The absolute monarchy was abolished almost by the king himself in 1849, and 1901’s change in political systems was equally peaceful. In all areas there is a belief in evolution. People should accept the new. That was in the spirit of Grundtvig. There was no tabula rasa in Danish architecture, but on the contrary a will to innovate, which resembles several European models such as C.F.A. Voysey’s speech on styles at “the Design Club” in 1911, Le Corbusier’s writings, and the Design-development and social commitment of the Bauhaus School. Everything was to be digested and in the words of Jensen-Klint “...since the beauty of all previous times is visible for us today, the architect must acquire it, so that it becomes his property, incorporated in him, and in his education, making him not imitate the old, but resumed it in giving himself” (1907). In 1915, Kay Fisker and Aage Rath, who were still students, won the competition for Gudhjembanen (the Gudhjem line) stations in Bornholm. The completed buildings were published in the architecture journal Architekten in 1916. There is a significant difference between the project and the final result. The Art Nouveau lines have disappeared, and the buildings are tighter and simpler. The smallest station, Christianshøj, built in wood and a tarred black, is classicism freed from “style”, and the plant’s shape is eliminated in favour of a consideration of functions and the surroundings. All blend in naturally with the landscape. One could say that they did not allow for anything unnecessary. Fisker and Rath do however have Baillie Scott for “Houses and Gardens” and the local building culture of Bornholm to thank for their progress. The stations are without any kind of nostalgic retrospection. When they finally had time to meet up with their friends in Copenhagen again, they were still sitting around happy about an old project with a hideous Doric column. Have we not come further! (letter in Fisker’s archives). It turned out to be difficult to abolish the styles; that is to say the superfluos, this unnecessary theatrical costume, which confused pure aesthetics and the functionality. When Adolf Loos gave his lecture Ornament und Verbrechen in Copenhagen in 1916, they might well have thought he was right, but too extreme. There had to be some degree of accommodation after all.

Vilhelm Wanscher was an art historian with ambitions both as an artist and as an architect. As a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, from 1915 he gave well-attended lectures in the history of art and architecture. Witnesses explain that it provided them with a holistic vision. His book The Aesthetic Perception of Art (1906) was read by everyone. Wanscher especially accentuated Italian baroque, and his influence can be sensed already in Faaborg Museum, but also in Fisker’s Hornbaekhus (Hornbaek House) 1922, in the inner yards of Politigården (The Police Headquarters) 1924, in relation to which Aage Rath play a crucial part, and in the Ny Scene (new Stage) at The Royal Theatre 1929 by Holger Jacobsen (b. 1876), who had also influenced Politigården.

Ivar Bentsen’s experiments with rising and falling number series in the Opera and Philharmonic project in 1917-18 was a further development of Jensen-Klint and Kaare’s theories. The entire kilometre architecture was to fill the entire country, divided by roads and park areas, a democratic architecture, where there was no hierarchy, and personality wasn’t expressed in the facades, but something you had yourself. Criticism was deadly: the windows were “the blind eyes of blind men”, “the whole regiment stands at attention in the socialist state”, was the verdict of Martin Nyrop. Wanscher was disappointed. He missed the invigorating dynamism of the baroque. The only decoration was a baroque balister, which crowned the building parts. This rational kilometre architecture was to fill the entire country, divided by roads and park areas, a democratic architecture, where there was no hierarchy, and personality wasn’t expressed in the facades, but something you had yourself. Criticism was deadly: the windows were “the blind eyes of blind men”, “the whole regiment stands at attention in the socialist state”, was the verdict of Martin Nyrop. Wanscher was disappointed. He missed the invigorating dynamism of the baroque. The project had great impact, however, on all the large yards that were built in the new residential areas outside Copenhagen in the years to follow.


Antonio Millán-Gómez

Postscript: a glimpse to nordic traditions

Few things are so scarce in Architecture as proper acts, coherent with the essence of things. And few as needed as the enthused glance to their authentic contexts, which in Nordic Architecture are dialogues, inseparable from a way of life caring for nature and an elegance based on lightness. In such exchanges one is moved from vernacular traditions to a transposition of classical models, questioned and reinvented over and over again, where care with scale does not neglect the material qualities of daily experience. Sober, varied, heterotopical Architecture, was a dialogue between authors, as well, opening in such a process a frame for collective coexistence and a method to establish the domain of our discipline. A debate such as this concerning us might have not gone beyond mere entelechy, but, once proposals were planned, the ensuing pragmatism went up to its final construction: city planning for welfare society, where a new landscape of Modernity was set up, whilst housing standards were improved. The reflections included in this monograph allow more than one reading, letting us see that Nordic Architectures still maintain their actuality, and go on gaining added layers of meaning. And they suggest some questions: why is it so? Let us sketch some themes.

Firstly, craft and grace: craft which endows works with propriety, in its material value and in the contingency which projects them towards a future. Lisbet Baaklev wrote: “I remember it clearly by quoting Jensen-Klint: “Let us study the object, the surface and the fabric according to their nature and the demands of the time, never engaging in the writing off of old styles, but practicing our personal style through a thorough education and acquisition of the consistent taste and dignified attitude to style of old times”. Grace that Morton Shand applied in 1930 (Swedish grace) to the Stockholm International Exhibition, but which also concerns the realizations of the previous decades: as priorisation in the making from Paris 1925 International Exhibition, understandable today with words written by I. Calvino. “Something
which can be distinguished with three qualities: 1) it is utmost light; 2) it is in movement; 3) it is an information vector”, something that “is associated with energetic (enérgeia). When this openings to a new knowledge is experienced on site, they imply to whom is participating of its efficacy, and the intellect is facing intuitions which cannot be responded with a simple argument. Irony, precision, patience… unveils all that seemed hermetic. The method has been shown by J.M López-Peñalva in Spain, with great generosity and wisdom: operating in another way is getting lost. Even something as defined as Asplund’s Woodland Chapel (1919) acquires another value when we place it next to Lewerentz and Stobellius’ Assembly Hall for the Färne Glassworks (1914), and transforms itself completely on site when we relate ritual space and its main access in direction West-East with the South paths crossings, clear and extended on its environment, the North vault, half-buried (with its waving earth roof continued in Villa Mairea), all sides in contrast with the rear, facing East and rather mundane. There is no place here for the disciplined points of any manifesto. Stylistic aspirations do not help us, after, since they inform very little about its authenticity. Continuity between productions requires scapism (and some contributions of this publication do need special knowledge and sound understanding). In this sense, transitions from classicism to romanticism –as different in each country- as well as the radical, functionalist change for-get sometimes previous architectures, such as the spatial wealth of German Baroque, without which the relation with works by Hans Scharing, Häring, Aalto’s Vuoksenniska, J. Leyviska offers a hard comprehension is it a mere expressive whim? One is moved to surprise when seeing that experts in the trans- sition from 19th to 20th Century Architecture –such as Henry-Russell Hitchcock- who is a studious of German Baroque, as well, avoid such relations.

From the’Other Tradition of Modern Architec-ture” (Colin St. John Wilson) the customary schemes are changed, owing to spatial operations in Architecture, since Centre-Eu-ripean and Nordic Organicism can be hardly understood with the already mentioned to South German Baroque, where more than to the articulate sequence of structural bays, we are moved to perceive the fusion of space. Paul Frankl showed these difficulties in his study of Varenzhenhagen pilgrimage church: “...somewhere (it is impossible to say whe- re) the space vaults suggest fuses with the homogeneous part of the space below”… “A second difficulty is thus added to that created by the complex total space, since the individual forms themselves are only suggested to the inquiring mind. The minds of more than ninety-nine per cent of the visitors to this pilgrimage church capitulate before such difficulty, and this is precisely the object: to appeal not to the mind but to the imagination that surrenders itself to the ambiguous and uncontrollable”. Linking this analysis to the transparency and interpenetration suggested by Van Deusburg’s counter-constructions is an obliged passage to understand John Leyviska’s architecture, as is stated in one of the papers. But the whole issue, revised by Nelson Goodman and C. Norberg-Schulz when dealing with architec-tural judgement seems to be, still today, quite relevant. Looking at the development of Architecture in Nordic Countries, following the four directions of their geography, we can find some premo-nitory categories:

A- In Finland’s east, excursions to Karelia in search of original identity brought to light the limits between two worlds (Occident and Orient, Classicism and Byzantine world). Log houses in this area required a clear design and building structure for its construction. There, the sturdy-refuge of the artist Aikieli Gallen-Kallela (1865) presents all the ingredients: materials from the immediate environment, roofs articulated around a central space by a transparent roof. Some national features are thus isolated: roof light as organizing ele- ment with a predominant flexibility, rejecting rigid forms. As early as 1900, at the universal Exhibition in Paris, the Finnish Pavilion (by H. Gisselius, A. Lindgren and E. Saarinen) obtained a generalized attention. Plans with precise geometry were maintained in Lars Sonck works (such as Villa Atolla for the composer Sibelius family), with an ordering that can be followed in the productions by E. Bryggman and A. Aalto (Villa Waren, Mairea, Saynatsalo), these already with echoes from neighbouring Sweden. Ten years later, the office buildings in Aleksanterinkatu (S. A. Lindqvist) or Helsinki Railway Station, with open plans and a Jugendstil air, opened the path to master works that are showing strength still today. And just a few years later, the Turku friends (Bryggman, Ekholm, aalto) provided solutions for social housing, institutional build-ings and a sense of economy in design, in which some lessons from Italy are adapted (Bryggman’s Rasmusson Chapel is a space of great solemnity... and simplicity), as well as some imported from Russian Constructivism (some scarcely published interiors from Aalto’s Turun Sanomat deserve further attention), not disregarding typologies designed ex-novo (such as the Taikahalli by H. Ekelund). A blooming of excellent architects faced quite soon the tight co-existence of Architecture and nature. And, in this respect, Aulis Bloms-tedt not only faced such challenge, but also showed his modernity solving in its Helsinki Workers’ Cooperative a masterly dialogue between a difficult topography and his respect for previously existing heritage. But he also passed the torch to several disciples: Pietilä, Russuivuori, Pallasmaa, whose lessons and debates deserve today deep consideration.

B- In Sweden still resound the echoes of the magnificent complicity between Asplund and Lewerentz, continuation of that of their mas- ters (R. Ostberg, C. Westman, L.I. Wahlman). The few years (1915-40) that elapse from the competition for the Enskede Cemetry to their inauguration show the hustle and bustle towards a more humane functionality. If a se- ries of visits to the Stockholm Town Hall show up to what extent some of the first proposals by Asplund for Göteborg Courthouse were already implicit in it, a visit to its tower under stormy weather unveils the brick material in its strict constructive function and strength, a “butatism” that exhibits its reason of being without making it a pseudo-style nor abandon- ing the Scandinavian domains. When the above mentioned complicity broke it left doubts about its causes, but allowed to make other pertinent questions, such as the constructive and symbolic intensity in Lewerentz architec-tural structures. He would deal with themes of
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Great Architecture in Björkagen and KLippan, in the same way as Louis I. Kahn and Aldo van Eyck travelled to study the architecture of the first civilizations or to the best architecture “unconscious of itself”. Unconscious? The festive atmosphere of Stockholm Exhibition (1930) was a complete success. The praise by Giedion, comparing it to the 1927 Weissenho- feisiedlung must be placed within the context of new indispensable cooperatives, few housing standards, a delicate economy... Far too many things requiring a New Empiricism. Index of an International Style, but exhibiting a more humanist functionalism: “a New Style that erased “the style”, a new bare language; the language of facts”. The following manifesto, with a significant title (Accept!) signalled the gap between the previous generation and the youngsters involved in the new architecture. Hence, the radicalism of the authors, “History could not provide any lesson”, and its decisive ideological operation: an authentic continuity exceeds the plurality of styles. The debate went on becoming more radical. Functionalism appeared “as response to a series of problems in Architecture and society, prepared for it during a long time”.

C-It was in Denmark where classicism left a deeper mark; the axiomatics of significant works led to Architecture without false pretences, a total contribution to design, understood as a domain to be treated with care, from terri- tory to home daily life objects, with its best results in the post-war recovery: With some beginnings modelled according to classical archetypes or Antiquity (a comparison of the Marte Cathedral by F. Melitahi and A. Jensen -1874-94, practical transposition of pieces such as the Vatican or the Pantheon, suffices), which unvels another world –most sober- when we pass to its interior; or the Glyptothque N.Y. Carlsberg, by H.Kampman -1900-06-, where a tuscan basement seems an excuse to show a roof solution which recalls the Halkarnassus mausoleum most strongly; in the Police Headquarters, by Kampman, A. Raff and H. Jacobsen -1919-24, where a diverse vocabulary solves with sasa a complex plan; even contrasting the rational vision of Greek Architecture as expressed by C. Dociadis, and that of the Dane Bundgaard, who in his Ph. D. thesis on Mnisskis and the Propilis studies, with subtly all details, such as blocked perspectives, the correlation of walls, columns and architraves, all let us understand that the Danish vision was some- thing else. The Romantic Nationalism shone as medievalist in Copenhagen Town Hall, and the work by Nyrop -1892-1905-, assimilation of the Sienesa Plaza di Campo atmosphere, begins in such way an apparatus to recover silent sanctuary and crafts... And serene is Mu- seum Faaborg, by Carl Petersen (1913-13), whose interiors evoke today others captured on canvas by Hammershoi or on celluloid by C.T. Dreyer. Another material episode was to be opened by the massive and correct use of brick in Grundeg church, by P.V. Jensen-Klint and Kaare Klint (1921-40), imposing inside and with a thundering symbolic silence inside. Swedish neutrality during Second World War made possible that some architects –English, such as Ralph Erskine, or Danish, such as Jilm Utzon- may opt for pacifism and could nourish themselves from the masters that had started Nordic Modernity a few years earlier. With reconstruction they were bound to find themselves in front of a different world, which they contributed to make it shine with a new light. Already in Copenhagen Airport by Lauritzon the care taken with wood panelling and bronze in the fine detailing of Göteborg Courthouse was present. And few years later Arne Jacobsen and Jilm Utzon opened other options, understandable from the rigour whi- ch which the first planned his work, and the search of the second in vernacular cultures to find a catalyst for his vision for a service that altered the character of architecture and some types for ever. Jacobsen did not leave mere objects upon places: rather, he trans- figures them; and, thus, at Beliveau the infrastructural dif- culties are not an obstacle to construct an organized setting, constituted and permanent as place. Utzon discovered with the Norwegian Korsmo the marvels of the great Mesoameri- can travel, and his wise modesty concerning the vernacular made that his structures might seem intemporal.

D- In Norway the exquisite sensitivity in front of a powerful landscape opened a tendency that, from Knudsen onwards, made the evaluation of architecture inseparable from its vernacular root, without separating it of its ecological reason of being, with some organic inclination. It is here where Modern Architecture appears earlier, with Lars Bang and A. Knudsen of its original culture. Wenche Selmer, on her behalf, shows masterly how much can be made in the strict duty of configuring a domestic domain in the most adverse situations, and doing it with full command. The Norwegian Government decision to open a route of national landscapes has opened to young architects the chance of maintaining the level of excellence existing to present date. Finns, Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders go on offering their contributions to the development of Modern Architecture with re- solution, especially in moments in which taking the environment into account is no longer a romantic consideration.

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