

Thinking with History

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Explorations in the
Passage to
Modernism

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*** INTRODUCTIONS



- 1. For Morris's Oxford years, see J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols. (London, New York, Bombay, 1901), 1:28–66.
- 2. George Bernard Shaw, "William Morris as I Knew Him," in May Morris, William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1936), 2:xxviii.
- 3. The Firm decorated rooms in St. James Palace and a model dining room for the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 4. The Earthly Paradise, in William Morris, Collected Works (London, 1910–1915), 3:1.
- 5. May Morris, Morris, 1:399.
- 6. B. Ifor Evans, William Morris and His Poetry (London, 1925), 97.
- 7. Richard Wagner, My Life, 2 vols. (New York, 1911), 1:101-2; idem, "Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde," in Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen, edited by Wolfgang Golther, 10 vols. (Berlin, etc. [1913]), 4:254-55.
- 8. Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften, 4:301-2.
- 9. Ibid., 302.
- 10. Quoted in Ernest Newman, Wagner as Man and Artist (New York, 1924), 184.
- 11. Ibid., 183-84.
- 12. [George] Bernard Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite (Chicago and New York, 1905), 57.
- 13. Wagner, My Life, 2:614-17.
- 14. See especially Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater* (Princeton, 1949), chapter 3, "*Tristan und Isolde*: The Action and Theater of Passion," *passim*; Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York, 1959), 192-216.
- 15. Morris, *Works*, 3:2. For the best analysis of Morris's "poetry of despair," see E. P. Thompson, *William Morris* (New York, 1961), 140-62.
- 16. Thompson, William Morris, 156. In Tristan und Isolde, the persistent problem of the lovers is to banish the day-world. Act II, where they succeed in this, is a night-act; Act III opens with the victory of day: a shepherd's plaintive song; a hot, still air; an empty sea; an atmosphere heavy with foreboding.
 - 17. Ibid., 222.
 - 18. Ibid., 219-20.
 - 19. Shaw, in May Morris, Morris, 2:xxxvii.
- 20. P. A. Loos, *Richard Wagner* (Bern, 1952), 487–88; Ernest Newman, *Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (New York, 1933–1946), 4:705, 101.
- 21. Quoted in Loos, Wagner, 489.
- 22. Newman, Life, 4:482.
- 23. Wagner, Gesammelte Schriften, 10:250-51.
- 24. Ibid., 250.
- 25. Loos, Wagner, 205.



Museum in Contested Space: The Sword, the Scepter, and the Ring

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Austria's construction of a capital complex within an existing city was surely one of the great achievements of nineteenth-century urban planning and bureaucratic imagination. To modern eyes, Vienna's circular Ringstrasse district, with its splendid monumental buildings of politics and culture and its vast, luxurious apartment blocs, appears as a coherent urban *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). The many styles of its buildings seem welded into a harmonious unity by the common commitment to monumentality and the agreed symbolic meanings of style in the lexicon of historicism shared by their makers. Even to its builders, the very modernity of the Ring consisted in its syncretic mastery of the diverse historical traditions that preceded it.

Yet what conflict lies concealed and congealed in the buildings of the Ringstrasse! Through much of its development the area was contested space. Many a building in it, and the site it occupies, was the outcome of a struggle among the subgroups that composed the ruling élite in their attempts to shape a swiftly changing Austrian politics. Into the built environment they projected their claims to power and their cultural values. To the phases in that struggle this essay is addressed—not for the first time in my writing,1 but with a new point of entry and, as a consequence, a new interpretation. The cultural historian Johan Huizinga once observed that historical thinking sometimes resembles a floral bouquet: to add a single flower of another form or color to the bouquet can alter its whole character and impact. Such has been the case for me in reexamining the development of Vienna's capital in the mid-nineteenth century after I discovered, as the new flower in the bouquet, the Kunsthistorisches Museum. In the great complex of the Ringstrasse, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, along with its sister, the Naturhistorisches Museum

across the square, had a certain pride of place, both spatially and symbolically. Spatially linked in the minds of its patrons and designers to the Hofburg, the museums represented symbolically the extension of the ancient dynastic patrimony of art and science, of a huge cabinet of curiosities, from the court to the people of the modernized Empire.

I shall say nothing of the Museum's definition either in content or in form. My concern here is rather with the assignment of space to it, and the changes in the organization of buildings around it that gave it a new meaning and function in socio-political conflict resolution. Through the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the politics of space itself became aestheticized as the politics of culture became neutralized.



The premise for the development of the Ringstrasse area as a compact representative space was, in a way, Austria's backwardness. Into the nineteenth century, Vienna's ancient defense system had survived. Its broad glacis, separating the inner city from the suburbs, provided a vast belt of open land on which a new capital area might be built (Figure 7.1).

Well before the Revolution of 1848, the bourgeois city fathers of Vienna had tried through recourse to the courts to win the right to build on the glacis to relieve the economic and population pressure on the inner city. In vain; Emperor Francis I simply forbade the city government from bringing suit. After the Revolution, the situation of those who wished to expand the city grew even worse. The military establishment, smarting from its eviction from Vienna by the liberal insurgents in October 1848, became more intransigent than ever about its control of the glacis. Where its earlier rationale for the defense system was protection against the foreign foe, the army redefined it now in terms of the protection of the emperor against his rebellious subjects. The army, in the early 1850s the most influential interest group in the emperor's entourage, closed its grip on the glacis area, drawing new plans for its military employment against urban insurrection. This included the construction of huge new barracks (1854-1857) and an arsenal (1849-1855), located near railway stations for swift reenforcement of the capital's garrison. True, a broad belt boulevard on the glacis—what became the Ringstrasse—was now espoused by the military for the rapid deployment of troops. Thus the Ringstrasse was motivated in the same way as the boulevards of Napoleon III's Paris. But the walls were to remain intact, the glacis left clear as a field of fire.2

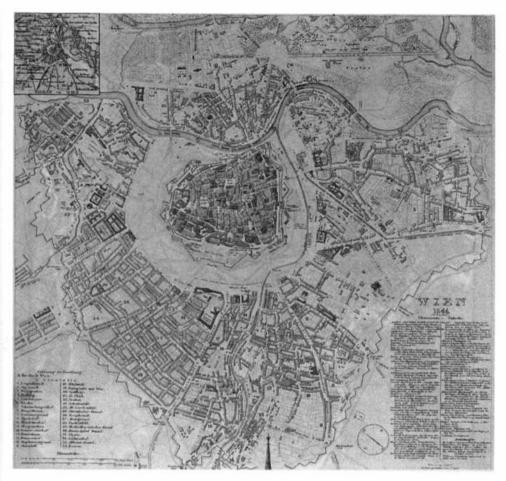


Figure 7.1. Vienna before Redevelopment, 1844.

Important for our concerns, however, was that the military party joined to its urban building program for defense a cultural one: the projection of its own image and values through a museum. Beginning in 1856, a Waffenmuseum (Museum of Arms—later called Heeresmuseum, Military Museum) was added to the new arsenal. Only the best of architecture could adequately serve the representational purposes of the builders. The army commissioned Theophil Hansen, whose classicism was soon to make him a favorite of the liberals, to provide it with a lavish Byzantine romantic building. Conceived in a triumphalist spirit to celebrate the army as guardian of the Empire, the museum contained a hall of military leaders (Feldherrnhalle) with commissioned statues of commanders, and a hall of fame (Oesterreichische Ruhmeshalle) decorated with painted battle scenes. In the entrance hall the busts of four modern generals (Haynau, Windischgrätz, Radetzky, and Jelačić) were placed over the grand staircase. Their common glory consisted in suppressing the Revolutions of 1848.³

It was thus under the sway of the sword that there was launched a postrevolutionary cultural politics through monumental building, soon to characterize the Ring as a whole, even while the army blocked civilian claims to use the precious space of the glacis for such purposes. Meanwhile, the emperor added his weight to the public glorification of military virtue with the erection on the Äussere Burgplatz—now the Heldenplatz—of the statues of Archduke Charles, victor over Napoleon at Aspern, and Prince Eugene.⁴

The other pillar of restored absolutism in the 1850s was, of course, the Church. Appropriately, the first nonmilitary institution to be built on the glacis was the Votivkirche. Financed by public subscription to commemorate the escape of Emperor Francis Joseph from an assassin's dagger in 1853, the new church was to serve as a patriotic shrine and, like Westminster Abbey, as a burial place for national heroes. Also serving as church for the garrison of Vienna, it represented the unity of scepter, cross, and sword against what Vienna's Archbishop Cardinal Rauscher called "the mortally wounded tiger of the Revolution." When the archbishop used those words at the laying of the cornerstone of the Votivkirche in April 1856, a concordat with major concessions to the Church was already in place. The Restoration atmosphere had reached its height.

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WITHIN the state bureaucracy and in the city, however, pressures were already at work in the mid-1850s that would usher in a new phase in the

development of the capital. Neo-absolutism was more than restoration and repression; it aimed also at the modernization of the monarchy. Alexander Bach, the interior minister whose tough, imaginative policies dominated the postrevolutionary decade, envisaged a highly centralized, transnational, bureaucratic state. He sought to blunt the dangerous political potential of liberalism and nationalism by fostering the economic and cultural interests of the bourgeoisie that could also strengthen the state. In the centralistic scheme of things, the city of Vienna acquired a new meaning. Even in the constitution imposed by the emperor in March 1849, the status of Vienna was explicitly defined in terms that transformed and enlarged the ancient dynastic concept of *Residenzstadt* into that of a centralizing state capital (*Reichsshauptstadt*). "Vienna is the capital of the Empire and the seat of the imperial power," the Constitution said.6

The logical parallel to political centralization was cultural centralization. Vienna must become the focus and radiating center of a transnational, pan-Austrian, modern consciousness. Traditional institutions of the court—theater, museums, opera—must reach out to the public of the whole empire to create a uniform culture. Where court institutions for this task were inadequate or nonexistent, the state must fill the void. Thus Bach tried to establish an Imperial Archive to unite all archives of the realm in a single building, including the prestigious Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv. The vigorous minister of education, Count Leo Thun, established the Institute for Austrian Historical Research (1854) to foster the professionalization of research and the discovery of a more useable past for the modern neo-conservative state.

In this context, plans were undertaken to organize and expand the reach of traditional imperial patronage of high art through a new court museum. In a more modern gesture, a museum for art and industry was established by the state as a practical supplement. Everywhere the tendency in cultural organization was the same: to strengthen the old dynastic principle with the étatist one wherever possible, and, in the process, to fortify traditional inheritance with modern practice.

In Alexander Bach's wide cultural program, the shape and character of the capital city was an ever more pressing concern. To give it definition, Bach and his fellow bureaucrats reached out to the middle class. They drew its professional intellectuals—architects, historians, art historians—into the governmental councils as consultants. Mindful of the pressure for space on the still-closed glacis to accommodate new housing, Bach also drew municipal representatives into the planning process. Still the

initiative remained firmly in the hands of the imperial authorities. It is important to understand, in view of our tendency today to see the Ringstrasse as a product of resurgent liberalism, how much its development was the work of neo-absolutist reformers. Their motive was to enhance the power of the state.

Through most of the 1850s, the contest over the modernization of the capital in terms of its representational functions in the politics of culture was spatially centered on the Hofburg. In view of the army's continuing resistance to building on the glacis, only occasional efforts were made to acquire sites for cultural buildings there. Instead, as the projects of renewal and expansion of the scepter's sway by means of culture increased, competing insider interest groups clamored for a site in the Hofburg area. Court officials pressed for new residential and visitors' quarters; the military, for new buildings for the Emperor's guard regiment and a new headquarters for the commandantura of Vienna. The Ministry of the Interior pressed for an Imperial Archive and an Imperial Geological Institute. In general, Bach's policy was to establish a whole range of state institutions of art and science that would ultimately outdistance and absorb the dynastic ones.⁷

The spatial focus of all these claims in the 1850s was the Äussere Burgplatz (Heldenplatz), between the old Hofburg and the Burgtor. Most plans for the cultural buildings, including both opera house and Burgtheater, envisaged expansion to the east and west of the Äussere Burgplatz. The Obersthofmeister, Carl Freiherr zu Liechtenstein, promoted the placement of the opera and the theater on either flank of the Burgtor. Both buildings were to be connected with the Hofburg by an arcade—a fitting expression of the primacy of the representational arts in Austrian court culture. This plan failed of acceptance, but its shadow may be reflected in the final siting of opera and Burgtheater: although detached from the immediate Hofburg area, the two buildings were placed closer to it than any other major buildings on the inner side of the Ring.

The more insistent the demands for a vigorous expansion of neo-absolutism's cultural building program became, the less adequate the idea of centering the new capital on the Hofburg space proved to be. The multiple content was simply too great for the confined space. Piecemeal planning was reduced to political maneuvering in what became a futile game of musical chairs. To fulfill the multiple requirements of state policy, the confining Hofburg square had to yield to the larger circle of the glacis; the contained space of tradition, to the fluid space of the modern city. An

absolute prerequisite for this was, of course, the removal of the sword that barred the way.

At the end of the year 1857, the civilian ministers, after careful political preparation, won the emperor's support for the inauguration of comprehensive planning of the new capital, with the glacis as its site. Juridically, the imperial rescript announcing this course was written still in the spirit of neo-absolutism, its language analogous to the imposed constitution of 1849. Where the draft prepared for Francis Joseph spoke only of the regulation of the city, the final draft substituted for the word city the more imperious phrase, at once dynastic and étatist, meine Residenz- und Reichshauptstadt.9 But the basic fact remained: the emperor had finally ordered that the walls and bastions be razed, and the land opened. The liberal Neue Freie Presse hailed the imperial command as a fairy-tale liberation, which broke the cincture of stone that for many centuries had kept Vienna's noble limbs imprisoned in its evil spell.¹⁰ The scepter had compelled the sheathing of the sword. Out of the empty glacis could soon rise the glory of the Ring, with the great monumental buildings disposed along its course.

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The Rescript of 1857 has always been regarded—and rightly—as a crucial turning point in the history of the planning of the capital. Once the primacy of the military in determining the use and function of the glacis was broken, the thinking about the capital's spatial form changed. The area began to be thought of not merely as a space in which single public buildings might be located, but as a socio-spatial whole, an ideal city-within-a-city. This process took place slowly, in phases that were conditioned by political changes. I should like to delineate those phases, indicating how each affected the museum and its meaning in the urban constellation.

The first phase was still distinctly imperial or, to stay with the metaphor of my title, the phase of the scepter. The second phase, that of ascendant liberalism, began with the positing of a spatial counterweight to the Hofburg in the Rathaus area, and ended in the compromise of the Ring. The Maria Theresien Platz with its museums can be seen as the spatial keystone of that compromise.

In 1860, two years after the emperor's rescript, the first official plan for the Ringstrasse development was released (Figure 7.2). Its visual presen-

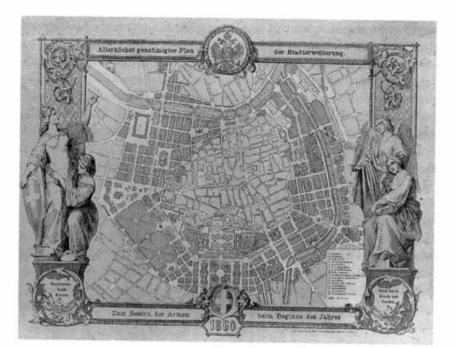


Figure 7.2. Official Announcement of Ringstrasse Plan, 1860.

tation reveals in several ways the persistence of monarchical primacy in defining the capital space. The plan is turned out of the normal orientation of the compass to create a vertical axis of Hofburg space from the Residenz to the Imperial Stables. The Heldenplatz is flanked by two proposed court buildings; the present site of the museums, by two guard and command buildings. Together, the four buildings define a Hofburg axis that in effect bisects the Ring, and serves as the salient center of the whole plan, as though drawing life to itself from the Ring on either side. That the plan showed only domestic buildings for the area adjacent to the Hofburg axis could only increase the latter's monumental impact on the whole. As for the museum, it is relegated to an area insulated by residences to the southwest. The Votivkirche is the nearest monument to the north, beyond the huge parade ground still reserved to the military. Thus the space is court space, the place for the sword is in it, and the scepter has clear primacy over the Ringstrasse, which appears only as an artery of communication, not as an organizing principle for the buildings along its course.

miweum in Contested Space

In the very year of the promulgation of this imperio-centric plan, 1860, the neo-absolutist politics upon which it was based was severely shaken. Against a background of defeat in Italy, the emperor had to introduce constitutional reforms which accorded new powers to the liberal élite, not only in the state but in the capital city. In the City Expansion Commission (Stadterweiterungskommission), the remarkable mixed commission that administered the development process, the liberal wind blew strong. The military presence in prime capital space was challenged once more. In 1864, Minister Count Schmerling reclaimed from the army the space allocated in the 1860 plan for its buildings on the present Maria Theresien Platz. By the time Francis Joseph opened the Ring formally in 1865, pressure to replace the military buildings with the museums had won the day. The interior minister and other elements in the City Expansion Commission argued for beautiful museums as opposed to utilitiarian military buildings as the fitting occupants of this most prestigious capital space. Although a plan by the influential architect, Ludwig Förster, for a single block-shaped building for all museums, both court and state, on the site, failed of approval, it won the support of the Vienna City Council. Art historian Rudolf von Eitelberger, through Count Schmerling, submitted a radical proposal for a comprehensive, nondynastic Oesterreichisches Museum or Reichsmuseum to include history, art, and science. The basic decision was soon taken: though the art and natural history museums should be court museums still, the imperial presence should manifest itself in the new capital space beyond the Burgtor not through arms, but through art.11

The competition for the design of the museums in 1866 was legendary for its bitterness, and not unaffected by the liberals' support of Theophil Hansen and Heinrich Ferstel against the more conservative championing of Moritz Löhr and Carl Hasenauer. Hansen and Ferstel both projected the museum area as an enclosed square across the Ringstrasse, thus independent of the Hofburg area, which would be terminated at the Ringstrasse. In short, the cultural buildings would have won spatial autonomy from the court. Semper and Hasenauer, by contrast, with the backing of the court bureaucracy, incorporated the museums as flanking buildings in a vastly expanded Hofburg area to form a unified Kaiserforum (Figure 7.3). In short, culture was presented as an extension of the imperial power. From the point of view of contested space, Gottfried Semper also neutralized the Ringstrasse by unifying the court and museum areas with his proposed triumphal arches that would span the Ring, thus achieving



Figure 7.3. Kaiserforum, G. Semper, 1869.

the representation of full symbolic dominance of the imperial principle over the capital's civic space—and this at the very moment when constitutional liberalism achieved ascendancy.



Parallel to the expanded Kaiserforum project and almost synchronous with its final phase in the last years of the 1860s, there began a countervailing building project to incarnate the constitutional and cultural values of newly ascendant liberalism in comparable monumental splendor.

Once more a political shift lay behind a turn in Vienna's urban planning. This time it was the defeat at Sadowa that brought a new advance of the liberal forces in both the state and the city in 1867. These pressed the claims of three institutions quintessentially associated with liberalism: the Parliament, the Rathaus, and the University. Appropriate monumental buildings for each could have been located in separate spaces anywhere in the Ringstrasse area, and during the mid-1860s much discussion and maneuvering were devoted to their separate and independent placement. It was the city government of Vienna which in 1870, after three years of pressure, won the emperor's approval for a solution which, in a single stroke, brought all three citadels of bourgeois law and rational culture together on a single site. That the site should be the parade ground, the last major parcel of glacis land in the hands of the army, lent a kind of political poignancy to the solution.

Of the three institutions most prized by the liberals, the University is the one whose history in the search for a home since 1848 most vividly illustrates the problem of politically contested space. During the decade of neo-absolutism the University dwelt under the shadow of the major role it had played in the Revolution. The Academic Legion had been the heart of insurgent Vienna's fighting force. The imperial army could neither forgive nor forget its own ignominious withdrawal in the face of the intelligentsia-in-arms. With the suppression of the Revolution, the military occupied the old University (today the Academy of Sciences) and forced the dispersion of its functions all over the city.

The minister of religion and instruction under neo-absolutism, Count Leo Thun, had, to be sure, championed the University's quest for a restoration of its autonomy. As a conservative reformer, Thun sought to domesticate the University by using the traditional English college model and by linking it more closely to the church. Accordingly, from 1853 to 1868, he and his collaborators worked to create a university quarter around the Votivkirche. Its buildings, in Gothic style, would be clustered about the church like chicks around a mother hen. The army and the emperor resisted any centralized university. As late as 1868, Count Thun's plan was reactivated, with Heinrich Ferstel authorized to draft plans for it on the Votivkirche site. The eyes of the University's own building committee, however, had strayed elsewhere: in 1867, it had already suggested the parade ground as the proper site, one large enough for a single massive building to house the whole University. It would also remove the University from the shadow of the church (although I have no evidence that the professors of the building committee said so). When at last the parade ground was freed, Ferstel was asked to design the building not in Count Thun's favored Gothic, but in the Renaissance style that symbolized to the liberal professorate the emergence of modern secular culture.13

A similar tale, though shorter, might be told for the political buildings that, with the University, would constitute the new quarter of bourgeois *Recht und Kultur*: the Parliament and the Rathaus. For our purposes, it must suffice to say that the satisfaction of all three claims came quickly and together, in those brief years of liberalism's political high-water mark, 1867–1873. The most persistent and determined agent in producing the result was the Vienna City Council. In 1867, it had pressed the University's claim to a parade ground site, but the War Ministry rejected it. In 1868, thanks to a large offer from a bank, an imperial decision released the parcel, but without specifying its uses. Public agitation be-

gan for placing the Rathaus, previously slated for a location on the southern part of the Ring, on the site.

At this point the Liberal mayor of Vienna, Kajetan Felder, produced his master stroke, one which tells us something about the prestige that the leading architects had acquired in the exciting years of building the new capital. Felder asked Friedrich Schmidt, the master of medieval civic architecture, to head a planning group for the parade ground area. Schmidt enjoyed the favor of the arch-conservative Cardinal Rauscher, for whom he had executed many church projects, but also that of the liberals for his secular Gothic architecture. 14 Schmidt's two collaborators were equally eminent architects who had been defeated in the museum competition. Theophil Hansen roughed out the Parliament building in the Classical style so prized by the liberals. Heinrich Ferstel, long experienced in the frustrating University project, returned to it in a final victorious assault. Mayor Felder, with the enthusiastic support of the City Council, presented to the emperor their proposal for the Rathaus quarter, a triumph of historical eclecticism and the most eloquent spatial expression of bourgeois power in the new capital. On April 10, 1870, the emperor agreed to turn over the parade ground for development.¹⁵

As the Rescript of 1859 had opened the way for the centering of the new capital on the expanded Hofburg axis, so his decision of 1870 created in the Rathaus quarter a countervailing spatial center of civic gravity that severely weakened the scepter's spatial primacy.

The generative element in this process of redefinition of Vienna's monumental area can be thought of as two rectangles: the Kaiserforum and the Rathaus quadrilateral. In 1870, thanks to the five years of quarreling among the planners of the Hofburg expansion, the Semper-Hasenauer Kaiserforum had only just been accepted. Truly this design would have assured, at the very moment of liberal ascendency, the emperor's long-cherished conceptual integration of Residenzstadt and Reichshauptstadt, symbolically defining the second in terms of the first. The Rathaus quadrilateral, however, although certainly not conceived as in open competition with the Kaiserforum, created near it a powerful center for an alternative cluster of political and cultural values belonging to the liberalrational sector of society. In effect if not in clear intention, it projected a Bürgerforum (Citizens' forum) to correspond to the Kaiserforum (Emperor's forum). A plan drafted by the Vienna Municipal Building Office (Stadtbauamt) envisaged that Rathaus and University would face each other across a square, as the museums were to do, with the Parliament in

the center-rear where the Rathaus stands today (Figure 7.4).¹⁶ This plan would have dramatized the interrelatedness of the values and functions of the several buildings. It would also have heightened the autonomy of the whole and freed it from the fluid magnetism of the Ringstrasse.¹⁷

This bold plan was not pursued. With the decision that each building should face the Ringstrasse, the collective, stable gravity of the square yielded its primacy to the street (Figure 7.5). Historical style differentiation reenforced further the autonomy that each building acquired as it turned its face from its neighbors to the street. The Greek of Hansen's Parliament, the Gothic of Schmidt's Rathaus, the Renaissance of Ferstel's University, the early Baroque of Semper's Burgtheater: in each case, the style chosen suited by association the function to which the monument was dedicated. This was indeed Vergangenheitsbewältigung (mastering the past) in nineteenth-century style, cultural self-definition as modern through the ingestion of a plural past. The visual pluralism of these four monuments certainly could compete for attention with the Hofburg complex, but at the price of surrendering some of its magnetic energy to the street. Thus it was that the Ring, the only tie between the individuated monuments, became the real forum of the imperial capital in its final form.

Q.11

The tension between Kaiserforum and Bürgerforum, and the form of its resolution, had its effect on the spatial signification of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. The abandonment of the arches that were to span the Ringstrasse to close the Kaiserforum weakened the museum's tie to the Hofburg. Yet the museum kept a certain independence from the Ring, for it did not face the street whose power was so strongly reenforced by the great liberal buildings to the north. Tied to neither complex, the museum thus occupied a mediating position between the monumental buildings of the dynasty and those of the liberals. This position accorded well with the museum's social function: to provide, through the traditional artistic culture it displayed, a crucial bonding element between the monarch and the new élite.

In the museum area, the most visible symbol of the political compromise that underlay this function is the statue of the Empress Maria Theresa that stands in the center of the square (Figure 7.6). The Empress's caring, motherly figure contrasts strongly with the two military

Figure 7.4. Civic Buildings Oriented to Each Other: A Civic Forum.



Figure 7.5. Civic Buildings Oriented to Ringstrasse: Parliament, Rathaus, University, Burgtheater.

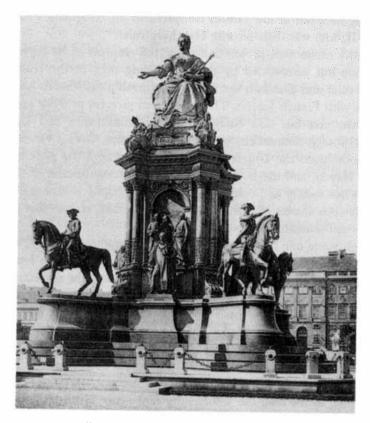


Figure 7.6. Maria Theresa Monument.

heroes whom Francis Joseph had chosen in the 1850s as focal statues of the Heldenplatz across the Ring. She stands in contrast, as well, to the figure whom the liberals chose to place before their Parliament: Pallas Athena. Lacking any heroes of their own in Austrian history, the liberals had turned to classical culture for an appropriate symbol.¹⁸

Between the military heroes of the monarch and the rational goddess of the liberal élite, Maria Theresa occupies a middle ground. The emperor himself chose her for the spot, but a liberal historian, Alfred von Arneth, developed the complex program for her monument. A former 48er, Arneth's years of imperial service as director of the State Archive had given his liberalism a conservative cast. Through a celebrated tenvolume biography of Maria Theresa, he had contributed to the rehabilitation of her very Catholic majesty for a bourgeois liberal culture that

had long held her in low esteem compared to the enlightened Emperor Joseph II, who was their favorite Habsburg ruler.¹⁹

Arneth's monument project called for the empress to be represented not alone but surrounded by the outstanding men of the realm who welded ruler and élite into the kind of partnership the liberals had come to prize with Francis Joseph. The monument pictures generals and great diplomats, yes; but also Enlightenment administrative and legal reformers: Joseph Sonnenfels, who abolished torture; Gerard van Swieten, who modernized the University. Great artists graced the pedestal, too: Gluck, Haydn, and the boy Mozart. In its contextualization of the empress in her society and culture, the rich iconography contrasts radically with previous statues of Habsburg rulers in Vienna, statues that portray them as self-contained figures of strength.

Arneth made one bold suggestion for his monument that failed of acceptance. He proposed that the empress carry no scepter in her hand, but rather a scroll containing the Pragmatic Sanction, the agreement that confirmed her, though a woman, as ruler. It symbolized legality, so prized by liberals, as the basis of royal power. That went beyond the tolerances of the court. Maria Theresa faces the Ring today with her scepter in her hand; it only rests on the Pragmatic Sanction's scroll beneath it.²⁰ The responsible committee had found the characteristic resolution of the conflict between traditional imperial and modern liberal values that, in the end, the whole Ring represents: synthesis in symbolism, compromise in fact.

By the time the Kunsthistorisches Museum opened its doors, the Ring had reached its mature character as one of Europe's most harmonious urban spaces, a magnificent fluid forum for a solid élite secure in its values and expressing them in the polysemic vocabulary of historical style architecture. The citizens and persons of culture could pursue their varied concerns without a sense of hierarchy among the different buildings of politics and culture.

In its neutrality and its equalizing power, the Ring leaves little to remind us of the history of contested space from which it had emerged. For only in troubled phases, in response to changes in social and political power, had the new capital taken form. In the fifties, the determinative, privileged element was the sword. Containment of the sword was the prerequisite to building a new capital on the glacis at all. After 1857, the scepter, even as it freed the glacis, projected an expanded Hofburg-centered order to dominate the capital. A decade later the ascendant lib-

erals generated in the Rathaus quarter their own countervailing space on the Ring. The failure to realize either the Kaiserforum or the Bürgerforum in their fullness as independent spatial entities can be read as an index of the liberalization of monarchical rule and the turning of the liberals to the monarch as the guarantor of their new-won social and cultural power.

To this bonding of tradition and modernity in cultural politics, the Museum and Maria Theresa in the square give eloquent expression. They are in a way the keystone of the completed Ringstrasse, where imperial power expresses itself in aesthetic culture, and the liberal élite, redefining Maria Theresa, honors the Baroque dynastic tradition. The sword is sheathed, the scepter shows itself in gifts of art, and the Ring absorbs conflicting claims to political primacy into the circular flow of pluralistic compromise.

NOTES

- 1. See Carl E. Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (New York, 1980), 34-62.
- 2. W. Wagner, "Die Stellungnahme der Mititärbehörden zur Wiener Stadterweiterung in den Jahren 1848–1857," in *Jahrbuch des Vereines für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 17/18 (1961–1962), 216–85.
- 3. R. Lorenz, "Politische Geschichte der Wiener Ringstrasse," in *Drei Jahrbunderte Jahre Volk*, *Staat und Reich* (Vienna, 1944), 487.
- 4. See the well-founded analysis in G. Kapner, "Ringstrassendenkmäler. Zur Geschichte der Ringstrassendenkmäler," in R. Wagner-Rieger, ed., *Die Wiener Ringstrasse*, *Bild einer Epoche* 9.1 (Vienna, Cologne, Graz, etc., 1969 et seq.), 9–14.
- 5. Lorenz, "Politische Geschichte," 489.
- 6. E. Springer, "Geschichte und Kulturleben der Wiener Ringstrasse," in Wagner-Rieger, ed., Wiener Ringstrasse, 2:85.
- 7. The most comprehensive account of the complex maneuvers of the 1850s is provided by Springer, ibid., chap. 5, passim; 310-11.
- 8. Ibid., 82-83, 135-39.
- 9. Ibid., 89, 94.
- 10. Neue Freie Presse, December 2, 1873.
- 11. Springer, "Geschichte und Kulturleben," 305-12.
- 12. The classic account of the architectural and conceptual contest over the museums is A. Lhotsky, *Die Baugeschichte der Museen und der Neuen Burg* (Vienna, 1941), especially pp. 36–92. Springer gives a condensed but often more historically insightful account of the competition in "Geschichte," 305–36. See also K. Mollig, H. Reining, and R. Wurzer, "Planung und Verwirklichung der Wiener

Ringstrassenzone," in Wagner-Rieger, ed., Wiener Ringstrasse, 3, Textband, 215-26.

- 13. N. Wibiral and R. Mikula, "Heinrich von Ferstel," in Wagner-Rieger, ed., *Wiener Ringstrasse* 8.3 (Wiesbaden, 1974), 44–47; also illustration 29. See also Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* 38–40 and notes.
- 14. A. Fenzel, "Kardinal Rauscher und Friedrich Schmidt," in Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, *Friedrich von Schmidt . . . Ein gotischer Rationalist* (Vienna, 1991), 34–39. For Schmidt's sketch of the whole complex, see ibid., 118, cat. no. 2.41.
- 15. Mollig, Reining, and Wurzer, "Planung," 211-15.
- 16. Ibid., 248 ff. There is no evidence that any of the major architects wished the buildings to face each other. Schmidt assigned his Rathaus the central position occupied by the Parliament in the Building Office plan. Hansen definitely wished his Parliament to face the Ringstrasse.
- 17. I have not included the Burgtheater in this survey because it was not included in this phase of the planning. Had it been so, it would only have increased the weight of the Rathaus quadrilateral as an independent if not countervailing spatial power to the Kaiserforum.
- 18. Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, 43.
- 19. "A. von Arneth," Neue Österreichische Biographie ab 1815, vol. 10 (Zurich, Leipzig, and Vienna, 1957), 46-60.
- 20. Kapner, "Ringstrasendenkmäler," 18-21.

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PART TWO



Clio Eclipsed: Toward Modernism in Vienna