

**ERNST L. FREUD, ARCHITECT:
THE CASE OF THE MODERN BOURGEOIS HOME**

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Volker M. Welter



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To the memory of

Paul Levi
(1919, Leipzig – 2008, Reading)

and

Harry Weinberger
(1924, Berlin – 2009, Leamington Spa)

The trace of my days on earth cannot perish in eons.

J. W. von Goethe, *Faust, Part II*

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3 Introduction 6

Anybody who sought psychoanalysis in Berlin during the 1920s had the choice between private practitioners and psychoanalytic clinics. A search could have started with a visit to Karl Abraham, who practiced in Berlin-Grunewald until his death in 1925 and continued in a wide, circular sweep through the western parts of the city, meeting along the way Hans and Jeanne Lampl in Berlin-Dahlem, Sandor Radó in Berlin-Schmargendorf, Max Eitingon in Berlin-Tiergarten, and, back in Berlin-Grunewald, René A. Spitz. If these consultations would not have yielded success, there was still the Poliklinik für Psychoanalytische Behandlung nervöser Krankheiten in Potsdamer Straße and, after 1928, in new premises in Wichmannstraße, both in the Tiergarten district. Or, for a longer stay, Ernst Simmel had opened the psychoanalytical clinic Sanatorium Schloß Tegel in Berlin-Tegel in 1927. Possibly unbeknown to our fictive patient, the search for a psychoanalyst would have taken him through a sequence of modern psychoanalytic interiors designed by Ernst L. Freud (1892–1970), the youngest son of Sigmund Freud and a successful domestic architect in Weimar Republic Berlin and in London after 1933.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the name Freud had become synonymous with psychoanalysis, but in the 1920s, at least in Berlin, the name was also synonymous with the creation of the earliest documented architect-designed psychoanalytical consulting rooms in architectural history. Intellectually, Sigmund Freud's conception of psychoanalysis has long been recognized as a major contribution to Western modernity. Architecturally, his Vienna consulting room and adjacent study, however, seem to illustrate all that contemporaries thought to be wrong with late nineteenth-century domestic interiors. Cramped with furniture and filled with antiques, statues, books, oriental rugs, art works, and aromatic cigar smoke, the rooms were sensuously rich and offered plenty of opportunities for a writer's thoughts and gaze to sojourn, but also for unhygienic dust to settle. These rooms recall the sumptuous period interiors that evoked Walter Benjamin's wrath when reflecting, for example, on the kind of later nineteenth-century domestic setting his Berlin grandmother lived in or of Jugendstil apartments in the early twentieth century. The aspirations, but also errors and faults of bourgeois life and thought, Benjamin argued, could be gleaned from the bodily impressions left in the abundant velvety surfaces covering and housing many objects in these rooms which functioned like a shell for the inhabitant and his possessions.¹

Compared to his father's quarters, psychoanalytical spaces designed by Ernst L. Freud were free from ornamental lines and decorative figurines. Instead, their interiors were a combination of the essential couch and chair with, perhaps, a print or two of the founder of psychoanalysis, a writing desk with a second chair, a net curtain, and a potted plant. Judging from the very few surviving black-and-white photographs, Ernst L. Freud's psy-

choanalytical rooms come across as almost inconspicuous modern designs, delineating an interior that obviously aimed to impress itself as little as possible on the patient's mind. While the latter tried to reclaim aspects of his life, his body left an impression, at least momentarily, in the soft upholstery of the couch. Thus, Freud's designs refute a modern architecture of the type Benjamin referred to when he described architectural modernism as the exchange of soft impressionable surfaces for hard, reflective, unwelcoming ones.²

Perhaps Benjamin thought of the *Maison de Verre* (1927–32) in his beloved Paris, designed by Pierre Charreau for a Parisian gynaecologist, when he made this observation. That building, with a gynaecological consulting room at its heart, is inscribed in the memory of modern architectural history not least because it was constructed from exposed steel beams and translucent glass bricks—external modernist characteristics which Freud's architecture generally neither relied upon nor would have exposed in a such an overly visible manner.

Architectural modernism experimented with radical political utopias, housing for the masses, and with space, form, and technology. For example, Berlin during the 1920s and early 1930s evokes images of radiant white cubes and regularly paced *Zeilenbau*, both of *Neues Bauen* perfection, proclaiming the will to build a new society within a most-likely socialist order for the masses of *Neue Menschen*. Such a picture at least emerges from many period accounts and those architectural histories that, accordingly, tell of *The Victory of the New Building Style*.³

Freud, however, stayed away from most issues that nowadays are considered to represent the architectural, social, and cultural goals of the 1920s and 1930s and, consequently, his architecture has not received much attention beyond the small circles of historians of psychoanalysis and the Freud family. The spatial settings of his consulting rooms illustrate one likely cause for this relative anonymity, viz. the emphasis psychoanalysis placed on the individual versus the one many contemporary modernist architects and later many historians placed on the masses. Another possible cause is the emphasis of Freud's architectural practice on domestic architecture for middle-class and bourgeois clients. Villas, country houses, and interiors for homes and rental apartments were the staple diet of his offices in Berlin and London. Freud also designed some business premises and offices for bankers, members of liberal professions, and others of comparable social standing, but with few exemptions his designs were usually for clients he personally knew.

Following closely his clients' wishes rather than pursuing a set of a priori artistic ideas, Freud created a heterogeneous œuvre that sought neither the expression of a *Zeitgeist*, such as, for example, the pursuit of the radically new, a fundamental break with the past, nor aligned itself with the opponents of modernism who favoured traditional architecture over any renewal, radical or not, of architectural practice. Looked at today, Freud's architectural works oscillate between the familiar and unfamiliar, the modern and traditional, and the homely and unhomely. Yet this does not point to architecture without qualities but rather at difficulties architectural history experiences when trying to place such œuvre.

The obstacles in handling heterogeneous modern designs, especially ones by a single architect, contrast sharply with the favourable reception Freud received by his contemporaries as both the sheer number of his clients and their illustrious names suggest. The 1936 *Philo-Lexikon: Handbuch des jüdischen Wissens* even included Freud in the section

on contemporary architects, which concluded with the entry 'Architects, Jewish',⁴ which placed his name right beside those of such famous colleagues as Adolf Messel, Erich Mendelsohn, and Josef Frank. Moreover, looking through period architectural magazines and contemporary books unveils quickly that bourgeois and middle-class architecture like Freud's was representative of a very large section of modern architecture in Germany and elsewhere during the 1920s, 1930s, and beyond.

To concern oneself with bourgeois modern architecture requires redirecting one's gaze towards the social, economic, and cultural background of middle-class clients including the occasionally plain ordinariness of their modern homes. The latter contrasts sharply with the more radical formal language of architectural modernism, but at least contemporaries were aware of the fact that the modernist style created only superficial similarities between buildings that catered to clients of highly disparate social and economic circumstances. For example, Albert Sigrist distinguished in *Das Buch vom Bauen*⁵ between bourgeois and proletarian versions of modernist architecture.

The middle classes were also the focus of contemporary sociological writings such as Siegfried Kracauer's study of *The Salaried Masses*. In the first chapter, 'Unknown Territory', Kracauer pointed out that the 'commonplace existence' of salaried clerks and office workers had hidden this rapidly growing section of the middle classes from the eyes of 'radical intellectuals' regardless of the widely visible fact that cities like Berlin were 'no longer industrial cities, but cities of salaried employees and civil servants'.⁶ Kracauer emphasized the hopes of the new middle classes to achieve a 'bourgeois way of life', even though he indicated a certain critical distance by calling the latter 'vanished' and citing studies that observed an alleged process of proletarianisation of the new middle classes.⁷

Other contemporaries took a much more positive stance towards bourgeois aspirations and culture. The philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner argued in *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* for a positive perception of society (*Gesellschaft*) as an alternative to the contemporary fascination with radical leftwing and rightwing ideas of community (*Gemeinschaft*). Published in 1924, the book was a refutation of Ferdinand Tönnies's study on *Community and Society* (1887)—an important inspiration for all sorts of visions of overcoming mass society with communitarian schemes, including architectural designs⁸—and a contribution to the heated argument about Germany's social and political future. Plessner charged the middle classes with both the defence of society and the increase of its appeal to all citizens. Moreover, he analysed in spatial terms the ritualized social behaviour that took place in the public and private spaces of society. Plessner's appreciation of both the bourgeoisie and society as a social order and his spatialized discussion of social behaviour provide, by analogy, a useful framework from within to look afresh at bourgeois domestic architecture. In short, then, modern domestic bourgeois architecture is the larger background against which this study presents and analyses Ernst L. Freud's architectural career and œuvre.

Bourgeois modernism has recently become the subject of revisionist architectural historical accounts. For example, John V. Maciuka's *Before the Bauhaus* offers a close and highly political reading of the manifold intersections between early modern architects like, for example, Hermann Muthesius and the cultural politics of the different governmental levels of the German nation state with regards to training and educating architects and craftsmen. His analysis also looks at how the interests of the Deutsche Werkbund, a bourgeois pressure group of designers, industrialists, and mainly liberal politicians, may

have overlapped with the imperial longings of the Deutsche Reich.⁹ Or Maiken Umbach's excellent study on *German Cities and Bourgeois Modernism, 1890–1924*, which theorises on the urban spatial politics of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ Using mostly Hamburg as a case study, the author analyses how that class configured the urban environment with regard to nature, sense of time, and place.

The present book employs a different methodology, which, in Kracauer's words, may not offer 'examples of any theory, but ... exemplary instances of reality'.¹¹ Thus in order to add a few tesserae to the mosaic of reality, to paraphrase Kracauer,¹² I pursue Ernst L. Freud's architectural career as a case study; a methodological tool that was, incidentally, perfected by Sigmund Freud in his writings on individual cases of psychoanalysis and their meaning for the development of the discipline at large. Moreover, the emphasis on individuals as acting agents in the cityscapes of twentieth-century architectural history in Berlin and London dovetails nicely with the self-perception of good bourgeois citizens.

The study takes a basic chronological approach to Freud's career and life, a path it deviates from if and when required by the larger argument. The contemporary discussion about bourgeois modern architecture in Weimar Germany, especially its domestic variety, is the topic of chapter 1, 'Modern Bourgeois Domestic Architecture of the Weimar Republic', and of chapter 9, 'Architecture without Quality?' In both chapters, questions concerning the middle classes and bourgeoisie as noted above are discussed. In order to delineate the appropriate bourgeois context in which architects like Freud were operating, great emphasis has been placed on identifying contemporary writers, for example Helmuth Plessner, who did not automatically assume that the middle classes were a disappearing part of modern society.

Sandwiched in between the opening and concluding chapters is the chronological account of Freud's career and architecture both in Germany and the United Kingdom; particular emphasis has been placed on his time in the former country. Chapter 2, 'The Making of an Architect', portrays Ernst L. Freud's youth in Vienna and his studies of architecture there and in Munich. Chapter 3, 'Going Modern with Rainer Maria Rilke and Adolf Loos', looks at two canonical figures of bourgeois modernity who were biographically linked to Ernst L. Freud; connections that turn out to have greatly influenced his evolving sense of bourgeois domesticity. Chapters 4 to 6 take the reader to Weimar Berlin. Chapter 4, 'Society Architect in Berlin', offers an overview of Freud's German works, including a look at the economic and social circumstances of Freud's own career and life, but also at the profession and his clients. Chapter 5, 'Houses in and around Berlin', analyses individual houses in the city and its vicinity while also discussing the expectations and desires of the bourgeois clients.

The following chapter 6, 'Couches, Consulting Rooms, and Clinics', enlarges the scope of the study by presenting the first ever architecturally historical analysis of all of Freud's psychoanalytic spaces known to us. These designs are included in this study as they were often conceived as extensions, conceptually and architecturally, of private homes. This chapter also takes the narrative to the United Kingdom, where Freud's first clients were psychoanalysts aiming to ease the exile experience of Sigmund Freud's son.

Chapter 7, 'At Home in England', moves the story to England where Freud lived in London from late 1933 onwards. The emphasis rests on analysing how Freud negotiated the loss of his home and client base with the need to restore both while also integrating his version of modern domestic architecture into the context of the British hesitation to fully

embrace Continental European modernism. In England, I argue, Freud found his true architectural home as suddenly his modern domestic designs blended in almost seamlessly with the pragmatic approach to modern architecture that many English colleagues had adopted in their attempts to modernize the architecture of the United Kingdom. Chapter 8, 'Family Architect', is likewise set in England and looks at Freud's projects for his own and his extended family. Leaving the chronological approach, this chapter presents exemplary analyses of Freud's Berlin and London homes as well as that of his parents in the British capital, including the recreation of the Vienna consulting room.

In order to portray Ernst L. Freud and his works as an example of bourgeois modern architecture, it was necessary to also research the lives of his clients, many, but not all, of them of Jewish background. Inevitably, this research has added to my architectural historical interest the aspect of exile studies. While I cannot claim expertise in this area, I have included many biographical details in the Selected List of Works, though space did not allow turning the latter into a series of miniature case studies. However, to the careful reader, and hopefully also to future historians, the biographical details offer further details about the bourgeois life and aspirations of many of Freud's clients. That these annotations are unequally distributed with regards to individual clients is a consequence of German National-Socialist politics and the Holocaust. Comparable to their architect, many clients of Freud were forced into exile, if they had been so lucky to realize early enough that they were no longer welcome in their home country. Thus, it is hoped that the annotations will contribute not only to the architectural history of the period but also to the remembrances of these émigrés.

Throughout the study, I mostly use the terms *bourgeois* and *bourgeoisie* instead of *middle class*. Regardless of the Marxist overtones, they convey rather well the cultural aspirations of those *bürgerliche* citizens that commissioned architectural works from Ernst L. Freud.

NOTES

1. W. Benjamin. 2002. 'Berlin Childhood around 1900' [1938], in H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 3 1935–1938*, trans. by E. Jephcott et al. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 344–413 (369). See also H. Heynen. 1999. *Architecture and Modernity. A Critique*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 107–117.
2. W. Benjamin. 2001. 'The Return of the *Flâneur*' [1929] and 'Experience and Poverty' [1933], in M. W. Jennings (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 2 1927–1934*, trans. by R. Livingstone et al. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 262–267 (264), 731–736 (734).
3. W. C. Behrendt. 2000. *The Victory of the New Building Style* [1927], trans. by H. F. Mallgrave. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute.
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5. A. Sigrist (i.e. A. Schwab). 1973. 'Das Buch vom Bauen.' *Wohnungsnot Neue Technik Neue Baukunst Städtebau aus sozialistischer Sicht* [1930]. Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 67, my translation.
6. S. Kracauer. 1998. *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. by Q. Hoare. London: Verso, 29, 32.
7. Kracauer, *Salaried Masses*, 82.
8. See V. M. Welter. 2010. 'The Limits of Community—The Possibilities of Society: On Modern Architecture in Weimar German', *Oxford Art Journal* 33 (1): 63–80.

9. J. V. Maciuka. 2005. *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
10. M. Umbach. 2009. *German Cities and Bourgeois Modernism, 1890–1924*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Kracauer, *Salaried Masses*, 25
12. Kracauer, *Salaried Masses*, 32.

Chapter 1

Modern Bourgeois Domestic Architecture of the Weimar Republic

In August 1928, the German architectural monthly *Die Pyramide* published three distinctly different architectural projects: an English country house, a villa by Le Corbusier, and a domestic interior by Ernst L. Freud. The English country house Northease in Rodmell, Sussex, had been owned by consecutive generations of one family since the time of Henry VIII.¹ The photographer and writer E. O. Hoppé presented a recent refurbishment and extension of the house by the architect J. C. Pocock. The owners are described as ‘assiduous, practicing farmers—she is in charge of the cows, while her brother-in-law takes care of the fields and sheep,’ but this was not a homestead of hard working farm folk; instead, ‘the impression of the mansion is rather poetic, and Romanticism constitutes without doubt the background to the daily life.’² Built in parts from local flint stone, the renovated house was furnished with an eclectic collection of historic and traditional furniture and objects. The interior fostered the romantic ambitions of the farming occupants but did not recreate a particular historic period (fig. 1.1). Even more, the sparsely decorated rooms, some of them underneath the visible rafters of an old barn, could almost be called an attempt at reinventing traditional interiors in light of the contemporary debates about modern architecture.

The contrast between Northease and the building presented in the next article could not have been greater. ‘A Villa by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret’ is the rather dull title of a tedious and stilted, but luckily short essay about the Stein villa in Garches, France.³ With words as devoid of meaning as the interior of the villa’s drawing room (fig. 1.2) was empty of furniture, the author tried to capture—in vain—the effects of the free plan and the free façade on the inhabitants: ‘One can see, when light, air, and space penetrate the building in all directions, how the drawing room—the centre of the domestic life—pulls together and lets shine through all dimensions, *viz.* lengths, widths, and heights of both the interior space and the entire grounds. Thus a feeling of a new and free monumentality is conveyed to the inhabitant.’⁴

No such shortage of meaningful words characterizes the third essay that is entitled ‘Zu Hause’ [At Home]. ‘What a world of imaginations is contained in these words: *Zu Hause!*’ the text begins. It continues asserting that the *Zu Hause* has to keep at bay the ‘questionable, wicked, threatening, and alien outside world.’⁵ Ultimately, both the home and its architect have more constructive roles than a mere defence against the uncanny.⁶

The *Zu Hause* begins with the earliest childhood. ... Here, within the security, the child begins to grasp thankfully and with fresh senses the environment. How constructive