investigates Tagore’s role as a global celebrity. Coming from British India, Tagore identified with both Indochina’s local Hindus (a despised minority there) and the region’s precolonial, Indian-influenced civilizations of Angkor and Champa. Tensions over his visit became apparent when local authorities blocked his trip to Angkor and his efforts to meet with local Hindus.

The vexed political and social context described by Hahn provides a counter to the chapters on Thailand. Lawrence Chua studies the role of what he calls “mutated translations,” a means by which regional themes in Thailand became part of “universal” modern architecture (61). Chua describes how “militarized aesthetics” were translated and mixed with notions of Thai-ness between the early 1930s and the late 1950s. He thus reminds readers that disciplinary narratives that now seem universal are inevitably situated in particular spatial and temporal contexts. His argument makes for a fascinating comparison with Koompong Noobanjong’s chapter on forgotten Thai memorials. According to Noobanjong, these are buildings whose original meanings have in many cases been erased, yet the structures remain as physical reminders of ideologies now banished from public view. Noobanjong here addresses the question of what might constitute modern Thai architecture between the 1930s and the present, considering how elements such as domes can be viewed as hybrids of modernist concepts and traditional Thai typologies.

Politics also underpins the chapter by Peter Scriver and Amit Srivastava. Discussing “Bali-style” architecture since the 1960s, the authors suggest that the very existence of this style—a generalized tropical traditionalism—gestures toward both resistance and acquiescence to Western modernity. Such an architecture’s embodiment of particular aesthetic preferences, and the deliberate use of these to resist imported forms and ideas, indicates the power wielded by transnational actors. Like other chapters in the book, this one raises questions of agency. Who, the authors ask, was in control of this architectural imagining? Can local design agency alter the overarching architecture of global hegemony?

The question of agency is also central to Tim Winter’s chapter on Bagan in Myanmar (Burma) and the contestations around restoration of its many ancient monuments. Western views that building fabric is intrinsic to historical authenticity have long run counter to local beliefs that the sacred power embedded in Bagan’s monuments requires ritual reinforcement and renewal. However, Winter notes how the local view has recently been lent authority by statements from Japanese, Korean, and Indian experts on the importance of intangible heritage. Given this fascinating shift, the author might have explored further how contemporary Asia-centric positions relate to Burmese views on the value of ancient national architecture.

Tūtin Aryanī’s chapter on Islamic women’s prayer spaces in Indonesia focuses on underrepresented buildings and gender politics. Aryanī considers the invisibility of women and their architecture in Indonesia from the eighteenth century to the present. This invisibility becomes literal as Indonesian men are socially conditioned to not look at women in public places and are proscribed from entering women’s spaces. The author makes a more general point about how scholarship on mosques, like the study of other building types in Indonesia, has focused on form rather than on user interactions with architecture. This provides an argument for a broader reframing of the terms modern and architecture, one that better accommodates distinct regional conditions.

Other chapters are organized around more conventional framings of modern architecture. Gerard Lico examines the rhetoric of hygiene in relation to modern architecture. He argues that during their colonization of the Philippines from 1898 to 1942, Americans saw disease and contagion not as the results of their occupation but as outcomes of “unsanitary” conditions in traditional Filipino dwellings and settlement layouts. Eunice Seng’s chapter on People’s Park in Singapore links that site’s monumental modernist forms and spaces to the Chinatown shophouse district, recreational park, and marketplace that it replaced in 1967. Seng describes tensions between the project’s idealistic architects and the developer and considers how the project has, since its inception, embodied Singapore’s efforts to express multiculturalism through infrastructural and architectural development, although this has often led to conflict, as have many of the government’s efforts to blend consumerism and public space. In an interesting coda, Seng describes the current usage of People’s Park as consisting largely of “Mainland Chinese people activities,” suggesting a recent sociopolitical twist to Singapore’s cultural and architectural identity (260). In the book’s final chapter, Mark Crinson reinforces the introduction’s overarching themes of translation, epistemology, and power. He evokes notions of “fluviality” in an effort to argue that a more relational view of modern architecture is necessary within the Southeast Asian context.

The framing of the various subjects covered here as constitutive forms of modern architecture might be arguable, but this, perhaps, is the point. Considering all of the attention paid to national identity in the book’s chapters, there would appear to be a multitude of parallel intra- and interregional topics awaiting similar exploration. This book should spark further productive and creative explorations and reframings of Southeast Asia’s modern architecture. Its importance lies in the fact that it brings together several scholars who are doing exactly that.

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Notes

Jindřich Vybiřal

Leopold Bauer: Häretiker der modernen Architektur, 1872–1938
Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018, 580 pp., 346 color and 253 b/w illus. $91.99 (cloth), ISBN 9783036516309

When Otto Wagner decided to retire from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna at the end of the 1911–12 academic year, he recommended his former student Jože Plečnik as his successor. Had Wagner opted to step down only a few years before, he likely would have put forward either Joseph Maria Olbrich or Josef Hoffmann to take
over his special architecture master class. But Olbrich died of leukemia in 1908 and Hoffmann went his own way, founding the Wiener Werkstätte with Koloman Moser. Wagner held all three men in the highest regard. He inscribed their names on the façade of his final project, the Artists’ Court of 1918, along with those of his early heroes and role models, Eduard van der Nüll, August Sicard von Sicardsburg, and Karl Friedrich Schinkel.  

Wagner’s fellow professors at the academy voted unanimously to approve his recommendation. The officials at the Ministry of Education, however, rejected the request and postponed Wagner’s retirement for a year. When the professors at the academy again put Plečnik’s name forward, the ministry officials once more turned it down. The professors held fast to their decision, but the officials demanded an explanation. Thus, pressed to find a solution, the professors proposed two possible replacements, submitting the name of Leopold Bauer, another former Wagner student, along with that of Plečnik. Bauer, very much against Wagner’s wishes, received the appointment.

It was a disastrous decision. The story, which Jindřich Vybíral relates in detail in his excellent new monograph on Bauer, marked, in his words, one of the most significant “cases” in the history of Viennese modernism” (323). The “not entirely hidden background” of the controversy, he explains, involved not only questions concerning the direction of modern architecture in the Habsburg lands but also the ever-present politics of nationalism and the meddling of archduke and heir to the throne Franz Ferdinand. To put it bluntly, Plečnik was turned down in part because he was a Slovene. Strong anti-Slavic sentiments were common among many of the empire’s German speakers—feelings that Franz Ferdinand shared. Plečnik also believed that Franz Ferdinand’s efforts to deny him the post had to do with the fact that the archduke had objected fervidly to Plečnik’s spare concrete design for the Heilig-Geist Church in the working-class district of Ottakring (324–25). But Vybíral contends that Franz Ferdinand’s aesthetic concerns were probably less specific, that “even before then, in eyes of the heir to the throne, Plečnik had been disqualified simply because he was a ‘Secessionist’” (324).

The chair that Bauer assumed on the eve of World War I was the most prestigious and most visible position in architectural design in the Habsburg lands. Wagner had not only established a vital new direction for the Wiener Moderne; he had also been remarkably successful as a teacher and guide. His legions of students filled important architectural offices and university teaching positions across the empire, and well beyond. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons that Wagner wanted Plečnik to succeed him was that Plečnik was an excellent pedagogue. (He had already taught with distinction for several years at the School of Applied Arts in Prague.) Bauer, on the other hand, had no comparable experience and was viewed as a conservative who would not carry on Wagner’s legacy. Many within the architectural community and most of the city’s journalists, even those from the ranks of the conservatives, recognized that an injustice had been done. Many of Wagner’s former students were also vocal in their disapproval.

Bauer, as a consequence, entered the school facing considerable opposition, including loud protests from the Wagner-Schüler who remained. He did nothing to mollify them, announcing instead his intention to be true to his own convictions, “which are no longer in harmony with those of Wagner” (330). What happened next was predictable. Although Bauer tried to push through reforms to modernize the curriculum (some of which made good sense), student resistance doomed him to failure. In late 1918, only days after the end of the war, Bauer responded to mounting criticism by summarily expelling more than a dozen of his students. They had complained that Bauer’s teachings “lacked aesthetic consequence,” that he willfully repressed their “individual development,” and that he had shown marked “disinterest” in their work (333). After a protracted internal investigation and several hearings, which were followed closely in the press, Bauer resigned in 1919. Peter Behrens eventually replaced him.

The episode is a crucial one in the history of Viennese modernism because Bauer was to some degree responsible for stifling the architectural revolution that Wagner had inaugurated in the early 1890s. It should be added, however, that by the time Wagner stepped down, his ideas were already falling from favor; a new, more radical emphasis on functionality, new ideas of space, and new building technologies were in the offing, and by the war’s end Wagner’s classically inspired aesthetic, however functional and utilitarian it was, was clearly passé. To what degree Plečnik might have continued the momentum of the Wagner-Schule is an open question: in the early 1920s, he, too, was finding his way back to a radical form of historicism, which he would continue to practice until his death in 1957.

What makes Vybíral’s massive study (which in both the new German-language and original Czech-language editions runs to nearly six hundred pages) a landmark is not only the light it sheds on Bauer’s unhappy tenure at the academy and his early Jugendstil designs (for which he is still largely known) but also the author’s efforts to examine the whole of Bauer’s long career, including his later designs, those made after 1919, which are as manifold as they are problematic. While most scholars in the field have long known of Bauer’s early designs and his tenure at the academy, his broader life and work have received little attention before now.

Bauer was born in 1872, in Jägerndorf (now Krnov), in what was then Austrian Silesia. His architectural education began at the Staatsgewerbeschule, the state trade school, in Brünn (Brno), where, remarkably, he overlapped with both Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos. After working for a time in Thorn (Toruń) and Düsseldorf, Bauer entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna as a student of Carl von Hasenauer. When Hasenauer died suddenly, in 1894, Wagner assumed his chair; as a consequence, Bauer became a de facto member of the Wagner-Schule. He soon subscribed to Wagner’s special brand of modernism, and by the early years of the new century he had fully embraced the Jugendstil. He produced several excellent examples of houses in the style, including his early masterpiece, the Villa Reissig in Brno (1901–2). But by 1904, Bauer had returned to his historicist roots, forging what Vybíral aptly characterizes as a “difficult compromise between history and modernity” (204).

Bauer was hardly alone in this: many of the leading architects in Central Europe— from Behrens and Bruno Paul to Josef...
Hoffmann and Richard Riemerschmid—found their way back to historical forms once the Jugendstil began to decline after 1905. Most sought some means of rapprochement, some strategy to articulate modernity without dispensing fully with the past. But in the 1920s, while functionalism and the new purism were ascending, Bauer essentially doubled down, developing an even more strident and idiosyncratic revivalism. Vybíral describes Bauer’s postwar architecture as a variant of a “conservative modernism,” a synthesis of old and new. It is surely that. But it is also something else: Bauer did not merely incorporate historical forms, he manipulated them with a willfulness and audacity that was nearly unprecedented before the advent of postmodernism.

Bauer’s Church of Saint Hedwig in Opava (now in the Czech Republic), completed in 1938, the same year he died, is a splendid case in point. In my view, it is in one sense a rereading of an early Renaissance design, very nearly Albertian in its lined simplicity, with a diagram of its arrangement drawn out on its front façade. But Bauer attenuated its masses, literally stretching them geometries, yanking them upward to render a tall, thin, and disproportionate tower. The church is an object lesson in how to tear up the classical rule book (or, at least, to dispense with most of its precepts), the product of a species of mannerism with hardly any regard for past authority.

Bauer’s contentious misapplications of tradition often have an undeniable beauty, but at times they can be awkward and visually disagreeable. The tale that Vybíral tells brilliantly is one of how an early star of the Wagner-Schule—who with his Villa Reissig constructed what was then seen as the first fully modern house in the Austrian Empire—could take such a seemingly deviant course. The book’s subtitle, Heretic of Modern Architecture, appears to sum it up: an erstwhile adherent falls from grace to the depths of apostasy. Vybíral is unwilling to take such an easy way out, however. He rejects superficial oppositions, seeking to identify in Bauer’s experience the myriad factors underlying what is in truth a complex and ramified story. Vybíral sees Bauer’s pluralism, his striving toward difficult design arrangements, as a consequence of both his seeking to please his clients and his highly practiced skill set; it is a sign, Vybíral asserts, of Bauer’s creative ambitions, not his limitations. Vybíral stresses the sometimes “poetic qualities” of Bauer’s designs and denies the standard equation of modernism with Miesian purism. The reality, he insists, is far richer, the definitions of what constitute the modernist experiment far broader.

Vybíral’s account thus belongs to a new form of revisionism—one that seeks to find a place for figures once shunted off to the margins. Seen in that light, Bauer and his architecture become part of the grand history of modernism. They form yet another chapter in an ever-expanding narrative.

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Notes
2. All translations of quotations from the book under review are mine.

Lucia Allais
Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the Twentieth Century
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, 347 pp., 8 color and 123 b/w illus. $45 (cloth), ISBN 9780226286556

In Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the Twentieth Century, Lucia Allais delves into the four tumultuous decades that preceded the signing of the World Heritage Convention in 1972. She uncovers the work of the many agents—from bureaucrats and intellectuals to lawyers and architects—who mobilized to engineer the survival of architectural monuments, setting the foundations for “the remarkable return of the monument to the world stage” (2). Allais explores how the opportunity to act architecturally was recognized and integrated into global governance during this period, when “state-sponsored and/or internationally-sanctioned techniques and practices of construction and destruction . . . fueled monuments’ survival” (8). She situates these techniques at the fault line between modernism and historicism, and this is one of the book’s greatest contributions. Focusing on a period when modern architecture achieved unparalleled international success, Allais questions the division of the twentieth century into pre- and postwar, and pro- and antimodern, locating modernists and preservationists “in a spectrum of engagements with a broad endangerment sensibility” (8).

In her introduction, Allais provides a general theoretical framework for her research, situating it in relation to the relevant literature on heritage, preservation, modern architecture, and global contemporary history. Although she focuses primarily on the mid-twentieth century, she begins by emphasizing the relevance of some of her findings to recent events, such as U.S. president Barack Obama’s state visit to Senegal’s Maison des Esclaves in 2013 and the political use of the ruins of Palmyra by different parties during the ongoing Syrian civil war. Allais then summarizes each of the book’s five chapters, which recount five episodes “when the survival of monuments was debated and designed within international organizations” (9). These case studies are threaded through a narrative of institutional and intellectual history, while Allais also identifies the various “means (from graphic formats like lists, maps, and policy memos, to hard materials like stone, iron, and epoxy glue) through which architectural matter was made to convey historical change” (9).

In her first chapter, Allais details the First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, held in Athens in 1931 and generally regarded as a landmark in the history of international heritage protection for giving birth—with difficulty, she notes—to an international preservation bureaucracy. In the following two chapters, she discusses the American response to the preservation of monuments during World War II, tracing how Allied planners, commanders, and consultants first militarized architectural knowledge through the making of lists of monuments and then systematized the protection of those monuments by creating maps of their locations. Although this topic has received considerable scholarly attention, these two chapters are particularly compelling because of Allais’s thorough and methodical use of archival sources. A brief ten-page section about the early years of UNESCO and the design of its headquarters in Paris by Marcel Breuer,