

1930 is Year Zero in Modern Scandinavian Architecture. The famous Stockholm Exhibition that year, with Gunnar Asplund as its main architect, introduced a new world to a broad mass audience. The white buildings along shores of Djurgårdsbrunnsviken convinced the general public that this future was a very desirable world. After that, Modernism, or Functionalism as it was called, was the dominant building style in the Nordic countries.

1930 is also the year that Lars Backer died. Like Moses he got a glimpse of the Promised Land. Backer was the pioneer of modern architecture in Norway. His restaurant Skansen in Oslo open in 1927<sup>1</sup> and he managed to erect two more buildings in the new style and write a manifesto<sup>2</sup> before his untimely death at the age of 38 years.

The 1930s was a very good period in Norwegian architecture. Ove Bang, Blakstad & Munthe-Kaas, Bjercke & Eliassen in Oslo and Leif Grung and Per Grieg in Bergen producing building of the first order, but none of them became international stars like the Finn Alvar Aalto, the Dane Arne Jacobsen or the Swede Gunnar Asplund.

The end of the Second World War in 1945 saw the return of pragmatism and common sense. In the patriarchal Social democracy of the period the emphases was on «building the country» after the destruction of the War, and there was little room for youthful utopianism.

According to Christian Norberg-Schulz<sup>3</sup> «the war destroyed belief in newness». After the war, many of the interwar period's eminent pioneers were gone. Lars Backer died in 1930, Ove Bang in 1942, and Frithjof Reppen (1893-1945) was shot in Vienna during a transport of German-held prisoners. In addition, several other leading modernists had changed course. For the young architects who graduated just after WWII, it must have seemed that their «father generation», those who had been active before the war, had retired from the front lines of the trade.

But of course Modernism was not totally dead. Erling Viksjø (1910-71) designed both for big industry and for the public authorities. He, more than any, would shape the modern Norway that became

evident in the early post war period. Viksjø was faithful towards the teachings of Le Corbusier, but with the aid of his invention, «natural concrete», a construction method in which façades were livened up with exposed river gravel, the stern concrete of modernism was refined into «stone architecture» and Norwegian nature appeared on walls after they were sandblasted.

This was a golden compromise that many found appealing. Among them were Christian Norberg-Schulz and PAGON (Progressive Architects Group Oslo Norway), which in the 1950s represented a more unadulterated form of modernism. At the same time as Erling Viksjø was constructing the Executive Government Building, Sverre Fehn, the artistic luminary of the group, was designing even more audacious buildings such as Økern Nursing Home (1955) and Norway's Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair (1958). These were harbingers of things to come.

#### Korsmo and Knutsen

The Norwegian parallel to the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition was the «Vi kan» (We can) exhibition in Oslo in 1938. The two main architects for the exhibition were Arne Korsmo<sup>4</sup> (1903-69) and Knut Knutsen<sup>5</sup> (1900-68). They were both young, promising modernist architects in the 1930s, but after WWII they went separate ways. They came to epitomize two alternative tendencies: An internationally focused architecture and an architecture that was locally rooted. Korsmo was well known in CIAM and internationally very well connected. He became the fatherfigur for the young architects in the PAGON group and design houses inspired by Charles Eames.

Knutsen was close to vernacular architecture and wrote very early pre ecological statements. He designed buildings that were anti-monumental. His Norwegian Embassy in Stockholm (1950) is rhythmic division of volumes, and his own summer cottage at Portør (1949) has a topological shape making it nearly invisible. Both Korsmo and Knutsen became professors and had many followers. The most important Knutsen-inspired architects may be Wenche Selmer (1920-1998). Her wooden houses and cabins scattered along the picturesque coast of Southern Norway blend in with the landscape. Her sensitive architecture escapes fashion. It is interesting that she lately has received more international attention.<sup>6</sup>

#### Lund & Slaatto

Two of the most influential post war architects in Norway have been Kjell Lund (b. 1927) and Nils Slaatto (1923-2001). They set up their practice together in 1958. They had a huge production of high quality. Only Sverre Fehn has won more prizes than them.

In the 1960s, Lund & Slaatto<sup>7</sup> designed compact buildings that often took on cubic or pyramidal shape. In the 1970s, they developed a structuralistic mode of operation that was redeveloped in the 1980s to accommodate new assignments and urban environments. They have been instrumental in renewing Norwegian wood architecture and their church architecture are highly appreciated, especially St. Hallvard (1966), a Franciscan monastery in Oslo. This cubical brick building has a cylinder shaped church room in the middle and a hanging dome. It is considered one of the masterpieces of 20<sup>th</sup> Century architecture in Norway.

#### Sverre Fehn

When Sverre Fehn<sup>8</sup> (1924-2009) received the Pritzker Prize in 1997, the first Scandinavian to do so, it was in a way his second international breakthrough. At the early age of 34 his Norwegian pavilion at the Brussels EXPO in 1958 gave him international respect. The square site was walled in on 3 sides with hammered concrete elements. On the 4th side it opened up with broad stairs towards the road. Laminated beams, 37 m long, 1 m high and only 15 cm thick, stretched from one party wall to the other. It carried a flat roof covered on both sides with plastic sheets that let sunlight through during day while electric light made it into a shining slab during night. Big sliding doors and straight walls guiding the visitors, created a succession of spaces that made the pavilion a refined exhibition space.

His Nordic pavilion at the Biennale Park in Venice consists of one big room, 446 m<sup>2</sup> without columns. There is a retaining wall on two sides against the raising terrain while the two other sides open towards the park with big sliding glass doors. In the middle of the room are some trees. As the only vertical elements they move through the dense web of 3 layers of concrete beams where sunlight is reflected downwards creating a diffuse mystic light.

Modernism pursues clarity and daring simplicity. Fehn's Nordic pavilion manages to give this minimalistic architecture a special magic atmosphere.

Fehn's other major work from the 1960s the

Hedmark Museum at Hamar, Norway. In this building he leaves pure modernism and creates his own personal architectural universe. Meeting a complex situation and a rich historical material, he developed a building that, together with Castelvecchio in Verona by Carlo Scarpa, has become a lesson in how new architecture converse with the remains of the past. The museum is inside a big, U-shaped barn. The middle part exposes the remains of a bishop-palace from the Middle Ages, another wing contains a local historical exhibition. Fehn has said that "only by manifesting the present can we converse with the past". This has been his main idea when he created the museum at Hamar. The visitors move on bridges over the archaeological excavations as on a Persian carpet over the exposed historical layers.

### Team 3

In 1975 Arne Henriksen<sup>9</sup> (b. 1944) got a job at the State Railway Architects Office. At the time he was a left wing Marxist who saw railway buildings as a public architecture that was potential meaningful for the general public. In the 1980s he designed stations and other railway buildings inspired by Aldo Rossi and Louis Kahn and received several Brunel Awards. He was recognised as the great renewer of Norwegian railway architecture. Two young architects came to work with him, Jan Olav Jensen<sup>10</sup> (b. 1959) and Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk (b. 1958). Because of them, Arne Henriksen got first hand knowledge of their master, Sverre Fehn, and he started to explore the use of expressive wooden constructions in his stations: Sandvika (1994), Slependen (1993), Lillestrøm (1998) and Eidsvoll (1998).

Jensen and Hølmebakk, two of the most talented Norwegian architects of their generation, have remained close friends with the older Henriksen and the three (Team 3) has joined up for several competitions. They won in Trondheim where half a city block had been destroyed by fire. Their winning project resulted in a mixed-use building divided into three parts reflecting the shape of the old buildings, but with exposed massive wood structure. Jan Olav Jensen was noticed already as a student when he a fellow student Per Christian Brynhildsen designed a leper hospital in Lasur in India in 1984. The structure was awarded the Aga Kahn Award for Architecture. Jensen and his partner Børre Skodvin have received several prizes for Mortensrud church (2002) in Oslo. They have shown great inventiveness

and originality in their work. Carl-Viggo Hølmebakk concentrates at great depth on refining his few but very sensitive buildings.

### The master and the supergroup

In 1989 a very small Norwegian practice of young architects named Snøhetta (meaning Snow cap, the name of a mountain top in central Norway) won the prestigious competition (650 entries) for the new library in Alexandria, Egypt. The importance of the competition had of cause to do with the mythical status of the ancient library in Alexandria that tried to gather all knowledge in the world and is considered the mother of all libraries. The old library burnt down 1600 years ago, and everyone understood that the new library had to have a design that invoked the greatness of the myth.

Snøhetta<sup>11</sup> had won no competition in Norway and had built nearly nothing before the Alexandria library, so this was a classical fairy tale story. When the building open in 2002, it was recognized as a masterpiece. One of the partners, Craig Dykers, described it as "grand but not simple", and that is correct. It is a tilted cylinder cut at an angle and facing North. The outer skin is a stone wall with letters and signs from all over the world cut into the granite. The semicircular reading room has a diameter of 160m and is divided into 7 terraces.

In 2008 the new building for the National Opera and Ballet opened in Oslo. It is positioned in the harbour and has a sloping marble plain making it possible to walk on top of the building. It is a great public space that is intensively used by the population.

The last 20 years that has seen the raise of Snøhetta, has also been a golden final for Sverre Fehn. In 1997, two year before Snøhetta won in Alexandria, Fehn got the Pritzker Prize in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, just before it was finished. In the same year there was a magnificent exhibition of his work in Basilika Palladiana in Vicenza and he got the Heinrich Tessenow gold medal in Dresden. At the end of his career he designed a string of museum, The Glacier Museum (1991) in Fjærland, The Aukrust Centre (1996) in Alvdal, The Ivar Aasen Centre (2000) in Volda plus Preus Photographical Museum (2001). At the very end two more buildings: Gyldendal publishing house (2007) and the Architectural Museum in March 2008, just two months before the Opera open in Oslo. It was as if the torch passed from one generation to the other, from the single master architect to

the super group.

### Public ambitions and new talents

In 1992, Åse Kleveland, the minister of Culture published a paper called Kultur i tiden (Culture in our time) where there, for the first time in Norway, was a separate chapter devoted to architecture. This can be seen as a first seed for a Norwegian architectural policy. The Winter Olympics at Lillehammer, two years later, also had an ambitious architectural profile. Then in 2009 the government issued a proper architectural policy paper. We will have to wait and see what the effect will be. The one thing that the state has done that undoubtedly has been very positive, is the project for National Tourist Routes<sup>12</sup>. It is a program for upgrading 18 scenic roads with look-out platforms, benches and toilet facilities. All the jobs have been given to promising, young architects and the results have been spectacular: poetic structures in dramatic landscape situations.

It is fair to say that at the moment Norway has plenty of talented architects (Jarmund-Vigsnæs, Lund Hagem, Helen & Hard<sup>13</sup>, 3RW, Kristin Jarmund<sup>14</sup>, Knut Hjeltnes, Haga & Grov, Reiulf Ramstad, 70°N Arkitektur, Space Group, Code and a-lab, to mention the most obvious ones). It is also positive that Steven Holl has just finished the Hamsun Centre in Hamarøy, and that leading international architects like Renzo Piano, Peter Zumthor and Juan Herros are building new museums in Norway now. This has to do with the fact that in this period of international financial crisis, the Norwegian economy is good and building activity high. So after 80 years with Modern architecture in Norway one may say that it has been a period of growth and that there are promising signs on the horizon.

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## Notes:

1. This was not the first modernist building in Scandinavia, as many believe. Edward Heiberg completed his own house in Denmark in 1924.
2. Lars Backer published the article «Vor holdningsløse arkitektur» [Our spineless architecture] in the Norwegian journal Byggekunst in 1925. One of its key points was, «We want to create an architecture that's in contact with contemporary times, natural for the construction materials we use.» Lars Backer mentioned Tessenow, Poelzig, Garnier and Le Corbusier as his inspirational sources.
3. Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000), Norwegian architectural historian and theoretician of international importance. Among his books: *Intentions in Architecture* (1965), *Meaning in Western Architecture* (1974), *Genus Loci* (1960).
4. Norberg-Schulz, Christian, *The Functionalist Arne Korsmo*, Oslo 1986
5. Dahle, Einar, Bengt Espen Knutsen, Oslo 2009. The book main subject is the son of Knut Knutsen, but a big part of the book deals with the father.
6. Tostrup, Elisabeth, *Norwegian Wood. The Thoughtful Architecture of Wenche Selmer*. New York 2006
7. Grønvold, Ulf, Lund & Slaatto, Oslo 1988
8. Norberg-Schulz, Christian and Postiglione, Gennaro, Sverre Fehn, New York Fjeld, Per Olaf, Sverre Fehn. *The Pattern of Thoughts*. New York 2009
9. Grønvold, Ulf, Arne Henriksen. Oslo 2010
10. Jensen & Skodvin Architects. Oslo 2007
11. Snøhetta (ed), Snøhetta. *Works*, Baden, Switzerland 2009
12. A+U 469
13. A+U 211
14. Frampton, Kenneth and Sand, Bente, Kristin Jarmund, Oslo 2008

## Denmark: Tradition and Modernity on the interface between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in Danish Architecture

Peter Thule

*The Nordic countries are somewhat of a paradox: On one hand they came quite late to industrialization; they are sparsely populated and located on the periphery of Europe. Hence -historically speaking- the Nordic countries can be considered provincial and fairly rural. Nor were they -with the possible exception of Sweden- part of the industrial avant garde with nations like Britain and Germany. On the other hand the Nordic countries are characterized by a series of other conditions normally associated with modernity. According to World Value Studies the Nordic countries score highly on parameters like secularization and self-expression compared with most other countries worldwide.<sup>1</sup>*

*In architecture "the Modern Project" appears to have become manifest through the creation of the welfare state. In this process political establishments allied themselves with the artistic and architectural elite throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus a progressive elite culture was diffused through large segments of the population through social housing projects and extensive institutional projects designed by the best architects of the time. During this period the political establishment was open to experiments as long as they were at the disposal of the populace.*

*Another aspect of this history of the pervasiveness of modern architecture in the Nordic countries lies in the fact that it can be considered the natural development of an already existing building culture rather than a distinct break with the past: The first generation of Nordic functionalists were schooled in the tradition of either Classicism or Arts and Crafts. This meant that many of the properties of these movements were subtly carried over into their formulation of the modern functionalist project. The works of the Nordic Modern movement may have resembled that architecture on which it was modelled, but it was strongly influenced by older traditions and hence perhaps less determined to be avantgarde than for instance the German Neues Bauen movement.*

*19<sup>th</sup> century architecture was particularly*

*significant in formulating the modern project in a Danish context. This was mainly due to the influence of two great Danish personalities: C. F. Hansen (1756-1845) and M.G. Bindesbøll (1800-56). To use a term coined by Danish architect Kay Fisker (1893-1965) the formal principles of 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish architecture can be almost entirely described through the architecture of Bindesbøll and Hansen. In the following I shall explain how the key principles of 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish architecture may be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

### **Bindesbøll's Legacy: The Crystalline Cluster and the Danish House**

*During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish architecture saw the construction of a range of projects characterized by a combination of pitched roofs and simple architectonic volumes. Frequently built from yellow brick, these buildings have an almost prismatic or crystalline expression where traditional architectural features like gabled roofs and brick walls suddenly appear abstract and unconventional. One of the earliest examples of such a formal principle dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century where Michael Gottlieb Bindesbøll, the architect behind the famous Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, designed a mental hospital at Oringe. The hospital buildings are designed with simple yellow-brick walls and gabled red tile roofs. The gabled roofs gradually step up towards the main building whose corners are anchored by grey buttresses. The entire composition is reminiscent of an organic or crystalline form with the same figure repeating within a given pattern.*

*Projects like Oringe were instrumental in making Bindesbøll a significant source of inspiration for Danish 20<sup>th</sup> century architects who were generally critical of historicism. Like Kay Fisker they were preoccupied with Bindesbøll's use of simple techniques to create a sober yet artistically valuable architecture.<sup>2</sup> It was felt by many that Bindesbøll's work foreshadowed functionalism in Denmark.*

*The general formal principles of Oringe resurfaced in 20<sup>th</sup> century Danish architecture with P. V. Jensen Klint's (1853-1930) unrealized yet epochal 1907 monument the Crystalline Cluster. Like Oringe 50 years earlier, Klint's monument features a hierarchic composition culminating at the centre and dominated by the figure of the pitched roof. Unlike Oringe however, Klint introduces a dual centre and the gabled roofs are partially*