

SUSAN R. HENDERSON

BUILDING CULTURE

ERNST MAY AND THE NEW FRANKFURT INITIATIVE, 1926–1931



PETER LANG PUBLISHING

This book is a history of the New Frankfurt initiative, its projects and actors, notably the architect and planner Ernst May, and its achievements, set within the turbulent context of the Weimar decade. It chronicles its many accomplishments: the construction of housing settlements, innovations in construction and materials, the parks and garden colonies program, innovations in school, medical facility and church design, reforms in woman's sphere, and a crafting of New Life culture. It examines the New Frankfurt in light of the social and political debates that shaped it and the works it produced, and describes the relationship of work and theory to contemporary reform movements. Finally, the narrative underscores the gulf between the idyll of modernity and the political and social realities of life in a Germany on the brink of collapse.

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BUILDING CULTURE

Studies in Modern European History

Frank J. Coppa
General Editor

Vol. 64



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Henderson, Susan R.

Building Culture: Ernst May and the New Frankfurt Initiative,
1926–1931 / Susan R. Henderson.

pages cm. — (Studies in modern European history; vol. 64)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. May, Ernst, 1886–1970—Criticism and interpretation.

2. Planned communities—Germany—Frankfurt am Main—History—20th century.

3. Architecture and society—Germany—Frankfurt am Main—History—20th century.

4. Frankfurt am Main (Germany)—Buildings, structures, etc. I. Title.

NA9085.M39H46 711'.409434164—dc23 2013012577

ISBN 978-1-4331-0587-6 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-1-4539-0533-3 (e-book)

ISSN 0893-6897

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the “Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available
on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability
of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council of Library Resources.



© 2013 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006
www.peterlang.com

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Printed in Germany

Dedicated

to

Barbara Miller Lane

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Acknowledgments

There are many who have helped over the years in this work. In particular, I would like to thank Jean-François Bédard, the late George Collins and Christiane Crasemann Collins, Christine Boyer, Dennis Doordan, David Haney, Eckhard Herrel, Jeanne Kisacky, the late Ferdinand Kramer, Lore Kramer, Stephanie Leeds, Mary Mcleod, Ulrike May, Barbara Miller-Lane, Barbara Opar, the late Julius Posener; Dietrich Pressel, Gail Radford, Susan Solomon, the late Werner Seligmann, and Patricia Waddy.

Of the institutions and their able staffs who supported my endeavors are Avery Library, Columbia University, New York; the Bauhaus Archive, Berlin; the Baumeister Archive, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; Bird Library, Special Collections, Syracuse University; the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, Oakland; the Library of Congress, Washington DC; the Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal; the Cornell University Library Archive, Ithaca, New York; the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM), Frankfurt am Main; the Ernst May Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main; the Freie Universität, Berlin; the Archiv des Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur (gta), ETH, Zurich; the library of the German National Museum, Nuremberg; the Getty Museum, Los Angeles; the University Library of Humboldt University, Berlin; the Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt am Main; the Leo Baeck Library, New York City; the New York City Public Library; the Stadthistorisches Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Universität für angewandte Kunst, Vienna; the Wolfsonian Museum, Miami Beach.

For financial and facilities support I would like to thank the the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Phillips Universität, Marburg the Renée Crown Honors Program of Syracuse University, the School of Architecture of Architecture, Syracuse University, the Wolfsonian Museum Fellowship Program.

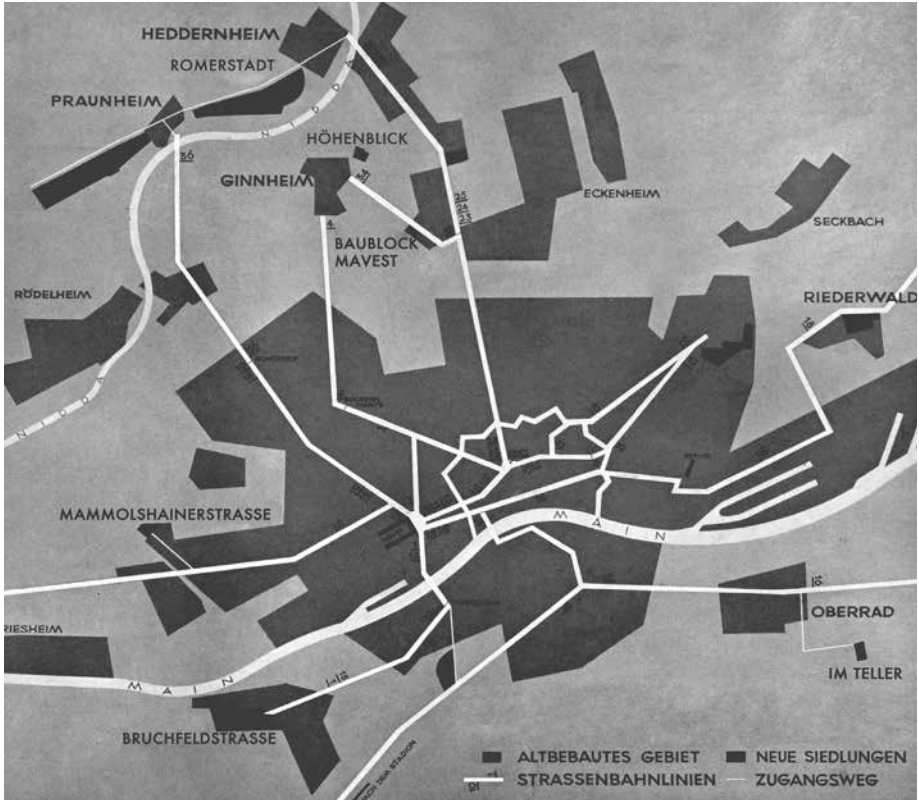
For the layout and design of the book thanks go to Jeffrey Hannigan, Brandon Peterson, and Dincer Savaskan.

Abbreviations

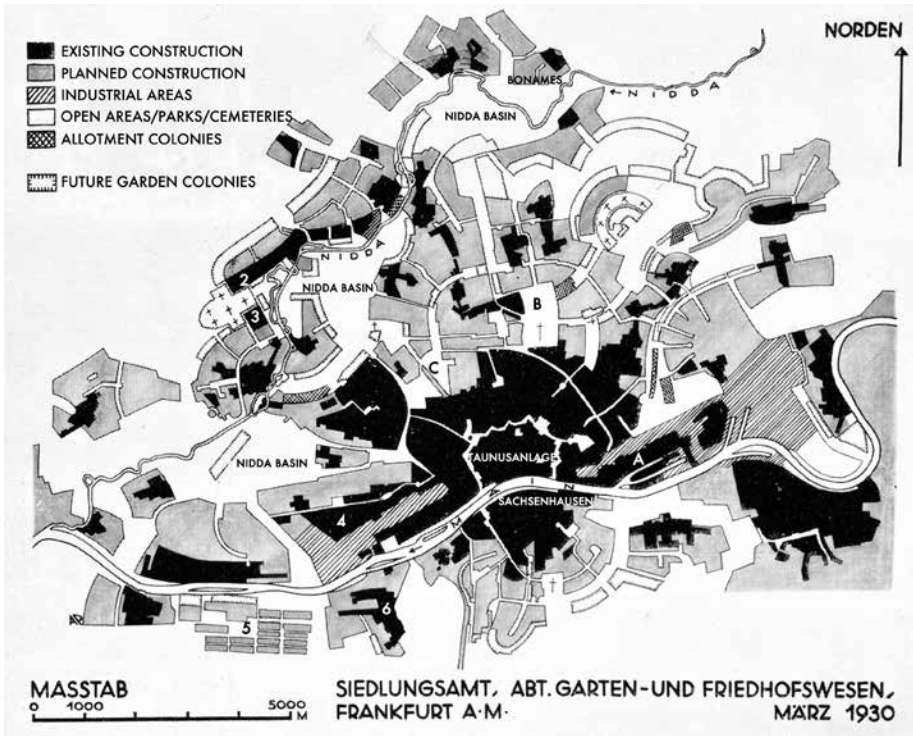
AfE	Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschränkte
AG	Aktiengesellschaft
ABG	Aktienbaugesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen
ATSB	Arbeiter Turn- und Sportbund
BDB	Bund Deutscher Bodenreform (Union for German Land Reform)
BDF	Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women's Clubs)
BDNF	Bund Das Neue Frankfurt
BHAB	Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin
<i>BM</i>	<i>Der Baumeister</i>
BRB	Bodenreform Bewegung (Land Reform Movement)
<i>BW</i>	<i>Bauwelt</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Bauzeitung</i>
CBWP	Catharine Bauer Wurster Papers, University of California at Berkeley, Bancroft Library
CCA	Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal
CIAM	International Congress of Architects
CMETH	Archive of CIAM, ETH, Zurich
CSP	Clarence Stein Papers, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
DAM	Deutsches Architektur Museum, Fft aM
<i>DBZ</i>	<i>Deutsche Bauzeitung</i>
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei (German Democratic Party)
DP	Demokratische Partei (Democratic Party)
DGG	Deutsche Gartenstadt Gesellschaft (German Garden City Society)
<i>DF</i>	<i>Die Frau</i>
<i>DNF</i>	<i>Das Neue Frankfurt</i>
<i>dns</i>	<i>die neue stadt</i>
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German Nationalist Party)
<i>DS</i>	<i>Die Siedlung</i>
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)
EBMA	Ella Bergmann Michel Papers, Getty Museum, Los Angeles
EBN	Eugen Blanck Nachlass, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
EM	Ernst May
EMN	Ernst May Nachlass, Deutsches Architektur Museum, Fft aM
EMNN	Ernst May Nachlass, Germanisches National Archiv, Nuremberg
Fft aM	Frankfurt am Main
<i>FGA</i>	<i>Frankfurter General Anzeiger</i>

FKN	Ferdinand Kramer, Private Archive, Fft aM
FN	Frankfurter Nachrichten
FNS	Franz Schuster Papers, Sammlungen der Universität für angewandte Kunst, Vienna
FSR	Frankfurter Stadt-Rundschau
FZ	<i>Frankfurter Zeitung</i>
GG	Gartenstadt Gesellschaft AG, papers, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
GK	<i>Gartenkunst</i>
GM	Getty Museum, Los Angeles
HBN	Herbert Boehm Nachlass, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
HEBS	Henry und Emma Budge Stiftung
IFHP	International Federation for Housing and Planning (Internationaler Verband für Wohnungswesen, Städtebau und Raumordnung)
ISGF	Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
JSAH	<i>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</i>
KP	Kommunistische Partei (Communist Party)
LRM	Life Reform Movement
MA	Magistratsakten, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
MAM	Magistratsakten, Miscellaneous Siedlungen einschliesslich Niederrad, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
MA PHRW	Magistratsakten, Praunheim, Hedderheim und Rebstöcker Walde, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
MCD	Max Cetto Nachlass, DAM
MCG	Max Cetto Papers, Getty Museum, Los Angeles
MSLN	Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky Papers, Sammlungen der Universität für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.
MSN	Miscellaneous Siedlungen including Niederrad, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
NM	<i>Neu Mayland</i>
PA	Personalakten, Personnel Papers, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
PHRW	Praunheim, Heddernheim, Römerstadt
RDH	Reichsverband Deutscher Hausfrauenvereine (National Union of German Housewife Associations)
RKW	Reichskuratorium für Wirtschaftlichkeit

Rfg	Reichsforschungsgesellschaft für Wirtschaftlichkeit in Bau- und Wohnungswesen (National Research Society for Efficiency in Construction and Housing)
RPA	Regional Planning Association Archive, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York
SB	<i>Städtebau</i>
SFG	Studien zur Frankfurter Geschichte
SGP	Siegfried Giedion Papers, ETH, Zurich
SH	<i>Schlesisches Heim</i>
SO	Sammlungen Ortsgeschichte Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
SHE	<i>Stein Holz Eisen</i>
SDP	Sozialdemokratische Partei (Social Democratic Party)
StAB	<i>Städtische Anzeigenblatt</i>
StAbt	Stiftungsabteilung, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
StHM	Stadthistorisches Museum, Fft aM
StVVA	Akten der Stadtverordneten-Versammlung, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
StVVP	Protokoll der Stadtverordneten-Versammlung, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
StVVP	Protokoll des Magistrats Stadt Frankfurt am Main, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
THN	Thea (Dorothea) Hillmann, Nachlass PA, Wohlfahrtsamt Protokoll, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
USDP	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei (Independent Social Democratic Party)
VS	<i>Volksstimme</i>
VW	<i>Die Volkswohnung</i>
WA	Wohnungsamt, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
WFA	Wohlfahrtsamt papers, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
WFAP	Wohlfahrtsamt Protokoll, Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Fft aM
WKV	Wissenschaft, Kunst, und Volksbildung
WKZ	Wild Konzentrationslager
WM	Wolfsonian Museum, Miami Beach
WLB	<i>Wasmuths Lexikon der Baukunst</i>
WMB	<i>Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst</i>
WMBuS	<i>Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst und Städtebau</i>
WSN	Wilhelm Schütte- Papers, Sammlungen der Universität für angewandte Kunst, Vienna.
ZBV	<i>Zentralblatt für Bauverwaltung</i>
ZP	Zentrumspartei (Center Party)



MAP 1 “An Orientation Plan for the Frankfurt Settlements,”
DNF, no. 5, 1928. This map has been modified to clarify some of the locations.



MAP 2 Planning map of 1930 includes proposals for expansion of settlements, gardens, cemeteries for the coming years.

This adapted version adds the following notations:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1. Römerstadt | A. Osthafen |
| 2. Praunheim | B. Municipal Cemetery |
| 3. Westhausen | C. Grüneburg Park (Palmengarten/IG Farben) |
| 4. Hellerhof and Tornow-Gelände | |
| 5. Goldstein | |
| 6. Bruchfeldstrasse | |
| 7. Central White-Collar District | |



FIGURE 0.01 Bruchfeldstrasse residents taking their ease, 1927.

Epigraph

*My goal went far beyond what was then generally considered the duty of an urban designer: the image of the New Life, one of harmonic consistency, pressed upon my imagination with irresistible force . . .*¹

—Ernst May, 1963

In one of the most publicized images of the program called the “New Frankfurt” (1926–1931), a husband and wife relax on the roof terrace of their apartment in Bruchfeldstrasse. (0.01) Young and childless, they while away their leisure time, a freedom achieved with the establishment of the eight-hour day only eight years before this photo of 1927. One imagines that it is a Sunday that finds them not at church, but reading the newspapers in luxurious privacy. They are clearly working people and urbanites. She exhibits the style of the New Woman, with her bobbed hair, loosely-fitted clothing and short skirt. Though there was little land near the factories of the Hoechst paint manufacturies for the construction of a garden suburb, the terrace of their new home is awash in sparkling sunlight and clean air, those ubiquitous life-giving elements that inhabit the poetic of so many major landmarks of modern architecture, from Duiker and Bijvoet’s Zonnenstraal sanatorium to Le Corbusier’s pastoral, the Villa Savoye.

The “New Life” (*Neue Leben*) portrayed here was a chief promise of the Weimar Republic, a “third way” solution to the turmoil of the previous decade; a boon its citizens for having survived the war, years of deprivation and political crises. Both slogan and campaign, the New Life was heralded by many, among them, planners, architects, and social reformers. It promised to be healthier, more “fulfilled,” more modern, and more individualistic life. As its most exquisite, the New Life promised to realize the German tradition of *Bildung*. The concept dated back to the 16th century, extended through the of Goethe, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Hegel. Although its meaning and history are complex, it was fundamentally an ideal of personal growth and self-fulfillment—spiritually, physically and intellectually. It could have political implications—liberating the mind from tradition, superstition and blind allegiance to authority. It could also be linked

to the development of a society, as a collective aspiration of cultural maturation. Wed to the New Life, *Bildung* was an inherent product of institutional efficiency, reform and rationalization. In the 1920s, the two institutions that would nest the New Life were the state and the family. Supported by an amalgam of ideals garnered from the pre-war life reform and youth movements, and garden city activism, the New Life proffered material and spiritual well-being, in favor of revolutionary transformation of the economy or class structure. Modern housing and settlements gave physical form to its aspirations embodied in the photograph of Bruchfeldstrasse in the peace, healthfulness, simplicity and modern style of the young couple, themselves a major object of New Life ministrations in its fostering of the nuclear family.² In their rooftop abode they are settled and at home.

Led by the architect and planner, Ernst May, the New Frankfurt was a settlement initiative, which shaped a vision of the New Life and set about to build it. The program began in 1926 with construction of the first settlements, and ended in a protracted erosion extending from 1931 to 1933. But the intervening years were ones of amazing productivity. May and his team produced new products, furniture and housing prototypes, innovative housing projects for the elderly and single women. They designed their own catalog of standardized building components—from windows to door handles, even cemetery headstones—commercial graphics and city signage. They launched the New Frankfurt and its achievements with a media campaign that harnessed print media, film and radio, and produced the ground-breaking journal, *Das Neue Frankfurt (DNF)*. Fifteen thousand units of housing were built in fourteen new settlements, re-housing some sixty thousand people; new community facilities, schools, churches, public buildings, parks and garden colonies rose to populate the new suburbs. The spectrum of design work included the kitchen, pre-fabricated housing systems, and furniture for housing and schools.

To each task, the design team applied the techniques of rationalization and standardization. Following the methods of Henry Ford and the principles of Taylor's Scientific Management, the material life of the urban worker was to be transformed from its smallest detail to its broadest outline. The approach for modernizing the economy was an adaptation of American Taylorism to social democracy. Applying principles of capitalist production to an emerging welfare state, policy makers believed they could rebuild the economy by fulfilling and expanding the needs of the German worker. It was the stated mission of May and his cohort to harness mass production, to discover the "one best way" in design, and, ultimately, to create a culture that embodied a kind of material egalitarianism.

Creating a modern culture of everyday life was an equal partner to the new building. The New Life ideal of the everyday culture was at once reformist and conservatively romantic, reflecting points of continuity between the utopian schemes of the Wilhelmine Reich and the reforming enthusiasms of the Weimar Republic—links often glossed amid self-assessments claiming title to a new age that had rebuffed its past. The history of the New Frankfurt initiative is a representative chapter in Weimar attempt to transcend class difference by means of a politically-neutral idealization of everyday life. In major housing initiatives, notably in Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt, architects, designers and urban planners campaigned for a mass culture that was international and homogenous. The “third way,” the concept of a path to the future that avoided the pitfalls of both the left and the right was reconsecrated as the New Life, buoyed by a utopian spirit and heroic idealism, the Frankfurt team began constructing vast housing estates, in a modern architectural language that spoke of rupture with the past, swathed in parks and gardens. The cast in the history of the initiative is equally operatic in scope, comprising politicians and social reformers, designers, well-meaning bourgeois and a fractious working class. Its passages move from aspirations and blind faith, to belief and ambition, ending in achievement and tragedy.

The goal of the “New Frankfurt,” to solve the basic material needs of the working class while uplifting these same clients through a series of programs and measures aimed to enrich daily life, was a utopian ideal embodied in the word “new” rather than “modern.” The suburban enclaves were the focus of a whole range of “new” catch phrases: the New Life, the New Person (*das Neue Mensch*), the New Woman (*die Neue Frau*), the New Household (*das Neue Haushalt*), and the New Building (*das Neue Bauen*) were key concepts of the fledgling German democracy. Emphasizing the simplicity, practicality, and freedom-from-drudgery through design was the physical counterpart, at least metaphorically, of newly-won political freedoms. The heroism inherent in the rejection of the monarchical and militaristic past was reflected in an abstract architectural language that defied local allegiances and regional particularities in favor of a democratic and universal ideal.

In the history of modern architecture, the New Frankfurt is perhaps most significant as a crucible for social reform from which it achieved one of the most remarkable building campaigns in modern architectural history. The New Frankfurt settlement program stands as one of the great syntheses of early modernist ideals in housing, urban design and planning, an urban Gesamtkunstwerk comprising all the diverse elements of a New Life suited to the aspirations of the fledgling republic.

Notes

- 1 Buekschmitt, *May*, 55.
- 2 The term “Neue Leben” has several possible sources. There was the Swiss, artists’ group “Das Neue Leben” (1918 to 1920) formed by Tauber, Arp and Giacometti and others, and utopian Heinrich Vogeler’s book, *Das Neue Leben. Ein kommunistisches Manifest* (1919). Among the list of “new”-tropes—the new life, the new woman, the new building—the new life was in common currency in the 1920s. In the Frankfurt case, it was appropriated with such insistence that it assumed a particular association with the New Frankfurt initiative.

Introduction

Within the irregularities and overlaps of any cultural history—its repeated co-presence of various forms of the emergent with forms of the residual and the dominant—that definition of period and type has a working usefulness.¹

—Raymond Williams

In November 1918, Germany achieved its belated revolution. German soldiers were exhausted, impoverished and starving, frustrated by an autocratic state that required unquestioning allegiance and yet afforded few of the reforms of its European neighbors. A demonstration in Kiel of sailors and workers marching under banners of “Peace and Bread” ultimately set off a nationwide revolt. The November Revolution unleashed the frustrated energies of the working class, the troops, the unions and the parties of the left, and, with them, a political storm of violent rhetoric and violent acts. Created under these conditions, the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) was a fragile proposition. Yet, Germany had at last achieved a parliamentary democracy, and, in 1919, it enacted a new constitution, one of the most liberal ever written, with numerous passages that reflected even socialist ideals. It established the franchise for all men and women, abolished aristocratic titles and privileges, and outlawed the banning of political parties. The new Reichstag was free to assemble, legislate, appoint ministers—all powers previously vested in the Kaiser. Of civil rights, it declared equality before the law, regardless of class, gender, race or religion; it guaranteed the right to assembly, to the formation of clubs and societies; and the eligibility of every citizen for public office. It stipulated the citizen’s right to work, to unemployment insurance, to an education, and the state’s obligation to protect the young. Some articles had a direct impact on social institutions, like articles 142–150, which required that education be provided for by public institutions, and established a universal education requirement of eight years. Articles 151–166 on the economy were some of the most innovative, using socialist principles as a legal framework for employment, aid, housing and labor relations. Article 155 concerned housing in confirming the state’s right to land

expropriation in its “effort to secure” a sound dwelling for every citizen. Though not guarantee of housing, the law declared the state’s right and obligation to provide such. Other administrative provisions, implicating both federal and state offices, would spur and ratify the social welfare programs for which Weimar is widely remembered. Reformers from the liberal to the socialist left now saw an opportunity to institute changes for which they had long struggled.

The Weimar Constitution was a remarkable document. It did not, however, constitute a complete break with the past. Power and culture continued to run in many of their usual tracks. Indeed, the years of the republic encompassed a series of “successive formations,” waves of change that built on previous social reforms, the bureaucratic apparatus and economic achievements of the Wilhelmine age. In 1871, Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) had unified Germany’s hundreds of principalities and free cities—Frankfurt was one—and enacted the first German constitution. During the Kaiserreich (German Empire, 1871–1918) that followed, the Prussian military establishment and the class of conservative landholders maintained their hold on power in the face of a developing industrial sector and a rising working class. Bismarck himself instituted notably repressive measures, including the anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf* (culture war) of the 1870s, and the Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878. A monarchist of dictatorial tendencies, he nevertheless believed in social reform and social welfare. In the 1880s, he instituted health, accident, and old age insurance paid for with state funds. These measures, combined with charitable institutions organized by the church and the rising bourgeoisie, set the groundwork for the welfare reforms of Weimar. By the time Bismarck was dismissed by Wilhelm II in 1890, he had brought about considerable social and political gains, although most were framed by, and on the behalf of, the bourgeoisie.²

The transition of the German economy accelerated during the war, industry evolving from an entrepreneurial to corporate structure. Here the figure of Walter Rathenau (1867–1922) is of exceptional significance. Son of the founder of the AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, General Electric Company), Walter took his place on its board before the First World War. He then applied his talents and expertise in the rationalization of industrial processes to the management of the famed *Kriegsrohstoffabteilung* (Raw Materials Division) of the German War Ministry, an agency that managed and distributed materiel resources during the war. Rathenau pared down the office staff to five managers, with no clerical staff, while giving it extensive coordination powers. The bureau proved a powerful and efficient tool, and Rathenau was credited with saving the war for Germany during

its first critical months, and with facilitating the country's first *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle).³ He continued this work as the Minister of Reconstruction in the early years of the republic, until his assassination in 1922. Under his direction, the state assumed the power to control prices, raw materials, and labor. A vast system of advisory boards that integrated supply and demand, production and distribution systems was staffed with delegates of business and industry. Following this model, post-war welfare operations, comprising mostly private charities, gave way to public offices, factory housing was replaced by public housing, and social controls, formerly imposed by the factory owner, the landowner and the church, were assumed by the state. The state also took an activist role in the economy and moved legislatively towards a tempered, corporatist form of capitalism that Rathenau idealized in his "New Economy" proposal of 1918, as "a smooth cooperation of diverse interests."

Rathenau and the creed of rationalization had a particularly profound impact on Germany's vast bureaucracy, which, in the post-war years was completely reorganized along modern managerial lines. The new structure spun an intricate network of federal, provincial, rural and urban authorities charged with building the new democratic Germany in the same spirit as the constitution. One of the principle undertakings was to develop civic infrastructure and housing, a project that represented the newly-enfranchised, and the promise of a better material life implied by the language of the constitution. Across the country, a coalition of housing unions, industry and social interest groups worked with the city magistrates in charge of housing, energy and transportation bureaus to implement expansion and modernization plans. Cities forecast rings of garden suburbs, healthy working-class communities built on newly incorporated lands, linked to the city by new tram systems, serviced by parks, schools, public libraries and community halls. In place of the damp, dark and congested medieval quarters would come light, order and a liberation of the spirit. Architects and designers, many of whom had spent the grim war years postulating modern utopias, were eager to participate in this vast project. In Frankfurt, the Housing Authority was reorganized with May as a Rathenau-like figure. Its collaborative nature began at the level of the settlement, where it partnered with private housing societies, and ended in the kitchen with representatives of industry and bourgeois women's groups participating as advisors on the design of the Frankfurt kitchen. It was in creating a salubrious environment that Weimar's Social Democratic administration came close to embodying aspects of the constitution.

There was much in this that was revolutionary, even more that was reforming, else that was regressive—Weimar had still to contend with unremitting conservative and oppressive forces. Inevitably perhaps, the aspirations of the republic were followed by both compromise and retrenchment, as the reigning Social Democratic Party (SDP) sought to establish a foothold in a volatile climate. Its compromises began with an alliance with the military, then Rathenau and others of the industrial establishment. It meanwhile shunned the left and more radical propositions within the party—notably, the socialization of industry—to assume a moderate position.⁴ The workers responded with an abortive second revolution, the March Uprising of 1921, and in a significant withdrawal of support for the party in the National Assembly elections of 1920 and 1924.⁵ The leadership faced other crises. 1920 brought the Kapp Putsch, an abortive military coup; in 1923, hyperinflation led to the country's near collapse. With the stabilization of the mark in 1925, in large part with American aid, the republic had its main chance, one that lasted a devastatingly short time, narrowing with the onset of the world depression in 1929, coming to its definitive conclusion with the election of a Fascist majority in 1933. But in that short time, the coalition the SDP had achieved substantive reforms, primarily in the area of social policy (*Sozialpolitik*) and the evolving institution of the social welfare state.⁶

From these beginnings Weimar evolved, becoming one of the richest and most turbulent eras of the twentieth century. The potential for revolution, with its promise of radical change, sometimes indistinguishable from the threat of Armageddon, was also an incubator of its creative energies. More directly, the new civil freedoms granted under the Weimar Constitution, coupled with Germany's burgeoning industrialization, prompted a transformation of material culture and social life. Political parties and enfranchisement allowed broad participation in the public realm for the first time in German history. New state welfare programs engendered a nascent culture that reshaped the lives of the laboring classes.

Reform

On the eve of WWI, reform movements were active across the country. Most of this myriad array of interests, were encompassed under the rubric of *Lebensreform* (life reform), and *Bodenreform* (land reform). The overriding theme was a dissatisfaction with life in the industrializing nation, with a loss of identity—in family, work, community and ethnic spheres alike. It was commonplace for advocates to tout their enthusiasms as “authentically German,” as achieving harmony with nature, or with spiritual rejuvenation. Treading a precarious line between state

suppression and revolutionary threat, reformers proffered an apolitical way out of the Wilhelminian impasse in revolutionary rhetoric that promoted ideals that were generally pacifying, even regressive, a contradiction that would prevail in much of the New Life agenda of Weimar

Cultural historian, Janos Frecot, called the Life Reform Movement one of “the most important psycho-social phenomena of the era.”⁷ Fundamentally middle class, life reform groups advocated for specific lifestyle practices. German body culture, for example, was an enthusiasm centered around homeopathy, nudism, athletic regimens, and vegetarianism.⁸ Life reform groups inhabited communal outposts, experimenting in alternative lifestyles. The more conservative ventured into native handicrafts, folk culture and agricultural self-sufficiency.⁹ Others had ties to social, spiritual or political creeds: anarchism, socialism, pacifism, spiritual-occultism, and racialism. In these tumultuous times, the life reform subculture was a kind of polyglot stew of beliefs. Up until the war, antagonistic strains among enthusiasts generally went unacknowledged; the presumption of accord was dispelled with in the struggle for their realization in the coming decade.

A primary distinction among life reform groups, whatever their political temper, was between those dedicated to personal *Bildung* and those devoted to a social welfare agenda and ministering to the poor. The latter fought against alcoholism, rallied for public health and hygiene, and established working-class athletic clubs and public baths. The former called for self-sufficiency and self-realization. What they shared was a desire to reestablish the “lost” harmony between the human and natural worlds, and their antipathy to the chaos and political volatility of the industrial city.¹⁰

Land reform was another major reform movement. Its major organization, the Bund deutscher Bodenreform (BDB, Union for German Land Reform), gained momentum before the war, largely through the persuasive powers of its charismatic leader, Adolf Damaschke (1865–1935). The BDB played out its mission as benefactor to the working class by fighting for the declaration of a civil right to a single-family home and a garden—“the only true German habitation”—and for tax reform and loan guarantees to encourage home ownership. By 1911, the BDB was one of the largest club organizations in Germany, with over 700,000 members. During the war years, it urged legislation that would provide homesteads for returning veterans and their families. The word “homestead” itself evoked an ideal of *Heimat* (home) laden with sentimental and *völkisch* nostalgia; at the same time, the homestead denoted a productive household that proffered independence and self-sufficiency. The BDB was a major force in the post-war “Germanization”

and “inner colonization” campaigns that resettled workers as farmers in insecure border regions during the crisis that followed the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Another result of the BDB’s efforts was the War Homestead Law (*Kriegsheimstätten-gesetz*) of 1915, a bill authored by Damaschke himself. Ernst May’s first large scale settlement, suburban Goldschmieden near Breslau, was a product of the law. Damaschke, meanwhile, gained such popular prominence that he was commonly suggested as a candidate for the first president of the Republic.

After the hardships suffered in the war and the hyperinflation, self-help initiatives gained in nationwide popularity. It was an historical moment when middle-class land reformers and working-class radicals rallied together, calling for land and home ownership for laboring people to insure individual and familial security, a protective shield against political turmoil and economic volatility.¹¹ Together, the Homestead Movement and the BDB were largely responsible for the substance of the Federal Homestead Law (*Reichsheimstättengesetz*) of 1920.¹² While home ownership and homesteading remained a rarity, the ideal of self-help was fundamental to the philosophy of Weimar housing societies and reconstruction policy. Accommodating land reform became a key component in SDP coalition building.

As a kind of meta-ideal, the garden city was a destination for both life- and land- reform initiatives. Heinrich and Julius Hart founded the German Garden City Society (DGG, *Deutsche Gartenstadt Gesellschaft*) in 1902. Their major effort was a campaign to dismantle industrial cities to shape a landscape of economically-autonomous settlements. In these garden cities, homesteaders would return to a “truly German” way of life, and the political turmoil and chaos of the cities would come to an end. The garden city ideal captured the popular imagination and a wide membership. Hans Kampffmeyer (1880–1932), poet and writer, social reformer, economist, student of gardening and landscape design, became DGG secretary in 1907, beginning a lifelong campaign for the garden city agenda.¹³ The organization was “at once more utopian, and more realistic than its English original,” a “breeding ground for socialist, cooperative and reformist ideals, but also for nationalist, capitalist and idealized vernacular values.”¹⁴ Over the years, it continued to lobby for private allotments and parkland, and held fast to the ideal of the single-family home, specifically, the homestead. The DGG formed alliances with many reform groups, most envisioning the garden city as setting for their particular reforms. And, where the Marxists saw the working-class dens of the city as their primary arena, the Social Democrats aligned with the DGG and dreamt of a neutral arena, where the workers were, content and depoliticized.¹⁵

Housing was one of the most important platforms of Weimar reform. Most workers occupied built *Mietskasernen* (rental barracks). Speculators built these multi-story blocks around small, paved courtyards, with woeful sanitary provisions and overcrowded conditions, and little interference by municipal officials and to the detriment of the health and well-being of the tenants. Urban overcrowding had broad implications reflected in high tuberculosis and infant mortality rates, in prostitution and alcoholism. Before the war, about one in ten apartments was co-financed by the state; between 1919 and 1930, the figure rose to 80 percent. With state sponsorship, rents and evictions came under federal control. The first reforms focused on improving existing conditions.¹⁶ Further regulations transformed housing economics and creating a state housing bureaucracy. In March 1918, the Prussian legislature passed a new Housing Law with provisions concerning the construction and quality of housing, others ensuring state funding for non-profit building cooperatives. It was passed even before the Weimar Constitution. A federal ordinance of December 19, 1919 pledged the state to the elimination of the housing shortage, and other laws followed, setting up municipal and provincial authorities that unified and centralized the housing effort. By 1920, the basic legal structure of the Weimar housing programs was in place.

Support for the social-welfare agenda during the Weimar years came from industry, the middle-class intelligentsia and its bureaucratic emissaries, from the center and social democratic political parties. Motives varied, but the agenda was largely agreed upon. Progressive industrialists saw reform as a means to a healthier worker; material redistribution as a means to reinvigorate Germany's languishing economy. Better and more housing was desperately needed in industrial quarters, and the state might prove a more dependable supplier than the speculator. Parks were beneficial outlets for working class energies and an alternative to both politics and the *Bierstube*. Public hygiene programs created a sounder working population. For each of the same issues, the SDP could claim the empowerment of the worker to live a more fulfilled and secure life. Conflicting interests were for the moment glossed over. Thus, in spite of the precarious state of the economy, from 1913 to 1930, social welfare expenditures quadrupled as the state poured funds into public programs—housing, infrastructure, education, and public health were major beneficiaries. The education budget alone rose 60 percent.¹⁷ Riding a wave invigorated by the birth of the republic, social welfare still had only a tenuous hold. The SDP must still struggle to maintain a line between the left and the right, and grapple with the remnants of an antidemocratic establishment that remained ensconced in institutions like the church, the school and university.¹⁸

The New Frankfurt emerged amid this national discussion. Major post-war reform movements and their associates provided the essential social text for its initiatives. From Land Reform Movement calling for self-reliance, to the political messianism of the Sports Movement, from the middle-class women's movement bent on "female redomestication," to the movement for education reform, the New Frankfurt embraced, absorbed, and reformulated each one, shaping a vision of a new democratic and *Bildung*-oriented culture. As part of this new liberal, reforming class of administrative and professional experts, planners and designers, Ernst May and his cohort found their opportunity. They believed that a new world was possible through reforms instituted by professionals harnessing the potentialities of the capitalist economy to the benefit of all. This achievement would depend, not on revolution but on economic democracy, on rationalization: on standardization of furniture and housing, on the implementation of mass production and assembly in construction, and optimum use of space. Thus increased production through rationalization became the necessary counterpart to the New Life. Planning authorities would distribute the fruits of the savings in the provision of the latest technological advantages—electricity, private baths, central heating. In the New Frankfurt, streetcar lines would facilitate the worker's daily commute; electric laundries and modern kitchens would lighten women's housekeeping burdens to free them for more uplifting endeavors; allotments provided a respite from urban life and a means of self-provisioning; parks enabled contemplation and sport; adult education and public libraries would develop the intellect of the enfranchised citizen, and community buildings would foster a vital social life. The turbulence of the Weimar decade had its own effect on this vision, shaping an overweening impulse to reorganize the city into an orderly terrain.

Frankfurt am Main

*To describe a city one must experience it. . . . This is especially true for the city of Goethe, so rich in venerable traditions. It was the spiritual and economic center of southwest Germany, and . . . a central node for the Rhine-Main cultural and economic region. It remains a city of provincial, federal and world significance.*¹⁹

—Dr. Ruppertsberg, Frankfurt city archivist, 1927

Frankfurters held that theirs was "the Florence of Germany," a city with a venerable past, rich both culturally and economically. With a long history of self-governance, it had borne the title of a free electoral and trading city of the Holy Roman Empire. German emperors were crowned in its halls. In the middle ages, it developed textile, leather and metal industries. Of its great mercantile fairs, Martin Luther once



FIGURE 0.02 A view of old Frankfurt with the Römer, ca. 1930.

FIGURE 0.03 The ancient Rathaus on the Römer, ca. 1930.

said, Frankfurt “is the silver and gold mine that renders to Germany everything we have coined, grown, or found.” At the end of the sixteenth century, the city granted French and Dutch Huguenots the right of settlement; the new immigrants rewarded the city by developing international trade and the banking industry. The Frankfurt exchange was one of the West’s earliest. By the end of the eighteenth century, Frankfurt’s Rothschild family was the greatest financial power in the world.

The ancient city grew along the banks of the Main River. (Figures 0.02–03) Its medieval core of narrow lanes and densely-clustered buildings encircled the old town square, the Römer, the traditional seat of city government. Farther out were the villages of Hoechst, Ginnheim, and Praunheim, and across the river to the south was Sachsenhausen. During the Enlightenment, the city of Goethe blossomed beyond its ancient walls and glacis (the Taunusanlage), in a ring of villas and estates built by the new ruling class. This gracious era ceded to the Industrial Revolution as boulevards wove a fabric providing for new civic institutions—the university, the library, the hospital, and the train station—and suburbs for the emerging middle class. (Figure 0.04) Over the centuries, Frankfurt stood as an established center of banking and trade, its warehouses prospering along the docks on the Main River, its banking houses in the city center, just beyond the old town. The East Harbor (Osthafen) handled bulk goods, the West Harbor (Westhafen) was the port for piece goods and grain. (Figure 0.05) The meat market was the largest in southern Germany, with a slaughterhouse district and cattle market occupying some thirty acres. Industrial development saw the founding of the Hoechst Dye Works in 1863 followed by other chemical and metal industries, like the Adler Factory, Frankfurter Machine Works, and metal found-



FIGURE 0.04 Senckenberg Natural History Museum. Ludwig Neher, 1907.

ries like Stempel. Ancient concerns expanded—the printing industry, leather good factories, and mills, all prospered.²⁰ While the nineteenth century city developed its rich “*Bürgertum*” culture, its industries spawned a city of workers. By the late nineteenth century, there were some 73,000 in metal industries, 10,000 garment workers, over 4,500 in printing and book publishing. With the incorporation of the suburbs in 1928, the chemical industry added another 76,000. The population grew meanwhile from 300,000 in 1900, to 470,000 upon May’s arrival in 1925. Frankfurt was now the second largest city in Germany.²¹

During the expansion and unregulated growth of the nineteenth century, the city struggled with epidemics, pollution, and political and labor unrest. But it was lucky in its leaders. Municipal government consisted of three major branches, the city council, the mayor, and the magistrate. Before the revolution, the city council and the mayor were elected, but the franchise was limited to men of property; the mayor appointed the magistrates, with the council’s approval. City politics were dominated by the Democratic Party (DP). Through two successive administrations, the DP introduced the most progressive legislative agenda in Germany, fostering the construction of housing and city planning, establishing building and public health standards, and restraining land speculation. In 1880, Johannes von Miquel (1829–1901) became mayor. Miquel was also a prominent member of the Verein für Sozialpolitik (Association of Social Politics), an organization dedicated to the cause of reform legislation touching the social and private lives of the working class. One of his achievements was the institution of minimal housing standards. Indeed, Miquel began his campaign for legislative reform by focusing on housing for the poor. The housing code enacted in 1886, served as a model for the whole nation. Later, as Federal Finance Minister, Miquel introduced national legislation



FIGURE 0.05 The East Harbor (Osthafen), ca. 1930.

to increase property taxes that would cede some revenues to the cities. Frankfurt was one of the first cities to write a code that took advantage of the new funds.²²

Franz Adickes succeeded Miquel as mayor in 1891, remaining in office until 1912. He began his tenure by proposing zoning land for low-rise construction, an attempt to temper land speculation and high rents. Perhaps his greatest success was in obtaining land for parks and housing. Adickes had been lobbying for federal expropriation legislation since the 1890s. Although he failed at the national level, he was able to institute a similar code in Frankfurt, the “*Lex Adickes*,” in 1901. The first such law in Germany, it too became a model for national legislation.²³ Adickes also enacted a city planning policy of “*offenes Bauweise*” (low/open building) to lower densities and encourage suburban development.²⁴ It was under Adickes that social policy began favoring nuclear families. By the end of Adickes and Miquel’s mayoralties, Frankfurt had a legislative framework for urban reform, development and experimentation that was unparalleled in Germany.

The Desperate Years

The codes of Miquel and Adickes were temporarily mooted by the cataclysms of war, revolution and hyperinflation. Between 1914 and 1925, privation, political upheaval and social chaos that began with the war years, continued through the revolution and the institution of the Treaty of Versailles, and ended with the debacle of hyperinflation. Mayor Georg Voigt had the unlucky fortune to oversee this turbulent interregnum.

With the end of the war in 1918; tumult overtook the city streets. In October 1918, a young Rudolf Heilbrunn witnessed a city jubilant on hearing the news of the soldiers' revolt. As the Reich disintegrated, the municipality appealed to the military and new soldier councils to maintain order. Sailors occupied the train station and patrolled the city in armed trucks. News also came of the lost war. Soon, retreating troops, "ragged, broken down, without hope or happiness," swept into the city. A rueful Heilbrunn was prescient in thinking that reintegrating demobilized soldiers back into society would be no small task.²⁵ Over the next few months, the city was plundered, rioted, and bloodied. As food shortages mounted, sailors looted shops and the city's storerooms. In December 1918, the French arrived in Hoechst, home of IG Farben Industries; it was the easternmost extent of their occupation of industrial and military sites in Germany. Two years later, in April 6, 1920, their army briefly occupied the city. After nine civilians were killed in a protest on Schillerplatz, a curfew was imposed. Elias Canetti recalled,

I often attended meetings, listening to the discussions that followed them on the streets at nights: and I watched every opinion, every conviction, every faith clashing with others. The discussions were so passionate that they crackled and flared. . . The most diverse sorts of people—professionals, proletarians, young, old—spoke away at one another, vehement, obstinate, unflappable, as though no other idea were possible; and yet the man each was talking to was just as stubbornly convinced of the opposite. . . . Early on, about one year after arriving in Frankfurt, I had watched a workers' demonstration on the Zeil. They were protesting the murder of Rathenau. . . I can still see the large, powerful figures marching behind the Adler Factory singing. They marched in serried ranks and cast defiant glances around. . . There was no end of them. I sensed a powerful conviction emanating from them; it grew more and more powerful.²⁶

In 1920, the federal government brokered a precarious political peace, bringing renewed optimism and hope about the future, and the future of democracy. But with the onset of inflation in 1921, culminating in hyperinflation, the population now struggled merely to survive. Canetti was appalled by the destitution, and by the stoicism of its citizens:

A woman had passed out on the street and collapsed. The people helping her up said 'She's starving.' She looked dreadfully pale and haggard, but other people walked by, paying no attention. . . . I have never experienced more disquiet in people than in those six months [in 1924] . . . everything derived from a single fundamental condition, the raging plunge of money. . . Inflation: its daily jump, ultimately reaching one trillion, had extreme consequences, if not always the same, for all people. It was dreadful to watch. . . . It was more than disorder that smashed over people, it was something like daily explosions . . . I saw them, undisguisedly close, in every member of that family; the smallest, the most private, the most personal event always had one and the same cause: the raging plunge of money.²⁷

Not only food, but housing was scarce, as demobilized soldiers and refugees from the Alsace-Lorraine and other ceded territories and occupied lands arrived in the city, and as young couples rushed to marry. In 1923, the number seeking housing in Frankfurt stood at 12,000; in 1924 it was 15,000. Meanwhile, as a result of the economic crisis, housing construction had come to a halt.

Ludwig Landmann

*We are the turning point! The time of chaos and upheaval is past, the time of reconstruction begins.*²⁸

—Ludwig Landmann on his inauguration as mayor of Frankfurt, October 31, 1924.



FIGURE 0.06 Mayor Ludwig Landmann, ca. 1925.

This was the city inherited by Ludwig Landmann upon his election in 1924. With characteristic boldness, he declared the beginning of a “New Era.” (Figure 0.06) A Democrat, at a time when the Social Democrats were in the majority, Landmann was an immensely popular and familiar figure in city government, with a career stretching back to the Adickes administration. Upon his election, he had the support of virtually all the newspapers, as well as that of the Weimar political coalition comprising the SDP, the DDP, and the Centrists. It was under Landmann that Frankfurt sided for reform and controlled capitalist development, a kind of economic democracy that sought widespread distribution of wealth through social programs. His vision was expansive and all-encompassing: culturally, economically, in education, and the quality of life, in sport and in science, the city would be reborn. His New Era—indeed his political career—was founded on this aspiration. The path he pursued was the revival of the economy, and, with it, the glory of Frankfurt’s cultural heritage.²⁹

Landmann’s achievements in the mayoralty (1924–1933) were vast. He expanded the city’s famous trade fairs; initiated an international highway system “Hafraba” linking these Hamburg, Frankfurt and Basel; he built the city’s new

international food trade entrepôt, the Grossmarkthalle; instigated the Rhine-Main-Danube and Nidda canal modernization; he fostered the construction of the Rebstock airport—the second largest airport in Germany; expanded tram and bus lines and the city's utility services and networks; and he achieved the incorporation of Höchst, Fechenheim and other suburban townships. In cultural and institutional affairs, he planned a whole series of projects—hospitals, libraries, and university buildings. The major cultural events of his term began with the “Summer of Music” festival of 1927, and ended with the CIAM Congress of 1929.³⁰

It cannot be said that settlement building was the centerpiece of the New Era, but it was indispensable, vital to the economic and social stability of the city, with its mass of under-housed workers. Landmann's efforts were aided by Miquel/Adickes reforms of the city's administrative magistracy. This new magistracy, which included heads of budget, welfare, and housing departments, had proved powerful actors in the previous liberal administrations.³¹ Appointments now were based on candidates' professional expertise, rather than on party loyalties or patronage. Landmann's own administrative reorganization included a centralized bureau from the old offices of architecture and housing, the municipal Hochbaudezeranat (Architecture Division). This new Hochbauamt (Architecture Department) would be less concerned with building urban monuments and more with housing, its director would be less of an architect and more a city planner.³² Ernst May's achievements in the new Hochbauamt would be beholden to this restructuring.

To run the Hochbauamt, Landmann needed to hire someone with a fresh eye, an interest in modern construction technologies, and a forceful personality. The search for a director of the Hochbauamt, the Stadtbaurat, took eight months. There were one hundred and two applicants. Landmann was hopeful of hiring Walter Gropius in a plan that would also have brought the Bauhaus to Frankfurt; Fritz Schumacher, the Stadtbaurat of Hamburg was asked to consult on the hiring. Gropius demurring, Ernst May was one of three on the short list, and seems to have been favored from the outset.³³ As the head of rural housing in the Silesian hinterland, a man of relatively little experience, not yet forty years old, he was not an obvious choice. He had never worked in an urban agency. His settlement housing indicated a predilection for the rural cottage. Yet he had several factors in his favor. He was well-positioned socially, being a native Frankfurter from a respected industrial family; his grandfather had been a prominent reform-minded politician from the Democratic Party. May had also demonstrated his dedication to reform in his work, and he and Herbert Boehm had recently received an honorable mention in the highly publicized competition for a master

plan for Breslau. The importance of May's apprenticeship in England with Raymond Unwin cannot be underestimated, seeming indicative of what Frankfurt might become under his hand.³⁴ A fervent supporter of liberal social policies, May was not only a man who could fulfill the dream of Adickes, lessening Frankfurt's density in suburban development, and establishing the nuclear family home as fundamental. He would also, as he made clear in the pages of *Schlesisches Heim*, harness rationalization as *the* economic and sociological driver. Also in Silesia, he had shown a talent for organization and acuity in the matter of publicity. Finally, May possessed the personal magnetism of a leader, a healthy ego, and great energy. When she met him in 1929, Catherine Bauer described him as having a "robust appearance, cosmopolitan humor and large-minded Geist, belong[ing] to that small group of distinguished European architects who seem more related to each other than to their respective countries—a group which includes Oud . . . and Mies van der Rohe. . . . I asked two of them what they thought of the other, and they both replied with enthusiasm, 'oh, he's a fine big chap.'"³⁵

On June 9, 1925, the Frankfurt city council, with a vote of yea by forty-seven of its fifty-five members—the eight Communists abstained—approved Ernst May's appointment as the new "Stadtrat für Hoch- und Städtebau" (Municipal Magistrate for Architecture and Urban Construction).³⁶ The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* opined it was "a lucky choice for the city,"³⁷ and the *Frankfurter Zeitung* observed that May was a man who had proven able under difficult circumstances.³⁸ The Social Democratic *Volksstimme* complained of the elaborate new title, "that means it will be expensive." But it also observed that with Landmann, magistrates were no longer just party cronies, but had the necessary abilities for the job.³⁹

Ernst May

*A man of action with an ability to think on a grand scale, armed with an extraordinary strength of will, [Ernst May] became City Architect [Stadtbaurator] of Frankfurt am Main. . . . While we, his colleagues, . . . developed theories and polemized, May understood how to wield the power of public office to realize new ideas, and he did so with great courage.*⁴⁰

—Walter Gropius, 1963

Ernst May was born in Frankfurt am Main on July 27, 1886, to a prominent family living in Sachsenhausen in a villa on Metzlerstrasse (formerly Stadelstrasse), one street back from the Main River. Its deep garden was beloved by Ernst. The "Lederfabrik May" (May Leather Goods Factory) was a prosperous local concern; its factory was located in Offenbach, in the east harbor district.⁴¹ The company

founder, May's paternal grandfather, Johann Martin May (1825–1919), was a member of the DP, and served many years on the city council. He lived a spartan existence; his avid interests in the natural sciences and German language studies were trumped only by his sense of social responsibility.⁴² From him, Ernst imbibed a dedication to social reform, and a respect for expertise, invention and the ideal of progress, i.e., the values of a liberal member of the upper middle class.⁴³ We know little of Ernst's grandmother, Clara, but that she came from a Jewish family of successful business people. Ernst's father, Adam, was not much of a businessman, losing most of his personal fortune in a speculative venture, apparently achieved with a certain flair. In his brief memoir, Ernst recalled his father and his uncle with detachment and disapproval:

Neither of his [Johann's] two surviving sons inherited this spiritual and physical demeanor. My uncle developed into a cool, calculating industrialist, always thinking of how to better the firm with new measures and discoveries. If my grandfather was skeptical of worldly success, neither my uncle nor my father was free from ambition. For both, public opinion was a decisive criterion in their performance.⁴⁴

Ernst was a product of both generations, at once ambitious and idealistic. He and his biographer are silent on the subject of maternal influence.

Having absorbed a romantic enthusiasm for Nature and old Germany—from his father in particular—May spent much of his youth hiking through the hills, forests and villages of the countryside, sketchbook in hand. While never a member of a Youth Movement group, he shared their enthusiasms.⁴⁵ During these hours of solitude, immersed in Nature, he later made the familiar claim of having discovered the “true” Germany through his wanderings. His many sketchbooks reflect an early fascination with ancient buildings, particularly for gothic monuments and country cottages.⁴⁶ This youthful experience—the discovery of folk culture, of medieval names and customs, of the German landscape and the natural world—would abide through his life, and unfold in his resuscitation of vernacular building in Silesia, and in aspects of his garden settlements in Frankfurt.

May's early passion for the architecture of the common people, coupled with his grandfather's sense of social responsibility, suggested a career in public service and architecture. It was a decision viewed with approbation by his family. In 1906, he began his studies at University College in London following his admiration for English culture, particularly the Arts and Crafts Movement. The school disappointed him. Expecting a liberal English education, he endured a curriculum centered on academic classicism with laborious hours spent drawing the Orders. Outside school, his intuition about English culture was confirmed in

what he saw of the quality, comfort and “style” of English urban life. He returned to Germany in 1908 to attend the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt, where he became entranced with the Jugendstil artists.

... I spent every free hour in the Artists Colony at Mathildenhöhe, fascinated by the lively intellectual atmosphere. A world that I had seen only in dreams and vague outlines, was suddenly before my very eyes, a reality of steel, wood, stone and iron. It was in those days that I resolved to dedicate my life's work and my powers to reawakening architecture.⁴⁷

By 1910, May was on his way back to England, seeking out Raymond Unwin to “deepen my superficial knowledge of English housing design through practical collaboration in a leading architectural firm.” He did indeed find lasting inspiration during his two-year sojourn in Unwin’s Hampstead office.⁴⁸ Nearing completion, Hampstead Garden Suburb was a revelation to May, its influence exerted throughout his career. In Hampstead’s housing, he discovered the architectural counterpart to the garden landscape—a crafted neo-vernacular where comfort and convenience were preeminent considerations. In its social idealism, he found a blueprint for the New Life:

In current urban design theory, we are inclined to categorize Unwin as romantic. But far more important than his formal modeling of master plans and buildings was that, in his large settlements, he succeeded in creating an authentic domestic climate, that is, he succeeded in bedding the housing—single family houses or apartment blocks—in a humane, attractive atmosphere, and he succeeded in incorporating the larger community's social institutions within a single settlement. All this, which today passes as accepted ingredients of the modern neighborhood, Unwin, with his farsighted intelligence, had already recognized and realized in that time.⁴⁹

The reforming paternalist was a type May recognized and admired, and Unwin presented a particularly apt hero—the professional activist in pursuit of a social vision. Ten years later, when the Weimar Republic declared its mission to build a new, modern and democratic Germany, May certainly must have seen himself as a German Unwin. In Frankfurt he found an opportunity to realize his ideals.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, he had yet to complete his formal education. In 1912, he returned to Germany to study at Munich’s Technische Hochschule as a pupil of Theodor Fischer and Friedrich von Thiersch. A follower of Camillo Sitte, Fischer extended May’s training as a garden city practitioner and an architect in the neo-vernacular mode.⁵¹ In 1913, he went into private practice in Frankfurt with a partner named Clemens Musch (1878–?). The two lived and worked in the picturesque Holzhausenschlössen. The little, moated castle was built in the fourteenth century. In the eighteenth century, it was the summer retreat of the Holzhausen family;

the little castle's most famous tenant was Friedrich Froebel, who lived there for a short while, serving as tutor to the children.⁵² The castle stayed in the family until 1923, when it became city property.⁵³ May and Musch's mutual interests lay indeed in the venerable architecture of the city; in later years, Musch became its dedicated defender, a member of the right-wing Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP), and an ardent critic of May and his policies.⁵⁴

May was called up to active service in the infantry in 1914.⁵⁵ Returning to Frankfurt in 1917, he apparently picked up the practice with Musch. There is scant record of their partnership or their work. In 1919, May became head of the Silesian rural housing agency, with its headquarters in the industrial city of Breslau. By this time, his credentials, if not his experience, were substantial—from his studies, to war work, to private practice. Surely, his employ with Unwin and studies under Fischer stood him in good stead; most significant perhaps, the Weimar Republic was everywhere seeking out eager, young professionals to populate its extensive and growing welfare bureaucracy.

Rural Settlements in Silesia

*Once a person has seen a dwelling in which four or more members of a growing family live and sleep, in which the house is so crowded that no more than a tiny speck of space remains to move around in, within which, in the absence of a laundry, wash hangs by day, in which, as I myself witnessed in several cases, small animals are kept sheltered in crates to insure them a roof, this person knows how frightful the housing conditions were for so many walks of life just before the war, and is in even in a worse state today.*⁵⁶

—Ernst May, 1921

In 1919, May assumed the leadership of the building division of the Silesian rural settlement agency, the Schlesische Landgesellschaft. Within a year, the entire rural settlement program was under his leadership, his duties encompassing everything from site planning to the standardization of housing, the general administration of the settlement program and editorial duties at the journal, *Schlesisches Heim*, to the coordination of projects between other local housing authorities and housing unions, work he achieved with a design team of some fifteen employees. In 1923, he added the role of director for the construction of refugee housing in the border areas of Silesia. It was an awesome responsibility for a young man, with only two years private practice and just returned from the front. Yet, in the relative isolation of Silesia, under primitive circumstances and the extreme limitations imposed by the devastated economy, he developed a program that lived up to his titles. The rural context even offered May some advantages over his peers working in the

cities: he could engage settlers in building their own housing, he could provide them gardens at little expense, and he could employ vernacular materials and techniques at a time when modern ones were everywhere unavailable.⁵⁷

In the 1920s, Breslau was the cultural and intellectual center of the province, and a city of national importance in the creative arts. Its art school, the Stättlichen Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe (State Academy for Arts and Crafts), was a force in both art and architecture. August Endell, Hans Poelzig, Hans Scharoun, Max Berg and Adolf Rading were among the faculty.⁵⁸ Both the rural and the Breslau housing authorities had their offices in the city, and over the next five years, May became an active and vocal member of his profession, in the city and abroad. He participated in numerous regional building fairs and exhibitions, gave lectures to local and professional groups, and published a variety of articles in newspapers and professional magazines. As a spokesperson for the rural Silesian housing program, he was in attendance at the annual International Breslau Building Fair and many other regional meetings, such as the Oppeln Heimstätten (Opole Homesteads) conference of 1922 where he shared the podium with Adolf Damaschke. His work was represented everywhere in the many exhibitions mounted by national organizations and research boards.⁵⁹

The housing produced by May's office was much like the vernacular cottages of Heinrich Tessenow's *Das Wohnhausbau* (1909) or Hermann Muthesius's *Landhaus und Garten* (1919). May remained aloof from the discussions taking place among the developing core of modernists. For him, Unwin still figured as the preeminent model and teacher; among those he asked to contribute articles in *Schlesisches Heim* included Martin Wagner, Fritz Schumacher and Heinrich de Fries. There were new pressures to bear, however. In these years of economic hardship, spectacular inflation and a shortage of basic building materials, housing production was overwhelmingly a matter of economization. Desperation was a rigorous taskmaster, schooling May in the extreme discipline of efficiency and organization. Confronting the housing emergency, he married self-help construction to the rationalization of production. At a time when Bruno Taut represented radicalism in the profession, May's Silesian office was a proving ground for modernist methodological principles: the development of administrative and construction strategies and the steady integration of legal and bureaucratic reforms provided a framework for the better-known housing programs that came in the later 1920s.

1924 was a pivotal year in May's career. Articulating his faith in rationalization, he authored his first work on what would become the existence minimum,

“Wie weit kann die Wohnfläche des Kleinhauses eingeschränkt werden?” (“How Far Can the Size of the Small House Be Reduced?”), in which he discussed how to reduce the typical house plan and argued why this would actually improve the German home.⁶⁰ He also built his first existence minimum project, the settlement of “Cavallen” in Breslau; there was also a middle-class model bungalow that employed self-help labor and was fitted out with built-in furnishings.⁶¹ He took an eventful trip to Amsterdam, attending the International City Building and Garden City Congress, and visiting works by Berlage, de Klerk, Dudok and Oud.⁶² In the same year, Hans Leistikow redesigned *Schlesisches Heim*, replacing its German script with a squared block type that was enhanced by an abstractly rendered German eagle and block-like row houses.

Meanwhile, May’s professional activities continued to expand. He became a member of the Deutsche Werkbund, and, in 1925, he, along with Walter Gropius, Hans Scharoun and Mies van der Rohe, was one of the ten founding members of “Der Ring.”⁶³ The same year, the conservative BDA announced they would begin publishing work by the Schlesische Heimstätte in their journal, *Die Baugilde*. May ruefully responded that he would henceforth return the favor in *Schlesisches Heim*.⁶⁴ His travels culminated with his visit to New York and Chicago, attending the International Conference of the Regional Planning Association chaired by Lewis Mumford. Barry Parker and Ebenezer Howard were among the conferees who toured Forest Park, Gilman and Arlington Schools and toured nine American cities.⁶⁵ Back in Breslau, May was ready to move on. He left his post in Silesia in August of 1925 to become the head of the housing program in his native Frankfurt.

“Make it brief”



FIGURE 0.07
Ernst May ca. 1927.

*Few of May's colleagues greeted their posts with as much lively interest as he has. Let us hope that one whose responsibility for our future is so great, does not fall prey to that menace, the administrative grind. . . . May must possess three qualities for this work: an artist's creativity, the scientist's independence of thought, and the bold honesty of the technologist.*⁶⁶

—*Frankfurter Nachrichten*, 1925

November 1925: Quite unexpectedly I received a phone call. 'This is May. — I've just been named Frankfurt City Planner. Do you want to come to Frankfurt? . . . May was possessed by a hunger for action; he was so full of plans and ideas, and under their force he laid his richly textured fantasies out before me. I said to myself, I am embarking on a whole new life.

*January 1926: I went to meet May at the Rathaus. The first thing I saw in his office was a sign on the wall behind the desk. In great red letters it read: "Make it brief." I was daunted, but May was striding towards me, with his heroic figure and his Caesar's head, giving my hand a hearty shake, and immediately inviting me to dinner on the following Sunday. . . . On my first day in the Rathaus office, May talked enthusiastically about the work before us. . . . Here, in the office where he worked on very real tasks, one immediately sensed the force and power of his strong personality. One knew, by his ardor and conviction that his goals for the city were no pipe dream. This man not only wanted to make good and beautiful things for his hometown, he had the will to achieve it.*⁶⁷

—Grete Lihotzky, 1986

May assumed his new post on September 1, 1925. He was 39 years old, and not slow to demonstrate his purposiveness. (Figure 0.07) In his acceptance speech given before the magistrates and the city council on that day, he declared that as “a son of this city,” being called to contribute to its development, “you can imagine how moved I am at this moment.”⁶⁸ He then urged the need for everything from salubrious housing for every citizen, to efficient transportation networks, to allotment gardens.⁶⁹

As in Silesia, May's coming achievements depended from the vast roles and responsibilities he was accorded. He determined the development plan for the city for the next ten years. He had virtual control over all building activities in the city and a staff of some thirty architects. He directed the construction of new roads and services as well as public facilities built in conjunction with the housing. He was the head of the city's bureau of landscape and parks, its

public housing finance office, and the building inspection office—any major private undertaking had to pass his approval both in terms of style as well as substance.⁷⁰

When moved his family to a house near the Palmengarten in the spring, he had already begun construction on a new house on the cliffs of Ginnheim overlooking the Nidda Valley.⁷¹ In September, he moved into the Hochbauamt offices, and began hiring a staff. In six months, he assembled a team of innovative, mostly younger, designers. At any one time, the staff numbered about forty, and represented a diverse range of skills and expertise. Herbert Boehm (1894–1954) came with May from Breslau. Eight years May's junior, he had worked closely with May at the Silesian Rural Housing Authority for some five years. Now he assumed a principal role in the Frankfurt planning office. Along with contributions by the radical conservative landscape architect, Leberecht Migge (1881–1935), Boehm helped May articulate his garden city ideal of settlement and landscape, and the Zeilenbau schemes that followed. Max Bromme (1878–1974), already on staff, began his tenure as director of the Landscape Office in 1912, and had been occupied with the drive to build Volksparks and allotment colonies. Overshadowed by the more ideological and flamboyant Migge, Bromme would nevertheless play a primary role in expanding the city's parks and garden colonies.

May's greatest coup was the hiring of Adolf Meyer (1881–1929), who assumed a variety of roles. Initially contracted to teach at the Kunstschule (Art School), he soon assumed a number of duties at the Hochbauamt. He headed the Bauberatungsstelle (Office of Building Advice) where he established building, signage and cemetery regulations and guidelines; he designed a series of industrial works, included two of monumental stature; and he introduced reinforced concrete systems in various applications. His career was cut tragically short by his drowning in 1929.

A few months before May's appointment, Landmann named the eminent architect, Martin Elsaesser, to head of the Architecture Office, which handled municipal architectural projects from market halls to schools.⁷² When May arrived, Elsaesser was already at work on the first "New Era" landmark, the Grossmarkthalle.⁷³

May's younger hires, in their late twenties and early thirties, were mostly from outside Frankfurt, a continual point of friction with the city council and the local chapter of the BDA. He hired them with the zest of a true believer seeking out acolytes, looking for those with specific expertise, but also with an allegiance to his vision, and to the rationalization and reform of housing. The initial group included the architect, Carl Hermann Rudloff (1890–1949), and the graphic designer, Hans Leistikow (1892–1962), both former members of May's Silesian team. From Vienna came the architects Grete Schütte Lihotzky

(1897–2000), Wilhelm Schütte (1900–1967)—the two soon married—Franz Schuster (1892–1972), and Anton Brenner (1896–1957), all experienced in housing design and the minimal dwelling, all with some degree of specialty in household furnishings. The young architect Eugen Blanck (1901–1980) came from Cologne, and Eugen Kaufmann (1892–1984), who had worked with Bruno Taut in the early 1920s, soon headed the office of standardization (*Typisierung*). The Frankfurter Ferdinand Kramer (1898–1985) found a promising opportunity to realize his talent, principally in the area of industrial design and furnishings; from Jena came Walter Dexel (1890–1973), who produced architectural graphics and furnishings; among the *Bauhäusler*, were Josef Hartwig (1880–1956) and, working only tangentially for the Hochbauamt, but with important consequences for the program, came the graphic designer Robert Michel (1897–1983) and his wife, the artist and filmmaker, Ella Bergmann-Michel (1896–1972). Many of the young group quickly assumed positions of responsibility. Schütte was promoted to supervise school projects, while Grete Lihotzky became the key figure in the design of kitchens and single-women's housing schemes. Others came and went through the Frankfurt office, through design competitions or special projects, still others contributed as a supporting cast. There were as many as twenty designers at work at any one time, among them, the artist and graphic designer Willi Baumeister (1889–1955), photographers Ilse Bing (1899–1998) and Elisabeth Hase (1905–1991), and the architects Mart Stam (1899–1986) and Walter Schwagenscheidt (1886–1968).

Some of the team left reminiscences of life at the Hochbauamt. When he began work in the settlement division in 1926, Max Cetto (1903–1980) was just out of school, a former student of Hans Poelzig, and twenty-three years old. After three months, he was assigned to Meyer's office.⁷⁴

At this time, I should point out, I was just one of the younger team members, . . . I found myself in the post of the most minor draftsman, but I slowly began receiving my own projects . . . One was the dressing room for a sport hall [Bertramswiese], another a coal crushing facility for the local electricity works. . . . But [then] I took over the design direction of an entire division, a position that had much greater importance, and one that I can recount only in an impressionistic way: a whole hall of draftsmen at work on my sketches at the same time on an abundance of projects that at one moment, for example, included a theatre, a school, a hospital, an office building, a restaurant, boathouses, and so it will go on, hopefully at an increasing pace.⁷⁵

Cetto's experience exemplifies the exciting opportunities and challenging array of projects that young architects encountered at the Hochbauamt. He assisted Meyer on major works, and got his wish for an increasing pace of work, design-

ing greenhouses for the city's nurseries, an extension to the city slaughterhouse, an isolation wing for communicable skin diseases at the municipal hospital, changing rooms for playgrounds and parks, and transformer stations. Among his unbuilt city projects were hospitals, schools, community centers, swimming pools, a rowing club, a bus depot, a water tower, and a residence for the director of the zoological gardens.⁷⁶ For, as Grete Lihotzky recalled,

*May gave team members a free hand—he was not one that always had to do things himself, rather he was the locomotive that moved everything forward. . . . He had nerve, “the elbows,” and in all matters architectural was possessed of steadfastness and determination to establish our then very new ideas in the public mind; among our team, no single one of us had the ability to achieve what has come to be known in architectural history as the New Frankfurt.*⁷⁷

Not all reminiscences were so elegiac. Walter Schwagenscheidt, ever melodramatic, described his tenure in Frankfurt as plagued by “uncertainty, agitation, sleepless nights, battles, . . . employees with too many bosses . . . all my labors “for” May, myself designated only as “co-worker” (*Mitarbeiter*).”⁷⁸ On the other hand, he described his job interview with May and Eugen Kaufmann as informal and amusing. May proceeded, “Do you agree to let me publish your works in *DNF*?” then, “three-quarters to Kaufmann but one-quarter to me,” “Schwagenscheidt is the kind of fellow we need to hire at our architecture school . . . I will see what I can do.”⁷⁹ On balance, May clearly had a talent for orchestrating and encouraging the contributions, particularly of the younger staff. Among others, the title of “dictator” became commonplace.⁸⁰

Among themselves, the design team seems to have forged a bond of mutual accord based on the political and social goals of the program, and for many team members life itself was configured by their Hochbauamt work. Many settled in New Frankfurt housing. The Schütte-Lihotzky's lived at Grethenweg, Schwagenscheidt and Stam in Römerstadt—Migge also kept an office there for a time, Rudloff, Baumeister and Leistikow all lived in Höhenblick, while May and Elsaesser built their homes nearby. When May left for the Soviet Union in 1930, seventeen of the group went with him. (Figure 0.08)

Beyond May's ability to find and galvanize a team of talent and spirit, the program bore the stamp of his influence and thinking. He was not only an idealist, he was also a skilled polemicist. And his well-known energy was coupled with a style that many characterized as dictatorial, but most also appreciated as dedicated and driven, a prerequisite for negotiating the tortuous landscape of city government. But even these many talents paled in comparison to the scale of his proposed endeavor.



FIGURE 0.08 Oskar Schlemmer and Willi Baumeister in Höhenblick, 1929.

or. For May matched Landmann for the virtual greed with which he outlined programs, research initiatives and events that would indeed create a “New Frankfurt,” the title he partnered to Landmann’s New Era. The terrain of the Hochbauamt was a whole world.

May’s team set to work in offices in the southern building of the Rathaus in the heart of old Frankfurt. The sweeping responsibilities of his office comprised three main divisions: the Architecture Office (Hochbauamt), where May’s post was situated and which oversaw all divisions, the Settlement Office (Siedlungsamt), and the Office of Code Enforcement (Baupolizei). The Hochbauamt had three divisions: Civic Architecture (Grossbauten) under Elsaesser,

Standardization in Housing Construction (Typisierung im Wohnungsbau) under Kaufmann, and “Building Advice” (Bauberatung) under Meyer. The Siedlungsamt included divisions of city and regional planning, parks, garden design, housing finance, and land expropriation. May wanted each division leader to produce new buildings, as he said, to be men of praxis.⁸¹

The building society was the important managerial and fiscal partner in settlement building. The societies served as contractors, in some instances had design offices, and managed the settlements, from upkeep to leasing. The primary organizations operating in Frankfurt were the Aktienbaugesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen (ABG, Building Society for Small Dwellings), Mietheim AG (Rental Home, Building Society), and the Nassauische Heimstätte AG (Nassau Homestead Building Society). Beginning in the Adickes administration on, housing societies and the state assumed a larger role in the construction of workers housing. By the war’s end, public infrastructures and policy were geared towards a joint program of urban modernization and housing construction, overshadowing both factory housing and speculative ventures.

The ABG sponsored two-thirds of the New Frankfurt settlement housing. Founded by Karl Flesch and Johannes Miquel in 1890, the organization was worker-supported and run by a board of prominent Frankfurters. Its purpose was to provide housing for large working-class families at low rents. Until the 1920s, most of its housing comprised two-room flats, a *Wohnküche*, a kitchen that was

also an all-purpose family room, and a generic room. By 1914, the ABG had built 1,578 units, making it one of the most productive housing cooperatives in the country. Sixty-one percent of its constituents were factory workers (50 percent of these were unskilled), and 12 percent were unemployed.⁸²

The most powerful boost to housing construction and to the work of housing societies was the federal Rent Tax (*Hauszinssteuer*), instituted in 1924. The revenues were used to boost housing production by funding public initiatives. This boon to the coffers was a by-product of the hyperinflation. Homeowners, who quickly paid off their mortgages with valueless marks, were now required to pay a tax on rents earmarked for new housing. Home to a prosperous middle class, Frankfurt gleaned especially high revenues.⁸³ By March 31, 1930, the city had received approximately 77,501,000 marks from the tax. Thirty million of this went for construction of housing, with the sponsoring housing societies contributing 20 percent of the cost.⁸⁴ The Hochbauamt served as broker, determining what society and what projects to fund, and societies had to conform to local regulations. During the New Frankfurt years this meant, for example, building flat roofs.⁸⁵ Beginning in 1926, the Rent Tax enabled a vast expansion of settlement construction in Frankfurt. The ABG reported:

Our newly built rental office was very busy this year. . . . Everyone interested requires a long conversation to address questions about the housing, how to apply, when units will be ready, etc. . . . this personal contact with our rental office is beneficial for everyone, and it is sometimes vital. Therefore we have created the optimum situation . . . with an office that provides a special hospitality to our visitors.⁸⁶

The state distributed Rent Tax funds through municipal and regional housing authorities, such that power over housing construction shifted to governing administrations, giving them essential controls over the design and administration of new settlements. The situation was made explicit with May's simultaneous appointment as Frankfurt City Planning Commissioner (*Stadtbaurat*) and design director of the ABG. Gartenstadt AG meanwhile came under de facto municipal control when building its settlements, and, for a time, it was subsumed within the ABG. During Landmann's administration, the partnership with these agencies and the city was close enough to render them virtually indistinguishable.

This, then, is the prelude to the New Frankfurt program and its turbulent history. In the chapters that follow, the historical narrative is carried primarily by New Frankfurt works themselves, with each major undertaking representing a conjunction of reform ideals, political struggles, and design innova-

tion. This rich texture of endeavors, propositions and solutions can be roughly divided between the years 1926 into 1928, when the economy was stabilized and there was a healthy tax base for housing construction, and from 1928 through 1932, when economic depression and political reaction led to a progressive erosion of the initiative.

Chapter one, “Early Settlements. Utopia to Realpolitik,” begins with the settlement drive at the outset of the initiative. From 1926 to 1928, the German mark was stabilized and revalued. American aid, in particular, helped set German industry back on its feet. Social spending expanded exponentially, a means of regenerating the economy, but also of achieving the promises of Weimar in the time of a majority SDP. These years coincide with the heroic phase of the program, the years of the Nidda Valley satellite, the debut of *Das Neue Frankfurt*, the invention of the Frankfurt Kitchen, the introduction of a concrete prefabrication system and the “open-plan” school. With almost total design control vested in the Hochbauamt, and the generous allotment of Rent Tax funds, there seemed few obstacles to the initiative’s success.

Devising a completely rationalized house was a complex undertaking. Chapter two, “House Building. Type, Form and Culture,” presents the many facets of this project—the establishment of house types, the particulars of the flat roof, experiments in concrete prefabrication systems and the standardization of fittings and fixtures. Rationalization allowed for more housing, but caused deterioration of the laborer’s situation. The ensuing strife and the controversies are discussed as a window into New Frankfurt politics.

Chapter three, “The New Woman’s Home. Kitchens, Laundry, Furnishings,” continues the discussion of household culture and modernization, centering on the Frankfurt Kitchen and its designer, Grete Lihotzky. Small, inexpensive furniture was an essential partner to the contemporary house and was avidly researched in the Frankfurt offices. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the new furniture that enabled the rational functioning of the small house.

Chapter four, “Life in the Settlements” gives a glimpse into the communal aspects of life in the early settlements. Aspirations for the settlement life are perhaps best exemplified by the great desire for libraries and reading rooms. Settlement associations and newsletters attempted the governance of the community with ambiguous results. The construction of churches for the settlements is an unexpected development in many respects, but even here the democratic urge is mirrored in buildings accommodating reformed Christian practice.

Chapter five, “Parks and Gardens,” introduces Nature as the New Life lei-

sure realm. In generous public parks, enhanced by sunning terraces, outdoor swimming facilities, and nature walks, the city supported “healthy” activities in a depoliticized terrain. The private leisure realm was to be the family allotment plot, the durable remnant of a conservative and *völkisch* movement. Together, the allotment and the green belt park system articulated the pastoral aspect of the New Life in post-war Germany.

In the 1920s, sunlight was virtually synonymous with mental and physical health. Chapter six, “Architectural Healing. Hygiene and the Pavilion,” relates the concept of the healthy building as a glazed pavilion. It opens with medical facilities and continues with the sustained experiment in school design. Among other innovative institutions were Mart Stam’s Altersheim (Home for the Elderly), Hochbauamt pavilion housing for homeless boys, and experiments in housing for single women.

The days of open horizons ended too soon. The second phase of the New Frankfurt initiative began with the onset of the depression and political disintegration. The program came under increasing attack while suffering reduced resources. The shift into decline, while inexorable, was not abrupt. Some initiatives were completed, others were stifled, while new ones emerged. Thus the 1929 CIAM Congress held in Frankfurt began with performances of experimental music, poetry and dance, and ended with the consecration of the existence minimum as the new housing standard. In chapter seven, “Rationalization Takes Command. *Zeilenbau* and the Politics of CIAM,” May pushes forward with a revised housing strategy based on the minimal dwelling, the existence minimum, and the super-block (*Zeilenbau*). The CIAM Congress is organized and brought to fruition amid internal politics and debates that say much about the particularities of the Frankfurt approach, and the evolving of nature of CIAM.

Chapter eight, “Urban Frankfurt. Aspirations and Politics,” outlines efforts to define culture and power in the landscape of the contemporary city. One goal of the New Era was to reclaim the city’s status as a cultural mecca. Key moments in Landmann’s campaign were the hiring of Fritz Wichert as director of Frankfurt’s Kunstschule (Art School), and the 1927 Summer of Music festival. The city’s reputation, particularly abroad, was also configured by the journal *Das Neue Frankfurt*, which played an exemplary role in shaping an image of cultured modernity. Its graphic standard also formed the basis for the city’s new graphic design code, which communicated the message of modernization in city signage. These efforts did not stand alone, as other powers effected their own stamp on the city. Two new monuments were signposts of the coming political storm: Max Taut and

Franz Hoffmann's ADGB Headquarters, and Hans Poelzig's IG Farben Administration Building. Their history is a prelude to a humbler, but, salutary event. The tumultuous opening of the new youth center in 1930 concludes the chapter.

Chapter nine is "‘Und sonst gar nichts.’ The End of the New Frankfurt Initiative." May and seventeen of his team left Frankfurt for the Soviet Union in 1930, leaving behind them political and economic turmoil that ultimately led to the Fascist seizure of power. Those who remained were discredited and dismissed by the Nazis and their right-wing cohort. The program's major remaining project, Garden City Goldstein, a new town planned for a population of some 30,000 was reconfigured by May's successor as an agrarian, self-help settlement. Beset by the poor economy and political reaction, the New Frankfurt initiative was steadily eroded, ending sadly and definitively in 1932. This chapter discusses that end, and the fate of many of its actors.

In sum, this is a history of the New Frankfurt initiative, its projects and actors, and its achievements, set within the turbulent context of the Weimar decade. It chronicles many and diverse aspects of the program, and examines the New Frankfurt in light of the social and political debates that shaped it. Inevitably, it also chronicles the gulf between the idyll of modernity, and the political and social realities of life in Germany on the brink of collapse.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1996), 67.
- 2 Jan Palmowski, *Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany. Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 307.
- 3 For a brief account of the Kriegrohstoffabteilung see Ralph H. Bowen, *German Theories of the Corporative State* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947), 170–72; or W.F. Bruck, *Social and Economic History of Germany from William II to Hitler* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 157–59.
- 4 Gunter W. Remmling, "Prologue: Weimar Society in Retrospect," in *Towards the Holocaust: The Social and Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic*, ed. Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann (London: Greenwood Press, 1983); Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin, 2004), chapter 2.
- 5 Werner T. Angress, *Stillborn Revolution. The Communist Bid for Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 105–219.
- 6 Weimar social and political history remains an area of intense study and debate. The summary of events given here necessarily elides great complexities.
- 7 Janos Frecot, "Die Lebensreformbewegung," *Das wilhelminische Bildungsbürgertum*, ed. Klaus Vondung (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 138–71, Frecot quotation, p. 138.
- 8 Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, "Der neue Mensch": *Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer*

Republik (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004).

- 9 Uwe Puschner, *Die Bewegung im wilhelminischen Kaiserreich. Sprache, Rasse, Religion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001).
- 10 The DGG took its place alongside the Heimatpflege, Heimatkunst and Bund Heimatschutz organizations as one of the conservationist organizations resolved to push back modernity. In this regard it is not surprising that although garden city ideas were popularly voiced among a broad political spectrum, its leadership was confined to the upper echelons of society, composed equally of the left and right, the reforming bourgeoisie as well as reactionary aristocrats.
- 11 Klaus Novy, *Genossenschaftsbewegung. Zur Geschichte und Zukunft der Wohnreform* (Berlin: Transit Buchverlag, 1983), 22–58.
- 12 Wenzel, “Heimstättenrecht,” *WLB II* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1930), 356–61.
- 13 In 1928, Kampffmeyer became the General Secretary for the DGG’s successor organization, the Internationale Verband für Wohnungswesen, Städtebau und Raumordnung (IFHP) with its headquarters in Frankfurt.
- 14 Jean-François Lejeune, “From Hellerau to the Bauhaus. Memory and Modernity of the German Garden City,” *Modern Cities*, vol. 3 of *The New City* series, ed. Jean-François Lejeune (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 53–68; Julius Posener, *Berlin auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Architektur* (Berlin: Prestel, 1979), 264–79; Franziska Bollerey, Kristina Hartmann, “A Patriarchal Utopia: The Garden City and Housing Reform in Germany at the Turn of the Century,” *The Rise of Modern Urban Planning*, ed. Anthony Sutcliffe (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 135–64; Klaus Bergmann, “Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft,” *Marburger Abhandlungen zur Politischen Wissenschaft* 20 (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1970), 135–163; Marco De Michelis, “Naissance de la Siedlung,” *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale*, nos. 15/16/17 (1985): 144.
- 15 Bergmann, “Agrarromantik,” 161.
- 16 Frederick F. Blachly and Miriam E. Oatman, *The Government and Administration of Germany* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 604–05.
- 17 Dietmar Petzina, “Problems in the social and Economic Development of the Weimar Republic,” *Towards the Holocaust*, 55–57; Ludwig Preller, *Sozialpolitik in der Weimarer Republik* (Kronberg: Athenäum-Verlag, 1978), 235, 332–34.
- 18 Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany. The Republic of the Reasonable* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 10–12.
- 19 Dr. Ruppertsberg, early leader of the Frankfurt City Archive from the introduction to *Frankfurt, das Buch der Stadt* (1927), quoted in Willi Emrich, *Bildnisse Frankfurter Demokraten* (Frankfurt: Waldemar Kramer, 1956), 57–58.
- 20 W. Klötzer, *Frankfurter Geschichte, 1920–1970* (Frankfurt: 1985), 97.
- 21 Judit Pákh, *Frankfurter Arbeiterbewegung in Dokumenten, 1832–1933*, volume II, (Frankfurt: Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte, e.V., 1997), 1115.
- 22 The new tax regulations were spelled out in the *Kommunalabgabengesetz*, a forerunner of the *Hauszinssteuer*. Brian Ladd, *Urban Planning and Civic Order in Germany, 1860–1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 142–46. On the Verein für Sozialpolitik see Nicholas Bullock and James Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 52–53, 61–70.

- 23 Dieter Rebentisch, *Ludwig Landmann. Frankfurter Oberbürgermeister der Weimarer Republik* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1975), 65–67; Bullock, *Movement*, 181–83.
- 24 Jörg R. Köhler, *Städtebau und Stadtpolitik im Wilhelminischen Frankfurt. Eine Sozialgeschichte. Studien zur Frankfurter Geschichte* 37 (Frankfurt: Verlag Waldemar Kramer, 1995). 313.
- 25 Cited in Klaus Gallwitz, *Max Beckmann in Frankfurt* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1984), 16.
- 26 Elias Canetti, *The Torch in My Ear* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), 79–80.
- 27 Ibid., 43, 51–52.
- 28 Cited in Karl Maly, *Das Regiment der Parteien, Das Regiment der Parteien. Geschichte der Frankfurter Stadtverordnetenversammlung, 1901 bis 1933* (Frankfurt: Verlag Kramer, 1995), 377.
- 29 Landmann's "New Era" was likely inspired by another "New Era" (1859–1862). In this brief span, liberal reform in Prussia attained a dramatic electoral ascendancy, only to be dashed with the dissolution of the Landtag after a second electoral victory in 1862. Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Imperial Germany, 1850–1918* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 18. For Landmann's definitive think piece on the economic development of the city see StVVA, 1917, 867ff.
- 30 Willi Emrich, *Bildnisse Frankfurter Demokraten* (Frankfurt: Waldemar Kramer, 1956), 55–61.
- 31 *FZ* (9 November 1925), clipping, EM PA.
- 32 Rebentisch, *Landmann*, 132.
- 33 Minutes (9 June 1925), StVVA, 533–34; minutes (1 September 1925), §843 StVVA, 719–21.
- 34 A reflection of May's early dedication to social issues is EM, "Unwin as a planner for social welfare," *Town and Country Planning* XXI (November 1913), 427–28.
- 35 Catharine Bauer, "Economics into Art" (1930), carton 1, typescript, CBWP, 3–4.
- 36 "Frankfurter Angelegenheiten," *FZ* (10 June 1925).
- 37 "Der Städtebauer," *Deutsches Allgemeine Zeitung* (5 June 1925).
- 38 "Der neue Frankfurter Städtebauer," *FZ* (6 June 1925).
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Walter Gropius in Buekschmitt, *May*, 9.
- 41 "Der neue Stadtbaurat," *FGA* (24 July 1925).
- 42 Buekschmitt, *May* 13–23. Johann Martin May (1793–1866) senior was an artisan and a leader among artisans engaged in legal and political struggles in the turbulent years of the mid-century. *Frankfurter Biographie* 2 (Frankfurt: Waldemar Kramer, 1994), 21.
- 43 The Democratic Party before WWI represented a middle position between the agrarian conservatives of the right and the labor unionists and socialists of the left. The party took a favorable, but patriarchal stance to reform. Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) provides an overview of German political parties during the period.
- 44 Buekschmitt, *May*, 13.
- 45 Mosse, *Crisis*, 172–73.
- 46 May's sketchbooks are some of the few personal mementos in the Ernst May collection, DAM.
- 47 Buekschmitt, *May*, 18–19.
- 48 Ibid., 19.
- 49 Ibid., 19.
- 50 In May's account, he spent his evenings in 1922 at the Unwins' home working on the German translation of *Town Planning in Practice*. The translator of record for *Grundlagen des*

Städtebaues Eine Anleitung zum entwerfen städtebaulicher (Berlin: Otto Baumgärtel, 1910). is L. MacLean. During May's internment in an English detainment camp in South Africa during WWII, Unwin's widow offered to fund his children's education and see him through any financial difficulties while his own funds were impounded. Buekschmitt, *May*, 20, 86.

- 51 Pehnt's description of Theodor Fischer (1862–1938) is apt: "the proponent of cozy, comfortable architecture taught liberation from the constraint of academically articulated facades and adaptation to nature as a principle of town planning." Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1973), 67. May was one of many architects who studied with Fischer, others including Walter Gropius, Paul Bonatz, Bruno Taut and J.J.P. Oud.
- 52 Inscription, Holzhausen photograph, EMNN. The castle stayed in the family, only becoming city property until 1923.
- 53 *Frankfurt am Main* (Freiburg: Karl Baedeker, 1981), 153–54.
- 54 Benjamin Lieberman, *From Recovery to Catastrophe. Municipal Stabilization and Political Crisis* (Oxford: Berghan Books, 1998), 144.
- 55 For more on his military career, see chapter 5.
- 56 EM, "Wie weit kann die Wohnfläche des Kleinhauses eingeschränkt werden?" *SH* (February 1921), 38–39.
- 57 Considering the economic crisis of the early 1920s, the rural housing programs were surprisingly productive. In 1919, public authorities built 1,820 rural settlements; the figure climbed to 3,268 in 1922. Bruno Ahrends, "Siedlung, ländliche," *WLB IV*. 377.
- 58 Petra Hölscher, *Die Akademie für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe zu Breslau* (Kiel: Verlag Ludwig, 2003), 208–09.
- 59 "Heimstättenbewegung," *SH* (March 1922): 72; "Bericht über die Gesellschaftsversammlung des *Schlesisches Heim* am 23 Februar 1920," *SH* (March 1920), 2.
- 60 EM, "Wie weit," 38–42.
- 61 EM, "Wohnungsfürsorge," *SH* (November 1924), 406–12; EM, "Das Mittelstandshaus mit Einbaumöbeln der Schlesischen Heimstätte auf der Betriebswirtschaftlichen und Bauausstellung in Breslau," *SH* (May 1924): 143–49.
- 62 EM, "Die internationale Städtebautagung in Amsterdam," *SH* (July 1924): 208–15.
- 63 The earliest lists of then members appeared in the *Berliner Tageblatt* (July 1926), and in *Die Form*, (1926), 225.
- 64 EM, "In eigener Sache," *SH* (February 1925): 65.
- 65 *Baltimore Evening Sun* (29 April 1925).
- 66 H.Th.W, "Dem Städtebauer," *FN* (4 September 1925).
- 67 Margarete Schütte Lihotzky, *Meine Arbeit mit Ernst May*, *BW*, no. 28 (1986); 1051.
- 68 Minutes (1 September 1925), §843 StVVA, 719.
- 69 Minutes (1 September 1925), §843 StVVA, 721; "Der neue Stadtbaurat," *FGA* (24 July 1925).
- 70 The Hochbauamt offices on the Römer were destroyed by Allied bombing. Most of the records, papers and drawings were lost.
- 71 Auszug Protokolls des Magistrats der Stadt Ffm (22 June 1925), EM PA #644; *ibid.*, *Städtisches Anziegerblatt* (5 September 1925).
- 72 His hiring engendered a protest by the city council, asserting that Landmann had overstepped his mandate in making the choice alone, and objecting to Elsaesser's simultaneous appoint-

- ment as professor of design at the Kunstschule and to the salary and special fees awarded him.
- 73 Rainer Meyer, "Martin Elsaesser von 1925–1932. Zum Werk eines avantgardistischen Baukünstlers" (dissertation, University of Bremen, 1988).
- 74 His pay was 200 marks per month. Contract (27 May 1926), "Dienstverlag," no. 880402, GMA.
- 75 Max Cetto, typescript (18 November 1927), MCG.
- 76 Niemeyer, memorandum, no. 880402, GMA.
- 77 Lihotzky, "Meine Arbeit."
- 78 Burghard Preusler, *Walter Schwagenscheidt, 1886–1968. Architektenideale im Wandel sozialer Figurationen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985), 75–89. Schwagenscheidt's contrary personality was on exhibit in Dessau as well. Hannes Meyer hired him in 1928 to instruct an atelier of twenty students. Soon discontented with what he called an inferior role, he left without completing the year.
- 79 Ibid., 75–76.
- 80 Thomas Elsaesser *et al.* eds. *Martin Elsaesser und das Neue Frankfurt* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 2009).
- 81 EM, "Organisation der Bautätigkeit der Stadt Frankfurt a. M.," *BM* 27, no. 4 (1929): 98; Jaeggi, *Adolf Meyer*, 192–93.
- 82 Pamphlets published by the ABG including: "Siebenunddreissigster Bericht des Vorstandes der Aktienbaugesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen in Frankfurt a. Main über das Geschäftsjahr vom 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1926" (1927); "Aktienbaugesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen/Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft Frankfurt a.M. A.-G." (1929); "Aktienbaugesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen zu Frankfurt am Main. Bericht des Vorstandes über das 39. Geschäftsjahr vom 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1928" (1929); "75 Jahre Gemeinnütziger Wohnungsbau," (1965). On the Gartenstadt AG, see "Mietheim Aktiengesellschaft zu Frankfurt am Main. Bericht des Vorstandes das 18. Geschäftsjahr vom 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1927" (1928); "Mietheim Aktiengesellschaft zu Frankfurt am Main. Bericht des Vorstandes das 19. Geschäftsjahr vom 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 1928" (1929).
- 83 The average income in Frankfurt was three times that for Prussia. Heike Risse, *Frühe Moderne in Frankfurt am Main, 1920–1933 Architektur der zwanziger Jahre in Frankfurt a. M. Traditionalismus—Expressionismus—Neue Sachlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts-Verlag, 1984), 300.
- 84 The figure would have been higher, but in 1929, the state diverted revenues to other purposes.
- 85 The subsidies were available only to non-profit undertakings. Risse, *Moderne*, 301ff.
- 86 "Aktienbaugesellschaft, January 1–December 31, 1927," 455.

The Early Settlements From Utopia To Realpolitik

What I saw in Europe in 1930 was so exciting that it transformed me from an aesthete into a housing reformer. . . . The most voluminous and interesting program, in Frankfurt under Ernst May, included a new system of construction, all kinds of innovations in planning and community facilities, and even specially designed kitchen equipment, which was mass-produced and sold in packages. Housing schemes were quite carefully designed for varied social uses: old people, single women, families at different income levels and so on. Everywhere technical, economic and social research was going on, including Alexander Klein's ingenious studies of minimal dwelling plans, based on analysis of family functions and household circulation.¹

—Catherine Bauer

At virtually the same time that Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson were touring Europe, preparing what was to become *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the American Catherine Bauer, journalist and housing reformer, was attending the Frankfurt course for professionals on the New Architecture. In 1932, she would publish her influential *Modern Housing* and introduce her all-male cohort, including Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein, and the other members of the Regional Planning Association of America, to exciting European developments in housing and planning. She would also organize the housing section of MoMA's *Modern Architecture* exhibit. Among the cities she visited, she reserved her highest praise for the Frankfurt, particularly its new settlements of Praunheim and Römerstadt in the Nidda Valley. There, in a hitherto sparsely populated area, Ernst May and his team shaped these two self-contained suburban settlements, islands of modernity and calm, essays in modern domestic culture and the New Life.

The achievements of the New Frankfurt initiative were the work of just a few years, years of optimism, confidence and tremendous energy. Only weeks



FIGURE 1.01 Bruchfeldstrasse viewed down the street “Bruchfeldstrasse” in 1927.

after his appointment in June 1925, May, with Herbert Boehm, presented an expansion plan for the city; in early 1926, construction began on the settlement of Bruchfeldstrasse. Meanwhile, they had readied a detailed proposal for the Nidda Valley satellite, a second was centered around a large proposed settlement, called Rotenbusch, and a third, flanking the forest, was a large settlement, called Riedhof. Swathed in parks and gardens, provided with electricity and central heating, strikingly modern in appearance, the satellite settlements would gain the New Frankfurt initiative widespread renown.

Bruchfeldstrasse: Working-Class Enclave

The settlement on Bruchfeldstrasse in Niederrad, somewhat derisively dubbed the “zigzag houses” . . . is better, much better, than its name. One should take exception to disparaging critics since they . . . have only seen it fleetingly. It makes such a good impression it is worth a trip just to see it.²
—Frankfurter General Anzeiger, 1927

With the construction of the community building in Niederrad, the housing office has achieved something of significance beyond this quarter of Frankfurt. In exemplifying the settlement of the future, it has given a major boon to the city and its citizenry. The community building . . . leads the colony of zigzag houses at Bruchfeldstrasse, like a locomotive its train. Remarkably, for only 10 marks a month, tenants have central heating and warm water from the center’s plant, access to a community laundry with electric washers, centrifuges and dryers—even individual drying lockers. Not only has the modern kitchen helped solve the difficulties of running the nuclear household of the working population of Niederrad, but since the opening of the model day care in the community building in March of this year, their infants and toddlers are conscientiously minded.³
—Frankfurter Zeitung, 1928



FIGURE 1.02 Griesheim industry in 1930.

In a neighborhood otherwise populated by pitched-roof rental barracks, the settlement of Bruchfeldstrasse rose novel and strange, its flat roofs and brilliant colors, an intrusion on the grim and compact enclave of Nied. The jagged line of strange buildings bespoke a novel and apolitical modernity, and gave rise to the playful name, the *Zickzackhausen* (zigzag houses). (Figure 1.01) Completion of this Adickes-era project was a stipulation of May's hiring. Though not his choice, in hindsight, it was fortuitous that his first foray into settlement construction was not a satellite born on recently-acquired land, but was an invasion of the industrial warrens south of the Main. Here, Bruchfeldstrasse gave immediate evidence of continuity between the venerated Adickes' administration and the New Frankfurt initiative, and challenged the truism that working-class poverty and partisan chaos were inescapable in life of the new republic.

Bruchfeldstrasse was settled by blue-collar workers at the manufacturies in Frankfurt's southwestern industrial districts.⁴ Griesheim, Nied, and Hoechst were home to the chemical, paint, and railroad industries, yet there were fewer than 500 units of company housing in the area. (Figure 1.02) For example, in 1916, the royal Prussian locomotive works built the Railroad Settlement Nied (Eisenbahn Siedlung Nied). Comprising seventy units, it was more a symbolic than a substantive achievement, the busts of former directors adorning the settlement portal. After the war, the rail-worker population ballooned to 5,000, then quickly contracted after the French forced works closures during their occupation in 1922. The factories reopened two years later, and, by 1927, the industry employed some 1,300 workers. Under Miquel, efforts to improve area housing proceeded in a desultory fashion, most workers continuing to live in speculative rental barracks. Meanwhile, supported by their industries, the villages of Nied



FIGURE 1.03 Aerial view of Bruchfeldstrasse. Postcard, ca. 1927.

and Hoechst resisted incorporation into Frankfurt. In 1927, they remained outside the scope of May's master plan. Even after their incorporation in 1928, they maintained exemptions from city planning regulations. The emergence of Bruchfeldstrasse nearby was a bright spot, an exception to the gloom that shrouded the industrial west, bringing the promise of the New Life to the gates of the old order.

Eventually housing some 2,500 people in 643 units, Bruchfeldstrasse was by far the largest settlement in this section of the city. From its core, new perimeter blocks of housing filled in and extended existing blocks to the northern border with Nied. To the south and east was the city forest, and the rail line from Darmstadt skirted its western extremity. (Figure 1.03) Two rows of zigzag houses flanked its main street. If in scale they echoed the stolid rental barracks, their gesture towards traditional form giving the strange vocabulary an elusive familiarity, the aggressive *palazzi* also posed a challenge.⁵ Critics mused on the precedents, Richard Döcker's Mönchstrasse block (1922) in Stuttgart, and Victor Bourgeois's Cité Moderne (1922) in Brussels, might be the source for the angled facades. Or, as Walter Schürmeyer, the Frankfurt architectural critic, suggested, they were a mechanism for maximizing daylight inside the apartments, a point elaborated in *Das Neue Frankfurt*.⁶ Popular news reports dwelt more particularly on their alien novelty, for good or ill.

Inside the courtyard framed by a block of zigzag houses, Bruchfeldstrasse achieved a compelling expression of the New Life. A view through the portal revealed a monumental ensemble, a *cour d'honneur* of neighborhood urbanity, an axis leading from the triangulated wading pool to the elegant community building, flanked by lushly planted allotments, drying yards and lawns.⁷ Two masonry blocks raised the central pavilion of the community building up high; an electric clock and the thin spire of the community's radio antenna marked its face. Trellis arms projected



FIGURE 1.04 Bruchfeldstrasse, the courtyard and community building, 1927.

out towards the courtyard from its base, where the children discovered another wading pool. This view down this central axis as captured by photographer Paul Wolff was the only consistently published view of the settlement.⁸ (Figure 1.04)

The ensemble was primarily the work of the young architect, Carl Rudloff. A native-born Silesian, Rudloff met May in Breslau and subsequently, was one of his first Frankfurt hires. In Breslau, Rudloff worked for the municipal housing authority. In Frankfurt, May gave him important responsibilities from the outset, appointing him the chief architect of the ABG, Frankfurt's great housing authority. As a result, Rudloff was in charge of designing the Bruchfeldstrasse courtyard and the ensemble of the zigzag houses. He had used the zigzag orientation before. In a 1924 Breslau housing competition, he explained how he endeavored to enliven a streetscape composed of rather plain houses: "The long forms . . . have little animation. This shortcoming will be addressed partly in placing them in alternatively forward and back positions, partly through the forthright and cheerful colors of the individual buildings." He commented that although these were two-story, single-family houses, the visual liveliness of this strategy was "appropriate for several-storied buildings as well."⁹ He also cited a German delight in the distant view and a love of corner windows.¹⁰ (Figures 1.04–05)

Meanwhile, Bruchfeldstrasse tenants moved into their new apartments. The units in the four-story blocks, with two- or three-rooms, and measuring from 45 to 90 square meters, were roomy by public housing standards. In 1927, Rudloff's furnished model—with a dining table sitting beneath the corner window—was on view at the Frankfurt fairgrounds in the exhibition *Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau* (*The New Dwelling. Its Interior and Exterior Construction*).¹¹ But it was the amenities that fired the public imagination. At a time when most Frankfurters



FIGURE 1.05 Bruchfeldstrasse. Corner windows and balconies.

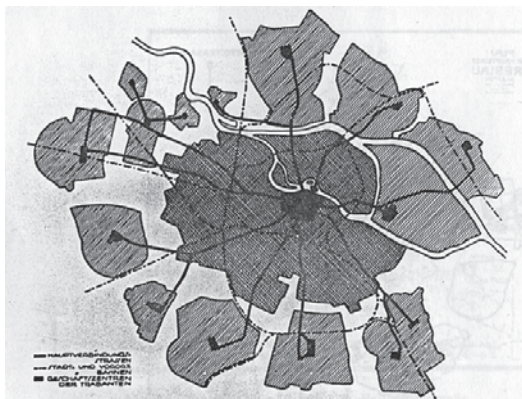


FIGURE 1.06 "Trabantan." Ernst May and Herbert Boehm, 1922.

lacked a private bath or toilet, and heated their homes with small coal stoves, a Bruchfeldstrasse flat boasted a built-in kitchen, a private bathroom, living room, and either a roof terrace or a garden. The top floor of the courtyard housing had both terraces and additional rooms for the apartments below. It was later reported that tenants illegally sublet these rooms, which had separate entrances. But the terraces became a vital expression of communality of the courtyard, bringing the view up to this stepped back floor, and peopling the building from top to bottom. (Figure 0.01)

The community building also provided many amenities: a nursery and a kindergarten with apartments for the employees; common rooms, two reading rooms, and a branch of the public Welfare Office (Wohlfahrtsamt).¹² An electric laundry and the central heating facility occupied the basement. The amenities for children garnered the lion's share of publicity, and the settlement was lauded as a kind of wonderland for children.¹³ Wolff's portraits of Bruchfeldstrasse children, published in *DNF* and elsewhere, showed children on their cots at nap time, toddlers playing in the nursery with uniformed attendants, asleep on the terraces, and gamboling in the wading pool. (Figure 6.52) In the nearby Haardtwaldplatz tower block, rooms were available for tenants to rent to accommodate visiting family members and guests. At the height of the tower, a two-story studio and apartment became home to a symphony conductor, Otto Schwartz. His presence exemplified Mayor Landmann's *Kulturstadt* (city of culture) campaign, with its both lofty and democratic aspirations.