

Norsk Bolig- og Byplanforening

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Arkitektrollen i det 20. århundredes Norden

Nordic Architects Write

A documentary anthology

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Johan Mårtelius and Wilfried Wang

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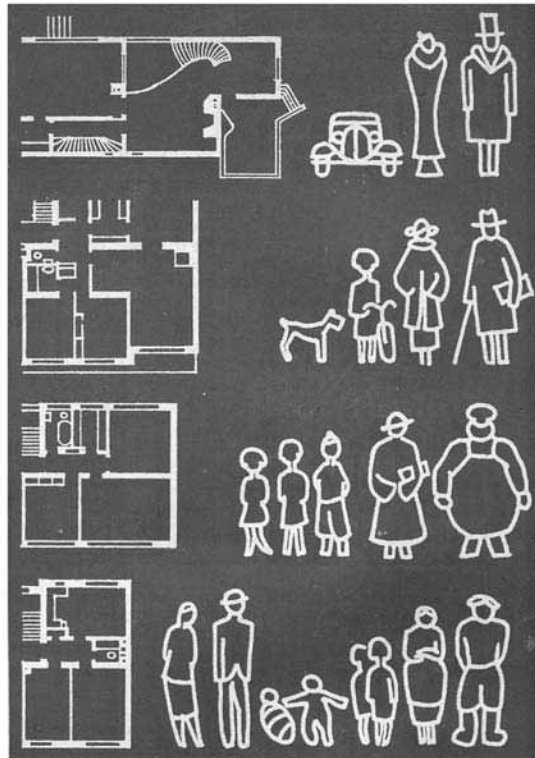
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Sketch by Carsten Boysen

1933

PLAN

Our Agenda

All intellectual life, all theoretical thinking, is dependent for its development on the existing material and social context of the time.

When within a certain profession there is a crass difference of opinion, when there are sharp theoretical oppositions, it is the result of the occurrence of a fundamental change in the profession's social circumstances – in the material and economic basis for its activity.

Norway has been left behind in the social development that has caused a profound international revolution in the architect's work and way of thinking.

This applies not only to our profession's technology; to an equally high degree, it applies to the profession's social side. In other countries, the new architecture has not been merely a breakthrough in the field of building methods. It has meant not only a break with the aesthetic premises of the past, but with the entire old apparatus of style. It has also been a social current. New social demands have forced architects to assume new working methods that rely primarily on scientific analysis of the functions that must be met and of the constructive possibilities that currently exist. The architect has become the organizer of construction activities. At the same time, however, in his urban planning he has been confronted with the task of organizing people's lives. The lack of a solution to the housing problem, the insolvability of urban planning problems within the framework of existing society have resulted in many architects, through their organizational work, being driven out of their traditional professional isolation and into increasingly more conscious social activity.

The functionalists' endeavour to establish optimal planning and purpose in the building industry is not only a technical tidying-up operation. In reality it represents a reaction – at least an unconscious reaction – against the lack of planning in capitalistic society. What the functionalists have lacked is a clear acknowledgement of the fact that the roots for this lack of planning are found in social circumstances. But one does not acquire an understanding of the social developments that are unfolding by isolating oneself in one's work within a special professional field. Only when the professional considers his field as a link in a larger social context will he begin to acquire a comprehensive overview of it.

In a number of European countries, groups of architects have come into existence that share a conscious social attitude towards the problems in building and urban planning, groups that have also discerned the political consequences of this view of society. The theoretical clarity that these groups represent is a result of



Harjuvita Housing by Alvar Aalto

1941

Alvar Aalto

Research for Reconstruction: Rehousing Research in Finland

Here emphasis is laid on the building activity in connection with the reconstruction problems being currently produced by the European War, mainly because of the opportunities they offer for large-scale housing. But this scheme is offered strictly in the spirit of a suggestion, not as a carefully formulated plan. If it succeeds in stimulating an eventually productive discussion of the possibilities of such a project, in doing so it will have served a valuable purpose.

A new problem created by the present war

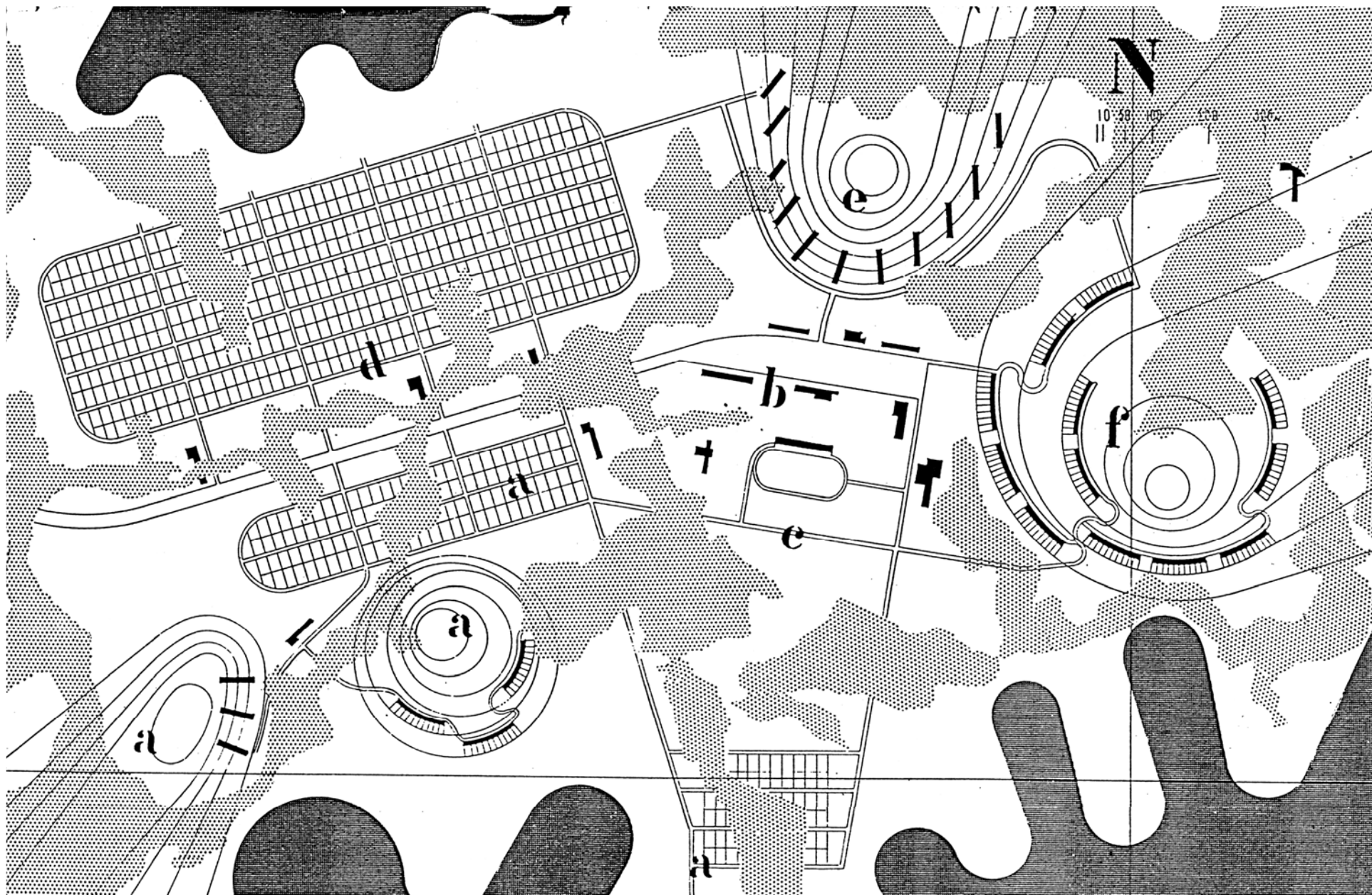
Years ago one of the first organised efforts to mitigate the sufferings that grew out of modern warfare led to the foundation of the International Red Cross. Today there is no question of the high humanitarian contribution of this undertaking. Out of the last World War a new problem developed outside the strict province of Red Cross activity. This was the problem of resettling refugees and transplanting various political and ethnic groups in the realignment of international boundaries. From a humanitarian viewpoint, the work in this field accomplished by leaders such as Fridtjof Nansen stands only second to that of the Red Cross. Each war brings its own problems to be solved. And new forms of human activity grow up to meet new needs.

The present war – "total war" – has already shown the sort of problem it is carrying along in its wake. It is an old problem which has taken a new aspect due to its increased scale, that is to say, the number of human beings involved. The scale of the problem indicates the scale of the activity required to meet it.

The nature of today's problem

Today one sees that the root disaster of this war is the unprecedented destruction of human dwellings that is being effected, from great cities to the humblest shelters, and the consequent disruption of the social group. This war is destroying the first and oldest human protection – the home and the community – and is being effected on such a scale that life in certain areas has become practically impossible. For example, in a city in eastern Finland 149 houses were destroyed in an hour, while many small Norwegian mountain villages were completely wiped out with equal rapidity.

The fact is that the technique of the present war destroys more buildings in non-military areas than it does human beings. The population feels the full weight of the present war first of all in this indirect way – through the destruction of its homes.







Tinggården Housing in Køge by Tegnestuen Vandkunsten

1974

Tegnestuen Vandkunsten

It Can Be Done!

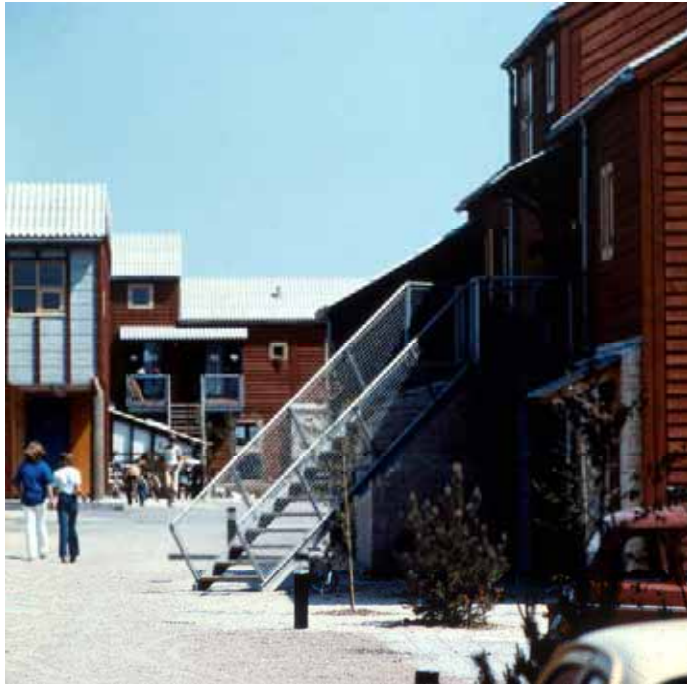
It is not just a question of understanding the building process, it is also about achieving a decent way of life, one could say, if one were to look further than just the building.

Density, growth, variation, basis dwelling and building tradition are well-known expressions. And one can well imagine that our thoughts about this can contribute to influencing the coming mass-building of dense/low-rise housing that is already part of many municipal disposition plans, on one hand. On the other hand, we also work with the shortcomings of technocratic awareness, which knows that 1,000 is more than 100, but has no idea what is better than the misery it has quantitatively forced on us. And which can also plan dense/low-rise housing into the heads of the users.

The ideas and notions that arise in this context, with no direct relation to building, are an expression of a "vision": a coherent notion of a better way to live, or in any case to inhabit, than that which we are asked to do in our grey, ordinary lives. In other words, a consideration of a quality of life – and the requirements that we feel are necessary. What does this have to do with dense/low-rise building? Nothing, other than we believe that one can live "dense/low" on the eighth floor, and that "the residents' collective assumption of control of their homes within the framework of a local society" is in any case, the most important issue, on one hand.

On the other hand, we would like to argue that the new buildings to be built in the next decade, should be dense/low-rise schemes with increased opportunities for communal living and a maximum degree of sovereignty. We would also like to argue that the planning of these schemes, to as great a degree as possible, is done in collaboration with those who will live there, as it is our experience up until now, that the resulting projects will benefit from this. We would also like to argue that the renovation and urban renewal are planned at a neighbourhood level together with the local residents who are forced to remain in their homes. And finally, we would like to argue that the mobilization of residents, which this and other things assume and imply, results in the formation and recognition of local societies, and a new municipal reform that ensures the residents' understanding and competence. The existing municipalities allow a certain degree of community spirit. The upcoming mega-municipalities will be too large for this.

In the last two years, we have sailed with SBI, the National Building Research Institute as our mother ship.







Millesgården by Johan Celsing

2007

Johan Celsing

The Robust, the Sincere

The robust

Buildings should be built to last. What is still typical today, despite all the new technology, is after all that architecture is a genuinely unwieldy, slow medium that requires major resources for its creation. For this reason the robust is important if architecture is to be taken seriously and contribute to the development of a sustainable community.

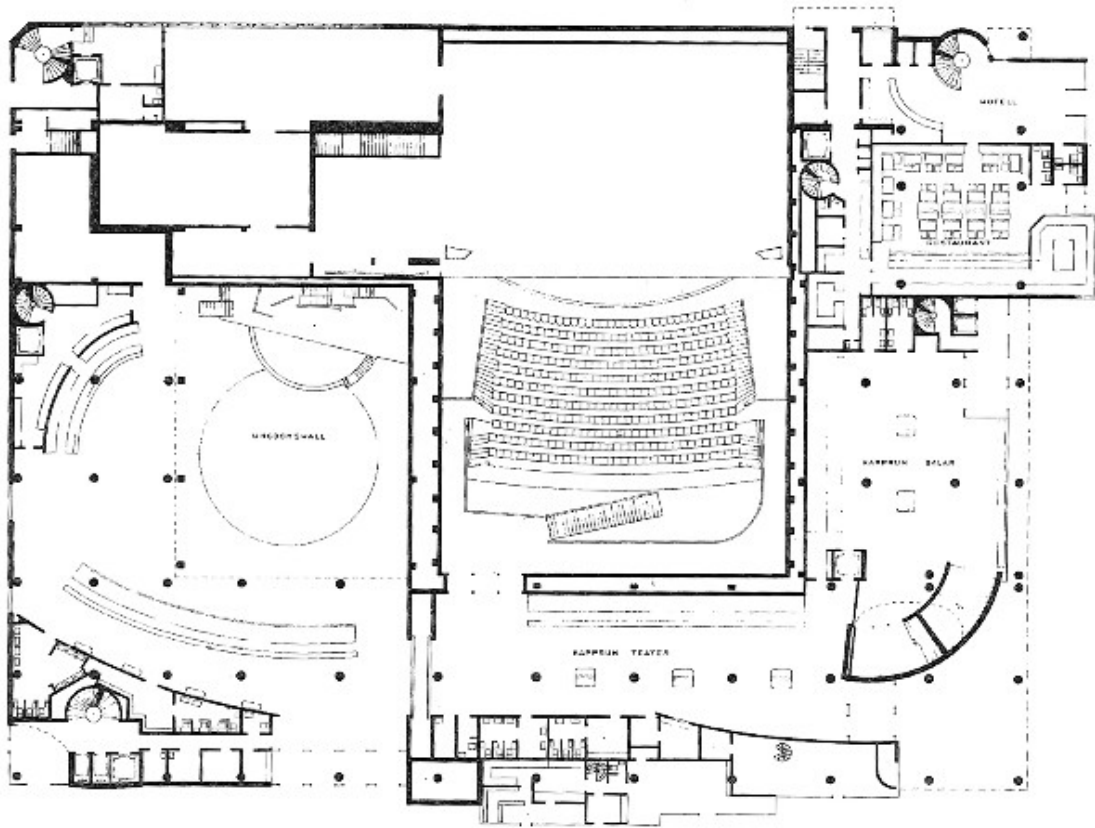
The robust is an alternative to the architecture that is mainly based on visual features. The really significant qualities of a building are complex and not always visually accessible. They quite simply demand a different commitment, or even presence, if they are to be judged.

The robust should not be interpreted to mean something crudely hewn and therefore sturdy through its brute strength. Instead it is intended to engender durable and multifaceted architecture. There are many factors that make architecture relevant in the long term and appearance is only one of them. Robust architecture affirms the context of a project in the broadest sense. Its physical, concrete surroundings are one aspect of this. Other aspects are the technical conditions that apply to the project, its financing, its social context, its history or current or expected social role. Robust architecture aims to determine the state in which all the circumstances can be scrupulously taken into account and synthesised in the form of a building. When one or more of these circumstances change, the building will continue to be relevant, but now superimposed with its own historical overlay.

Sigurd Lewerentz's works provoke thought in this context as they focus on the essential, the poetic, advanced experiments, but not as visually challenging buildings that demand the attention of those who are not really affected by them. On the other hand, those called upon to use them find them more interesting than most other buildings.

Another aspect of the robust, but different, is how the building may be combined with other buildings, or perhaps even rebuilt. In this respect robustness denotes how clearly, or as it were self-evidently, the building manifests itself. Here we could describe the robust as the cut-off point where functional requirements have been fulfilled and where the design acquires an almost generic character. This can also be expressed by saying that it is also open for other forms of use. This is easier said than done. There are many examples of buildings with a contrivedly archaic appearance and even more whose appearance is merely the sum of all their functions.





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ARKITEKTEN

Robusthed

Arbejder af Ahlisen, Aravena, Exner, Czech, Jensen & Skodvin, Lataton & Vassel, Lewerentz, KieranTimberlake, Mandilla, Nieto Sobejano, Rintala Eggertsson, Tesin og Tezuka, Arkitekturpriser, Københavns Rådhus, Architectural Engineering, Glas i byggeriet, Arkitekturfotografi, Thomas Heatherwick, Bøger, Udstillinger.

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