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 their 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 a 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.

Lucía 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, Lucía 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, commandants, 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,
offers a chronological jump of fifteen years that Allais uses to introduce “the prodigious wave of re-functionalization of monuments” (171)—a theme that figures prominently in the book’s final two chapters. In the richly illustrated fourth chapter, she analyzes the role of UNESCO in “decolonizing” museums, describing how during the 1960s the museum interior became a space for international values, spatial standardization, and cultural normativity. Chapter 5 builds on a celebrated essay that Allais published in 2013, which examines the international project to salvage the Egyptian temples of Abu Simbel. Finally, Allais closes the book with a ten-page coda that highlights her conclusions. “If the destructive events of the midcentury gave monuments’ keepers powerful new tools for designing aesthetic effects,” she writes, “these designs of destruction only ever gave them the illusion of intention. . . . Theirs was an ever-fleeting freedom, and an aleatory kind of architectural power” (264).

Designs of Destruction can be read as an exciting variation of global history, the architectural historical trend championed by Allais’s former adviser at MIT, Mark Jarzombek. While he emphasizes the need for architectural historians to research those areas of the world the discipline has traditionally ignored or disregarded, Allais aims to identify the global networks, colonial forces, and power interests that move through architectural artifacts worldwide, even in the West. However, at times it seems that the author’s global lens narrows to focus on American and Central European actors only. This is particularly the case in the book’s first chapter, which provides little information about the participants at the Athens Conference. In contrast with her thorough study of the members of the 1943 American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Monuments in War Areas, or Roberts Commission, Allais discusses only a few of the participants at the Athens Conference, omitting some important attendees. Similarly, although the relevance of the Athens Conference is undeniable, a more comprehensive approach to the subject, including discussion of the multiple professional meetings that ultimately led up to the conference, would have provided a more nuanced picture of the historical period. Given that Allais has studied the prehistory of the Athens Conference, as evidenced in her doctoral dissertation, “Will to War, Will to Art: Cultural Internationalism and the Modernist Aesthetics of Monuments 1932–1964,” it seems likely that such information was edited out during the book’s production.

Similarly, although the book covers the period between 1931 and 1972, the turbulent 1930s are only briefly discussed. Allais moves from her analysis of the 1931 Athens Conference in the first chapter to a detailed study of the 1940s Roberts Commission in the next. This is surprising considering that during those years the League of Nations—which Allais rightfully situates as foundational to modern bureaucratic international relations—played a decisive role in the salvation of artworks during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). This experience and the actors involved were crucial for defining the strategies followed during World War II. Although one could argue that the members of the Committee for the Salvage of Spanish Art Treasures—an international group that included the director of the Louvre, the president of the Tate Gallery, and the president of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art—were concerned with artworks rather than monuments, the boundaries between art and architecture were much more blurred than they are today. Allais recognizes that during the 1920s and 1930s the League of Nations extensively discussed “a legal project for an international agreement between states to protect art and architecture from destruction during war” (12). The League’s understanding of “heritage” gave paintings, sculptures, and architecture the same consideration, even if the first two were easier than the last to move and salvage from bombing. Eliminating this experience from the narrative by arguing that architecture and artworks should not be considered equally goes against some of the principles that guided League of Nations officials during the 1930s.

Throughout this book, as in the numerous articles and essays Allais has published elsewhere, the prose is acute, precise, and accessible. The author shows her mastery of secondary sources and her ability to identify, select, read, and interpret primary sources, which she consulted in numerous archives, both in the United States and abroad. The narrative is well supplemented by Allais’s careful selection of illustrations and the diagrams she has drawn, particularly in the second and fourth chapters. From a theoretical perspective, Allais’s greatest contribution to the literature might be her questioning of the historical afterlife of Alois Riegl’s theory of the modern aesthetic. As she rightly points out, Riegl’s vision of destruction was not catastrophic; rather, it was based on the idea of time as the natural agent of destruction. Allais effectively illustrates how the renewed interest in Riegl “since the 1970s is partly owed to the historical phenomenon of monument survival, and the many material transformations—some inadvertent, many deliberate—that were effected in the interim across so many objects of cultish devotion” (17).

Designs of Destruction is a well-researched, well-written, and engaging book that successfully bridges the gaps between architectural history, preservation policy and practice, and international relations. It is a must-read for any scholar interested in alternative constructions of modernity and the global history of historic preservation.

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Carla Yanni
Living on Campus: An Architectural History of the American Dormitory
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019, 304 pp., 14 color and 132 b&w illus. $140 (cloth), ISBN 9781517904555; $34.95 (paper), ISBN 9781517904562

Living on Campus is a lively, intriguing history of dormitories that combines social and architectural history to provide a glimpse of something most readers know about but may not have realized they did. Anyone who has gone away to college—or taught at one that has residence halls—is probably aware of many of the things Carla Yanni describes without being fully conscious of where this knowledge came from. Unsurprisingly, the inspiration for the American system of housing students came from England, from Oxford and Cambridge in particular. As Yanni notes, most European universities do not provide...