This issue is about interventions in the city and, in 1984, any such scheme must focus on the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie by James Stirling, Michael Wilford & Associates. Completed earlier this year, the building is a major contribution to contemporary urban thinking. It re-knits parts of the city; it provides a new and exciting range of public amenities; it suggests an approach to the monumental appropriate for a democracy. And it is an amazing popular success—it has moved to being West Germany’s second most visited museum from fifty-second place; by the end of the year it promises to top the league. The building is shown on the following pages and its importance is analysed by five international critics, starting here with Alan Colquhoun, who is Professor of Architecture of Princeton University and partner in Colquhoun & Miller, London.

DEMOCRATIC MONUMENT

The city of Stuttgart, which used to be the capital of the Kingdom of Württemberg and is now the capital of the Land of Baden-Württemberg, has a spectacular site. It is situated at the head of a valley along the floor of which runs a linear park about two miles long, which penetrates into the heart of the old city and terminates in the eighteenth-century and medieval palaces. The nineteenth-century suburbs climb the sides of the valley and give the city the appearance of a huge amphitheatre. The city, however, has been irremediably damaged by post-war traffic engineering and commercial development.

The new Staatsgalerie by James Stirling, Michael Wilford & Associates occupies a site at the foot of the south-eastern slope of the valley. It is next to the original Neo-Classical gallery and is connected to it by a bridge. Both buildings face the Staatstheater—also Neo-Classical but with extensive modern additions—which is sited on the edge of the park. But these two groups of buildings are now separated by an urban freeway and the Staatsgalerie is thus physically cut off from the cultural core of the city of which it is fundamentally a part.

The old gallery has a three-sided event court which presupposes a leisurely frontal approach. But this is made impossible by the presence of the freeway: one’s view of both the old and the new galleries is predominantly distant, fleeting and diagonal and is cut off from one’s actual approach, which is by means of a pavement, squeezed between the buildings and the road, from which there are no anticipatory views.

The site is a rectangle with its long side parallel to the road. It is an island site and rises steeply towards the back. The city asked for a public footpath across the site from front to back, and also for the base level of the gallery to be raised one storey above street level to provide for car parking at ground level. Stirling & Wilford’s building is a brilliant and forceful response to these difficult topographical, contextual and programmatic conditions. It consists of ‘shelves’ of accommodation stepping up the site and overlapping in section. The ground level is occupied by a car park. A first-floor terrace leads to the entrance foyer, from each end of which a staircase and a ramp lead to the galleries on the floor above. These take the form of a U-shaped block in the centre of which is a large open-air rotunda acting as a sculpture court. Behind and above the gallery block is an archival and administration wing and a small music school, accessible from the road at the top of the site. On the side opposite the old gallery a separate block, attached to the gallery wing, houses an experimental theatre. This also has its own entrance.

Viewed from the Staatstheater across the freeway, the building appears as a series of ramps parallel to the building plane leading to a terrace over the entrance foyer; behind this are the drum of the rotunda and the gallery; behind these again is the administrative block which merges with the houses mounting the hillside beyond. This escaleador reminds one of an Italian Baroque garden, or even more, perhaps, of Leo von Klenze’s Walhalla, except that it is studied asymmetrical, and leads to no frontalised mass beyond.

Rather than being contained within the arms of the gallery this tumulus-like series of plastic events projects forward, and partially conceals the gallery wings. The central axis of the building is marked by a steel and glass facade at the foot of the ramp and by a central door into the building at street level. But this door turns out to be merely a ventilation opening into the garage—possibly another reference to Walhalla. The actual entry to the building is off-centre, and by means of a movement parallel to the building plane, through a projecting ‘free-form’ lobby. This violent and fragmented composition of inclined planes and cylinders is brought under control by a clever secondary move whereby the experimental theatre block is pushed forward so as to balance the right wing of the old gallery.

The entire composition thus reads as three gable-end facades (two old, one new) containing two contrasting spaces: the void of the event court and the system of ramps to the new building. This