Individual versus Typical. The hidden definition of quality in the Deutscher Werkbund.

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At the turn of the 20th century in Germany, industrialisation led to a disconnect between the artist and their product. In response to the fears of cultural decay, the Deutscher Werkbund, an association of artists and craftsmen, was established in 1907. While its goal was to improve the quality of German design, it never officially defined the concept of quality. Its members theorised about it for years, but the debate between proponents for mass production and individualists broke out and swayed the historical interest away from quality.

In this study, the statements of the key figures of the Werkbund – Henry van de Velde, Hermann Muthesius, and Friedrich Naumann – are analysed to distil their theories on quality. The ideas behind quality creation, such as the production process and the physical characteristics of a product, are uncovered. When the stylistic discrepancies and historiographical biases are ignored, we see that the actors were trying to achieve the same goal – the highest quality – despite the multiplicity of opinions.

This study defines approaches to preserve the quality of products and work in a highly industrialised society. It outlines the ideas of personal creative freedom on the rise of mass production. These ideas are the lessons of those at the forefront of 20th-century industrialisation and are still relevant in present-day society.

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Introduction.

Defining quality is a complex task. A Merriam-Webster definition of "quality" calls it an "inherent feature", a property of an object; it also connects it to superiority ("Quality," n.d.). The everyday meaning that we give to the word "quality" is a part of our tacit knowledge, or the implied concepts that all humans grasp yet cannot put into words (Collins, 2010). However, to create something of high quality, we need to know the standards to which we need to strive; ideally, we want a definition of quality.

But a universal definition does not exist. It varied throughout time and has always had muddled definitions (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). The meaning changes in different circumstances, from the product's fitness to its task, value, and even our expectations. (Giaccio et al., 2013). Any attempts to define quality under one term often accept trade-offs (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). I explore what was the definition of quality at the beginning of the 20th Century in industrialising Germany to see the evolution of quality definition, and how it helps us to improve the quality of products a century later. I use an example of the Deutscher Werkbund to study the participation of the artist in the process of making, their individualism in mass-production, and how it relates to the concept of quality.

At the turn of the 20th century, Germany was undergoing fast economic growth and rapid industrialisation. The country was looking for ways to increase its exports and promote its products abroad. At the time, the recognised quality of English products helped to radiate the ideas of the Arts & Crafts movement beyond England. Its principles of re-uniting artists with the product have gained popularity in Germany as well, and became the founding principles of the "Deutscher Werkbund", an association of artists and industrialists. The Werkbund members believed that by raising the standards of design, using the finest materials and careful craftsmanship, they would allow Germany to compete internationally based on quality rather than quantity (Anderson, 1994). This union was to form new links between art and industry, between the designer and the producer (Campbell, 1978).

The Werkbund was founded on the premise of increasing quality. The group leaders intended that each member would do their best to produce quality work, whatever their sphere of activity or artistic preference. But the efforts to raise the general level of the applied arts inevitably led to attempts to define quality (Campbell, 1978). Proposed definitions varied significantly within the organisation. The differences in stylistic preferences and views on arts and the industry grew into a conflict. Later historians would struggle to theorise the quality in the Werkbund's terms.

In my research, the most prominent study of quality in the context of the Werkbund is "The first theorisation of quality: Deutscher Werkbund" by Giaccio et al (2013). It focuses on comparing the principles of quality management, introduced in the Werkbund, to the quality management standards used now, such as the ISO certification. The study outlines the "Werkbund programme" – principles that were allegedly used for quality control. However, the source for many of these principles is unclear: gathered over many years of the Werkbund meetings, the study does not provide the original statements that led the authors to their summary. Although the authors reach the comparison they are said to achieve, I cannot trace the original Werkbund ideas in it, and hence I cannot rely on this study to see how the Werkbund defined quality.

It is surprising that the organisation never defined what quality meant, given that the Werkbund's main goal was to improve it. The members never reached an agreement on what identified a good or a poor design, and the concept of quality has also remained obscure. The organisation's original president, Theodore Fischer, implored not to define quality, as well as beauty (Müller, 1974). To get the desired meaning, I will need to distil it myself from the many questions and quarrels about quality in the Werkbund.

Many authors recall a "debate" in the Werkbund history – a discourse that happened at the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne. The most active participants of it, as well as its ideological leaders, were Herman Muthesius and Henry van de Velde, renowned artists at the time. The debate revolved around *Principles* (*Leitsatze*), proposed by Muthesius. In his speech at the exhibition, he outlined his vision of the Werkbund future and was rebutted by van de Velde. In the eyes of later historians, their reputation within the organisation brought a lot of weight to the difference in their visions.

Most research about the Werkbund presents the Cologne debate as a battle between two groups of men, their leaders, and the two ideas. But presenting the conflict as two-sided greatly simplifies it. Historians omit many original statements and inadvertently control the original narrative. Unpacking this discourse is essential to show the differences and similarities that existed, despite its internal tensions, in the aspirations for quality within the Werkbund.

A prominent Werkbund historian Joan Campbell (1978) notes that although her research of the Werkbund covers its entire history as a private organisation, from 1907 to 1939, she places a special emphasis on its Weimar period – 1918 to 1933. The organisation in a nation that lost its war had to adapt, and its survival from the Second Reich into the Third shows the

flowering of extraordinary modern spirits (Campbell, 1978). Campbell reasons that earlier historians focused on the events that preceded WWI, omitting the importance of the Werkbund's contributions to modern design in the light of its brilliant offspring Bauhaus in post-war years.

On the other hand, I focus my attention on the pre-WWI years of the Werkbund and before, to study the aspirations with which it was founded, and the evolution of the meaning of quality, led by its founders and their associates. I will trace two categories linked to quality – the process of production and the product's physical characteristics – in earlier writings of Muthesius, van de Velde, and their contemporaries to form a view on what created quality at the time of the Werkbund. I show how all these points came together at Cologne, and why the discussion of the role of the artist in the mass-production at the beginning of the 20th century is still relevant today.

Chapter 1. The Werkbund Foundation.

The ideals and aspirations of the Werkbund are the products of their era. As European countries industrialised, starting with Great Britain in the 19th Century, the feeling of disconnect between an artist and their product was growing more noticed. In England, in response to these concerns, a Gothic Revival movement was born, pioneered by Augustus Pugin. He was concerned with the state of culture in Britain and was reminiscent of the earlier Gothic society, which to Gothic revivalists was an embodiment of social values. The fact that a craftsman was no longer associated with their work was seen as one undermining the cohesion of the society on all its levels. Revivalists saw that the only way to proceed in the industrial era was to turn to purer forms of Gothic and to reconnect the craftsman with their work (Figueiredo, 2016).

The restorative trends in England continued in the mid-19th century with the Arts & Crafts movement. Based on the ideas of Pugin, a writer and critic John Ruskin would see the communal values that the Gothic revival brought as a cure-all for the ills of Victorian Britain. His response, both reactionary and escapist, preached on the return to handicrafts, the honest use of materials, and the full engagement of the maker. Ruskin never accepted that manufacturing might produce objects that fulfil artistic requirements, despite his advocacy of popular and simplified aesthetics (Long, 2019). Art historian Christopher Long in his essay connects this conviction to Ruskin's faith in individualism, and the joy and meaning an artisan finds in their work.

Ruskin's ideas were picked up by young William Morris, who would propel them as a response to the conflict between artistic and industrial production (Nau, 2019). A craftsman from a well-to-do family, he would pursue his artistic ambitions with Ruskin's affinity for nature and natural forms. Despite his inclination towards socialism in his later years, his goals of bringing products into the homes of ordinary people were often contradicted by the deluxe pricing of most of his designs (Long, 2019). Based on Ruskin and Morris, the Arts & Crafts movement, which focused on uniting the designer and the craftsman and restoring the enjoyment of work, would become an influential art movement in Europe for years to come.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, a similar feeling of disconnect between production and culture was noticed in Germany. In response to such fears, The German Werkbund was founded in 1907. Though heavily influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement in England, which romanticised craftsmanship and individual creations, The Werkbund aimed to bridge the gap between the arts and industry. It rejected the backwards-looking ways of its predecessors and was looking to restore dignity to labour in the industry,

as well as improve the quality of German products to compete in the international market (Campbell, 1978).

In her account of the history of the Werkbund, Campbell (1978) credits three founding fathers – Hermann Muthesius, Friedrich Naumann, and Henry van de Velde – with the association's initial success. These three would become the decisive figures within the organisation for the years to come. Their different backgrounds and distinctive views on policies and organisation would establish the Werkbund's ideals, as well as discrepancies within them.

Hermann Muthesius was a German architect, born in 1861. During his education years, he spent some time in Japan and Italy, which laid the foundations for some of his early publications (such as "Italian trip impressions", 1898). He began working at the Prussian Ministry of Public Works, and in 1896 was commissioned as a cultural and technical attaché to the German Embassy in London. His extensive studies of British art and technology for the next eight years informed his position on contemporary culture and architecture, which he showed in his later publications, notably "Style-Architecture and Building-Art", 1902 (Anderson, 1994). Muthesius's proactive and polemic position he held since the foundation of the Werkbund would earn him a title of a leader of the organisation in the eyes of the historians, such as Campbell.

Friedrich Naumann was to become a political lever in the future organisation. A former Protestant pastor, known best for his liberal political stance with strong social views, he already earned a national reputation by 1907, when he contested a Reichstag seat for the left-liberals. Naumann had strong artistic leanings and was writing art exhibition reports and essays. His artistic inclinations drew him to discuss his thoughts of founding a private association, which would uphold the nation's cultural growth, at the Dresden Arts and Crafts exhibition in 1906. There he developed the organisational footprint for the future initiative together with his acquaintances. His efforts in persuading other artists and industrialists, as well as his organisational input, make him one of the figures most responsible for the Werkbund's early success (Campbell, 1978).

Despite the roles of Muthesius and Naumann, the Werkbund would not be possible in the form it happened without input from Henry van de Velde. Born in 1863, he began as a painter. He was influenced by the Neo-Impressionist movements that were popular in his native Belgium. He respected the works of Arts & Crafts in England, celebrating Morris in his articles, but disagreed with its methods. He believed in aesthetics as a catalyst to the moral and social progress of society, rather than Socialist party politics.

With his works in architecture, painting, and applied arts, van de Velde attempted to reunite the arts that have been separated. As one of the creators of Art Nouveau, he influenced many European artists with his "new style" (Kuenzli, 2019). His move to Germany in 1899 can be linked to a rapid spread of Jugendstil, a German version of Art Nouveau, in the years that followed. Van de Velde's prominent position on the art stage at the turn and the beginning of the 20th century explains his high reputation in the Werkbund, where many younger artists were directly influenced by his works and writings.

The Deutscher Werkbund was founded in Munich on 5 October 1907. And the agreement between these three men in their goals would shape the values of the Werkbund. This is why the polemic between Muthesius and van de Velde, which would happen seven years later at the Cologne Exhibition, is so important. As many historians polarised the debate, the original values of the organisation became blurry. The simplified version of the argument shows us not what quality meant to the Werkbund at the time, but the disagreements around it. In the following chapters, I distil the core ideas that Muthesius, van de Velde, and Naumann argued for years before the debate, to show that they often aligned.

Chapter 2. Theorisation of quality.

Quality-building characteristics.

The disagreements within the Werkbund highlight its diverse nature. It was an organisation of artists and industrialists, who did not exactly see eye to eye with each other. This does not imply bipolarity, however. In the Werkbund, we see a wide mix of artists, who supported and of those, who despised the industry. We see industrialists that sponsored their individual endeavours and those, who were looking to optimise the production. As Muthesius emphasised in the closing statement of his Cologne speech, the Werkbund had "something unnatural about it, with its elements that could not possibly get along, namely art and industry" (Posener, 1964, p.222).

The diverse nature of the Werkbund easily justifies an assortment of aligned and confronting opinions about quality. Moreover, it makes one wonder why the debate did not happen earlier. And I believe it did. Both Muthesius and van de Velde have written extensively in the years before the Werkbund debate, even before its establishment. And the points uncovered from the debate are but a summary of those years of writing. So let us look at the positions on quality the authors took and trace their roots.

From the writings of Muthesius, van de Velde, and their contemporaries, I can note two topics linked to quality – the process of production and the product's physical characteristics. The process of production involves ideas of mass-production and individual craft, or by whom and for whom the work is done, and if they are enjoying the process. This quality-building characteristic is defined by how something is built. The other topic is the physical characteristics of a product, such as its form, material, and execution. The arguments of style and beauty all touch on the physical form of the object and are thus included here as well. What something is made of, how well it is finished – these are covered in this topic.

Lastly, the topic of export is also often addressed in the writings. The export topic is only secondary to quality; authors use it when describing future aspirations. They either link the export to a necessity of improving quality or fault the export for the degradation of quality. I will include the authors' remarks on export to place the argument within the topic of globalisation in the present day.

Quality and the Process of Production.

Art and design historians, such as K. Kuenzly (2019) or F. Schwartz (1996), present a supposed opposition within the Werkbund between individual work and mechanical production. This dichotomy is particularly interesting in the historic context of the organisation. The ideas of the Arts & Crafts movements seduced many bright minds outside England. Often characterised as anti-modern, Romantic, and backwards-looking, they became increasingly fashionable in intellectual circles (Campbell, 1978). The conflict between individual and industrial production and the focus on bringing artistic touch to everyday artefacts greatly inspired the Werkbund programme. But its members reflected on the ideas of Ruskin and Morris long before its foundation.

For instance, in his 1909 essay *Kunst und Industrie*, Henry van de Velde subscribes to the broad definition of beauty by Ruskin, who extended artistic quality to all that is joyfully created. Van de Velde adds that Germany was to show the morality in quality work, worth making by higher class citizens. Later in 1914, during the debate in Cologne, he would add that quality is born with elites. This completes his take on the position of an artist. The quality can only be produced with joyful work, by people of taste, for people of taste. Industry, in his opinion, represented the opposite. An industrialist would cater to the tastes of the public, which cannot be relied on, cultivate them, and make the public completely dependent on them (Van de Velde, 1910). This creates a vicious circle, where the industry serves whatever the public deems tasteful, and produces it in large quantities, reinforcing the public craving for a product, as well as the industry's craving for increased profits. This craving for profits, van de Velde states, left such a strong mark on the industry that it would have to "throw away the most essential basic conditions of its existence if it really wanted to align itself with beauty and morality". Hence, he goes on to say that "uniting art and industry means nothing less than merging ideal and reality" (Van de Velde, 1910, p.139).

To ensure the transmission of good taste, van de Velde suggests that artists should lead the industry, and see the product from its conception, through its production, to its distribution. As an example of a successful relationship, he mentions Peter Behrens's at AEG, the General Electricity Company. At the time a company of some seventy thousand people, AEG employed Behrens as a lead designer for everything it built, including all of its buildings, products, and advertisement (Kuenzli, 2019). His years at AEG not only led to a unified style and increased quality of the company's products but also earned him a reputation as the first industrial designer. Van de Velde

praises Behrens for his work for AEG because of his effectiveness in creating a new industrial culture according to the logic of production, rather than the calculations of middlemen.

These statements raise a few questions. Van de Velde ignores that the transmission of good taste from the artist to a layman requires the artist to have good taste in the first place. While in his writings, we see inherent confidence in his work, this should not be extended to every artist. Not only does classifying taste as "good" brings us back to the question of what is good and who defines it, but it also overlooks a possible lack of integrity in the artist's actions. The anticipation of high profits can yield an undesirable collaboration between the artist and the industrialist, and a clever ploy to adhere to public cravings returns the vicious circle. Van de Velde may consider himself a man of good taste, but his thoughts on taste are poorly applicable in the practical realm.

Another questionable point is the artist's sole control of design but also production. In praising Behrens's work for AEG, van de Velde contradicts himself. Behrens, though he has control over the production chain, does not manufacture everything that he designed. He also utilises types to produce the designs efficiently, which contradicts van de Velde's apparent hatred of typification in 1914. It is unclear what van de Velde sees as a practical solution for individual creative freedom in mechanical production. As van de Velde advocates for the government support and protection of the artist (Kuenzli, 2019), I believe that he realises that his approach is not competitive in a market, possibly accounting for his dislike of export. It seems that for a small-scale artisan, he prefers full control of production and distribution. A large-scale industry requires an artist as a chief designer, who is concerned with matters of beauty, materials, and execution.

Henry van de Velde is not the only one who theorises about mechanisation. Friedrich Naumann, an industrialist best known for his liberal political stance, and a founding member of the Werkbund, argues the opposite. It was his speech in 1906 titled *Kunst und Industrie* that generated van de Velde's same-titled response a few years later. In his speech, Naumann envisions industrial art to result in the specialisation of designers; they would focus on a particular product or a material, and render its production efficient (Kuenzli, 2019). The van de Velde we know from the individualistic statements would be outraged by this alone. But Naumann continues and accepts diminished individual artists' enjoyment in mass-producing goods. He rejects William Morris's doctrine of pleasure in work and accepts depersonalisation as an inevitable by-product of modernisation. He provides

an example of Goethe's book: the text goes through purely mechanical efforts of proofreaders and typesetters, who transmit the ideas from the poet to a reader, and none of their mental labour is evident to the reader. Only as they open the book "the artistic magnetism again emerges" (Kuenzli, 2019, p.120).

Naumann's position is radical. If we imagine the preference for artistic or industrial production not as two mutually exclusive poles, but as a gradient from one to another, Naumann's position would be on the opposite end from van de Velde's. He believes in the artistic quality of a design but allows the transmission of this quality to happen through a third party – a factory worker. His understanding of production is practical.

On the preference gradient from industry to arts also lies Hermann Muthesius. He stands somewhere between van de Velde and Naumann, as he appreciates both mechanical production and artistic freedom. Familiar with British building traditions and culture, his attention to handicrafts and respect for the work of Ruskin and Morris, he drew inspiration from Arts & Crafts movement (Anderson, 1994). However, he did not show anti-modern beliefs common amongst Arts & Crafts followers. He believed in cooperation with progressive elements in the industry to create a harmonious national style. His approach was marked by a term he coined *Sachlichkeit* or rationality, sincerity. It regarded the form and style as a part of quality, which I discuss in the following chapter, but it also concerned the way of production. For example, Muthesius laments the decline of noblemen, and thus a man of taste. As the industrious burgher no longer possesses the taste, they are attracted to gaudy and vulgar (Muthesius, 1904). This highlights the same vicious circle outlined by van de Velde, but which Muthesius follows up very differently. He believes in the necessity of education for the public. Only by teaching the middle-class the aesthetic values and the importance of quality, rational design, can the pressure on factory owners bring such production. Muthesius is the first to consider quality creation a two-sided process, to which both the artist and the consumer contribute.

Despite his respect for Arts & Crafts, Muthesius pleas to not regard machine work as evil. We should not blame the machine for producing surrogates that satiate the middle-class, he says. He asks to regard the machine as only a tool. One that should not be excluded from production entirely, nor should it replace a craftsman. "Do not demand of it to perform work that must be reserved for the human hand. […] It is a tool, not a goddess of production" (Muthesius, 1904, p.92). Recalling again the vicious circle, the bad work encouraged by industry harms the factory worker, who is "spiritually injured" and loses interest. While Muthesius does not share

Ruskin's and Morris's dislike for machinery, the joy of work is as important for him in quality creation.

An important distinction is made when the machine is categorised as a tool. When one presents a bipolar image of a machine versus an individual, we are quick to assume them as mutually exclusive. However, a machine can be used by an individual to create their desired design. It should facilitate it, not go against their artistic vision. Theodore Fischer states: "Man could produce quality work with a tool or machine as soon as he has mastered it to become a tool" (Müller, 1974, p.87). A machine is only as good as the artist that uses it, and to create quality with a machine its operator should have only quality in mind.

The dichotomy of individual and machine production played an important role in defining "quality work" – *Qualitatsarbeit* – the focus of the Werkbund. The distance that the industry created between a designer and their product was connected to the decrease in the quality of machined goods. There were individualists, such as Henry van de Velde, who saw the artist as a leader in the industry and demanded control over the manufacturing and distribution. Such views often neglected the growing complexity of projects and the scale of the industry that catered to the needs of the ever-growing populace. To ensure the quality of the final product at this large scale, individualists demanded the design to be considered by artists with aesthetics and functionality in mind. In striving for such values, industries need to educate people on what creates quality, and set positive trends. In trying to optimise the design, the limitations of the machinery must be considered. The preferred design carefully uses the benefits and drawbacks of the machine rather than being limited by it.

Quality and the Physical Characteristics.

The previous chapter dealt with the concept of quality in the process of making – *how* something is made. This one discusses the form, material, and execution – the *what* and *out of what*.

Although the conflict between the machine and the artist became very notable in the later years of the Werkbund, it was the form and execution that formed the ideals of the Werkbund at its foundation. At the first annual meeting in 1908, the original president Theodore Fischer defined the goal of the organisation as producing an artistic or industrial product of positively good quality, "namely good in the sense of the material used and technical execution, and good in the sense of the shape and colour" (Müller, 1974, p.85). From the beginning, these were the pillars on which the Werkbund began to improve the quality of German products.

A contemporary Werkbund critic Joseph Lux said: "Quality is understood to mean not only the excellent, solid workmanship and the use of faultless, genuine materials, but also the organic idea of the objective, noble or ... artistic design carried out with these means" (Müller, 1974, p.86). The Werkbund could not focus only on practicality. Its "quality" was to balance the modern functionality with traditional aesthetics and materiality.

The important members of the Werkbund adhered to this definition. In the essay *Kunst und Industrie,* van de Velde recognises all products that are "perfectly made of the best materials" as beautiful. He suggests that the quality of products should be examined by an artist commission: first, they would assess the artistic value of the object, and then its execution and the material used. "A product of beautiful materials and impeccably finished will always triumph over an item whose only quality is good design (Van de Velde, 1910, p.162).

Hermann Muthesius also supported the functional-aesthetic concept of blended art and industry that characterises the "quality work". "Quality cannot be exhausted with material solidity, least of all in those areas where beauty is of importance", he stated in the 1908 meeting in support of Fisher's words (Schwartz, 1996, p.112). In some research about the Cologne Debate, Muthesius comes off as a lover of mechanisation and a hater of all that is artistic. We see this is not true: he aspires to have beauty in every product. Muthesius despises fakes, seen in industrial production. The bad work not only harms the factory worker but also causes constant dissatisfaction of the user because of the defects and the lack of durability (Muthesius, 1904). From my research, with "Style-Architecture and Building-Art" (1904) Muthesius is the first one to ever connect quality to durability. Muthesius's understanding that a life of a product does not end when it leaves the hands

of a craftsman, or a conveyor belt, is refreshing. He thinks about the end-user, their participation in the design process, and the lifecycle of a product.

Why Muthesius often comes off as a hater of aesthetics is because many researchers connect aesthetics and style. And style is a concept Muthesius abhorred. In "Style-Architecture and Building-Art" (1904), he cautions us from slipping into superficialities and formalism, like van de Velde and many other artists do. His *Sachlich,* rational approach encourages authenticity in the form, materials of everyday artefacts, and a direct satisfaction of need. He is striving for a "unified culture", German society devoid of stylistic excesses, where the beauty and utility inspire one another (Anderson, 1994).

What later would be called functionalism is felt here. Muthesius outlines the path towards contemporary art: the master-builder should refrain from any style and focus on what is required of him by the particular problem. Muthesius demands banning styles and "style-mongering" (Muthesius, 1904, p.81). This is reminiscent of the "form follows function" postulate, which Louis Sullivan advocated across the ocean a few years before, and which would become the guiding force for generations of modernists to come. For Muthesius, quality comes from the authenticity of a product, which inspires its aesthetics, and a high level of execution, which instils durability.

The Werkbund members universally agreed on the connection between physical characteristics and quality. These characteristics often included the use of the best materials and a high level of finish. Some connected quality to durability, which nowadays is linked to lifecycle assessments of a design. Some extended the quality to the form of the object and how it relates to function.

While the material and finish properties of an object can be studied objectively, it is the relation to function, authenticity, and beauty that has strayed the Werkbund away from agreeing on universal rules to achieve quality. In the initial years, the Werkbund members focused on doing their best in improving the objective material qualities and reached great success. But as the individual narratives became louder, the focus shifted to discussions about style and away from the original goal of improving quality. Attempts to outline the future for the organisation ended in a dispute in Cologne in 1914. The brightest moment in the Werkbund history; its fame has overshadowed and let slip major thoughts on the quality that preceded it. The drama, interrupted by WWI. Let us look at the Cologne Debate, the culmination of those years of writing.

Chapter 3. The Cologne Drama.

A conflict between mass production and individuality and reluctance to agree on the ideals of the Werkbund – these are the starting points of the Cologne Debate in 1914. It began with Hermann Muthesius announcing his vision for the Werkbund's future, a list of *Principles* (*Leitsatze*) to follow. The accounts of Joan Campbell (1978), van de Velde's monographer Katherine Kuenzly (2019), and van de Velde (1962) himself present the events that followed in rather simple terms. Muthesius allegedly focused on an introduced notion of "Typisierung" or typification. Henry van de Velde took the call to typify design as "a restraint on the imagination", and was resolute in rebutting him (Van de Velde, 1962, p.360). Together with his supporters, he wrote his *Counter-Principles* (*Gegenleitsatze*) to respond.

Though the original statements are cited in the discussions of the conflict, most of the points are often ignored. Historians like F. Schwartz (1996) and K. Kuenzly (2019) sum up van de Velde's position as that of an individualist and present Muthesius as a promoter of standardisation. The argument at Cologne is hence rendered as "standardisation versus individuality". But it is not what Muthesius and van de Velde argued about.

To see exactly what they advocated, let us see the original statements, as listed in Julius Posener's "Anfänge des Funktionalismus" (1964). To start with Muthesius's theses, let us not summarise them all under one hat of "Typisierung" or "standardisation". In *Principles*, Muthesius highlights the Werkbund's efforts to refine production and its aspiration to produce only the best and exemplary work. He discusses the style and the taste in his search for a unified culture – an idea that he preached for more than a decade. Only two points mention "Typisierung", which he introduces as a tool of "healing concentration" to reach a unified culture.

But the meaning of "Typisierung" became a stumbling block for the participants of the debate and the historians that followed. It is questionable whether anyone in the debate understood what Muthesius meant. A quote by August Endell, a member of the audience of the debate, is the best way to illustrate Muthesius's poor phrasing, as well as to hint at its relation to quality:

"[Quality] …a word that has led to the most dire misunderstandings. […] And if to this unfortunate word "Quality" we added the even more dubious word "Typisierung", then the whole Werkbund program would be utterly botched, for this word, which did not even exist before, is the height of ambiguity" (Schwartz, 1996, p.122).

Principles' alleged focus on "Typisierung" is far-fetched, but the ambiguity of the term caught attention, sparked an argument in the Werkbund, and distracted historians from other key points. Muthesius argued for unifying styles, design, and culture from as early as 1902 in his "Style-Architecture and Building-Art". And in *Principles*, his ambition for a rational and authentic design is clear when he speaks about regaining a harmonious culture. It is hard to say what was the reason for him to introduce "Typisierung" in Cologne when he defended his points for years without it. But given the outrage of the audience that followed, and the rebuttal by van de Velde, it is safe to assume that Muthesius's choice of words cost him this argument.

In Henry van de Velde's *Counter-Principles,* a line of argument is more prominent than in *Principles*, hence easier for historians to summarise as "individualistic". Van de Velde proclaims that artists distrust anyone who "sterilises" their creativity and thus protest any canon or typification. But the original text reveals contradictions to *Principles* on multiple levels, as well as arguments on other topics.

"And yet nothing good and glorious has ever been created out of mere consideration for export", van de Velde adds (Posener, 1964, p.206). He discusses the "curse" of having to export, which shows his long-time displeasure with the requirements of a rapidly globalising market. Like Muthesius, van de Velde restates his years' worth of opinions that we uncovered in the chapters before. His points stray away from arguing with Muthesius; he marches past it and states his position on other subjects. Most importantly to us, quality.

"The efforts of the Werkbund should be aimed at cultivating the gifts of individual craftsmanship" (Posener, 1964, p.206). Van de Velde outlines his own vision of the Werkbund's future. One part of creating fine quality products is enthusiasm for work, he believes. He adds that quality is first created for a limited circle of customers and experts. He believes that a national clientele of high-class connoisseurs must first develop for quality to trickle down to the public (Posener, 1964). Statements like this one earned van de Velde a label of an elitist (Kuenzli, 2019). As he argued before, the quality work should be carried out by higher class people of taste, for such people of taste, too. And since Muthesius argued that quality must be created for the middle-class to gain traction (Muthesius, 1904), this is the first and only contradiction about quality between van de Velde and Muthesius at Cologne.

The *Counter-Principles* show that disagreements between van de Velde and Muthesius go beyond the issues of "individualism versus standardisation". They shine little light on what quality meant for the two, their focus shifts

away. The original points of the Cologne Debate reveal a multiplicity of opinions about style and the way of working, hidden from us under the simplifications of historians.

Conclusion.

A glance at the history of the Werkbund online or in literary sources often shows us a brief overview of the events and achievements of the pre-WWI Werkbund, quickly succeeded by the more famous Bauhaus. It also describes its culmination, the endpoint to that organisation, the Cologne debate of 1914. It presents a battle between two leaders of opinions, one arguing for mechanisation as the future of art, and the other for a sensual, individual, artistic touch. Only this storytelling is deceiving at best.

Not only did the organisation continue after WWI, alongside Bauhaus, formally to this day. But the Cologne Debate was not a battle of "the machine versus the artist". It was two men, who were influential in artistic movements at the time, sharing their views on the future of art; views they shared for more than a decade prior. Many of the views aligned – they both believed in the honest efforts of a craftsman, and in creating conditions for them to enjoy their work. They believed that quality and aesthetic beauty go hand in hand, and that with efforts to create a long-lasting and well-finished product of good materials, one may achieve quality.

It takes an effort to trace the roots of the views they shared that day in Cologne, their original wording already unclear, and with layers of historians' simplifications on top. The presented polarisation is untrue and unhelpful; it conceals the lessons we can take from the people, who led innovations of the new era, where industry and creative arts had to combine and work together. And these lessons are still relevant today.

The Werkbund's predictions – today. Discussion.

The ideals of the Werkbund responded to the problems that arose during the industrial revolution. Thinkers of the time, such as A. Pugin, were proclaiming a loss of culture, degradation, and society's ultimate demise. The rapid spread of Arts & Crafts ideas across the western world demonstrates that these fears were universal amongst different nations. Some nations developed earlier than others. Great Britain was the first European nation to industrialise, and the concerns about the disconnect between the product and the maker arose there first. In Germany and Austria, they only became relevant some fifty years later, as the nations were catching up to that development stage, and similar societal issues.

As Y. N. Harari points out in "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" (2015), humans tend to develop faster than they can adapt to the changes they create. Although the western world has moved past the industrial revolution well into the digital era, the problems it created were never resolved. The move to the digital only means that now we must deal with it alongside "older" problems. Hence, I believe that the principles of quality, which were brought forward by those at the forefront of industrialisation in the 20th century, are still relevant a century later.

Such are the notes on the physical product characteristics: its material and execution. The quality of the product today certainly includes the selection of the materials and their finish. Their fitness to the task is just as crucial – the choice of what material is "good" is contextual and can be different for the target user and the use case. Muthesius's preference for durability is particularly relevant in light of increased environmental efforts. Now industries must shift their focus to the product lifecycle, its potential reuse and recycling strategies.

Both Van de Velde's and Muthesius's notes on public trends – and the vicious circle – are very important. The need to educate the public is as present as ever. Muthesius teaches us that in a free market, the public votes with the wallet and defines trends, and the trend for quality can be only achieved if the public demands it. Educating the public on what is quality, and what is anti-consumer, is essential.

Depersonalisation in the industry is even more present now than in the Werkbund time. Naumann accepted the transmission of quality to happen through a factory worker. This approach is more realistic on a large scale, where the gap between a designer and a consumer is usually bridged by an unidentifiable mix of both human and autonomous labour. But the quality of the product does not correlate with the ethics of production. High-quality products now are often created in sweatshops that neglect workers' rights in

an attempt to boost margins. The burden of progress has to shift from the employee to the parent industry, which should be accountable for enforcing fair labour standards (Smestad, 2009). Today, we must reconsider the factory processes in terms of the human rights of the "hidden" factory worker, rather than focus on how these processes benefit the quality of the product.

Henry van de Velde's individualistic outlook also has its potential nowadays. An approach of creating a product from the ground up by a single individual is relevant for small businesses. With the rise of the Internet, an artisan now has more ways to advertise and distribute their work than at the beginning of the 20th Century. The joy at work in the case of small producers can benefit the quality, as all the participants can positively contribute to a final tangible object or a service. As for the large-scale industry, most industries today employ professional designers that bring together practicality, production process, and aesthetics. Companies like Apple demonstrate that even on a massive scale, aesthetic values and style are as important in trendsetting and competitiveness as other notions of quality. Van de Velde has foreseen that industry would need an artistic touch.

What he has also foreseen is the industry's ever-increasing hunger for profits. The limitations in rights of what a user can do with their property are a very present issue in the electronics space. Corporations integrate maintenance into their offering while restricting consumers to repair their products (Bradley & Persson, 2022). Anti-consumer behaviour may be combatted with right-to-repair bills, like the recent developments in Europe (European Comission, 2020). However, many of such bills are blocked at early stages, often with the efforts of large conglomerates that have a significant political sway (Godwin, 2021). Governments should exercise more control over such conglomerates in the future and force them to allow consumers to repair and use their products in the way deemed necessary, rather than profiteering from it.

All in all, many positive and negative predictions of the Werkbund came to reality a century later. Unpacking them shows that many problems in modern society are not new and that discourse is a very important tool to solve them. These problems – what quality meant then, what it would mean in the future, and how important is the critical analysis of the discourse as presented by historians – are the lessons of Cologne 1914.

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