The true occasion of the birth of the Deutscher Werkbund (German Arts and Crafts Society) was the Third German Exhibition of Applied Art in Dresden in 1906. The proposal of certain friends who shared the same outlook that 'the exhibition should end in the founding of a society of artists and highly qualified representatives of trade and industry' was put into practice on 6 October 1907. Although one of the movers of this proposal, Hermann Muthesius (b.1861 in Gross-Neuhausen, d.1927 in Berlin) was not among the founder members. Nevertheless Muthesius was the first to formulate the society's programme. As a result of his reports on British domestic architecture (1904–7), however, he was already known to the German arts and crafts movement and building industry as 'The Muthesius Case'.

To help form to recover its rights must be the fundamental task of our era; in particular it must be the content of any work of artistic reform embarked upon today. 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. What sense is there in speaking of success so long as this is still the case? Is there a more accurate testimony to a nation's taste than the buildings with which it fills its streets and populated areas? What would it mean, compared with this, if we could prove that today the energies required for decent architectural constructions are available and that these energies have simply not been able to get to grips with the tasks? Precisely the fact that they have not got to grips with the tasks characterizes the cultural situation of our day. The very fact that thousands and thousands of our people not merely pass by this crime against form unperturbed, but as the employers of architects contribute to its multiplication by choosing unsuitable advisers, is unmistakable proof of the abysmal condition of our sense of form and hence of our artistic culture in general.

The Deutscher Werkbund was founded in years when a closing of the ranks of all those struggling for better things was made necessary by the violent assaults of their opponents. Its years of struggle for its principles are now over. The ideas it existed to propagate are no longer contradicted by anyone; they enjoy universal acceptance. Does this mean that its existence is now superfluous? One might think so if one were to consider only the narrower field of applied art. But we cannot rest content with having put cushions and chairs in order; we must think further. In truth the Deutscher Werkbund's real work is
only now beginning, with the dawning of the era of peace. And if up to now the idea of quality has held first place in the Werkbund's work we can already observe today that, as far as technique and material are concerned, the sense of quality in Germany is in the process of rapidly improving. Yet even this success is far from completing the Werkbund's task. Far more important than the material aspect is the spiritual; higher than purpose, material, and technique stands form. Purpose, material, and technique might be beyond criticism, yet without form we should still be living in a crude and brutal world. Thus we are ever more clearly confronted by the far greater, far more important task of reviving intellectual understanding and reanimating the architectonic sense. For its architectonic culture is and remains the true index of a nation's culture as a whole. 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. Without a total respect for form, culture is unthinkable, and formlessness is synonymous with lack of culture. Form is a higher spiritual need to the same degree that cleanliness is a higher bodily need. Crudities of form cause the really cultivated man an almost physical pain; in their presence he has the same feeling of discomfort produced by dirt and a bad smell. But as long as a sense of form has not been developed in the cultured members of our nation to the same level of intensity as their need for clean linen, we are still far removed from conditions which could in any way be compared with epochs of high cultural achievement.