The Architecture of Absolutism

Putting all this into the fewest possible words, we have seen that the 17th century bequeathed the Baroque to the 18th, but that the Baroque was then assaulted from the outside by radical theories of a rational kind and eroded from the inside by mutations of its own nature. Let us now turn to some of the buildings in which these processes are seen to be at work. First, palaces.

Three royal palaces: Vienna, Stockholm and Berlin

In 1700, three great royal palaces were being built – in Vienna, Stockholm and Berlin. If we glance at the incentives behind these, and consider the architectural results, we shall understand something of the nature of palace-building in the 18th century. Take Vienna first. Under the Emperor Leopold I the city finally disposed of the Ottoman menace and after the Relief of Vienna in 1683 there was a surge of optimism and national consciousness at once reflected in building activity. The two grand criteria for the builders were Paris and Rome and by 1691 a Viennese writer was boasting that the city surpassed the first and at least equalled the second. In 1695 the imperial palace of Schönbrunn was begun. It was outside the city – a Viennese Versailles – and the clear intention was to invest the imperial dignity with a symbol no less striking than Versailles. The architect was J. B. Fischer von Erlach, the son of a mason-sculptor and himself first a sculptor, who had spent twelve years in Italy. A clue to his attitude and to the atmosphere in which he worked is given by the remarkable book which he published towards the end of his life, the 

Entwurf einer historischen Architektur (1721). It is a pictorial history of the world's architecture containing besides reconstructions of the seven wonders

9 Staircase of the Palace of Caserta, near Naples, 1751–74, by Luigi Vanvitelli (for plan see pl. 32). Staircases came into their own with the Baroque, consuming extravagant quantities of space for the sake of sheer architectural display.
Schoenbrunn, the Viennese Versailles, was begun in 1692, raising the Emperor Leopold to equality with Louis XIV. His architect was J. B. Fischer von Erlach, and it was to Bernini that he turned for inspiration. The garden front, seen here in a painting by Bellozzo of 1739, was altered in 1744–49, but the long parade of pilasters is Fischer's. In the background is the city of Vienna, with Fischer's Karlskirche (pl. 34, 35) on the right. In 1724 Fischer had published a series of engravings to illustrate the history of world architecture, Entwurf einer historischen Architekton, though his purpose was 'to inspire the artist rather than inform the scholar'. This view of Nero's Golden House in Rome (right) is close to Schoenbrunn, and would have been closer had his original plans been realized.
Berlin may well owe something to the Stockholm palace. Here, the incentive was the ambition of the Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick III, to acquire the style of King. He did so, in 1701, as Frederick I, King of Prussia. The building of a Louvre was a desirable preliminary. For this he employed Andreas Schlüter, a sculptor-architect of genius whose origins and early life in Warsaw are obscure. Schlüter planned a huge rectangle consisting of two courts, longer than the Louvre though not as wide (but exactly the width of Stockholm). He only succeeded in building one court before his dismissal as a result of the collapse of a too ambitious tower. The Berlin palace is no more; it was deliberately destroyed for political reasons (the reasons, in another context, for which it was built) in 1945.

With these three palaces—Vienna, Stockholm, Berlin—it is instructive to compare a palace that was never built. In 1698 the old Palace of Whitehall in London was (like the old Castle in Stockholm in the previous year) destroyed by fire. Immediately, the King's surveyor, Sir Christopher Wren, prepared plans for a new palace covering the whole site and incorporating the Banqueting House of Inigo Jones, which had survived. That the palace was never built is not surprising: absolutism in England was extinct. But the plans remain as a project of extraordinary originality—less accomplished, to be sure, than Fischer or Tessin or Schlüter, but wonderfully expressive in their dramatic articulation. As at Stockholm, and to some extent at Berlin, the influence of Gian Lorenzo Bernini shines through.

The Courts of Germany

These three—or, counting Whitehall, four—royal palaces conceived at the turn of the century introduce an age of palace-building lasting for fifty years. Always it is Paris and Rome which supply the basic concepts (and sometimes, indeed, the architects) but in the German-speaking lands there emerged a few men of outstanding genius who conducted the Baroque idea into new and original paths. Three of these men were born within a few years of each other. Mathaeus Daniel Poppelmann, a Westphalian who came to Dresden, was born in 1662. Johann Lukas von Hildebrandt of Vienna was born in 1663 and so was Johann Dietzenhofer, one of a family of architects in Prague who came to Bavaria and Franconia. If we seek names to set
beside these outside central Europe we find in Italy nobody and in France only Germain Boffrand, born in 1667, and he was almost wholly integrated in the Mansart tradition; but if we cast our net as wide as England there are Sir John Vanbrugh, born in 1664, and his collaborator, Nicholas Hawksmoor, born in 1661, who in spirit and even sometimes in form are singularly close to their German and Austrian contemporaries.

Of these names, Hildebrandt's becomes first the important one. He was an architect of a new type. The son of a German captain in the Genoese army he had no craft background but became a pupil of Carlo Fontana in Rome and studied military engineering. His great work is the Upper Belvedere built for Prince Eugene in 1721–22. Hildebrandt followed Fischer in many things but not in his romantic attachment to history. He was very much a contemporary designer, rarely using the conventional orders and achieving his effects by brilliant play with Baroque and Mannerist ornaments he had seen in Genoa and Turin. Then, Hildebrandt's Baroque dissolves swiftly into Rococo. His ornaments become the substance, as they do in the French Rococo of Oppenordt. The staircase at the Belvedere has no orders. The piers of the lower hall are crouching giants; the vault over the stair itself rises from 'terms' with human torsos; and the lines of the structure swim into a free play of plaster relief ornament. The exterior is necessarily more rigid but the glamorous modelling of every part exorcizes the rigidity of convention. Hildebrandt invented the Austrian Baroque-Rococo equation and it is seen in the Belvedere in full maturity.

Hildebrandt's work leads us easily to that of Pöppelmann and to his fantastic performance in the Zwinger at Dresden. Plans for a palace for Augustus the Strong, challenging Stockholm and Berlin, were made soon after he came to the electoral throne of Saxony in 1694. But wars delayed the project till 1709. By then Pöppelmann had taken over. He was sent on a study trip to Vienna and Rome in 1710 and the building of the Zwinger proceeded; the Kronentor was built in 1713 and the Wall-pavilion begun in 1716. The Zwinger is only part of a palace and a subsidiary part at that, its sole purpose being as a theatre for tournaments with a 'grand-stand' (the Wall-pavilion) and a ceremonial gateway (the Kronentor). But there is probably no building in
Pommersfelden was built for an Archbishop-Elector of Mainz, 1711-18, by Johann Dienzenhofer, with a staircase (right) by Hildebrandt. The staircase is an arcaded 'cage' in the centre of the house.

Two English palaces by Sir John Vanbrugh – Blenheim and Castle Howard. Like Pommersfelden, Blenheim (below left) uses a giant Corinthian order, but based on the ground and supporting an orthodox pediment. The stairhall at Castle Howard (below right) is, like that at Pommersfelden, a stone 'cage', but the stairs rise outside, not inside the 'cage'.

The Residenz at Würzburg, perhaps the most magnificent of all the German palaces. Begun in 1716 by Balthasar Neumann, it brought together some of the finest talents in Europe. The staircase ceiling (right) was painted by Gianbattista Tiepolo in 1737. He also decorated the Kaisersaal.

Belvedere are all reflected in this, the most majestic and accomplished of all German palaces. Neumann's own genius is especially conspicuous in the staircase which ascends in a single flight from a low, vaulted hall, dimly lit, then switches back in two narrower flights emerging in a hall over which floats one vast and fabulously brilliant painting by Tiepolo.

After Neumann, whose churches belong to a later section, the achievements of German Baroque – the counterparts in architecture of Bach and Handel in music – could hardly ascend further. Nevertheless, there is that ever-busy side-issue of the Baroque – the Rococo. This flourished supremely in Bavaria, thanks to the Elector Max Emanuel's discovery of genius in a French dwarf, François de Cuvilliés, who was born in 1695. He had him trained in Paris, then appointed him joint architect to his Court in Munich. The first purely Rococo pieces in Germany, distinct from the Baroque-Rococo of Hildebrandt, were the Reichen Zimmer in the Munich Residenz (1730-37). Then followed the summer pavilion known as the Amalienburg in the park at Nymphenburg. Here Cuvilliés brought
Rococo is a style of architectural ornament of such incremental vigour that it tends to identify with the building it adorns. It is distinguished by undulating movement, counter-balancing curves, the use of rocaille ornament evocative of coral and sea-shells—the whole as light in colour as in substance. These two examples are by François Cuvilliés: the Amalienburg Pavilion and the Reichenzimmer in the Residenz in Munich.

Rococo decoration to a kind of naturalism which it never achieved in France; it was almost as if Rococo themes, artificially planted, had begun to grow of themselves. Here and in the Munich Residenz-theater (see p. 103) are the models of the finest German Rococo. Through his colleagues and imitators and through Cuvilliés' own engravings the style spread throughout Germany and beyond.

**Varieties of absolutism**

In 1740, a monarch of equal celebrity as a political force, a military genius and a patron of the arts, succeeded to a German throne.

Frederick II of Prussia had already revolted against the philistinism of his father's Court and taken as his architect the patrician Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff. The King and his architect worked closely together, Frederick actually making sketch plans which Knobelsdorff interpreted in the light of his own talents, which were considerable. He had been to Rome and, moreover, had mastered decorative art to the extent of being the author of the effective Rococo in the wing he added to Charlottenburg, one of his first works for the King. His next work, in 1741, was the Berlin Opera-House, a building which abruptly introduced into the Baroque scene an unexpected influence—English Palladianism. Frederick looked to England again when, years later, after Knobelsdorff's death, he built the Neues Palais at Potsdam—a rather sad derivative of Castle Howard. Meanwhile, the Stadtschloss at Potsdam showed an inclination towards Perrault's Louvre, while Sans Souci, the King's very personal summer residence at Potsdam, built in 1745-47, looked several ways at once. The entrance court with its Corinthian colonnades shows Knobelsdorff's tendency to a purer classicism. The garden front with its domed projecting centre is very evidently of Parisian derivation though the 'terms' which support its entablature might, in their extreme Rococo

Frederick the Great's palace of Sans Souci, at Potsdam, combines suggestions from a wide variety of sources, French and German (the caryatids supporting the entablature, for instance, recall the Zwinger). The architect was Georg von Knobelsdorff, the date 1740.
animation, have come from the Zwinger at Dresden. The interiors of Sans Souci are similarly mixed. There is Knobelsdorff’s severe Corinthian colonnade under the dome, but the music room is done in the perfectly accomplished Rococo of Johann Michael Hoppenhaupt. The stylistic varieties of Potsdam expose very clearly the restlessness of the 'forties — a restlessness beginning to be felt in all countries and which was only to be resolved in the renewed interest in theoretical principle in the next decade.

Palace-building, obviously, is part of the dynastic history of Europe and it follows that in countries where dynastic questions had been pretty well settled palaces were not built. Blenheim Palace is a freak which, in its very character as a gift to a national hero on the part of a Queen who built no palaces herself, underlines the truth of this for England. In France after Louis XIV, palace-building was a meaningless proposition and the accumulated talent of French architecture

27, 28, 29. Russia had relied on foreign architects ever since the Middle Ages, and with Peter the Great’s ambition to modernize his empire, that reliance became even stronger. Below left: Peterhof, by a Frenchman, Jean-Baptiste Leblond, 1716–17. Peter’s daughter Elizabeth turned to the Italian Bartolomeo Rastrilli, who built the palace of Tsarskoe Selo (below right) and the Winter Palace in St Petersburg (opposite), and partly remodelled Peterhof, all in the 1740s and 50s. These Russian Baroque palaces are notable for their masterful handling of very long façades and for their use of exterior colour, a resource that had been comparatively neglected in Central and Southern Europe.

sought outlets elsewhere. De Cotte and Boffrand were constantly in request at foreign courts. Boffrand, as we have seen, participated at Würzburg and his major works were the palaces for Leopold, Duke of Lorraine, at Nancy and Lunéville, with the same Duke’s country house called La Malgrange. The last two were never finished; neither was the palace he began for the Elector Max Emanuel of Bavaria near Brussels.

In Russia, under Peter I and his successors, the opportunities for immigrant architects were considerable. The first celebrity whom Peter drew to his new capital at St Petersburg was Schlüter, anxious for employment after the collapse of his Berlin tower. But Schlüter shortly died and Peter fared little better with the distinguished
Frenchman Leblond, who did, however, live long enough to provide the design for Peterhof and to train the first Russian-born architect to practice in a full classical idiom, Zemtsov. But it was under Peter's daughter, Elizabeth Petrovna, and her architect, Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli, that Russian Baroque architecture emerged as something with a character of its own. Rastrelli was the son of an Italian sculptor who had come to St Petersburg with Leblond and had thus been in Russia since the age of fifteen. He was sent to Paris to study under de Cotte, saw something of Germany and Italy and returned with a markedly Rococo taste. In the ten-year reign of Anna Ioannovna he was set to reconstruct the Winter Palace as it then stood (the work of two obscure Italians) but his real opportunities came with the accession of Elizabeth in 1740. For her he completed the Summer Palace—a timber work, long since destroyed—proceeded to the Anichkov Palace (also destroyed), a gay, lofty building with a Baroque version of Russian domes on the pavilions, then reconstructed Leblond's Peterhof, doubling its length, and finally engaged on the total rebuilding both of the Great Palace at Tsarskoe Selo and of the Winter Palace at St Petersburg. In the last three of these Rastrelli had to cope with façades of preposterous length (that bitter legacy of Versailles). He divided them pavilion-wise and applied classical orders in quantity. At Tsarskoe Selo a lumpish Corinthian parade in three different heights; at the Winter Palace the Corinthian, fantastically elongated, balances over an Ionic and carries statues on pedestals at top, giving a sense of forced theatricality, a brutally literal Bibiena stage-design. Anywhere in Western Europe this would have been intolerable. In the tremendous water-girt flatness of St Petersburg it achieved what was needed, an effect of absolute, grim and careless dominion.

Rastrelli's palaces came later in the Baroque season; the Winter Palace was finished only in 1762. But, strangely, the last triumphant expression of the palace theme was in the country of so many of its sources—Italy. In the earlier part of the century there had been little

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30 The Stupinigi, 1714-13, was built as a hunting-lodge outside the Piedmontese capital of Turin, but its splendour belies such a humble purpose. Filippo Juvarra's plan radiates from the star-shaped central hall whose architecture dissolves into painted mythology on a lavish scale.
Caserta, near Naples, 1751-74, is one of the largest palaces in Europe, designed to give the Bourbons of Naples the same prestige as those of France. Its architect, Luigi Vanvitelli, did not avoid monotony in its long façade, but the plan combines rationality with some spectacular set-pieces. The staircase shown in pl. 9 is near centre on the right.

occasion for palace-building. At Turin, indeed, the capital newly created Kingdom of Savoy. Filippo Juvarra brought French and Italian influences together in the Palazzo Madama and that tour-de-force in radial planning, the castle of Stupinigi, built in 1729–33. And from Turin, Juvarra gave the plans for the palaces of Mafra for John V of Portugal and of Madrid for Philip V of Spain. But the last episode in our story takes place at Naples.

Naples, after 230 years of delegated rule, obtained a dynasty of her own with the ascent to the throne in 1734 of the Bourbon Charles III. Twenty-five years of enlightened despotism followed, with Charles entrenching his power on the classic model of his forbear Louis XIV. The creation of a Neapolitan Versailles was predictable and it was for this that he called Luigi Vanvitelli from Rome in 1751. Between that year and 1774 the palace of Caserta was built. It is famous for its size. There are said to be 1,200 rooms and the rigid lines of the lay-out stretch over the countryside as far as the eye can reach. But Caserta is not really on the Versailles model. Its plan—a cross within a rectangle providing four huge and identical inner courts—has something of the character of the Escorial and earlier 'ideal' plans for the Renaissance. In the architectural treatment, certainly, French classicism is thoroughly reflected but in the monumental parts of the interior there is something different again—a contrivance (arising from the plan) of dramatic Baroque perspectives which remind one of Piranesi. Caserta is a splendid fusion, on Italian soil, of Italian and French skills, addressed to the palace problem in the last years when that problem could still be taken with immense seriousness and at unlimited expense.
The Urban Image

Up to now, this essay has concerned itself almost exclusively with individual buildings, whether as examples of architectural style or of building types. Of the composite urban formations which play such an impressive role in the 18th-century panorama nothing has been said. The question now to be asked is whether the division of the century into a Baroque half and a Neo-classical half, proposed as a rough generalization at the beginning of this book, can be effectively retained when we extend our view from individual buildings to groups of buildings and from groups to whole towns. In other words is there 'Baroque town-planning' and 'Neo-classical town-planning'? This is not an easy question. Towns of consequence, whatever the style of their dominating monuments, are in general much older than the 18th century and absolutely new towns are necessarily very rare. What we can discern is a change of attitude to the nature of towns - to the urban image. At the beginning of the century a town was regarded as an irreducible fact of nature - something which might be artificially limited or extended and into which new elements might be inserted but not as a totality capable of reorganization and improvement as such. By the middle of the century a more comprehensive attitude has emerged.

The insertion of new, planned, elements into existing cities we can see in both Rome and Paris. In Rome, the Piazza S. Ignazio, formed in 1727 by Filippo Raguzzi, is a tiny enclosure (much smaller than the typical London square) consisting of a few houses laid out round a central block with a concave façade. The elliptical concavity of this central block is echoed in the façades of houses recessed between streets on either side of it so that the whole of the side of the enclosure is on the

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157 The Spanish Steps, Rome, with S. Trinità dei Monti at the top. The steps were laid out by Francesco de Santis, 1723-25, as part of a continuing programme of urban embellishment. The insertion of isolated scenographic features in an urban plan is typically Baroque; Neo-classical taste looked more to the grand vista.
move. The other three sides of the piazza are straight but Raguzzi's
ornaments confirm the whole as a Rococo enterprise.

On a much grander scale but still Rococo in conception are the
Spanish Steps in Rome, leading from the Corso to S. Trinità de' Monti. Designed by Francesco de Santis in 1723–25, this phased ascent
of nearly one hundred steps takes the theme of Vignola's stepped
approach to the Castello Farnese, expands and elaborates it and
transposes its straight lines into a counterpoint of curvatures with
wonderful scenic effect.

Planning and politics
In Paris in 1761, Pierre Patte published a plan of the city on which are
marked a number of schemes by various architects for monumental
places in honour of Louis XV. Each scheme is an individual, limited
proposal but when distributed on the map they adumbrate something
like a monumentalization of the whole city. Even more striking as
evidence of the new comprehensive attitude is John Gwynn's plan for
the reorganization of London in his London and Westminster Improved
of 1761. This is, in a sense, Patte in reverse. Patte shows a number of
separate monumental conceptions distributed on the existing map.
Gwynn takes the existing map and by an elaborate system of street
'improvements' conducts the whole towards a certain degree of
monumentality - what he calls 'Public Magnificence'. The differences
between Patte and Gwynn demonstrate exactly the passage from one
urban image to another - from the Baroque idea of dramatically
planned features inserted into a town to the Neo-classical idea of a
town considered as an organism capable of connected visual re-
creation.

Baroque town-planning is necessarily related to the structures
which figure most prominently in the Baroque age - the palace and
the great church. But most conspicuously the palace. Among the
palaces of the 17th century which served as models for the 18th, the
Palace of Versailles takes absolute precedence. At Versailles, the
successive labours of Le Vau, Le Nôtre and Jules Hardouin-Mansart
had brought into existence not only a palace commanding the almost
limitless vistas of a geometrically ordered park but, on the approach
side of the palace, a town of corresponding regularity. Park on the

158 Piazza S. Ignazio, Rome, 1727, by Filippo Raguzzi. This is architecture's closest
approach to a Baroque stage-set, its concave façades leading the eye to mysterious
diagonal views.

ewest, town on the east, both converged upon the palace. Louis XIV
died in 1715. In the same year Karl Wilhelm, Margrave of Baden-
Durlach, began to lay out a Versailles of his own at Karlsruhe. It was
designed for him by his military engineer, von Betzendorf. Here the
wooded park is on the north, the town on the south of the palace. The
radial ideal of Versailles is intensely exaggerated, no fewer than thirty-
two avenues converging on the central octagonal tower of the palace,
and the palace itself shooting its wings into two of the urban radii.
There is nothing here of the high sophistication of Versailles and
Karlsruhe is a curiosity in which we may perhaps detect a survival of
the 'ideal' city plans of the Italian renaissance.

Karlsruhe was never closely imitated, though the converging
streets of Neustrelitz, laid out from 1733, and those of another
159 Pierre Patte’s plan for Paris, 1765, aims at the dramatic surprise. It involves over twenty projects for places royales containing statues of Louis XV, each a Baroque explosion which virtually ignores the existing street pattern.

Karlsruhe (Pokoj) in Upper Silesia are in much the same spirit and geometrically dependent on the princely palace. At Ludwigsburg, near Stuttgart, another residenzstadt, the new town built by Duke Eberhard Ludwig of Württemberg from 1709, is not subordinated to but laid out alongside the palace. In Spain the Aranjuez lay-out of 1748-78, for Philip V, stems directly from Versailles, with avenues radiating into the park on the west and into a newly planned town on the east. These radiating avenues appear again in St Petersburg, though here – in what used to be called the Nevsky, Admiralty and Ascension Prospects – they converge not on a royal palace but on the Admiralty building.

The emphatic visual dependence of a street plan on a building in which supreme authority is vested is a Baroque idea. Often the emphasis is of a purely symbolic kind and fades out quickly as we lose sight of the palace. Similar in spirit is another Baroque device – the place royale. This developed in France. The place royale is not normally dependent on a palace but is simply a formal area in a city, dedicated to the prestige of the monarchy and providing at its centre a site for a statue of the monarch. The first place royale was the one built in Paris under Henri IV and called Place Royale until it became Place des Vosges. Under Louis XIV came the circular Place des Victoires and the octagonal Place Vendôme. Under Louis XV came a number of places royales in the French provinces – at Rennes, after a great fire in 1720, at Montpellier and at Bordeaux, where the magnificent Place de la Bourse, designed in 1733 by J. J. Gabriel, makes a great spectacle on the bank of the Garonne.

160 John Gwynne’s scheme for the improvement of London, 1766, represents a totally different ideal: the modification of an entire city to embody rational and continuous order, with a royal palace exactly in the centre of Hyde Park.
161 Upper left: the park of Aranjuez, south of Madrid, laid out for Philip V of Spain. As at Versailles, the palace is set between park and town, with lines radiating out into both.

162 Lower left: Versailles' radial plan was carried to its ultimate extreme at Karlsruhe, Germany, where no fewer than thirty-two avenues converge upon the royal palace.

163 Above: the Place de la Bourse, Bordeaux, 1733, by J. J. Gabriel, a municipal showpiece facing the river Garonne.

Related in some respects to Bordeaux is the most famous place royale of all – the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Today, we are so accustomed to thinking of this space as a component – indeed, the central component – of the great formal framework on which the whole map of Paris hangs that we forget that in origin it was nothing of the kind. It started with a scheme of 1748 promoted by the civic authorities for a 'Place Louis XV' to honour the sovereign (this was the theme of Patte’s plan already mentioned). The site was settled by Louis' gift of the ground westward of the Tuileries. A competition was then held (1753) for the lay-out but the final design was in large measure the work of Jacques-Ange Gabriel, son and successor of the Gabriel who designed the place at Bordeaux. His two magnificent palaces flanking the Rue Royale with the vista to the Madeleine originally commanded a space with a statue of Louis XV in the centre,
164, 165 The Place Royale (now the Place de la Concorde), Paris, originated in 1748 as a project for honouring Louis XV. It was built from 1753 onwards on the axis of the Tuileries and the Champs Elysées, creating a new axis and new vistas—one between symmetrical buildings by J.-A. Gabriel to the church of the Madeleine, the other to the bank of the Seine where the Pont de la Concorde was later built.

166, 167 The sequence of spaces created at Nancy, in Lorraine, forms one of the most satisfying of all 18th-century exercises in town-planning. From the Place Stanislaus (foreground in photograph, left on the plan), a triumphal arch leads into a long open space, formerly a tilting ground, with the ducal palace at the end. From Héré de Corny, Plans et elevations de la Place Royale de Nancy, 1793.
bounded on all four sides by sunk gardens in relation to which the eight seated statues representing French towns were appropriately sited. It was only with the coming of the Pont de la Concorde in 1788–90 and the creation of the Rue de Rivoli under Napoleon that the Place de la Concorde lost its stately gardened isolation and became in due course the whirling centre of a planned Paris.

Contemporary with the Place de la Concorde is the Place Stanislas at Nancy, the capital of Lorraine. Here, Stanislas Leczinski, former King of Poland and by grace of his son-in-law, Louis XV, Duke of Lorraine, proposed the fitting tribute of a place royale. In this case, the place itself acquires special importance by its siting on the axis of an ancient tilting-ground at one end of which a palace was already proposed. Stanislas’ architect, Héré de Corny, completed the palace (on reduced lines), gave it a forecourt with colonnaded hemicycles to left and right, designed uniform elevations for houses along the old tilting-ground (Place de la Carrière) and closed the far end of this with a triumphal arch, through which is entered the Place Royale (Place Stanislas). It is a wonderful sequence – perhaps the finest piece of formal town-planning produced in the 18th century. But the lay-out resulted from unique circumstances. Its character is still that of the traditional and limited place royale but its felicitous linkage with other emerging formal elements gives it the air of something more, while its architecture – delicately deriving from Versailles and the Louvre and enhanced by superb ironwork – is, in its own right, a minor masterpiece.

The place royale idea was not confined to France. We find it magnificently expressed in the Amalienborg at Copenhagen, begun under Frederick V in 1749. The architect was Nicolas Eigtved, a Dane, but the sources are French. Four palaces, much in the style of J.-H. Mansart, lie across the corners of the place. Built as family residences by four leading Danish noblemen, they became the property of the Crown in 1794. In the middle of the square is Sally’s equestrian statue of Frederick – one of the few statues designed expressly for a place royale to survive the rages of revolution. Of the four roads which lead out of the square one directly faces the Frederiks-Kirke with its portico and commanding dome (compare the Place de la Concorde and the Madeleine); another goes in a direct line to the harbour.
At Brussels, a place royale on the French model was begun by the Habsburg Governor of the Netherlands, Charles de Lorraine, in 1766. It proved to be only the beginning of a much grander project which matured ten years later when the Haute Ville was laid out as a formal residential area round the park of the former Ducal Palace. And in Lisbon we have the Praça do Comércio, created on the bank of the Tagus after the great earthquake of 1755. In both these – as, indeed, at Copenhagen – there is a greater awareness of the relationship of the place royale to the town as a whole.

**Formality dissolves**

The theme of the place royale is, of course, something totally distinct from the theme of town extension. Most great towns of the 18th century tended to increase by the simple process of the sale of land and the building of streets of houses as a form of commercial enterprise. State control was more rigorous in some cases than in others. In Berlin, from 1721, large areas north and south of Unter den Linden were not only planned but to a great extent built by the State, sites being leased with half-built carcases (immediathäusen) already on them. In Paris, on the other hand, great private or corporate landowners like the Comte d'Artois, the banker Laborde and the Grand Priors of the Temple developed their lands for profit without very much regard to amenity; amenity in Paris being associated exclusively (apart from the Royal precincts) with the individual hôtel, its court and gardens. In London also it was the development of their properties by great families and institutions which created the extensive westward limb which in the course of the century altered the whole outline and balance of the capital.

London, however, developed in a way of its own. It lacked nearly all the great assets of Paris. Palaces were few and mean and lacked extensive formal lay-outs. Public buildings were not approached by lawns and tree-lined avenues. The great churches – even St Paul's – had not the courtesy of a parvis. Fountains there were none. And since fortifications had mostly disappeared with the Middle Ages, there could be no boulevards to replace them. London had, however, at the beginning of the century adopted a mode of development not without merit. This consisted in the development of streets round squares. The first 'square' in London was the arcaded oblong laid out by Inigo Jones at Covent Garden in 1630 and as this has some relationship to the Place Royale (des Vosges) of Henri IV we may perhaps connect, at that stage, the idea of the London square with that of the place royale. But once that is admitted we must add that the ideas parted company at once. The London square became simply an element in the economics of estate development. The square, with its railed private garden, was the magnet with which to draw wealthy buyers. That achieved, the streets adjoining the square had, to the less rich, the prestige of proximity to the rich. Lesser streets followed in their grades. Easy access to a church or chapel-of-ease, as also to a market, was essential and both were often specially built. That was the London formula and it worked for a century and a half.

It worked mainly because the Court in London had never had the powerful attraction of that in Paris. Few of the English nobility aspired to great magnificence in their London houses; they were content with miniature splendour in a house in a row. In this they disappointed even their contemporaries. It was confidently supposed that St James's Square, formed soon after 1660, would consist entirely of a few palaces; and when Cavendish Square was laid out in 1717 the same hope prevailed. In each case one or two immense houses were built but no more. The three or four window frontage was enough – at least for those below the rank of duke.

The whole of that part of London, therefore, built between the reigns of Charles II and Victoria consists of a network of streets in which there is a frequency of squares – the squares mostly taking their names from the families to whom the ground belonged, as Bedford Square (Duke of Bedford), Grosvenor Square, Portman Square, Fitzroy Square (family names); or from names associated with the royal house, as Hanover Square, Brunswick Square, Mecklenburgh Square.

Only rarely did the squares of 18th-century London submit to formal architectural control. Of those that did, Bedford Square is the only intact survivor. Nevertheless the idea of a row of houses treated as one palatial composition was present from early in the century and if it did not find much acceptance in London it did so elsewhere in England with dramatic results – namely in Bath.
The extension of Bath from 1727 onwards was a truly extraordinary episode. It arose on the one hand from a sudden upsurge in the popularity of Bath as a centre of fashionable life when the London season closed and on the other from the practical ambition and naive vision of a young mason-architect, John Wood. Bath was, in origin, a Roman city and it entered the head of John Wood that the exploitation of its new prosperity in building schemes could be matched with a restoration of its antique splendour in architecture. His earliest proposals included a 'forum', a 'circus' and a 'gymnasium'. These features would necessarily resolve themselves, in practice, into groups of ordinary town houses having, in bulk, the form of their nominal prototypes. No 'gymnasium' was ever attempted but a 'forum' was partly built (North and South Parades) and a 'circus' triumphantly completed (the Circus). A square of the London type (Queen Square) was added, with façades of greater architectural pretension than anything yet seen in the capital. After Wood's death in

174, his son of the same name planned further extensions, incorporating in them an invention of his own — the crescent or curved terrace. Today, Queen Square, the Circus and Royal Crescent are the chief architectural features of the Georgian city. Highly original in themselves, they are connected in a loose, informal way which admirably fits the hilly site. The elder Wood, though untravelled, seems to have been familiar with Le Notre's use of the rond-point; he may have known of Mansart's circular Place des Victoires in Paris. For the younger Wood's Crescent it is hard to think of any prototypes at all: even the rather curious designation 'crescent' seems to come from nowhere.

The achievements of the Woods and their followers at Bath influenced urban extension in Britain for the remainder of the century. Every major English town has its crescents and some have circuses. When James Craig made his plan for the New Town of Edinburgh in 1766 he did, indeed, adhere to conventional London
are basically those of a vast military encampment. A slightly greater
degree of sophistication comes with the plan of New Orleans made by
a French engineer in 1721; an area divided into 66 square plots one of
which – the Place d’Armes – provides for the emphatic grouping of
church, arsenal and governor’s residence, the church being on the axis
of a central street. Even more sophistication attaches to Annapolis
whose radial plan, adopted shortly before 1700, anticipates Karlsruhe
by fifteen years!

But the one great triumph of urban planning in 18th-century
America was Washington, D.C. The decision to create a federal
capital was taken in 1783. Major Pierre L’Enfant, son of a French
painter of battle-pieces, offered his services in a theatrically phrased
letter to President Washington in 1789. They were accepted and the
site on the Potomac was chosen.

The most striking thing about L’Enfant’s plan, seen in historical
perspective, is the extent to which it depends on Versailles. Although
the basic pattern is a monotonous criss-cross this is overlaid by an
arrogant counter-pattern of diagonals. These radiate from the Capitol
and again from the White House. More diagonals cross them, meeting
them and each other in squares and ronds-points, as Le Nôtre’s avenues
do at Versailles. The Mall before the Capitol echoes the great canal at
Versailles and even the relation of Capitol to White House is
approximately that of the Palace of Versailles and the Grand Trianon.
It is curious, on the face of it, that the greatest symbol of absolutism
ever constructed should provide so much and so immediately for the
capital city of a nation opposed in every respect to the principles which
Versailles embodied. But L’Enfant himself saw no objection. To him,
the radiating avenues of Washington represented rays of enlightenment
reaching out to all parts of the continent; and, at the same time,
welcoming paths for all people, at all times, seeking the protection of
the Union.

But the Washington plan remains distinctly a Baroque plan and an
anomaly in the Neo-classical climate prevailing in America as well as
in Europe at the time it was built. What, in other hands, might
Washington have become? Perhaps the only architect of the time
really equipped for the creation of a new capital city which should be
at one and the same time a great symbol and an organism perfectly

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172 Edinburgh New Town was laid out parallel with the old during the latter part of
the century. Charlotte Square and St Andrew’s Square, each with a prominent
building to close the vista, are linked by George Street. North of this is an extension
planned after 1800.

practice; but the further development of the New Town after 1800
makes exhaustive use of the Bath elements. John Nash’s great plan for
Regent’s Park and Regent Street of 1811 draws as heavily on the same
source. In the United States, there was no planning on the Bath model
until 1793, when Charles Bulfinch designed the Tontine Crescent in
Franklin Street, Boston, destroyed in 1858. It was a building of Adam-
like delicacy, remote from the robust Palladianism of the Bath
original.

Growing into the future

It is to America that we must, in conclusion, look to complete this
brief survey. In America a wholly new town was necessarily a more
realistic proposition than in Europe. William Penn’s plan for
Philadelphia of 1682 and the plans of Baltimore, Savannah and
Reading which followed it in the first half of the 18th century
represent the making of new patterns on virgin soil; and the patterns

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all formality is abandoned. Buildings and groups of buildings lie in the landscape, their forms suited to their varying functions; there is organization but no determination of the plan — it grows into the future as into the distance.

Ledoux’s plan for Chaux is one of the great prophetic documents of the 18th century. Its influence was barely felt in his time and it is only in our own day that its combination of the strictly formal with the functionally free has been recognized as a liberating gesture of high import. To compare it with L’Enfant’s Washington is perhaps absurd, but in these two plans we have the two great urban images of the end of the century — the one rooted in that heritage of the 17th century which had, all along, so much enriched the 18th; the other a revolutionary flight of the imagination into a new world — a world based on industrial organization and democratic principle, a world from which the potent arrogance of Versailles has at last receded.

174 Ledoux’s scheme for the royal salt-works at Chaux — a foretaste of the architect as social engineer. The centre, with the official buildings, conforms to a radial plan, but further out regularity is abandoned and streets are allowed to expand organically. (From Ledoux’s Architecture considérée sous le rapport de l’art . . . , 1804.)