Germany's already highly developed and modernized industrial sector and the bulk of this industry survived the war in far better condition than civilian dwellings. In the aftermath of the war, the industry's intact machinery and solid foundations could be recalibrated for consumer purposes, manned by a highly skilled (if psychologically troubled) population that included engineers and marketing experts as well as the growing source of labor provided by returning soldiers and refugees in desperate need of work and purpose. Jarausch's suggestion implies that postwar deprivation in Germany belied the fact that the Nazi regime had in fact paved the way for speedy economic recovery, driven largely by industrial production – even as the country saw itself

engulfed in postwar conditions of lack.

9. See Betts, 4.

10. Cited in Jarausch, 87.

11. Erhard, 14. emphasis added.

12. As if in perfect confirmation of Erhard's theories, only one year after the currency reform, the FRG's economy had undergone enough sustained growth to bring living standards back to an unexpected 85% of prewar levels – largely thanks to the consumer market and consumer agency. By 1952, there was a West German trade surplus and by 1960 West German exports represented 17% of the GNP, equaling already high prewar levels. Schildt and Sywottek, 420.

13. Ibid, 421-422.

14. This is not to imply that West German industrial design, or consumer product production was entirely free of foreign influence. As Greg Castillo and others have shown, both the United States and the Soviet Union competed with each other for popular support in Germany by trying to assert their superiority in the domestic and consumer arenas. Yet German designers were themselves not bound to any foreign-controlled regulations or regulatory commissions. The forms of industrially produced designs thus reflected the development of specifically German idioms, as will be discussed, that were indeed produced within an international context of exchange and influence, but which also maintained a degree of independence and a heavy dose of skepticism particularly in regards to the perceived cultural indecency of "Americanism." See Betts, 73-109.

15. Cited in Betts, 9. For instance, Braun electronics advertisements emphasized their function as national representational agents. One image, for example, carried the heading, "*Visitenkarte Deutschlands*" (calling cards of Germany), see Fig. 2.

16. Wilhelm Wagenfeld, *Wesen und Gestalt: Der Dinge um Uns* (Potsdam: Eduard Stichnote, 1948), unpaginated.

17. Chancellor Adenauer and Erhard tellingly enacted housing legislation that facilitated the purchase of new homes and industrially produced design products, like washing machines and refrigerators, through significant tax deduc-

tions so that West Germans could settle psychologically and physically while simultaneously building up the new nation as new home owners and consumers – a profound demonstration of the interconnection between politics and the production of industrial and architectural design consumer products. The previous year, Erhard and Würmeling had sponsored the *Aktion Volkswaschmaschine*, in order to enable families to purchase a washing machine and thereby free the housewife from the chore of lengthy washing so that she might spend more time with her family. See Schildt and Sywottek in Moeller, ed., 1997. Jürgen Habermas astutely noted the blurred boundary that emerged in this context between the public, political sphere and the so-called private sphere in which the “apolitical German” of the 1950s took refuge. Deconstructing the fallacious nature of the privacy of the domestic sphere, Habermas argued, “the (public sphere) has turned into a conduit for social forces channeled into the conjugal family’s inner space by way of a public sphere that the mass media have transmogrified into a sphere of culture consumption. The deprivatized province of interiority was hallowed out by the mass media: a pseudo-public sphere of a no longer literary public was patched together to create a sort of superficial zone of familiarity.” Cited in Betts, 240.

18. The phrase became widely used during this era. See Schildt and Sywottek, 427. For example, in 1957, the sociologist Helmut Schelsky wrote that, “The modern economy...*forces* man to consume, even if this occurs only through the ‘soft force’ of a continuous production of desires and the urgent and inescapable readiness of potential fulfillment...” Schelsky, *Schule und Erziehung in der Industriellen Gesellschaft* (Würzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1957), 72.

19. See Pamela E. Swett, Jonathan Wiesen and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

20. This particular conflation led Erich Kästner to sardonically characterize West Germany in the 1950s as an era of ‘motorized Biedermeier,’ referring to the earlier nineteenth century German era of conservative, bourgeois interiority. Cited in Schildt and Sywottek, 438.

21. Joan Campbell’s *The German Werkbund* (Princeton: Princeton University

Press, 1978) remains an authoritative English source on Werkbund history in general.

22. In 1946, Bartning wrote an article entitled “*Die Stunde des Werkbundes*” (The Hour of the Werkbund) in reference to the important tasks the organization faced in rebuilding the destroyed nation. As Paul Betts has shown, Bartning’s views were widely shared in design, but particularly in Werkbund circles. See also Gerda Breuer, ed., *Das Gute Leben: Der Deutsche Werkbund nach 1945* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2007).

23. The *Zentralstelle für die Förderung der deutschen Wertarbeit e.V.* (Hannover) or the *Arbeitskreis für Industrielle Formgebung im Bund Deutscher Industrieller* (Cologne) were others.

24. Breuer 2007, 60.

25. The Werkbund promoted the tale of the avant-garde’s persecution under Hitler and opposition to the NS regime. The individual stories of various Werkbund members, however, paint a much more nuanced picture. Hermann Gretch, for example, whose designs featured so prominently in the Werkbund children’s crates, was an early member and supporter of the NSDAP. His success as an industrial designer grew during the Third Reich. Others, like Wilhelm Wagenfeld, had been steadfast critics of fascism, but were renowned enough as designers to continue working under their leadership. Perhaps tellingly, however, Wagenfeld was one of only three members of the Werkbund to vote against the Nazi cooption of the organization in the 1930s. Other prominent designers like Lily Reich all voted to accept the changes demanded by the Nazis to the Werkbund’s rhetoric and administrative structure. On the case of Reich and the politics of collaboration-resistance in German design of the 1930s, see Esther da Costa Meyer, “Cruel Metonymies: Lilly Reich’s Designs for the 1937 World’s Fair. *New German Critique*, no. 76, Special Issue on Weimar Visual Culture (Winter, 1999): 161-189. See also Paul Betts’ Ch. 1 on the checkered history of the Werkbund during the 1930s. For an introduction to the Werkbund’s postwar reformation, see Breuer, 56-74.

26. Robert G. Moeller deploys the term to great effect in his analysis of postwar German constructions of history in “War Stories: The Search for a Useable

Past in the Federal Republic of Germany.” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Oct., 1996): 1008-1048.

27. Cited in Breuer, 62 [translation mine].

28. The advertisements for the Werkbund in support of a 1956-57 Interbau exhibition in Berlin make this clear. One page in the exhibition catalogue shows an arrow dynamically pointing out of the ruins of Berlin towards a new future free of the cluttered urban fabric of yore. The new, unfettered living couture is embodied in turn by a photograph of a spare, light-filled, functionalist living room whose pared-down surfaces enable rather than hinder a clarity of sight and mind (Figs. 3-4).

29. Cited in Betts, 76.

30. Again, in English scholarship, Joan Campbell (1978) covers the pre-war history of the movement and Frederic J. Schwartz provides compelling readings of the movement’s philosophy as related to the world of advertising and German cultural and intellectual history: *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1996.

31. Cited in Betts, 76.

32. Ibid, 84.

33. Wagenfeld, unpaginated.

34. And, as Joan Campbell has noted in relation to the prewar context, by extension the nation. See Campbell, 14.

35. Wilhelm Wagenfeld, 1948.

36. Hermann Glaser, “Das Schöne und das Hässliche Ästhetik in den fünfziger Jahren” in *Das Gute Leben: Der Deutsche Werkbund nach 1945*, Ed. Gerda Breuer (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2007) 74-83.

37. Cited in Breuer, 66 [translation mine].

38. The Council’s duty was to support the best of German design in the interest of (international) economic competition and trade. The *Rat* brought together not only designers, but also unions and representatives of manufacturing and sales, publicists and educators who all espoused the same aesthetic values. This group, led by Werkbund member Mia Seeger, served as a liaison to the eco-

conomic ministry, preparing exhibitions and awarding prizes for “good” form.

39. Schwippert, cited in Breuer, 66 [translation mine]. Hans Schwippert eloquently summarized the Werkbund’s confrontation with the liberal democratic marketplace as follows: an extraordinary new freedom has emerged for designers and West German citizens, he wrote, “under the condition that this new freedom of choice is deployed and practiced with discernment. When we begin to educate people to think consciously about the freedom of choice, when choosing, that is buying, that is owning, that is taking a thing into one’s personal environment, that is decorating a home and realizing one’s own personal environment: when this practice of self-realization is taught and practiced- then rote, distorted consumption will finally disappear.”

40. Bartning proclaimed in 1946, “*Werkbund...seine neue, schlichte Aufgabe der Menschenbildung.*” Cited in Breuer, 67.

41. See Betts, 72-109. For a local, contemporary review, see Heinrich König, “Faire Chancen für neue Möbel: die erste deutsche Wohnberatungsstelle in Mannheim eröffnet” in *Die Vier Wände*, October 7, 1953.

42. See “Die Eklöh-Furcht: SUPERMARKT” in *Der Spiegel*, 26.08.1959, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-32333113.html> (accessed July 5, 2013).

43. Ibid. Historian Michael Wildt has astutely described the way in which, during the 1950s, in the context of the new self-service economy, product design began to assume an increasingly important semantic function. See Wildt, 1994. On postwar shopping and advertising in Germany, see also Swett, Wiessen and Zeitlin, eds., 2007.

44. König, “Faire Chancen für neue Möbel,” *Die Vier Wände* 7.10.1953.

45. Cited in Betts, 97.

46. In an article on the crate endeavor writing in 1956, a reporter noted that “as praiseworthy as the work of the Werkbund is and will always remain, it is always suffered under the barrier of age...here [with the crates] the simple but utterly convincing idea to make the trip to schools is certainly correct...these new lessons will certainly bring more than all discussions have until now” from “Kunst in Kisten,” *Deutsche Zeitung und Wirtschaftszeitung*, March 28, 1956.

47. Cited from the minutes of a planning meeting that took place in Hannover

on March 20, 1963 between Schulrat Thies, Dipl. Ing. Kulenkampff, and Architekt Naegel (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin).

48. Schildt and Sywottek define the period prior to 1955 as the era of reconstruction, whereas the post-1955 years through the late 1960s can be conceived of as distinct years of economic expansion. On the various crate projects, the following short articles are the most accessible sources: Henning Haeger, “Werkbundkisten: Eine (zu) frühe Initiative des Landesverbandes Niedersachsen” in *Wie Wohnen: Von Kunst und Qual der richtigen Wahl- Ästhetische Bildung in der Alltagskultur der 20; Jahrhunderts*, ed., Beate Manske (Stuttgart: Hatje Catz Verlag, 2004), 121-123; and Stefan Jungklaus, “Werkbundkisten- Erziehung zum vernünftigen Konsumenten” in *Kampf der Dinge: Der Deutsche Werkbund zwischen Anspruch und Alltag*, ed. Werkbund Archiv/Museum der Dinge (Leipzig: Koehler + Amelang, 2008), 126-132.

49. Lancelle, 1955.

50. Ibid.

51. The *Arbeitstisch* came replete not only with writing utensils, but also included a set of recommended exemplary reading that ranged from Knaus’ Lexicon to the *Galgenlieder*, the German poet Christian Morgenstern, and extended, even, to novels by Ernest Hemmingway, a nod towards the new allegiance with the United States and the principles of individuality and independence.

52. The crate pamphlet for the “Principles of Modern Building” box, made in Stuttgart, stated that the house ought to function as “the container for a free, distanced living realm of the individual, as a nest for the family, as protection and shelter from the environment and danger...” Unpaginated pamphlet produced by the *Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen*, Karlsruhe for the crate “*Prinzipien des modernen Bauens*,” (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin).

53. As pedagogue Wilhelm Braun Feldweg observed in 1956, these object lessons which the Werkbund derived from the notion of “*werkbetrachtung*,” central to the famous Bauhaus *vorkurs* curriculum, enabled youth to “observe the essentials” of the material world which they inhabited. Feldweg, cited in Peter Schmidt, “Die ‘Schulkisten’ des Badischen Landesmuseums Karlsruhe:

Ein Beitrag zur Behandlung des Themenfelds Gestaltete Umwelt im Kunstunterricht.“ in *Wie Wohnen: Von Kunst und Qual der richtigen Wahl- Ästhetische Bildung in der Alltagskultur der 20. Jahrhunderts*, Ed. Beate Manske, (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), 114.

54. Wagenfeld, 1948.

55. The loan period for the crates ranged from four to six weeks.

56. Rudolf Schnellbach, *Kunstunterricht und Umweltgestaltung: Programm und Bericht über die vom Badischen Landesmuseum durchgeführte Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen in Baden-Württemberg* (Stuttgart: Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts and den Schulen, 1961) unpaginated [translation mine].

57. Ibid. [Emphasis mine].

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. “*Verwendeten Material, nach der Funktion, Zweckbestimmung, Technik, Form und Farbe der Gegenstände, nach der Bedingtheit handwerksmäßiger Einzel- oder instrieller Serienherstellung und nach Gesichtspunkten der Wirtschaftlichkeit.*” Cited in Stephan Jungklaus, 127. As the pamphlet produced in Hannover to explain the crate initiative stated, the selection of materials used for lessons of “*gute Form*” needed to pay special attention to issues of ornamentation (Dekor) and color because these qualities can often fool the user-viewer’s eye. They often trump function with enticing surface appearances. See *Werkbundkiste: Erläuterung zum Unterricht in Werkbetrachtung*, Ed. Deutscher Werkbund Niedersachsen-Bremen, 1956. Unpaginated.

”Geschmack aus der Kiste: Gestern Vorgeführt: Hilfsmittel für Kunstunterricht” *Hannover Zeitung*, July 16, 1964.

61. Juliane Roh declared in the Werkbund monthly journal that though one can fight over taste and decoration, functionality “*sich tatsächlich beinahe wissenschaftlich exakt ausmachen lässt, was eine optimale Form für einen bestimmten Zweck ist.*” Roh, “Müsterkisten der neuen Sammlung München,” *Werk und Zeit*, vol. 8, No. 4 (1959): 4.

62. The majority of the *Landesmuseum* crates were fabricated as editions of

ten, though the most popular sets numbered as many as sixteen editions.

63. The latter two included only photographs and texts, in accordance with the scale of the featured themes.

64. In Hannover, the thematic crates included types for cutlery, porcelain, glass, plastic, metal, wood and wicker, ceramic, textiles, and a version of the “model apartment.”

65. Schnellbach et al., 1961, unpaginated.

66. Pamphlet produced by the *Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen*, Badisches Landesmuseum, (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin), unpaginated.

67. Pamphlet produced by the *Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen*, Karlsruhe for the crate “*Der Frühstückstisch*,” *Gruppe VII* (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin).

68. “*Die vor uns stehenden Gläser waren nun zu betrachten, nicht nur mit den Augen, sondern viel mehr noch mit den Händen: der Sinn des “begreifens” wird hier offenkundig.*” Alfred Fäustle, “Über den Umgang mit Musterkästen im Unterricht“ in *Werk und Zeit*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1959), 4.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. When not being deployed in the classroom, teachers sometimes set up the contents of the crates in school hallways so that students could prolong their interaction with the items. The Stuttgart *Geschäftsstelle* produced additional vitrines for this purpose, though sometimes the empty crate served as a convenient plinth. The transformation into a pedestal speaks to the way in which the crate both brought objects from the museum into the hands of the public but simultaneously maintained a connection to canonical forms of display.

72. “And this was a winning argument!” Fäustle triumphantly concludes. Fäustle 1959, 4 [translation mine].

73. In Niedersachsen, 55 percent of teachers evaluated the project entirely positively, while 35 percent wanted additions to the materials (like textiles) and only 10% percent disapproved. *Werkbundkisten: Aktion zur Unterstützung des Unterrichts in Umweltgestaltung Abschlussbericht*, ed., Deutscher Werkbund

Niedersachsen-Bremen, June 1970 (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin), unpaginated.

74. Eberhard Kulenkampff, cited in Rolf Seufert, "Hölzerne Kisten, die es in sich haben: Der Werkbund in Hannover überlässt den Schulen zur Anschauung geschmackvolle Gegenstände," *Die Welt*, September 23, 1965.

75. Cited in Schnellbach et. al., 1961.

76. Of a total 310, 230 regional *Gymnasien* made use of the crates. Peter Schmitt, "Die ‚Schulkisten‘ des Badischen Landesmuseums Karlsruhe: Ein Beitrag zur Behandlung des Themenfelds Gestaltete Umwelt im Kunstunterricht" in *Wie Wohnen: Von Kunst und Qual der richtigen Wahl- Ästhetische Bildung in der Alltagskultur der 20. Jahrhunderts*, Ed. Beate Manske (Stuttgart: Hatje Catz Verlag, 2004), 112.

77. Wagenfeld, Gretsch and Heinrich Löffelhardt were the designers whose works were most frequently used in the crates from Berlin to Hannover. Josef Strasser, "Die Güte Form macht Schule: Zu den Werkbundkisten als designpädagogisches Instrument" in *100 Jahre Deutscher Werkbund 1907/2007*, Ed. Winfried Nerdinger, (Munich: Prestel, 2007), 250-251.

78. See Jaraus, 156-182.

79. *Werkbundkisten: Aktion zur Unterstützung des Unterrichts in Umweltgestaltung Abschlussbericht*. Ed. Deutscher Werkbund Niedersachsen-Bremen, June 1970 (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin), unpaginated.

80. For example, Rudolf Schnellbach wrote in the introduction to the 1949 Cologne exhibition, "Social difference should not be expressed in the form of our appliances and furniture, for the form of furniture is not linked to the social differences of the user." Such statements reveal the type of conformism that underlay an educational project that aimed to build critical autonomy. *Wie Wohnen: Gedanken und Bilder zur Ausstellung* (Suttgart: Verlag Georg Hatje, 1949-50), unpaginated.

81. Pamphlet produced by the *Geschäftsstelle für die Ergänzung des Kunstunterrichts an den Schulen*, Karlsruhe for the crate "Der Mittagstisch," *Gruppe VIII* (Werkbund Archiv, Berlin).

82. Theodor W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Catchwords and Interventions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 192.

83. Ibid, 192.

84. Ibid, 194. For Adorno's critique of functionalism in architecture in the postwar context see his essay "Functionalism Today" in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), 6-21.

85. Adorno, 195.

86. Cited in Betts, 105.

87. Hermann Sturm, cited in Schmitt, 120.

Image: Publicity photograph of school children unpack the contents of a Werkbund crate, Berlin. Photo by Bildbericht Orgel Köhne Berlin. Courtesy Werkbund Archiv/Museum der Dinge, Berlin.

