

Reception, Exile and The People's Home— Some Aspects of Sweden's Relationship to the Bauhaus

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- [F] What are the social, political, and economic preconditions for Bauhaus reception? And how do they vary from one period or country to another?

diversity of modernism

bauhaus reception
reception of *neues bauen*
[new building]

swedish functionalism
identification of functionalism
with the welfare state

- [F] In the Nordic countries, Modernism—in contrast to the countries where it originated, such as Germany or the Soviet Union—is not the result of revolutionary upheaval after the First World War. Instead it is, to a large extent, derived from reception of Modernism on the European continent and its «translation» into the Nordic context. Reception of *Neues Bauen* and the Bauhaus is particularly significant in Sweden. The resulting «Functionalism» had a long-lasting impact that is virtually unparalleled elsewhere and, as an aesthetic as well as political programme, shapes the architecture, urban planning and design of the Social Democratic welfare state established in the 1930s. Looking northward reveals numerous overlaps, parallels, and differences between closely related yet distinct developments.

From the Continent to the North

processes of transfer, translation,
and transformation

Just as the Bauhaus builds on discussions in the Deutscher Werkbund before the First World War, the «cultural transfer» of Modernism from Germany to Sweden also begins with reception of the Werkbund's ideas. A key figure in this context is Swedish art historian Gregor Paulsson (1889–1977), who studied in Berlin in 1912, where he met publisher and gallery owner Herwarth Walden (1878–1941) and the circles around *Der Sturm* and came into contact with the Werkbund.¹ Back in Sweden, he often referred in his work for the Swedish Arts and Crafts Association (Svenska Slöjdföreningen) to German models and the ideas of the Werkbund, as well as the concept of cooperation between industry, crafts and art, as can be seen in particular in his two books *Den nya arkitekturen*, 1916, and *Vackrare vardagsvara* [*Better Things for Everyday Life*], 1919.²

After the First World War, this reception did not resume in Sweden until the mid-1920s. In contrast to other countries, the end of the First World War did not represent a decisive turning point in Sweden as historical developments took a different course there. While in Germany the Revolution and the founding of the Weimar Republic promoted radical changes in art and culture, the Nordic countries—with the exception of Finland—experienced comparatively stable political and social conditions during this period. This is reflected in their cultural life and explains—as Leonardo Benevolo has noted—why the flowering of Nordic classicism continued well into the interwar years and why the new radical currents initially found little resonance in the North.³

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European avant-garde movements

utilitarian architecture

functionalism as a concept

[F] The reception that began in the mid-1920s was initially rather superficial. Scant attention was paid to the diverse theoretical discussions of the various avant-garde movements after the First World War, but initially focused instead on the most prominent international figures.⁴ In 1925, Uno Åhrén (1897–1977) discovered Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and his «L'Esprit Nouveau» pavilion and declared him a pioneer of a future «utilitarian architecture». Åhrén also introduced the key term «functional» into Swedish discourse in 1927, defined it as «economically functioning design».⁵ Subsequently, «Functionalism» became a popular generic designation for Modernism in the Nordic countries, together with the abbreviated variant «Funkis». As reception progressed, people increasingly turned to Bauhaus and *Neues Bauen* in the hope of finding solutions for housing and urban planning problems in their own country.⁶

rationalizing housing construction

Sven Markelius (1889–1972) was Sweden's most important connection to the Bauhaus. During a study trip in 1927 he visited the Bauhaus in Dessau and made friends with Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Markelius was particularly impressed by the thoroughly rationalized planning and construction process for Dessau-Törten (1926–1928) and celebrated the housing estate as «a topical example of economic organization of housing construction»⁷. It is also thanks to Markelius that Gropius was invited on two occasions—in March 1928 and in October 1931—to give lectures in Stockholm.⁸ The extent to which Gropius' ideas on rationalizing housing construction in Sweden fell on fertile ground can be seen, *inter alia*, from the length at which they were addressed in the 1931 manifesto *Acceptera* (Accept).⁹

Bauhaus reception
different Bauhaus versions
social, functional,
and scientific approach

Bauhaus reception in Sweden is not limited to Gropius and the rationalization of housing construction but also extends to the scientific-objective teaching approaches of Hannes Meyer (1889–1954), who developed an architecture department from 1927 and succeeded Gropius as Director in 1928–30. In 1928 the young Swedish architecture student Sune Lindström (1906–1989) studied under Meyer. As he wrote in 1929, Lindström understood the Bauhaus to be «an educational institution» that aimed to attain «the spiritual liberation of the individual» with a view to integration into society, and he cited Meyer's ADGB Bundesschule (1928–1930) as an exemplary embodiment of this goal.¹⁰

Bauhaus school

Radiating out from these pioneers, lively exchanges were triggered. A growing number of architects from Sweden and the other Nordic countries made pilgrimages to important buildings



Fig. 4
Max Söderholm, Corso with Alnarp
garden and exhibition hall for means of
transport, gouache, 1930

Fig. 5
Main restaurant «Paradiset» («Paradise»)
of the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition by
Gunnar Asplund in co-operation with Nils
Einar Eriksson and engineer Erik
Ragndahl. Photograph: Carl Gustaf
Rosenberg

Fig. 6
Uno Åhrén (1897–1977), terraced house
45, 1930 Stockholm Exhibition.
Photograph: unknown

- [B] What do we understand by taking a stand regarding architecture and design, and particularly of the Bauhaus and Modernism?

reception of *neues bauen*
[new building]

and exhibitions on the European continent, such as the Werkbund exhibition «Die Wohnung» [The Dwelling] in Stuttgart-Weißenhof (1927),¹¹ established relationships with leading *Neues Bauen* protagonists and participated in international discourse.

The Breakthrough of Functionalism in Sweden

swedish functionalism

More than any other event, the «1930 Stockholm Exhibition: Arts and Crafts, Building and Housing» («*Stockholmsutställningen 1930 av konstindustri, konsthantverk och hemslöjd*») Figs. 1, 2, together with the *Acceptera* manifesto published the following year, brought together the various modernization efforts and marked the breakthrough of Swedish Functionalism. Gregor Paulsson, who headed the exhibition, refers to the Weißenhof exhibition as a significant role model but moved beyond it with his programmatic aspirations. He conceived the Stockholm exhibition as a comprehensive and forward-looking programmatic show, covering the three themes «architectural and structural details», «streets and gardens, means of transport» and «household objects».¹² The show consisted of around one hundred temporary pavilions around Djurgårdsbrunnsviken Bay Figs. 3, 4. This reflected Paulsson's intention to avoid any «museum-like festivity» and to present the exhibition in a thematically ordered and egalitarian fashion, as if in a commercial or everyday environment. This approach also informed the completely new exhibition architecture developed by Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940) Fig. 5, which created the sense of a modern-day public festival. Integrating the setting and the world of nature, it combined classic urban planning vocabulary with modern landscape planning, together with a number of architectural motifs to make the show as varied as possible, and was supplemented by flags, banners, neon signs and lots of electric lighting. Asplund described the show as specifically «Nordic» and clearly distinguished it from the German exhibitions.¹³ The exhibition also played a pioneering role in the development of housing construction Fig. 6. In contrast to the Weißenhofsiedlung, the aim here was to develop solutions as close to reality as possible, in order, as Uno Åhrén noted in the catalogue, «to give everyone the apartments they need at prices they can afford».¹⁴

housing construction

[B]

affordable housing

The exhibition was a phenomenal success and attracted more than four million visitors, although Sweden had only about six million inhabitants at the time. Its enormous success probably

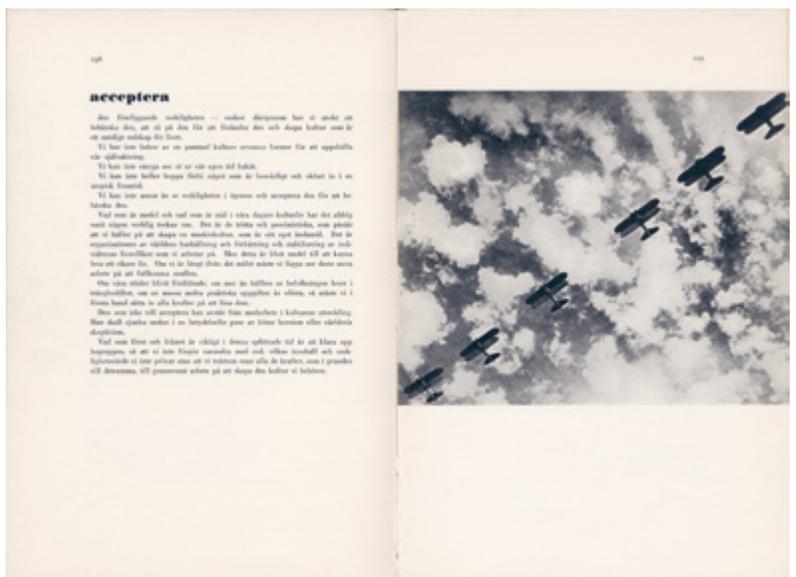
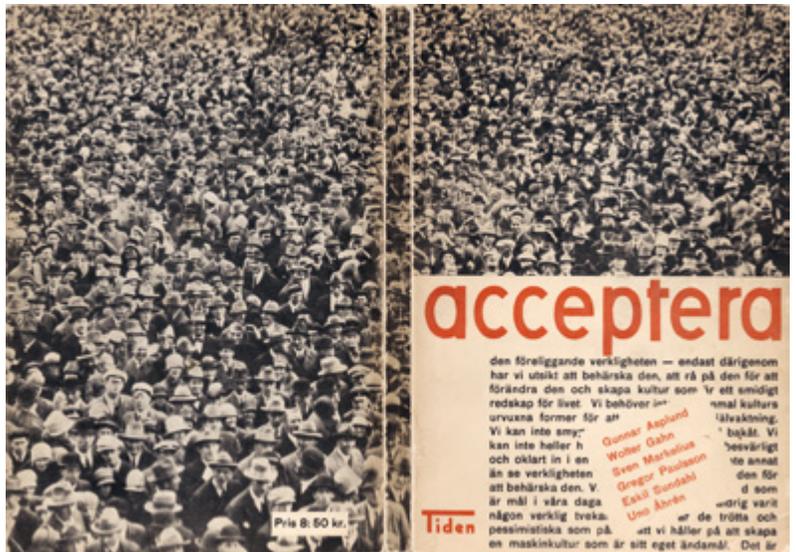


Fig. 7
The authors of Acceptera (from left to right): Sven Markelius, Uno Åhrén, Gunnar Asplund, Eskil Sundahl, Wolter Gahn, Gregor Paulsson

Fig. 8
Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl, Uno Åhrén, Acceptera, Stockholm 1931, cover (front and reverse)

Fig. 9
Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl, Uno Åhrén, Acceptera, Stockholm 1931, spread p. 198–199 (Final roll call)

- [G] Which ways of taking a stand can we discover in processes of Bauhaus transfer, translation, and transformation?

new political, social,
and architectural awakening

identification of functionalism
with the welfare state

new living—a new lifestyle

«new man» as a concept

stemmed essentially from the synthesis of an architectural and social new awakening, a comprehensive applied arts and industrial exhibition and a summer festival programme. The exhibition was interpreted as signalling a bright future, indicating that the global economic crisis could be overcome and heralding the welfare state;¹⁵ it was celebrated, for example, by proletarian poet Ivar Lo-Johansson (1901–1990) as the beginning of an «Age of Functionalism» that was articulated in a «new architecture» and—like the Bauhaus—also in «a new attitude to life» and a «new man».¹⁶

There was extensive press coverage of the exhibition. While reviews by foreign critics ranged from enthusiastic to benevolent, the verdict in the Swedish newspapers was more divided. The exhibition was sometimes vilified as «un-Swedish», «a threat to national tradition», «American advertising» or «rootless commercial architecture imported from Germany».¹⁷

- [G] In response to the criticism, Gregor Paulsson, Gunnar Asplund and the other architects involved in the exhibition—Wolter Gahn (1890–1985), Sven Markelius, Eskil Sundahl (1890–1974) and Uno Åhrén ^{Fig. 7}—published the *Acceptera* manifesto in 1931 ^{Figs. 8, 9}. *Acceptera* lacks the utopian aspirations and aggressive attitude of other avant-garde manifestos, such as those published by the Bauhaus. Based on the imperative indicated in its title of accepting the challenges of the present and inevitable progress, as well as on the search for a «third way» between «the individual and the mass», the authors developed a comprehensive programme for modernization of architecture, urban planning and the applied arts.¹⁸

modern architecture and
design as a response
to social modernization

Nordic Functionalism Moving Towards International Recognition

In the late 1920s, progressive architects from Sweden and other Nordic countries gained increasing international recognition. They were regarded more or less as members of the Modernist movement on an equal footing with their peers and Nordic functionalism was seen as part of this movement—or at least as a Nordic variant of it. This becomes apparent in the reception of their work through exhibitions—in Germany, for example, the *Nordische Kunst* exhibition in 1929 at the Thaulow Museum in Kiel—or the relevant overview publications.¹⁹ This international recognition is

diversity of modernism
swedish functionalism

also reflected in their participation in the CIAM congresses. No Nordic architects were present when CIAM was founded in 1928 but Markelius became a member that same year. In 1929 he and Gunnar Sundbärg (1900–1978) attended the second congress in Frankfurt am Main and Uno Åhrén joined CIAM in 1930.²⁰ Finally, in 1932, works by the Nordic Functionalists were presented side by side with the usual text-book examples in the *Modern Architecture* exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art.²¹

Sweden as a Land of Exile

emigration and exile

processes of transfer, translation,
and transformation

Functionalism's breakthrough segued almost seamlessly into the arrival of around 5,000 German-speaking emigrants who sought refuge in neutral Sweden between 1933 and 1945 and were a driving force in the aforementioned reception and translation processes. Among them were a number of architects, for example, Austrian Josef Frank (1885–1967) as well as the two Bauhaus architects Fred Forbát (1897–1972) and Werner Taesler (1907–1994), who made a significant contribution to the development of Swedish Functionalism.²²

neues bauen [new building]

emigration and exile

Born in Hungary, Forbát had studied in Budapest and Munich from 1914–1920 and established himself as a representative of *Neues Bauen* during the Weimar Republic. He worked in Walter Gropius' studio and taught at the Bauhaus for a time before joining Ernst May (1886–1970) in 1932 and moving to the Soviet Union. Disillusioned, Forbát had already returned to Hungary in 1933 as an «involuntary exile», emigrating from there to Sweden at the invitation of Uno Åhrén in 1938, after Jews were banned from practicing as architects. Taesler, who was a decade younger and came from near Berlin, had studied in Basel, at the Bauhaus and in Munich from 1928 to 1931 before following May to the Soviet Union in 1931, where he remained until 1935. As a member of the KPD [Communist Party of Germany], he could not return to Germany and also opted to emigrate to Sweden. In 1944, the two architects organized a «Conference on the Study of Reconstruction Problems» in Stockholm. Forbát rose to become a prominent urban planner, who, for example, drew up the development plan for Lund in 1939–1942 in cooperation with Lindström, organized the CIAM meeting in Sigtuna in 1957, and taught in 1959–1960 as Professor of Urban Planning at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. Taesler, on the other hand, made an important

- [F] What are the social, political, and economic preconditions for Bauhaus reception? And how do they vary from one period or country to another?
- [N] How do our own cultural, social, and political beliefs and stances affect our understanding of the Bauhaus, Modernism, and modernity?

contribution to disseminating information in Sweden about architecture in the Soviet Union, particularly with his series of articles on the subject in 1935–1936. As a practising architect, however, he had less success.

Functionalism and the People's Home

- social democratic welfare state [F] In 1932 the Social Democrats came to power and over the next four decades transformed Sweden into a welfare state often referred to as the «Folkhem» [the People's Home]. Functionalism shaped the architecture, urban planning, and design of the period as an aesthetic and political programme. Many of the ideas transposed from the Continent to the North from the mid-1920s, shown at the Stockholm exhibition and described in *Acceptera* were now increasingly widely and more comprehensively implemented.²³ A further contributory factor was that the pioneers involved in the Stockholm exhibition and *Acceptera* moved into influential positions. Swedish functionalism was manifested above all in housing and urban development, culminating in what was known as the «Million Programme» between 1965 and 1974. Over the course of just one decade, around one million apartments were built as part of this programme, in keeping with the principle of rationalized housing construction, mostly as slab buildings. While Functionalist ideas were put into practice—turning the housing shortage of the 1960s and 1970s into a housing surplus—there was also growing criticism of this Functionalism, which now appeared as a symptom of an excessive welfare state and misguided bureaucracy.²⁴
- identification of functionalism with the welfare state
- swedish functionalism
- rationalizing housing construction
- social democratic construction schemes
- critique of functionalism [N] In 1976, the election of a liberal prime minister did not merely put an end to the Million Programme. It also marked the beginning of a broad-based reckoning with Functionalism, as can be seen, for example, in the exhibition *Aufbruch und Krise des Funktionalismus* organized for German audiences in 1976 by the Swedish Architecture Museum, or in the polemic published in 1980 by Hans Asplund (1921–1994), Gunnar Asplund's son Fig. 10.²⁵
- history as perpetual reshaping With increasing historical distance, the way in which Functionalism is viewed in Sweden has indeed become more diverse. However, as revealed by the most important depictions of the topic, it is still considered primarily from the perspective of a history of its national impact, starting with the Stockholm exhibition and *Acceptera*.²⁶

Bauhaus centenary

swedish functionalism vs.
german modernism/bauhaus style

The Bauhaus centenary should therefore be used as an opportunity to recall the origins of Swedish Functionalism on the European continent and to point out the overlaps, parallels, and differences. Taking a look at the long-lasting impact of Functionalism in Sweden, it is also tempting to speculate and imagine a different Modernism in Germany than the one that came to an abrupt end in 1933 when the National Socialists seized power and the Bauhaus was dissolved.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Gregor Paulsson, *Upplevt*, Stockholm 1974, pp. 12–14, 73–76.
- 2 Gregor Paulsson, *Den nya arkitekturen*, Stockholm 1916; id., *Vackrare vardagsvara*, Stockholm 1919. [English translation of the latter text; Gregor Paulsson, «Better Things for Everyday Life», in: *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, (eds.) Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg, and Barbara Miller Lane, New York 2008, pp. 72–125.
- 3 Cf. Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna I–II*, Bari 1960; English: *History of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1971; cf. Juhani Pallasmaa and Simo Paavilainen (eds.): *Nordisk Klassicism. 1910–1930 / Nordic Classicism 1910–1930*, Helsinki 1982.
- 4 Cf. Atli Magnus Seelow, «From the Continent to the North. German Influence on Modern Architecture in Sweden», in: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift. Journal of Art History*, Vol. 85, Nr. 1, 2016, pp. 44–62.
- 5 Uno Åhrén, «Brytningar», in: *Svenska Slöjdföreningens Årsskrift*, 1925, pp. 7–36; cf. Eva Rudberg, *Uno Åhrén*, Stockholm 1981, pp. 41–48.
- 6 See for example Gotthard Johansson, *Funktionalismen i verkligheten*, Stockholm 1931.
- 7 Sven Markelius, «Bostadsområde vid Dessau-Törten. Ett aktuellt exempel på ekonomisk organisation av bostadsbyggandet», *Byggmästaren*, Vol. 6., Nr. 19, 1927, pp. 236–243; cf. Eva Rudberg: *Sven Markelius, arkitekt*, Stockholm 1989, pp. 48–50.
- 8 Walter Gropius, «Byggnadsväsendets rationalisering», in: *Byggmästaren*, Vol. 10, Nr. 28, 1931, pp. 149–156; cf. Reginald R. Isaacs: *Walter Gropius 2/I*, Frankfurt am Main and Berlin 1986, pp. 500, 600–601.
- 9 Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, Eskil Sundahl and Uno Åhrén, *Acceptera*, Stockholm 1931, pp. 90–92, German: Atli Magnus Seelow, *Akzeptiere. Das Buch und seine Geschichte. Deutsche Übersetzung mit Einleitung und Kommentar*, Erlangen 2018, p. 90–92. [English translation: as Note 2, pp. 140–347]
- 10 S. [Sune] Lindström, «Bauhaus», in: *Byggmästaren*, Vol. 7, Nr. 17, 1929, pp. 96–98; Hannes Meyer, «Erläuterungen zum Schulprojekt. Grundsätze der Gestaltung», in: *ibid.*, pp. 98–101.
- 11 See for instance Uno Åhrén, «Stuttgartutställningen», in: *Byggmästaren*, Vol. 6, Nr. 21, 1927, pp. 253–261; cf. Seelow 2016 (as Note 4), pp. 49–54.
- 12 Gregor Paulsson, «Stockholmsutställningens program», in: *Svenska Slöjdföreningens Tidskrift*, 1928, pp. 109–117; «Stockholmsutställningen 1930», in: *Svenska Slöjdföreningens Tidskrift*, 1928, pp. 85–86.
- 13 «Kulturkrönika 1930» [Conversation with Gunnar Asplund and others], in: *Byggmästaren. Utställningsnummer, 1930*, pp. 8–32, here p. 11. For the exhibition see: *Stockholmsutställningen 1930 av konstindustri, konsthantverk och hemslöjd, maj–september. Officiell huvudkatalog*, Stockholm 1930; see Eva Rudberg, *Stockholmsutställningen 1930*, Stockholm 1999, pp. 54–65, 100–177; Peter Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, London 2006, pp. 130–139; Atli Magnus Seelow, *Reconstructing the Stockholm Exhibition 1930*, Stockholm 2016, pp. 40–121.
- 14 For the housing exhibition see: *Stockholmsutställningen 1930 av konstindustri* (as Note 13); Uno Åhrén, «Bostadsavdelningens planläggning och tilkomst», in: *ibid.*, pp. 25–30, here

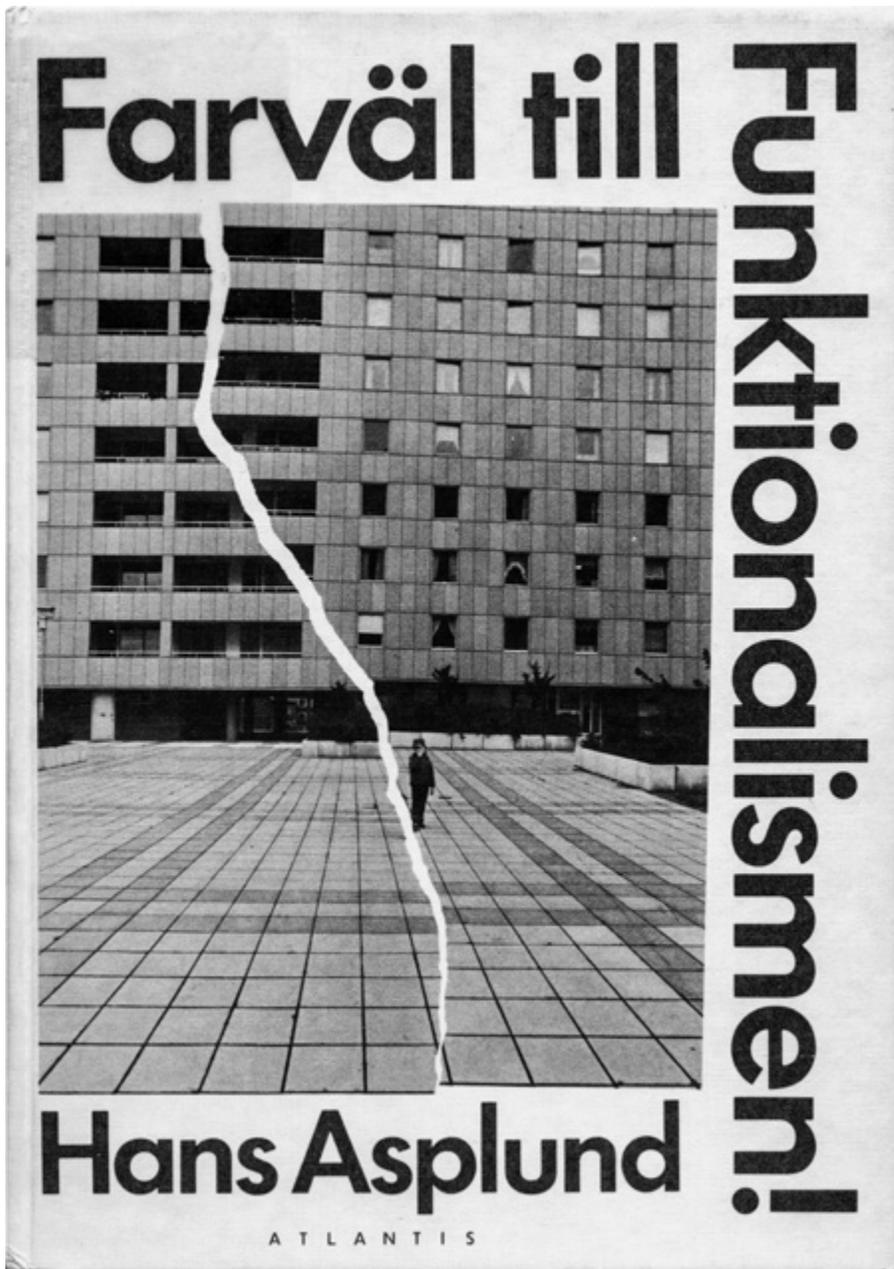


Fig. 10
Cover of the book by Hans Asplund, *Farväl till Funktionalismen!*, Stockholm 1980

- p. 30; cf. Lucy Creagh, «At the Limits of Architecture. The Housing Section of the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition», in: *Dash. Delft Architectural Studies on Housing*, Rotterdam 2013, pp. 18–35; Seelow 2016 (as Note 13), pp. 122–183.
- 15 Cf. Christiane Küster-Schneider, *Schau Fenster Zukunft. Gesellschaftliche und literarische Diskurse im Zeichen der Stockholmsausstellung 1930*, Freiburg 2002.
- 16 Ivar Lo-Johansson, *Författaren*, Stockholm 1957, p. 5.
- 17 See Per G. Råberg, *Funktionalistiskt genombrott. Radikal miljö och miljödebatt i Sverige 1925–1931*, Stockholm 1970, 2nd expanded edition, Stockholm 1972, pp. 171–177; Rudberg 1999 (see Note 13), pp. 187–195; Eva Rudberg, «Rakkniven och lösmanschetten. Stockholmsutställningen 1930 och «Slöjdstriden»», in: *Formens rörelse. Svensk form genom 150 år*, (ed.) Kerstin Wickman, Stockholm 1995, pp. 122–139.
- 18 See Seelow 2018 (as Note 9), pp. LIII–LXXXVI.
- 19 *Nordische Kunst Kiel 1929. Ausstellungen im Thaulow-Museum: Nordische Volkskunst, Nordische Baukunst der Gegenwart*, Hamburg 1929; see for example Gustav Adolf Platz, *Die Baukunst der Neuesten Zeit*, 2nd expanded edition, Berlin 1930, pp. 145, 513–515; Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale. Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna*, Milan 1932, 3rd ed., Milan 1941, pp. 801–818.
- 20 Sven Markelius, «Den andra internationella arkitektkongressen «Neues Bauen»», in: *Byggmästaren*, Vol. 9, Nr. 2, 1930, pp. 1–5; cf. Martin Steinmann (ed.), *CIAM. Internationale Kongresse für Neues Bauen. Dokumente 1928–1939*, Basel and Stuttgart 1979, p. 213.
- 21 Cf. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style. Architecture since 1922*, New York 1932, 3rd edition, New York and London 1995, pp. 107–109, 112–113, 118–119, 178–179, 224–225.
- 22 On this and the following point cf.: Fred Forbat, *Erinnerungen eines Architekten aus vier Ländern*, (ed.) Sibylle Hoiman, Dokumente aus dem Bauhaus-Archiv 5, Berlin 2019; Werner Taesler, *Flüchtling in drei Ländern. Ein Bauhaus-Architekt und Sozialist in Deutschland, der Sowjetunion und Schweden*, (ed.) Ekkehard Henschke, Stuttgart 2019; Roger Jönsson, *Arkitekt i mellankrigstidens Europa. Fred Forbat och funktionalismen*. Dissertation University of Lund 2004.
- 23 Cf. Eva Rudberg, «Der Aufbau der Wohlfahrtsgesellschaft im «Volksheim». 1940–1960», in: *Schweden*, (eds.) Claes Caldenby, Jöran Lindvall, and Wilfried Wang, *Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert*, 4, Munich, New York 1998, pp. 110–142; David Kuchenbuch, *Geordnete Gemeinschaft. Architekten als Sozialingenieure. Deutschland und Schweden im 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 45–74.
- 24 Cf. Claes Caldenby, «Die Zeit der großen Programme. 1960–1975», in: Caldenby et al. 1998 (as Note 23), pp. 142–169.
- 25 *Aufbruch und Krise des Funktionalismus. Bauen und Wohnen in Schweden 1930–80*, Stockholm 1976; Hans Asplund, *Farväl till Funktionalismen!*, Stockholm 1980.
- 26 See for example Råberg 1972 (as Note 17); Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *1930/1931: Den svenska modernismen vid vägskälet*, Stockholm 2014; Per I. Gedin, *När Sverige blev modernt. Gregor Paulsson, Vackrare vardagsvara, Funktionalismen och Stockholmsutställningen 1930*, Stockholm 2018.