

A man of many gifts and the anti-materialistic struggle in the arts: Ferdinand Feldegg's monographs on Friedrich Ohmann and Leopold Bauer

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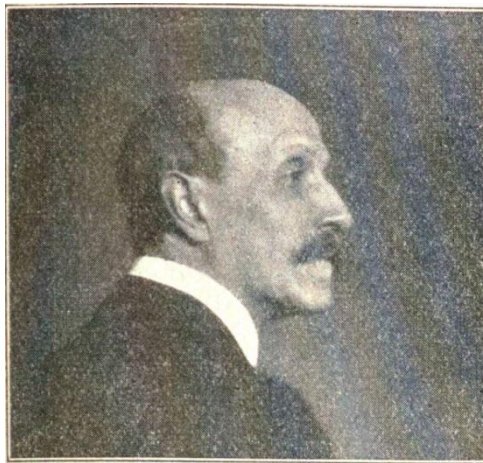


Figure 1 Ferdinand Feldegg, portrait photography from 1920th. *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung* 28. 2. 1925.

Ferdinand von Feldegg (fig. 1) was a man of numerous and various gifts. As a student, he excelled in fencing (not really a surprise, given that his father was an Austrian general).¹ He achieved real renown thanks to four philosophical books which he published in the 1890s.² His writings attracted the attention of Rudolf Eucken who included him among the major contemporary representatives of 'metaphysical psychologism' in a line leading from G. W. Leibniz via Arthur

¹ 'Fechtakademie', *Prager Tagblatt*, April 19, 1877, 5; 'Preisfechten des Prager Fecht-Clubs', *Prager Tagblatt*, April 29, 1878, 2-3; 'Fecht-Akademie', *Prager Tagblatt*, March 12, 1879, 4. – Feldegg was born on March 10, 1855, in Piacenza and spent his childhood in various garrison towns, such as Ljubljana, Pula, Dubrovnik and Bolzano. He entered high school in Prague and finished his studies in Opava, Silesia. His Austrian family was ennobled in 1623. His father Josef Fellner von Feldegg (1815–1880) took part as an officer in Radetzky's Italian campaign and, in connection with being discharged from active duty, was elevated to the rank of honorary deputy field-marshal. 'Joseph Fellner von Feldegg', *Prager Tagblatt*, April 2, 1880, 3; Ferdinand Feldegg, 'Mein Leben und Schaffen', *Neue illustrierte Zeitung*, February 28, 1925, 5–6.

² Ferdinand Ritter von Feldegg, *Das Gefühl als Fundament der Weltordnung*, Wien: Hölder, 1890; Feldegg, *Grundlegung einer Kosmobiologie*, Wien: Hölder, 1891; Feldegg, *Das Verhältnis der Philosophie zur empirischen Wissenschaft von der Natur. Beantwortung der von der Philosophischen Gesellschaft in Berlin gestellten Preisfrage*, Wien: Hölder, 1894; Feldegg, *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Gefühls. Gesammelte kritisch-dogmatische Aufsätze*, Leipzig: Barth 1900.



Figure 2 Ferdinand Feldegg, design for the sepulchral chapel of Dr Franz Schmeykal, 1896. *Der Architekt*, 2, 1896.

Schopenhauer all the way to Eduard von Hartmann and Wilhelm Wundt.³ Feldegg's books were polemically directed against post-Kantian idealism as well as materialism, which gained him enemies in both camps. Moreover, adherents of exact thought were irritated by his conviction that philosophy is closely related to poetry.⁴ This is the reason why, frustrated by their reactions, Feldegg channelled his energies in the next decade into dramatic poetry. Various Austrian theatres staged about ten of his plays, the most popular among them being 'Benedek', banned by governmental censorship.⁵ In the 1920s, Feldegg's philosophical interests turned to a new object, as he became an editor of the *Eros* monthly and wrote three books on the aesthetics of sex life; these were published and republished and brought the author the popularity that he strove for.⁶ Yet his principal occupation was architecture, which he studied first at the Prague Technical University (1873–1879) and then, under Theophil Hansen, at the Vienna Academy (1880–1883). He accepted commissions only rarely and made his name primarily by participating in architectonic competitions, rather than by his realized projects which are few.⁷ (Fig. 2) Since his artistic talent lagged behind his literary gifts, he opted for a career of an architectural critic, publicist, and educator. For students of arts and crafts he

³ Rudolf Eucken, 'Bericht über die Schriften zur Metaphysik u[nd] allgem[einen] Weltanschauung', *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*, 1, 1895, 103–115, quote at 112.

⁴ Christfried Albert Thilo, 'Über F. Ritter von Feldegg', *Zeitschrift für exacte philosophie im Sinne des neueren philosophischen Realismus*, 19, 1892, 60–63.

⁵ 'Ein verbotenes Stück', *Reichspost*, March 9, 1905, 9.

⁶ Feldegg, *Geist und Sitte im Geschlechtsleben. Zwölf sexualkritische Betrachtungen*, Wien and Leipzig: Frisch & Co., 1920; Feldegg, *Paradoxa im Geschlechtslebens. Zwölf sexualkritische Betrachtungen*, Wien and Leipzig: Frisch & Co. 1913; Feldegg, *Die Schönheit im Geschlechtsleben. Zwölf sexualästhetische Betrachtungen*, Wien and Leipzig: Frisch & Co., 1919.

⁷ Inge Scheidl, entry 'Ferdinand Feldegg' in *Architektenlexikon Wien 1770–1945*, www.architektenlexikon.at

published a textbook of ornamental forms, based upon Gottfried Semper's theories.⁸ The book proceeded to a second edition and was soon followed by a collection of plans of monuments of the Italian Renaissance.⁹ In 1895, Feldegg founded *Der Architekt*, a Vienna-based journal of architecture, which provided a publication platform for Otto Wagner's school; thereby he acquired a reputation as the advocate of the most radical faction of Austrian modern architecture. (Fig. 3) And on top of all that, he published in his lifetime three biographies of architects: Theophil Hansen, Friedrich Ohmann, and Leopold Bauer. Thus, at the turn of the century, he became the founder and, for a long time, the most prominent representative of the genre of architectural biography in Austria. In the Hapsburg monarchy he had no competition to speak of. The reviewer of the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* lauded his first monograph by stating: 'As far as we know, a biographical work of a comparable literary perfection has not been written about any artist, the less about an architect; neither on Semper nor on any famous predecessor of his do we possess a comparably monumental work.'¹⁰ This was a fairly excessive praise, given the conjuncture of artistic biographies at the time, including the oeuvre of Herman Grimm or Carl Justi in Germany or Moriz Thausing's monograph on Albrecht Dürer in Austria.¹¹



Figure 3 Title-page of the journal
Der Architekt, 1, 1895.

⁸ Ferdinand Ritter von Feldegg, *Grundriss der kunstgewerblichen Formenlehre*, Wien: Pichler 1887; 2nd edition 1891. Cf. Srov review in *Blätter für Kunstgewerbe*, 16, 1887, 48.

⁹ Ferdinand Ritter von Feldegg, *Italienische Renaissance-Architekturen in moderner constructiver Durchbildung*, Wien: Pichler, 1891.

¹⁰ 'Theophilos Hansen und seine Werke', *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (Tages-Ausgabe), June 19, 1893, 12: 'Nicht unberührt wollen wir zum Schlusse lassen, daß ein biographisches Werk von gleicher künstlerischer Vollendung unseres Wissens noch keinem Künstler, zumal Architekten geschrieben wurde; weder über Semper, noch über einen seiner älteren berühmten Vorgänger existirt ein ähnliches monumentales Werk.'

¹¹ Cf. Karin Hellwig, *Von der Vita zur Künstlerbiographie*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005.

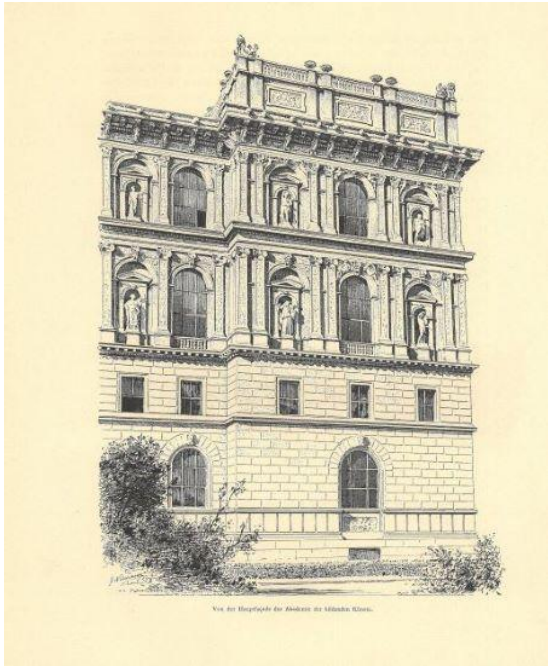


Figure 4 Theophil Hansen, Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, 1871-1876, illustration from the book Ferdinand Feldegg and Georg Niemann, *Theophilus Hansen und seine Werke*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1893.

While the monograph on Hansen – with text written by Feldegg, while his co-author Georg Niemann assembled the graphic documentation – did pursue the stated goal of ‘erecting a monument to the grand master Theophil Hansen’, it was an exemplary biography.¹² The events of Hansen’s life are combined with his work, the exposition is structured by the stages of Hansen’s production, and Feldegg’s biographical interpretations are based on a conscientious study of Hansen’s diaries, his correspondence, and the public response in architectural journals. Images were selected to illustrate the exposition. (Fig. 4) However, Feldegg’s two subsequent monographs were different in conception and presentation. In volume I of the book on Ohmann (1906), more than half of the space is occupied by full-page imagery, and in volume II, from 1914, the text occupies less than a quarter of the number of pages.¹³ In the 1918 Bauer monograph, the text combined with inset illustrations makes up less than half the pages; the rest are full-page plates.¹⁴ Both publications look quite similar to the corpuses of architectonic drawings with accompanying texts that were brought out by architects themselves, including Bauer in 1899.¹⁵

¹² Vorwort, in Ferdinand Feldegg and Georg Niemann, *Theophilus Hansen und seine Werke*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1893: ‘dem dahingegangenen grossen Meister Theophilus Hansen ein Denkmal zu stiften.’

¹³ Ferdinand von Feldegg, *Friedrich Ohmann’s Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, Vol. 1, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1906; Vol. 2, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1914.

¹⁴ Ferdinand von Feldegg *Leopold Bauer. Der Künstler und sein Werk*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1918.

¹⁵ Leopold Bauer, *Verschiedene Skizzen, Entwürfe und Studien. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnisse unserer modernen Bestrebungen in der Baukunst*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1899.

In his exposition of Ohmann, Feldegg does start with the subject's birth, yet already on page 2 he proceeds from biographical data to a consideration of Ohmann's stylistic starting-points and his concept of modern architecture, from which he then deduces a psychological characteristic of Ohmann's creative type. And while the third monograph does follow in its outward structure the basic system of studies with a biographical foundation – Feldegg even claims that his goal was to 'portray Bauer's personality on a biographical basis'¹⁶ –, after the three introductory chapters, devoted to the key life stages of the architect, there follow, just like in the Ohmann monograph, expositions of select buildings, ordered without regard to chronology and drawing heavily on the architect's own comments.

The likely explanation for the different character of the Hansen monograph lay in the circumstances of its conception: the book was commissioned by the Hansen Society, and Feldegg – at the time a candidate for a permanent post at the State Technical College (*Staatsgewerbeschule*) in Vienna – strove to demonstrate exemplary accuracy. Once he acquired the position he wished for, which happened in the summer of 1893, he lacked both the time and the motivation for a comparable scholarly achievement.¹⁷ Yet a comparison of the three books inescapably raises the question as to the category or genre of writing the Ohmann and Bauer books belong. Were we to ask if Feldegg's monographs on modern architects took part in the historical discourse, the answer would have to be negative. Unlike the Hansen monograph, these works do not present real events within the conceptual frame of the discipline of history. Any considerations as to how one project is related to another are only hinted at. The exposition does not proceed in an academic style and completely lacks the marks of the German tradition of art historical writing, with its focus on categorical distinctions of visual phenomena, morphological analysis, comparative method, and proceeding towards universally valid judgments. Feldegg had no interest in historical facts as such and did not claim to be a historian; rather, he classified his own work as 'literary activity' and 'scribbling about art'.¹⁸ Its distinction from the common run of journalism was supposed to lie in its philosophical grounding, not in a scientific method.

The distinguishing feature of Feldegg's 'scribbling' which sets him apart from the historical discourse was his abdication of objectivity and the striving to express personal views and preferences. Feldegg's choice of subjects for his monographs was an expression of subjective attitudes and values alone. At the time of publication, both Ohmann and Bauer were established and well-positioned architects, professors of the Vienna Academy and holders of the title of 'Oberbaurat'. Ohmann led the expansion of the imperial residence in Vienna; Bauer's project directed the construction of the last great building of the Ringstrasse era, the seat of the Austrian-Hungarian Bank. Yet Feldegg was no opportunist, eager merely to exploit the artistic establishment in economic or symbolic terms. To a large degree, he could rightfully claim to be a discoverer of both architects, and he

¹⁶ Feldegg, *Bauer*, 1: 'Bauers Eigenart lebensgeschichtlich darstellen'.

¹⁷ 'Amtlicher' Theil, *Wiener Zeitung*, July 28, 1893, 1.

¹⁸ F. Feldegg's letter to L. Bauer of March 13, 1907, The Albertina Museum, Vienna, L. Bauer's papers: 'literarische Tätigkeit', 'Kunstschriftstellerei'.

subsequently served as their spokesperson as well as a lifetime guide in the competitive struggle for recognition. His first study on Ohmann dates from 1898, a time when the architect's official position was still in Prague and he was just acquiring his first major commissions in Vienna. Bauer, half-a-generation younger, drew Feldegg's attention only one year later when, as mentioned above, he published his first book.¹⁹

Why, precisely, were Ohmann and Bauer so attractive for Feldegg? And which cultural values formed the basis of the bond between the critic and his two protégés? Given that *Der Architect* published student projects from Wagner's school, it was easy to get the impression that this periodical served as the 'official organ' of the experimental wing of Austrian modernist architecture.²⁰ Yet Feldegg's very first article of the first year already suggested that the trajectories to be promoted here will be rather complex and not very concordant with Wagnerian rationalism. In the same year when Otto Wagner published his programmatic work *Moderne Architectur*, Feldegg opposed the views presented there by defending a traditional aesthetic approach, linked to the category of monumentality and, by appealing to the renowned past of Viennese architecture, warned against the risks of dry utilitarianism. 'Nothing would be sadder than to have the second Viennese Renaissance, as opposed to the first one, be called an era of a traffic and railway style, a non-artistic utility!'²¹ In an essay brought forth that year in the *Süddeutsche Bauzeitung*, Feldegg proposed the term 'architectural materialism' as a denomination of the concept he rejects – thus linking his own position within the discourse of architecture with the neo-idealism of his philosophical works. He sees the characteristic feature of his present thus: 'It is materialism, an absolute control of matter over the spirit, of external corporeity over inner ideality.'²² Three years later, he printed in his own journal a long review of Richard Streiter's theoretical work that delivered a sharp rebuke of Wagner's teachings. Even though the review did not adopt an expressly antagonistic attitude towards Wagner, the praise heaped upon Streiter's oeuvre left no doubt as to the reviewer's basic standpoint.²³ (Fig. 5)

¹⁹ Ferdinand von Feldegg, 'Friedrich Ohmann', *Der Architekt*, 4, 1898, 37; Ferdinand von Feldegg, 'Philosophie der modernen Baukunst', *Der Architekt*, 5, 1899, 21–22.

²⁰ Marco Pozzetto, *Die Schule Otto Wagners 1894–1912*, Wien and München: Schroll & Co., 1980, 255.

²¹ Feldegg, 'Wiens zweite Renaissance', *Der Architekt*, 1, 1895, 1–2, quote at 2: 'Nichts wäre trauriger als dies, wenn die zweite Renaissance Wiens dereinst, zum Unterschiede von der ersten, die Ära des Verkehrs- und Eisenbahnstils, der kunstlosen Nützlichkeit genannt werden würde!'

²² Feldegg, 'Architektonischer Materialismus', *Süddeutsche Bauzeitung*, 5, 1895, 344–348, quote at 345: 'es ist der Materialismus, die absolute Herrschaft des Stoffes über den Geist, des Äußeren, Körperlichen über das Innere, das Ideelle'.

²³ Feldegg, 'Architektonische Zeitfragen', *Der Architekt*, 4, 1898, 5.



Figure 5 Page of the journal *Der Architekt*, 4, 1898, with the Feldegg's essay 'Architektonische Zeitfragen'.

For Feldegg, Ohmann was the kind of creative personality which seemed to be missing in Vienna after the deaths of Heinrich Fersel, Theofil Hansen and Friedrich Schmidt.²⁴ In 1898, Feldegg hailed in Ohmann an intellectually related promoter of the local artistic identity. 'A part of the Viennese genius loci, of the 17th and 18th centuries, lives on in him,' the essay claims: 'As if it was his vocation to re-establish

²⁴ Friedrich Ohmann (1858-1927) was one of the most important Central European architects around 1900 and his numerous works are scattered along the axis between Split and Magdeburg. Born in Lviv/Lemberg, Galicia, he studied with Heinrich Ferstel and Karl König at the Vienna Technical University from 1877 to 1882 and with Friedrich Schmidt at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts from 1882 to 1883. In 1888 Ohmann became the first professor of architecture at the School of Applied Arts in Prague, where he worked until 1898. In 1899-1907 he was in charge of the completion of the imperial residence in Vienna and from 1904 he was professor of architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts there. The notion of modernity that Ohmann represents in his work was not based on a revolutionary turn to utilitarian values, i.e. the subordination of form to function. His modernity was evolutionary – based on a dialectical synthesis of the best ideas of the past with contemporary building types and constructions. Its starting point was the study of Baroque architecture. As the embodiment of 'openness' of form, the Baroque was an important stimulus for Ohmann to develop his personal creativity – it offered him a middle way between the complete freedom of artistic imagination and the rationality of rules and laws as demanded by nineteenth-century historicism. Ohmann also learned from Baroque architects to design with a view to wider spatial relationships – the genius loci. Baroque thus served as a means for him to express local and regional identity. Cf. Jindřich Vybíral, 'Friedrich Ohmann and Prague Architecture around 1900' in Peter Burman, *Architecture 1900*, Dorset: Routledge, 1998, 173-178; Jindřich Vybíral, *Friedrich Ohmann. Objev baroku a počátky moderní architektury v Čechách/ Friedrich Ohmann. Die Entdeckung des Barocks und die Anfänge der modernen Architektur in Böhmen*, Prague: Umprum, 2013.

the tradition which was almost utterly lost to us.²⁵ Yet, besides an appreciation of this continuity, Feldegg's narrative also contained a critique of the immediate past, i.e. of the evolutionary concept of historicism which neglects the dynamic transformations of architectonic culture. This is why Ohmann could not be simply integrated into this concept and why it was preferable to present him as an ambivalent, or rather, a consensual creative personality, anchored in the past yet searching for new paths: 'Having his entire education being in the school of historicism and being quite permeated by its grand, monumental productions, consummated in the Baroque, Ohmann has found and is still finding a subjective, utterly personal transition towards a new school. He is historical and modern at the same time.'²⁶ (Figs 6 and 7)



Figure 6 Friedrich Ohmann, reconstruction of the church in Přeštice, Bohemia, 1897-1898, illustration from Feldegg's book *Friedrich Ohmann's Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, Vol. 1, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1906.

Figure 7 Friedrich Ohmann, design for the Café Corso, Prague, 1897-1898, illustration from Feldegg's book *Friedrich Ohmann's Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, Vol. 1, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1906.

There is no doubt that the Ohmann monograph was a perfect match for the expectations of the Vienna public, which was never too receptive towards radical modernist experiments. Architectonic circles especially welcomed Feldegg's model of historical development, with its cautious mix of both evolutionary and

²⁵ Feldegg, 'Friedrich Ohmann', 37: 'In ihm lebst etwas vom genius loci Wiens – des XVII. und XVIII. Jahrhunderts... Er wäre also berufen, jene Tradition wieder herzustellen, die uns heute nahezu gänzlich verloren gegangen.'

²⁶ Feldegg, *Friedrich Ohmann's Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, 24 and 28: 'Ganz aufgewachsen in der historischen Schule, ganz erfüllt von den großen monumentalen Endergebnissen derselben, zumal wie solche das Barock in sich beschließt, fand Ohmann und findet er heute noch beständig einen subjektiven, ihm ganz allein eigentümlichen Übergang zur neuen Schule. Er ist Historiker und Moderner zugleich.'

revolutionary moments and conservative by dint of keeping historical styles as guidelines of an architect's education. The architect Max Ferstel expressed his approval by stating: 'A deep and thorough historical education will guard the artist, even as he ventures now and then into the terrain of modern forms, from the dangers befalling those with less schooling, or indeed those who, with cocksure contempt, neglect historical models altogether.'²⁷ Critics were not bothered by the tendentiousness of Feldegg's interpretations, as they were supposedly presented by 'one of the most vocal heralds to date of Otto Wagner's fame'.²⁸ Only the more liberal Hugo Haberfeld, while manifesting sympathies both towards the book and its author, had to take exception to Feldegg's portrayal of Ohmann as the synthesizer of historicism and modernity in an alleged architecture of the future. Haberfeld was ready to acknowledge that Ohmann was no mere copier, yet he saw him as a 'clever aesthetic hedonist whose own artistic will was not strong enough to resist the seductive beauty of the past'.²⁹ Haberfeld concluded with the legitimate concern lest Ohmann 'gets confounded by Otto Wagner's enemies who praise him due to their longing for a counter-king'.³⁰ (Fig. 8)



Figure 8 Friedrich Ohmann, design for a greenhouse in the Hofburg garden in Vienna, 1901-1905, illustration from Feldegg's book *Friedrich Ohmann's Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, Vol. 2, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1914.

²⁷ Max von Ferstel, 'Friedrich Ohmann Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten', *Zeitschrift des österreichischen Ingenieur-Vereines*, 58, 1906, Literaturblatt, 70: 'Die äußerst gründliche historische Schulung bewahren aber den Künstler auch bei gelegentlichen Exkursen ins Gebiet moderner Formgebung vor den Gefahren, denen minder Geschulte oder gar jene, die sich mit souveräner Verachtung über historische Vorbildung überhaupt hin hinwegsetzen, rettungslos verfallen.'

²⁸ Friedrich Stern, 'Der Leiter des Burgbaues', *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (Tages-Ausgabe) March 7, 1906, 1-3, quote at 1: 'bisher einer der lautesten Herolde von Otto Wagners Ruhm'.

²⁹ Hugo Haberfeld, 'Friedrich Ohmanns Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten', *Die Zeit*, December 2, 1906, 32-33, quote at 33: 'vielmehr stets als kluger, ästhetischer Genießer, dessen persönlicher Kunstwille nicht so stark war, daß er der lockenden Schönheit der Vergangenheit widerstehen hätte können'.

³⁰Haberfeld, 'Friedrich Ohmanns Entwürfe', quote at 33: 'Nur darf er sich nicht von den Feinden Otto Wagners beirren lassen, die einen Gegenkönig haben möchten und ihn darum über die Masten Preisen'.

Still, it was clear that for the role of a cultural hero who launches a new epoch, a new actor – more manifestly innovative – would have to be found. It was fairly logical that the choice eventually fell on Leopold Bauer, who was capable of parting ways with historical models quite early in his career and excelled in the community of Austrian architects by his verbal powers as well.³¹ Moreover, as an apostate from the camp of the rationalists he was suitable for the role of a 'counter-king' whom Wagner's opponents were eager to proclaim. Thus, Feldegg's texts on Ohmann and Bauer were part of the process of articulating principles of modern architecture, and they were meant to demonstrate the historical legitimacy of its relatively more conformist faction, which, while it did reject the exhausted historicism of the 19th century, struggled for hegemony vis-à-vis the radical wing. To use the terms introduced by Panayotis Tournikiotis, Feldegg employed an 'operative démarche', and his writing belongs under the heading of critical architectural discourse.³² (Figs 9 and 10)

Feldegg found fault with Wagner primarily regarding his extreme anti-artistic rationalism, i.e. his fetishism of utility and of technologies of construction. He also blamed him for refusing to learn from history and being subject to the temptations of transient aesthetic fashions. While he did find acceptable Wagner's 'true, though one-sided and tendentially excessive principles of the materialistic and constructive kind', he saw the conjunction of such a theory with a practice of ornamental arbitrariness as an irreparable vice (Feldegg uses the German word

³¹ Leopold Bauer (1872-1938) is a controversial, but at the same time extremely significant personality of Central European architecture of the 20th century. He was born in Krnov/Jägerndorf in Austrian Silesia and from 1892 to 1896 studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where his teachers were Karl von Hasenauer and Otto Wagner. Bauer's early architectural and design work represented one of the most radical expressions of Viennese modernism. His book *Verschiedene Skizzen, Entwürfe und Studien* (1899) was seen by his contemporaries as the most important theoretical impulse to emerge from the Wagner School. Bauer's earliest architectural realisation, the Karl Reissig Villa in Brno (1901-1902), has been described as the first modern house in the Austrian monarchy. Later, however, Bauer reconsidered his radically modernist assumptions and switched to the position of new historicism. The essence of his heresy was a rejection of rationalism and an attempt to restore the importance of the artistic imagination, which was supposed to protect modern architecture from the tyranny of function and construction. He subjected his teacher Otto Wagner to harsh criticism and, as a compromise candidate, succeeded him on the professorial chair for several years (1913-1919). At that time he created his greatest project, for the building of the Austro-Hungarian Bank in Vienna. With this work, which was only partially realized, he continued the tradition of monumental buildings of the Ringstrasse era. At the same time, however, he continued to work on a wide range of purely contemporary architectural tasks, such as department stores, transport and industrial buildings and urban planning issues. His inter-war work espoused the principles of modern architecture, while not abandoning figurative qualities based on historical association. Cf. Jindřich Vybíral, 'Leopold Bauer. Apostate of Wagner's School', *Centropa* 6:1, 2006, 43-51; Jindřich Vybíral, *Leopold Bauer. Häretiker der modernen Architektur*, Basel: Birkhäuser 2018.

³² Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1999, 7 and 21.



Figure 9 Leopold Bauer, Karl Reissig Villa in Brno, 1901-1902, illustration from Feldegg's book *Leopold Bauer. Der Künstler und sein Werk*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1918.

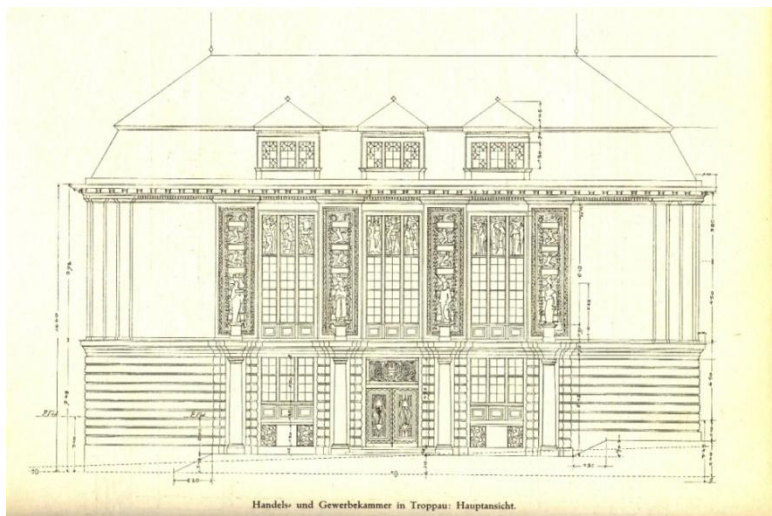


Figure 10 Leopold Bauer, design of the Chamber of Trade and Commerce building in Opava, 1908, illustration from Feldegg's book *Leopold Bauer. Der Künstler und sein Werk*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1918.

'*Ungereimtheit*', meaning 'incongruity' or 'absurdity').³³ In the monograph, Bauer was presented as an antipode to Wagner: Wagner's former student Bauer, as portrayed by Feldegg, worked to grant artistic imagination greater sway and laid aside the limitations dictated by function and construction. Instead of ephemeral fashions he preferred solutions not bound to a single day, and his projecting had a firm basis in theory. Whereas Wagner 'never tires in looking at every and each architectural problem from the viewpoint of an original "modern" building style',

³³ Feldegg, *Leopold Bauer*, 2: 'die wahren, wenn auch einseitigen und tendenziös überspannten Grundsätze materialistischer und konstruktiver Natur'.

Bauer, 'far from vowing fealty to this coercing dogma, has the tasks that originate completely in the past and have their roots in it arise from the spirit of this very past as well'.³⁴ Feldegg purposefully subordinated his choice of facts to this scheme; for instance, he consciously ignored Bauer's initial, radically modernist works.

Feldegg was not a mere passive spectator of his hero's break-up with the Wagnerian faction of modernist orthodoxy and his search for a more conformist approach. Rather, he encouraged and actively supported Bauer – which is why, in his monograph, impartial biographical narrative recedes before a subjective interpretation of relatively recent developments in Central European architecture, demonstrating the exclusive position of the protagonist of this narrative and of the view he stood for. Feldegg presented Bauer's career as a chain of causally connected episodes, inexorably proceeding towards the expected climax, i.e. Bauer's split from Wagner's orthodoxy as the presupposition of a catharsis rejuvenating the entire field of architectural production. Feldegg interspersed his claims with quotes from older essays by the critics Franz Servaes and Karl Kuzmany and the art historian Edmund W. Braun that confirm his own constructs and stamp them with the seal of objectivity. However, a key part of Feldegg's monograph was played by Bauer's own writings. The reason Feldegg introduced them into his narrative was not only to enhance the text's authenticity but also to endow his own explanations and predictions with an authority surpassing the import of mere opinions by dint of employing Bauer's 'scientific', especially Darwinistic arguments.

The extant correspondence between the impresario and his protégé also demonstrates that Bauer was far more than a mere object of some crafty manipulation of facts in the service of pre-set conclusions. Bauer and Feldegg were bound by aesthetic preferences, similar intellectual interests, and congruent value systems. Bauer expressed his view on this point in a July 1911 letter: 'I have always felt that our mutual understanding contains a shared link, named Hansen. This master of a grandiose architectonic rhythm has forever enchanted me, and indeed it is first and foremost due to Master Hansen and, next to that, due to our many illuminating philosophical discussions that, unlike many of my colleagues from the Wagner school, I have remained a bit more judicious.'³⁵ At the same time, the correspondence allows us to see Bauer's calculating pragmatism. He was happy to join the mutually profitable game and to entrust Feldegg with the role of a mouthpiece. His long, carefully stylized letters contain his artistic confessions,

³⁴ Feldegg, *Leopold Bauer*, 16: 'dass der letztere restlos jedes der Baukunst gestellte Problem unter dem Gesichtswinkel original-„moderner“ Bauweise auffaßt, während der erstere keineswegs zu diesem Gewaltdogma schwört, sondern Aufgaben, deren ganze Herkunft in die Vergangenheit zurückgreift und in ihr wurzelt, auch im Geiste eben dieser Vergangenheit erstehen lassen will'.

³⁵ Carbon copy of the L. Bauer's letter to F. Feldegg of July 15, 1911. The Albertina Museum, L. Bauer's papers: 'ich habe immer das Gefühl, dass wir bei unserem gegenseitigen Verstehen ein gemeinsames Bindeglied haben und das heißt Hansen. Dieser Meister eines großzügigen architektonischen Rhythmus [!] hat es mir von jeher angetan und wenn ich mir etwas mehr als vieler meiner Kollegen aus der Wagnerschule Besonnenheit bewahrt habe, so verdanke ich es wirklich dem Meister Hansen in erster Linie und vielen unseren aufklärenden philosophischen Gesprächen in zweiter Linie.'

included in the well-based expectation that the addressee would use them in his interpretations. He employed this 'media strategy' not only vis-à-vis Feldegg but also in letters to other potential expositors of his work. To Adalbert Franz Seligmann, the arts critic of the *Neue Freie Presse*, he confessed: 'I am feeling more and more that I need an ally who could assist me in my effort to create something sensible and good for the next architectonic generation. In a time of immense confusion in all things artistic, it would be a mistake to underestimate the significance of both spoken and written propaganda.'³⁶ (Fig. 11)

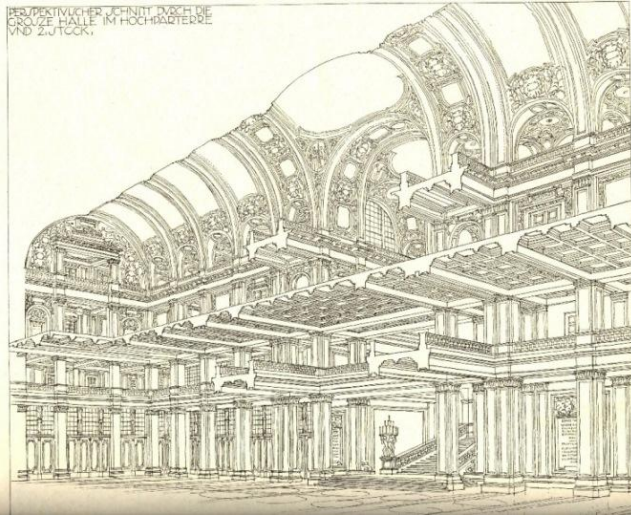


Figure 11 Leopold Bauer, design of the Austro-Hungarian bank in Vienna, 1911, illustration from Feldegg's book *Leopold Bauer. Der Künstler und sein Werk*, Wien: Schroll & Co., 1918.

Bauer's own critic-in-waiting proved his friendship at the time of Bauer's appointment to be Wagner's successor at the Academy, when the radical modernists made the architect into a target of merciless attacks, and in 1919 Bauer eventually resigned the position under dramatic circumstances.³⁷ Subsequently, Bauer found occasions to pay his protector back. When Feldegg was ousted from the editorship of *Der Architect* in 1908, Bauer pushed through an embargo of the new editorial team by the Austrian Central Association of Architects (*Zentralvereinigung der Architekten*).³⁸ Eight years later, he made an (unsuccessful) attempt to introduce Feldegg among the columnists of the *Neue Freie Presse*, characterizing his promoter at this occasion thus: 'While it is true he has built little by himself, as teacher at an architectural school he is sufficiently familiar with all technical issues; he possesses a

³⁶ Carbon copy of L. Bauer's letter to A. F. Seligmann of November 21, 1916. The Albertina Museum, L. Bauer's papers: 'Ich spüre aber immer mehr, dass ich Bundesgenossen brauche, die mich bei meiner Arbeit, Vernünftiges und Gutes für die nächste Architektengeneration zu schaffen, unterstützen. ... In der Zeit grenzloser Verworrenheit in allen künstlerischen Dingen wäre es verfehlt, die Bedeutung einer Propaganda durch Wort und Schrift in all diesen Fragen zu unterschätzen.'

³⁷ Feldegg, 'Fall Wagner – Bauer', *Wiener Bauindustrie-Zeitung*, 31, 1913–14, 52–53; Feldegg, 'Unsere Architekturhochschule', *Fremden-Blatt*, November 13, 1917, 1–2; Feldegg, 'Terror. Eine Bedrohung der Lehrfreiheit', *Österreichische Bauzeitung*, 36, 1918–19, 17; Feldegg, 'Der Fall Leopold Bauer', *Die Zeit*, March 28, 1919.

³⁸ Minutes from session 15 of the editorial committee of the Zentralvereinigung, November 10, 1908. The Albertina Museum, L. Bauer's papers.

comprehensive philosophical education which allows him to contemplate things from a higher viewpoint; and finally, perhaps most importantly in this particular case, he is a writer with an extraordinary verbal control.³⁹ Bauer wrote several celebratory pieces commemorating Feldegg's jubilees, as well as an obituary after Feldegg's death on December 8, 1936.⁴⁰ The reviewers of the 1918 monograph were well aware that the two men were friends, and the author's affirmative attitude did not really irritate them. Only Dagobert Frey, the historian of art, glossed Feldegg's 'warm and friendly tone of recognition' by the embarrassed comment that, 'commensurate to Bauer's significance as an artist and a theoretician, we would wish him to be characterized from a more distanced, objective standpoint'.⁴¹

Feldegg's 1915 lecture which laid the basis for the subsequent monograph on Bauer created a stir by its blunt attack on Wagner. The point of contention was not Bauer's well-respected oeuvre but rather Feldegg's 'principal emphasizing of historicism as a self-saving architectural idea'.⁴² The art historian Max Eisler accused the critic of enflaming an 'artistic war' against modern culture in Austria: 'Once again, the old turns against the new which carries the onus of the action of the present and whose indefatigable and infallible powers determine the future.'⁴³ Even though Feldegg responded that he had in mind nothing of the kind, his defence was unpersuasive. Still, he does not seem to me to be such a reactionary as Eisler thought. In the Ohmann monograph, Feldegg expressed his position by stating: 'It is easy for those who either despise or else unconditionally accept everything new. Today one can easily attain a state of happiness by this or the other way. (...) Yet – what about us, the others! (...) We are a spitting image of those who sit in between two chairs.'⁴⁴ Besides being a person of numerous gifts, Feldegg also was 'a man

³⁹ L. Bauer's letter to A. F. Seligmann of November 21, 1916: 'Obwohl er selbst wenig gebaut hat, so besitzt er doch als Lehrer an einer Bauschule genügende Vertrautheit in allen Fachfragen; er verfügt über eine umfassende philosophische Bildung, die ihn befähigt, die Dinge von einem höheren Gesichtspunkte anzuschauen, und schließlich, was in diesem Falle vielleicht das Wichtigste ist, er ist Schriftsetzler und beherrscht das Wort in ganz ungewöhnlichem Maaße.'

⁴⁰ Prof. Ferdinand Feldeggs 70. Geburtstag, *Neue Freie Presse*, March 9, 1925, 4; Prof. Ferdinand Fellner Ritter von Feldegg, unpublished obituary, The Albertina Museum, L. Bauer's papers.

⁴¹ Dagobert Frey, 'Leopold Bauer', *Der Architekt*, 22, 1919, 97–103, quote at 100: 'Der warme freundschaftliche Ton der Anerkennung vermag leider nicht ganz dafür zu entschädigen, daß wir der Bedeutung Bauers als Künstler und Theoretiker entsprechend eine Charakteristik von höherer Warte wünschen würden.'

⁴² Max Eisler, 'Kunstkrieg', *Der Morgen*, March 8, 1915, 5: 'die prinzipielle Betonung des Historismus als des alleinseligmachenden baukünstlerischen Gedankens'.

⁴³ Eisler, 'Kunstkrieg': 'Das Alte wendet sich nochmals gegen das Neue, auf dessen Schultern die Tat der Gegenwart ruht, dessen durchhaltenden und beständigen Kräften die Zukunft gehört.'

⁴⁴ Feldegg, *Friedrich Ohmann's Entwürfe und ausgeführte Bauten*, 23–24: 'Leicht haben es nur diejenigen, die entweder unbedingt alles Neue verwerfen oder es unbedingt hinnehmen. Auf die eine oder andere Weise kann man freilich auch heute leicht selig werden ... Aber wir anderen! ... Wir gleichen also aufs Haar demjenigen, der – zwischen zwei Stühlen sitzt.'

without qualities', searching both for a new moral that would synthesize the intellect and the soul and for a new art which would blend the old and the new.

The difficult question of the very possibility of such a synthesis of the old and the new is tackled by the author by means of various theories of aesthetic individualism. As noted by Mitchell Schwarzer, Feldegg – following here his cultural models: Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche – saw the means for transcending the nineteenth-century cultural crisis in the energy of an imaginative subjectivity.⁴⁵ This was another aspect of his joining of the broadly conceived social-romantic movement which stood in an aesthetic opposition to modernity and was criticizing the symptoms of the industrial civilization, including objectification, nihilism, the spirit of utility, massification and also materialism. Older historiography used to call this ideological complex 'a progressive reaction', whereas more recent authors prefer the label of 'cultural critique'.⁴⁶ In the German-speaking countries around 1900, this line of thinking was pervasive, even though it might not have been dominant in Europe more broadly. Feldegg's monographs as well as his polemical essays shared a common basis with the ideas of very various authors, including Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, Walther Rathenau, and Oswald Spengler. And the view expressed in them was not 'extreme' at all. Rather, these texts represented the intellectual 'mainstream', and were very well received in Vienna. 'For me in particular, Friedrich Ohmann is the embodiment of the future of our architecture', proclaimed the critic Friedrich Stern in a piece about Feldegg's monograph, mentioning also the alleged 'inner vacuity of the argument' of Feldegg's opponents.⁴⁷ 'There is no doubt that Feldegg is correct in many of his deductions against the Wagnerian manner, which he calls "an artistic nonsense", since this manner of developing and cultivating art led to immense hyperbole, uncritical idolization, prostrate devotion and apparent artistic arbitrariness', claims Albert Hoffmann in his review of the Bauer monograph.⁴⁸ For Seligmann, Wagner's school simply represented 'anarchist utilitarian art'.⁴⁹ It was Wagner – not Feldegg – in whom Vienna saw an extremist. And it is also indubitable that the conciliatory attitude to Wagnerian modernism, present in the book on Ohmann, is absent from

⁴⁵ Mitchell Schwarzer, *German Architectural Theory and the Search for Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 219–220.

⁴⁶ Richard Hamann – Jost Hermand, *Stilkunst um 1900*, Berlin: Akademie, 1967; Georg Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik. Von J. J. Rousseau bis G. Anders*, München: C.H. Beck, 2007.

⁴⁷ Stern, 'Der Leiter des Burgbaues': 'Friedrich Ohmann verkörpert speziell für mich die Zukunft unserer Architektur', 'innere Hohlheit der Argumentationen'.

⁴⁸ Albert Hofmann, 'Das Werk von Leopold Bauer', *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, 52, 1918, 421–424, 425–428 and 437–438, quote at 426: 'Es ist unzweifelhaft, dass Feldegg mit manchen dieser Ausführungen gegen die Art Wagners, die er eine "künstlerische Ungereimtheit" nennt, im Recht ist, denn er hat bei dieser Art, Kunst zu üben und zu pflegen, an maßlosen Übertreibungen, an kritikloser Anbetung, an willenloser Hingabe an eine scheinbar künstlerische Willkür nicht gefehlt.'

⁴⁹ Adalbert Franz Seligmann, 'Ausstellungen, Mappen und Bücher', *Neue Freie Presse*, July 18, 1918, 1–3, quote at 3: 'anarchistische Zweckkunst'.

the Bauer monograph. Within a few years, Feldegg's views became radicalized, and it is more than likely that the alliance with Bauer contributed to this development.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the symposium *Architekt*innen-Monographien. Potentiale, Grenzen, Alternativen* organized by the Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna on 23 September 2021.