In 1860, the liberals of Austria took their first great stride toward political power in the western portion of the Habsburg Empire and transformed the institutions of the state in accordance with the principles of constitutionalism and the cultural values of the middle class. At the same time, they assumed power over the city of Vienna. It became their political bastion, their economic capital, and the radiating center of their intellectual life. From the moment of their accession to power, the liberals began to reshape the city in their own image, and by the time they were extruded from power at the century’s close, they had largely succeeded: the face of Vienna was transformed. The center of this urban reconstruction was the Ringstrasse. A vast complex of public buildings and private dwellings, it occupied a broad belt of land separating the old inner city from its suburbs. Thanks to its stylistic homogeneity and scale, “Ringstrasse Vienna” has become a concept to Austrians, a way of summoning to mind the characteristics of an era, equivalent to the notion “Victorian” to Englishmen, “Gründerzeit” to Germans, or “Second Empire” to the French.
Toward the close of the nineteenth century, when the intellectuals of Austria began to develop doubts about the culture of liberalism in which they had been raised, the Ringstrasse became a symbolic focus of their critique. Like "Victorianism" in England, "Ringstrassenstil" became a quite general term of opprobrium by which a generation of doubting, critical, and aesthetically sensitive sons rejected their self-confident, parvenu fathers. More specifically, however, it was against the anvil of the Ringstrasse that two pioneers of modern thought about the city and its architecture, Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner, hammered out ideas of urban life and form whose influence is still at work among us. Sitte's critique has won him a place in the pantheon of communitarian urban theorists, where he is revered by such recent creative reformers as Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs. Wagner's conceptions, radically utilitarian in their basic premises, have earned him the praises of modern functionalists and their critical allies, the Pevsners and the Giedions. In their contrasting views, Sitte and Wagner brought to thought about the city the archaic and modernistic objections to nineteenth-century civilization that appeared in other areas of Austrian life. They manifested in their urban theory and spatial design two salient features of emergent twentieth-century Austrian higher culture—a sensitivity to psychic states, and a concern with the penalties as well as the possibilities of rationality as the guide of life.

I shall first consider the Ringstrasse itself as a visual expression of the values of a social class. It is important to remember, however, that there was more to municipal development than the projection of values into space and stone. The liberals who ruled Vienna put some of their most successful efforts into the undramatic technical work which made the city capable of accommodating in relative health and safety a rapidly increasing population. They developed with remarkable dispatch those public services common to the expanding modern metropolis throughout the world. The Danube was channeled to protect the city against the floods that had plagued it for centuries. The city's experts developed in the sixties a superb water supply. In 1873, with the opening of the first city hospital, the liberal municipality assumed, in the name of medical science, the traditional responsibilities which previously the church had discharged in the name of charity. A public health system banished major epidemics, though tuberculosis remained a problem in the working-class dis-
Unlike Berlin and the industrial cities of the north, expanding Vienna generally retained its Baroque commitment to open space. To be sure, parks were conceived no longer exclusively in the language of geometry but also in the physiological, organic terms favored by the nineteenth century: “Parks,” said Mayor Kajetan Felder, “are the lungs of a megalopolis.” In the provision of parks, utilities, and public services, the liberals of Vienna established a respectable record. By contrast, those features of city planning for which Vienna later became famous—the provision of low-cost housing and the social planning of urban expansion—were altogether absent in the Ringstrasse era. The planning of the Ringstrasse was controlled by the professional and the well-to-do for whose accommodation and glorification it was essentially designed. The imperial decree governing its development program exempted the rest of the city from the purview of the City Expansion Commission and thus left it to the tender mercies of the private construction industry. Public planning was based on an undifferentiated grid system, with control applied only to the height of buildings and the width of streets.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the liberal city fathers in defining and developing the public services which are the bone and muscle of the modern city, they took their greatest pride in transforming the city’s face. The new development of Vienna, by virtue of its geographical concentration, surpassed in visual impact any urban reconstruction of the nineteenth century—even that of Paris. In the new Vienna, the fathers “projected their image” no less consciously than the managers of the Chase Manhattan Bank a few years ago proclaimed their character in what they called the “soaring angularity” of their New York modular skyscraper. The practical objectives which redesigning the city might accomplish were firmly subordinated to the symbolic function of representation. Not utility but cultural self-projection dominated the Ringstrasse. The term most commonly used to describe the great program of the sixties was not “renovation” or “redevelopment,” but “beautification of

* There were two exceptions: the establishment of a single public housing project by a foundation created for Francis Joseph’s Jubilee in 1898; and a commercial project of 1912. See Hans Bobek and Elisabeth Lichtenberger, *Wien* (Graz-Cologne, 1966), pp. 56-7.
the city’s image [Verschönerung des Stadtbildes].” More economically than any other single source, the great forum built along Vienna’s Ringstrasse, with its monuments and its dwellings, gives us an iconographic index to the mind of ascendant Austrian liberalism.

THAT VIENNA should have had at its center a huge tract of open land available for modern development was, ironically, a consequence of the city’s historical backwardness. Well after other European capitals had razed their fortifications, Vienna had maintained them. The massive defense works and the broad glacis which had protected the imperial capital against the marauding Turk had long since ceased to define the city limits. Our map of 1844 shows how solid was the ring of habitation that had closed around the broad glacis (Figure 1). The inner city remained insulated from its suburbs by the vast belt of open land. Joseph II, the benevolent “people’s emperor,” developed much of the glacis as a recreational area, but the Revolution of 1848 redefined, both politically and militarily, the place of the glacis in the life of the city. The abolition of feudal political jurisdiction led to the incorporation of the suburbs fully into the city. At the same time, the liberals extracted from the emperor the right to municipal self-government after three centuries of direct imperial rule. The new municipal statute of March 6, 1850, although not fully implemented until the introduction of constitutional government for all Austria in 1860, provided a political framework for advancing civilian claims to the glacis. Behind the political pressure lay the rapid economic growth of the 1850’s, which created for the city of half-a-million both a population influx and a severe housing shortage.*

The Revolution of 1848, while issuing in increased political and economic demands for the civilian utilization of the defense zone, also revitalized its strategic importance. The enemy in question was now not a foreign invader but a revolutionary people. Through

* Between 1840 and 1870, both the population of Vienna and the number of economic enterprises doubled.
most of the 1850's, the Austrian army, smarting from having had to withdraw from Vienna in 1848, opposed plans for civilian development of the glacis. The Central Military Chancellery took as its major premise the persistence of a revolutionary threat. The imperial court must be secure against possible attacks "from the proletariat in the suburbs and outlying localities. Only the army could be relied upon to defend the imperial government," Generaladjutant Karl Grünne maintained, arguing as late as 1857 against the proposal to scrap the fortifications. In a period of "revolutionary swindle," he said, even the conservatives would remain passive in the face of "tumult."

As the 1850s progressed, economic needs proved stronger than counterrevolutionary fears in the highest councils of government. On December 20, 1857, Emperor Francis Joseph proclaimed his intention to open the military space to civilian uses, and established a City Expansion Commission to plan and execute its development. The liberal Neue Freie Presse later interpreted the symbolic import of the event in the language of fairy tale: "The imperial command broke the old circumference of stone which for many centuries kept Vienna's noble limbs imprisoned in an evil spell." Yet the author of these lines, writing in 1873 when the liberals had taken over the Ringstrasse, distorted the beginnings of the development. In fact, during the first

Figure 1. Vienna before redevelopment, 1844.
three years (1857–60), the allocation of space and especially the priorities for monumental building still expressed the values of dynastic neo-absolutism. First came a great church, the Votivkirche (1856–79)—"a monument of patriotism and of devotion of the people of Austria to the Imperial House"—built to celebrate the emperor's escape from the bullet of a Hungarian nationalist assassin. Financed by public subscription under the leadership of the royal family and the higher clergy, the Votivkirche expressed the unbreakable unity of throne and altar against what Vienna's Archbishop, Joseph Cardinal von Rauscher, called at the cornerstone-laying ceremonies "the mortally wounded tiger of Revolution."9 The fact that the Votivkirche was intended to serve simultaneously as church for the garrison of Vienna and as a Westminster Abbey for Austria's greatest men made it, in the words of the Neue Freie Presse, a symbol of the "Säbel- und Kultenregiment [the rule of the sabre and religion]."

The military for its part, although it lost the battle for the walls and fortifications, received favored treatment in the first Ringstrasse plans. To complete its chain of modernized counterinsurgency facilities, a program already well advanced by 1858, an imposing new arsenal complex and two barracks were strategically constructed near railway stations that could feed reinforcements into the capital from the provinces. Huge tracts of land adjacent to the Hofburg continued to be reserved as protective fields of fire against the suburbs.10 Finally, the military left its imprint on the Ringstrasse as a thoroughfare. With fortifications gone, Austrian army spokesmen, like their contemporary counterparts in the construction of the boulevards of Paris, favored the broadest possible street to maximize mobility for troops and to minimize barricading oppor-

* The Arsenal near the South Station was built to house three regiments and an artillery workshop in 1849–55. The architects Siccardsburg and van der Nüll participated in the work, although both had been officers in the Academic Legion, the main military force defying the Army in 1848. The Arsenal was supplemented by the sumptuous Military Museum, the first "cultural institution" built on the glacis. Its architect was Theophil Hansen, an enthusiast for the Greek Revolution who later designed the Austrian Parliament building. The largest of the barracks was the Franz-Josef Kaserne (1854–57), which was torn down at the century's end to make way for a new War Ministry, seat of the new-style bureaucratized army.
tunities for potential rebels. Hence the street was designed as a broad artery totally surrounding the inner city in order to facilitate the swift movement of men and matériel to any point of danger. Military considerations thus converged with civilian desires for an imposing boulevard to give the Ringstrasse both its circular form and its monumental scale.

Within a decade of the imperial decree of 1857, political developments had transformed the neo-absolutist régime into a constitutional monarchy. The army, defeated by France and Piedmont in 1859 and by Prussia in 1866, lost its decisive voice in the councils of state, and liberals took the helm. As a consequence, the substance and meaning of the Ringstrasse program changed, responding to the will of a new ruling class to erect a series of public buildings expressing the values of a pax liberalis. In 1860, the first leaflet presenting the development plan to the public recorded iconographically the ideology of the new sponsors (Figure 2). The meaning of the female figures flanking the map is clearly stated in the legends: on the right, “Strong Through Law and Peace” (i.e., not through military force); on the left (where the spirit of art is literally dressing her mistress, Vienna), “Embellished Through Art.”

The contrast between the old inner city and the Ring area inevitably widened as a result of the political change. The inner city was dominated architecturally by the symbols of the first and second estates: the Baroque Hofburg, residence of the emperor; the elegant palais of the aristocracy; the Gothic Cathedral of St. Stephen and a host of smaller churches scattered through the narrow streets. In the new Ringstrasse development, the third estate celebrated in architecture the triumph of constitutional Recht over imperial Macht, of secular culture over religious faith. Not palaces, garrisons, and churches, but centers of constitutional government and higher culture dominated the Ring. The art of building, used in the old city to express aristocratic grandeur and ecclesiastical pomp, now became the communal property of the citizenry, expressing the various aspects of the bourgeois cultural ideal in a series of so-called Prachtbauten (buildings of splendor).

Although the scale and grandeur of the Ring suggest the persistent

* The army pressed in vain for the street itself to be still wider than the 82 feet stipulated for it.
power of the Baroque, the spatial conception which inspired its design was original and new. Baroque planners had organized space to carry the viewer to a central focus: space served as a magnifying setting to the buildings which encompassed or dominated it. The Ringstrasse designers virtually inverted Baroque procedure, using the buildings to magnify the horizontal space. They organized all the elements in relation to a central broad avenue or corso, without architectonic containment and without visible destination. The street, polyhedral in shape, is literally the only element in the vast complex that leads an independent life, unsubordinated to any other spatial entity. Where a Baroque planner would have sought to join suburb and city—to organize vast vistas oriented toward the central, monumental features—the plan adopted in 1859, with few exceptions, suppressed the vistas in favor of stress on the circular flow. Thus the Ring cut the old center off from the new suburbs. "...[T]he inner city," wrote Ludwig von Förster, one of the chief planners, "acquired a closed and regular form by filling in its irregular edges as a seven-sided figure around which one of the most lordly promenades, the corso, could run [ziehen], and could separate the inner city from the
Rathaus, University, and Burgtheater, c. 1878.
quite independent of its neighbors' weighty presence.* Trees running along the entire length of the Ringstrasse only serve to heighten the primacy of the street and the isolation of the buildings. Vertical mass is subordinated to the flat, horizontal movement of the street. No wonder that the "ring street" gave the whole development its name.

The several functions represented in the buildings—political, educational, and cultural—are expressed in spatial organization as equivalents. Alternate centers of visual interest, they are related to each other not in any direct way but only in their lonely confrontation of the great circular artery, which carries the citizen from one building to another, as from one aspect of life to another. The public buildings float unorganized in a spatial medium whose only stabilizing element is an artery of men in motion.

The sense of isolation and unrelatedness created by the spatial placement of the buildings is accentuated by the variety of historical styles in which they were executed. In Austria as elsewhere, the triumphant middle class was assertive in its independence of the past in law and science. But whenever it strove to express its values in architecture, it retreated into history. As Förster had observed early in his career (1836), when he set out to bring the treasures of the past to the attention of modern builders in his journal, Die Bauzeitung, "... [T]he genius of the nineteenth century is unable to proceed on its own road. ... The century has no decisive color." Hence it expressed itself in the visual idiom of the past, borrowing that style whose historical associations were most appropriate to the representational purpose of a given building.

The so-called Rathaus Quarter, which I used above to illustrate the equivalency principle in the placement of buildings, also exemplifies the pluralism of architectural styles and its ideational significance. The four public buildings of this sector together form a veritable quadrilateral of Recht and Kultur. They represent as in a wind rose liberalism's value system: parliamentary government in the Reichsrat building, municipal autonomy in the Rathaus, the higher learning in the University, and dramatic art in the Burgtheater. Each building was executed in the historical style felt to be appropriate to its

* Notable exceptions to street-centered placement are the two major museums, of Art History and Natural History, which face each other across a space conceived by its planners as a square (see page 101).
function. Thus to evoke its origins as a free medieval commune, now reborn after a long night of absolutist rule, liberal Vienna built its Rathaus in massive Gothic (Figure 4). The Burgtheater, housing the traditional queen of Austria’s arts (Figure 5), was conceived in early Baroque style, commemorating the era in which theater first joined together cleric, courtier, and commoner in a shared aesthetic enthusiasm. On the grand staircase within, one of the youngest masters of Ringstrasse painting, Gustav Klimt, won his spurs in decorating the ceiling with canvases depicting the history of the theater.* Like the Opera and the Museum of Art History, the Burgtheater provided a meeting ground for the old aristocratic and new bourgeois élites, where differences of caste and politics could be, if not expunged, at

* See pages 209–11.
least attenuated by a shared aesthetic culture. The imperial court (Hof) could comfortably extend itself to the newly widened public in the institutes of the performing arts—the Hofburgtheater, Hofoper, Hofmuseen—while the new bourgeoisie could eagerly absorb traditional culture in those arts without surrendering its proud sense of separateness in religion, politics, and science.

The Renaissance-style University, in contrast to the Burgtheater, was an unequivocal symbol of liberal culture. Accordingly, it had long to wait to realize its claims to a significant building site on the Ringstrasse. As the citadel of secular rationalism, the University was the last to win recognition from the diehard forces of the Old Right, and suffered first from the rise of a populist, anti-Semitic New Right. The siting of the University and even its architectural style occasioned years of conflict within the government and among its shifting constituent social interest groups. For years the University dwelt under the shadow of its role in the Revolution of 1848. The

Figure 5. Hofburgtheater (Gottfried Semper and Carl Hasenauer, architects), 1874–88.
Academic Legion, composed of faculty and students of the University and other institutions of higher learning, had been the heart of revolutionary Vienna's organized fighting force. The imperial army could neither forget nor forgive its own ignominious withdrawal in the face of the intelligentsia-in-arms. After the suppression of the revolution, the military occupied the old University in the inner city, and forced the dispersion of its functions in buildings scattered through the outer districts. On assuming office in July 1849, the aristocratic, pious, but enlightened conservative Minister of Religion and Instruction, Count Leo Thun, had sought both to modernize and to domesticate the University, to restore its autonomy yet to link it more closely to throne and altar. He strove in vain against the army and other political objectors to bringing the University out of its punitive diaspora. From 1853 to 1868, Thun and his collaborators worked to create a new English- and Gothic-style University quarter which would be clustered around the Votivkirche—to no avail.\footnote{15}

The University problem was resolved only when the liberals came to power. At that time, the three public institutions most important to the liberals—University, Parliament, and Rathaus—were still housed in quarters either temporary or inadequate, while the army held on to the parade ground, the last open tract (over 500 acres) of the old glacis. Immediately after its formation in 1868, the new Bürgerministerium (Citizens' Ministry) petitioned the emperor for that plot, without success. Mayor Kajetan Felder finally broke the deadlock by setting up a commission consisting of the three architects for Parliament, Rathaus, and University to draw site plans to accommodate all three buildings on the parade ground. In April 1870, with the enthusiastic support of the liberal-dominated city council, Felder won the emperor's approval for the triple building plan. Against a large compensatory payment from the City Expansion Fund, the army finally surrendered its champ de Mars to the champions of liberal politics and learning.\footnote{16}

The political change that made possible the location of the University in a place of highest honor on the Ringstrasse was reflected also in the form and style of the building itself. Count Thun's plans for a medievalizing cité universitaire, with Gothic buildings huddled about the Votivkirche like chicks around a mother hen, faded with the neo-absolutist politics that had given them birth. The University
now took the form of an independent building, massive in feeling and monumental in scale. Not Gothic, but Renaissance was the style chosen for it, to proclaim the historical affiliation between modern, rational culture and the revival of secular learning after the long night of medieval superstition.

Its designer, Heinrich Ferstel (1828–1883), a Vicar of Bray even among the politically flexible architects of the day, commanded all the varieties of historical “style-architecture,” as it was called, ready to meet the changes in preference that accompanied changes in political power. The son of a banker, Ferstel had had his youthful moment as a revolutionary in the Academic Legion in 1848, but soon retrieved this blighted start as architect for the Bohemian aristocracy in the conservative fifties. With the patronage of one of these aristocrats, Count Thun, Ferstel soared to fame as architect of the Votivkirche. But when the liberal phase of University planning finally began, Ferstel was commissioned to design a building in Renaissance style. He went to the cradle of modern humanist learning, Italy, to study the universities of Padua, Genoa, Bologna, and Rome. To be sure, certain natural scientists objected to Ferstel’s seeking to outdo in his imposing structure the models of the Renaissance past. Those venerable buildings, their petition ran, did not serve the purpose of furthering the natural sciences. These flowered elsewhere—in the universities of Berlin and Munich, the Collège de France, the University of London. In their simple buildings, “better suited to sober requirements . . . the exact sciences can feel comfortable.” But even these critics advanced their functional views somewhat apologetically, accommodating themselves in the end to the prevailing emphasis on representational considerations: “When everyone is marvelling at the style of the Italian universities, then surely we shall gain great glory if we outdo them.” Renaissance thus won the day as the proper style for Vienna’s monumental center of liberal learning (Figure 6).

Perhaps the most imposing building in the quadrilateral of Recht and Kultur was the Reichsrat or Parliament (Figure 7). Its Danish architect, Theophil Hansen (1813–1891), built five of the public buildings in the Ringstrasse complex,* but it was on the Parliament

that he lavished his greatest effort. He selected the style he most revered—the classical Greek—to dress the exterior of the building, even though its articulated, blocklike volumes had greater affinity with the Baroque. A true Philhellen, Hansen believed that his "noble, classical forms would produce with irresistible force an edifying and idealizing effect on the representatives of the people." As in the case of the University, the plans for the form, style, and location of the Parliament changed as the power of the liberals grew. At first the two houses of the legislature were to be in separate buildings executed in different styles. In his original plans Hansen projected the House of Lords in classical Greek, the "nobler" style. For the House of Representatives, he contemplated Roman Renaissance. But all plans were suspended with the Austro-Prussian War and the ensuing internal crisis in 1866. When the smoke cleared and a more liberal constitution was established, it was decided in 1869 to unite the two houses in "a single monumental building of splendor

Figure 6. University (Heinrich Ferstel, architect), 1873–84.
[Prachtbau]," with a wing for each House. A shared central hall, shared reception rooms for the presidents of both chambers, and the adoption of the "nobler" Greek style for the whole symbolized the hoped-for parliamentary integration of peers and people. No expense was spared to provide the richest materials for the execution of Hansen's sumptuous plans.

The liberation of the parade ground from the army also gave the Parliament a site befitting its new political importance. Instead of the modest location originally contemplated, the building now assumed

* On the present Schillerplatz.

Figure 7. Reichsrat (Parliament) (Theophil Hansen, architect), 1874–83.
prime Ringstrasse frontage, where it could directly face the Hofburg across a small park. Hansen so designed the building as to create every possible illusion of height, as Figure 7 shows. He placed the main entrance to the Parliament building on the second story within an imposing columned porch, and constructed a wide ramp running up to it from the ground level for vehicles. The vigorous ascending diagonal line of the ramp imparts to the massive, rough-textured ground floor the character of a masoned acropolis on which the polished classic upper stories rest. Yet, however ingenious the illusion achieved, the temple of Recht did not secure the effect of dominating its environment that its creator seems to have wished for it.

The statuary gracing the ramp betrayed the degree to which Austrian parliamentary liberalism sensed its lack of anchorage in the past. Having no past, it had no political heroes of its own to memorialize in sculpture. It borrowed a pair of “tamers of horses” from Rome’s Capitol Hill to guard the entrance to the ramp. Along the ramp itself were placed the figures of eight classical historians—Thucydides, Polybius, and other worthies. Where historical tradition was lacking, historical erudition had thus to fill the void. Finally, Athena was chosen as central symbol to stand at the front of the new building (Figure 8). Here myth stepped in where history failed to serve. The Austrian parliamentarians did not gravitate toward a figure as freighted with a revolutionary past as Liberty. Athena, protectrix of the polis, goddess of wisdom, was a safer symbol. She was an appropriate deity, too, to represent the liberal unity of politics and rational culture, a unity expressed in the oft-repeated Enlightenment slogan, “Wissen macht frei” (Knowledge makes [us] free). Despite her grand scale, Athena is no more able to dominate the scene than Hansen’s Reichsrat. She stares stonily across the windswept center of life: the Ringstrasse itself.*

The primacy of the stylistically imposing over the functionally useful, which is present even in the well-designed Parliament building, did not always appeal to the practical men who sat on the building committees. In 1867, when the architects Ferstel and Hansen submitted plans for the museums of Art History and

* Kundmann’s statue of Athena, though a part of Hansen’s plan, was erected only in 1901, nearly twenty years after the completion of the building, and long after the spirit of rationality had abandoned the Reichsrat.
Natural History that provided inadequate interior space in the interest of the facades, one of the committee members countered by drawing an engineer's sketch of "a functional structure [Nutzbau], with a usable floor plan and an unusable facade." A new architect, Gottfried Semper, who advocated in principle the unity of utility and splendor, had to be brought in from Germany to reconcile the conflicting demands.²¹ Interestingly enough, it was only in urban building that the bourgeois fathers felt impelled to assert the primacy

Figure 8. Athena fountain before the Parliament (Theophil Hansen and Karl Kundmann), 1896–1902.
of the aesthetic. In the countryside, they felt no need to screen their businesslike identity. Thus when the city councilmen had to select a style for the Baden aqueduct of the new Vienna water supply system, they rejected a suggestion for “something with decoration [etwas mit Schmuck].” Instead, they followed the advice of one of the architects, who averred that for such a practical structure in the countryside, there was only one appropriate style, “which is called the style of Adam; namely, naked and strong.”22 In the city, such a baring of muscle would have been considered gross. There the truth of industrial and commercial society had to be screened in the decent draperies of pre-industrial artistic styles. Science and law were modern truth, but beauty came from history.

Taken as a whole, the monumental buildings of the Ringstrasse expressed well the highest values of regnant liberal culture. On the remnants of a champ de Mars its votaries had reared the political institutions of a constitutional state, the schools to educate the élite of a free people, and the museums and theaters to bring to all the culture that would redeem the novi homines from their lowly origins. If entry into the old aristocracy of the genealogical table was difficult, the aristocracy of the spirit was theoretically open to everyone through the new cultural institutions. They helped forge the link with the older culture and the imperial tradition, to strengthen that “second society,” sometimes called “the mezzanine,” where the bourgeois on the way up met the aristocrats willing to accommodate to new forms of social and economic power, a mezzanine where victory and defeat were transmuted into social compromise and cultural synthesis.

The contemporary liberal historian Heinrich Friedjung interpreted the Ringstrasse development as a whole as a redeemed pledge of history, the realization of the labors and sufferings of generations of ordinary Viennese burghers, whose buried wealth and talent were finally exhumed in the late nineteenth century “like huge coal beds lying under the earth.” “In the liberal epoch,” Friedjung wrote, “power passed, at least in part, to the bourgeoisie; and in no area did this attain fuller and purer life than in the reconstruction of Vienna.”23

One young provincial, Adolf Hitler, who came to Vienna because, as he said, he “wanted to be something,” fell under the Ringstrasse’s spell no less than Friedjung: “From morning until late
at night,” he wrote of his first visit, “I ran from one object of interest to another, but it was always the buildings that held my primary interest. For hours I could stand in front of the Opera, for hours I could gaze at the Parliament; the whole Ring Boulevard seemed to me like an enchantment out of ‘The Thousand-and-One Nights.’”

As an aspiring artist and architect, Hitler soon learned in frustration that the magical world of Recht and Kultur was not easy to penetrate. Three decades later he would return to the Ring as the conqueror of all it stood for.

II

The extraordinary array of monumental buildings in the Ringstrasse complex can easily obscure the fact that large apartment houses occupied most of the building space. The ingenuity of the City Expansion Commission consisted precisely in harnessing the private sector to create the financial basis for public construction. The proceeds of the sale of land went into a City Expansion Fund (Staderweiterungsfond), which in turn defrayed the cost of streets, parks, and, in considerable part, of the public edifices.

The authorities manifested complete confidence in private enterprise to produce the desired financial results, and accordingly encouraged rather than constrained speculation in the released properties. The acute housing need of the inner city in the 1850's provided an appealing economic argument for such a course. Despite the protests of the property owners of the inner city, who feared the competition of vast new housing construction, the Expansion Commission operated on the principle that the most lucrative exploitation of the land would produce the best results for the community. The Commission defined its aims, of course, not in terms of the needs of the low-income groups for housing, or even in terms of urban economic development as a whole, but simply in terms of the representative public buildings and public spaces of the Ringstrasse. Building controls for the residential sector were limited as to height, building line, and to some extent land parcelization. For the rest, the

* Hitler's close, personal, and often perceptive criticism of the Ringstrasse makes clear its power and vitality as symbol of a way of life.
market determined the results. And "the market" meant the intersection of the economic interests and cultural values of the well-to-do.

The urban geographer Elisabeth Lichtenberger has made an intensive study of the Ringstrasse's social and economic structure which, taken together with Renate Wagner-Rieger's researches on Ringstrasse architecture, makes it possible for us to understand the habitat that the new Viennese ascendency class constructed for itself in the half-century after 1860. Both spatial organization and aesthetic style reveal the needs and aspirations of the builders and their clientele.

The fundamental residential building was the apartment house. Four to six stories high, the normal multiple-unit dwelling rarely contained more than sixteen units.26 The formal model for this type of building was the Adelspalais (aristocratic palace) of the Baroque era, of which many fine examples existed in Vienna's inner city. Adapted to the needs of the new Ringstrasse élite, the Adelspalais became, in the language of the day, a Mietpalast (rent-palace) or Wohnpalast (roughly translated, an apartment palace).* It was also called, from the viewpoint of the investor rather than the tenant, a Zinspalast (an interest-bearing palace). Plebeian in relation to the Adelspalais, the Mietpalast was aristocratic in relation to the Mietkaserne (rent-barracks), the monotonous multi-story tenements that sprang up simultaneously in Vienna's outer districts to house the working class.27 Both types of building proclaimed in their rectangular forms and ample dimensions their affiliation to Baroque and classical progenitors in the inner city: the bourgeois Mietpalast to the noble's palais; the working-class Mietkaserne to the imperial soldiers' barracks. Neither the upwardly mobile new men of wealth nor the downwardly mobile artisans who were entering the army of industrial workers retained their traditional forms of housing, which, whether single or multiple, had been at once residence and workplace for both master and men.28 Nineteenth-century urban life gradually separated living and labor, residence from shop or office; the apartment building reflected the change. The Ringstrasse buildings marked

* The word Palast used alone signified not only the grand one-family house, but also imposing clubs, organizational buildings, and even warehouses of a certain grandeur. Cf. Renate Wagner-Rieger, Wiens Architektur im 19. Jahrhundert (Vienna, 1970), pp. 205-6.
a transitional stage in this development. While still integrating commercial space with housing in the pseudo-palace that was the Mietpalast, the commercial part was seldom the workplace of those who lived in the building.

When the question of housing patterns first opened up for the Ringstrasse planners, some of them saw an opportunity to rectify the damage they felt that history had done in forcing the population into concentrated housing. *How Should Vienna Build?* Under that title, a contemporary pamphlet addressed the question confronting the ruling élite. In the old city the predominance of multiple-unit dwellings for the middle class had been imposed by increasing population growth. The single-family dwelling now found two prominent champions, the authors of the pamphlet. They were Rudolf von Eitelberger, the University’s leading art historian, and Heinrich Ferstel, whom we have already encountered as architect of the Votivkirche, the University, and other major Ringstrasse buildings. Both men were romantic historicists and both were, like so many Austrian liberals, Anglophiles. Ferstel, inspired by travels in England and the Low Countries in 1851, pressed the superior merits of the English semi-detached house, with its small private garden, for the Ringstrasse development. But the English town house, especially in its nineteenth-century incarnation, was a pure dwelling. A product as well as a symptom of the modern division of labor, which concentrated work in specialized buildings and even in separate districts, the English upper-middle-class residence no longer served as the place of work. When the two Austrian critics advocated the English house for the Ringstrasse, however, they adapted it to an earlier lifestyle: that of the prosperous artisan or merchant of early capitalism, whose home was also his workplace. Eitelberger’s and Ferstel’s model house would contain, in a quite un-modern and un-English way, store or office on the ground floor, living quarters for the family on the second floor, workshops and quarters for the servants and workers on the upper stories. For those more modern bourgeois families for whom residence was separated from workplace, Eitelberger and Ferstel proposed a house with separate apartment units, one to a floor. This so-called *Beamtenhaus* (in Austria the state official was indeed the forerunner of the business executive) still maintained the scale of their medievalizing burgher-house, in the interest of aesthetic homogeneity. The conception of the middle
class that emerges from these housing designs reflects the slow pace of Austrian capitalist development and the social archaism which consequently marked some of the most vigorous artistic spokesmen of the middle class.

The English or patrician town-house did not prevail in the Ringstrasse developers’ councils. It satisfied neither the demand for maximum land use nor the yen for the symbols of aristocratic station. The dwellers of Vienna’s inner city had been accustomed by Baroque tradition to the Miethaus. The problem was not to supersede this but to exalt it. The new Viennese middle-class man aspired to be not so much a patrician as a nobleman, in his outward appearance even if not in his inner values. The Ringstrasse Mietpalast as a building type bore the stamp, with all its contradictions, of the Austrian bourgeois-aristocratic rapprochement.

The decision to sell the land in lots modeled not on the small parcel size prevalent in inner city and suburb, but on that of the traditional palais, effectively sealed the fate of the English house idea. Although a few new imposing palais were built on these lots as individual residences by the nobility of blood or wealth, most of the buildings were conceived as multiple-family dwellings, whose “aristocratic” character was established first and foremost by their facades. While the lower floor, often heavily rusticated, was let for commercial use, the second floor contained the most spacious apartment(s), and bore the name of Nobelétage or Nobelstock (from Italian usage: piano nobile). Sometimes the third floor duplicated the floor plan of the Nobelstock, sometimes it was further subdivided into smaller apartments. Vertical differentiation of the facade by height of window, richness of ornamentation, pillars, and so on, reflected to some extent the size and lavishness of the apartments within: the higher the floor, the more numerous and the smaller the living units. Yet the so-called ennoblement (Nobilitierung) of the facade was frequently deceptive. The number and deployment of the apartments in the interior space, as Wagner-Rieger has pointed out, was a matter of consumer demand and speculator’s will.

In the first building period of the Ringstrasse, 1861–65, the overriding need for middle-income housing generated a tendency toward smaller, uniform units, to which corresponded a certain classical uniformity in the facade. The Kärntner Ring shows this tendency (Figure 9). In the second wave of building, 1868–73, differentiation
predominated in both facade and interior, proclaiming alike the fact of stratification within Ringstrasse society and the aspirations of its members. In the Reichsratsstrasse, an exclusive street behind the Parliament, the laminated facade reached its zenith (Figure 10). Architects developed floor plans placing as many apartments as possible at right angles to the street in order to distribute the prestigious blessings of facade windows and thus maximize rental values.32 “Ennobling” features that increased the rental yield did not have to be located in the individual apartment units. Imposing stairwells (Figure 11) and large vestibules (Figure 12) became favored de-
vices adapted from palace architecture to the apartment house. These features, of course, were also used for grandiosity in public buildings—one thinks of the “Imperial Stairway” (Kaiserstiege) in the Opera, or the two whole wings devoted solely to lavishly decorated stairways in the Burgtheater, one for the court, one for the public (see Essay V, Figure 33). In the apartment buildings with strong vertical differentiation, the master stairway (Herrschaftsstiege) might go only as high as the Nobelstock, or perhaps one higher, with simple stairs serving the upper stories. As in the broad streets of the Ring area, so in the interior of its buildings (both

Figure 10. Reichsratsstrasse.
public and private communications space was squanderously magnified to produce a sense of grandeur.

As a residential area, for both buyers and tenants, the Ringstrasse

Figure 11. Stairwell in Kärntner Ring No. 14, 1863-5.
scored a stunning success. Until the fall of the monarchy—and notwithstanding the development of villa districts in the suburbs—the Ringstrasse retained its magnetic power for all elements of

Figure 12. Vestibule in Reichstrasse No. 7, 1883.
Vienna’s élite: aristocratic, commercial, bureaucratic, and professional. The highest strata of society not only resided in the Ring area but, with surprising frequency, owned the buildings in which they lived. For the Ringstrasse apartments, although generally built by development companies, were prized as among the most secure and lucrative private investments. To maximize their attractiveness, the state and city waived property taxes for thirty years. The high aristocrat, the merchant, the widow of fixed income, or the doctor who could afford it, were all drawn to buying an apartment building, living in one of its units, and earning income from the rest. In the Ringstrasse house, social desirability and profitability thus reinforced each other.

Great ingenuity went into satisfying the demand for the maximum income-producing grandeur at reasonable cost. The development companies purchased parcels of a whole block. The best architects—August von Siccardsburg and Eduard van der Nüll of the Opera, Theophil Hansen of the Parliament—were engaged to devote their skills to maximum land use. Covering the whole block with a single building whose very scale and proportions proclaimed grandeur, they employed stairwells and courtyards to achieve rhetorical impact without consuming too much space in relation to the actual dwelling units. But to attract individual investors smaller units were necessary. Hansen solved this problem for one development company, the Allgemeine Oesterreichische Baugesellschaft, with a kind of condominium, the Gruppenzinshaus (Figure 13). Hansen designed his block-size building in such a way that it could be divided into eight multiple-dwelling entities, each to be sold to a separate owner (Figure 14). By sharing the interior court and a vast, palatial facade, and by using uniform entry designs, each owner could benefit from a grandeur that would have been prohibitively expensive for individually designed units of the size he purchased. When designing neighboring buildings for different clients, the architects sometimes tuned their designs to each other to achieve not only economies but also the grandeur that stylistic homogeneity in sill-lines, floor-lines, and even ornament could produce.

The felicitous combination of prestige and profit in individually owned rent-palaces reflected one of the major social tendencies of the liberal era: the rapprochement of aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The drive toward integration did not always come from below.
Figure 13. Gruppenzinsbaus (apartment building) (Theophil Hansen, architect), 1870.

Figure 14. Floor plan of the Gruppenzinsbaus.
Indeed, the nobility of both wealth and lineage were among the first heavy investors in Ringstrasse housing in the 1860's. This highest social stratum developed a virtual quarter of its own, centering on the spacious Schwarzenbergplatz (Figure 15). There its members, such as Archduke Ludwig Victor and the banker Freiherr von Wertheim,* owned almost half the houses. The aristocrats were not merely absentee landlords; half of them lived in the palace-like rental houses they had built. While the titled nobility of all kinds also owned much property everywhere on the Ring as late as 1914 (about one-third of all the privately owned houses), only in the Schwarzenberg Quarter did they tend to reside in the buildings they owned.97

Within the middle class, the textile manufacturers composed the largest group of resident owners concentrated in a single neighborhood, occupation ally defined. What the Schwarzenberg Quarter was for the aristocracy, the Textile Quarter was for the bourgeoisie: an area of visible pre-eminence. The textile industry was well into

*Ferstel built the palaces of both these clients, with interesting variations in internal lay-out accommodating to the persistent difference in life-styles of old nobility and financial aristocracy. See Norbert Wibiral and Renata Mikula, Heinrich von Ferstel, in Renate Wagner-Rieger, ed., Die Wiener Ringstrasse, VIII, iii, 76–85.

Figure 15.
Schwarzenbergplatz.
the process of modernization in the sixties when the Ringstrasse development began. Yet it had strong ties with the past. Until the twentieth century, textile firms in Austria were not anonymous
corporations, but family firms headed by individual entrepreneurs. While manufacturing was carried on largely in the provinces, especially in Bohemia and Moravia, management remained centered in the capital. The ancient clothmakers’ quarter of the inner city simply spilled over into the northeast sector of the Ringstrasse to become the new Textile Quarter. There the textile entrepreneurs built houses which united residence and workplace in the customary way (Figure 16). On the ground floor and sometimes on the mezzanine was the company office. On the Nobélétage the owner and his family resided. The top floors, when not used for further office or warehouse space, were rented out. After the nobility, the textile manufacturers belonged to the group with the highest ratio of home owners to tenants in the Ringstrasse area. In general, of course, it was only the most prosperous firms whose owners could afford headquarters in the Ringstrasse development. Two-thirds of the 125 enterprises represented in the area employed over 500 persons; two-fifths, over 1,000.

There were other business enterprises scattered in the Ring, but their offices

Figure 16.
Concordiaplatz.
tended to be accommodated in buildings designed as multiple-unit dwellings. By the time the large bureaucratized company began to assert its need for a specially designed building-type, the Ringstrasse was virtually complete and the dominance of the residential Mietpalast established. New offices could be accommodated only by renovation. As late as 1914, only 72 of the Ringstrasse's 478
privately owned buildings were in the hands of corporate owners, and of these only 27 had their business in the houses they owned. Here too, the Ring development showed itself a creature of the era of individualism. The dwellings located over the businesses subordinated them, absorbing them visually into their facades. Commercial needs were not permitted to dominate the face of the residential blocks or the social function of representation which the buildings had been designed to satisfy.

While the Textile Quarter and the area around the Schwarzenbergplatz bore rather prominent class marks, most of the Ringstrasse neighborhoods blended the fluid strata of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie. As one passes clockwise along the Ring from the Schwarzenbergplatz to the Opera district, the “second society”—that fusion of cultivated aristocratic, rentier, bureaucratic, and business élite—took over, while the presence of the high nobility diminished. Proceeding still further to the area between the museums and the University, one entered the classic zone of the Grossbürgerstum, the Rathaus Quarter. Here dwelt the strongest social pillars of ascendant liberalism, as the dignified personages strolling on the Reichsratsstrasse suggest (Figure 10) and the statistics demonstrate. Financial and business leaders, rentiers, university professors, and the largest number of high officials of government and business to be found in any quarter lived here. The cluster of monumental buildings of the new order in politics and culture—Reichsrat and Rathaus, museums and Burgtheater, the University—served as a magnet to draw the ruling élite to reside in their precincts, just as the imperial Hofburg in the old city had earlier attracted the nobility to settle nearby.

The apartment houses of the Rathaus Quarter, though built to a scale reminiscent of St. Petersburg, achieve a strong collective dignity despite their individual pomposity. The Reichsratsstrasse, lying behind Hansen’s Parliament and leading to the Rathaus (Figure 10), seems almost like a bourgeois answer to the old aristocratic Herrengasse leading to the square before the Hofburg (Figure 17). The facades of the individual Reichsratsstrasse apartment buildings, though highly individuated in their heavy neo-Renaissance facades, are adjusted to each other through sills, rustication, and scale of fenestration to produce a homogeneous street vista with sight lines to the great public buildings, the Rathaus and Votivkirche. Like the
Herrengasse, the Reichsratsstrasse establishes a firm sense of a street of habitations. This is in contrast to the Ringstrasse itself, which dwarfs the buildings both by its width in relation to their height and by the force of its horizontal thrust. Finally, the Rathaus Quarter architects muted the commercialism of their rental palaces by the most discreet accommodation of the shops and offices on the ground
floor. Whether by concealing business or store fronts beneath costly arcades in the manner of the rue de Rivoli in Paris, or by simply avoiding prominent signs, the designers assured an elegance rare even in the Ringstrasse area. While not as imposing as the Schwarzenbergplatz with its vast Baroque square and its fully exposed block buildings, the Rathaus Quarter achieved the sense of opulent dignity to which the élite of the liberal era aspired. Its residential buildings provided a fitting environmental setting for the confidently assertive monumental public edifices that were the jewels in liberal Vienna’s Ring.

III

If the Ringstrasse embodied in stone and space a cluster of social values, those who criticized it inevitably addressed themselves to more than purely architectural questions. Aesthetic criticism had its anchorage in broader social issues and attitudes. Those who perceived dissonances in the relationship between style and function in the Ringstrasse were in fact raising a wider question, a question of the relationship between cultural aspiration and social content in a liberal bourgeois society. But the discrepancy between style and function could be approached from either side. Camillo Sitte took seriously the historical-aesthetic aspirations of the Ringstrasse builders, and criticized their betrayal of the tradition to the exigencies of modern life. Otto Wagner launched his attack from the opposite point of view, denouncing the masking of modernity and its functions behind the stylistic screens of history. Thus in the battle of the books around the Ringstrasse, both ancients and moderns attacked the synthesis of the mid-century city builders. Sitte’s archaism and Wagner’s functional futurism both fed a new aesthetic of city building in which social aims were influenced by psychological considerations.

In his major work, Der Städtebau (City Building) (1889), Sitte set forth the basic critique of the modern city from the point of view of the ancients, using the Ringstrasse as a negative model. Sitte called himself a “lawyer for the artistic side,” aiming at “a modus vivendi” with the modern system of city building. This self-