

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATIONAL STYLES AND URBAN PLANNING 1890-1910**

## CHAPTER 1

### National Styles

The street plan of much of Central Europe, Ljubljana, Cracow, Prague and Zagreb had been created many centuries before as the Greek model of Acropolis and Agora or the Roman Milesian model. With the development of the grid iron pattern, after Cerdà's Barcelona (1855) the street existed as a thoroughfare and not a dark, devious passage herded between buildings. Although it is possible to attribute the widening of roads and streets to vehicular traffic, this overlooks practices particularly evidenced in Maya, Inca, and Indian cities where religious ceremonies and military and civic processions had a need of greater space. Equally, the ascription of grid iron systems, with their *insulae* (blocks of houses) and connecting thoroughfares to the conquests of Alexander the Great is to deny the regular plan of Mohenjo Daro laid out some centuries before in 2,500 B.C.:

All parts there were designed to function within a whole. The slightly inaccurate grid iron covers about one square mile of ground and all the streets, about thirty three feet wide and unpaved, run from east to west and north to south [and] were probably directed by ritual laws as well as by the direction of the prevailing winds.<sup>1</sup>

From 1860 the centralisation of economic life and culture in Vienna led to the creation of a vibrant, highly-educated professional population drawn from all of Austria-Hungary. These professionals although being educated in Vienna were not Viennese nor Austrian, their own understanding of ethnicity determined they were Magyars (Ethnic Hungarians), Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Ruthenes as the Northern Slavs; Croats, Slovenes and Serbs as Southern Slavs and as Transylvanian Romanians and Istrian Italians. The increased participation of the Slavs and others in Viennese life from 1867 was occasioned by the disastrous expansionist ambitions of the Emperor Franz Joseph and his Government with failed military actions against the Italians in 1859 and an equally disastrous engagement against the Prussians in 1866. To protect Habsburg authority the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary was created in 1867 with Budapest and Vienna as their eastern and western capitals respectively allowing cultural, economic, and artistic life to be devolved to the other cities of the empire.

Unlike the Western European model of expansion based upon the development of industrialisation and urbanisation, Central Europe as a predominantly agricultural and rural economy did not possess a unifying element of advanced commerce to drive change. The speed of advancement in all fields until 1900 was hampered by reference

to the past. In architecture this was seen as historicism, an obsessive interest in the past. We find historicism in the work of Ferdinand Fellner (1847-1914) and Hermann Helmer (1849-1914) in Beaux Arts, Neo Baroque and Neo Renaissance mixes. As architectural ambassadors of the Viennese court Fellner and Helmer constructed these buildings of great monument regardless of any national sentiments (1.1).

In opposition to this historicism was the idea of remembrance, or more properly recollection of the past, where that which was regarded as the best in whatever form was re-assembled as a national style. One of the first examples of this national style was seen in the building of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, Ödön Lechner, 1892-1896. The difference between historicism and national style is that with historicism there may be little connection with the place or time in which it is now being used whereas the national style is predicated on a perceived shared linguistic and cultural route. In the case of Lechner's national style this was taken from the studies of József Huszka who from 1881 urged Hungarian architects to,

base the renewal of architectural style on ethnographic discoveries.<sup>2</sup>

As part of a lecture programme entitled 'The Past and Present of Our National Style'. Huszka's thesis, which Lechner shared, was that Hungarian folk art in the use of decorative motif had showed striking similarities to Indo-Persian and Moorish art and that therefore pre-Christian Hungarian art and culture should lead in any positioning of their national style.

This position of national styles was repeated throughout the countries of Central Europe leading architects to reconsider their nations' histories using the teachings of Gottfried Semper one of the most influential German architects of his time who was defining the difference between adornment and ornament and how both related to the structure. His hypothesis was that adornment was an autonomous element applied to a building as an indicator of purpose as in Greek sacred architecture.<sup>3</sup>

The parts that were resting places of construction, such as the pediment, the frieze, and the spaces in between the beams were suitable for adornment by high art for symbolic-allegoric representations of the ideal purpose of the temple.<sup>4</sup>

Ornament was seen as part of the building, in part to frame the adornment making the function of ornament an integral part of the structure. From this understanding of high art Semper proposed architecture as a universal language able to communicate ideas of social progress and freedom as the ultimate goal of history. Semper further argued that by applying strict analytical process in considering origin and function, the confusing

layers of history within a single architectural work would be stripped away revealing the essential language of the building. As the adoption of a fashion or faddish style would completely contradict Maks Fabiani's deeply held view of a national element in architecture, he would not allow the adoption of an essentially decorative applied Viennese form in any of his work. In questioning Semper's view of art being the individual differences between civilisations and their specific requirements, for example the Egyptian as contrasted with the Greek, the Roman as contrasted by the Hun.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is easy to simplify Semper's observations to one of 'nationality and provenance' there is much more to his apparently simple comments. What he postulated is immensely searching and allowed many 'Viennese' architects and designers who were to succeed him to understand who they were and what their work represented. In the comparison of a *situla* (an Egyptian water bucket) and the *hydria* (a Greek water vessel) Semper quite clearly defines both objects very precisely in terms of their geography, topography and hydrography. In closing this statement Semper indirectly questions the beauty of the Greek forms. Adolf Loos mischievously puts it:

What! Those magnificent Greek vases with their perfect shapes which seemed created solely to demonstrate the instinct for beauty of the Greek people? Their shapes a product of crude functionality. That means these vases were practical! And we always thought they were beautiful! We have been misled. We had always been taught that beauty and practicality were mutually exclusive.<sup>6</sup>

It is fitting that this quote comes from Adolf Loos' 'Ornament and Crime' as this work is one of the most misconstrued critiques of the time. Perhaps the difficulty encountered in understanding Loos then as now is that an ironic humour is present in all his written works and speeches. One unfortunate who was the subject of Loos' barbed wit was his old adversary, Josef Hoffmann:

Only in Vienna is one grabbed by the lapels from time to time and forced to hear an admiring, "Ah, Hoffmann!" Not me though. I take the English approach. But in Vienna designers are made into demigods, professors, university lecturers, and for a donation receive honorary doctorates.<sup>7</sup>

The simplest reading of Loos always leads to understanding whether it is a veiled attack on position or privilege, as above, or a very clear statement of principle. The true problem for certain groups of Viennese was they could not tolerate his observations as they questioned and undermined their positions of privilege. This inability among the Viennese to understand how to move from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is without doubt a defining moment in modern architecture relying on the triumvirate of

### 1.1 Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, New German Theatre, Prague 1887



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Wagner, Loos and Fabiani to disseminate their wisely considered views of modernism, via a brief flirtation with some industrial aspects of Secession. In eschewing ideas of *Heimatstil* (German cottage architecture) or the pared down results of *Biedermeier* (refined cottage style) a new style was born that would grow into modernism via the dual functions of town planning and architecture throughout Central Europe.

Fabiani had made recommendation to Ferdinand Rainer as regards Loos' suitability for creating something original with the Café Museum Vienna, 1899, and latterly to furnish Rainer's apartment at Schwindgasse 13, Vienna, 1903.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that because of Fabiani's adherence to a new aesthetic he would perforce connect this to his underpinning knowledge of classical forms following his studies of antiquity of the classical world. As with Wagner and Loos, Fabiani would create truly modern works based on classical proportions and truth to materials. These works were in no respect Secessionist and bear no comparison with J.M. Olbrich or his followers.<sup>9</sup> Fabiani, Loos and Wagner were purists where there was no confusion between structure and decoration and where decoration was used it would be a bold cladding of marble or ceramic tile, not hesitant, piped-on tracery.

Anathema to them was Olbrich's habit of using extensive visual 'tricks' to convey an idea. The truth of this was revealed in 1985-1986 when two Viennese architects, Otto Kapfinger and Adolf Krischanitz, researched and reconstructed the Secession House, Vienna, 1896. What they discovered surprised everyone, but would have been little revelation to Wagner, Fabiani, Loos and their circle, as they knew that Olbrich, far from breaking away from the academy and classical forms or even poking fun at the notions of classicism, employed the classical conventions of cyma and entasis in the design of the Secession House. Kapfinger and Krischanitz found that the 'box' of the Secession House is by no means a rectangular geometric volume: every detail is shaped with slanted surfaces and detailing that creates visible tension, pressure and weight, in order to,

anthropomorphize tectonic form to adjust it to the dynamics of perception. In this way, instead of a tensionless regularity of vertical and horizontal planes, a more appealing composition was achieved that appears monumental despite its relatively modest dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

Could it be that Olbrich, the father of Secession, was making reference to Classical forms? Perhaps it is necessary to look for further contradictions and resultant over simplifications of leading architects, ideas and works at this time.

Fabiani aligned himself with Alois Riegl (1858-1905) and *Alterswert* (Age Value).<sup>11</sup> In part, both men admiring the pioneering work of Semper but contending that Semper's followers, in concentrating on technological advancement through product and technique as determinants of social change, were ignoring the 'marks' made on society by other than great styles and high art.<sup>12</sup> Riegl believed that his investigations for the Czecho-Slav Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895 in Prague had demonstrated the connection between the built environment and the way peasants lived and produced folk artefacts. In the Vienna of 1895 this was a new idea which at first appeared to be out of step with the pursuit of urbanisation and industrialisation through the wider Empire where so many folk traditions might be lost. In Riegl's view all of the ethnographic study which had been carried out in Austria-Hungary from the Vienna Exhibition of 1873 to Prague 1895 which set out to demonstrate the connection between the peasants' way of life, the built environment and the folk artefact was of equal value.<sup>13</sup>

This view of architecture being a problematic language in Central Europe is presented further by Friedrich Achleitner who has modernised the view of Semper through 'The Language Problem in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy', but more particularly with Adolf Loos, a constant commentator on the nature of culture, who was now a confidante.<sup>14</sup>

By contrast to all the differences expressed as national styles throughout Austria-Hungary, Vienna was becoming the educational home of a large number of architects and architecture students from Central Europe who were searching for a modernising influence in their understanding of architecture. The catalyst for this development was Vienna and the Academy of Fine Arts with Otto Wagner as the Professor of Architecture from 1894. The necessity of being educated in Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Paris or Moscow at a higher level was that the Habsburg Empire had to a great extent denied the constituent countries of Austria-Hungary their right to speak and educate in their own languages in favour of a forced Germanisation in the west or by making Magyar the language of choice in the more easterly countries. There was also an enormous amount of prejudice against ideas which did not originate from the Viennese elite.

It [Vienna] could not help regarding genius and enterprise of genius in private persons, unless privileged by high birth and State appointment, as ostentation, indeed presumption.<sup>15</sup>

For anyone to be successful in Vienna or the wider Empire they had to have the proper connections. It was therefore necessary for students of the professions to leave their homelands. This elitist proposition was in direct opposition to the ideas of building for

the urban city as expressed by Otto Wagner and Maks Fabiani in their work *Moderne Architektur* (Vienna 1896) and by Adolf Loos in 'Ornament and Crime'(Vienna 1908).<sup>16</sup>

## Urban Planning

The publication of Camillo Sitte's *Der Städtebau*, (City Building, Vienna, 1889), is seen by many as the beginning of city planning.<sup>17</sup> Sitte's analysis of the artistic and civic character of old European towns, particularly within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, heralded a new approach to the planning of squares and thoroughfares and in the placement of public statues and monuments.

No writer did more to encourage a reaction against the monotonous uniformity and geometrical severity of nineteenth century urban planning.<sup>18</sup>

The reconsideration of how towns and cities had been organised from medieval times onwards had become an important part of historical research.

The now meaningless enclosure and the disorder and clutter that often characterized the late medieval city had become intolerable.<sup>19</sup>

The narrow streets and ill-lit alleyways were not only crime ridden but also the breeding ground of disease, poverty and pestilence. The later blight of unrestricted commercial and industrial development from the 1800s was revisiting this medieval form and now was being commented on both privately and publicly by many, but almost by accident Camillo Sitte became the voice of the people. As Sitte later wrote in the preface to his third edition of *Der Städtebau*:

Only when everyone is already feeling and thinking more or less along the same line, and it therefore depends only on one person finally expressing the matters clearly, are such happy results possible.<sup>20</sup>

The classical orders as documented by Marcus Vitruvius Pollo in the first century B.C. were being rediscovered, unearthed and measured by archaeological scientists, illustrators and cartographers in Europe and elsewhere from the late 18th century onwards. This rediscovery allowed for the development of an understanding of the forms of classical architecture and their placement within a classical settlement. However, Vitruvius's 'Ten Books of Architecture' have descriptions only of how buildings were built, i.e. a 'game plan' for buildings of a particular time and purpose. This classical tradition was then reinterpreted by successive generations of architects and planners adding a blend of vernacular and historicist, imperial details to the schemes.

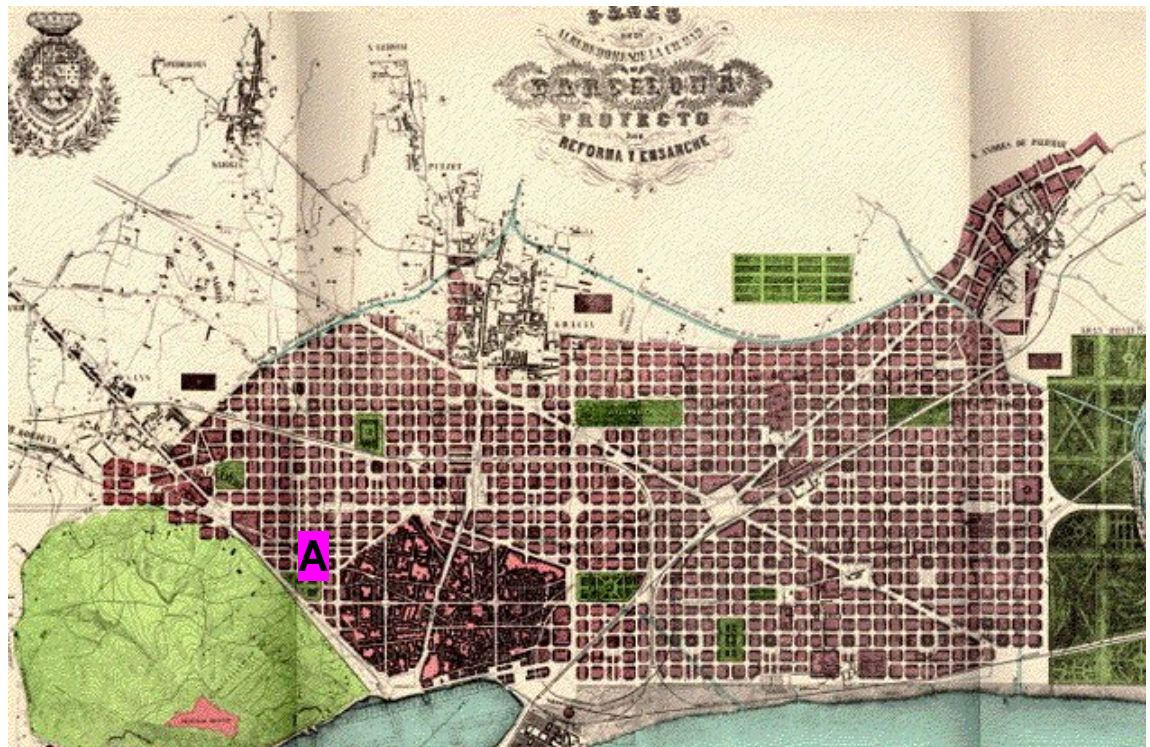


This form of architecture and planning continued for centuries until the publication of another book on architecture, similarly divided into ten books. *De Re Aedificatoria* (On the Art of Building) Florence, 1450 by Leon Battista Alberti, a masterpiece showing architects how buildings should be built. This theoretical treatise guided planning and building until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when for most of Continental Europe, Baroque and the later form of Baroque-Rococo became the dominant architectural style. From the mid-19th century a new monumental tradition that sought to redefine cities gained great power, best evidenced in the works of Georges Eugène Haussmann, Paris 1853-1870, and Ildefons Cerdà, Barcelona 1859, which was contemporaneous of the Vienna Ringstrasse of 1859. The greatest flaw of this architecture and planning is seen in that Haussmann's boulevards, promenades and frontages were placed in front of the Paris slums where little had changed.

It is perhaps unfair to include Cerdà with Haussmann and the Viennese plans, for his ideal plan to remodel Barcelona suffered immeasurably at the hands of the developers. In search of ever greater profit they ignored the essence of his humanitarian scheme. Cerdà surveyed Barcelona and drew plans of unparalleled accuracy in 1855, where he identified the problems of cramped and unhygienic conditions within the older medieval housing particularly. This housing was a breeding ground for high death rates. The cholera epidemic claiming some six thousand lives during the hot summer of 1854 was the result of this unsanitary overcrowding.

Cerdà's plan had great sympathy with Sitte's understanding of the use of verdured squares and park layouts in cities. Within both men there was a realisation that these green spaces, the 'lungs of the city', were vital to public health and hygiene.<sup>21</sup> Cerdà intended his regularised plan for Barcelona (1.2) to alleviate these problems of public health. His solution to the overcrowded city was to use uniform quadrangular blocks intersected by small roads crossing through two of the main thoroughfares linking to the largest roads. Within this regularised grid Cerdà wanted housing to be strictly controlled, being built up on two sides with height restrictions creating a shaded garden square between. This plan would guarantee maximum amounts of light with the planting acting as a 'small lung' for the welfare of the inhabitants. Equally the scale of the larger thoroughfares would allow the passage of traffic away from the densely populated *manzanas* (housing clusters) particularly the omnipresent steam tram and the attendant paraphernalia of telephone and telegraph communication which could be located in these wider boulevards. However the private developers viewed Cerdà's control and restriction on property densities as interference in their profits and as a consequence little of Cerdà's vision was realised. Even that which was achieved has throughout

## 1.2 Ildefons Cerdà, Barcelona Plan 1895



1 © odin.let.rug.nl 2005



2 © regionalworkbench.org 2005

Area where the “Old City” meets Cerdà’s “New City” **A** above - 1, and the same view in a satellite photograph of today - 2

the decades seen the inner courtyards invaded by workshops, car parks and shops.

Two legacies of Cerdà's vision are still apparent today and demonstrate the advantages of an ideal urban plan. Firstly, the *chafflane*, the 45% angled corner of the city block allows for the turning moment of the tram, which still provides adequately for the progress of traffic. Secondly, the creation of the quality apartment block with roof gardens atop the glassed-in galleried drawing rooms of the principal, larger flats. Following Cerdà's lead it was left to a group of modernist visionaries, Sitte, Wagner, Fabiani and Loos, to address this veneering over of all the ills that towns and cities still contained and to improve planning and building within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As discussed earlier in the chapter Hausmann's reconstruction of Paris under Napoleon III was an act of duplicity,

the new facades alongside the giant highways concealed a mass of ancient slums behind them.<sup>22</sup>

Not even the beautifully arranged forms of the Beaux Arts style of Charles Garnier's Paris Opera House, 1874, could disguise this fact. Baron Hausmann's Plan created architecture for an elite group, who had no connection with the poor and starving of the ever present Paris slums. By contrast the most successful of all Imperial Cities at this time was Vienna. The westernmost capital of the Dual Monarchy presiding over the other economic and commercial powerhouses of the empire – Budapest the easternmost capital and Prague one of the largest and oldest cities within the Empire. All of these cities had developed advanced systems of finance, trade and industry and particularly rail transportation, which would over the years, link the cities of Central Europe in a coherent trade and exportation chain.

In returning to Vienna one returns to the ideas of a native Viennese, Camillo Sitte; like Cerdà, his greatest complaint against the planners was that they surveyed only on the surface and in lacking a three-dimensional model they did not give sufficient thought to elevations of buildings and their abilities to be light and airy. This inability to plan in three dimensions tended to result in a:

stereotypical employment of compact and solid building-blocks as the primary element of design.<sup>23</sup>

This was further added to by the imposition of a:

square square, a straight street, a triangular open space, and a radial or star-shaped plaza.<sup>24</sup>

All of these forms Sitte loathed, not for their individual forms, but because they would be unable to grow or change with the development of the city.

The problems of city expansion and development were considered in Reinhard Baumeister's book *Stadt Erweiterungen technischer, baupolizeilicher, und wirtschaftlicher Beziehung*, (City Expansion, Technically, Politically and Economically) Berlin 1876. However it was not until the intervention of Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner that a blueprint for the expansion and modernisation of the towns and cities of Austria-Hungary was put in place. Although some may find this an unusual pairing their understanding of a city's need to grow and re-generate was a shared imperative – both abhorring the inability of successive planners to understand the importance of history and tradition. One of Sitte's basic criticisms of Meyreder's 1890 plan for the old historic inner city of Vienna was that,

the proposed street layout would lead traffic through old squares like Am Hof and the Graben instead of circumventing them and leaving them in peace.<sup>25</sup>

In evaluating all aspects of this plan Sitte found that the obsession with the straight-line uniformity of wide streets and regular building-block shapes and the ill-conceived garden spaces had 'no trace of artistic beauty'. Sitte unlike his contemporaries, Baumeister and Stubben was not obsessed with planning above ground for the ease of traffic nor did he follow the other obsession of sub-surface planning for super efficient sanitation systems.<sup>26</sup> The ensuing overland, sub-surface schemes generated geometrical plans that were imposed on irregular terrains.<sup>27</sup> By ignoring the ancient routes through a town or city the planner undermined the established infrastructure and destroyed that which was beautiful and appropriate.

Not only had architectural associations been bemoaning the fact that these ancient quarters were being ruthlessly destroyed instead of serving as models for the new development of cities, but literature of many types dwelt on the superiority of the pre-industrial town.<sup>28</sup>

Sitte was one of many in both theory and literature who championed the fitness and purpose of many pre-industrial towns and cities with a desire to maintain the old while accommodating the modern and the new. This understanding is exemplified in many of his new plans and re-developments, but is best seen in plan form for the layout of Eilenriede, Hannover (1.3). His desire to conserve the old and blend in the new was not an altruistic act to preserve the old history and tradition, for he was very much a modern man. Sitte realised quite clearly that planning was inexorably linked to the perceptions and status of the indigenous population. Symbolic representation seemed to him



indispensable, since modern society was only just emerging 'the people', had to be provided with architectural codes whose reading would help them find their place in this society and develop a sense of place.

Unfortunately in understanding this truth Sitte was never to complete a plan for an ordered metropolis. The modern planning process was moving at speed and although he tried to correct the aesthetic failures of the Ringstrasse by his book of 1889 *Der Städtebau* (City Building), the proposed alterations to replace the oversized boulevards with a sequence of intervening squares is little more than a cosmetic pastiche which would not arrive at a unified street or site frontage – both essential parts of all his theoretical planning works.

Sitte's contemporary, Otto Wagner, understood the metropolis as a highly complex system that,

obeyed its own specific laws.<sup>29</sup>

Like many Viennese, Wagner was sympathetic to the writings of John Ruskin, who wrote of the ills of urban deterioration and the need for rethinking how man lived,

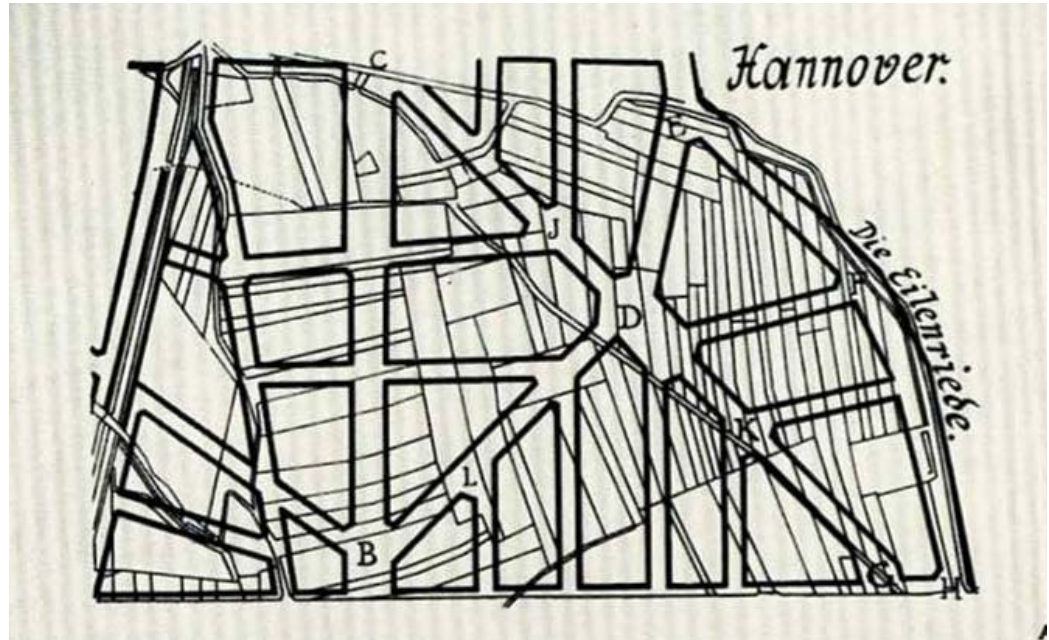
remedial action in the houses that we have, and then the building of more, strongly beautifully, and in groups of limited extent, kept in proportion to their streams, and walled round, so that there be no festering and wretched suburb anywhere.<sup>30</sup>

Although a critic of the uninspired, ad-hoc development of the Vienna Ringstrasse by a multitude of developers, Wagner, via his mother, was one such speculator. Investing in and developing properties which were just off the Ringstrasse some years prior to his fame and pre-eminence as the 'European Architect' with the publication of his essay on Modern Architecture, Vienna 1896. [See note 16]. The subsequent translation and publication in America, in the 'Brickbuilder' 1901, sealed Wagner's reputation. Sitte's *Der Städtebau* did not enjoy such rapid translation from the original [which would have remained unread by many]. Even when translated into a technically difficult German text in 1904 many preferred the less than exact French translation and this delay coupled with many inaccuracies in the later translations dictated that Wagner rather than Sitte was seen as the father of city planning at this time.<sup>31</sup>

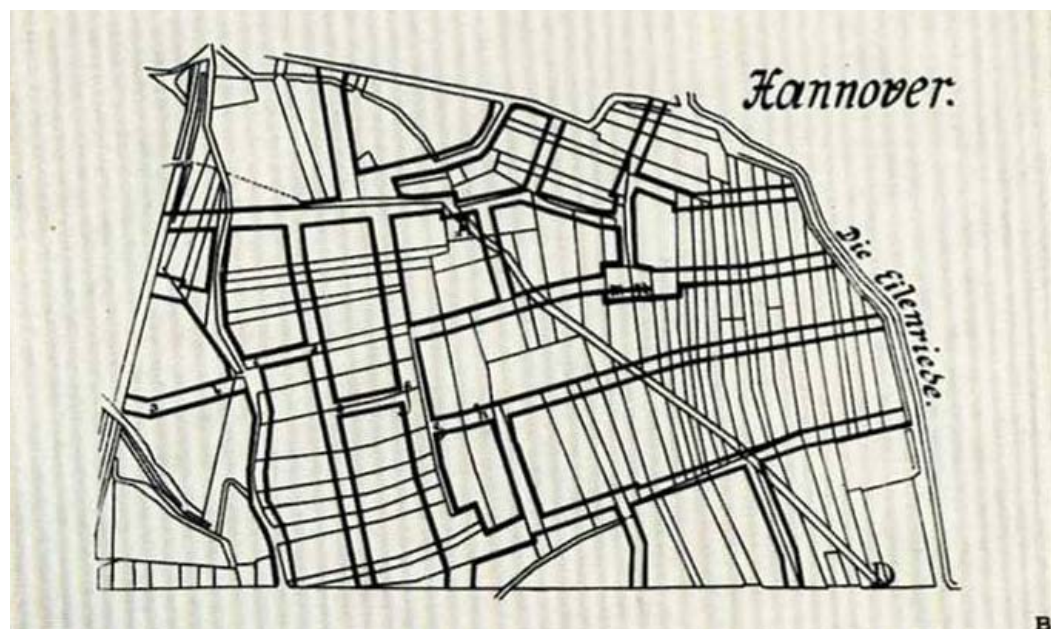
Despite Sitte's historical delay in translation, history and hindsight have proven the great strength of Wagner's perception which was expressed with equal measures of brevity, clarity and radicalism. In recognition of Sitte's contribution to city planning Wagner as

### 1.3 Camillo Sitte, Eilenriede, Hanover c1900

1. An imposed grid taking no account of property boundaries



2. Sitte's proposal using boundary lines and Die Eilenriede



the chair of the International Congress of Architecture organised a special graveside ceremony in 1908 where Sitte was honoured. Wagner followed on from Sitte's lecture on the 'Vienna of the Future' which gave great attention to its matters of traffic planning. When Wagner was entrusted with what in the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be known as a 'rapid transit system', designing the stations, tunnels, overpasses and elevated sections of the *Stadtbahn* (Metropolitan Railway) 1894-1901 (1.4) he demonstrated a genius for planning, and emphatically established his credentials as a founding father of the modern city within Central Europe.

Wagner's approach to architecture and his opposition to the idea of a National Style is best summed up in his 1915 Budapest lecture at the invitation of Ödön Lechner, the artistic expression of architectural works must be similar in every centre of culture, since the way of life and system of government are similar. If we accept this argument, we should realize that a national style cannot exist.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly this was in complete opposition to the direction being taken by Ödön Lechner and his followers. It is now clear that this rejection of the vernacular and the traditional did not produce an all-encompassing architecture that served peoples of Central Europe equally as was intended. What was needed was a re-evaluation of how people wished to live and this gave rise to further versions of city planning.

It is also necessary to consider the contribution of Adolf Loos and Maks Fabiani. In taking many parts of the city planning argument from Sitte and Wagner, Adolf Loos and Maks Fabiani added their experience of the intimate understanding of nation and tradition so implicit in the disparate states of Austria-Hungary, which the two knew only too well being born respectively as Czech, Brunn/Brno and Slovenian, Kobdilj Stavitel. For these men it is important to understand that this perception of nationality and a sense of belonging to a place were very different.

Following initial training in structural engineering in Reichenberg (now Liberec), Czech Republic, Loos returned to Brno where he worked as a mason until taking up a three-year architectural course in Dresden, but not graduating. He had to depart to undertake military service in the Imperial Rifles in Vienna. Following this he refused to return to Brno and run the family business; he wanted instead to go to Chicago for the 1893 World Exhibition. A deal was struck with his mother to finance this journey but the price was to waive his inheritance and not return to Brno. Despite being poverty-stricken he worked his way around some of America's most exciting cities, well versed in the blossoming progressive architecture created by Louis Henry Sullivan. In his travels he

## 1.4 Otto Wagner, the Vienna Stadtbahn, 1894-1901, Karlsplatz Station



Front Elevation



Decorative detailing



was a bricklayer, kitchen hand, hairdresser's assistant and a supernumerary at the Metropolitan Opera. It was this cosmopolitan understanding of the development of cities linked to a knowledge of the re-use of classical forms at the Chicago exhibition which would inform all of his writing and architectural oeuvre on his return to Austria-Hungary in 1896. He was determined to make an 'Introduction of Western Culture into Austria' this being a published supplement in the Peter Attenberg edited "*Kunst*" (Art). His other close supporter, Karl Kraus, championed Loos' Café Museum in Vienna's Operngasse 1889, (1.5) which was dismissed by Viennese supporters of the baroque who were hostile to the sparseness of line and lack of ornament. Kraus' sharp wit allowed a brilliant lampooning explanation of the Viennese conservative bourgeois view:

All Adolf Loos and I have done, he literally and I in words, is show that there is a difference between an urn and a chamber pot, and that it is this difference that provides the scope for culture to develop. The others are divided into those who use the urn as a chamber pot, and those who use the chamber pot as an urn.<sup>33</sup>

Adolf Loos' understanding of how this knowledge might be applied to the architectural development of Vienna is thoroughly demonstrated in his theoretical plan for transforming the old inner city into a well regulated, thriving modern business capital, 1909-12. Loos used the street plan of 1859, which included the recently acquired lands from levelling the old city defences and walls, but was prior to the constraining Ringstrasse. His plan combined the carefully considered squares, views and open prospects of Vienna, after Sitte, while at the same time, where appropriate, using broad avenues as arteries to cultural and financial centres. This aesthetic was visualised in evocative freehand sketches of municipal buildings, banks, apartments and houses. An accompanying model shows how this layout would work within and without the encircling Ringstrasse. The best demonstration of how Loos balanced his modernism with a desire for comfort is demonstrated in the exterior and interior design of the Steiner House Vienna, 1910, (1.6). The problem faced by Loos was how to create the desired three-storey space when the frontage was restricted by local ordinance to one storey. Loos solution was to arch a semi-circular, sheet-metal roof from first floor arcing through a second floor and continuing to form a three-storey, flat-roofed block as the garden façade.

The use of sheet metal roofing provided a functional, simple and elegant solution and, coupled with the plain walls, adhered to all of Loos' statements about taste and culture which at times were used as a critique of the *Secession* and *Werkbund*.

## 1.5 Adolf Loos, Café Museum, Vienna 1889

Before restoration and after



Views of the interior

We already have the style of our times. We have it everywhere where artists, and that means the members of that association, have not yet managed to poke their noses in. Ten years ago these artists were looking for new realms to conquer and having already ruined cabinet making, tried to take over the tailoring trade. At that time the future members of the *Werkbund* belonged to the *Secession*. With a few forceful essays on these questions I drove these gentlemen out of the tailors' and shoemakers' work, and also saved other crafts not yet infested with 'artists', from an unwanted invasion.<sup>34</sup>

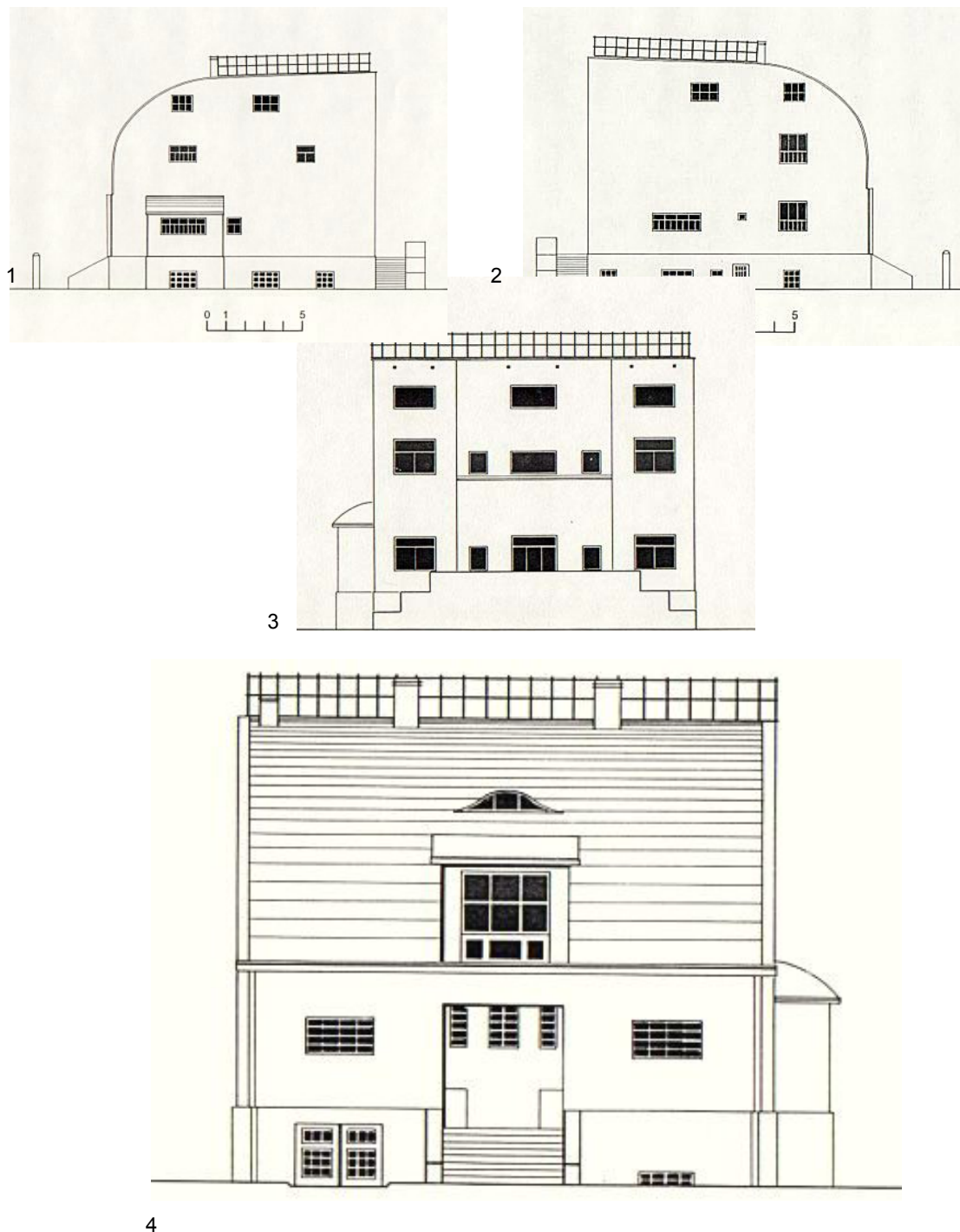
The Steiner House is now a forlorn relic of its former self, stripped of its curving roof and balancing fence and pillars with a smaller scale balcony of the same construction now all removed. Surmounted by an all too heavy half-pitched roof despite pretences to being fully pitched, all of the elegant symmetry of Loos' design in the street façade and the garden façade (1.6 - 8) has gone. Although this 'architectural vandalism' does allow us to refute some critics' concerns of Loos' means and methods. The total absence of decoration on the outside walls and the curved sheet metal roof are seen by Benedetto Gravagnuolo (Adolf Loos: Theory and Works) as being the denial of Loos' aesthetic because, as he points out, these are the walls plastered with lime mortar like the old Viennese houses and in turn the sheet metal roof is material drawn from the local historical building. Gravagnuolo implies that, in using these extant and traditional materials, Loos has become a historicist unable to grapple with the use of or understanding of new forms or materials. An examination of the elevations and the interiors gives the lie to that observation.

The Steiner House became an icon of architectural history of the modern age and of the Twentieth Century as soon as the first photographs were published. Almost every book on modern architecture cites the Steiner House as an essential contribution to its development.<sup>35</sup>

The design of the interior of the Steiner House would seem at first to contradict this statement of the modern with its apparent conservatism with comfortable furniture in the English style mixed with oriental rugs in a beamed and wainscoted interior. Look more closely however and the proportions of the beamed ceiling look wrong, surely the beams are too far apart to support the weight of other floors? On entering the dining room this sense of foreboding is heightened, the main window is set far too far into the corner, the wainscoting is too high? All of these doubts allow the viewer to proceed through the space with a sense of wonderment as they rise and fall throughout the interior in anticipation of the room beyond. Is that a mirror, why is it below a window, is that a window or a gridded decoration? What Loos has created is far from predictable,

## 1.6 Adolf Loos, Steiner House, Vienna 1910

The Elevations of the Steiner House, 1 South, 2 North, 3 East, and 4 West,



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### 1.7 Adolf Loos, Steiner House, Vienna 1910

Three quarter view and photograph of the front elevation when first built



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### 1.8 Adolf Loos, Steiner House, Vienna 1910



This view like many others is from the gardens and gives little clue, other than the cubic form, as to the modern approach to a difficult site and planning restrictions Adolf Loos had to overcome..

Adolf Loos, Steiner House, Vienna c.1970



supporting his view that the interior areas of a home were places of conversation, music eating and drinking in a play of social harmony enlivened by the unsettling questions and further possibilities of the interior.

Loos' original is far superior to the ill-resolved house we see today. Loos' statement was modern, balanced and beautifully resolved by comparison. Any incidental use of materials from the history of building is appropriate, as it is the way Loos uses them, not what they are, that makes the whole concept modern. Gravagnuolo's view would appear to be part of a commentary that misunderstands modernism confusing the use of materials in modernism with the dictates of the Modern Movement. Clearly if this were the case there would be no place for Loos in the cannon of modernism but as will be seen in his later developments of the *raumplan* of which the Steiner House was an early example, Loos' influence on many was considerable.

The logical deduction was that construction pure and simple was to take the place of the fantastic forms of past centuries, the luxuriant decoration of past epochs. Straight lines right-angled edges. That is the way the craftsman works who has an eye to function and has tools and material at hand.<sup>36</sup>

The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use. Ornament means wasted labour and therefore wasted health. That was always the case. Today, however it also means wasted material, and both mean wasted capital.<sup>37</sup>

The major difference between Loos and others was that Loos never was able to re-plan on a large scale. However with the destruction of Zagreb in 1880 and Ljubljana in 1895, both from earthquakes, planners including Fabiani were able to take advantage of the situation to introduce new thinking around city planning and employ the very best architectural solutions. The result was a comprehensive re-planning of Zagreb and Ljubljana, which remain two of the most well resolved modern cities to this day – appropriate resolutions of the city ideal, 'The City for the People, the Polis.' The founding of these 'Cities of the People' was to play a major role in influencing further developments across Central Europe in cities like Brno, Zlin and Wroclaw, cities which were essential to the formation of new states in the former Empire.

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## Notes to Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> Zucker P., *Town and Square, from the Agora to the Village Green*, Columbia University Press, New York & London, 1959, p.20
- <sup>2</sup> Op.cit., Moravanzsky, 1998, p. 217-234
- <sup>3</sup> See, Semper G., *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Cambridge, 1989, and Semper G., *Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven and London, 1996, Ed. Malgrave H.F.
- <sup>4</sup> Op.cit., Moravanzsky, 1998, p.287
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.287-288
- <sup>6</sup> Op.cit., Loos, 1989, p.69
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.193
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.309-310
- <sup>9</sup> see Horvat Pintaric V., *The Architecture of Otto Wagner*, Studio Editions, London, 1989, p.7-31, for an explanation of the Secession in relation to growing ideas embodied within architectural modernism particularly Wagner, Loos and Fabiani.
- <sup>10</sup> Op.cit., Moravanzsky, 1998, p.137
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.100-103
- <sup>12</sup> see Smith B., 1998, *Modernism's History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, p.41-46
- <sup>13</sup> Op.cit., Moravanzsky, 1998, p.242
- <sup>14</sup> Op.cit., Blau and Platzer, 1999, p.94-105
- <sup>15</sup> Geretsegger H. and Peinter M., *Otto Wagner The Expanding City The Beginning of Modern Architecture*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1970, p.19
- <sup>16</sup> It is often stated that Otto Wagner wrote *Moderne Architektur*; however in conversation with Dr Peter Krečič, Director of the Museum of Architecture, Ljubljana, I learned of a letter from Maks Fabiani to Professor Nace Sumi dated Gorica/Gorizia 27<sup>th</sup> May 1955, which describes Maks Fabiani as living with Wagner at that time, discussing the ideas within the book and writing the text jointly with him. This letter appears in full in *Archives d'histoire de l'art* ( Anthology for Art History), *Nova vrsta* (New series) XXVII, Ljubljana, 1991, p.121-122
- <sup>17</sup> see Collins G.R. and Craseman Collins C., *City Planning According To Artistic Principles*, Random House, New York, 1965 a., and *Camillo Sitte and the Birth Of Modern City Planning*, Random House, New York, 1965 b. for the fullest explanation of these ideas..
- <sup>18</sup> Fleming J., Honour H. and Pevsner N., *Penguin Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, Penguin Books, London, 1999, p.529
- <sup>19</sup> Op.cit., Mumford, 1961, p.348
- <sup>20</sup> Op.cit., Collins, 1965 b, p.2
- <sup>21</sup> Although this remark is attributed to F. L. Olmstead in reference to Central Park, New York, c.1858, William Windham used the phrase 'Lungs of London' to refer to Hyde Park in the House of Commons, 1808. Anecdotal evidence particularly from discussions within what was to become the Royal Horticultural Society, Kew Gardens, suggest that plants-men used phrases similar to this in the previous century. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/pda/A386138>, 2005
- <sup>22</sup> Hall P., *Cities of Tomorrow*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1992, p.202
- <sup>23</sup> Op.cit., Collins, 1965 b, p.17
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.17
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.18
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.549
- <sup>27</sup> Op.cit., Fleming, 1999, p.594
- <sup>28</sup> Op.cit., Collins, 1965 b, p.22 and note 38 p.120
- <sup>29</sup> Op.cit., Blau and Platzer, 1999, p.62
- <sup>30</sup> Op.cit., Mumford, 1961 p.475
- <sup>31</sup> see Collins, 1965 b, Chapter 7
- <sup>32</sup> Op.cit., Moravanzsky, 1998, p.239.
- <sup>33</sup> Op.cit., Loos, 1998, p.7, Introduction by Alfred Opel
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.164
- <sup>35</sup> Sarnitz A., *Loos*, Taschen, Koln, 2003, p.43
- <sup>36</sup> Op.cit., Loos, 1998, p.181
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.171