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Visual representations of working-class Berlin, 1924–1930

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Submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of PhD

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Abstract

This thesis examines the urban topography of Berlin's working-class districts, as seen in the art, architecture and other images produced in the city between 1924 and 1930. During the 1920s, Berlin flourished as centre of modern culture. Yet this flourishing did not exist exclusively amongst the intellectual elites that occupied the city centre and affluent western suburbs. It also extended into the proletarian districts to the north and east of the city. Within these areas existed a complex urban landscape that was rich with cultural tradition and artistic expression. This thesis seeks to redress the bias towards the centre of Berlin and its recognised cultural currents, by exploring the art and architecture found in the city's working-class districts. The thesis adopts Henri Lefebvre's premise that each society creates its own space in which it lives, works, and sustains its cultural identity. On this basis, working-class culture and the spaces in which it was practiced, are treated with equal weight.

The thesis begins by examining how the *laissez-faire* economics of the German Empire (1871–1914), combined with a massive influx of rural migrants into Berlin, creating a complex industrial landscape, whose working-class inhabitants retained many pastoral traditions. The thesis moves on to study the works of a number of artists active in Berlin between 1924 and 1930, using examples of their work to examine the unique nature of the working-class districts, and the culture and traditions that took place within them. The second half of the thesis explores the working-class districts from an explicitly political perspective. The extensive house building programme that took place across Berlin throughout the twenties is explored in all its varied and conflicting political perspectives. What emerges is a picture of a growing schism between Berlin's Social Democratic government, and Communist supporters in the working-class districts. 1929 emerges as a critical year in which political contestations of space between the two parties and their supporters reached new levels of hostility, as working-class culture clashed against Social Democratic urban policy.

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Mark Hobbs. London, February 2010.

Author's declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Mark Hobbs, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out for the Department of History of Art, University of Glasgow, under the supervision of Dr. Debbie Lewer and Professor David Hopkins, between October 2006 and February 2010.

Abbreviations

Political parties

DVP	German Peoples' Party
DVNP	German National Peoples' Party
KPD	German Communist Party
NSDAP	National Socialist Workers' Party
SPD	German Social Democratic Party

Housing societies

DEGEWO	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung des Wohnungsbaues</i> German Society for the Promotion of House Building
DEWOG	<i>Deutsche Wohnungsfürsorge für Beamte, Angestellte und Arbeiter</i> German Housing Welfare for Civil Servants, Employees and Workers
GAGFAH	<i>Gemeinnützige Aktiengesellschaft für Angestellten-Heimstätten</i> Not-for-Profit Public Limited Company for Employees' Homesteads
GEHAG	<i>Gemeinnützige Heimstätten-Aktien-Gesellschaft</i> Not-for-Profit Homesteads Public Limited Company

Other bodies

ARBKD	Association Revolutionärer Bildender Künstler Deutschlands German Association of Revolutionary Artists
RKGD	<i>Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands</i> Association of German Small Garden Clubs

Newspapers

AIZ	<i>Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung</i>
BIZ	<i>Berliner-Illustrirte-Zeitung</i>

Note: All English quotations from German sources have, unless explicitly stated, been translated by the author.

Visual representations of working-class Berlin, 1924–1930

1. Introduction

1.1 Weimar culture

Weimar Berlin continues to fascinate us. At the time the third most populous city in the world, it symbolises a high-point of early twentieth-century cultural life. The city boasted some of Europe's most modern and exciting architectural projects, including Erich Mendelsohn's Columbia-Haus on Potsdamer Platz, Walter Gropius and Hans Scharoun's housing blocks in Siemensstadt, and an array of modern cinemas and department stores. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe proposed one of his most ambitious skyscraper designs for the bustling central thoroughfare of Friedrichstrasse. Berlin had a thriving press industry, with scores of newspapers and magazines published daily, including the popular illustrated paper, the *Berliner-Illustrirte-Zeitung*, which could sell close to two million copies each week. The city's film industry produced scores of titles, many now considered classics, including Fritz Lang's blockbusting *Metropolis* (1927), Georg Pabst's pioneering *Die freudlose Gasse* (1925) and Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (1930), which launched the career of Marlene Dietrich. Weimar Berlin also boasted a flourishing artistic and intellectual scene. Amongst those who considered Berlin as their home during the twenties were, to name a few, the artists George Grosz and Otto Dix, playwright Bertolt Brecht, the writers Kurt Tucholsky and Walter Benjamin, physician Magnus Hirschfeld, and the scientists Albert Einstein and Max Planck. And then there was the almost mythical nightlife, captured by Christopher Isherwood in *Goodbye to Berlin* (later made into the film *Cabaret*), and symbolised by the famous Tiller Girl performances, and the tragic, debauched existence of Anita Berber.

Weimar Berlin's culture continues to fascinate us in part because we recognise in it many of the features of modern life which characterise our own time: images of soaring skyscrapers, blockbuster movies, celebrity culture and hedonistic nightlife. But in this most modern of metropolises, the past continued to lived alongside the present. It did so not simply in the subjective sense implied by Ernst Bloch in his concept of non-simultaneity (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*), but in a distinctly material manner as well, most particularly evident in the sharp contrasts to be found between Berlin's city centre and its suburbs. The brilliant

examples of Berlin's modernity mentioned above were overwhelmingly concentrated in a small number of the main thoroughfares and squares at the heart of the city: on the Kurfürstendamm and around the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in the West End, along Friedrichstrasse, and around Potsdamerplatz and Leipziger Strasse. But if visitors to Berlin turned away from these focal points, and headed just a short distance towards the suburbs, he or she would have found themselves confronted with a very different view of the city, one which still bore strong links to the past, capable of speaking to earlier societies much more than it ever could speak to us.

We can better understand the relationship between Berlin's centre and its suburbs by looking more closely at the German term for the suburb, *Vorstadt*. While the English word *suburb* emphasises both the supporting role the suburbs play, and their inferior status in relation to the city centre, the German equivalent *Vorstadt* suggests something quite different. The prefix *vor-* can mean *before*, *pre-* and *prior to*, and fixes the relation of the suburb to the city centre in a temporal, rather than in a spatial or qualitative sense. The *Vorstadt* is therefore a transitional stage in the process of urbanisation, a point along the way in which the countryside is assimilated into the expanding urban sprawl. In this sense, the current *Vorstadt* was yesterday's countryside, and will be built-up with urban development tomorrow. Nineteenth-century writers and mapmakers frequently referred to the settlements that lay outside the gates of Berlin's customs wall as *Vorstädte*.¹ There was, for example, the Oranienburger *Vorstadt* and the Rosenthaler *Vorstadt* to the north of the city, and the Potsdamer *Vorstadt* to the south. In the mid-nineteenth century, these areas were predominantly rural, but were gradually being assimilated into the urban fabric. The term *Vorstadt* associates the rural and the urban with each other in both time and space, in a relationship not fixed but constantly evolving. This sense of change, of past and future, permeates through contemporary descriptions of the city and the *Vorstadt*. In 1908, one eyewitness reflected upon the transformations he saw at the edges of Berlin:

1. Robert Springer discusses the various *Vorstädte* around Berlin in: Robert Springer, *Berlin : Ein Führer durch die Stadt und ihre Umgebungen* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1861), 37.

At the periphery, new city quarters spring up in the space of 365 days, where one had strolled across meadows a year earlier.²

Writing a generation later in 1932, another Berliner vividly described the street in which he lived:

I walk slowly through the Wallstrasse. Lights burn brightly behind the tall windows of the Electricity Works. The machines hum. [...] The isolated one- and two-storeyed houses seem even tinier and more crooked in the lantern light, amongst the tall tenements. They are left over from Charlottenburg's early days; have outlived generations. The tiles on the roofs are weather-beaten and moss-grown. Heavy wooden shutters hang in front of the windows on the ground floor. Wallstrasse. The town wall used to be here. A meadow must once have been behind it, with rustling trees. Now there is not the smallest green twig in the street.³

The past and the present coexisted alongside each other on Wallstrasse, and on many other suburban streets across the city. Despite the fact that Wallstrasse was now part of an urban landscape, it contained rural traces which functioned as an index to the past, recalling a time when meadows and trees covered the area. Though Charlottenburg had long since been urbanised by the 1930s, meadows could still be traversed and the rustling leaves of woodland still heard, across many of the city's suburban neighbourhoods; in districts such as Wedding, Reinickendorf and Weissensee to the north, Friedrichshain to the east, and Neukölln to the south. The populations of these areas were dominated by the working classes, most of whom did not enjoy unlimited access to the luxuries and disposable artefacts associated with modern metropolitan life. By contrast, their lives were still

-
2. 'An der Peripherie entstehen in dreihundertfünfundsechzig Tagen neue Stadtteile, wo man vor einem Jahr über Wiesen spazierte.' Hermann Könsbruck, "Neu-Berlin," *März*, January 7 1908. Quoted in: Dieter Glatzer, and Ruth Glatzer, eds., *Berliner Leben 1900–1913 : Eine historische Reportage aus Erinnerungen und Berichten* (Berlin [East]: Rütten & Leoning, 1986), 153.
 3. Jan Petersen, *Our Street. A Chronicle written in the Heart of Fascist Germany*, trans. Betty Rensen (Berlin: Seven Seas, 1961), 59.

loosely held together by pastoral traditions and mores that they—or their parents and grandparents—had brought with them, into Berlin, from the agricultural hinterlands in which they had previously lived.

Social and economic historians have paid a good deal of attention to Germany's working classes in this period between 1871 and 1933, an era in which Germany's rapid industrial development propelled an equally rapid growth of its cities. Historians with an interest in art and culture, particularly those in the West, have done so to a lesser extent, focusing instead on the city's cultural elite and its achievements. This is a shame, because cities like Berlin boasted thriving proletarian communities that were rich in cultural tradition. The lack of research into what I think is a significant aspect of German urban culture in the twenties, has left us with a one-sided view of Weimar's culture and modern development. A closer appreciation of this other side of 1920s German urban culture, will help us recognise the Janus-face of modernity, and enable us to better appreciate the social tensions inherent in the processes of modernisation.

1.2 Ernest Burgess's model of urban development

In 1925, the sociologist Ernest Burgess devised a theoretical model of urban development and urban class structure. Based upon research carried out in collaboration with his colleagues at the University of Chicago, Burgess used Chicago itself as the basis for his formulations. In the model, he emphasised a clear distinction between the city centre—with its Central Business District—and the residential suburbs at the outermost periphery.⁴ In between the two, stretching out in concentric rings representing different bands of urban development lay further areas, characterised by their social class structure (fig. 1). The first area away from the centre was a zone of transition, populated by the city's original working-class neighbourhoods and factories. Beyond this lay further working-class housing, followed by bourgeois residential and commuter zones, at the very edges of the urban sprawl. Burgess's model for Chicago has remained an important tool in the analysis of urban social development, but it has its shortcomings. The most obvious flaw, which subsequent generations of urban geographers and sociologists have pointed out, is that Burgess's model oversimplifies the social structure of cities, and is only very broadly

4. Ernest W. Burgess, "The Growth of the City : Introduction to a research Project," in *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 50.

applicable to cities caught in a particular historical stage of development.⁵ Nevertheless, such criticisms have not prevented our understanding of the development of many cities—including Berlin—being framed by an approach similar to Burgess’s model, that simplifies urban expansion and urban class relations. It should not be too surprising that many historical accounts of Berlin are compatible with Burgess’s model for Chicago, given the many similarities in both cities’ patterns of urban development in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; similarities which compelled Walter Rathenau to dub Berlin the ‘Chicago on the Spree.’⁶

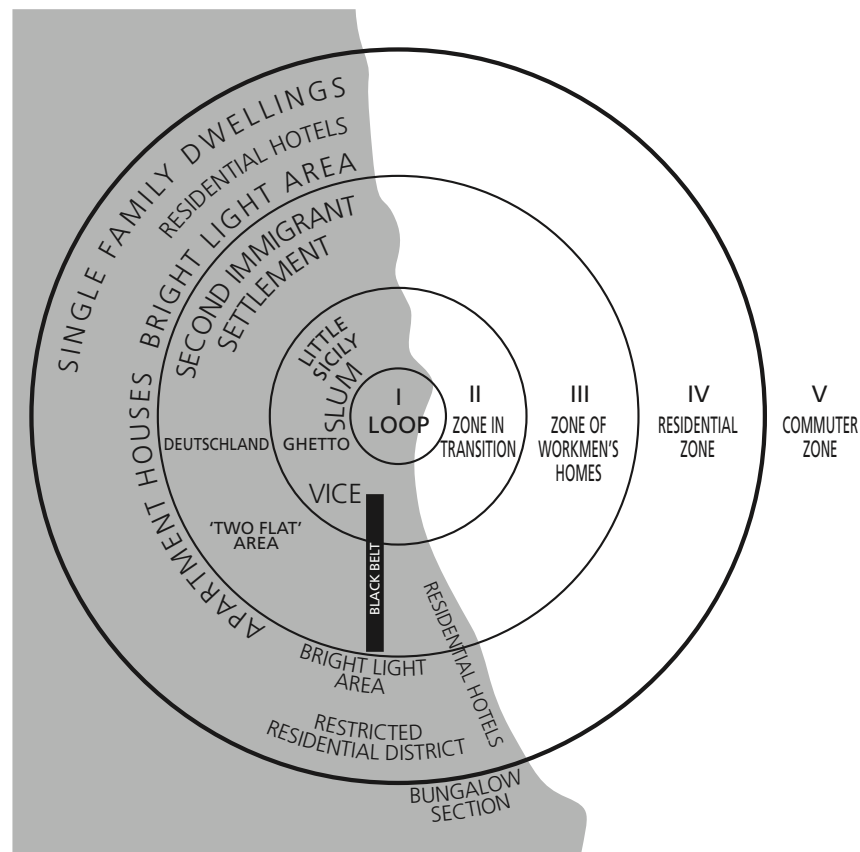


Figure 1: Adapted version of Ernest Burgess’s concentric zone model for 1920s Chicago. Based on the diagram published in: Parker, *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience*, 42.

5. Rex and Moore reflected on the simplified nature of Burgess’s and Park’s urban models, when observing real-world conditions in Birmingham, UK, in the 1960s: John Rex, and Robert Moore, *Race, Conflict and Community : A Study of Sparkbrook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 272-73. For an introductory discussion of Burgess’s and Park’s models, and subsequent criticism of them, see: Simon Parker, *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience : Encountering the City* (London: Routledge, 2004), 40-47.
6. Walther Rathenau, *Der schönste Stadt der Welt* (Berlin: Philo, 2002), 23.

1.3 Voices from Weimar Berlin

The first-hand accounts of Imperial and Weimar Berlin, with which present-day historians are most familiar, go some way to substantiating Burgess's model of urban class structure. For example, the majority of those commentators upon whom we rely to describe the urban culture found at the heart of early twentieth-century Berlin, came from comparatively affluent backgrounds, benefitted from a university education and, with the exception of the odd transgression, lingered in the city centre. Georg Simmel (1858–1818), whose 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' has framed so much of our understanding about how we experience and respond to the urban environment, enjoyed a privileged upbringing in a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin. As a child, Simmel lived at the very heart of Berlin, on the corner of Friedrichstrasse and Leipzigerstrasse, and later studied at the city's Humboldt University.⁷ Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), whose legacy as an astute observer and interpreter of modern culture remains strong, also grew up in a privileged Jewish family in Berlin. His childhood reminiscences in *A Berlin Chronicle* painted a picture of a sheltered youth spent in the West End of the city, 'confined to this affluent quarter without knowing any other,' while the poor existed invisibly 'in the back of beyond.'⁸ Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966), also born to Jewish parents, travelled to Berlin to study architecture at the city's Technical University, where he attended lectures by Simmel. His feuilletonistic essays for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* regularly explored his experiences in modern cities such as Berlin and Paris, while his 1931 book, *The Salaried Masses*, examined lower middle-class culture in Berlin, and focused upon the offices and clubs situated at the heart of the city.⁹ These and other key commentators on Berlin's modernity shared similarities to Baudelaire's outlook on the modern city, although they lived comfortable middle-class lives compared to the rather squalid and destitute experiences of the French poet. But even Baudelaire himself, divorced by his status as a writer from the real economics of the city, lived a separate existence from his fellow impoverished Parisians who suffered under the yoke of industry and capitalism. What the writings of these individuals all shared was a privileging of the individual over the masses. All were interested in the figure of the flâneur, whose subjective experience as 'the man in

7. An outline of Simmel's early life can be found in: David Frisby, *Georg Simmel, Key Sociologists* (Chichester: Horwood, 1984), 21-44.

8. Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 10-11.

9. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany* (London, New York: Verso, 1998).

the crowd' has come to dominate discourses on modernity. Moreover, the themes that connected Baudelaire with Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer, were all found in the mercantile spaces of the city; in the busy shopping arcades, department stores and commercial streets, where people exchanged goods and services for money, strolled for pleasure, and sought a host of other metropolitan entertainments. All of these activities were found in their greatest concentration in the busy central public spaces of the city. In the case of Berlin, around Friedrichstrasse and Potsdamer Platz in the city centre, and Savignyplatz and the Kurfürstendamm in the affluent West End.

In the spaces of the city which Burgess described as the transitional and workers' zones, the concerns of reporters in early twentieth-century Berlin shift from the cultural to the social. Hans Ostwald (1873–1940) described the inhabitants and features of these areas more frequently and vividly than most. Ostwald, the son of a blacksmith, concentrated upon the criminal underclasses and proletariat of Berlin. Between 1905 and 1908 he oversaw and contributed to the fifty volume *Großstadt Dokumente* (City Documents), a series of studies which explored various aspects of Berlin's society, often focusing on the darker side of urban life. There were volumes covering a range of themes, including Berlin's poverty, dance-hall culture, pimps and prostitutes, homosexuality (in a volume written by Magnus Hirschfeld), and crime, all of which lurked in the 'dark corners' of the city.¹⁰ While many of the volumes making up the *Großstadt Dokumente* dealt with cultural forms specific to the proletariat, they also dwelt upon aspects of culture and working-class life associated with a certain degree of social deviancy. Other eyewitness accounts from the transitional zones of the city focused on less sensational aspects of working-class life. These include the city's social and political campaigners, who reported upon conditions in Berlin's industrial districts, and upon whom today's social historians often rely for first-hand accounts. There were many individuals who drew attention to working-class housing conditions in the transitional zone, including Bruno Schwan, who represented the German Housing Reform Society, and Heinrich Lichte, who took photographs of the living conditions of the sick and poor.¹¹ Other reporters with an interest in working-class life

10. Hans Ostwald, *Dunkle Winkel in Berlin*, 6th ed., vol. 1, *Großstadt-Dokumente* (Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1905); Magnus Hirschfeld, *Berlins drittes Geschlecht*, 4th ed., vol. 3, *Großstadt-Dokumente* (Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1905).

11. Bruno Schwan, *Die Wohnungsnot und das Wohnungselend in Deutschland*, vol. 7, *Schriften Deutscher Verein für Wohnungsreform* (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1929). Heinrich Lichte's photographs (see figures 10 and 11) were collected in a series of studies published annually before the first

included Alexander Graf Stenbock-Fermor, a Communist and former miner who explored working-class Berlin ‘from below’ in a series of vignettes published in book form in the 1930s.¹²

Another category of Weimar commentators represented the trend towards what Burgess called a process of decentralisation: ‘the tendency of each inner zone to extend its area by the invasion of the next outer zone.’¹³ German geographer Friedrich Leyden recorded similar observations in his 1931 study of Berlin, *Geographie der Weltstadt*.¹⁴ Leyden produced a thorough account of Berlin’s physical and social development, which reported a decentralisation of industry and the urban population, from the centre towards the periphery, providing a real-world case study which could corroborate Burgess’s model. Martin Wagner (1885–1957), Berlin’s chief urban planner between 1924 and 1933, supported this decentralisation of the urban population. Wagner had studied architecture in Berlin, where he too attended Simmel’s lectures. During his tenure as city planner, Wagner worked closely with the architect Bruno Taut (1880–1938), best known for the modern housing estates constructed in Berlin during the twenties, and the art critic Adolf Behne (1885–1948), who publicly supported both Wagner’s and Taut’s proposals. Wagner, Taut and Behne represented a group of campaigners and reformers that directly engaged with the conditions of the proletariat, and actively sought to improve their social circumstances. They found the root of the problems they hoped to solve in the cramped tenement districts in the transition zone of the city, and created their solutions, the modern and spacious housing estates, in the city’s outer suburbs.

1.4 The spatial nature of Weimar’s historiography

Berlin’s historic structure, and the relations between its centre and periphery, were corrupted, made artificial, in the wake of the political division of the city by the victorious allied forces during the aftermath of the Second World War. ‘Red Wedding,’ for example, once the Communist’s most prized stronghold in the whole of Germany, found itself in the

World War, for example: Albert Kohn, ed., *Unser Wohnungs-Enquete im Jahre 1912* (Berlin: Verlag der Ortskrankenkasse für den Gewerbebetrieb der Kaufleute, Handelsleute und Apotheker, 1913).

12. Alexander Graf Stenbock-Fermor, *Deutschland von Unten : Reisen durch die proletarische Provinz 1930* (Luzern/Frankfurt a.M.: 1980).

13. Burgess, “The Structure of the City,” 50.

14. Friedrich Leyden, *Groß-Berlin : Geographie der Weltstadt* (Berlin: Mann, 1995), 94-95.

French sector of Berlin, on the side of the western allies. Meanwhile, the city's Royal Palace was situated on the Russian side of the border. In the ensuing decades, how historians from both sides of the divide reconstructed Weimar Berlin's history and culture, had as much to do with a political as with an urban geography. In the West, many historians recounted Berlin's spectacular metropolitan development and cultural credentials, recalling Herwarth Walden's assertion in 1923 that the city was the 'capital of the United States of Europe.'¹⁵ In the East, many historians eschewed Weimar's flamboyance, praising instead the political solidarity of the proletariat, and especially their heroic resistance against the National Socialists between 1933 and 1945.¹⁶ And for as long as the Cold War endured—and the Wall continued to divide Berlin—accounts of Weimar remained framed by the contrasting ideological rhetoric of East and West. Detailed accounts of urban development were often subordinated to political histories while the enforced spatial barriers stood fast. When the Wall finally fell in 1989, and the ideological divisions between East and West began slowly to dissolve, what emerged was a Berlin which, structurally speaking, had changed little since the twenties. Berlin never developed into the city of eight million inhabitants that Martin Wagner envisaged. When city officials surveyed the reunified Berlin in the early 1990s, they found an urban population roughly the same as it had been in the early 1920s.¹⁷ Berlin's political division after World War Two had effectively stunted the city's economic and urban development, leaving it unable to evolve forwards from its prewar state. After the destruction that had been wrought upon the city during the War, reconstruction of the existing urban fabric became a priority over any new urban expansion. As a result, the Burgessian model of urban development and class structure continued to remain to some extent relevant to Berlin, and has consequently continued to dictate historical investigations of the city. Eric Weitz's recent 'excursion' through Weimar-era Berlin particularly highlights its persistence. Weitz 'visited' the bohemian cafés and bars around Potsdamer Platz in the centre of the city, the poorest

15. 'Hauptstadt der Vereinigten Staaten von Europa.' Quoted in: Eberhard Roters, *Weltstadtsinfonie : Berlin Realismus 1900–1950* (München: Kunstverein, 1984), 9.

16. For example, see the unwieldily titled: Kreiskomitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR und Kreisvorstand der Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, ed. *An der Seite der Sowjetunion im Kampf gegen Faschismus und Krieg : Lebensbilder antifaschistischer Widerstandskämpfer aus dem Stadtbezirk Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg*, vol. 1, Zur Geschichte der örtlichen Arbeiterbewegung Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg (Berlin: Kreisleitung Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, 1985).

17. Martin Wagner, "Leitgedanken für die Ausstellung Berlin 1930 'Die neue Zeit'," *Kommunale Blätter für Groß Berlin* 4, no. 5 (1927): 21. "Statistiken : Bevölkerung," <http://www.statistik-berlin.de/framesets/berl.htm> (accessed 05/02/2010).

working-class neighbourhoods in the transitional zones of the inner city, and one of the new housing estates for the workers, relocated to the city's residential zone.¹⁸ What is evident from studies such as that by Weitz, is that those interested in the city's art and culture remain focussed upon the city centre, and the intellectuals, gallery owners, dandyish artists and critics who circulated around the city's western hub. Meanwhile those interested in the city's social and political history, are usually attracted to conditions in the transitional zone, where the city's poorer and often marginalised inhabitants lived. Finally, accounts of the lives of the city's most affluent inhabitants, moves to villas and garden suburbs at the remotest edges of the sprawl. This template remains on the whole valid for Berlin; a city whose structure has not radically altered since the Weimar era.

Historical accounts of Weimar in the West have commonly sought to underline the importance of Weimar's cultural accomplishments, and to incorporate them into a western, mainstream narrative of Modernism still dominated by Paris and New York. Out of this programme arose the notion of Weimar as a culture which promised so much, and yet cruelly ended in tragedy; the mythologising of a culture that was 'cut short,' repressed, or scattered to the four corners of the globe.¹⁹ Some aspects of Weimar culture have been more readily assimilated into the canon of western Modernism than others. The international, avant-garde credentials of the Bauhaus, in terms of both its abstract, geometric art and its modern architecture were unassailable, as were some of the era's highest-profile artists, including George Grosz, Otto Dix and Max Beckmann, whose works revealed the political and social tensions that oscillated through republican life. All of these made it into Peter Gay's 1968 study *Weimar Culture : The Outsider as Insider*, one of the first significant surveys of Weimar culture in the postwar period.²⁰ Gay reflected upon the tensions within Weimar culture, created by the political climate, representing its strains of ingrained conservatism and new-found progressivism as a Freudian conflict between father and son. Gay's essay concentrated primarily on the high artistic circles—of literature, poetry, painting and theatre—exploring in particular the contrasts between the Expressionist and New Objectivity (or *Neue Sachlichkeit*) aesthetic, and their relation to political debate. John Willett's *The New Sobriety*—the author's own particular translation

18. Eric D Weitz, *Weimar Germany : Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 41-79.

19. John Willett, *The Weimar Years : A Culture Cut Short* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984).

20. Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture : The Outsider as Insider* (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001).

of *Neue Sachlichkeit*—embraced a far broader range of cultural forms. Willett considered the visual arts, architecture, photography, literature, poetry, film and theatre, as being closely linked to each other, and emphasised their tendentious qualities in a highly politicised public arena. Willett also—in contrast to Gay’s primarily national emphasis—sought to stress the international character of German Modernism, and its dialogues with Russian Constructivism, *Pittura Metafisica* from Italy, and geometric Cubism from France. And while Gay’s study sat comfortably alongside conventional narratives of art history, Willett clearly sought a modification of accepted accounts, and included in his book an adaptation of Alfred Barr’s famous diagram of the genealogy of abstract art, refashioned to accommodate German 1920s Realism into the schema of early twentieth-century modernisms.²¹ Willett’s book contributed to a revival of interest in Weimar culture that emerged in the late 1970s, and which found particular expression in a spate of international exhibitions concentrating on German *Neue Sachlichkeit* art. The huge *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre* (Trends of the Twenties) exposition in West Berlin in 1977—effectively four exhibitions distributed across the city’s western sector—offered an ideal opportunity to rehabilitate Weimar’s art on a world stage. Most significantly, it allowed the German art historian Wieland Schmied to situate Germany’s *Neue Sachlichkeit* realism alongside the trends in realism and Surrealism in France during the twenties.²² In London in 1978, the Hayward Gallery staged an exhibition entitled *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties*, also curated by Schmied.²³ Two years after the Hayward Gallery exhibition, a similar show opened in the USA, in Minneapolis and Chicago.²⁴ The interest in Germany’s *Neue Sachlichkeit* art in North America was made possible by the so-called Death of

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21. Key figures covered by Gay, which also feature in the chapter on experimental art in Gombrich’s *The Story of Art* include Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus, the painters Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Oskar Kokoschka, and the sculptor Ernst Barlach. E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 12th ed. (London: Book Club Associates, 1972), 442-75. For Willett’s alternative diagram of artistic movements, see: John Willett, *The New Sobriety, 1917-1933 : Art and Politics in the Weimar Period* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 14.
22. Stephan Waetzoldt, and Verena Haas, *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1977).
23. Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the Twenties* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978).
24. Louise Lincoln, ed., *German Realism of the Twenties : The Artist as Social Critic* (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1980).

Modernism and the emergence of Postmodernism, a cultural shift in which figurative trends in the visual arts, including Photorealism, began to challenge the earlier hegemony of abstract modern art.

In East Germany there was a tendency for most art historians to disregard Neue Sachlichkeit art, continuing a line of criticism that had initially emerged in communist censure during the twenties. In their 1987 book *The 'Golden' Twenties*, Bärbel Schrader and Jürgen Schebera paid scant attention to the likes of Christian Schad, Alexander Kanoldt and Carlo Mense—artists who had been reintroduced to western art-historical narratives in the international Neue Sachlichkeit art exhibitions of the seventies. These artists produced art, so the authors claimed, in which ‘Not a single trace of activism remained.’²⁵ Schrader and Schebera concentrated instead on practitioners of a ‘tendentious art,’ including the Verists George Grosz and Otto Dix, alongside other Berlin artists that art historians in the West tended to ignore, such as Otto Nagel and Heinrich Zille.²⁶ East Germany’s art historians concentrated upon the oeuvres and activities of these individual, politically active artists, rather organising them into artistic groupings around general Modernist narratives. In the immediate postwar period, Otto Nagel—having been made director of the East German *Akademie der Künste*—was instrumental in recovering the Weimar-period work of some of his contemporaries, including Hans Baluschek, an artist who—as we shall see—divided Communist critics. Later on, after his death in 1967, Nagel himself became the subject of various monographs and exhibitions.²⁷ This tendency for East German art historians to focus on artists associated with the proletariat naturally signified a geographic shift in emphasis away from the city centre and towards the working-class districts.

By contrast, there are far fewer notable examples of western historians consciously moving away from mainstream accounts of Weimar modernism, and penetrating into spaces away from the centre of the city. John Czaplicka ventured into the city’s working-class districts

25. Bärbel Schrader, and Jürgen Schebera, *The "Golden" Twenties : Art and Literature in the Weimar Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 151.

26. *Ibid.*, 150.

27. Erhard Frommhold, *Otto Nagel : Zeit, Leben, Werk* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1974); Christine Hoffmeister, ed., *Otto Nagel 1894–1967 : Gemälde - Pastelle - Zeichnungen* (Berlin: Henschel, 1984); Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, ed., *Otto Nagel : Leben und Werk, 1894-1967 : Gemälde, Pastelle, Zeichnungen* (Oberhausen: Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, 1987).

in his essay on artistic representations of Berlin at work, but predominantly focused on the turn-of-the-century period.²⁸ And although Dorothy Rowe's study *Representing Berlin* (2003) explored similar areas of the city to those which Czaplicka had looked into, the department stores and commercial streets of the city such as Friedrichstrasse, dominated her investigation.²⁹

While discourses of artistic Modernism still frame much of the West's understanding of Weimar art, only on rare occasions moving beyond the city centre as a focus of study, social historians with an interest in the German working classes have more successfully penetrated into the proletarian transitional zone of Berlin. In the 1970s, left-wing scholars in West Germany developed a new approach to historical enquiry known as *Alltagsgeschichte* (History of Everyday Life) which developed, in the words of British historian Geoff Eley, a 'more qualitative understanding of ordinary people's lives, both by investigating the material circumstances of daily existence at work, at home, and at play [...] and by entering the inner world of popular experience in the workplace, the family and household, the neighbourhood, the school'.³⁰ The *Alltagsgeschichte* approach relied heavily on diaristic and oral histories, and sought to reconnect larger socio-economic and political constellations with their effects upon working people in their everyday routines and experiences. Besides Eley and his colleague David Blackbourn, the *Alltagsgeschichte* historian most familiar to English-speaking audiences is Alf Lüdtkte, who has written extensively on the lives of German workers and working conditions in German factories during the Weimar era and the Third Reich.³¹ With its emphasis on microhistories, *Alltagsgeschichte* has often given a distinctly regional flavour to historical enquiries, with many historians choosing out of practicality to focus on the records and stories from one particular region or city. David Crew's investigation of Weimar's social-welfare system

28. John Czaplicka, "Pictures of a City at Work, Berlin, circa 1890–1930: Visual Reflections on Social Structures and Technology in the Modern Urban Construct," in *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen, and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 3-36.

29. Dorothy Rowe, *Representing Berlin : Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

30. Geoff Eley, "Foreword," in *The History of Everyday Life : Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtkte (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), viii.

31. Alf Lüdtkte, "Polymorphous Synchrony – German Industrial Workers and the Politics of Everyday Life," *International Review of Social History* 38, Supplement 1 (1993): 39-84; Alf Lüdtkte, "What Happened to the "fiery Red Glow"? Workers' Experiences and German Fascism," in *The History of Everyday Life : Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtkte (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), 198-251.

concentrated on evidence collected in Hamburg, while Lyn Abram's study of German culture from the Imperial era focused on materials related to the regions of Westphalia and the Rhineland.³² Notable Anglo-American studies which have borrowed from the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach and restricted their focus to Berlin, include Eve Rosenhaft's study *Beating the Fascists* (1983), which investigated the violence in Berlin between 1929 and 1933, and Richard Bodek's work *Proletarian Performance in Berlin* (1997), which explored Agit-prop theatre in Berlin's working-class districts.³³ Within Berlin itself, the Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Berlin History Workshop), founded in 1982 in West Berlin, has made a significant contribution to the study of everyday life in Berlin, publishing extremely localised histories of Berlin's working-class districts, including Wedding and the *Rote Insel* in Schöneberg.³⁴

Besides Weimar Berlin's visual arts, art historians have also explored the city's urban-planning and architectural achievements. Once again, these accounts can be to an extent accommodated by Burgess's urban model. The dominant narrative produced is one in which industry and workers' settlements moved outward from the centre and transitional zones of the city, to the suburban periphery. This prevailing narrative has been supplemented by a specific set of attitudes to urbanisation, framed by Ferdinand Tönnies' definitions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, originally conceived in 1887. These can be distilled into a distinction between on one hand, a conservative anti-urbanism, and on the other, and a progressive programme of rational urbanisation.³⁵ Barbara Miller Lane's study *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (originally published in 1968) remains an important benchmark in studies of Weimar architecture. Lane emphasised the ideological and stylistic divisions that existed between avant-garde architects and their

32. Lynn Abrams, *Workers' Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia* (London: Routledge, 1992). David Crew, *Germans on Welfare: from Weimar to Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

33. Both Rosenhaft and Bodek concentrated much of their efforts on the working-class district of Wedding, which will also be the primary focus of this study: Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929-33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13; Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), 23-33.

34. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. *Der Wedding – hart an der Grenze: Weiterleben in Berlin nach dem Krieg* (Berlin: Nishen, 1987); Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, ed. *Spurensicherung in Schöneberg 1933* (Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1983).

35. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, trans. Charles Loomis, P., *Fundamental Concepts of Sociology* (New York: American Book Company, 1940).

conservative opponents.³⁶ Lane makes clear the extent of the opposition amongst conservative critics in the republic to the Bauhaus and international style of architecture. She focused much of her attention on the social housing programmes initiated by Ernst May in Frankfurt and Martin Wagner in Berlin which, representing the republican government's outlook, clashed against counterrevolutionary currents. But in focusing on the most avant-garde housing estates built at the periphery of the city, and the fervent conservative criticism they invited, Lane omitted a range of political and aesthetic positions that lay in between these two extreme positions, and inevitably oversimplified the debate. This has much to do with the fact that Lane's book dealt with developments across Germany as a whole, and as *Alltagsgeschichte* studies later demonstrated, only by narrowing the geographical scope could the nuances of historical details be picked up. Ronald Wiedenhoef's 1985 study *Berlin's Housing Revolution* did just this, and thus managed to retrieve a much broader range of architectural styles and discussions than Lane's publication. Thanks to his local emphasis, Wiedenhoef analysed more closely the local politics of Berlin's housing programme, and covered a broader variety of housing examples.³⁷ However, Wiedenhoef concentrated predominantly on the historical and economic context of Berlin's new housing developments, saying less about either the geography or the planning challenges faced by this urban expansion. Manfredo Tafuri's 1990 essay on the social politics of Weimar's cities, did focus on such urban planning challenges, as faced by May in Frankfurt and Wagner in Berlin, while downplaying questions of style and architectural form.³⁸ Tafuri described how political opposition and bureaucracy played a major role in compromising—not aiding—the programmes of radical architects and urban planners. As Lane had done earlier, Tafuri concentrated his discussion of Berlin on the activities of Wagner, Bruno Taut, and their GEHAG housing society, which situated its most significant housing developments at the edges of the city. Both Lane's and Tafuri's studies subscribe to the Burgessian model of outward urban expansion, and in doing so, place too much emphasis on Wagner and Taut's contribution to Weimar

36. Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

37. Ronald Wiedenhoef, *Berlin's Housing Revolution : German Reform in the 1920s* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985).

38. Manfredo Tafuri, "Sozialpolitik and the City in Weimar Germany," in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth : Avant Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 197-263.

Berlin's housing programme. And while Wiedenhoeft's disregard for geographical context allowed him to avoid the pitfalls suffered by Lane and Tafuri, it also denied a closer understanding of the nature of Berlin's urban development during the Weimar period.

Marxist approaches to history, which emerged in the 1970s, led to an increasingly multidisciplinary approach to history that privileged modernity over modernism. The focus on investigations of modernity progressed to the extent that, with the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc in the 1990s, a renewed freedom of movement across international and political boundaries coincided with an increased spirit of transgression in the social sciences. In recent years, numerous studies have been published which combine enquiries of art, architectural, and broader cultural histories, with socio-economic, philosophical and political lines of enquiry, creating narratives in which Weimar's flourishing culture of arts and ideas has been considered in a far more holistic fashion. But despite the fact that Berlin's artificial geo-political barriers have been removed, allowing the city to undergo extensive redevelopment, recent historical investigations have continued to analyse Berlin in a manner still spatially constrained by Burgess's simplistic model of urban development. So while recent studies have provided a penetrating insight into their subject matter, they have remained entrenched in old urban geographical distinctions. Most of the recent studies of Weimar Berlin's modernity have based a significant proportion of their historical reconstructions and interpretations of the city on writers such as Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer; in other words, on those figures constituting a well-established canon of German modernity. The continued reliance on these key figures inevitably distorts historical explorations of Weimar Berlin, creating accounts that remain confined to the central spaces of the city, and which concentrate upon on the artistic achievements of the city's most prominent artists and producers. In her book *Weimar Surfaces*, Janet Ward has concentrated on the bright lights, cinemas and films, department store windows and streamlined façades at the centre of the urban metropolis.³⁹ What makes Ward's study particularly important is the way in which she has investigated Weimar's modernity through the ideas of a constellation of postmodern thinkers and cultural geographers, underlining the relevance of Germany's metropolitan culture in the 1920s to our own present-day context. However, because Ward has been primarily concerned with Weimar's *surface* culture, and the modern city's representation of itself, she has risked propagating a

39. Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces : Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2001).

mythical vision of Berlin which, she suggests, entered ‘the “roaring twenties” with bravado’.⁴⁰ Other historians have consciously avoided mythologising ‘golden twenties’ Berlin, pointing out that this image was in fact an artificially constructed myth, propagated by the city’s publicists during the twenties.⁴¹

Sabine Hake’s recent assessment of Weimar Berlin, *Topographies of Class* (2008) has focused on the growth of the white-collar classes in the city, though the author concedes that Berlin was, according to wage levels and occupational statistics, ‘a working-class city.’⁴² Hake concentrated her architectural and spatial analysis upon the central spaces of the city, including Potsdamer Platz, Alexanderplatz and the Kurfürstendamm, as seen through the eyes of Kracauer and Franz Hessel. Similarly, David Frisby’s investigation of Imperial and Weimar Berlin relied heavily on Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer’s texts. In a chapter on the rationalised city, Frisby looked specifically at Martin Wagner’s attempts to initiate the redesign of the centrally located Alexanderplatz.⁴³ Those few studies which have deliberately shifted the focus away from the centre of the city, towards the working-class districts, have not always thoroughly penetrated working-class culture. Using a combination of Simmel’s writings and Ostwald’s *Großstadt Dokumente*, Dorothy Rowe’s book *Representing Berlin* traced an outline of Imperial and Weimar Berlin which hovers somewhere between the city centre and the transitional zone of Berlin’s inner-city working-class neighbourhoods.⁴⁴ The picture which Rowe paints is one which conforms to the sensational character of Ostwald’s volumes, focusing on the sexually perverse and immoral nature of the city, of prostitution, female crime and sexual deviancy—as constructed by a dominant male, bourgeois perspective of the city. The artists and works which Rowe studied in detail, include Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s and Otto Dix’s representations of prostitutes in the city centre, bolstering the discourse on urban modernity long associated with Berlin through Ostwald’s research, which fails to grasp the less sensational reality of the working-class areas of the city. By contrast, Willi Guttman’s

40. Ibid., 10.

41. Deborah Smail, and Corey Ross, “New Berlins and new Germanies: Story, Myth and the German capital in the 1920s and 1990s,” in *History and Identity in twentieth-century Germany*, ed. Mary Fulbrook, and Martin Swales (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 63-76.

42. Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class : Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 66.

43. David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity : Critical Explorations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 282-93.

44. Rowe, *Representing Berlin*.

studies of German proletarian culture during the Weimar Republic have offered many valuable insights that describe a less scandalous version of life in the working-class neighbourhoods, including workers' attitudes to and engagement with the visual arts.⁴⁵ However, Guttsman has largely concentrated on those cultural forms organised by the centralised labour movements and political parties rather than working-class culture organised by the working-classes themselves, in the process denying a specifically localised perspective. Of the many recent studies concentrating on Weimar Berlin, Richard Bodek's study on Agit-prop theatre in the city's working-class districts is almost unique in having focused on uniquely proletarian cultural forms found in the city's working-class districts.⁴⁶ Besides fully appreciating the truly localised nature of working-class culture, Bodek also underlined the importance of acknowledging previously marginalised cultural configurations in Weimar society, by inviting comparison between Agit-pop performance and Brecht's epic theatre.

With these observations in mind, the premise of this thesis can be set out as follows: to study those aspects of Weimar Berlin's culture rooted not in the centre and in its institutions, but in its working-class districts, using an approach derived from *Alltagsgeschichte*. It will acknowledge that, while the simplified models of urban development and class structure that Robert Park and Ernest Burgess conceived may *to a limited extent* be applicable to Berlin, these models must also be consciously disregarded, in order to move forwards towards a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of urban development and urban social patterns. Lastly, it will also approach the issues of urban criticism and urban reform in a more considered manner, as opposed to dealing with the oversimplified dichotomies associated with society and progressive urbanism (*Gesellschaft*) versus community and traditional rural idyll (*Gemeinschaft*).

1.5 Notes on theoretical approach and methodology

By opting to pursue a geographical, rather than an exclusively historical or political approach in my investigation, the well-established social and cultural contours of Weimar will be circumvented, allowing new perspectives upon the object of study. The spatial approach that I want to use is best summed up by Henri Lefebvre's assertion that 'the

45. Willi Guttsman, *Workers' culture in Weimar Germany : between tradition and commitment* (New York ; Oxford: Berg, 1990).

46. Bodek, *Proletarian Performance*.

spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space,' and that 'the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.'⁴⁷ My intention here is to put space—specifically the spaces of Weimar Berlin—at the heart of my historical investigation. After all, historical accounts can often be meaningless without being firmly situated within a geographical context. As Tolstoy's biographer Aylmer Maude remarked, 'space is the lord of *War and Peace*, not time.'⁴⁸

There are different facets to the spatial practices of a society, and correspondingly, different characteristics of the spaces it produces. first and foremost—as both Marx and Weber regarded it—the city was a focal point, a marketplace through which capital could flow and accumulate.⁴⁹ Capitalists, according to Marx's law of accumulation, had to invest in their cities in order to increase its capacity to generate more capital. Thus, the economic character of a city is inscribed in its physical structure. David Harvey, who has taken Marx's ideas and applied them specifically to the development and our experience of cities, has observed that:

Capital represents itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image, created as use values to enhance the progressive accumulation of capital. The geographic landscape that results is the crowning glory of past capitalist development.⁵⁰

Furthermore, Harvey points out that the present-day state of the city—a product of past investment—in turn acts 'as barriers to further accumulation.'⁵¹ On this premise then, the streets and cityscapes of Weimar Berlin which I shall be examining were the product of

47. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Nicholson-Smith Donald (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 38.

48. Aylmer Maude, "Introduction," in *War and Peace* (London: The Book Society, 1942), viii.

49. Weber's remarks on the characteristics of the city are elaborated in: Max Weber, *The City*, eds. Don Martindale, and Gertrud Neuwirth (New York: The Free Press, 1958), 80-81. Marx did not discuss cities at length in *Capital*, but did acknowledge 'the cleavage between town and country' upon which the 'economic history of society' is based. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Eden Paul, and Cedar Paul, vol. I & II (Letchworth: Temple Press, 1933), 371-72.

50. David Harvey, *The Urbanisation of Capital*, Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization 2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985), 25.

51. Ibid.

Berlin's peculiarly rapid development during the previous, imperial era. Besides economic influences, the structure and growth of cities is always to some extent dictated by the political or ideological nature of the ruling party holding sway over the it. The classic and oft-quoted example of this idea is Georges-Eugène Haussmann's renovation of Paris under Napoleon III.⁵² Examining the city's spatial structure and architecture can cast light upon how, in the words of Edward Soja 'relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology.'⁵³ Here, Soja draws upon the spatial theories of power as expounded by Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. For example, Foucault's particular interest in studies such as *Discipline and Punish*, was the organisation of spaces into matrices of power, in which people and things could be organised according to function, class, and so on.⁵⁴ Granted, Haussmann's Paris—or Albert Speer's plans for Berlin—are extreme examples of ideology and politics embodied in bricks and mortar, but the same principle of spatial division, partition and function, also operates at the smallest and most mundane levels: in the street markings at traffic intersections, grass lawns in housing estates upon which play is prohibited, and the restriction of musical performances in the public arena.

The first important theoretical models of urbanism, which emerged from the Chicago School of Sociology in the early twentieth century, form the basis of my approach to thinking about urban development, urban class structures, migration patterns and class conflicts in the city. Although many aspects of the Chicago School's assertions—best encapsulated, as we have seen, in Ernest Burgess's concentric ring model of urban social structure—can now appear overly simplistic, their basic tenet that the city should be viewed in a sociological or even ecological sense, as being comprised of a myriad human relationships existing in a continuous state of flux, remains relevant. Robert Park claimed in his 1925 essay *The City*, that the city was neither simply a 'physical entity' nor an 'artificial construction' but a 'body of customs and traditions' and a 'product of [...] human nature.'⁵⁵ Louis Wirth, in *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938), defined the city as a

52. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture : The Growth of a new Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 739-75.

53. Edward W Soja, *Postmodern Geographies : The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, vol. Haymarket series (London: Verso, 1989), 6.

54. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

55. Robert E. Park, "The City," in *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1.

‘relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals.’⁵⁶ Particularly pertinent to my own investigation, Wirth also stressed the continuities between rural and urban society, asserting that ‘to a greater or less degree, [...] our [urban] social life bears the imprint of an earlier folk society.’⁵⁷ Later writers, including Manuel Castells, in his book *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), reasserted the individual’s influence alongside the institutional social structures of the city. Urban protest movements, suggested Castells, develop in a number of ways, including through a need to defend ‘cultural identity associated with and organised around a specific territory.’⁵⁸ Here, the spaces of the city become integral to the creation or maintenance of cultural identity: ‘The control over space is a major battle in the historic war between people and the state.’⁵⁹ In short, the city is more than just an ensemble of buildings and spaces; it is also the sum of the myriad human relations and interactions contained within it. The city’s concrete spaces and social relations work upon and respond to each other, while being continually altered and adjusted according to a wealth of socio-economic and political influences.

As I have already stressed, my interest here is on the outskirts, rather than the centre of Berlin. This focus corresponds to the *Alltagsgeschichte* approach to history which I want to adopt where appropriate, best described as a ‘systematic decentralisation’ of the collection and interpretation of materials.⁶⁰ Attempting to recover an alternative image of Berlin—one which existed then at the periphery of the city and exists today at the periphery of academic interest—will require making use of a broad range of literary and visual materials that reach beyond bourgeois and institutional responses to the city. Literary sources used include contemporary fiction by writers from a variety of political standpoints and—alongside the likes of Benjamin, Kracauer and Franz Hessel—lesser-known flâneuristic texts by writers sympathetic to the proletarian cause, travel writers and other commentators, who explored the working-class areas of the city. An array of newspapers, magazines and journals, dealing with everything from popular culture to specialist topics, and taken from a range of political standpoints is also used. Visual sources include, amongst other things, artworks, photographs, postcards, cartoons, and so

56. Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *The Journal of American Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1938): 8.

57. *Ibid.*, 3.

58. Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: a Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), xviii.

59. *Ibid.*, 70.

60. Eley, “Foreword,” ix-ix.

on. This thesis is, at its heart, an art-historical enquiry, and the oeuvres of several artists who preoccupied themselves with working-class subject matter will play a central role in my visual sources. Furthermore, historical maps have constituted a particularly important means of reconstructing the changing spatial configurations of the city.

Within the materials uncovered, I have remained alert for two very specific characteristics. first, I have been interested in representations of Berlin which—whether consciously through means of satire, or unconsciously—comment on the contradictory or illusory urban character of Berlin, often revealing a dialectical relationship between the city’s urban and rural spaces. Secondly, following a Foucauldian path of enquiry, I have looked for evidence of structures of power and hierarchy, mapped out in urban space, as a means of establishing the socio-political nature of space and the fundamental distinctions between urban centre and urban periphery. I have used these two features to measure the capacity for and extent of an autonomous proletarian culture in the city, and the pressures it came under from a dominant bourgeois culture.

My choice in restricting my investigations to Berlin, rather than German cities in the Weimar Republic in general, has been made with the intention of producing a series of qualitative conclusions, while avoiding any temptation to make generalisations of cultural character based on geographic location. If I am to emphasise the local character which defined urban working-class culture, then I must be prepared to accept that only in the broadest sense will my findings here be applicable to Weimar Germany’s other major metropolitan centres. Few cities in modern history have created such a sequence of fascinating social spaces as Berlin has done over the last century and a half. The city bore witness to three distinctly different regimes—rapidly expanding imperial empire, socialist republic, fascist dictatorship—followed by its division into western democratic and Soviet communist factions, and later reunification. On historic maps of Berlin, and even in many spaces of the present-day city, these successive regimes and their ideological perspectives are visible, embodied in bricks and mortar, and can be read by the historian-geographer, much as a field archeologist might read a soil core sample.

My decision to focus exclusively on the period 1924–1930, the so-called period of relative stability in the Weimar Republic, is based predominantly on the fact that these years saw an unprecedented burst of activity in city building and organising, not just in Berlin, but

across the Republic. I have also chosen this specific period because of its perceived status as a critical cultural turning point—a period of transition from the earlier revolutionary, expressionist aesthetic, to a more objective, rationalised perspective. By focussing on the years 1924 to 1930, and the so-called New Objectivity, or *Neue Sachlichkeit*, I have not entirely disregarded the earlier years of Expressionism. Though my focus is not the expressionist aesthetic in the artistic sense, my intention in chapter two, which deals with Berlin's rapid urban and industrial development from the years 1870 to 1914, is to convey something of what might be termed an expressionist urban aesthetic, or approach to urbanism, which was characterised by a certain degree of disorder and instinctual city-building, and which contrasted strongly with the rationalised urban planning approach which dominated from 1925.

In chapter three, I examine the *Neue Sachlichkeit* urban landscape, and in particular those representations of the industrialised proletarian districts of Berlin. I focus my attention primarily on one artist, Gustav Wunderwald, who repeatedly painted the factories and tenement blocks of areas such as Wedding, Moabit, Prenzlauer Berg and Spandau. I use this exercise as a means of uncovering the historical conditions under which Berlin's working-class districts were created, and argue that these urban spaces were deeply contradictory and complex. Using the streets and buildings captured in Wunderwald's paintings, I argue that these were spaces of change and non-change; heavily built-up areas which were, at the same time, often fragmented and incomplete. I also compare Wunderwald's paintings to those by other urban landscape artists of the time, in order to better understanding the *Neue Sachlichkeit* term.

Chapter four concerns itself with the relation between urban space and cultural traditions and identity. I set out the case for an alternative view of Berlin as a 'rural' city, arguing that it retained a pre-urban character at odds with its *Weltstadt* aspirations. Working-class culture was largely derived from pastoral traditions that were imported into the city by immigrant labourers from the rural hinterlands. These cultural forms and traditions were recorded in the works of artists, writers and photographers, and retold in eyewitness accounts, and demonstrate how aspects of rural tradition persisted in an urban context in twenties Berlin.

Chapter five looks in detail at two artists who were consistently preoccupied with the proletariat and proletarian culture throughout the 1920s in Berlin: Hans Baluschek and Otto Nagel. In the first part I outline the contrasting biographical history and political orientation of each artist, the former a Social Democrat, the latter a Communist. In the second section I set out to analyse and compare similar works by the two artists, highlighting the different spaces and uses of space each artist employed. In the last section, I explore the notion of ‘authenticity’ with regard to both artist’s approaches to the production and reception of their works, and conclude that the geographies of artistic conception and exhibition were fundamental contributors to the political legitimacy of the artist and his or her artwork.

Chapter six shifts the focus to architecture, and argues that the bias of historians towards the international style of avant-garde architecture distorts the true picture of Germany’s *Neues Bauen* programme. Taking Berlin’s working-class district of Wedding as my case study, I show that the city’s house building programme was initially characterised by a rich variety of architectural styles and forms that mirrored the wide range of political viewpoints on housing reform found in Weimar Germany. I go on to explain in detail how 1929 saw a crucial turning point in the *Neues Bauen* programme, in which the earlier diversity in housing style and form was superseded by an increasingly homogeneous international style of architecture. By focussing on the spatial qualities of the new housing projects, I argue that the realities of the *Neues Bauen* programme fell far short of public expectations, which were shaped by its press coverage and advocacy by leading architects and critics.

The final chapter attempts to pull the threads from the previous chapters together. It describes how working-class identity, formerly rooted in rural tradition, was increasingly threatened by the Social Democrats’ efforts to modernise and rationalise the city. The changes I am concerned with here are physical rather than those made through constitutional measures, and deal with the attempt to directly transform the spaces of the working-class areas of the city, through the construction of new housing estates, parks, transport infrastructures, and so on. This discussion concerns itself specifically with events in Wedding in 1929, and underlines the increasing political schism that had opened up between the Social Democrats and Communist Party.

2. The making of an industrial giant: Berlin 1840–1914

2.1 The industrialisation of Berlin

The complex and heterogeneous urban landscape which Berlin's visitors encountered in the 1920s, was the product of an erratic and remarkable period of industrialisation, stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century. Streets, houses, parks, factories, warehouses, gasometers and railways were all built to encourage an ever-greater circulation and accumulation of capital. According to geographer David Harvey, the history of a city is written in its physical structure, which also implies that 'the geographic landscape [of the city] is the crowning glory of past capitalist development.'¹ It stands to reason then, that if one wants to fully understand visual representations of Berlin created in the 1920s, one must first get to know the earlier historical conditions that helped shape the cityscape in the first place.

Between 1840 and 1914, industrialisation transformed Berlin from a provincial *Residenzstadt* into an ambitious *Weltstadt*.² Throughout the nineteenth century, a burgeoning group of middle-class entrepreneurs and capitalists made their fortunes from an array of new commercial activities, including property development, and the railway, chemical and electrical-engineering industries. flush with profits—some of the time anyway—Berlin's *nouveau riche* built new houses, rental blocks, factories and other commercial premises. In the eyes of many contemporary critics, the new Berlin that was now spreading out beyond the city's historic centre, was characterised by a vulgar eclecticism of architectural styles. In his ironically titled book *Der schönste Stadt der Welt* (The most beautiful City in the World, 1902), Walter Rathenau declared that Berlin had become 'the most parvenu of all cities, and the city of the parvenu.'³ Karl Scheffler described the façades of the new housing blocks that lined Berlin's streets as a product of a 'bleak building trade education, which wants to create the appearance of palaces so as to

1. Harvey, *Urbanisation of Capital*, 25.

2. *Residenzstadt*: seat of royal power. *Weltstadt*: world city. In the mid-nineteenth century, Berlin was royal capital of the Prussian state. By the eve of the first World War, Berlin was the capital of a unified Germany, one of the most powerful nations in the world.

3. 'Dass Berlin der Parvenu der Großstädte und die Großstadt der Parvenu ist'. Rathenau, *Schönste Stadt der Welt*, 15.

show off the commercial credentials of the property.’⁴ Architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg bemoaned the architectural and aesthetic decline of Germany’s cities in the late-nineteenth century. He noted that, in the 1890s, the streets of Germany’s cities had become increasingly bland and unfriendly. ‘From Königsberg to Lindau, from Breslau to Aachen’ stood buildings that were ‘poorer, more awkward and more desperate than the next.’ Unattractive buildings which, lamented Naumburg, were ‘built so substantially and strong that they offered no consoling hope of them collapsing anytime soon.’⁵

2.2 The first industrial revolution, 1840–1870

The first wave of nineteenth-century industrialisation in Germany—frequently referred to by historians as Germany’s first industrial revolution—fuelled Berlin’s growth between 1840 and 1870.⁶ Bismarck’s ‘blood and iron’ policy not only brought together the previously independent states of the German Empire, with Berlin as the capital of the new German nation, but it also led to the large-scale industrialisation of many of its cities, and Berlin in particular. 1837 stands as a defining moment in the story of Berlin’s industrial expansion. In this year, the engineer August Borsig built an iron foundry and factory on Chausseestrasse, outside the city’s customs wall and opposite the Oranienburg Gate, to the north of the city centre.⁷ Borsig spearheaded a burgeoning railway-construction industry in Berlin, building locomotives for the rapidly expanding German rail network. Following Borsig, other railway manufacturers constructed factories along Chausseestrasse, including

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4. ‘Er hat der Fassade, mit Hilfe seiner geknickten Baugewerkschulbildung, einen Schein von Palastähnlichkeit zu verleihen gesucht, um das Handelobjekt nach außen zu empfehlen.’ Karl Scheffler, *Der Architektur der Großstadt* (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1998), 30.
 5. ‘Königsberg bis Lindau, von Breslau bis Aachen stehen tausende und abertausende Kilometer lang diese Bauten da, einer armseliger, ungeschickter und hilfloser als der andere. Sie sind an sich dauerhaft und fest gebaut, und keine Hoffnung tröstet, sie würden doch bald zusammenfallen.’ Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Das Gesicht des deutschen Hauses* (Munich: Georg D.W. Callwey Verlag, 1929), 26-27.
 6. Mommsen makes a distinction between Germany’s first and second industrial revolutions in: Wolfgang J Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918 : Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (London: Arnold, 1995), 104. Though a history of the city’s railway industry, *Berlin und seine Eisenbahnen* (1896) provides a thorough and well-illustrated account of Berlin’s nineteenth-century industrial development: Königlich Preussischen Ministers der Öffentlichen Arbeiten, ed. *Berlin und seine Eisenbahnen 1846–1896*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Ästhetik und Kommunikation, 1982), 19.
 7. Rheinmetall-Borsig A.G., ed., *Deutscher Maschinenbau 1837–1937 : Im Spiegel des Werkes Borsig* (Berlin: Elsner, 1937), 15.

Franz Egells and Friedrich Wöhlert. Contemporary observers dubbed this embryonic landscape of factories, foundries and smokestacks as the *Feuerland* (fireland). In his 1861 guide to the city, Robert Springer described the *Feuerland* as a place where:

the pharaohs of industry have built innumerable obelisks, which impregnate the air with coal smoke; everywhere here one can smell soot and iron, and hear the pounding of the machines and the crack of the blacksmith's hammers.⁸

Not only did the construction of the rail network and rolling stock constitute a massive industry in itself, but the ability to transport goods by rail more effectively than had hitherto been possible by road and canal, added further impetus to economic growth.⁹ The first stretch of railway line in Berlin opened in the Autumn of 1838, a 26-kilometre stretch between the city and nearby Potsdam.¹⁰ Adolf Menzel painted a prospect of the new railway in his 1847 work *Die Berlin-Potsdamer Eisenbahn* (The Berlin to Potsdam Railway). The *Ringbahn* line, a 36-kilometre long circular route surrounding Berlin, played a far more important role in Berlin's industrial development. Built between 1867 and 1877, the *Ringbahn* encircled the city like a steel girdle, running through the predominantly rural landscape surrounding Berlin, and encouraging industrial development along its path.¹¹ In the years following its completion, an array of factories, goods storage depots, power stations, coal yards and gas storage facilities clustered beside the *Ringbahn* and its stations.

Like the railway lines themselves, the city's early industrial areas and accompanying workers' housing grew up in a distinctly ad-hoc fashion. As early as the 1850s, the city's authorities recognised the need to impose some sort of regulation on the new urban developments spilling out beyond the 1735 customs wall that still encircled the historic

8. 'Das Oranienburger Thor grenzt an jene Stadtteil, den der Berliner das „Feuerland“ nennt, wo der Pharaon der Industrie die unzähligen Obelisken erbaut hat, welche die Luft mit Kohlenqualm schwängern; hier riecht man überall Ruß und Eisen, und hört das Pochen der Maschinen und den Schlag der Schmiedehämmer.' Springer, *Berlin*, 30.

9. Conrad Matschoss, *Ein Jahrhundert deutscher Maschinenbau : Von der mechanischen Werkstätte bis zur deutschen Maschinenfabrik 1819–1919*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1922), 50.

10. Königlich Preussischen Ministers der Öffentlichen Arbeiten, *Berlin und seine Eisenbahnen 1846–1896*, 143.

11. *Ibid.*, 304-13.

city centre. The responsibility for urban development fell to the *Baupolizei* (Municipal Building Department) a function of the city's *Polizeipräsidium* (Police Department). Their responsibilities involved authorising new streets and building plots, and ensuring a certain level of consistency in building heights and appearances. The *Baupolizei* assigned James Hobrecht, a young engineer whose expertise lay in drainage and sewerage systems, with the task of creating a blueprint for Berlin's urban expansion. Hobrecht published his proposals in 1862, which optimistically intended to accommodate a century's worth of future urban expansion, and consisted of regular grids of streets extending up to two miles away from the existing edges of the city. Hobrecht's plan was clearly indebted by Baron Haussmann's contemporaneous scheme for the centre of Paris, with Hobrecht including long, straight boulevards, grand squares, and radiating grids of rectangular street blocks in his designs. Unlike the new designs for Paris however, Hobrecht's plan for Berlin did not demand any demolition work. Existing towns and villages were incorporated into, rather than eradicated from the new urban structure. Hobrecht broke down his plan into fifteen separate zones, each of which had its own large-scale map that detailed individual building plots on every street of the proposed new urban area.

Hobrecht's plan acted more as a framework than a concrete proposal, and was only fully realised in the area around Nollendorfplatz to the south of the existing city. But it did have a profound influence on the shape of Berlin's development over the course of the next forty years. The districts of Wedding and Prenzlauer Berg to the north, Lichtenberg and Friedrichshain to the east, and Neukölln and Schöneberg to the south, all owed much of their shape and character to Hobrecht's plan. These neighbourhoods were dominated by *Mietskasernen* (literally, tenement barracks), and colloquially referred to by later generations of Berliners as a *Steinerne Meer* (stone sea).¹² Berlin's tenement districts have long been associated with Hobrecht's plans, largely thanks to the architectural critic Werner Hegemann and his 1930 book *Das steinerne Berlin* (Stone Berlin), which savagely attacked Hobrecht and the *Mietskasernen*. Hegemann was damning in his verdict, accusing Hobrecht and the Prussian government of engaging in 'foolish acts' through their 'petty and more or less self-serving aims' which ultimately wreaked 'significant and irremediable damage' upon the city.¹³ The unusually large blocks that characterised Hobrecht's street

12. Hans Ostwald, *Das galante Berlin* (Berlin: Hermann Klemm, 1928), 346; "Berliner Höfe," *Vorwärts*, November 26, 1925.

13. 'Es waren keine bösen Absichten, sondern wirklich nur „untergeordnete, mehr oder weniger

grids produced individual building plots much deeper than they were wide, setting the physical parameters for future building development. Such was the intensive use of Berlin's building plots for the construction of tenements that Berlin, according to Hegemann, had the most densely populated housing in the world, with an average of 75.9 people per building, compared to 7.89 in London, 20.4 in Manhattan, and 38 in Paris.¹⁴

Hegemann's diatribe has cast a long shadow over subsequent accounts of Berlin's historical development. It is only in recent years that historians' reappraisals of Hobrecht's 1862 plans have challenged Hegemann's 'fallacy' that Hobrecht himself was directly responsible for the *Mietkasernen* and their poor living conditions.¹⁵ Claus Bernet has succinctly summarised these reassessments of Hobrecht's plans, insisting that Hobrecht did not explicitly call for the construction of six-storey tenements, and painting a picture of Hobrecht's proposals as little more than containers which were subsequently exploited by profiteers and capitalists.¹⁶ Moreover, these speculators benefitted from building regulations that Ronald Wiedenhoeft has described as 'overly permissive,' consisting 'of a patchwork of preventative measures designed basically to limit the degree of abuse.'¹⁷ Between 1860 and 1914, the emerging social stratum of middle-class entrepreneurs took advantage of the newly commodified land which Hobrecht's plan had created, hoping to make handsome profits from buying up and developing real estate. Ernst Bruch, one of Berlin's early campaigners for housing reform, commented in 1872 on the transformations being wrought upon the land market in Berlin. He pointed to the German economist Étienne Laspeyres's observation that every commodity extracted directly from nature,

selbstsüchtige Zwecke", welche die preußische Regierung bei diesem, ihren größten Schildbürgerstreiche verfolgte. Sie fand sich in den Anmaßungen ihrer eigenen Paragraphen-Netze gefangen, und die kleinen Kniffe, durch die sie sich frei zu machen suchte, waren es, die großen und unheilbaren Schaden anrichten.' Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin : Geschichte der grössten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (Berlin: Verlag von Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1930), 297.

14. Ibid., 468. The layout of a typical tenement block is described in detail later in this chapter.

15. Claus Bernet, "The 'Hobrecht Plan' (1862) and Berlin's urban structure," *Urban History* 31, no. 3 (2004): 417.

16. Ibid., 404, 416.

17. Wiedenhoeft, *Berlin's Housing Revolution*, 23.

inevitably sees an increase in its value.¹⁸ Land and property prices in Berlin increased significantly from the late 1860s onwards, a product of the commodification of land by Hobrecht's Plan.

Friedrich Kaiser's circa 1875 painting *Berlin im Bauieber der Gründerjahre* (Berlin in the Building Fever of the early Years of the German Empire) captures the energy and activity that accompanied the first boom in Berlin's construction industry (fig. 2). Kaiser described a scene of frenzied building activity on the outskirts of Berlin, in which scores of tenement blocks were under construction. The street in question, Grenadierstrasse (now Almstadtstrasse) was situated immediately north of the city's historic centre, within the area colloquially known as the *Scheunenviertel*.¹⁹ The *Scheunenviertel* was one of Berlin's first tenement districts, which very rapidly degenerated into a maze of slums, inhabited by a diverse mixture of immigrants, Jewish settlers and petty criminals, and rife with poverty and prostitution. In Kaiser's painting, several phases of building are shown. In the background, a row of completed blocks recedes into the distance. In the middle-ground stands a row of nearly completed blocks covered in scaffolding. Finally, in the foreground, the foundations and walls of new housing blocks are being laid. The signs of furious building activity can be seen all around. To the left of the composition, ramshackle builders' huts lean against a finished tenement, while in the foreground a pile of bricks sits alongside a discarded brick carrier. The gesticulations of the men driving on horses in the foreground suggests an immediacy mirrored in the activity across the scene.

18. Ernst Bruch, "Wohnungsnoth und Hülfe," in *Städtisches Jahrbuch für Volkswirtschaft und Statistik*, ed. Statistisches Bureau der Stadt (Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1872), 31.

19. Christian Böttger, et al., *Lexikon Alle Berliner Straßen und Plätze : Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Hans-Jurgen Mende (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben GmbH / Edition Luisenstadt, 1998). Kaiser's painting is referred to as *Bau der Grenadierstrasse* in: Rolf Bothe, ed., *Stadtbilder : Berlin in der Malerei vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Berlin Museum, 1987), 176.

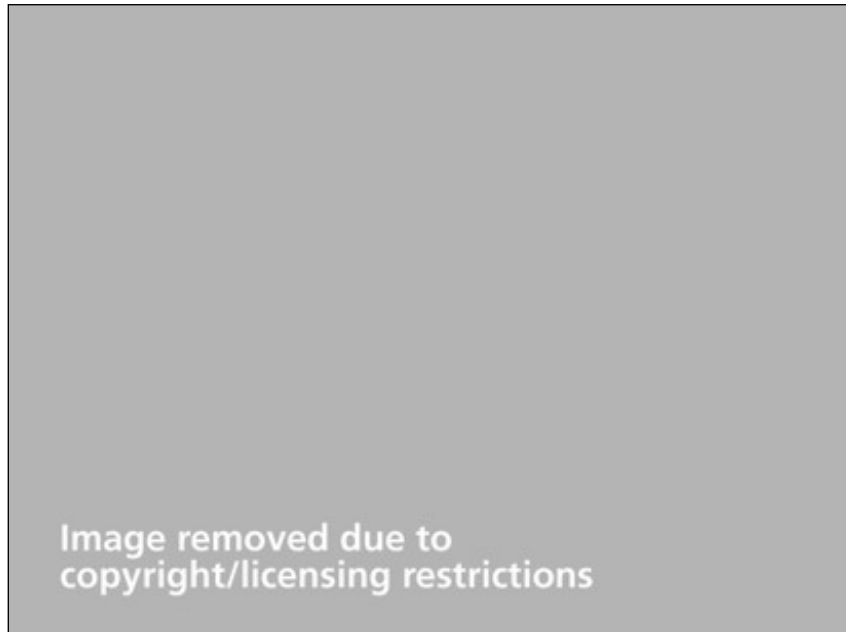


Figure 2: Friedrich Kaiser, *Berlin im Baufieber der Gründerjahre*, c.1875.
Oil on canvas, Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

2.3 The *Gründerkrise* and subsequent economic uncertainties

The passage of unprecedented urban development which Kaiser's painting captured was, however, short-lived. The global economic crash of 1873 had a profound effect on Berlin and its industry, precipitating a long period of economic uncertainty—known as the *Gründerkrise*—across the whole of Germany.²⁰ The economic collapse was not helped by a declining demand for new investment in the now well-established rail network. The pace of railway construction slowed after German unification in 1871. In 1870 railway construction accounted for a quarter of the country's annual net investment, but by 1885 this figure had fallen to roughly an eighth.²¹ The German economy continued to lie in the doldrums for much of the 1880s, before finally being revived in the 1890s by the emerging electrical-engineering industry. And there were further intermittent periods of difficulty for the German economy in the first years of the twentieth century, before it rallied once more in the years leading up to the first World War. The fluctuating economic conditions

20. An insightful contemporary account of the 1873 crash, and its effects on the economy in Berlin, can be found in: Henry Vizetelly, *Berlin under the new Empire : Its Institutions, Inhabitants, Industry, Monuments, Museums, Social Life, Manners and Amusements*, vol. II (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1879), 193-220.

21. *Ibid.*, 225. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), 35.

between 1870 and 1914 had a direct impact upon rates of industrial production, which subsequently affected the demand for labourers, immigration levels, housing demand, and the property market.

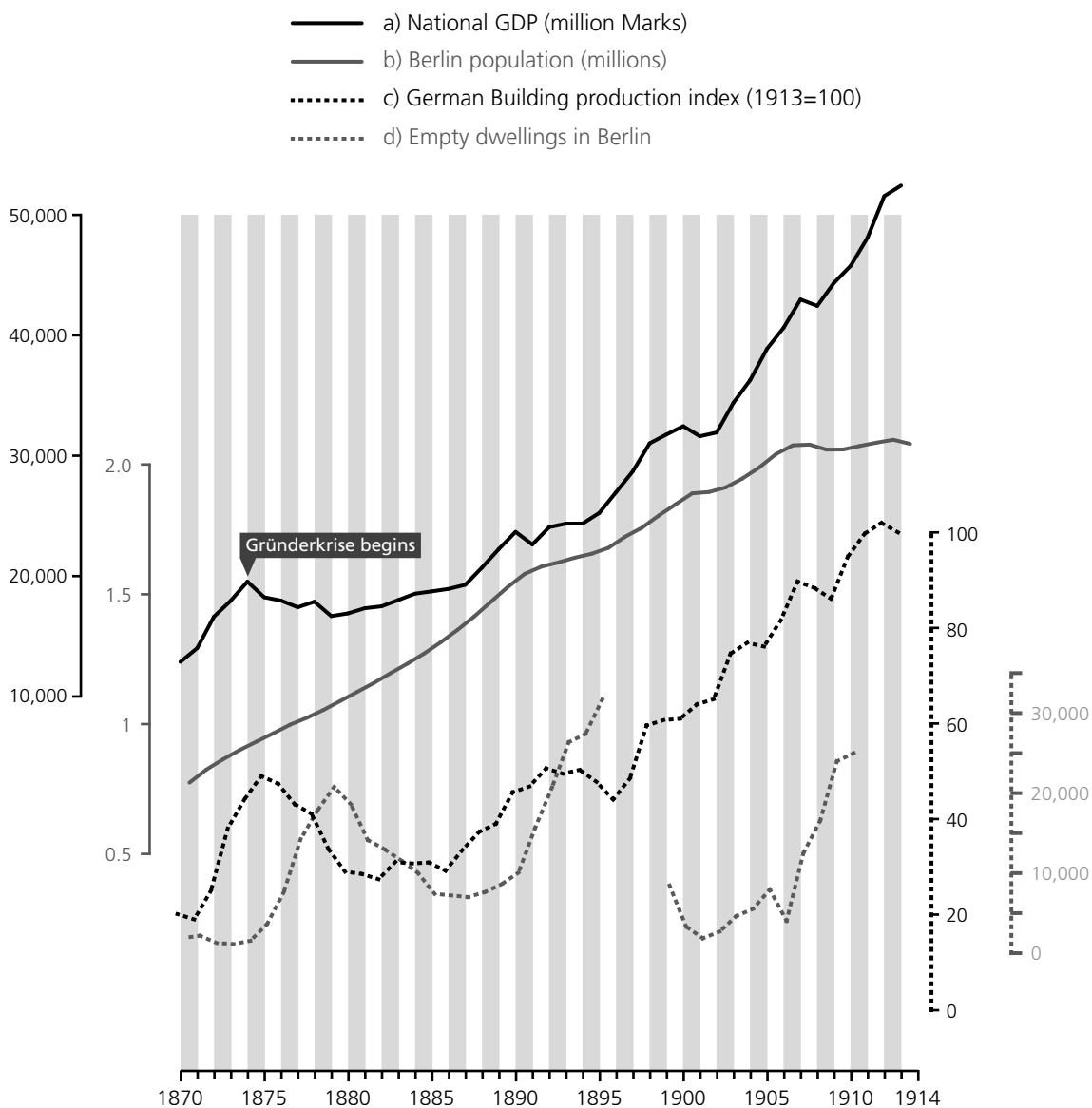


Figure 3: The economics of Berlin's growth.
 Sources: a) Hoffmann, *Wachstum*, 825–826.
 b) Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt*, 124–125; Schwenk, *Stadtentwicklung*, 253
 c) Hoffmann, *Wachstum*, 390–393. d) Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt*, 126–127.

Berlin's migration figures throughout this period mirror the city's (and country's) economic peaks and troughs. Alternating periods of economic growth and stagnation directly affected Berlin's population growth rate (fig. 3, compare lines a and b). Between 1871 and 1875, during which time Berlin's economy boomed and the demand for industrial labour remained strong, 155,000 migrants arrived in Berlin. In the following five

years 1876–1880, this figure dropped to 90,000. By the end of the 1880s, migration reached a new peak, with 185,000 persons arriving in Berlin between 1886 and 1890. But once again, economic uncertainties saw the numbers drop to just 20,000 between 1891 and 1895. In several years—1892, 1894, 1901/02 and 1908/09—more people migrated away from, rather than into Berlin, with the birth rate alone maintaining the city’s growth.²² The dramatic variations in migration figures naturally had a direct effect on housing demand, and the amount of new building activity (fig. 3, compare a and c). The *Mietskasernen* constituted the majority of housing constructed in Berlin in the late nineteenth century. Cheaply built and densely populated, they offered the prospects of handsome profits for land and property owners when the demand for housing and rent rates peaked. Licenses for new building developments in Berlin reached a peak of 3,437 in 1874, before dropping to 1,752 licenses in 1879. This figure steadily rose to a new high of 3,117 in 1889, before falling away again, to 1,780 in 1896.²³

Figure 3 demonstrates how the fluctuating economy and its attendant rises and falls in migration numbers, combined with a two to three-year delay in the completion of new housing stock, to ensure that there perpetually existed a disparity between housing supply and housing demand (compare lines c and d).²⁴ Whenever demand for housing reached a high point, rising land and property prices prompted a new wave of housing construction. But in the two to three years that elapsed between the commencement and completion of a tenement block, demand for housing could easily collapse, leaving builders and property owners with loans to repay and empty apartments not collecting rent. For this reason, property ownership and housing construction were high-risk ventures, with all but six of

22. Emmy Reich, *Der Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin von 1840 – 1910*, vol. 164, Staats- und sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungen (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1912), 164-65.

23. *Ibid.*, 134-35.

24. Richard Tilly, “Cyclical Trends and the Market Response : Long Swings in Urban Development in Germany, 1850–1914,” in *German industry and German industrialisation : essays in German economic and business history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, ed. Robert Lee (London: Routledge, 1991), 164. See also: Nicholas Bullock, and James Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France 1840-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23.

Berlin's seventy land companies falling victim to the 1873 crash.²⁵ But despite the risks and uncertainty, the construction industry remained an important sector in the German economy, and its labourforce grew from 530,000 in 1875 to 1.63 million in 1913.²⁶

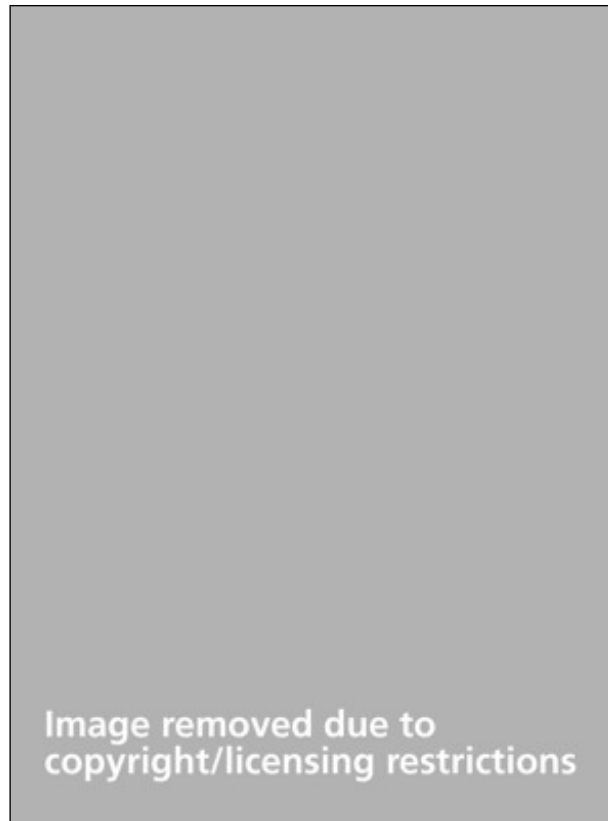


Figure 4: Heinrich Zille, *Arbeiter auf dem Heimweg, Charlottenburg*. Photograph, 1898.
Reproduced from: Heinrich Zille, and Matthias flügge, *Heinrich Zille : Das alte Berlin : Photographien 1890–1910* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2004), plate 24.

Landowners had to content themselves with waiting for an economically expedient time to develop their plots. While they did so, they protected their property by enclosing them with high wooden fences (*Bretterzäune*). These wooden barriers were a ubiquitous sight around the edges of the city throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and stood as an index of the commodification of land and the uncertainties of the economy. A large proportion of Heinrich Zille's photographs and illustrations from this era show the *Bretterzäune* in the background. In one of his most memorable photographs from the turn of the century, three factory workers purposefully stride home after a day at the factory

25. Ibid., 159.

26. Hermann Aubin, and Wolfgang Zorn, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte* vol. II (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1976), 535.

(fig. 4). The low evening sun throws shadows of each man against the wooden fences beside which they walk. By erecting fences around their land, developers hoped to keep out squatters, and stop the property being used as a communal dumping ground. Another possible—and more profitable—use for vacant plots were as storage yards for wood and coal, which could easily be cleared when the financially propitious moment came to commence building.

Hans Baluschek's 1895 drawing *Neue Häuser* (New Housing Blocks) comments quite specifically on the risks and consequences of Berlin's economic downturns, emphasising in particular the arbitrary and precarious qualities of Berlin's house building industry (fig. 5). Baluschek's drawing shows a scene at the edge of the city, where the ambiguous *Vorstadt* dissolves into rural hinterland. The drawing, one of Baluschek's early Berlin works, shows two five-storey tenement blocks adjacent to a builders' yard, a factory, and other dwellings. These buildings occupy a plot which stands isolated in a large expanse of open terrain. In the distance the faint outline of the tenement districts is barely visible. Rolf Bothe rightly described Baluschek's drawing as a visual account of Berlin's geographic extension into the surrounding countryside, but it can reveal considerably more than that in light of the complex economic patterns of urban expansion already discussed.²⁷

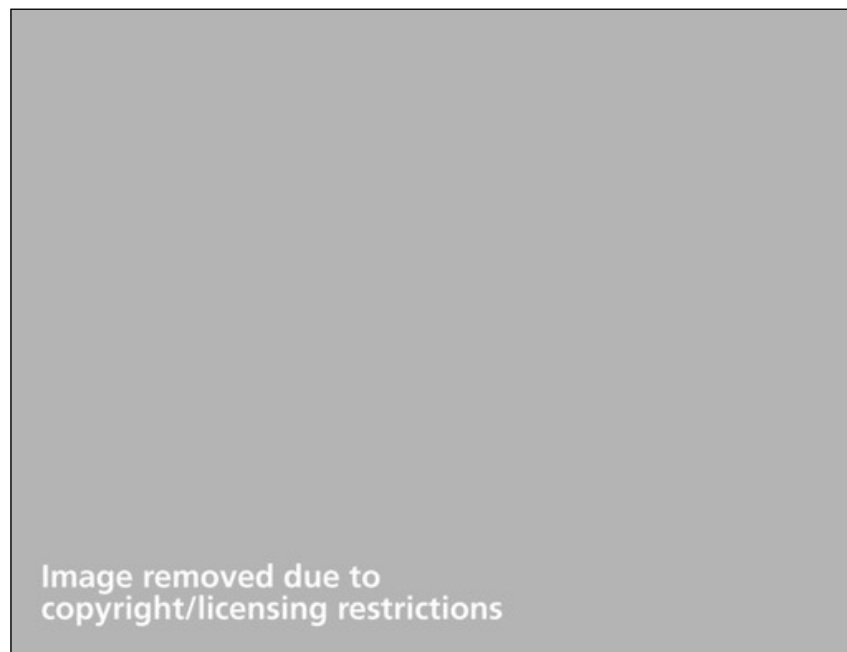


Figure 5: Hans Baluschek, *Neue Häuser*, 1895.
Chalk and watercolour on paper. Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

27. Rolf Bothe, *Stadtbilder*, 192-93.

The two tenement blocks that dominate the scene merit closer attention. The first thing to note is their close proximity, one arranged behind the other. This layout is typical of Berlin's late nineteenth-century *Mietskasernen*, where blocks were stacked one behind the other as closely as the building regulations allowed, in order to squeeze as many paying tenants onto the plot as possible. In 1895, the regulations allowed blocks to stand as little as six metres away from each other.²⁸ Second, upon closer inspection, it is evident that the two blocks are unoccupied; the windows show no sign of habitation, and the entrance is boarded up. Furthermore, the bare trees suggest it is mid-winter, so one might expect to see smoke rising from the chimneys on the blocks. Next to the tenements is a builder's yard, identifiable by the sign outside, which reads 'Fuchs & Beutler, Builders'. Like the tenement blocks, the yard shows little sign of activity. The rear tenement block and the hut in the builder's yard are exactly aligned, directly linking the builders with the new tenement blocks.

The statistical evidence outlined above points to the conclusion that the two housing blocks in Baluschek's drawing arrived on the market at an inopportune moment, during a period of housing oversupply. Baluschek's drawing dates from a period (1895) when there was a slump in housing demand, caused by a significant drop in the numbers of migrants arriving in Berlin in the immediately preceding years. If we assume that Baluschek's drawing shows these blocks as they were in 1895, we can reasonably conclude that the long process of buying the land in question, the application for planning permission, and actual building activity, began towards the beginning of the 1890s, at a time when demand for housing was at a peak, following record immigration numbers in the previous years.²⁹ During the planning and building of the blocks however, this demand dropped away as immigration numbers fell sharply, leading to a glut of housing on the market by the time the blocks were finally completed.³⁰ Baluschek is therefore responding not simply to the physical expansion of the city, but to the precarious nature of economic investment in such expansion.

28. Paul-Friedrich Willert, ed., *Zusammenstellung der für die Anwendung des §110. Abs. 1 BauO Bln wesentlichen früheren Bauordnungsvorschriften aus der Zeit vom 1. Juli 1853 bis zum 30. November 1925* (Berlin: Senators für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, 1975), 72.

29. Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin*, 124-25.

30. Bullock, and Read, *Housing Reform in Germany and France*, 24-25.

2.4 The second industrial revolution, 1890–1914

After the uncertainty of the *Gründerkrise* years, the German economy received a renewed boost with the development of the electrical-engineering industry, which sparked the country's so-called second industrial revolution. The Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (General Electric Company, or AEG) and Siemens dominated the new industry, and both were based in Berlin. Emil Rathenau founded the AEG in order to mass-produce Thomas Edison's electric lamps in 1883.³¹ In 1884 Rathenau acquired a small factory premises in the rear block of a building on Schlegelstrasse, at the heart of an already overcrowded industrial landscape in the north Berlin district of Wedding. Under Rathenau's guidance, the AEG grew at an astonishing rate. In 1887 the company purchased an existing factory site on Ackerstrasse, also in Wedding, followed in 1894 by the acquisition of a much larger site close by on Brunnenstrasse, formerly the district's cattle yard and slaughterhouse. When production commenced on the Ackerstrasse site in 1888, the factory had 11,000 square meters of floor space and employed 120 workers. By 1906, the same premises had been enlarged to 39,100 square metres and accommodated over 6,000 employees.³² By the mid 1920s, the AEG employed over 57,000 workers alone on its Brunnenstrasse premises in Wedding.³³ The AEG's decision to situate so much of its industrial activity in Wedding is explained by Emil Rathenau's biographer Alois Riedler, who described how the company could recruit one hundred workers off the streets of north Berlin on a daily basis with little difficulty.³⁴

Rapid industrialisation—as experienced by the likes of the AEG, its main competitor Siemens, and the locomotive manufacturer Borsig—brought growing profits, but inevitably caused significant logistical problems: increasing levels of production and employee numbers demanded more and more space. In both the first and second waves of Berlin's industrial revolution, companies big and small encountered the challenges of expanding

31. R. R. Mirus, *Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft Berlin : Die Organisation der AEG-Zählerfabrik*, vol. 9, *Musterbetriebe Deutscher Wirtschaft* (Berlin: Organisation Verlagsgesellschaft, 1929), 5.

32. Henning Rogge, *Fabrikwelt um die Jahrhundertwende : am Beispiel der AEG Maschinenfabrik in Berlin-Wedding* (Cologne: DuMont, 1983), 20-21.

33. Franz Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding* (Berlin: Kribe-Verlag, 1924), 97.

34. 'In Berlin N ist es möglich, was sonst in der Welt selten ist, dass an einem Tage mehrer hundert geschulte Arbeiter aufgenommen und eingestellt werden; so groß ist das Angebot von guten Kräften.' Alois Riedler, *Emil Rathenau und das Werden der Großwirtschaft* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1916), 156-57.

their business in an increasingly constrained physical environment. In David Harvey's words, 'spatial structures (transport, warehouses, etc.) are created that themselves act as barriers to further accumulation.'³⁵ When Borsig commenced production on their first site on Chausseestrasse in 1837, there remained ample scope for further development. But over the course of the next four decades, the area rapidly built up with an array of new buildings and facilities.³⁶ The pace of Borsig's growth is evident in two paintings by Karl Biermann, which were commissioned by the company to celebrate their first ten years of production. The first painting depicted the Borsig site on Chausseestrasse, shortly after its opening in 1837. The second painting showed the same scene in 1847. Adolf Eltzner's impression of the same area in 1867 reveals even further the extent to which the area had been transformed, as other companies joined Borsig on Chausseestrasse, and expanded their own operations (fig. 6).³⁷ The solution to the problem of industrial expansion was relocation—or in other words—to 'overcome spatial barriers and to annihilate space with time.'³⁸ Borsig acquired two new sites in Berlin, in Moabit, in 1847 and 1850, in order to expand and diversify operations. By the 1890s however, Borsig's board members accepted the need to relocate away from their existing premises on Chausseestrasse. The company required a new site that could accommodate future expansion, be better organised, and take advantage of an improved transport infrastructure. In 1894, Borsig purchased a tract of land in Tegel, north of Berlin, and in 1898, the company moved production to the new site, while bringing operations to an end on Chausseestrasse.³⁹ Both the AEG and Siemens undertook similar relocation programmes, with the former setting up a major site in Oberschöneweide to the southeast of Berlin in the 1890s, and the latter gradually concentrating their operations on the outskirts of Charlottenburg, at Siemensstadt.⁴⁰

35. Harvey, *Urbanisation of Capital*, 25.

36. See diagrams of the Chausseestrasse site in: Rheinmetall-Borsig A.G., *Deutscher Maschinenbau*, 15, 17, 19, 31.

37. These and other images which chart Berlin's industrial development can be found in: Sabine Beneke, and Hans Ottomeyer, eds., *Die zweite Schöpfung : Bilder der industriellen Welt von 18.Jahrhundert bis die Gegenwart* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2002).

38. Harvey, *Urbanisation of Capital*, 25.

39. Rheinmetall-Borsig A.G., *Deutscher Maschinenbau*, 36-37;

40. Mirus, *AEG Berlin*, 9.; Georg Siemens, *History of the House of Siemens* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1957), 68, 94-95.

However, the fortunes of the likes of the AEG, Siemens and Borsig were not representative of the circumstances in which most companies found themselves in Berlin. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these three companies made up part of the 0.4 percent of German businesses with over fifty employees on their books. In 1892, 95.9 percent of German companies had no more than five employees, or some 59.8 percent of the nation's workforce.⁴¹ Many of these smaller companies also faced the challenges of expanding their enterprise, but had to find other means than costly wholesale relocation to solve their problems. Just as the AEG had done earlier, they had to maximise the space they had, or buy-up nearby or adjoining plots of land wherever possible. Like the AEG's first production premises on Schlegelstrasse in Wedding, many small businesses operated in workshops and units nestled within the tenement blocks, cheek by jowl with residential properties.

41. Hermann Aubin, and Wolfgang Zorn, *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, 533.



Figure 6: Development of the Borsig works on Chausseestrasse in 1837, 1847 and 1867.
Top two paintings by Karl Eduard Biermann. Woodcut by Adolf Eltzner

Borsig's relocation to Tegel left a large hole on Chausseestrasse, but the demands for urban space meant that the old site underwent swift redevelopment in the space of just two years. The old Borsig site was divided up into new plots, with new roads added to the area. These new developments contained a mixture of housing and commercial spaces, rather than industrial premises.⁴² Scenes of demolition and subsequent redevelopment, such as that carried out on Borsig's old site on Chausseestrasse, were not uncommon in and around Berlin.

42. Berliner Adressbuch, 1899.



Figure 7: Heinrich Zille. *Arbeitspause, Abbruch im Scheunenviertel*. c.1910.
Reproduced from: Heinrich Zille, and Matthias flügge, *Heinrich Zille : Das alte Berlin : Photographien 1890–1910* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2004), plate 26.

One photograph taken by Heinrich Zille shows an instance of inner-city redevelopment in early twentieth-century Berlin. *Arbeitspause, Abbruch im Scheunenviertel* (Work Break, Demolition of the *Scheunenviertel*, c.1910), shows us a typical scene from Berlin's turn-of-the-century tenement districts. Zille's photograph shows a tenement neighbourhood being demolished, the very same area already seen in a state of construction in Friedrich Kaiser's painting. In the background of the photograph stands a disorderly array of four- and five-storey tenement blocks (fig. 7). The demolition, or 'creative destruction' of areas that had outlived their use or become physically run-down was—and still is—an important aspect of the organic processes of urban development.⁴³

2.5 The creation of neighbourhood identity in Berlin's working-class districts

Berlin's uneven economic and physical development, combined with its repeated phases of expansion, contraction, demolition and renewal, had a direct effect upon the ways in which community identity forged itself in some of the newer parts of the city. The strongest neighbourhood (*Kiez*) identities developed in the most densely populated and isolated

43. David Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience, Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization 1* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985), 27-28.

tenement quarters of the city, which were usually dominated by factory workers. The tenement neighbourhoods of Wedding, Moabit, Prenzlauer Berg, Lichtenberg and Schöneberg, all developed strong political identities in the late nineteenth century, expressing support for Germany's Social Democratic Party, which had been founded in 1875. The physical character of Berlin's *Kieze* also played an important role in neighbourhood identity. Urban geographer Kevin Lynch has explained how residents rely on the physical characteristics (or 'elements') of their neighbourhood to define its boundaries and focus.⁴⁴ Both Eve Rosenhaft and Pamela Swett, in their respective studies of Berlin's neighbourhood violence in the early thirties, have emphasised how factories, streets and taverns could serve as the focus of neighbourhood identity (what Lynch called 'nodes' and 'landmarks'), and railway lines and highways as their boundaries (Lynch's 'edges' and 'paths').⁴⁵ But what Rosenhaft and Swett fail to make explicit is that many of Berlin's working-class neighbourhoods also formulated their identities in terms of both a physical and an ideological isolation. Many of the working-class neighbourhoods which both authors mention in their respective studies, including the Rote Insel (Red Island) in Schöneberg, the Beusselkiez in Moabit and the area around Kösliner Strasse in Wedding, all stood at the very outskirts of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The original physical identities of these neighbourhoods were not simply established by railway lines or particular factories, but by their position at the very edges of the city, alongside the grassy meadows and sandy wastelands that constituted the terrain surrounding Berlin.

44. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Technology Press, 1960), 47-48.

45. Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?*, 11; Pamela E. Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies: The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28-29.

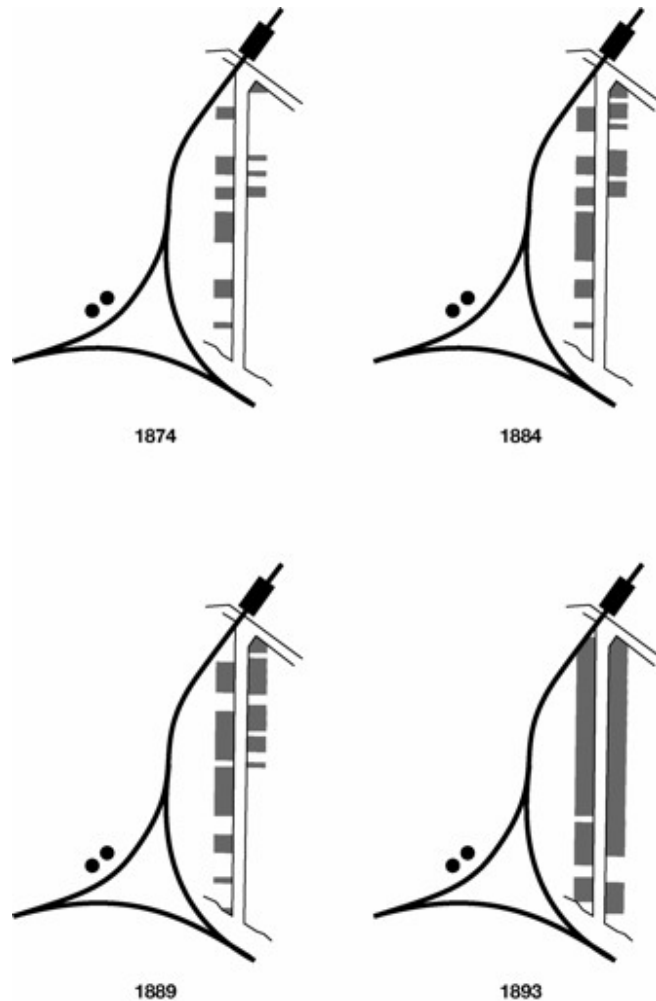


Figure 8: The development of Sedanstrasse, 1874–1893.
Based on data taken from the Berlin Adressbuch.

The particular example of Sedanstrasse, in the Rote Insel neighbourhood in the district of Schöneberg to the south of Berlin, serves as a useful illustrative example. In 1871 a Berlin merchant named Wilhelm Ferdinand Lenz purchased a tract of land to the south of the centre of Berlin, and to the east of the nearby town of Schöneberg. The Berlin *Baupolizei* laid out a new street on the land (Sedanstrasse), lined by a hundred plots, fifty on each side.⁴⁶ In the wake of the 1873 market crash and the *Gründerkrise*, Lenz was unable to develop his land. In 1874, seventy-five of the hundred plots along the street were classified as building sites (*Baustelle*), awaiting development. Ten years later in 1884, sixty-two plots still remained untouched. The fact that only thirteen plots were developed over the space of a decade indicates the protracted and severe nature of the economic

46. Helmut Winz, *Es War in Schöneberg : Aus 700 Jahren Schöneberger Geschichte* (Berlin: Puttkammer, 1964), 101, 111.

uncertainties encountered in Berlin during the *Gründerkrise*. Even by 1893, when the economy had significantly improved, thirteen plots on Sedanstrasse were still building sites.⁴⁷ For the first ten to fifteen years of its existence, Sedanstrasse barely resembled a street, but rather a fragmented line of tenements stretching out into the rural hinterland (fig. 8, map D). A single plot with a front and rear housing block could house a minimum of twenty families, and yet barely one hundred families lived along the entire length of the street in 1878.⁴⁸

The Rote Insel acquired its name from both its geographical character, and its dominant political demographic. In the 1880s, the neighbourhood was considered an island because it stood entirely surrounded by railway lines. To its east and west, ran the almost parallel tracks that terminated at the Potsdamer and Anhalter stations respectively. To the south the Ringbahn enclosed these two parallel lines, and to the north there lay a railway loop and various sidings and goods yards. The red quality of the neighbourhood was political, deriving from the residents' infamous support for the Social Democratic Party during the time of the party's prohibition in the 1880s.⁴⁹ Extending out into the countryside to the south of Berlin, with the affluent suburb of Schöneberg to the west and Prussian military barracks directly to the east (map D), the working-class residents of Sedanstrasse were isolated in both a geographical and an ideological sense. This early vision of Sedanstrasse directly recalls Baluschek's 1895 drawing *Neue Häuser*. Baluschek himself lived on the Rote Insel at around this time, two blocks away from Sedanstrasse.⁵⁰

The peculiar urban quality of Sedanstrasse and the Rote Insel was not unique, and similar configurations of space and working-class identity were scattered all around the outer industrial districts of early twentieth-century Berlin. The working-class district of Wedding in the north of the city is arguably the best known of the city's industrial, proletarian neighbourhoods, and will act as the main area of focus in the following chapters. With a

47. Berliner Adressbuch, 1874, 1884, 1893.

48. Ibid. 1878.

49. Gisela Wenzel, "Die Rote Insel," in *Spurensicherung in Schöneberg 1933*, ed. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Berlin: Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt, 1983).

50. Baluschek lived on Cheruskerstrasse, at around the time he drew *Neue Häuser*: Berliner Adressbuch, 1898.

population of 350,000 in the mid twenties, it was the most-populous district in the city, and home to some of Berlin's biggest industrial sites and tenement complexes. But the district also retained a pastoral quality, where the city met the surrounding countryside.

2.6 The working-class district of Wedding

The location of Wedding within the area of Greater Berlin is shown in map A, while map C shows the extent of development in Wedding at the beginning of the twentieth century. Map E summarises land-use and historical-development patterns in Wedding at the end of the 1920s. The southeastern corner of Wedding adjoined the historic centre of Berlin, and was comprised of a mixture of tenements and factories, most of which had grown up between 1870 and 1914. The northern and western extremities of the district were still dominated by grassy meadows, wooded areas and sandy marshes. What we have here are two Weddings—one old (*alte*), one new—roughly divided from each other by the major thoroughfare Seestrasse. Alte Wedding was part of Berlin's *steinerne Meer*, the working-class tenement districts which surrounded Berlin to the north, east and south. This part of the district also contained numerous industrial complexes. Within this area, the AEG alone employed 57,000 workers. Other major employers in 1920s Wedding included the Bergmann Electricity Works (10,000 workers), Dr. Paul Meyer AG (metalworks, 3,000), Theodor Hildebrand & Sohn (chocolate manufacturers, 2,500), Gebrüder Stollwerk (cake production, 1,500), the Berliner Maschinenbau AG (700 workers) and the Wittler bakery, Berlin's largest, employing 350 workers.⁵¹ Each morning armies of factories labourers and employees took over the streets of Alte Wedding, making their way to work, though you had to be up early to catch them:

The streets in the tenement quarters are already full of people from six or seven in the morning. It is still completely dark, yet these people on the streets have no more time for sleep; they all walk with speed and no-one speaks; it is a strangely silent haste, the only noise being their heels clicking hard against the pavement.⁵²

51. Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, 94-108.

52. 'Die Straßen in der Wohnvierteln sind schon um sechs, um sieben Uhr voll von Menschen. Es ist noch ganz dunkel, aber diese Leute auf den Straßen haben keine Zeit mehr zum Schlafen; sie laufen alle, so rasch es nur geht, sie sprechen nicht einmal dabei, es ist eine merkwürdig stumme Haste und nur die Absätze klappern hart auf das Pflaster...' Eugen Szatmari, *Das Buch von Berlin*,

The factory workers were the first to hit the streets, and an hour later a second wave—this time of salaried employees—set out.⁵³ For those workers who did not work within walking distance from their homes, Berlin's public transport network was at hand to ferry them to their destination. Streetcars, overcrowded with workers, ran north along Müllerstrasse, heading to the Borsig works in Tegel.⁵⁴ These workers had special tickets for use on the streetcars, which were only valid before seven in the morning and after five at night.⁵⁵

Factory and manual labourers accounted for between fifty and sixty percent of the population in Wedding in the 1920s.⁵⁶ The overwhelming majority of the district's 350,000 inhabitants lived in the *Mietskasernen*, most of which had been built between the 1870s and 1914.⁵⁷ The worst streets of the tenement districts were renowned for their drabness and monotony. On her first encounter with Wedding in 1925, Walli Nagel recalled that:

The life in Wedding was for me at first rather bleak. The streets, the people: all were grey in the same way [...] Here the houses appeared to me as gigantic, endless barracks, and I never knew where one house ended and the next began.⁵⁸

Some of the tenement-lined streets appeared more respectable than others, with ornate plasterwork façades and wrought-iron balconies flowing with green foliage and flowers. But outward appearances were deceptive, and frequently obscured much poorer conditions in the *Hinterhäuser* and *Seitenflügel* of the tenements. In 1909 and 1910, a number of British working-men's clubs toured German cities, investigating the working and living conditions of their German counterparts. In Berlin, one party requested their cab driver to

vol. 1, *Was nicht im Baedeker steht* (Munich: R. Piper & Co, 1927), 206-07.

53. *Ibid.*

54. "Reinickendorf wählt die roten Kandidaten!," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 16, 1929.

55. Based on evidence collected by Liang, in interviews with former workers: Hsi-Huey Liang, "Lower-Class Immigrants in Wilhelmine Berlin," *Central European History* 3, no. 1/2 (1970): 100.

56. See figure 59: Leyden, *Groß-Berlin*, 143.

57. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1927* (Berlin: Otto Stollberg & Co, 1927), xv.

58. 'Das Leben am Wedding war für mich in der ersten Zeit irgendwie ernüchternd. Die Straßen, die Menschen, alles hatte das gleiche Grau. [...] Hier wirkten die Häuser auf mich wie große, endlose Kasernen. Nie wusste ich, wo ein Haus zu Ende war und wo das nächste anfang.' Walli Nagel, *Das darfst du nicht!*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1981), 71.

take them around the worst of the city's slum districts. 'At the conclusion of our journey,' recalled one party member, 'nobody remembered passing through them.'⁵⁹ The layout of a typical tenement complex is worth exploring in more detail, in order to reveal the extent of the poor living conditions that lay behind the façade of the building (fig. 54). The dimensions of the plot of land, coupled with municipal building regulations, dictated the layout. The building plots were far deeper than they were wide, allowing developers to build a first block directly overlooking the street, and usually one or two further blocks ranged directly behind it. Building regulations allowed these blocks to be four or five storeys high. Small courtyards (*Hinterhöfe*) with a minimum area of sixty square metres, separated each of the blocks in the complex.⁶⁰ In many instances, side wings (*Seitenflügel*) connected the blocks to each other. In this manner, builders could erect tenement complexes capable of housing scores of families. The largest and most notorious tenement complex in Wedding was situated on Ackerstrasse and known as the *Meyers-Hof*. It contained a total of seven blocks, separated by six internal courtyards (fig. 9).

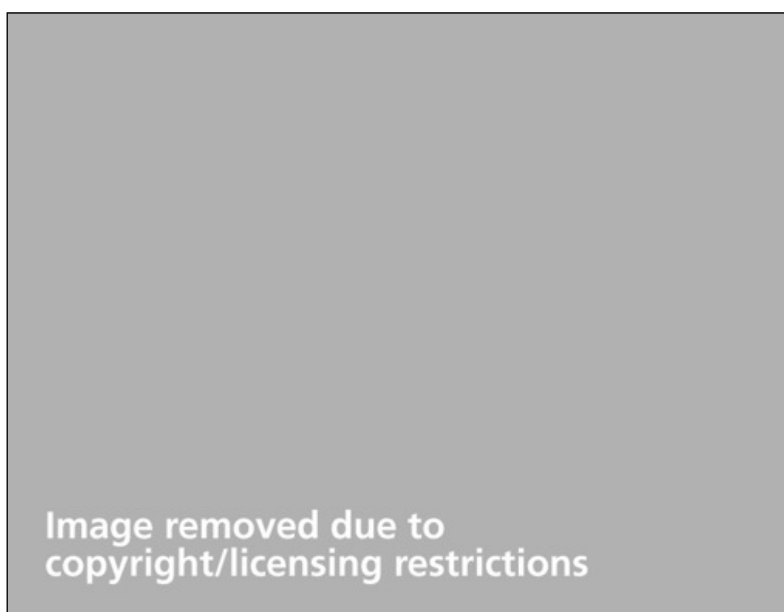


Figure 9: Aerial photograph of the Meyers-Hof tenement complex in Berlin-Wedding.

59. Tariff Reform League, ed. *Reports on Labour and Social Conditions in Germany*, vol. I, II, Working Men's Tours (London: Tariff Reform League, 1910), 28.

60. According to the 1887 building regulations, which remained in force until 1897: Paul-Friedrich Willert, *Bauordnungsvorschriften*, 94.

The built-up nature of the tenement complex meant that those apartments situated in the rear blocks of the complex, and especially those on the ground floor and in the side wings, suffered from a lack of natural light and fresh air. By contrast, the apartments in the front block received far more light and through draft. These variations dictated the class layout of the tenement complex. Affluent, middle-class tenants rented the generously sized apartments in the front block of the complex, while the smaller dwellings further back in the rear blocks and side wings were inhabited by the poorer proletariat. This class configuration explains why many—including the aforementioned working-mens' tours from England—failed to spot the worst conditions in the tenement neighbourhoods, which lay hidden behind smart façades. The rear blocks and side wings of the tenement complex suffered from overcrowding and a lack of basic facilities. In many instances, families lived in unsuitable conditions in the tenement's cellar and attic spaces. One housing report published in 1929 stated that in Wedding, there were instances where up to seventeen people lived in a single, three-room apartment, and up to forty people shared one toilet.⁶¹ Many rooms suffered from the perpetual problem of damp and mildew. One pastor described the similar conditions he encountered in the rear blocks and side wings of the tenements in nearby Moabit:

As you enter, it takes your breath away, stepping into the fumes of the kitchen or living room. Small children make a racket all around (in these conditions you constantly find the most children), and increase the already existing disorder [...] The beds are not made; they never are made. The rumpled covers bristle with dirt. The narrow rooms are full with ransacked odds and ends of furniture. Sometimes the rooms are almost completely empty. Occasionally one finds whole families who have barely a table with a couple of chairs, and let alone a bed, but just a mattress which must lie on the floor.⁶²

61. Schwan, *Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend*, 124, 125.

62. 'Kommt man hinein, so verschlägt es einem fast dem Atem, wenn man in den Dunst der Küche oder des Wohnzimmers tritt. Kleine Kinder lärmen umher (gerade in diesen Verhältnissen findet man auch heute noch die meisten Kinder) und steigern die schon vorhandene Unordnung schier uns Hoffnungslose. [...] Die Betten sind nicht gemacht, sie werden nie gemacht. Die verwülhten Bezüge starren vor Schmutz. Die engen Räume sind vollgepfropft mit plundrigem, auseinandergehendem Hausrat. Manchmal freilich sind sie fast ganz leer. findet man doch gelegentlich Familien, die kaum einen Tisch mit ein paar Stühlen, jedenfalls aber keine Bettstellen



Figure 10: Heinrich Lichte, Sorauer Strasse 27, Cellar dwelling, 1908.
Reproduced from: Johann Friedrich Geist, and Klaus Kürvers, eds.,
Das Berliner Mietshaus 1862–1945 (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1984), 462.

In 1930, the writer Christopher Isherwood lived with the Nowak family in their attic apartment in a tenement block in Kreuzberg. Isherwood, who lasted barely a month in the apartment, after ‘slumming had lost its novelty for him,’ recounted the details in his later life:

This was one of the attic flats, so it overlooked the rooftops and got plenty of daylight, at least. The lower flats stared at each other across the deep pit of the courtyard and their gloom was perpetual. The Nowaks’ chief disadvantage was that the roof of the building leaked and the rain water seeped through the ceiling. There was only one toilet to every four flats, and the Nowaks had to walk down a flight of stairs to reach theirs, unless they preferred to use a bucket in the kitchen. To wash properly—that is to say, not in the kitchen sink— they had to go to the nearest public baths. [...] When the kitchen stove was alight, the flat got smelly and stuffy; when it wasn’t, you shivered. And, no matter what the temperature was, the sink stank. Because of the

besitzen, sondern die Matratzen oder Strohsäcke auf den Fußboden legen müssen.’ Günther D. Dehm, *Proletarische Jugend : Lebensgestaltung und Gedankenwelt der großstädtischen Proletarierjugend*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1930), 93-94.

leaky roof and the overcrowding, the Nowaks had been told by the housing authorities that they mustn't go on living here. Dozens of other families in this district had been told the same thing; but there was nowhere to move to.⁶³

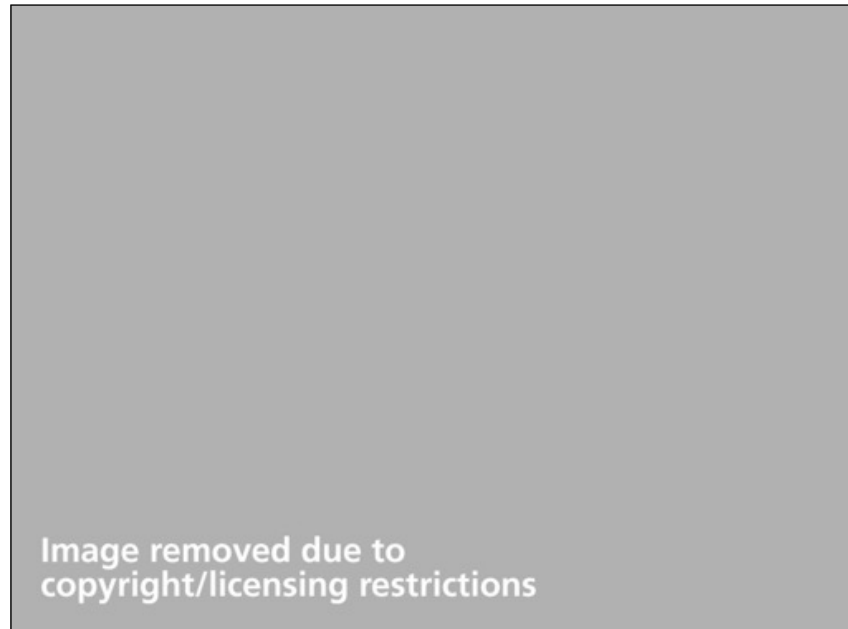


Figure 11: Heinrich Lichte, Rüdersdorfer Strasse 12: Attic Apartment, 1918.
Reproduced from: Johann Friedrich Geist, and Klaus Kürvers, eds.,
Das Berliner Mietshaus 1862–1945 (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1984), 463.

By day the streets of Alte Wedding were a hive of activity, with workers going to and from work, housewives making trips to the local shops and children playing along the pavement. By night however, such areas took on an entirely different feel. With their early starts, most workers were in bed by ten o'clock, leaving the streets dark and deserted. The writer Eugen Szatmari, who helped adapt some of Edgar Allen Poe's short stories for the 1932 horror film *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Sinister Stories), tapped into the irrational fear of the dark—and one might suspect a bourgeois fear of the proletariat—in his description of the tenement districts of Berlin as an underworld (*Unterwelt*):

[...] in the dead of night, these streets assume a completely different appearance, a completely different, wholly changed face. When the first lanterns begin to emit their pallid yellow light, and the playing children have disappeared from the street, when

63. Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 50-51.

the first made-up street girls appear, with their compulsory handbag on their arm and their customary smile on their lips, sashaying through the grey of the gloaming along the indistinct street, then these streets of the north and east transform themselves.⁶⁴

According to Hans Ostwald, the street girls of the working-class districts were a far more opportunistic breed compared to the professional working girls who operated along the northern end of Friedrichstrasse. With their heads uncovered, and still wearing their kitchen aprons, they relied upon drunken workers staggering home from a public house (*Kneipe*), to earn an extra Mark or two.⁶⁵

Naturally, with such a large working-class population, Wedding's political profile was decidedly left-wing. In the 1929 local elections, the SPD and KPD polled thirty and forty percent of the vote respectively.⁶⁶ Political rivalry was intense between the two parties, and furthermore, both had to contend with the growing threat from right-wing groups. Political affiliations and propaganda were highly visible on the streets of old Wedding. In the heart of the district, around streets such as Kösliner Strasse and Gerichtstrasse, the working-class population made their presence felt by hanging red (communist) and black-red-gold (republican) flags from their windows. Political demonstrations and marches were frequently organised by the Communists, and various other politically inflected events such as exhibitions, meetings and agit-prop performances, all took place on a regular basis.⁶⁷

64. 'Beim Einbruch der Nacht bekommen sie und die Straßen, in denen sie stehen, ein ganz anderes Aussehen, ein ganz anderes, vollkommen verändertes Gesicht. Wenn die ersten Laternen ihr fahlgelbes Licht auszustrahlen beginnen, wenn die spielenden Kindern von der Straße verschwinden, wenn die ersten geschminkten Mädchen erscheinen, die mit der unvermeidlichen Handtasche am Arm und mit dem unvermeidlichen Lächeln auf den Lippen durch die im Grau der Dämmerung verschwimmenden Straßen streichen, dann verwandeln sich diese Straßen des Norden und des Ostens.' Szatmari, *Das Buch von Berlin*, 157.

65. Ostwald, *Das galante Berlin*, 449.

66. Erich flatau, "Neue Arbeit! Betrachtungen nach der Berliner Wahl," *Kommunale Blätter der SPD. Berlin* 6, no. 11/12 (1929): 47.

67. Chapter seven describes the political character of Wedding in more detail.

Immediately north of the heart of old Wedding, where Kösliner Strasse and Gerichtstrasse both lay, a very different urban landscape was to be found. At the beginning of the 1920s this area of Wedding, north of Seestrasse, still consisted of wide open expanses of land. Only along Müllerstrasse were there signs of encroaching urban development (map C). The origins of Müllerstrasse, the main thoroughfare running through Wedding out of Berlin to the north, date to 1827. The street acquired its name from the fact that at this time, no less than nineteen windmills could be found dotted along the road.⁶⁸ Right up until the 1870s, the landscape around Müllerstrasse barely changed. The road itself was dotted with rural homesteads and municipal cemeteries. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's *Alte Nazareth-Kirche* (Old Nazareth Church), built between 1832 and 1835, stood for many years in a predominantly rural environment. Beyond the road, the landscape was comprised of a barren and undulating landscape of sanddunes, known as the Rehberge, and dotted with windmills, homesteads and cottages. By the end of the nineteenth century, the open spaces around Müllerstrasse had to increasingly make way for tenement blocks, factories, storage yards, depots and later on, new housing estates. The poet Arno Holz lived in the vicinity of Müllerstrasse in the 1880s. He bemoaned the encroachment of the tenements from the south, lamenting that, at the sight of the 'grey monstrosities on Müllerstrasse, the heart bleeds.'⁶⁹

One noticeable prewar urban development north of Seestrasse was a new municipal park, called the Schillerpark. Joseph Roth described the Schillerpark as a 'surprising gem' in the north of Berlin that looked as if it had been transplanted from the affluent western districts of the city.⁷⁰ When it opened in 1913, the new park stood well beyond the edges of the urban sprawl. By the 1920s the city had begun to encroach around its perimeter. At the northern corner of the park stood a series of garden terraces, which rewarded the climber with a panoramic view south towards the heart of Alte Wedding (fig. 12). Looking south from the terrace, the observer in 1920 could see the park stretching out across the immediate foreground, followed by a band of garden colonies, a churchyard and then finally in the distance, the cliff-like walls of the tenements along Seestrasse and beyond.

68. Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, ed. *Rechts und Links der Panke* (Berlin: Heimat und Werk, 1961), 74.

69. '...beim Anblick der "grauen Ungetüme in der Müllerstrasse das Herz blute..."' Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 76.

70. Joseph Roth, *What I Saw : Reports from Berlin 1920–33*, ed. Michael Bienert (London: Granta Books, 2004), 75.

Roth noted that the park was mainly patronised by the working-class population of Wedding, and was deserted until mothers turned up with their children around mid afternoon.⁷¹ Besides offering a place of play and relaxation, Wedding's ever-resourceful proletarian population found other more practical uses for the park. On warm summer nights, it was used as an open-air dormitory by those living in the stuffy and airless apartments in the tenements.⁷² In the autumn, these same tenement inhabitants collected the fallen leaves off the ground, taking them home to dry and use as fuel for the fire during winter.⁷³ The park was also a popular meeting point for political organisations, thanks to the garden terrace that served as an ideal platform for political speech-making. During the 1920s the communist *Rotfrontkämpferbund* (Red Front fighters League) held meetings in the park.⁷⁴

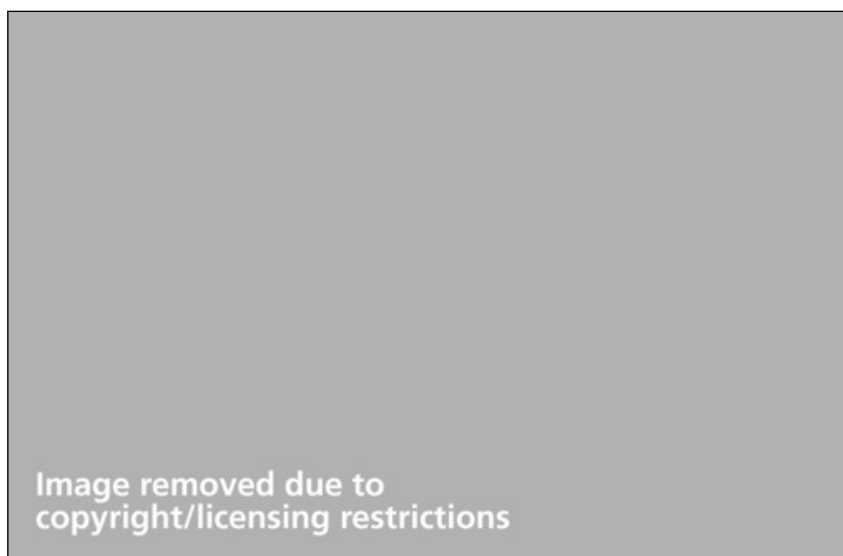


Figure 12: Postcard, The view from the terrace in the Schillerpark, Wedding, circa 1910.

Large colonies comprised of gardens and allotments, a popular preoccupation of the proletariat, took up significant amounts of space in the open areas of northern Wedding. Fritz Rück described these areas as:

71. Ibid., 76.

72. Schwan, *Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend*, 121.

73. Roth, *What I Saw*, 77.

74. Hilde Benjamin, *Georg Benjamin : Eine Biographie* (Leipzig: S Hirzel Verlag, 1982), 176.

land which has fallen behind the times like an island, where garden colonists water their potato beds and lament over the perpetual drought as though they were important farmers, whose prosperity depends on the highs and lows of the weather. In actual fact it is the high and low of the employment agency and welfare office that dictates their lives.⁷⁵

Rück was looking across to the western side of Müllerstrasse, to the so-called African quarter of Wedding where, at the turn of the century, the city authorities had designated the new but as yet undeveloped streets with African names, reflecting Germany's imperial ambitions on the African continent. Here, there existed large swathes of open land that had been taken over by garden colonists. The colonies comprised hundreds of small plots of land, upon which many inhabitants from Wedding's tenements grew vegetables, kept small livestock, and generally retreated to when they wanted to escape the hubbub of urban life. In periods of economic strife and acute housing shortage, the ramshackle huts found in the colonies were used as permanent homes by families who could neither find nor afford lodgings in the tenements.

As map E illustrates, the northwestern end of Wedding, north of Seestrasse, was the site of numerous new urban developments throughout the course of the 1920s. These developments, and their impact upon the landscape and lives of the local proletarian population, are the focus of this thesis. They serve to underline the complexity of this environment, of a *Vorstadt* that was no longer wholly rural, and not yet fully urbanised. The proletarian writer Alexander Graf Stenbock-Fermor visited Müllerstrasse in 1930. He described the landscape he encountered, as he emerged from the underground station at Seestrasse:

75. 'Man sieht aus den Fenster auf ein Gelände, das wie eine Insel hier zurückgeblieben ist, Laubenkolonisten begießen ihre drei Kartoffelbeete und jammern über die anhaltende Dürre, als wären sie richtige Bauern, deren Gedeihen von den Hochs und Tiefs der Witterung abhinge, während es doch in viel größerem Maße das Hoch und Tief des Arbeitsnachweises und der Stempelstelle ist, das ihr Ergehen reguliert.' Fritz Rück, "Am Rande der Großstadt," *Magazin für Alle*, November 1929.

[...] here the city appears to end. I walk through wide, almost rural lowlands. The growing *Weltstadt* cannot entirely blot out the old landscape. [...] On the horizon, factory smokestacks. Elsewhere a small area of woodland. Undulating terrain. Walls. Rubbish dumps. Tracks. White, clean new housing estates. A complicated and disjointed landscape.⁷⁶

The writer Fritz Rück also poetically described the unique landscape that characterised Müllerstrasse, in an article for the *Magazin für Alle* in 1929. He suggested that:

... the rhythm and atmosphere of the city is nevertheless taking effect here in disjointed and cumulative form, before it melts away into innumerable offshoots, into the disintegrating network of gardens, woods, fields and country lanes of the open countryside.⁷⁷

The peculiar rural quality of Berlin's suburbs which writers such as Stenbock-Fermor and Rück observed, will be the focus of later chapters. In the meantime, the focus will return to the built-up areas of Berlin's suburbs, and in particular to Alte Wedding, in order to explore in more detail how one Weimar-era artist responded to the history and complexity of Berlin's industrial urban landscape.

76. 'Auf einmal scheint die Großstadt aufzuhören. Ich gehe durch eine breite, fast ländliche Ebene. Die wachsende Weltstadt kann die Spuren der alten Landschaft nicht ganz verwischen. [...] Am Horizont Fabrikschlote. Irgendwo ein Stück Wald. Gewellte flächen. Mauern. Schutthaufen. Schienen. Weiße, klare neue Siedlungshäuser. Eine verworrene, zerrissene Landschaft.' Stenbock-Fermor, *Deutschland von Unten*, 141.

77. 'Und doch wirkt der Rhythmus und Dunstkreis der Stadt hier noch einmal in zugleich gelöster und geballter Form, bevor er sich in die unzähligen Ausläufer, in das zerrinnende Geflecht der Gärten, Wälder, Felder und Landstraßen des flachen Landes verliert.' Rück, "Am Rande der Großstadt."

3. Gustav Wunderwald and the Neue Sachlichkeit urban landscape

3.1 Introduction

‘Sometimes,’ wrote the aspiring artist Gustav Wunderwald in a letter to a friend in the winter of 1926, ‘I stagger back as if drunk from my wandering through Berlin; there are so many impressions that I have no idea which way to go.’¹ Wunderwald, describing his search for inspiring scenes to paint on the streets of the city, was not the first and by no means the last individual to find themselves overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of Berlin. His description of feeling drunk through sensory overload brings to mind fellow Berliner and sociologist Georg Simmel’s description of the ‘intensification of nervous stimulation’ that the modern city-dweller encountered on the streets of the metropolis.² Most urban inhabitants, argued Simmel, adopted a blasé attitude in order to protect themselves from the excess of sights, sounds and movement encountered in the urban public sphere.³ By contrast, some individuals—like Wunderwald—consciously chose to immerse themselves in the tumult of the big city, wandering around its streets in a state of rapture, just as Baudelaire had done in Paris half a century earlier. On his excursions through Berlin, Wunderwald probably crossed the path of the writer Franz Hessel, who was himself roaming the streets of the German capital at this time. Wunderwald and Hessel were both flâneurs, exploring the nooks and crannies of the city, at a time when Berlin was at the very height of its powers: a culturally diverse melting pot of over four million inhabitants, the third most populous and geographically the largest city in the world.

But Wunderwald was no radical poet who sought out the bustling crowds, nor was he a respected literary figure, admired by the likes of Walter Benjamin and Kurt Tucholsky. When he wrote the above lines to his friend, the theatrical director Wilhelm Schmidtbonn

1. ‘Manchmal komme ich wie besoffen von meinen Wanderung durch Berlin zurück, der Eindrücke sind so viele, daß ich nicht weiß, welches zuerst anfangen.’ Hildegard Reinhardt, ed., *Wilhelm Schmidtbonn und Gustav Wunderwald : Dokumente einer Freundschaft 1908–29* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1980), 86.

2. Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Simmel on Culture*, ed. David Frisby, and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 175.

3. *Ibid.*, 178.

in late 1926, Wunderwald was a stage designer of sound reputation, harbouring a desire to make a name for himself in the art world. Between 1926 and 1929, Wunderwald produced scores of paintings, the majority of which took the streets, houses and factories of Berlin as their subject matter. He steered clear of the historic centre of Berlin and avoided the crowded fashionable areas around Friedrichstrasse and the Kurfürstendamm. Wunderwald preferred instead to concentrate his attentions on the deserted side streets of the city's working-class, industrialised neighbourhoods, principally in Wedding, Moabit and Spandau. Visitors to these districts usually dwelt upon their monotonous appearance. Baedeker's 1923 guide to Berlin dismissed the neighbourhoods in the working-class areas of east Berlin as 'containing little that is worth seeing,' while Eugen Szatmari, in his alternative guide to the city, *What is not in Baedeker*, described the working-class areas as 'dreary workers' quarters [...] with grey, stark and dirty houses.' Stephen Spender recalled interwar Berlin as consisting of 'straight, long, grey, uniform streets' with squares of 'little positive character.'⁴ But these impressions reveal only one side of the story. As many of Wunderwald's paintings attest, these neighbourhoods also offered a richly varied patchwork of buildings and land use, of 'tenement houses, firewalls, advertising hoardings, tenement courtyards, factories' and much more besides.⁵

While Wunderwald's paintings betray the artist's interest in the varied cityscapes of these neighbourhoods, they also largely ignore their human activity. In these scenes, advertising hoardings, factory chimneys and tenement blocks loom over streets almost entirely devoid of people. There is scant evidence of the maelstrom of modernity, of crowds as 'immense reservoir[s] of electrical energy' which Baudelaire described,⁶ or of the 'denser and more intimate' atmosphere that Franz Hessel found in the city's tenement neighbourhoods.⁷ The airless and eerie quiet that pervades Wunderwald's paintings allude to the artist's previous career as a theatrical set painter, and their lack of narrative and human presence makes

4. Karl Baedeker, *Berlin and its Environs* (London: Baedeker, 1923), 49. '...nüchterne Arbeitergegenden [...] mit grauen, kahlen und schmutzigen Häusern.' Szatmari, *Das Buch von Berlin*, 157; Stephen Spender, *World within World* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1951), 126.

5. 'Mietshäusern, Brandgiebeln, Reklameschilden, Hinterhöfen, Fabriken usw.' Paul Westheim, "Gustav Wunderwald," *Das Kunstblatt* 11, no. 1 (1927): 3.

6. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1995), 10.

7. 'Im älteren Berlin wird das Leben nach den Hinter- und Gartenhäusern zu dichter, inniger und macht die Höfe reich [...]' Franz Hessel, "Der Verdächtige," in *Ein flaneur in Berlin* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1984), 8.

them ideal backgrounds in front of which an actor could recite his lines. There is a static quality to his paintings that is further stressed by the muted colour palette often employed in them, and the austere means with which the paint was applied to the canvas (fig. 13).

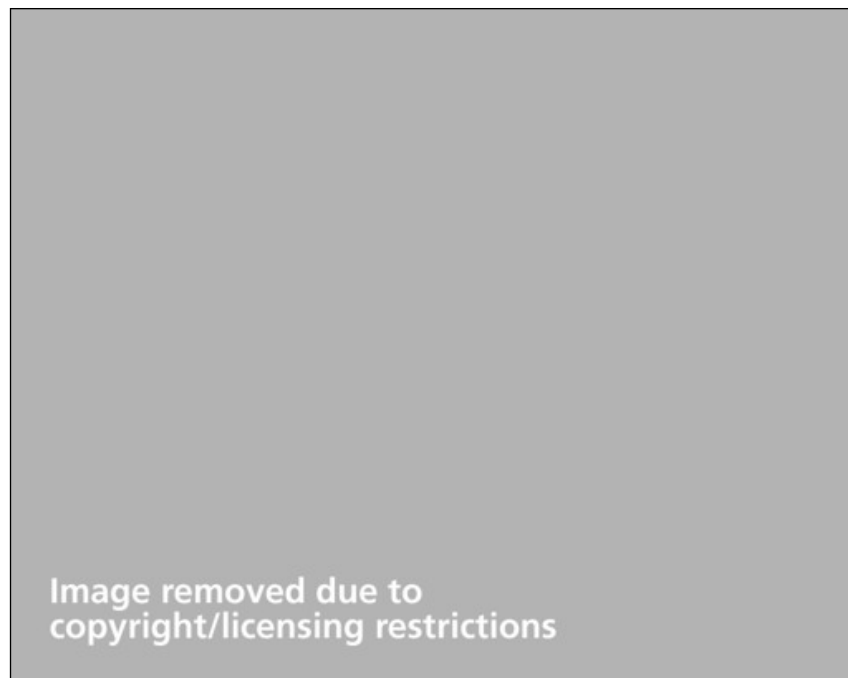


Figure 13: Gustav Wunderwald, *Brücke über die Ackerstrasse*, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 66cm. Berliner Bank AG, Berlin.

Wunderwald's paintings first came to the attention of the wider public in an article by the art critic Paul Westheim, that appeared in the January 1927 edition of the journal *Das Kunstblatt*. Westheim felt strongly that, in Wunderwald, the search for a painter capable of representing the new Berlin had come to an end. Describing the way in which Wunderwald portrayed the 'bare and unprepossessingly rough world' of Berlin's industrial districts, Westheim called the artist's stylistic approach 'unromantic and objective [*sachlich*]'.⁸ And referring to the array of urban motifs in Wunderwald's paintings, Westheim concluded that the artist 'saw them characteristically in a lowly, objective [*sachlich*] sense, with [...] the intimacy of attachment.'⁹ Despite his allusions to the *sachlich* quality of Wunderwald's paintings, Westheim chose not to directly associate the artist with the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) style—in common parlance at the time—and associated with the newest

8. 'Und hat ihm gewiss auch geholfen, diese scheinbar so karge, so reizlos spröde Welt unromantische sachlich zu sehen'. Westheim, "Gustav Wunderwald," 2.

9. 'Er sah sie unpathetisch, sachlich charakteristisch, sah sie [...] mit der Intimität des Zugehörigen.'
Ibid., 4.

works by prominent artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix. Westheim instead emphasised Wunderwald's isolated development, independent of any particular external influence or artistic school. He ventured instead that the trend towards *Sachlichkeit* in contemporary art had probably given Wunderwald the impetus to 'create those images that he always saw but never dared himself to paint.'¹⁰ So, rather than compare Wunderwald to any German contemporaries such as Carl Grossberg or Alexander Kanoldt—both of whom took the built environment as the main subject of their works—Westheim compared Wunderwald to another self-taught painter of urban landscapes, the Parisian Maurice Utrillo.

3.2 Neue Sachlichkeit

Westheim's clarification over Wunderwald's position in relation to Neue Sachlichkeit has not however, prevented the latter's retrospective inclusion by later historians into the Neue Sachlichkeit canon. This has a lot to do with the fact that the original definition of Neue Sachlichkeit has shifted and evolved significantly from its original interpretation, allowing Wunderwald's—and numerous other artists'—subsumption under the term in later years. The Mannheim Kunsthalle curator Gustav Hartlaub is credited with coining the term Neue Sachlichkeit in 1923. Hartlaub used the term in a letter to artists and art critics, setting out his vision for an exhibition of the newest trends in German painting. Using the term *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, Hartlaub declared:

I am interested in bringing together representative works by those artists who over the last ten years have been neither Impressionistically vague nor Expressionistically abstract, neither sensuously superficial nor constructivistically introverted. I want to show those artists who have remained—or who have once more become—avowedly faithful to positive, tangible reality.'¹¹

When Hartlaub's exhibition opened two years later in 1925, the curator suggested that the works on display evinced two distinct tendencies: a left-wing, dubbed *Verism*, characterised by the politically and socially motivated realism produced by the likes of

10. 'Möglich, sogar wahrscheinlich, dass die Betonung der Sachlichkeit in der heutigen Kunst ihn dazu gebracht hat, die Bilder zu gestalten, die er immer sah und zu malen sich nicht getraut hatte.' Ibid.

11. Cited in: Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 9.

George Grosz, Otto Dix and Rudolf Schlichter; and a classical, ‘timeless’ approach, represented by painters such as Georg Schrimpf and Carlo Mense.¹² Hartlaub’s exhibition travelled from Mannheim to other German cities, including Dresden and Berlin, allowing the *Neue Sachlichkeit* term and aesthetic to quickly disseminate amongst artistic circles.

Though he did not explicitly state as much, Hartlaub may well have described this *Sachlichkeit* as new, in order to distinguish it from the *Sachlichkeit* that was already in common currency in architectural circles. The principle of *Sachlichkeit* in architecture predated Hartlaub’s *Sachlichkeit* in the visual arts by at least two decades. In 1901, Herman Muthesius wrote of the need for less ‘style-making’ (*Stilmachen*) in architecture, which had ‘long prevented the sources of an objective (*sachlich*) progress.’ Muthesius reiterated this point in 1903, arguing that the functional architecture of railway stations, steamships and bridges all demonstrated a ‘scientific objectivity’ and a primacy of function over decorative form.¹³ The notion of an architectural *Sachlichkeit* became enshrined in the core values of the *Deutsche Werkbund*, which Muthesius became involved with from 1907. Establishing whether or not these two definitions overlapped would be a perilous task, given their origins in two very different branches of the arts, but certainly from the outset, critics and commentators conflated the two terms. Reviewing Hartlaub’s Mannheim show in *Das Kunstblatt*, Paul Westheim was not critical of the paintings and drawings he saw, but he did reflect that ‘More important perhaps would have been to offer an insight into the corresponding efforts in architecture.’¹⁴ Werkbund member and architectural critic Adolf

12. Gustav Hartlaub, “Introduction to ‘New Objectivity’: German Painting since Expressionism,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, et al. (1995), 492-93.

13. ‘In der Architektur hat das “Stilmachen” lange die Quellen sachlichen Fortschrittes verstopft, in der Nutzkunst nicht minder.’ Hermann Muthesius, “Neues Ornament und neue Kunst,” *Dekorative Kunst* 8 (1901): 362. Also: Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and its Present Condition*, trans. Stanford Anderson, vol. Texts & documents (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 79. For an overview of the turn-of-the-century application of the term *Sachlichkeit* in architectural discourse, see: Harry Francis Mallgrave, “From Realism to *Sachlichkeit*: The Polemics of Architectural Modernity in the 1890s,” in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), 281-321.

14. ‘Wichtiger wäre vielleicht gewesen einen Ausblick zu geben nach den gleichartigen Strebungen in der Architektur.’ Paul Westheim, “Kunst in deutschen Westen: Mannheim: Ausstellung ‘Neue Sachlichkeit,’” *Das Kunstblatt* 9 (1925): 268.

Behne added to these crosscurrents, by reviving the term's architectural application in the mid twenties, as German architects and planners began to embark on an extensive programme of house building activity across the nation.¹⁵

The Neue Sachlichkeit term quickly spread from the enclosed spaces of the art gallery and the rarified atmosphere of artistic criticism, into the public consciousness. Fritz Schmalenbach noted that from 1926, the term took on a growing currency and was 'used in the widest circle as a fashionable formula for a new general attitude of mind and life among the young.'¹⁶ One of the most popular songs in Germany in 1928 declared that 'there is an objectivity in the air!'¹⁷ As the phrase passed into common parlance its meaning evolved, becoming inextricably associated with a rationalised, dehumanised aesthetic, a mindset commonly associated with the radical architects and designers of institutions such as the Bauhaus.¹⁸ In a 1928 edition of *Simplicissimus*, Theodor Heine satirised the architects in Dessau, one of whom he drew as having chopped off his family's ears in his ongoing struggle against ornamentation (fig. 14).¹⁹ In a 1930 edition of the popular magazine *UHU*, cartoonist Walter Trier mocked the Neue Sachlichkeit, showing the inventor of steel-framed furniture drawing up his designs while seated in a comfortable armchair stuffed with cushions. Trier also satirised the Neue Sachlichkeit architect, T-square nailed to his head, drawing up interchangeable plans for country houses, churches, town halls and schools (fig. 15).²⁰

15. For an overview of the architectural debates in early twentieth-century Germany: Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, vol. Oxford history of art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57-72. See chapter six for more on the building activity and *Sachlichkeit* in twenties Berlin. For more on Behne and *Sachlichkeit*: Frederic J Schwartz, "Form follows Fetish : Adolf Behne and the Problem of 'Sachlichkeit'," *Oxford Art Journal* 21, no. 2 (1998): 47-77.

16. Fritz Schmalenbach, "The Term Neue Sachlichkeit," *The Art Bulletin* 22, no. 3 (1940): 163.

17. 'Es liegt in der Luft eine Sachlichkeit.' Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. P.S. Falla (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 88.

18. Jost Hermand, "Unity within Diversity? The History of the Concept 'Neue Sachlichkeit'," in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Keith Bullivant (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

19. Thomas Theodor Heine, "Sachlichkeit!," *Simplicissimus*, 10 September 1928.

20. Christian Ferber, ed., *UHU : Das Magazin der 20er Jahre* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1979), 34-35.



Figure 14: Thomas Theodor Heine, "Sachlichkeit!," *Simplicissimus*, 10 September 1928.

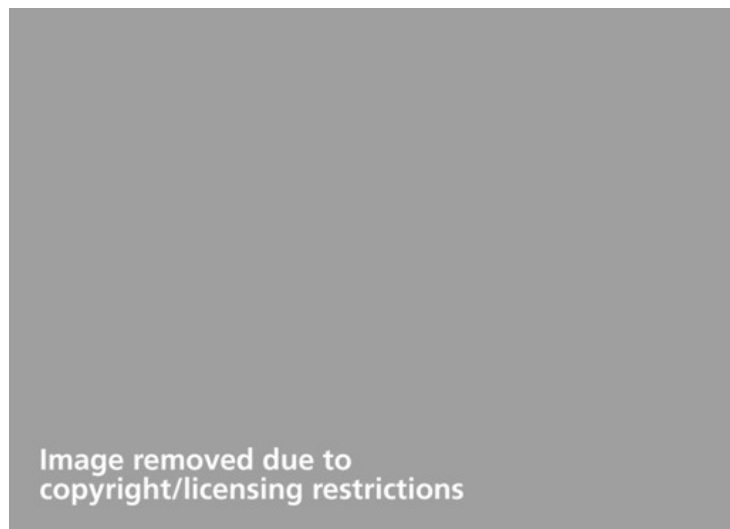


Figure 15: Walter Trier, *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, 1930. Reproduced from: Christian Ferber, ed., *UHU : Das Magazin der 20er Jahre* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1979), 34-35.

By the end of the 1920s, the reconfiguration of Neue Sachlichkeit was complete. Having acquired popular currency, the label disposed of the left-wing politics that characterised the Verist paintings of Grosz, Dix and Schlichter, steering a middle-of-the-road course towards a bourgeois, mass-produced aesthetic based on technological standardisation. The radical voices of the likes of Alfred Kemény, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and

Béla Balázs responded particularly critically to the mutated Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic. Kemény, writing in the communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* specifically identified the Neue Sachlichkeit as a bourgeois form of the visual arts found in the large art exhibitions and salons of Berlin, and characteristic of the ‘relative stabilisation’ (*relativen Stabilisierung*) of Germany. He contrasted Neue Sachlichkeit with a revolutionary brand of Sachlichkeit, characterised by the works of members of the ARBKD (*Association Revolutionärer Bildender Künstler Deutschlands*, German Association of Revolutionary Artists) and other Berlin artists such as Paul Eickmeier.²¹ Ernst Bloch attacked the Neue Sachlichkeit style associated the most recent housing estates, and what he saw as their ‘dreadful emptiness,’ while Benjamin attacked Neue Sachlichkeit’s effects in literature and photography, accusing it of being able to subsume every revolutionary theme for bourgeois consumption.²² Brecht meanwhile, lampooned the followers of the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic in his poem *700 Intellectuals pray to an Oil Tank*, first published in 1929. Balázs, meanwhile, described the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic as being a ‘vision of the Taylorised world [...] the last stage of ‘reification’ (*Verdinglichung*), which Marx had branded the greatest curse of bourgeois capitalism.’²³

Like their Weimar predecessors, later generations of cultural critics and historians have continued to debate the appropriate terms in which to define the Neue Sachlichkeit label. Jost Hermand has written an invaluable and detailed account of the post-war discourses surrounding the term, and rather than restate the entirety of his valuable comments, I will focus on the most salient points related to this discussion. Hermand acknowledged the expansion of the art-historical use of the term, criticising those ‘more liberal scholars [who] have tried again and again to use the term “Neue Sachlichkeit” for all the art of the so-called period of stability between 1923 and 1929 [...] irrespective of the extremely disparate political presuppositions of the individual artists and their work.’²⁴ Hermand was

21. Durus [Alfréd Keményi]. “Zwischen ‘neuer’ und revolutionärer Sachlichkeit,” *Die Rote Fahne*, January 1, 1929.

22. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, vol. 1, Weimar and now (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 201; Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, autobiographical Writing*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1989), 229.

23. Bertolt Brecht, “700 Intellektuelle beten einen Öltank an,” *Simplicissimus*, 11 February 1929. ‘Sie ist als Bild der taylorisierten Welt [...] die letzte Etappe hener “Verdinglichung,” die Karl Marx als den größten fluch des bürgerlichen Kapitalismus bezeichnet hat.’ Béla Balázs, “Sachlichkeit und Sozialismus,” *Die Weltbühne* 24, no. 51 (1928): 917.

24. Hermand, “Unity within Diversity?“, 172.

referring to historians such as Wieland Schmied who, in his own book *Neue Sachlichkeit und Magischer Realismus in Deutschland. 1918–1933* (New Objectivity and Magic Realism in Germany, 1969), outlined a definition of Neue Sachlichkeit which subsumed a far broader range of visual art produced in Germany during the twenties than Hartlaub had included in his original exhibition. Though Schmied agreed with Hartlaub's earlier observation that there was a left and right wing of Neue Sachlichkeit, he expanded the original definition to incorporate numerous other artists and stylistic trends. The 1978 London exhibition *Neue Sachlichkeit and German Realism of the 1920s*, curated by Schmied, reflected this enlarged definition. Besides those artists represented by the original 1925 exhibition (primarily Grosz, Dix, Schlichter, Beckmann, Kanoldt, Mense, Schrimpf), Schmied included constructivist works by Heinrich Hoerle, the uncanny realism of Franz Radziwill and Carl Grossberg and the hyperrealist portraits of Christian Schad. Schmied made such an inclusivity possible by organising German Neue Sachlichkeit into a number of geographic centres, each of which bore, he argued, their own distinct visual approach. Schmied asserted that the left-wing Verists were predominantly based in the urban centres of Berlin, Dresden and Karlsruhe, while the classical wing was largely concentrated in Munich.²⁵ The newly appointed constructivist Neue Sachlichkeit painters (Heinrich Hoerle, Franz Seiwert) were concentrated in Cologne. Not only did Schmied's schema neatly align geographic centres with physical spheres of influence (the magic realists in Bavaria, close to the Italian border, and the constructivists in Cologne, closer to the machine-cubism of the likes of Léger in France), but it also managed to accommodate the problematic Frankfurt-based Beckmann, who neither stylistically, nor geographically sat comfortably alongside the other Neue Sachlichkeit 'schools' and styles.²⁶ Sergiusz Michalski's book, *New Objectivity* (1994) reinforced the notion of regional centres that Schmied had introduced, while opening up the label to incorporate an even larger selection of German artists from the 1920s.²⁷ By including a number of artists including Wunderwald, Hans Baluschek and Franz Lenk into a chapter on Berlin—alongside the better-known names of Grosz, Dix and Schlichter—Michalski's study further underlined the increasingly arbitrary nature of the Neue Sachlichkeit label and its geographic arrangement.²⁸

25. Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 10.

26. *Ibid.*, 18-23.

27. Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity : Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933*, trans. Michael Claridge (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1994).

Besides relying on geographic categories, Schmied also identified several characteristics typical of the Neue Sachlichkeit artist and his or her art. Integral was their feeling of alienation from the world. Unable to understand its interconnections, they were compelled to ‘retreat to the object,’ a withdrawal that resulted, suggested Schmied, merely in banality and ‘rigidity.’²⁹ Michalski also pursued this preoccupation on the part of the Neue Sachlichkeit artist with the object. He suggested that artists were able to ‘condense entire complexes of subjects’ into certain objects, or motifs, driven primarily by aesthetic interests rather than a concern with content or reportage.³⁰ Pursuing the subject matter of the Neue Sachlichkeit artists further, Michalski also arranged his selection of Neue Sachlichkeit art by thematic content. He organised works under a variety of headings, including portraiture, still-life, urban and rural landscape, further consolidating the broad inclusivity that the Neue Sachlichkeit label had now acquired. Michalski arranged Wunderwald’s urban scenes alongside those by Carl Grossberg, Franz Lenk, Franz Radziwill and Karl Hubbuch, observing that, in Neue Sachlichkeit urban landscapes, ‘slightly fairy-tale-like urban veduté predominate, in no small way indebted to [Henri] Rousseau.’³¹

Concomitant with this greater inclusivity which both Schmied and Michalski pursued, is the stripping away of any extreme left and right-wing tendencies in Neue Sachlichkeit art which, Hermand suggested, was an attempt by historians to ‘save the honour’ of Neue Sachlichkeit.³² Indeed, Michalski explicitly stated his desire to disregard the ‘political categorisations of Neue Sachlichkeit.’³³ The result is an art-historical account, bemoaned Hermand in response to Schmied’s 1969 study, that is ‘extremely sterile,’ and in which ‘everything problematical or contradictory is avoided.’³⁴ It is these sorts of politically neutral schemata which have allowed Gustav Wunderwald to be retrospectively incorporated into the Neue Sachlichkeit canon.

28. Ibid., 20.

29. Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, 12.

30. Michalski, *New Objectivity*, 159.

31. I believe Michalski specifically had Wunderwald in mind in this observation: Ibid., 177.

32. Hermand, “Unity within Diversity?”, 173.

33. Michalski, *New Objectivity*, 20.

34. Hermand, “Unity within Diversity?”, 173.

Those art historians who have had the opportunity to study Wunderwald's oeuvre in greater detail, have been less prepared to readily accept the artist as belonging under the Neue Sachlichkeit moniker. Writing in the catalogue for the 1982 exhibition of Wunderwald's work at the Berlinische Gallery in Berlin, Eberhard Roters suggested that there was a clear distinction between Wunderwald and Neue Sachlichkeit urban landscape painters such as Grossberg, Hubbuch and Anton Räderscheidt. The difference came from the fact, argued Roters, that while the Neue Sachlichkeit painters created scenes frozen in a moment of time in a similar fashion to the photographic snapshot, Wunderwald's pictures betray the fact that the artist adhered to the classical principle of painting his scenes *in situ*, brushstroke for brushstroke, the result being that while the Neue Sachlichkeit works displayed a feeling of cold rigidity, in Wunderwald's paintings 'the poetry of their mood quite unexpected comes to the fore.'³⁵ In the same catalogue, Hildegard Reinhardt also insisted that Wunderwald should be considered more as a dedicated realist, rather than a Neue Sachlichkeit painter. Referring to Franz Roh's two Post-Expressionist groupings, the Idyllists and the Verists, Reinhardt thought that Wunderwald, 'with his complete political and social indifference, and his rigorous devotion to detail and factual obsession, established himself somewhere between both camps.'³⁶

Schmied and Michalski's definition of Neue Sachlichkeit, and Roters and Reinhardt's doubts over Wunderwald's appropriateness as a Neue Sachlichkeit artist, were derived from Hartlaub's original definition—and Franz Roh's elaboration—of the term as an art-historical category. Further discussions by historians have revolved around the broader use of the term as a totalising historical concept. In a later essay on Neue Sachlichkeit, Jost Hermand maintained that the term should be understood to represent an entire 'political and socio-economic formation that reflected the industrialisation and urbanisation of

35. 'Wunderwalds Bilder wirken hingegen so, als habe er in seinem Leben keine einzige Fotografie gesehen. Sie sind nach den klassischen Prinzipien an Ort und Stelle vor dem "Modell" Pinselstrich für Pinselstrich erarbeitet, [...] die Poesie ihrer Stimmung kommt ganz unvermutet zum Vorschein.' Hildegard Reinhardt, et al., *Gustav Wunderwald : Gemälde, Handzeichnungen, Bühnenbilder: Eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag des Künstlers* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1982), 11-12.

36. 'Es ist unbestritten, dass Wunderwald mit seiner totalen politischen und sozialen Indifferenz, seiner rigorosen Gegenstandstreue und Tatsachenbesessenheit zwischen den beiden Lagern anzusiedeln ist.' *Ibid.*, 52.

Germany.³⁷ Thus, under *Neue Sachlichkeit* comes the enthusiasm for North American culture, of Taylorism and Jazz music, the Tiller Girls, and Gustav Stresemann's politics. At the core of all these phenomena lies the city. As Hermand noted:

the central space for the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was the city, because city-dwellers had already achieved a positive alienation: the atomisation of an anonymous and impersonal society based on the homogenisation and standardisation of all forms of life.³⁸

The big city, continued Hermand, has seen the 'greatest industrialisation and rationalisation,' and the 'highest level of mobility and a pace of life that corresponded to that mobility.'³⁹ Hermand's description of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as an overly rationalised and organised form of life, a 'white socialism,' and a vanguard of National Socialism, corresponds to the observations made by the likes of Brecht and Benjamin sixty years earlier. The central location of *Neue Sachlichkeit* as the city, in the sense which Hermand expressed it, is a distinctly *external* interpretation of the term, that incorporates the abstract processes of capitalist accumulation. At its most basic material level, this involves the absolute spaces created when land is divided into parcels and exchanged for money. The city becomes dominated by what David Frisby called 'impersonal capital,' in which human interests are displaced by the need to accumulate wealth.⁴⁰ If we *internalise* the concept within the setting of the city, we arrive back to a definition of *Neue Sachlichkeit* that corresponds to Simmel's blasé response to the city, as well as the attitude adopted by Schmalenbach's 'young people' in 1926. In other words, a protective mental mechanism, which acts as a barrier and filter to the external stimuli of urban experience. The city inhabitant 'reacts with his head instead of his heart' suggested Simmel, because 'intellectuality is seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of

37. Jost Hermand, "Neue Sachlichkeit : Ideology, Lifestyle, or Artistic Movement?," in *Dancing on the Volcano: Essays on the Culture of the Weimar Republic*, ed. Thomas W. Kniessche, and Stephen Brockmann (Columbia: Camden House, 1994), 59.

38. *Ibid.*, 61.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Harvey, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, 79; Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, 267-68.

metropolitan life.’ Furthermore, the abstracted market relations found in the city, continued Simmel, mean that purchasers and producers adopt an ‘unmerciful matter-of-factness [*Sachlichkeit*]’ in their transactions.⁴¹

The above discussion has only briefly outlined the extent to which the *Neue Sachlichkeit* term has pervaded discourses on early twentieth-century culture. It operates on a number of levels: artistic, architectural, cultural, political, socio-economic, and can also be defined in both an abstract (material, external) and psychological (spiritual, internal) sense. Externally, in the abstracted workings and economic transactions of the urban centre, and internally as the attitude the modern urban dweller adopts in response to metropolitan life. Are any of these terms compatible? And if they are, does the 1920s German painter of urban landscapes represent the very confluence of the different definitions of the term? Understanding whether Gustav Wunderwald should be regarded as a *Neue Sachlichkeit* painter or not, requires thinking about *Neue Sachlichkeit* in a new way that is capable of resolving the inconsistencies in its definition; or in other words, by bringing the broader socio-economic definition of *Neue Sachlichkeit* to bear upon the present-day scattered art-historical definition, without compromising Hartlaub’s original vision.

In the second half of this chapter I will examine in detail a small selection of Wunderwald’s paintings, analysing them from both a subjective and an objective angle. Subjectively, we can assess them against the fragments of Wunderwald’s biographical details and writings we have at our disposal. Objectively, if we choose those paintings whose precise location we can identify, then we can investigate the historical conditions in which these scenes were created, and how they might have been connected to Wunderwald’s own experiences in Berlin. By comparing these internal and external details, and by seeking to identify points of connection, the aim will be to better understand Wunderwald’s motives, and his position in relation to *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

3.3 Biographical details

Born in Cologne’s industrial suburbs in 1882, the son of a gunsmith, Wunderwald experienced first-hand the modern, industrialised city from a young age. Showing early signs of a proficiency in painting, he began a two-year apprenticeship under the guidance

41. Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 175-76.

of the painter Wilhelm Kuhn.⁴² Wunderwald quickly found his niche in theatrical and stage set design, taking a job as a scenery painter in Gotha in 1899. For the next thirteen years, Wunderwald's skills took him to numerous jobs in a variety of cities. After a year in Gotha, Wunderwald spent four years in Berlin (1900–1904) working at the studio of Georg Hartig and Company, where he specialised in theatrical set painting. Wunderwald spent two of these four years living on Beusselstrasse in Moabit, an industrialised and still-emerging neighbourhood at the fringes of the city. In 1904, the artist moved from Berlin to Stockholm, and then onwards to Düsseldorf, Innsbruck and Freiberg over the next eight years. He returned to Berlin in 1912, where he secured a job as a stage designer at the German Opera House. From this point onwards until his death, Wunderwald remained in Berlin, living on Reichsstrasse in Charlottenburg's West End.⁴³ In 1915, the German military called up Wunderwald, posting him to Macedonia as an infantryman for the duration of the war. Upon his return, the aspiring painter set out to establish himself as an independent artist. Throughout the twenties Wunderwald worked tirelessly at his own self-promotion. His persistence paid off in 1926, when he came to the attention of Berlin gallery owner Karl Nierendorf and the prominent art critic Paul Westheim. In late 1926, seven of Wunderwald's paintings appeared in an exhibition entitled *Das Gesicht von Berlin* (The Face of Berlin) at the Galerie Nierendorf.⁴⁴ To coincide with the exhibition, Westheim wrote a lead article on Wunderwald in his own art journal *Das Kunstblatt*, reproducing several works by the artist. For a few brief years, Wunderwald's urban landscapes began to attract attention in high places. Among those who brought his works were Gustav Böß, then mayor of Berlin, and the screenwriter Hans Kyser.⁴⁵ Wunderwald continued to paint and exhibit until 1934, but without doubt his most prolific phase, and the period in which he produced his very best works, was between 1926 and 1929, when he repeatedly painted scenes from Berlin's industrial areas. He worked as a film colourist for the German film conglomerate Ufa from 1934 until his death in 1945.⁴⁶

42. Hildegard Reinhardt, *Gustav Wunderwald (1882–1945) Untersuchungen zum bildkünstlerischen Gesamtwerk* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1988), 11-16.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Hildegard Reinhardt, *Wilhelm Schmidtbonn und Gustav Wunderwald*, 87-88.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Reinhardt, *Gustav Wunderwald*, 228–29.

3.4 Gustav Wunderwald's Berlin paintings: three examples

The affluent area in which Wunderwald lived from 1912 in the West End of Berlin, was a far cry from the industrial proletarian quarter around Beusselstrasse, where he had lived ten years earlier. In 1912 Reichstrasse stood at the fringes of the city, with open fields and the Grunewald forest stretching out to the west. This vantage point allowed Wunderwald to observe the encroachment of the urban landscape into the surrounding countryside. From his apartment on Reichstrasse, the subject of the first painting I want to examine in detail was just a short walk away. *Miethäuser am Karolingerplatz* (Tenement houses on Karolingerplatz, 1926) illustrates two neighbouring housing developments on a residential square in the relatively new and affluent west end of Berlin (fig. 16). The building on the left is a two-storey, single-family house, with a grand porch and front garden, while the building on the right is a five-storey apartment block spanning two plots and making full use of the depth of the land. The aesthetic contrast between the two housing developments obviously appealed to Wunderwald's sensibility. The difference in scale is further emphasised by the colour employed in the two buildings. The larger housing block appears to almost glow with its yellow tone. Its gaudy, five-storey walls tower over the rather muted lilac shades of the single-storey house.

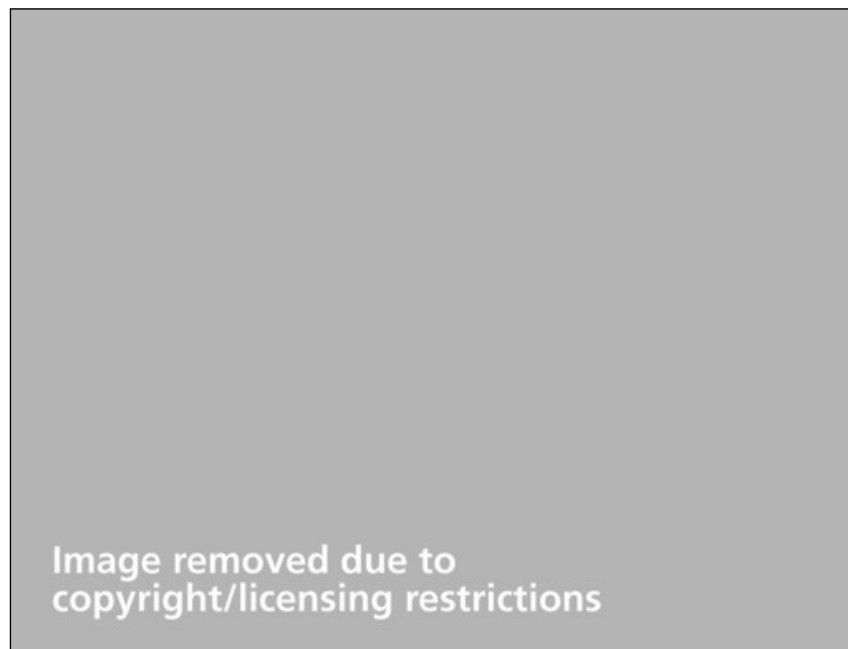


Figure 16: Gustav Wunderwald, *Miethäuser in Berlin (Karolingerplatz)*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 84.5cm. Private Collection, Munich.

We can discover little more, looking at this painting, without unearthing the objective facts and historical development of this scene. Karolingerplatz first appeared on the Berlin map in 1908, standing at the very extremity of Berlin-Charlottenburg's development, close to the Grunewald forest.⁴⁷ The first building activity on the square began in 1913, when the larger housing block in Wunderwald's painting was constructed across two plots (Karolingerplatz 2–3). These two properties each housed fourteen families; ten in each front block (five storeys with two apartments on each floor) and the remaining residents in side wings, extending to the rear of the plot. These two plots remained the only ones on Karolingerplatz developed with multi-storeyed housing; the remainder of the properties were occupied by single-family homes, like the house on the left-hand side of Wunderwald's painting, which stood at Karolingerplatz 4, and was built around 1925. The distinct contrast created by the two properties reflects the lack of strict building regulations enforced by Berlin's authorities, which should have ensured consistent building lines. An academic named Dr. Bennigson owned and resided in the house at Karolingerplatz 4. Bennigson also owned the land behind his house, which extends out of Wunderwald's picture frame to our left, along the adjoining street, Frankenallee. Dr. Bennigson was an aspiring property developer, and in 1927, he began construction of multi-storey housing blocks on his land on Frankenallee, behind his own house. These blocks were completed in 1929. Two years later, Dr. Bennigson moved out of his own house on Karolingerplatz, which was subsequently demolished to make way for a further housing block which connected the existing blocks shown in Wunderwald's painting at Karolingerplatz 2 and 3, with Dr. Bennigson's 1929 blocks around the corner on Frankenallee. The multi-storey housing block in Wunderwald's painting fell victim to the Allied bombing campaign in the Second World War, but Bennigson's later housing block—which replaced his house seen in the painting—remains standing on Karolingerplatz to this day.

Similar waves of construction, demolition and reconstruction—characteristic of Berlin's development from the 1870s and right through into the 1920s—appear in another painting by Wunderwald, this time situated in the industrial district of Wedding in north Berlin. A factory building is the central feature of Wunderwald's painting *Fabrik an der Lindower Strasse* (Factory on Lindower Strasse, 1927), undoubtedly one of the artist's most unassuming, banal works (fig. 17). At the centre of the frame stands the factory building,

47. See the entries for Karolingerplatz: Berliner Adressbuch, 1915-1932.

amongst neighbouring tenement blocks. The factory is set back from the street, and extends behind the tenement to our right. A smokestack beyond the factory spews out black smoke. The space immediately in front of the factory is an open yard, occupied by a couple of huts and a solitary tree. On the street, a lone figure saunters along. A woman stands inside the entrance to a rag-shop on the ground floor of the left-hand tenement. Above the scene hangs a leaden grey sky, penetrated in places by early morning sunlight. Superficially, this painting ticks all the boxes required of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* urban landscape. The scene is shrouded in a veil of deafening silence. It is wholly unremarkable—the complete antithesis of the image of Berlin as a dynamic *Weltstadt*, as a centre of energy and movement. Those urban motifs that Schmied and Michalski draw attention to—such as the smokestack and the tenement block—dominate the scene, but this is no artificially constructed urban landscape, and nor is it shrouded in any mystique that might impel us to call it magical realist. Instead, it is faithfully copied from reality. Situated in the heart of Wedding, Lindower Strasse typified the urban landscape of Berlin's working-class areas.

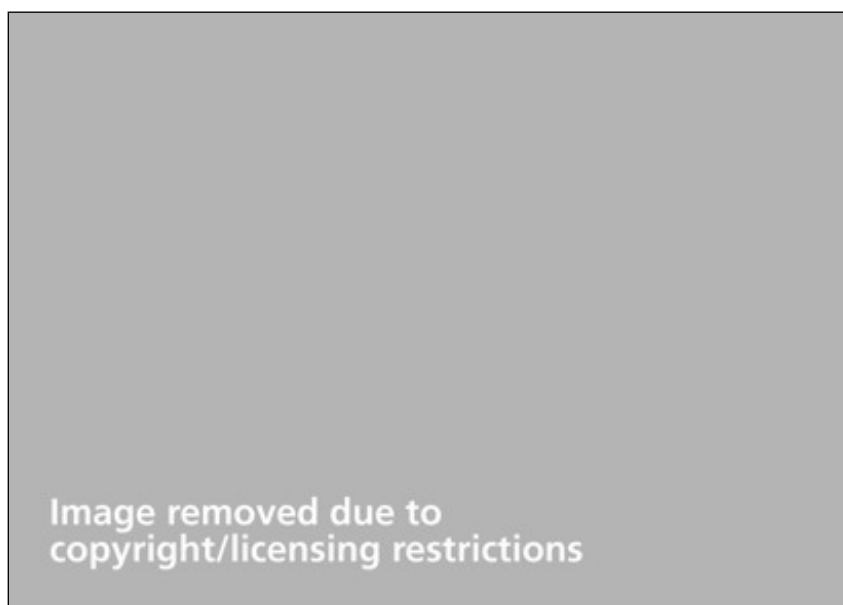


Figure 17: Gustav Wunderwald, *Fabrik an der Lindower Strasse*, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 69.7cm. Galerie Gunzenhauser, Munich.

The first appearance of Lindower Strasse can be found in city planner James Hobrecht's 1862 proposals for the projected expansion of Berlin which outlined this street and the twenty-six individual plots lining it. The street was designated its name two years later,

and by 1871, twenty-one of these plots were undergoing development.⁴⁸ The *Königliche Verbindungsbahnhof* (Royal Railways Consortium) owned plots one to seven, upon which was built Wedding's elevated *Ringbahn* railway station, with commercial premises below the platform at ground level.⁴⁹ A machine-tooling business, Hasse and Company, owned the premises that is the subject of Wunderwald's painting. Hasse purchased the piece of land that can be seen at the centre of Wunderwald's scene—plot 22—in 1873.⁵⁰ The company successfully negotiated the ups and downs of the economy over the following decades, and still operated from these premises when Wunderwald painted a view of their factory in 1927.⁵¹ Hasse's commercial development typified that of many medium-sized enterprises in Berlin between the 1870s and the first World War. Having weathered the economic storms of the *Gründerkrise*, the company began to look for ways to expand their premises in the 1890s. In 1897, Hasse purchased the rear half of plot 20—off to the right of Wunderwald's painting—and in 1899 they purchased plot 21, visible at the right-hand edge of the scene, creating a contiguous stretch of land that afforded them the opportunity to build new, larger factory premises.⁵² Shortly thereafter, Hasse constructed a new factory building which lay at the rear of the three conjoined plots, taking advantage of the enlarged space on offer. It was this factory building which Wunderwald painted in 1927. The factory buildings survived the Second World War and remain standing to this day on Lindowerstrasse in Wedding.

Why did Wunderwald choose to paint this factory on Lindower Strasse over any number of other similar sites across north Berlin? The reason, I think, is because Wunderwald was acutely aware of the historic development of this street. Opposite the factory building in the painting—directly behind us if we situate ourselves at Wunderwald's viewpoint—stood the Wedding train station, a stop on the circular *Ringbahn* which ran through the industrial districts of the city. This stretch of the railway was elevated, allowing the train passenger to look down into Lindower Strasse and the surrounding area when passing through on their journey. Wunderwald painted this scene from the elevated platform of the station. During his first spell in Berlin between 1900 and 1904, Wunderwald lived for two

48. Böttger, et al., *Lexikon Alle Berliner Straßen und Plätze*. (3) 38.

49. See the entry for Lindower Strasse: *Berliner Adressbuch*, 1871.

50. *Ibid.* 1873.

51. *Ibid.* 1927.

52. *Ibid.* 1897-1900.

years on Beusselstrasse in Moabit, which also had a station on the *Ringbahn*, situated just two stops west from Wedding. It is impossible to say with certainty—but it is extremely plausible—that Wunderwald first saw this scene at the beginning of the century, during the time in which Hasse’s new factory buildings were built.

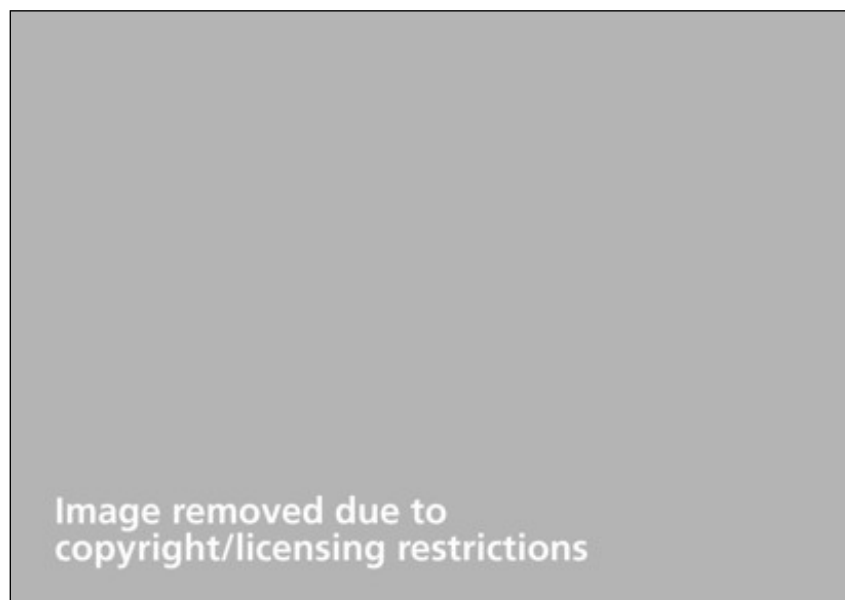


Figure 18: Gustav Wunderwald, *Travemünder Straße*, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 61 x 85cm. Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.

Travemünder Strasse (1927) presents a third example of how Wunderwald captured the dramatic changes wrought in Berlin by urbanisation, through his desire to find aesthetically appealing and intriguing scenes. It evinces the artist’s fascination with specific instances of Berlin’s urbanisation, and exemplifies the artist’s awareness of the stratification of Berlin’s urban development (fig. 18). The painting shows a somewhat haphazardly assembled collection of buildings, in front of which runs a wooden fence, separating the buildings from the street. On the fence, daubed in block letters are the partially obscured words *Lichtspiele Marienbad* (Marienbad Cinema). Two women, dressed for the cold weather, immersed in conversation, stand in front of the painted fence. Their presence on the street provides a sense of scale to the buildings that rise up behind them. These constructions vary in height, shape, colour and architectural detail: a real hodgepodge of urban development. There is something almost Cézannesque in the manner with which Wunderwald has attentively treated the variety of angles and volumes in this painting.

They create an intricate urban topography that clearly appealed to the artist. Furthermore, the decorated surfaces of these buildings—horizontal stripes of ceramic tiles in various alternating colours—clearly provided further incentive for the artist.

But what are we looking at here? In 1927, the buildings in Wunderwald's painting were crowded onto the rear of several deep plots, located on the corner of Travemünder- and Badstrasse in Gesundbrunnen, a working-class neighbourhood in Wedding. Many of the buildings shown in the painting still exist to the present day, just as they were in Wunderwald's time. This space and these buildings, which constituted Badstrasse numbers 38 and 39, have a rich and fascinating history, which was well-known by Berliners and frequently retold in historical accounts of Berlin and Wedding. The story begins in 1701, when the area in question was still countryside, far beyond the city walls of Berlin, which lay to the south.⁵³ On one day in this year, King Friedrich I was returning to the city from an excursion, when he stopped by a water mill which lay alongside the river Panke. Requesting refreshment, the King was given a cup of iron-rich water from a nearby spring. So taken was Friedrich with the drink, that he ordered a well house to be built upon the spring, thus giving the area its name Gesundbrunnen (literally, healthful spring).⁵⁴ In the 1760s, with the reputation of the healing powers of the spring's waters confirmed, Friedrich II (usually remembered as Friedrich the Great) gave permission for the construction of bathhouses and a clinic for alcoholics upon the site. By the late eighteenth century, the new owners of the spring and its surrounding land had taken advantage of its reputation, and a collection of hostelrys and restaurants had collected around Badstrasse, directly in front of the baths.⁵⁵ Frequently patronised by the royal family over the years, in 1801 the bathhouse was given the official name, the Luisenbad, after Queen Louise, King Friedrich Wilhelm III's wife, who visited the baths on a regular basis.⁵⁶

53. The following account is a brief outline of the history of the area, and has been constituted from a number of sources: Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, 13-16; Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, *Rechts und Links der Panke*, 82-87; Kathrin Chod, et al., *Berliner Mitte. Das Lexikon* (Berlin: Stapp Verlag, 2001), 397, 406.

54. Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, 13.

55. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

56. *Ibid.*, 15.

From the mid-nineteenth century the fortunes of the Gesundbrunnen and the Luisenbad changed for the worst. New industrial developments in the surrounding area polluted the river Panke, contributing to the gradual drying up of the spring. When James Hobrecht's proposals for Berlin's future expansion were published in 1862, the land on Badstrasse quickly acquired new economic value, sealing the fate of both the spring and bathhouses. The commoditisation of land had little regard for historic boundaries, and the bathhouses and spring found themselves situated upon a number of newly defined plots of land, designated as Badstrasse 35-39. In the ensuing years, speculators purchased and developed the plots along Badstrasse. The construction boom along the street, combined with the building of new sewage systems, had a continued adverse impact on the Gesundbrunnen. By the late 1860s, one author claimed that the spring now 'muttered to itself in a lonely and pathetic manner, complaining of the ungratefulness of the present era.'⁵⁷ Further development followed, as property developers built a five-storey apartment block at Badstrasse 35-36, between 1874 and 1877. In 1880, an architect named Carl Galuschki purchased plots 38 and 39. Galuschki stalled on developing his land while the German economy remained volatile, but in 1892 he finally began construction of a lavishly decorated, six-storey block across his two pieces of land, which he christened the Luisenhaus in honour of the baths. The rear of the Luisenhaus, with its coloured ceramic decor, can be seen at the far right of Wunderwald's painting. The construction of the Luisenhaus entailed the relocation of the well house to the rear of the plots.⁵⁸ Most of the external surfaces of the Luisenhaus—both front and rear—were decorated with colourful ceramic tiles arranged in horizontal bands: a display of parvenu wealth which the likes of Walter Rathenau and Paul Schultze-Naumburg must surely have recoiled in horror at. By the late 1880s the natural spring had completely dried up, but despite this fact, Berlin's new-found entrepreneurial spirit ensured that the history of the region would not be forgotten, thanks to a commercial venture running out of premises in the Luisenhaus,

57. 'Jetzt murmelt der Quell einsam und traurig, als klagte er über die Undankbarkeit des Zeitalters.' Robert Springer, *Berlin wird Weltstadt. Ernste und heitere Culturbilder* (Berlin: Hausfreund-Expedition, 1868), 155.

58. Chod, et al., *Berliner Mitte*, 397, 406.

which manufactured bottles of artificially carbonated table water, branded as *Königen Luisenquelle* (Queen Louise Source).⁵⁹ After the spring had fallen into disuse, the bathhouses were converted into the Marienbad theatre at the turn of the century.

The street from which Wunderwald painted his scene, Travemünder Strasse, was actually a much later addition to the Gesundbrunnen landscape. The new road was incorporated into the existing street plan in 1907.⁶⁰ The new plot at Travemünder Strasse 2 annexed a significant portion of the existing plot at Badstrasse 39, upon which the Luisenhaus stood. As owner of this plot, Galuschki received 633,000 Reichsmarks in compensation from the city authorities for the loss of his land and the extensive truncation and rebuilding of the Luisenhaus that this loss entailed (fig. 19). A year later, in March 1908, the historic well house was finally demolished.⁶¹



Figure 19: The Luisenhaus, during construction in 1892 (left), and during (centre) and after (right) modelling in 1906/07. Reproduced from: Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, ed. *Rechts und Links der Panke* (Berlin: Heimat und Werk, 1961), 86-87.

This intriguing sequence of historical events is captured in the brick and stone of these plots along Badstrasse. From a rural space of royal patronage, to the early effects of industrialisation and the complex exploitation of space which typified the entrepreneurial spirit of the *Gründerzeit*, this area captures in architecture and architectural space the evolving economic and social fortunes of Berlin. The storey of the Gesundbrunnen and the *Luisenhaus* are a microcosm of Berlin's modern historical development, of a shift from

59. Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, *Rechts und Links der Panke*, 85.

60. Böttger, et al., *Lexikon Alle Berliner Straßen und Plätze*.(4) 225

61. Chod, et al., *Berliner Mitte*, 397, 406. A fascinating sequence of photographs showing the Luisenhaus during construction in 1892/93, and in the course its remodelling in 1906/07 can be found in: Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, *Rechts und Links der Panke*, 86-87.

what Lefebvre called pre-capitalist, absolute space to capitalist, abstract space.⁶² Though impossible to prove, it is reasonable to surmise that Wunderwald was aware of the history of the space he chose to paint. The names of the streets and buildings in the vicinity all bear witness to this narrative. Historic accounts of the Luisenbad and Luisenhaus were available to Wunderwald, for example in Franz Gottwald's *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, published in 1924.⁶³ A most compelling reason for suggesting that Wunderwald was aware of the history of the area lies in his choice of viewpoint from which to produce the painting. Standing on Travemünder Strasse, with the river Panke behind him, Wunderwald could look 'in' to the rear of plots 35 to 39 on Badstrasse, exposing the array of structures that constituted these plots. Once again, we should also consider how dramatically the area had changed when Wunderwald came to create the painting. On his earlier sojourn in Berlin between 1900 and 1904, Travemünder Strasse did not exist and the Luisenhaus was still intact.

3.5 Assessing Gustav Wunderwald's relation to Neue Sachlichkeit

Studying Wunderwald's urban landscapes, two discernible motives driving the artist's decision-making process of what to paint become apparent. In the first instance, scenes which created a strong visual impression attracted him. These works are distinguishable by bold contrasts in size and scale, striking colour combinations and unusual viewpoints which created interesting perspectives and angles. To this category we should add *Brücke über die Ackerstrasse* and *Miethäuser am Karolingerplatz*. The second motivation was much more subjective, and was deeply rooted in the artist's memories and recollections, as well as his appreciation—accumulated from the years spent travelling around numerous European cities—of the transience of the urban landscape. In this category fits *Fabrik an der Lindowerstrasse* and *Travemünder Strasse*. Consistently identifying between one source of inspiration and the other in Wunderwald's urban landscapes is not always easy, particularly given that so much of what he painted did not survive the bombs of the Second World War. There is evidence enough however to be sure that in some instances, a heightened awareness of the shifting urban landscape did play a role. For example, we know that in 1926 Wunderwald sent a letter to his friend Wilhelm Schmidtbonn, referring specifically to a new painting of Beusselstrasse in Berlin's Moabit neighbourhood, the

62. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 229.

63. Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, 13-16.

street in which the artist had lived over twenty years earlier.⁶⁴ Another work from 1929, of the street in Kalk-Köln where Wunderwald grew up as a young boy, is even more suggestive of the importance of memory and the past to the artist.

The tendency towards reflection, which characterised the second motivating force behind Wunderwald's urban landscapes, can be organised into two further inclinations. In paintings such as *Travemünder Strasse* and *Fabrik an der Lindowerstrasse*, Wunderwald returned to a scene once familiar to him, only to be struck by the changes wrought in his absence. These experiences were certainly not unique in a city that had developed so rapidly in such a short space of time, and other individuals, including Siegfried Kracauer, encountered similar experiences on Berlin's streets. In late 1932, Kracauer wrote an account of just such an experience, in which he recounted his surprise and sadness upon finding out that a favourite café on the Kurfürstendamm had shut down. Kracauer's first inclination that something is wrong comes when he tries to open the door, only to find it locked. Startled, he peers through the window and sees that the interior is empty. Surely, thinks Kracauer, it must have been cleared out overnight, as the premises had been lit up just the previous evening. 'Or,' he asks, questioning his ability to adequately recollect the passage of time, 'am I deluding myself?'⁶⁵ Wunderwald most likely encountered the same emotions, doubts and shocks when he revisited streets in Berlin which he had not seen for many years. Without an *aide-memoire*, the streetscape of Beusselstrasse in Moabit, or Lindowerstrasse and Travemünder Strasse in Wedding, appeared as jolts to the psyche, as ruptures in time and space. By contrast, in a work such as *Miethäuser am Karolingerplatz*, Wunderwald is responding not so much to the shock of change, but in a measured way which betrays an awareness on his part on the ephemeral nature and ongoing redevelopment of the city and its streets. *Karolingerplatz* is an attempt on Wunderwald's part to record a streetscape whose changes he has thus far witnessed first-hand; a means of containing or preempting future shocks, an *aide-memoire* to measure future changes against.

64. Hildegard Reinhardt, *Wilhelm Schmidtbonn und Gustav Wunderwald*, 86.

65. 'Es muss über Nacht geräumt worden sein, denn am Abend vorher war die Teestube noch erleuchtet gewesen. Oder täusche ich mich?' Siegfried Kracauer, "Straße ohne Erinnerung," in *Straßen in Berlin und anderswo* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1987), 18.

Walter Benjamin also acutely felt these shocks upon the streets of Berlin. He explored them in his text *A Berlin Chronicle*, which he claimed was not so much an autobiographical account, than an account of the experience of place, ‘of a space, of moments and discontinuities.’⁶⁶ The notion of shock also played a significant role in Benjamin’s exploration of Baudelaire’s *fleurs da mal*. Here, Benjamin looked for the causes of these shocks, which he argued Baudelaire placed ‘at the very centre of his artistic work.’⁶⁷ He connected them to Proust’s concept of the *mémoire involontaire*, in which previously forgotten images and sensations are recalled, triggered by present-day experiences, in Proust’s case in *In Search of Lost Time*, the taste of madeleine pastry, which transported the author back to his childhood. Benjamin applied his own thoughts about the aura of the object to Proust’s ideas, connecting the consciously recalled image (*mémoire volontaire*) to the photograph and the camera’s objective means of recording data, and the *mémoire involontaire* with the original work of art. He asserted that ‘to perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*.’⁶⁸ Herein lies the crucial distinction between the two aforementioned categories into which Wunderwald’s paintings can be organised. The views at Lindowerstrasse and Travemünder Strasse spoke personally to Wunderwald; they looked back at him as he looked at them, an instance in which a *mémoire involontaire* was invoked, of an irretrievable image from the past that was similar and yet different to the one before him. On the other hand, the view of Karolingerplatz is better aligned to the *mémoire volontaire*, a consciously recorded image that protects against rather than responds to shock.

These points can help us to establish a fix on Wunderwald’s relation to the Neue Sachlichkeit style of painting, though the results are not always unambiguous. On the one hand, I am inclined to concur with Hildegard Reinhardt’s claim that Wunderwald should be regarded as a realist, rather than a Neue Sachlichkeit painter. However, her reasons for doing so, based on the artist’s ‘complete political and social indifference’ combined with a ‘rigorous devotion to detail and factual obsession,’ though not necessarily incorrect, do not intimate Wunderwald’s personal and subjective responses to the city, for which I am

66. Benjamin, “A Berlin Chronicle,” 28.

67. Walter Benjamin, “On some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 159.

68. *Ibid.*, 184.

arguing the case here.⁶⁹ On the other hand, there are instances—*Karolingerplatz* being a good case in point—where Wunderwald’s motives seem more objective, calculating, and consistent with our understanding of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.



Figure 20: Franz Lenk, *Berliner Hinterhäuser*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 113.5 x 94cm. Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.

Wunderwald’s painting of *Karolingerplatz* is worth comparing to Franz Lenk’s 1929 painting *Berliner Hinterhäuser* (Rear Tenement Blocks in Berlin, fig. 20). This painting concentrates upon the front-house and side-wing of a five-storey tenement block. The side of the front block is inscribed with a ‘shadow’ of a previous, four-storey building that formerly adjoined the tenement block. Similarly, the rear wall of the side wing and the adjacent tenement in the background also have the shadows of previous neighbouring buildings. At the centre of the painting is the tenement block courtyard, normally an interior space hidden from view, but now exposed by the demolition of the adjoining buildings. The opened up courtyard affords the viewer a peak into a world usually hidden

69. ‘[...] seiner totalen politischen und sozialen Indifferenz, seiner rigorosen Gegenstandstreue und Tatsachenbesessenheit [...]’ Reinhardt, et al., *Gustav Wunderwald*, 52.

away from view. From a top window, a sheet is being aired and billows in the wind. By contrast, a line of washing hangs rather limply in the sheltered foot of the yard. Whether Lenk painted this scene directly from real life or not is a moot point. Undeniable however is the artist's attention to detail. On the exposed brick surfaces of the tenement walls, the floors levels and joist marks of the demolished buildings persist, along with other shadows and discolourations. On the plot of land neighbouring the tenement stand two wooden huts amongst piles of earth strewn with buckets, barrels and wooden boxes. The shadows of the demolished buildings and what could be builders' huts indicate the provisionality of Lenk's scene—a moment captured between demolition and redevelopment. Our voyeuristic glimpse into the courtyard of the tenement is likely only to be a temporary one.

Franz Lenk's *Berliner Hinterhäuser* is an ideal example of the Neue Sachlichkeit urban landscape. In an art-historical sense, it may be considered as Neue Sachlichkeit because of its fanatical attention to detail and its almost photographic quality. In a socio-economic sense, it demonstrates an acute awareness of the object, and the processes of urban development being wrought upon it. It captures the transitional moment in time between one building being demolished and another being built to replace it. In capturing this moment and the traces of these processes, it professes a conscious acknowledgement, an objective response to these processes. When Carl Grossberg painted urban scenes from real life, such as the *Avus* racetrack in Berlin in 1928, he too was preoccupied with creating a detailed and precise record of the object, as was Richard Gessner, who painted a scene showing the Shellhaus in Berlin under construction in 1930. In Wunderwald's oeuvre, there are a number of works which might fit this definition of Neue Sachlichkeit, in which objects and their new and aesthetic qualities are privileged over subjective response. As unassuming as it is, *Karolingerplatz* is one. More obvious examples are *Berlin, Funkturm und Kaiserdamm* (Berlin, Radio Tower and Kaiserdamm, 1926), a scene showing the new exhibition halls in Berlin's West End—and one of the few examples where the artist painted a well-known, modern architectural landmark in the city, and *Bahndamm* (Railway Embankment, 1928, fig. 21) less an urban landscape than a study of an industrial structure comparable to Grossberg's machine portraits. Another Wunderwald work I consider as being Neue Sachlichkeit is *Unterführung in Spandau* (Underpass in Spandau, 1927). Sergiuz Michalski featured this painting in his book on Neue Sachlichkeit art, implying that discernible in this work was a detachment from reality and a retreat towards fantasy. Here, I am inclined to agree with Michalski when he states that '[t]his place, which the

observer is customarily aware of merely in passing—and this only fleetingly—is for Wunderwald the ideal place in which to pause, so as to safeguard it from being forgotten.⁷⁰ Both *Unterführung in Spandau* and *Bahndamm* represent examples in which—according to one contemporary critic—Wunderwald demonstrated his liking for ‘relatively simple motifs which carry along the observer in the uniformity of their composition.’⁷¹ In these conscious attempts to privilege the object over his subjective response to it, Wunderwald froze moments in time, thereby forcing an acknowledgement of the city’s ability to endlessly change.



Figure 21: Gustav Wunderwald, *Bahndamm*, 1928.
Oil on canvas, 71.5 x 61.5cm. Private Collection.

Ultimately, Wunderwald’s incorporation into the Neue Sachlichkeit category of the visual arts is, as already acknowledged by Hermand, simply a result of post-World-War-Two historians’ tendency to shift the political nature of the movement to a bourgeois middle-

70. Michalski, *New Objectivity*, 50.

71. ‘[...] verhältnismäßig einfache Motive, die aber durch die Einheitlichkeit ihrer Richtung den Beschauer mitreißen.’ Agnes Waldstein, *Das Industriebild : Vom werden einer neuen Kunst* (Berlin: Furche-Kunstverlag, 1929), 44-45.

ground. Though some of Wunderwald's urban landscapes can be subsumed under the broadened category of *Neue Sachlichkeit* with some justification, it seems to me that numerous others betray a much more subjective response to the city on behalf of the artist, and thus share more in common with the Wunderwald's Expressionistic contemporaries, of Werner Heldt's pre-World-War-Two Berlin scenes and even the city portraits of Meidner and Kirchner.

Towards the end of his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin quotes from the poet's review of the 1859 Paris salon exhibition, in which Baudelaire deliberately ignores the landscape paintings on display:

I long for the return of the dioramas whose enormous, crude magic subjects me to the spell of a useful illusion. I prefer looking at the backdrop paintings of the stage where I find my favourite dreams treated with consummate skill and tragic concision. Those things, so completely false, are for that very reason much closer to the truth, whereas the majority of our landscape painters are liars, precisely because they fail to lie.⁷²

Baudelaire, insists Benjamin, is insisting on the 'magic of distance,' which brings us back to Wunderwald, the former stage scenery painter, who I think on many occasions himself treated with a 'tragic concision' those Berlin cityscapes he painted.⁷³

72. Quoted in: Benjamin, "On some Motifs in Baudelaire," 187.

73. *Ibid.*, 187-88.

4. The rural city: working-class culture in Berlin

4.1 The case for and against viewing Berlin as a *Weltstadt*

With the enlargement of its boundaries and the creation of the administrative district of Greater Berlin in 1920, the German capital became the third most populous city in the world, and geographically the largest. Berlin now pressed the claim more than ever for the title of *Weltstadt*. It is arguable that during the period of classical modernity, no other city's inhabitants were quite as acutely aware as Berliners were of their home city's ascent to *Weltstadt* status. This has a lot to do with the rapid expansion the city experienced in a relatively short period of time. Writing in 1930, the art critic Adolf Heilborn recalled how the royal capital (*Residenzstadt*) of his childhood, had transformed into an 'exploding *Weltstadt*,' breaking out from the old city walls as a youthful giant might do from its shackles.¹ The term had already found some currency as early as the 1860s, when the writers Adolf Streckfuss and Robert Springer both published histories that documented the city's ascent to *Weltstadt* status.² Other commentators, including James Hobrecht, thought this declaration rather premature at that time, with Hobrecht branding the claims as a farce (*Posse*).³ On the occasion of the opening of the *Gewerbeausstellung* (Trade Exhibition) in the city's Treptower Park in 1896, Berlin's claim to be a city of international importance carried far greater legitimacy.⁴ By the mid twenties, Berlin's status as *Weltstadt* was indubitable. 'The new spirit of Berlin,' proclaimed chief city planner Martin Wagner, 'is

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1. 'Längst hat es die gemächliche Bahn des behäbigen „Einst“ über die engenden Mauern hinausgeführt: aus der eben erwachten Residenzstadt meiner Kindertage ist die wie ein junger Riese alles hergebrachte Maß des Wachstums gleich lästiger Kette sprengende Weltstadt geworden.' Max Brückner, and Adolf Heilborn, *Weltstadt Berlin* (Berlin: Rembrandt-Verlag, 1930), introduction.
 2. Adolf Streckfuss, *Vom fischerdorf zur Weltstadt. Berlin seit 500 Jahren. Geschichte und Sage* (Berlin: Alexander Jonas, 1864); Springer, *Berlin wird Weltstadt*.
 3. James Hobrecht, *Über öffentliche Gesundheitspflege und die Bildung eines Central-Amtes für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege im Staate* (Stettin: Th. von der Nahmer, 1868), 3.
 4. Gerhard Masur discussed the 1896 exhibition in connection with Berlin's aspiration to be a *Weltstadt* in: Gerhard Masur, *Imperial Berlin* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971), 123.

the *Weltstadt* spirit.⁵ Amid the rushing crowds and neon lights of the city's most famous thoroughfares and squares—Potsdamer Platz, Friedrichstrasse and the Kurfürstendamm—Berlin had become worthy of comparison to the likes of New York, London and Paris. Berlin's press industry enthusiastically embraced the city's elevated identity, frequently publishing details of fantastic, large-scale projects worthy of a *Weltstadt*. Many of these reports appeared in the immensely popular *Berliner-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, whose circulation approached two million copies in the late twenties. In one article entitled *Berlin auf dem Wege zur Weltstadt* (Berlin on the Way to Becoming a *Weltstadt*), artistic impressions of plans for a new railway hub were announced. The new station, intended to replace both the Potsdamer and Anhalter rail termini, would be the largest in Europe, featuring a luxury hotel and office space.⁶ Another article described innovative solutions to the increasing demands on space in the city, and featured illustrations of multi-storey office complexes built on bridges over the Spree river, and elevated roadways at Potsdamer Platz.⁷ Far-fetched ideas such as these fed the imagination of Berliners, and confirmed that Berlin's impression of itself as a *Weltstadt* remained more an aspiration than a reality. Berlin's ambitions—and the concealment of the reality that lay behind it—are embodied in the frequent conflation of the city with images of New York, the metropolis most admired by many amongst Berlin's cultural elite. The obsession with American culture is embodied in Grosz and Heartfield's Dada photomontages, including *Dadamerica* from 1920. Grosz's continued preoccupation with the USA is well documented; in a review of the artist's work at the flechtheim gallery in Berlin in 1926, one critic described how Grosz had 'Americanised Berlin' in his work.⁸ Elsewhere, in the set of fourteen photomontages produced to publicise Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Berlin: The Symphony of a City), Ruttmann and photomonteur Otto Umbehrr used photographic

5. 'Der Geist des neuen Berlins ist ein Weltbürgergeist.' Martin Wagner, "Das neue Berlin – die Weltstadt Berlin," *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 1 (1929): 4. See also a special edition of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift*, celebrating Berlin's *Weltstadt* credentials in industry, arts and architecture: Ernst Friedrich Werner, ed., *Berlin : Kultur* Deutsche Zeitschrift (Berlin: F. Fontane & Co, 1925).

6. "Berlin auf dem Wege zur Weltstadt," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 20 February, 1927.

7. "Platzhunger der Grossstädte," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 6 January, 1929.

8. 'Er baut ein Berlin, er amerikanisiert Berlin mit Französischer Farbe, und seine Gestaltungskraft liegt darin, dass Berlin dadurch immer mehr Berlin wird.' Emil Szittya, "George Grosz – Nur einige Worte," *Der Querschnitt* 6, no. 3 (1926): 245. Grosz's sneaking admiration for North American culture is revealed in the artist's autobiography: George Grosz, *The Autobiography of George Grosz : A little Yes and a big No*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), 179-82.

fragments of North American skyscrapers as integral elements to their images, in light of the complete absence of any such high-rise buildings existing in Berlin at the time (fig. 22).⁹



Figure 22: Otto Umbehr. Promotional photomontages for *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, 1927. Source: Deutsches Filminstitut, Frankfurt.

The images created to represent *Weltstadt* Berlin, which described a unified and interconnected city of skyscrapers and traffic systems, obscured a much more complex reality: that of a fragmented and incomplete city. When German politicians created the municipal district of Greater Berlin in 1920, they established an administrative unit of sharp contrasts, comprising a disparate collection of settlements. In total, eight urban civil parishes, fifty-nine rural civil parishes and twenty-seven rural estates comprised Greater Berlin (map B).¹⁰ One journalist observed that the ‘borderline of Greater Berlin binds medieval formations, docklands, villages, manors, lakes and woods in a uniformity that cannot be coherently characterised.’¹¹ The ‘immense multiplicity’ (*ungeheure Vielheit*) of Berlin’s landscape was accompanied by a corresponding lack of coherent identity amongst

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9. A reporter visiting Berlin in 1936 noted that he could find ‘only three or four buildings [...] as much as ten stories high’ in the city. Douglas Chandler, “Changing Berlin,” *The National Geographic Magazine* 71, no. 2 (1936): 134.
 10. For details and locations of each parish and estate, see: Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1929* (Berlin: Otto Stollberg & Co, 1929), xiv.
 11. ‘Die Grenzlinie Groß-Berlins fasst mittelalterliche Bildungen, Hafenviertel, Dörfer, Rittergüter, Seen und Waldungen in ein einheitlich nicht zu charakterisierendes Ganzes ein.’ Walter Petry, “Stadt und Erde,” *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 12 (1929): 246-50.

its inhabitants, so that the citizen from Charlottenburg considered him or herself first and foremost a ‘Charlottenburger,’ the resident in Schöneberg a ‘Schöneberger,’ and so on.¹² As another put it: ‘Berlin: it is many towns, many landscapes, many different types of people’¹³ The majority of the outer districts of the ‘city’ of Greater Berlin were rural, comprising large tracts of farmland, manorial estates, wetlands and forest. One had only to take the briefest of streetcar journeys away from the glitz and glamour found in the centre of Berlin to find themselves in a very different situation, where both the landscape and the lives of the inhabitants had noticeably rural qualities.



Figure 23: Ast. “Dörfchen Berlin,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 24 July, 1927.

Writing in a 1924 edition of the magazine *Die Weltbühne*, Kurt Tucholsky lampooned Berlin’s urban qualities. Credited to his pseudonym Peter Panter and entitled *Dorf Berlin* (Village Berlin), Tucholsky described an exchanged between the narrator and his old

12. E. R. Uderstädt, *Berlin : Wie es nur Wenige kennen* (Berlin: Norddeutsche Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1930), 92.

13. ‘Berlin: das sind viele Städte, viele Landschaften, viele Menschengruppen.’ Stenbock-Fermor, *Deutschland von Unten*, 140.

friend Lisa, who had just returned from Paris. ‘A city?’ Lisa retorts, referring to Berlin, ‘— a city? But children peck around Potsdamer Platz like chickens!’ Tucholsky, is unable to defend his home city against the charge, and replies: ‘That could well be the case.’¹⁴ On his flaneuristic explorations of Berlin, Franz Hessel travelled by tram from Berlin’s centre, through the working-class area of Gesundbrunnen and onward towards Pankow to the north of the city. Hessel described the ‘strange mix of metropolis and garden city’ which he saw, where one-hundred-year-old cottages sat alongside bankers’ mansions from the war years, with the garden colonies just beyond.¹⁵ Staying in Gesundbrunnen, a cartoon from a 1927 edition of *BIZ* presented a view of the banks on the River Panke, under the title ‘Dörfchen Berlin’ (Hamlet Berlin). The cartoon showed a contemporary view of the Panke, a modest stream lined with ramshackle fencing and back gardens, weeping willows and other greenery (fig. 23). The cartoon’s caption dryly pointed out that the scene was ‘a landscape view [...] in the city of four million inhabitants.’¹⁶ The river Panke was situated at the heart of Gesundbrunnen, an area of Wedding heavily industrialised and populated by the twenties. Here, the Panke ran alongside Travemünder Strasse, whose history we have already uncovered in the previous chapter. This scene was familiar to many Berliners as the site where, in earlier times, an old water mill had once stood. Photographers and illustrators reproduced this scene time and again throughout the late nineteenth century on postcards and drawings, for the area had a reputation as a picturesque spot of natural beauty. Although Gesundbrunnen had undergone extensive changes in the intervening period—indicated by the substantial buildings lurking in the background of the *BIZ* illustration—the banks of the Panke retained a curiously rural quality. The survival of the Panke right up until the present day is symbolic of Berlin’s inability to entirely eradicate the rural spaces into which it rapidly expanded. Journalist Walter Petry described the persistence of these rural qualities in Berlin as a ‘penetration of nature into the city.’ Petry understood that Berlin’s physical character was the accumulated product of successive generations of urban development, in which previously rural villages and towns were

14. “‘Eine Großstadt?’” sagte meine greise Freundin Lisa, als sie aus Paris zurückkam, “eine Großstadt? Kinder auf dem Potsdamer Platz picken ja die Hühner –!” Das könnte wohl sein.’ Peter Panter [Kurt Tucholsky], “Dorf Berlin,” *Die Weltbühne* 20, no. 34 (1924): 293.

15. ‘[...] fahre ich durch dies seltsame Gemisch von Großstadt und Gartenstadt [...] etwas eingesunkenen Häuschen derer, die vor bald hundert Jahren hier aufs Land zogen, dann nahe bei Villen vornehmer alter Bankierfamilien Baracken [...] und weiterhin Kleingartenkolonien.’ Franz Hessel, “Norden,” in *Ein flaneur in Berlin* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1984), 221-22.

16. ‘Landschaftsbild von den Ufern der Panke in der Viermillionenstadt.’ Ast [pseud.]. “Dörfchen Berlin,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 24 July, 1927.

absorbed into the expanding city. Crucially, Petry also understood that this ‘penetration’ preserved social forms as much as it did physical patterns. The city, according to Petry, should be comprehended ‘as a collection of all historical forms of settlement’ whose ‘stratified formation [...] is repeated sociologically, in the composition of its population.’¹⁷

The important role that agriculture continued to play in Berlin, demonstrates one means by which the city retained a socially significant rural character. Berlin’s agrarian industry existed not simply as remnants of a bygone age, but persisted as a significant component of the urban economy. Historical accounts of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Berlin regard the city as an industrial giant, thanks to its heavy industry and large corporate conglomerations such as the AEG, Siemens and Borsig.¹⁸ In doing so however, they run the risk of overlooking the fact that Greater Berlin contained extensive areas of farmland. For example, in the twenties, around 5,000 hectares (or 5.6 percent) of the total land area of Greater Berlin was occupied by rye fields, producing 10,000 tonnes of rye each year, constituting one percent of the whole of Germany’s annual rye harvest.¹⁹ Besides the substantial quantities of rye grown within the city limits, the farms on the outskirts of the city also grew large volumes of oats (3,335 tonnes on 2,006 hectares in 1925), potatoes (56,560 tonnes on 3,536 hectares) and a wide range of other grains, pulses and vegetables, whose fields accounted for over twenty-one percent of the total land area of Greater Berlin.²⁰ The extensive farm estates in northeast Berlin, in Malchow and Falkenberg, benefited from a symbiotic relationship with the city. Berlin’s sewage system channelled the city’s waste to the farms for use as fertiliser, producing large volumes of fruit and vegetables for consumption by the selfsame urban population. The Malchow estate, covering 1,590 hectares, harvested 34,520 kilograms of apples and 121,455 of pears in 1924 alone.²¹ Statistics also make it clear that the keeping of livestock and animal husbandry were thriving in the city. In 1930 it was claimed that there were 660,585

17. ‘Ist dieses Eindringen der Natur in die Stadt [...] Wir müssen demnach die Stadt als Sammlung aller historischen Formen von Niederlassung begreifen, [...] ein Schichtengebilde, das sich auch im Soziologischen, im Aufbau seiner Bevölkerung wiederholt.’ Petry, “Stadt und Erde,” 246-50.

18. See chapter two.

19. Peter Meckermann, *Berliner Zeitspiegel : Hallo, Meckerman erzählt!* (Berlin: Richard Schröder Verlag, 1930), 219-20.

20. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1927*, 43.

21. *Ibid.*, 45.; Ines Meinicke, and Hildur-Mathias Bernitz, *Der Gemüsegarten Berlin. Bilder einer Ausstellung* (Rangsdorf: Natur & Text, 1996), 21.

poultry, 33,415 pigs, 24,431 dairy cows and 3,110 beehives in the city.²² Furthermore, the distribution of livestock was not concentrated to the large farms on the outskirts of the city as one might expect—these were primarily arable concerns. In 1925 there were 4,000 cattle kept in Wedding—primarily an industrialised district—while there were just 2,200 in Weißensee, a predominantly rural district situated further out to the northeast.²³ The significant contribution made by agriculture to Berlin's economy might suggest that a sizeable proportion of the city's population were still involved in agricultural labour and farming activities. In reality, the official number of Berliners employed in agriculture in 1925 was just under 20,000—less than one percent of the city's working population. It should be pointed out however, that this figure does not include those employed in the city's slaughterhouses and markets, and the significant numbers of households who grew their own produce and kept livestock in their own gardens or plots in the garden colonies.²⁴

These facts and figures directly contradict the idea of Berlin as a wellspring of modernity, but they begin to make sense when considered in conjunction with further statistical data on the city's recent demographic growth. Between 1877 and 1905, the population of Berlin doubled from one to two million inhabitants. The surrounding towns and cities saw corresponding patterns of growth, the result of which was an aggregate population of Greater Berlin of nearly four million inhabitants in 1920. This population growth was not the result of a large increase in Berlin's birth rate, but was instead achieved through an influx into the city of migrant workers and their families.²⁵ The inward migration into German cities at the end of the nineteenth century was as much precipitated by a crisis in agricultural working conditions as it was a rising demand for industrial labour in the cities. A large proportion of Berlin's new inhabitants arrived from the predominantly agricultural regions of Silesia and Pomerania, to the east and north of the city. The upshot of this swift and significant migration into Berlin was that a large proportion of the city's working-class population in the 1920s was still composed of first and second-generation urban dwellers, who could directly recall their previously rural circumstances. According to sociologist Erich Fromm's 1929 survey of German workers, although the vast majority of the survey's

22. Meckermann, *Berliner Zeitspiegel*, 219-20.

23. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1927*, 44.

24. *Ibid.*, 10-11.

25. Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin*, 124-25. See also: Hans-Jürgen Mende, and Kurt Wernicke, eds., *Lexikon der Berliner Stadtentwicklung* (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 2002), 253.

recipients lived in urban areas, over one quarter (twenty-six percent) had been born in the countryside.²⁶ Another study, published a year later in 1930, which compiled details of family lives in a working-class neighbourhood in Berlin, uncovered a similar picture. Of the fifty-five husbands and wives who gave answers to their place of birth, only four said that they both came from Berlin. In most cases, either one spouse—or both—came from the the provinces, usually East Prussia, Silesia and Pomerania.²⁷ The rural immigrants who now found themselves living in urban areas, tried to hold on to aspects of their previous lives. In his 1912 study of workers' social attitudes and aspirations, Adolf Levenstein asked labourers what they most liked to do whenever they had sufficient free time or financial resources. The majority of those asked stated their desire to escape to nature, whether it be simply a walk in the woods on a Sunday, or the dream of owning a small cottage in the countryside.²⁸ The new urban proletariat moved to Berlin out of necessity rather than choice. For many, it was simply the case that the big cities offered better opportunities for employment, education and welfare.²⁹ Yet while Berlin's newest inhabitants spent most of their time in the industrial factories and the inadequate and crowded conditions of the tenement blocks, they did not simply relinquish their previous cultural identities. As E. P. Thompson noted in his study of the English working classes, rural customs can persist—and even flourish—in an environment becoming increasingly urbanised. Even more importantly, Thompson associated a 'conscious resistance to the passing of old ways of life' with political radicalism, a theme which will be explored in more depth later on.³⁰ Prior to the growing power of the trade unions and the introduction of the eight-hour working day in the early twenties, the amount of leisure time available to workers and their families remained restricted by the long hours of work: usually between nine to twelve hours a day, five or six days a week.³¹ It would be a mistake however to

26. Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study* (Oxford: Berg, 1984), 69.

27. Alice Saloman, and Marie Baum, eds., *Das Familienleben in der Gegenwart* vol. 1 Bestand und Erschütterung der Familie in der Gegenwart (Berlin: F. A. Herbig, 1930), 148.

28. Adolf Levenstein, *Die Arbeiterfrage: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozialpsychologischen Seite des modernen Großbetriebes und der psychophysischen Einwirkungen auf die Arbeiter* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1912), 187-212.

29. See the testimonies of families 41 and 42, who declare education and work opportunities respectively as the prime reason for moving to Berlin: Alice Saloman, and Marie Baum, *Familienleben*, 96, 98.

30. E. P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963), 448.

31. Jürgen Kuczynski, *Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter in Deutschland*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Tribüne, 1954), 128. Quoted in: Siegfried Reck, *Arbeiter nach der Arbeit: Sozialhistorische Studie zu den*

disregard the importance of such small amounts of leisure time; if anything its significance should be underscored by the need to counterbalance the intensity and volume of work that dominated working-class family life. How did previously rural peasants spend their precious free time in their new urban environment? I am inclined to agree with Peter Stearns' statement that there was an effort at continuity between the old (rural) and new (urban) ways of life, the aim being to 're-establish as much of the past culture world as they could' once they were ensconced in the city.³² With these points in mind it is reasonable to consider Berlin's historical development as much an import of agrarian-rural culture, as it was a physical outward urban expansion.

There is, I believe, a great deal more to be said about the persistence and maintenance of rural customs and traditions in the lives of Berlin's working classes right into the 1920s, and one useful means of exploring this idea lies in a somewhat neglected body of art from the period which deals specifically with these topics. Themes dealing with urban working-class leisure dominated the artistic oeuvres of Hans Baluschek, Otto Nagel and Heinrich Zille, and also featured prominently in the work of numerous other early twentieth-century illustrators and photographers. This chapter seeks to address these shortcomings by exploring numerous visual documents, with the intention of demonstrating that Berlin's working classes did retain a strong sense of rural tradition right into the latter years of the Weimar era. In doing so, it will also shed light on how new urban development continually pushed against the lives of the working classes, putting pressure on their rural traditions. This struggle between the urban and rural is captured particularly successfully by the era's artists and photographers, revealing working-class culture's points of resistance and ability to adapt to urban space.

Wandlungen des Arbeiteralltags (Lahn-Gießen: Focus, 1977), 27-28.

32. Peter N. Stearns, "The Effort at Continuity in Working-Class Culture," *Journal of Modern History* 52 (1980): 628.

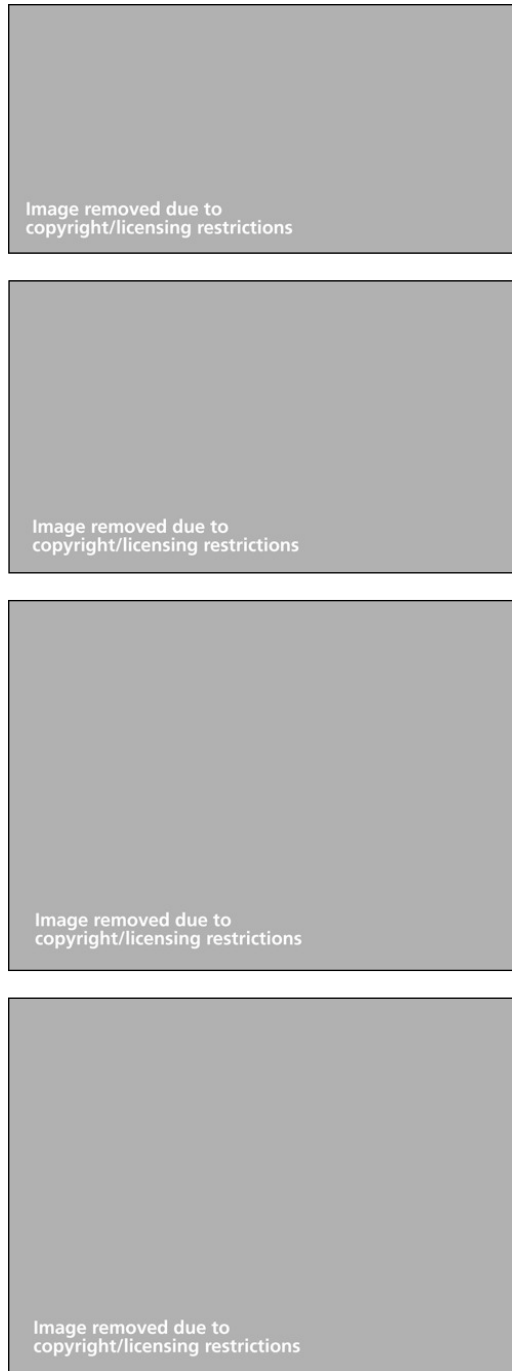


Figure 24: Sasha Stone. Four photographs taken from: Martin Wagner. "Das Berliner Wohnungsproblem – ein Interview." *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 3 (1929): 50–57.

4.2 Conflicting ideas of urban progress

Different social formations create their own unique configurations of space through a process which Henri Lefebvre called spatial practice, thus ensuring their own social cohesion and unity.³³ The production and reproduction of social space is integral to the continuation of cultural and social forms; that is, to the identity and values of that society.

33. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 38.

Conflicts over space in a society therefore indicate wider conflicts over the continuation of tradition and cultural hegemony. In the working-class districts of 1920s Berlin, conflicts emerged between the city's working classes and the municipal authorities over spaces at the outskirts of the city. The conflicting viewpoints of each side can be read in a variety of visual sources from the 1920s. Themes of changes in land use and ownership are clearly demonstrated in a sequence of photographs that accompanied an editorial feature in the March 1929 issue of *Das neue Berlin*, a short-lived journal dedicated to city planning, edited by Berlin's chief urban planner Martin Wagner and architectural critic Adolf Behne. The feature in question, an interview conducted by Behne with Wagner on the challenges facing housing production in Berlin, was accompanied by a sequence of photographs taken by the renowned Weimar-era photographer Sasha Stone (fig. 24).³⁴ The five photographs, distributed throughout the eight-page article, constructed a narrative of the transformation of land on the outskirts of Berlin, from makeshift huts and gardens into modern housing estate. The first photograph described a panoramic view of allotments and huts in Weißensee, at that time still a predominantly rural district in north Berlin. The allotments are made up of rickety sheds and scrap heaps. An unmade track weaves through the plots and in one garden, a woman is hanging out her washing. In the second photograph, there is no sign or trace of the allotments. Instead, we see labourers constructing a new road surface, laying down paving stones upon a prepared gravel surface. In the third and fourth scenes, new housing blocks are shown during and after construction. The fifth and final view is of a furniture delivery van parked outside one of these new housing blocks. The continuity of the narrative is maintained throughout the photographs, and is consonant with the planning policies and Social Democratic strategies of Greater Berlin's government, which *Das neue Berlin* promoted. The replacement of unplanned huts and garden plots with the ordered and rational architecture of the modern housing estates, reflects the broader aims of the German republic: a desire to sweep away the old and create a new, ordered society, underpinned by economic welfare and social egalitarianism. New homes guaranteed light, sun and air for the worker and his family, and new welfare benefits were designed to support the less fortunate strata of society. New measures sought to balance the

34. Martin Wagner, "Das Berliner Wohnungsproblem – ein Interview," *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 3 (1929): 50–57.

rights of the workforce with capitalist economics in the factories and offices. Furthermore, the government established an array of new health and welfare facilities, including pedagogical institutions, health clinics and sport centres.³⁵

The housing crisis (*Wohnungsnot*) was one of the more challenging social maladies faced by the new republican government, but it was by no means a new problem, having persisted ever since the first large-scale influx of migrants into the city in the early 1870s. As early as the 1880s, the seeds of housing reform were sown by progressive-minded philanthropists and architects, but their efforts at building good-quality housing with little government support were barely able scratch the surface, given the extent of the problem. Werner Hegemann, one of Germany's most prominent architectural writers, and a vociferous critic of the city's inadequate tenement blocks, drew attention to the severity of the problem shortly before the first World War, by posting scores of placards around Berlin, which claimed that '600,000 inhabitants of Greater Berlin live in tenements at the rate of from five to thirteen people per room.' The poster was illustrated with a drawing by Käthe Kollwitz. Hegemann was prosecuted by the Prussian police for his efforts at drawing attention to this social crisis.³⁶ After Germany's defeat in the first World War, and the subsequent difficulties caused by hyperinflation, the housing crisis in Germany and Berlin in particular remained acute. Article number 155 of the republican constitution, ratified in August 1919, dealt specifically with the issue, pledging to provide every German with a healthy home, with particular priority given to those injured in the war, and those families with children.³⁷

The housing crisis was two-fold: on one hand there was a continued chronic shortage of housing stock (*Wohnungsmangel*), and on the other, what stock that did exist was usually severely overcrowded and lacking in basic facilities, promoting poor living conditions conducive to the spread of disease. This aspect of the crisis was often referred to by the press as housing misery (*Wohnungselend*). Throughout the first World War and the

35. Two excellent historical studies of Weimar's welfare system are: Crew, *Germans on Welfare*; Young-Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity and the Weimar State : 1919–1933* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

36. Werner Hegemann, *City Planning Housing : Volume 2 - Political Economy and Civic Art* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc, 1937), xviii.

37. Horst Hildebrandt, ed., *Die deutschen Verfassungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1971), 107.

inflationary crisis that followed, precious little new housing was built. It was not until 1924 that the government had finally put the required administrative and financial apparatus in place to facilitate a house building programme whose ambition could hope to match the scale of the housing problem. This was only made possible by the stabilisation of the Germany economy in late 1923, and access to foreign capital, provided by the 1924 Dawes Plan.³⁸ The extent of the problem was intimidating. By the mid-twenties there were approximately 250,000 Berliners on the city's housing lists, with a continuing population influx into the city of up to 20,000 people per year. It was estimated in 1929 that around 46,000 units needed to be built in the city each year for the next ten years, in order to eradicate the crisis.³⁹ For many Berliners, living conditions had remained unchanged for some thirty years, and were so acute that whole families were forced to share one room, or even one bed, encouraging the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis.⁴⁰ Infant-mortality rates in particular were excessively high in the capital, with one doctor claiming in the *AIZ* that there were as many as eighteen infant deaths per one hundred to unmarried women, and 6.5 per one hundred to married women, in the three months of July to September 1924.⁴¹

The Social Democrats responded to the housing crisis by socialising many aspects of the land and building industry.⁴² Of the various cooperative societies set up to finance and coordinate the extensive house building programme, the GEHAG building society was one of the most significant. Founded in 1924, the GEHAG could claim to have been involved in the construction of nearly 8,500 dwellings in and around Berlin by 1930, including the very estate on Buschallee in Weißensee that Stone photographed in *Das neue Berlin*, a complex of 568 dwellings built between 1928 and 1930.⁴³ Given the extraordinarily poor, overcrowded and unhealthy conditions in which many of Berlin's poorer classes continued to live, the prospects of large volumes of new housing stock that promised 'light, air and

38. The economics of the housing programme are discussed in fuller detail in chapter 6.

39. Schwan, *Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend*, 114–19. See also: Max Hodann, "Querschnitt durch Berliner Mietskasernen," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 5, no. 15 (1926): 4.

40. See: Schwan, *Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend*, chapter 2. Also: Felix Ziege, "Wohnungselend," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 6, no. 23 (1927): 5.

41. Hodann, "Querschnitt durch Berliner Mietskasernen," 4.

42. See chapter six for a detailed account of the housing industry in the 1920s.

43. Wolfgang Schäche, ed., *75 Jahre Gehag : 1924–1999* vol. 3 *Wohnen in Berlin : 100 Jahre Wohnungsbau in Berlin* (Berlin: Mann, 1999), 34, 78.

sun' (*Licht, Luft und Sonne*) were a welcome step forward in solving the city's housing crisis. However, without wanting to belittle the conditions and struggles encountered on a daily basis by the poorest inhabitants of Berlin's tenements—and their desire to escape their miserable circumstances—I do think that our automatic association of the *Mietskasernen* as being universally detrimental, and the modern housing estates as wholly beneficial, takes into account only the material, physical qualities of life, while disregarding the richness of spiritual life, of communal relations, culture and working-class camaraderie, which the tenements were able to support. In this sense, Berlin's tenements offered something akin to the 'multiplicity of contact points' that Richard Sennett discerned in regard to early twentieth-century working-class Chicago.⁴⁴

My contention is that the Social Democratic notion of progress, as encapsulated in Stone's photographic narrative, could only be achieved at a cost to many aspects of a working-class culture that remained rooted in traditional notions of community and pastoral custom. In order to maintain these values, Berlin's proletariat had to protect their cultural practices in whatever way they could, often by adapting them to the urban environment. The remainder of this chapter will explore in more detail several key aspects of Berlin's working-class culture, with particular emphasis placed on their spatial character.

4.3 The garden colony movement in Berlin

Berlin's *Kleingartenkolonien* (small garden colonies) are an ideal case study with which to explore how rural customs adapted to Berlin's expanding urban landscape. The colonies, situated at the outskirts of the city, were an important component of urban working-class culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. They remain an integral aspect of urban culture in the city to this day. Their popularity with Berlin's proletarian population during the *Kaiserreich* and Weimar Republic is evident in the abundance of references to them in visual and literary documents.

From its origins in the second half of the nineteenth century, what is now known by Germans as the *Kleingarten* movement, developed from two very different historic conditions. In the 1860s, self-sufficient families living on the outskirts of cities such as

44. Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder : Personal Identity and City Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 56-57.

Berlin, set up allotment gardens (known as *Schrebergärten*, after their founder Moritz Schreber), in order to grow produce and keep livestock. In the areas around Oranienburger Strasse and Prenzlauer Berg to the North and Kottbuser Tor and Schlesischen Tor to the south, migrants grew vegetables and reared animals upon a landscape comprised largely of desolate sanddunes and rubbish dumps.⁴⁵ A few years later, in the early 1870s, a massive influx of migrants flowed into the city, attracted by the opportunities that the city's industrial expansion offered. Between 1871 and 1875, 155,000 immigrants arrived in Berlin.⁴⁶ This sudden influx precipitated an acute housing shortage, resulting in the accumulation of slums (known as barrack cities) outside the gates of the city, inhabited by the poor and homeless. The slums collected outside of the city's Frankfurter and Landsberger Gates to the east, and the Kottbuser Gate to the south.⁴⁷ One contemporary observer visited the 'barrack city' beyond the Kottbuser Gate in 1872:

Here, where the urban culture ends, a number of wooden huts stand on both sides of the route, most of which are thrown together from rough boards, similar to the tradesmen's stalls found at the annual markets. Here and there just a wooden frame, covered by canvas for protection against the weather, frequently with a floor made of just cardboard, scarcely covered by mulch.⁴⁸

45. Walter Reinhold, "Die Berliner Laubenkolonisten," in *Kleingärten und Kleingärtner im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Günter Katsch, and Johann B. Walz (Leipzig: Bundesverband Deutscher Gartenfreunde, 1996), 126. Originally published in: Heinrich Förster, et al., *Zur Geschichte des deutschen Kleingartenwesens* (Berlin: Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands, 1931).

46. Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin*, 124.

47. Ibid., 124-25.; Eduard Bernstein, *Die Geschichte der Berliner Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 1 : Vom Jahre 1948 bis zum Erlass des Sozialistengesetzes (Glashütten im Taunus: Detlev Auvermann, 1972), 230.

48. 'Hier, wo die städtische Kultur gewissermaßen aufhörte, standen zu beiden Seiten des Weges eine Anzahl von rohen Holzhütten, meist aus ungehobelten Brettern zusammengeschlagen, ähnlich den Buden der Kaufleute auf Jahrmärkten, hier und da auch nur ein hölzernes Gerüst, zum Schutz gegen die Witterung mit grauer Leinwand überzogen, oft auch nur mit Pappbogen der geflochtenen Strohecken notdürftig bekleidet.' Max Ring, "Ein Besuch in Barackia : Berliner Lebensbild," *Die Gartenlaube*, July 1872.

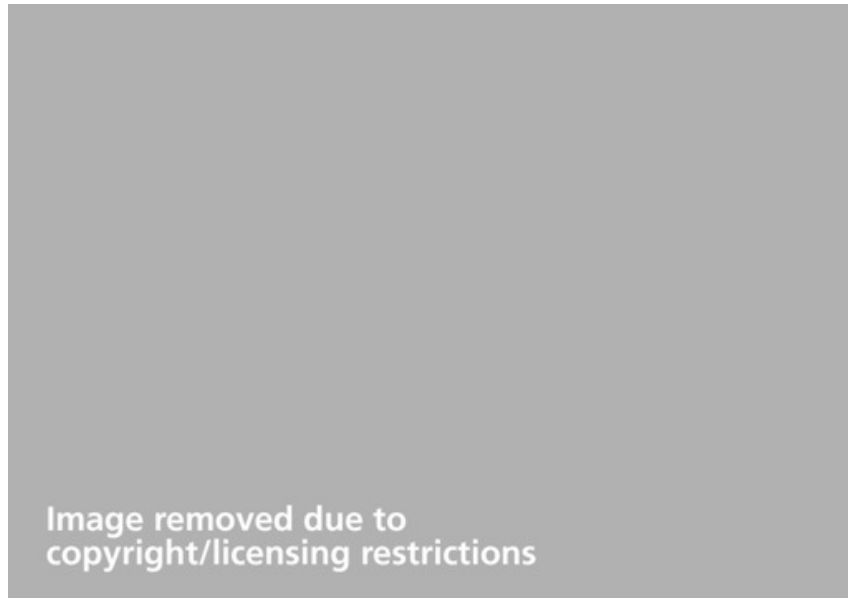


Figure 25: L. Loeffler, *Die Barackenstadt von Berlin*, Engraving, 1872. From: Max Ring. "Ein Besuch in Barackia : Berliner Lebensbild." *Die Gartenlaube* July (1872): 458-61.

Unsurprisingly, the city authorities did not welcome the presence of these slums. Tensions between the authorities and slum inhabitants were increasingly strained throughout the summer of 1872, and finally culminated in angry slum dwellers rioting through the city centre, prompting the city police to forcibly clear the slums to the east of the city.⁴⁹

Over the following decades, these two contrasting origins of the garden colony movement became intertwined, as migrant workers and their families established themselves in the new but barely adequate accommodation offered in the tenements being built at the edges of the city. With their improved domestic circumstances, Berlin's emergent proletariat slowly transformed the slums into summerhouses and gardens. Here, they could escape from the tenements in their free time, into an environment which offered a sustained connection with their earlier, rural existence.⁵⁰ Instead of makeshift huts constructed from cardboard and rags, families now took some pride in building themselves a summerhouse (*Laube* in German) on their plot of land at the edge of the city (fig. 26). From the summerhouses which characterised the garden plots, the colonies derived their new name as *Laubenkolonien*.

49. Bernstein, *Berliner Arbeiterbewegung*, 257-61.

50. Reinhold, "Berliner Laubenkolonisten," 128.

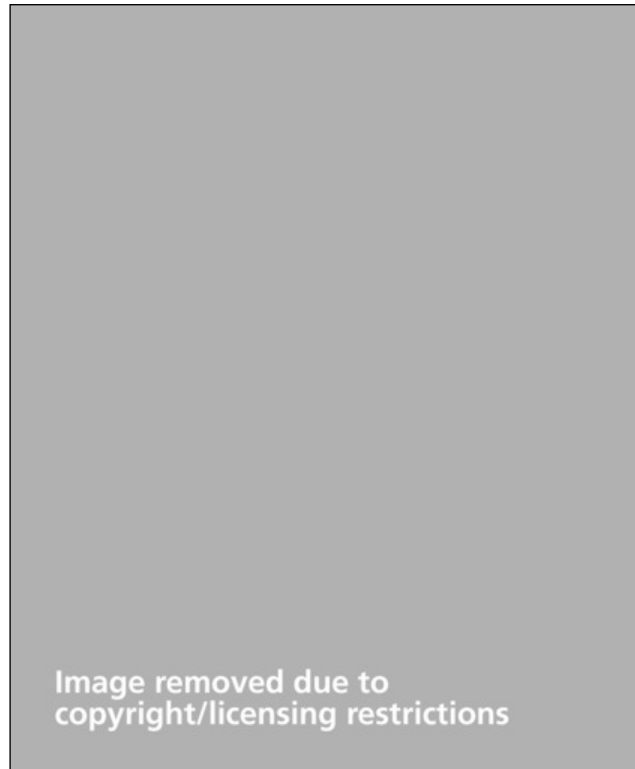


Figure 26: Heinrich Zille, *Whoever trusts in God and filches planks, builds himself a fine summerhouse!*, c.1900.

Berlin's industrial expansion continued apace from the 1870s onwards, right up until the eve of the first World War. During this period the urban population jumped from 824,000 in 1871, to over two million by 1910.⁵¹ New neighbourhoods, filled with tenement-lined streets and smoke-belching factories spread out to the north, east and south of the historic city centre. As the industrial districts grew ever more dense and dirty, the garden colonies lying a short distance beyond them assumed an increasingly important function as places of recovery (*Erholungsstätten*) for the working-class population who, as one commentator later described, found themselves 'increasingly amassed together in stone cages.'⁵² For many of the city's factory workers and their families, who had arrived only recently from the agricultural hinterlands to the east, the gardens offered a sustained connection to their earlier social customs; a setting in which they could continue to appreciate the changing seasons, grow fresh produce and keep livestock. The importance of the gardens as a link to nature is reflected in the names gardeners gave to their colonies, for example, *Grüner Allee*

51. Reich, *Wohnungsmarkt in Berlin*, 124-25.

52. 'Je mehr die Stadt wuchs und je mehr Menschen in die Steinkäfige zusammengeballt wurden, um so stärker wurde die Notwendigkeit nach Schaffung von leicht erreichbaren Erholungsstätten.' Georg Wendt, "Kleingartenwesen und Partei," *Unser Weg* 3, no. 2 (1929): 36.

(Green Alley), *Freiheit* (Freedom), *Natur Freunde* (Nature Friend) and *Gute Ernte* (Good Harvest).⁵³ As more and more plots clustered together to form colonies, they also offered the possibility of meeting other, like-minded families from similar backgrounds. By the turn of the century, many colonies had begun to set up loosely organised associations, intended to represent the interests of the scores, if not hundreds, of individual garden owners contained in the colony.⁵⁴

Ironically, it was Berlin's unregulated, profits-driven building industry—responsible for creating the city's monstrous tenement blocks—that also fostered the burgeoning garden colony movement. Berlin's proletariat found respite from one by retreating to the other. As we have already witnessed in chapter two, between 1871 and the first World War, Berlin's economy endured a roller-coaster ride of boom and bust. The wildly fluctuating numbers of migrants arriving in the city each year severely affected housing demand, construction costs and land prices.⁵⁵ The *Baulöwen* (property magnates) who purchased tracts of land surrounding the city had to play the market with care and patience. If a landowner chose an economically inappropriate time to build housing, financial ruin was highly likely, but choosing the right time to begin construction could deliver handsome profits. Rather than leave their land lying fallow and unproductive while waiting for an opportune moment to begin building, land owners entrusted their plots to building societies who rented the land to the garden associations. The building societies and garden associations drew up leaseholds, subject to renewal on an annual basis, ensuring that the landowner had the opportunity to take back control of his land once a year, should the prospect of profitable development look encouraging.⁵⁶ The uncertainty over their future did little to dim the enthusiasm of Berlin's working-classes for the garden colonies, who laboured year on year to transform their plots of sandy, unpromising soil around Berlin into a colourful and fertile garden.

53. W. Reinhold, *Tätigkeitsbericht des Vorstandes für das Geschäftsjahr 1929, Berlin : Provinzialverband Groß-Berlin, Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands, 1929* (Berlin: Hansen, 1929), 23.

54. Wendt, "Kleingartenwesen und Partei," 36.

55. See chapter 2.

56. Otto Albrecht, "Deutsche Kleingartenpolitik," *Die Arbeit* 1, no. 3 (1924): 172.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were already some 40,000 gardens scattered around the outskirts of Berlin, which were ‘more or less distributed arbitrarily across any free spaces that were either state, church or private property.’⁵⁷ These 40,000 gardens offered a space away from the busy city for some 180,000 citizens—at least ten percent of Berlin’s population. Berlin’s breweries capitalised on the growing popularity of the garden colony movement, establishing *Gartenlokale* (beer gardens) in the colonies, often alongside a central square, where the garden associations organised special events, including children’s festivals and most important of all, the annual harvest festival.⁵⁸ Photographer Willy Römer captured the spirit of the harvest festivals in Berlin’s garden colonies in a series of photographs taken throughout the early decades of the century (fig. 27). The gathering and display of produce, so it would seem, was secondary to the music, dances, paper lanterns, decorations, and carnivalesque procession of children through the avenues of the colony.⁵⁹

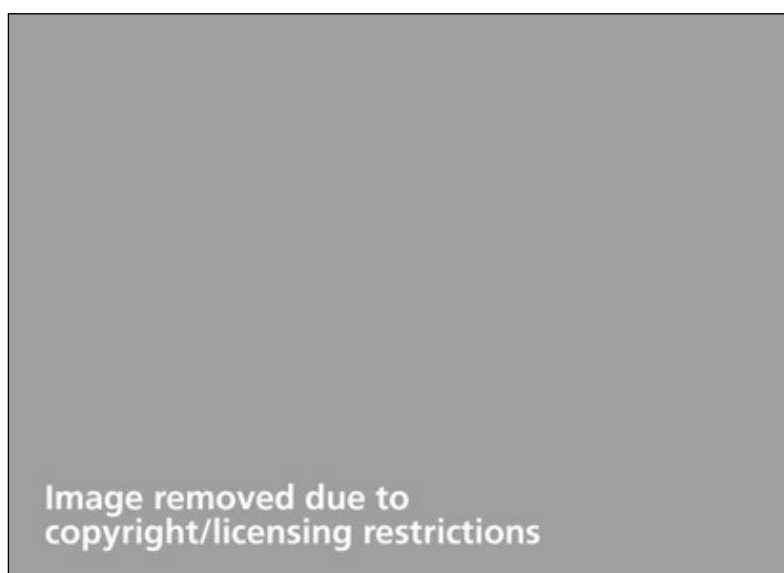


Figure 27: Willy Römer, Music and dancing in the festivities square in a garden colony at the edges of Berlin (Pankow), no date. Reproduced from: Willy Römer, *Erntefest im Schrebergarten : Berlin 1912–1927* (Berlin: Nischen Verlag, 1985), 5.

57. W. Reinhold, “Der Kleingarten als Reaktion gegen das Wohnungselend im Zeitalter zunehmender Industrialisierung und der Mietskasernen,” *Kleingartenwacht* 4, no. 7/8 (1927): 86-87.

58. Albrecht, “Deutsche Kleingartenpolitik,” 172.

59. Willy Römer, *Erntefest im Schrebergarten : Berlin 1912–1927* (Berlin: Nischen Verlag, 1985).

The popularity of the garden-colony movement with Berliners is evident in their coverage in the city's flourishing press industry. As a predominantly working-class pursuit, with around sixty-three percent Berlin's garden plots being tended by workers,⁶⁰ the colonies tended to feature most frequently in Social Democratic and (in the 1920s) communist publications. Writers and journalists regularly visited the gardens in the spring, when families returned to their plots to carry out repairs and a spring clean after the long winter, or in the late summer, when the harvest festivals took place.⁶¹ In literature, garden-colony life appeared in short stories and poems that recounted idyllic, late-summer days spent picking gooseberries and tending flower beds full of pansies and daisies.⁶² Publishers in the city also got involved by selling practical how-to guides for the discerning gardener and colonist.⁶³



Figure 28: Heinrich Zille, Laubenkolonie illustration from: H.E. "Laubenkolonien." *Magazin für Alle* August (1930): 12–14.

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60. Egon Johannes, "Entwicklung, Funktionswandel und Bedeutung städtischer Kleingärten" (Universität Kiel, 1955), 53. Quoted in: Reck, *Arbeiter nach der Arbeit*, 154.
61. Anonymous, "Mutter reich mir mal die Nägel her! Frühling in der Laubenkolonie," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 9, no. 21 (1930): 406; Anonymous, "Erntefest in der Laubenkolonie," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 7, no. 36 (1928): 15.
62. Oskar Hübner, ed., *Wir kleinen Berliner : Mit 28 Zeichnungen von Willibald Krain* 2nd edition (Berlin: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz, 1927), 113-15.
63. Fritz Meissner, *Der Hausgarten : Praktische Anleitung zur Anlage, Ausschmückung und Pflege von Hausgärten, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lauben und Laubenkolonien*, vol. 14, Ullsteins Sammlung : Praktischer Hausbücher (Berlin: Ullstein & Co, 1902).

The colonies were as much a popular topic for visual artists as they were for poets and writers. The ad-hoc character of the early gardens is best demonstrated by Heinrich Zille's turn-of-the-century scenes. In his illustrations, Zille frequently portrayed the *Lauben* as rickety buildings, constructed from whatever materials one could lay their hands on (fig. 28). Zille's drawings show how the early colonists initially worked independent of each other. Each of the huts and gardens were unique, and their position in relation to each other betrayed no evidence of systematic organisation. Furthermore, the remoteness of the gardens is emphasised by the distance between them and the tenement blocks and spires of the city in the background. Zille's illustrations also allude to the social importance of the early gardens, showing the entire family dressed in their Sunday best for their weekend visit to the outskirts of the city. Sunday was the one day of the week when the entire family, free of working commitments, could afford to escape the tenement neighbourhoods and head out from the city. Situated away from the noise and bustle of the tenements, working-class families spent their Sundays during the warmer months slowly improving their summerhouse and nurturing their garden.

While Zille's scenes appeared in a variety of newspapers and magazines, Hans Baluschek's monumental painting *Sommerfest in der Laubenkolonie* (Summer Festival in the Garden Colony, 1909), elevated representations of garden colony culture into the annual Berliner Secession exhibition (fig. 29). Baluschek's painting shows the main event of the year in the garden colony—the summer, or harvest festival—in which the members of the colony celebrate the climax of the agricultural year. The painting concentrates on the procession of children carrying paper lanterns through the colony in the gloaming. On either side stands a row of summerhouses, each painted differently, with a name plaque over the door. Above the summerhouses, an array of limply hanging flags attest to the gardeners' political allegiances. If Baluschek's painting represented a growing awareness of working-class garden colony culture in bourgeois circles, it also represented a growing sense of organisation and institutionalisation in the garden colonies themselves. This colony however, still remains separate from the city, with the shadowy outlines of tenements lurking in the distance against the darkening sky. Photographs of the newly opened Schillerpark in the working-class district of Wedding from 1913, provide further evidence of the extent of the colonies and their proximity to the city. Photographs taken

from the park's elevated terrace show a large swathe of land occupied by gardens, sandwiched in between the park grounds and the tenement blocks in the distance, which are partially obscured by a smoky haze (fig. 12).

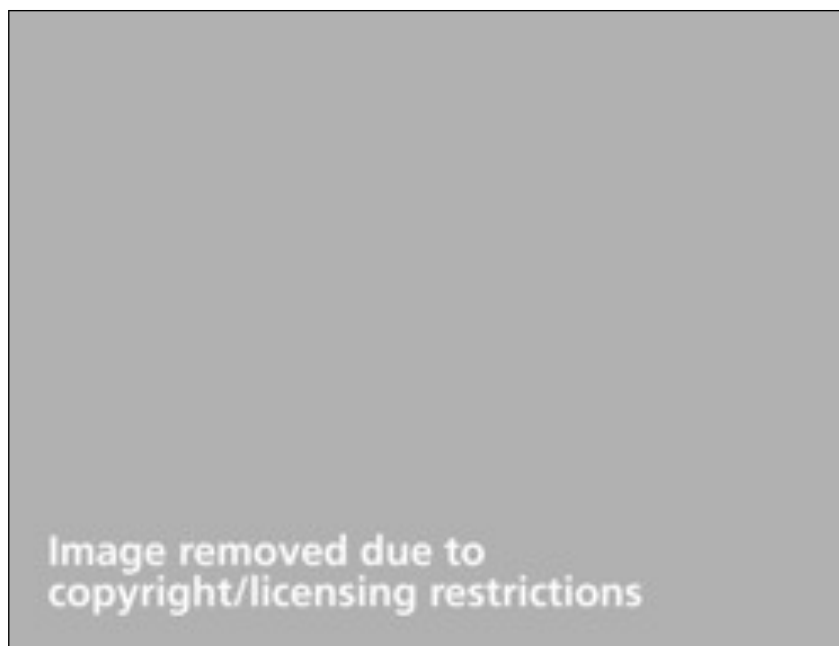


Figure 29: Hans Baluschek, *Sommerfest in der Laubenkolonie*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 191 x 253cm. Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

The colonies took on a significant socio-economic importance during the first World War. German leaders and economists were unprepared for a lengthy conflict, and by the time the announcement of the Kaiser's abdication came in November 1918, the country's economy lay in tatters. With food in scarce supply, the garden colonies became an important source of food production and nutrition (*Ernährung*) for many urban citizens. Germany's new republican government quickly recognised the social role the gardens had played during the war. In July 1919, Reichspresident Ebert and his nutrition minister Robert Schmidt signed the Reichskleingartengesetz (Small Gardens Act), which pledged to guarantee greater future protection for the colonies against the continued threat posed to them by property developers.⁶⁴ Two years later, garden representatives founded the *Reichsverband*

64. Friedrich Ebert, and Robert Schmidt, "Die Kleingarten- und Kleinpachtlandordnung vom 31. July 1919," in Günter Katsch, and Johann B. Walz (Leipzig: Bundesverband Deutscher Gartenfreunde, 1996), 163-65. See also: Georg Kaisenberg, ed., *Kleingarten- und Kleinpachtlandordnung nebst verwandtem Recht* 3rd Handbuch des deutschen Kleingartenrechts (Berlin: Franz Dahlen, 1924). Otto Albrecht succinctly summarised the new act in: Albrecht, "Deutsche Kleingartenpolitik," 168-76.

der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands (Association of German Small-Garden Holders, or RKGD), which recruited some 300,000 members across Germany in the space of three years.⁶⁵ By the end of 1929, Berlin alone had 853 *Kleingarten* associations with 66,750 members.⁶⁶ An SPD publication from this year calculated that there were over 126,000 small gardens in the city, used by over half a million people—more than an eighth of the city's population.⁶⁷

With the republican government having acknowledged their importance to the urban population in 1919, the garden colonies enjoyed a sustained high profile in the work of artists during the twenties. Baluschek's 1925 painting *Sonnenidyll* gives us a glimpse into the more mundane day-to-day existence of the colonies, as well as an idea of the growing proximity of urban developments. Just beyond the garden plot at the centre of the painting lies a car repair garage, and further on, a streetcar trundles along a road. Baluschek commented more explicitly on the changing status and situation of the garden colonies in a lithograph from the same year, *Laubenkolonie in der Großstadt* (Garden Colony in the City), chosen by the artist as the frontispiece for his *Volk* portfolio of lithographs. Two things are striking about this image. First, the garden colony has become a densely arranged and orderly affair. Second, the colony is enclosed by urban development, with factories to one side and rows of tenements to the other (fig. 30). Gustav Wunderwald also took the colonies as a theme in his paintings, including *Laubenkolonie (Villa Minna)* from around 1924, and *Hinterhäuser im Winter* (Rear Tenement Blocks in Winter, 1925). These two works reflect the diverse range of situations in which the garden colonies found themselves. On one hand, *Laubenkolonie (Villa Minna)* described an expansive, sprawling colony with numerous factory chimneys spewing smoke in the far distance. On the other hand, *Hinterhäuser im Winter* suggested a much smaller colony—numbering just a few plots—squeezed onto land adjoining the rear of a number of tenement blocks.

65. *Ibid.*, 173.

66. Reinhold, *Tätigkeitsbericht*, 5.

67. SPD., *Sozialdemokratische Kommunal-Arbeit in Berlin 1925/1929 : Tätigkeitsbericht und Handbuch für die Kommunalwahlen 1929* (Berlin: Bezirksvorstand Berlin der SPD. Kommunales Sekretariat, 1929), 102.



Figure 30: Hans Baluschek, *Laubenkolonie in der Großstadt*, 1925. 16 x 18cm. Stadtmuseum Graphische Sammlung, Berlin.

In many of the post-1919 representations of the gardens, including Wunderwald's *Hinterhäuser im Winter*, the republican red-gold-black flag, hoisted above the summerhouse, dominated the scene (fig. 31). Despite increasing communist support amongst Berlin's working-class areas throughout the 1920s, the colonies—whose gardeners belonged to an older generation of workers less easily swayed by radical left-wing politics—retained a predominantly Social Democratic character. Besides hoisting flags above their plots, some gardeners reputedly went as far as painting the exterior of their summerhouses in a deep socialist red.⁶⁸

4.4 Working-class culture in the tenement neighbourhoods

The harvest festivals were not exclusively restricted to the garden colonies, and many residents in the densely crowded tenements also celebrated the occasion. It is unclear whether the commemoration of the harvest by Berlin's tenement inhabitants was an aspect of the introduction of rural customs into the city by agricultural migrants, or comprised part of a deeper, historical acknowledgement of the importance of the harvest amongst the

68. Jack Hunter, "Prolet-Idyll," *Kulturwille*, May 1928.

predominantly agricultural regions of eastern Germany. Whatever their origins, the tenement festivals shared distinct similarities with those that took place in the colonies, and suggest a certain level of adaptation of rural custom into an urban environment.



Figure 31: Gustav Wunderwald, *Hinterhäuser im Winter*, 1925.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 71.5cm. Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

The average tenement complex was a microcosm of Berlin society. In fact, a typical tenement complex could easily accommodate a population comparable to that of a rural town or village. An illustration of a tenement yard by the artist Otto Nagel, appearing in a 1926 newspaper article about the artist, carried the subtitle: ‘A tenement rear courtyard in Wedding, around which 400 people live.’⁶⁹ The *Meyers-Hof* tenement complex on Ackerstrasse in Wedding was reputedly home—if one believed the newspapers—to anywhere between 1,200 and 2,500 people.⁷⁰ The *Mietskasernen* supported a broad cross section of society, bringing the working- and middle-classes into close contact with each

69. ‘Ein Hinterhaus, in dem 400 Menschen hausen.’ Heinrich Brasse. “Das andere Gesicht der Weltstadt. Mit dem Proletarier-Maler durch Berlin N,” *Neue Zeit: Das große Berliner Morgenblatt*, January 1, 1927.

70. Traut Hajdu claimed 1,200 people lived in the *Meyers-Hof* in 1929: Traut Hajdu, “‘Meyershof’ – eine Stadt in der Stadt,” *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 8, no. 19 (1929): 5. A report in the *Münchener Illustrierte Presse* quoted a figure of 2,500 in 1932. See: Johann Friedrich Geist, and Klaus Kürvers, eds., *Das Berliner Mietshaus 1862–1945* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1984), 413.

other; a deliberate ploy which James Hobrecht hoped would lead to the betterment of the proletariat. Working-class mothers who lived in the cellars of the tenement blocks, Hobrecht claimed, would be compelled out of pride to raise themselves to the standards of their better-off neighbours.⁷¹ Hobrecht's convictions were naïve, if not completely misplaced, and the gulf in the living conditions between the worst and the best rooms in the tenements was equally capable of destroying rather than raising the aspirations of the poorest inhabitants.

The common hardships shared by the tenement's poorer residents produced a far greater sense of solidarity and neighbourly sentiment than was ever likely to be produced between those in vastly different material circumstances. Poorer residents lived towards the rear of the tenement complex, and because their windows overlooked the internal courtyards, it was natural for these spaces to become a focus of social interaction—the public side of life in the tenement block. If the tenement block was capable of supporting a population the size of a small village, then the tenement courtyard was the inhabitants' equivalent of the village square. Conditions in the courtyards were often little better than in the rooms of the tenements themselves. In the SPD newspaper *Vorwärts*, one observer described the yards in detail:

Across crumbling, beaten pavement you arrive at the small, almost square courtyard. It is surrounded by massive walls and the thousand eyes of the grey house looking towards the sky. In one corner, three overflowing bins, beside them a rotting hand-wagon and a pair of old boxes. The sun strives in vain to shed light upon the floors of these stone chasms, in which the sounds of a hundred and one stories, laughter, screams, hooting bands, children's songs, drunken bawling, gramophone music, the newest music, and melancholy folk songs all mingle together; where the stifling air oppresses like lead weights upon the sickly lungs. Is there nothing, of which the eye

71. 'Wenn eine Mutter aus dem englischen Arbeiter-Viertel ihr Kind ungewaschen, ungekämmt und zerlumpt umherlaufen lässt, weil jede Anregung zur Verausgabung von Arbeit und Zeit nach dieser Richtung hin fehlt, so wird sich die Mutter aus der Kellerwohnung einer Mietskaserne doch scheuen, dies zu tun, denn sie weiß sich beobachtet und dem Tadel besserer Mitbewohner ausgesetzt.' Hobrecht, *Über öffentliche Gesundheitspflege*, 14-15.

can enjoy? On the contrary! At many of the windows—yearning towards light and air— are blossoming heather and murmuring greenery, which the *Steinmeer* cannot suppress.⁷²

Throughout the course of the *Kaiserreich*, government regulations increasingly restricted the public spaces in which street entertainments and buskers could operate, pushing them into the private spaces of the working-class neighbourhoods.⁷³ The effectiveness of such regulation however, is to be doubted. Fritz Rück asserted in 1931 that ‘singing, music, and children’s play’ were all prohibited in the tenement courtyards.⁷⁴ And yet, an abundance of documentary evidence—both literally and visual—suggests that such regulation was either unenforceable or ignored, or both. Two of Weimar Germany’s best-known photographers of everyday life, Willy Römer and Friedrich Seidenstücker, both captured images of organ grinders playing in tenement courtyards.⁷⁵ Besides the organ grinders, singers, children and musical troupes all freely moved from one tenement courtyard to the next, busking for money. With four or five rows of windows rising up on two, three, or all four sides of the courtyard, the entertainers had a captive audience. The bare stone walls of the courtyard ensured that their sounds echoed up all the way to the top-most windows in the attic spaces above.

72. ‘Über brüchigen, ausgetretenen Zementboden gelangt man auf den kleinen, fast quadratischen Hof. Rings ragen mit gewaltigen Mauern und tausend Augen graue Häuser gen Himmel, in einer Ecke stehen drei übervolle Müllkästen, daneben ein verwitterter Handwagen und ein paar alte Kisten, die Sonne bemüht sich vergeblich, den Grund dieser Steinschlucht zu erleuchten, in der hunderterlei Gerstiche, Gelächter, Geschrei, heulendes Reifen, kindliches Ballen, trunkenes Johlen, quarrende Grammophonmusik, die neuesten Schlager, Schwermütiger, Volkslieder durcheinanderwirbeln, deren stickige Luft wie mit Bleigewichten beschwert auf den matten Lungen lastet – nichts, woran das Auge sich erfreuen könnte? – Doch! An vielen der Fenster und nicht zuletzt Sehnsucht nach Licht und Luft, nach blühender Heide und raunendem Walde, die das steinerne Meer nicht erdrücken könnte.’ “Berliner Höfe,” *Vorwärts*, November 26, 1925.

73. Abrams, *Workers’ Culture*, 93-94.

74. Fritz Rück, *Der Wedding in Wort und Bild* (Berlin: E. Laubsche, 1931), 9.

75. Willy Römer, *Leierkästen in Berlin 1912–1932*, ed. Diethart Kerbs (Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1983), 18. Photographers by Seidenstücker, including an organ grinder playing in a tenement courtyard, appear in: Franz Hessel, *Ein flaneur in Berlin* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1984), 180.

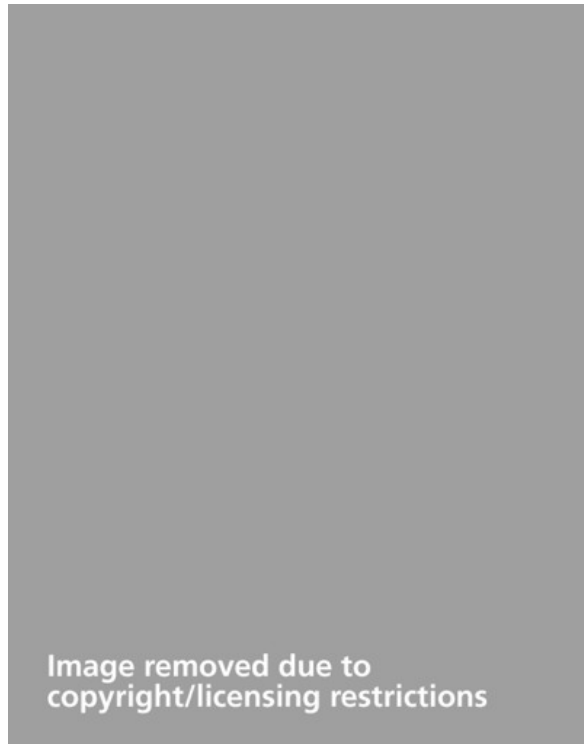


Figure 32: Heinrich Zille, *Zirkusspiel im Hinterhof*, 1925. Lithograph, 45.5 x 37cm.

Christopher Isherwood wrote in *Goodbye Berlin*, of the procession of street singers and musicians who performed in the courtyard below the Nowaks' apartment in Kreuzberg. He described the 'nearly continuous [...] parties of boys with mandolins, an old man who played the concertina and a father who sang with his little girls.' Occasionally, residents would throw down a penny (*Groschen*) wrapped in newspaper, lest it hit one of the unfortunate performers.⁷⁶ Bauhaus visionary László Moholy-Nagy was another chronicler of tenement courtyard life, dedicating a significant proportion of his 1931 film, *Berliner Stilleben* (Berlin Still Life) to the street singers and other goings-on in the *Meyers-Hof*. Heinrich Zille produced a number of prints of courtyard scenes in the mid twenties, including the 1925 lithograph *Zirkusspiel im Hinterhof* (Circus Event in the Tenement Courtyard), in which a circus troupe known as *Klub Wedding* perform in a rear courtyard (fig. 32). In the background of the scene, tenement residents and children peer down from their windows onto the spectacle. The circus troupe consists of a number of clowns, acrobats, dancers and strongmen, who use a ground-sheet as a makeshift circus ring, and various props, ribbons and bunting to decorate their arena. The sign above the passage to the street reads: 'Every Sunday 4pm. Circus performance – Club Wedding.' Troupes such

76. Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin novels: Mr Norris Changes Trains / Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Vintage, 1999), 380–81.

as Club Wedding performed in numerous locations across the working-class districts, and the advance arrangement of times and places for performances is indicative of their importance and role in proletarian day-to-day life.

Zille's insights into day-to-day goings on in the tenement blocks emphasised the intimate and collective nature of working-class existence. Because of their distance from the street and their spatially central role in tenement life, the courtyards assumed a distinct working-class identity, and with this—at least for the inquisitive bourgeois intruder—an ambiguous part-public, part-private identity. When the writer Franz Hessel stepped into the tenement courtyards of Berlin's working-class districts, he felt life become 'denser and more heartfelt'. Yet at the same time Hessel felt his own conspicuous presence as an outsider in such a space. He described venturing into courtyards in the morning, 'when singers and fiddlers appear,' and standing next to the 'old woman doorkeeper' who takes no offence at his presence. Hessel recalled how he was 'allowed' to look up at the windows of the courtyard walls, and confessed to the reader that he would like to 'have [his] share of evenings in these courtyards,' before ultimately conceding that he has 'neither the courage nor excuse for intruding,' and that his 'status as a trespasser is too easily seen.'⁷⁷

The buskers, with their music and singing, were impromptu performances which occurred on a daily basis. Other less frequent events took place on a larger scale and were planned well in advance. Besides Christmas, the most significant of these events—already mentioned—was the harvest festival, often celebrated with the same level of vigour in the tenements as it was in the garden colonies. Occurring throughout August and September, tenement blocks had their own appointed date on the calendar for their festivities.⁷⁸ Though they lacked the luxury of the open space afforded in the garden colonies and were often dependent on the enthusiasm and organisational skills of individuals rather than an 'association' of like-minded individuals, the courtyard festivals were still successful enterprises. Music was provided by a band (plus the obligatory organ grinder), and paper lanterns and hats were made for the children. There were Punch and Judy shows, food

77. 'Vormittags gelingt mir das allenfalls, wenn Sänger und Geiger sich produzieren [...] Da kann ich mich neben die alte Portierfrau stellen [...] Sie nimmt keinen Anstoß an meiner Gegenwart, und ich darf hinaufsehen in die Hoffenster, [...] ich möchte doch auch mein Teil an dem Abend dieser Höfe haben [...] allein ich finde nicht Mut noch Vorwand, mich einzudrängen, man sieht mir meine Unbefugtheit zu deutlich an.' Hessel, "Der Verdächtige," 8-9.

78. Walter Petry, "Ackerstraße 132 'Meyers Hof'," *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 10 (1929): 200.

donated by local businesses and of course, plenty to drink. The festivities could spill out onto the street, and were guaranteed to last well into the early hours.⁷⁹ The tenement harvest festivals and other organised festivities attracted great interest in all quarters of the press, and the photographic essays in mainstream newspapers and magazines were one of the few instances in which working-class culture was revealed to a broader audience (fig. 77).⁸⁰ With the coverage of the harvest festivals, illustrated magazines such as *BIZ* could open a window onto another world without having to delve too deeply below the surface and revealing the hardship of daily life that lay beneath.

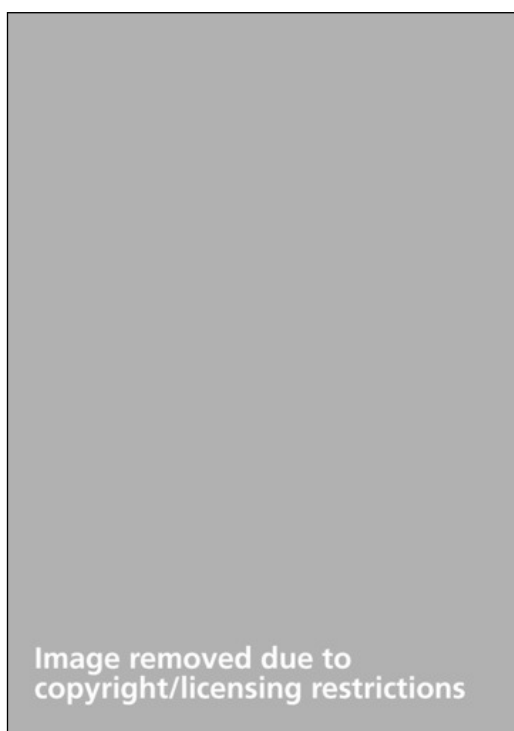


Figure 33: Hans Baluschek, *Auf dem Dach (Kleiner Leute Dachgarten)*, 1926. Lithograph, 25x18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Most tenement complexes were comprised of more than simply residential spaces. In order to improve their profitability, commercial and factory spaces were frequently incorporated into the blocks. In the most documented and extreme case of the *Meyers-Hof* in Wedding, the courtyards of the complex permitted access to public baths, pumpnickel, screw and cigarette factories, carpenter's and cartwright's workshops, a butcher's shop, clothes shop,

79. Mimsch [Friedrich Kroner]. "'Erntefest' in der Mietskaserne," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 25, 1929; Gottwald, *Heimatbuch vom Wedding*, 190-91.

80. Mimsch [Friedrich Kroner]. "'Erntefest' in der Mietskaserne," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 25, 1929; "Ackerstrasse 1932/33 lädt zum Ball," *Weltspiegel*, September 8, 1929.

and coal and wood merchants.⁸¹ The comings and goings of motor vehicles, horses and carts and the sound of machines, made many courtyards a hive of noise and activity. Furthermore, livestock were often kept in the courtyards and one might expect to find horse stables, pigs and chickens in them.⁸² Above the courtyards, the roof of the tenement—where accessible—was an important space for the tenement dweller. Many blocks had flat roofs, which could be put to a variety of uses. Baluschek featured two rooftop scenes in his series of lithographic prints, *Volk*, published in the mid-twenties. *Dachromantik Alt-Berlin* (Roof Idyll in Old Berlin, 1927) shows an intricate landscape of pitched and flat surfaces, punctuated by windows and chimneys. This was a space—or to be more accurate a series of unconnected yet intimately related spaces—that could be enjoyed by all ages, spaces for hanging out one's washing, tending a window-box, or simply contemplating nature and relaxing. Baluschek's *Auf dem Dach (Kleine Dachgarten)* (On the Roof (Small Roofgarden), 1926) offered a different scenario. In this scene the roof area is flat and more expansive, creating an open space for socialising, gardening, even dancing amongst the chimney pots and greenery. Two young ladies dance while a young man, cigarette hanging off his bottom lip, looks on. In the background, an old lady tends a raised garden bed. Such a variety of practical and social uses for the domestic roof space are akin to those advocated by Le Corbusier in his designs for modern houses and skyscrapers in *Towards a New Architecture*, first published in 1923.⁸³ Though never intended as a benefit or design feature of the tenement, the flat roof obviously had its uses that catered for a broad range of social groups (fig. 34).

81. Petry, "Ackerstraße 132," 200; Hajdu, "'Meyershof'," 5.

82. Ibid.

83. Corbusier Le, *Towards a new architecture*, 2nd ed. (London: Architectural Press, 1968), 68-69.

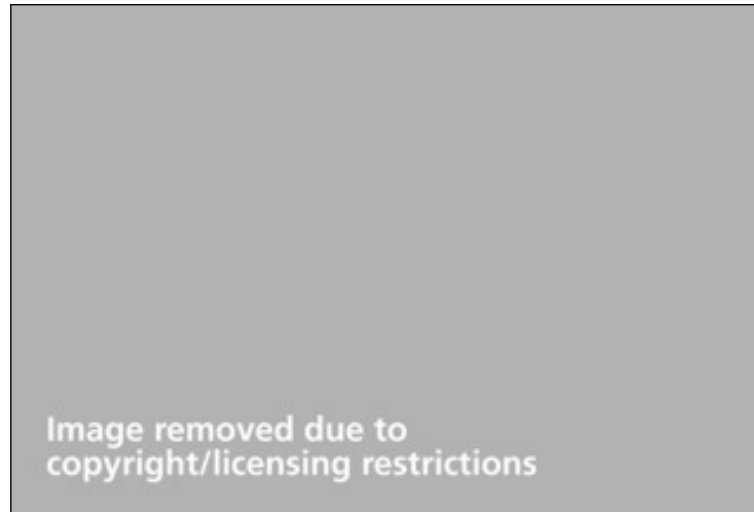


Figure 34: Unknown photographer, Untitled, 1926.
Reproduced from: Hans-Christian Adam, *Berlin : Portrait of a City*
(London: Taschen, 2007).

Towards the end of the 1920s, amid an atmosphere of increasingly hostile campaigning by the KPD and NSDAP parties, the tenement courtyards became important locations for political canvassing. With unemployment endemic in working-class neighbourhoods, the Nazis focussed on the tenements—traditionally identified with left-wing voters—as targets in which to establish an electoral foothold amongst a disillusioned and despondent population. One particularly visible means by which KPD campaigners could counter NSDAP propaganda and appeal to Social Democratic voters, was through Agit-prop performances in the tenement courtyards, designed to encourage support for the Communist Party. In 1930, one of the best-known Agit-prop troupes, *Roter Wedding*, campaigned intensively throughout the Wedding district:

Kösliner Strasse 6 [...] The Agitprop troupe ‘Red Wedding’ have just announced themselves. [...] An old flat-bed wagon is their stage, and with no hesitation they get started. [...] The drums are stirring. In three different windows the Workers’ League attach loudspeakers [...] and accompany the singing of the troupe. Not one of the hundred windows is closed. Two hundred workers push their way into the courtyard. [...] ‘Bravo! Red Front!’ cries out from the windows.⁸⁴

84. ‘Kösliner Strasse 6 [...] Die Agitproptruppe „Roter Wedding“ hat sich angemeldet [...] Ein alter Plattenwagen ist die Bühne, und ohne zu zögern geht es los. [...] Die Trommeln werden gerührt!

4.5 The working-class taverns

Despite the efforts of social campaigners and the temperance movement, drinking in the local tavern remained an integral aspect of the lives of many workers. Many workers saw the tavern as a refuge, somewhere to escape the repetitive drudgery of the factory and the overcrowded home. There were plenty of taverns to be found in Wedding, with one standing on almost every street corner. Official statistics recorded 1,307 public houses and inns in the district in 1927, the equivalent of one per 345 residents in the district. Another proletarian district in the city—Kreuzberg—boasted even more taverns: over two thousand in total, or one per 230 inhabitants in the district.⁸⁵ The taverns were usually situated on the ground floor, or below ground in the cellars of the tenement blocks. Inside, they contained a large space with bar, tables and chairs. Many taverns also had a back room, used for music and dance performances, including the *Tingel-Tangel*, a popular working-class entertainment, usually performed by the barmaids for the titillation of the tavern's male clientele. This entertainment attracted the attention of several German artists, including Baluschek, Rudolf Schlichter and Max Beckmann, who made the dance the subject of paintings.⁸⁶ Politically orientated groups and labour movement clubs regularly used the local taverns as meeting places, regarding them as useful places in which to forge alliances, recruit colleagues and carry out one's party obligations, away from the rather open and public spaces of the street.⁸⁷

Some taverns had a very distinct political affiliation. In the proletarian districts, designated *Parteikneipe* (party locals) were used for group meetings and exhibitions organised by party members. Walli Nagel recalled accompanying her husband, artist Otto Nagel, to their *Parteikneipe* in Wedding in the mid twenties, where they attended party meetings and discussed the situation in Soviet Russia.⁸⁸ The communist *Arbeitsgemeinschaft-Sozialpolitischer Organisation* (Work Community of Social-Political Organizations, or

Der Arbeiter-Nadia-Bund sendet mit drei in verschiedenen Fenstern verteilten Lautsprechern rote Lieder und begleitet den Gesang der Truppe. [...] Nicht eins von den hunderten Fenstern ist geschlossen. 200 Arbeiter drangen sich im Hof. Dufte! Bravo! Rot Front! schreit es aus den Fenstern.' "Links, links, links im Hof der Mietkaserne," *Die Rote Fahne*, August 1, 1930. See also: Bodek, *Proletarian Performance*, 80.

85. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1929*, 93.

86. Ostwald, *Das galante Berlin*, 288.

87. Otto Rühle, *Illustrierte Kultur- und Sittengeschichte des Proletariats*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1930), 434.

88. Nagel, *Das darfst du nicht!*, 70, 78.

ARSO) used the party locals in the working-class districts of Berlin as information offices from 1929.⁸⁹ In Klaus Neukrantz's *Barricades in Berlin* (1931), the *Red Nightingale* tavern was the focus of attention for the communist supporters of Kösliner Strasse in Wedding, amidst an increasingly political climate:

The workers of the alley gave the "Red Nightingale" a distinct political atmosphere, something not be found in usual pubs. This one was more like a Red workers' club than anything else. Everybody knew everybody else, and strange faces were rarely seen. Strangers were met with suspicion.⁹⁰

As the political situation became increasingly volatile from 1929 onwards, Nazi taverns were often targeted by KPD supporters, and vice-versa. As the political situation reached meltdown from 1931, shootings and incendiary attacks at taverns became increasingly common.⁹¹ Not all taverns displayed the same sort of political partisanship. Otto Nagel's painting *Wedding-Kneipe* (1927) contains the portraits of a particular tavern's patrons, arranged in compartmentalised panels in the manner of a religious altarpiece (fig. 35). Nagel included short biographical details of each character underneath their portrait. His characters included a war invalid, a prostitute, a long-term unemployed worker, a manual labourer and a skilled Borsig employee of long standing: in other words, a range of probable Social Democratic and communist supporters. Elsewhere, the cast of characters whom Christopher Isherwood described from the *Alexander Casino* cellar bar of 1932 in *Goodbye to Berlin*, suggests political apathy rather than activism.⁹²

89. Anonymous, "Die ARSO-Arbeit um Bezirk Berlin-Brandenburg-Lausitz," *Proletarische Sozialpolitik* 2, no. 6 (1929): 189-91.

90. Klaus Neukrantz, *Barricades in Berlin* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1979), 27.

91. Norman LaPorte, "Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity : The KPD in the Third Period, 1929–1933," in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, ed. Matthew Worley (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 49. See also Erich Kästner's narrative of a fictional incident in *Fabian*, in which a Communist supporter is shot by a Nazi after an altercation in a tavern: Erich Kästner, *Fabian : The Story of a Moralistic*, trans. Cyrus Brooks (London: Libris, 1990), 45.

92. Isherwood, *The Berlin novels*, 383-386, 392-393.

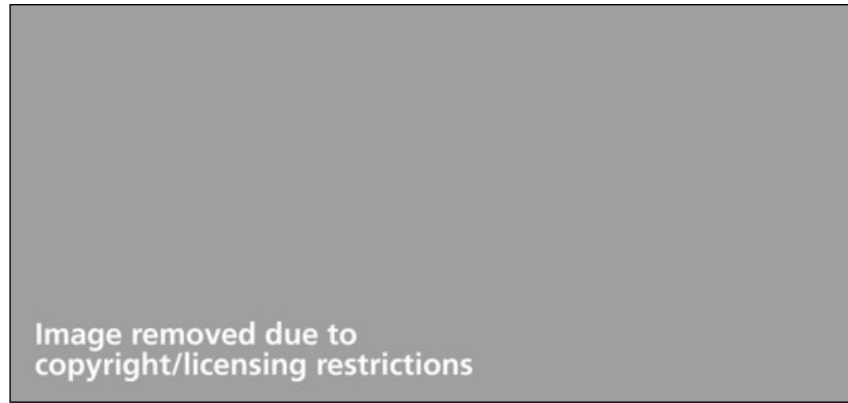


Figure 35: Otto Nagel, *Wedding-Kneipe*, 1927. Whereabouts unknown. Reproduced from: Otto Nagel, *Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1952), plate 28.

Other, larger spaces were also used as meeting places and exhibition venues for the labour-movement groups and political parties. In Wedding, the most significant venue for events was the Pharus Halls on Müllerstrasse. Prior to the first World War, the Social Democrats frequently used the hall for party events and meetings. After the early revolutionary years of the new republic (1919–1921), in which the landscape of Germany’s political left was radically altered, the Pharus Halls became a communist focus of activity, and was regularly used by the KPD for meetings and exhibitions.⁹³

4.6 Open spaces in the tenement neighbourhoods

Alongside the tenement complexes, building plots (*Baustellen*) ringed by wooden fences were, as we have already seen in chapter two, a frequent sight in Berlin’s working-class districts. After the war, they continued to be a highly visible feature amongst the buildings of the city’s industrial and suburban districts. In some of the less well-developed neighbourhoods at the fringes of the city, building sites and empty plots contributed to a landscape rich with a variety of land uses, including multi-storied tenements and factories, coal and woodyards, allotment gardens, funfairs, building sites, empty plots of ground and rural properties built many decades previously.⁹⁴ The extremely heterogeneous nature of

93. Karin Mahlich, “Vom Feldschlößen zu den Pharen-Sälen,” in *Wedding*, ed. Helmut Engel, et al. (Berlin: Nicolai, 1990), 321-40.

94. For example, Christianiastrasse in 1927. See: *Berliner Adressbuch*, 1927.

the outer urban areas was demonstrative evidence of the city's uneven development, and proof of the *laissez-faire* economical principles that underlay Berlin's pre-war phase of urbanisation.



Figure 36: Gustav Wunderwald, *Am Wedding (Blauband), Häuser mit Reklame*, 1926. Oil on canvas, 61.5 x 71.5cm. Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

The mixture of tenements and building sites were a popular motif for Berlin's artists. They represented the newness and transience of the young, vibrant, expanding city. As a purely formalistic conception, they offered bold visual contrasts between open space and the exposed, monumental firewalls of neighbouring tenements. Gustav Wunderwald's *Am Wedding (Blauband), Berliner Häuser mit Reklame* (Wedding (*Blauband*), Berlin Housing Blocks with Advertising Signs, 1927) uses dramatic perspective in its description of a lumberyard lying in the shadow of a tenement firewall, emblazoned with advertisements (fig. 36). Other artists deliberately sought to convey the provisional nature of the spaces of the city, of economics, and of society. Rich in urban texture, Franz Lenk's *Berliner Hinterhäuser* alludes to the redevelopment of a plot adjoining a five-storey tenement building (chapter 3, fig. 20). Landowners erected the wooden fences around their plots as a means of keeping people off their property, to prevent their occupation by squatters or use as rubbish dumps. But these defences were not impregnable. Writing in 1908, the Social Democratic politician Albert Südekum recalled living in the outer districts of the city,

where children would break into fenced-off plots, ignoring the ‘entry prohibited’ signs.⁹⁵ In his illustration *Arbeiters Ferienparadies*, which appeared in a 1929 issue of the pro-communist magazine *Eulenspiegel*, Otto Nagel illustrated an instance of working-class occupation of an empty plot amongst the tenements, satirising in the process the paucity and state of the public spaces available to the working-classes in the city (fig. 37).⁹⁶ In the illustration, the barren ground of the plot is strewn with detritus, which has not discouraged people from using the space for recreational purposes. The roughly executed style of the drawing accentuates the squalid nature of the subject matter. Hence the need for wooden fencing. Once secured, these empty spaces could remain idle for any length of time. Just as those larger spaces on the outskirts of the city were ideal for leasing out as garden colonies, so those smaller spaces within built-up areas of the city were also pressed into productive economic service. They found common use as coal and lumberyards (as described by Wunderwald above), which developers could easily clear to make way for building development at an opportune moment. The city’s historical records reveal numerous instances in which plots of land are described as a building site, wood or goods storage yard one year, and as a construction site or occupied building the next.⁹⁷

95. Albert Südekum, *Großstädtisches Wohnungselend*, vol. 45, Großstadt-Dokumente (Berlin: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1908), 39-40.

96. Otto Nagel, “Arbeiters Ferienparadies,” *Eulenspiegel*, July 1929.

97. For example: Berliner Adressbuch, 1870-1890.



Figure 37: Otto Nagel, "Arbeiters Ferienparadies," *Eulenspiegel*, July 1929.

Another use of inner-city plots capable of generating income was their leasing to fairs and travelling circuses. Hans Ostwald described the funfair (or *Rummelplatz*) as a remnant from Berlin's past, which endured in the newer areas of Berlin's *Steinmeer*. Ostwald described the *Rummelplätze* of the 1920s as being filled with 'men and women, prostitutes, pimps, [and] children who had runaway from welfare services.'⁹⁸ Many *Rummelplätze* had been established as far back as the turn of the century and remained extremely popular with the city's working-class inhabitants. Wedding had two notable parks, the *Volkspark* in Gesundbrunnen and the *Nordpark* 'Onkel Pelle' on Müllerstrasse (fig. 38). Contemporary photographs and written accounts indicate both the rich diversity and tawdriness of the entertainment on offer:

98. Ostwald, *Das galante Berlin*, 346.

Here one can ride on the carousel throughout the year. There is a small circus of predatory animals, whose bears and lions go to great lengths for a not undemanding public that are kept entertained by their tricks. One can win the lottery here, see the funfair's boxing world champions, and try their hand at the punch bag for twenty Pfennigs. Here one can stroll and flirt, here is bustle.⁹⁹

The Nordpark on Müllerstrasse made an appearance in Erich Kästner's 1931 novel *Fabian, Portrait of a Moralist*. In the story, the eponymous hero found 'an unexpected break in the line of house-fronts, a gap between the solid tenement buildings—the entrance to a fairground, Uncle Pelle's Amusement Park.'¹⁰⁰

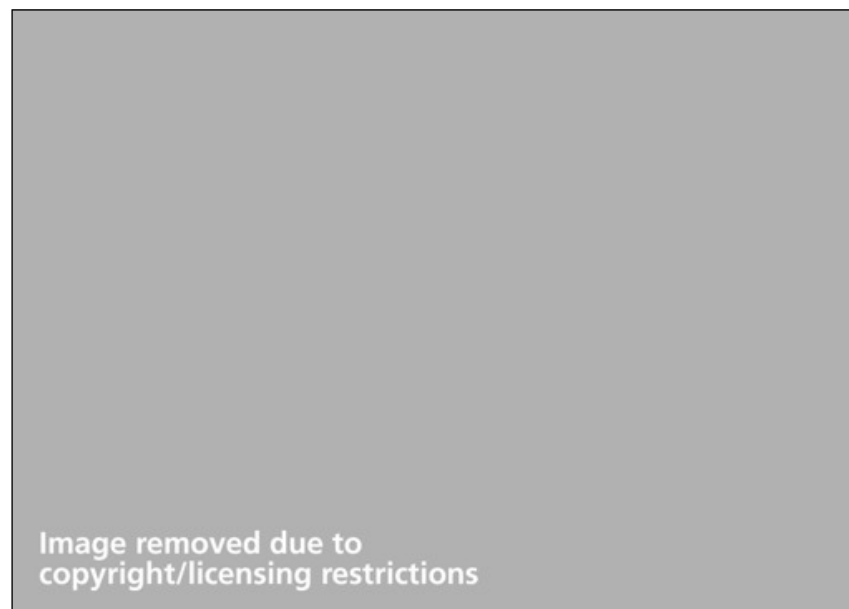


Figure 38: Anonymous. Nordpark "Onkel Pelle" (Vergnügungspark), Blick zum Nordeingang. 1930. From: Landesarchiv Berlin.

Kästner's description of the 'gap' amongst the solidity of the surrounding buildings corresponds to the striking visual contrasts created between the tenement and open space that Wunderwald, Lenk and Nagel described in the paintings above. The firewalls of the

99. 'Hier kann man das ganze Jahr hindurch Karussell fahren, hier ist ein kleiner Raubtierzirkus, und die Bären und Löwen geben sich mächtige Mühe, ihr nicht allzu anspruchvolles Publikum zu unterhalten durch allerlei Kunststücke, hier kann man in der Lotterie gewinnen, die Champions aller Rummelplätze der Welt beim Boxen sehen, für zwanzig Pfennige such selbst am Punchingball versuchen, hier wird flaniert und kokettiert, hier ist Betrieb.' Rück, *Der Wedding*, 9-10.

100. Kästner, *Fabian*, 122.

tenement blocks were omnipresent in the photographs, paintings and drawings made of the *Rummelplätze*. Otto Nagel's *Rummelplatz der Proletarier* (Funfair for the Proletarians, 1927) and George Grosz's 1928/9 painting *Funfair* both describe how the fairs were squeezed into spaces amongst the tenements. In his painting, Grosz populated the fair with a shooting gallery, food stall and amusement stand, placing a colourful painted traveller's caravan directly behind them (fig. 39). In the top half of the painting, Grosz filled the canvas with the firewalls and façades of tenement blocks. In the top left-hand corner he added a glimpse of the black hulk of a factory and smokestack. The most dominant feature of the painting is a huge advertisement for Kaiser coal briquettes that covers the tenement firewall on the left-hand side. With its limited colour palette and close cropping at the painting's edges, Grosz's *Funfair* feels distinctly one-dimensional and even claustrophobic. The foreground and background are pressed up against the picture plane, while the tree and telegraph pole to the left of the scene appear to be growing out of the shooting gallery, rather than behind it. The factory in the background has a distinctly menacing presence.

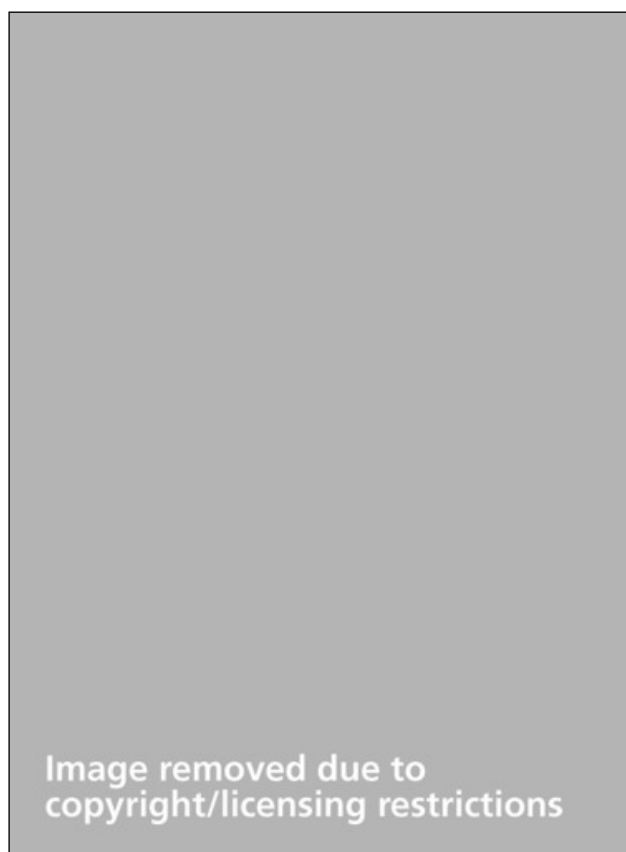


Figure 39: George Grosz, *Funfair*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 60cm. Carlo Ponti, Rome.

By no stretch of the imagination can Grosz's funfair be considered fun. Grosz instead imbued the scene with an empty sense of despair, much like the atmosphere that permeates through Kästner's *Fabian*. Grosz's faceless characters recall the artist's earlier Dadaist automatons of the early twenties, while the muted and rather ghostly colour palette is less Neue Sachlichkeit than Expressionist in quality. With the advertisement for Kaiser's coal briquettes dominating the scene, Grosz is commenting directly on the dehumanising, alienating effects of advertising and consumerism, forcing the onlooker to conclude that the little man is not even safe in those places in which he seeks distraction on his own terms. Grosz's painting echoes the suggestion made in *Die Rote Fahne* that the funfairs were tolerated by the bourgeoisie as a 'means to an end: in order to keep the proletariat in a state of indifference under the cloak of cheap pleasure.'¹⁰¹ The amalgamation of motifs in Grosz's *Funfair*—taken from Neue Sachlichkeit subjects (advertising signs and tenement blocks) and 'proletarian' art (working-class leisure activities) typifies the political ambiguities of Grosz's work in the late twenties. On another level, Grosz's painting can be read as commenting on the wider political issues facing the Weimar Republic and Berlin at the time. The artist's black sense of humour is evident in the player at the shooting gallery who fires his rifle to musical accompaniment: an allusion to the deepening political crisis then unfolding against the backdrop of Berlin's perceived decadence.

101. '[...] als Mittel zum Zweck: Proletarier unter dem Deckmantel des billigen Vergnügens im Indifferentismus zu erhalten.' "Vergnügungsstätten?," *Die Rote Fahne*, September 5, 1926.

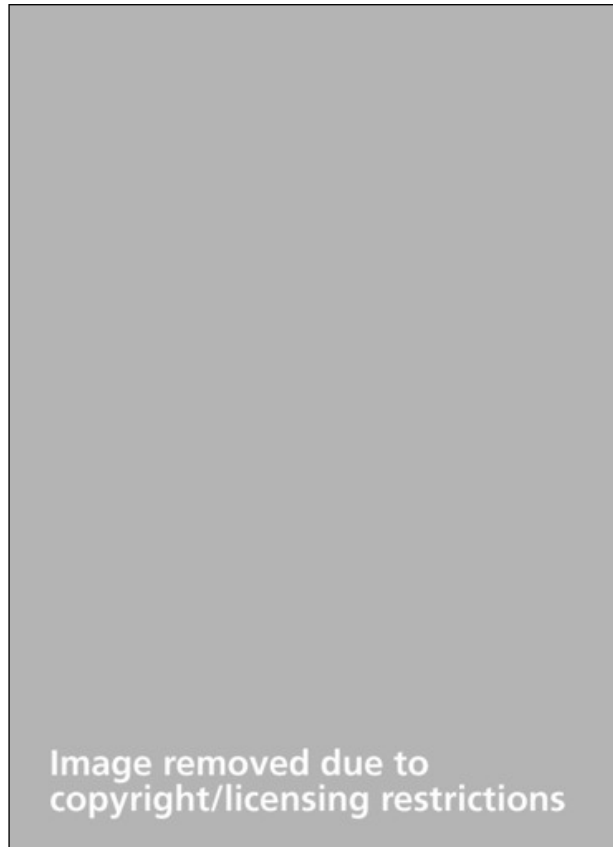


Figure 40: Hans Baluschek, *Arme Musik (Vorstadtwald)*, 1926. Watercolour, chalk on board, 97.8 x 68.8cm. Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

4.7 Open land at the edges of the city

Although Berlin's working-class districts had been heavily urbanised by the eve of the first World War, the edges of the city and the rural hinterland were never too far away. A diverse strata of Berlin society exploited the open and expansive spaces at the edges of the city, intent upon escaping the urban hubbub and indulging in recreational activities. A mixture of sandy wasteland, scrub and boggy marshes characterised the terrain surrounding Berlin, and while such a topography does not sound particularly inviting, ample evidence exists to suggest that these spaces remained popular with, or simply essential to the urban population. One contemporary report from the outskirts of Wedding described the 'white sands' of the area, and the *Laubenkolonien* that lay 'isolated' between the suburbs and the city periphery (fig. 91).¹⁰² Contemporary photographs and accounts depicted the occupation of these spaces by garden colonists, gypsies, and children playing

102. '[...] im Norden sich über einen Kranz von Laubenkolonien in die weißen Sandhaufen, die zwischen den Vorstädten und der Peripherie liegen, verlierend.' "Auf dem Wedding," *Die Rote Fahne*, June 30, 1926.

sports and games.¹⁰³ In numerous works, including *Arme Musik (Vorstadtwald)* (Poor Music (Wood in the Suburbs), 1926, fig. 40), and *Bei Mutter Grün* (Amongst Mother Nature, 1925), Baluschek portrayed the city's *kleine Leute*, or little people, using these spaces in their leisure time. The largest and most significant of Baluschek's works on this subject matter was his 1928 painting *Sommerabend* (Summer Evening, fig. 41), in which the artist imagined the scene at the end of a working day in the summer. As the sun edges towards the horizon in the distance, a cast of working-class characters make the most of the evening light upon an extensive patch of rough ground, overshadowed by the towering walls of neighbouring tenements. The space occupying the foreground and bottom-half of the painting is taken up by the open expanse of rough, undulating sandy dunes and grassy patches. Baluschek achieved a sense of perspective in this space through a careful distribution of human figures. The expanse of land is flanked in the background by the rear walls of the tenement in the centre of the picture and by wooden fencing to either side. Baluschek opened up the left and right-hand sides of the composition, allowing us to see past the tenement block, to blue sky beyond and a factory in the far distance.

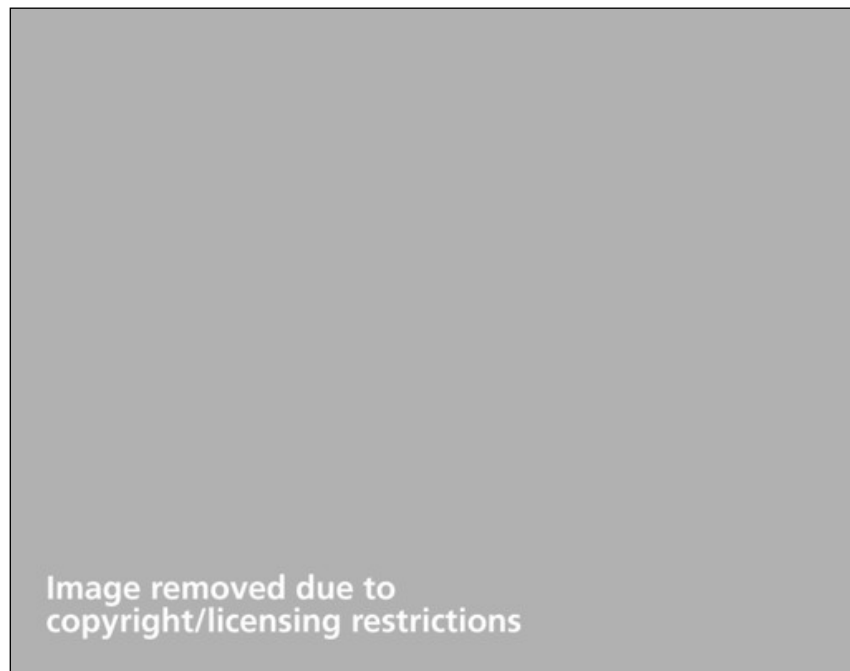


Figure 41: Hans Baluschek, *Sommerabend*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 120 x 151cm. Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.

103. Stenbock-Fermor, *Deutschland von Unten*, 141-42.

Baluschek populated all of these scenes with a varied cast of working- and lower-middle-class characters. There is no fashionable attire on display, no accessories or embellishments, and the figures are dressed in workaday clothes. A broad cross-section of the population are shown: men, women and children, old and young. In *Sommerabend*, the solitary figure of a factory worker, recognisable by his cap and clothes, sits at the left-hand edge of the frame. A mother and her two children walk towards us, hand-in-hand, to our right. There are also three young couples in the scene, courting and canoodling. Yet the apparent ease with which these figures occupy the space in Baluschek's *Sommerabend* belies the provisional quality of areas such as these. As was the case in the *Laubenkolonien*, the land that we can see in these scenes was not owned by those who used it. From 1925 onwards, these spaces were increasingly threatened with urban development. Berlin's lower classes appropriated these spaces for their own purposes, but remained acutely aware that their occupation was temporary. In the meantime, this inhabitation of space contributed to a sense of proletarian community and identity.

A drawing by the illustrator Willibald Krain, which appeared in Oskar Hübner's anthology of stories and poems about Berlin's working classes, offers us an aerial (or kite's eye view) of the land at the edges of the city.¹⁰⁴ In the scene, young children fly their kites, which soar up into the sky above Berlin. Overhead, an aeroplane sweeps by (fig. 42). Although much of the picture frame is dominated by the kite and the sky, the landscape below brings together those common motifs found at the outer edges of the city explored earlier. The largest expanse of space occupying the foreground is an unspoilt and grassy terrain, not dissimilar to that found in Baluschek's *Sommerabend*. In the far background, where the land meets the sky, the horizon line is obscured by the more familiar objects of industrial Berlin: the gasometer, the smokestack and the tenement block. In between the undeveloped expanse and the city we can see, on the left, a garden colony, fenced in and recognisable by the flags sitting atop the roofs of its huts. To the right of the gardens is another enclosed space, a plot of land surrounded by fencing. This plot is a building site awaiting imminent development, denoted by the heap of building material contained within, and the large sign announcing the forthcoming construction work.

104. Oskar Hübner, *Wir kleinen Berliner*, 123.



Figure 42: Willibald Krain, *Drachensteigen*, 1927. Reproduced from: Oskar Hübner, ed., *Wir kleinen Berliner : Mit 28 Zeichnungen von Willibald Krain* 2nd edition (Berlin: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz, 1927), 122.

Krain's illustration is revealing. In the narrow space between the built-up city and the surrounding meadows lies the focal point—the frontline—of urban development. In this belt of land, the garden colony and the building plot are juxtaposed directly alongside each other. These small details within Krain's illustration encapsulate the ongoing processes of urbanisation occurring at the edges of Berlin between 1925 and 1930. They point towards the further encroachment of the ordered spaces of the city into a landscape still used by the working classes in their leisure time, spaces in which rural customs persisted. Krain's illustration unwittingly hints at a growing conflict over the space at the edges of city, a political contestation of space between bourgeois and proletarian interests.

The conflict hinted at in Krain's illustration occurred across Berlin throughout the latter part of the twenties. At the points of engagement, the *Weltstadt* vision of Berlin clashed directly against the alternative vision of the city explored here in this chapter. One report, published in the *Neue Zeit* newspaper in early 1927 is symptomatic of such confrontations. The article commented upon one 'incomprehensible scheme' whereby an entire garden colony of over 800 plots in Charlottenburg was faced with the threat of clearance in order

to make way for 1,600 flats. The report went on to state that a protest meeting was to be held by the association of garden colonies in Berlin Westend and Charlottenburg, allowing those gardeners who had, ‘over many years of hard work, created fertile gardens out of a barren and sandy desert’ to voice their objections.¹⁰⁵ The provisional existence of the colonies led one contemporary observer to refer to them as ‘an illusory world. ... [where] The workers are farmers on notice. The land they have is only rented, and every day the monthly termination of the rent might arrive. The city needs this space for new housing blocks.’¹⁰⁶

This conflict of interests and ideas raises further points that will be explored in the following three chapters. first of all, how did Berlin’s artists respond to the conflicts they saw in the working-class landscape, and was their response dependent upon their political outlook? Secondly, how did the working classes perceive and respond to the Neues Bauen programme of housebuilding and urban redevelopment which began in 1926, and finally, how did the conflict between municipal planning policy and working-class culture unfold in the highly politicised atmosphere of Berlin in 1929?

105. ‘Wir berichteten bereits wiederholt über die unverständliche Maßnahme der “Wohnungs-Fürsorge-Gesellschaft,” die sämtlichen Kleingärten des großen Kleingartengeländes Nord-Westend die Kündigung zugestellt hat. Es handelt sich dort bekanntlich um mehr als 800 Kleingärtner, die meist den wirtschaftlich schwächeren Kreisen angehören und die in jahrelanger, unermüdlicher Arbeiter aus einer öden Sandwüste fruchtbare Gärten gemacht haben. Die Enttäuschung über die plötzliche Kündigung, bei den betroffenen Kleingärtnern wird um so verständlicher, wenn man weiß, dass verschiedene derselben bereits seit denn Jahre 1901 dort ihren Garten haben. Aber nicht nur ihren Arbeitsschweiß haben die Kleingärtner diese Scholle geopfert, sondern auch mancher Spargroschen ist in die Gärten hineingesteckt worden. Dazu kommt, dass eine beträchtliche Anzahl der Siedler das ganze Jahre über dort wohnt und überhaupt keine Stadtwohnung besitzt.’ “Die Kleingärtner protestieren,” *Neue Zeit: Das große Berliner Morgenblatt*, February 24th, 1927.

106. ‘[...] dieser bäuerlich-ländliche Kultur, die mühsam in der Großstadt errichtet wird, ist eine Scheinwelt. Die Arbeiter sind Bauern auf Kündigung. Den Boden hat man nur gepachtet. Jeden Tag kann man die monatliche Kündigung eintreffen. Die Stadt braucht das Gebiet für neue Häuserblocks.’ Stenbock-Fermor, *Deutschland von Unten*, 142.

5. Social space in Otto Nagel and Hans Baluschek's images of working-class Berlin

5.1 The political nature of space

Discernible in the numerous visual representations of working-class culture explored so far, are varied responses from artists to Berlin's social conditions, culture, and ongoing urban development. This is significant, not least because in the final years of the Weimar Republic, political divisions and conflicts in Berlin's working-class districts arose to such a pitch, that they ended up spilling out onto the streets in a campaign of uncontrollable and bloody violence. Just as the political landscape existed in an almost permanent and fragile state of flux, so did the physical landscape of Berlin's working-class areas. In densely populated districts like Wedding, space was becoming increasingly politicised, with parties from across the political spectrum vying for the hearts, minds and votes of the working classes. This is usefully illustrated by the case of the Pharus Halls on Müllerstrasse in Wedding, a popular venue for KPD events during the twenties. On February 11th 1927, Joseph Goebbels, then *Gauleiter* (district chief) for the NSDAP in Berlin, audaciously organised a National Socialist meeting at the Pharus Halls, a provocative gesture that underlined the Nazi Party's desire to penetrate the communist strongholds in working-class Berlin.¹ The KPD organ *Die Rote Fahne* described the evening as 'der faschistische Überfall auf dem Wedding' (The fascist Attack on Wedding). The German word *Überfall* is generally translated as 'attack,' but can also be read in this context to imply 'invasion' or 'inroad,' lending greater symbolic and territorial significance to the headline.² The evening, not unsurprisingly ended in clashes between KPD and Nazi supporters, signalling the beginning of a new phase of political violence in the capital. Police squads arrived to separate the two sets of supporters with their truncheons, making several arrests before the

1. A brief history of the Pharus Halls can be found in: Chod, et al., *Berliner Mitte*, 473.

2. "Der faschistische Überfall auf dem Wedding," *Die Rote Fahne*, February 13, 1927.

end of the evening.³ The NSDAP, with no real politically legitimate leverage at the time, adopted militaristic and confrontational tactics against their enemies on the streets, which many KPD supporters were only too happy to meet head on.

The disputes and violence that emerged in the latter half of the twenties between Communists and Nazis are well documented by historians, and constitute part of a wider attempt to better understand how the National Socialists were able to seize governmental power, bringing Germany's first democratic republic to an end.⁴ Likewise, the political instabilities of the early years of the republic are equally well chronicled, in an effort to understand to what extent the new republic was compromised (and compromised itself) from the outset.⁵ The flashpoints of revolution and violence that marked both the beginning and end phases of the republic, largely took place in the public sphere. They manifested themselves in the form of street demonstrations, violent confrontations between Communists, National Socialists and the city police force, full-blown riots, such as the *Blutmai* clashes in 1929, agit-prop performance, election posters, Red Front marches, and so on.⁶ The impassioned nature of public protests at the beginning and end of the republic obscures the ongoing political struggles that persisted throughout the republic's so-called period of relative stability, between 1924 and 1929. Less discernible because of its lack of physical confrontation, was a slow-burning power struggle in which political partisanship was less distinct, and which is arguably better identified by class rather than by sharp distinctions between political parties. In other words, between bourgeois government paternalism (instigated by the SPD) and working-class tradition. The spaces in working-class districts such as Wedding were, as described previously in chapter two, divided between those inner-city areas comprised of built-up tenement neighbourhoods and factories, and the sparser spaces of garden colonies and sandy wastelands at the periphery.

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3. *Die Rote Fahne* also published what they described as a first-hand account of the incident, though the validity of all its claims must be questioned: "Freche Provokation und planmäßiger Überfall!," *Die Rote Fahne*, February 13, 1927. A briefer and more objective, bureaucratic report appeared in the SPD organ *Vorwärts*: "Schlägerei in einer völkischen Versammlung," *Vorwärts*, February 12, 1927.
 4. The most important study in English is: Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?*. See also: Swett, *Neighbours and Enemies*.
 5. For example: Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 81-128.
 6. Eric D Weitz, "Communism and the Public Spheres of Weimar Germany," in *Between Reform and Revolution : German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1988), 275-92..

These latter spaces were targeted by government officials and city planners as the ground upon which a new Berlin was to be constructed in the form of modern housing estates and organised recreational facilities.⁷ In this chapter I will argue that the contrasting properties of these inner- and outer-working-class spaces were particularly underlined by two of Berlin's best-known visual narrators of the proletariat: Hans Baluschek and Otto Nagel. The political qualities of Berlin's working-class districts—including their importance in sustaining a legitimate working-class culture—is evident in the work of both artists. To that end, it is upon these two artists that I wish to concentrate.

5.2 Hans Baluschek

Hans Baluschek was born in Breslau (now Wrocław in Poland, then part of Prussia) in 1870. His father was a civil servant and SPD supporter.⁸ In 1876, the Baluschek family moved to Berlin, to allow the father to take up a new post in the civil service. According to Friedrich Wendel, Baluschek's first biographer, two experiences in the artist's formative years bore an influence on his later art. First, Baluschek saw much of the city's working-class quarters and factories at first-hand, while accompanying his father on his professional errands. Second, Baluschek was profoundly affected by Zola's novels: *Germinal* and *L'Œuvre* in particular, both of which were published in the 1880s.⁹ Baluschek's formative years coincided with the period of Berlin's most intensive industrial urban development. The aspiring young artist and the parvenu German capital grew up together, and the sights and spectacles that Baluschek witnessed during these years left a permanent mark on his work throughout his career. In 1889, Baluschek attended the *Akademischen Hochschule für die bildenden Künste* (University of fine Arts) in Berlin, where he cultivated his own distinct brand of critical urban realism that owed much to the literary descriptions of Zola's novels. Baluschek's choice of subject matter ensured that opportunities were limited for him in the thin air of academicism that still circulated around Berlin's artistic institutions at the turn of the century. The foundation of the Berliner Secession in 1898 offered a way for Baluschek and other like-minded artists to circumvent the academic salon system. Baluschek joined the Secession at its inception and participated in the group's first exhibition in Charlottenburg in 1899.¹⁰ In the intervening period prior to the first World

7. See chapters 6 and 7.

8. Friedrich Wendel, *Hans Baluschek : Eine Monographie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1924), 12.

9. *Ibid.*, 12, 14.

10. *Katalog der deutschen Kunstausstellung der "Berliner Secession"* (Berlin: Bruno & Paul Cassirer, 1899).

War, Baluschek assumed an increasingly prominent role in the group, exhibiting his first large oil painting in 1907, *Sonntag auf dem Tempelhofer Feld* (Sunday on the Tempelhof fields) and becoming a member of the selection committee from 1908.¹¹ Along with fellow member Käthe Kollwitz, Baluschek stood out from the other Secessionists, thanks to his preoccupation with urban themes and his focus on proletarian subject matter.¹² As a member of the Secession, Baluschek remained an outsider to Berlin's academic art institutions right up until the eve of the first World War. Like most other German left-wing artists and intellectuals, Baluschek supported the War, and experienced the conflict first-hand as an infantryman.¹³ In the wake of Germany's defeat and the subsequent period of revolutionary instability, Baluschek experienced a period of artistic crisis and unclear political outlook, which is mirrored in the subsequent conflicting historical accounts of his political direction. In her account of the end of Expressionism, Joan Weinstein situated Baluschek towards the right wing of the SPD, citing evidence of the artist's continued staunch patriotism that manifested itself in a series of published drawings from 1920. Meanwhile, Günter Meißner recounted Baluschek's brief membership of the short-lived, anarchistically inclined *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (German Workers' Communist Party), prior to joining the SPD.¹⁴ Baluschek's artistic output in this brief period often touched explicitly upon political events, dealing with themes of war, revolution and a sense of expressionistic optimism for the future. Two of the artist's most important works from 1920 reinforce the ambiguities of Baluschek's political outlook at this specific juncture in time. In a lithograph, entitled *Proletarier* (sometimes referred to as *Streik*), a revolutionary crowd of citizens have seized control of the city streets, clenched fists held aloft. And in the artist's large oil painting entitled *Zukunft* (Future), a young working-class family is shown, life-size in scale. The wife is heavily pregnant and the whole family is huddled tightly together in a pose that suggests both defiance and fear for the future. The group, shown in profile, are almost silhouetted against an industrial backdrop, from which expressionistic rays of light flood out from factory windows. The complicated nature of Baluschek's artistic responses to the German revolution and the new

11. Günter Meißner, *Hans Baluschek* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1985), 32; Akademie der Künste, ed., *Hans Baluschek 1870–1935* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1955), 90.

12. Peter Paret, *The Berliner Secession: Modernism and its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 84.

13. Meißner, *Hans Baluschek*, 40; Wendel, *Hans Baluschek*, 31.

14. Joan Weinstein, *The End of Expressionism: Art and the November Revolution in Germany, 1918–1919* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 78-79; Meißner, *Hans Baluschek*, 44-47.

republic are symptomatic of complexities that existed between art, artists and politics at this time. From these disparities, Margrit Bröhan's assertion that while the SPD was a 'political-spiritual home' for Baluschek, he could also identify with aspects of the KPD's aims, which allowed him to co-operate with his communist colleagues as and when appropriate, strikes an agreeable balance.¹⁵ As the decade progressed, Baluschek became an increasingly well-established and prominent figure amongst Berlin's art establishment, as well as a continued staunch supporter of the SPD. However, he rarely adopted a positivist rhetoric consistent with Social Democratic propaganda and ideology. As Bröhan points out, Baluschek's work retained a descriptive quality grounded in reality that continued to reflect the realities of proletarian life.¹⁶ By the end of the twenties, Baluschek had become a preeminent figure in Berlin's artistic community, working on selection committees, and chairing the *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung* (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) committee from 1929 to 1931. In one photograph from 1923, the artist is seen accompanying Reichspräsident Ebert around the annual Berlin art exhibition.¹⁷ In 1935, Baluschek died in Berlin, aged sixty-five.

5.3 Otto Nagel

Otto Nagel was born a generation later than Baluschek, in 1896, in a tenement on Reinickendorfer Strasse, in the heart of working-class Wedding in north Berlin.¹⁸ The son of a cabinetmaker, the young Nagel showed early artistic promise while still at school. On being shown examples of the youngster's drawings, the architect Bruno Paul, then director of Berlin's *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of Applied Arts), offered the youngster a place in his institution, which Nagel was forced to reluctantly decline on financial grounds.¹⁹ Having finished school, Nagel spent two unfruitful years as an apprentice in a glass- and mosaic-manufacturer in Heinersdorf, on the outskirts of north Berlin. The youngster went

15. Margrit Bröhan, *Hans Baluschek 1870–1935 : Maler – Zeichner – Illustrator* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1985), 116.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 115, 117.

18. Nagel's autobiography, *Leben und Werk*, is a rather brief affair that provides little insight into the artist's activities in the 1920s, and practically glosses over the period of the Third Reich completely: Otto Nagel, *Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1952). Walli Nagel's own autobiography offers a more rewarding insight into aspects of the everyday life of her husband and family: Nagel, *Das darfst du nicht!* The best recent surveys of Nagel's life and work, both of which provide a chronological survey of the artist's activities are: Christine Hoffmeister, *Otto Nagel*; Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR, *Otto Nagel*.

19. Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 22.

on to drift through various factory jobs in Wedding, though he continued to draw and paint in his spare time.²⁰ Only eighteen years old at the outbreak of the first World War, Nagel was opposed to the conflict from its outset, a position that led to him to break with his father. Nagel soon became interested in radical left-wing politics and joined the Spartacus Group in 1917. In the same year he was involved in the Berlin Bread Strike, and was finally sent to a labour camp in Cologne for his continued refusal to accept conscription. Nagel returned to Berlin after his internment, working at the Bergmann Electricity Works in Wedding as a shop steward.²¹ He joined the KPD in late 1918, and the *Arbeitsrat für Künstler* (Workers' Council for Art) in 1919, where he met his life-long friend and supporter, the art critic Adolf Behne.²² Around this time, Nagel began to turn his back on the avant-garde style that had previously distinguished his work, in order to pursue a sober and realistic art dedicated to proletarian subject matter. His earliest paintings betrayed an obvious debt to German Expressionism in their use of colour, though Nagel was reluctant to embrace the fluidity of Expressionist human form, preferring instead a figurative quality rooted in realism, that he maintained throughout his career. Nagel continued to work at the Bergmann Works until 1921, when he was blacklisted and dismissed from his post as a consequence of his participation in the strikes in March of that year.²³ From this point onwards, Nagel put his talents as an artist entirely in the service of the proletarian cause. By the middle of the decade, he was regularly contributing work to Berlin's annual jury-free art exhibition, and exhibiting and donating works to help raise funds for workers' organisations.²⁴ In 1925 Nagel travelled to Moscow, helping organise an exhibition of German art in the Soviet capital. Upon his return Nagel increased his artistic activities, concentrating on a series of larger, more ambitious paintings than any he had previously undertaken, as well as organising exhibitions of proletarian art (of which more later), writing—for the likes of *AIZ* and *Magazin für Alle*, as well as his own novel—and magazine editorship. In the wake of the Nazi seizure of power, much of Nagel's work was lost or destroyed, while the artist himself was banned from painting in his studio, or representing anything remotely communist or Bolshevik in nature.²⁵ In consequence, the

20. Ibid., 22-24.

21. Christine Hoffmeister, *Otto Nagel*, 11.

22. Ibid.; Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 25.

23. Christine Hoffmeister, *Otto Nagel*, 11-12.

24. In 1925, Nagel showed one oil painting, *Vater und Sohn*, and three drawings at the annual jury-free show, and continued to exhibit some of his larger portraits throughout the latter half of the twenties: *Juryfreie Kunstschau Berlin 1925* (Berlin: Mann, 1925).

25. A list of Nagel's works—and the fate they suffered—can be found in: Ludwig Justi, *Otto Nagel*, vol.

body of work Nagel created during the Third Reich consists largely of innocuous pastel and pencil drawings of Berlin street scenes, the last of which depict the city in flames and ruins during the Second World War. After the War, Nagel returned to East Berlin, helping to found the East German Kulturbund, and later becoming president of the East German *Akademie der Künste* in 1956. Nagel died in East Berlin in 1967.

5.4 The use of space in the works of Baluschek and Nagel

Whatever the points of divergence and intersection in the two individuals' artistic and political orientations, much of the work they created between 1925 and 1928 touches on similar themes. During this period, Baluschek published thirty-six lithographs across three volumes of a portfolio entitled *Volk* (1925–27), alongside various other drawings, prints and paintings. Nagel undertook a series of large-scale portraits from 1926, along with countless other sketches and drawings, before his involvement in other artistic pursuits towards the end of the decade. The spaces in both artists' pictures are the city's working-class neighbourhoods: industrialised areas, tenement districts, and the open spaces at the very edges of the city itself. Here lies the first key difference in the work of the two artists. While the spaces inhabited by Baluschek's characters are almost always open areas, often at the very margins of the city, Nagel depicted dark, claustrophobic interiors in the inner-city tenement neighbourhoods. One situation allowed for the admission of idealism and light, the other misery and gloom.

7, *Kunst der Gegenwart* (Potsdam: Eduard Stichnote, 1947), 8-16. Walli Nagel described how many of her husband's works were thrown from the window of their apartment by Nazi inspectors: Nagel, *Das darfst du nicht!*, 134-35.



Figure 43: Otto Nagel, *Parkbank am Wedding*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 136.5 x 190cm. Neuenationalgalerie, Berlin.

Take Baluschek's 1928 painting *Sommerabend*—already described in the previous chapter (fig. 41)—and compare it to a canvas by Nagel, *Parkbank am Wedding* (Park bench in Wedding, 1927, fig. 43). Both paintings represent the same theme: the occupation of open spaces by the proletariat at leisure. In Baluschek's *Sommerabend*, the occupation of space makes possible an assertion of working-class cultural identity. And yet, while Baluschek stresses a measure of working-class independence, he does not do so in a particularly strident or assertive manner. Besides organising the painting's perspective, Baluschek's careful arrangement of characters deliberately avoids any possibility of a crowd forming, and the consequent political implications this might infer. The worker shown sitting to the left-hand side of the painting, for example, is happy to sit and relax on his own at the end of a hard day's work. *Sommerabend* is analogous to a Social Democratic ideal of political detachment combined with social stability, underlined in the emphasis on familial values and inclusivity.

The space depicted in Nagel's *Parkbank am Wedding* is situated within the built-up area of Wedding, rather than at its edges. The scene is set in an urban square, populated with trees and other greenery, but surrounded by the *Steinmeer* of tenement blocks. On the bench in the foreground sit four proletarian citizens, with a young toddler at their feet. The faces of these characters are gaunt, resigned and lined with wrinkles brought on by age and hardship. Their clothing is dark and rugged, and though the leaves on the trees imply that

this is not a winter scene, the impression is not one of a light summer evening that Baluschek's painting suggests. The first male figure, to the left of the composition is probably a war veteran, who lost his left arm during the conflict. The second male crosses both arms and leans one hand on his walking stick. His head is bent forward and his eyes closed, perhaps lost in thought, or simply shutting out the exterior world. The woman beside him, perhaps his wife, throws a glance out of the picture frame, her mouth poised as if on the verge of pronouncing some utterance. The fourth adult, an elderly lady, sits with blanket and walking stick resting in her lap. Her attention—and that of the war invalid's—is attracted to the same direction as the first woman's, indicating that there is activity beyond the picture frame that grabs their attention: probably simply the daily comings and goings one might expect to find in such a densely populated environment. The toddler on the ground however, remains oblivious to events surrounding him. On closer inspection, one can see that Nagel artificially elongated the park bench to an almost absurd extent, allowing it to accommodate these seated characters. Besides bringing the various figures of the painting together, the park bench also plays an important symbolic role in the painting. first, it binds the subjects of the picture together in a social as well as physical sense. More importantly, the bench implies a legitimate occupation of public space, and its presence and use by these figures underline the social importance of this public space. One only has to venture into present-day Wedding and Moabit on a summer's evening to appreciate the popularity and importance of the innumerable benches scattered about the streets, which are almost permanently occupied by inhabitants from the surrounding tenements and blocks of flats.

Nagel's square in Wedding is a wholly different space to Baluschek's open terrain. Baluschek's space is a non-space; a place of no specific function or status, a space outside the city where one goes to escape the urban bustle. It is the same kind of space upon which garden colonies were first built, and which, inevitably, urban expansion must finally encroach upon. It is a transient and temporary space, and its use as a place of simple leisure activity and relaxation seems appropriate. Nagel's space, by contrast, is a finite, definite space, enclosed by urban development, a recognised and important social space. It is an intrinsic element of the urban fabric and carries a history as old as the tenements that surround it. In carrying a sense of history, it also carries cultural significance. Nagel's space and subjects carry forward a sense of cultural tradition and the weight of working-class life, while in Baluschek's painting, these themes are replaced by simple, disinterested

leisure in a transient, politically neutral space. The picture titles also suggest as much: *Sommerabend* is typical of Baluschek's works that frequently focus on the time of day or year (*Aprilidyll*, *Frühling*, *Spätsommer*, *Herbst*). By contrast, most of Nagel's pictures emphasise their particular location, usually Wedding (*Weddinger Jungen*, *Weddinger Familie*, *Straße am Wedding*, *Wedding-Kneipe*).

Nagel's 1929 drawing *Arbeiters Ferienparadies* (fig. 37) can also be usefully compared to Baluschek's *Sommerabend*. Instead of the open expanse of land at the edge of the city, Nagel once more chose to situate his drawing deep within the built-up working-class district, the space on this occasion being an undeveloped plot of land.²⁶ The cast of characters appear similar to Baluschek's, and sit or lay about in much the same way. But in bold contrast to the idyllic scenario in Baluschek's *Sommerabend*, Nagel satirised the situation, showing the proletariat effectively occupying a rubbish heap. Instead of a green, light and open space, Nagel describes a rocky barren surface strewn with tin cans and other debris. The sketchy quality of the illustration also conflicts with Baluschek's rather more polished oil painting. In particular, the way in which Nagel blocked in the sides of the tenements with rough black colour only serves to enhance the bleakness of the image and emphasise the enclosed nature of the space.

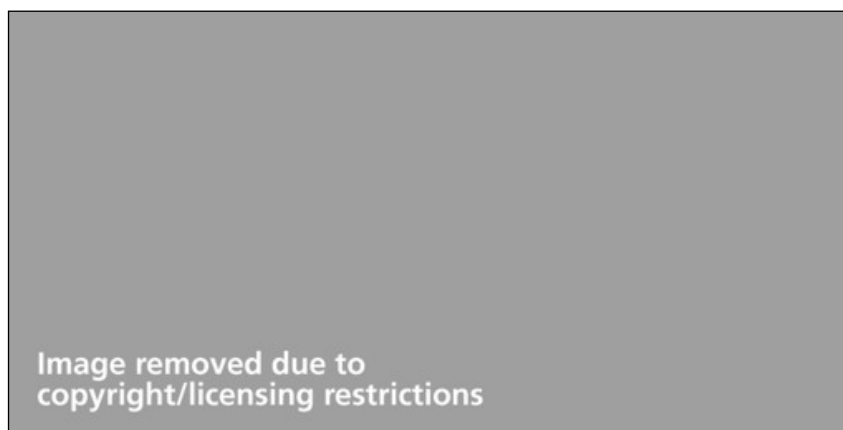


Figure 44: Otto Nagel, *Feierabend*, 1928. Oil, Whereabouts unknown.

This enclosure of space is a recurring theme in Nagel's work. It is particularly well demonstrated in the artist's now lost circa-1928 painting *Feierabend* (End of the Working Day). A panoramic painting, some three metres wide, it depicts a crowd of pallid-faced

26. Nagel, "Arbeiters Ferienparadies."

workers returning home from a day at the factory (fig. 44). The faces are expressionless, with no evidence of joy or relief in the knowledge that another day's work is done. Instead, the crowd move along in a 'strangely silent haste, the only noise being their heels clicking hard against the pavement.'²⁷ All but two of the workers depicted are male; the central two workers are shown with their partners, who have either come to meet them from work, or are employed in the same factory. Nagel's workers are represented in full length in front of a background in which the horizon line sits unusually close to the top of the composition, making the work strongly reminiscent of Gustav Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (1849–50). The group of workers are moving together in one direction, from right to left. We can see the factory from which the workers have departed in the background towards the top right-hand corner of the frame, and towards the centre of the frame are tenements to which some of the workers are now returning. The figures in the foreground are separated from the factory and the tenements behind them by wooden fencing which, from a viewpoint roughly level with that of the workers, obscures most of the scene's background. Only at the far-left of Nagel's painting, where his fence turns off at a right angle and recedes into the background, do we get a sense of distance and perspective in the urban landscape. Two particular observations on the use of space in *Feierabend* are worth elaborating on. First, the high fence beside which the workers walk cordons off a space which we cannot see. It channels and restricts the movements of the workers, pushing them into the foremost space of the picture. This sense of a spatial control and channelling of the workers is analogous to the spatial conditioning within the factory itself. New principles of scientific management in the factory, as propounded in the works of Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, had become particularly influential in the German workplace by the mid-twenties, as German industry endeavoured to improve its efficiency and competitiveness.²⁸ Secondly, the opening up of space on the left-hand side of the painting, as the fence recedes into the background, reveals large tenement blocks ranged down a street. The urban development

27. '[...] eine merkwürdig stumme Haste und nur die Absätze klappern hart auf das Pflaster.' Szatmari, *Das Buch von Berlin*, 206. Szatmari is actually describing the scene in the working-class districts in the early morning as the worker's make their way to the factories, but seems equally appropriate to Nagel's painting.

28. F. W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917). For an analysis of the influence and reception of Taylor and Ford's ideas in Germany, see: Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 30-57.

in the background contrasts with the rather spartan appearance of the foreground, inviting comparisons between the civilisation and activity of the city centre on one hand, and the rough and provisional industrial *Vorstadt* on the other.

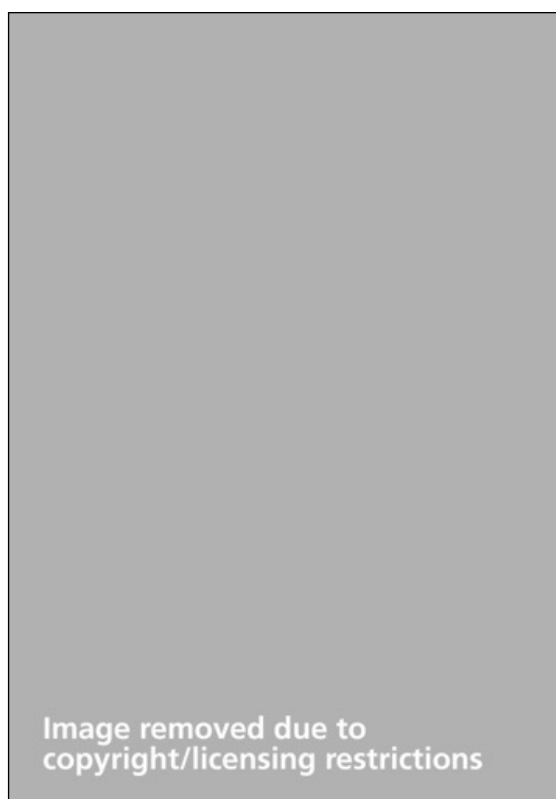


Figure 45: Hans Baluschek, *Fabrikschluß*, 1926. Lithograph, 30x20.8cm. Stadtmuseum Graphische Sammlung, Berlin.

Such a dramatic and deliberate enclosure of space is rarely, if ever attempted by Baluschek. It is worth noting that, to the best of my knowledge, Baluschek never painted or drew a scene from the claustrophobic spaces within the city's tenement courtyards. One work by Baluschek which bears thematic similarities to Nagel's *Feierabend* is a 1926 lithograph entitled *Fabrikschluss* (Factory Closure), in which a group of workers head away from the factory following its closure (fig. 45). Beyond the representation of workers leaving the factory however, the two pictures have little else in common. Rather than describing the end of a working day, Baluschek's print shows workers who have lost their jobs. It is possible that Baluschek was, like Nagel, also responding to the drive for greater efficiency in German factories. Unemployment peaked in 1926, as the repercussions of workplace rationalisation began to make themselves felt in the factories.²⁹ If this print is a

29. Nolan says that unemployment in Germany reached more than two million in 1926: *Ibid.*, 170.

comment by Baluschek on the current economic situation, it is hardly impassioned or strongly rhetorical. Our viewpoint as observers marks the key psychological difference between Baluschek's *Fabrikschluss* and Nagel's *Feierabend*. Baluschek's scene relies heavily on the basic rules of linear perspective, and the workers are seen walking towards us, from the background of the picture. Even though Baluschek's workers are bound by walls on each side, and are spatially constrained in a manner not dissimilar to those in Nagel's painting, the walls serve only as a device for emphasising the perspective and depth of field in the scene. This traditional perspective view creates a markedly different effect on the viewer, as compared to the side-on and flat picture space in Nagel's painting. Baluschek's reliance on traditional methods of perspective in his work clearly contrasts with Nagel's approach. His use of a conventional picture space gives him the scope to construct his artistic narratives, filling the composition with a host of urban motifs and characters. Nagel by contrast, is not especially interested in establishing settings and narratives with traditional methods. The large-scale portraits that he created in the mid twenties use modernist formal techniques similar to those employed by Gustav Courbet and Édouard Manet, and create a psychological mood rather than a concrete narrative. The figures in paintings such as *Anilinarbeiter* and *Weddinger Jungen* (fig. 46), both from 1928, exist in a flat, dark and claustrophobic space.

The contrasts between the spaces of the two artists bring to mind the distinctions Bertolt Brecht made at this time between dramatic and epic theatre. Drama 'invited its spectators to empathise with the emotional destiny of its central characters,' and was considered by Brecht as individualistic and illusionistic; 'a reactionary prop to petit-bourgeois morality.'³⁰ Much of this description, I think, fits comfortably with Baluschek's art. His 1906 cycle of drawings entitled *Opfer* (Victim) portrayed a range of characters from all classes that were intended to elicit responses of sympathy, horror and aversion. Visual narratives intended to encourage empathy on the part of the viewer were still evident in Baluschek's thirty-six lithographs that made up his *Volk* portfolios. For example, the disconsolate unemployed worker who sits forlornly in the snow in *Der Arbeitslose* (The Unemployed Man), unable to enter the factory premises, the homeless man who trudges

30. Peter Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson, and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 187-88.

through the snow and looks up into the window of a warm bourgeois sitting room in *Weihnacht* (Christmas), or the wretched street singer, who sits pathetically at the feet of the passing bourgeoisie in *Der Strassensänger*.

Epic theatre, as conceived by Brecht, was a medium designed to address topical subject matter and engage the viewer in new ways by developing new relationships between the viewer and the work. Brecht contrasted his new style of theatre against the old dramatic mode, which caught up the viewer in the plot, encouraging sympathy, sadness and laughter on behalf of the play's characters along the way. In epic theatre, Brecht wanted to transform the spectator of dramatic theatre into an observer, who is faced with situations and characters he or she may identify with, recognise and respond to.³¹ Brecht declared that his theatre set out to address 'the great themes of our times [...] the building up of mammoth industry, the conflict of classes, war, the fight against disease.'³² There are, I would argue, similarities between Nagel's Weimar-era art, and the visual presentation of Brecht's epic theatre and Erwin Piscator's stage sets. *Verfremdung*, or alienation was an integral component of epic theatre, seeking to reveal the artifice of the work, and make the viewer aware of his situation as observer.³³ In theatrical terms, devices such as the use of a narrator, the conspicuous inclusion of songs, film projections, placards, and a lack of scenery, were all intended to disrupt traditional notions of realism and empathy. Nagel's portraits work in a similar manner, as far as is permissible for the static, two-dimensional canvas. These paintings are life-size, and immediately engage with the viewer in a very direct manner. The lack of background, shrouded in darkness, combined with the contrast of white, pallid faces of the subjects is equivalent to the lack of stage scenery and the use of the single white spotlight being directed upon the stage actor. When confronted by Nagel's portraits, the lack of narrative props and the immediacy and directness of the confrontation between subject and viewer, produce an impression quite at odds with the rather more disinterested manner in which one interacts with Baluschek's art.

31. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre : The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 37.

32. *Ibid.*, 77.

33. Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice," 191.

The other element of epic theatre that can help develop our understanding of the differences between Nagel's and Baluschek's work is *Gestus*, which John Willett described as a combined sense of 'gist and gesture; an attitude [...] expressible in words and actions.'³⁴ *Gestus* draws us towards the social content of the work, and is of practical use in thinking further about how the characters in the two artist's works inhabit their surroundings. The manner in which these spaces are inhabited is of greater importance than the types of space in themselves, for it is in the *Gestus*—the social context and action—of the figures that the real political differences between these artists becomes most evident. The differences are explicit enough to be surmised in a series of opposites. Baluschek's characters are frequently portrayed as meek and submissive, while Nagel's are defiant and assertive. Moreover, while Baluschek's figures tend to be disinterested and leisurely, Nagel's are keenly aware of themselves and carry a sense of historical tradition. Such contrasting properties are distilled in a comparison between Nagel's *Weddinger Jungen* (fig. 46) from 1928 and Baluschek's 1925 lithograph *Arbeiterjugend* (fig. 47). These two works are comparable because they represent similar themes: young members of the working classes.



Figure 46: Otto Nagel, *Weddinger Jungen*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 63 x 91cm; Staatliche Museen/Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

34. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 42.



Figure 47: Hans Baluschek, *Arbeiterjugend*, 1925. Lithograph, 25 x 18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Nagel's *Weddinger Jungen* shows two young boys dressed in communist uniforms. Our attention is instantly drawn to the children's faces, which are not only wanly described in similar fashion to Nagel's other portraits, but also appear grotesquely accentuated. Here, more so than with Nagel's other paintings of this period, to encounter these two youngsters, painted to scale, is to immediately experience a sense of revulsion at their physical condition. The background against which the two youngsters stand is reduced to a series of muddy-brown brushstrokes—we cannot but focus our attention on the two faces, however unpleasant they might appear. Of the two boys, the one closest to us in particular wears an expression of world weariness that belies his age. By contrast, Baluschek's young couples in *Arbeiterjugend* are far less aware of their surroundings and unconcerned of their situation (fig. 47). They are enjoying those aspects of life that being young particularly offers: courtship, a cigarette, time to idle. We could speculate that Baluschek was employing irony in his presentation of the worker youth in their idleness, while the factories and tenements in the background serve as a reminder—a blot on their landscape—of the inescapable fates of these young people. Perhaps, but the unassuming frequency with which all of these motifs recur in Baluschek's work—the tenement, factory, the space at the edge of the city, idleness—do not make this suggestion

particularly convincing. Whatever the intent, it was far too insipid for the communist critic. As Alfred Kemenyi, art critic for *Die Rote Fahne* rather harshly put it, Baluschek's youngsters appear 'simply to be looking at grasshoppers.'³⁵

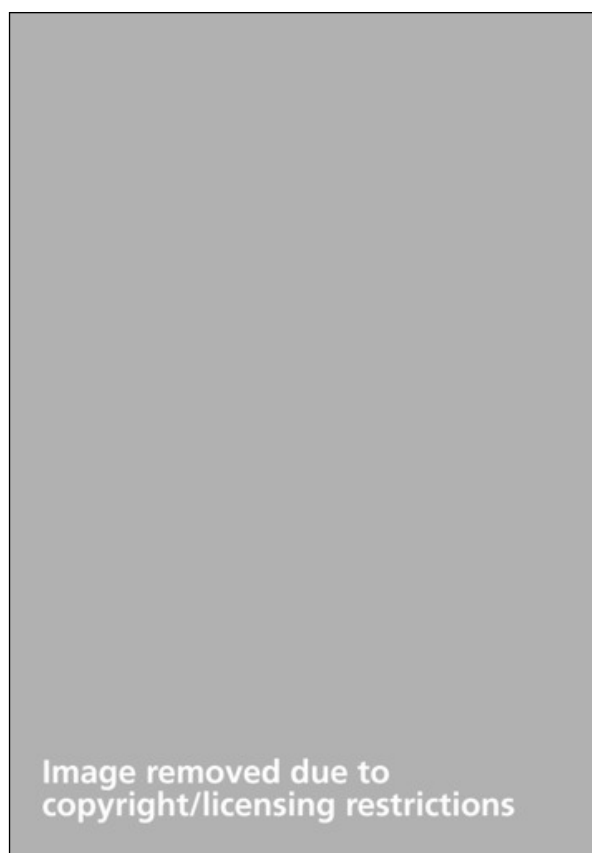


Figure 48: Hans Baluschek, *Die Lumpensammler*, 1926. Lithograph, 25 x 18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Besides gestures of engagement and disinterest, themes of power and control also divide the two artists' work. Questions of regulation and observation are particularly recurrent throughout Baluschek's city pictures, frequently going hand-in-hand with suggestions of state authority and benevolence. Two frequently used motifs employed by Baluschek to symbolise these concepts are the fly-tipping signpost and the police officer, or Schupo. Rubbish dumps always appear at the very outermost edges of the city, and stand as an index of the ambiguity and marginality of these spaces. Furthermore, in Baluschek's work, these spaces are inhabited by society's most marginalised characters, such as the scavengers in *Die Lumpensammler* (The Rag Collectors, 1926, fig. 48), and the pathetic

35. 'die "Arbeiterjugend" scheint nur noch aus Grashüpfern zu besehen' Durus [Alfréd Keményi].
"Hans Baluschek : Ein kleinbürglicher Darsteller des Proletariats," *Die Rote Fahne*, May 29, 1930.

drunk in *Porträt einer Säuferin* (Portrait of a Drunken Lady, 1923, fig. 49). These poor specimens are not alone in the cast of characters Baluschek portrays in the half-urban, half-rural grey areas at the city limits, and an incomplete list includes vagabonds, vagrants, prostitutes, beggar families and gypsies. On the odd occasion, these characters are to be found situated in the city proper; and when they are, they are usually accompanied by the second of Baluschek's motifs to be explored here: the police officer. But unlike the police officers which frequently appeared in Grosz's pictures, and who Grosz openly mocked, Baluschek's Schupos are portrayed as upright, incorruptible, and in charge.

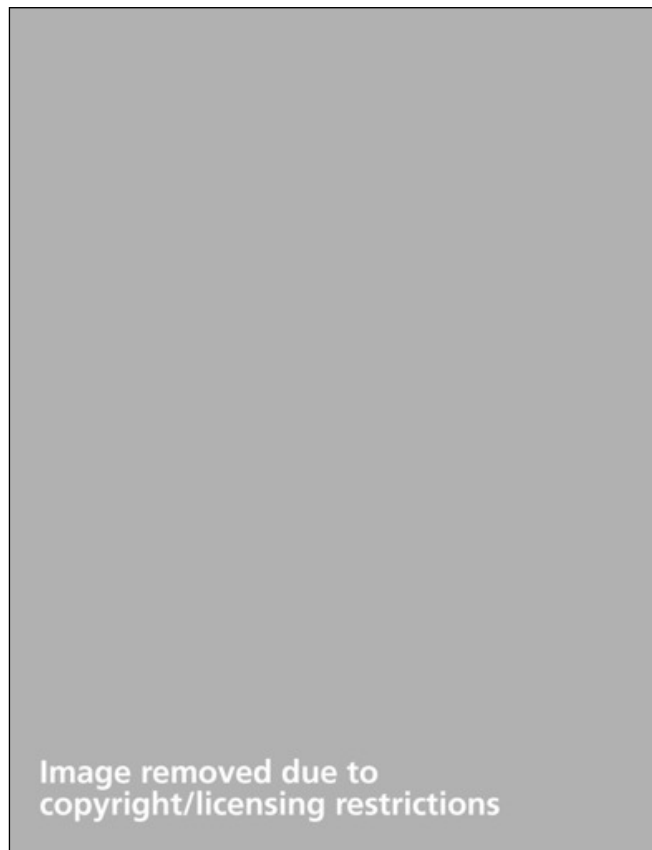


Figure 49: Hans Baluschek, *Porträt einer Säuferin*, 1923. Lithograph, 31.2 x 23.9cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

In *Die Hungernden (Arbeitslose)* (The Hungry/Unemployed, fig. 50), jobless workers, some with spouses and children are shown queuing for food. The passive faces of these sorry characters are bereft of any agitation or sense of anger at their situation. The Schupo Officer stands with his back to us, and while we cannot see his facial expression, his stance suggests he looks on with a sense of both compassion and authority. As Vernon Lidtke has argued, Social Democratic supporters had become accustomed to continual police monitoring at public gatherings during the *Kaiserreich*. Wishing to avoid unnecessary

confrontation, they moderated their behaviour in the presence of the authorities accordingly.³⁶ Baluschek's *Die Hungernden* belongs to a category of late-Weimar era images that depict queues at soup kitchens and unemployment offices, many of which hint at the resignation of the working classes, and the republican authorities' lapses into militancy, as they sought to impose order upon the growing chaos.

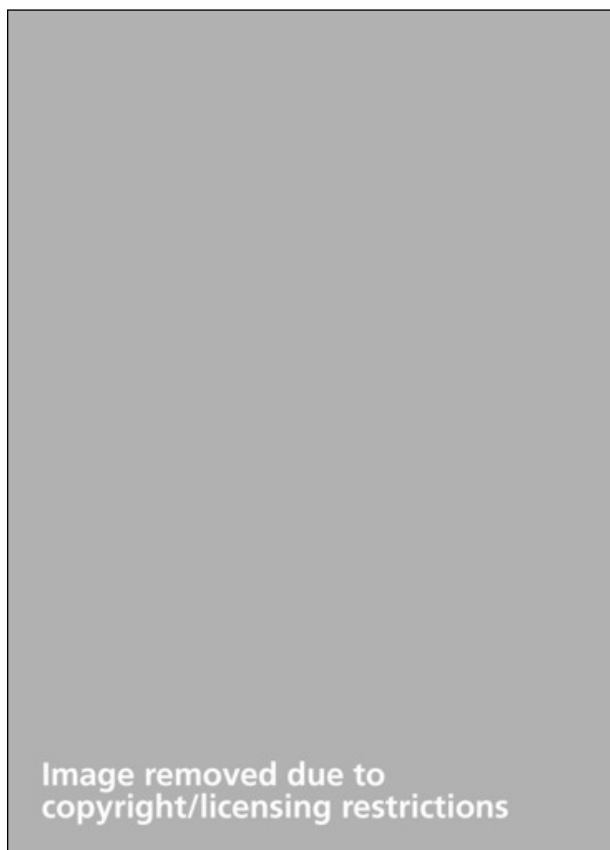


Figure 50: Hans Baluschek, *Die Hungernden (Arbeitlose)*, 1925. Lithograph, 25 x 18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

36. Vernon L Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture : The Socialist Labour Movement in Imperial Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 84.

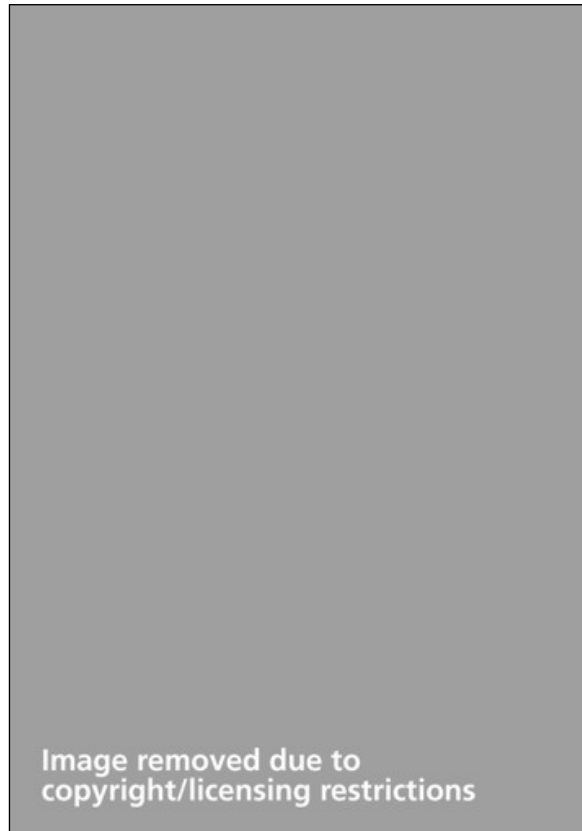


Figure 51: Hans Baluschek, *Der Schupo und die Tippelschickse*, 1926. Lithograph, 25x18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Police authority is evident in another of Baluschek's lithographs from the *Volk* portfolios. In *Der Schupo und die Tippelschickse* (The Police Officer and the Tramp, 1926, fig. 51), a police officer stands over a vagrant woman, who sits under the officer's gaze on a park bench. The tramp has her back to us, making it difficult to ascertain her expression or response to the policeman's somewhat admonishing gaze. The suggestion however is clear, in that there are some elements of society whose presence in public spaces is subject to scrutiny by the authorities. The narrative of this scene is worth of comparison to Nagel's *Parkbank am Wedding*. Recurrent in Baluschek's work from the twenties are representations of state authority which incongruously recall—perhaps even fondly—Germany's previous regime. Other prints from Baluschek's *Volk* portfolios depict marginalised characters under close scrutiny from authority. For example, *Die Aufgegriffen* (1927, The Arrested), which shows a man and his children in custody, and *Gerichtskorridor* (Outside the courtroom, 1927, fig. 52), which shows another downtrodden victim waiting with resignation—presumably for sentencing—in a corridor outside the courtroom. The submission to authority is even more contrived in Baluschek's 1930 watercolour painting *Aufgegriffene* (fig. 53). Here, the artist recreates a terrain on two levels (possibly a railway

embankment) that allow two policemen to stand over a group of hapless *kleine Leute* (little people), further emphasising the subservience of the people under the state. This sense of submissiveness on the part of the people at such a politically charged moment in time—and the dress of the characters shown here suggest they represent a good cross-section of ‘the people’—drew criticism from communist critics, which will be explored in more detail below. Baluschek seems not to have been aiming to criticise or respond ironically to events, instead advocating such order and regulation. It is strikingly apparent that, as one surveys Baluschek’s oeuvre, themes of meek submission to order and authority constitute one of the principal concerns of the artist’s work, which these pieces selected here serve to epitomise. They correspond to Social Democratic policy throughout the 1920s in Berlin, in which the urban landscape was increasingly organised and subjected to regulation. By contrast—and as we might expect—Nagel’s subjects display no such meekness and submission to authority. This is not to say that Nagel’s pictures and characters are always outwardly confrontational. Instead, they tend to exhibit a sense of quiet defiance in a far more subtle and humane manner.

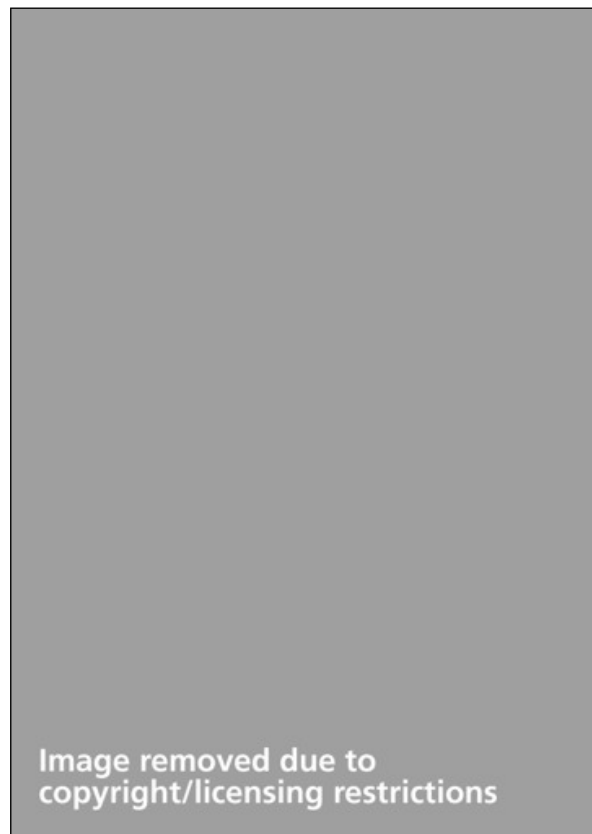


Figure 52: Hans Baluschek, *Gerichtskorridor*, 1927. Lithograph, 25x18cm. Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

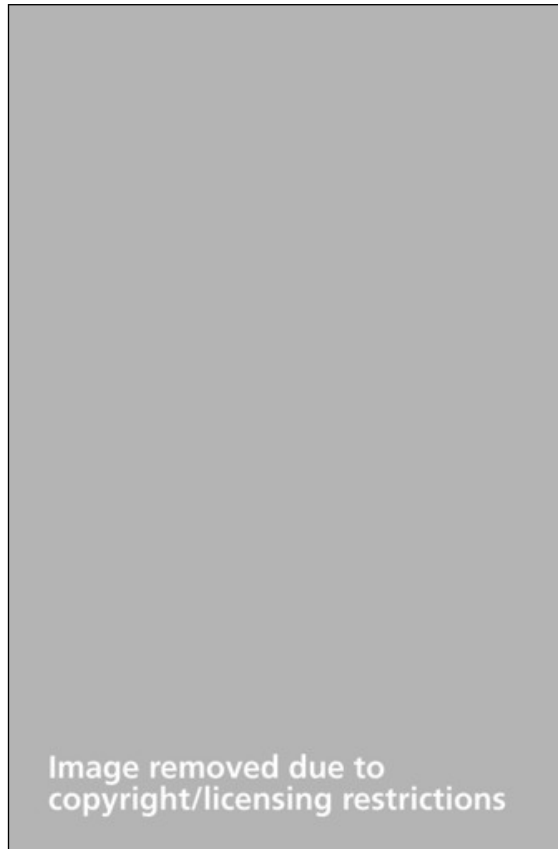


Figure 53: Hans Baluschek, *Aufgegriffene*, 1930. Watercolour, pastel on board, 94.5 x 64cm. Märkisches Museum, Berlin.

5.5 The working methods of the two artists

The working methods employed by Baluschek and Nagel reveal divergent approaches to the origination and production of images, that can help to explain the contrasting spatial dynamics that emerge in their work. It also helps to explain the consequent political reception of the work—and the artist’s own political stature in the eyes of critics and colleagues. Besides his perceived Social Democratic political association, Baluschek’s working methods were not up to the task of delivering the authenticity that the communist critic demanded, and for which Nagel, by the mid twenties, was setting the standards.

‘I must know the people whom I paint’ declared Nagel, ‘I must know something about their lives, in order that I may see them for who they are.’ Nagel was insistent that his work was of the people, about the people, and for the people.³⁷ This meant real proletarian subject matter in its natural environment. In the case of his portraits, Nagel painted his

37. ‘Ich muss den Menschen, den ich malen will, kennen, muss um sein Leben wissen, um ihn überhaupt richtig sehen zu können.’ Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 36–37.

fellow working-class inhabitants of Wedding, often committing their features to paper in their poky apartments or in the dingy back rooms of the local bars. Occasionally, the artist might drag his subject back to his makeshift studio in his own apartment to finish off a painting. Outside of the studio, Nagel took his sketchbook with him wherever he went, using it to record the gestures and faces of those he encountered.³⁸ The artist's sketchbook pages were filled with hastily scratched-out drawings of working-class citizens, standing on street corners, relaxing in beer gardens, or sitting on street benches. Many of these studies were the basis of ideas that found their way into finished paintings.

Having left behind his avant-garde colour experiments of the early twenties, Nagel's post-1925 work was characterised by the dull and earthy tones that pervaded Wedding. For Nagel the proletarian painter, the sooty grey of endless rows of tenements, the deep brown grime of factory smoke and the jaundice yellow of malnourishment, all made significant contributions to the artist's palette. Nagel's post-1926 portraits, such as *Weddinger Jungen* (fig. 46) and *Anilinarbeiter* (Aniline Worker, 1928) are particularly characterised by an almost monochromatic application of paint. Nagel's working-class subjects are distinguished by their unhealthy, pale complexions, set against the dark, dingy backgrounds of factory and pub interiors. The monochromatic tones tell us something of the poor working conditions in the factories endured by many workers, as well as the malnutrition that blighted many of Berlin's poorer citizens.³⁹ But they are also a product of the artist's own working conditions. Nagel's 'studio' was a poorly lit room in a tenement apartment in Wedding—a gift to the artist and his family from the city of Berlin, after a petition had been signed by prominent artistic colleagues including George Grosz, Otto Dix, Heinrich Zille, Käthe Kollwitz and Baluschek.⁴⁰ According to his Nagel's wife Walli, 'the "studio" was perpetually dark, so that [Nagel] usually painted by gaslight, not knowing whether it was day or night outside.'⁴¹

38. Ibid.

39. Lüdtke, "What Happened to the "fiery Red Glow"?", 214, 220-21.

40. Nagel, *Das darfst du nicht!*, 74.

41. 'Das "Atelier" war immer dunkel, darum malte mein Mann stets bei Gaslicht, und nie wusste man in diesem Zimmer, ob es Tag oder Nacht war.' Ibid., 76.

In contrast to Nagel's characters, the subjects of Baluschek's pictures are rarely mirrors of real people. On the rare occasions when Baluschek painted conventional portraits, they were of prominent public figures, including Friedrich Ebert and renowned physicist Karl Ferdinand Braun. Baluschek's scenes and narratives were based on the artist's observations around Berlin, but they were not of Berlin, nor based on the lives of specific Berliners. In his autobiography, Nagel recollected meeting Baluschek one day in the Reinickendorfer Straße in Wedding. The author described how his artist colleague was observing some building works in the road, while scribbling down written notes in a small book. Nagel inquired as to whether he had made any drawn studies, to which Baluschek insisted that his written notes were sufficient.⁴² Baluschek outlined his working method in a 1920 essay published in *Die Gartenlaube*. In the piece, entitled *In the struggle for my Art*, Baluschek sought to defend his work against his detractors. He described how real-life experiences and observations supplied the initial impetus for a work, and how he then drew upon a repository of 'ideal types' from his imagination—not just human figures, but also tenements, street lamps, railways signals and locomotives.⁴³ Baluschek's pictures are portraits of the big city rather than specific individuals. His oil paintings are far more panoramic and colourful than Nagel's, describing open-air environments rather than claustrophobic interiors. Paintings such as *Sommerabend* and *Sonnenidyll* embrace the full spectrum of colour. Baluschek's studio was far better suited to the mixing and application of colours for the canvas than Nagel's was. In 1928 Baluschek was given an apartment by the authorities in the Berlin district of Schönberg, in recognition of his artistic contribution to the city. Unlike Nagel's apartment however, his was a bright and airy top-floor, south-facing studio apartment in the newly built Ceciliengarten estate in Schöneberg.⁴⁴

42. Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 36.

43. 'Was mich um mich herum irgendwie berührt, ergreift, packt, erschüttert, gibt mir die Impulse zu meinen Bildern. Dann formt sich die Komposition, und aus meinem reichlichen, in meinem Gehirn aufgespeicherten Typenmaterial stellen sich die figuren ein. Auch vierstöckige Mietskasernen mit ihren Hinterhäusern haben ihren Typ, ebenso wie Straßenlaternen, Trottoirbäume, Eisenbahnsignale und Lokomotiven. Ich habe sie durch Beobachtung in ihrem Wesen erkannt und hebe mit Leichtigkeit das zwingend Charakteristische hervor.' Hans Baluschek, "Im Kampf um meine Kunst," *Die Gartenlaube*, July 1920.

44. Bröhan, *Hans Baluschek*, 116–17.

5.6 The importance of location and display in Nagel's work

The importance ascribed by Nagel to the proletarian authenticity of the artwork in terms of subject matter and production, was mirrored by the artist's desire to present his work first and foremost to a proletarian audience. Nagel sought to use his artistic ability to increase the class consciousness of the proletariat. In early 1926, Nagel played a leading role in helping organise an exhibition of proletarian art in the Stein department store, situated on Chausseestrasse, the main thoroughfare running through Wedding. The exhibition brought together work by numerous artists with proletarian sympathies, as well as art created by the workers themselves. Amongst the recognised artists who exhibited were Nagel himself, Baluschek, Heinrich Zille, Käthe Kollwitz and representatives of the *Rote Gruppe*, including Otto Dix and Rudolf Schlichter. Though disparate stylistically, the themes represented had much in common. Writing in the magazine *Die Weltbühne*, in response to the first exhibition in Wedding, the art critic Adolf Behne—a close friend and supporter of Nagel—described the themes of the exhibition as ‘the proletariat, misery, despair, illness, drink, dance.’⁴⁵ The success of the Wedding department store led to three similar shows in other stores across Berlin: the Tietz store on Alexanderplatz, Joseph in Neukölln and Lindemann in Spandau.⁴⁶ However, in his review of the first show, Behne cast doubt on the usefulness of showing the proletariat pictures that merely reflected their own lives back at them. ‘Would it not [...] be better?’ he wondered ‘to show this collection to the bourgeoisie in the Kaufhaus des Westens, who can then at least see the misery of the proletariat in painted form?’⁴⁷ Behne went on to suggest that the proletariat would be equally well-served by the boldest and most ambitious abstract art created by the likes of Mondrian or Oskar Nerlinger because, as he saw it, a juxtaposition of reds and greens is ‘just as revolutionary as painting a hand grenade or a victory at the barricades.’⁴⁸ This proposition brought a stinging rebuke from John Heartfield in a subsequent edition of *Weltbühne*, who mocked the revolutionary Constructivism that Behne spoke of, and which Heartfield now claimed was being applied to our ‘villas, commercial buildings, drinking

45. ‘Proletariat, Elend, Verzweiflung, Krankheit, Destille, Schwoop.’ Adolf Behne, “Tempelhofer Feld und Wedding,” *Die Weltbühne* 22, no. 9 (1926): 347.

46. Christine Hoffmeister, *Otto Nagel*, 19.

47. ‘Wäre es nicht [...] richtiger, diese Kollektion im “Kaufhaus des Westens” den Bürgern zu zeigen, die dann das Elend wenigstens in gemalten Zustände sehen könnten?’ Behne, “Tempelhofer Feld und Wedding,” 347. The Kaufhaus des Westens, or KaDeWe, was Berlin's biggest and most exclusive department store, situated in the heart of the city's west-end.

48. ‘Rot zu Grün ordnen so, dass beide Farbquanten ihr höchstes Maß an Kraft, Würde, Freiheit erhalten, ist sehr viel revolutionärer als Handgranaten oder “Sieg der Barrikade” malen.’ *Ibid.*

dens and luxury homes—inside and out.’ Heartfield continued: ‘Mr. Behne obviously does not understand that to gain people’s comprehension over their own miserable situation, is a revolutionary factor of the first degree.’⁴⁹ Behne and Heartfield’s spat was symptomatic of the shifting attitudes to avant-garde art within the Third International, and indicated the cleft between the official Communist party line on revolutionary art, which was shifting towards social realism and political satire, and away from the constructivist, abstract art of the international avant-garde. If the retreat away from international abstraction towards figurative realism ran counter to the currents of modernism, it did at least permit a dialogue at a regional, local level. Nagel’s art enabled a dialogue between the artist and his fellow, local working-class comrades, and acted as a mirror, held up to the eyes of the proletariat. By removing art from its traditional gallery context and placing it in the spaces of everyday life, Nagel wanted to arrest the attention of the proletarian and elevate him or her to a new level of self-awareness, in the same manner that epic theatre tried to undermine the usually dulling effects of theatrical tradition. In contrast, the abstract international style that, according to Heartfield, was now increasingly being used to adorn the bourgeois home, could stake no such claim to represent the proletariat. The implications of this argument posed challenging questions for the modern housing estates built for the workers in the 1920s.

In late 1926, Nagel organised an exhibition of his own work in the back room of a workers’ local pub, the *Sängerheim*, in the heart of Wedding. Adolf Behne wrote a review of the exhibition for a February 1927 edition of *Die Weltbühne*, which contrasted markedly with his earlier response to the Stein department store exhibition. Behne described how one first had to pass through a room filled with ‘red-front fighters, smoking, reading and playing billiards, into a dance hall in all its suburban, crimson-upholstered beauty,’ in order to find the seventy paintings, pastel drawings and sketches by Nagel that were on display.⁵⁰ What became of these works is unknown; few of their titles correspond to any surviving pieces from Nagel’s oeuvre. Fortunately, the catalogue gives us an insight into

49. ‘Kunstleistungen unsrer Konstruktivisten in Rot, Grün und Lila an den Außen- und Innenfronten ihrer Villen, Geschäftshäuser, Sauf- und Luxusstätten immer öfter verwenden, [...] Herr Behne weiß selbstverständlich nicht, dass einem Menschen Klarheit über seine elende Lebenslage zu verschaffen ein revolutionärer Faktor ersten Ranges ist.’ John Heartfield, “Grün oder – Rot?,” *Die Weltbühne* 22, no. 11 (1926): 434-35.

50. ‘Im “Sängerheim” rote Frontkämpfer, rauchend, lesend, beim Billardspiel, und im Tanzsaal von vorstädtischer, karminroter Tapezierer-Schönheit: Nagel.’ Adolf Behne, “Otto Nagel,” *Die Weltbühne* 23, no. 2 (1927): 77; Christine Hoffmeister, *Otto Nagel*, 19.

the themes on display in the exhibition. Works included bore titles such as *Arbeiterkinder* (Worker's Children) *Straßenmädel* (Street Girl), *Alter Prole* (Old Proletarian), *Laubenkolonist* (Garden Colonist) and *Degenerat* (Degenerate). Otto Steinicke, writing in *Die Rote Fahne*, described the portraits and other scenes as 'unfriendly, sad, despairing, sceptical, but always true' while a correspondent writing in *Vorwärts* recalled the painting's 'emaciated, pale faces with hollow cheeks and tired eyes.'⁵¹ Behne paid as much attention to the exhibition visitors as he did the exhibition itself, watching the men and women of Wedding 'seriously and taciturnly' studying the pictures as if they were mirrors held up to their own faces, so that they may 'see themselves on the walls.'⁵² The experience was sobering. 'Sometimes,' suggested Steinicke, 'Nagel applies his colours in a cruel fashion.'⁵³ Behne continued his review by envisaging what these visitors might make of the National Gallery in Berlin, imagining their astonished and helpless expressions, as they backed away to the exit, having decided that this is not the place for them. The *Sängerheim* exhibition, surmised Behne, showed an artist and his art in complete affinity with its public. Nagel's pictures 'have their place, in which they cannot leave without committing something akin to an act of treason.'⁵⁴

Authentic proletarian art was judged as that which had been created in the proletarian districts by proletarian artists, depicted proletarian subject matter and, as much as possible, was displayed for the benefit of the proletariat. To this end, Nagel ticked all the right boxes in terms of authenticity. The same cannot be said for Baluschek, who did not directly draw from subjects in the working-class districts, but merely took notes before retreating to his studio apartment in the comfortable district of Schöneberg to complete his pictures, whereupon they were most commonly shown in juried exhibitions.

51. 'Er ist unfreundlich, traurig, verzweifelt, skeptisch, aber immer wahr.' 'Abgemagerte bleiche Gesichter mit hohlen Wangen und müden Augen starren auf den Betrachter.' Otto Steinicke. "Der Maler Otto Nagel. Eine Gesamtausstellung," *Die Rote Fahne*, December 10, 1926; "Das Gesicht des Berliner Nordens," *Vorwärts*, December 10, 1926.

52. 'Das Publikum, Männer und Frauen vom Wedding, ernst, schweigsam, langsam die Bilder Otto Nagels betrachtend. Sie sehen sich selbst an den Wänden.' Behne, "Otto Nagel," 77.

53. 'Grausam trägt er manchmal die Farben auf.' Steinicke. "Der Maler Otto Nagel. Eine Gesamtausstellung," *Die Rote Fahne*, December 10, 1926.

54. 'Otto Nagels Bilder suchen nicht mehr, sie haben ihren Platz, den sie nicht verlassen können, ohne einen Verrat zu begehen.' Behne, "Otto Nagel," 77-78.

5.7 Communist criticism of Baluschek

If, as Heartfield insisted, the proletariat must be made aware of their circumstances and have their real lives reflected back at themselves, then the only effective proletarian art was one rooted in its surroundings and the everyday lives of its inhabitants, one rooted in a culture constructed from the ‘bottom up.’ By 1929, Stalin’s influence in Soviet Russia had permeated through the hierarchy of the KPD, leading to an ever-widening rift between the Communists and Social Democrats. The Communist party accused the Social Democrats as being a tool of Imperialism, and as preparing the ground for war against the Soviet Union. The 1929 May Day riots in Berlin in particular, suggested one party document, was indicative of the Social Democrats’ transformation into Social Fascists.⁵⁵ The renewed militancy and uncompromising character of Communism had led to questions being asked—particularly by communist art critic Alfréd Keményi—about George Grosz’s commitment to the party, and his status as its official artist.⁵⁶ The void left by Grosz’s decline in the eyes of the Communists, was one into which Nagel stepped.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly then, as an SPD supporter whose art was not emphatically communist in spirit, Baluschek attracted a growing amount of censure from communist critics. Writing in the magazine *Kulturwille* on the occasion of the artist’s sixtieth birthday, the communist illustrator Fritz Schiff acknowledged the debt younger communist artists owed to Baluschek, but regretted the elder artist’s inability to break away from a naturalism that in his view, left him unable to ‘accuse or attack,’ nor able to enter into the socialist spirit.⁵⁸ Writing at the same time in *Die Rote Fahne*, Alfréd Keményi made a clear distinction between the artist’s pre- and postwar work. Keményi praised the earlier phase of Baluschek’s career (a time before German Communism) for the attention it drew to the plight of the proletariat. He singled out the artist’s series of *Opfer* drawings from 1906 as being ‘hard-hitting, uncompromising reportage which met in full, with denouncement and social criticism, the developments of the time.’ By contrast, the artist’s postwar output was denounced as little more than petit-bourgeois trumpery—as ‘a flirtation with the bourgeoisie.’⁵⁹ Nagel agreed with Keményi’s

55. KPD., *Waffen für den Klassenkampf: Beschlüsse des XII. Parteitages der KPD* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag, 1929), 53.

56. Alfréd Keményi, “Künstler des Proletariats,” *Eulenspiegel*, July 1931.

57. Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party: Art and Radicalism in Crisis, 1918 to 1936* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 112.

58. ‘Baluschek ist in seiner Kunst zu sehr von jenem “Naturalismus” erfüllt [...] Baluschek klagt nicht an und greift nicht an.’ Fritz Schiff, “Hans Baluschek: Zum 60. Geburtstag des Malers am 9. Mai,” *Kulturwille*, June 1930.

59. ‘Die Serie der Kohlenzeichnungen des Sechsenddreißigjährigen (1906): “Die Opfer” z.B. enthält

analysis of a split in Baluscek's oeuvre, either side of the War, though he understandably did not use quite the same condemnatory rhetoric to describe his fellow artist as Keményi had. Instead, he regretted the lack of connection with the proletarian cause in Baluscek's later work. Both Nagel and Schiff could agree that Baluscek should be remembered as 'the first painter in Germany to portray the modern industrial proletariat.'⁶⁰ In truth, the distinction between Baluscek's pre- and postwar work, which Keményi, Schiff and Nagel all drew attention to was overstated. Baluscek depicted both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie throughout the entire course of his artistic career, openly stating his interest in all classes of society.⁶¹ For example, in the 1907 Berliner Secession exhibition, Baluscek exhibited a large painting, *Sonntag auf dem Tempelhofer Feld* (Sunday on the Tempelhof field), which portrayed the middle-classes enjoying their day of leisure, alongside his drawings from the *Opfer* series, which Keményi later praised so emphatically for their proletarian subject matter. Keményi's statement of Baluscek flirting with the bourgeoisie is as applicable to the artist's turn-of-the-century output as it was to his later 1920's work. Likewise, the overly sentimental quality of many of Baluscek's characters was not a new, postwar development either, and if anything, the expressions became less mawkish over time.

The real issue that I believe lay at the heart of Keményi's criticism and Nagel's regret, is related to the notion of the authenticity of Baluscek's method and his art. Where urban politics is concerned, geographic location must be the prime factor in establishing any such authenticity. How could an artist who now lived in the reasonably affluent suburb of Schöneberg, to the south of Berlin, truly understand the working-class North Berliner from Wedding? Moreover, was the impact of such work not undermined further, when it was ultimately intended for display to the bourgeois art enthusiasts in the academically

eine Reihe harter, rücksichtslos gestalteter Reportagen, die zur Zeit ihres Entstehens als Anklage und soziale Kritik ins Volle trafen. [...] Denn das Umgehen einer wirklichen, einer rücksichtslosen Kritik des Kapitalismus mit den Krokodilstränen der Rührseligkeit, wie es in den Mitleidsbildern des späten Baluscek (1914–1930) geschieht, ist in Wirklichkeit der malerische (und zeichnerische) Ausdruck eines Liebäugelns mit der Bourgeoisie.' Durus [Alfréd Keményi]. "Hans Baluscek : Ein kleinbürgerlicher Darsteller des Proletariats," *Die Rote Fahne*, May 29, 1930.

60. 'Hans Baluscek war der erste Maler in Deutschland, der das moderne Industrie-Proletariat darstellte.' Otto Nagel, "Hans Baluscek – zum seinem 60. Geburtstage am 9. Mai," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 9, no. 18 (1930): 357.

61. 'Arbeiter, Kleinbürger, Spießer, Dirnen, Zuhälter entstanden in meiner Kunst zu dem neuen Leben, das ich wollte.' Baluscek, "Im Kampf um meine Kunst."

recognised art shows and galleries of west Berlin? Lacking the presence of characters and situations drawn from real life, Baluschek constructed narratives from his own perspective, creating scenes that lacked credibility in the eyes of communist observers.

Baluschek's lack of authenticity in the eyes of communist critics is worth comparing to the huge popularity that Heinrich Zille, arguably the most famed chronicler of Berlin's working classes and a contemporary of Baluschek, enjoyed amongst both critics and the wider public. When Zille died in August 1929, the tributes published by Social Democrats and Communists alike, cut across the now-rarely negotiable political divisions on the left. Nagel—who had become a close friend of the ageing Zille—wrote a tribute to the late artist in the September 1929 issue of the the Social Democratic *Sozialistisches Monatshefte*. Nagel underlined the authenticity of Zille as a proletarian and representative of the Berlin proletariat. 'He belonged to his class right up until his last breath,' he said.⁶² Nagel stressed that the people and things Zille drew were taken from reality, and in no way insincere. 'He cherished only the intimate experience of the proletarian everyday. Nothing at all special. Simply the grey everyday ... [the] struggle for work and bread.'⁶³ The writer Adolf Heilborn wrote a tribute for the *BIZ*, which was lavishly illustrated by Zille's own drawings and a full-page illustrated tribute by fellow caricaturist Willibald Krain. Heilborn's text focused on Zille's popularity in Berlin, and the critical recognition the artist had won from Berlin's academic institutions, including the National Gallery and the Academy of Arts. Despite the less politically engaged rhetoric of his tribute—compared to Nagel's—Heilborn nonetheless acknowledged Zille as 'the most Berlin of all of Berlin's artists,' and an artist who 'led the struggle for the poorest of the poor.'⁶⁴

As the son of a craftsman and himself trained as a printer, Zille did not work in the factories as Nagel had done. Neither was Zille a native Berliner, having moved (like Baluschek) to the city at a young age. From 1892, Zille and his young family lived in the

62. 'Heinrich Zille war sein ganzes Leben lang Proletarier. Er gehörte seiner Klasse bis zum letzten Atemzug.' Otto Nagel, "Heinrich Zille," *Sozialistisches Monatshefte* 35, no. 9 (1929): 821.

63. 'Er hielt nur das kleine Erlebnis des proletarischen Alltags fest. Alles nichts Besonderes. Einfach der graue Alltag [...] Kampf um Arbeit und Brot.' Ibid.

64. 'Wir fühlen eben, dass hinter dem eigenartigen Künstler ein ganzer, gütiger Mensch steht, dass Zille mit all dem Humor seiner Kunst den Kampf für die Ärmsten der Armen führt. [...] Zille, der berlinischste aller Zeichner [...]' Adolf Heilborn. "Heinrich Zille +," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 18 August, 1929.

tenement districts of Charlottenburg.⁶⁵ The grounds of Zille's near universal acceptance are to be found in the working-class legitimacy of his work—garnered through the circumstances of its production and reception—both of which took place in the streets and tenements of the city's working-class districts. Though character types appear in Zille's work as frequently as they do in Baluschek's, the starting point of Zille's characters were—as Nagel noted—studies from real life: in the cellar bars and tenement courtyards, and the streets and open spaces of the city's working-class districts. Nagel recollected that:

Heinrich Zille began in the truest spirit of his words in the street, his pocket crammed with small sheets of paper. Wherever he walked, sat or stood, he scratched out his studies. He explained to me, how he ran behind old ladies all day long, in order to observe the pleats of their skirts.⁶⁶

Moreover, Zille's foremost talent as draughtsman rather than painter, meant that his work appeared most frequently in the pages of the popular press—in the pages of *BIZ*, and in the popular satirical magazines such as *Simpicissimus*. These sketches were usually accompanied by the artist's own captions, written in a north Berliner dialect. Over the course of his career, Zille immersed himself in and portrayed a proletarian world neglected by other artists to such an extent, that he was affectionately regarded as 'Meister Zille,' a spokesperson for an entire 'Milljoh' (milieu).⁶⁷

Despite their similar biographical details and artistic concerns, Baluschek never enjoyed the same sort of adulation that Zille received. When Baluschek died in 1935, the press was already severely restricted under duress from National Socialist censorship. At the time, Baluschek's death received far less attention in the city's newspapers and magazines, leaving us to merely speculate as to whether Berliners felt grieved in quite the same way as

65. Bernhard Braunert, and Therese Eler, eds., *Heinrich Zille 1858–1929* (Berlin (East): Berlin-Information, 1978), 213-16.

66. 'Heinrich Zille ging im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes auf die Straße, die Tasche vollgepackt mit kleinen Blättchen. Wo er ging, saß oder stand, da "strichelte" er seine Studien. Er erzählte mir, wie er tagelang hinter alten Frauen hergelaufen war, um das Fallen der Rockfalten zu beobachten.' Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 36.

67. Heinrich Zille, and Georg Hermann, *'Mein Milljöh': neue Bilder aus dem Berliner Leben* (Berlin: Eysler, 1916).

they had six years earlier at Zille's passing. Furthermore, Zille's popularity, unlike Baluschek's, has endured to the present day. His books of collected drawings remain in print, and there is a permanent museum in Berlin, dedicated to his art.

5.8 Conclusion

The stakes at the German ballot box were raised ever higher as the twenties drew to a close. Political legitimacy was paramount: what one said and did—and where one said and did those things—were factors crucial to winning the hearts of minds of Berlin's working-class voters. In Otto Nagel's work, KPD supporters recognised a portrayal of the proletariat that could only have come from their own ranks. Reports in *Die Rote Fahne* and *AIZ* were full of praise for Nagel's work, continually emphasising the artist's roots as a worker and Wedding resident. 'He is no white-collar proletarian, he does not come from the bourgeois classes, and he does not have a conventional artist's studio' declared one writer.⁶⁸ Though they rarely saw in Nagel's work an incitement to raise arms in anger nor any encouragement for the workers to overthrow the factory owners and the government (recall Nagel's pacifist stance throughout the course of the first World War), what they got instead was an overwhelming gesture of solidarity and defiance in the faces and body language of the workers, mothers and children that Nagel painted, and who stood unintimidated in their familiar surroundings. One gets the impression that, on those occasions when Nagel's portraits were exposed to a middle-class audience, his subjects were bent on staring their bourgeois viewers down to see who blinked first; a confrontation which the pictures were always bound to win. Nagel's figures might have been frequently poor and pathetic, but they were also proud and uncompromising. By way of contrast, Baluschek's subjects cowered and capitulated in front of the viewer. They are situated outside of the public spaces that the Communists made their own in their struggle against the government—and later the Nazis—accepting their own miserable situation and deferentially submitting to authority. The spaces in which they creep are open, marginal spaces of transience and recreation: the railway embankment, the garden colony, the spoil heap and the areas of no mans' land at the edge of the city. Nagel's spaces by contrast, are the inner-city spaces of the tenement, courtyard and urban street.

68. 'Der Maler ist kein Stehkragenproletarier, er kommt nicht von der Bourgeoisie, er malt nicht in den üblichen Künstlerateliers.' Anonymous, "Ausstellung der Künstlerhilfe," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 3, no. 5 (1924): 15.

As already indicated at the end of chapter four, the biggest challenge facing open spaces in the working-class districts of the city; areas that, as we have seen in this chapter, both Baluschek and Nagel employed in their art throughout the twenties, came from the municipal authorities, who were under pressure to construct vast amounts of new housing stock in order to solve the city's housing crisis. The next chapter will look in closer detail at these efforts to build new housing throughout the latter part of the twenties, exploring in detail how the housing-construction industry adapted to changing circumstances, and the transformative effects that new housing had on the working-class landscape.

6. The politics of architecture : Berlin's Neues Bauen housing programme

6.1 Introduction

On the 8th July 2008, the United Nations organisation UNESCO awarded world heritage status to five of Berlin's best-known housing estates built during the Weimar Republic.¹ This classification was the outcome of two years' campaigning for the recognition of Berlin's early twentieth-century architectural heritage. The five recipients were the Schillerpark estate in Wedding, designed by Bruno Taut and built between 1924 and 1930, the Hufeisen (Horseshoe) estate in Britz (Taut and Martin Wagner, 1925–1930), the Carl-Legien estate in Prenzlauer Berg (Taut with Franz Hillinger, 1929–1931), the Weiße Stadt (White City) in Reinickendorf (Otto Salvisberg, Bruno Ahrends, Wilhelm Büning, 1929–1931), and Siemensstadt (Otto Bartning, Fred Forbat, Walter Gropius, Hugo Häring, Paul-Rudolf Henning and Hans Scharoun, 1929–1934). A sixth estate, Bruno Taut's Falkenberg garden city, built between 1913 and 1916, was also included in the list.²

The five Weimar-era projects were chiefly the outcome of an eight-year building frenzy which lasted from 1924 until 1932, transforming the suburban and working-class districts of Berlin. The republican government embarked on the so-called Neues Bauen programme in order to alleviate the nation's acute housing shortage. In Berlin alone, cooperative building societies built over 140,000 new homes in the space of eight years.³ Berlin's Neues Bauen programme produced a legacy of great architectural importance, in which many of the most famous names from the European architectural avant-garde contributed to a 'new Berlin,' including Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Bruno Taut and Hans Scharoun. UNESCO world heritage status has underscored the cultural significance of Berlin's interwar housing programme, and the architectural importance of all six UNESCO sites is beyond doubt. Collectively they share many features which demonstrate their contribution to architectural modernism: a radical break from past styles in their rejection

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1. "Unesco erklärt sechs Berliner Siedlungen zum Weltkulturerbe," *Berliner Morgenpost*, 8 July, 2008.
 2. Jörg Haspel, and Annemarie Jaeggi, eds., *Housing Estates in the Berlin Modern Style* (Munich, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007), 16.
 3. Ibid.

of ornamentation in favour of a functional approach, the use of flat roofs, and a mixture of clean white or brightly coloured façades. At the time of their construction, Germany's popular press and specialist magazines swiftly recognised the importance of these new estates and—as we shall see later—dedicated innumerable illustrated essays and architectural compendiums to them. In the intervening years, these examples of Weimar Berlin's housing programme have continued to attract both popular and scholarly attention.⁴ And now, UNESCO world heritage status has reiterated the justification for their inclusion in the modernist canon.

However, the emphasis on a handful of the most modern and avant-garde projects, all of which share a great many stylistic similarities, obscures the true diverse nature of Berlin's interwar housing programme; a concealment which UNESCO world heritage status is likely only to perpetuate. These five UNESCO estates account for around 6,700—less than five percent—of the 140,000 homes built in Berlin between 1924 and 1932.⁵ The similarities shared by the UNESCO heritage sites are reflected in the fact that one architect (Bruno Taut) was involved in the design of three out of the five developments, and one building society, the GEHAG, was responsible for the construction of two. The UNESCO list actually presents a distorted view of Weimar Berlin's housing programme, obscuring the work of many architects who were celebrated by their contemporaries. For example, Jean Krämer's colossal streetcar depots combined with housing blocks in Wedding and Charlottenburg received a great deal of attention in Berlin's press when they were completed.⁶ The architect Paul Mebes has also been overlooked, despite the significant contribution he made to Berlin's interwar housing programme.⁷

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4. The avant-garde nature of Taut's housing estates, and Wagner's urban-planning policies are discussed respectively in: Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany*, 87-124; Tafuri, "Sozialpolitik and the City," 197.. Both Lane and Tafuri focus much of their attention on Bruno Taut's work for the GEHAG building society. Broader cultural surveys of Weimarian Berlin also tend to focus on the iconic estates designed by Taut. For example, Eric Weitz's recent book describes Taut's *Waldsiedlung in Zehlendorf*: Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 177-83.
 5. figures on the number of units in the five UNESCO estates taken from Maria Berning, et al., *Berliner Wohnquartiere : ein Führer durch 60 Siedlungen in Ost und West* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1994), 126, 140, 144, 148, 152.
 6. Max Osborn, "Strassenbahnhof," *Der Querschnitt* 6, no. 8 (1927): 610-11; Ulf Dietrich, "Neuer Betriebsbahnhof und Wohnbauten der Berliner Straßenbahn," *Städtebau/Baupolitik* 4 (1930): 577-82.
 7. Adolf Behne. "Berlins neuer Wohnbau," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 December, 1928; Otto

It is important to acknowledge the rich variety of shapes, sizes and styles of housing created in Weimarian Berlin if we are to adequately understand the relations between the housing crisis (*Wohnungsnot*) and the Neues Bauen programme, issues which dominated municipal politics in 1920s Germany. This importance goes beyond simply challenging our own present-day impression that avant-garde architectural styles enjoyed hegemonic status in Germany in the 1920s. What I am most interested in understanding here, are the intersections between architecture, location, social conditions and political opinion. The wide variety of domestic architecture created in Berlin and across Germany throughout the twenties is indicative of the diversity and complexity of Weimar society. The avant-garde housing estates recognised by UNESCO embodied one particular outlook amongst this diversity, advocating an egalitarian vision of society based on socialist principles. This is why they have endured as potent symbols of the Weimar spirit of political idealism and rebirth, a spirit that was defeated in 1933. Historical surveys of the political and cultural life of the Weimar Republic have repeatedly insisted that this sense of modernism and idealism was at best skin deep: scratch below the surface and one finds deep-seated resentment of republican values and modern culture deeply ingrained in German society. Peter Gay described the *Vernunftrepublikaner*, or rational republicans, as well-educated and intelligent members of German society who learned to live with, rather than embrace the values of democracy and the republic,⁸ while Eric Weitz has argued that ‘No one, no thing, exercised hegemony’ in the republic’s political landscape.⁹ If we look beyond the modernist veneer of Berlin’s Neues Bauen programme, we can see this compromise, resistance, ambivalence and doubt, all rendered in stone and brick.

6.2 Factors dictating differences in political opinion over the Neues Bauen programme

Housebuilding on such an unprecedented scale carried great risks. It was an extraordinarily costly and long-term project, intended to transform the lives of millions of Germans. The political stakes were high, and opinions were sharply divided over the best way to go about funding, designing and building new housing. Not everyone approved of the government’s reform measures, nor of the radical new housing forms that progressive architects were

Wagner. “Baut gute Häuser!,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 August, 1925.

8. Gay, *Weimar culture*, 23.

9. Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 83.

proposing. The heated political atmosphere of the republic meant that behind each observation, comment, suggestion and criticism connected to the housing programme, there usually lay a distinct political opinion or position.

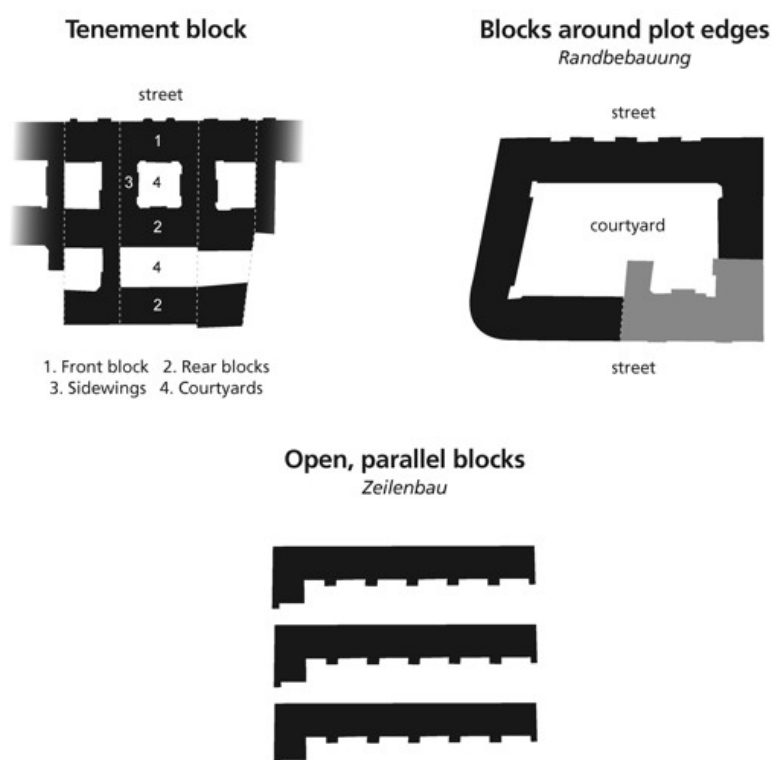


Figure 54: Different housing forms: tenement, *Randbebauung*, *Zeilenbau*.

Political opinions revolved around three important aspects of the Neues Bauen programme: architectural style, architectural form, and finance. The first two points are worth considering together. By architectural form I refer to the shape and size of a building: its number of floors, length and ground plan, or shape. The nineteenth-century tenement complex, the *Randbebauung* (increasingly common in early twentieth-century housing) and the *Zeilenbau* (predominant after 1930) are all examples of architectural form (fig. 54). By architectural style, I refer to the trimmings that adorn the architectural form. Architectural style includes the decorative features and colours of the façade, the type of roof used, door and window fittings, and so on.¹⁰ Architectural form and style were capable of operating independently of each other. A luxury villa in the Grünewald and a tenement

10. See Werner Hegemann's richly illustrated historical study of the façade in his book: Werner Hegemann, *Reihenhaus-Fassaden : Geschäfts- und Wohnhäuser aus alter und neuer Zeit* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1929).

block in the workers' quarters could share common stylistic features that linked them to the same trends and ideas, even though they were entirely different in terms of form. Similarly, a five-storey housing block can—as we shall see—be executed in either a strikingly modern or traditional manner. The lack of any rigid relationship between architectural form and style informs the political complexities of Weimar Germany's housing programme.

The so-called *Dächerkrieg* (or roof war) that erupted in Berlin in 1928 can help to illustrate this point. In August 1928, the GAGFAH building society, which represented the salaried, lower-middle classes, opened a combined architectural exhibition and housing estate in the southwestern district of Zehlendorf in Berlin. The GAGFAH society acknowledged their indebtedness to the modern Weissenhof estate—which had formed the centrepiece of the Werkbund exhibition in Stuttgart the previous year—in the formulation of their own project.¹¹ As the Werkbund had done at Weissenhof, GAGFAH commissioned numerous distinguished architects to design a series of individual houses and apartment blocks. Unlike the Werkbund however, GAGFAH—which preferred both traditional architectural style and form—enlisted a group of architects that were less radical than their Weissenhof counterparts, and included amongst others, Heinrich Tessenow, Paul Mebes and Wilhelm Jost.¹²

What made the GAGFAH estate particularly controversial was its provocative location: situated directly alongside the recently completed and extremely modern GEHAG housing estate, designed by Bruno Taut, Otto Salvisberg and Hugo Häring. The close proximity of the two estates sparked a war of words in the press, which concentrated on the most obvious difference in the appearance between the two sets of housing: the roof. While all the homes on the GAGFAH estate boasted pitched roofs, those on the GEHAG side were flat. Despite its name, the *Dächerkrieg* was not simply a case of architects bickering over the relative advantages of the flat and pitched roof. The confrontation opened up broader questions of how best to address the housing crisis, and more importantly, what should a specifically German style of architecture look like in the present circumstances. Paul Westheim's rebuke of the GAGFAH estate reflected opinion amongst many on the centre

11. *Ausstellung Bauen und Wohnen : Gagfah-Siedlung fischtalgrund Berlin-Zehlendorf* (Berlin: Thienemann, 1928), 766.

12. *Ibid.*, 772.

and moderate-left. Westheim attacked the ‘Biedermeier’ architects who had contributed to the GAGFAH estate, asserting that they were lacking in public spirit (i.e. not responding to the urgent need to build simple, functional homes) and should not be allowed to build homes—at least certainly not with public funds.¹³ The latter issue—the question of which style was most appropriate for German architecture—gave rise to various disputes best defined by a series of antinomies: of traditional versus modern, the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat, rural versus urban, the former regime versus the current republic.

The *Dächerkrieg* also demonstrated the internal frictions generated when architectural form and style operated independently of each other. As one commentator, writing in the *Deutsches Handelswacht* (German Trade Observer) noted of the Zehlendorf *Dächerkrieg*: ‘one could also build GAGFAH houses without roofs and DEWOG [GEHAG] houses with roofs.’¹⁴ On one hand, opinions as to what was the appropriate architectural *style* for the German home were essentially irreconcilable between progressives and conservatives. On the other hand, there was scope for compromise and agreement over what was considered to be the most appropriate architectural *form*. Understanding the *Dächerkrieg* as simply being a question of modern versus traditional style inevitably overlooks the subtleties of the wider debate, subtleties which can be found in numerous voices from both the left and the right, who built up their beliefs in brick and concrete, as well as putting them down on paper.

Alongside questions of architectural style and form, a third point on which political conflict emerged was the discussions as to how any housing programme should be funded and organised. This issue wrought large thanks to the immense volume of new housing required. When the republican government passed its new constitution in the historic German city of Weimar on the 11th August 1919, one of the 181 articles that made up the new constitution (article 155) made direct reference to the need for an extensive

13. ‘Architekten, denen es so sehr an Gemeinsinn fehlt, ganz zu schweigen von dem mangelnden künstlerischen Empfinden, sollte man nicht bauen lassen. Wenigstens nicht aus öffentlichen Mitteln, die zur Verbesserung, nicht zur Verschlechterung der Bausitten bestimmt sind.’ Paul Westheim, “Architektenscherze,” *Das Kunstblatt* 12 (1928): 284. For an historical summary of the debates surrounding the flat roof, see: Richard Pommer, “The flat roof : a modernist controversy in Germany,” *Art Journal* 43, no. 2 (1983): 158-69.

14. ‘Rational und irrational, revolutionär und traditionell kreuzen sich in jedem Menschen und in jeder Menschengruppe; also können auch Gagfahleute Häuser ohne Dächer bauen und Dewogleute solche mit Dächern.’ Quoted in: Anonymous, “Das Dach als Symbol,” *Kulturwille*, October 1929.

housebuilding programme. 'Every German their own healthy home' it declared, singling out in particular those families with children, and those returning from the war, for provision with their own homesteads (*Heimstätten*).¹⁵ The estimates as to how much new housing was actually required varied widely. According to a 1926 report in the *AIZ*, the housing deficit equated to sixteen homes for every one thousand German citizens, or roughly one million homes required across the Reich. The crisis in Berlin was particularly acute, with thirty-eight homes for every one thousand citizens required, a deficit of 174,000 dwellings.¹⁶ Another report from 1929 calculated that once external factors, such as inward migration, marriage, and the deterioration of current housing stock were taken into account, the number of new homes that Berlin required over the next ten years stood at 460,000.¹⁷

Delivering on the promise of providing a home for every German family was critically important to the success of the new government, given the overcrowding and deplorable conditions that many German citizens had to endure in the tenement districts of Germany's cities. Housing campaigner Victor Noack described it as 'the centrepiece of the fundamental rights and obligations' of the republic.¹⁸ The government had set themselves a daunting task in article 155, to which campaigners continually referred whenever doubts arose (as they inevitably did) over the government's ability to fulfil their promise. Most of the political censure inevitably came from the far left. A 1926 report in the communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne*, used its heading to remind the government of their promise: 'Every German a healthy home.' The report described the plight of one Berlin family who had resorted to living in a corridor in a housing block, while three thousand homes allegedly stood empty across the city.¹⁹ The categorical nature of article 155 made it an easy target for political satirists. A cartoon by Wilhelm Schulz in a 1928 issue of *Simplicissimus* compared the fortunes of two German families with the texts of two articles from the republican constitution. The poorer of the two families is holed up in a rickety

15. Horst Hildebrandt, *Die deutschen Verfassungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, 107.

16. E.H. "Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend in Deutschland," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, 25 March, 1926.

17. Schwan, *Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend*, 119.

18. 'Der Artikel 155 ist das Kernstück des die Grundrechte und Grundpflichten behandelnden 2. Hauptteiles der Verfassung.' Viktor Noack, "Artikel 155 in Gefahr!," *Die Wohnung* 1, no. 5 (1926): 136-37.

19. "'Jedem Deutschen eine gesunde Wohnung...'," *Die Rote Fahne*, August 25, 1926.

shack in the *Laubenkolonie* slums outside the city, while the more affluent family reside in a large suburban house, with their motorcar parked out front (fig. 55). While the illustration of the poorer family is shown with the text of article 155 as its caption, the image of the affluent family is shown alongside article 151, which declared that the ‘order of economic life must comply to the principles of justice in accordance with the objectives of ensuring a decent life for all.’

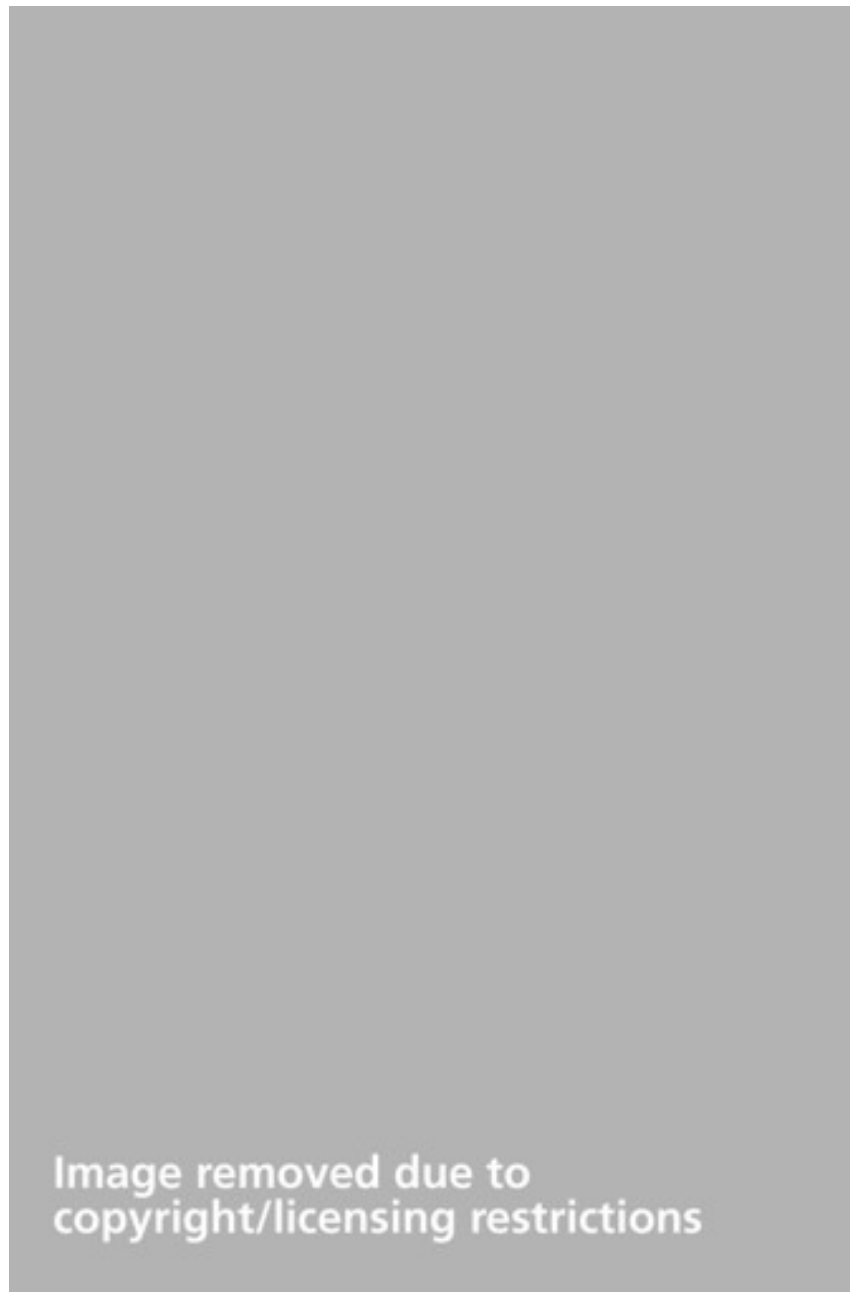


Figure 55: Wilhelm Schulz, "Artikel 151 mit 155," *Simplicissimus*, 12 November 1928.

In order to enable the German government to deliver on its ambitious pledge of providing every German with their own home, it first required significant financial funds and a new framework of sweeping housing reform measures. The republican government's primary aim was to take the house building industry out of the hands of the capitalists who had dominated it prior to the War, and place it under the supervision of socialised building societies. Efforts at housing reform had actually begun as early as the late nineteenth century, when the first of the philanthropic building societies dedicated to the creation of healthy homes were founded. The earliest societies catered for very specific occupational or geographical groups. For instance, the *Beamten Wohnungs-Verein Neukölln*, established in Berlin in 1902, committed itself to constructing housing blocks in the district of Berlin-Neukölln for civil service employees.²⁰ In the final year of the first World War, the German government began to rather belatedly take an interest in housing reform, introducing the first steps towards governmental support for new housing projects. In March 1918, the Prussian authorities passed a law providing state financial support for non-profit-making building societies, and a further law passed one month later provided state financial assistance for mortgages on smaller homes.²¹

A comprehensive reform of the laws governing land use had to wait until the ratification of the new republican constitution in 1919, which introduced new measures intended to put an end to the speculative building industry in Germany, widely regarded as having brought healthy profits for individuals and poor living conditions for the masses. Besides promising every German their own home, article 155 also stated that 'the allocation and use of land will be controlled by the state in a way which prevents its misuse.'²² In article 10 of the constitution, the new government took on the responsibility for overseeing land rights, land distribution and the acquisition of land for housing.²³ The *Reichssiedlungsgesetz* (State Settlement Law), passed at the same time as the national constitution, set out the implications of the land reforms in greater detail. The law obliged the federal states to set up non-profit-making building societies, and provided them with further powers to procure

20. Emil Müller, et al., *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre Beamten-Wohnungs-Verein Neukölln* (Berlin: Beamten-Wohnungs-Verein Neukölln, 1927). An historical account of the housing reform movement in Germany can be found in: Bullock, and Read, *Housing Reform in Germany and France*, section I.

21. Albert Gut, "Das Wohnungswesen in Deutschland vor dem Weltkriege," in *Hundert Jahre Architekten Verein zu Berlin* (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1924), 65-66.

22. Horst Hildebrandt, *Die deutschen Verfassungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, 107.

23. *Ibid.*, 72.; Gut, "Wohnungswesen in Deutschland," 66.

land through dispossession orders.²⁴ The new measures immediately had the desired effect. From 1919 onwards, a raft of new building societies appeared across the country. Many of these new organisations dedicated themselves in the first instance to constructing one-off housing projects, but later expanded to take on further and increasingly ambitious enterprises. For example, reformers in Berlin created the *Berlin-Heerstrasse* society in 1919 with the express intention of building a settlement of *Märkisch* homesteads in Charlottenburg.²⁵ Over the course of the next ten years, the society expanded its operations to become one of the largest building cooperatives in Berlin. In 1929, the *Heerstrasse* society took on the construction of the newest housing blocks at Siemensstadt, incorporating 1,370 homes.²⁶ In 1924 the GEHAG society was created, one of the largest and most important of the new cooperative housing societies. From its inception, the GEHAG society committed itself to building homes for workers, salaried-employees and civil-servants.²⁷ New cooperative building guilds (*Bauhütte*) worked alongside the public building societies, using the latest construction methods and technologies to erect new housing as cheaply as possible. In Berlin, the most significant of these organisations were the *Bauhütte Berlin* and the *Deutsche Bauhütte*, the latter of which constructed the GEHAG estates in Britz and Zehlendorf.²⁸

New housing had to be affordable to low wage earners, which meant that its construction had to be cost-efficient and capable of being produced in large quantities. To achieve these aims, the housing programme required significant funding. The previous regime had already introduced mortgage support for the construction of small homes, but the new republican government went further. Two important sources of income were secured for new housing development. The first of these was the housing interest tax (*Hauszinssteuer*), introduced in 1924. The *Hauszinssteuer* was a tax upon housing wealth created during the inflationary period of 1922/23, and collected revenues of around 750 million Reichsmarks.

24. Ibid., 66-67.

25. *Märkisch* here referring to the local (Mark Brandenburg) style of vernacular architecture.

26. For a survey of the Heerstraße building society, see: Curt Gorgas, *Die Gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft Berlin-Heerstraße* (Berlin: Richard Balczus, 1929).; Jörg Haspel, and Annemarie Jaeggi, *Housing Estates*, 87.

27. Richard Linneke, "Die Sparabteilung der gemeinnützigen Heimstätten Spar- und Bau-A.G. in Berlin," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 1, no. 13 (1924): 125.

28. William T. Ham, "The German Building Guilds," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 43, no. 2 (1929): 293-94.

The government used these funds to issue low-interest mortgages.²⁹ The second source of capital came from abroad. The introduction of the United States' Dawes Plan in 1924, designed to assist Germany with its war reparations, brought large amounts of financial aid into the country, and helped to fund additional mortgages (*Zusatzhypotheken*) on new housing projects.³⁰ The influx of capital into government coffers enabled municipal authorities to begin to exercise some of their new powers over privately owned land. In Berlin, the municipal government purchased several large tracts of terrain for housing development. On the 18th December 1924, the city authorities paid nearly six million Reichsmarks for 598 hectares of land that had formerly belonged to a feudal estate in the southeastern suburb of Britz.³¹ Less than a year later, the GEHAG and DEGEWO building societies both began construction of housing estates on this land.

6.3 New planning regulations in Berlin

Once the necessary financial and organisational frameworks for the house building programme had been established at the national and state levels, municipal councils required local regulations to supervise the anticipated increase in building activity. In Berlin, municipal building councillor Walter Koeppen drew up the city's new building regulations, which came into effect in November 1925.³²

Koeppen's new guidelines divided Greater Berlin into five building zones that radiated from the city centre outwards, with zone five at the centre of the city, and zone one at the periphery. five building classes were established, which outlined the maximum number of storeys permitted for each and every part of the city. Areas designated building class five lay along the main roads and existing built-up areas of Berlin, and permitted five-storey constructions. At the opposite end of the scale, building class one land was limited to single-storey buildings, and situated at the most rural fringes of the city. In total, Koeppen

29. E. Heinrich, and K. K. Weber, *Wohnungsbau. Die Voraussetzungen. Die Entwicklung der Wohngebiete*, vol. 4A, Berlin und seine Bauten (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1970), 27.

30. Martin Wagner, "Her mit den Wohnungsbauprogrammen," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 4, no. 1/2 (1927): 4-7.

31. Paul Busch, *Zeitgemässe Grundstückspolitik der Stadt Berlin* (Berlin: Labisch, 1929), 21, 37. See also a report in the *Deutschen Bauzeitung* in 1927, quoted in Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 162-63.

32. Walter Koeppen, *Bauordnung für die Stadt Berlin vom 3. November 1925* (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1927).

designated some 12,300 of Greater Berlin's 88,000 hectares as land for housing development.³³ The majority of land earmarked for new housing fell inside building class three areas, permitting three-storey buildings. Wherever prospective building plots sat alongside existing developments, the building class acquiesced to the height of the earlier buildings, in order to ensure consistency in street lines.

The most significant statute in the 1925 building regulations finally consigned the tenement complex to history, by prohibiting the construction of rear and side blocks in future housing projects. From this point onwards, new housing blocks could be arranged either around the perimeter of the building plot (*Randbebauung*) or in open-ended terraces (*Zeilenbau*).³⁴ Another important ruling prohibited any further combination of industrial and residential land use in new developments. In future, factory and housing sites had to be built independently of each other.³⁵ The previous lack of regulation on this issue had resulted in the uniquely mixed topography of Berlin's working-class districts, in which factories stood directly alongside housing blocks, juxtapositions which had fascinated artists like Gustav Wunderwald. Besides addressing the form and layout of new housing developments, the 1925 regulations also addressed the state of existing housing conditions. Statute 27 restricted the construction of dwellings in attics and cellars, while statute 29 reiterated an old Prussian law from 1875, stating that 'residential summerhouses (*Wohnlauben*) on undeveloped land were not to be regarded as dwellings,' and that inhabitants of such dwellings must have proof of habitation elsewhere.³⁶ This ruling was intended to discourage permanent occupation of the slum-like allotment gardens around the edges of the city.

33. Walter Koeppen, "Bauzonen und Sondergebieten," in *Probleme der neuen Stadt Berlin*, ed. Hans Brennert, and Erwin Stein, Monographien deutscher Städte (Berlin: Deutscher Kommunal-Verlag, 1926), 270, 276.

34. Koeppen, *Bauordnung*, 14, 21.

35. *Ibid.*, 21.

36. 'Wohnlauben auf unbebauten Grundstücken sind nicht als Wohnhäuser (Wohngebäude) im Sinne des §12 des Baufluchtliniengesetzes vom 2. Juli 1875 anzusehen, wenn sie nur vorübergehend, und zwar höchstens für die Zeit vom 15. April bis 15. Oktober jeden Jahres zum Aufenthalt von Menschen dienen und die Bewohner nachweislich anderwärts eine feste Wohnung haben.' *Ibid.*, 41-43.

6.4 New housing developments in Wedding

Once the legislative and financial foundations had been established, housing construction could begin in earnest, which it did across Berlin from late 1924 onwards. It would be too ambitious a task to summarise here the wide variety of housing that took place across Berlin between 1924 and 1931, and the assortment of political positions and moral stances that they were borne out of. What I intend to do instead, is to explore some of these contrasting viewpoints in conjunction with surveying new housing projects built in the working-class district of Wedding between 1924 and 1931. There is good reason for doing so. Wedding's new housing developments embraced a wide variety of architectural styles and forms, offering several useful case studies which can help towards providing a better understanding of the debates surrounding architectural direction and housing policy.³⁷ I am also going to distinguish between two distinctly different phases of house building activity in Wedding, mirrored across the rest of Berlin and Germany. The first phase ran from 1924 to 1928, and the second phase from 1929 to 1931. These two phases are characterised, as I shall explain below, by an altered economic situation that impacted upon housing style and form.

6.5 Heimatschutz: Architecture and Conservatism

The new regulations provided plenty of scope for a rich variety of architectural forms of housing across Berlin's diverse environs, and in some cases the realisation of housing programmes which seemingly represented the antithesis of an urban housing programme being rolled out at a time of acute housing shortage. Take for example the Jungfernheide housing estate, comprising fifty homesteads (*Heimstätte*), divided into one hundred semi-detached homes, and which lay at the fringes of the Jungfernheide woods in Wedding, away from the district's main roads and built-up areas (map E, D4).³⁸ The architect Paul Mebes and his colleague Paul Emmerich designed most of the houses, employing a *Märkisch* vernacular style which featured steeply pitched roofs and dormer windows (fig. 56). Surrounding the rustic homes were modestly sized gardens incorporating horse stables.

37. The various housing projects in Wedding, which will be discussed below, are highlighted on map E in Appendix I.

38. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 268-69.

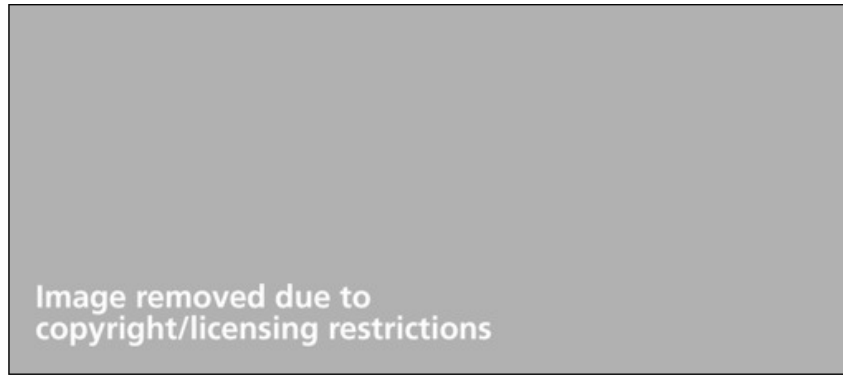


Figure 56: Jungfernheide Estate, circa 1928.
Reproduced from: Ebel & Schmidt, *Wohnungsbau der Nachkriegszeit*, 61.

It might seem surprising that such a low-density housing project could be built in close proximity to the city centre when the demand for housing was so high. But the Jungfernheide estate—built between 1925 and 1929—was not unique in Berlin. There were in actuality, numerous homestead estates being constructed around the fringes of the city during the early to mid-twenties. Most were located in the west and southwestern districts of the city, traditionally more affluent than the working-class areas to the north and east. Here, the bucolic character of Berlin’s suburban districts, with their lush woodland areas and secluded lakes, offered plenty of opportunities to build rural settlements at the edge of the urban sprawl. However, it must be stressed that there were important distinctions to be made between many of these *Heimstätten* developments. On one hand, many projects, including the aforementioned *Heerstrasse* estate of 250 homes in the Westend,³⁹ the homestead estate built by the *Heimstätten-Siedlung Berlin-Wilmersdorf* society in Schmargendorf,⁴⁰ and the Jungfernheide estate, closely adhered to traditional architectural styles associated with the *Landhaus* (country house), and the *Heimatschutz* (homeland protection) movement. The architecture and design of these settlements implied a preference for rural living, and consciously tried to bring a rural setting into the vicinity of the city. On the other hand, there existed other developments which retained the architectural form of the *Landhaus*, but applied more modern architectural principles. Examples in this category include the Eichkamp estate on the outskirts of Charlottenburg, part-designed by Bruno Taut,⁴¹ and the Freie Scholle estate in Tegel, also designed by

39. Gorgas, *Gemeinnützige Baugesellschaft Berlin-Heerstraße*, 5.

40. Martin Ebel, and Friedrich Schmidt, eds., *Wohnungsbau der Nachkriegszeit in Deutschland* (Berlin: Eulen-Verlag, 1928), 163.

41. Heinz Johannes, *Neues Bauen in Berlin : Ein Führer mit 168 Bildern* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag,

Taut.⁴² These projects combined a preference for rural setting with a more progressive outlook to architectural design. Here, we can see in practice the elastic relationship that existed between architectural style and form in contemporaneous housing developments. But what all the societies building these estates did share, was support for statute 155 of the Weimar constitution, and the principle of cooperative building societies working towards a rural or garden-city approach to living.

The popularity of *Heimstätten* estates in the mid-twenties points to the fact that the modern architectural styles and forms frequently associated with Weimar's housebuilding programme were neither universally accepted nor hegemonic. In reality, the desire for a traditional, Germanic way of life—encapsulated in the ideal of the rural *Landhaus*—remained strong, particularly amongst critics who opposed modern architecture, but urban culture in general. Those who rejected urban culture and modern architecture also tended to be the most vociferous and conservative opponents of the republic and its political principles. It followed then, that these critics also attacked the housing reforms implemented by the republican government. Architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg was the most prominent voice representing architects from the conservative right, and his hatred of modern architecture and the Social Democratic republic typified the opinion of a large section of Weimar society, who, as Ernst Bloch pointed out, sought refuge in the past rather than live in the present. Bloch conjured up visions of a pre-capitalist era, in which the means of production still lay in the hands of the peasant, who enjoyed an intimate connection to nature and the German soil.⁴³ Bloch might well have had Schultze-Naumburg in mind when he wrote this description. Throughout the twenties, Schultze-Naumburg published several books and countless newspaper and magazine articles attacking modern architecture and housing reform measures. His ideological values were rooted in the pre-capitalist idyll of the early nineteenth century, recalling romantic images of rural farming communities and the single-family *Landhaus*. In Schultze-Naumburg's opinion, German culture had been in steady decline since the country's rapid industrialisation in the 1870s. He cited the 1890s as the decisive period in which German cities and their housing deteriorated in terms of aesthetic quality and living standards.⁴⁴

1931), 37.

42. Ibid., 88.

43. Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 98-99.

44. Schultze-Naumburg, *Gesicht des deutschen Hauses*, 26-27.

Schultze-Naumburg concerned himself more with the spiritual and moral well-being of Germany's population, than with their material conditions. He argued that the single-family, privately owned home held numerous economic, moral, healthful and artistic advantages to renting in the modern housing block.⁴⁵ The architect saved most of his invective for those modern buildings that boasted flat roofs, whereupon Schultze-Naumburg's nostalgia for a rural traditional past assumed a specifically racial character. On these grounds he attacked the new modern style, viewing it as distinctly un-German and of Asiatic descent. He reflected that 'Today there is a whole school which is foreign to our German heritage, that is making the attempt to originate a style which should have nothing in common with what until now connected the people to a cultural community.'⁴⁶ He insisted that the praxis of dwelling had a racial character that is ingrained in the individual's blood. Schultze-Naumburg made it clear in his sentiments, that the single-family home represented the most appropriate way of life for the German family, and any regression towards communal living in estates or 'Asiatic architecture' was a backwards step towards primitivism and barbarism.⁴⁷

Schultze-Naumburg attacked the republican government's new housing reforms with a similar level of aggression. Referring to the *Hauszinssteuer*, he decried the dispossession of the propertied classes as 'a fatter morsel for the communist and bolshevist ideologues.' The republic's economic housing programme, continued Schultze-Naumburg 'brings endless friction, quarrelling, arguments and misery to the population, as they [the government] clumsily raided with their own hands those things that had for a millenium been considered most sacred: one's own hearth, to prevent with surety any real improvement in housing.'⁴⁸ With such clear-cut opinions as these, we can say with equal

45. Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Das bürgerliche Haus* (Frankfurt am Main: H. Bechhold Verlag, 1927), 5-9.

46. 'Es gibt heute allerdings eine ganze Schule, die sich unserer deutschen Herkunft gegenüber so fremd fühlt, dass sie den Versuch macht, eine Stil zu erzeugen, der nichts mehr mit dem gemein haben soll, was bisher das Volk zu einer Kulturgemeinschaft verband.' Schultze-Naumburg, *Gesicht des deutschen Hauses*, 137.

47. *Ibid.*, 141-42.

48. 'Und dann war die Vorstellung einer Enteignung der „Besitzenden“ ein viel zu fetter Lockerbissen für die kommunistischen-bolschewistischen Ideologen [...] unendlich viel Reibung, Zank, Streit und Elend in die Bevölkerung zu bringen, indem man mit täppischen Hände an das griff, was Jahrtausende als das Heiligste galt: den eigenen Herd, mit Sicherheit aber jede wirkliche Besserung des Wohnungswesens zu verhüten.' Schultze-Naumburg, *Das bürgerliche Haus*, 1.

surety that Schultze-Naumburg would have endorsed Berlin's *Heimstätte* projects such as the Jungfernheide estate, but he could not support the government measures that helped finance them.

There were other groups on the conservative right who had no interest in Schultze-Naumburg's criticisms of urban architecture and urban life. In fact, they were largely responsible for it. What they did share with the architect however, was an outright rejection of housing reform. This group was comprised of the capitalists, building profiteers and landlords who had benefitted financially from the unregulated building trade and its consequences before the War. Though there was little they could do in the face of the 1925 building regulations and ongoing socialisation of the housebuilding industry, they remained prominent critical voices in discourses surrounding housing reform and architectural development throughout the twenties. A report in the magazine *Wohnungswirtschaft* (Housing Economy) reported on one such spokesperson, known as Richard Lion, who voiced his concerns and recommendations in the trade supplement of the *Vossische Zeitung*. Lion declared that current housing reform measures were having a detrimental effect on wholesale index prices, and thus a detrimental effect on rent levels. Lion argued that private housing entrepreneurs should once again be given the opportunity to build affordable homes, and insisted that the tenement block of the immediate prewar period was perfectly adequate, with only minor adaptations required in order to provide residents with more air and light.⁴⁹ Lion ended his argument by suggesting that the tenement blocks of the prewar era would still be standing and occupied long after the newly built state-funded houses of the twenties have fallen into ruin. Elsewhere, Carl Ladendorff argued that prewar housing had offered the best living conditions to Germany's urban inhabitants. Ladendorff was a member of the *Wirtschaftspartei* (Economy Party), a centre-right political splinter group which had made a modest showing in the 1925 municipal elections in Berlin. Amongst other issues, the party opposed the increasing financial controls being imposed upon the housing market, helping it win significant support from property owners and landlords across Germany. Ladendorff claimed in 1927 that: 'Never and nowhere will the people live better, more comfortably, more carefree and more cheaply than in the tenement houses *produced by the free economy*.'⁵⁰ The Social

49. Anonymous, "Kein Witz," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 4, no. 3/4 (1927): 23-24.

50. 'Niemals und nirgends werden die Menschen besser, bequemer, sorgenloser und billiger wohnen aus in den in *freier Wirtschaft hergestellten Miethäusern*.' Original emphasis "Die 'patriotische

Democrats remained continually aware of the threat which the previous era's capitalist developers still posed, if they were ever again given the chance to dictate municipal policy (fig. 74).

6.6 Supporters of Weimar's housing programme

Shortly prior to the beginning of construction on the Jungfernheide estate, work on another housing development had commenced in Wedding, in December 1924. The Schillerpark estate, designed by Bruno Taut, was one of the first of Berlin's new housing estates to benefit from the financial resources made available through housing reforms (map E, B5). Left-wing members within the Social Democratic Party were the driving force behind German housing reform and housing projects such as the Schillerpark estate. Berlin's chief city-planner Martin Wagner played a leading role in socialising Germany's housing industry. In 1924 he helped establish two organisations that played a key role in Berlin's Neues Bauen programme. Under Wagner's guidance, three of Germany's largest trade union groups representing employees and civil-service workers founded the DEWOG society, on the 14th March 1924.⁵¹ The DEWOG assumed responsibility for the overall coordination of a socialised house building industry. Exactly one month later, Wagner helped found the GEHAG society.⁵² The GEHAG oversaw the design and construction of large-scale building projects, and was responsible for the celebrated Horseshoe estate in Britz (1924–1932), the Waldsiedlung (Woodland estate) in Zehlendorf (1926–1932), and the Carl-Legien estate in Prenzlauer Berg (1929–1931), all of which were radical in their architectural design, and were overseen by Bruno Taut. But the GEHAG also pursued other more traditional forms of housing, including the aforementioned Eichkamp and Freie Scholle estates, designed by Taut and largely comprised of single-family homes with pitched roofs. Although the Hufeisen estate is best remembered for the horseshoe-shaped block of flats at its centre, the estate itself comprised a significant proportion of traditional single-family homes.

Mietkaserne', " *Wohnungswirtschaft* 4, no. 10/12 (1927): 104.. For more on the conservative reaction against the Republic's housing programme amongst property owners and landlords, see: Ben Lieberman, "Turning against the Weimar Right : Landlords, the Economic Party and the DNVP," *German History* 15, no. 1 (1997): 56-79.

51. Anonymous, "Staatshilfe für Selbsthilfe," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 1, no. 1/2 (1924): 9.

52. Klaus Homann, *Martin Wagner 1885–1957 : Wohnungsbau und Weltstadtplanung. Die Rationalisierung des Glücks* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1986), 166.

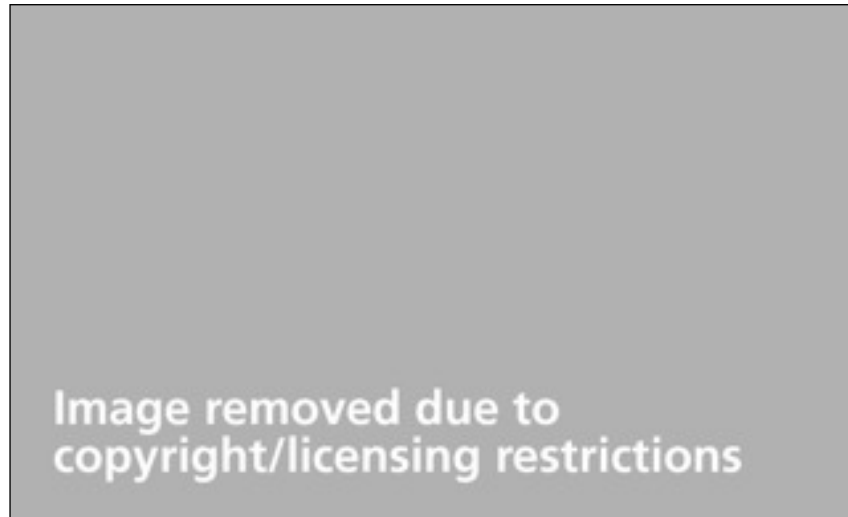


Figure 57: Arthur Köster, View of the Schillerpark estate, Wedding, circa 1927.

Principle figures associated with the DEWOG, including Wagner, Taut and the architect Richard Linneke, regularly contributed to the organisation's magazine, *Wohnungswirtschaft*, first published in April 1924. As its name suggests, *Wohnungswirtschaft* primarily concerned itself with the economic and bureaucratic organisation of the housing industry, but the architectural and aesthetic principles of the DEWOG and GEHAG organisations were also coherently communicated through both the magazine's design, and the housing projects it chose to report on. Both of these aspects changed markedly during the early years of the magazine's publication. The sixteen issues from 1924 were dominated by garden-city projects, and serve as a reminder of the important formative influence that the Garden city movement had upon both Wagner and Taut. Amongst the projects featured were Wagner's own Lindenhof estate, built between 1918 and 1921, when the architect worked as municipal councillor for housing in the south Berlin district of Schöneberg,⁵³ housing by Hermann Muthesius in the German garden city of Hellerau (1916) and Raymond Unwin's housing in New Earswick in Yorkshire, England.⁵⁴ The one notable exception to these examples was an article by Wagner on new housing developments in Holland, illustrated with photographs of Amsterdam's latest unadorned and flat-roofed houses.⁵⁵

53. Martin Wagner, "Was wir wollen," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 1, no. 1/2 (1924): 1-3.

54. Linneke, "Sparabteilung der gemeinnützigen Heimstätten Spar- und Bau-A.G. in Berlin," 125-29.

55. Martin Wagner, "Neue Wege," *Wohnungswirtschaft* 1, no. 8 (1924): 73-79.

A dearth of recent housing projects accounted for the emphasis in 1924 issues of *Wohnungswirtschaft* on pre and immediate postwar garden city developments, a deficiency caused by the lack of building activity in Germany between 1919 and 1923, caused by the country's economic and political crises. This situation slowly began to change from 1925 onwards, when the first projects built under the auspices of the Neues Bauen programme began to emerge across Germany's towns and cities. Later editions of *Wohnungswirtschaft* were entirely dominated by the modern architectural aesthetic. For example, across all of the 1927 editions of *Wohnungswirtschaft*, the centrepiece of the GEHAG development in Britz—Bruno Taut's now-complete Horseshoe block—featured consistently on the front cover of the magazine. The publication's graphic design also changed profoundly. Sans-serifed typography and asymmetric layouts replaced the previous expressionistic masthead and serifed text. The magazine's designers also introduced a second colour onto the magazine cover, employing solid blocks of black and red to create a powerful visual impression. Developments at the Bauhaus in Weimar, and then in Dessau, were clearly influencing goings-on in Berlin.

The Leipzig-based Social Democratic *Arbeiter-Bildungsinstitut* (Institute for Workers' Education) responded positively to the first signs of the emergent new housing programme. The April 1926 edition of the institute's magazine *Kulturwille* dedicated itself to the question of housing and living in Germany. Victor Noack's lead article concentrated on the effects of the housing crisis suffered by the proletariat, and was accompanied by photographs of Taut's completed Schillerpark estate in Wedding.⁵⁶ In another article, Karl Gvatter criticised previous efforts at workers' housing, which are 'nothing other than a poor imitation of the bourgeois home,' still lacking in 'class-conscious furnishings.'⁵⁷ Gvatter's article was dominated by another photograph of the exterior of Taut's Schillerpark estate. Elsewhere in the same issue, the editors reproduced Taut's visual comparison of the bourgeois and proletarian living room interior, taken from the architect's own book *Die neue Wohnung: die Frau als Schöpferin* (The New Home: The Wife as Creator), first published in 1924.

56. Viktor Noack, "Wie das Volk leidet an der Wohnungsnot," *Kulturwille*, April 1926.

57. '[...] nichts anderes ist, als der dürftige Abklatsch einer Bourgeoisieheimstätte. [...] Der Arbeiterwohnung fehlt noch, man möchte fast sagen, das klassenbewusste Möbel' Karl Gvatter, "Die Arbeiterwohnung," *Kulturwille*, April 1926.

The subtitle of this special issue of *Kulturwille—wohnen und bauen* (living and building)—was significant. From the outset of the Neues Bauen programme, architects and supporters of housing reform explicitly made a link between building and living: when a tenant moved into a newly built home, he or she could lead a new life. No individual did more to promote the new architecture and its association with a new approach to living than Adolf Behne. Throughout the twenties, Behne published articles in an array of newspaper and magazines from across the political spectrum. He contributed articles to the populist *BIZ*, the workers' *AIZ* and the Social Democratic *Sozialistisches Monatshefte*, to name just three.⁵⁸ Behne also published several of his own books on new housing and the new living culture, emphasising in particular the special relationship which the modern architect and the open-minded tenant should have with each other.⁵⁹ He leapt to the defence of the new architectural style whenever detractors levelled accusations of discomfort and harshness at it. In one representative show of support, Behne argued that the new architecture offered an alternative type of comfort attuned to the tempo of modern life, driven by energetic sports and dance rhythms. He insisted that 'All the earlier comforts were designed for the tired person,' encouraging 'distraction and stupefaction.' By contrast, the modern style 'does not send one to sleep, but provides refreshment and relaxation.'⁶⁰ While Behne devoted much of his attention to the exterior appearance of the modern home, Taut concentrated more on the modern domestic interior. He frequently drew attention to the contrasts between the stodgy and cluttered bourgeois home, and the clean and rationalised worker's apartment,⁶¹ paying particular attention to the role the housewife was to play in the new home, surrounded by the latest technology and time-saving devices in her modern kitchen.⁶²

58. Adolf Behne. "Neues Bauen," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 30 April, 1926; Adolf Behne, "Abfall der Mietskaserne," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 5, no. 17 (1927): 14-15; Adolf Behne, "Weges zu einer bessern Wohnkultur," *Sozialistisches Monatshefte* 33, no. 2 (1927): 121-23.

59. Adolf Behne, *Neues Wohnen, neues Bauen* (Leipzig: Hesse & Becker, 1927).

60. 'Aller frühere Komfort war auf einen müden Menschen abgestellt. [...] Das Ergebnis war keine wirkliche Ruhe, sondern Zerstreung und Betäubung. [...] Der neue Komfort packt uns nicht ins Bett, sondern will Erfrischung und Entspannung geben [...]' Adolf Behne. "Ist die neue Bauart unbehaglich?," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 27 March, 1927.

61. Bruno Taut, "Arbeiterwohnhaus," *Die Form* 2, no. 9 (1927): 282-83.

62. Bruno Taut, *Die neue Wohnung : die Frau als Schöpferin* (Berlin: Mann, 2001).



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Figure 58: Sasha Stone, photograph for an article in the *BIZ* by Adolf Behne.
From: Adolf Behne. "Berlins neuer Wohnbau," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 December, 1928.

Behne, Taut and other advocates of housing reform all emphasised the improved amount of sun, light and fresh air that the inhabitants of new housing would enjoy, qualities distinctly lacking in the rear blocks and courtyards of the old tenements, where many working-class families were confined. The black-and-white photographs that often accompanied newspaper articles convincingly demonstrated the light and airy appearance of the new homes. More often than not, the photographs showcased Taut's work for the GEHAG, for the simple reason that they were the most striking in appearance and largest in size. In another *BIZ* article written by Behne, a large photograph of Taut's GEHAG housing block on Grellstrasse in Prenzlauer Berg (taken by Sasha Stone) dominated the increasingly incongruous-looking Fraktur typography used through the publication (fig. 58). The four-storey block in the photograph is lined with orderly balconies sweeping around in a graceful curve away from us. The white plasterwork of the walls contrasts with the shadows cast by each balcony, creating a regular pattern of dark triangles moving across the image. The caption to the photograph declared that these 'homes succumb to the sunlight, free from the dictates of old building regulations.'⁶³ Behne's article on the 'decline of the tenement blocks' for the *AIZ* invited comparisons to be made between the

63. Behne. "Berlins neuer Wohnbau," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 9 December, 1928.

old tenements with their dark courtyards and the modern housing estates. Once again, Behne illustrated his article with one of Taut's architectural achievements, this time an aerial photograph of his Horseshoe estate:

What distinguishes [the new housing block] as a matter of principle from the prewar era is this: it is only built around the edges of the plot, which means that the inner area remains a continuous free space, which not only serves as a garden [...] but can also be used for playing areas, grass lawns and paddling ponds. All homes now have a front on two sides: one on the street and another behind, which offers the possibility of through drafts in each room.⁶⁴

Aerial photographs of Taut's Horseshoe were—and have remained—the most unmistakable visual motif of Berlin's Neues Bauen programme. Otto Hagemann's photographs from 1928 show the Horseshoe's interior spaces at ground level. His shots underline the sense of openness and greenery that housing reformers and architects were keen to emphasise. In Hagemann's pictures, children play in the sandpits and play areas, while adults look on from park benches. Elsewhere, residents admire their gardens and chat with neighbours. In these photographs, the sun shines down brightly, bouncing brilliantly off the white walls of the buildings and casting sharp shadows around them.

Besides the advantages of increasing light, air and sun, the new and radical forms of architecture also helped to dissolve class differences. The old tenements had distinct class layouts, with larger, costlier apartments at the front and pokier, squalid rooms in the rear blocks and side wings. The new estates offered no such differentiation. Although they frequently contained apartments of various sizes offered at different levels of rent, distinguishing between a larger home from a smaller one from the outside was hardly possible. Taut demolished the previous distinctions between front and rear in his housing designs. As Behne pointed out: 'Because there are no longer any rear blocks, there is no

64. 'Was ihn prinzipiell vom dem Block der Vorkriegszeit unterscheidet, ist dies, dass er nur am Rande bebaut ist, so dass im Innern ein großer zusammenhängender freier Luftraum bleibt, der nun als ein Garten, der seinen Namen ehrlich verdient, mit Spielplätzen, Rasenflächen und Planschbecken eingerichtet werden kann. [...] Alle Wohnungen haben jetzt Front nach zwei Seiten: zur Straße und nach innen und damit die Möglichkeit, Zug durch alle Räume zu machen.' Behne, "Abfall der Mietskaserne."

longer a façade.⁶⁵ Implicit in the layouts of the new estates such as the Horseshoe, was the equation of spatial with social equality. The new housing forms no longer relegated poorer families to smaller, cheaper dwellings in dark interiors—they had just as much access to sun, light and air as their more affluent neighbour.

The openness of these forms also eradicated the distinction between private, interior and public, exterior space. The Schillerpark estate was the first new housing development in Berlin to employ this new type of open architectural space. Work began on the first phase of the project in late December 1924, reaching completion by 1926, with two further phases completed in 1928 and 1930.⁶⁶ In stylistic terms the Schillerpark estate set a new precedent for housing in Berlin at the time, which Taut would take a step further in Britz. Taking inspiration from recent developments in Holland, he left his brick façades unadorned and punctuated them with generously sized balconies, visually connected to each other by bands of white plasterwork, creating an overall impression of horizontality. Taut exploited the blank canvas offered by the empty building plots, ranging his blocks around the edges of the land. He also avoided creating an interior courtyard by providing generous openings between the housing blocks, which eliminated any real distinction between private interior and public exterior space around the estate. The population density of the Schillerpark estate was low, with around eighty flats comprising the first two phases, made up of a mixture of 1½ and 3-room dwellings.⁶⁷ Taut's Schillerpark estate stood as the first fully realised example in Berlin of the egalitarian possibilities of a social housing programme. Behne praised Taut's design, exclaiming that, now the front, rear and side blocks had been banished, 'the architects of our generation have abolished the dictatorship of form [and] they simply build good dwellings.'⁶⁸ The Schillerpark estate's modern architectural form signalled a clean break, not just from the tenements of the previous era, but also from its stylistically conservative but well-meaning contemporaries, which will be the focus of the next section.

65. 'Weil es hier keine Hinterhäuser mehr gibt, gibt es auch keine "Fassade."' Ibid.

66. Jörg Haspel, and Annemarie Jaeggi, *Housing Estates*, 41–42.

67. D. Rentschler, and W. Schirmer, *Die Wohngebäude – Mehrfamilienhäuser*, vol. 4B, Berlin und seine Bauten (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1974), 372–73.

68. Adolf Behne, "Wohnungen," *Die Weltbühne* 21, no. 10 (1925): 361–63.

6.7 Between modern and tradition: moderate architects and housing developments

John Maciuika has suggested that the 1860s generation of architects, including Hermann Muthesius, Theodor Fischer, Peter Behrens and Richard Riemerschmid, were too entrenched in the old social structures of the *Kaiserzeit* to respond adequately to the housing question in the 1920s, thus clearing the way for a younger generation of architects born in the 1880s (including Walter Gropius, Otto Bartning, Taut and Mies van der Rohe) to rise to prominence.⁶⁹ Maciuika's argument is persuasive, helping to account for the emergence of an avant-garde clearly indebted to its predecessors and, in many cases, teachers, but it overlooks the large numbers of architects of the older generation who *did* rise to the demands of Weimar's housing challenge. Amongst the many architects active in Berlin during the twenties were Paul Mebes (1872–1938), Albert Gessner (1868–1953) and Hermann Dernburg (1868–1935). The qualities of their architectural work throughout the decade can be best described as embracing the demand the new forms of housing required to address the acute housing shortage, combined with a cautiousness towards the progressive architectural style employed by Taut and other architects of his generation. Berlin's Neues Bauen programme is dominated by these architects, and countless others who adhered to similar principles. Taut's contribution to Berlin's housing effort may be indisputable, but the architect Paul Mebes—with the aid of his colleague Paul Emmerich—overshadows Taut in the quantity of housing projects he completed throughout the 1920s.⁷⁰

New housing developments built in Wedding between 1924 and 1930 were dominated by projects that conform to this middle path, and some are worth investigating in more detail. I am going to concentrate on the Zeppelinplatz development (1924–25), designed by the architects Max Bleier and Franz Clement (map E, E5),⁷¹ a housing complex on Ostender Strasse (1927) by Albert Gessner (map E, E5),⁷² an estate built by the DEGEWO society on Dubliner Strasse (1927/28) by Erich Glas (map E, C4),⁷³ and Christianiastrasse 94–98 (1927/28), designed by Paul Mebes and Paul Emmerich (map E, C8).⁷⁴ Built within four

69. John V. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 292.

70. Edina Meyer's survey of Mebes's work remains the best source of information on the architect: Edina Meyer, *Paul Mebes: Miethausbau in Berlin 1906–1938* (Berlin: Richard Seitz & Co, 1972).

71. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 268; Rentschler, and Schirmer, *Die Wohngebäude*, 379.

72. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 268; Rentschler, and Schirmer, *Die Wohngebäude*, 380–81.

73. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 269–70; Rentschler, and Schirmer, *Die Wohngebäude*, 373.

74. Meyer, *Paul Mebes*, 213.

years of each other, these projects display a rich diversity of both architectural styles and forms. They merit a closer look in order to understand what I think is an important and yet frequently overlooked point: that radical architects from both the left and the right needed unconfined, open spaces in order to realise the full extent of their progressive or reactionary ideas, be they modern housing blocks or *Heimstätte* estates. By contrast, those architects operating in the middle ground were prepared to accept external constraints impinging upon their plans. In these instances, more than anywhere else, the simple goal of producing adequate housing took priority over grand architectural or political statements. The majority of the housing projects built across Berlin between 1924 and 1930 were assimilated into the existing urban fabric. The architect's creative vision—and client's principles—were frequently subordinated to more practical considerations.

Erich Glas's housing for the DEGEWO society around Dubliner Strasse in Wedding illustrates this point well. Comprising 880 flats in total, the development was at the time the largest postwar housing project in Wedding to date.⁷⁵ Glas had to accept numerous external constraints when drawing up his designs. First, the blocks had to stand five storeys high, in order to maintain consistent street lines with existing prewar buildings. Second, the new blocks had to confine themselves to the awkward shapes of existing building plots, which were particularly narrow at certain points. And third, existing tenement buildings, all of which had rear blocks and side wings, further encroached into the already limited interior spaces around the DEGEWO site. Architects and planners encountered these constraints on a regular basis. Ludwig Hilberseimer, one of Berlin's most progressive architects and a leading advocate of rationalised city planning, criticised the restrictions imposed on new building developments by antecedent planning, branding the new housing arising out of such compromised circumstances as the 'malformed link between the single home and barracks.'⁷⁶ Hilberseimer believed that despite the good intentions of the new building regulations, new developments obliged to adhere to the street layouts and ground plots from the prewar era of unfettered building speculation were inherently flawed. The DEGEWO development undoubtedly improved upon the conditions of the old tenement blocks, but not all of the residents enjoyed the same levels of abundant sun, light and air that housing reformers promised. Many residents in the blocks on Glasgower-, Dubliner-

75. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 269-70.

76. '[...] ein missratenes Zwischenglied zwischen Eigenhaus und Kaserne.' Ludwig Hilberseimer, "Über die Typisierung des Miethauses," *Die Form* 1, no. 15 (1926): 338-40.

and Schöningstrasse found that their new homes backed immediately onto older tenement buildings, significantly reducing the space of their inner courtyard and reducing the amount of light permitted into their apartments (fig. 59).

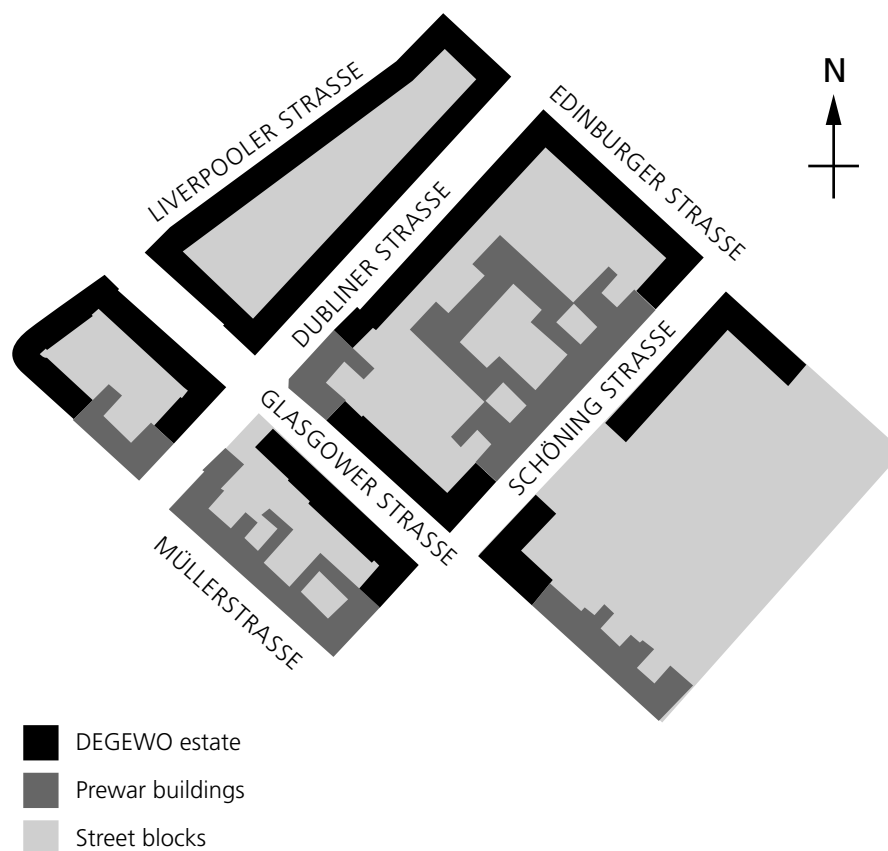


Figure 59: Plan of the DEGEWO estate in Wedding
Produced using image data from Google Maps

Glas enjoyed far greater creative freedom in the stylistic design of his façades for the DEGEWO estate, and the results are a mixture of traditional and modern motifs. He used both red brick and areas of plasterwork rendered in subdued tones to prevent the lengthy façades from appearing overly repetitive. Glas also made prudent use of balconies, using them to punctuate the long, straight lines of the buildings, while avoiding the overwrought qualities of the prewar façades, that often groaned under the weight of ornate balustrades. He intelligently located all his balconies on south-facing walls to maximise their exposure to the sun. The windows are set flush with the walls and are devoid of fussy decorative elements, while the doorway entrances are recessed with repeated rows of brickwork: a typically expressionistic device. Distributed about the walls of Glas's blocks are a number of expressionistic figurative sculptures. The architect is represented by one statue of a figure holding a model of a house in his arms. Glas crowned his blocks with pitched roofs,

but with hardly any eaves to speak of, they are barely visible from street level (fig. 60). The impression of simplicity expressed by the DEGEWO façades is enhanced by their juxtaposition with the fussier prewar blocks sitting alongside, imbuing them with a character which, though less emphatic than the radiant white walls we commonly associate with the Weimar architectural avant-garde, is still unquestionably modern. They combine expressionist stylistic flourishes and earthy tones with the machine-like repetition of form and orderliness associated with the Neue Sachlichkeit style.



Figure 60: Two views of the DEGEWO estate, Wedding. Top: corner Schöning- and Glasgower Strasse. Note the adjoining pre-war tenement at the right-hand edge of the photograph. Bottom: Looking down Dubliner Strasse. Author's own photographs.

The constraints Glas encountered in the DEGEWO estate were also faced by the architects Mebes and Emmerich on another housing development in Wedding. The architects were engaged by the *Gemeinnützige Heimstättenbau-Gesellschaft der Berliner Straßenbahn* (Berlin Streetcar Cooperative Housing Association) in 1927 to design a row of four housing blocks containing sixty apartments on Christianiastrasse (now Osloer Strasse, fig. 61)⁷⁷ Situated at the edges of the urban sprawl in the 1920s, Christianiastrasse was one of Wedding's main thoroughfares, running east to west through the district. The speculative nature of the construction industry prior to the war had left a fragmented and disparate landscape around such fringes of the city as this. Christianiastrasse and its surrounding streets comprised a patchwork of tenement blocks, building sites, factory premises, garden colonies, wood, coal and goods yards.⁷⁸ Mebes and Emmerich's new housing blocks stretched across four empty plots, closing a gap between existing prewar buildings. Again, the new blocks had to stand five storeys high, to ensure a consistency in building height with the adjoining structures.⁷⁹

77. Meyer, *Paul Mebes*, 213.

78. *Berliner Adressbuch*, 1927.

79. Werner Hegemann, "Miethäuser von Mebes und Emmerich," *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 14, no. 7 (1930): 297-305.



Figure 61: Christianiastrasse 94–98. Reproduced from: Jakob Schallenberger, and Erwin Gutkind, eds., *Berliner Wohnbauten der letzten Jahre* (Berlin: W. & S. Loewenthal, 1931), 78.

The façade that Mebes and Emmerich designed for the new housing blocks created a powerful visual impression. Protruding front door entrances and stairwells emphasised the verticality and height of the blocks, while bands running between the windows simultaneously accentuated the development's horizontality and width. One contemporary photograph framed the new development in such a way as to make it appear seemingly endless (fig. 61).⁸⁰ The photographer's decision to crop his image in this way—thus omitting the neighbouring buildings—was very likely to have been a conscious one. The adjoining blocks had been built between 1910 and 1914,⁸¹ offering a strong contrast with the new blocks that now sat between them. Though not overly ornate, the prewar façades included balconies and loggias, that were finished in a lightly coloured plasterwork. By contrast, Mebes and Emmerich's blocks had such no balconies and loggia on display—these were all hidden away on the south-facing rear walls of the blocks. Moreover, the dark red brick of Mebes and Emmerich's façades set up a further sharp contrast against their neighbours. As a result, the newer blocks created a far plainer and austere impression

80. Jakob Schallenberger, and Erwin Gutkind, eds., *Berliner Wohnbauten der letzten Jahre* (Berlin: W. & S. Loewenthal, 1931), 78.

81. Berliner Adressbuch, 1910-14

compared to their prewar neighbours, an impression which raises important points. The contemporary observer, setting eyes upon Mebes and Emmerich's development for the first time, would be struck by the dissimilarities these housing blocks had with those widely praised in the press. He might be forgiven for having reservations about the advantages that those new blocks supposedly offered over their prewar neighbours. How did these dark, rather severe new blocks provide better quantities of sun, light and air to their inhabitants, compared to their lighter, balconied neighbours?

The housing estates on Zeppelinplatz and Ostender Strasse suffered from far fewer environmental constraints than those negotiated by Erich Glas and Mebes and Emmerich. These projects were built upon untouched plots in an area of Wedding that was designated building class four, allowing a maximum building height of four storeys. The greater freedom enjoyed by the architects Bleier and Clement at Zeppelinplatz, and Albert Gessner on Ostender Strasse, resulted in housing designs more attuned to the values held by social conservatives, and both projects struck a healthy balance between the need to build urban housing and the desire to retain a sense of, if not quite rural, than at least a small-town character. The influence of the English Garden city movement is particularly evident in both of these developments.

The *Moabit Erbbau Verein* (Moabit Heritage Building Association), one of Berlin's older, prewar housing societies, built the Zeppelinplatz estate between 1924 and 1925. The development comprised 144 homes, the majority of which had 2½ rooms and a floor space of seventy square metres.⁸² The architect's Bleier and Clement built their housing blocks around the edges of the plot, creating an interior, enclosed garden space. Free from existing building lines on the side of the building plot which adjoined Zeppelinplatz, the architects had the luxury of being able to set their blocks back from the street. They recessed the western block, allowing the blocks along Ostender and Limburger Strasse to project outwards. This layout gave the impression of the estate as having two wings to the north and south, imbuing the project with a feel that is reminiscent of a stately manor (fig. 62).

82. Werner Hegemann, "Wohnbauten des Erbbauvereins Moabit in Berlin," *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 11, no. 12 (1927): 486-89.

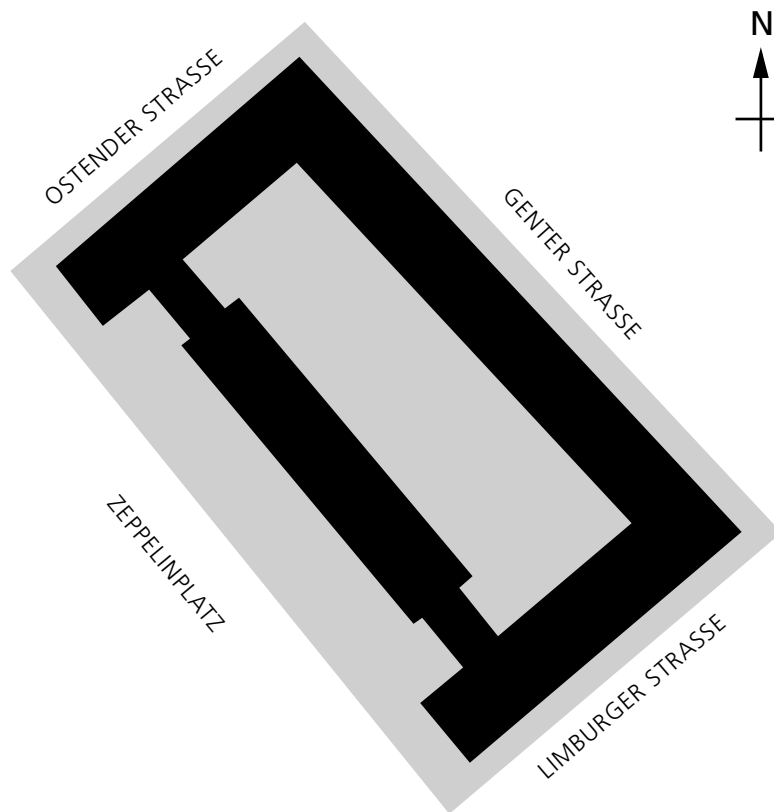


Figure 62: Plan of the Zeppelinplatz estate in Wedding
Produced using image data from Google Maps

Bleier and Clement's project featured in an article in *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, introduced by Werner Hegemann and accompanied by a statement from the *Moabit Erbbau Verein*. By the society's own admission, these homes had 'none of the so-called "modern comforts"', but were equipped with double windows, a modern oven, and gas heating in the bathroom.⁸³ The association also emphasised the thriftiness of the exterior design, which renounced all ornament and almost all colour (fig. 63). By contrast, the architects paid a great deal of attention to the design of the gardens and the interior courtyard. The most striking and indulgent architectural features of Bleier and Clement's designs are the arches and pillars surrounding the two entrance points into the interior courtyard, and the ornate balcony and top-floor loggia above them. These details further emphasised the somewhat stately feel of the architecture. Bruno Taut mocked this aspect of Bleier and Clement's design in his book *Bauen, der neue Wohnbau* (Building, the new Housing, 1927) which featured a sketch of the entrance to the Zeppelinplatz estate,

83. 'Die Wohnungen haben zwar keinen sogenannten "modernen Komfort," dafür aber in allen Küchen und Kammern Doppelfenster, modernste und heiztechnisch beste Öfen [...]' Ibid., 486.

accompanied by the caption which announced an ‘entrance into the castle courtyard,’ while the balcony above was suggested as being the ideal place for a lord to address his people (fig. 64).⁸⁴



Figure 63: Zeppelinplatz housing blocks. Author’s own photograph.

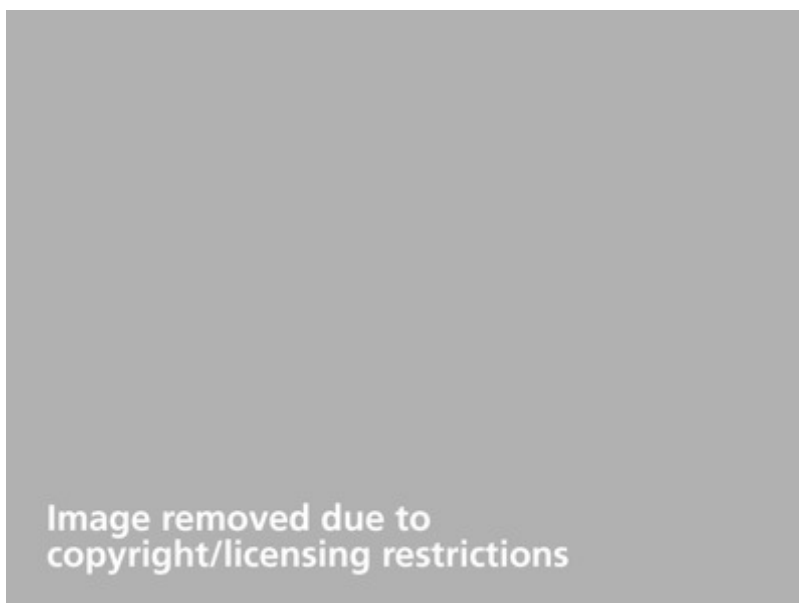


Figure 64: The Zeppelinplatz estate, main entrance (left) and illustration. Reproduced from: Taut, *Bauen, der neue Wohnbau*, 5.

84. ‘Einfahrt in den Schlosshof. Balkon für Ansprachen “An mein Volk”’ Bruno Taut, *Bauen, der neue Wohnbau* (Leipzig, Berlin: Verlag Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1927), 5.

Two blocks away from the Zeppelinplatz complex, Albert Gessner also enjoyed a freer rein in the design and layout of his housing project, commissioned by the Primus Building Society. Primus were responsible for numerous projects in north Berlin throughout the 1920s, and their principles are clearly expressed in a 1926 review of their work to date. ‘To build healthy and cheap homes for the people is the task of our society. [...] Furthermore, we are dedicated to the alleviation of the housing crisis and look forward to the continued support of the municipal and German authorities, whose goodwill up until now has been appreciated.’⁸⁵ The society went on to provide more detail on their aesthetic standpoint. ‘As far as the architecture is concerned [...] the utmost simplicity and economy must prevail [and] and the richly ornamented façades of the pre-war era must not be repeated.’ So far so good, but while they embraced simplicity and rejected the ornamentation of the previous regime, the Primus society remained wary of going too far down the road towards architectural avant-gardism. In Primus developments, ‘there is no pure culture of the cube and no flat roofs. [We] believe in building for the people who might not be expecting overly unfamiliar [*fremd*] designs. Also, in terms of colour, we have pursued a middle path. We see plasterwork in a more pleasant and light colour, and experiments with vivid tones are avoided.’⁸⁶

85. ‘Gesunde und billige Wohnungen für das Volk zu errichten ist Aufgabe unserer Gesellschaft. [...] Wir wollen auch fernerhin an der Behebung der Wohnungsnot getreu mitarbeiten und erhoffen dazu die Unterstützung der städtischen und Reichsbehörden, deren bisheriges Wohlwollen wir mit Dank anerkennen.’ A. Jaumann, *Die Primus Heimstätten : Errichtet von der Heimstätten-Gesellschaft "Primus" mbH* (Berlin: Richard Balczus, 1926), 2.

86. ‘Was die Architektur anbelangt [...] allergrößte Einfachheit und Sparsamkeit obwalten musste. [...] Gewisse Eigentümlichkeiten der modernen Formsprache finden wir hier bei den Primusbauten nicht, so nicht die Reinkultur des “Kubus” und nicht das flache Dach. Die Primusgesellschaft glaubt, dass sie für das Volk baut und diesem nicht allzu fremde Gestaltungen zumuten darf. Auch in der Farbe hat man einen Mittelweg beschritten. Wir sehen Putz von angenehmer heller Farbigkeit, Experimente mit grelleren Farbtönen sind vermieden.’ *Ibid.*, 16-20.



Figure 65: Corner, Anrumer- and Ostender Strasse. Author's own photograph.

The Primus Society built several housing developments in and around Wedding, including a complex on Ostender Strasse. This project, designed by the architect Albert Gessner and built in 1927, corresponds to the society's ideas on architectural aesthetics (fig. 65).⁸⁷ Gessner himself was a member—along with Schultze-Naumburg—of the short-lived group *Der Block*, formed in 1928 as a reaction against the modern architectural styles associated with the Weissenhof exhibition of the previous year, and the architectural proclamations of the avant-garde group, *Der Ring*.⁸⁸ Gessner designed a rectangular complex, totally enclosing an interior garden space behind the housing blocks. He created simple and uncluttered façades, rendered in plasterwork with plain horizontal bands running along them. Gessner also avoided using too many balconies on the outside of the complex, restricting them instead to the interior, and used pitched roofs with dormer windows across the estate. Gessner intended the four corner blocks to be the most striking features of the complex designing them in such a way as to make them more appear more prominent. Small architectural details helped to further emphasise the fortress-like quality of the estate, which in turn further underlined the strong contrast between the exterior, public space of the street and the interior, private space of the courtyard.

87. Whether the present-day orange-coloured façade is identical to the original colouring is not known.

88. Bestelmeyer, et al., "Der Block (Manifest)," *Baukunst* 4, no. 5 (1928): 128.

6.8 Berlin's housing programme amid the worsening economic climate

The housing projects explored so far were all built between the years 1924 and 1928. They represent a good cross-section of Berlin's Neues Bauen activity, and the various ideological positions from which they were drawn. In stark contrast, the building activity that took place between 1929 and 1931 demonstrated a far greater sense of homogeneity in terms of both architectural form and style. From 1929 onwards, new estates sprang up across Berlin which shared key characteristics in layout and appearance. Deteriorating economic conditions played a dominant and decisive role in these changes. Despite the good intentions of the building societies, city planners and architects, all of whom strove to contribute to an industry dedicated to delivering good quality and affordable housing, economic factors beyond their control threatened to undermine the whole project.

The biggest problem lay in the fact that land prices and building costs remained under the influence of the peaks and troughs of the capitalist market. At their high point in 1929 the cost of building materials had risen by over seventy percent from prewar levels.⁸⁹ These rises alone eliminated the savings made by increasingly rationalised house building techniques. The 1925 building regulations, which helped lower land prices in Berlin, were intended to help lower the cost of housing. As Georg Haberland, managing director of the *Berliner Boden-Gesellschaft* (Berlin Land Association) noted, 'When one can only build a front block instead of front, side and rear buildings, so the value of the land is going to be less.'⁹⁰ The price per square metre for a plot of land around the residential streets of Wedding, designated building class four or five, fell from 110 Reichsmarks in 1914 to between 20 to 30 Reichsmarks in 1929.⁹¹ But although these decreases in land prices were supposed to be advantageous to house building, they were still not sufficient. According to

89. Statistical data for Berlin suggests that the building material prices reached a peak in 1929, standing 72 percent higher than they had in 1913. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1931* (Berlin: Otto Stollberg & Co, 1931), 37.

90. 'Kann man statt Vorderhaus, Seitenflügel und Quergebäude auf dem gleichen Grundstück nur ein reines Vorderhaus bauen, so ist der Wert des Grund und Bodens ein geringerer.' Georg Haberland, *Die Berliner Wohnungsversorgung : Streiflichter* (Berlin: Bauwelt-Verlag, 1928), 21.

91. For comparative land values in Berlin, see Ferdinand Kalweit's surveys from 1930 and 1937. The 1937 survey cites land prices from 1914 in its introduction while the 1930 edition lists land prices across Berlin by street. Ferdinand Kalweit, *Die Baustellenwerte in Berlin* (Berlin: Ermo, 1930); Ferdinand Kalweit, *Die Baustellenwerte in Berlin* (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1937), xiii-xv.

municipal councillor Paul Busch, land prices needed to stand at around 14 to 16 Reichsmarks in building class four areas, and around 16 to 20 Reichsmarks in building class five areas, if new housing was to be affordable to Berlin's lowest wage earners.⁹²

These economic complications had a detrimental effect on house building costs, resulting in higher rent rates for new housing. Between 1925 and 1929, rents in Berlin nearly doubled, with a two-bedroom flat rising from 23.10 to 43.75 Reichsmarks per month.⁹³ Planners and architects had to find new solutions to reduce the cost of their housing projects. This meant rationalising their designs by resorting to ever more standardised forms. Many housing societies and architects reduced the sizes of the apartments in their blocks to a bare minimum in the hope of reducing costs, a controversial measure opposed by many in the industry. Martin Wagner publicly spoke out against the so-called 'minimum existence' (*Existenzminimum*) dwelling that had 1½ rooms, and in some cases less than forty square metres of floor space, arguing that they were in fact more, rather than less expensive to manufacture.⁹⁴ Communists also disapproved of such small apartments. KPD city councillor Frida Rosenthal argued that they were unhealthy and endangered morals. Young, childless couples would be compelled to remain childless, and such was the expensive rents of larger flats that families with children might be encouraged to rent the smaller, cheaper dwellings, inevitably leading to the kind of overcrowded conditions new housing was supposed to solve. The Communist Party demanded a minimum dwelling size of fifty-four square metres.⁹⁵ Despite the opposition, the trend towards larger quantities of smaller homes continued unabated. The number of 1½-room flats built in Berlin rose from 824 in 1924, to 5,923 in 1930. Over the same period, the numbers of homes built with 3½- or more rooms dropped from 3,652 in 1924, to 1,375 in 1930.⁹⁶ Housebuilding projects became fewer and farther between, but significantly larger in scale. All building

92. Busch, *Zeitgemässe Grundstückspolitik*, 20.

93. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1929*, 38; Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1931*, 36.

94. Martin Wagner, "Berliner Wohnungsbauprobleme," *Die Wohnung* 3, no. 7 (1928): 201.

95. Frida Rosenthal, "Klein-Heim oder kein Heim," *Proletarische Sozialpolitik* 2, no. 2 (1929): 49-50.

96. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 27.

societies, regardless of their ideological standpoint, found themselves under pressure to build large and uncomplicated multi-storey housing blocks, simply out of economic necessity.

6.9 Communist criticism of the new housing estates

Assessing communist responses to Berlin's housing programme presents a challenge, because the KPD were never directly involved in any large-scale production of housing in Berlin. It is both easier and practically more useful to look at communist responses to the housing programme through the prism of the difficult economic conditions described in the section above, given that—from an aesthetic architectural perspective—their outlook was not dissimilar to the progressive figures within the SPD. Communist critics praised the efforts of the likes of Wagner and Taut, and their eschewal of ornamentation and commitment to functionality, though they reserved their highest praise for those figures perceived as being the most radical in their proposals. In his review in *Die Rote Fahne* of Otto Nagel's proletarian art exhibition, staged at the Joseph department store in Neukölln, Alfréd Keményi mildly criticised the exhibited designs of Bruno Taut's Schillerpark estate, because of the decorative elements he felt they still contained. He was however, much more appreciative of the 'ingenious' plans displayed by Ludwig Hilberseimer, which were 'as light and bright, clear and spacious, as working humanity's future.'⁹⁷ Communist writers praised Taut's Horseshoe estate which—as we have already seen—received significant press coverage in the communist press. One article commended the Britz development for having taken into consideration the need for 'comfortable and healthy homes'⁹⁸

But any faint praise which communist critics could heap upon SPD housing projects was always countered by criticism of the economics underlying these achievements. The same article which praised the Horseshoe estate in Britz, also criticised its high rent rates, caused—in the eyes of the communists—by the capitalist economic principles upon which

97. 'Innerhalb der ganz wenigen ausgestellten Werke der Baukunst von Max Taut, Bruno Taut und Mendelsohn führen wieder die genialen Entwürfe von Hilberseimer. Sie sind so licht und hell, so klar und großzügig, wie die Zukunft der arbeitenden Menschheit.' A. Kamen [Alfréd Keményi]. "Kunstaussstellung 'Neukölln'," *Die Rote Fahne*, June 22, 1926.

98. 'bequemes und gesundes Wohnen' Anonymous, "ARSO – Was will die ARbeitsgemeinschaft-SOzialpolitischer Organisation?," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 7, no. 31 (1928): 4-5.

the republic's housing reforms and building industry were based.⁹⁹ While Communists supported attempts to rationalise the mass-production of housing for the workers, they criticised what they considered to be inherent flaws in the programme. The communist press continually drew attention to the fact that, while housing construction was being socialised, the industry remained dependent on land and construction material prices that remained dictated by the capitalist market. The Communists also opposed the republican government's means of raising funds for the housing programme, rejecting the 'unsocial' *Hauszinssteuer* and loans as a means of funding house building, demanding instead taxes on the ownership of large and luxury homes.¹⁰⁰ Communist critics also accused the authorities of a lack of financial commitment to the housing crisis, which spilled over into indignation in 1928 when the government announced new investments in armaments and the military. 'Battleships instead of housing' was one frequent accusation which the radical left-wing press directed at the government.¹⁰¹

From 1929 onwards, with the economic crisis in Germany escalating and Stalin's five-year economic plan in full swing in Russia, German Communists repeatedly drew attention to the scale of achievements in the Soviet republic. One 1931 article from the magazine *Die Rote Stern* illustrated numerous projects from across the Soviet republic, including vast new housing complexes in Nizhniy Novgorod, Leningrad and Moscow. 'The building density of these cities is no longer affected by fantastically high land prices as it is in Germany or particularly in America, but purely by the laws of social hygiene and efficiency' declared the article. In one photograph, a crowd of workers purposefully stride down a street lined with newly built housing, under the caption 'they are building a new world!'¹⁰² A proletarian alternative to the official 1931 *Deutsche Bauausstellung* in Berlin, staged in an unused factory hall in Kreuzberg, also emphasised Russian progress compared to German struggles.¹⁰³ German Communists had access to a continual stream of

99. Ibid., 4.

100. "Mieterhöhung statt Hilfe gegen die Wohnungsnot," *Die Rote Fahne*, August 20, 1926; Rosenthal, "Klein-Heim oder kein Heim," 47-50.

101. Erich Schilling, "Panzerkreuzer statt Wohnungen," *Simplicissimus*, 3 September 1928.

102. 'Die Bauungsdichte dieser Städte wird nicht mehr wie bei uns und besonders America von zum Teil phantastisch hohen Bodenpreisen beeinflusst, sondern allein von den Gesetzen der Sozialhygiene und Wirtschaftlichkeit.' 'Sie bauen ein neue Welt!' Anonymous, "Die Sozialistische Stadt," *Der Rote Stern* 8, no. 18 (1931): 4-5.

103. Anonymous, "Rundschau : Proletarische Bauausstellung," *Die Form* 6, no. 7 (1931): 279-80.

propaganda flowing into the country from Russia, helping them to compare the Soviet building frenzy with the worsening state of affairs in Germany. One builder from Neukölln lamented in a 1931 issue of *Magazine für Alle* that ‘in our working-class districts the proletariat still lives two families to each home [...] One can speak only of an insane capitalist housing policy in Germany. And how does it look in Russia?’ The rhetorical question did not need answering.¹⁰⁴ Observing how the financial situation was making it almost impossible to build adequate housing in Berlin, the Communists demanded the construction of more communal housing complexes, inspired by the Russian model of collective living.¹⁰⁵

6.10 The *Zeilenbau* in Berlin

The Friedrich-Ebert estate was the most significant and the last of Wedding’s housing estates built between 1924 and 1932 (map E, B3). It is a good example of the functional, large-scale housing estates that characterised Berlin’s house building activity from 1929. Work commenced on the complex in this year and reached completion in 1931. The *Eintracht* building society undertook the project, having acquired a vast tract of land in the open fields of north Wedding. The building society enlisted the architects Paul Mebes and Paul Emmerich to draw up designs for the land in early 1929. The architects were asked to use the open *Zeilenbau* form of housing, in which repeated rows of parallel blocks were ranged alongside each other, in preference to the closed *Randbebauung* form.¹⁰⁶ The reason for doing so was simple: more blocks could be squeezed onto the land, helping to reduce rent levels. Other forms of housing—certainly the *Heimstätten* estates, and even the *Randbebauung* blocks—had become increasingly unfeasible in the difficult economic climate. Mebes and Emmerich designed the first phase of housing blocks, while Bruno Taut was commissioned to design a second phase. Taut followed Mebes and Emmerich’s original plans, but provided more open space between the parallel blocks than his colleagues had done. In total, the first two phases of the Friedrich-Ebert estate comprised approximately 1,400 flats, the majority of which had 1½ to 2½ rooms, with a floor space of

104. ‘In unseren Arbeiterbezirken wohnen die Proleten immer zwei Familien in einer Wohnung. [...] Man kann in Deutschland also nur von einer wahrsinnigen kapitalistischen Wohnungspolitik reden. Und wie sieht es in Russland aus?’ Bruno Grap, “Ganz Sowjet-Russland eine Baustelle,” *Magazin für Alle*, September 1931.

105. Leonie Pilewski, “Neuer Wohnungsbau in der Sowjetunion,” *Die Form* 6, no. 3 (1931): 99.

106. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 169.

between forty-four to sixty-two square metres per flat.¹⁰⁷ These flats were packed into over twenty-five blocks, all of which were regular in shape and size, and the majority of which the architects aligned along an east-west axis (fig. 66). The impressive scale of the estate prompted the writer Fritz Ruck to describe the development as a whole new district (*Stadtteil*) of the city.¹⁰⁸

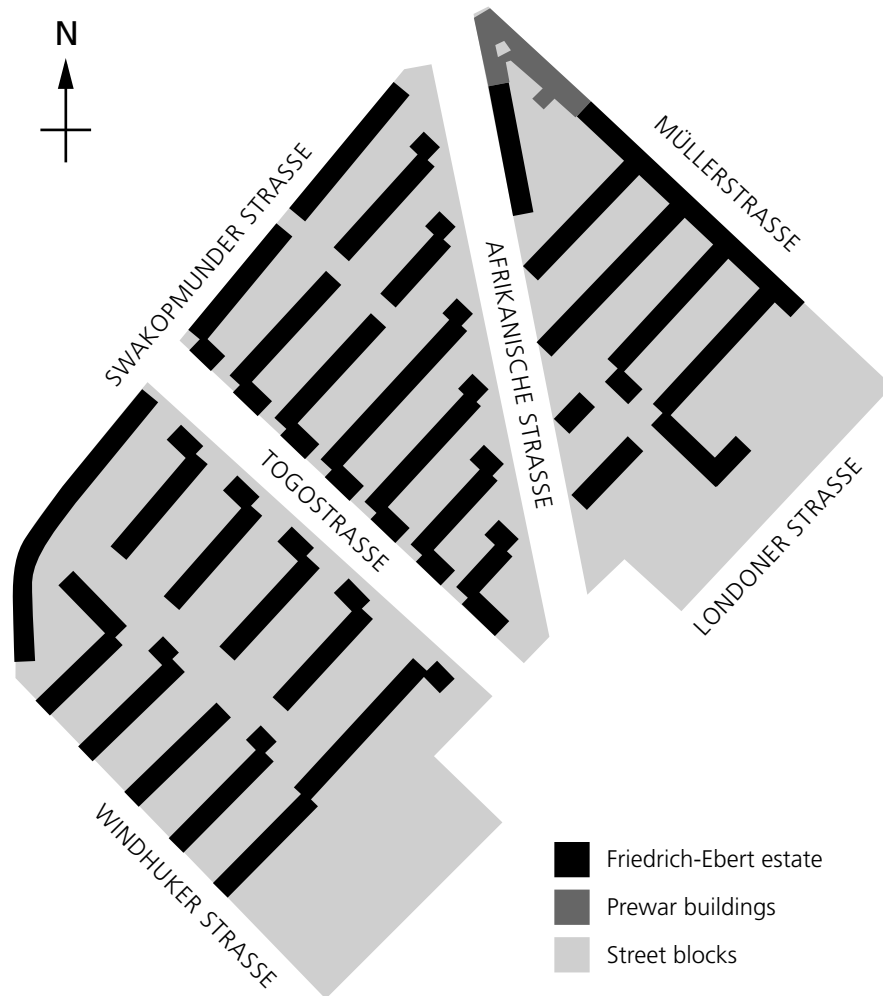


Figure 66: Plan of the Friedrich-Ebert estate in Wedding
Produced using image data from Google Maps

The *Zeilenbau* form dominated house building activity across German cities after 1929. It represented an extreme form of rationalisation, dictated by the growing financial pressures being exerted upon house building, and new technological advances in mass construction. Although open-minded architects and housing societies embraced this progressive new

107. Helmut Engel, et al., eds., *Wedding* vol. 3 *Geschichtslandschaft Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1990), 434.

108. Ruck, *Der Wedding*, 10.

form, some critics clearly felt that these architects were encroaching upon a line of acceptability. As we have already seen, prominent figures disapproved of the ever-shrinking apartment sizes, but the external aesthetics of the *Zeilenbau* also gave rise to concern. These criticisms primarily emanated from the Deutsche Werkbund throughout the mid to late twenties. The principles of the English Garden City had heavily influenced members of the *Werkbund* since the organisation's inception in 1907.¹⁰⁹ The architectural proposals of Hermann Muthesius and Karl Schmidt—two of the most prominent figures from the early years of the *Werkbund*—were indebted to English reformer Ebenezer Howard's vision of the Garden City, published in England in 1902 in his book *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.¹¹⁰ In the following years his vision was partially realised at Letchworth and Welwyn in England. A German translation of Howard's book appeared in 1906—one year before the foundation of the *Werkbund*. Taut's Falkenberg estate (1913–1916), and his and Wagner's Lindenhof estate (1918–1919)—both situated on the outskirts of Berlin—were closely modelled upon the English Garden City principle. After the war the English Garden City's influence persisted in Germany, though the architectural style was gradually updated by the new generation of architects and planners that included Wagner, Taut, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. This new generation of architects associated with the *Werkbund*, embraced the modern style of architecture and modern construction methods, while remaining cautious of an aesthetic of pure functionalism, arguing instead for the continued importance of balancing individuality and functionality in the finished product.¹¹¹ The architect Hugo Häring outlined the *Werkbund*'s position in the first number of the organisation's magazine *Die Form* in 1925. The *Werkbund*, argued Häring, opposed those most overtly mechanised architectural forms associated with Le Corbusier. He insisted that: 'We do not want to mechanise the object, only its manufacture.'¹¹² Opinion within the *Werkbund* was that Le Corbusier's maxim of the house as a 'machine for living' was setting a dangerous precedent that risked reducing the home to just another technological artefact.¹¹³ In the Weissenhof housing estate, which formed the centrepiece of the organisation's *Die Wohnung* exhibition in Stuttgart in 1927, the *Werkbund* put their architectural beliefs into practice. On one hand, they demonstrated

109. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus*, 217–19.

110. Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1945).

111. Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, 169.

112. 'Wir wollen aber nicht die Dingen, sondern nur ihre Herstellung mechanisieren.' Hugo Häring, "Wege zur Form," *Die Form* 1, no. 1 (1925): 3-5.

113. Wilhelm Lotz, "Wohnen und Wohnung," *Die Form* 2, no. 10 (1927): 297.

their commitment to the modern architectural aesthetic by inviting avant-garde architects including Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe to contribute to the exhibition, at the expense of traditional architects. On the other hand, their decision to commission single-family homes or small housing blocks from a range of different architects avoided any possibility of a mass-produced aesthetic emerging from the exhibition.



Figure 67: Friedrich-Ebert Estate. Reproduced from: Paul Mebes, "Die Friedrich-Ebert-Siedlung in Berlin," *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 16, no. 9 (1932): 431.

Adolf Behne, himself a member of the Werkbund, shared this perspective. Despite championing the modern aesthetic over outdated ornamentation, he felt compelled to speak out against the overly rationalised architectural forms he saw developing. In a chapter of his 1927 book *Neues Bauen, neues Wohnen* entitled *Diktatur oder Sachlichkeit* (dictatorship or objectivity), Behne insisted that the architect must not entirely banish ornamentation, or his buildings could end up resembling penitentiary institutions. The modern architect, argued Behne, threatened to impose a dictatorship upon the dweller from above, a tendency which, admitted Behne, many architects took pride in.¹¹⁴ The economic

114. Behne, *Neues Wohnen, neues Bauen*, 29. For a useful introduction to Behne's outlook, and how it changed over the course of the twenties in response to an increasingly functional architectural style, see: Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Introduction," in *The Modern Functional Building* (Santa

constraints and technological advances that triggered a growing dominance of pure functionalism over form in housing developments after 1929, further alarmed Behne. His disquiet over the growing dominance of functionalism over form which characterised the mass-produced *Zeilenbau*, was evident in his essay on the Dammerstock housing estate in Karlsruhe, whose design was overseen by Gropius, that appeared in *Die Form* in 1930.¹¹⁵ Behne criticised Dammerstock for the architect's apparent subjugation of every other practical or aesthetic consideration in order to ensure that each flat received sun in the bedrooms in the morning, and sun in the living room in the evening. As a result, the blocks that comprised the estate were identical in layout, as well as being identical in aspect and appearance. Behne returned to a phrase he commonly employed in his warnings to architects, accusing the Dammerstock estate of using 'dictatorial methods' (*diktatorische Methode*) that had alienated the architect from the dweller. He further suggested that the aesthetic impact of the rows of parallel blocks was reminiscent of the old firewalls of tenement buildings.¹¹⁶

After 1929, even those building societies which had previously rejected the modern machine aesthetic, opting instead to retain traditional features in their architecture, were compelled to modernise their designs and construction techniques. In 1930, the GAGFAH building society, which had controversially commissioned the estate of traditional homes in Zehlendorf in 1928, constructed a new housing development along Steegerstrasse in Wedding (map E, B9). Each of the blocks in the new development stood five storeys high. The longest of the blocks ran for 250 metres along the street and—with the inevitable exception of its pitched roof—had no decorative features (fig. 68). Hans Bechly, president of the Trade Union of German Employees, lamented in a 1928 GAGFAH report of the difficulties that were forcing the society to abandon its desire to build low-rise homes. Bechly cited the price of land as a primary cause of the problem.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the Primus estate, which had previously claimed that it wished to avoid cubistic forms that its tenants might find alien, constructed the modern Weisse Stadt estate in Reinickendorf in 1929, just to the north of Wedding. These examples indicate how, from 1929 Berlin's Neues Bauen

Monica, CA: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1996), 1-83.

115. Adolf Behne, "Dammerstock," *Die Form* 5, no. 6 (1930): 163-66.

116. *Ibid.*, 165.

117. Hans Bechly, et al., *16,000 Wohnungen für Angestellte : Denkschrift Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Gagfah anlässlich ihres zehnjährigen Bestehens* (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth A.G, 1928), 9.

programme found itself caught up in a relentless drive towards rationalisation and pure functionality. In essence this meant that financial considerations were taking increasing precedence over social concerns, a trend which Ernst Bloch later described as a ‘peaceful growth of capitalism into socialism.’ Bloch bluntly criticised the resulting Neue Sachlichkeit style of architecture, describing how an intoxication of rationalisation (‘a rationalisation without Ratio’), created buildings of ‘dreadful emptiness,’ comprised of nothing more than a hollow façade.¹¹⁸



Figure 68: GAGFAH estate on Steegerstrasse, Berlin-Wedding. Author’s own photograph.

The impact of the dramatic changes in housing design and construction that occurred around 1929 is evident in the myriad architectural surveys and compendiums published throughout the course of the Weimar Republic. Municipal building officer Jakob Schallenger’s 1925 essay on recent house building activity in Berlin, demonstrated a rich variety of projects. The gamut of architectural styles ran from the modern blocks of Taut’s Schillerpark estate, through to the distinctly rustic Zehlendorf-West development (designed by Mebes and Emmerich) with its steeply pitched roofs, gables, dormers and wooden painted window shutters. Schallenger also presented a range architectural forms. Multi-storey blocks featured alongside terraces of two-storey houses and detached single-family homes.¹¹⁹ By 1927, there were significant signs of changes emerging in the

118. Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 201.

119. Jakob Schallenger, “Der Wohnungsneubau in Berlin : Aus der Tätigkeit der Berliner

housing industry for another municipal building officer, Wilhelm Lübbert, to observe that in Berlin, ‘Today the building societies and construction companies predominantly populate land with three and four-storey constructions, and only in exceptional cases are two-storey houses, and even more rarely single-family houses ever built.’¹²⁰ In 1931, Schallenberger co-edited an architectural survey of Berlin’s housing with the architect Erwin Gutkind. This new study continued to emphasise the wide variety of housing forms and architectural styles created over the course of the previous decade, but they assigned a disproportionate amount of space to the very latest *Zeilenbau* developments in the city, including the Friedrich-Ebert estate, the modern blocks in Siemensstadt, the Weisse Stadt in Reinickendorf, and Taut’s Carl-Legien estate in Prenzlauer Berg.¹²¹

6.11 Who lived in Wedding’s new housing?

The examples shown of Wedding’s new housing projects has demonstrated the wide variety of architectural forms and styles produced, and the diverse range of political opinions and circumstances that lay behind them. But did these political positions and architectural qualities correspond in any way to the inhabitants of these new homes? The occupational details of the first residents of the Jungfernheide estate demonstrate that associating the political left and the proletariat with modern housing blocks, and a conservative bourgeoisie with traditional architectural styles, is too simplistic a statement to make, and prone to contradiction. Amongst some of the first residents of the Jungfernheide estate there were many of lower-middle and middle-class occupation, including skilled manual workers, civil servants, managers and tradesmen. Other residents included shoemakers, lift and park attendants, metalworkers, factory workers, police officers, carpenters and porters. In the address book records for some properties, up to three occupations were listed, suggesting that some residents shared their homes, probably because of the shortage of available and affordable housing.¹²² The situation is further complicated when we examine the occupations of the residents of four modern housing

Wohnungsfürsorgegesellschaft,” in *Berlin : Unter Mitwirkung der Zentralstelle für den Fremdenverkehr Groß-Berlins und anderer Verbände*, ed. Berthold Hirschberg (Berlin: Industrie- und Handels-Verlag Berthold Hirschberg, 1925), 102-13.

120. ‘Die Baugenossenschaften und Bauunternehmungen bebauen heute vorwiegend Gelände, auf denen eine drei- und viergeschossige Bauweise zugelassen ist; nur noch in Ausnahmefällen wird Gelände mit zweigeschossigen Häusern, und sehr selten mit Einfamilienhäusern bebaut.’ Lübbert, “Der Berliner Wohnungsbau nach dem Krieg,” *Die Wohnung* 2, no. 1 (1927): 23.

121. Jakob Schallenberger, and Erwin Gutkind, *Berliner Wohnbauten*, 108-23.

122. Berliner Adressbuch, 1929. Sample collected from Sambesistrasse and Ugandastrasse.

blocks directly adjoining the Jungfernheide estate on Afrikanische Strasse, designed by Mies van der Rohe (map E, D4). Strikingly modern and austere in their design, Mies' blocks represented the complete antithesis of the traditional homesteads they sat alongside. The blocks contained eighty-eight flats, ranging from 1½ to 3 rooms in size.¹²³ The first residents of Mies' estate were dominated by municipal functionaries, high-ranking civil servants and bank workers. Some of the smaller flats accommodated hospital workers, tailors, train drivers, teachers, and architects.¹²⁴ Comparing the occupations of the residents from the Jungfernheide and Afrikanische Strasse housing developments, reveals no distinct patterns that might lead to firm conclusions relating to architecture and class.

Over at Zeppelinplatz, the *Moabit Erbau Verein* housing complex was dominated by employees in the postal service. Postmen, postal assistants and postal secretaries comprised over half of the residents. Other occupations listed were either middle or skilled-working class, and included a blacksmith, salaried employees, office workers and teachers.¹²⁵ A short stop down the road, in the Primus housing complex on Ostender Strasse, the occupational mix was a little more biased towards middle-class occupations. Reichsbank civil servants, office employees and teachers were all well represented, alongside foremen, bricklayers and secretaries.¹²⁶

Elsewhere in Wedding, the pattern remains mixed. In the DEGEWO estate around Dubliner Strasse, the residents came from predominantly middle-class and civil-service professions, once again interspersed with a smattering of skilled working-class tenants.¹²⁷ The blocks at Christianiastrasse 94–98 were built by the Berlin Streetcar Housing Society for its employees. The overwhelming majority of the fifty residents here were manual working class. Occupations included lathe operators, smiths, cartwrights, painters and metalworkers—the sorts of occupations one might associate with streetcar construction and maintenance. Other commercial concerns also built housing for their employees in

123. Heinrich, and Weber, *Wohnungsbau*, 268–69; Rentschler, and Schirmer, *Die Wohngebäude*, 378.

124. Berliner Adressbuch, 1929. Sample collected from Afrikanische Strasse 133–138.

125. Ibid. 1928. Sample collected from Zeppelinplatz 1–4 (approx. 50 households).

126. Ibid. 1930. Sample collected from Ostender Strasse 35–39 and Amrumer Strasse 4–8 (approx. 64 households).

127. Ibid. 1930. Sample collected from Glasgower Strasse 18 and Glasgower Strasse 23 (approx. 24 households).

Wedding. The new residents of Krämer's housing blocks around the streetcar depot on Müllerstrasse consisted exclusively of streetcar conductors and drivers, brought together from their previously disparate homes to live under the roof of their employers, and cheek-by-jowl with their work.¹²⁸

The housing developments mentioned above were all completed before or around 1928—that is, prior to the escalating financial crisis which took hold from early 1929 onwards. How then, did a housing development such as the Friedrich-Ebert estate fare in the economic downturn? The address books for 1933—the first full year after the estate's completion, show plenty of inhabitants, but short entries for some blocks suggest many flats remained empty. The occupations listed are dominated by either middle-class or skilled manual occupational groups. Tradesmen appear frequently, as do tailors, nurses, teachers, and civil servants. Writers, city councillors, engineers, waiters, bakers and bank workers also number amongst the Friedrich-Ebert estate's residents. Hardly any manual or factory labourers figures amongst the first residents.¹²⁹ Compare this to a typical tenement in old Wedding. For example, in the fifty households in Kösliner Strasse 6 lived sixteen tenants classified as worker, metalworker or machinist. There were also four widowed households, two sewing workers, three bricklayers, a carpenter, butcher, baker and an invalid—but not a single civil-service employee.¹³⁰

The bias towards better wage earners, and those whose jobs were less at risk in times of economic depression, is not at all surprising. Of all Berlin's new housing developments, the Friedrich-Ebert estate revealed the growing schism between on the one hand, the government, SPD and bourgeoisie, and on the other, the unemployed and working classes. If the name of the estate did not make it obvious enough, then Taut's decision to paint the balconies in his part of the estate in black, gold and red, underlines the factional political nature that coloured the housing question.¹³¹ One could assume—given that the SPD

128. *Ibid.* 1929-31. Sample collected from addresses on Belfaster Strasse.

129. *Ibid.* 1933. Sample collected from Togostrasse 29a to 30c (approx. 52 households).

130. *Ibid.* 1930. Sample collected from Kösliner Strasse 6 (50 households).

131. Helmut Engel, et al., *Wedding*, 434.

advertised the first available apartments in the Friedrich-Ebert estate in 1930 to party members through their own party policy magazine *Unser Weg*—that the SPD had given up hope of these estates serving a broader social (and political) spectrum of the population.¹³²

The impact of the economic situation on rent rates, and the subsequent tendency for new housing to be dominated by middle-class tenants, combined to bring about significant shifts in the geographical class distribution of Wedding. With its 1,400 flats capable of housing some 3,500 people, the Friedrich-Ebert estate contributed to the wider trend in Berlin of a population shift, from the inner-city areas towards the periphery of the city.¹³³ But this was a selective redistribution, with better-off tenants escaping the inner-city districts, in which low wage earners and the unemployed remained firmly stuck. The Friedrich-Ebert estate was symbolic of an increasing split along social and geo-political lines in Wedding. Fritz Rück observed, ‘in these newly built homes the rent is accordingly higher, and has changed the composition of the population of Wedding. The factory workers decline in numbers and the salaried employees and civil servants move in.’¹³⁴ Wedding thus experienced an increasing polarisation in its social geography. While the south of the district, with its built-up neighbourhoods of tenements and factories, continued to be dominated by the proletariat, planning policies and housing projects transformed the northern half of the district from rural hinterland into ordered space, in which the majority of new housing was occupied by the middle classes.

6.12 The gap between expectation and reality in Berlin’s housing programme

This brief excursion around a selection of Wedding’s interwar housing estates has demonstrated the variety of domestic architectural styles and forms that flourished between 1924 and 1928. It has also shown how deteriorating economic conditions changed the approach to the design and construction of housing, from the low-density *Heimstätte* estates of the mid twenties, through to the *Zeilenbau* blocks of minimum-sized dwellings that dominated by 1930. Furthermore, this account has shown how an array of ideological and political viewpoints informed and supported a rich variety of architectural approaches,

132. Anonymous, “[Advertisement],” *Unser Weg* 4, no. 5 (1930): 95.. Two further adverts appeared in the subsequent two issues.

133. Leyden, *Groß-Berlin*, 89-95.

134. ‘[...] in diesen Neubauwohnungen die Miete entsprechend höher ist, ändert sich hier auch die Zusammensetzung der Bevölkerung des Weddings. Die Fabrikarbeiter nehmen ab, die Angestellten und Beamten nehmen zu.’ Rück, *Der Wedding*, 10.

all of which were challenged by such worsening economic circumstances, that even the most progressive of reformers such as Adolf Behne and Martin Wagner were increasingly troubled by new architectural developments.

Also evident from this brief investigation is a serious discrepancy between press coverage of the Neues Bauen programme, and *what actually occurred* on the ground, in the working-class districts and suburbs of the city. The extensive coverage given to the new *Mustersiedlungen* (model estates)—such as the GEHAG developments in Britz and Zehlendorf—in numerous popular newspapers and magazines left its mark upon the collective psyche of the inhabitants of Berlin's proletarian districts. And yet, as we have seen in the case of Wedding, the actual fruits of the housing programme often bore little resemblance to the utopian visions disseminated in the press. What Wedding's working-class population actually witnessed, was a variety of new housing estates which appeared to offer an incremental rather than a radical improvement upon prewar forms of housing. From the outside, many of Wedding's new developments, including the DEGEWO and Christianiastrasse housing projects, did not look markedly different from the older tenement quarters. And though other developments, such as the Zeppelinplatz and Ostender Strasse housing estates, did outwardly signal a break—though not a radical break—from the prewar tenements, they continued to cling on to traditional architectural styles and forms, and preserve a hierarchy of private and public spaces which preserved earlier social divisions of space. There is little doubt that Wedding's new housing developments were an improvement on the tenements, but they could not bridge the gap between reality and expectation, which the well-publicised GEHAG estates elsewhere in the city had helped to establish. Ultimately, the GEHAG estates in Britz and Zehlendorf were idealised forms of the Neues Bauen programme, and had little impact upon the wider house building industry in Wedding and across Berlin.

Although historians have acknowledged how the increasingly difficult economic situation hampered Berlin's Neues Bauen programme, they have paid less attention to the cultural engagement—or lack of—on the part of the working classes towards new housing projects.¹³⁵ By looking beyond the most prominent and obvious examples created by the

135. For example, Iain Boyd Whyte quotes figures on the professions of the residents in the Hufeisen estate in 1927, showing a lack of proletarian occupants: Iain Boyd Whyte, "Berlin 1870–1945," in *The Divided Heritage: Themes and Problems of German Modernism*, ed. Irit Rogoff (Cambridge:

architectural avant-garde, and examining the fruits of the housing programme at a small-scale local level, what becomes apparent is the gap between promise and reality that the Social Democratic champions of modern housing reform ultimately failed to overcome. The difficulties faced by architects and planners is brought sharply into focus by their repeated endorsement of modern domestic interiors for workers' homes, and their constant bemusement at many family's preferences for *Hauskitsch* and *Nippsachen* (kitsch and bric-a-brac). Behne admitted as much when he said that 'the architect serves the tenant, but not necessarily the typical tenant of today, instead he serves the fully culturally aware, rational, prudent tenant.'¹³⁶ This gap between expectation and reality is manifest in the surprising lack of engagement between Berlin's artists and the Neues Bauen programme. Though Otto Nagel publicly complained of the kitsch objects usually associated with the bourgeois 'Philistine' (*Spießbürger*), which were still found in workers' homes, he never took up the subject of Berlin's new housing in his Weimar-era art. He continued instead to concentrate on the dingy tenement blocks and gloomy streets of old Wedding.¹³⁷ This was, after all, where Nagel himself lived. As a committed member of the Communist Party, Nagel betrayed little interest in the housing programme instigated by the Social Democratic government, particularly while the social problems and conditions associated with the tenements not only remained unresolved, but appeared to be worsening. We should compare Nagel's apathy towards the Weimar housing programme to his rather different outlook in communist East Germany after the Second World War. During the construction of the apartment blocks on Karl-Marx-Alle in the 1950s, Nagel produced two paintings on the subject, *Aufbau der Karl-Marx-Alle II* (Building of the Karl-Marx-Alle II, 1952) and *Maurerlehrling* (Apprentice Bricklayer, 1953). But as things stood in the twenties, with the Communists in political opposition and rents in the new housing estates being unaffordable to the average proletarian family, Nagel continued to bring attention to the miseries and hardship of life in the old tenement districts, in the hope of stirring up class consciousness amongst the proletariat.

Cambridge University Press, 1991), 238.

136. 'Gewiss: der Architekten dient dem Mieter, aber nicht glatt dem Durchschnittsmieter von heute, sondern dem vollen kulturellen Verantwortung geweckten, vernünftigen und einsichtigen Mieter.' Behne, *Neues Wohnen, neues Bauen*, 31.

137. Otto Nagel. "Hauskitsch in Arbeiterwohnungen," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, 29 May, 1927.

Hans Baluschek's lack of artistic response to the housing programme is more surprising, given his earlier interest in Berlin's urban development. Moreover, he himself lived in a newly built housing estate that was a product of the city's Neues Bauen programme: the Ceciliengarten in Schöneberg. I think that there are three specific reasons that account for Baluschek's indifference. The first and most obvious reason is that Baluschek rarely painted domestic scenes within the tenements; his works are situated in the open air, at the edges of the city. Second, although Baluschek was an SPD supporter, he never closely followed the party line, and rarely involved himself in any outright political propaganda in his art. His concerns were more social than political, and themes of homelessness, poverty and vagrancy had a tendency to appear in his work more frequently than idyllic representations of families living in new homes. A third and equally compelling reason is that the spaces to which Baluschek continually returned—those grey areas at the edge of the city which had hitherto resisted order, and were inhabited by vagabonds, gypsies and wanderers—were being increasingly eroded under a Social Democratic programme of spatial and social order across the city, which the post-1929 housing estates made a significant contribution to. The spaces which Baluschek had repeatedly described were rapidly disappearing under new housing estates, municipal parks, and other ordered spaces. The artist's large painting *Sommerabend* from 1928 was the last significant work by the artist that situated its subject matter at the social and geographical margins of the city. From 1929 onwards, Baluschek increasingly retreated to the centre of Berlin, devoting the last years of his life to painting the static cityscapes of Berlin's historic centre.

Neither it seems, did the newly created spaces of the city hold any particular interest for Gustav Wunderwald. Only one or two of his many Berlin scenes depicted house building activity, and these—including *Neubau in Westend* (Construction in Westend, 1926)—concentrated on small-scale affairs. Wunderwald—as I have argued in chapter three—was far more interested in the historical character of the urban environment, and the fascinating contrasts and juxtapositions of old and new it produced. He pursued the historic stratifications of the city in his paintings, contrasting the muddy colours and textures of the nineteenth-century tenements with the gaudy, artificial hues of modern advertisements. Despite the fact that Wunderwald painted several scenes of Wedding between 1926 and 1929, to the best of my knowledge he never chose as his subject any of those housing

developments discussed above.¹³⁸ Given his tendency to choose vistas with striking historical or visual contrast, Wunderwald saw little of these qualities in Wedding's new housing blocks that compelled him to take them as a subject for his painting.

If Berlin's artists largely ignored the city's Neues Bauen activity, then its photographers did not. The aesthetic qualities of Berlin's new housing, with their clean lines, smooth surfaces and lack of ornamentation, were better served to the photographer's lens than the painter's brush. It has also much to do with the fact that many photographers were responding to a client's brief, the client being in these cases the city authorities, building societies, and numerous architectural magazine and book publishers. Well-established Weimar photographers such as Sasha Stone, Otto Hagemann and Arthur Köster regularly photographed Berlin's new housing estates for promotional literature and publications.¹³⁹ Of all the Weimar-era painters, Carl Grossberg's hyperrealist approach was best suited to the radiance and pristine quality of the new architectural forms, but he preferred modern factory buildings and machinery over housing complexes. Interestingly enough, on the occasions when Grossberg did paint Berlin's housing blocks, he preferred to depict the old nineteenth-century tenements, and the spontaneous treatment of these subjects in his watercolour sketches are visually more interesting than his polished oil paintings of modern subjects (fig. 69). The mass-reproducibility of the photograph was analogous to the modern, functional housing block. Both were products of the latest ideas and technologies, and could be manufactured through mechanical means. Furthermore, the political importance of the housing programme, and the central role it played in the SPD's propaganda materials (which are discussed in the next chapter), required a means of mass reproduction that the photograph was best suited to deliver. The oil painting hardly seemed an appropriate means of representing the modernity and scale of Berlin's new housing developments.

138. The most comprehensive inventory of Wunderwald's paintings can be found in: Reinhardt, *Gustav Wunderwald*.

139. Hagemann took many photos of the GEHAG housing developments in Britz and Zehlendorf between 1926 and 1933. Stone also took numerous photographs, many of which featured in *Das neue Berlin* in 1929. For a recent overview of Köster's photographs, see: Michael Stöneberg, *Arthur Köster : Architekturfotographie 1926–1933. Das Bild vom "Neuen Bauen"* (Berlin: Mann, 2008).

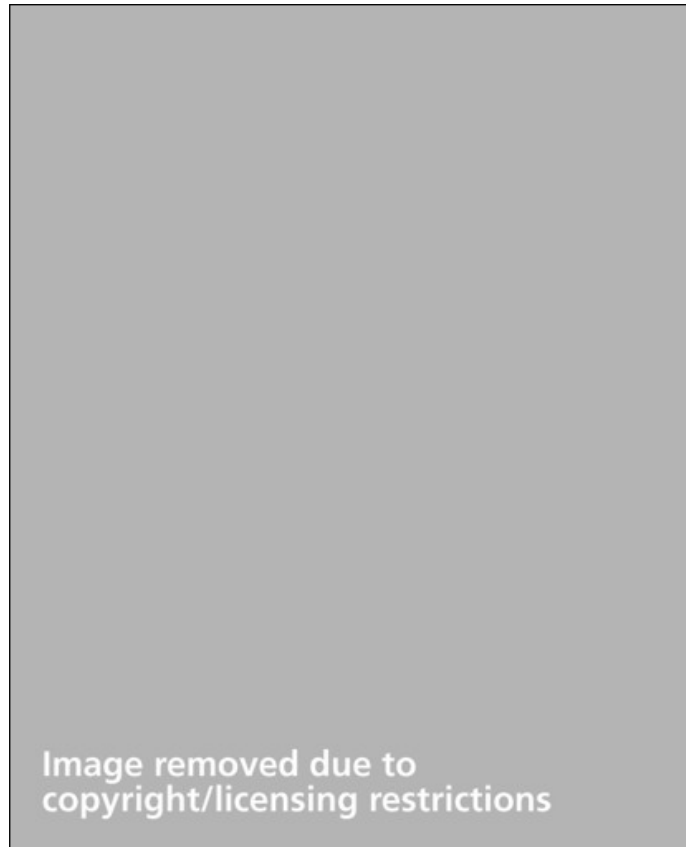


Figure 69: Carl Grossberg, *Berlin, Brandmauer*, 1932. Watercolour, 47 x 38.5cm.
Private collection.

So far we have seen how the working-class areas of Weimarian Berlin in many ways retained a distinct rural quality, and how the inhabitants of these areas adapted their rural customs and traditions to an urbanised environment. We have also seen how artists depicted the working-class spaces of the city—those spaces in which these imported cultural ideas were sustained—and how many of these spaces were eventually subsumed by modern housing developments. The next chapter will explore in further detail how the friction between proletarian cultural tradition on one hand and municipal planning policy on the other, assumed an increasingly acrimonious and political character towards the end of the 1920s.

7. Contrasting political representations of working-class Berlin

7.1 Introduction

Weimar historians—regardless of whether their emphasis be cultural, political, social—have tended to divide up the history of the Weimar Republic into three distinct phases. Two economic events delineate these periods: the stabilisation of the German currency along with the introduction of the Dawes Plan in late 1923 and 1924, and the economic pressures building throughout 1929, culminating in the meltdown of political power following the collapse of the North American stock markets in October of that year. For supporters of the republic, the first years (1919–1923) immediately after the war were pregnant with a new spirit and optimism. ‘Our work belongs to the future; we must give up the present’ proclaimed Adolf Behne, in his 1920 rallying cry for architects *A Call to Build*.¹ Later historians stressed the optimistic fervor of this period. John Willett called it ‘a turning point,’ while Detlev Peukert considered it a ‘new direction.’² The second phase of the republic (1924–1929) brought with it a greater sense of pragmatism and stability, in which a degree of economic prosperity returned, while the arts continued to flourish. These were Weimar’s so-called ‘golden years,’ in which a culture which Franz Roh perceived of as ‘plain,’ ‘static’ and ‘civilised’ prospered, compared to the ‘ecstatic,’ ‘dynamic’ and ‘primitive’ sentiments of the earlier period.³ Jost Hermand later described the stability of this period as ‘relative’ compared to the earlier and later phases of the republic, while Peukert branded it as ‘deceptive.’⁴ Political radicalism and increasing levels of violence scarred the third phase of the republic (1929–1933)—chiefly a result of the economic Depression. As Thomas Mann noted: ‘Surely it is too much to demand sound political thought from an economically ailing people.’⁵ These last years were marked by high

1. Adolf Behne, “A Call to Build,” in *Images*, ed. Charlotte Benton, and Tim Benton (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1975), 2-3.

2. Willett, *New Sobriety*, 5; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic : The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), vi.

3. Taken from Ranz Roh’s Post-Expressionist Schema: Franz Roh, *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus : Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925), 119-20.

4. Hermand, “Unity within Diversity?”, 167; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, vi.

5. Thomas Mann. “Appell an die Vernunft,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, 18 October, 1930. Quoted in: Thomas Mann, “An Appeal to Reason,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, et al.

unemployment, abject poverty, and bloody political confrontation, all of which took their toll on the floundering republic, which—to use historian Eberhard Kolb’s words—slid into an inexorable decline of ‘disintegration and destruction.’⁶

We have seen in the previous chapter, how 1929 bore witness to a turning point in architectural development: a raising of the stakes in housebuilding, in which the necessities of the economic situation and a simple bottom-line demand for mass housing created the *Zeilenbau* estate. This chapter will continue to concentrate on 1929 in Berlin, opening up the scene to consider in more detail how two particular events of this year impacted upon the city; two events which raised the political consciousness of the city’s proletariat to levels not seen since the revolutionary atmosphere of 1919 and 1920. Between May 1st and 3rd 1929, running street battles between police and communist supporters took place in several working-class neighbourhoods of the city, sparked off by the Communist Party’s defiance of a ban on public demonstrations in the city, enforced by the Social Democratic police commissioner Karl Zörgiebel. Six months later, on November 17th, municipal elections took place across Berlin, to elect a new political assembly for the city. In the wake of the May Day riots, the Communist party claimed that the ‘German bourgeoisie had sparked civil war against the working classes,’ driving an irreversible wedge between Social Democrats and Communists.⁷ This schism became painfully apparent in the publicity and propaganda published by both parties in the run-up to the November elections.

The political composition of Berlin’s municipal government differed slightly from the German national political landscape, with above the national average support for the left-wing parties. In the previous round of local elections in the city in 1925, the SPD polled nearly a third of the vote (thirty-two percent), with a twenty-one percent share to the DNVP and nineteen percent going to the KPD.⁸ Though still not yet a potent political force in Berlin in 1929, the NSDAP had already made clear its intention to go after the left-wing vote in the proletarian districts of the city, with Goebbels, then *Gauleiter* for Berlin,

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 150.

6. Kolb, *Weimar Republic*, vii.

7. ‘Die deutsche Bourgeoisie eröffnet den Bürgerkrieg gegen die Arbeiterklasse [...]’ “Die Lehren der Berliner Maikämpfe,” *Die Rote Fahne*, May 24, 1929.

8. SPD., *Sozialdemokratische Kommunal-Arbeit*, 3.

making it clear that ‘history is made in the street.’⁹ The Communists meanwhile, were prepared to ‘fight for the streets,’ and considered their freedom to demonstrate an integral part of their struggle against the ‘dictatorial plans of the bourgeoisie and Social Democracy.’¹⁰ By concentrating their energies on the city’s working-class neighbourhoods, they could retain and hopefully improve upon their share of the vote. The Social Democrats meanwhile—in power and with the most to lose politically—fought their own corner through the city’s bureaucratic structures: the press, the police and public offices.

This chapter will look in greater detail at the publicity and propaganda campaigns run by the SPD and KPD in Berlin’s working-class districts during 1929, taking the May Day violence as a turning point in the political representation of the city’s proletarian neighbourhoods, which framed the disputes between the two parties in the run-up to the November elections. It will delineate the conflicting left-wing representations of Berlin by focusing on specific themes of urban development: transport, housing, public spaces and the garden colonies.

7.2 Important events in Berlin in 1929

On the 1st May 1929, in defiance of a ban on public demonstrations enforced by the chief police commissioner Karl Zörgiebel, communist supporters took to the streets in various parts of Berlin. In several locations, the demonstrations quickly descended into bloody violence, after the overly brutal intervention of the city’s police force. In the ensuing two days, in which barricades were erected in the streets of Wedding and Neukölln, thirty-three people were killed.¹¹ The *Blutmai* riots in Berlin marked the beginning of a phase of political street violence that endured until early 1933.¹² KPD propaganda painted the violent exchanges that took place in Wedding and Neukölln as a conflict waged against the working classes by the Social Democrats, insisting that ‘the Social Democrats were the organisers, provokers and executors of the bloodbath on the 1st May.’ Both the police

9. Quoted in: Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), 90.

10. ‘Der Kampf um das Recht auf die Straße [...] gegen die Diktaturpläne der Bourgeoisie und Sozialdemokratie [...]’ “Strasse frei am 1. Mai!,” *Die Rote Fahne*, March 19, 1929.

11. For an historical analysis of the May Day riots, see: Chris Bowlby, “Blutmai 1929 : Police, Parties and Proletarians in a Berlin Confrontation,” *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (1986): 149.

12. The best study of the street violence that characterised the final years of the Republic in Berlin is Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?*. See also: Swett, *Neighbours and Enemies*.

president for Berlin (Zörgiebel) and the Prussian minister for the interior (Albert Grzesinski) were SPD members, and the KPD singled them out for particular criticism in their press in the wake of the *Blutmai* violence.¹³ The localised nature of the riots played into the Communist Party's hands. In Wedding, barricades were set up around Kösliner Strasse, a 'self-contained ghetto of poverty' and well-known stronghold of communist support, which subsequently become the focus of Klaus Neukrantz's novel *Barrikaden am Wedding*.¹⁴ Responding to the May bloodshed, the KPD acted quickly upon what it saw as a 'turning point in the political development of Germany,'¹⁵ initiating a process of mythologising 'Red Wedding' and Kösliner Strasse in particular, which would be 'ineffaceably embedded in the memories of the workers' for its heroic resistance against bourgeois, Social Democratic police brutality.¹⁶ The KPD hastily rearranged their twelfth annual party conference, which had been due to take place in Dresden from the 5th to the 10th May.¹⁷ They relocated the summit to Wedding, described in party documents as 'the stronghold of Communism [and] the stage of the heroic struggle at the barricades.'¹⁸ Wedding's reputation as a communist stronghold quickly spread throughout Germany, and similar proletarian districts in other German cities were often compared to and even referred to as Wedding. In 1931 the communist press reported on fighting between police and demonstrators following an unemployment demonstration in Segeroth, 'the largest proletarian quarter' in Essen, described by the article headline as 'Essen's Wedding.'¹⁹

While the *Blutmai* riots demonstrated a local politics increasingly characterised by violence, the city's local elections in November 1929 were the subject of an equally intense conflict between Social Democrats and Communists, played out in party newspapers and election propaganda. The previous round of local elections in October

13. 'Die Sozialdemokratie war der Organisator, der Provokateur, der Vollstrecker des Blutbades vom 1. Mai.' "Die Lehren der Berliner Maikämpfe," *Die Rote Fahne*, May 24, 1929.

14. Neukrantz, *Barricades in Berlin*, 45.

15. '[...] einen Wendepunkt der politischen Entwicklung in Deutschland.' "Die Lehren der Berliner Maikämpfe," *Die Rote Fahne*, May 24, 1929.

16. '[...] unauslöschlich in das Gedächtnis der Arbeiter eingegraben ist.' "Wedding," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 2, 1929.

17. Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919–1943* vol. 3: 1929–1943 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 28.

18. '[...] roten Wedding, der Hochburg des Kommunismus, dem Schauplatz der heldenhaften Barrikadenkämpfe [...]' KPD., *Waffen für den Klassenkampf*, 3.

19. 'Segeroth, dem größten Proletarierviertel von Essen.' "Schwere Zusammenstöße im Essener Wedding," *Die Rote Fahne*, May 24, 1931.

1925 had secured the SPD 73 of the 225 seats in the municipal council, against 47 seats for the DNVP and 43 for the KPD. SPD members were elected as chairs to fifteen of Berlin's district assemblies, including Wedding, while the remaining six were controlled by the centre- and right-wing parties, the DVP and DNVP.²⁰ The Social Democrats recognised the critical importance of the 1929 vote. Their experiences over the preceding four years had taught them that, despite the potential for a left-wing majority (*Linksmehrheit*) in the municipal assembly once SPD and KPD seats were combined, there was little chance of exploiting any such advantage, given the persistent lack of cooperation from the Communist Party. All too often, the SPD depended upon uneasy alliances with the DVP, Centre Party and Democrats, in order to pass legislation.²¹ The inability to form a left-wing majority had, in the eyes of the SPD, allowed the German right to take control of parts of the city. Their key concern ahead of the November 1929 elections was an increasing erosion of the SPD vote, with further gains made by the KPD and right-wing parties. The SPD acknowledged that they needed to convince the proletariat that they were making progress towards socialism. They also wanted to discourage the proletariat from voting for the KPD, which they regarded as throwing away votes to the right's advantage.²²

Political tensions ran high in Berlin in the run-up to the November elections. Wary of the threat it faced from both the far-left and right, the SPD threw its full weight into publishing propaganda materials that emphasised the improvements the party had made in Berlin. The KPD responded by drawing attention to what it saw as the SPD's failures in the city. What these propaganda materials amounted to were two conflicting visions of Weimarian Berlin. The propaganda manifested itself in a variety of highly visible and mass-reproducible forms, including press articles, election leaflets, street demonstrations and exhibitions. Not surprisingly, both parties concentrated on the city's suburban, working-class districts, where a large proportion of their supporters were based.

7.3 Social Democratic visions of a modern *Weltstadt*

As we have witnessed in the previous chapter in relation to the city's housing programme, Berlin's Social Democrats endeavoured to transform the city into a modern *Weltstadt* through a combination of socialist organisation and massive economic investment. The

20. SPD., *Sozialdemokratische Kommunal-Arbeit*, 5, 13.

21. *Ibid.*, 16-18.

22. Paul Hertz, "Der Kampf um die Seele des Proletariats," *Unser Weg* 1, no. 1 (1927): 2-4.

principle architect of the Social Democratic vision of Berlin was Martin Wagner, who held the post of *Stadtbaurat* (head of municipal planning) in the city from 1926 until 1933. Wagner's vision for Berlin is evident in his plans for a grand exhibition, intended to showcase the city and its status as a modern *Weltstadt*, as well as in the short-lived journal *Das neue Berlin*, which he edited with Adolf Behne. In 1927, Wagner published a proposal for an exhibition entitled *Die neue Zeit* (The new era) with a rhetoric full of Expressionist optimism and utopian intent. The exhibition, stated Wagner, 'will set out a new *raison d'être* and a new way of life for this new era.'²³ In the first issue of *Das neue Berlin*, Wagner declared that 'The new spirit of Berlin is the spirit of the *Weltstadt*.'²⁴

A new spirit, a new time, a new city—Wagner obsessed over the newness of Berlin during his tenure as chief city planner. In Wagner's eyes, Berlin had the potential to become a city of international importance alongside London, Paris and New York. New transport infrastructures and hubs, new housing, new leisure, healthcare and educational facilities, were all part of a universal vision which anticipated a doubling of Berlin's population, from four to eight million people. Likewise for Wagner, the 'spirit' of the city was fundamentally important, and while the city's growth to four million inhabitants had been borne out of a 'petit-bourgeois spirit,' the next four million, he insisted, was to be 'pregnant with a new spirit' associated with cultural progress rather than cultural decline.²⁵ Mindful of the fragmented nature of Greater Berlin—constituted as it was from a disparate scattering of individual cities, towns and villages—Wagner warned against the outdated provincialist point of view. He demanded that a new, *Weltbürgergeist* (international outlook) must prevail over old ways of thinking, which in turn would help to 'produce new urban structures in both content and form.'²⁶

23. '[...] sie will den nach einem neuen Lebensinhalt und einer neuen Lebensform strebenden Menschen der neuen Zeit [...]' Wagner, "Leitgedanken," 21.

24. 'Der Geist des neuen Berlins ist ein Weltbürgergeist.' Wagner, "Das neue Berlin," 4.

25. 'Ein Viermillionenentwicklung kleinbürgerlichen Zeitgeistes liegt hinter uns; eine Viermillionenentwicklung weltstädtischen, von kulturellem Gestaltungswillen durchtränkten neuen Zeitgeistes liegt vor uns.' Wagner, "Leitgedanken," 21.

26. 'Dieser Weltbürgergeist wird sich auch seinen Stadtkörper nach Inhalt und Form zu schaffen haben.' Wagner, "Das neue Berlin," 4.

A committed socialist and SPD member since 1921, Wagner played a leading role between 1924 and 1930 in the transformation of Berlin. He was instrumental in the creation of the German trade unions and the socialisation of Germany and Berlin's housing industry, through the establishment of the DEWOG and GEHAG building societies in 1924.²⁷ Wagner enjoyed a fruitful and close working relationship with Bruno Taut, lead architect for the GEHAG, and together they oversaw the construction of several large-scale housing projects across Berlin. Though he was a committed socialist, Wagner understood the importance of economic investment and the capitalist market to Berlin's future development. Of all the projects he oversaw during his tenure as chief city planner, this approach is nowhere more evident than in his plans for an international exhibition and congress centre in the West End of the city, and the anticipated 1931 *Bauausstellung* (Building Exhibition) due to be staged there.²⁸ Wagner also oversaw ambitious proposals to redevelop both Alexanderplatz and Potsdamer Platz into streamlined transport hubs, neither of which were fully realised.

Evident in Wagner's vision, and characteristic of Social Democratic plans for Berlin, was a sense of order and organisation, or *Ordnung*. Social Democratic planning policy sought to replace the ad-hoc growth of the city which had distinguished the prewar era, with a renewed sense of purpose and order. At a macro level, this was achieved through the implementation of the new building regulations in 1925, which separated future residential and industrial areas of the city for the first time.²⁹ On a local scale, this planning approach was characterised, for example, by the way in which new public parks were carved up into distinct areas designated for different uses, of which more later in this chapter. One commentator, writing in the Berlin SPD newsletter, described how the 1925 building regulations had transformed the city in line with the Social Democratic vision. 'The newly built areas appear unlike those built in earlier decades; here, we encounter a different spirit

27. Homann, *Martin Wagner*, 166.

28. Martin Wagner, "Eine Studie über die Gestaltung des Berliner Ausstellungsgeländes," *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst* 15, no. 1 (1931): 33-40.

29. Koeppen, "Bauzonen und Sondergebieten," 276.

[...] While we discern a certain individuality in the old houses, by each having a different appearance, isolating one neighbour from the others [...] the newly built areas create a closed uniformity.³⁰

The desire for order was symptomatic of the age. The ambitious proposals for new transport hubs, including one scheme intended to create a three-tier traffic intersection at Potsdamer Platz, separating road and pedestrian traffic, might appear to us fantastical, but reflected a broader inclination towards rationalisation, an inclination evident in the most mundane municipal directives.³¹ For example, there were regulations which restricted access to certain public spaces at specific times of the day, as was the case for the factory workers, whose streetcar tickets were only valid before seven in the morning and after five in the afternoon, or certain months of the year, as epitomised by regulations for the garden colonies, which restricted residence in the gardens to the warmer months between April and October.³² Within the new housing estates, architects including Bruno Taut sought to eradicate the supposedly disorganised prewar existence of Berlin's inhabitants by designing the interiors of the new homes according to Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management.³³

Besides a rationalised approach to planning, the other overriding characteristic of the new Berlin was one of decentralisation, or dispersal (*Auflockerung*). The outward growth of the city, with its attendant redistribution of both industry and population to the city's suburban districts was not a new phenomenon. As Friedrich Leyden pointed out, this trend had been progressing since the turn of the century.³⁴ With the creation of the new administrative area of Greater Berlin in 1920, this outward growth could be better planned and coordinated by the municipal authorities. Under Wagner's guidance, the Social Democratic government in

30. 'Die Neubauviertel muten anders an als die in den früheren Jahrzehnten erbauten, ein anderer Geist empfängt uns. [...] Während wir in den alten Häusern eine gewisse Eigenbrötelei erkennen, indem jedes ein anderes Aussehen hat, sich gewissermaßen ein Nachbar vom andern absondert [...] wirken die neuen Bauviertel durch ihre geschlossene Einheitlichkeit.' Max Radke, "Die Auflockerung Berlins. Wissenswertes aus der Berliner Bauordnung," *Kommunale Blätter der SPD. Berlin* 8, no. 12 (1931): 50-51.

31. "Platzhunger der Grossstädte," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 6 January, 1929.

32. Liang, "Lower-Class Immigrants," 100; Paul-Friedrich Willert, *Bauordnungsvorschriften*, 789.

33. For example, see the chapter entitled *Die bessere Anordnung der Wohnräume* (The better arrangement of living spaces) in: Taut, *Die neue Wohnung*, 64-89.

34. Leyden, *Groß-Berlin*, 94-95.

Berlin focussed much of their attention on a redistribution of the urban population out beyond the existing urban landscape, bringing about a geographical dispersion of the city's inhabitants. On this matter, Wagner and other urban planners in Germany—including Ernst May in Frankfurt—were indebted to the English garden-city movement.³⁵ We have already seen in the previous chapter, how the larger housing developments of the twenties—such as the GEHAG estates in Britz and Zehlendorf, the Siemensstadt estate in Charlottenburg, and the Friedrich-Ebert estate in Wedding—adhered to the concept of the *Gartenstadt*, helping to bring about shifts in the urban demographic.

7.4 Communist policy towards city and countryside

On the 3rd October 1929, in advance of the November local elections, *Die Rote Fahne* published a comprehensive list of their intentions—effectively amounting to a communist vision of a 'Red Berlin'—should they take political control of the city. In contrast to SPD policy, the sense of order was less apparent. Not because the Communists necessarily lacked a coherent vision, but because many of their demands implied revolutionary action: the abolishment of the local authorities, the dispossession of land and building materials, and the confiscation of large houses from the rich, and their redistribution to communal associations.³⁶ Beyond the radical demands lay several somewhat more mundane promises that echoed Social Democratic policy: the construction of water and electricity lines, road-building programmes, welfare measures, and better protection for the garden colonies.³⁷

This manifesto represented a specifically localised perspective intended to overturn the supposed injustices inflicted by Social Democratic planning policy, in contrast to the far loftier ideological aims of Communism as an international movement, to be found in the texts of the political movement's founding fathers. KPD and *Deutsche Werkbund* member Alexander Schwab—writing under the pseudonym of Albert Sigrist—dedicated a chapter of his book *Das Buch vom Bauen* (The Book of Building, 1931) to Communist attitudes to urbanisation, quoting at length from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and August Bebel.

35. Emphasising the continuity in German pre- and post-World-War architecture, John Maciuika has pointed out that Wagner studied under Hermann Muthesius, founder of the German Werkbund, while Theodor Fischer taught May. Both Muthesius and Fischer were pioneers of the German garden city movement in the early years of the century. Maciuika, *Before the Bauhaus*, 242, 234.

36. "Aufgaben und Forderungen der Kommunisten zum Wahlkampf : Kommunistische Kampfforderungen für das rote Berlin," *Die Rote Fahne*, October 3, 1929.

37. Ibid.

Schwab quoted from Engels' 1887 book *Die Wohnungsfrage* (The Housing Question): 'How do we solve the present housing problem? [...] How a social revolution would solve this problem, depends not just on the day-to-day circumstances but on many other questions, of which the *dissolution of the contrasts between city and land is the most crucial*.'³⁸ Next, Schwab recited points eight and nine from the Communist Manifesto, in which Marx and Engels called for unity amongst the workshops and factories in both urban and rural areas, and reiterated the 'gradual elimination of the differences between city and countryside.'³⁹ finally, Schwab turned to August Bebel's *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (The Woman and Socialism) in which the founding father of Social Democracy added his calls for the dissolution of the city, through the remigration of the urban population from the city to the land. Bebel says that, through a fusion of industrial and agricultural activity, 'life will achieve all the comforts of the big city without any of its disadvantages.'⁴⁰

Schwab himself argued that the beginnings of urban dissolution (*Auflösung*) were already apparent: 'It suffices to mention a few trends here: allotment gardens, the rambling movement, sports, the garden-city movement.'⁴¹ Schwab noted that the garden colony movement usefully highlighted the association with the land and an interest in agricultural production, as well as the ownership of the agricultural economic means by the individual. Of these trends which Schwab drew attention to, the garden-colony movement was hardly an *emergent* sign of urban dissolution, and as we have already seen, should be best viewed as a *persistence* of older rural customs within an urban landscape.

Other communists were more sceptical about Marx and Engels' dissolution of the city in the present-day context. Writing in *Die Form* in 1931, Leonie Pilewski conceded that, despite the frenzy of building activity occurring in Russia as part of Stalin's five Year Plan, eradicating the contrasts between the city and countryside remained a distant dream. At

38. 'Wie ist nun die Wohnungsfrage zu lösen? [...] Wie eine soziale Revolution diese Frage lösen würde, hängt nicht nur von den jedesmaligen Umstände ab, sondern auch zusammen mit viel weitergehenden Fragen, unter denen die Aufhebung des Gegensatzes von Stadt und Land eine der wesentlichsten ist.' Albert Sigrist [Alexander Schwab], *Das Buch vom Bauen : Wohnungsnot, Neue Technik, Neue Baukunst, Städtebau* (Berlin: Der Bücherkreis, 1930), 188. My emphasis.

39. '[...] die allmähliche Beseitigung des Unterschiedes von Stadt und Land.' *Ibid.*, 189.

40. 'Das Leben wird die Annehmlichkeiten der bisherigen Großstadt ohne ihre Nachteile erlangen.' *Ibid.*, 190-91.

41. 'Es muss an dieser Stell genügen, einige Stichworte zu nennen: Schrebergärten, Wanderbewegung, Sportbewegung, Gartenstadtbewegung.' *Ibid.*, 191.

best, urban planners could hope to built industrial and agrarian towns with populations of 50–60,000 inhabitants.⁴² The rapid industrialisation of cities such as Moscow was a significant obstruction to achieving any sort of urban dissolution and subsequent urban-rural equilibrium. Likewise, the prospects of complete urban dissolution remained an equally distant ambition for Berlin's Communists. Putting aside their own ideas about order and organisation in the run-up to the November local elections, they instead preoccupied themselves with disputing Social Democratic claims of urban improvements, by painting a picture of Berlin's continued disorganisation and decent into disorder. This task was made easier by, on one hand the apparent improvements being made in Russia under the five Year Plan, and on the other, the financial compromises increasingly faced by many building projects in Berlin.⁴³ In the next part of this chapter, four specific areas of Social Democratic planning policy in Berlin will be addressed—transport, housing, open or public space, and the garden colonies—along with the Communist's corresponding efforts to discredit and disrupt the Social Democrats' claims.

7.5 Berlin's transport network

The most effective means of encouraging urban growth and decentralisation in any city is to upgrade transport hubs within the urban centre, and extend the transport infrastructure outwards into the suburbs. Though Martin Wagner's plans for the rationalisation of Alexanderplatz and Potsdamer Platz never reached fruition, there were numerous other transportation projects completed in Berlin, which contributed to the outward growth and redistribution of the city.

Berlin's public transport companies extended the city's underground rail network in all directions throughout the 1920s. The extensions to the existing network—which dated back to the turn of the century—often responded to or influenced new housing development in the proletarian and suburban districts.⁴⁴ For example, the extension of the

42. Pilewski, "Neuer Wohnungsbau in der Sowjetunion," 100-02.

43. One of the best examples of a major housing project in Berlin being scuppered on financial grounds, was the Südgelände housing proposal for some 20,000 homes, first proposed in 1927 by an American building firm, Chapman & Co. For a full account, see: Georg Wendt, "Das Wohnungsbauprojekt der Bewoag," *Kommunale Blätter für Groß Berlin* 4, no. 11 (1927): 41-42.

44. For maps showing the chronological development of the Berlin underground network between 1913 and 1930, see: Ulrich Lemke, and Uwe Poppel, *Berliner U-Bahn* (Alba: Düsseldorf, 1985), 34, 36, 41, 45.

present-day U3 line, from Thielplatz to Krumme Lanke in the southwest suburb of Zehlendorf, clearly responded to the need to serve the new GEHAG and GAGFAH housing estates in the area. The station *Onkel Toms Hütte* was itself incorporated into the GEHAG housing development. Other underground lines stretched out into open land, increasing the surrounding land prices and encouraging building development, a trend which communist critics were quick to seize upon. One observer in *Die Rote Fahne* observed how the new line between Alexanderplatz and Friedrichsfelde attracted *Baulöwen* (or building magnates) as it extended out into the open and ‘expectant countryside’ (*wartendes Land*).⁴⁵ The most significant underground line development in Wedding during the 1920s was the extension to the Nord-Süd (north-south, now U6) line, which opened in 1923. Developers extended the route northwards, from Stettiner Bahnhof out to Seestrasse, at the fringes of the existing urban sprawl.⁴⁶ The Nord-Südbahn company purchased an extensive area of land on Müllerstrasse—alongside the new Seestrasse underground station—redeveloping it as a storage and maintenance depot for the new line. Plans to extend the Nord-Süd line further, from Seestrasse out to Tegel, began in 1929, but were abandoned in 1931 on financial grounds.⁴⁷

The twenties also saw continued upgrades and extensions to the city’s road and streetcar network. The Berlin Streetcar Company constructed two monumental streetcar depots in Charlottenburg and Wedding, both designed by the architect Jean Krämer, and both incorporating employee housing and offices into their structure.⁴⁸ The land upon which the streetcar company built the Wedding depot lay beyond the edges of the city. Standing six storeys high, the depot dominated the open landscape of fields, garden colonies and rural homesteads amongst which it stood. In December 1928, the city authorities brought together the privately run and disparate underground, streetcar and omnibus services in the city, creating the municipal *Berliner Verkehrs-AG* (Berlin Transport Company, or BVG) in the process. The SPD drew attention to this achievement in their 1929 local election propaganda (fig. 70). ‘The BVG has the task of improving, modernising and extending Berlin’s transport network. Numerous large developments in the centre of the city and in

45. Roland [pseud.]. “Auf Wohnungssuche,” *Die Rote Fahne*, March 28, 1929.

46. Arbeitskreis Berliner Nahverkehr ev, and Berliner Fahrgastverband IGEB ev, eds., *Berliner U-Bahn Chronik* (GVE: Berlin, 2007), 87.

47. *Ibid.*

48. For a description of the Charlottenburg depot, see: Dietrich, “Neuer Betriebsbahnhof,” 577-82. For the Wedding depot, see: Osborn, “Strassenbahnhof,” 610-11.

the suburbs testify to this' proclaimed election leaflets.⁴⁹ A photomontage accompanying the text sought to make clear the benefits that the extended transport network had for the working-class citizens of Berlin, visually describing how the journey from urban centre to rural periphery could be made for just 20 Pfennigs. The photomontage contained, running from the top of the page to the bottom, the inner courtyard of a tenement block, an omnibus, travel tickets and two ten-Pfennig coins, and finally, a selection of rural, scenic views from the outskirts of the city. One particular scene showed a group of young boys hiking along the riverside in Treptow, another a young couple reclining on a green slope in the Grunewald. In another election leaflet for the north Berlin districts of Reinickendorf, Pankow and Weißensee, the Social Democrats drew further attention to the 'cheap, time-saving' public transport facilities (*billige zeitsparende Verkehrsmittel*) they had built, which included new omnibus routes and streets, as well as new underground railway lines.⁵⁰

The Communists countered the SPD's claims of modernisation by focusing on areas where there was a perceived lack of progress and development. They described how workers in the north of the city regularly had to endure 'hour-long journeys in overfilled streetcars'⁵¹ in order to get to work. Furthermore, they also accused SPD-run district councils of trying 'with all their power to retain rural conditions' at the outskirts of the city. A critical piece of local election propaganda in *Die Rote Fahne* claimed that:

the streets in Reinickendorf are in large part surfaced in cobbles [while] other streets could by all means rival third-rate country roads. The asphalt street of Schönholzer Weg ends abruptly in thick sludge.⁵²

49. 'Die B.V.G. hat die Aufgabe, den Berliner Verkehr zu verbessern, zu modernisieren und zu erweitern. Zahlreiche große Bauten im Innern der Stadt und in den Vororten zeugen davon [...]' Anonymous. "[Untitled]." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

50. Anonymous. "Wir bauen für Euch billige zeitsparende Verkehrsmittel." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Reinickendorf, Pankow & Weißensee. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

51. 'Dagegen sind die Arbeiter zu stundenlang Fahrten in überfüllten Straßenbahnwagen gezwungen.' "Reinickendorf wählt die roten Kandidaten!," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 16, 1929.

52. 'Die Straßen in Reinickendorf-Ost sind zum größten Teil mit Kopfsteinen gepflastert. Andere Straße können durchaus mit Landstraßen dritten Ranges konkurrieren. Die Asphaltstraße

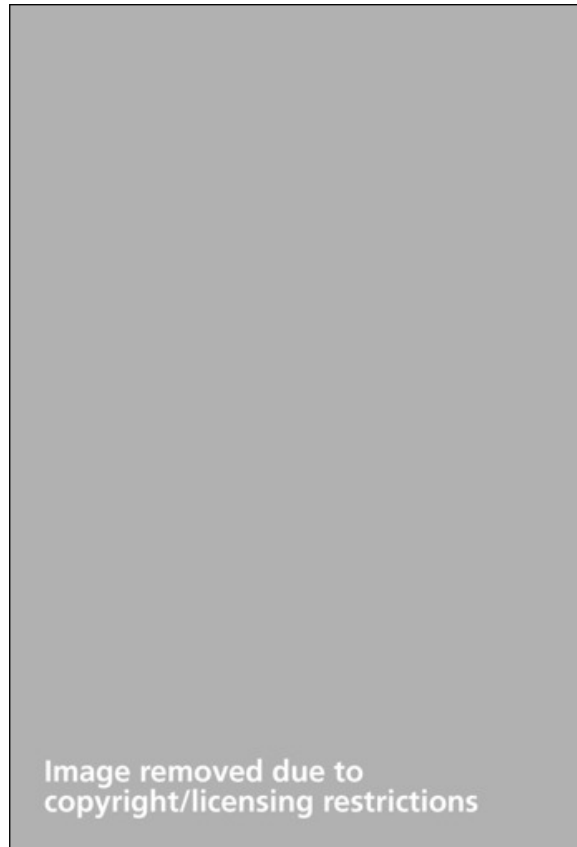


Figure 70: Page from SPD election leaflet, November 1929.
Reproduced from: Anonymous. "[Untitled]." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

This last image of a main street running through northern Berlin suddenly transforming from asphalt to mud, serves as another reminder of the contradictions that existed between Berlin as a *Weltstadt*, and the rural qualities of the city's working-class and suburban districts. Here, the two conflicting visions are brought together into close proximity. The asphalt street was a primary signifier of Berlin's modernity in the twenties, playing a popular role in many films including Joe May's *Asphalt* (1929) and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt* (1927). The sudden transition from asphalt road to muddy, unmade track tells us much about the superficial quality of the modern vision of Berlin that the Communists were determined to undermine. This particular image also brings to mind Otto Nagel's painting *Frühschicht* (Early Shift, 1929), in which a small crowd of labourers is shown, making their way towards a factory in the early hours of the morning (fig. 71). Nagel based the painting on his own experiences ten years earlier, recalling how he 'wandered over the open spaces towards the Bergmann factory at

Schönholzer Weg endet direkt in dickem Morast.' Ibid.

Wilhelmsruh [Reinickendorf] in the early morning.⁵³ The route shown is a muddy track, flanked by foliage and trees, and rising upwards on a shallow incline. In the background, at the end of the track, stands the factory with its billowing smokestacks. Nagel represented the scene from the viewpoint of the worker, who looks forward and up along the track, towards the factory, which dominates the top half of the scene. The workers ahead have their backs to the viewer. They are wrapped up in coats and caps against the cold weather, and trudge with seeming reluctance along the track. They also appear to lean into the slope, and the angle of their stances is mirrored by the trees alongside them, leading the observer's gaze up and in to the frame, towards the factory. This painting is something of an anomaly in Nagel's work from the late twenties, the vast majority of which depicted the dark and claustrophobic spaces of the inner-city proletarian quarters. I would venture that Nagel is consciously juxtaposing the modern factory and its labourforce with the rural aspects of Berlin's working-class districts. There is another layer to this reading: we should also interpret the space represented between the unseen workers' housing outside of the frame and the factory within, as a symbolic one. This space is presented as a wintry, harsh and uncultivated space, through which the workers must struggle uphill and along muddy tracks in the bitter cold. It suggests both an alienation of these men from their work, and a domination of their work over them.

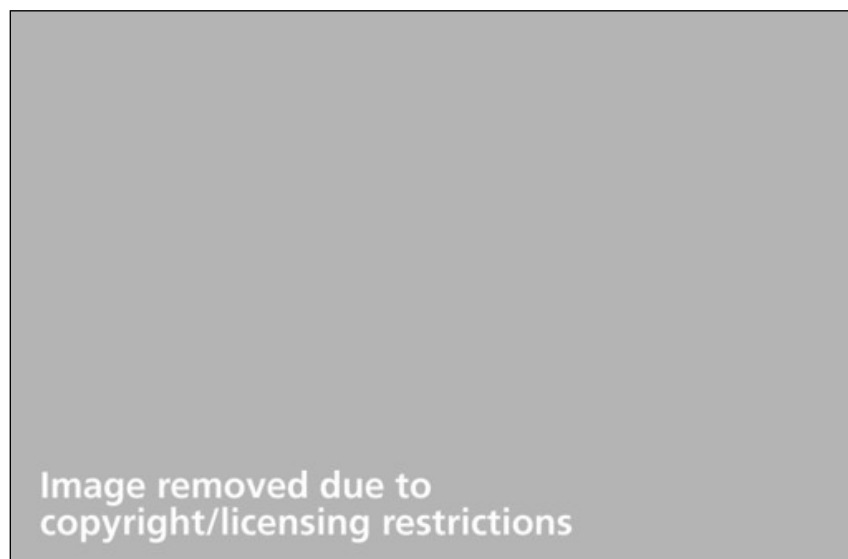


Figure 71: Otto Nagel, *Frühschicht*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 115.5cm. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

53. 'So kam die Arbeit "Frühschicht" 1930 zustande, als das Erlebnis bereits zehn Jahre zurücklag, in der Zeit, als ich selbst noch frühmorgens über das Freigelände in die Bergmannwerke nach Wilhelmsruh wanderte.' Nagel, *Leben und Werk*, 37.

Comparing Hans Baluschek's painting *Fabrik mit Werkhaltestelle* (Factory with station, 1929) with Nagel's *Frühschicht* reinforces the contrasting viewpoints already touched upon in SPD and KPD visions of Berlin (fig. 72). Baluschek's *Fabrik mit Werkhaltestelle* depicts a well-organised scene, with factory buildings and smokestacks dominating the background of the picture. Across the foreground of the scene runs a railway line with adjoining platform. A small stationmaster's office occupies the centre of the frame, outside of which stands the stationmaster himself, awaiting the arrival of workers. The murky half light and illuminated streetlamp suggests either dawn or dusk, and the arrival of either an early or late shift of employees. Interestingly, unlike Nagel's painting, Baluschek's work is entirely devoid of the workers themselves, but the various pictorial elements—factory, station, signs—all collude to suggest that this scene sees a regular stream of workers going to and from work. While Baluschek's scene emphasises the organisation of the workers through the ordered spaces of the transport network and the factory, Nagel's painting suggests quite otherwise: a distinctly rural view of the same theme.

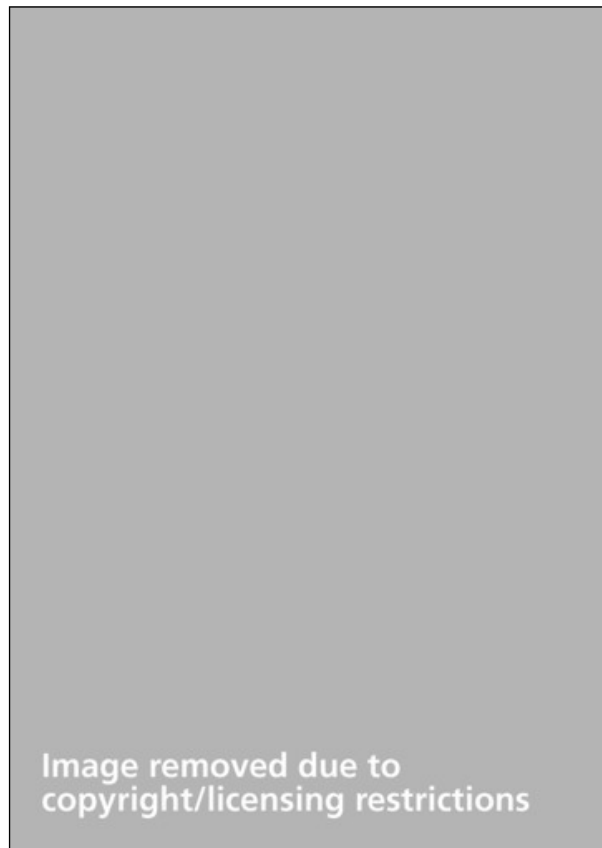


Figure 72: Hans Baluschek, *Fabrik mit Werkhaltestelle*, 1929.
Oil painting, Berlin-Museum, Berlin.

7.6 Berlin's tenement districts, housing crisis and housing programme

The ongoing housing crisis was one of the most pressing political concerns affecting the working-classes in Berlin. Few concerns appeared so frequently in the city's communist and Social Democratic press throughout the twenties, who gave it particular prominence in the run-up to the local elections in November 1929.⁵⁴ This significant political theme actually consisted of several distinct dialogues, each of which merits closer attention. Representations of daily life in the tenement blocks regularly featured in the illustrated press, while the political newspapers focused on the ongoing housing crisis. And while the Social Democrats tried to emphasise the progress they had made with their house building programme, the Communists took the Social Democrats to task over its failures.

In the run-up to the November local elections, Berlin's Social Democrats and Communists meted out the blame for the housing crisis in different directions. The Social Democrats blamed the previous regime and its policy of unfettered capitalist speculation in the building market for the present predicament. On the eve of the elections, a full-page article in *Vorwärts* reminded its readers that 'The building entrepreneurs of the earlier period were only in it for themselves, and their disposal of land inconsiderately selfish.'⁵⁵ The Social Democrats emphasised the unapologetic stance that capitalists and anti-republicans adopted when it came to the housing question. A cartoon which appeared in the pages of *Vorwärts* showed a cross-section of a tenement complex with two narrow courtyards in semi-darkness (fig. 73). In one of the courtyards stands a bourgeois figure and a proletarian worker. 'The bourgeoisie, and not Social Democracy, have created our urban culture' proclaims the bourgeois, gesticulating proudly to the tenements around him. The proletarian is less impressed and, with his hands in his pockets, replies sardonically: 'Quite. That's obvious in this tenement courtyard.'⁵⁶ The Social Democrats were also becoming increasingly aware of the renewed threat emerging from the centre and right, and particularly sought to highlight the potential danger to their housing programme that

54. Articles on housing policy, as well as attacks on the housing policy of political opponents regularly featured in the political press in the run-up to the November elections. Compare, for example:

"Unser Kampf gegen Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend," *Vorwärts*, November 16, 1929;

"Proletarische Wohnungsbaupolitik," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 8, 1929.

55. 'Dem Bauunternehmer von früher war nur daran gelegen, den ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Grund und Boden rücksichtslos selbstsüchtig auszunutzen.' "Unser Kampf gegen Wohnungsnot und Wohnungselend," *Vorwärts*, November 16, 1929.

56. "Bürgerliche Stadtkultur," *Vorwärts*, November 13, 1929.

an electoral shift to the right could precipitate. Another cartoon appearing in *Vorwärts* shortly before the November ballot, portrayed a transformed urban landscape, in which the tenements are foregrounded by an open-air swimming pool and sports field, upon which crowds of people are at play (fig. 74). Looking on from the sidelines stand two portly bourgeois figures, whose conversation runs thus: ‘To think, a good twenty blocks of flats would have been built here ... True, we’ll get the majority on the 17th November and put a stop to these sports grounds!’⁵⁷



Figure 73: “Bürgerliche Stadtkultur,” *Vorwärts*, November 13, 1929.



Figure 74: “Hausbesitzer und Sportplätze.” *Vorwärts*, November 7, 1929.

57. “Hausbesitzer und Sportplätze,” *Vorwärts*, November 7, 1929.

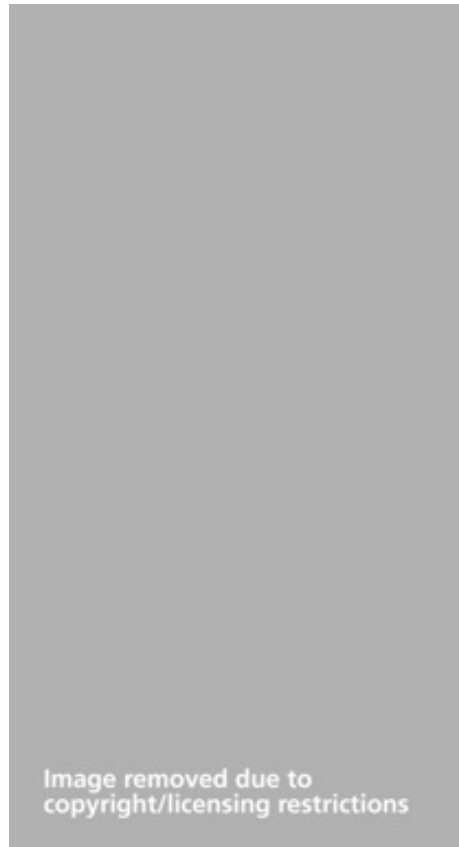


Figure 75: Communist perspectives on Social Democratic housing policy.
Reproduced from: *Die Rote Fahne*, November 15, 1929.

Rather than concur with the Social Democrats by blaming the previous, capitalist regime for the present housing crisis, the Communist Party preferred to shift the blame to the Social Democrats, holding them responsible for the perpetuation of the crisis throughout the twenties. They publicly argued that the Social Democrats had little genuine interest in alleviating the housing crisis for the working-classes. In the run-up to the elections, *Die Rote Fahne* carried a sketch that showed readers how they thought the Social Democrats used their housing interest tax [*Hauszinssteuer*] to exploit the proletariat (fig. 75).⁵⁸ According to the caption, twenty-five percent of the tax, extracted from the proletariat, went on building new homes for the rich, while the remaining seventy-five percent went towards the upkeep of state bureaucracy. This single illustration deftly addressed a whole range of issues. It contrasted the decrepit old tenements with the new housing blocks whose rents lay beyond the pockets of the proletariat. It also charged the Social Democrats with underinvestment in housing, and took another swipe at the perceived levels of bureaucracy in the state. Out of the pile of coins representing state bureaucracy, extended a

58. "So wird die Hauszinssteuer verwandt!," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 15, 1929.

truncheon with a police helmet balanced on top, alluding to the notion of the social-fascist police state and its heavy-handedness, and recalling the events of the *Blutmai* riots earlier that year.

7.7 Contrasting perspectives of life in the tenements

1929 and 1930 saw a spate of illustrated photo essays and artistic explorations of the *Meyers-Hof* complex in Berlin, the city's largest and most populous tenement blocks—the so-called city within a city.⁵⁹ However, although numerous photographers and journalists documented the exterior appearance of the *Meyers-Hof*, only the most politically committed commentator ventured into the tenement apartments to describe the conditions inside. Walter Petry's photoessay on the *Meyers-Hof*, which appeared in Martin Wagner and Adolf Behne's magazine *Das neue Berlin* in October 1929, offered up a Social Democratic perspective on tenement life. Petry began by concentrating on the façade and entrance to the building:

In the centre of the façade, below the individual stately balconies, stands the entrance for the rear-tenement dwellers, a tunnel, which reveals the interior of the “castle.”⁶⁰

Petry then turned his attention to the state of the rooms in which the poorest lived, referring to the apartments as ‘homes’ (*Wohnungen*) in inverted commas as a means of questioning their suitability as such. However, he ventured no further than the corridors leading into these ‘homes,’ failing to describe them firsthand. Instead, Petry quickly turned to the more positive aspects of life in the *Meyers-Hof*, and in particular the residents' celebration of the harvest festival on the 4th August. Petry elaborated on the sense of tradition and history shared by many inhabitants of the complex. He described one old lady who moved into the *Meyers-Hof* as a girl in 1872, and the porter who had sat in his booth for the last thirty years. Despite the fact the Petry suggested that many of the homes in the *Meyers-Hof* did

59. A complete document of the *Meyers-Hof* complex and its coverage in the illustrated press can be found in: Johann Friedrich Geist, and Klaus Kürvers, *Berliner Miethaus*, 402-11. Franz Hessel's visit to the *Meyers-Hof* is recorded in: Hessel, “Norden,” 219. Moholy-Nagy's 1931 film *Berliner Stilleben* contains extensive footage of life in the tenement's courtyards.

60. ‘Genau in der Mitte, unterhalb des einzigen herrschaftlichen Balkons, sitzt das Einschluflsloch der Hinterhausbewohner, ein Tunnel, der der Blick ins Innere der “Burg” freigibt.’ Petry, “Ackerstraße 132,” 199.

not deserve the name, he also set out to paint a picture of security, acceptance and stability felt by tenants. He finished his essay by noting that ‘The sense of order, the docility and humility of the residents is unbreakable.’⁶¹ The second page of the short essay featured two photographs, one taken from an upper-floor window looking down at a courtyard from a sharp angle, and the other featuring a group of four young children playing in the courtyard. Both photographs privileged aesthetic detail over living conditions, with the latter photograph focusing on the disintegrating plaster walls in the background. rather than the children in front of them. In their role as magazine editors, Wagner and Behne did not miss the opportunity to contrast this latter photograph with images on the following page of a modern children’s day centre, designed by Erwin Gutkind in north Berlin.⁶²

The photographer Traut Hajdu also wrote a short essay on the *Meyers-Hof* complex with accompanying photographs, which appeared in the 1st May 1929 edition of the *AIZ*. Under the subtitle *Eine Stadt in der Stadt* (A City within the City), Hajdu’s article also began by describing the deceptive outward appearance of the notorious tenement complex, and the vast spaces hidden behind its façade. She described the scene through the front entrance, alongside her now-famous photograph of the same view (fig. 76):

[...] when you look through the entrance into the courtyard, a passageway opens up that is so long, you cannot see the end as it recedes in perspective. Archway after archway, between which are six courtyards seen as patches of light. Behind the front block lie five grey rear blocks, each one the same as the other.⁶³

61. ‘Dieser Geist der Ordnung, der Fügsamkeit und Bescheidenheit der Bewohner ist unsterblich.’ *Ibid.*, 200.

62. *Ibid.*, 201.

63. ‘Blickt man aber durch die Einfahrt in den Hof, dann öffnet sich ein langer Gang, so lang, dass der Hintergrund in der Perspektive schon zu verschwimmen beginnt. Torbogen hinter Torbogen, dazwischen, als halbhelle flecken, sechs Höfe. Hinter dem Vorderhaus liegen fünf Quergebäude, eins wie das andere, graue Kasernen.’ Hajdu, “‘Meyershof’,” 5.

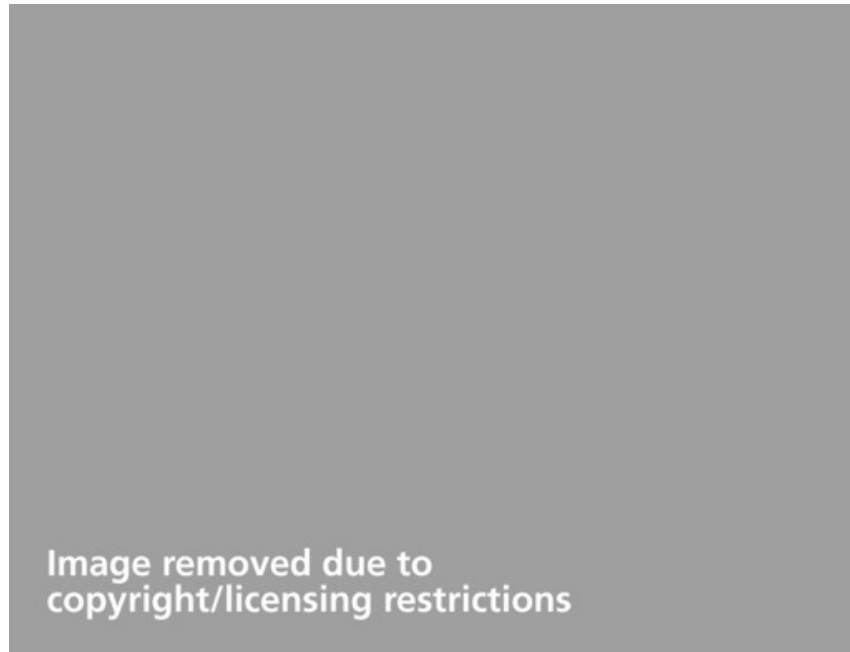


Figure 76: Traut Hajdu, entrance to Meyers-Hof tenement block, 1929.
Bildarchiv, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Hajdu then turned her attention to the worst rooms in the cellars, but ventured further into their interiors than Petry had done. She described the ‘pitch-black, dank murkiness’ (*‘pechschwarzer, feuchtkalter finsternis’*) of the rooms and attic spaces in which the poorest lived. One photograph featured the interior of an attic room, in which evicted tenants had set-up makeshift camps in empty water-storage tanks. Besides venturing into the tenement interiors, Hajdu also uncovered the insignificant details of daily life, which Petry avoided by concentrating on the annual tenement festival. In another photograph of an apartment interior, a woman calls upon her neighbour, to inform her that the distributor of municipal registration documents is doing the rounds. Concluding her short exploration, Hajdu branded the *Meyers-Hof* a ‘Zilleburg’—literally, one of Heinrich Zille’s ‘castles,’ which the artist had so frequently drawn—and a ‘celebration of building capital’ created by those interested in making profits rather than healthy homes.⁶⁴

On the 25th August 1929, the popular illustrated newspaper *BIZ* published a feature on the *Meyers-Hof*, which offered a far less politically engaged focus on life in the Berlin tenements. Under the subheading *A vanishing people’s tradition in Berlin*, the article dealt entirely with the harvest festival celebrated in the *Meyers-Hof*.⁶⁵ By focussing on the

64. ‘eine Feste des Baukapitals [...]’ Ibid.

festival—which Petry had described as one of the two most important dates in the year of the tenement’s inhabitants—the article’s author, UHU-magazine editor Friedrich Kroner, managed to completely avoid any reference to the poverty and day-to-day conditions in the tenement block. Kroner signed the article with the pseudonym Mimsch, possibly to preserve his identity from Bertolt Brecht, who had satirised Kroner and his own luxurious modern apartment two years earlier in his play *Nordseekrabben, oder Die moderne Bauhaus-Wohnung* (North-sea Prawns, or the modern Bauhaus-Home, 1927).⁶⁶ The photographs accompanying the essay showed the tenement’s inhabitants enjoying the festival. In one image a group of children look on as the band plays. Below, another image looks across a crowd of children, many of whom wear paper hats emblazoned with the Islamic star and crescent. In a further photograph, four old women, seated on wooden chairs, look on from the sidelines. Yet another photograph shows a view looking down upon the crowded courtyard, decorated with bunting. The article even reproduced the handwritten festival programme for the day. These images contrast strikingly with those used in Hajdu’s and particularly Petry’s articles. Although Kroner deliberately steered clear of describing the negative aspects of tenement life, the photographs accompanying his text actually capture something more of the ‘dense’ and ‘heartfelt’ atmosphere which Franz Hessel found in the tenement courtyards: the social bonds of working-class communities (fig. 77).⁶⁷

65. Mimsch [Friedrich Kroner]. “‘Erntefest’ in der Mietskaserne,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 25, 1929.

66. Schwartz, “Form follows Fetish : Adolf Behne and the Problem of ‘Sachlichkeit’,” 62.

67. Hessel, “Der Verdächtige,” 8.

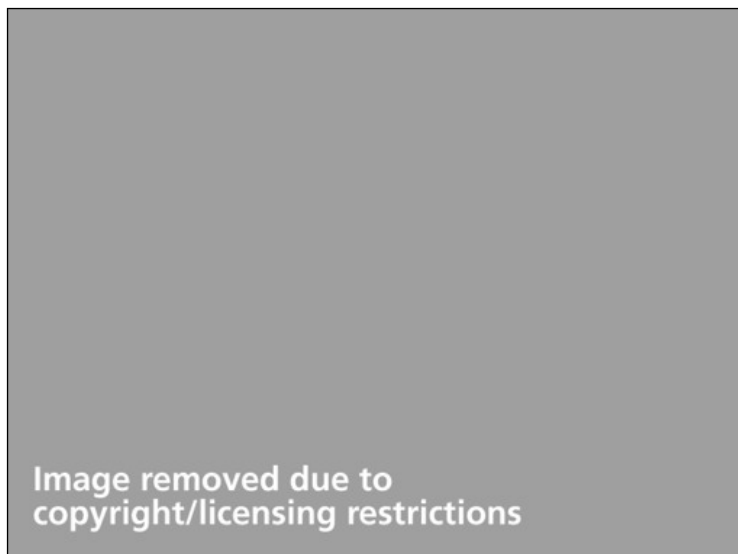


Figure 77: Photographs from Friedrich Kroner's "'Erntefest' in der Mietskaserne," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 25, 1929.

7.8 Communist representations of the housing crisis

The Communist Party in Berlin attacked the Social Democrats for the persistence of the housing crisis, and particularly seized upon the fact that hundreds of families across the city had to resort to living in makeshift shelters in the garden colonies. Throughout the twenties, the radical left-wing press drew continual attention to the conditions that many members of the proletariat endured in huts and colonies that resembled the slums of the *Gründerzeit*. These images were the Communists' primary weapon for undermining Social Democrats' claims of progress being made in the provision and improvement of housing

(fig. 78). In doing so, the Communists inverted the previously positive image of the *Laubenkolonien*—as frequently depicted in the prewar era by Heinrich Zille (fig. 26) and Hans Baluschek—into visions of proletarian poverty and desperation.

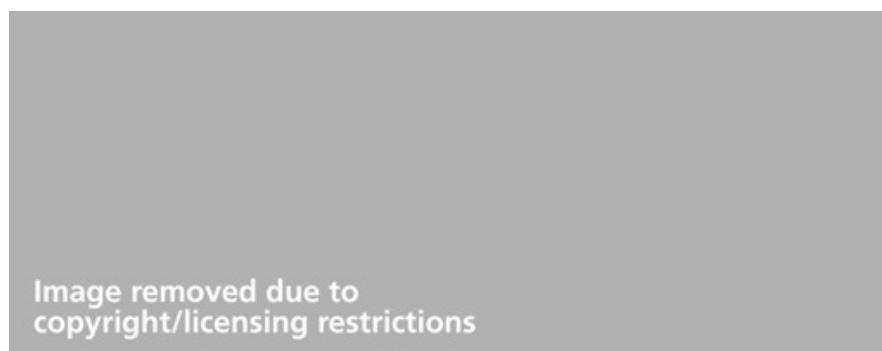


Figure 78: Family of eight living in a hut on the Blumenthal heathland, Berlin.
Source: Fritz Rück, "Am Rande der Großstadt," *Magazin für Alle*, November 1929.

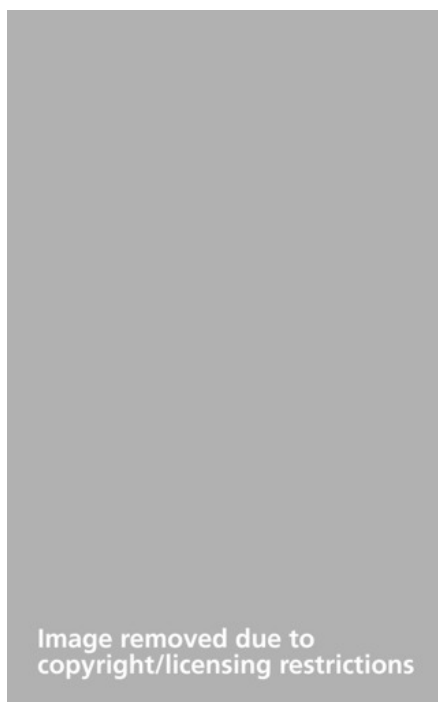


Figure 79: "Notwohnung im Taubenschlag für eine dreiköpfige Familie,"
Die Rote Fahne, August 27, 1926.

Long-term residence in garden colonies was not unusual throughout the interwar years, and was the result of housing shortages, expensive rents and long-term unemployment. Strictly speaking, permanent residence of the garden colonies was restricted to the months between April and October each year, and residents had to prove that they had housing provision

elsewhere.⁶⁸ However a government ordinance from 1923 did allow permanent residence where the inhabitants could prove that they had no other place to live.⁶⁹ One frequent strategy that the Communists adopted in order to emphasise the debasement of the proletariat, was to compare their living conditions to those of livestock. In August 1926, *Die Rote Fahne* claimed that one worker and his wife and child in Berlin-Cöpenick had resorted to living in a pigeon coup. The report described how the coup had been lashed together from egg crates. The single room within this ‘home’ contained a mattress lying on bare earth, a narrow table, and a solitary chair. In wet weather, the rain poured into the dwelling from every crevice.⁷⁰ The report also carried a photograph—at this point in time a rare occurrence in the daily newspapers—showing the worker’s wife standing outside their home, holding the young child in her arms (fig. 79). The following day, *Die Rote Fahne* printed a further photograph of the wife and child outside of their ‘home.’⁷¹ The similarities of these photographs with Heinrich Zille’s prewar illustrations of life in the garden colonies is striking. The huts in Zille’s drawings were just as ramshackle in their appearance, lying in a sea of mud, and accessible by planks of wood serving as a garden path. But while Zille emphasised the positive aspects of these situations—proletarian initiative, the garden as a place of retreat and relaxation, family values strengthened—the later communist portrayals sought to emphasise quite the opposite: the proletariat dependent upon and at the mercy of Social Democratic housing policy, the *Laube* as a squalid dwelling suitable only for animals, the threat to the family and to the individual’s health. Examples of such scandals were abundant throughout communist newspapers. Another story in *Die Rote Fahne* from January 1929 described an immigrant working as a diary farmer, who was compelled to live in a horse stall.⁷² One month later, *Die Rote*

68. Koeppen, *Bauordnung*, 43.

69. Paul-Friedrich Willert, *Bauordnungsvorschriften*, 789.

70. ‘Der Taubenschlag ist nur ganz provisorisch zusammengeschlagen. Das gesamte Baumaterial gaben einige ausgediente Eierkisten. [...] Bei Regenwetter verkriecht sie sich in das Loch, das ihnen die Unterkunft bietet. [...] Im Raum selbst, auf blanker Erde, liegt eine Matratze; dass Bett aufzustellen, war nicht möglich. Außer einem schmalen Küchentisch und einem Stuhl konnte nichts weiter untergebracht werden.’ “Notwohnung im Taubenschlag für eine dreiköpfige Familie,” *Die Rote Fahne*, August 27, 1926.

71. “‘Wohnungsfürsorge’ in Köpenick,” *Die Rote Fahne*, August 28, 1926.

72. “Wohnung im Pferdestall,” *Die Rote Fahne*, January 8, 1929.

Fahne revealed that a land owner in Plotzensee in north Berlin had installed several cattle wagons on his property, renting them out to homeless families at a cost of thirty Reichsmarks a month.⁷³

7.9 Social Democratic representations of housing progress

It is difficult to verify the true extent of the housing poverty which the KPD drew attention to. The communist press naturally highlighted the worst-possible examples they could find. But how widespread such instances were is another question. Meanwhile, the Social Democrats were hardly likely to acknowledge or respond to such claims in their election propaganda. But at the same time, they could not hide away from the fact that housing shortages and the housing crisis persisted, despite all their efforts to build new homes. The SPD faced a conundrum when it came to emphasising their house-building achievements in their propaganda. They repeatedly drew attention to the progress that had been made in building new housing, but readily accepted that more units needed to be built. They also conceded that much new housing remained unaffordable for many families.⁷⁴

In their 1929 local election publicity, the Social Democrats concentrated on highlighting their most significant achievements in housing, rather than dwelling on the compromises and difficulties encountered. The various GEHAG estates in Britz, Zehlendorf and Prenzlauer Berg played a dominant role in the attempt to convince the electorate of the Social Democrats' housing success. The various regional election pamphlets that were distributed prior to the November elections focused on those housing estates built locally. For example, the Neukölln district leaflets concentrated on the GEHAG estate in Britz and the Prenzlauer Berg district publicity on the new GEHAG estates around Grell- and Schönlanke Strasse.⁷⁵ The GEHAG estates were obvious choices to publicise, with their striking and modern design. They epitomised the radical improvements in housing which the Social Democrats had long promised: light, sun and air, in modern, clean apartment

73. "Wie die Proletarier 'wohnen' : 30 Mark Monatsmiete für einen Viehwagen," *Die Rote Fahne*, February 6, 1929.

74. The expensive nature of housing is noted, for example, with reference to Jean Krämer's streetcar housing estate in Wedding: "Der neue Wedding," *Vorwärts*, September 12, 1930.

75. Anonymous. "Wählt SPD Liste 1." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Neukölln. (Berlin: SPD, 1929); Anonymous. "Von der Wohnhöhle zur Sonnenwohnung." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 2nd edition, Prenzlauer Berg. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

blocks. In those districts where achievements in housing development were less pronounced, there appeared a gap between the representation of how people had to live and how they should live. This lack of conviction is evident in the first November election leaflet distributed in Wedding. Here, two photographs are juxtaposed (fig. 80). In the first is shown a dingy corner in a tenement courtyard with a wooden toilet outhouse. ‘This is how people once lived’ exclaimed the caption, carefully avoiding the fact that this is how many of Wedding’s inhabitants *still* lived. The second photograph presented the interior courtyard of the Zeppelinplatz housing development in the district, with its extensive gardens and greenery. The caption to this second photograph declared that ‘this is how people should live.’⁷⁶ Unable to hide behind the emphatic representations of housing estates such as those built by the GEHAG in Britz, Zehlendorf and Prenzlauer Berg, the Wedding propaganda leaflets demonstrate a certain sense of ambivalence towards the housing problem, and attempts at its alleviation.

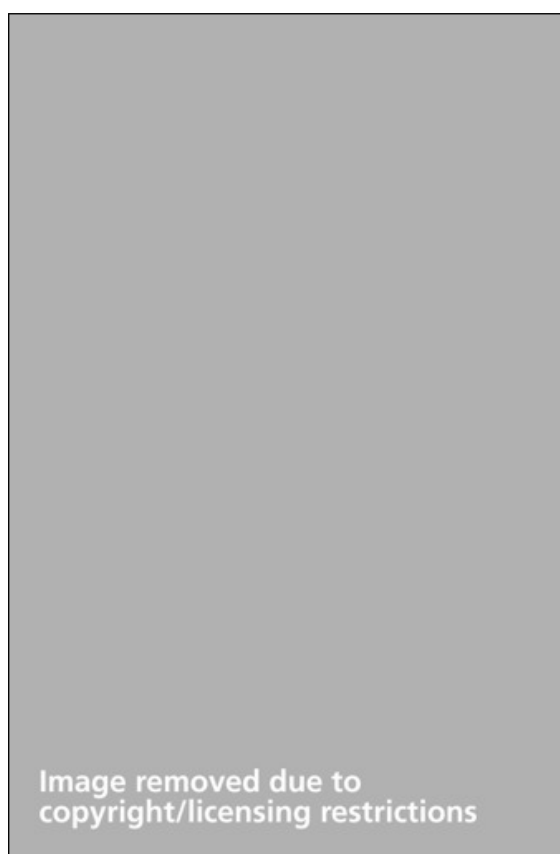


Figure 80: SPD election leaflet for Wedding district, November 1929. Reproduced from: Anonymous. "Sozialdemokraten schufen Kinderspielplätze und gesunde Wohnungen!" *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Wedding. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

76. Anonymous. "Sozialdemokraten schufen Kinderspielplätze und gesunde Wohnungen!" *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Wedding. (Berlin: SPD, 1929). My emphasis.

7.10 Promoting *Ordnung* in the new housing estates

The 1929 local elections arrived too early for the Social Democrats in Wedding to point to the Friedrich-Ebert housing estate as an exemplar of local housing policy. At this point in time, the new development resembled little more than a building site, but the spatial order and regularity of the estate—as described in the previous chapter—was already discernible from the shells of those blocks already constructed. In late 1929, the new *Zeilenbau* estates were growing up around the city: the Carl-Legien estate in Prenzlauer Berg, the Buschallee development in Weißensee, the new Siemensstadt blocks in Charlottenburg, the Weiße Stadt in Reinickendorf. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the forms of these new housing estates were based on egalitarian principles that dispensed with the rigid hierarchical class structures that had characterised the prewar tenement blocks. They also offered to the resident cleaner spaces, improved facilities, and access to more light, space and air than the tenements had yielded. The spatial organisation which precipitated these social improvements could, on the other hand, be seen as having a corresponding detrimental social effect. The open geometric quality and spatial distribution of the new estates also permitted a greater organisation of daily life than the tenements had ever allowed.

There was a tendency towards an increased codification of spaces for different uses in the most modern of the new housing estates. In the grounds surrounding the blocks, space was divided between tenant gardens, green spaces and children's play areas, with fences and signs erected to enforce such distinctions. Within the buildings, architects created communal spaces, including central washing and drying areas, kindergartens, and commercial spaces for local shops. Some estates, such as the Britz development, even had their own school. What the new estates omitted said just as much as the facilities they incorporated. There were hardly any 'pubs on the corner' (*Kneipe um die Ecke*) to be found in the new estates: a product of—depending on which way one looks at it—health reformers (*Lebensreformer*) within the Social Democratic Party, who advocated temperance during the twenties, and argued that drinking was a bourgeois leisure pastime, or Social Democratic paranoia over the potential role pubs played in propagating subversive political (communist) machinations.⁷⁷ The housing companies provided tenants

77. Otto Jenssen, *Sozialistische Lebensreform : Marxismus und Alkoholismus* (Berlin: Deutscher Arbeiter-Abstinenten-Bund, 1925), 10, 21.; Adelheid von Saldern, *Häuserleben : Zur Geschichte städtische Arbeiterwohnens vom Kaiserreich bis heute* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1995), 130-31.

with copies of the estate's *Hausordnung* (literally, Rules of the House)—often in poster format positioned in the lobby of each block—which stipulated tenants' responsibilities with regard to a range of issues, including noise, restrictions on playing on the estate's lawns, and the responsible disposal of refuse.

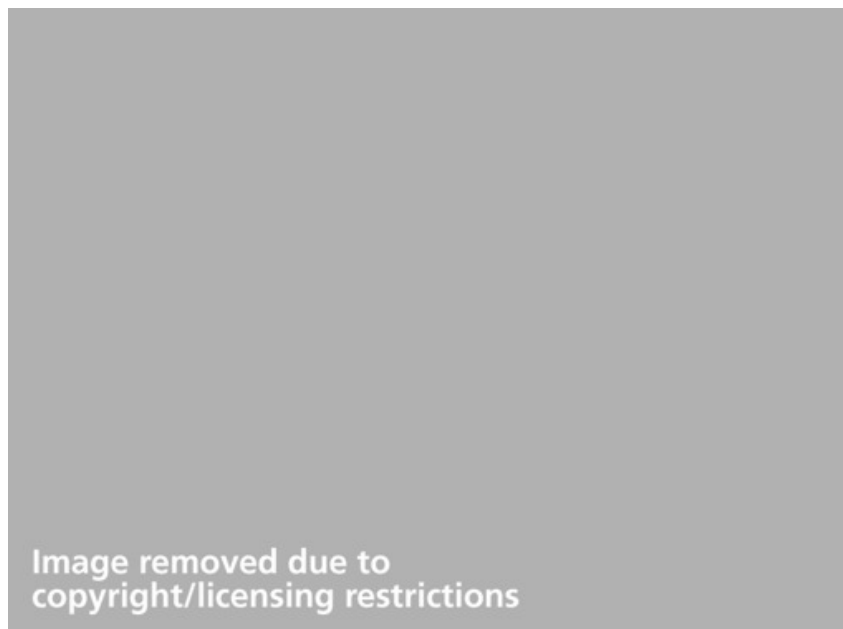


Figure 81: SPD election leaflet for the district of Neukölln. Source: Anonymous. "Wählt SPD Liste 1." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Neukölln. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

Photographic documents of the new housing estates advanced a new sense of social order and cleanliness, which was particularly emphasised by the regularity of the architectural spaces and smoothness of the surfaces they portrayed. These photographs were almost always macro views, taken either from the air or through wide-angled lenses (fig. 81). They reinforced a sense of total order, which easily obscured the political complexities of everyday life that the new estates were never immune from. Even though many new estates were dominated by salaried employees, civil servants and other middle-class occupational groups who were commonly associated with the Social Democratic Party, they still contained many others of working-class occupation or different political orientation. Berlin's address book records can be relied upon to indicate the occupational class of estate residents, but political inclination is less easy to discern. In the case of the Schillerpark estate in Wedding, KPD supporter Hilde Benjamin recalled that in 1926, amongst a majority of Social Democratic tenants, six fellow KPD comrades lived in the same block as herself and her husband, the school doctor George Benjamin, with a further

six comrades housed in a neighbouring block.⁷⁸ Benjamin's recollection supports the claim by recent historians that, despite a dominance of better-paid, middle-class tenants, Berlin's new housing estates did house a minority of blue-collar workers and communist supporters.⁷⁹ Given the antagonisms which we know occurred between Social Democratic and communist supporters on the streets and in the pages of the political press, it would be naïve to assume that friction between the two groups of supporters did not manifest itself in the new estates; the aura of harmony that surrounded the new estates was always liable to be disrupted by political disagreement. Petty squabbles broke out in Britz, for example, when the newsletter *Heim am Buschkrug*—published for the residents of the new GEHAG and DEGEWO estates in the district—was deemed to have broken rules regarding the political neutrality of its content. The printer swiftly refused to have anything more to do with the paper. Rival newsletters appeared, leaving the *Heim am Buschkrug* editors to look for another printer, who published just three more, single-page issues, before the project was abandoned.⁸⁰ Tensions are evident in another estate newsletter, published by an independent editor for the residents of the Weiße Stadt estate in Reinickendorf. Entitled *Die neue Stadt* (The new City) it suggested that neighbourly frictions, class prejudices and political agitation lay beneath the surface of the orderly, often empty spaces and clean façades presented by SPD publicity (fig. 82). The Primus building society began construction of the Weiße Stadt estate in 1929, with the first residents moving in in mid-1930, and construction finishing in 1931.⁸¹ In total, some 814 apartments comprised the development, consisting mostly of 1- to 2½-room apartments.⁸² The first residents of the Weiße Stadt were, according to one resident, former Bauhaus director and communist sympathiser Hannes Meyer, largely comprised of 'salaried employees, the petit bourgeois and intelligentsia,' though again, address book records suggest there was a significant scattering of blue-collar workers, including factory labourers, mechanics and bus drivers.⁸³

78. Benjamin, *Georg Benjamin*, 176.

79. Andrea Lefevre has pointed out that the Friedrich-Ebert estate was home to several prominent Communist supporters: Andrea Lefevre, "Die Friedrich-Ebert-Siedlung," in *Wedding*, ed. Helmut Engel, et al., *Geschichtslandschaft Berlin* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1990), 441. Ian Boyd-Whyte has taken data from the Berlin address books, which show that of the 1,800 residents of the GEHAG estate in Britz in 1927, 85 were unskilled workers. Whyte, "Berlin 1870–1945," 238.

80. Anonymous. "Wohngemeinschaft?," *Heim am Buschkrug*, 17 August, 1928.

81. Jörg Haspel, and Annemarie Jaeggi, *Housing Estates*, 73.

82. Berning, et al., *Berliner Wohnquartiere*, 144.

83. 'Die Bewohner der Siedlung sind zum großen Teil Angestellte, Kleinbürger und Intelligenz.'

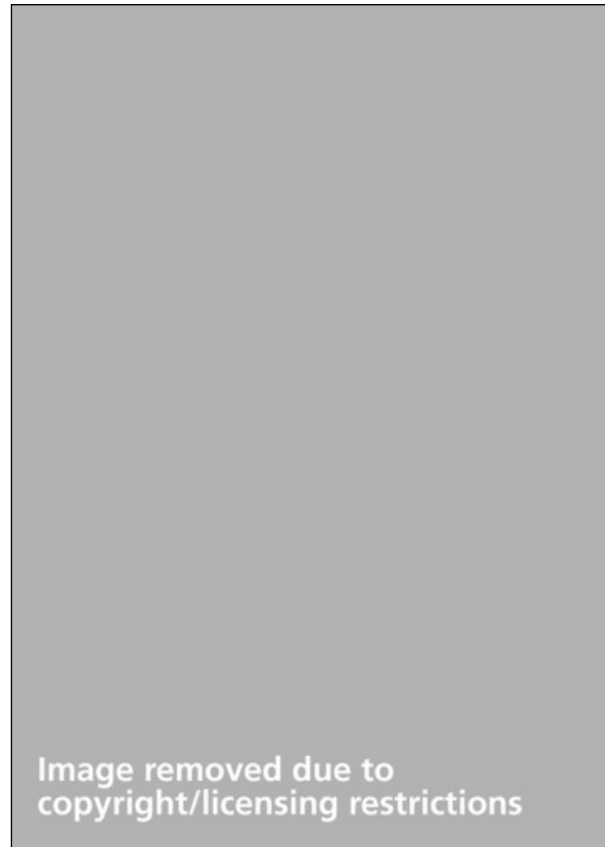


Figure 82: Example of the Weiße Stadt residents' newsletter *Die neue Stadt* from 1930. Fritz Ebers. "Mieterversammlungen," *Die neue Stadt*, 20 October, 1930.

Each edition of *Die neue Stadt* featured letters from estate tenants, which reveal the residents' dissatisfaction with some aspects of the design and build-quality of the homes in the estate, as well as friction between neighbours who held contrasting ideas on hygiene and behaviour. Complainants wrote of rubbish bins being left outside their windows, parents allowing their children to run amok on the grass lawns of the estate rather than keeping to the designated playing areas, and of some neighbours inconsiderately shaking mops and emptying brooms out of their apartment windows.⁸⁴ If these grievances only hint at the discord felt between residents from different class backgrounds, then editor Fritz Ebers' open letters in the September and October issues of the newsletter, highlight distinct political disagreements. Amid an increasing number of complaints relating to building defects and rising rent costs, a dispute arose between Ebers—a theatre director and himself

Quoted in: Johann Friedrich Geist, and Klaus Kürvers, *Berliner Miethaus*, 430. Residential data taken from: Berliner Adressbuch, 1932. Samples taken 24 blocks: Schillering 3–31, and Genfer Strasse 45–67.

84. Fritz Ebers. "Unsere Müllkästen," *Die neue Stadt*, 20 October, 1930; G.H. "Ruhe! Stille!," *Die neue Stadt*, 15 September, 1930.

a resident of the Weiße Stadt⁸⁵—and a recently formed ‘interest group’ (*Interessengemeinschaft*) of estate residents. The interest group accused Ebers and his ‘rag’ (*Wurstblatt*) of being a Primus-funded organ, while Ebers responded by insisting that an active and non-confrontational dialogue with the Primus society was the best step forward, accusing the interest group of trying to ‘arouse interests through political machinations.’⁸⁶ Ebers did not explicitly state the precise political nature of these plots, but the variety of occupational groups that lived at close quarters in the Weiße Stadt undeniably points toward antagonisms between Social Democratic and communist supporters.

Besides political tensions within the estate, there also existed a sense of mistrust on the part of some estate residents, against the proletariat—and more specifically the *Lumpenproletariat*—who lived in the surrounding landscape. The positioning of many new housing estates, including the Weiße Stadt and Friedrich-Ebert estate, at the very fringes of the city, put the new residents of the estates in close proximity with the poorest of Berlin’s inhabitants, who lived in the neighbouring Laubenkolonien. Hans Ostwald suggested that, despite the close attention which the police paid to them, the Laubenkolonien often harboured criminal elements. Ostwald cited a newspaper report in one of his books, which described one criminal gang residing in the Laubenkolonien outside of Reinickendorf, in whose tents police recovered numerous stolen goods during one raid.⁸⁷ A reader’s letter in *Die neue Stadt* casts light on the sense of geographic dislocation felt by residents in the Weiße Stadt estate, and the deep sense of suspicion and fear they held against the inhabitants of the nearby Laubenkolonien. The unnamed resident wrote to complain of the morally dubious inhabitants in the nearby Laubenkolonien, who crept undetected into the Weiße Stadt by dark. ‘Our Primus estate has become an Eldorado for a particular type of burglar who engages in petty swindling’ claimed the author, who went on to suggest that the ‘wonderful cakes’ in the window of the Wunnicke bakery, and bicycles were particularly at risk, as a result of the ‘expensive and particularly ineffective’ electrical lighting around the estate.⁸⁸ Such was the near-hysterical outlook from one—undoubtedly

85. Berliner Adressbuch, 1932.

86. ‘[...] deren Interessen durch parteipolitische Dinge erwecken wollen.’ Fritz Ebers. “Mietersversammlungen,” *Die neue Stadt*, 20 October, 1930.

87. Ostwald, *Das galante Berlin*, 509.

88. ‘Und so ist auch unsere Primus-Siedlung ein Eldorado für eine gewisse Sorte von Einbrechern geworden, die nur ‘kleine Dinger drehen.’ Ein beliebtes Ziel hierfür boten da die Bolle’sche Meierei-filiale und Wunnicke Bäckerei. [...] Und man kann auch verstehen, dass bei den teuren

bourgeois—resident who found themselves living in the complex landscape of the new Berlin, where housing developments stood alongside the makeshift shelters of the homeless and unemployed in the garden colonies.

7.11 Open and rural spaces within the city

The close proximity of the Weiße Stadt and Laubenkolonien in Reinickendorf was typical of the urban fringes of Berlin in the 1920s. The suspicions deeply held by many inhabitants about those who resided in the Laubenkolonien were not untypical of the time either; it was a sentiment that had endured since the emergence of the slums that first grew up around the city in the 1870s, which were regularly purged by the authorities.⁸⁹ Throughout the latter part of the decade, Berlin's Social Democratic government carried out its own clearance of many of these disorganised, rural spaces by converting them into organised urban facilities. The extensive open spaces and rural settlements at the edges of the city offered planners and architects real scope for development. Social Democratic city councils converted open fields, marshes, lakes and wooded areas into public parks, play areas and sports fields, and replaced old and rustic buildings with modern counterparts.

und vor allem schlechten Bewag-Verbindungen ein lebhaftes Interesse für Fahrräder besteht [...]'
Anonymous. "Kriminelles!," *Die neue Stadt*, 1 February, 1931.

89. Bernstein, *Berliner Arbeiterbewegung*, 230.

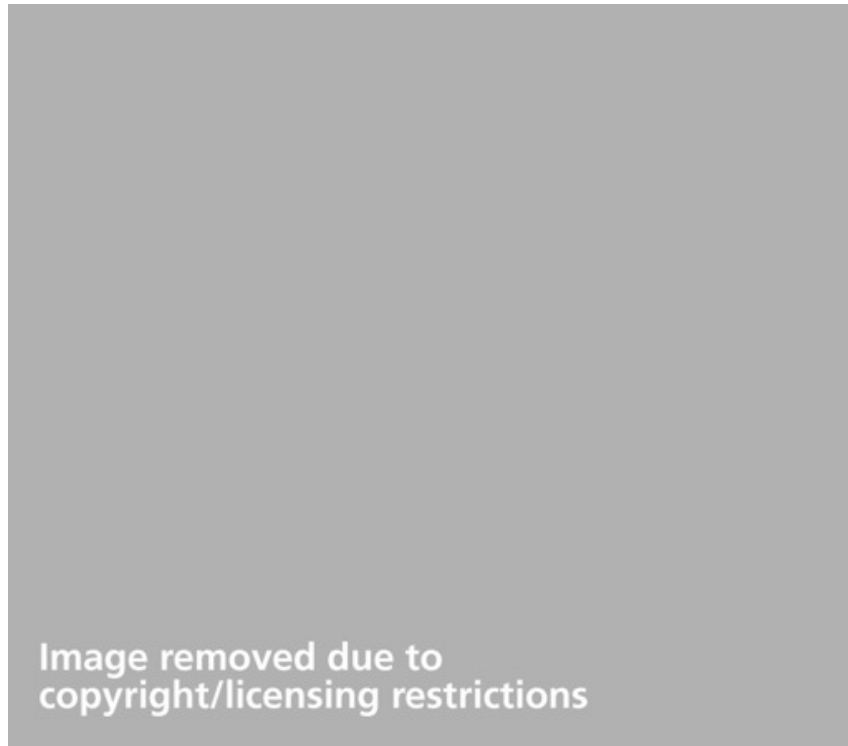


Figure 83: Erwin Barth. Plan for the Volkspark Rehberge.
From: Barth. "Volkspark Rehberge." *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 6 (1929): 118.

The transformation of the Jungfernheide woods and Rehberge in north Berlin—into the Volkspark Rehberge—is a particularly useful example. The government in Berlin purchased the Jungfernheide estate in early 1926 at a cost of over two million Reichsmarks, with the intention of transforming the space into a vast public park.⁹⁰ Situated in Wedding, and designed by Erwin Barth, the Volkspark Rehberge was intended as a place of leisure and recuperation for the district's working-class population (fig. 83). The joy of these spaces, declared Barth, had become lost to the working-classes, who visited them all too rarely. 'The parks must have a social function' he asserted.⁹¹ The land earmarked for the new park consisted of a featureless landscape of sandy dunes known as the Rehberge, lying at the edge of the Jungfernheide woods. Barth's assertion that the working classes seldom visited spaces such as the Jungfernheide and Rehberge is—as seen in chapters four and five—contradicted by visual documentary evidence. Contemporary photographers, illustrators and artists, including Hans Baluschek, repeatedly portrayed the proletariat occupying such spaces throughout the 1920s. Although many of Baluschek's

90. Busch, *Zeitgemässe Grundstückspolitik*, 21.

91. 'Ist dies nicht der Fall, so geht der Bevölkerung die Freude an ihnen verloren, sie besucht dann die Anlagen zu wenig, [...] Die Anlagen müssen einen sozialen Inhalt haben.' Erwin Barth, "Volkspark Rehberge," *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 6 (1929): 117.

works—such as *Bei Mutter Grün* (Amongst Mother Nature, 1925) and *Arbeiterjugend* (Working Youth, 1925) and the oil painting *Sommerabend* (Summer Evening, 1928)—do not refer to any specific location, the undulating and sandy landscape they describe, with the tenements seen in the distance, undoubtedly represent the sort of areas to which Barth referred. Photographic evidence also attests to the fact that the Rehberge was populated—albeit probably rather sparsely—by families living in *Wohnlauben* and garden colonies, and used by children as play areas (fig. 91). The spaces at the edge of the city such as the Rehberge *were* used by the working-classes, but not necessarily in such a way that the benevolent yet officious Social Democratic government necessarily approved of.

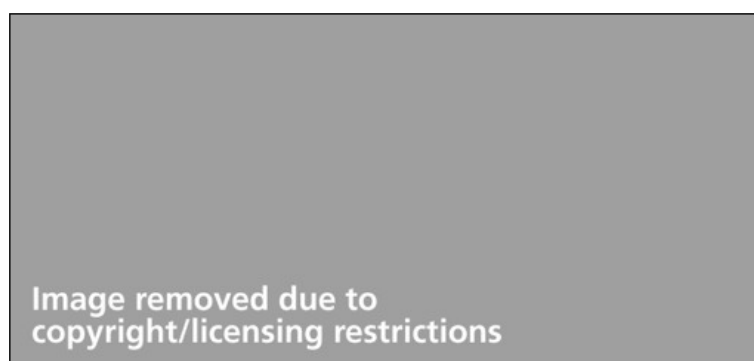


Figure 84: The Rehberge, prior to being developed into the Volkspark Rehberge.
From: Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, ed. *Rechts und Links der Panke*
(Berlin: Heimat und Werk, 1961), 58.

The Berlin authorities set to work an army of unemployed labourers upon the Rehberge (fig. 84), transforming the area between 1926 and 1929, from ‘desert sanddunes’ into a series of compartmentalised and functional green spaces, of ‘spacious sports areas, broad meadows, and hills covered with trees and shrubs [which] now present themselves to the eyes of the astonished visitor.’⁹² The new park boasted numerous playing areas, paddling pools and sandpits for children, garden areas rich with plants and flowers for educational purposes, sports fields and a running track, a toboggan run for winter games, scenic walks, and a new permanent garden colony.⁹³ Writing about the new park in a feature in *Das neue Berlin*, Barth included artistic impressions of his vision, which indicate the degree of planning and effort that went into creating an orderly and aesthetically pleasing space (fig.

92. ‘Geräumige Sportsplätze, weite Wiesengelände, mit Bäumen und Büschen bestandene Hügel bieten sich jetzt dem Auge des erstaunten Besuchers.’ “Volkspark Rehberge : Die Vollendung des schönen Werkes,” *Vorwärts*, June 18, 1929.

93. *Ibid.*; Barth, “Volkspark Rehberge,” 119-21.

85).⁹⁴ The authorities celebrated the opening of the park on the 22nd June 1929 with a Volksfest-style day of celebration. Just like the spaces of the park itself, the celebratory day was highly organised into various activities scheduled at specific times, and catering for children and adults of all ages. Relay races, gymnastics displays and other sports were staged alongside dancing and musical performances.⁹⁵



Figure 85: Erwin Barth, Plan and artistic impressions of the Volkspark Rehberge.
From Barth. "Volkspark Rehberge." *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 6 (1929): 117–21.

Communist supporters found little scope for criticism of the new parks. *Die Rote Fahne* announced the opening of the Volkspark Rehberge and its garden colony in an unusually objective fashion, albeit with no mention of the Social Democrats' involvement in the project.⁹⁶ Indeed, parks such as the Rehberge presented themselves as ideal places for communist gatherings and demonstrations. The Schillerpark had been the preferred focal point for outdoor gatherings by Communists in Wedding, but with the opening of the Volkspark Rehberge in June 1929, the party switched to the new public space. The KPD organised their first event in the Rehberge—a sports and culture day—for the 25th August 1929.⁹⁷ The Social Democrats were quick to criticise the KPD's idea of 'culture,' reporting

94. Ibid.

95. "Der Volkspark Rehberge : Großes Spiel- und Sportfest am Sonnabend," *Vorwärts*, June 20, 1929.

96. "Dauerkolonie Rehberge," *Die Rote Fahne*, June 23, 1929.

97. "Massen heraus in die Rehberge!," *Die Rote Fahne*, August 25, 1929.

how the communist gathering had been a disorganised affair in which ‘barely half’ of the planned sports programme had gone ahead, and which ended with rubbish being strewn across the grass and playing areas of the park. ‘Large dug-out lumps of turf and wagonloads of sandwich papers bear witness to communist “culture,”’ claimed one newspaper article in the Social Democratic organ *Vorwärts*.⁹⁸ The SPD’s November election propaganda leaflets reminded voters in Wedding of the aftermath of the KPD’s sports and culture day in the Rehberge, printing a photograph of the littered sports fields (fig. 86). ‘On their so-called culture day’ protested the caption to the image, the Communists ‘abandoned the park—which had been a pleasant spot and should be serving as a place of relaxation for the population of Wedding—having transformed it into a real pigsty.’⁹⁹

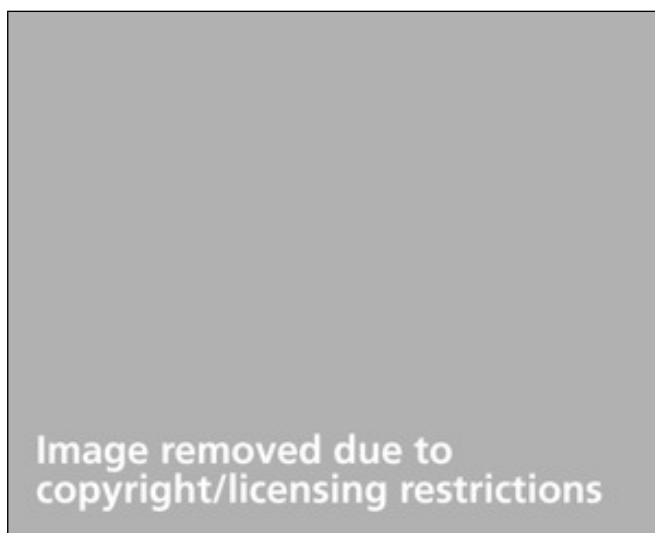


Figure 86: ‘What the Communists have done.’ From SPD election leaflet for Wedding, November 1929. Source: Anonymous. “Was tun die Kommunisten?” *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 3rd edition, Wedding. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

Where at all possible, the Social Democrats carried out their desire to impose orderliness on previously untended spaces in the built-up areas of the city, and they highlighted several specific examples in their election leaflets. These illustrations frequently deployed visual

98. ‘[...] kaum die Hälfte des Programms wurde durchgeführt. [...] Große herausgegriffenen Rasenstücke und Wagenladungen von Stullenpapier zeugen heute am Montag von kommunistischer “Kultur.”’ “Die KPD. in den Rehbergen,” *Vorwärts*, August 26, 1929.

99. ‘sogenannten Kulturtag. [...] Als sie den Volkspark verließen, hatten sie die schöne Anlage, welche der Bevölkerung des Weddings zur Erholung dienen soll, in einen wahren Schweinestall verwandelt.’ Anonymous. “Was tun die Kommunisten?” *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 3rd edition, Wedding. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

‘before’ and ‘after’ comparisons. In the first edition of the election leaflet for Wedding, one such comparison showed how the SPD had provided safer playing areas for children (fig. 80). The first photograph showed youngsters playing in a sandpit situated directly alongside a busy road along which omnibuses and cars passed by. Another sandpit with children is shown in the second photograph, however this one is situated amongst the trees and greenery of a park. The caption described how ‘children once played in dirty places amongst the traffic, [but] now they are in pleasant enclosures, safe from harm.’¹⁰⁰ A similar message was communicated in the third edition of the election leaflet for the Charlottenburg and Tiergarten districts. In this instance however, the first image is an illustration rather than a photograph.¹⁰¹ The drawing depicts a sandy patch of wasteland upon which children are playing in the heart of Moabit, a densely populated working-class district in Tiergarten (fig. 87). The wind kicks up clouds of sand, which blows across a terrain strewn with broken metal springs, cans and other detritus. In the background, crowds mill about outside an imposing building, like convicts enjoying a break of fresh air.¹⁰² While most of the children’s activities in the scene appear innocent enough, two figures urinate and defecate on the ground. The negative imagery used in this illustration is strongly reminiscent of that used by Nagel in his drawing *Arbeiters Ferienparadies*, which described a similar inner-city space acting as both dumping ground and play area (fig. 37). Nagel’s illustration appeared four months earlier in an edition of the satirical communist magazine *Eulenspiegel*.¹⁰³ The second image in the SPD comparison was a photograph, purportedly showing the same area in Moabit, now landscaped with new trees, and a clear demarcation between paths and grassed-over areas. But there is hardly a person to be seen in this newly created space—just a solitary figure, barely discernible in the background.

100. ‘Einst spielten Kinder auf schmutzigen Plätzen inmitten des Verkehrs. Jetzt sind Kinder inmitten schöner Anlagen vor Gefahren geschützt.’ Anonymous, “Sozialdemokraten schufen Kinderspielplätze und gesunde Wohnungen!”

101. Anonymous. “Otto-Park : einst und jetzt.” *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 3rd edition, Charlottenburg and Tiergarten. 1929).

102. Though Moabit was (and is) the site of one of Berlin’s biggest prisons, the square shown in the illustration lies some distance away from this institution.

103. Nagel, “Arbeiters Ferienparadies.”



Figure 87: SPD election leaflet for Tiergarten and Charlottenburg, November 1929.
Source: Anonymous. "Otto-Park : einst und jetzt." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 3rd edition, Charlottenburg and Tiergarten. 1929).

The Social Democratic authorities also acted to transform the spaces around the numerous lakes and bathing spots which the proletariat frequented during the summer months. In the communist press, allusions were routinely made to the authorities attempts to prevent people from bathing in unauthorised areas. Representations of the Schupo officer standing over bathers with a look of disapproval, alongside 'Baden Verboten' signs, regularly appeared in the pages of the communist press in the summer months (fig. 88).¹⁰⁴ In response, the municipal authorities built modern, new bathing facilities at some of the city's most popular spots, including a complex in Wannsee (designed by Martin Wagner, 1929–1930), and on the Plotzensee in Wedding, between 1926 and 1928.¹⁰⁵

104. Sauer, "Am Sonntag geht's mit Kind und Kegel – nach Tegel," *Eulenspiegel*, June 1930;
Anonymous, "Baden Verboten," *Eulenspiegel*, August 1930.

105. Chod, et al., *Berliner Mitte*, 477-78.



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Figure 88: Anonymous worker's drawing, "Baden Verboten," *Eulenspiegel*, August 1930.

Elsewhere, in the election leaflet distributed to the districts of Cöpenick and Treptow—predominantly rural areas to the southeast of Berlin—the SPD illustrated how they had carried out ‘practical work in the interests of progress.’¹⁰⁶ The leaflet described, once again using before and after illustrations, how a dilapidated shack originally used as the communal offices for the parish of Müggelheim, had been demolished and replaced with a modern two-storey construction that functioned as the administrative offices for the local fire service. The run-down wooden hut was an example, warned the feature, of what ‘was still possible in the vicinity of the big city.’¹⁰⁷ Mention should also be made here of the new administrative offices in Wedding, situated on Müllerstrasse, and completed in 1929. The new building, designed by Martin Wagner, brought together the various, previously disparate local district offices into one centralised site.¹⁰⁸ The new offices sat directly alongside the Nordpark funfair, allowing council officials to keep close tabs on one particular aspect of working-class leisure which they viewed with deep suspicion, and attempted to regulate throughout the twenties with suffocating bureaucratic regulation.¹⁰⁹ As the district’s main thoroughfare, Müllerstrasse underwent significant changes throughout the latter half of the 1920s. The numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

106. Anonymous. “Praktische Arbeit im Interesse des Fortschritts leisten.” *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 2nd edition, Cöpenick & Treptow. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

107. ‘[...] was früher in der Nähe der Großstadt noch möglich war.’ Ibid.

108. Rück, *Der Wedding*, 16-17.

109. Ingrid Heinrich-Jost, *Wer will noch mal? Wer hat noch nicht? Aus der Geschichte der Berliner Rummelpätze* (Berlin: Edition Berlin 750, 1985), 85-86.

rural farmsteads, mills and properties dotted along the northern half of the street were increasingly overwhelmed by modern, urban developments. One of the quirkiest and most-recognisable rural properties on Müllerstrasse was a small cottage, colloquially known as the *Schmales Handtuch* (small hand towel), at number eighty-three. Early photographs showed the cottage standing amid meadows and fields (fig. 89), but images taken after 1927 show Jean Krämer's immense streetcar depot now standing immediately alongside the now-derelict house (fig. 90).¹¹⁰

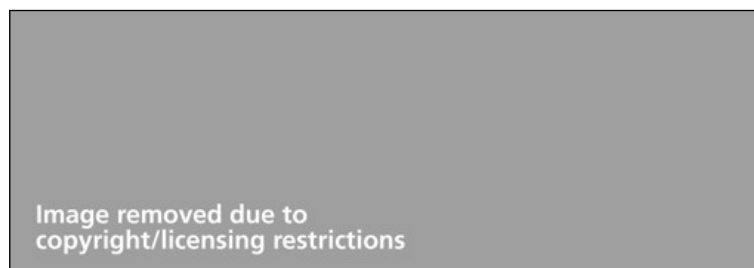


Figure 89: The *Schmales Handtuch*. From: Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, ed. *Rechts und Links der Panke* (Berlin: Heimat und Werk, 1961), 79.

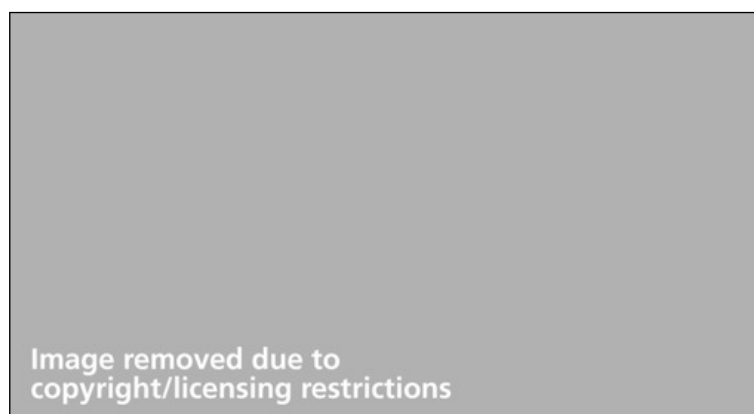


Figure 90: The *Schmales Handtuch*, alongside the recently built Strassenbahnhof on Müllerstrasse. From: Fritz Rück, "Am Rande der Großstadt," *Magazin für Alle* 4, no. 11 (1929): 19.

7.12 The garden colonies

The garden colonies around Berlin's outskirts—introduced in chapter four—were a particularly emotive issue when it came to SPD and KPD politics. Beloved of the proletarian population, the colonies faced an increasing threat throughout the 1920s, from

110. See: Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, *Rechts und Links der Panke*, 79; Rück, "Am Rande der Großstadt." for before and after comparisons of this cottage. For more on the rural properties that lined Müllerstrasse, see Bezirksamt Wedding von Berlin, *Rechts und Links der Panke*, 74-81.

urban expansion, and new housing developments in particular. The SPD responded to the ongoing threat faced by the garden colonies, by setting up new permanent facilities, or *Dauerkolonien*, that were guaranteed protection from clearances by land owners. The first Dauerkolonie in Berlin was incorporated into the Volkspark Rehberge in Wedding.

These permanent colonies, created under supervision from city planners and other government experts, were a far cry from the less-organised Schrebergärten and Laubenkolonien set up by working-class families a generation or two earlier. The new Dauerkolonie Rehberge was ‘designed’ by planners, unlike the adhococracy of the old *Schrebergärten*, and managed by the *Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands* (National Association of German Small Garden Clubs, RKGD). The plots were laid out in an orderly grid, and the construction and positioning of the summerhouse, as well as the planting, were all carefully prescribed by rules that each owner had to abide by (fig. 92). Candidates for a plot in the Dauerkolonie Rehberge were required to provide evidence of previous experience in keeping a garden, and had to agree to particular standards in the maintenance of their new plot. The RKGD also demanded a 30 Reichsmarks deposit, followed by regular payments of 10 Reichsmarks a month.¹¹¹ New plot owners were allowed to choose from three different styles of summerhouse, imaginatively titled *Sonntagsfreude*, *Kinderland* and *Erholung* (respectively ‘Sunday Joy’, ‘Children’s Land’ and ‘Recovery.’)¹¹² Other regulations set out by the RKGD for the permanent colonies stipulated the maximum height of wooden fences, the width of paths, and cautioned against the keeping of animals such as rats and rabbits on sanitary grounds.¹¹³

111. W. Reinhold, “Von Dauerkolonien in Berlin,” *Kleingartenwacht* 6, no. 1 (1929): 1.

112. Ibid.

113. “Richtlinien für Kleingarten-Dauergebiete, aufgestellt vom Reichsverband der Kleingartenvereine Deutschlands,” *Kleingartenwacht* 4, no. 5 (1927): 50-51.



Figure 91: Otto Roth, Alte Laubenkolonie, Rehberge, Wedding, c.1924. Landesarchiv, Berlin.

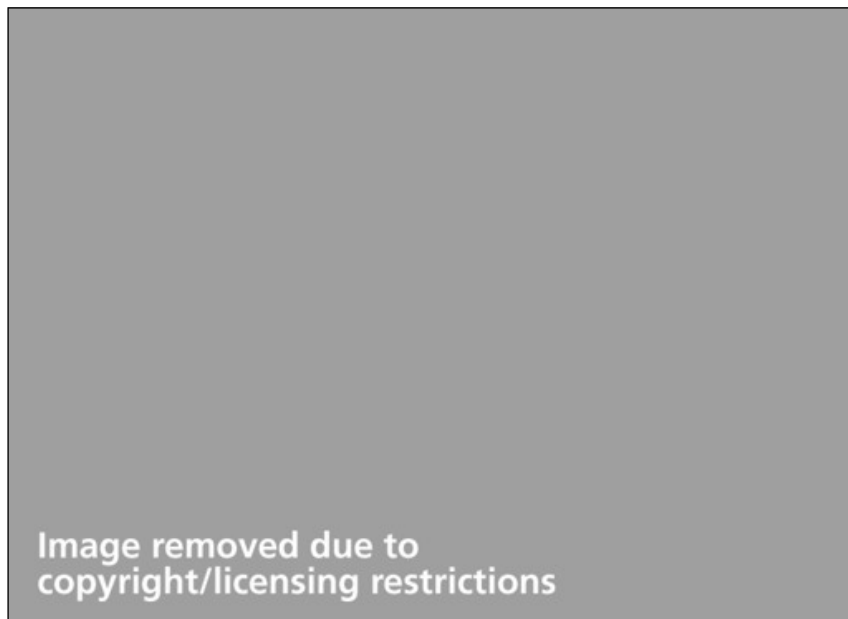


Figure 92: *Dauerkolonie Rehberge, Wedding*. 1929. Landesarchiv, Berlin.

Both the 1919 Small Gardens Act and the RKGD referred to the colonies as Kleingärten rather than Laubenkolonien, and point towards an important and growing distinction between the two terms. Government ministers and reformers regarded the Kleingärten colonies as organised and official affairs (fig. 92), while associating the Laubenkolonien with the unsanctioned and rather more haphazard settlements which continued to shelter the economically most-vulnerable sections of the urban population, and which resembled

the original slums that had emerged in the early 1870s (fig. 91). The increasing public perception of this distinction is summed up by the recollections of one Wedding resident, whose parents moved from a Laubenkolonie to the new Dauerkolonie in the Rehberge, recalling that:

The character of the garden colony changed. Instead of the old “Laubenpiepern” who were largely motivated out of social misery and were often non-native rural folk in the first and second generation, quickly came more recreation-seeking, hobby-gardeners. The Laubenpieper was old fashioned and markedly individualistic, and often wholly uncommunicative.¹¹⁴

During the years 1925 to 1933, Berlin’s authorities effectively undertook a covert programme of Laubenkolonien clearances, a programme which was in fact the reverse side of their Neues Bauen programme of social welfare improvements and urban renewal.¹¹⁵ The creation of the *Volkspark Rehberge*—and the 444 plots contained in its permanent colony—entailed the clearance of a large swathe of Laubenkolonien, and some 348 disputes over garden clearances ended up before the local Kleingarten court of arbitration.¹¹⁶ Social Democratic officials considered the shacks and huts in the colonies as squalid and not conducive to good health, particularly as they were being increasingly used as permanent dwellings in light of the ongoing housing crisis. The clearance of these

114. ‘Der Charakter der Lauben änderte sich. Aus alten „Laubenpiepern“, die zum großen Teil aus sozialer Misere motiviert und oftmals wohl auch zugewandertes Landvolk in erster und zweiter Generation waren, wurden alsbald mehr erholungsuchende Freizeitgärtner. Die Laubenpieper alten Stils waren noch ausgeprägte Individualisten und oft gar nicht kommunikativ.’ Ursula Diehl, and Gisela Weidmann, eds., *Weddinger Gärten Gestern und Heute* (Berlin: Koll, 1985), 21. The colloquial term ‘Laubenpieper’ is still used to refer to the small-garden owners. The term literally translates into English as small-garden pipets, and metaphorically draws an analogy between the chattering garden owners who build themselves a summerhouse, and the songbirds who take great care in constructing their nest.

115. Tafuri alludes also alludes to this aim when he suggests that Wagner, in his *Städtebaugesetzentwurf* (1930), wanted to address ‘unauthorised residences’ on the city outskirts. Tafuri, “Sozialpolitik and the City,” 216.

116. Rück, *Der Wedding*, 65.

unauthorised colonies to make way for housing, parks, or regulated, permanent colonies represented an opportunity for the city authorities to impose some top-down order upon parts of the city which had been organised by proletarian families from the bottom-up.

The policy of clearance is evident in various Social Democratic publications of the time. In his book *Der Wedding in Wort und Bild* (Wedding in Words and Pictures, 1931), Fritz Rück made a photographic comparison of the Rehberge's old allotments and new Dauerkolonie. The first photograph showed the 'old summerhouses in Wedding,' which were typically ramshackle and irregular in layout and construction (fig. 91). By contrast, the image of the Dauerkolonie showed the 'newly created permanent summerhouses in the Volkspark Rehberge,' and appeared as a paradigm of order and geometric planning.¹¹⁷

The SPD's programme of organisation and bureaucratic control over the colonies was also reflected in the fact that, despite the growth in popularity of the garden colonies as a form of leisure activity, between 1925 and 1929, the total space occupied by garden colonies in Greater Berlin declined from 5,793 to 4,448 hectares—a reduction of nearly a quarter. In areas such as Wedding, garden colonies were clearly losing out at the expense of building developments, streets and public parks.¹¹⁸ The increasingly emergent difference in social function between the Laubenzkolonien and Kleingärten *and* Dauerkolonien, and the obvious distinction between their respective associations with the impoverished and middle-classes, is evident in the era's visual documents and press publications. For example, popular newspapers such as *BIZ* reported on Berlin's annual *Wochenende* (Weekend) exhibitions, in which designs for new summerhouses by leading architects and designers, including Bruno Taut and Hans Poelzig, were built and incorporated into idealised garden displays on a grand scale at Berlin's new exhibition centre.¹¹⁹ Also particularly revealing is how

117. 'Alten Lauben im Wedding. Neugeschaffene Dauerlauben im Volkspark Rehberge.' *Ibid.*, 21.

118. Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1927*; Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1931*

119. "Kleine Wochenende-Häuser," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 30 April, 1927.

articles and features in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* referred to the colonies as Kleingärten,¹²⁰ while the KPD's *Die Rote Fahne* and workers' *AIZ* continued to report from the Laubenkolonien around Berlin and Germany.¹²¹

Communist newspaper articles regularly drew attention to the threat faced by the Laubenkolonien which, they claimed, were home to as many as 160,000 families in Berlin.¹²² But the Communists did not entirely ignore those colonies used for leisure purposes. One report from *Die Rote Fahne* in the summer of 1929, described the imminent clearance of the 27 plots which made up the colony 'Empor' on the border of Wedding and Pankow to make way for car garages. The article emphasised the loss of the gardeners' hard work: not just that year's harvest which was threatened with ruination, but also the labour invested over the course of the last fifteen years. The blame for this scandal was laid firmly at the feet of Social Democratic city councillor Franz Czeminski: 'Czeminski assumes that car garages are more important than gardens!' mocked the report. 'Why shouldn't he think that? He needs no recuperation in a garden colony.'¹²³ *Die Rote Fahne* picked up the story once more in the run-up to the November elections, pleading that 'every garden owner should vote Communist' in the forthcoming ballot.¹²⁴ The Volkspark Rehberge and Dauerkolonie Rehberge were two jewels in the crown of the SPD's work in Berlin, and unsurprisingly featured prominently in the party's 1929 local election campaign. As if to remind the local population in Wedding, the park and colony featured heavily all three editions of the SPD's election pamphlets for the region.¹²⁵ But they also featured in pamphlets distributed to other districts around the city, for example in the suburbs of Wilmersdorf and Schöneberg, two districts that remained under DVP control.

120. For example: "Die Kleingärtner in Rehberge," *Vorwärts*, June 24, 1929; "Kleingärtner und Wahlen : Die Sozialdemokratie fordert: "Mehr Land dem Volk", " *Vorwärts*, November 17, 1929.

121. "Laubenkolonisten müssen räumen : Fünf Mark Entschädigung und dann herunter!," *Die Rote Fahne*, February 6, 1929; Anonymous, "Mutter reich mir mal die Nägel her! Frühling in der Laubenkolonie," 406.

122. Anonymous, "'Auf der Laube' Wie 1 1/2 Millionen Großstadtfamilien wohnen," *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* 8, no. 7 (1929): 6.

123. 'Stadtrat und Sozialdemokrat Czeminski hält Autogaragen für wichtiger als Kleingärten! Warum soll er auch nicht? Er braucht zu seiner Erholung keine Laubenkolonie.' "Autogaragen oder Kleingärten? : Skandalöser Magistratsentscheid gegen die KGD," *Die Rote Fahne*, July 9, 1929.

124. 'Jeder Kleingärtner wählt Kommunistische Partei, Liste 3!' "27 Laubenparzellen grundlos zerstört," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 9, 1929.

125. For example: Anonymous. "Gesunder Aufenthalt in frischer Luft." *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 1st edition, Wedding. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

One leaflet printed a photograph of the Rehberge colony alongside the question ‘garden owners: who is looking after the protection of your colonies?’ Alongside the photograph of the Rehberge is a picture showing the clearance of the ‘Bingerloch’ colony in ‘non-Social Democratic’ Wilmersdorf.¹²⁶

7.13 Conclusion: Social Democratic *Ordnung* and Communist unrest

In simple terms, what these explorations of Social Democratic municipal policy and Communist response reveal, is a clear dichotomy between the Social Democrats’ desire for order through the demarcation of clear borders and organised spatial *distribution*, and the Communists’ attempts to disrupt this order by generating unrest and organising displays of mass support, usually through large *gatherings*.

In the wake of the *Blutmai* riots in Wedding in May 1929, the Communist Party changed its campaigning tactics these towards new agitational techniques. A report from the twelfth party conference—held in Wedding barely a month after the riots took place—stated that the ‘KPD’s tactical change means the use of new forms of revolutionary mass mobilisation, a new form of proletarian unity organised from below, new forms of struggle against the bourgeoisie and reformism.’¹²⁷ Communist propaganda began at an extremely local level. Factory and street cells produced regular newsletters, principally intended to attract work colleagues and neighbours to the KPD. The central committee for the KPD reported in 1929 that in Berlin there existed 113 *Betriebszeitungen* (factory newspapers), fifty-six *Häuserblockzeitungen* (tenement newsletters) and sixteen *Ortszeitungen* (neighbourhood newspapers), all disseminating communist propaganda.¹²⁸ Two notable proletarian authors who described the actions of Berlin’s factory and street cells in their novels were Willi Bredel and Klaus Neukrantz, who revealed how the cells attempted to

126. ‘Kleingärtner, wer sorgt für die Erhaltung eurer Kolonien? [...] Das geräumte Gelände der bislang in hoher Kultur gewesenen Kolonie “Bingerloch” im nicht sozialdemokratisch verwalteten Bezirk Wilmersdorf.’ Anonymous. “Kleingärtner, wer sorgt für die Erhaltung eurer Kolonie?” *Unser Weg : Bilder aus der Kommunalen Arbeit der SPD*, 2nd edition, Schöneberg, Wilmersdorf. (Berlin: SPD, 1929).

127. ‘Die taktische Wendung der KPD. bedeutet die Anwendung neuer Formen der revolutionären Massenmobilisierung, neuer Formen der proletarischen Einheitsfront von unten, neuer Kampfformen gegen die Bourgeoisie und den Reformismus.’ KPD., *Waffen für den Klassenkampf*, 27.

128. KPD., *Bericht des Zentralkomitees der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands an den 12. Parteitag* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag, 1929), 259.

recruit members from the mass of ‘unorganised’ labour, and to instigate factory and rent strikes when necessary.¹²⁹ These sorts of protests were extremely localised affairs, usually only affecting single factories or housing blocks. They were complimented by the organisation of much larger, city-wide demonstrations, principally organised by the Berlin and Brandenburg branch of the KPD, through the pages of *Die Rote Fahne* and the *Volks Echo*, the two major communist dailies in the city.

Organised by the party hierarchy, the city-wide demonstrations were more strategic than the smaller, local protests. Party organisers intended them to be as much an outward display of strength, as a protest against any specific grievance. The recipe was simple: pick a theme guaranteed to rouse the proletarian masses (for example, the perceived warmongering by the republican government towards Soviet Russia), adding plenty of incendiary rhetoric. Second, provide a timetable for the demonstration at short notice. Finally, report on the success of the occasion in the newspapers the following day. In November 1929, prior to the local elections, the Berlin branch of the KPD organised two large-scale protests in the city. The KPD scheduled the first demonstration for the 7th November in the Lustgarten in the city centre. The communist leadership promoted the gathering as a celebration of the twelfth anniversary of the October Revolution, and a show of continued support for Soviet Russia, in the face of alleged threats of war from the German government.¹³⁰ *Die Rote Fahne* listed the designated meeting points and times for demonstrators in each city district, two days in advance. On the day of the protest, demonstrators congregated at their local designated meeting point, before heading onwards towards the Lustgarten at a set time. Organisers planned the departure of each local group carefully, to ensure that—wherever they had come from in the city—they all converged on the Lustgarten at exactly the same time.¹³¹ *Die Rote Fahne* described the scene the following day:

129. For a literary description of a factory cell meeting, see: Willi Bredel, *Maschinenfabrik N&K* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), 20-23. In *Barricades in Berlin*, the 145th street cell has its headquarters at the local bar *The Red Nightingale*: Neukrantz, *Barricades in Berlin*, 32-43.

130. “Massen heraus in den Lustgarten!,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 7, 1929.

131. “Auf die Strasse für die Sowjetunion!,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 5, 1929.

The character of the demonstration was evident in the thousands of placards and many hundreds of banners that were carried along in the processions. “We will protect the Soviet Union”, “Our message for the party of the victorious October revolution!”¹³²

Once the various processions of demonstrators had converged on the Lustgarten, under the watchful eye of the city’s nervous police forces, there followed political speeches and a rousing rendition of the *Internationale*. *Die Rote Fahne* published a photograph of the demonstration, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Otto Griebel’s painting *Die Internationale*: a sea of white faces, illuminated by the photographer’s flash, staring out from the late-Autumn darkness (figs. 93 and 94).¹³³

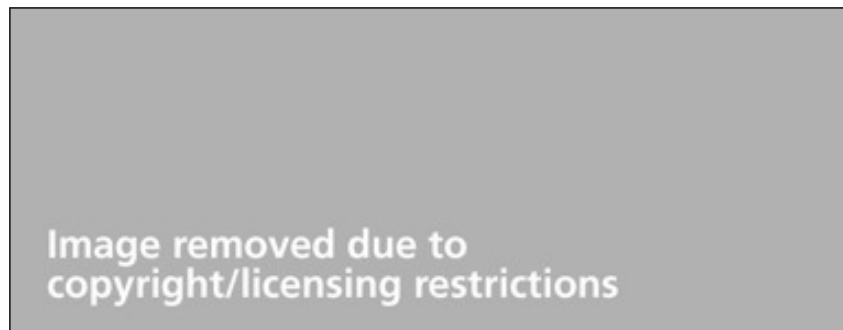


Figure 93: From: “Die Kampfdemonstration im Lustgarten,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 8, 1929.

132. ‘Der Charakter der Kampfdemonstration spricht aus den Tausenden von Losungen, aus den vielen Hunderten von Transparenten, die in den Zügen mitgeführt werden. “Wie schützen die Sowjetunion,” “Der Partei des siegreichen Oktober unsern Kampfgruß!” “Die Kampfdemonstration im Lustgarten,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 8, 1929.

133. *Ibid.*

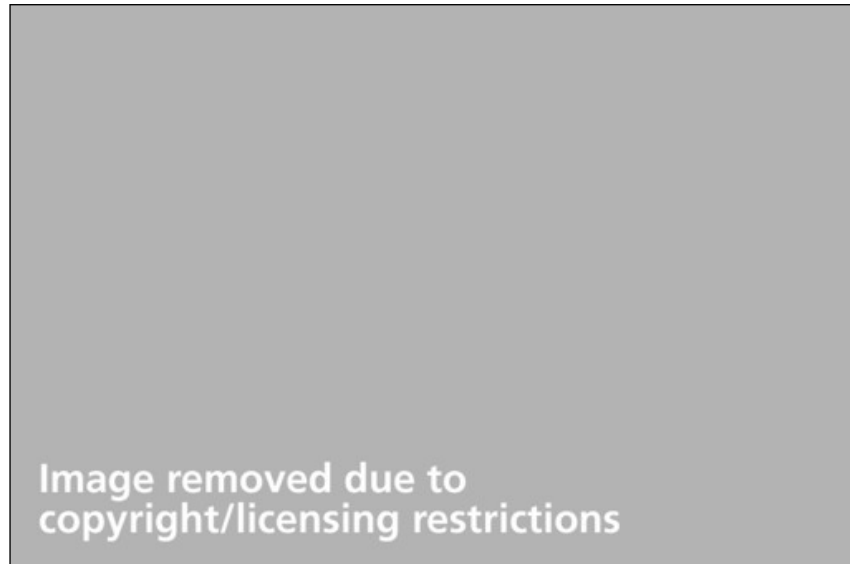


Figure 94: Otto Griebel, *Die Internationale*, 1929-1930. Oil on canvas, 123 x 183cm. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.

The KPD arranged another evening of demonstrations for the day before the elections, on November 16th. The Communists planned these demonstrations at a local level, in key districts across Berlin. The following day, *Die Rote Fahne* reported on events in Wedding, Neukölln and Moabit, the three districts in which support for the Communists was strongest. The headline read ‘The KPD rules the streets of Berlin.’¹³⁴ In Wedding, workers demonstrated against the SPD local candidate, who had been the subject of a smear campaign in *Die Rote Fahne* throughout the course of the run-up to the elections. The report described the scene in the streets:

Around 2,000 workers demonstrated yesterday evening with tumultuous enthusiasm. [...] The speaking group *Die Rote Wedding* were particularly impressive. Whole streets were decked out in red flags. The demonstration was received with indescribable enthusiasm.¹³⁵

134. “Die KPD. beherrscht die Straßen Berlins,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 17, 1929.

135. ‘An 2000 Arbeiter demonstrierten gestern Abend mit stürmischer Begeisterung [...] Eindrucksvoll der Sprechchor der Truppe “Roter Wedding.” Ganze Straßenzüge weit sind die Straßen rot beflaggt. Unbeschreibliche Begeisterung empfing die Demonstration.’ Ibid.

The flag was a useful—and non-violent—way in which neighbourhoods could display their political support in the final years of the Weimar Republic. Essentially, supporters used them to stake their territory, creating a distinct and visible presence on the streets. Hanging from tenement windows, communist red flags vied with the black-red-gold flags of republican supporters and, later on, Nazi flags adorned with swastikas. During the September 1930 Reichstag elections, the SPD boasted that over five thousand of their banners and flags could be seen adorning the homes of supporters each evening.¹³⁶ But the Communists provided formidable competition to the SPD, with the editors of *Die Rote Fahne* repeatedly encouraging their readers to hang red banners and flags from their windows.¹³⁷

Displays of mass organisation, accompanied by flags and banners, were an integral part of the films, literature and images associated with Communist propaganda. December 1929 saw the cinematic release of the film *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness), arguably the most important proletarian film of the Weimar era. *Mutter Krausen* was the last of the so-called *Zille* films, made in tribute to the recently deceased and much-loved artist Heinrich Zille. The film's production was overseen by Zille's artistic colleagues Otto Nagel, Hans Baluschek and Käthe Kollwitz. In one significant sequence towards the end of the film, Erna joins her communist boyfriend Max in a demonstration through the streets of Wedding. The scores of demonstrators, accompanied by a *Rotfrontkämpferbund* marching band, carry flags and banners, one of which reads 'we demand homes fit for humans.'¹³⁸ When Erna first falls in with the march she is in a state of distress, but is quickly overcome with a joyful emotion brought on by the scale and spectacle of the event, and the feeling of solidarity in marching alongside her fellow comrades.¹³⁹ This sequence bears strong similarities to a scene in Neukrantz's *Barricades in Berlin*, in which Anna joins the demonstrators marching through Wedding:

136. Käthe Kern, "Unsere Wahlpropaganda," *Unser Weg* 4, no. 10 (1930): 220.

137. "Massen heraus in den Lustgarten!," *Die Rote Fahne*, November 7, 1929.

138. "Wir fordern menschenwürdige Wohnungen"

139. For a detailed narrative breakdown of the film, see Rudolf Freund, ed., *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück : filmprotokolle und Materialien* (Berlin: Henschel, 1976).

Anna ran by the side of the demonstrators. She was thinking how curiously the demonstration changed at once the expression of the faces of the people in the alley. The nervous tension vanished. All at once they felt themselves filled with a sense of a new conscious, confident power, through the steady rhythm of marching shoulder to shoulder. [...] For the first time in the her life Anna felt, as she marched through the alley with these thousands, a strong wave of elation rising from her heart to her burning eyes.¹⁴⁰

Particularly redolent here is the way in which an active participation in mass demonstrations against the authorities creates a heightened state of emotion, revolutionary fever and, most critically, solidarity. The communist newspapers sustained this sentiment through their reporting of these events in the communist press, as did the reconstructions by communist filmmakers and authors.

These types of communist demonstrations had a significant historical precedent. In the same way that the Communists inverted the positive image of the garden colonies to recall the slums around Berlin from the 1870s, the KPD-organised marches into the centre of Berlin brought to mind earlier incursions, including those in 1848, 1872 and 1892. The riots of the previous eras and the organised communist marches of 1920s shared a key spatial characteristic: they were conscious movements by the masses from the margins to the heart of the city. This foray into the centre of Berlin challenged the unwritten rules relating to the spatial class structure of the city. In the 1870s this segregation was far more visible, far more pronounced, with workers having to pass through one of the city gates along the customs wall, in order to enter the city. The description of the February 1892 demonstrations by the unemployed in Heinrich Mann's *Der Untertan* (Man of Straw, 1918), underline the division between the bourgeois city centre and the proletarian workers who, having arrived from their tenement quarters in the north, appeared lost and intimidated in the streets around the Unter den Linden and the emperor's palace.¹⁴¹ The Weimarian proletariat no longer had such a physical or symbolic barrier to pass through on their way from the suburbs to the city centre, though there remained psychological barriers—or fears—in the minds of the bourgeoisie. The Communists repeatedly exploited

140. Neukrantz, *Barricades in Berlin*, 99.

141. Heinrich Mann, *Man of Straw* (London: Penguin, 1984), 40-41.

the sense of fear that they were able to instill in the minds of the middle classes, with their incursions into the bourgeois spaces of the city, and once there, through direct and indirect confrontations with the bourgeoisie. The proletarian art exhibitions, organised by Nagel in various department stores, are one example of such as incursion and indirect confrontation. The Communists organised other exhibitions and events, some of which appeared to be quite impromptu. For example, in the run-up to the November elections *Die Rote Fahne* reported on a group of workers which had apparently burst into spontaneous song in the Tietz department store on Alexanderplatz:

In the department stores it is certainly always noisy, but how great it was yesterday to all ears, when suddenly in the Tietz store at the Alex the “Internationale” rung out, sung by a troupe of communist workers, which used the coming together of a large crowd in the department store, to appeal to the voters for the KPD on 17th November.¹⁴²

The workers continued their choral practice through the streets around Alexanderplatz before, inevitably, incurring the wrath of the police along the way.¹⁴³ The fervent and apparently spontaneous nature of such communist gatherings pushed against and undermined the Social Democrats’ attempts at spatial order, or *Ordnung*. They reminded the authorities that no amount of planning and regulation would stand in the way of the masses. Perhaps the state of disarray left behind by communist supporters after their sports and culture day in the *Volkspark Rehberge* was a deliberate gesture rather than a lack of consideration: a reminder of the fine line that existed between order and disarray at this most turbulent of historical moments.

This chapter has shown how, from 1929 onwards, the SPD and KPD stood diametrically at odds with each other, utterly irreconcilable in the wake of the *Blutmai* riots. Though the two parties opposed each other on practically every issue and policy, the task of this

142. ‘Im Warenhaus ist es gewiss immer laut, aber wie spitze gestern alles die Ohren, als plötzlich bei Tietz am Alex die “Internationale” ertönte, die von einem Trupp kommunistischer Arbeiter gesungen wurde, die das Zusammensein großer Menschenmengen im Warenhaus benutzen, um für den 17. November zur Stimmenabgabe für die KPD. aufzurufen.’ “Rot Front” im Warenhaus,” *Die Rote Fahne*, November 10, 1929.

143. Ibid.

chapter has been to clarify what their positions entailed in terms of Berlin's urban spaces and future development. Broadly speaking, these can be summarised as a desire on the Social Democrats' part for *Ordnung*: to subject spaces to increasing organisation, intended to disperse and regulate the population. Naturally, the Communists opposed these ideas, and attempted to disrupt this *Ordnung* by drawing attention to persistent examples of disorder in the city, and by organising congregations and demonstrations whenever possible.

8. Conclusion

During the second half of the twenties, Berlin witnessed a significant shift in the representations of its working-class districts. This transition can be broadly described as a change from an expressionistic to an objective (or *Neue Sachlichkeit*) mode of perception. Gustav Hartlaub's *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition—an event now considered to be a turning point in the cultural climate of Weimar Germany—arrived in Berlin in 1925, the same year that the Social Democrats' new building regulations were introduced in the city. Both events marked a turning point away from an earlier optimism that distinguished cultural ideas during the formative years of the Republic, towards a soberer acceptance of reality.

The earlier Expressionist mode was a product of Berlin's urban development between the 1870s and 1914—described in chapter two—and was driven by entrepreneurial ambition and capitalist speculation, barely contained within a weak and reactionary institutional framework of regulation. The upshot of Berlin's uncontrolled growth quickly produced a paradoxical situation wherein the city's expansion acted as a consequent constraint to further development. This in turn led to the dual processes of expansion and fragmentation of urban spaces. The result of these complimentary and contradictory processes was an urban landscape that was both complex and heterogeneous. Expressionist artists such as Kirchner, Meidner and Grosz responded most characteristically to the 'battlefields filled with mathematical shapes' which Berlin had become.¹ They saw and recognised the fragmentation and unpredictability of the city, and attempted to realise this in their paintings.

The *Neue Sachlichkeit* style that superseded Expressionism was a response to a new approach to urban development which was carried out in a far more rationalised and measured fashion; in other words, in ways not necessarily governed by the tyranny of capital, but by bureaucratic government. Berlin's future direction as a planned entity, under the watchful eye of chief planner Martin Wagner, framed the mood of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

1. Ludwig Meidner, "An Introduction to Painting the Metropolis," in *Voices of German Expressionism*, ed. Victor H. Meisel (London: Tate, 2003), 113.

Berlin now ‘carried a responsibility’ to use Wagner’s words, to a ‘spiritual, economic and civilised life’ in its future growth.² Artists acknowledged the fact that the city was no longer expanding and changing in the same way as it had done before the War. The urban landscape painters of the twenties—including Gustav Wunderwald and Franz Lenk—were less impelled to represent the dynamic modernity of urban life in the same way that the Expressionists and Dadaists in Berlin had done a few years earlier. Their emphasis turned away from themes of spatial fragmentation, towards the temporal continuities of modernity, capturing in freeze-frame both the cumulative effects and transitional processes of urbanisation.

The shift from Expressionist to Neue Sachlichkeit modes of representation found corresponding expression in Berlin’s architecture and architectural spaces. The tenement block, one of the most recognisable motifs from the city’s working-class neighbourhoods, was characterised by dark, gloomy and overcrowded spaces, epitomised by Heinrich Zille’s illustrations (fig. 96) and Heinrich Lichte’s photographs from the prewar era (figs. 10 and 11).³ In the late twenties, the tenements still played a prominent role in representing Berlin’s proletarian districts, and they were frequently juxtaposed alongside stylised images of modern housing developments for the purposes of comparison.

Unlike the representations of the tenements, the visions of new housing solutions which Social Democratic political reformers produced were empty spaces of *potential* inhabitation; spaces that offered possibilities but were lacking in social content and human relationships. Photographers aestheticised the new housing developments, and then mapped this aesthetic back onto the tenements, transforming what had once been viewed as vessels of proletarian hardship into aesthetic objects. Martin Wagner and Adolf Behne, for all their good intentions, were as guilty as most for this decontextualisation of the solution in relation to the problem. Their magazine *Das neue Berlin*, whose appearance in 1929 came when this process of visual sanitisation was near completion, repeatedly reduced the housing problem and its proposed solutions to simplified, abstract visual patterns (fig. 95). One might recall Behne’s comparison of the repetitive blocks of the Dammerstock housing estate with the firewalls of the old tenements.⁴ Many of the most

2. Wagner, “Leitgedanken,” 21-24.

3. Lichte’s photographs can be found in: Albert Kohn, *Unser Wohnungs-Enquete*.

prominent Weimar-era photographers such as Sasha Stone, Arthur Köster, treated both the tenements and the new housing blocks as aesthetic objects. None of this escaped the attention of Walter Benjamin, who observed how the cliff-like firewalls, crumbling grey plasterwork and pokey interior courtyards of the tenements had been transfigured into artistic objects.⁵ If representations of the tenement block had once been used to social ends then, to paraphrase Benjamin, now they had been entirely assimilated by the modern apparatuses of production and publication, turning the ‘struggle against poverty [into] an object of consumption.’⁶ By the end of the decade, the tenement and modern housing estate was just as legitimate a subject for the Neue Sachlichkeit artist or photographer as were Berlin’s other visual distractions: the latest cinema release, the new power station in Rummelsburg, the Tiller Girls and the six-day races. The photograph—and the Neue Sachlichkeit artwork—privileged style over substance, and stripped images of their meaning. Brecht remarked in *The Threepenny Lawsuit* that the ‘situation has become so complicated that a simple “description of reality” tells us less than ever about this reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or of the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions.’⁷

4. Adolf Behne, “Dammerstock,” *Die Form* 5, no. 6 (1930): 165.

5. Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 230.

6. *Ibid.*, 229-230, 232.

7. ‘Die Lage wird dadurch so kompliziert, dass weniger denn je eine einfache „Wiedergabe der Realität“ etwas über die Realität aussagt. Eine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute.’ Brecht’s quotation appears in the original German in: Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory : Marxism, Modernity and the Threepenny Lawsuit* (University of California: California, 1997), 141. The english quotation is taken from: Schwartz, “Form follows Fetish : Adolf Behne and the Problem of ‘Sachlichkeit’,” 53.

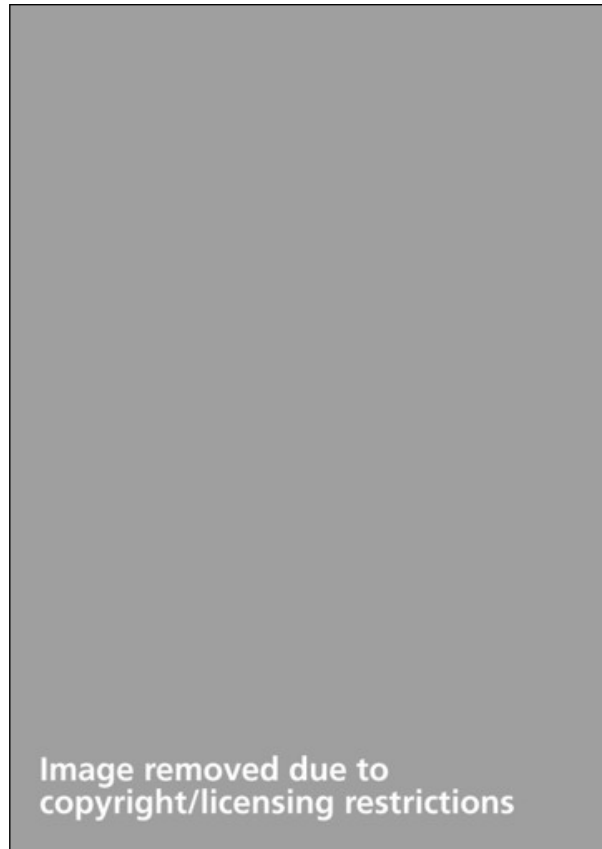


Figure 95: Sasha Stone, Old and new housing in Berlin. Source: Stone, Sasha. "Alter und neuer Wohnbau Berlins." *Das neue Berlin* 1, no. 3 (1929): 58–59.

This aestheticism of Berlin's new housing developments was particularly evident in the myriad architectural surveys and magazines that publicised new architectural projects. In Heinz Johannes' *Neues Bauen in Berlin* (New Building in Berlin, 1931), Erwin Gutkind and Jakob Schallenger's *Berliner Wohnbauten der letzte Jahre* (Housing in Berlin in recent Years, 1931), the illustrations in the pages of *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, and the photographs of Sasha Stone and Arthur Köster, the emphasis was not on the function of these buildings as homes, schools, hospitals, offices, and so on, but on their architectural form.⁸ The photographs emphasised clean surfaces and straight lines, and frequently strove for symmetrical balance and aesthetically pleasing composition. Very few surveys of the new housing developments focussed on their attributes as homes. The qualities of sun, light and air that were represented, were done so in the spirit of a clinical aesthetic rather than as a social gain.

8. Johannes, *Neues Bauen in Berlin*; Jakob Schallenger, and Erwin Gutkind, *Berliner Wohnbauten*.

It might be understandable for those books and magazines that marketed themselves as architectural surveys to present the new housing estates in such a fashion, in which architects and planners could debate the relative artistic merits of each other's work, but it is perplexing that the Social Democrats should choose to use the same means of representation for their 1929 local election publicity. Statute 155 of the Weimar Constitution emphasised the individual ('for every German a healthy home'), and yet Social Democratic representations of new housing developments rarely concentrated on their inhabitants. Instead they employed the same visual language used in the architectural surveys, rather than focussing on the social improvements they could offer. Aware of their failure to produce adequate volumes of affordable homes, the Social Democrats opted for scale and spectacle, hoping to instill a sense of awe in the electorate. SPD propaganda presented photographs of the largest estates, which were characterised by empty, regular spaces, demarcated by evenly distributed clean lines running along white façades. But there was no hiding for the proletariat from the failures of the Neues Bauen house building programme, and all these abstract qualities could do was risk alienating them further. What these photographs lacked was social content. As Brecht observed, the 'actual reality' (*eigentliche Realität*) had become functionalised, and human relationships reified. Steve Giles has noted that Brecht realised that photographic reproductions of 'reality' could not depict the abstract and functional relations which constituted social reality.⁹ The overwhelming majority of the photographs taken of the fruits of Berlin's Neues Bauen programme, of the permanent garden colonies, of the new urban parks and squares—and of the tenements by the end of the decade—contained at best what Frederic Schwartz has called the 'weak shadows' of human life.¹⁰ In the case of the new housing estates, the photographs taken of them reinforced the Social Democrats' obsession with a will to order. The flawless images, devoid of human figures, illustrated compartmentalised spaces that alluded to the comprehensive house rules designed to uphold peace, quiet and cleanliness, while discouraging disorder and transgression.

9. Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory*, 141.

10. Schwartz, "Form follows Fetish : Adolf Behne and the Problem of 'Sachlichkeit'," 70.



Figure 96: Heinrich Zille, *Berlin – Ackerstrasse*, 1905. Heliogravüre, 20.1 x 24.5cm. Private collection.

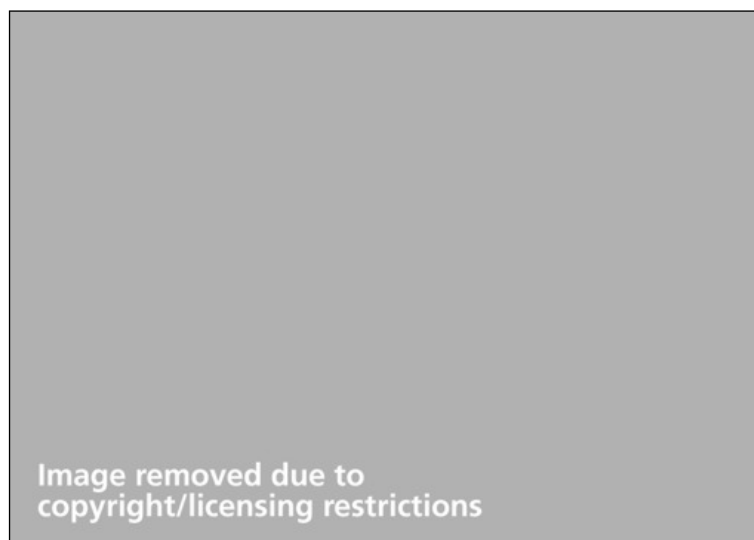


Figure 97: Otto Hagemann, *Hufeisensiedlung, Rudower Allee, Gartenfront*. Photograph, 1928. Landesarchiv, Berlin

Only on rare occasions did human activity make an appearance in representations of the new housing estates. Otto Hagemann's commissioned photographs of the Britz housing developments in 1928 appear as conscious attempts to show signs of the social life of the estates. But even here, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetic dissolved social relations (fig. 97). It is in such photographs as these that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* aesthetic reveals itself as a reconfiguration of social space. In one photograph, children play alone in the sandpits in the centre of the estate, detached from their mothers who can now keep an eye on their

offspring from the balconies of their apartments.¹¹ In another photograph, gardeners are confined to their garden plot by wire fences. In every photograph of the new estates, the green lawns in the interior spaces are empty: play and games on them were prohibited. In a similar fashion, photographs of the *Dauerkolonie Rehberge* show a geometrical grid of plots (fig. 98): a garden colony that has been Taylorised, subjected to the same principles of rationalisation that had taken hold in the factory assembly halls a few years earlier (fig. 99). In the few photographs showing social activity in the *Dauerkolonie Rehberge*, private family units exist in self-contained and immaculately kept garden plots (fig. 92).

The richness of the social relations of the urban working-class that characterised the prewar era, and which Zille had best represented, were not sustainable in the same form in the new spaces created by the Social Democrats in Berlin in the late 1920s. An evolved urban mentality, akin to the present-day concept of the nuclear family, or what Richard Sennett called the ‘intensified family,’ began to replace the older notion of extended relations, with their ‘multiplicity of contact points,’ and whose origins had developed in rural communities.¹² The tenement courtyards, *Laubenzkolonien* and the open terrain at the edges of the city, functioned as transitional spaces, a buffer zone in which many aspects of rural community life could be adapted and maintained in an urban environment. The harvest festival which took place in the garden colonies and tenement courtyards is a good example of this. The increasing erosion of these traditions and mores amidst the urbanisation of space and culture, provoked the interest of the popular illustrated press, which displayed an appetite for romanticising tenement life and its dying customs. But an intriguing dialectic emerges here. In some of the illustrated newspaper articles which featured the *Meyers-Hof* from 1929 onwards, the photographs appeared both disinterested and detached, while at the same time managing to unwittingly capture a candid, undiluted snapshot of proletarian life (fig. 77).¹³ Although these reports documented annual events such as the harvest festival, they managed to reproduce something of the character of daily

11. This particular advantage was noted by a Frau Dr. Wegscheider on her visit to the Britz estate in 1927. See: Wegscheider, et al., “Weitere Urteile über die Großsiedlung Britz,” *Wohnungswirtschaft* 4, no. 16 (1927): 138.

12. Sennett, *Uses of Disorder*, 56-57.

13. Mimsch [Friedrich Kroner]. “‘Erntefest’ in der Mietskaserne,” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, August 25, 1929.

life, by capturing the myriad tiny details—those ‘inconspicuous surface-level expressions’ that Kracauer described—which tell us more about the tenement’s inhabitants than the Neue Sachlichkeit images offered up by those with a left-wing reformist political agenda.¹⁴

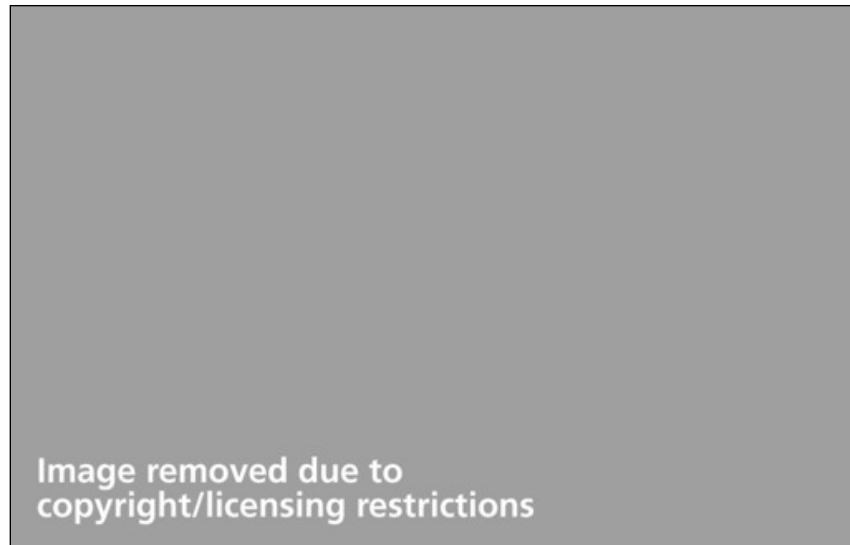


Figure 98: Dauerkolonie Rehberge, circa 1929. Landesarchiv, Berlin.

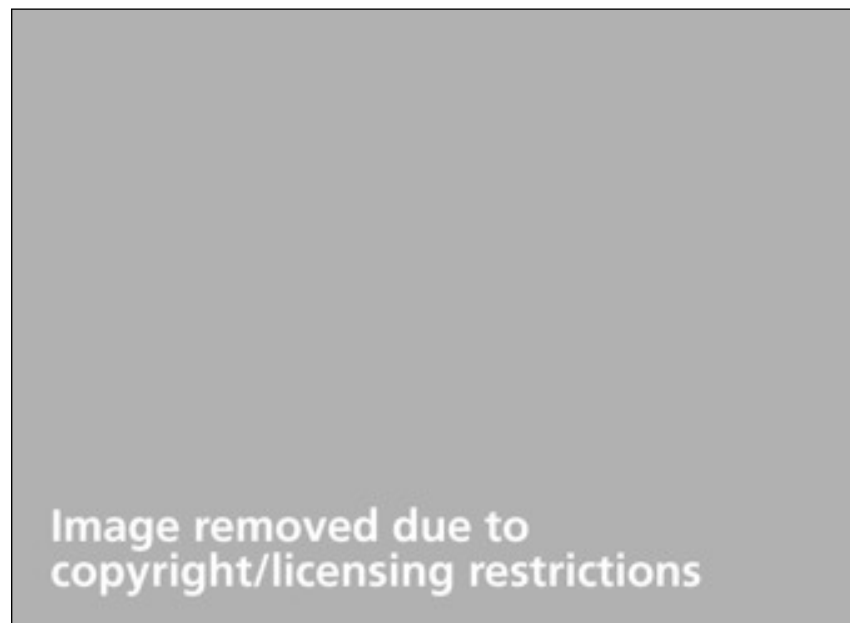


Figure 99: AEG assembly hall on Brunnenstrasse, 1900. Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

14. Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75.

The Social Democrats' propaganda images of Berlin's transformation at their hands reflected the *Neue Sachlichkeit* shift of focus away from the human individual to the manmade object; to an object, or objects that were spatially arranged in an ordered fashion. Conscious of the threats each faced from their political opponents, SPD and KPD propaganda became overwhelmingly political rather than social. Communist propaganda tactics from 1929 onwards were in actual fact extremely similar to the Social Democratic aesthetic, and their marches and demonstrations entailed the same high degree of spatial organisation and arrangement that the Social Democrats tried to impose upon urban space. Explicit in communist propaganda was the submission of the individual to the crowd: only the masses could effect revolution. So while the Social Democrats were determined to dissolve the masses by compartmentalising them and distributing them in space, the Communists applied comparable principles of spatial organisation to bring the masses together. But what both SPD and KPD aims shared was a dissolution of old social patterns based on rural custom, towards a modernised, organised society.

The reorganisation of urban space and the subsequent dissolution of old social patterns it inflicted, provoked responses from many contemporary observers who were sensitive to the changing spaces of the city, the loss of its traditions, and the fragmentation of social relations. When Siegfried Kracauer returned to Berlin in the late twenties, having studied architecture in the city some fifteen years earlier, he responded to the changes he saw, just as Wunderwald had done a few years earlier. He encountered the city in a heightened state of sensitivity that comes with re-experiencing a place as new, second time around. Here and there, Kracauer encountered changed scenes which acted as *mémoires involontaires*, invoking prior images lost forever that underlined the changing nature of the city. This is evident in a piece entitled *Farewell to the Linden Arcade* (1930), in which Kracauer explored the once-popular public passage off Friedrichstrasse, for the first time since before the war. Kracauer found the arcade irrevocably changed:

The Lindenpassage has ceased to exist. [...] When I recently strolled through it again, as I so often did during my student years before the war, the work of destruction was already almost complete.¹⁵

15. Siegfried Kracauer, "Farewell to the Linden Arcade," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed.

The arcade had been transformed from its prewar appearance. Kracauer described the ‘cold, smooth marble plates’ that obscured the older architectural details, and the ‘modern glass roof of the sort one finds by the dozen nowadays.’ However, Kracauer found that there still remained glimpses of the ‘faded bombast that now no passerby will ever again be able to appreciate.’¹⁶ Despite these small details, the fate of the arcade is sealed: ‘Now, under a new glass roof and adorned in marble, the former arcade looks like the vestibule of a department store [...] All the objects [in the arcade] have been struck dumb. They huddle timidly behind the empty architecture.’¹⁷

The appeal of such spaces, observed Kracauer, was their appearance as fissures in the bourgeois façade of public life: ‘Everything excluded from this bourgeois life because it was not presentable or even because it ran counter to the official world view settled in the arcades.’¹⁸ Kracauer clearly regretted the demise of the Linden arcade, and not simply because of its architectural renovation in the modern style which he never exhibited any great enthusiasm for. Evident in Kracauer’s descriptions of the faded shops and attractions within the arcade is his lament for the passing of a previous way of life, that was disappearing across the whole city. Here, the Linden arcade represented Berlin itself. The postcards were now merely mass-produced commodities and the World Panorama and Anatomical Museum no longer a source of fascination for Berliners, who had long since become enthralled by the magic of the cinema screen.¹⁹ The Linden arcade was a victim of what Kracauer called elsewhere, a process of demystification:

The capitalist epoch is a stage in the process of demystification. The type of thinking that corresponds to the present economic system has, to an unprecedented degree, made possible the domination and use of nature as a self-contained entity.²⁰

Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 337.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 342.

18. Ibid., 338.

19. Ibid., 342.

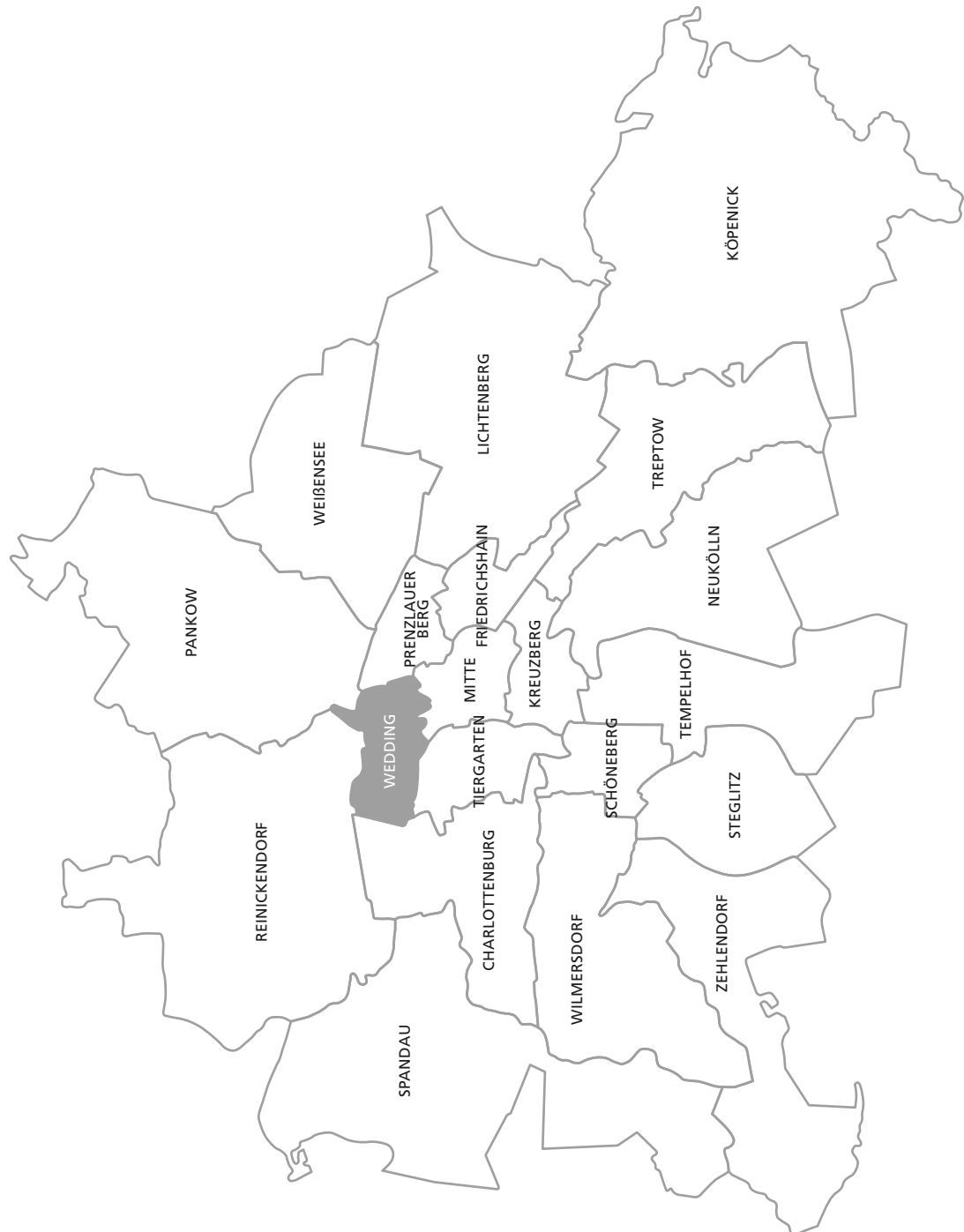
20. Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 80.

If the era of capitalism involved a process of demystification that enabled a domination over nature, then what exactly had been demystified? If demystification implies a clarity and an explicit statement of values, then it is the tacit understandings of nature that have been undermined by capitalism. Or to put it another way, the established rural traditions and customs of the past had been unravelled and destabilised, by a new form of urban environment that dominated and organised space.

Both the compartmentalisation of undeveloped space in Berlin's working-class districts, and the transformation of the existing proletarian neighbourhoods into aestheticised objects are symptomatic of this process of demystification. In the former instance, by an erosion of tradition and rural customs through their rationalisation under Social Democratic guidance. In the latter, by the transfigurative effects of new media forms, particularly photography and the cinema. Spaces such as the Volkspark Rehberge and the new Zeilenbau housing projects like the Friedrich-Ebert estate, completed dominated nature, weakening the possibility of maintaining old customs and social practices. And amongst the tenements, where the remnants of rural and proletarian traditions persevered, they were increasingly neatly packaged and commodified for popular consumption.

The post-World-War-Two period inherited the attitudes to urban development that were forged in the Weimar era, and continued to focus on renewal programmes capable of completely rupturing traditions and communities, rather than fostering a sense of continuity with previous urban development. Weimar Germany's architects, planners and economists pioneered methods of mass production, bureaucracy and economics, which enabled them to ride roughshod over existing urban spaces and the people and traditions they contained; mistakes which urban planners continued to perpetrate across Europe and North America throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Appendix I: Maps



Map A: Administrative districts of Berlin after the inauguration of Greater Berlin in 1920.



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Map B: Berlin, with its administrative districts and former villages.
From: Statistisches Amt der Stadt Berlin, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Berlin 1929*
(Berlin: Otto Stollberg & Co, 1929), xiv.

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Map C: Berlin-Wedding, 1902.



Map D: Building development in Berlin-Schöneberg, 1879, with the Rote Insel highlighted.
Source: Baedeker, Karl. *Berlin-Schöneberg : Stadtführer*. 3rd ed. Berlin: Baedeker, 1976.



Map E: Wedding, circa 1930, showing recent urban developments.

Key to Map E

pre 1914	post 1924	Land use
		Housing developments
		Industry
		Municipal facilities (hospitals, public offices, etc)
		Public green space
		Open land and woodland
		Churches and cemeteries

Housing estates

1. Friedrich-Ebert estate (Mebes & Emmerich, Bruno Taut)
2. Jungfernheide estate (Mebes & Emmerich)
3. Strassenbahnhof estate (Jean Krämer)
4. Housing around Sansibarstrasse (Iwan & Zamojski)
5. Afrikanische Strasse apartments (Mies van der Rohe)
6. DEGEWO estate around Dubliner Strasse (Erich Glas)
7. Schillerpark estate (Bruno Taut)
8. Housing around Ostender Strasse (various)
9. Schillerhof estate (Erich Glas)
10. Christianiastrasse 94–98 (Mebes & Emmerich)
11. Atlantic Stadt (Rudolf Fränkel)
12. GAGFAH estate, Steegerstrasse (Reinhardt & Süßenguth)

Appendix II: Weimar Constitution

The following articles are referred to in the above text, and are reproduced from: Hildebrandt, Horst. *Die deutschen Verfassungen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1971.

Artikel 10

Das Reich kann im Wege der Gesetzgebung Grundsätze aufstellen für:

1. die Rechte und Pflichten der Religionsgesellschaften;
2. das Schulwesen einschließlich des Hochschulwesens und das wissenschaftliche Büchereiwesen;
3. das Recht der Beamten aller öffentlichen Körperschaften;
4. das Bodenrecht, die Bodenverteilung, das Ansiedlungs- und Heimstättenwesen, die Bindung des Grundbesitzes, das Wohnungswesen und die Bevölkerungsverteilung;
5. das Bestattungswesen.

Artikel 151

Die Ordnung des Wirtschaftslebens muss den Grundsätzen der Gerechtigkeit mit dem Ziele der Gewährleistung eines menschenwürdigen Daseins für alle entsprechen. In diesen Grenzen ist die wirtschaftliche Freiheit des einzelnen zu sichern.

Gesetzlicher Zwang ist nur zulässig zur Verwirklichung bedrohter Rechte oder im Dient überragender Forderungen des Gemeinwohls.

Die Freiheit des Handels und Gewerbes wird nach Maßgabe der Reichsgesetzes gewährleistet

Artikel 155

Die Verteilung und Nutzung des Bodens wird von Staats wegen in einer Weise überwacht, die Missbrauch verhütet und dem Ziele zustrebt, jedem Deutschen eine gesunde Wohnung und allen deutschen Familien, besonders den kinderreichen, eine ihren Bedürfnissen entsprechende Wohn- und Wirtschaftsheimstätte zu sichern. Kriegsteilnehmer sind bei dem zu schaffenden Heimstättenrecht besonders zu berücksichtigen.

Grundbesitz, dessen Erwerb zur Befriedigung des Wohnungsbedürfnisses, zur Förderung der Siedlung und Urbarmachung oder zur Hebung der Landwirtschaft nötig ist, kann enteignet werden. Die fideikomnisse sind aufzulösen.

Die Bearbeitung und Ausnutzung des Bodens ist eine Pflicht des Grundbesitzers gegenüber der Gemeinschaft. Die Wertsteigerung des Bodens, die ohne eine Arbeits- oder Kapitalaufwendung auf das Grundstück entsteht, ist für die Gesamtheit nutzbar zu machen.

Alle Bodenschätze und alle wirtschaftlich nutzbaren Naturkräfte unter Aufsicht des Staates. Private Regale sind im Wege der Gesetzgebung auf den Staat zu überführen.

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Eulenspiegel

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Heim am Buschkrug

Kleingartenwacht

Kulturwille

Das Kunstblatt

Das neue Berlin (1929)

Die neue Stadt

Proletarische Sozialpolitik

Der Querschnitt

Die rote Stern

Simplicissimus

Sozialistisches Monatshefte

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