

Review Article

The Multiple Modernities of Sweden

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Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State is an edited volume dedicated to - in the editors' words - a 're-reading of the formative moment of a particular Swedish modernism in architecture, and some of its echoes, nationally as well as internationally'. (p. 8) This restrictive description, however, does not do the intricacy of the volume justice, as the group of international scholars who have contributed to this book paint a much richer picture, including not only architecture and design, but also political history, social sciences and media studies in their accounts. The editors believe that such an intricate reading is necessary to respond to the need for diversifying the history of modernism. Based on the premise that the history of modernism cannot be chronicled in one single overarching trajectory, Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein - an architect and a philosopher, respectively - launch a plea for the conception of 'multiple modernities' that can deconstruct the well-known story of modernism into several (national) narratives. These narratives, they argue, might resonate with the existing anthology of modernism or could, conversely, oppose common assumptions.

The concept of 'multiple modernities', which aspires to reconstruct national accounts on modernism is - by the editors' own admission - closely related to Kenneth Frampton's concept of 'critical regionalism'. Mattsson and Wallenstein, however, argue that it is necessary to expand this concept, as '[r]egional inflexions are not just simply inflexions of an underlying curve, but must be thought of

as autonomous responses, which means that they both react to and integrate tendencies emanating from "centres", as well as reinterpret "local" histories as points of leverage for their own operation'. (p. 13) *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* should thus not be read as a 'top-down' Swedish variant of the ostensibly monolithic history of modernism, but as a 'bottom-up' history of the development of modernism in Sweden, which contributes to a more diversified understanding of the 'modernist' welfare state and its ties to architecture and consumption. The book is composed of three chapters, each of which comprises three to five essays: 'Constructing the Welfare State', 'Consumers and Spectacles' and 'Towards a Genealogy of Modern Architecture'.

The three essays in the first chapter combine sociology and political science (1) to trace the origin of the Swedish welfare state back to its formative moment in the 1930s ['The Happy 30s. A Short History of Social Engineering and Gender Order in Sweden', Yvonne Hirdman], (2) to demonstrate its uniqueness by anatomizing its underlying moral logic ['Pippi Longstocking. The Autonomous Child and the Moral Logic of the Swedish Welfare State', Hendrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh] and (3) to challenge existing historiography on the Swedish welfare state by proposing a novel reading ['In Search of the Swedish Model. Contested Historiography', Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén]. Even though the essays by Lundberg, Tydén and Hirdman offer valuable insights into the unfolding

- and the different modes of interpretation - of the Swedish model, the most compelling paper in this chapter is undoubtedly the contribution by Berggren and Trägårdh. Following the legendary story of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking*, the authors effectively reveal how processes that occurred in Sweden differed from contemporary developments in other parts of the Western world. Berggren and Trägårdh argue that the unfolding of the Swedish welfare state paradoxically hinged on the notion of individual freedom; Swedish citizens were to obtain greater individual autonomy through greater dependency on the state. The Swedish model, the authors indicate, thus not only differs radically from developments in Anglo-American countries, which displayed an absolute apathy towards state intervention, but also from the 'conventional' European welfare state model, which focused on the family as the means and end of its policies. The authors trace the origins of this notion of individual freedom back to 19th-century political culture and social philosophy in Sweden. Furthermore, they tie it to the peculiar 'Swedish theory of love' which bases the ethos of love on the principle of egalitarianism and rejects the idea of 'dependency' in relationships as it corrupts the ability to love someone 'truly' - *no strings attached*. The underlying moral logic of the Swedish welfare state is thus its ambition to liberate the individual citizen from all forms of subordination in civil society. The authors consequently proceed to demonstrate how this 'statist individualism' - by rendering relationships within the family as equal and voluntary as possible - fomented a conundrum concerning its applicability to children's rights.

The second chapter 'Consumers and Spectacles' combines five essays which - each in their own manner - relate to one (or both) of the subtitle's keywords. Helena Mattsson opens this section with an essay on the 'reasonable consumer' ['Designing the Reasonable Consumer: Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism', Helena Mattsson]. She argues that in Sweden commodities

were used as an intermediary between the individual and society, and, building on this reasoning, predicates that consumer objects were to contribute to the formation of a 'collective'. However, for this 'system' to function, the Swedish welfare state was to shape 'reasonable consumers'. The 'reasonable consumer' would be able to distinguish an 'unsound' - aimed at expressing individuality - from a 'sound' commodity, which allows him or her to partake in the envisaged collective order. Referring to the modern apartment on display in the 1957 Without Borders Exhibition in Stockholm, Mattsson cites the home as the arena for the development of controlled consumption and its concomitant reasonable consumers. It is precisely in the realm of the home that the individual learns to mediate between desires and needs. From a reader's point of view - assuming that the reader reads the book back to back - it would have been pleasant if Penny Sparke's essay on domestic consumption, which invites the reader into the home, had followed. Mattsson's text ['Designing "Taste". Domestic Consumption, Modernism and Modernity, Penny Sparke']. By contrasting Elsie de Wolfe and Lena Larsson's stance on interior design, Sparke identifies the home - despite its foreseeable submission to taste - as the locale where the individual negotiates between subjective concerns and rational programmes.

At this point in the book, where the correlation between commodities, consumers and the individual constitutes the prime focus, a peculiar omission surfaces. At the risk of summoning stereotypes, one cannot help but wonder how IKEA, the world's largest Swedish-'born' furniture retailer and, not surprisingly, one of the country's best-known export products, would frame into the story? Is it merely a coincidence that this company, which provides rational designs for each individual's taste, was founded in Sweden in the 1940s? An essay relating the Swedish 'reasonable consumer' and associated notions of 'individuality' and 'rationality' to IKEA

might have formed a welcome bridge between Mattsson and Sparke's texts and Reinhold Martin's essay, which traces the correlation between the individual and mass customization in corporate culture from modernism to postmodernism ['Mass Customisation: Consumers and Other Subjects', Reinhold Martin]. Martin turns the reader's attention away from both the home and Sweden as he traces the development of the Union Carbide Corporation's headquarters in the United States over a time-span of thirty years. Martin succinctly illustrates (using no images whatsoever) how despite an increasing focus on 'personal customization' in the architecture of the buildings, the individual is - paradoxically - gradually reduced to 'a techno-economic figure composed of numbers inside and out'. (p. 108) Even though Martin's story flawlessly illustrates the evolution of the notion 'individuality' from the mid-to late-twentieth century, it is not entirely clear how this essay contributes to the formation of a specific Swedish modernity.

The final two essays in this chapter mainly revolve around the concept of 'spectacle' as they explore (1) the set-up and effects of the Modern Leisure Exhibition in Ystad in 1936 ['The Exhibition Modern Leisure as a Site of Governmentality', Ylva Habel] and (2) the development of the Skansen Open Air Museum in Stockholm in the 1930s ['The Vernacular on Display. Skansen Open-air Museum in 1930s Stockholm', Thordis Arrhenius]. Both essays focus on exhibition strategies. Following Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', Ylva Habel exemplifies how the Modern Leisure Exhibition, designed to offer visitors first-hand leisure experiences by offering them a set of 'performative spaces', moulded an active Swedish audience that favoured the approval of the Vacations Act merely two years later. Thordis Arrhenius' article is closely related to Habel's as it demonstrates how, by offering visitors 'authentic experiences', the Skansen Open Air Museum - showcasing vernacular Swedish architecture - pinpointed the vernacular home as a predecessor

of the mass-produced, industrialized buildings of the modern movement. Skansen thus became an important instigator of the country's modernizing aspirations in the 1930s.

The third and final chapter 'Towards a Genealogy of Modern Architecture' relates the pervasiveness of modern architecture in Sweden to the socio-political developments in the country, incorporating ideas - such as the 'reasonable consumer' - that were introduced in the first two chapters of the book. Eva Rudberg's essay immediately sets the tone as she challenges the common assumption that functionalism and social democracy in Sweden were two sides of the same coin ['Building the Utopia of the Everyday', Eva Rudberg]. Rudberg not only describes the manner in which functionalism was introduced in Sweden by revisiting the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition and the 1931 Swedish manifesto *acceptera*, but she also traces the resistance it evoked (even within the Social Democratic Party) and suggests that 'Swedishness in functionalism is a question of what perspective one chooses'. (p. 155) In the following two texts, David Kuchenbuch and Joan Ockman compare the developments in Sweden to contemporary developments in foreign countries; Germany and the United States, respectively. Through this comparison, Kuchenbuch demonstrates how, contrary to Germany, the unfolding of modernism in Sweden engendered a culture of self-education. Clearly affiliated with the concept of the 'reasonable consumer' introduced by Helena Mattsson, Kuchenbuch postulates that 'Good Swedes [...] would teach each other how to be capable of questioning the appropriateness of their wishes, and thus make reasonable demands on the architects'. (p. 165) ['Footprints in the Snow. Power, Knowledge, and Subjectivity in German and Swedish Architectural Discourse on Needs, 1920s to 1950s', David Kuchenbuch]. Joan Ockman, in turn, develops a comparative architectural historiography of the US and Europe to study the effects of the increasing pressure of an advancing

consumer culture on modern architecture from the pre- to the postwar period [‘Architecture and the Consumer Paradigm in the Mid-Twentieth Century’, Joan Ockman]. Ockman emphasizes the exceptional state of affairs in Sweden as she attempts to unveil why the Swedish model of the social welfare state eventually collapsed. Sven-Olov Wallenstein finally closes both the chapter and the volume with a theoretical/philosophical re-reading of the manifesto *acceptera*, employing Foucault’s concept of biopolitics as a vantage point [‘A Family Affair: Swedish Modernism and the Administering of Life’, Sven-Olov Wallenstein].

Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State offers an in-depth reading of the peculiar development of the ‘Swedish Middle Way’ in the twentieth century and thus forms a prominent contribution to the existing anthology of modernism. The essays in this volume engagingly illustrate how architecture and consumption were instrumental in the formation of the Swedish ‘Folkhemmet’ and identify the home, or the domestic sphere, as one of its main arenas. However, it seems that the editors have had to choose between a ‘narrow’ but intricate understanding of the underlying moral logic of the Swedish welfare state and a broader perspective on the different (building) ‘programmes’ that such a welfare state (must have) produced. A significant part of postwar architectural discourse in Europe revolved, after all, around notions of ‘community’ and ‘encounter’ and led to the development of a variety of projects, designed to facilitate community interaction - from utopian dreams to factual (often state-initiated) building programmes. Surely, Sweden must have a multitude of collective spaces - such as schools, cultural centres, sport facilities and holiday camps - where the collective of ‘reasonable consumers’ could meet? Unless we are to believe that the Swedish ‘statist individualism’ did not allow community-oriented notions to touch ground. An essay on the development of such spaces could have not only

broadened the scope, but also opened the discussion to include (besides architecture) the urban scale. This could have balanced the comprehensive and diversified study of the private sphere and would have illustrated its reciprocal dependency on notions of collectiveness as well as collective practices and spaces. I am nevertheless well aware that it is nearly impossible to examine all facets of Swedish modernism and the ‘Swedish Third Way’ in the intricate fashion as has been done in this book in one single volume, and would therefore like to conclude by saying that I am looking forward to *Swedish Modernism*, Volume 2.

Biography

Janina Gosseye is a PhD-researcher at the department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning, KU Leuven and a lecturer in architectural theory at PHL in Hasselt. Her research focuses on the development of leisure spaces in postwar Flanders. She has published her findings in the *Journal of Architecture* and the *Journal of Urban History* and recently co-organised an international seminar together with Hilde Heynen on ‘Architecture for Leisure in Postwar Europe, 1945-1989’ at KU Leuven.