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2014
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INVESTIGATING AND WRITING ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY:
SUBJECTS, METHODOLOGIES AND FRONTIERS

Papers from the Third EAHN International Meeting

Edited by Michela Rosso

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Published thanks to the contribution of



EAHN
2014
torino

Michela Rosso (ed.)

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Cover Image

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The authors

Publishing

Politecnico di Torino

ISBN

978-88-8202-048-4

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that of urban landscape, the latter being much more complex to define from a theoretical and practical point of view. This fact reveals the substantial weakness of the Italian legislative action which, together with the economic interests involved by the renewal practices, contributed to the supremacy of the historic centre notion. Indeed, the latter achieved tangible results in conservation practices, while the concept of urban landscape is still being theorized, at least at an international level.

From the research it emerges that in Italy the cultural debate was more earnest than in France, but the legislative framework regarding urban preservation was substantially weaker.

The final part of this work will be dedicated to verifying if the theoretical construction of urban landscape has been considered in the planning process and in the urban heritage preservation practices against the intense urban transformations that occurred in the contemporary decades.

Two case studies, Turin and Lyon, are selected to evaluate the procedures and results. These cities have been chosen because they are both medium size post-industrial cities. During the second half of the twentieth century their townscapes have deeply changed as a result of significant urban planning decisions. The planning process of the two cities will be investigated through different sources: town plans and architectural projects, debate and resolutions of local authorities, newspaper articles, photographs, etc.

The goal is to evaluate if urban landscape can be used as an operational instrument of analysis and preservation in the urban planning process.

My doctoral thesis is based on a supervising agreement between the Politecnico di Turin and the Université Rennes 2.

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7.1.4 'A Home':   stberg's search for the total artwork

CHIARA MONTERUMISI

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This paper aims to be a discovering voyage on how the Swedish architect Ragnar   stberg (1866-1945) turned the intuitions expressed in his 15-pages pamphlet entitled *Ett hem. Dess byggnad och inredning* ('A Home. Its construction and interior design') which came out in 1905, into projects of domestic architecture. *Ett hem* encapsulates the Nordic devotion to craftsmanship, inscribed in the early studies on Swedish folklore and rural tradition undertaken by historian Nils M nsson and ethnographer Artur Hazelius, which had paved the way for the Svenska Sl jdf reningen (Swedish Society of Industrial and Crafts design) founded in 1845.

The title of the booklet captured the two fundamental themes of the fin de si cle architectural debate: construction (*byggnad*) and interior design (*inredning*), encompassing the enduring dilemma of their relation summed up in *Ett hem*. To a certain extent one can compare Laugier's primitive hut with   stberg's search for the essence of the tiny wooden homes, but both aimed to design the human space par excellence: a domestic vernacular shelter.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century nationalistic feelings had been progressively spread in Scandinavian countries and in Germany, stressing the desire of nationhood due to not still defined boundaries of these nations. Then, philosopher-literati and artist-architects focused on the search for their own origins through a vernacular idiom, conveying moral, spiritual and national values.

In their imaginary, Sweden meant simultaneously both the vast native land and the intimate home.

Housing design embodied that sense of identity, encompassing national, regional and local concerns.

Some visual artists, such as the painters Anders Zorn and Carl Larsson emphasized the notion of the ideal home, and celebrated the region of Dalecarlia as a symbol of true Swedishness. There they built open-air studios that served as model and spur to national romantic architects like Lars Israel Wahlman, Carl Westam and Ragnar   stberg. Hence, the architects offered appropriate precedents for Swedish housing and interior design, first to peasants and then to the nascent bourgeoisie. Equally the intellectual

and ante litteram feminist Ellen Key powerfully influenced the generation of younger architects among whom Östberg was a leading exponent through her writings on Scandinavian domestic aesthetics and family education.

It is also worth noting that National Romanticism was partly in debt to the theories of the British Arts & Crafts Movement whereby, according to its champions William Morris and John Ruskin, artistic innovation had to be based on nature, not on machines. Östberg firmly stated that all visual arts should work together closely, creating a balanced interplay of popular culture and craftsmanship.

Inspired by Larsson's homonymous *Ett hem* ('A home', 1899), a collection of watercolours depicting traditional interiors and domestic life, Östberg drew attention on the traditional peasant's wooden house (*allmogehems*). He also described all the fundamental features for domestic design and proposed some simple homemade houses for the lower classes. As he said, 'any home is none other than a clear expression of its occupants' needs'. The analytic study of the *allmogehems* was also a source of inspiration to Östberg's projects for the bourgeoisie *bostad* (villa), built in the wild outskirts of Stockholm.

As an expression of Swedish vernacular identity *Ett hem* embodied the stimulating cross-disciplinary debate at the dawn of the twentieth century which was captured by the writings of Key, Larsson and Östberg, published in the series entitled *Studentföreningen Verdandi* (Verdandi's Student Booklets), a progressive platform for intellectual exchanges founded in 1888.

Until now this booklet has been accessible to only-Swedish readership; it is my aim to include an English translation in the documentary section of my doctoral thesis.

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7.1.5 Order and Proportion: Dom Hans van der Laan and the Expressiveness of the Architectonic Space

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My doctoral research deals with the history of proportions in twentieth-century architecture and aims at introducing how proportioned elements favoured the legibility of architectural forms by interacting with human perceptive attitudes. Distancing from the symbolic, aesthetic, and ethical values attributed to proportions over the centuries, the research proposes an analysis of the role of proportions in the oeuvre of Dutch architect and Benedictine monk Dom Hans van der Laan (1904-91).

Van der Laan devoted his entire life to the search for the essence of humanistic architecture. With his plastic number system and his experiments on perception, he explored human attitude to discern surrounding forms and classify them through their dimensions. He demonstrated how nature, which because of the infiniteness of its dimensions could not be completely understood by human mind, could be shaped by man and become intelligible through the application of proportional ratios. According to the plastic number theory, human beings could draw from surrounding visible world a set of intelligible ratios and sizes apt to their mind and apply them in the construction of architecture. In this way architecture could fulfil what Van der Laan considered its highest goal, i.e. to serve human intellect necessities. Therefore proportions were not external tools or final checking devices in design practice, but they stood for the essence of architecture, making the unlimited nature comprehensible by human limited perceptive skills.

During his long-life research Van der Laan built three plastic number devices, which he named the abacus, the triangle of forms, and the *morphoteek*, or the sets of regular geometric volumes built on plastic number progression. These were extremely useful to exercise the eye in perceiving proportioned forms and to understand the interaction between morphological and dimensional features of forms and the human brain structure.

Van der Laan applied his plastic number system in few buildings where the experience of ordered disposition and articulation of intelligible forms called up to build spaces for bodies and minds. In my dissertation I carried out a careful analysis of the proportional ratios in Van der Laan's most well known design, the S. Benedict Abbey in Vaals (1956-86). Based on Van der Laan's fifteen lessons collected in his book entitled *Architectonic Space* (1977), the