Learning from the German Machine: Le Corbusier's 1912 Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne

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Le Corbusier published his first book as a young man of 24 under his given name of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. Although not well known, the Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne provides an important contribution to our understanding of the early modern movement in Europe, particularly as it took shape in the capable hands of German artists and industrialists before World War I.

The Étude is precisely what its name implies: a study. It is, accordingly, full of factual information. It is carefully organized and thorough, although, as Jeanneret admits, the subject of the study is vast, too vast to encompass in a brief report. So, its 74 pages limit themselves primarily to pertinent details, written in compressed form, so as not to exceed "on account of the fatigue it will cause the reader, the limits of usefulness."[1] Despite its brevity, contemporary readers of the report found it 'remarkable'.[2] The Commission of the School of Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, which requested and funded the study, determined that it was remarkable enough to publish and distribute. It produced 500 copies and delivered them to artists and dignitaries throughout Switzerland, France, Germany and Belgium.

For present day readers, the study is remarkable for a number of reasons. Being the first book Le Corbusier wrote, this study shares the base appeal of many 'firsts': it represents the beginning of a long, and important list of polemical works by one of the great designers and design theorists of the twentieth century. As the interest it commanded at the time attests, however, the study is more than simply a point to which one can regress no further in the writings of Le Corbusier; it is notable for what he describes and how he does so. It remains the most thorough and systematic firsthand study of the German decorative arts movement before World War I. For anyone interested in the emergence of modern design, both in Germany and France, it provides much information that is otherwise dispersed widely in other sources, or simply not available at all.

The study is also remarkable for what it says about Le Corbusier's thinking in the context of his early career. It also recommends itself as a prism through which we can examine the forces, biases and precedents that affected his work later on. By Jeanneret's own account, the commission to undertake the study facilitated many important contacts for him. While gathering information in Germany he met and befriended many of the key figures in the development of modern design: Theodor Fischer, Karl Ernst Osthaus, Peter Behrens, Hermann Muthesius and many others. The study also helped Jeanneret position himself as a polemical teacher and practitioner of architecture.[3] For, as he well knew, one of the principal reasons he was asked to do the study—an invitation contrived by his teacher and mentor Charles L'Eplattenier—was to provide justification for what was to become a very controversial re-forming the School of Art in his home town of La Chaux-de-Fonds.[4] L'Eplattenier had been working to shift the focus of the school away from its emphasis on the regional watch industry to the broader movement that was modernizing design and artistic production throughout Europe. Jeanneret's study showed how effective German designers had become in this. Partly on the merits of his study, the school hired Jeanneret to help re-organize the school and to teach architecture in its New Section. (Although an important part of his formation, his tenure in the post was brief: it was eliminated after two years of almost constant acrimony between the conservative forces in the Old Section and the reform-

minded proponents of the New Section.[5])

The completed study, which Jeanneret presented to the commission of the school of art in January 1912, described many of the events and places he witnessed firsthand while studying and working in Germany from 1910-1912. His carnets from those years are filled with notes for the study, so we can see his first attempts to deal with the subjects it covers.[6] Letters to L'Eplattenier and to his friend William Ritter contain more refined, working versions of his polemical commentary in the preliminary and closing remarks of the study.[7] The final version is clear and concise, but not unbiased. Its critical commentary is incisive and insightful, and undoubtedly contributed to its appeal in the politically charged atmosphere of pre-war Europe.

Soon after Jeanneret presented the report, the School of Art decided to send 450 copies of it to regional officials, educators, industrialists and the press in the small watch-making city of La Chaux-de-Fonds. Many of the remaining copies made their way into the hands of interested parties elsewhere in Europe. Although, as L'Eplattenier lamented later on, the study received virtually no response from local recipients, it attracted serious attention in France and Germany. According to L'Eplattenier, it

provoked commentary in the principal German dailies, and the French and German periodicals and art reviews, l'Art et les Artistes, l'Art décoratif, l'Art à l'Ecole, la Grande Revue, Art et Décoration, Kunstwart, Dokument des Fortschritts. Its author received a request from luminaries at the forefront of the decorative art movement for a second edition in Paris, and even until recently constant requests from booksellers in Brussels, Paris, Vienna, etc.[8]

Interest in the study persisted during the war, especially in France. L'Art de France reproduced virtually all of it in two volumes during the spring of 1914.[9] And the study provided much of the factual material for a long article speculating on post-war reconstruction by M. Storez in the Grande Revue of October 1915.[10]

The study has piqued interest periodically since then. Sections of the report, translated into German, appeared in the April 1967 edition of Werk magazine. And not long after that, on the instigation of H. Allen Brooks, Da Capo Press published a facsimile copy of the study in 1968.

The text has received a small, but increasing amount of attention from design historians over the last two decades. Mark Wigley, for example, comments on its surprising influence after 1912 and its importance in the context of Le Corbusier's later career White Walls, Designer Dresses (2001).[11] Werner Oeschlin produced the first thorough historical assessment of the study in his 1987 contribution to Le Corbusier une encyclopédie, "Influences, confluences et reniements." He argues that the book acted as a springboard for many of Le Corbusier's theoretical arguments about material, the emergence of 'style', the relationship between the technician and the artist and so on.[12] Giulian Gresleri has also dealt with the study on several occasions, and not surprisingly, it figures significantly in Les voyages d'Allemagne: Carnets, which he edited and published in 1994. Recent books on Le Corbusier's early career by Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rüegg, Paul V. Turner, Geoffrey H. Baker and especially H. Allen Brooks point out the importance of the study as part of the formative education of Le Corbusier.[13] In her more extensive analysis of the study in Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier Nancy Troy contends that it was "one of several strategic tools that Jeanneret exploited, taking advantage of the nationalist climate pervading France during these years, in order to establish his professional credentials in the Paris art world as expert on decorative art."[14] She also points out that the strong French bias in the introductory and concluding remarks served to insinuate him into the French decorative arts scene. By all accounts, the Étude seems to warrant additional study.

As a factual report the Etude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne recounts an extraordinarily productive period in German design before World War I. Jeanneret gathered the information for the report from the summer of 1910 through the fall of 1911, and submitted it to the commission in January 1912. By the time he arrived in Germany in April 1910, the Deutscher Werkbund had been in operation for three years, Peter Behrens had been working for the A.E.G. for about as long (and had recently completed construction of its already famous turbine factory). Two summers before, an exhibit in Munich had prompted an impressed—and very concerned—delegation from Paris to invite members of the Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk to

display their work in France. These same artists were preparing for their momentous Salon d'Automne exhibit when Jeanneret began gathering his data. There was much to study and comment upon.

The report contains information on the activities of the Werkbund, the A. E. G. and the Werkstätten, giving unusual firsthand accounts of their activities and production. The report also describes the people, events and organizations that sustained the huge, concerted program of reform in the German decorative arts, industrial design and architecture, of which these well-known groups were just a part. It investigates museums, exhibitions, conferences, workshops, garden cities, working-class housing and schools. It also comments on contemporary advertising and shop front design, music, theater, and the reform of printing and book-making.

As a historical document the study reveals something of the machinations of the German state at a crucial moment in its history, when having consolidated its power and position in Europe it had begun to turn attention inward to the development of its culture and cultural production. The results of this were to expand German influence into artistic and commercial domains, and to insinuate German tastes into the very fabric of European life. The factual report, for all of the admiration it bestows on the German initiatives, therefore presents, in addition, a frank assessment of what many designers and critics outside of Germany saw as a grave threat.

While it is merely the subtext of the report itself, the 'German threat' is clearly the central theme of the introductory remarks and final considerations in the study. Jeanneret's decidedly French bias in his assessment of the origins and implications of the German decorative arts movement certainly accounts for some of the favorable reception the report received in France.

In the introductory notes to the text, Jeanneret placed the phenomenon of German progress in the arts in vivid contrast to the long, but faltering tradition of French dominance in matters of taste:

> Now here is an aspect of something new and unexpected: France persists in renouncing its painters and sculptors, the Institute condemns and undermines them. But Germany positions itself as a champion of modernism, creating nothing in the domain of the fine arts to prove itself so, but revealing its new tastes through the systematic absorption (purchase) of the works of Parisian painters and sculptors (Courbet, Manet, Cézanne, van Gogh, Matisse, Maillol, etc.) and, on the other hand, revealing itself almost without warning to be colossal in power, in determination and in achievement in the domain of the applied arts.[15]

This rather jaundiced view of German 'progress' in the arts was surprisingly widespread and persistent. Commentators on German design at the time often tempered their assessment of its undeniably favorable developments—and the impressive organizational structures that made them possible—with deprecating comments about German originality or German taste. Given the military posturing of Wilhelmine Germany, it seemed that even in art its intentions were aggressive rather than creative. Indeed, a vocal French architect, M. Storez, writing during the war, saw German advances in artistic production as much more than a commercial threat. Acknowledging that the inundation of Europe with German-made products was well under way, he envisioned the expansion of German imperialism into the cherished domains of art and from there into the everyday lives of French people.[16] He urged that the advance be met with the force of organization built on the unassailable foundation of French tastes. Alongside this sort of encouragement, however, even the most vociferous critics of German design in the early 1910s found it difficult not to acknowledge that it was the complacency of other European nations, more than any other factor, which had allowed Germany to gain the advantage in the arts.

This was not merely a French complaint. It is evident, for example, in the words of William Lethaby, one of the more eloquent spokesmen of the late Arts and Crafts Movement in England, who echoed Jeanneret in 1915 saying:

> The first thing in the arts which we should learn from Germany is how to appreciate

> English originality. Up to about twenty years ago there had been a very remarkable development of English art in all kinds. For five or six years, round about the year 1900, the German Government had attached to its Embassy in London an expert architect, Herr Muthesius, who became the historian (in German) of the English free architecture. All the architects who at that time did any building were investigated, sorted, tabulated, and, I must say, understood.... It is equally true or even more true that the German advances in industrial design have been founded on the English arts and crafts. They saw the essence of our best essays in furniture, glass, textiles, printing, and all the rest, and, laying hold on them, coined them into money....[17]

The threat of German competition also helps to explain why a regional School of Art in French-speaking Switzerland commissioned Jeanneret's study in the first place. The school aimed to head off German competition for products of Swiss design by emulating German efforts. When L'Eplattenier convinced the commission of the School of Art to invite Jeanneret to undertake the project, he was seeking to reform the school of art so it could help make Swiss designers and manufacturers more competitive against German advances on French-Swiss tastes. He later explained that The''New Section' of the School of Art was founded in 1911with the goal of establishing, among ourselves, an effective collaboration of art and industry.

In this area we have been outpaced for several years by neighboring countries, as has been evident in the international expositions and, in a manner more directly perceptible, in the unconstrained and unsettling invasion of foreign products onto our soil. Native industry has been compelled to cede place to German industry, and taste—our taste—must submit to the domination of the outer-Rhine or to that of Parisian manufacturers—which is humiliating.[18]

The context into which the study made its way in La Chaux-de-Fonds was, however, complicated by more than foreign competition. As he produced the report Jeanneret may have been treading carefully between German and French interests, but he knew he was stepping into a maelstrom at home. He surely did not realize how tempestuous things would get. The document, as it turns out, was a centerpiece in the struggle for control of the instruction at the School of Art, for the vitality of the city's principal industry, watch making, and for reform of the decorative arts movement throughout Switzerland. As L'Eplattenier discovered in the brief, tumultuous life of the New Section, however, resistance to anything that appeared to emulate 'Germanic' organization was difficult to overcome.

This was as true in a provincial town of Francophone Switzerland as it was in Paris. On one hand, traditional academic structures still maintained enough influence to sustain effective resistance to change. On the other, the liberal political orientation of reform-minded French designers could not abide the domineering presence of the state in artistic matters. The Kaiser's financial backing and organizational support had made the German decorative arts movement very effective, but—in the eyes of the French—all the more sinister and distasteful.[19]

The great magnitude of the German threat had first come into focus for French designers in the summer of 1908. That summer the city of Munich and its Vereinigten Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk prepared displays of interiors, furniture and domestic equipment for an annual exhibition, Die Ausstellung München. The exhibition gained almost universal admiration from art critics. A delegation sent by the Municipal Council of Paris came away from it with a dire proclamation: "The commercial defeat which has threatened us for many years is no longer to be feared, indeed, it has already occurred.... We cannot compensate for the advance which Munich has been able to accomplish to our detriment in the industrial domain." Looking forward to what Parisian designers might expect from Germany later on, the picture was even more bleak." "Only in five or six years from now will we see and experience the complete results, when this army of students begins to produce industrially.... The only thing we can try to do with any hope of success is to begin to prepare the future generation to enter into competition with these countries."[20] This task was daunting because the German initiative was so broad, systematic and effective. It included a significant overhaul of the educational system in Germany, particularly in the crafts, as well as the development of amicable relationships among artists and manufacturers. In 1908, it was clear that Munich was merely a har-

binger of a much more substantial movement. Art and industry throughout Germany were poised to embark on large-scale collaborative efforts under the auspices of various regional workshops, and under the much broader purview of the Deutscher Werkbund.

Aside from facilitating effective product design, the Werkbund almost immediately introduced innovative marketing techniques, which rapidly spread the appeal of German products. When Jeanneret visited the artists, institutions and schools that constituted the German decorative arts movement in 1910 and 1911, there was nothing anywhere in Europe to match it. Even if foreign critics were demure in their praise for the artistic merits of German design, they had to profess profound appreciation for the organization of arts education and production in Germany. So, although it was no doubt at least partly true that "German advances in industrial design [were] founded on the English arts and crafts," as Lethaby said in 1915, and that German tastes benefited from French advances in the arts, as Jeanneret and others proclaimed, Jeanneret's Study of the Decorative Art Movement in Germany demonstrated that the commercial success of German design followed on uniquely German initiatives and extraordinarily effective organizational efforts.

The German state played a crucial role in these initiatives. Having consolidated twenty-six formerly independent political entities under an empire stretching across Northern Europe from France to Russia in 1871, the German empire needed to establish a distinct identity for itself. It did so primarily on the basis of middle class economics and social values.[21] Two important agents of this were an excellent education system—"a superb educational machine," in the words of one historian[22]—and an extremely vibrant industrial sector of the economy. The latter formed rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. Stimulated and directed by well-trained engineers and technicians, German industry grew faster than in any other area of Europe. As a result of this growth, middle class manufacturers and financiers experienced remarkably high standards of living. The laboring class also benefited from a rising standard of living bolstered by a generous state welfare policy. More than anywhere else in Europe, "the common man" in Germany prospered during the first decades of the twentieth century.[23] During those years the decorative and industrial arts, supported by the state educational system and industry, provided some of the most visible manifestations of middle-class German economic and political success.[24]

To propel the development of this sector of the German economy, the state actively promoted the absorption of 'foreign' influence through careful analysis of the artistic production of its competitors. This was the charge handed to Hermann Muthesius, for example, when he took a commission as cultural and technical attaché to the German Embassy in London in 1896. During his time in England Muthesius published a study of contemporary English architecture and undertook more specialized studies on religious and domestic architecture. The latter, a comprehensive analysis of the English house, finally published in three volumes in 1904, remains the definitive work on the subject. The English House provides a remarkably thorough account of English domestic architecture, interiors and furnishings, but it is also revealing for what it says about the state of artistic culture in contemporary Germany. In the introductory remarks to the study Muthesius made the startling assertion that his native Germany lacked a viable artistic tradition because its people did not generally live in houses. Its only hope of rising from an abysmal artistic standing among other industrialized nations, he argued, was to develop more intense and productive connections between art and everyday life. This needed to begin at home. "Artistic education is loudly advocated today," he said, "but obviously its only basis can be the privately owned house."[25] Having the opportunity to take control of one's own environment, to furnish it, to exercise artistic sensibilities at will was the only way to develop a German culture sensitive to art.

English domestic architecture provided a superb demonstration of the point. Muthesius took pains, however, to assert that simply emulating an English style of house building would not stimulate a German artistic movement. English houses could "provide pointers" for the development of German artistic culture, but the modern German house, and by implication all modern German artistic and architectural production, could only be German. "The greatest merit of the English house as it stands completed before us," Muthesius declared,""is that it is English, that is, it conforms totally to English conditions, embodies totally English ways of life, is totally suited to local climatic and geographical conditions...."[26] Although

English domestic architecture and interiors offered few specifics upon which Germans could model their own designs, it did demonstrate admirable principles to follow: "To face our own conditions squarely and as honestly as the English face theirs today, to adhere to our own artistic tradition as faithfully, to embody our customs and habits in the German house lovingly—these are the lessons we can learn from the English house."[27] Authenticity, quality, sensitivity to the conditions of environment and everyday life, were principles that underlay the widely-acknowledged success of contemporary design in England. Muthesius contended that any artistic manifestation of the age in Germany had to follow these principles.

In an important polemical text that he published on his return to Germany in 1902, Muthesius argued that architecture—"the art of daily life"[28]—had to be the "central issue of the new artistic movement" in Germany.[29] Like contemporary English domestic architecture, it could only succeed by aspiring to become a vernacular, middle class art.[30] "Even here," he said, "reform can only proceed from the small to the large, from the interior to the exterior."[31] Citing the work of William Morris, he explained that England had only managed to escape from the constraints of nineteenth century "abstract formalism" by initiating artistic reform in domestic interiors, which led in turn to "a total revolution in the domestic building art" and thence to a general renewal of architecture.[32] What Germany needed was a straightforward approach to artistic design, not another externally applied style. Muthesius therefore urged his German contemporaries to "restrict ourselves to the home-grown," and to develop a new German building-art adapted "to needs and local conditions, unpretentiousness and honesty of feeling."[33] A modern building-art in Germany could only derive from German conditions and it could arise only as a uniquely German art, even if its inspiration came from abroad.

Given these intentions it is hardly surprising that foreign observers of the decorative arts movement in Germany, like Jeanneret, continually questioned the viability of German taste, reserving their praise for German organization and production. The real threat, of course, was that these borrowed and reconstituted tastes would insinuate themselves—as German innovations—back into French or English culture. As the decorative arts movement gained the support of German industry and the marketing force of the Deutscher Werkbund, as its products infiltrated foreign markets, the threat became increasingly palpable.

When Muthesius wrote Style-Architecture and Building-Art in 1902, Germany had already begun to establish a strong arts and crafts movement. Initially adopting Arts and Crafts methods of hand production, new crafts schools and commercial workshops (many of which Jeanneret visited and described in the study) developed a vast range of products including anything from post cards to the interiors of large private houses. They quickly found ways, however, to make effective use of machines and mechanized production processes. In 1905, for example, Richard Riemerschmid developed a line of machine-made domestic furnishings for the Werkstätten in Dresden. These pieces benefited from extensive use of machines for the production of components, which were then assembled by hand. These same standardized components could be combined in a variety of ways to create other pieces in the line. A great benefit of this process was that it substantially reduced the costs of producing each piece of furniture, making artist-designed furniture available for the first time to buyers of truly limited means. Bruno Paul introduced a similar line in Munich three years later. The Werkstätten manufactured these and other products in modern facilities that were partially mechanized, beautifully organized and incredibly clean, according to Jeanneret.[34]

In addition to cultivating very fruitful individual efforts by designers like Riemerschmid and Paul, the Werkstätten became particularly adept at developing collaborative productions (reminiscent of the interiors installed in the Maison d'Art in Brussels and L'Art Nouveau gallery in Paris a decade earlier). At the 1908 exhibition in Munich, the Vereinigte Werkstätten für Kunst im Handwerk, under the leadership of Bruno Paul, displayed a series of beautifully coordinated room ensembles that demonstrated to foreign visitors especially how far German design had come. The showrooms of the various werkstätten, which occupied key sites in major cities throughout Germany demonstrated the commercial viability of their approach. Visiting several of these in 1910 and 1911, Jeanneret remarked on their'"astonishingly tasteful window displays" as well as their beautifully coordinated sales rooms. He declared:

> Parisians can remain skeptical as to taste, on account of the incompatibility of the two races, which seems to become more pronounced here, where everything that offers itself to the eyes is in some way the expression of the German soul; but these Parisians, if they do not admire everything are at least impressed by the harmony which is undeniable. From the curtains, the fabrics, the furniture, the rugs, the lighting fixtures, the dishes, the curios, everything is born of the same desire finally to realize affinity, proportion, suitability, kinship.[35]

Potential customers to these shops found themselves invited to stroll through coordinated series of fully furnished domestic interiors whose pieces could be purchased separately or en bloc. The extraordinary attention paid to the public display and commercialization of consumer products in these shops began to influence an increasingly large range of retail establishments in Germany. Jeanneret marveled at the exceptionally inventive and tasteful displays that graced the shop fronts of everything from book sellers to department stores in Berlin. "The art of display," he proclaimed, "is a completely new art.... It is developing with stunning rapidity."[36] Much of the credit for this widespread promotion of product display belonged to the vastly influential Deutscher Werkbund, which had been foundation in 1907 to coordinate the production of German artists and industry on a national scale.

Development of the art of display was only one of a huge range of efforts coordinated by the Deutscher Werkbund. The fundamental practical aim of the organization was to bring art, craft and industry together under the unified goal of quality production. Presuming that this was an important "cultural task"—a point that Muthesius, one of the principal spokesmen of the organization, continually emphasized—the Werkbund also developed ways of promoting the work of its members to the public. Among many other efforts, it instituted a traveling museum dedicated to commerce and industry and published a series of brochures promoting the recent work of its members as well as a layman's guide to artistic Berlin. The Werkbund also hosted public lectures on a great range of topics including: surface ornamentation, fashion and taste, the arrangement of domestic interiors and shop front design.[37] These were extraordinarily effective. According to Jeanneret, more than 5000 salespeople attended the Werkbund lectures on the decoration of shop fronts in 1910. The Werkbund also established a school in Berlin, and a similar program in Hagen, to educate merchants in the art of promoting retail products.

Although its immediate aim was to bring together art and industry, the underlying motivation of the Werkbund was to alter fundamentally the relationship of art and the people of Germany. Beginning with reform of the equipment people used in their day-to-day lives, it endeavored to change public sensibilities toward artistic production. It sought to change people's rather distant and often confused admiration of 'art' to a more straightforward appreciation of quality and suitability in the things that affected them directly every day.

One of the most effective collaborations brought about by the Werkbund was between the Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft (the AEG) and the artist, Peter Behrens. The work Behrens undertook for the firm provided a remarkable (if unusual) demonstration of the potential breadth of Werkbund influence. Jeanneret, who worked in Behrens's office from November 1910 to April 1911, remarked that'"not one visible part of the building or of the industry coming from the A. E. G. has not been reconsidered by him."[38] Behrens designed letterhead, electrical consumer products, worker housing and factory buildings for the firm. His well-know turbine factory of 1909 demonstrated a significantly altered industrial working environment that emphasized the benefits (extolled by contemporary critics and promoters of the firm) of light and space on the lives of workers and the quality of their production. It thereby brought to life, with uniquely German features, the sort of reformed work environment envisioned by Ruskin and Morris.[39]

The collaboration between Behrens and the AEG also served to benefit middle-class consumers. Thanks to its huge capital reserves, the AEG was able to develop products independently of the conservative economic forces that had often held sway in the design and marketing of domestic products. Under the artistic direction of Behrens, the firm designed inexpensive lamps, tea kettles, sewing machines, fans, etc. that were virtually untainted

by nineteenth-century styles, and thus at variance with traditional German tastes. Many of these became very successful products for the company nevertheless. And it was in large part due to the broad infusion of these and other simplified, high-quality products into everyday living environments—an effort supported by the education of public artistic sensibilities and concerted marketing efforts sponsored by the Werkbund—that German tastes opened themselves to the modernization of the decorative arts.

Behrens's work for the AEG also demonstrated the vital interdependence of product design and building design. It reinforced the idea, firmly held by many of the organizers of the Werkbund, that altering public sensibilities by introducing changes in the design of objects could encourage new ways of thinking about architecture. In 1902 Muthesius had concluded Style-Architecture and Building-Art with the presumption that once the arts and crafts laid the groundwork for an artistic culture, architecture would assume "leadership in the community of arts."[40] Acknowledging at the time that this eventuality was some time off, he could only ask, "When will our architecture be ready to assume this responsibility?"[41] The astounding success of German artistic production in the succeeding decade seemed to make this transfer of artistic control immanent.

By 1911, however, Muthesius was becoming impatient with architecture, even if he was rightfully proud of German accomplishments in product design and the modernization of building interiors:

> The fortunate progress of the arts and crafts movement, which has given new shape to the interior decoration of our rooms, breathed fresh life into handicrafts and imparted fruitful inspiration to architecture, may be regarded as only a minor prelude to what must come. For in spite of all we have achieved we are still wading up to our knees in the brutalization of forms. If proof is needed we have only to observe the fact that our country is being covered daily and hourly with buildings of the most inferior character, unworthy of our age and calculated to speak to posterity all too eloquently of our epoch's lack of culture.... If a nation produces good furniture and good light fittings, but daily erects the worst possible buildings, this can only be a sign of heterogeneous, unclarified conditions, conditions whose very inconsistency is proof of the lack of discipline and organization.[42]

In a speech to the Werkbund that same year, Muthesius echoed a widely-held sentiment that Germany was capable of far more than it had achieved so far: "Germany enjoys a reputation for the most strict and exact organization in her businesses, heavy industry and state institutions of any country in the world—our military discipline may be cited as the ground of this. Such being the case, perhaps this is an expression of Germany's vocation—to resolve the great problem of architectonic form."[43] The solution to this problem proved to be elusive. With the exception of a few buildings, like those Behrens designed for the AEG, architecture was slow to manifest the changes that had so profoundly affected the design of domestic interiors and furnishings.

> As a witness to these conditions, Jeanneret was similarly aware of the great successes, but also of the vulnerability of Germany in the domain of artistic production. So it was not with false optimism that he concluded his report with his bets on France saying, "Germany, for the last one or two years especially, is returning again to follow the footsteps of the giants of the arts of France." And holding out hope for French decorative arts he asked, "Will a France suffocated by Germany escape from its lethargy in the area of applied art? Precursory signs have appeared at the last two 'Salons d'Automne'."[44] Although clearly not yet a threat to German production, French designers such as André Mare and his collaborators in the Maison Cubiste exhibit of 1912, were beginning to develop new directions for the decorative arts that promised to challenge German dominance in the field.[45]

Although it would not be quite proper to hold out Jeanneret's own rise to prominence in Paris after the war as confirmation of his predictions in 1912, he no doubt perceived his role in the development

of modern architecture as an outcome, partially, of his experience with the decorative arts movement in Germany. In 1925, Le Corbusier answered Muthesius's question of two decades before, announcing in The Decorative Art of Today that architecture had finally assumed 'leadership in the community of arts'—that—"the hour of architecture" had come to fruition. "Decorative art," he said, "has raised from its cradle the new consciousness born of the machine...."[46] But this time it was in France that this momentous change had come about. Le Corbusier argued that, while Germany had benefited from England and France before the war, France, bolstered by an understanding of German accomplishments and spurred by competition with Germany, achieved the final synthesis of modern architecture. He explained the succession this way:

> The sweet voice of Ruskin—'Look, here are the flowers, the insects, and the beasts of the Good Lord.' Soul of Giotto. Delight in primitives. Pre-Raphaelitism. Here in rational France the appeal to nature; analysis. The entomologist Fabre excited us. We realized that natural phenomena have an organization, and we opened our eyes. 1900. An outpouring. Truly a fine moment!

Then Germany, working twenty-four hours a day, seized the moment. Her painters built houses—Darmstadt and after. But houses have no life without structure. All that great noise was for nothing. Nothing came out of it all. Still, there was a stimulus. The Munich people came to Paris in 1912 (sic). The Salon d'Automne. The ensembliers.... Cubism, so profoundly serious in the hands of its authors, is evidence that everything was called into question. Around 1910 it already showed the pressures for revolt and the ascetic virility appropriate to conspirators bent on overturning the established order. This was achieved....

A new conception has been born. Decoration is no longer possible. Our effusions, our vivid awareness of the beauties and power of nature have found their place in the framework of architecture.[47]

Jeanneret's knowledge of the decorative arts movement in Germany, and his affinity with the circle of Cubists involved in the decorative arts in France before the war positioned him well for the extraordinarily influential architectural work he undertook in Paris in the early 1920s. Clearly, his own development, and the development of the architectural movement into which he inserted himself, was significantly affected by German design before World War I. Jeanneret's Study of the Decorative Art Movement in Germany is thus, in many ways, an important text for the history of modern architecture. It presents not only a clear assessment of the decorative arts at their height in Germany, but it also helps to describe the competitive environment in France that spurred the development of modern architecture, a movement in which Le Corbusier played a crucial role.

NOTES

[1] Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* (La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912) 6.

[2] Hector Guimard for example referred to is as 'The very remarkable report by Mr. Jeanneret.' See Hector Guimard, letter to Charles L'Eplattenier 28 March 1914, reproduced in Charles L'Eplattenier, et. al.'*Un Mouvement d'Art à la Chaux-de-Fonds à propos de la Nouvelle Section de l'Ecole d'Art* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Imprimerie Georges Dubois, 1914) 35.

[3] See for example, L'Eplattenier, et. al., 35.

[4] Jeanneret kept this reason secret even from his parents. See for example Jeanneret, Letter to his parents, 29 June 1910 (LCms 56) 2.

[5] For an account of these discussions see L'Eplattenier, et. al.

[6] Le Corbusier (Ch.-E. Jeanneret), *Les voyages d'Allemagne, Carnets,* 5 vols. (New York: Monacelli Press and Fondation Le Corbusier, 1995). In the introductory text to the transcriptions Giuliano Gresleri explains that Jeanneret's "German sojourn coincided with the very structure of *Etude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne*. Even the literary construction of the essay resembles that of the diaries" 13.

[7] Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, letter to Charles L'Eplattenier, 16 January 1911. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, letter to William Ritter, 14 January 1911.

[8] L'Eplattenier, et. al. 35. This book details the formation and demise of the New Section at the School of Art.

[9]'*L'Art de France*, April 1914 and May 1914.

[10] M. Storez, "Que seront l'Architecture et l'Art Decoratif après la Guerre?""*Grande Revue*: October 1915, 492-521. See especially p. 498: "Before embarking on this study, I would like to thank particularly the Swiss Architect, Mr. Jeanneret, who made a very well-documented report on this German modern art movement, which he

published in 1912 and which a very French publication, *l'Art de France*, reproduced in its editions of April and May 1914."

[11] Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001) 180.

[12] Werner Oechslin, "Influences, confluences et reniements," in Jacques Lucan, dir.,"*Le Corbusier une encyclopédie* (Paris, Éditions du Centre Pompidou/CCI, 1987) 36.

[13] Paul V. Turner, *The Education of Le Corbusier, a Study of the Development of Le Corbusier's Thought 1900-1920* (New York: Garland Publishing 1977). Geoffrey H. Baker, *Le Corbusier—the Creative Search: The Formative Years of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold 1996). H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1997).

[14] Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 103.

[15] Jeanneret, *Étude* 13.

[16] See M. Storez, 500-501.

[17] W. R. Lethaby, "Modern German Architecture and what we may learn from it,""*Form in Civilization: Collected Papers on Art and Labour*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) 81.

[18] "Nouvelle Section" de l'Ecole d'Art,'"Prospectus" (La Chaux-de-Fonds, Haefel & Co., 1912) 3.

[19] See for example, M. P. Verneuil, "Le Salon d'Automne,""*Art et Décoration* 28: July-December 1910, 129-160.

[20] The delegation included, among others, Frantz Jourdain, president of the Salon D'Automne, Victor Prouvé, president of the Union Provinciale des Arts Décoratifs, Senator Charles Couyba, and sculptor Rupert Carabin. See, Municipal Council of Paris, "Report on the Second Congress of the Union Provinciale des Arts Décoratifs held in Munich [1908]"*L'Art et les métiers d'art*, January 1919. Quoted in Arlette Barre-Despond and Suzanne Tise, *Jourdain* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991) 111-113

[21] For an account of the broader origins and manifestations of German nationalism in the late nineteenth century see, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Dover, New Hampshire: Berg Publishers, 1985) 102-105, 239-240.

[22] John M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1967) 203.

[23] Roberts, 203-204.

[24] Jeanneret pointed out in 1912 that the strength of German education and state support for sciences was central to the strength of the decorative arts in Germany. He also asserted that Germans' native abilities in this area were not comparable to those of the French, but that they had succeeded in dominating the decorative arts trade more through organization and perseverance than through ability. See Jeanneret, *Étude* 9-16.

[25] Muthesius, *The English House,* Ed. Dennis Sharp, trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Rizzoli, 1987) 9.

[26] Muthesius, *The English House* 11. Muthesius's emphasis.

[27] Muthesius, *The English House* 11.

[28] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and its Present Condition*, Trans. Stanford Anderson (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994) 98.

[29] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 47.

[30] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 94.

[31] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 96.

[32] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 96.

[33] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 97.

[34] Jeanneret, *Étude* 25. Jeanneret also mentions that designers of objects produced in these factories received commissions on their sale. For a more detailed account of the economic motivations of these workshops see Schwartz 160.

[35] Jeanneret, *Étude* 25. Jeanneret's emphasis.

[36] Jeanneret, *Étude* 27. Jeanneret's emphasis.

[37] Jeanneret, *Étude* 16.

[38] Jeanneret, *Étude* 43.

[39] See Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 58-59.

[40] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 99.

[41] Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* 99.

[42] Hermann Muthesius, "Aims of the Werkbund,""*Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1970) 26-27.

[43] Muthesius, "Wo stehen wir?" Quoted in Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*. 2nd ed (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1960) 76, original page not cited. The things in which Germans put such faith during the years before World War I—business, heavy industry, military discipline—became sources of great disillusionment after the war. It was already clear to some at the time that the lack of a German style in the early years of the twentieth century had been partly the consequence of the overproduction of commodities by business and heavy industry. See Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" [1903)]"*The Sociology of Georg Simmel* ed. H. Wolf (New York: Free Press, 1950) 410. See also Schwartz 29 and Francesco Dal Co, *Fig-*

ures of Architecture and Thought: German Architecture Culture 1880-1920 (New York: Rizzoli, 1990) 60.

[44] Jeanneret, *Étude* 73.

[45] For an account of Jeanneret's relationships with the progressive French interior designers before World War I, see Troy 103-158.

[46] Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* 132.

[47] Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* 137.

The 'Ã‰tude sur le mouvement dâ€™art dÃ©coratif en Allemagne', printed in 1912, was Le Corbusier's first publication.Â Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, and a young woman called Charlotte Perriand presented new concepts of furniture at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1929. That collection of iconic furniture has not dated in the slightest, and still fits perfectly with the modern home today. This is mainly due to Le Corbusier's conviction that the binomial shape/function value must be expressed in the three dimensional manifestation of any daily used and useful object. Le Corbusier's iconic furniture, like the classic LC4 Chaise Longue , is produced by Italian designer furniture brand Cassina under license from EÌtude sur le mouvement d'art deÌcoratif en Allemagne. Ã—Close. Donate this book to the Internet Archive library. Ã—Close. Hooray! You've discovered a title that's missing from our library. Can you help donate a copy? If you own this book, you can mail it to our address below. You can also purchase this book from a vendor and ship it to our address: Internet Archive Open Library Book Donations 300 Funston Avenue San Francisco, CA 94118. Better World Books.Â EÌtude sur le mouvement d'art deÌcoratif en Allemagne. by Le Corbusier. 0 Ratings. 0 Want to read.Â A reprint of the 1912 edition. Series. Da Capo Press series in architecture and decorative art, v. 21. Classifications. Dewey Decimal Class. Learning from Le Corbusier. L.J. Duport. Ecole Nationale SupÃ©rieure dâ€™Architecture de Montpellier. RÃ©sumÃ©: InterrogÃ© sur lâ€™enseignement de lâ€™architecture, et bien quâ€™il ait exposÃ© ses idÃ©es sur le sujet principalement dans.Â de la machine en fonctionnement constant. Les questions sociales ainsi que la nature pratique soulevÃ©e par cette. situation dans laquelle la production de la machine et le travail, la famille, la vie et les loisirs de lâ€™hommes sont. intimement liÃ©s, constituent finalement un thÃ¨me central des thÃ©ories de Le Corbusier sur lâ€™architecture et.Â Ainsi Le Corbusier, dont les prÃ©occupations architecturales du moment sont le logement de masse, va travailler. avec Pierre Jeanneret sur le terrain de Pessac Le premier plan comprend 135 maisons, rÃ©parties en quatre. First published in 1912, Etude sur le mouvement d'art decoratif en Allemagne was Le Corbusier's first publication. In it, the young architect lucidly analyzed the German applied arts movement and its protagonists (such as Peter Behrens, for whom Le Corbusier worked in 1910-11). The text is one of the most substantial documentations of the development of modern German desig First published in 1912, Etude sur le mouvement d'art decoratif en Allemagne was Le Corbusier's first publication. In it, the young architect lucidly analyzed the German applied arts movement and its protagonists (such as Pe Etude sur le mouvement d,art decoratif en Allemagne, (La Chaux-de-Fonds: 1912). 7. * architects.Â Le -Corbusier*s acknowledgment that reason subordinates romantic'flights of the mind stems from the reaction to romanticism and the illogical element in eclecticism. In Germany this reaction developed along the lines set forth by Gropius and the Werkbund. They attempted to rationally apply standards of the machine with its functional logic to architecture.Â Of course even in "the machine for living" expression he was differing from the German approach. The Germans were not so much concerned with making architecture functional like a machine as with applying the products of mechanization to architecture.