CHAPTER 2

Another Way to Understand Modernism:
Breslau Wohnung und Werkbund
Ausstellung 1929

“This house naturally satisfies high modern demands but the unforced connection to centuries-old requirements is comfortable, because the familiar, the everyday commodities, are connected to sentimental values.”
—Bauwelt, “Wohnung und Werkraum: Versuchs-Siedlung der Werkbundausstellung in Breslau” June 1929

“The spirit and conviction of the times, also gives the building arts their tasks, which are only recognized in the context and as part of the great cultural problems,” wrote architecture critic Alfred Krüger in a critique of the recently opened Breslau Werkbund exhibition Wohnung und Werkraum (WuWA).¹ For Krüger, WuWA was the physical manifestation of contemporary modern culture in its most positive forms. WuWA projects, he noted, searched for an appropriate expression of the Zeitgeist by reacting to conditions of modern living. He cited machines, trains, the automobile, the airplane, and radio as recent inventions that had a profound impact on the way people live, an impact that could be read in the exhibition designs. Krüger related the exhibition, located in a remote corner of Germany, to national cultural concerns, to make it clear that WuWA had local, regional, and national dimensions. As the crowning achievement of the Breslau arts scene, and the turning point after which that scene rapidly declined, WuWA epitomizes the complex Breslau engagement with modernity and 1920s cultural debates.

An Exhibition for Breslau

Heinrich Lauterbach put forward the initial proposal for a model housing estate, likely in 1926. It coincided with the appearance of a municipal study on
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the housing crisis, *Siedlung und Stadtplanung in Schlesien* (Housing and City Planning in Silesia), which suggested that city officials had an interest in promoting more aggressive housing policies long before WuWA was conceived. Statistics in the study revealed the significant housing crunch in Breslau after the war: where Köln had a density of 27.3 people per hectare and Frankfurt am Main had thirty-five people per hectare, in Breslau, 560,000 people lived in a space of 4,920 hectares at a density of 114 people per hectare. Unlike cities in western and southern Germany, Breslau had not expanded into the surrounding area, which was largely agricultural. Breslau wanted to reduce its density to thirty-nine people per hectare, which would require an estimated 3,550 new apartments per year, a goal that took into account the shortfall of approximately 11,500 units and added annual increases of about 2,400 units (see chapter 1). City authorities estimated that at least 130,000 people were “making a mockery of basic health requirements” because of substandard housing and overcrowding. According to a 1916 survey, 156 apartments in Breslau had no heat whatsoever; 15 percent of all apartments had only one heated room and no kitchen; 30 percent one heated room and a kitchen; 28 percent two heated rooms and a kitchen; 21.4 percent three to four heated rooms and a kitchen;
only 5.6 percent had more than five rooms. The bulk of the demand was therefore for small, inexpensive apartments with basic amenities, an area that WuWA was well suited to explore.

WuWA was broad and comprehensive, designed to appeal to both lay people and experts. Along with model housing, it included numerous exhibitions related to domestic and workplace design, held in several buildings on the grounds of the 1913 Centennial Jubilee. The Messehalle (1925), designed by Max Berg and Ludwig Moshamer, featured exhibitions about design and construction, including contemporary furniture and home furnishings, lighting, raw materials, new construction materials and systems, new building technologies, architectural details and surfaces, paints and color design, the historical development of mass housing, the development of the living room and its furnishings, green spaces, everyday life, art by local figures, and model work places. The work shown in Hans Poelzig’s Pavilion (1913) traced the historical development of the apartment, the housing estate, and contemporary landscape architecture. Berg’s Centennial Hall (1913) presented exhibitions on Neues Bauen architecture, the Breslau Eichborngarten housing cooperative, and the Bauhaus educational system. Although WuWA had no art exhibit, four art exhibitions were held in Breslau that year to capitalize on the expected increase in tourism. Other cultural events that coincided with the exhibition were the Künstlerbund’s release of the book Silesian Artists, as well as the national Werkbund Days and the Association of German Architects annual meeting, both held in Breslau that year. Twenty-one participants worked on WuWA, including architects Heinrich Lauterbach, Adolf Rading, and Theo Effenberger; graphic designer Johannes Molzahn; product designer Josef Vinecky; and poet Hans Nowak. The Municipal Housing Authority of Breslau, Deutsche Werkbund, the Breslau Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Breslau Chamber of Agriculture, the Breslau Chamber of Craft, the Homemakers Alliance, labor unions, and the Exhibition and Fair Association all collaborated on the exhibition. These collaborating organizations were as broad in their orientation as the architecture and exhibitions themselves, with the Werkbund representing the more liberal side and the Homemakers Alliance decidedly more conservative.

The Exhibition Catalog captured WuWA’s intentions and purpose: “Every modern exhibition is a tactically considered totality . . . each modern exhibition speaks for specific ideas,” it noted, and the goal of the whole was “to propagate in wide circles the thinking behind modern living culture and contemporary workspace organization.” In other words, WuWA was a didactic effort to promote contemporary design in domestic and work environments to an uneducated and possibly hostile audience. WuWA’s objectives were decidedly
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forward-looking: it sought “1) the alteration of housing methods and housing culture and, 2) the improvement and standardization of work methods, rationalization of work with its reorganization in the workshops of construction as well as business.”

The organizers clearly had the 1927 Stuttgart Weissenhof-siedlung Exhibition in mind, identifying it in the exhibition program as a starting point for developing a new approach to housing design. They intended to capitalize on Stuttgart’s achievements, while correcting its shortcomings. Marg Moll, the sculptress and wife of Academy director Oskar Moll, wrote, “the WuWA in 1929 was created by architects and artists at the Academy, [and] proved that these men in the ‘province’ were trying to demonstrate new ideas with audacity and panache.”

Her comment affirms the central role played by the Academy, but also highlights how conscious Breslau artists were of their provincial status, implying that one of the goals of the WuWA organizers was to show that they were not provincial, but rather were as sophisticated and knowledgeable as their counterparts in other parts of Germany.

As scholars like Karin Kirsch and Richard Pommer have pointed out, Stuttgart included an international array of famous architects who were required to use the signature elements of Neues Bauen: flat roofs, simple rectangular volumes, terraces and roof gardens, and white stucco, steel, and reinforced concrete construction, qualities that gave the development an intentionally uniform appearance.

The narrow aesthetic range at Stuttgart reflected the desires of Mies van der Rohe, who oversaw the project, and the Werkbund, but it did not please the city councilors who, as in Breslau, attempted to pressure the Werkbund to include local talent. By contrast, the Breslau organizing committee had a mandate to restrict participants to Silesian architects and included a variety of work to reflect the richness of local and regional design.

On the surface, many of the aesthetic choices in Breslau looked similar to Stuttgart, but on closer examination the work was markedly different, for it mixed progressive and traditional aesthetic elements, featuring buildings with flat and pitched roofs; white and colored stucco; “cigar box” and curvilinear forms; stucco and wood; open and compartmentalized plans; punched windows and large, expansive glass walls; plain interiors and brightly colored ones; symmetrical and asymmetrical arrangements; and more.

How and to what degree contradictory values came together varied from project to project, for design choices were left up to participating architects. Since the Breslauers as a group inclined toward an alternative view of progressive art and architecture, one that bridged the divide between traditional and modern, diverse work was to be expected.
The Vision

Several factors shaped the pragmatic approach of the Breslau WuWA: the nature of cultural politics in Breslau, with its minimal sympathy for avant-garde art; the prevailing attitudes in Breslau arts circles; and the beliefs of Heinrich Lauterbach and Adolf Rading, the Breslau-based Werkbund planners, especially Lauterbach, who was heavily involved in conceiving and promoting the initial idea. From the start, the rationale for the Breslau exhibit was different from Stuttgart. Local government and business interests saw it as an opportunity to improve Breslau’s national commercial profile, especially in light of the city’s postwar circumstances. In 1926, when Lauterbach began to lobby for a Werkbund exhibition in Breslau, the city was still struggling with the political and economic aftermath of losing Silesian territories after World War I and facing new economic pressures from the commercial competition between Germany and Poland that heated up in the late 1920s. Silesia wanted to demonstrate industrial superiority over its eastern neighbor, and WuWA was an attractive way to showcase its industrial products to Germans and Poles alike.17

For Breslau architects like Lauterbach, the WuWA offered an unprecedented opportunity to showcase local and regional design in a nationally and internationally visible forum. Architects and artists in the East had long been marginalized; the national press rarely noticed even their most outstanding achievements. Lauterbach wrote that when he first approached Oskar Moll at the Academy to request the Academy’s support, its staff was skeptical about his plans.18 Lauterbach wanted their help because they were “natural allies,” with shared aesthetic and philosophical biases, who could help him counter any local resistance that might arise, given the notoriously conservative taste of many city officials and residents. As Hans Poelzig once described Breslauer attitudes towards new art and architecture, “The land around Breslau is hard, and the cultural ground is even harder to till.”19

Breslau’s arts and municipal leadership was initially divided over the project. Moll backed it fairly early on, as did Rading and Academy architecture professor Hans Scharoun. Mayor Dr. Otto Wagner and Municipal Housing Authority official Hugo Althoff also championed the idea, but Fritz Behrendt, city building director, opposed it. The insistence of the Berlin-based Werkbund executive board on appointing Rading as joint manager of the exhibition may have been the catalyst for Behrendt’s opposition. In contrast to Lauterbach, Rading, a Berlin native, belonged to the Weimar avant-garde and had strong ties to Berlin-based groups like The Ring and the Werkbund. But although
Behrendt was a conservative architect in every way, economic arguments and assurances that the exhibition would feature local talent and disavow radical aesthetics eventually won him over. Lauterbach was a native son whose design work was more restrained than Rading’s. The joint directorship ensured that WuWA would be shaped by a balanced representation of local and national interests as well as multiple aesthetic viewpoints.

The Financing

Lauterbach approached Breslau’s city council with a proposal for a Werkbund housing exhibit early in 1926 (the exact date is not known), from which we can infer that he secured Werkbund support late in 1925. In July 1926, the city sent a delegation, which included Wagner and Althoff, to the Prussian Ministry of Commerce in Berlin to ask the ministry to share the cost of mounting the exhibition. This was the first of many such excursions, as Breslau’s lobbying efforts eventually included the State Ministry of Labor, State Ministry of Economics, State Ministry of the Interior, State Ministry of Welfare, Prussian Ministry of Labor, Prussian Ministry of the Interior, and Prussian Ministry of State, as well as the chancellor and the president. Althoff reported to officials in Breslau, “There are still no concrete plans over the contents of the exhibition. But it should not be only about Silesia, but representative for the entire East. It should serve to illuminate the economic meaning of the East in the totality of the German economy . . . in order to give a better understanding of the economic needs of the East.” He went on to note that although Breslau expected to sign an economic agreement with Poland in the near future, the exhibit would not be an appropriate vehicle for German-Polish cooperation, since most visitors would be German.

Breslau’s request fell on deaf ears. The Ministry of Commerce representative, Mr. Muhle, felt that the ministry had financed too many recent exhibitions and could not foot the bill for any more, so the city would have to finance the venture on its own. City officials persisted. A note to the file dated August 1927 records the local and regional support for the proposed exhibition, especially among industrial concerns who saw it as an opportunity to improve their profile, but the main obstacle to moving forward was financial: the city could donate a tract of land near the 1913 Centennial Hall, but did not see a way to raise the five million marks needed to cover the projected shortfall between ticket sales and contributions. City representatives argued that if the exhibition succeeded in improving the Silesian economy, it would help stabilize Silesia,
which remained politically shaky. Despite the region’s dire need, the federal and Prussian governments had thus far done little to support Silesia, so its turn had come.23 Once again, however, the Ministry of Commerce informed the city officials that they no longer offered financial support to exhibitions.24 Records show that the Breslauers were skeptical about Berlin’s rationale, and some believed their lack of interest was less a policy change than the usual federal government marginalization of their province.25

As late as January 11, 1928, articles in the Breslau press contained contradictory reports about the exhibition’s status: some wrote that it would not occur, while others reported that it was a fait accompli.26 The press coverage may have reflected internal debates since the city did not definitively decide to mount the exhibition until the following month. Later correspondence shows that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry continued to waffle on funding until December 1928, when it seems to have been promised to the Breslau representatives, though the amount was still unclear.27 A note in the files lists five exhibitions the Reich Ministry of Economics planned to support financially: Barcelona (the famous exhibition pavilion designed by Mies van der Rohe), Leipzig, Munich, Breslau, and Königsberg.28 Barcelona was to receive the lion’s share (750,000 RM) of the two million RM allocated for exhibition funding, with Breslau slated for a meager 100,000 RM. By late 1928, the state governments of Upper and Lower Silesia had also committed funds to the exhibit, and in a letter dated January 1929, the national government—the Ministry of Commerce and Industry—finally committed 150,000 RM to WuWA “so that the State at least participates in the sponsorship action in the same amount [as the provincial governments].”29 It appears, however, that the money never arrived. The Breslau Housing Authority paid the architects’ fees, the city absorbed the exhibition deficit, and Breslau once again felt overlooked and underserved by the federal government in Berlin.30

The Architects

A portion of the June 30, 1928, Breslau Municipal proposal for the upcoming exhibition survives in Berlin. It reveals the arguments that eventually convinced reluctant Breslau and Berlin politicians to support the exhibit. According to the document, “the changes in the condition of the area of Silesia, that lost its hinterland, was divided into two provinces, and the years-long disturbance of its commercial contacts has affected the total economic life [of Silesia] and worst of all in Breslau.” A list of Silesia’s troubles followed:
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From the abundance of difficulties that the aftermath of the war brought we would like to refer to the following:

1. Breslau has the worst housing conditions. 17% of all families live in one room, another 34% in 1–2 rooms, a kitchen and a room. The influx of refugees from Posen and West Prussia, who according to experience always stop in the first large city, substantially increased the housing crisis.

2. The greater portion of industry either migrated or shut down, because the eastern market was lost and the unfavorable freight relationships make the establishment of new markets in the west and south very difficult.

3. For similar reasons, wholesale business lost the larger houses or was reduced to regional significance.

4. Unemployment in Breslau is very high. It is far beyond the average in Germany; it was established very early on [after the war] and has lingered unabated already for years and burdens the municipal budget terribly.

5. Small businesses are distressed by the constrained purchasing ability of the people, especially agriculture, that like industry and commerce had to adjust to and struggle with a shrunken market and unfavorable freight conditions.

6. Entrepreneurship and craft suffered in a similar way from the reduced purchasing ability of the people and from the poor economic situation of commerce, industry, and agriculture.

7. Year after year commerce and industry hope for an end to the German-Polish commercial war, and are always disappointed anew. A deep despondence afflicts the wider circles of our people, a despondence that has had unhealthy consequences in our cultural and artistic milieu. Our cultural institutions are desolate; our musical life lays abandoned.31

The program was thus a pragmatic response to Silesian circumstances.

A note to the files indicates that the WuWA agenda was later revised to focus on small houses, especially the newly fashionable Existenzminimum (existence minimum). A letter from Breslau city officials specified that the exhibition “will feature small and tiny housing only. It will therefore benefit the less well off in the population. Experiments, like those in Stuttgart (Weissenhofsiedlung), are to be avoided, therefore it is going to be limited to 10 architects who know local affairs well, Tessenow and Poelzig have been taken on as advisers and as-
This account makes it crystal clear that the Breslau exhibition was intended to be less radical than Stuttgart. According to Lauterbach, Poelzig and Tessenow were brought on to mediate between the Breslau Housing Authority and the *Deutsche Werkbund* because Behrendt, the head of the Housing Authority, did not trust the *Werkbund* representatives to choose “appropriate” architects. Behrendt may have feared that the *Werkbund* representatives would choose private architects, ignoring his employees, or he may have been concerned about style, since Breslau tastes were more conservative than *Werkbund* tastes. In the event, the compromise candidates were all *Werkbund* members with modernist sympathies though few would be considered members of the avant-garde. The practical Breslauers accepted Behrendt’s conditions in order to advance their project. The final roster included architects across the spectrum of 1920s German modernism, making the composition of the group very different from Stuttgart and a reflection of Breslau cultural politics.

Lauterbach’s pointed criticism of Stuttgart served as one starting point for Breslau. Lauterbach saw the Stuttgart exhibition as an important attempt to test the new approach to architectural design, to see whether “the new building art was far along enough for different individuals, as they struggled with the problem of housing, [to] finally create a cohesive image.” However, as he put it, “the spiritual side of housing has been ignored. One is busy mostly with technology, norms, procurement of funding, and so on . . . we hope that the exhibition will bring us a bit further forward.” In other words, Stuttgart was too concerned with aesthetics and building technology, and not concerned enough with how people live in their houses. He hoped that Breslau would better balance these two important value systems. The balancing act began with the choice of participants.

Unfortunately, the *Werkbund* Archive records of the architect selection were destroyed in a bombing raid during the Second World War, so only sketchy evidence of the process remains. However, according to Lauterbach, who mentioned the process in an article he wrote for *Schlesische Monatshefte*, Behrendt asked Poelzig to mediate between the city and the *Werkbund* to find a compromise for selecting participating architects. Poelzig “made the suggestion that Effenberger and Heim, who had built a great deal with the city (Pöpelwitz, Zimpel and other housing estates), might mediate between the City (namely the Housing Authority), and the ten involved architects, because they stood closer to Behrendt in their building outlook than Rading and me. In order not to have the thing collapse we accepted this solution.” It is not clear whether ten specific architects were already under discussion at this point or whether ten was the target number for participation, or whether this compro-
mise resulted in Effenberger and Heim participating in the selection with Lauterbach and Rading or simply meant that Lauterbach and Rading agreed to divide their choices between city employees and others. It is interesting to note, however, that there were no strictly traditionalist architects on the final list, which ultimately numbered twelve: five from the city—Theo Effenberger, Paul Heim, Albert Kempter, Richard Konwiarz, and Ludwig Moshamer—and seven others—Moritz Hadda, Paul Häusler, Emil Lange, Lauterbach, Rading, Scharoun, and Gustav Wolf.

The WuWA architects had varied backgrounds. Many of them were connected to the Breslau Academy: Effenberger, Hadda, Lange, Lauterbach, and Wolf were graduates; Rading and Scharoun were professors; and Effenberger and Lauterbach later taught there as well. During their tenures with the city, Heim, Kempter, Konwiarz, and Moshamer collaborated with progressive architects Max Berg and Ernst May. The five city architects were among the most forward-thinking in the municipality, although much of their work for the city was closer to Heimat architecture than Neues Bauen, suggesting that the compromise effected by Poelzig merely ensured a wider range of progressive viewpoints. Interestingly, when presented with the opportunity to design their own buildings, all five worked in a more contemporary idiom than they had used for publicly funded projects.

Heim came from an extremely conservative arts background. He studied under Bernhard Pankok at the Baugewerkschule (Building Trade School) in Stuttgart then worked for the reactionary architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg before moving to Breslau. Schultze-Naumburg is famous for his work on traditional looking architecture and Heimatschutz. He was vehemently antimodern, led the charge against the Bauhaus, and was an active member of the Nazi party. As a student, Heim met Albert Kempter, who became his brother-in-law and business partner. Kempter also studied at the Stuttgart Baugewerkschule. He entered the city architect’s office in Breslau under Max Berg in 1909, a year before Heim. The Baugewerkschule was far more conservative and practically oriented than the Academy, with a strong contingent of Heimatschutz activists, giving Kempter a traditional grounding.

Moshamer and Wolf graduated from the Technical University (TU) in Munich, though Wolf first completed a degree in art pedagogy in Breslau. The innovative architect Theodor Fischer was a professor in Munich at that time and trained many of the leading lights of the German avant-garde, including Hugo Häring, Ernst May, Erich Mendelsohn, and Bruno Taut, as well as more conservative architects like Paul Schmitthenner. Wolf collaborated with Schmitthenner on the Karlowitz Housing Estate in Breslau and the Staaken Housing Estate in
Berlin before becoming director of the *Städtische Handwerker- und Kunstgewerbeschule* (Municipal Handwork and Applied Arts School) in Breslau in 1927. Moshamer moved to Breslau in 1911, right after completing his studies. He worked in the communal building department of the city under Max Berg and Hugo Althoff, so his professional experience was quite progressive. With Berg, Moshamer designed the Breslau Waterworks building, a landmark modernist structure that still stands in downtown Breslau. Moshamer was the only WuWA architect who had participated in the Centennial Jubilee in 1913, where he helped Berg with the design for the Centennial Hall.

Lange received his architecture degree from the Breslau Academy in 1909. He began working for Poelzig in 1904, while he was still a student, and stayed until 1924, when he went out on his own as an independent architect. Poelzig is considered a progressive, but not radical, architect. His factory design was ahead of its time, but much of his other work was steeped in traditional building modes. Hadda also graduated from the Breslau Academy and studied with Poelzig. In 1917, he opened an independent practice in Breslau with Ludwig Schlesinger that was known from the start for its modern designs. Perhaps most interestingly, Hadda was a founding member of the Young Silesia group of artists who came together to create a forum for young artists who were not included in Academy, *Kunstverein, Gesellschaft der Kunstfreunde,* and *Künstlerbund* exhibitions. Of all the WuWA architects, only Effenberger, Lauterbach, Rading, and Scharoun had national reputations, while only Rading and Scharoun were internationally known. Rading and Scharoun were also the only ones considered members of the radical avant-garde, although this was not actually an accurate assessment of their design philosophies.

**The Site Design**

Although the Breslau organizers did not want a uniform design approach, the architects still needed guidelines. The exhibition program lays out their thinking. It praises the Stuttgart *Weissenhofsiedlung* for its pioneering efforts to explore housing reform but criticizes its failure to foreground the “technical and economic side of housing.” In contrast, WuWA will explicitly address construction techniques and costs, as well as the economics of time and space, that is, minimizing design time, streamlining construction, and making spaces as efficient as possible. In Breslau, as in Stuttgart, the goal of the exhibition was to display “prototypes and quality,” rather than fully developed mass production elements.
The Homemakers Alliance had been disappointed with Stuttgart, so the Breslauers included them in the planning from the start. The Homemakers Alliance developed a “Negativer Wunschzettel (Negative List of Desires),” from which we can infer both their complaints and their desires. Their general requirements included a healthy environment for children, more than one room, sound isolation, better spatial planning with minimal circulation space, storage rooms and pantries, and larger kitchens. In response to Stuttgart, they called for terraces with protection against the weather, roof gardens and terraces with railings, and glass surfaces of reasonable size. Evidently, the challenge of cleaning inordinately large glass surfaces trumped the bright light they afforded. Tending to the pragmatic, the Alliance seemed wholly unconcerned with aesthetics.

The WuWA site was at the edge of the fairgrounds used for the 1913 Centennial Jubilee celebrating the German victory over Napoleon, outside the city’s historic center. Long and thin, with a bend at the middle, the site was flanked by the Grüneicher Weg to the south, the small side streets Uechtritzweg and Zimpelerstrasse to the east and northeast, the Pinkenweg to the northwest, and undeveloped building lots to the west.

The neighborhood beyond the undeveloped lots contained large, traditionally designed mansions and Jugendstil villas, both on spacious green grounds. Across Uechtritzweg and Zimpelerstrasse was the public park Grüneiche. The area was thus a logical location for a “green” development, but the organizers wanted to go even further than the Garden City Movement by experimenting with other progressive environmental elements as well as material, technological, and spatial innovations.

Rading and Lauterbach were primarily responsible for the site design of the housing estate. The rest of the exhibition was installed in the adjacent Centennial Hall and Exhibition Pavilion from the 1913 Centennial Jubilee. The realized plan consisted of low-rise row houses, medium-rise single-family detached houses, two slightly taller housing blocks, and a kindergarten. A planned restaurant/café and high-rise apartment house were never constructed, but their inclusion in the plans attests to Rading and Lauterbach’s vision of a mixed development that explored the full range of housing options. Mixing the types actualized a philosophical approach to urban design, which held that variety was necessary to good public spatial planning. In keeping with the green concept, there was a large public park at the center of the site, behind the row houses, plus generous green space in front of and behind each building. Most of the designs included terraces, balconies, and roof gardens to give residents private outdoor space. The planning itself com-
bined rational and romantic traditions. Individual buildings were laid out in picturesque fashion, rather than on a “rational” grid, in order to capitalize on the natural features of the site and make the urban plan less contrived. Thus some buildings, such as units 9–22, lined the street like typical German perimeter blocks, albeit set behind small strips of garden, while private villas were turned and set back, and the kindergarten sat inside the block, surrounded by green space. A common heating plant used the relatively clean fuel gas rather than coal. The consolidation of heating functions in one location meant that only one building needed a chimney, so pollution into the atmosphere could be concentrated and hopefully controlled. Effenberger, Heim, and Rading supervised construction, completing the estate in an impressive three months from start to finish.41

The completed model housing estate attracted a diverse community of progressive artists, many of them Academy professors. Molzahn and painters Robert Bednorz and Georg Muche moved into Adolf Rading’s Turmhaus; the
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painter Günter Grundmann installed himself in Scharoun’s Ledigenheim; Johannes Drobek and others lived in Heim and Kempter’s building; and Heinrich Lauterbach and Oskar Schlemmer occupied row houses 13 and 14. Along with Breslau’s creative community, lay people also embraced the architecture. Long after he left Breslau, Rading pined for the close community at the WuWA housing. Today, its buildings are still fully occupied.

The Buildings

The exhibition guidelines and the backgrounds and architectural politics of the selected architects inevitably led to a degree of uniformity in the WuWA designs. Minutes of meetings between Breslau municipal authorities and Rading and Lauterbach, as representatives of the Werkbund, detailed the exhibition guidelines, but they were relatively vague and did not address aesthetics. In Breslau, what constituted the “modern” was less restricted—broader in both formal range and material palette—than Neues Bauen dictates: pitched roofs, colored buildings, and animated forms accompanied the simple forms,
ornament-free surfaces, and flat roofs of *Neues Bauen*.\(^{45}\) Ernst May’s lament that “really very talented artists . . . forgot the clear, sober economic efficiency and succumbed to the temptations of the exhibition devil” may be extreme, but it does speak to *WuWA*’s movement away from orthodoxy toward aesthetic variety.\(^{46}\) Building 2, the one-story kindergarten designed by Paul Heim and Albert Kempter, had wood-frame construction and was clad in wood siding, a marked departure from the stucco-clad exteriors favored by *Neues Bauen* architects.

The central roof was raised to create clerestory windows that opened onto the main space. The massing was symmetrically arranged around the front entrance and the interior plan was also symmetrical, meaning that the play between symmetry and asymmetry that characterized innovative design of the period was totally lacking. Indeed, Heim and Kempter’s work had more in common with the Scandinavian modern of Alvar Aalto, Sigurd Lewerentz, and Erik Gunnar Asplund than with their German counterparts. Although flat roofs dominated the development, Gustav Wolf’s designs for 32 and 33 had pitched roofs, generally considered a traditional element, although some modernists, like May and Effenberger, used them in housing estates.

While Wolf’s houses also featured more traditional small, punched win-
dows, his spatial planning was simple and functional and his facades were white stucco with no ornamentation, both hallmarks of new architecture, which he, like others, combined with traditional German architectural tropes.

The exhibition guidelines called for experimentation with color, a mandate the architects seem to have embraced enthusiastically. The call for color dated back to Bruno Taut’s 1919 “Aufruf zum farbigen Bauen” (Call to Colored Buildings), which posited visual sensuousness against technological and mechanical sterility. In contrast to the almost willful application of color in Jugendstil architecture, Taut and his contemporaries attempted to understand the relationship between color and human perception and emotions: they believed that color embodied human emotion and therefore could counter the cold, rational machine aesthetic, so they sought to develop a system for applying color in architecture based on its evocative powers. Hans Scharoun supported Taut’s call to color, and a group of devotees to color formed in Breslau in the early 1920s, with Effenberger and Rading among its members. In Breslau, there was a committee of more progressive architects at the Schlesische Bund für Heimatschutz, which was dedicated to research on the architectural use of color.\footnote{One of the exhibition booths in the Centennial Hall was also...}
devoted to this issue. The discussions in Breslau revolved around the appropriate way to use color in contemporary architectural design, particularly how bright colors could reflect a building’s tectonics but also emotional values. The “decorative painter” Max Streit was largely responsible for the exhibit, as well as more generally for color at WuWA. His emphasis on the emotional power of color is evident in a 1929 article, where he wrote, “Delight in color is particular to man and as old as delight in nature, his need for amusement, cheerfulness, and vitality.”

Color was used on exterior and interior surfaces at WuWA, often in bold ways. Scharoun’s Ledigenheim, for instance, had pale yellow stucco façades accented with bright yellow columns and metal ornamentation, while orange-red panels divided the units. Interiors were yellow, red, orange, dark and light blue, purple, and pink—very different from the neutral palette of many 1920s buildings—with color used on many different surfaces, not just walls, as in the waiting room, which had blue and pink-peach columns and pink furniture.

As Franz Landsberger pointed out in Schlesische Monatshefte, Scharoun also used color to delineate space, letting the meeting of two colors mark a functional boundary in place of a wall. Even carpeting was sometimes col-
ored: red on a stair, blue in a circulation space and hallways. Scharoun was not the only WuWA architect who used color: Effenberger’s villa was olive green; Paul Heim and Albert Kempter’s housing was ochre; Rading’s building was pinkish yellow; and the kindergarten was bluish green. If the visual purity associated with Neues Bauen was not a priority for color, neither was it a major concern for volume. Massing was sometimes simple, as in the row housing designed by Lange, Moshamer, Lauterbach, Hadda, Häusler, and Effenberger. But projects like the Ledigenheim, Rading’s multifamily housing, and villas by various architects had animated and complex massing.

These projects responded to the site and programmatic agenda, rather than a singular design imperative. They freely incorporated curvilinear forms, a choice that had earned Scharoun the epithet “Kurvenromantiker” (curve romantic) at the Weissenhofsiedlung, a label that implied that curves were irrational and unscientific. Effenberger, Hadda, and Lauterbach stepped their house forms to indicate internal programmatic differences and to better scale buildings to people.

The unbuilt restaurant had a similar design. The restaurant plan was a rectangle with a circular outdoor “room” that cut into its southeast corner. The Ledigenheim is a modified pinwheel with protruding wings that also cascade, albeit less dramatically. One section of the building is strictly orthogonal, while the main wing is a curved rectangle that counters the turn in the road. Its walls and other garden features similarly juxtapose straight lines and orthogonal forms with curvilinear ones. Rading’s multifamily house has an orthogonal footprint with the occasional curved wall or protrusion. The building is divided into two regular blocks, but odd roof volumes defy its regularity.

WuWA facade design also exhibited a compositional freedom at odds with the rational Neues Bauen. The animated facades on the Ledigenheim, with their alternating rhythms, circular windows, and odd variety of shapes, and the quirky composition of Rading’s multifamily units, intended to convey individuality, are examples. Rading bragged that he had managed to create an individuated series of facade treatments on a prefabricated pattern building; he did so by juxtaposing local asymmetries with larger symmetries.

The facades of the unexecuted restaurant structure were similarly animated: each elevation is different and all are asymmetrical; two thirds of the east elevation, for instance, consists of thin, horizontal windows, while the rest is floor-to-ceiling vertical windows. The purposeful approach to differentiating facades is perhaps most starkly apparent in 9–22, the row houses. The block begins with a simple, repetitive pattern typical of Neues Bauen, but Hadda disrupted the rhythm in 16 and 17, putting 16 at a greater distance from 15 and
Fig. 21. The row houses by Effenberger et al. The flatness and uniformity of the block is apparent (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw).

Fig. 22. Aerial photograph of the WuWA showing Gustav Wolf’s project in the lower left-hand corner and Scharoun’s Ledigenheim above (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw).
Fig. 23. Curved form and stepped massing at Lauterbach’s House (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw).

Fig. 24. View of the Lauterbach House from the side (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw).
17 closer to 16. He also added two quirky small circular windows, one downstairs and one up, adding to the facade’s asymmetrical irregularity, which is the only instance thereof in the entire contiguous block. In this case, the outer expression is designed for visual interest, a clear departure from the function-related facade design typical of *Neues Bauen* and the rest of the block.

**Social Innovations**

Although WuWA was supposed to explore housing challenges particular to the “Eastern borderland,” its buildings failed to address any of the region’s specific climatic, site, or cultural conditions. In fact, this premise was flawed from the start, as neither politicians nor architects ever articulated clear distinctions between the eastern territories and the rest of Germany. The weather environment in the East was hardly unique, and the social and economic circumstances architects hoped to address in their work were also found elsewhere in Germany. As Alfred Rothenberg, writing for the *Ostdeutsche Bau-Zeitung*, waggishly

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*Fig. 25. Rading’s Turmhaus, typical floor plan (Museum of Architecture in Wroclaw).*
observed, “Breslau has the strangest climate that one can imagine: namely, it has none at all!”

One place where architects did manage to make some original contributions, however, was in the realm of the *Existenzminimum*. Rading and Scharoun, in particular, stood out. Rading’s project plays with notions of individuality and community or *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. As a multifamily scheme, it was designed for a community of residents, but Rading hoped to avoid the usual pitfalls of mass-produced prefabricated systems and instead give the units as much individual expression as possible. He designed a building with eight apartments that used prefabricated construction elements and systems. The building was divided into four equal sections delineated by the structural grid, but within the four quadrants floor plans varied so that each unit was distinct. The apartments were approximately sixty-four square meters (640 square feet), but they could sleep up to four people in minimalist bedrooms that held little more than beds. Designs for the children’s bedrooms, for instance, show two beds head to foot between the walls, with no space for other furniture.

The apartment layouts are all variations on a basic type: a sort of courtyard plan, with the living room at the center serving as the communal space, and surrounding rooms along its perimeter functioning as individual spaces. A
central communal circulation area large enough to double as an interior street provides access to the units. These corridors terminate in communal rooms at either end, intended as play areas for children during the day and as reading rooms for adults in the evening. The roof is also accessible and designed to be a protected outside space for residents. Each unit has a private balcony that provides individual access to the outdoors. The design thus balances the communal with the individual throughout.

Whereas Rading designed for typical nuclear families, Scharoun imagined a new client for the Ledigenheim: the single, childless adult. The building was an effort to create a new kind of living space for single people by combining design models from hotel accommodation and apartment living. In Scharoun’s hands, this daring experiment fused social and communal ideals, as embodied in his use of shared public spaces—restaurant, public garden terrace, roof terraces—to create a sense of community among those who chose to live in its small residences.

Scharoun achieved remarkable economy of scale by splitting the apart-
ments into two floors then sliding part of the scissor section of each unit either underneath or over the public corridor. Each residence is just twenty-seven square meters (270 square feet). The visitor enters into a tiny vestibule, then ascends or descends into the living room, before descending or ascending, respectively, into the bedroom. No interior doors separate the rooms except for the bathroom, which is situated next to the stair, between the living room and bedroom. Scharoun takes the *Existenzminimum* to its extreme limits. The living room is the size of a child’s bedroom in a small house, and the kitchen is a nook in the living room wall, as wide as a stove. But the size was countered by the double exposure and cross ventilation afforded by the split section, which Scharoun believed were “psychologically important” achievements.

Scharoun’s and Rading’s buildings can be understood in the context of other efforts to develop new models of collective housing in the 1920s. Interest in affordable housing dates to the second half of the nineteenth century but accelerated after the First World War, due to acute housing shortages. Beginning in 1920, proposals for rationalized, mass-produced housing—like Le Corbusi-
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gadgets. This section was followed by model workspaces for offices, workshops, and “intellectual workers.” Thus, rather than a pro-modernist polemic, the exhibition embodied the organizers’ vision of the WuWA as a public education project, subtly injecting the contemporary design agenda into its wider design information.

Even Johannes Molzahn’s advertising graphics conveyed WuWA’s aesthetic diversity and mix of modern and conservative elements (see fig. 15). The foreground of the placard featured a white-sleeved hand holding an old-fashioned pencil atop an engineering measure, while in the background appeared images of a steel-frame building under construction and a curvilinear building model, akin to an Erich Mendelsohn design. To the left, a hand held a trowel above two hands engaged in clay handwork. In this series of juxtapositions—the old hand trades and the modern steel industry, the blue collar and the white, the architect’s creativity and the engineer’s calculations—the element that ties old and new together is the human hand, suggesting that human agency connects tradition and modernity. Molzahn’s graphic design thus symbolized the agency of the WuWA architects, while also alluding to the oppositional forces that shaped the model housing estate, where traditional trades and crafts complemented industrial production.

The Year of the WuWA

Breslau in 1929 was one long cultural celebration, before, during, and after the WuWA. The Academy held the first exhibition of the year in January at the Christophoriplatz gallery. Franz Landsberger called the show of “high importance” because it demonstrated the strength, breadth, and depth of talent in Breslau’s arts community, offering a balance between more traditional artists, like von Gosen and Bednorz, and contemporary art, where it also engaged the division between abstraction and the more pictorial Neue Sachlichkeit (because Academy shows included faculty and students, they presented a formidable range of artistic perspectives). Das Junge Schlesien, which opened at the Generalkommando on March 3, 1929, and ran through the end of the month, was a response to WuWA and a venue for younger, less established artists. The exhibition, whose notable participants were Isi Aschheim, Joachim Karsch, Thomas Myrtek, Georg Nerlich, and Wolfgang von Websky, was modest in size, including only paintings and sculpture. The Academy also mounted its annual end-of-year show in the summer to run parallel to WuWA, capitalizing on the presence of WuWA visitors.
In contrast to the Academy’s shows, which were meant to complement WuWA and its accompanying exhibitions, Die Schlesische Kunstausstellung, Breslau 1929 Am Zoo was a counter exhibition, organized as an overt protest against what some saw as the closed group at the Academy that dominated WuWA planning and Das Junge Schlesien. Participants were not members of the Künstlerbund but belonged to a motley group of local arts organizations: Association of Silesian Women Artists, Free Artists Association of Breslau, Breslau Kunstverein, Artists’ Guild of Waldenburg, Association of Fine Artists St. Lucas Ober-Schreiberhau, and the Alliance of Silesian Textile Artists. Although the list of participants is impressive, there is no evidence that the protest received much attention or had much of an affect on the Breslau arts scene.

The Response

Contemporary critics, both within and beyond Silesia, had mixed reactions to the WuWA. The national architecture magazine Stein, Holz, Eisen (Stone, Wood, Steel) covered the event consistently, from its initial phases to the open exhibition, but although its articles were supportive, they were not enthusiastic. By contrast, the articles in Schlesische Monatshefte, an organ of the Schlesische Bund für Heimatschutz, and the Schlesisches Heim were unabashedly positive, reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the organizers and participants, many of whom were involved in the journals. The Silesian outlier was the Ostdeutsche Bau-Zeitung, which presented a critical and skeptical voice from the Silesian perspective. More typically, the reviewer for the conservative journal Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung offered surprisingly balanced criticism, commenting favorably on the “painterly” aspect of the urban plan but disparaging its organization as detrimental to an overall visual effect, and disdaining the unoriginal planning of the mid-sized units while praising Scharoun’s Ledigenheim. Meanwhile, Die Form, the official journal of the Deutsche Werkbund, criticized the WuWA for a lack of originality, accusing the architects of merely replicating Stuttgart. Reviewers for Die Form also noted the technical failures and what they felt was a lack of imagination in many of the designs, except for those by Rading and Scharoun (who happened to be the only architects who had also built for Stuttgart). They pointed to Wolf, Heim, and Kempter’s projects as examples of uninspired conservative design. In contrast, Wasmuth’s writer Georg Münter preferred the straightforward work of Wolf, Effenberger, and Hadda and felt that Rading and Scharoun were impractical and inaccessible to the tastes of the normal German.
The Breslau Housewives Association wrote one of the Ostdeutsche Bauzeitung’s most critical articles, eviscerating the architects for their many impractical ideas, including large glass surfaces that were difficult to clean, lack of adequately placed kitchen storage, and unsafe roof gardens. The housewives bemoaned furniture “not designed to accommodate the living needs of the users” and architecture unsuitable for German families. They did, however, approve of Scharoun’s project, which they saw as an appropriate venue for experimentation since it had a different purpose than the typical apartment or single-family home. The housewives’ complaints suggest that the new ideas about design may not have been so palatable to the clients for whom they were intended. But the sheer variety of responses to WuWA shows how fragmented German architecture and design had become. Writing for Die Wohnung, Gustav Wolf concluded, “The Breslau buildings demonstrate that even in the realm of the contemporary, there is no consensus. And likewise that in spite of the general ‘scientific’ theme in most [projects] formal approaches are still based on feeling.” Whether or not he was right about the impact of personal judgment on aesthetics, Wolf was correct that there was no consensus. But in Ostdeutsche Bauzeitung, Alfred Krüger explained that the architecture exhibited at WuWA aspired to be more than a reflection of contemporary civilization and was “about the deepening of inner life, enhancement of ethics, an essential character formation . . . it is about the enrichment of culture and not its impoverishment.” In other words, Krüger anticipated the audience critique of WuWA as emblematic of an international, anti-German aesthetic and argued the opposite.

The claim that the exhibition was an expression of regional modernism ultimately falls apart, as Alfred Rothenberg pointed out in the Ostdeutsche Bauzeitung. Rothenberg began by ridiculing the selection of Silesian architects as more appropriate than “outsiders.” Supposedly, natives were better equipped to understand the local climate, but, as noted above, Rothenberg reminded his readers that “Breslau has the strangest climate that one can imagine: namely, it has none at all.” “Climate” here had a double meaning, relating to the weather conditions in Breslau and Silesia and the prevailing attitudes of Breslau’s artistic community, neither of which Rothenberg saw as distinct or unique. He blamed what he perceived as the paucity of innovations at WuWA on this lacuna: “There are new ideas, yes . . . but it remains to be seen how far our architects have realized their goal.” Crediting Rading’s aesthetic to “American ideas,” he praised only Scharoun and, by implication, condemned the others for lack of originality. Although he never said it directly, Rothenberg was clearly comparing Breslau and Stuttgart: Stuttgart, in his view, was innovative; Breslau was not.
Another Way to Understand Modernism

The struggle between innovation and convention at the WuWA was not lost on the contemporary audience. It found perhaps its most eloquent expression in the writing of Rudolf von Delius for Dekorative Kunst. Von Delius asserted that “in the struggle for the new style in the building arts this event is certainly of the highest meaning. . . . The danger here is clear: it lies in the victory of the machine moderated . . . but happily we see here in Breslau how every architect does actually search for the individual tone so that the richness and warmth are not lost.”

Von Delius captured the essence of the problem: how to give form to new ways of living without descending into a cold, mechanistic, and formulaic architectural language. He saw the complexity of artistic expression at WuWA not as a sign of weakness or indecision but as a marker of strength. Allowing overt and varied expression of the tensions in contemporary culture made for a true reflection of the times: the Zeitgeist in built form.

Thomas Mann, the great German novelist and essayist, often wrote about the clash between Kultur and Zivilisation, which he believed was central to the Weimar-era experience. In Mann’s view, what he called the “big K” and the German “cultural idea” were intrinsic to the interwar German character. Mann blamed this binary worldview for many of Germany’s struggles after 1900, in particular the country’s inability to embrace modern democracy and romantic attachment to outmoded traditions, but also its hostility to new art and resistance to recognizing nuances in any realm.

Mann believed in a more complex world, where polarities existed but were also mitigated. He illustrated his point with the popular German distinction between Dichter (poet) and Schriftsteller (writer). The poet, Mann asserted, was seen as the “naïve genius,” while the writer was the “mere intellectual,” critical and factual, rather than imaginative. Poets could no more be rational thinkers than writers could be creative sparks, and the two could not overlap. For Mann this dichotomy was yet another wrongheaded manifestation of the Kultur and Zivilisation divide that plagued Germans. He felt that lyrical, creative expression not only could but must go hand-in-hand with critical thinking if writing is to be uplifting and outstanding, not just mechanical. In its marriage between creative freedom and rational functional planning, WuWA can be seen as an exemplar of Mann’s artistic vision.

Mann was not alone. As Eric Weitz, Sabine Hake, and Detlev Peukert demonstrate, Weimar culture was characterized by a confrontation with modern life in all its aspects. Weitz uses the examples of Martin Heidegger, Sigfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin to illustrate the complex responses Weimar-era cultural figures had to modernity, revealing the combination of skepticism and fascination with which Germans reacted to the trappings of urbanized “mass society.”

The creative minds at WuWA confronted modernity at many levels:
urban, building, and room design; construction materials and methods; social conventions; new technologies; and more. Neither the challenges nor the solutions were particular to Breslau and Silesia, but their variety definitively demonstrates that the attitude toward modernity in Breslau was not monolithic.

Scholarship on Weimar culture has underscored its simultaneous preoccupation with the meaning of the present and visions of the future. In this sense, WuWA was typical: in addressing pressing contemporary housing and urban design problems, emerging environmental issues, questions of domestic space, and the challenges of construction economies, it combined the real and the ideal, what was feasible in the present and what might be possible in the future. The fact that the realized projects were not all equally revolutionary—or equally successful—does not undermine their value as confrontations with the conditions of modernity.