Austria as a ‘Baroque Nation’. Institutional and media constructions

Andreas Nierhaus

Paris, 1900

When Alfred Picard, General Commissioner of the World Exhibition in Paris 1900, declared that the national pavilions of the ‘Rue des Nations’ along the river Seine should be erected in each country’s ‘style notoire’, the idea of characterizing a ‘nation’ through the use of a specific historical architectural or artistic style had become a monumental global axiom. Italy was represented by a paraphrase of St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, Spain chose the look of the Renaissance Alcazar, the United States selected a triumphant beaux-arts architecture, Germany moved into a castle-like building – in the style of the "German Renaissance", of course – and the United Kingdom built a Tudor country house. However, there were considerable doubts about the seriousness and soundness of such a masquerade: ‘Anyone wanting to study national styles at the Quai d’Orsay would fail to come to any appreciable results – just as the archaeologist who wants to collect material for costume design in a mask wardrobe [would equally fail]. Apart from few exceptions, what we find is prettily arranged festive theatrical decoration (...).’

Whereas the defenders of modernism must have regarded this juxtaposition of styles as symbolic of an eclecticism that had become almost meaningless, both the organizers and the general public seemed very comfortable with the resulting historical spectacle.

It was no coincidence that the Austrian Pavilion was given the form of a Baroque castle. (Fig. 1) Its architect Ludwig Baumann assembled meaningful quotes from the buildings of Johann Bernhard and Joseph Emanuel Fischer von Erlach, Lucas von Hildebrandt and Jean Nicolas Jadot in order to combine them into a new neo-Baroque whole. He drew this vision from a reservoir of historical forms that had been gradually filled over the previous decades by architects and art historians, thus inevitably almost arriving at the logical endpoint of historicist architecture.

‘Of course Austria has rendered its official pavilion in a style that has found favor and home with the House of Habsburg, the Baroque.’ And it had done so on the


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grounds that this style, as Max Mora continued, represented ‘the style almost archetypal of Austrian architecture’.3

The visitors of the Paris exhibition were invited to place this specifically Austrian ‘national style’ within the broader context of the diverse set of identities cohabiting within the Habsburg monarchy, which, aside from the Austrian pavilion, occupied two other sites at the ‘Rue des Nations’. Since the Ausgleich or Compromise of 1867, Hungary had increasingly acted as an independent state and had thus decided to build a national pavilion of its own for the Paris exhibition. By choosing Vajda Hunyad Castle, the ancestral home of king Matthias Corvinus, as the model for the building, the Hungarian planners were making a clear reference to the history of the country before the reign of the Habsburgs. On top of that, the provinces of Bosnia and Hercegovina, since 1878 jointly governed by Austria and Hungary (and destined to be annexed by the Empire in 1908), also got their own special pavilion – a sort of colonial imagining of what a ‘traditional’ Bosnian mansion might look like. In comparison and contrast to other nations – and to the pavilions of Hungary and of the occupied Balkan provinces – one could argue that Austria was for the first time effectively declaring itself ‘officially’ to be a ‘Baroque nation’, yet at the same time it was becoming obvious that the Habsburg Empire

was now an increasingly fragile body of contrasting countries, ethnic groups and languages that in no way corresponded to the contemporary notion of an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous nation. The Baroque was seen both as an ‘imperial’ style and at the same time as a ‘popular’ dialect of a classic artistic language that could be understood in all parts of the Empire. Thus, the Baroque was seen as capable of uniting conflicting dynastic, regional and ethnic interests within the monarchy. Despite all political dislocations and fractures that were to follow throughout the twentieth century, the reference to the Baroque would remain a constant of Austrian politics of identity.

In addition to and in conjunction with museums, books and films, exhibitions – both national and international – had also always played an important role in the construction of Austria as a ‘Baroque nation’. The activities of the ‘authors’ of such exhibitions were set within a discursive framework in which art-historical research into the Baroque was endowed with great significance: Among art critics, the Baroque had been seen for many decades as a style of decay – as a tasteless and excessive parody of the Renaissance ideal. But from the 1880s onwards, more ‘objective’ art-historical research had led to a revaluation of the Baroque, an evaluation that was eventually to make this previously long-deprecated style a possible choice for the Austrian Pavilion at the 1900 Paris exhibition.\(^4\)

The history of scholarly research on the Baroque and its various connotations can thus always be seen also as a history of exhibiting and showcasing the Baroque – and vice versa – and accordingly the subject generated intense exchanges between research institutions, publications and exhibitions. Nevertheless, little contemporary scholarly interest has thus far been dedicated to this fact.\(^5\) Exhibitions do more than simply create spatial transformations of knowledge on their subject matter: they also inevitably produce specifically crafted representations of their topic under the prevailing social, cultural and political circumstances – especially where they are guided by some cultural and political impetus or have the status of an official state event.\(^6\) Due to their cultural and political relevance, their educational goals, their theatrical design and not least their potentially large public, exhibitions are in any case a particularly suitable object of study in the dissemination of historical and political narratives of ‘identity’ and ‘identities’.

\(^4\) In 1888, the architect of the Austrian Pavilion, Ludwig Baumann, together with Emil Bressler and Friedrich Ohmann, had published a portfolio titled *Barock. Eine Sammlung von Plafonds, Cartouchen, Consolen (…) aus der Epoche Leopold I. bis Maria Theresia*, which was mainly intended as a sourcebook for architects, but which also assembled previously widely scattered material for the scholarly study of the Baroque idiom.


\(^6\) This is sometimes less true of the museums of today, which often have to conform only to the economic dictates of its program budget, though the situation varies from country to country.
The following text is not meant to be a history of Baroque exhibitions in Austria between 1900 and 1960: instead it aims to situate the medium of the exhibition within a larger institutional and rhetorical context, in which art historical research, the museum, the popular book and not least the film all play central roles and make reference to one another.\(^7\)

**The ‘Future of the Baroque style’**

Baumann’s Paris pavilion was the architectural expression of a discourse on the Baroque as an Austrian national style that had been set in motion twenty years earlier with Albert Ilg’s pamphlet ‘Die Zukunft des Barockstils’ (The Future of the Baroque style).\(^8\) After the Empire’s defeat by Prussia at Königgrätz (1866), the compromise with Hungary (1867) and the founding of the German Reich, (1870) Ilg, who worked as a curator at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, wanted to provide a politically weakened, multi-ethnic Austrian state with a suitable aesthetic expression of its identity and hence add some ideological stability to its existence. In order to make a demarcation between it and Prussia, Ilg set the (Catholic) ‘Austrian Baroque’ against the (Protestant) ‘German Renaissance’ – though beyond that he also called upon contemporary artists to follow the model of the Baroque, on the grounds that only that style would be appropriate for and characteristic of a people, ‘whose flowering coincides with the flowering of the other factors in prosperity. In Austria this only became the case with the Baroque. It is only since that time that the idea of an Austrian state arose.’\(^9\)

As Peter Stachel has pointed out, Ilg linked already well-known attributions to the Baroque into an ideological argument, whose function can only be made entirely intelligible in the context the political conditions at the time of its creation, but whose effects were to extend beyond that time frame.\(^10\) Ilg’s interpretation of the Baroque as a ‘supranational national style’\(^11\) was to prove a statement that had far-reaching effects. Indeed, the presumed almost ‘natural’ relationship between the Baroque and the ‘Austrian mind’ was to continue to be considered a valid ideology right up until the second half of the 20th century.\(^12\) This idea was always linked to

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\(^7\) At this point, we can do no more than outline this system of references in an effort to explore possible further directions for a wider research aiming to link together history, art history, film and media studies in a transdisciplinary manner.


\(^10\) Stachel, ‘Albert Ilg and the “invention” of the Baroque’, 137.


\(^12\) Compare Stachel, ‘Albert Ilg and the “invention” of the Baroque’, 137–138.
the concept of national identity, which was more difficult to construct and had a less secure status in Austria than in other countries. The reason why the narrative of ‘Baroque Austria’ retained validity from the late nineteenth century, throughout the First Republic and the fascist Ständestaat (“corporate state”) until well into the Second Republic is linked more to the complicated make-up of Austria, than with any special Austrian preference for the Baroque. The narrative was useful because it lacked any clear ‘national’ connotations – the Baroque left room open for varying interpretations within changing political systems. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the essential steps taken by Austria on its way to becoming a modern ‘nation’, unlike in the case of its neighbors to the north and south, were not set in the nineteenth century, but in fact as recently as in the late twentieth century. Thus, the first expressions that equated the Baroque with the ‘Austrian’ in the nineteenth century should be seen primarily as a reaction to European nationalism, and to the nationalist tendencies present within the state’s borders, which were seen as a threat to the existence of the monarchy. Multi-ethnic Austria was almost the opposite of the contemporary modern concept of the nation state. Describing the Baroque as imperial Catholic style expressing a ‘synthesis’ towards a higher unity endowed it with the potential to become a model for the desired unity of the monarchy under the protection of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine – and under the hegemony of the German speaking population. The message was that what Baroque had achieved on an aesthetic level should also be possible on the political plane – and vice versa – that the nationalist antagonisms and tensions currently in play within the monarchy had the potential to be aesthetically sublimated through a renewal of the spirit of the Baroque.

During the last years of the monarchy, an effort was led by the highest authorities to establish a neo-Baroque Reichsstil (Empire Style). The Baroque found an advocate in Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who simultaneously flatly rejected the modern architecture of the period as represented by Otto Wagner and his students. The Paris pavilion was to be the first ‘official’ building to present this late Reichsstil, a style that would culminate 14 years later in the monumental War Ministry building on Vienna’s Ringstrasse. Indeed, this schematic, synthetic adoption of the Baroque had almost nothing to do with the ideal artistic requirements of Albert Ilg, but it nevertheless built upon the idea of the Baroque as a genuinely Austrian style. At this point it should be noted that the adoption of the Baroque in the Vienna of 1900 was not automatically connected with any conservative or reactionary aesthetic attitude – the case was rather that the Baroque provided a large and adaptable resonant space that played a complex role in the context of the process of aesthetic modernization that occurred around the turn of the century.13

13 In his influential lecture on the Baroque, Alois Riegl pointed out that it would continue to have an effect “up to the most modern Secession style”. Alois Riegl, Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom, ed. by Arthur Burda and Max Dvořák, 2nd edition, Vienna 1923 (first edition 1908), 5.
The Barockmuseum

Although the fall of the monarchy in 1918 had suddenly made the Baroque Reichsstil obsolete, the ‘national Baroque bacillus’¹⁴, as a critic of Ilg once had put it, was to survive the transition to the democratic First Republic. Accordingly, the Barockmuseum (Museum of Baroque Art) opened in Vienna’s Lower Belvedere Palace in 1923. It had originally been the idea of Hans Tietze (1880–1954), who, as an

advisor in the Ministry of Education, had been working on the reorganization of the former imperial museums in Vienna since 1919, a tasked forced upon the new dispensation by the collapse of the monarchy. Thanks to increased art collection activities in previous years, Franz Martin Haberditzl (1882–1944), director of the Staatsgalerie (National Gallery), succeeded in showcasing important art of the Baroque period from public collections, using resources that were complemented by significant loans from private owners, with the historical setting of the summer palace of Prince Eugene of Savoy providing the backdrop.\(^\text{15}\) The very center of the museum, which was to be extended in 1933/34, was the Marble Hall that housed Georg Raphael Donner’s sculptures for the famous Providentia Fountain on Neuer Markt, with adjacent rooms dedicated to such important artists as Franz Anton Maulbertsch or Paul Troger. (Fig. 2–3) The displays concentrated mainly on specimens of courtly and sacred art of highest quality. The topic of obvious regional differences – those between the Alpine provinces and the capital in Vienna, for example – was relegated to the background in favor of an image portraying a homogenized whole. The category of ‘folk art’ was entirely unrepresented in the selection. In sum, as Hans Tietze’s declaration of 1924 claimed, ‘the wealth of the proudest national memories of Austria’ flourished ‘like a fresh bouquet’ in the Barockmuseum.\(^\text{16}\) Following the commonly shared reading introduced forty years earlier by Albert Ilg, Tietze pointed out that Austrian Baroque

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\text{is not just a style, but moreover the style that most clearly expresses the artistic talent of that tribe (...). It arrived at its full independence at a time when Austria was achieving the summit of its national power, when it was effectively becoming what it was (...). The Austrian Baroque is a national style in the sense that it has always been a latent force and needed only a favorable set of historical circumstances to emerge in all its brilliance (...).}\(^\text{17}\)
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The Baroque Museum was thus more than just a synopsis of the regional art of a certain period. Indeed in the years of the First Republic, the content of the museum, supposedly expressing the ‘typically Austrian’ would and could always be read

\[^\text{15}\text{ Compare Elfriede Baum, Katalog des Österreichischen Barockmuseums im Unteren Belvedere in Wien, Vienna: Herold, 1980, vol. 1, 10–11.}\]


with an eye to the future: in the association with the German Reich which had been avoided as a result of the peace treaties of 1919. For Hans Tietze, the task of forming a characteristic overall image of Austrian art had an obvious role in preparing the country’s future role within a larger German state. In her review of the new Barockmuseum, Tietze’s wife Erica Tietze-Conrat pointed clearly to the institution’s political meaning: ‘The Baroque Museum aims to put a forgotten art and cultural epoch back into its proper light once more and, through this demonstration of a glorious past, strengthen its force for the future. Its ultimate goal is therefore not aesthetic (...).’

Hans Sedlmayr

During the First Republic, the politicization of the Baroque was inseparably linked to Hans Sedlmayr, an art historian whose views were destined to shape the image of the Baroque in Austria right up until the 1960s. Following the research impetus initiated by Ilg in the 1880s and 1890s, academic focus concentrated on studies of individual works and artists, while any coherent overall picture of the Baroque in Austria remained largely unpainted. A turning point came in 1911 with the publication of Wilhelm Pinder’s book, Deutscher Barock (the German Baroque), whose large print runs popularized the theme in a number of unexpected ways. Hans Sedlmayr first encountered the book, as he put it himself in hindsight in 1936, ‘in the trenches of World War I’. For the young architect and aspiring art historian, it provided what he called “intellectual ammunition” for a confident – in his case ‘German-conscious’ – attitude towards the topic. And Sedlmayr’s encounter with the Baroque in the elementary space provided by the trenches was to prove momentous. He was destined to ascend to the status of by far the most important actor in research on the Baroque in Austria in the two decades between 1925 and 1945. In 1925, two years after the opening of the Barockmuseum, his monograph on Fischer von Erlach was published by Piper in Munich. The introductory essay, aimed at a wider audience, was followed by a list of works and drawings. The

22 Hans Sedlmayr, Fischer von Erlach der Ältere, Munich: Piper, 1925.
plentiful high-quality images contained in the volume provided the reader for the first time with a visual overview of the architect’s work. To follow were Sedlmayr’s book on Borromini and his richly illustrated volume on Österreichische Barockarchitektur (Austrian Baroque Architecture), published by Benno Filser in Vienna.23 The two most important chapters “Einleitung für ‘Laien’” (Introduction for the layman) and “Einleitung für Kunsthistoriker” (Introduction for the art historian) illustrate the wide range of his expected audience: the reader would discover that his ‘Introduction for the layman’, labeled with the surtitle ‘Zum Sehen barocker Architekturen’ (On seeing Baroque Architecture) contained a remarkable study on the aesthetics of perception, while his introduction of the professional audience provided a relatively conventional approach to the subject. “The ‘German Baroque’ in architecture”, it declares,

is a synthesis of the great architectural systems (...) that emerged in the XVIIth Century in the West – that is, in France, Holland, and Italy. (...) These systems emerged, not in a mechanical mixture of two vocabularies, but from a true fusion of the innermost core of these systems, a fusion that never could have been derived from the premises alone: out of red and blue, seemingly irreconcilable, a pure violet comes into being (...).24

Sedlmayr saw Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach as ‘the greatest power for synthesis that the German Baroque possessed (...). In Fischer’s work, the synthesis of various design systems that makes up the true subject of the entire German Baroque, is not completed unconsciously, by simply passively picking up latent trends, but by what in fact constitutes a conscious act.”25 Through his tendentious interpretation of a contemporary Baroque source in the argumentation that followed, Sedlmayr brought an aspect to the foreground that was to be stressed again and again in the years to follow in an effort to document the superiority of Austrian – and thus German – Baroque art over ‘foreign’ artistic ‘invaders’ since the end of the seventeenth century. It was in his ‘Ehrenruf Teutschlands’, a kind of panegyric to the German countries, that author Wagner von Wagenfels had praised Fischer’s 1690 triumphal arches as a victory over the Italian arts – a source that Albert Ilg had already cited in his monograph on Fischer in 1895 and, in sharp

23 Hans Sedlmayr, Österreichische Barockarchitektur, Vienna: Dr. B. Filser, 1930.
24 ‘Deutscher Barock’ (...) ist in der Architektur die Synthese aus den großen architektonischen Systemen (...), die im XVII. Jahrhundert im Westen, das heißt Frankreich-Holland, und in Italien ausgebildet worden sind. (...) Nicht in mechanischer Mischung zweier Vokabulare, sondern aus einer wahrhaftigen Verschmelzung des innersten Kerns dieser Systeme ist entstanden, was man aus den Prämissen allein niemals ableiten, kaum im vagsten ahnen hätte können. Aus Rot und Blau, den scheinbar Unvereinbaren, entsteht ein reines Violett (...).’ Quoted from Sedlmayr, Österreichische Barockarchitektur, 23.
25 ‘(...) die größte synthetische Kraft, die der deutsche Barock besessen hat (...). Bei Fischer ist die Synthese der verschiedenen Gestaltungssysteme, die das Thema des ganzen deutschen Barock bildet, nicht unbewußt im Aufnehmen latenter Tendenzen vollzogen, sondern ein bewußter Akt.’ Quoted from Sedlmayr, Österreichische Barockarchitektur, 32–33.
contrast to subsequent researchers, had also analyzed in detail.26 Where Ilg had tried
to draw a balanced picture of Wagner’s ‘Deutschthümlerei’ (Teutophilia), in
writings that included digs at the German nationalism of his own time, forty years
later, Hans Sedlmayr resorted to the language of sheer confrontation: ‘Fischer’s
victory over an Italian in Vienna 1690, seen then as a triumph of German art,
provides the first signal of a transformation in world history.’27

During the 1930s – a period of rapidly changing political circumstances –
Sedlmayr sharpened his words further. From 1934 on, Austria had been
transformed into an authoritarian Ständestaat that was endeavoring to create an
independent German-Austrian Identity, appealing to the ‘glorious’ past of the
Habsburg Empire and contrasting it with Hitler’s Germany.

Although Sedlmayr was a German national Catholic whose attitudes were
close to the Austro-fascist regime, he was also member of the NSDAP. In 1936, the
year of his appointment to a professorship at the University of Vienna, Sedlmayr
published an essay on ‘Österreichs Bildende Kunst’ (Austria’s visual arts) in an
anthology edited by Josef Nadler and Heinrich Ritter von Srbik, Österreich. Erbe und
Sendung im Deutschen Raum (Austria. Heritage and mission in the German domain),
a book which was meant as a preparation within the humanities for the Anschluss to
the German Reich. In his essay, Sedlmayr attempts to demonstrate the importance
of the Austrian Baroque and its political significance in the bigger German context.
His approach is not to focus individual buildings, but rather to construct an entire
Kunstlandschaft (artistic landscape), thus evoking the idea of a so to speak
naturalistic ‘rooting’ for the Baroque: ‘The liberation of the Austrian landscape from
the Turks had brought a state of affairs into being that called for the emergence of a
great architect.’28 Thus, this ‘Austrian landscape’ first needed to be freed and
cleansed before it could produce things of great value. The new style that Fischer
then creates out of a synthesis of the French and the Italian – the Reichsstil – is, says
Sedlmayr, ‘thoroughly German, yet also European’.29 With the addition of Fischer’s
new buildings,

Austria has become a model for at least the whole of southern Germany.
Both from east to west and towards the north goes the main wave of this
new art, sweeping the defeated Italians before it. Bohemia, Franconia and
Silesia follow, and the architecturally empty Hungarian space becomes
their colony. Saxony and Poland are also to follow. Wherever German

26 Albert Ilg, Die Fischer von Erlach, vol. 1: Leben und Werke Johann Bernhard Fischer’s von
27 ‘Fischers als Triumph der deutschen Kunst verstandener und proklamiertener Sieg über
einen Italiener in Wien, 1690, ist das erste Signal zu einem welthistorischen Umschwung.’
Sedlmayr, Österreichische Barockarchitektur, 32.
28 ‘Die Befreiung der österreichischen Landschaft von den Türken hatte eine Lage geschaffen,
die nach einem großen Architekten rief.’ Quoted from Sedlmayr, ‘Österreichs bildende
Kunst’, 274.
Baroque arises of its own accord, it does so in accordance with the form created by Fischer and encouraged by his example. The eyes of Germany turned towards Vienna.30

The Italian, and with it everything ‘foreign’, is driven off, leaving an empty space to be colonized – all this sounds like nothing other than a linguistic preparation for war, with all the politics of displacement and extermination that the concept brings with it.

Baroque in the Ständestaat and during the Nazi era

In the meantime, the Ständestaat, internally torn and threatened by the civil war, insofar as it resorted at all to the diplomatic detour of cultural policies, attempted to create new alliances against Hitler and appealed to the understanding of the West, of France – even as the situation was becoming increasingly hopeless. In 1937, during the World Exhibition in Paris, an Exposition d’Art Autrichien was shown at the Jeu de Paume.31 Only a few months before the Austrian Anschluss, the country represented itself as a nation rich in culture, open to modernism in the arts – in effect as the ‘better German state’. The objects exhibited ranged from treasures of high medieval art to contemporary expressionist painting, the latter style being given the largest space within the exhibition. Among the 600 objects on display, the Baroque, with 120 works, was also strongly represented. Among other works, the selection included paintings by Franz Anton Maulbertsch, sculpture, furniture and porcelain pieces, and Baroque buildings were displayed in the form of large-format photographic panels.32 The cover of the catalogue (Fig. 4), featuring a monumental Annunciation by Styrian sculptor Veit König, created a link between Catholicism as a sort of Austrian state religion and the Baroque as the characteristic style of Austria. In their prefaces, Jean Mistler and Alfred Stix once again highlighted the unifying power of the Austrian Baroque, as well as the closeness of the country’s ‘sensual’ native people with the Baroque, which had thus inevitably become Austria’s ‘national style’.33 Once again, according to Albert Ilg and Hans Tietze,

contemporary (expressionist) Austrian art, particularly as represented by the works of Oskar Kokoschka, was closely linked to the Baroque tradition, in an discussion in which the Baroque was interpreted as the cultural grounding upon which the creative impulses of contemporary art in Austria were built. Modernism and modernity are not interpreted as a radical break with tradition, but located within a historical and cultural continuity. It is a testament to the cultural and political ambivalence of the Ständestaat, that at the same time as Oskar Kokoschka’s paintings were being displayed at the notorious Entartete Kunst (“degenerate art”) exhibition in Munich 1937, the first major museum presentation of his works was opened in Vienna, staging the artist as a member of the set of ‘authentically Austrian’ painters, thus indirectly emphasizing Austria’s cosmopolitanism and openness towards contemporary art, in sharp contrast to the German Reich. In 1960, Oskar Kokoschka was to contribute the foreword to Klára Garas’ monograph on Baroque painter Franz Anton Maulbertsch, thus placing himself explicitly within an ‘invented’ tradition of expressive colorism in Austrian Baroque painting.34

Despite what Hans Sedlmayr might have secretly wished, interpretations of the Baroque as produced by the discipline of history of art were to have hardly any political relevance during the Nazi era. By 1940, there was already a taboo in place against even speaking of ‘Austria’, and Austrian Baroque art seemed to disappear into the larger German whole. No significant exhibitions of such art were opened

until 1945, and – aside from Bruno Grimschitz’ 1944 study of Viennese Baroque palaces\(^\text{35}\) – no significant books on the topic were published.

**Second Republic: the Baroque nation**

After 1945, Austrian cultural politics were in a position in which they could once more easily build upon the times before 1938. However, the purpose of such efforts was now to emphasize that Austrian culture was different and separate from that of Germany in aid of the effort to constitute an independent and – from 1955 on – neutral Austrian state capable of distancing itself from complicity in the crimes of the Third Reich.

The thesis that Austria was the ‘first victim of Hitler’, based on the Allies’ 1943 ‘Moscow Declaration’, made it possible to deprecate the participation of many Austrians in the crimes of the Nazi regime. At the same time Austria needed to be constructed successfully as an independent, non-German nation in terms of culture, in a process that went so far that for a while not ‘German’ but a ‘language of instruction’ was taught in Austrian schools and in 1950 an ‘Austrian Dictionary’ (which still exists to this day) was published for the first time.

In this context, it was now the task of art historians to thoroughly expel the ‘Germanness’ from the Austrian Baroque, a Germanness for which specialists in the discipline had previously been argued more or less convincingly. From an analysis of contemporary sources, it seems that the easiest way to achieve this was to simply replace ‘German’ by ‘European’, thus documenting a cosmopolitan attitude in Austria’s cultural life and at the same time asserting a claim to full membership of the ‘free Western world’.

The Lower Belvedere had been severely damaged in the 1939–1945 war. After *Masterpieces of Austrian Baroque Art* exhibition was held there in 1951, the Barockmuseum was reopened in 1953, largely maintaining the pre-war layout, though the style of presentation was now more sober.\(^\text{36}\) The Barockmuseum had now become part of a new institution, the new ‘National Gallery’, as the international artworks in the collections had been separated out to be exhibited separately in their own museum. The Österreichische Galerie (Austrian Gallery) was created especially in order to demonstrate the country’s cultural autonomy through the structure of the museum, accepting the risk that Austrian art might become isolated in the realm of the provincial as a result.\(^\text{37}\)

Within a year of the 1955 Austrian State Treaty, which brought full sovereignty to the country, along with its guaranteed ‘perpetual neutrality’ and the

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\(^{35}\) Bruno Grimschitz, *Wiener Barockpaläste*, Vienna: Wiener Verlag, 1944. In the bibliography of this work, Jewish authors like Hans Tietze were highlighted as ‘non-Aryan’.


\(^{37}\) For the contemporary discussion about provinciality in Austria, confer the critical reader Österreich – geistige Provinz?, Vienna: Forum-Verlag, 1965.
withdrawal of all Allied troops, the occasion of the 300th birthday of Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach was celebrated – a date that had great popular appeal, as ever since Albert Ilg, Fischer remained generally regarded to be Austria’s greatest artist of all time. The decision to honor the architect’s birthday by organizing a large exhibition must have been taken very late – the curator, Hans Aurenhammer, had only six months to put the show together. It was Hans Sedlmayr who had first suggested it. In 1945, he had been suspended from the University of Vienna because of his membership in the NSDAP\(^{38}\) and since 1951 had been teaching in Munich and preparing his great monograph on Fischer von Erlach. Aside from Sedlmayr, architect Clemens Holzmeister, whose influence had been strong all the way back to the time of the Ständestaat, and who was also engaged in building the festival hall for the Salzburg Festival, played an important role in organizing the great event. The exhibition was first shown in Fischer’s hometown of Graz, then moving on to Salzburg, Vienna, Munich and Stuttgart. As Harald Keller wrote in *Kunstchronik*, it was ‘the greatest exhibition that has been held for an architect in living memory’\(^{39}\) (Fig. 5)

![Figure 5 Insight into the Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach exhibition, Vienna 1956.](image)

In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, Federal Minister of Education Heinrich Drimmel drew a striking parallel between the time of Fischer and the year 1956, directly relating the victory of the Habsburgs over the Turks to the reconstruction and economic boom in the years since 1945:


A time that will go down in the rich history of our country as an era of powerful resurgence, a time when a rejuvenated faith in the future of our homeland combines in support of a renewed will to live that has the courage to take up the challenge and does not hesitate to assert herself and her determination inspired by the example of history. (...) Fischer von Erlach’s star rose over an earth that still bore the marks of terrible battles, battles upon which not just the fate of our homeland, but also the future of Europe depended.  

40 Karl Maria Swoboda, who had taught at the German University in Prague until 1945 and had always stressed the German national character of Czech and Moravian art in his writings, also contributed a preface for the exhibition. In it he now described the Austrian Baroque as striving for ‘balance, harmony of proportions, the formal and beautiful inperturbability of the architectural design’ and attested a ‘radical idealism of design’, which was the expression of a higher ‘Austrian idea’.  

41 In contrast, Hans Aurenhammer, both in the catalogue and later in his concise 1957 monograph on Fischer, drew a far more nuanced, even disillusioned, image. Clearly directing his fire against Sedlmayr (of course, without mentioning him), and making reference to discussion of the Germanness of Fischer’s Art following the completion his triumphal arches in 1690, he writes: ‘The national enthusiasm on Fischer’s output (...) should, however, never be overstated nor assumed to be a general phenomenon. (...) Fischer’s triumphal arches (...) were taken to be a national event at a particular historical moment and by a particular political group. More than that, however, what they were was an artistic fact.’  

42 Much later, in the 1990s, it would
Hellmut Lorenz who exposed Sedlmayr’s concept of Reichsstil as simply a political construct that has no real correspondence with the actual real-world qualities of the buildings themselves.43

In 1960, the pattern of major shows on the Baroque continued with the exhibition on Jakob Prandtauer und sein Kunstkreis (Jakob Prandtauer and his artistic circle) (Fig. 6), which was held in the Benedictine Abbey at Melk in Lower Austria. In one of the largest spaces of the exhibition was screened a movie in color titled, Austria Gloriosa – Barocke Impressionen (Austria Gloriosa - Baroque Impressions).44 The film once more clearly expressed the preferred interpretation of the Baroque in postwar Austria: the country’s most famous Baroque buildings – its churches, monasteries, castles and palaces (and thus only its works of ‘high art’) – are staged almost as the native-grown ingredients of a genuinely Austrian ‘cultural landscape’. The film concludes with views of the crown of the Holy Roman Empire on the

Figure 6 Exhibition poster Jakob Prandtauer und sein Kunstkreis, Melk monastery, 1960.

http://www.filmportal.de/film/austria-gloriosa_a598211ea48f470c84adbccc1bf2d13f.
cupola of Klosterneuburg Abbey and scenes of a Catholic High Mass, all accompanied by Mozart’s Coronation Mass. Financed by the Federal Ministry for Education, the film was presented in the same year at the Berlinale Film Festival. Rupert Feuchtmüller, the curator of the exhibition at Melk Abbey, was involved as a consultant in its production. The title of the film was probably his idea.45

Also cinematic in effect was the design of an early example of the coffee-table book genre published in 1963 under the title *Imago Austriae* by publicist Otto Schulmeister and military historian Johann Christoph Allmayer-Beck.46 The photos it contained were taken by Erich Lessing, and funding once more came from the Federal Ministry of Education, thus giving the work something of an official character. The various levels of meaning of the term ‘Imago’ – with references ranging from ancient death masks to the subconscious image as spoken about in psychology and the ‘image’ as understood in contemporary advertising – were combined into one to create a visual synopsis of Austria – a representative, albeit contradictory picture of the country.47 The structure of the 300-page volume, with its recurring motifs and varyingly paced movements – all revolving around the question ‘What is Austria?’ – sometimes recalls a piece of music.48 The sequences of images, captioned with catchy labels like ‘Mutterboden der Geschichte’ (The fertile clay of history), ‘Der territoriale Kern’ (The territorial core), ‘Das Klösterreich’ (Empire of monasteries), and so on – are characterized by impressive landscapes alternating with theatrically staged interiors, famous works of art and painstakingly reproduced paintings, engravings and historical photographs.49 Browsing the volume, one is struck by the suggestive sequence of visual impressions between the book’s historical accounts, contemporary photographs and short texts, a presentation that reminds one of film sequences. Taken together, these visual impressions create an overall picture that oscillates between critical self-questioning and a rich cultural and historical self-assurance and self-confirmation, seeking to grasp ‘Austria as an idea’. It is no coincidence that the back cover shows a view over Prince Eugene’s Belvedere Palaces (Fig. 7), while inside the book, among its many Baroque references and allegories, one finds a remarkable double page with Balthasar Permoser’s portrait of the great general Prince Eugene displayed together

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49 The section ‘Adel aus vieler Herren Länder’ (nobility from many countries), for example, opens with a view of the staircase of Prince Eugene’s Winter Palace in candlelight, followed by an exploration of the banquet hall at Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt on the next two pages, a detail from a painting Bernardo Bellotto, the gold room of the Lower Belvedere Palace, concluding with an early-morning view of the Belvedere Palaces.
with the first few bars of his military anthem ‘Prince Eugene the noble knight’ under the headline ‘Selbstverwirklichung im Barock’ (Self-realization in the Baroque). This highly successful book, which would be reprinted numerous times up until 1985, and which, according to its title, aimed to create a lasting ‘image’ for Austria both at home and abroad, was to exert further media impact in the global exhibition industry when it was chosen to serve as the basis for a spectacular ‘multimedia show’ created by architect Karl Schwanzer for the Austria pavilion at the 1967 Expo in Montreal.

The process of ‘naturalization’ of the Baroque in the Austrian countryside and, conversely, the legitimation of the Austrian through the Baroque had been largely completed by the end of the 1960s. The titles of some major exhibitions held in the 1970s and 1980s at historic locations included Groteskes Barock (the grotesque Baroque, at Altenburg Abbey in 1975), Maria Theresia und ihre Zeit (Maria Theresa and her time, at the Schönbrunn Palace in 1980), Welt des Barock (The World of the

50 ‘Zum letzten Male entsteht aus der abendländischen Tradition und unter Kräftezustrom aus ganz Europa ein Reichsbau, den Geist und Leben des Barock erfüllen (For one last time, an empire is constructed, built upon of the traditions of the West, filled the spirit and life of the Baroque, supported by efforts from the whole of Europe).’ Quoted from Schulmeister and Allmayer-Beck, Imago Austriae, unpaginated.
51 Felber, Krasny and Rapp, Smart Exports, 167–168.
Baroque, at St. Florian Abbey, 1986), Prinz Eugen und das barocke Österreich (Prince Eugene and Baroque Austria, at Hof and Niederweiden Castles in 1986). Finally, in 1992, the first cultural and art historical exhibition to deal with the Baroque critically Lust und Leid. Barocke Kunst, barocker Alltag (Pleasure and Pain. Baroque art, Baroque everyday life) was held in Trautenfels Castle in Styria. In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, however, the show’s coordinator Dieter Czwienk continued to stress the stereotype of the ‘baroque soul of Austria’, claiming the Baroque to be an expression of the ‘typical Austrian mentality’, though he also spoke of certain ‘tensions between Baroque art and Baroque everyday life’ that needed to be addressed by the exhibition. The catalogue also contains a number of contributions on assessments of the Baroque during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Major exhibitions on the Baroque since 1945 all show a strikingly broad geographical distribution, thus rendering the whole of Austria as a ‘land of the Baroque’ in a process through which a reality in which very substantial regional differences existed, for example between Tyrol and Vienna, are deliberately homogenized.

Figure 8 ‘Österreich – Land des Barock’, school wall chart, 1960s.

54 ‘Österreich – Land des Barock’ is the title of a school wall chart from the 1960 (the author has a copy in his possession).
New identities

Looking back at the Baroque exhibitions in Austria over the last sixty years, one gets an impression that the urge to commit the affirmative act of equating ‘the Baroque’ with ‘Austria’ became less powerful to the extent that the strength of a national consciousness increased. The evaluation of Austria and its people as an independent ‘nation’ was by no means self-evident in the 1960s, meaning that this evaluation had a continued need to be driven home, not least by appealing to the continuing attractive power of the Baroque. According to recent surveys, however, that evaluation now enjoys general consensus.\(^5\)

Today, exhibitions on the Baroque no longer serve \textit{co ipso} in the effort to establish an Austrian identity. Precisely because of the effective achievement of a settlement during the postwar period, the Baroque now seems to have taken its place among what is now quite a diverse range of Austrian identities. Indeed, it was this state of affairs that made it thinkable for the Barockmuseum as housed in the Lower Belvedere Palace to be closed from one day to the next in 2007, after 84 years in existence. In its place, a number of rooms were installed to provide space for temporary exhibitions, which – not coincidentally – turned out to frequently involve such subjects as the work of Gustav Klimt and his contemporaries during the era of ‘Vienna 1900’. It would seem that the closure of the Barockmuseum is quite a lot more than a footnote in the museum history – it probably marks a turning point in the history of Austrian identity. For it seems that official Austria, as represented by its national museums, now simply no longer needs the Baroque to act as a cipher for its historical and cultural self-assurance. The evocation of a historical period that had been repeatedly called the ‘Österreichisches Heldenzeitalter’ (Austria’s Age of Heroes) ever since a speech made under the same heading by President Wilhelm Miklas on occasion of the \textit{Türkenbefreiungsfeier} (the celebration marking the country’s liberation from the Turks) on September 12, 1933,\(^6\) has made way for another invocation. Since the 1980s – and especially since the major exhibition \textit{Traum und Wirklichkeit. Wien 1870–1930} (Dream and Reality. Vienna 1870–1930) – which was held at the Vienna \textit{Künstlerhaus} in 1985, Vienna’s previously little-noticed contribution to modernity during the period before and after 1900 has been increasingly moving into focus. At the same time, there has also been a remarkable change of emphasis in historical studies and identity politics which, due to the complex historical and socio-political circumstances in which it occurred, can be outlined only briefly in this essay. In the postwar period, the Baroque had served its purpose as a frame within which an Austrian national consciousness could be formed and as a common denominator shared by the various regional identities within the country’s borders. This focus on the distant Baroque period had succeeded in building a bridge over the nineteenth century and had managed to

\(^5\) In 1956 only 49\% of respondents had affirmed the existence of an Austrian nation, by 2007 the figure was 82\%. Compare ‘Österreicher fühlen sich heute als Nation’, \textit{Der Standard}, March 12th 2008.
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Austria as a ‘Baroque nation’. Institutional and media constructions

... completely cut out the traumatic events of the twentieth century, which then lay only a few years in the past. During the postwar period, the thesis of Austria as Hitler’s first victim, a position seemingly legitimized by the Moscow Declaration of 1943, became the defining narrative. But this view was no longer tenable by 1986 at the latest, with the controversial election of Kurt Waldheim to the presidency. The long delay in dealing with the history of Austria during the Nazi regime and in confronting the expulsion and extermination of the Austrian Jews drew ‘Vienna 1900’ into a new light: The Jewish contribution to this unique artistic, cultural and scientific heyday could simply not be ignored, and so it became necessary to enter into a public discussion of a specially extruded section of history in this area too. Following new legislation in 1998, numerous important works of art formerly in the possession of Jews that had remained in public collections after 1945 were returned to their legitimate owners. Among these were a number of major paintings by Gustav Klimt. The loss to the state of one of the icons of Viennese Modernism, Klimt’s Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer – one of the most expensive artworks ever sold, now in New York – finally confronted the Austrian public with questions on the legitimacy of claiming the ‘ownership’ over a cultural heritage whose main protagonists had been driven out of the cultural life of the country after the Anschluss and ultimately murdered by their fellow citizens.

That ‘Vienna 1900’ can today stand pars pro toto for Austria, thus also proves to be a logical consequence of a fundamental change in the country’s view of its own history, a view where the Baroque sometimes almost seems to have been deliberately out of sight. Today, in 2016, the universal Baroque architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach would not be nominated as the most important artist in Austria’s history. The winner would much more likely be Gustav Klimt, whose impressive portraits of women recall an important and far more recent component of an Austrian culture, a component that was destroyed in the wake of the events after 1938.

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was born 1978 in Graz, in the province of Styria, he studied Art History and History at the University of Vienna and received his PhD in 2008. From 2005 to 2008 he worked for the Austrian Academy of Sciences, and he has been curator for architecture at the Vienna Museum since 2008. His curatorial work includes major exhibitions such as “Werkbundsiedlung Wien 1932. Ein Manifest des Neuen Wohnens” (2012), “Der Ring. Pionierjahre einer Prachtstraße” (2015) and “Gezeichnete Moderne” (2016). His research and publications focus on the history of architecture since 1800, architecture and the media, architectural drawings, and housing.

During the Eurovision Song Contest in May 2015 in Vienna, the Austrian winner of the Song Contest 2014, Conchita Wurst, was represented on posters as kind of tableau vivant of Gustav Klimt’s famous portrait of Jewish art patron Adele Bloch-Bauer. The painting had been returned to its legitimate owner in 2006. It is now on display at the Neue Galerie, New York.
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