Beyond the Bauhaus

Barnstone, Deborah Ascher

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Beyond the Bauhaus: Cultural Modernity in Breslau, 1918-33.
Acknowledgments

I first heard of the city of Breslau as a child from my father, Abraham Ascher, who was born there. I must confess, however, that for decades the city remained only a remote name since my father’s family had all fled or been murdered by the Nazis, and Breslau after the war became Wroclaw, a Polish city situated behind the Iron Curtain that was virtually inaccessible to those of us in the West. Indeed, I knew shamefully little of my father’s Heimatstadt until my father decided to author his own study on the city, specifically on the Jewish community that had resided there during the Nazi period between 1933 and 1941. It was, in fact, toward the final stages of producing his book that my father called one day to inform me that he had discovered material of art historical interest that might prove interesting to me. He sent me a small collection of official Nazi correspondence from 1935–37 about the extraordinary art Nazi officials had discovered in private Jewish collections in Breslau. My father was correct; the letters were a revelation, although not precisely for the reasons that he had anticipated. For, as I researched Breslau, I soon discovered that it had been home to an extraordinary community of forward-thinking people during the 1920s who were arts patrons but also artists, architects, and urban designers, many of whom are still world renowned today. Equally exciting was the discovery that almost none of this history had been documented or disseminated in any language, much less in the English-speaking world. Thus, I have to thank my father first and foremost for this project.

As with any book-length study there are innumerable people who offered support, advice, and expertise along the way. Franziska Bollerey enthusiastically encouraged me to pursue the project when I was formulating the idea for the book. The German Academic Exchange Service, Washington State University Saupe Fund for Excellence, the Technical University Delft, and University of Technology Sydney Centre for Contemporary Design Practice helped defray
the costs of traveling to Germany and Poland in order to conduct the necessary archival research. The archivists at the Wroclaw state archive, University of Wroclaw Library, the Ethnographic Museum, and the Architecture Museum in Wroclaw gave me invaluable help locating materials and permitted me to photocop y enormous quantities of material relevant to my work. I owe a special thanks to Jerzy Ilkosz, Piotr Łukaszewicz, and Juliet Golden. Juliet was indomitable chasing down images and permissions for me. Beate Störtkühl at the Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa pointed me in the right direction at the beginning of the research and generously shared some excellent resource material from her institute with me. The archivists at the German National Museum in Nuremburg; Staatsbibliothek in Berlin; the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz; the Werkbund Archive; the Bauhaus Archive; and the Academy of the Arts, in particular Heidemarie Bock; Petra Albrecht; Tanja Morgenstern; and Dr. Eva-Marie Barkofen went beyond the call of duty in order to offer assistance.

In addition to sitting in archives and libraries, I was fortunate to be able to interview several people who offered vital perspectives on Breslau; the interview with Brigitte Würzt, Oskar Moll’s daughter, helped me understand the cultural milieu in Breslau during the 1920s as well as the outstanding art made by both her parents; the interview with Chaim Haller about his wife Ruth’s father, Ismar Littmann, provided me with important insights into collecting in Breslau; Walter Laqueur shared some key memories; and the lawyer Willi Korte helped me understand the complex nature of looted art research and recovery.

Portions of three chapters were previously published as articles. Part of chapter 4, “The Breslau Academy of Fine and Applied Arts,” was published in the Journal of Architectural Education; part of chapter 6, “Between Idealism and Realism: Architecture in Breslau,” was published in the New German Critique; and part of chapter 5, “Dissemination of Taste: Breslau Collectors, Art Associations, and Museums,” was published in The Art Journal. In addition, much of the material in this book was initially tested in academic conference presentations, from which I received detailed and valuable feedback. These included the German Studies Association and the Association of Art Historians of Great Britain.

The two readers for University of Michigan Press, professors Elizabeth Otto and Claire Zimmerman, both gave the manuscript a thorough reading, delivering extremely insightful and helpful criticism and direction at a crucial time in the project. Without their tough but thoughtful comments, the book would have been far weaker indeed. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband,
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