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The Architecture of Erik Gunnar Asplund

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Notes

Preface

1

Bruno Zevi, *Erik Gunnar Asplund* (Milan: Il Balcone, 1948); also Eric de Mare, *Gunnar Asplund: A Great Modern Architect* (London: Art and Technics, 1955).

2

Gunnar Asplund, Architect, 1885–1940, ed. Gustave Holmdahl, Sven Ivar Lind, and Kjell Ödeen, with an essay by Hakon Ahlberg (Stockholm: AB Tidskriften Byggmästaren, 1950; first published in Sweden in 1943).

3

The interest in Asplund in Hungary and other eastern European countries appears to date back to the time of Stalin, when modern architecture was effectively discouraged. Asplund provided the more progressive architects with an example that combined traditionalism and modernism.

4

Although he is essentially unknown to his profession in the United States, one suspects that his influence in this country has been much greater than his obscurity

would indicate. Leading practitioners and theorists in both the United States and England have been, to one degree or another, familiar with his work. But I would like to suggest that Asplund's main influence on architecture in America has come about indirectly, through the work of Eero Saarinen (who was in Finland in the 1930s) and Alvar Aalto. They drew on very different aspects of Asplund's work. Saarinen's form making, his use of different vocabularies for different projects, had antecedents in Asplund's search for significance and exerted its greatest influence in the 1950s and early 1960s. (Bruce Adams, an associate of Eero Saarinen from 1950 to 1955, recalls that Saarinen spoke with admiration of Asplund's work and often mentioned the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex specifically.) Aalto's adoption of many of the motifs of Asplund's method of plan organization was to reach the United States in the middle 1960s and to have an increasing following from this date onward.

5

Uno Åhren, "Reflexioner i Statsbiblioteket" (Reflections while in the Public Library), *Byggmästaren*, 1928, p. 93.

6

Although their work displays major differences on the level of meaning, they shared a reductionist aesthetic, a love of fine materials, and the influence of Biedermeier.

7

In addition to stylistic and formal motifs I have focused on the symbolic dimension of Asplund's work, a dimension of which I was unaware at the beginning of the project and which only gradually revealed itself as following a remarkable pattern. Although some of my interpretations are speculative (since there is minimal written corroboration from Asplund) the very consistency with which his projects invite metaphoric readings constitutes the strongest support for my thesis. My attempt to discuss meaning and metaphor in his work does not represent an effort to psychoanalyze Asplund, but aims to consider meaning in relationship to the building in question. However, Asplund's rather personal and unorthodox figurative constructs do invite speculation about his attitudes and intent.

8

Also needed is a more thorough study of Asplund's influence on other architects, mainly in Scandinavia but also elsewhere. Here Asplund's influence on Aalto's post-World War II work, never previously analyzed to my knowledge, deserves particular attention.

Chapter 1

9

There are two versions of this story, the first told by Asplund in his article "Konst och Teknik" (Art and technology; *Byggmästaren*, 1936), according to which his teacher discouraged him because he thought Asplund did not draw well enough. Ahlberg emphasizes the older Asplund's worries about his son's livelihood.

10

Clason was particularly against the widely used neo-Renaissance stucco facades which expressed neither the materials (usually brick) of which the building was constructed nor its structure.

11

Both Östberg and Westman went to the United States in 1893. Östberg returned to Sweden after traveling and seeing the World's Columbian Exposition; Westman stayed on to work for a few years. They were both to be strongly influenced by architectural developments in America, particularly the work of H. H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan, and by the shingle style in general. The evolution and major work of this movement are well documented in Hakon Ahlberg, *Modern Swedish Architecture*, ed. F. R. Yerbury

(London: Ernest Benn, 1925), and in August Hahr, *Architecture in Sweden* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1938).

12

Ivar Tengbom, younger than Östberg and Westman, started as a National Romantic architect, but his best-known buildings, like the Stockholm Concert Hall, are in the classical style. Carl Bergsten was more internationally oriented than the other three and is perhaps best known for Liljevalchs Art Gallery of 1916.

13

Eric Lundberg, *Svensk Bostad* (Swedish dwelling; Stockholm: Nordisk Rotogravyr, 1942).

14

But one senses that Östberg must have been somewhat embarrassed about the articulation of this bold design feature in the otherwise proper facade and thus treated it as a semiround bay.

15

Noted by Elias Cornell in his book *Ragnar Östberg, Svensk Arkitekt* (Stockholm: Byggmästarens Förlag, 1965).

16

As Henry-Russell Hitchcock noted in his article "Aalto vs. Aalto: The Other Finland," *Perspecta* 9/10, *The Yale Architectural Journal* (1965), Nyrop's town hall also influenced Saarinen's design for the National Museum in Helsinki.

17

Eric Lundberg's analysis of the K. O. Bonnier villa was purely in relationship to developments in housing. Elias Cornell, in his book on Ragnar Östberg, discusses the interior skewed walls of the villas and the building masses of the town hall but gives them little emphasis. To my knowledge there has been no comprehensive analysis of the development of these motifs in Swedish architecture, let alone of their eventual influence on Aalto.

18

The other students included Osvald Almqvist, Erik Karlstrand, Josef Östlin, Sigurd Lewerentz, and M. Wernstedt.

19

This motif may have found its most dramatic expression in the balcony wing of the Paimio Sanatorium by Alvar Aalto.

Chapter 2

20

Stanford Anderson, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany, 1900–1917," doctoral dissertation, photocopy, Columbia University, 1968, pp. 133–136.

21

Staffan Björk, *Heidenstam och Sekelskiftes Sverige* (Heidenstam and turn-of-the-century Sweden; Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1946).

22

Quoted in *ibid.*

23

For a thorough discussion of the Northern Romantic tradition in painting, see Robert Rosenblum's *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

24

Provoked by the ongoing restoration of Uppsala Cathedral and Gripsholm Castle, Heidenstam published two articles in the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* entitled "Modärn Barbarism" and "Gripsholm som Forminne" (Gripsholm as a historic relic) that set forth his view of current restoration practices. For an excellent discussion of the architectural debate preceding

the emergence of National Romanticism, see Ulf G. Johnsson's "Mot en Ny Stil—Svensk Arkitekturdebatt omkring 1900" (Toward a new style: Swedish architectural debate around 1900) in *Sju Uppsatser i Svensk Arkitektur Historia* (Uppsala: Ars Suetica, 1970).

25

Gothard Johansson, "Stads-huset och 90talet" (Stockholm City Hall and the 1890s), *Dagens Nyheter*, 1923 (day and month unknown).

26

According to Hakon Ahlberg, Strindberg was popular among the younger generation of architects at this time, and his second wife, Ingrid Hindmarsch, reports that Asplund kept returning to the work of this writer, whom he much admired, even in the 1930s, when he had little time for reading. (Letters to the author.)

27

Asplund would, however, probably have been aware of the work of artists such as Böcklin and Klinger, whose enigmatic paintings had strong surreal overtones and would inspire de Chirico, Ernst, and others.

28

E. G. Asplund, "Några Anteckningar om ett Modärnt Tyskt Fasadmateriel" (Notes on a modern German facade material), *Teknisk Tidskrift A*, 1911.

29

Hakon Ahlberg gives a lengthy account of Asplund's trip to Italy: see *Gunnar Asplund, Architect*.

30

Asplund Archive, Swedish Architecture Museum, Stockholm.

31

Lars Israel Wahlman, another leading architect of the National Romantic style, whose most famous building was perhaps the Engelbrecht Church in Stockholm (1907-1913).

32

I am indebted to Bengt Johansson's excellent unpublished essay, "Skogskyrkogården i Enskede, 1914-1940" (The Woodland Cemetery in Enskede, 1914-1940), 1961, for many of the facts concerning the planning of the cemetery and its evolution.

33

Ulf G. Johnsson, "De Första Svenska Krematorierna och Deras Förutsättningar" (The first Swedish crematoria and the conditions under which they emerged), *Konst Historisk Tidskrift*, vol. 15 (1964), p. 117.

34

Ibid.

35

As mentioned earlier the architects would however have known of and been influenced by the Swedish landscape painters of the 1890s who had close affinities to Friedrich. On another level Friedrich's dilemma as discussed by Robert Rosenblum, his need to revitalize the experience of divinity in a secular world outside the sacred confines of traditional Christian iconography, which had exhausted itself, had parallels to the problems faced by the more sensitive architects at the turn of the century: the exhaustion of meaning in the traditional styles.

36

Ibid.

37

Though the building, with its layered wall planes, is classical and would, as an element in the landscape, more obviously invite a com-

parison to Poussin, the fact that it is approached obliquely and from below rather than frontally makes a significant difference in how the composition is experienced. The processional up past the great cross toward the loggia at the crest of the slope with the sky as a background is of an intensity that takes on symbolic meaning. Viewing the buildings head on from the grass-covered knoll is a totally different experience, which brings Poussin, with his frontally layered landscapes, more readily to mind.

38

A comparison of Asplund's chapel and Lewerentz's (designed in 1922) is instructive. Though both architects had moved strongly in a classical direction since their winning competition, Asplund succeeded in retaining, even intensifying, the romantic spirit of the winning entry. Lewerentz, on the other hand, produced a simple and beautifully detailed but cold classical chapel which stands apart from, rather than being integrated into, the landscape.

39

Bengt Johansson, "Skogskyrkogården i Enskede."

40

Aage Rafn et al., *Boken om Liselund* (The Liselund Book; Copenhagen, 1918).

41

Arkitektur, 1919. Hytten in turn may have been inspired by Sebastiano Serlio's published design for a house for a peasant.

42

However, it is interesting that on the page with the picture of Hytten in the Liselund Book is a picture of a half-buried earth vault.

43

For another excellent analysis of the building see Michael Graves, "The Swedish Connection," *Journal of Architectural Education*, September 1975. Asplund's ability to transform this layout into a composition similar to cubist collage leads one to speculate on the picturesque townscape, particularly the roofscapes of medieval villages, which was a popular motif for Cézanne, Braque, and Picasso, as a possible source for cubism.

44

However, these developments did not necessarily entail a more successful three-dimensional massing of the building.

45

The corridor and rotunda together tend to figure as an independent element within the rectangular plan, the bedrooms becoming a residual space between them and the exterior contour.

46

In writing about the building in *Byggmästaren* Asplund speaks of the private nature of the entry court, as well as of the evening sun it captures. This made it a pleasant place for the family to sit. Today it is in fact used both as the entry and garden side of the house; with increasingly informal life styles, such a mixed use is common today, whereas in 1918 it would have been rather unusual.

47

There is a Magrillian quality to the juxtaposition of the doors, although the villa antedates Magritte's work by a number of years.

48

But it did receive a lengthy and laudatory review in *Byggmästaren* the same year from Gustave Strengell, the Finnish architect and theoretician.

49

The same picture had appeared earlier in the *Deutsche Werkbund Jahrbuch*, which may be where Paulsson found it.

50

Gunnar Asplund in *Byggmästaren*, 1918.

51

Thus the grain warehouse for Eskiltuna, with its narrow classical tower, was to exercise an enormous influence on apartment building designs, particularly in Finland.

52

August Strindberg, *Plays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

53

These appear more clearly in a drawing of a slight variation of the scheme not pictured here.

54

One explanation could be that Asplund's wife gave birth to their first child in June 1920, probably about the time plans and details for the building were being finalized. Asplund, who was becoming increasingly involved with metaphors of man and nature in his work, could easily have become obsessed with the richly organic images of pregnancy.

55

Here it should be noted that a detailing in which windows were set flush with the facade was also quite common in Sweden in the late eighteenth century.

56

Gunnar Asplund, "Aktuella Arkitektoniska Faror för Stockholm, Hyreshusen" (Present-day architectural dangers for Stockholm: Apartment buildings), *Byggmästaren*, 1916.

57

Charming as are these facades (and the later ones for Gustaf Adolf Square), they are in fact quickly sketched pastiches. Thus they are not included here. It appears that Asplund usually did not give serious thought to the facades until a building was ready to be built. As Ahlberg pointed out in *Modern Swedish Architecture*, the plan was his first concern. Moreover, although classical columns and pilasters appeared in a number of his preliminary facade sketches for projects, they were almost always eliminated in the built version.

58

Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect*.

59

Ryberg had been one of the winners of the Göta Square competition.

60

The choices of passages and entries creates an almost labyrinthian feeling that leaves the arriving visitor unsure of which route to follow, perhaps an appropriate commentary on an anonymous modern bureaucracy.

61

Colin Rowe and Frederick Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

Chapter 3

62

Paul Mebes's book *Um 1800* came out in 1908 and soon became a standard text not just in Germany but in Scandinavia.

63

The writings of the Danish art historian Vilhelm Wansher were actually more important to the classical revival.

64

Carl Petersen became professor at the Academy (architecture school) in Copenhagen, where he exercised considerable influence on students, including Aage Rafn and Kay Fisker. Rafn, while still a student, was the moving force behind the Liselund book, which, according to Steen Eiler Rasmussen was partly a polemic against Nyrop. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978.) Both Bentsen and Thomsen were also to become professors at the Academy.

65

Kay Fisker worked for Asplund and Lewerentz in the summer of 1916.

66

Thus Lewerentz's 1914 proposal for a crematorium in Hälsingborg was the basis for the main chapel in their joint competition entry. Lewerentz in turn later borrowed motifs from Asplund. Asplund also admired Lewerentz as a landscapist and no doubt learned a good deal from him in this area; and Lewerentz acquired an extensive architectural library, from which Asplund often borrowed. But, judging from their later work, it is hard not to conclude that the strong romantic naturalism and pathos of their winning scheme originated with Asplund. According to Hakon Ahlberg, who knew both architects well, Asplund was quick and intuitive, Lewerentz more systematic. But of their colleagues, they stood closest to one another in a shared sensibility. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978.)

67

Gunnar Asplund, "Skandia-teatern i Stockholm" (The Skandia Cinema in Stockholm), *Byggmästaren*, 1924, p. 185.

68

In his diaries, quoted in Hakon Ahlberg's essay, Asplund describes a real festival in Taormina during his Italian trip.

69

In an interesting essay on Asplund entitled "'Himlen som ett Valv'—Om Asplunds Rums Gestaltning" ("The sky as a vault"—on Asplund's spatial conceptions), *Arkitektur*, no. 5 (1961), p. 93, Elias Cornell traces the occurrence of this metaphor in Asplund's oeuvre.

70

Gunnar Asplund, "Skandia-teatern i Stockholm."

71

Ibid.

72

Thus the partly open curtain may be seen as a metaphor for both the gates of Paradise and sexual fulfillment.

73

Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," in *Sketches*, ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

74

The jury, while acknowledging its originality, doubted that the small scale and the tightness of the site would allow for the desired effects. For instance, the frontal perspective would never be seen as such because of the screen of trees between it and the viewer.

75

However, the pavilion is also quite logical in terms of Asplund's own previous production, such as the Woodland Chapel, where the pyramidal roof appears to be supported by all the columns when seen from the front.

76

Each of these details may call up other associations as well. The point to stress is that each one invites a symbolic reading and, when taken together, the readings appear consistent.

77

Boullée's library project, which must also have inspired Asplund, could, given its rectangular shape, hardly be interpreted as a metaphor for the mind.

78

The fact that the back side of the square is not joined flush with the other wings,

thus breaking the otherwise perfect form, is perhaps problematic in terms of a symbolic reading. Yet seen from the sides and the front the building gives the impression of being perfectly square. One senses that Asplund had to resolve a conflict between his desire for a perfect square and his wish to give the building a front and a back.

79
Stanford Anderson, "Peter Behrens and the New Architecture of Germany, 1900-1917."

80
Where the corridors to the reading rooms break through the bookcases, Asplund has detailed the corridor wall as the fine cover of a giant book that also serves as bookend for the bookshelves. The detailing, carried out in wood veneers and brass inlay, clearly refers to a gilt-embossed leather cover.

81
This room seems invariably to trigger a warm response in Scandinavians, who immediately remember the fantasy world of their childhood, but it is often judged by English and American critics as sentimental and kitschy, perhaps simply a case of cultural differences.

Chapter 4

82
Uno Åhren, "Pa Väg mot en Arkitektur," (Toward a new architecture), *Byggmästaren*, 1926, p. 133.

83
Uno Åhren, "Reflexioner i Stadsbiblioteket."

84
"New classicism" (*ny klassicism*) is the Swedish term for Scandinavian twentieth-century classicism. What Åhren did not perceive in those heady days of early functionalism was that, although the Stockholm Public Library was a product of haut bourgeois culture, it transcended its milieu and has continued to exercise a powerful imaginative impact because of its timeless formal rigor and its strong psychological and symbolic dimension. If Asplund's library clothed itself in the monumental vocabulary of the traditional ruling classes it had in other respects little or nothing to do with haute bourgeois pretensions. Rather it may be said to represent the displacement from within of the materialism of bourgeois culture in favor of the spiritual and metaphysical.

85
As he phrased it, "Here it is a question of intellectual Sweden's grasp on the average Swede—a sympathetic and understanding grasp which aims at removing his luxury appendix, an operation that the average Finn also needs." Alvar Aalto, "The Stockholm Exhibition I," *Sketches*.

86
According to Sven Ivar Lind, on first being shown some pictures in 1926 of Le Corbusier's houses by Kruger, the contractor for the Stockholm Public Library, Asplund had been startled. "Imagine designing houses with horizontal strip windows!" he had exclaimed. Yet it seems unlikely that Kruger would have come upon Le Corbusier before Asplund. Rather, one suspects that, in the manner of the *grand maître*, Asplund was professing ignorance of the other's work.

87
According to Hakon Ahlberg, Asplund felt that he had been used by Gregor Paulsson and that Paulsson's vision was somewhat limited. (Conversation with the author, summer 1978). Exactly when Asplund developed these sentiments is unclear. But judging by his early enthusiastic espousal of the

modernist vision in his lecture, "Our Architectural Concept of Space" (1931), they probably developed after the Exhibition was over, perhaps even some years afterward.

88

In the same essay he answers the point, often brought up, that Aalto's and Bryggman's 700th anniversary exhibition in Turku occurred a year earlier than the Stockholm Exhibition. "To draw the conclusion that the Finns this time were in advance of the Swedes is, to put it mildly, an exaggeration." Nils Erik Wikberg, "Om Arkitektur" (About architecture) in *Försök över Arkitektur*, (Efforts in architecture) a collection of his essays (Helsinki: Söderstrom & Co., 1963).

89

Gregor Paulsson, *Upplevt* (Autobiography; Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1974).

90

Ibid.

91

Ibid.

92

If Paulsson's version is correct, Asplund at first hesitated about the new style. Thus, perhaps Paulsson's persuasiveness was of key

importance, or his account is subtly meant to give that impression. We know that Asplund's International Style base for the library was published in June 1928 and thus predates any officially presented projects for the exhibition. Asplund may have felt that despite Paulsson's modernist enthusiasm he had to tread carefully in dealing with a conservative board of directors, to lead them on gradually toward a more modernist solution.

93

It must be kept in mind that the complex of buildings was both temporary and, of course, an exhibition, and as such not really a direct model of a city. But as it spoke to the interests of a new, middle-class, urban society, its spatial organization was at the very least symbolically important. A year later, in his inaugural speech as professor at the Technical High School, he was to take a more orthodox modernist line (see note 78). And in a chapter on the city published in the polemical booklet *Acceptera* (Accept) a year after the exhibition as a kind of followup by Paulsson, Asplund, and a group of other architects involved in

the exhibition, the city's destruction was not proposed. But new developments must be allowed to happen within the traditional city if it is to remain a vital and functioning organism, they insisted.

94

Alvar Aalto, "Stockholm Exhibition I," *Sketches*.

95

Noted by, among others, Bruno Zevi, in his book *Erik Gunnar Asplund*.

96

This did not prevent an angry uproar over the architecture of the exhibition from various sources.

97

That Asplund chose not to design one of the dwellings in the housing section has often been cited as proof that he did not share the social concerns of the Modern Movement, that to him modernism was just another style for pursuing his formal preoccupations. To his contemporaries housing was the architect's primary concern. Subsequent developments would indicate that perhaps after all Asplund had a larger perspective on the issue.

98

The exhibition's influence on examples of postwar

Swedish urbanism, such as Vällingby center or Hötorget in Stockholm, would be worthy of a study; unfortunately these projects lack the high and consistent level of architectural quality of the exhibition.

99

Joints were caulked only where leaks appeared.

100

Gunnar Asplund, "Stockholmsutställningen 1930" (The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930), *Byggmästaren*, special issue, 1930, p. 132.

101

Beyond the restaurant was the housing exhibition, with dwellings by various architects, including Åhren and Markelius, designed to strict budgetary standards.

102

In 1931 Asplund was appointed professor of architecture at the Technical High School in Stockholm. The speech he gave at his installation, entitled "Vår Arkitektoniska Rumsuppfattning" (Our architectonic concept of space; *Byggmästaren*, 1931) took as its point of departure Oswald Spengler's analysis of the underlying spatial conceptions of various cultures throughout history from his *Decline of the*

West, published in 1922. According to Spengler, the endless room represented the Western conception of space (which originated around 1000 A.D.) and was most clearly manifest in the Gothic and the baroque. Taking this as a point of departure, Asplund postulated in the development of modern architecture and town planning the dissolution of space (Ger. *Raum*), both interior and exterior (the square and the street). (Spengler's book came out before the revolutionary effects of the Modern Movement were clearly apparent.) Strongly influenced at this point by the thinking of Le Corbusier and various German town planners, Asplund discussed approvingly German open "lamel" housing developments and Le Corbusier's Voisin plan, though he perceptively pointed out that it would have required a dictatorship to realize the latter. He said: Our era's architectural signature is the dissolution of architectural space. . . . Town planning and architecture have spent much energy and knowledge in maintaining our old spatial ideals despite all the enormous pressure in the form of unanticipated flow of people to the cities, social changes, and the rapid growth of traffic. . . .

Under the pressure of reality people are now beginning all over the world to

turn away from the traditional conception [of enclosing space], as it works against the solution of real problems, and are beginning to arrive at the principle of dissolved space, a principle which is natural for our era's real situation and behind which we seem to discern new formal architectural values. . . .

According to this conception, architectural space attempts, in other words, not to enclose itself as an architecturally defined and independent entity, but to open itself up for sun, nature, human life, and movement.

The dissolution and the transformability of space, the opening up of the building mass, the intimate connection between outside and inside all seem to indicate to me that our architectural conception of space is approaching the Spenglerian archetype: the endless space. . . .

It is not a degeneration but a regeneration.

The speech is evidence of Asplund's genuine, if temporary, conversion to the doctrines of the Modern Movement.

103

In its distortion of the ideal as a gesture to view and water, the project anticipates some of the work of Sert, Sterling, and Venturi, among others.

104

In addition to the one plan there are a diagrammatic plan and legend explaining the spaces as well as a few drawings of skylighting details.

105

The same motif of square interlocked into the side of a larger square, as well as the spiral circulation system which ends in a rising counter spiral, occurs in Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall, though organized in a clearer and more concise manner.

106

Analyzed from the point of view of its detailing and its influence on Scandinavian architecture the building could probably command a lengthy essay. As this is not the thrust of my book I have preferred to discuss similar detailing in the Gothenburg Law Courts Annex, where it takes on additional layers of meaning.

Chapter 5

107

Two of the finest of these projects are Sigurd Lewerentz's Government Insurance Building in Stockholm and Sven Markelius's Concert Hall in Hälsingborg.

108

Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect*.

109

But the functionalist polemic which Åhren had introduced in 1926 in Sweden had its counterpart in Denmark in the journal *Kritisk Revy* (1926–1928), edited by Paul Henningsen, the designer. It was widely read in Scandinavia by, among others, Alvar Aalto, who also contributed an article to it on the technical aspects of cinema design.

110

The Kviberg Crematorium represented perhaps too radical a break with modernism to have become an acceptable model for emulation. However, the exposed roof trusses of the Skövde Crematorium were quickly to become a standard Scandinavian motif.

111

Ture Ryberg's entry to the town hall and law courts competition for Halmstad in 1936.

112

According to Asplund's second wife, Ingrid Hindmarsh, Alvar Aalto was in Stockholm almost once a month during this time, 1934–1940 and would always drop by the Asplund office, which was in the same building as their apartment, to discuss ideas and projects with Asplund.

113

Alvar Aalto, "Rationalism and Man," *Sketches*.

114

Gunnar Asplund, "Konst och Teknik" (Art and technology), *Byggmästaren*, 1936.

115

According to Hans Asplund, who is in possession of his father's lecture notes from the Technical High School, Gunnar Asplund continued to teach the functionalist creed to his students even after he himself had clearly gone beyond it in his own work. Torvald Akerson, who had Asplund as a professor in 1934 and later worked for him, was also struck by the discrepancy between his teaching and his practice.

116

As Asplund never wrote a word about his use of symbolic associations in this building this remains a conjecture on my part.

117

Björn Fredlund, "E. G. Asplund's Om och Tillbyggnad av Göteborg's Rådhus," *Göteborg Förr och Nu*, vol. 6 (1970).

118

The walls were covered in a light ash paneling.

119

Though Asplund probably knew similar European examples, the Bradbury Building in Los Angeles was a good example of such a space.

120

In his book *Experiencing Architecture*, Steen Eiler Rasmussen has perceptively compared the quality of natural light in the main interior space of Asplund's law courts annex with that of the main interior spaces of Nyrop's and Östberg's city halls.

121

Göteborg's Handels och Sjöfartstidning, 26 October 1936, cited in Fredlund's essay on the building.

122

The interest in primitive art and children's drawings had, as Stanford Anderson suggests, its origins in the early years of the century. By the 1930s such motifs were common in art. It would seem

reasonable that Asplund, who followed developments in art closely, would have adapted the idea to architecture.

123

This sort of curved wooden wall had appeared in Asplund's rotunda at the Villa Snellman of 1917–1918, and the wooden detailing of the judges' desks had its source in a cloakroom screen in the Bredenberg Department Store. Wood was, of course, commonly used by other architects as well, and it is less a question of who used it first as how it was used. In this respect Aalto, whose sense of texture was superb, outshone Asplund in the elegance of his wood detailing. The degree to which Asplund was influenced by wood ship detailing remains to be explored.

124

Thus, as I mentioned in the introduction, one can perhaps trace Eero Saarinen's form making, most often regarded as a peculiarly American approach, back through Asplund to this nineteenth-century tradition.

125

Lewerentz would continue to work on the landscaping of the cemetery and has often

been considered as responsible for the magnificent open landscape facing the crematorium. But without going into detail about who was responsible for what (a task almost impossible at this late date, with both architects dead), it should be noted that during the crucial period when this landscape took form, in the years 1922–1932, the architects were working jointly on its design. Similarly, Lewerentz was involved in much of the important work of siting the main chapel (the crematorium), as well as in preliminary design proposals for it, the last one dating from 1932. Except for some variation of the open loggia, which was always a part of the conception, and the low wall coming up the hill, these early proposals bear little resemblance to Asplund's final design.

For background on the cremation movement in Europe, see note 133.

126

In conjunction with this plan they had decided to cut a road through the ridge to facilitate certain traffic movements. The cut resulted in the famous knoll with its meditation grove, but it was not until the work was in progress that the architects realized the potential

of it as an open landscape. Until the plan of 1932 was formulated, the hill was to have pine trees on it as well as graves. The motif of trees forming a square as they do around the meditation place was a theme that had occurred in Asplund's work before, both in the Bernadotte tomb of 1921 and in the competition proposal for the library park in Stockholm of 1926. Thus one suspects that he was responsible for it.

127

At this time it was still not clear that the building would be a crematorium.

128

For the 1923 Gothenburg Exhibition Lewerentz designed a small pavilion for the Swedish Cremation Society. A narrow flight of stairs, which increase in steepness after each landing, leads up the hill to the religious pavilion at the top. Asplund, in a 1923 article in *Byggmästaren*, wrote in highly favorable terms of the increasingly steep processional that cut through a series of terraces on each side but had one criticism. "How would it have been without a building, with an open sky at the top of the steps?" Here we may see the seed of the final conception for the siting of the chapel; for it is in the

end the sky almost more than the landscape which becomes the focus of the entry panorama. Lewerentz was to use the idea of the variably steep steps again, this time in reverse, from steep to increasingly shallow, in the beautiful steps he designed leading up to the top of the grass-covered hill. See Gunnar Asplund, "Bilder med Randantekningar från Konstindustribyggnaderna på Göteborgsutställningen" (Pictures with notes from the arts and crafts pavilion at the Gothenburg Exhibition), *Byggmästaren*, 1932, p. 277.

129

There is a slight discrepancy between the plan and the sketch, but essentially they refer to the same scheme.

130

The cross harks back to the leaning cross of the original competition entry of 1915.

131

Asplund has further created a directional communication between sky and earth. If the knoll with the meditation grove at its top represents a reaching upward to the sky, a transmitter of man's prayers, the great inverted roof of the loggia with its impluvium is a receiver of the life-giving forces from above.

The trunks of the trees

mimic the pillars of the loggia.

132

According to Sven Ivar Lind there is a clear correspondence between the shape of the burial vaults below ground of the Rettig and Ankarcrona family mausoleums, both designed by Asplund (of which plans have never been published) and that of the main chapel in cross section.

133

The cremation movement had its source in the late eighteenth century in the French Revolution and the romantic movement, but it was only in the late nineteenth century that it began to gain ground because of the increasingly unsanitary conditions prevailing in the cemeteries of Europe's larger cities. The movement existed almost independently of organized religion and developed its own ideology and symbolism.

In Sweden the Cremation Society published a magazine called *Ignis*, with which Asplund was no doubt familiar. It carried long articles dealing with, among other things, the cremation practices of primitive and exotic peoples, from the early Nordic tribes to the Hindus and Parsees. The publication represented an

attempt to compile a history for the movement as well as to find significant symbols and rituals. Among the important symbols was the phoenix. Initially the movement, inspired by Lessing, had adopted antiquity's idealized vision of death rather than the darker Christian one, symbolized by the skeleton. But it was finally Herder's use of Thanatos as symbol of death but also of rebirth that came to prevail. I am indebted for most of this information to Ulf G. Johnsson's "De första Svenska Crematorierna och deras förutsättningar."

134
A detail which the building committee asked Asplund to eliminate.

135
The benches in the waiting room similarly evoke the railroad station, as does, on a much more abstract level, the linearity of the scheme.

136
It may be noted that the great Bronze Age burial mounds in Denmark have, especially when they occur in pairs, always been referred to by the local population as the "maiden mounds."

137
Three other projects were on Asplund's drawing board when he died, in addition to the three I will discuss here. The block of flats on Malmkillnads Street of 1939 were never built. The Stockholm City Archives Building of 1939–1940, designed to be built into a granite hill was to be realized in somewhat modified form under the supervision of Sven Ivar Lind, who also oversaw the construction of the Kviberg and Skövde crematoria. The State Veterinary Bacteriological Laboratories, a sprawling complex on the outskirts of Stockholm which grew out of Asplund's work on the State Bacteriological Laboratories, was also to be built after his death by Joel Lundquist, a former associate.

138
Unfortunately, when built the wall went straight into the hill rather than climbing up it as originally designed, thus destroying an essential element of the composition.

139
Asplund's coupling of rough gneiss walls with smooth granite support structure around the main windows recalls Lars Sonck's facade for the Telephone Building in Helsinki, a building with

which Asplund would no doubt have been familiar. Another possible source of inspiration would have been H. H. Richardson's work in America, some of which Asplund probably saw during his American trip in 1938, the same year that this version of the Kviberg project was done.

140
According to Sven Ivar Lind, Asplund, in his designs for the Skövde Crematorium, drew inspiration from the medieval stone churches that were common in that part of Sweden.

141
The Skövde Crematorium provided one of the first examples of a modern building with exposed wooden roof trusses. This treatment was to become a popular Scandinavian motif, used with particular lyricism by Alvar Aalto.

142
Asplund would also have been aware of the first-prize competition design for the Linköping Museum by Nils Åhrbom and Helge Zimdahl of 1936, where a low, square block at a skew is played off against a long, rectangular main wing.

Conclusions

143

Interviews with Sven Ivar Lind, Tore Åhlén, and Torvald Åker-son.

144

According to Torvald Åker-son.

145

One can say that Asplund did not conceive his detailing only in terms of function and form but also in terms of significance, a dimension that elsewhere has been conspicuously absent since the advent of the Modern Movement.

146

Thus, for instance, in the many perspective sketches for the loggia at the crematorium, Asplund appears to have rehearsed many of the developments in American architecture in the 1950s and 1960s, from the more banal to the more inspired, in the area of solutions for pavilion-type buildings.

147

Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," *Sketches*.

148

Hakon Ahlberg, *Gunnar Asplund, Architect*.

149

Only in his discussion of the Skandia Cinema does he appear to have departed significantly from this pattern.

150

Alvar Aalto, "E. G. Asplund in Memoriam," *Sketches*.