

The German Werkbund - A Retrospective

I. General – Introduction

The Deutsche Werkbund (DWB), founded in 1907, was the first larger organization whose members reflected the manifestations of industrially produced mass goods. This examination of the then new world of products and goods was not only conducted theoretically. Rather, the members of the DWB tried in various ways to influence the design of things and to use those they considered "good" as "cultural emissaries"¹ to improve the taste of broad sections of the population.

The DWB still exists today and is thus one of the few socio-political organizations in Germany that survived the great social upheavals and economic crises of the 20th century, the two world wars that accompanied or were triggered by them, and last but not least the so-called III. Reich. However, these crises also affected the existence of the DWB and led to major conflicts within the organization. These and the respective changes in social and economic circumstances were the reason for various reorientations of its program and the change in its organizational structure after the last war. The consequence was, especially in the last decades, the loss of a clear profile. This, but even more so its complex history, are probably the most important reasons why the Deutsche Werkbund has remained rather unknown to a larger, especially international public, even though it was able to count numerous prominent personalities among its sometimes well over 2,000 members, including the first president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Theodor Heuss (member of the DWB from 1913 on).

As can already be seen from the biographies of its founding members, the Deutsche Werkbund is a child of the late 19th century. A strong motive for their union was the common experience, perceived as "disgrace", that German products were still considered cheap and bad in international comparison until the turn of the century and therefore a negative image was associated with the label "Made in Germany", which the British government had enforced in 1887 with the "Merchandise Act".² Thus, not least of all, the patriotic, "national sentiment" of many members of the early DWB was an element that united them, and this was a common feature of the course of the imperialist armament of the European nation-states before the World War I, which sometimes took on bizarre nationalist excesses. After the collapse of the German Empire, after revolution and inflation in the early Twenties, in the Weimar Republic, a younger generation of members recalled the original goals of the Werkbund, but expanded the spectrum of topics from product design and architecture to living and working and urban planning. Already at the beginning of the so-called III. Reich, the DWB was dissolved by the National Socialists. After World War II, in 1947, the Werkbund was reconstituted as a national umbrella organization and in ten independently working (West German) regional groups. The socio-political influence that the organization had until 1934 could no longer be achieved, but the various groupings appeared and continue to appear today with interesting initiatives on societal issues.

There is an almost unmanageable number of publications on the history of the Deutsche Werkbund (and the work of its members).³ It will not be retold in this article. Rather, the aim of this text is to look back at his most important positions, actions and achievements and trying to illustrate the contribution he has been able to make to the shaping of industrialized society over the last 100 years.

¹ Compare Asa Briggs: *Victorian Things*, London 1988, p. 11ff.

² Compare Udo Felbinger: *Vom Makel zur Marke: Made in Germany 1876-1916*, in: Renate Flagmeier (Hrsg.), *Made in Germany. Politik mit Dingen. Der Deutsche Werkbund um 1914*, Berlin 2017, p. 27-41.

³ A selection of these publications is listed in the appendix to this text.

II. On the Program of the Deutsche Werkbund

With other social reform movements that were virulent at the turn of the 19th to 20th century, especially in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, the members of the Werkbund, who came from bourgeois-liberal circles, shared the criticism of the consequences of unrestrained industrial development, the increasing economization of working and living conditions, and the "semiotic chaos of commercialized forms" (F. Schwartz) of the world of goods and in architecture. But unlike German artisan organizations and the diverse life reform movements in Germany - from anthroposophy and the naturopathy movement to nutritional reform, to name but a few -, and unlike the *Arts & Crafts Movement*, which propagated a return to pre-industrial production methods, the DWB has not been an enemy of industrialization. Rather, its members, largely in agreement with the cultural-political associations that had already emerged earlier, the *Dürerbund* (1902-1935) and the *Bund Heimatschutz* (from 1904),⁴ believed that targeted cooperation with industry would give them a chance to improve the design of products and, through this, working and living conditions in general: Cheap and fashionable mass products, often made from substitute materials and decorated with historical forms, were to be replaced by durable products of high-grade design and technical quality that would encourage consumers to decorate their living environment "tastefully"; moreover, it was hoped that by producing such quality products, work and "labor" itself would once again be given "the value it had had in better times, when work could be a pleasure."⁵ Overall, it was believed that in this way, even under the conditions of "modern capitalism", a "harmonious culture" understood as "lost" could be established, which would at the same time make it possible to balance out social contradictions. This is what § 2 of the 1908 statutes of the association says:

"The purpose of the federation is the refinement of commercial work in the interaction of art, industry and handicraft through education, propaganda and coherent statement on relevant questions."

The formulation "refinement of commercial work" is to be understood as a formula for the lowest common denominator on which the cooperation of the members of the DWB, which were characterized by different, even partly contradictory interests, should be based: For "refinement of industrial work" or, as it was briefly called: *Qualitätsarbeit* (quality work) meant neither an advocacy of a certain artistic style, nor of the artisan or industrial method of production, and demanded an improvement of the products and their manufacturing conditions without explicitly commenting on the working conditions, i.e. the so-called "social question".

Thus, the Deutsche Werkbund brought together personalities of different political colours, different artistic attitudes and personal interests: independent artists and craftsmen, architects, merchants, medium-sized entrepreneurs and representatives of the big industry as well as politicians, civil servants and theorists. This "union of the most intimate enemies" (Wolf Dorn, first secretary of the DWB) held together above all by the common expectation of being able to act as a pioneer for a better society by propagating the so-called *Qualitätsarbeit* and at the same time to give international recognition to the German culture which had been renewed in this way. This socio-political expectation was, however, connected with the further, possibly stronger, and in any case clearly business expectation that, as agreed in the "unwritten statutes", contracts for products and projects should preferably be awarded to the members of the closed, exclusive association,⁶ i.e. that as a member of the Werkbund one could also profit from the cooperation in one's own field of work.

⁴ This organization exists to this day, now under the name *Bund Heimat und Umwelt Deutschland* (BHU), and counts about 500.000 members.

⁵ Compare Theodor Fischer (first head of the board of the DWB), quote in Wend Fischer: *Zwischen Kunst und Industrie*. Der Deutsche Werkbund, München 1975, p. 16.

⁶ Only by resolution of the board one could become a member of the DWB.

The Werkbund was thus at no time an artistic school or a professional association, but can best be understood as a peculiar mixture of agency and lobby, which from the beginning up to recent times was determined by a dynamic interplay between the initiatives of its individual members and its actions and positions as an association: often far removed from the "coherent statement" required by the statutes.⁷ Thus, the Werkbund was able to act most effectively where it succeeded in giving space to the individual interests of its members within the framework of the organization, i.e. in the context of exhibitions, publications, educational programs and conferences.

III. From Type-dispute to Cooperate Identity

The central demand of the Deutsche Werkbund for *quality* and *tasteful design* "from sofa cushions to urban planning" (Herrmann Muthesius) remained indeterminate. For in view of the variety of products and the diversity of their functions and formal design, it was impossible to develop convincing and uniform criteria by which these characteristics could have been defined. There was only agreement to the extent that "expediency, construction correctness and fabric authenticity,"⁸ later also defined as *material suitability, formal correctness, objectivity and functionality*, should distinguish a product of *Qualitätsarbeit*. Whether a product met these criteria could therefore only be decided in individual cases and often remained the subject of respective discussions. If it becomes clear here once again that the Werkbund did not represent any particular (artistic) style, then this openness with regard to "questions of form" is one of the main reasons why the DWB has been able to participate in socio-political discourses to this day.

However, this openness also led to the so-called "Typenstreit" (type dispute) that almost caused the split of the organization already in 1914. Because from the beginning oriented towards industrial mass production, it seemed obvious to some members of the DWB to start out from respective production conditions when designing consumer goods or at least to take them into account. Thus, *Hermann Muthesius* saw in the production of well-designed types, according to which the mass goods were to be manufactured, the chance to be able to achieve the goals of the Werkbund according to "objective" design and at the same time to achieve their general implementation:

"The reduction of the movement to the typical is above all also necessary to bring about a uniformity of the general taste. For the audience, a certain conformity of the given, a visible evenness, is the precondition for forming a picture and getting used to a form of expression. Individual peculiarities are confusing. Concentrations create security and reassurance."⁹

Even if one does not want to go so far as to understand Muthesius' demand as an attempt to exercise "a kind of cultural dictatorship over the use of things,"¹⁰ here one can clearly see the elitist and authoritarian position, legitimized as expert opinion, from which he, like many of his comrades-in-arms, tried to determine what was to be considered good taste for the "public", that is, for the mass of the population. For the "masses" were generally denied the ability to make an appropriate aesthetic judgment. The tendency towards authoritarianism of the better-knowing and the educational visions and impulses associated with it, however, more or less obviously permeate

⁷ As Winfried Nerdinger noted in retrospect: "The motto issued by the then [from 1950] chairman Hans Schwippert and quoted again and again since then, *the Werkbund is what its members achieve*, ultimately only proves the loss of importance of the organization, which could neither set clear goals nor tackle major projects itself and wanted to adorn itself with the achievements of its members. With this claim, from the Bauhaus to Interbau, everything that pleases was and is appropriated, while for mistakes of course the individual members are made responsible. See: Winfried Nerdinger: 100 Jahre Werkbund – eine Einführung, in: ders. (Hrsg.): 100 Jahre Werkbund 1907/2007, München 2007, p. 8.

⁸ Compare Friedrich Naumann: Flugschrift 1908, quoted in Kurt Junghans: Der Deutsche Werkbund. Sein erstes Jahrzehnt, Berlin 1982, p. 157 ff.

⁹ Hermann Muthesius: Die Werkbundarbeit der Zukunft. Vortrag auf der Jahreshauptversammlung in Köln 1914, Jena 1914, p. 43.

¹⁰ Compare Gert Selle: Geschichte des Design in Deutschland, Frankfurt/M 1994, p. 143.

almost all of the activities of the Werkbund to this day and can be regarded as its typical feature (and problem). It is therefore not surprising that only one equal member of the *Bund*, the then highly successful artist and designer *Henry van de Velde*, contradicted Muthesius: he was able to assert the necessity of artistic freedom, and flatly refused to be forced into a canon of types for economic reasons, or even at all.¹¹

But the ensuing fierce debate among the members was not only a dispute about the necessity of standardizing industrial products. Rather, it became soon fundamental discussion about the position and role of applied-working artists in the context of industrialized production conditions; in other words, about a problem comparable to the one that had already arisen for the first time (from 1839 on) with the invention and implementation of photography as the first technical process of image production for visual artists: the loss of their dominant role as producers of mimetic-realistic representations, which could now increasingly be produced more and more easily even by "laymen".¹² Similarly, however, to painting, which, after an initial shock phase, began to flourish again from the middle of the 19th century onwards, applied-working artists also received new fields of work with the design of the surfaces of the bodies of goods and of trademarks, word and figurative marks and advertising materials. This development was decisively promoted by the fact that the copyright for applied artistic works was legally anchored in Germany from 1907 on.¹³

Peter Behrens, who worked from 1907 to 1914 as an artistic advisor for the Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft (AEG) in Berlin, was a prime example of the new role of authors of applied artistic works. In this capacity he designed products, logos and advertising material, business equipment and buildings, and was able to influence the company's overall image. Although in retrospect Behrens designs may seem rather conventional and often eclectic, his position within the large company was a role model that many other companies, large and small, such as *Bahlsen*, *Kaffee Haag*, the *Dresdner Werkstätten für Handwerkskunst* or the *Linoleum Werke Delmenhorst*, each in its own way adapted.¹⁴ However, these designs primarily served to develop the appearance of the goods into unmistakable branded articles and to advertise them accordingly. It was not until the mid-1950s, however, that the Werkbund company *Max Braun* was able to develop a coherent design that encompassed both the products and the company's market presence, i.e. a genuine corporate identity. It not only included the design of its (high-quality) products and their promotion with an advertising concept based on information instead of persuasion, but also aimed at a non-authoritarian, partnership-based relationship with its customers, who were no longer understood as "consumers" but as "users". Thus, the Braun company was the first in Germany to integrate design as an equal factor in the company's production and sales process.

IV. Promoting "Good Design" via Collections, Exhibitions and Museums

The Deutsche Werkbund became known to a broader public primarily through its exhibitions. At the same time, they were always the events in which the visions of its members crystallized and thus also had an effect on the organization itself. One exhibition, the *Dritte Deutsche Kunstgewerbe-Ausstellung* (Third German Arts and Crafts Exhibition) in Dresden in 1906, provided the decisive impetus for the founding of the DWB the following year. Because this exhibition, unlike its predecessors, was not organized by the associations of crafts and industry, but by artists: Only when a company was willing to execute the designs of the artist, from whom it had been invited, it could

¹¹ Compare Kurt Junghans: *Der Deutsche Werkbund. Sein erstes Jahrzehnt*, Berlin 1982, p. 45, who understands Henry van de Velde's position as kind of a sober view on the production conditions.

¹² We have been experiencing a comparable but far more comprehensive development for several decades with the digitalization and algorithmization of all kinds of activities.

¹³ Compare Frederic J. Schwartz: *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War*, New Haven 1996.

¹⁴ 1908 about 160 companies from all parts of the economy have been member of the DWB.

show its production. For the aim of the exhibition was to show arts and crafts "as art" and not "as business".¹⁵ A further innovation of the exhibition, organized by *Fritz Schumacher*, was that it did not show individually manufactured furniture and interiors for bourgeois homes, but serial products such as *Richard Riemerschmid's* "machine furniture", simple home furnishings and designs for public buildings such as post offices, courts and schools. It was one of the most important early promoters of the Werkbund, the liberal politician *Friedrich Naumann*, who grasped the cultural and economic policy dimensions of the exhibition and tried to secure its innovative approach by founding an organization. In his lecture "Art and Industry" he analyzed

"In the craftsman, the three activities of the artist, technician and merchant are united. Now the artist separates from the businessman, and the businessman separates the commercial and the industrial part in his business".¹⁶

The formula of the *trinity of artist, technician, and merchant* developed from this, however, ignored and faded out the actual production conditions; it remained the ideological basis of the Werkbund until the 1920s, and has been the basic *Bauhaus-idea* led by *Walter Gropius* as well.

The first major exhibition that the Deutsche Werkbund was able to organize was the *Deutsche Werkbund-Ausstellung Cöln 1914*. From 1912 onwards, specifically planned by the Werkbund and the city of Cologne, it was to provide an "overview of the state of German quality work" and demonstrate the "interplay between architects and artists, industrialists and designers, and between business and art" to the national and international public.¹⁷ However, the exhibition of the 50 buildings erected on an approximately 30-hectare site on the eastern bank of the Rhine, which were designed by almost as many architects from Germany and Austria (most of them members of the Werkbund), did do justice to these highly ambitious goals to a limited extent only. For the exhibition proved to be an ensemble of stylistically highly diverse buildings, most of which varying conventional forms. Contemporary observers have already described only three buildings as remarkable; in retrospect, they are also regarded as pioneering architectures: the *Fabrikgebäude* by *Walter Gropius*, although in terms of design far less interesting than the building for the *Fagus-Werke* realized by him and *Adolf Meyer* the year before; the *Werkbundtheater* by *Henry van de Velde*, which for the first time made the different functional areas in a theater the basis of its constructive design, although it still seemed to be committed to Art Nouveau in its appearance; and finally the *Glashaus* by *Bruno Taut*, a sugar loaf-shaped advertising building for the glass industry, in which not only products made of glass were displayed, but which, as a housing constructed primarily of glass, was itself the most important exhibit. The exhibition, which opened in mid-May, had to be closed with the outbreak of World War I on August 1; despite one million visitors, it was a financial disaster for everyone involved and had essentially no consequences for design issues.¹⁸

The *Deutsches Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe* (*German Museum of Art in Commerce and Trade*, often just called *DM* for *Deutsches Museum*) had a far more lasting effect than the Cologne exhibition. It was founded in 1909 by *Karl Ernst Osthaus*, the owner and director of the *Museum Folkwang* in Hagen, was run by himself until 1919 and then by *Ernst Fuhrmann* until 1921.¹⁹ Already in its founding year the Werkbund decided to support the museum with 1,000 Reichsmark per year; thus, it functioned de facto as the museum of the DWB, in whose board of directors Osthaus was

¹⁵ Compare Kurt Junghans: *Der Deutsche Werkbund. Sein erstes Jahrzehnt*, Berlin 1982, p. 20.

¹⁶ Friedrich Naumann: *Kunst und Industrie*, in: *Das deutsche Kunstgewerbe 1906*, München 1906, p. 32 ff.

¹⁷ Wolfram Hagspiel: *Deutsche Werkbund-Ausstellung Cöln 1914*, in: Winfried Nerdinger (ed.): *100 Jahre Deutscher Werkbund 1907/2007*, München 2007, S. 65f. Compare: *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes 1915*, Jena 1915.

¹⁸ All buildings (constructed in wood-Rabitz technique), except a small village, and also the glass house have been demolished in the same year.

¹⁹ After the death of K.E. Osthaus (1921), in 1923 his holdings were sold to the *Kaiser Wilhelm Museum* in Krefeld, where they were forgotten until the 1980s. Compare the exhibition catalogue *Das Schöne und der Alltag – Deutsches Museum für Handel und Gewerbe*, Hagen and Krefeld 1997.

elected in 1910. Osthaus understood his museum primarily as an instrument for educating the taste of producers and of intermediaries, namely the dealers, as well as the buyers, and developed a decidedly innovative concept for this purpose. Until 1916/17 the DM played an important role in the activities of the DWB, not least because Osthaus included many works by Werkbund members in his extensive collections, things that were by no means considered collectible or even museum-worthy in contemporary arts and crafts museums:

"Thus the museum endeavors to bring letters, invoices, catalogs, packaging, logos, posters and all similar objects, insofar as they have artistic value, into its archives in abundant quantities. (...) In addition, it is "of the utmost importance that store windows, stores, exhibition halls, offices, workshops, engine houses and factories, possibly also ships, festive and table decorations, advertising carriages and theater scenes are available at all times in reproductions suitable for exhibition. (...) A further group is a sample stock of all those materials that are important for architecture and furnishings. This includes wallpaper, tension and furniture fabrics, linoleum and carpet coverings, tiles, window, door and furniture fittings, but also wood, marble, leather, glass samples and similar materials. (...) The museum wants to serve the creative artist and his client and not the scholar, or at least the scholar only secondarily.²⁰

The Deutsches Museum consisted of eight so-called organs, some of which were economically and organizationally independent: the *Ausstellungszentrale* (Exhibition Center from 1909), the *Vermittlungsstelle* (Mediation Office from 1909), the *Photographien- und Diapositiv-Zentrale* (Photography and Diapositive center from 1910),²¹ the *Staatliche Hagener Handfertigkeitssseminar* (Manual Skill Seminar from 1910)²² led by J. M. L. Lauweriks, and, also headed by him, the *Hagener Silberschmiede* (Hagen Silver Smithy from 1910), the *Kunstgewerbehaus* (Shop for Applied-Art Goods from 1912),²³ the *Hagener Verlagsanstalt* (Hagen Publishing House from 1916)²⁴ and the *Reklameprüfstelle* (Testing Station for Advertising from 1916), the latter based in Berlin.²⁵ The *Hagener Schaufensterwettbewerb* (Shopping-window Competition), which was held twice from 1910 onward, following the Berlin model, was also an initiative of the Deutsches Museum. As can be seen from the names, all the museum's organs were strictly focused on its objectives, above all on the task of mediation, and were designed in such a way that they could work together and support each other from different points of view: Ideally, the products of the designers and artists to whom a commission from the business world had been mediated through the *Mediation Office* were collected in the museum, documented in the *Photography and Diapositive Center*, and then assembled thematically with other products in the *Exhibition Center* to form touring exhibitions, which were first tested in Hagen and finally sent, sometimes in several versions, to other cities; These activities of the museum were in turn supported by publications of the *Hagener Verlagsanstalt* and intensive lecture activities, in which the picture archive could be accessed, and were concluded with the sale of the products, possibly in the museum's own store, the *Kunstgewerbehaus*. At the peak of its activity around 1913, the museum held about 20,000 objects and about 30 ready-made exhibitions, many of them equipped with a special display developed by the museum itself. They could be called up by catalog, simply dispatched, assembled without any special previous knowledge

²⁰ Karl Ernst Osthaus, Das Deutsche Museum für Kunst in Handel und Gewerbe, in: Die Welt des Kaufmanns, Jg. V, Heft 10, Oktober 1909, München 1909, p. 466-469.

²¹ The approx. 20,000 photos later became the basis of the picture agency Foto Marburg.

²² As a seminar for laymen and a further education institution for masters, it was run as part of the Prussian School of Arts and Crafts in Hagen until 1922.

²³ The arts and crafts shop was probably the very first museum store ever.

²⁴ The publishing house was continued by Ernst Fuhrmann from 1921 to 1936 as *Folkwang-* and later *Folkwang-Auriga-*Verlag.

²⁵ It was created in connection with the 1st *Advertising Congress* in Berlin and as such is a forerunner of both the *Gute Form* competition as well as the *Marketing Clubs*.

or technical equipment and combined to form larger complexes.²⁶ With this concept and its collections, the Deutsches Museum can be considered one of the very first design museums.²⁷

While Osthaus collected only of what he believed to be *Vorbilder*, i.e. role models for "good design" in his museum, *Gustav E. Pazaurek* was concerned with *Gegenbildern* (*counter-images*) in the sense of the Werkbund's basic educational ("good versus bad") concept, and in 1909, in his function as director of the *Landesgewerbemuseum* in Stuttgart, he opened a department for "aberrations of taste" within the museum, which existed until 1933. Here, in the sense of a systematically structured "Encyclopedia of Bad Taste",²⁸ he showed some 800 objects, which he classified and described as deterrent examples of bad design according to various criteria.²⁹ The collection was divided into three main categories: "material defects", "design defects" and "decorative defects", and these in turn were divided into numerous sub-categories. For the classification, he developed his own nomenclature, a "metaphor of evil,"³⁰ with which he drastically characterized the "offences" against factual design. For example, he identified "material encroachments", "material rape", "decorative brutality" and "functional lies" on the objects and was able to identify "material surrogates", "technical pimping", "ornamental frenzy" and "Hurra-Kitsch", to name but a few of the forty categories he developed.

The *Deutsches Warenbuch* (German Commodity Book), which was published in 1915 with a print run of 10,000 copies, also belongs in the context of the sample collections of models and counter-images. It was created on the initiative of the writer and publisher *Ferdinand Avenarius*, the founder of the *Dürerbund*, an association whose aim was the aesthetic education of the people and the cultivation of culture. The *Dürerbund*, which had over 300,000 members in 1912, published the influential magazine *Kunstwart* and operated an advice center in Dresden for home furnishings, housekeeping, and questions of life. In order to relieve the burden on this advice center, Avenarius developed the idea of a catalog that "offers exemplary mass-produced goods for household needs and thereby seeks to gain a significant influence on general culture. (...) Our aim is to provide a pictorial price list of the most useful, dignified and beautiful mass-produced goods," which "is characterized by the use of good materials, reliable work and functional design."³¹ A *Dürerbund-Werkbund Cooperative* was founded specifically for the publication and distribution of the Commodity book. It was to mediate between manufacturers, selected retail merchants, artists and buyers and to control the quality of the goods offered. The selection of the 1,660 articles that were illustrated in the merchandise book was decided by a high-ranking committee from the circles of the *Dürerbund* and the *Werkbund*. The successor to the *Warenbuch* was the *Deutsche Warenkunde* (German Commodity Studies), which was published from 1939 to 1942 by the *Kunst-Dienst der Evangelischen Kirche* (Art Service of the Protestant Church) and was compiled mainly by members of the *Werkbund* (which was dissolved at that time). It found its continuation on the one hand in the *Deutsche Warenkunde*, which was published in West Germany from 1955 to 1961, and on the other hand in the *Warenkunde* of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), entitled *Form und Dekor*, which

²⁶ In the short time of its existence, the museum organized about 200 exhibitions, the largest of which, the exhibition *German and Austrian Applied Arts*, toured the USA for a year from 1912 onwards, starting at the *Newark Museum* in Newark, N.J. Even during the war, the museum remained active and tried to influence the design of war graves and monuments, for example with the exhibition *Die Kunst im Kriege*.

²⁷ The almost complete correspondence of the museum (1909-1921) can be found in the archives of the Osthaus Museum of the City of Hagen.

²⁸ A partial reconstruction of this collection and its contemporary development has been included within the exhibition *Böse Dinge. Eine Enzyklopädie des Ungeschmacks 2013* at the *Werkbundarchiv - Museum der Dinge*, Berlin.

²⁹ Compare *Gustav E. Pazaurek: Guter und schlechter Geschmack im Kunstgewerbe*, Stuttgart 1912.

³⁰ Compare *Imke Volkers, Böse Dinge. Ein neuer Blick auf eine alte Sammlung*, in: *Böse Dinge. Eine Enzyklopädie des Ungeschmacks*, Hrsg. *Werkbundarchiv – Museum der Dinge*, Berlin 2013, p. 23.

³¹ Compare *Deutsches Warenbuch*, Jena 1915, p. XVII.

appeared during the same time and was initiated by the architect and designer and important Werkbund member *Mart Stam*.³²

In the 1920s, the Werkbund came to prominence above all with two nationally important exhibitions in Stuttgart: in 1924 with the exhibition *Die Form*, and in 1927 with the exhibition *Die Wohnung*, in the course of which the residential estate *Am Weißenhof* was created. Both exhibitions had a programmatic character for the further work of the Werkbund. While the exhibition *Die Form* was intended to demonstrate, by means of objects of everyday use (dishes, cutlery, glasses, and furniture), "how pure form can be artistically shaped by a creative force from the simplest to the richest moving form in any material without the mere decorative ingredient of an ornament,"³³ the exhibition *Die Wohnung* realized this idea by building apartments and houses. It presented new solutions for rationalizing and typifying constructions by means of "60 fully furnished apartments, built by the city of Stuttgart according to proposals of the DWB by 16 of the best architects in Europe"³⁴ and is to date celebrated as the first major example of the so called *Neues Bauen* (New Building). However, contrary to all the theoretical statements of the architects, the buildings were in most cases individual, one-off productions in the new "factual" style; this meant that the entire enterprise fell far short of the level of design, building technology and organization that had already been achieved in the *New Frankfurt Project* (1925-1933) with the construction of approx. 12,000 apartments and community buildings (and in which Werkbund members also participated). In the wake of the Stuttgart Experiment, further model complexes for "modern humans" were created with the Werkbund settlements in Brno (1928), Breslau (1929), Prague (1932), Neubühl (1932) and Vienna (1932).³⁵

After World War II, the Werkbund attempted to tie in with its pre-war history with the exhibitions *Neues Wohnen* and *Deutsche Architektur seit 1945*, both staged in Cologne. In view of the destroyed cities and the enormous pent-up demand of the population, the Werkbund members saw a new opportunity to implement their visions of "to the purpose" design. Thus, in the Cologne exhibition halls, "modernly designed objects of utility and furniture" or "modern architecture" (with the help of photographs) were displayed, which, however, most people could not afford to buy. The touring exhibition *Die gute Form* (The Good Form), on the other hand, commissioned by the *Swiss Werkbund* and put together by *Max Bill*, which was first shown in Switzerland and in early summer 1949 also in Cologne and which actually took a look ("from the coffee cup to the housing estate") at the entire spectrum of industrial products, proved to be momentous.³⁶

The last major building exhibition on which the Werkbund was able to exert influence through individual members was the International Building Exhibition INTERBAU in Berlin, which opened in 1957. 53 architects committed to the *Neues Bauen* were invited to the international competition, which was held in 1952, to design various types of buildings, from high-rise residential buildings to single-family homes, as well as churches, cultural and commercial buildings for Berlin's destroyed Hansa Quarter in the vicinity of the Tiergarten. In the end, 35 buildings were created, arranged

³² At this time, Mart Stam was director at the Weißensee Academy of Art (Berlin) which he however left already in 1952 in course of the so called Formalismus-Debatte by which East-German officials demanded a clear alternative to what was seen as western-decadent style.

³³ Compare Prospect of Werkbund-Exhibition *Die Form*, Stuttgart 1924, p. 2. Compare also Walter Riezler: *Die Form ohne Ornament*, in: ders. (Hrsg.): *Werkbund-Ausstellung*, Stuttgart 1924, p. V-VIII.

³⁴ Compare the prospect of the exhibition; Architects have been, among others, Peter Behrens, Le Corbusier, Josef Frank, Walter Gropius, Hans Poelzig, Mies van der Rohe, Hans Scharoun, Mart Stam, Bruno und Max Taut.

³⁵ The first two housing estate projects designed by Werkbund members, financed by K.E. Osthaus, were built in Hagen (Hohenhagen, Walddorf-Siedlung, Stirnband-Siedlung) from 1906 to 1913; on the initiative of *Karl Schmidt*, the owner of the *Dresdner Werkstätten für Handwerkskunst*, the *Gartenstadt Dresden-Hellerau* was built from 1909 and from 1906 (until 1938) the *Margarethenhöhe* housing estate with over 3,000 apartments was built in the city of Essen.

³⁶ Compare Max Bill: *Sicht der Dinge. Die gute Form. Eine Ausstellung 1949* (Sonderausstellung des Schweizerischen Werkbundes), Ed. Lars Müller in conjunction with the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, Zürich 2015.

according to the principles of an open, green city. 60 model apartments (out of the 1,160 residential units) were equipped with devices from the Werkbund company Max Braun. The INTERBAU is considered an important example of the so-called Second or Post-war modernism.

IV. People's Educator

Not only through its exhibition activities and the sample collections did the Deutsche Werkbund, as a *Volkserzieher* (people's educator) attempt to influence the so-called *Geschmackserziehung* (taste education) of the "masses", but from the very beginning it was strongly and lastingly involved in the reform of the teaching and learning programs at schools of all levels. A central role here was played by Hermann Muthesius, who as a Prussian government official was responsible for the reform of the Arts and Crafts Schools (*Kunstgewerbeschulen*) from 1903 to 1926. Like the members of the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung* (Art-Education-Movement), he was convinced that aesthetic education must be given a central place in all pedagogical programs. For "art is an indispensable complement to life."³⁷ It is therefore not surprising that many members of the Werkbund were active at all levels in schools and educational institutions. In this context, Peter Behrens, who reformed the *Düsseldorf School of Arts and Crafts* as director from 1903 to 1907, *Hans Poelzig*, who created a "Bauhaus before the Bauhaus"³⁸ from 1903 to 1916 as director of the *Breslau School of Arts and Crafts*, and finally Henry van de Velde, who built up the *Großherzoglich-Sächsische Kunstgewerbeschule* (Grand Ducal-Saxon School of Arts and Crafts) in Weimar from 1902 and headed it until 1916, should be mentioned by name. The curriculum he developed, in which working in workshops was the pedagogical focus, was taken over in large parts by the Bauhaus Weimar/Dessau. The close connection between the DWB and the Bauhaus is already indicated by the Bauhaus motto "Kunst und Handwerk" (Art and Crafts) and, later, in Dessau, "Kunst und Technik" (Art and Technology), under which the activities of Gropius' school was placed. In addition, various members of the Werkbund taught at the Bauhaus. It can therefore be considered a true offspring of the Werkbund.³⁹ And this also applies at least to the first years of the *Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm* (Ulm School of Design), which, founded in 1953 by *Inge Aicher-Scholl*, *Otl Aicher* and *Max Bill*, existed until 1968 and was able to set international standards for the conception of design courses and the professional profile of the designer.

In other places, too, the Werkbund made efforts in the post-war period to train designers for industry, and in particular to reform the schools of Arts and Crafts. They were rebuilt as *Werkkunstschulen* (schools of Arts and Crafts) without university status, and served mainly for the further education of craftsmen. In the 1970s, many of these schools were dissolved or merged into so called Comprehensive Universities. In consequence the Werkbund lost much of its influence on education.

In connection with the pedagogical initiatives of the Werkbund, the various *Werkbundkisten* (Werkbund boxes), sample collections of objects of daily use, which from 1952 onwards were mainly compiled by teachers and used in school lessons, should be mentioned here. While in the early years the focus was mainly on multipliers (educators, producers, dealers), a new target group for "taste education" was now seen in the pupils, and attempts were made to realize this directly in the schools with the help of those kits.

³⁷ Konrad Lange: *Das Wesen der künstlerischen Erziehung*, in: *Kunsterziehung* (1901), Leipzig 1902, p. 30.

³⁸ See Rainer K. Wick: *Der frühe Werkbund als 'Volkserzieher'*, in: Winfried Nerdinger (Hrsg.): *100 Jahre Werkbund 1907/2007*, München 2007, p. 53.

³⁹ The fact that the Bauhaus became far better known than the Werkbund is primarily due to the fact that, unlike the Werkbund, it propagated its own style, which converged with the international tendencies of the so called Neues Bauen, and also, *nomen est omen*, because it left behind numerous buildings at home and abroad.

V. Speaking to the Public

All these activities were accompanied by an intensive and varied journalistic activity ("Propaganda"), which emanated from both the Werkbund itself and its members. The publications, like the *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Werkbunds*, served partly to inform the members of the association, partly, as with the *Gewerbliche Materialkunde*, they were addressed to experts and, thirdly, to a general public. The *Mitteilungen* appeared from 1915 to 1920 and were designed by one artist each, from typography to layout to "werkbundgerechte" advertisements, and contained exclusively contributions by Werkbund members.⁴⁰ The *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbunds* (Yearbook of the Deutsche Werkbund), which appeared in six issues from 1912 to 1920, was aimed at a wider public. The elaborately designed yearbooks, which featured numerous illustrations, set programmatic themes such as "The Spirituality of German Labor" (1912), "Art in Industry and Trade" (1913) or "Traffic" (1914). From 1925 to 1934, the Werkbund published *Die Form. Zeitschrift für gestaltende Arbeit* as a regular publication. Already in 1922 there had been a first attempt to establish this first Werkbund magazine. The editor *Walter Curt Behrendt* wrote in the first volume of 1925: "The magazine will deal with the tasks of form design for all areas of commercial and artistic creation."⁴¹ It was mainly devoted to current contributions in the fields of architecture and housing and urban planning, but was also appreciated for its design in the sense of "new typography". In 1934/35 the National Socialists took over the magazine and discontinued its publication shortly thereafter.

After World War II (after several unsuccessful attempts) the monthly magazine of the Deutsche Werkbund *Werk und Zeit* was published from 1952 onwards. In addition to the classic Werkbund topics of design (especially in the field of industrial design) and education, it critically examined architecture and urban planning and, from the late 1960s on, also socio-political issues. From 1969 to 1977 the magazine functioned as *Monatszeitung für Umweltgestaltung* (monthly publication for environmental design), and its authors increasingly dealt with socio-economic issues or the participation of citizens in the structural design of the environment. The magazine, which was edited by *Dieter Beisel* during this period, became, in the words of the then chairman of the DWB, *Julius Posener*, "an organ of the controversy" and thus, in his opinion, corresponded to the tradition of the Werkbund, however lost followers. From 1977 on it was published only quarterly and from 1987 on it was called *werkundzeit. Zeitschrift als interdisziplinäres Organ der Gestaltung* (magazine as an interdisciplinary organ of design). Further renaming and restructuring followed until the publication of the magazine was discontinued in 2007 and replaced by a website.⁴²

The changing profile of the magazine *Werk und Zeit* reflected the increasing fragmentation of the Werkbund in the post-war period, both in terms of its organizational constitution and with regard to the topics its members considered relevant. Initially still strongly oriented towards the design of things and buildings (and dominated by architects), this focus was increasingly called into question. Thus, it was already said in 1959 on the occasion of the conference and action *Die große Landzerstörung* (The Great Destruction of Land) in Marl: "The self-evident is no longer self-evident: the pure air, the clear water, the bare nature. The mere appearance teaches us how ugliness spreads in every form. Especially where there is a city. And where is there no city? (...) It should no longer be that the general comfort of life is bought by the ugliness and impoverishment of the world. (...) According to the old ideology we can no longer use the earth without limits. Its blessings are not inexhaustible."⁴³

⁴⁰ From 1920 onwards, the *Mitteilungen* appeared only as a supplement to the journal *Die Form*.

⁴¹ In: *Die Form: Zeitschrift für gestaltende Arbeit*, Berlin 1925, 1.1925-1926, p. 1.

⁴² In addition to these periodicals, the DWB produced numerous exhibition catalogs and issued self-standing publications. Examples include the six *Bücher der Form* (1924 to 1928), the catalog for the exhibition *Film und Foto* (Berlin 1929), the catalog for the exhibition *Profitopoli\$ oder Der Mensch braucht eine andere Stadt* (Munich 1971), and the documentation of a symposium of the Werkbund Bayern that took place in 1978 under the title *Der Mensch ohne Hand oder die Zerstörung der menschlichen Ganzheit* (Munich 1979).

⁴³ Exposé for the conference *Die große Landzerstörung* in: *Werk und Zeit*, 10/1959.

VI. Conclusion

Due to the political situation in post-war Germany the Werkbund, up to 1934 a national organization, was newly founded from 1947 onwards in regional societies, which associated among a national "roof" in 1950. However, the new West-German Werkbund, a federal structure, never gained much impact, whereas the regional societies while setting up and following specific issues worked more or less effectively.⁴⁴ Nonetheless in all its organizational entities the Werkbund pursued and pursues the basic ideas set up firstly in 1908:

(Extract from the statutes) "The task of the dwb e.V. is the promotion of art and culture, in particular the promotion of good quality in the shaping of the human environment in the interaction of art, technology, science, media, industry, crafts and trade. (...) The promotion of quality is to be achieved in particular through education, training, and public relations work on relevant issues in all areas of life. The dwb e.V. continues to realize its tasks in particular through coordination, support and implementation of projects, exhibitions, word and image events, publications, statements, etc. This also includes the support of and cooperation with educational institutions with related objectives. (...) The dwb e.V. is selflessly active."⁴⁵

Since the federal Deutsche Werkbund had no longer a dominant federal board nor substantial financial resources, its first major activity was aimed at establishing an overarching, politically neutral and financially secured professional organization that could advise the German government on design issues. In 1953 the Deutsche Bundestag, the national parliament, established the *Rat für Formgebung* (Design Council) as an independent state-approved advisory and assessment body for industrial products.⁴⁶ One of the tasks of the Rat für Formgebung was to participate in the preparation of exhibitions, competitions and calls for tenders. In 1954 and 1957, the Council was entrusted with representing Germany at the X. Triennale in Milan and in 1958 at the World Exhibition in Brussels. Subsequently, the Rat für Formgebung developed a wide range of activities and started working as a lobby for design-oriented companies. In consequence the Deutsche Werkbund thus lost much of its earlier significance in this field.

On the other hand, a growing number of its members started to question the "achievements" of unleashed economic growth and consuming. Already in 1959, at a congress in Marl, the ecological problems of industrialization were clearly addressed. For example, Hans Schwippert, Chairman of the Werkbund, stated, that in the last fifty years good drinking glasses had been produced, "but of what use is that if the water in them is not mere than a denatured broth?" Quite a few activities against environmental devastation were initiated in the following years, and the discussions about environmental protection and the social responsibility of industrial enterprises led to an increasing politicization of the Werkbund – which many of its members did not approve.

Over the past decades, new topics such as everyday culture, the "throwaway society", participative planning, or urban degradation have been brought up by members of the Werkbund, some of which have attracted considerable attention, at least on regional levels. As an overarching institution, however, the Deutsche Werkbund increasingly lost importance in the public consciousness as much as specific topics have been propelled by respectively focused societal organizations.

⁴⁴ Different with respect to those societies the Werkbund-Archive was founded in Berlin (1973) as an autonomous society dedicated to collect and preserve all material relevant to issues of the Werkbund and its members. From the 1980ties on it started to conceive exhibitions, and in 2007 its organ, the Museum der Dinge, was officially accredited as a museum institution. The first Werkbund-archive, located in Berlin and run by Theodor Heuss, burned completely 1944 in a bombing raid during the war.

⁴⁵ <https://www.deutscher-werkbund.de>. To date the DWB has about 2,000 personal and institutional members; it is organized in 10 + 1 societies.

⁴⁶ <https://www.german-design-council.de/about/>

"It is the tragedy of the Werkbund that it was the first to identify and name the crucial problems of the future – long before the warnings of the *Club of Rome*, before the founding of the *green* parties and the ecology movement; but the magnitude of this still unsolved and seemingly unresolvable task, if not broke, then at least fragmented it."⁴⁷

Michael Fehr, (2020)

⁴⁷ This is why its former president, Julius Posener, as early as in 1986 would ask: "Do we still need the Werkbund?" Compare Winfried Nerdinger: 100 Jahre Werkbund – eine Einführung, in: W. N. (ed.): 100 Jahre Werkbund 1907/2007, Munich 2007, p. 8.