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On April 28, 1905, Berlin’s most celebrated department store, A. Wertheim on Leipziger Platz, unveiled an exhibition of meticulously designed home interiors provided by leading artists for its new Department of Domestic Art, or Wohnkunst-Abteilung (Figures 25.7 and 25.8). Just opposite the Wertheim’s prominent neo-Gothic façade, completed in 1904 by the architect Alfred Messel as a monument to merchandise display and conspicuous consumption, the Prussian Ministry of Commerce and Industry was in the midst of opening a new department as well. This was the so-called State Trades Office, or Landesgewerbeamt, among whose primary duties was to accelerate the reform of Prussia’s schools of arts, crafts and trades, or Kunstgewerbe- und Handwerkerschulen. At the same time that the Wertheim store launched its exhibition of home interiors, the Commerce Ministry created the State Trades Office to focus dozens of state crafts schools on the production and display of complete, harmoniously designed domestic interiors for middle-class consumers. Both institutions had begun experimenting with efforts in this direction in 1902, and by the spring of 1905 they had each met with sufficient success to merit the introduction of full-size ‘departments’.

The Department of Domestic Art and the State Trades Office, inaugurated in the seemingly disparate settings of a privately owned department store and a state ministry, in fact shared a similar purpose: to educate producers and consumers alike about the social, economic, and cultural value of a tastefully designed, properly furnished German home. To a degree previously unseen in German history, this article argues, the German home in the early years of the twentieth century assumed new cultural meanings and symbolic significance as a site of economic, political, artistic and social intervention. The widespread and energetic focus on providing new designs, furnishings, and products for the German home around 1900 would influence cultural production in Germany in ways that would be felt for decades to come; looking backwards in


Figure 25.8: Peter Behrens, view of living room in Wertheim department store home interiors exhibition, 1905.
Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, 16 (1905)

time, this intense focus also reflected larger processes that had been transforming German society for decades. These processes included a rapidly increasing national population, unprecedented urbanization and economic growth, and massive organizational changes and restructuring in such economic
spheres as the crafts, industrial manufacturing, advertising and distribution, and the retail industry. By no means static, these processes were also influenced by reform-oriented groups such as the late nineteenth-century Movement for Artistic Education, the Dürerbund (founded 1902), the Association for Homeland Protection (Bund Heimatschutz, founded 1904), and the Deutscher Werkbund (founded 1907).

The focus on the German home and the cultivation of a consciously middle-class German consumer identity, this article contends, was closely linked to the efforts of a wide variety of Wilhelmshome institutions as they sought to adapt to the dizzying conditions of twentieth-century Wilhelmshome capitalist modernity. The core feature of this modernity, as discussed here, was the presence of shifting, unstable, and often competing value systems being mediated, on the one hand, by massive changes in the predominantly middle-class world of commerce and industry, and on the other hand, by the efforts of various government and private groups which, each in their own way, struggled to arrest and redirect constructively the energies associated with Germany's rapid social, economic, and political evolution. As a curious feature of this Wilhelmshome modernity, the activities of some of these institutions could at times seem to be widely disparate, only to prove, upon closer examination, actually to complement one another or, as with the Wertheim store and the Prussian Commerce Ministry, to interpenetrate in significant ways.

As noted by numerous contemporaries, and also later by historians of the period after 1900, the creation and securing of markets for Germany's domestic products was an important motivating factor for the focus on domestic goods and interior furnishings. Yet this was far from the only issue at stake. The organization of new systems for designing and equipping the home reflected a variety of middle- and upper-middle-class German attitudes toward the 'masses' as consumers and citizens; toward the role of businesses and government in shaping an economy increasingly shifting in the direction of large enterprise, mass production and mass consumption; and toward the role of artists, design associations and even department stores as self-appointed educators of the modern German consumer. For this reason, a comparison of the Wertheim store's new home interior displays to the Commerce Ministry schools' emphasis on the design of integrated domestic spaces offers insights into the variety of forces that were shaping early twentieth-century German industrial, commercial and consumer culture in new and profound ways.

The Department Store as Erzieher

From 1902 until 1911, the well-established, Stralsund-based firm of A. Wertheim relied on Curt Stoewing, a professor of architecture, painting and applied arts at the Technical University in Charlottenburg, to design and curate exhibitions of domestic interiors and applied arts furnishings deemed worthy of Alfred Messel's sumptuously designed 300-metre-long department store complex. The relatively new, ever-expanding flagship Wertheim outlet at Leipziger Platz received instant acclaim as Messel's cumulative masterpiece, not least due to the willingness of the architect's patron to spend seemingly limitless funds in order to elevate the Berlin shopping experience to levels rivalling such international department store 'great powers' as Harrods in London, or the Bon Marche and Printemps stores in Paris. Department stores had been growing at a furious pace in Germany since unification in 1871, and even significant new taxes levied on them in 1900 did nothing to halt the expansion of their numbers and revenue.

As veritable palaces of consumption in an increasingly urban nation with a growing middle class, department stores concentrated the activities of shopping, eating, entertaining, and even banking in often spectacular, culturally laden material surroundings. One contemporary observer, Paul Göhrle, remarked that with the confines of the Wertheim's six-story, 655-square-metre Großer Lichthof ('great skylit court')—the largest of thirteen covered courtyards in the sprawling building—one could easily erect an average-size apartment building. Another contemporary, the architect Alfred Wiener, remarked that Messel's Wertheim store at Leipziger Platz was the first to 'fulfill perfectly' the demands of department store design, foremost among which was to 'place the product in the most advantageous way before the eye of the consumer.' But why, one might reasonably ask, did a department store of Wertheim's size and stature deem a Domestic Arts Department, with artists' exhibitions of complete home interiors, to be the best solution for displaying furniture and other domestic goods in the first place? Was this viewed by Wertheim, along with such rival Berlin competitors as Tietz, Gerson, and the KaW (Kaufhaus des Westens), as sound retail strategy? Or was it perhaps an anomalous departure by a wealthy department store into the realms of art and culture, in the hopes of drawing consumers with a higher disposable income? In fact, and as we will see, Wertheim and its competitors joined the Movement for Art Education, the Applied Arts Movement, and even Wilhelmshome government institutions to overlay the concepts of art and culture onto commerce in their promotion of fashionable, well-made goods to a rapidly expanding middle class. In his publicity announcement for the 1905 Wertheim home interior exhibition, organizer Curt Stoewing proclaimed that the new Department of


1 Peter Stürzebecher, Das Berliner Warenhaus, pp. 12-16.
2 Paul Göhrle, 'Das Warenhaus', Die Gesellschaft, 7 (1907), 18, as quoted in Stürzebecher, Das Berliner Warenhaus, p. 29.
Domestic Art had been designed to appeal to 'multifarious human spirits as a promoter of artistic re-formation and the general elevation of existence.' Moreover, Stevöing maintained, new room ensembles by such artistic and architectural luminaries as Peter Behrens, Alfred Grenander, Bernhard Pankok, Gertrud Kleinheppel and Richard Riemerschmid showed that artists had a valuable role to play in Germany as 'leaders and educators of the people's sensibilities' (Führer und Erziehern des Volksträger). Another critic and designer, Emil Högg of Dresden, focused on the Wertheim exhibition's contribution to a specifically German middle-class education, sense of progress, and national pride. Recognizing that interior designs featuring high-quality products for German homes depended on cultivated consumers to purchase them, Stevöing, Högg, and other reformers and critics encouraged the public to make the outlays that would signify their membership in the ranks of a cultivated middle-class citizenry. Reflecting on the Wertheim store's contribution to this process, Högg wrote:

It is important to note that the house of A. Wertheim has been thoroughly pacifist in its exclusive use of German designers and German manufacturers, whereas one can only derive the comfort of one's tears each time our German princes journey abroad to make their dowry purchases in Paris. The definition and status of the term 'modern' itself, in reference to the design and outfitting of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German homes, is one of such extreme relativity that it almost does more to confuse than clarify. For example, fast-paced developments in the German applied arts fields indicated to Stevöing that, as far as the 1905 Wertheim home interiors exhibition was concerned,

[We hardly require the word 'modern' any more to describe our new good art ... When a thing is well made and is an authentic product of its creator, then the best appraisal has already been given, and the creator can be satisfied with his work.]

As Stevöing's comment suggests—and the recognition of this is crucial to our understanding of consumption, technology and modernity in relation to the Wilhelmine home—the meaning of the word 'modern' underwent a seemingly unending series of periodic shifts when it came to describing the rapid evolution of nineteenth-century styles in the design of German home furnishings.

As the architectural historian Stefan Muthesius has pointed out, even before the unification of the Second Empire in 1871, slippages of meaning among such terms as 'interior decoration', 'interior design', and numerous sub-speciality crafts fields were only one sign of the shifting terrain in the fields of design and production. 'From the consumers' point of view,' Muthesius adds, 'the new ornate interior was a manifestation of increased wealth, legitimately expressed within the old hierarchy of décorum. By the 1880s, he continues, 'probably the most popular epithet of the day was “modern” (e.g., Moderne Renaissance), and the term was applied liberally to a variety of recombinations of Renaissance, Baroque, and rococo designs.'

At the same time, as Muthesius usefully reminds us, the exhibition innovation known as the 'complete domestic interior' began appearing with particular frequency at the 1867 Paris world's fair. In other words, designers and manufacturers throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century were capitalizing, through a regular sequence of national exhibitions and world's fairs, on the serious commercial potential of carefully assembled consumer products arranged in appealing, fashionable, domestic interiors (Figure 25.9). Inasmuch as rising wealth meant increased disposable income, the middle-class home became a locus of self-definition and self-expression for families of sufficient means. Interior decorators, interior designers, artists, and architects all participated in the creation of products (and, more generally, a demand for those products) that would aid those of sufficient means to distinguish themselves through the outfitting of their home environments.

The march of innovation in nineteenth-century world's fairs reveals an expanding awareness on the part of crafts industries of the potential for appealing to, and even influencing, various consumer classes. In London in 1851, for example, we witness the first occasion on which goods from many nations are displayed alongside one another for comparative, competitive evaluation inside Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace. The Paris exhibition of 1867 sees the first exhibition of complete domestic interiors, while in Vienna in 1873 there appears the first exhibition division to focus entirely on the living conditions of the underclass. Among other items on offer in this new section are cookbooks that allow working families to maximize their nutrition while staying within their limited means.

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6 Curt Stevöing employed this same slogan in his similar, but much smaller exhibition of 1902. 
8 Ibid.
9 Emil Högg, 'Neue Wohnräume und neues Kunstgewerbe bei A. Wertheim', Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, 16 (1905), 646, 98, here p. 666 (emphasis in original).
10 Stevöing, 'A. Wertheim', p. 643.

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or, later, department stores and government ministries taking an interest in the applied arts—was implicitly involved in education for the purpose of elevating the taste of the consuming public. The neologism Kunstgewerbe, after all, had arisen in the 1860s 'as a very late completion of the old attempts to elevate the crafts from the technical to the polite arts', as Stefan Muthesius points out.\textsuperscript{14} Just as the labour associated with creating domestic furnishings was being redefined to classify it as a more cultivated form of 'artistic' crafts production, so too the consumers of these products became associated with middle-class sophistication and taste.

This effect was entirely intentional, as Julius Lessing, the first head curator of the Berlin Applied Arts Museum, pointed out as early as 1891. He maintained that the term Kunstgewerbe had been popularized in the 1860s and 1870s as a vaguely defined process of adding 'art' to the crafts, while at the same time the term denoted a process of 'rebuilding the crafts estate' (den Handwerkerstand wieder aufbauen).\textsuperscript{15} This theme was as popular with Otto von Bismarck in the 1860s as it was with an array of early twentieth-century political parties seeking constructive answers to the 'social question', with which the applied arts movement remains linked. The historian Monika Franke defines most clearly the twin promises made by supporters of the applied arts movement in the 1870s in 1880s: 'The applied arts would prevent crafts practitioners from falling to the level of common workers; they would also enable workers to climb into the ranks of the trades middle classes.'\textsuperscript{16}

The British Arts and Crafts movement in particular offered a National Romantic way for European commercial and professional middle-class self-definition through improved design of the home and its accoutrements.\textsuperscript{17} German reformers in the applied arts and domestic spheres eagerly followed aspects of the British example, not least as a way to compete with France.\textsuperscript{18} By the 1880s, leading cultural figures such as Julius Langbehn, Ferdinand Avenarius, Alfred Lichtwark, Peter Jessen, Ludwig Pallat and Richard Streiter were describing the important role that Germany's crafts and artistic fields had to play in fostering the nation's economic, social and cultural development. In 1888, for example, the Dresden-based critic Ferdinand Avenarius issued a call in his journal, Der Kunstwart ('The Keeper of Art'), for an educated, elite 'party of realists' (Partei der Sachlichen) to teach the German public about the role art could play in everyday life. Art, in short, could function as both a

\textsuperscript{14} Stefan Muthesius, 'The altdeutsche Zimmer,' p. 271.
\textsuperscript{15} Julius Lessing, Das Kunstgewerbe als Beruf (Berlin, 1891), as quoted in Franke, 'Schoenheit und Bruttosozialprodukt', p. 169.
\textsuperscript{16} Franke, 'Schoenheit und Bruttosozialprodukt', p. 169.
\textsuperscript{17} See Barbara Miller Lago, National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries (Cambridge, 2000).
\textsuperscript{18} Stefan Muthesius, Das englische Verhältnis: Eine Studie zu den deutschen Reformbewegungen in Architektur, Wohnbau und Kunstgewerbe im späten 19. Jahrhundert (Munich, 1974).
The Domestic Interior in Wilhelmine Germany

...nearly nineteenth-century German equivalent of the Arts and Crafts movement, or Kunstgewerbemovement. At least two points are significant about this historical trajectory for the consideration of consumption, technology and modernity in Wilhelmine Germany. First, the department store, representing an unprecedented concentration of commercial wealth as a correlate to the enlarging concentration and scale of German manufacturing, effectively leveraged the artistic ideology and achievements of the highly individualistic Arts and Crafts movement by parading complete, artist-designed room ensembles before urban shoppers in centralized showroom displays. The wealth and power of the department store supported its image as an authority in matters of taste. The store, and not the individual interior designer or architect, posed as the 'expert' who was advising consumers, for the store's selection of artists' rooms and wares implied that they had been screened for their quality, value, and taste.

Second, it is clear that crafts practitioners in the 1870s, 80s and 90s had begun to distinguish a distinct field of 'design' from that of older 'decoration' through their creation of original, complete, and 'modern' interior ensembles based on reinterpretations of Renaissance, Baroque, and other reworked historical forms. Half a century later, such designers and historians of a vaunted twentieth-century 'modernism' as Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson and Nikolaus Pevsner would discount these late-nineteenth-century designs simply as retardataire 'historicism'. In actual fact, and when cleared of the ideological imperatives that drove Hitchcock and Johnson to herald the arrival of a definitive twentieth-century 'modern' style in the 1932 'International Style' exhibition they organized at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the works of the last quarter of the nineteenth century can be recognized for what they were: the products of a vital period of technical and stylistic experimentation. Relative to their own era—as if to a twentieth-century generation of tastemakers who cherry-picked signifiers of meaning and freighted the word 'modern' with the criteria of abstraction—the interior designers of the late nineteenth century were producing designs of an entirely modern character, and doing so at the scale of the integrated domestic interior. If the comments of Curt Stoeving suggested that 'we hardly need the word modern any more', then this was due to his recognition that the artistic production of complete interiors had managed, by 1905, to achieve widespread recognition as an established practice. Similarly, the educative potential of well-executed works of applied art, shown to best advantage in rooms designed and furnished by artists, had become sufficiently widely accepted in world's exhibitions and speciality workshops to also begin appearing in exhibits organized by department stores.

19 Ferdinand Avenarius, 'Pro domo', Der Kunstwart 2, 6 (1888), 81, as cited in Gerhard Krentsch, Kunstwerk und Dörerhand: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gehäldten im Zeitalter des Imperialismus (Göttingen, 1969), p. 180. 20 There is a rich literature examining Karl Schmidt's Dresden workshops, and for this reason they do not receive detailed consideration here. For historical analysis and sources concerning the Dresden workshops see John V. Maciuika, Before the Bancers: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920, chap. 6 'Cultural Fault Lines in the Wilhelmine Garden City Movement'.


Promotion and reception of the room displays at the Wertheim store suggest the place that the Department of Domestic Art and its domestic interiors occupied in the turn-of-the-century discourse of the German home. The taste-making journal Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration, a creation of the Darmstadt-based entrepreneur and artists’ colony advocate Alexander Koch, featured back-to-back favourable articles on the exhibition by two participants in the exhibition, Curt Stoewen and the designer and critic Emil Högg. In Högg’s view, what would have been the object of open and loud derision on the part of an uncomprehending public only a few years ago was now being regarded with some degree of curiosity, if not outright acceptance. ‘The masses (Die Masse),’ Högg wrote haughtily, ‘will of course never have an opinion of their own, and the most that we can achieve is to convince them that they need to be led by the few who possess taste.’\(^{23}\) Högg’s own contribution to educating mass taste was the exhibition of a towering, bow-shaped gun cabinet (Geweberschrank), obviously intended for that portion of the consuming public capable of supporting a lifestyle that included hunting, clay-pigeon shooting or target practice (Figure 25.10).

Högg compared the Wertheim exhibition favourably to the Darmstadt Artists’ Colony, an elite residential community led by the Viennese architect Joseph Maria Olbrich and supported by Ernst Ludwig, Darmstadt-Hessen’s young, British-educated Grand Duke. Olbrich and his six fellow artists proudly launched an exhibition of their works in 1901 entitled A Document of German Art. The exhibition featured Olbrich’s hilltop exhibition building and eight lavishly designed new homes (Figure 25.11). All were filled with luxurious interior furnishings designed by the artists and produced by leading Hessen applied arts manufacturers. This veritable orgy of a self-consciously modern luxury Wohnkultur met with some derision, not least because a highly melodramatic opening ceremony, replete with a Greek chorus wearing costumes designed by Peter Behrens, proclaimed the dawning of a new German artistic era. Voices rose in hymns to a new age of German artistic dedication and cultural sophistication, while a ceremonial procession bore a symbolic crystal down the steps of the Ernst Ludwig House to be set among the model homes below. Had they known how much public money had been spent to construct luxury artists’ homes and fill them with elegant domestic accoutrements, the masses so decried by Högg might have been moved to reach for the contents of the critic’s gun cabinet. The Darmstadt legislature, responding to the perceived waste of public resources on a lofty, traditional, elite symbol of German Kultur, slashed all further funding for the colony and its activities immediately after the close of the 1901 exhibition. Ernst Ludwig responded by reaching ever deeper into his grand ducal pockets to fund further experimental exhibitions in German domestic culture and applied arts, a practice he engaged in until World War I.\(^{24}\)

Many critics faulted the Darmstadt exhibition’s patent cultural elitism and its indulgence in luxury products that no average consumer could hope to afford. Högg, however, praised the colony as a cultural and educational asset in which leading artists were introducing new levels of quality and aesthetic awareness to Darmstadt-Hessen’s native applied arts manufacturers. Observing that there was a lack of royal and grand ducal patrons in German cities who might be interested in underwriting applied arts projects for the benefit of German commerce and culture, Högg reasoned that Berlin’s Wertheim store had rightly ‘assumed the honorary title of protector of art’ through its commercial exhibition of artist-designed domestic interiors.\(^{25}\)

The Wertheim’s wilful blending of German culture and commerce typified a broader turn-of-the-century trend in which a growing number of department stores, applied artists’ cooperative firms and applied arts schools put the stamp of ‘art’ and ‘culture’ on domestic products and interiors. The applied arts movement offered itself as the palliative for those mass-produced German products that had been so notoriously derided for being ‘cheap and bad’, in German

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\(^{23}\) Högg, ‘Neue Wohnräume’, p. 650.

\(^{24}\) Thorough analysis from numerous perspectives appears in the exhibition catalogues Darmstadt, Ein Dokument Deutscher Kunst 1901-1976, 5 vols (Darmstadt, 1976). For documentation of the Darmstadt colony’s restoration and treatment as a cumulative, century-long achievement see Christiane Geelhaar (ed.), Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, 100 Jahre Planen und Bauen für die Stadt (Darmstadt, 2000).

government reporter Franz Reuland’s words, when they appeared in such late-nineteenth-century world’s fairs as the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876.26

Such fusions of art with commerce were also the source of Ferdinand Avenarius’s call for the Bürgertum to enforce a kind of ‘cultural hygiene’ so that members of the lower classes could be steered toward German products of higher quality. With increasing frequency in the 1890s and early 1900s, reformers such as Avenarius and Paul Schultz-Naumburg in Saxony, Hermann and Anna Muthesius in Berlin, and Adolf Loos in Vienna issued overlapping and mutually reinforcing calls for greater recognition in the German-speaking world of the rising tendency toward decorative restraint, fitness of objects to their use, and, in short, what became known as an objective, realist Sachlichkeit in design. Reformers applied these principles in analysing everything from German clothing styles to domestic architecture, from appliances to transportation infrastructure; their remarks left no question as to their extremely low opinion of the philistinism, degeneracy, and primitivism of mainstream, parvenu German tastes in all these areas.27

Borrowing most frequently from the perceived advanced state of civilization in the British Empire, German-speaking reformers argued that only a hopefully ignorant population would persist in using their newly attained wealth to purchase raucously ornamental houses, hopelessly overcrowd their interiors with furniture and accoutrements in a mélange of historical styles, and wear gaudy and impractical clothing. Closely following the manner of these much better-known critics, Höffg observed that in visiting the Wertheim home interior displays of 1905, the undereducated members of the Berlin populace witnessed ‘model examples of restraint’ drawn from the ‘as-yet-unwritten textbook of the modern style’, while at home ‘they persisted in living among the very counter-examples’ of the Wertheim displays.28 Höffg’s comments recall Avenarius’s Kunstwart, which bemoaned its readership with educational advice about everything from domestic decorative taste, domestic hygiene and proper table manners. One of the most provocative of his many pieces admonished Germans to modernize their domestic surroundings and living habits by following his ‘Ten Commandments for Interior Decoration’, published in a popular exhibition of 1900 in Dresden, entitled The People’s Exhibition for Home and Hearth. Among these were simple rules pronounced to ‘Avoid all imitations’, ‘Strive for proper home surroundings,’ ‘Include fine art in your home’ and ‘Decorate for use and purpose’.29 As the historian Heide Rezepa-Zabel has noted, Avenarius’s journalistic efforts ‘sought to spread his pedagogical message to the consuming classes (Käufergesellschaften) of even the most modest means.30

In tune with the sharpening tones and mounting tensions felt across many fields in the years before World War I, reformers raised the tone and warned against mistakes in their efforts to educate bourgeois taste. By 1912, for example, Avenarius and his circle warned the middle classes to observe their ‘consumer duties’ when it came to exercising sound judgment in the purchase of domestic articles of quality and good taste.31 In perhaps the most sharply worded essay of the era, Adolf Loos’s ‘Ornament and Crime’ of 1908, the


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.
architect and prolific feuilletonist for Theodor Herzl’s liberal newspaper, Die Neue Freie Presse, proclaimed:

Since ornament is no longer organically linked with our culture, it is also no longer the expression of our culture... I have made the following discovery and I pass it on to the world: The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.32

Loos, in distinction to all his peers, had identified one key guiding principle of the greatest importance for German-speaking craftsmen, architects, and all producers seeking to contribute to the making of modern dwelling environments: each craft field and every realm of representation—whether painting, drawing, photography or architecture—was governed by its own internal conventions, techniques and technologies, and these could only be mingled with one another at their peril. Modernity, to Loos, was the state in which creators of houses or any form of material culture worked in a manner that was continuous with past traditions in their particular field, while incorporating only those new technologies that the current era had discovered for the improvement of each individual realm of production. Obeying this law would prevent, in Loos’s view, the craftsmen, artists, or architects of a given era from committing the cardinal sin of trying to originate a new ‘style’; the best they would achieve, if they consciously sought to ‘invent’ a modern style, was the production of a quickly passing fashion, and at worst, a ridiculous cultural self-caricature. For this reason Loos would distance himself from many German cultural reform efforts, and especially those of the Deutscher Werkbund, which he accused at length of cultural ‘superfluity’, of being an originator of ‘degenerate culture’.33

Early twentieth-century German popular organizations such as Avenarius’s Dührerbund, with more than 300,000 members in 1912, and the more elite Deutscher Werkbund, with 971 (individual and corporate) members in 1912, focused particular attention on integrating the growing forces of large-scale German industrial production with a consciously cultivated ethos of informed, if not altogether enlightened consumption.34 The Werkbund, for example, had made its debut in October 1907 with a stated goal that oriented constituent member businesses, artists, politicians and critics toward the ‘reconquest of a harmonious culture’.35 Through the cooperation of artists, manufacturers, government officials and retailers, Werkbund leaders such as Fritz Schumacher, Karl Schmaltz and Hermann Muthesius believed the reconquest of a harmonious culture would produce the ‘ennoblement of manufacturing’, ‘quality work’ and the careful ‘ordering of relations among producer, merchant, and consumer’.36 The critic Joseph August Lux stated the challenge facing the Werkbund concisely:

‘The modern movement is not an outward-looking common struggle for intellectual principles, but rather a fight against an enemy within our own land—against the lack of understanding of the public, and against the closed and thoroughly organized army of merchants, entrepreneurs, industrialists and manufacturers who seek with great stubbornness to defend their comfortable old forms of profit accumulation (Gewinnmacherei).’37

Culture, economy, and the design and making of utilitarian household objects: all of these were closely connected in the discourse of the German home, as can be seen from the Wertheim and Darmstadt examples. A wide variety of constituencies—from critics of the overcrowded ‘barracks city’ (Mietkaserneenstadt) for urban workers to advocates of suburban, single-family dwellings set in “pure air and God’s free nature”—considered the home as both the symbolic and actual bedrock of national health.38 By placing such great emphasis on the German home as a site for cultural renewal, artistic intervention, and consumer and citizen education, Wilhelmine reformers turned the topic of how one lived and dwelled—one’s ‘lifestyle’—into a topic of cultural, economic, and political significance. As the Wilhelmine reformer Friedrich Landmann stated: ‘Lifestyle reform is above all reform of the self; it has to begin with one’s own body and in one’s own home.’39

In recent years, no one has been more perceptive than the art historian Frederic Schwartz in untangling the manifold debates over Wilhelmine commercial fashion, the search to define legitimately a new artistic style, and the phenomenon of a harmonious, integrated culture as a ‘figure of longing’.40


32 Ibid., p. 109.
33 J.A. Lux, Das moderne Kunstgewerbe in Deutschland (Leipzig, 1908), 6, as quoted in Rozep-Zabel, Deutsches Warenbuch, p. 149.
As Schwartz convincingly demonstrates, this discourse was linked to the larger themes of twentieth-century German social and cultural renewal, especially as the tendency toward greater concentration in the realms of Wilhelmine commerce, industry and retailing prompted a variety of calls for action, such as greater integration in the face of rising social unrest, economic inequality and political tension.

The Commerce Ministry’s Interest in Reforming the Wilhelmine Home

One shortcoming of analyses by Schwartz, Jefferies and others of the Wilhelmine era ‘reform milieu’, to borrow historian Kevin Repp’s phrase, is the tendency to leave commonly accepted divisions between citizen reform groups and state policy initiatives unquestioned. Certainly much recent literature has contributed to the recognition of the possibility that ‘multiple modernities’, or what was called at the beginning of this article ‘competing value systems’, coexisted in defiance of more simplistic categories such as ‘modern’ or ‘anti-modern’, terms that had characterized many earlier historical analyses of the Wilhelmine era. Thus, when a historian of the stature of Thomas Nipperdey asserts that ‘Wilhelmine society was a society of reform movements and of reforms’, he is generally not speaking of reform efforts originating from within a government reputed more for blocking than supporting reform.41 Similarly, Kevin Repp’s characterization of a Wilhelmine ‘anti-politics’ leaves out, for the most part, the possibility that some of the very reform impulses being advanced by leading members of the Wilhelmine Bürgerbüro were simultaneously being advanced by bürgerlich civil servants operating anchored well within the state structure.42

The art historian Frederic Schwartz, for his part, has recently moved from an analysis of Wilhelmine design culture that virtually ignored the role of government, to one that acknowledges, in the case of the architect and civil servant Hermann Muthesius, that ‘there is no doubt that Muthesius stood close to an important nexus of institutions of government and education and would have been privy to information that was strategically invaluable for the highly activist supporters of applied arts reform. But,’ he continues, ‘it is as a publicist and theoretician that Muthesius made his most important mark in the early


work as an applied arts school reformer from his founding and leadership roles in the Deutscher Werkbund. They were all, simply put, of a piece, and integrated in a manner that may not have been seen in an architect from any other era of German history, including Prussia's own Karl Friedrich Schinkel. 47

As Muthesius learned from the British Arts and Crafts movement, the single-family private home was the main object of British artists' highly decentralized reform efforts. Beyond his inherent interest as an architect in the single-family dwelling, house ownership conveyed to Muthesius the power of the private individual. No social class was a more fitting carrier of individuality than the educated middle class, which was made up of individuals who had gained their identity and distinction through education and personal cultivation in a particular field. The most important lesson that the Germans could learn from the English example, in Muthesius's eyes, was that encouraging Germans to live in private houses was a crucial part of modern cultural advance. 'For there can be no doubt,' Muthesius asserted, 'that to dwell in a private house is in every way a higher form of life.' 48

Returning from his phenomenally productive period of government service and publishing in Britain, Muthesius wasted no time making the single-family home, and in particular the domestic interior, the focus of a thorough reform of Prussian applied arts education. Inspired by the efforts of British architects and educators such as William Richard Lethaby and Charles Robert Ashbee, among others, Muthesius orchestrated reforms that shifted the emphasis of applied arts education away from the training of 'applied arts draughtsmen' to the production of 'applied arts craftsmen'. Further, and in a manner congruent with the centralized organizational tendencies evident in German industry and, simultaneously, in the growing number of entrepreneurial 'crafts workshops', Muthesius re-ordered each and every craft discipline (decorative painting, weaving, furniture-making, metalwork, ceramics, interior finishing and joinery, to name several that are most relevant to the home) so as to place each one under the guiding hand of an architect. His new 'Service Regulations for Directors and Instructors' of November 1903, combined with his 'Instructional Workshops Decree' of December 1904, specified that at some three-dozen top Prussian applied arts schools, professional architects or artists would oversee each craft discipline in the development of individual designs of domestic objects for integration into an overall interior design scheme. The emphasis was to be on 'the bourgeois interior... of simple, solid appearance.' 49 'Only in this way,' Muthesius further explained in his

46 Muthesius, Das eingeschlossene Haus, vol. 1 p. 5.
47 'Ergebnisse der Besichtigung der Kunstgewerbe- und Handwerkschulen in Düsseldorf, Crefeld, Bielefeld, Harman, Cöln, Iserlohn, Halle, Erfurt, Kassel und Hamm in Juli und August

hand-written evaluation of Prussia's schools for Commerce Minister Theodor Möller, 'can the student appreciate that a dresser or a mural is conditioned by the overall concept of the space, that these are not objects unto themselves, but parts of an artistic whole.' 48

The point of this entire technical, economic, cultural, and aesthetic exercise, as far as the Prussian Commerce Ministry's focus on German home was concerned, was to enlist home design in the service of state economic development policy. What were the state's goals? First and foremost, to improve the quality of German products for domestic as well as export markets. This had long been a cornerstone of the thinking of Theodor Möller, the National Liberal politician, industrialist and Commerce Minister, who explained that in an increasingly industrial age, it was necessary to offer crafts workers and other members of the embattled German crafts Mittelstand a series of 'ladders upon which intelligent people of lesser means can climb up into the higher classes.' 49 For Möller, Muthesius and other members of the Prussian Commerce Ministry, the focus on improving production of domestic furnishings and interiors was of simultaneous benefit to crafts producers and consumers. Makers of these goods would command higher prices and contribute to Germany's vital export sector; as Möller put it, "without further development of exports we cannot feed the 800,000 people who are added to our population every year." 50 Consumers of better designed, higher-quality domestic furnishings, meanwhile, would be contributing to Germany's economic health and expansion, while purchasing wares whose quality and consistency would demonstrate their users as members of a modern, educated middle class. The crafts schools certainly did not represent the mainstream of Germany's economic future. But they did include tens of thousands of trades-level and skilled crafts workers whose economic livelihoods were being threatened by the rapid expansion and concentration of Wilhelmine industry. For this reason, the policies of the Commerce Ministry and its State Trades Office brought the schools into line with the kinds of economic industries that the state wished to promote across Germany. Matching each school's curriculum with the manufacturing character of its surrounding town and region, Muthesius introduced workshop-based instruction that 'first of all it would consider

1904' (signed and dated Hermann Muthesius, 15 Oct. 1903), in Geheimen Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, LfA 120 EX FachI Nr.1 Bd.13 File IIb.8130, pp. 6–7; the forty-two-page report is hereafter cited as 'Ergebnisse'. The complete sentence reads: 'Zu pflegen wäre der bürgerliche Innenraum und das Haupltürenzimmer wäre auf eine einfache, gediegenere Erscheinung zu legen, bei welcher Verfeinerung in der Farbe' (emphasis original).
48 'Ergebnisse', pp. 10 11.
50 Letter from Theodor Möller to his daughter, Irmgard Möller, 5 May 1901, as quoted in Wolther, Theodor Adolf von Möller, pp. 67 8.
local industries, following those working techniques in which artistic value will rest primarily on the work of the [guiding] artist.\footnote{51} Further, Muthesius's revised school regulations required every school director and member of the teaching staff to maintain an active architectural or artistic practice, thus linking them to industry through commissions. In this way a certain continuity could be established from the school director to the teaching staff and on down to the students, the best of whom could be employed by the staff for the execution of actual commissions for homes, offices and industrial interiors.

If the introduction of these administrative and curricular reforms was dramatic, evidence of their impact was apparent as early as 1904. Where late nineteenth-century applied arts draughtsmen had copied historical styles to decorate two-dimensional elevations of a variety of interiors, applied arts students of furniture, decorative painting, and other departments were taught, as a consequence of Muthesius's reforms, that their pieces, rather than existing on their own, were conditioned by the spaces they were to occupy and therefore should be designed as parts of an artistic whole. Over-decorations as a source of ornamental distinction would be replaced by the design of practical, integrated works of furniture and decoration. These were to be drawn not simply in elevation or section, but in perspective, and designed according to a harmonious colour scheme; they would further be fitted into a 'bourgeois' (bürgerlich) interior that Muthesius argued need not be filled with cheap, machine-produced products mimicking older, handcrafted historical styles, but should be distinguished by simplicity and elegance.\footnote{52}

The contrast between projects at Prussia's leading applied arts school, the Düsseldorf Kunstgewerbeschule, is revealing on several levels. The Düsseldorf student project for a stair hall dating from 1886 reveals all the tendencies of historical ornament rendered in elevation and applied to interior surfaces in the same manner that the nineteenth-century term Kunstgewerbe itself connoted the application of 'art' to a 'craft' or 'trade' (Figure 25.12). The Düsseldorf student project for a living room design in 1904, by contrast, demonstrates a series of individually constructed domestic interior furnishings and objects rendered in perspective (Figure 25.13). Each of the furnishings—the cabinets, the rug, the lighting, the wainscoting, and the wall stencilling—has been designed in a manner consciously derived from a square module, used to govern the proportions, dimensions, and decorative character of each object in the room. This student project is related to the living room interior designed by Peter Behrens for the Wertheim home interiors exhibition and pictured earlier (see Figure 25.8 above): Behrens's interior displays the same modular,

\footnote{51} Muthesius, Verwaltungsbericht des Königl. Preussischen Landesgewerbeamts 1905 (Berlin, 1905), p. 159.
\footnote{52} "Ergebnisse", p. 8.

simplified geometric approach governing the disposition of the room and its contents. A cabinet, a piano and a number of other furniture pieces employ materials and support members that echo the appearance of the wood used in the battened wainscoting to subdivide the walls into roughly equal units.

This similarity was hardly an accident. Behrens was the director of the Düsseldorf Kunstgewerbeschule from which the student project issued. Max Benirschke, the instructor for the course in which the student project was designed, had been hand-picked by Behrens to join the Düsseldorf teaching staff, based on Benirschke's reputation for being open to the recent 'modern', sachlich direction in architecture and design. Behrens, arguably the leading Wilhelmine practitioner in architecture and applied arts (judging from the sheer volume of his commissions and the favourable press attention he received), had spent two days at the Prussian Commerce Ministry in 1902 being interviewed by Commerce Minister Theodor Möller and his staff for the position of school director in Düsseldorf. Behrens, for his part, had abandoned his lavish Darmstadt Artists' Colony residence for Düsseldorf and written to Muthesius, then still in London, to report on the success of his
negotiations for the Düsseldorf school directorship. Professing exhaustion with the process by which Darmstadt, and indeed the rest of the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing German nation, seemed to be expressing its 'yearning for a culture' (Sehnsucht nach einer Kultur), Behrens wrote:

What pleases me greatly in assuming this post is the opportunity it extends to be able, in a direct sense, to be subservient to the interests of the state. Where today from many sides the yearning for a culture is coming to expression — almost ad nauseam — I believe that little is helped through the seal of a slogan; rather the only possibility in this period lies in self-development or in the hands of the state. On this last point I regard your official appointment and the efforts of people like Professor Ludwig Pallat [of the Culture Ministry] as the best confirmation of my good faith.53

Another prominent artist-architect, Richard Riemerschmid, represents a direct link between the Prussian Commerce Ministry's applied arts school and the Wertheim exhibition of home interiors across the street from the ministry. Like Behrens, Riemerschmid had designed the furnishings and interior architecture for a living room at the 1905 Wertheim exhibition. Riemerschmid, again like Behrens, had been retained by Muthesius and the Commerce Ministry in 1903, 1904, and 1905 to conduct summer courses to instruct teachers employed by Prussian applied arts schools in the new methods and philosophy behind a pedagogy oriented to the improvement of German home interior design. What appeared to be two completely separate entities when they were created in 1905 — the State Trades Office of the Prussian Commerce Ministry and the Department of Domestic Art of the Wertheim department store — in fact shared many common links, as well as some indirect roots. The widespread proliferation of interest among Wilhelmine Germans in the home and home furnishings as objects of artistic, social, and economic import seemed, by the early twentieth century, to be bounded only by the scope and scale of German expansion itself. It can hardly come as a surprise, then, that the mobilization of applied arts forces from the private and governmental spheres would continue to have the domestic interior as its main focus in, for example, a deliberately provocative national exhibition known as the Third German Applied Arts Exhibition in Dresden, opened in the summer of 1906. Held shortly after the creation of the State Trades Office in 1905, the Dresden exhibition had an unusual degree of support from the State Trades Office as well as from leading artists and manufacturers in the emerging, increasingly industrialized and centralized 'applied arts economy'. Similarly, it can hardly come as a surprise that the Deutscher Werkbund would arise shortly after this exhibition as a reform-minded association of artists, craftsmen, manufacturers, politicians, cultural critics, and architects. Widely credited as the organization's founder, Muthesius instigated the events that led his allies to form the new design association after he declared publicly, in early 1907, that an applied arts education should be understood as a cultural means of education... for a process of education which produces proper accommodations for us to live in can basically only be a character education, and one in which the pretentious and parvenu tendencies of today's interior design will be eliminated.54

In this speech, given at the inauguration of the Berlin Commercial College, a brand-new institution supported by the Commerce Ministry, Muthesius formally denounced all crafts industries that followed the old methods of historicist decoration and applied ornamental reproduction as enemies of the German nation and culture. Amid demands for Muthesius's dismissal by the Association for the Economic Interests of the Crafts—a group of craftsmen who resented the new emphasis on individual manufacture and leadership by

53 Letter from Behrens to Muthesius, 21 Jan. 1903, Muthesius Nachlass, Werkbund Archive-Berlin.

professional architects—Commerce Minister Clemens Delbrück defended Muthesius publicly on the floor of the Prussian Chamber of Deputies.  

Subsequent developments affecting the Deutscher Werkbund between 1907 and 1914 have been studied in far greater detail than have events in the decades pre-dating the founding of this organization. What may be appreciated and added to our understanding of the Werkbund in this particular context is the way that accelerating international tensions, and mounting competitive energies on the part of many Germans, found reflection in reformist rhetoric surrounding the German home and its furnishings. Foremost among the representatives of German "quality mass products" (die guten Massenwaren) was the Deutsches Warenbuch ("Book of German Products") of 1915. The book was a joint production of the Deutscher Werkbund and Ferdinand Avenarius's Dürrerbund, delayed in its publication by the start of World War I. Simultaneously a cultural polemic and a very simply illustrated, exhaustive catalogue of "approved" and "tasteful" domestic housewares produced by German crafts industries, the Book of German Products followed on the heels of a more modest preliminary effort by a Dürrerbund offshoot to produce a similar, more homely catalogue in 1912, Gediegenes Gerät fürs Haus ("Dependable Equipment for the Home").

The Deutsches Warenbuch ordered and advertised the products of the domestic sphere with the same dedication that the Interior Ministry, the Commerce Ministry, the Foreign Office and the Chancellor's Office joined forces with the Werkbund after 1912 to order the production and distribution of Werkbund "quality products" in Germany's international export markets. Less jingoistic than works by Werkbund authors such as Muthesius or Ernst Jäckh might have been, the Deutsches Warenbuch nonetheless blended the cultural and economic missions of the Werkbund and Dürrerbund, Joseph Popp's introduction makes this clear:

The product of good quality supports a people not only economically, but ethically and artistically as well. Every possession has a positive or negative effect on the family, the basic cell of society. From the objects of our domestic environment and everyday use we form positive or negative impressions, acquire good or bad moods, and obtain perceptions and habits that unconsciously influence and mould our lives.

Because 'the cultured person of the present is least cultivated in matters of taste, and is often surrounded by an excess of junk of the worst kind', it was necessary to 'bridge the gap between the good mass product and the people,' particularly since "the economic, ethical, and artistic significance of a good product... is clear to only a few".

As this brief look at the Deutsches Warenbuch makes clear, the economic, cultural, and political significance of the German home and domestic products did not wane during the closing years of the Wilhelmine era. After the war, the meaning and symbolism of the domestic environment conformed in new ways to the challenges of housing shortages, economic difficulties, and Weimar Republican cultural debates. Weimar architects from Walter Gropius to Bruno Taut would develop fresh examples of harmoniously designed domestic interiors at the Bauhaus and in a variety of German housing settlements, or Siedlungen. Similarly, generations of designers after World War I would continue to take up the challenge of designing tasteful products that would succeed in domestic and export markets and target, most of all, middle-class consumers. Certainly the styles and particular challenges of local politics and economics would change. What should be clear from this short survey, however, is that the complexities attending nearly every facet of Wilhelmine social, economic and political life were reflected in the literal and symbolic construction of the German home; this process of generating and reflecting cultural meaning would continue long after World War I.

In the Wilhelmine era, special exhibitions of artistic home interiors could originate in premier German department stores as well as in the halls of the state bureaucracy; historical ornaments termed 'modern' in one decade could be derided as barbaric in another; and craftsmen of one generation could battle those of another in a quest for a sense of legitimacy granted by generous state subsidies, private commissions or admission into prestigious exhibitions. If, as James Retallack has written recently, "whole books could be filled citing Germans who felt that every dimension of their personal, communal, and political existence was in flux between 1890 and 1914"; then it could be said that the book on modernity, technology, and consumption in the Wilhelmine home is just beginning to be written.

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Abstract

In the opening years of the twentieth century, the German home assumed new cultural meanings and symbolic significance as a site of economic, political, artistic, and social intervention. This article investigates a range of Wilhelmine institutions—from the Wertheim

[56] Rezepa-Zobel, Deutsches Warenbuch, pp. 52-91.
[57] See the full reprint and discussion of this book in Rezepa-Zobel, Deutsches Warenbuch, for a discussion of the Werkbund in relation to Wilhelmine imperialism see Maciuika, Before the Bauhaus, chap. 7.
[59] Ibid.
department store and the Prussian Commerce Ministry, to the Applied Arts Movement and the Movement for Art Education—to illustrate the variety of German approaches to promoting new conceptions of the home. Examining the ways in which Wilhelmine private and state reformers turned the topic of how one lived and dwelled into a topic of pressing significance, the article argues that private, commercial efforts and state-driven policy initiatives interpenetrated to a degree previously underappreciated in Wilhelmine historical studies. These private and state initiatives were, in turn, closely tied to the cultivation of German consumer identities, and to larger efforts on the part of Wilhelmine institutions to adapt to the dizzying conditions of twentieth-century capitalist modernity. As a result of these developments, special exhibitions of artistic home interiors originated in premier German department stores as well as in the halls of the state bureaucracy; historical ornaments termed ‘modern’ in one decade were denigrated as barbaric in another; and generations of craftsmen battled one another for a legitimacy conferred, to a significant degree, by private commissions, generous state subsidies, and admission into prestigious exhibitions.

**Keywords:** Wilhelmine era, consumption, department stores, state policy, design reform, Wertheim