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Abstract

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the sign "Monument to an Unhappy Love" stood in front of the Junkerhaus, referencing the inhabitant's unrequited love for his master's daughter while a carpentry journeyman in Hamburg. Built in 1890 by architect, woodcarver, and painter, Karl Junker (1850-1912), the Junkerhaus is a "museum-house" that integrates living and creative spaces and is situated just outside the historic centre of the small northern German town of Lemgo. Orphaned as a boy, and rejected as architect and artist and as a man, Junker earned himself the reputation of a tight-lipped recluse who, at age 40, set out on his last, most singular and single-minded project: to design, build, furnish, and decorate his house without concession to style or artistic tradition. With an enormous marriage bed and a beautifully carved cradle (both of which, like the rest of the furniture, are solid and grounded in stasis for a settled existence), Junker appeared to ready himself for a life that never arrived with a house that he, a bachelor, never needed. Thus, the space became a repository for a longing infused with such interiority and confinement that, at its centre, could be nothing but Junker's most intimate and hidden "window-view" painting of a domestic scene. Arrested in a past that never was, the Junkerhaus contains the memory of lost time and inevitably intertwines it with the very materiality of the house. Perhaps this memory was only a potential one—an "it could have happened this way"—and the house, as it were, was built on the subjunctive.

Keywords: containment, memory, petrification, repetition, secret

A life like Karl Junker's is worthy of a legend: he was orphaned and lost his brother as a young boy, unhappily loved his master's daughter when a carpentry journeyman in Hamburg, moved to far-away Munich to study at the Academy for the Arts, then travelled in Italy some years before returning to his small northern German hometown of Lemgo with nothing but a moderate inheritance and time on his hands. He set up shop there and worked quite prolifically, but soon experienced professional disapproval and artistic rejection.[1] The enormity and corporeality of this injustice is humbling, never more so than when face-to-face with the monumental model of one such rejected design for Berlin's Museum Island. At age 40, in what looks like an act of defiance, a dogged feat of force, he set out on his last most singular and single-minded project: to design, build, furnish, and decorate his house. From inception it was envisioned as a "museum-house" (where living space and that for the creation and exhibition of art would be integrated, without concession, beyond artistic tradition), and as final claim to his right as architect and artist.[2] "I will develop a new style", he is supposed to have said, and "Perhaps people will not understand me right away. I will fare like Richard Wagner with his music. But later, after fifty or perhaps after a hundred years, people will realize what I was."[3]

Today, the Junkerhaus, a true "Gesamtkunstwerk" incorporating different art forms, is considered the culmination of this artist's life work and he, himself a captive, both the "creator … and prisoner of an extraordinary (artistic) vision" and its highly systematic and controlled execution.[4] In ever-increasing isolation, Junker lived and worked in his house for the remainder of his life, dying there, a strange recluse, at age 62.

Since 1891, the building has stood there, set back from the street with its vivid, yet disciplined, façade of squares and axial references. Classically academic proportions and the oddity of a belvedère meet the regional "Fachwerk" half-timbered construction (Figure 1).[5] When applying for building permission, Junker presented with a wooden show piece model, whose modules could be taken apart and reassembled.[6] Such compartmentalisation reaches far beyond the precise, conventionally bourgeois, and well-behaved interior layout with vestibule, atelier, workshop, kitchen, and (for a measure of comfort quite forward at the time) an indoor toilet on the first floor. A salon, living-room, guest, children's, and master bedroom were outfitted with a beautifully carved cradle on the second (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Front "Fachwerk" façade of the Junkerhaus.

Figure 2. Wooden cradle in the master bedroom.

With the endurance of unstinting work, and what seems a persistent insistence on his plan, Junker appeared to ready himself for a life that never arrived, building a house that he, a bachelor, never needed. Those who enter the space feel the weight, almost too heavy to carry, of the longing infused and suffering endured here, inside this repository of uncanny homeliness, where time is weighed down with dust, waiting worked into every corner, fidelity nailed down. Exigencies may well be frightening, but the Junkerhaus is precisely that, a necessity. Fostered for many years by a neighbouring couple, it has withstood time and neglect and remains a work of astonishing determination, steadfastness, and consequence, following its own rules quite rhythmically, yet without a real precedent or artistic reference point.

Every house is built to shield from threat, but Junker also sheltered and stored his solitude in casings at the core of internal framing. From the outside in, the building materials for furniture, doors, windows, and picture frames, often coloured, and worked in relief, are earthbound with carvings raw and knobby like roots. In front of coffered walls, underneath panelled ceiling medallions, and in the silent presence of furniture that appears to grow out of its surroundings as if it "continued … the trees", the truly precious is contained in an intricately carved, wall-mounted cabinet.[7,8] It is the picture of a domestic scene and Junker's most intimate, so-called "window-view" painting. In the background church steeples, in the foreground a woman and child looking out a window as a man (very like the portraits of the elder Junker with dark beard, top-hat, and obviously returning home from a venture), while still outside, embraces the woman as the boy waves at him (v 3).[9]

Figure 3. "Window-view" painting inside a wall-mounted cabinet.

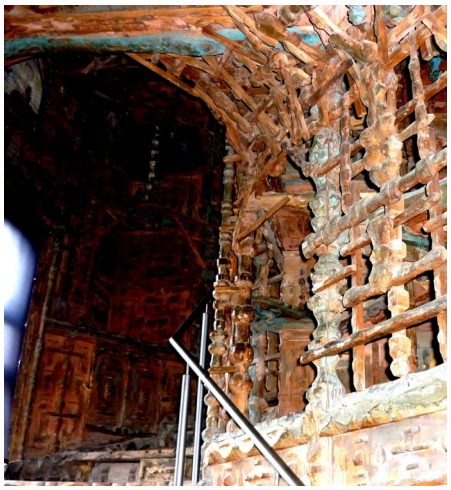
The recycled cabinet door, whose interior carries the painting, holds the key that is second nature to enclosed space, where things are predictable and controlled.[10] Yet, when Junker adorns a carved wardrobe with a wooden architectural model (Figure 4), makes girding into umbrella stands, or lets the ornamentation at the tip of a chair's canopy function as an oil lamp hook, he walks the line of boundaries precariously. His paintings are enclosed by frames that dissolve separation, then merge with them in substance, and whose ornamentation continues in the wooden carvings and poles nailed to the wall. Junker aesthetically binds in both ways: he encloses and connects with borders both rigid and malleable. Regardless of the spatial relationship, however, every frame comes at a cost. It narrows a sphere, perhaps even a life-sphere, and what is excluded may forever be "elsewhere". For Junker, with little connection to the outside world, leaving the confines of his house must have meant exposure to the risk of life and that, perhaps, is only for the fearless.

Figure 4. Wooden architectural model on top of a carved wardrobe.

In the years leading up to the Junkerhaus project, paintings and drawings of branches, trunks, stumps, and roots covered in fungus accumulate, with "irregularities in bark (of) pathogenic excrescence … as if [Junker] were particularly fascinated by the biotic processes of growth and decay".[11,12] Now the visitor enters the house through the vestibule as under a thicket of sticks from

crude dead trees (Figures 5 and 6). Whether it is called “Buckelstil” (hump-style), “Warzenstil” (wart-style), “Knorpelstil” (gnarl-style), or “Stabornamentik” (twig-ornamentation), Junker fingers them. He seems to encrust the entire interior—nothing remains untouched—as with a fossilised overgrowth, and adorns, even crowns, furniture with entwined wood mazes or embosses it with the lattice work of mounted struts and poles.[13,14] Ornamentation, at its best yet another self-contained system, works on seams and naturally attaches itself to boundaries that tie up edges and create connections where materials or objects meet, then puts them “in motion through shifting, angling, and displacing them”.[15]

Figures 5, 6. Ceiling and wall of the vestibule.



For Junker, however, ornamentation meant something more and different: the steady and ordered filling of the surface of the work with embellishment after embellishment of the same, yet bespoke, sculptural elements. There is no fury of genius here, but a fear of absence that is corporeally mediated by an over-abundance worked from wood and habit. With each new carving, he seems to reiterate “this is worth my doing”. Repetition insists, that is obvious here, and this makes Junker’s an architecture of “holding in place” and “doing over”, one of faithfulness and abandon, one that, ultimately, tries to fill the space of the irreplaceable and thus knows itself justified. In doing so, his ornamentation both repeats and varies, because each repetition produces a difference, and their accumulation constructs combinations and structural patterns of referencing that satisfy a deeply-rooted need for continuity and safety in a house that, like no other, manifests the unrepeatable. The spatial reverberation of repetition is felt everywhere.[16] It propels the visitor up to a tiny attic room, the only one in which Junker actually lived.

In the architectural plan submitted for building permission, the staircase is the sole feature Junker “drew in by hand, that is to say, without a ruler” (Figure 7).[17] Its unusual curve “finds its preparation in the slanted shape of the vestibule”, but seems out of step with the otherwise symmetrical layout of the house.[18] What looks like wooden undergrowth houses the steps, and surrounding the staircase,

is a dense, nailed lattice-work of branches, sticks, and twigs, which turns and "turns on itself" as the stairs narrow and wind their way up to a ladder into the belvedère.[19] Where the curve forms little niches, shelving is integrated into a space that otherwise succeeds in blurring the line between wall and ceiling, creating a singular, cage-like space that appears increasingly menacing and impenetrable, even when flooded with light from a shaft above.

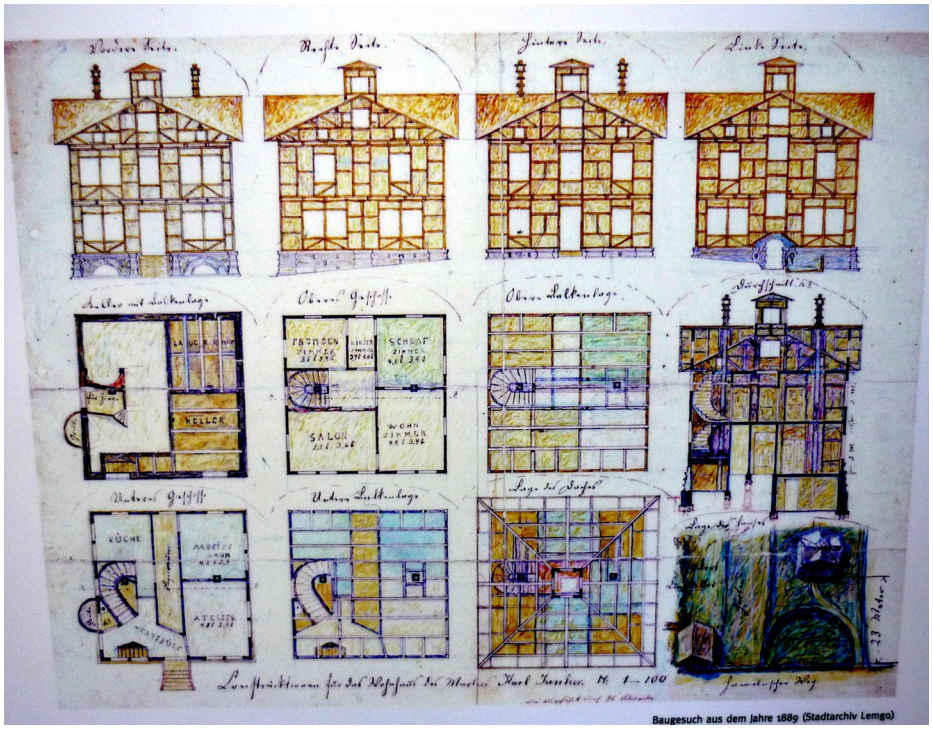


Figure 7. The Junkerhaus architectural plan.

Generally, Junker appears to favour the vertical over the horizontal, and when a staircase presents us with a choice, we know that "up" leads us to privacy and seclusion.[20] As if to celebrate this ascent, an enormous wooden chandelier hangs through an opening in the ceiling into the second floor hallway (Figure 8). A carpenter and woodcarver, Junker was trained to work the range from fitting a broom-stick to fashioning butterfly cases. The extent of his craftsmanship is displayed in a construction that covers the crude and the filigree without any inconsistency in style.

Figure 8. Wooden chandelier in the second floor hallway.

On the second floor, Junker never rested in his heavy bedstead (Figure 9), underneath which is preserved the original floor painting, and which (like most other architectural features) is solid and grounded in stasis with "struts … [to] secure [such] exceptional stability" as appropriate for a settled existence.[21] Unwieldy wardrobes and chests, containing the unmovable, can bear the burden and make quite clear "this is where things stand". The archaic nature of wood, the material with which Junker was so intimate, served his purpose well. An early critic, making the best of it, tells us: "Feverishly, he worked day and night at his joiner's bench, lugged knobby branches, tree stumps, even entire tree trunks to his house on a small hand wagon."[22] Another recounts that inside the Junkerhaus "[a] ll furniture [was] playground for knives and chisels".[23]

Figure 9. Bedstead in the master bedroom.

The nails he used to hammer the ornamentation onto the surface, like succinct punctuation marks, have become part of Junker's architectural syntax. True, their use is fast and practical, but nails also leave lasting marks of a subtle violence that compounds the erotic nature of the poles with their bulbous carvings and enveloped polymorphic human figures (Figure 10). The desire here is so raw and naively sincere that it is deeply moving. It only expends itself in building up more of the same rough chisel work from inside. Despite opening his home for a small fee to outside visitors, simply to rush them through in a manner both grumpy and proud, the space is infused with such interiority and confinement, that this is no house of welcome. Rather, it is one of a radical and irreversible leave-taking into a petrified world, where severance is expressed in sculptural work that seems to reach for something beyond permanence.[24]

Figure 10. One of many wooden poles throughout the Junkerhaus.

The sheer amount of furniture handles, often indistinguishable from ornamentation, invites to reach and take hold of knobs you can close your fist around. It is but another small pleasure when the wood looks rough like bark, but is soft to the touch and drawers pull smoothly. A multitude of hooks and boards indicates that Junker insisted on a proper place for everything. To unburden

himself, shelves were installed on top of walls, overhead stretching from one wall to another, under table-tops, inside and attached to seating and beds, above and next to doors, and, perhaps most in keeping with Junker's aesthetic, in corners, those box-like spaces, half-open, half-closed, but never neglected. How could he ever have filled them all? It is clear only that the shelves themselves become part of the escalating web of "Stabornamentik", kept only just shy of dispersion, only just superable.

With rigour, Junker manages the grid by segmenting and centering with suspended knobs, while "lunettes", the light-coloured wall and ceiling paintings, soften the squares of the wood medallions with their arched frames and a style reminiscent of pointillism. In these, along with the creatures of myths and fables, he painted stereotypical men, women, and children, grouped as family, mother and child, or lovers, while embracing, sitting together, dancing, playing musical instruments, or drinking from goblets. Rather than their schematic faces, the viewer notices their disproportionate, overly long limbs, arms holding, reaching, or waving. These are all gestures that aim at narrowing distance and recall Junker's "window-view" painting; as before, recognisable as Junker himself, the dark-haired and dark-bearded man in the centre.

Befitting an artist with historicist tendencies, his work is conservative, backward-looking, and arrested in the past. The rigidity of the nailed lattice work, and the embossed mounting of struts and poles, mark the end of change and a disengagement from the present to a point that does not pass, "a past that does not pass by".[25] When you tread the same spot, repetition works itself out of memory; a memory which accumulation, in its turn, attempts to preserve. Besides, is not memory always space? If the Junkerhaus contains a remembrance "that belonged to a lost time", its "very materiality … means that memory is not abandoned", that house and memory are "inevitably intertwined".[26, 27,28] Perhaps it was only a potential one—an "it could have happened this way"—along with the pictures and furnishings that so often tell a family story, and the house, as it were, was built on the subjunctive.

How truthful, then, the sign in front of the house that from the 1950s to 1970s read, "Monument to an Unhappy Love".[29] However, regardless of what we know about Junker, we feel that the house contains far more than a guarded memory, but an inviolate secret whose force derives from a tightly controlled balance that rasps its own boundaries and exemplifies the necessity and totality of giving over. The legends that so readily attached themselves to this reclusive man (receiving a medal from the German Emperor, building for the mad Bavarian King Ludwig, or travelling to India) are poetry and feed from the fact that Junker left a house, along with hundreds of paintings, watercolours, drawings, sketches, gouaches, sculptures, and models, but no personal documents. The exception is two letters, only discovered in 1982, to a former Lemgo school mate: the first to announce his love and future prospects in Hamburg; the second to inform about his intentions to move to Munich.[30,31] The two secret cabinets he hid behind the cassette panelling

of the staircase are empty today, as they should be. Without further commentary, Junker's work simply says "I existed once". His house could be nobody else's.

Endnotes

[1]For a detailed account of rejected projects see: Bernd Enke, "Biographische Anmerkungen zur Künstlerpersönlichkeit: Karl Junker (1850-1912)," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 15-17.

[2]"Between 1830 and 1914 about 120 'museum houses' were built in Europe, 40 in Munich alone, followed by 25 in Berlin, four each in London and Paris, three each in Vienna and Brussels. About one-fourth of these 'museum houses' were designed, like Junker's, by the artist himself. In no other city but Munich could Junker have had such intense exposure to what became his life's work … During the 1870s and 1880s twelve 'museum houses' were built in Munich, for instance for Heß, Gedon, Seitz, Kaulbach, Defregger or Lenbach, to mention only the ones most known." See also Eckart Bergmann, "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus und Gesamtkunstwerk," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 129. All translations by the author.

[3]Jörg Katerndahl, "Karl Junker als Quelle Psychiatrischer Begutachtung nach dem Tod," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 101. This alleged quotation is first mentioned in Karl Meier, *Das schöne alte Lemgo* (Lemgo: Ernst Weege, 1927), 92.

[4]Joachim Huppelsberg, *Karl Junker. Architekt. Holzschnitzer. Maler. 1850-1912* (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1983), 39.

[5]All photographs by the author.

[6]For a detailed discussion of the model see: Jochen Georg Günzel, "Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker und der Zimmermeister Heinrich Schirneker: Ihre Anteile an Bauplan und Modell des Junkerhauses," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus*, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 22-26. See also: Wilhelm Salber, *Drehfiguren. Karl Junker. Maler. Architekt. Bildhauer* (Cologne: Walter König, 1978), 24; Klaus Peter Schulmann, "Karl Junker – ein Lemgoer Künstler Zwischen Impressionismus, Jugendstil und Expressionismus," in *800 Jahre Lemgo. Aspekte der Stadtgeschichte*, eds. Peter Johanek and Herbert Stöwer (Lemgo: Wagener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), 518. For an animated visual presentation see *Das Junkerhaus Lemgo*, directed by Hermann-Josef Höper (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 2004), DVD.

[7]Regina Fritsch was the first to use the image "as if this 'furniture' were growing out of the wall" in "Truhe, Schrank und Bett. Zur Funktionalität und Künstlerischen Gestaltung der Möbel von Karl Junker," *Karl Junker und das*

Junkerhaus, eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 58. Junker's Hanover gallerist, Herbert von Garvens, his only true supporter and promoter, commented that Junker "feels the trees grow" and that for him "everything turned into (a) growing-out-of." See Jan Ochalski, "Karl Junker (1850-1912). Biographie eines Universalkünstlers unter Berücksichtigung der Malerei," (PhD diss., University of Bochum, 1998), 157.

[8]Stefan Mischer, "Das Heim als Heiligtum: das Junkerhaus im Spannungsfeld Zwischen Nationalromantik and Christlicher Erneuerungsbewegung" (PhD diss., University of Hamburg, 1998), 64.

[9]These are an etching by Walter Steineke from 1910, which depicts him painting, and a postcard, between 1895 and 1912, which shows him with the Junkerhaus model. For a representation of the etching see Enke, "Biographische Anmerkungen," 18. The postcard is shown in the *Junkerhaus* DVD cited above.

[10]Wolfram Bangen speaks to Junker's practice of recycling in "Grußworte und Ansprachen zur Eröffnung des Junkerhauses am 11. 9. 2004," accessed October 10, 2010, http://www.junkerhaus.de/ansprache bangen.pdf, 4.

[11]John MacGregor first took note of this preoccupation with trees in "Karl Junker: Das Unheimliche als Haus," in *Karl Junker und das Junkerhaus,* eds. Regina Fritsch and Jürgen Scheffler (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2000), 197-98. Peter Gorsen, in "Karl Junker, 1950-1912. Das Haus in Lemgo," in *Kunst und Wahn*, eds. Ingrid Brugger, Peter Gorsen and Klaus Albrecht Schröder (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 288, speaks of 'portraits' (rather than 'nature studies') of trunks, stumps, and roots that took anthropomorphic forms. Ochalski dedicates an entire chapter, "Landscapes and Nature Studies" to the representation of trees. See also "Karl Junker (1850-1912)," 144-60.

[12]Mischer, "Das Heim als Heiligtum," 63.

[13]Karl Meier uses 'Buckel-, and ‚Warzenstil' in "Ein gespenstisches Haus. Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo – Eine Bauschöpfung ohne Vergleich," *Westfalen im Bild* 9(10), (1935): 12.

[14]Bergmann uses 'Knorpelstil' and 'Stabornamentik' in "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus und Gesamtkunstwerk," 131.

[15]Salber, *Drehfiguren*, 52.

[16]Gilles Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), has long since established that "(d)ifference inhabits repetition" (76).

[17]Günzel, "Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker," 27.

[18]Bergmann, "Das Junkerhaus als Künstlerhaus," 134.

[19]Salber, *Drehfiguren*, 46.

[20]Huppelsberg, in *Karl Junker. Architekt. Holzschnitzer*, 31, points to the rigid vertical structuring in many of Junker's paintings.

[21]Fritsch, "Truhe, Schrank und Bett," 56.

[22]Gerhard Kreyenberg, "Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo i.L. Ein Beitrag zur Bildnerei der Schizophrenen," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 114 (1928): 154.

[23]Meier, "Ein gespenstisches Haus," 12.
[24]Both Enke, in "Biographische Anmerkungen," 19, and Kreyenberg, in "Das Junkerhaus in Lemgo," 170, give accounts of this practice.
[25]Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 60.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Tom Cresswell, *Place. A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 83.
[28]Ibid., 85.
[29]Günzel, "Der Architekturmaler Karl Junker," 42.
[30]Enke, "Biographische Anmerkungen," 20.
[31]Ibid, 16.

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Biographical note

Anne-Kathrin Wielgosz teaches cross-disciplinary courses in language and literature at Walsh University in the U.S. Her long-standing interest in the semiotics of spatial structures dates back to her work as language and writing liaison in architecture.

Email: awielgosz@walsh.edu