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BOSSOM LECTURES ON THE MAKING OF GREAT ARCHITECTURE

2. 'What is it like 30 years later?' An assessment of Alvar Aalto's work

PROFESSOR COLIN ST JOHN WILSON
Architect

Delivered to the Society on Monday 10 April 1995, with Paul Vaughan, writer and broadcaster, in the Chair

THE CHAIRMAN: Professor Colin St John Wilson is Emeritus Professor of Architecture at Cambridge. He has also taught or lectured at Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, UCLA and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His principal buildings are in Cambridge, Oxford and London, but I suppose he is best known at the moment as the architect of the new British Library in St Pancras, the construction of which began in 1982. The date of completion or of the library being opened is, as they say, a point verging on the moot. Those of you who have seen the *Evening Standard* tonight will know that the building has most recently been described as an eccentric masterpiece, and that same article uses eulogistic terms to describe it.

Professor Wilson is also the author of numerous books, the latest of which is to be published this year with the title *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture*. It is about the reaction against orthodox architectural theory in this century, the resistance movement, as he calls it, against the CIAM (the International Congress of Modern Architecture). One of the architects featured in that book is Alvar Aalto (who was an Honorary Royal Designer for Industry). He is the subject of tonight's lecture, 'An assessment of Alvar Aalto's work' which Professor Wilson has subtitled 'What is it like 30 years later?'.

In 1966 Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote a rather chastened preface to the reissue of the famous (or I would say infamous) book that he wrote with Philip Johnson in 1932 called *The International Style*. In doing so he made a telling point about the date. He said: 'Had we written it a few years later, we would have had to face serious developments that were sharply changing the international picture'. The two 'developments' were the resurgence in old age of Frank Lloyd Wright with the design of Fallingwater (the house which was the subject of Richard MacCormac's lecture on 3 April) and the 'rise to prominence of a young architect called Alvar Aalto'. And Aalto is the subject of this second Bossom Lecture.

Those of you who saw that presentation on Fallingwater will understand that it was a building that made absolute nonsense of Hitchcock and Johnson's attempts to reduce the jolting energy of early modernism to a mere 'style', least of all to a canon that rejected all notions of mass in favour of lightweight, standardised grids and equally rejected all applied decoration, symbolic expression or any allusion to the past. It was a *jeu d'esprit* extending our understanding of all of these notions in a very refreshing way.

The particular work of Aalto that I will present is the Villa Mairea at Pori in Finland built between 1937–39 for Harry and Maire Gullichsen in a large wooded estate in which it was a tradition within Maire's (Ahlstrom) family that each generation should build its own 'country house'. It is a particularly apposite choice of building since Wright's Fallingwater was quite explicitly the precedent that inspired the first design proposed by Aalto. Indeed Aalto even tried to talk his client into finding a site that would allow him to suspend the building over moving water. However, Harry Gullichsen said firmly, 'I want to be within 10

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photo Futagawa

Villa Mairea: the east façade

minutes walk of my office, so you can forget that idea . . .'.

In associating Aalto with Wright, I am above all keen to challenge the way in which Hitchcock and Johnson, embarrassed at having their thesis torn apart, tried to marginalise both architects as being eccentric and 'irrational', charming in a rogueish way, but best understood (like the Expressionists) as a sideshow that had no part to play in the great march of progress. I argue to the contrary that both Wright and Aalto represented the true and essential tradition of modernism where the so-called International Style, whose terms were drawn solely from sources of aesthetic taste, inevitably collapsed into its opposite aesthetic formula which also was promulgated by Philip Johnson and was called Post-Modernism. Indeed, what they stood for has a great deal to say to us today; and one of the things that it says is that the true nature of modern architecture did not suffer from any of the weaknesses which have been set at the door of the International Style and given as the occasion for self-justification by the post-modernists (the rejection of history, of decorative propriety, of sensuous mass). I therefore want to deepen the game that Richard MacCormac opened up last week and adopt a more polemical stance.

First, let me say something about Aalto himself. He was 10 to 15 years younger than the other masters of the modern movement, 30 years younger than Frank Lloyd Wright, and he differed from them all in one way which is significant. Whereas Wright, Gropius, Mies and Le Corbusier considered that the enemy was the dead hand of the Past, Aalto thought that it was the bad faith of the Present. He talked about 'les deux cochons': one was the attempt to invent a new 'style'

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and the other was the obsession with technology. He said that 'true architecture only exists where man is at the centre' and it is interesting to see the way in which he did turn that genial (but rather abstract) proposition into 'flesh-and-blood' architecture. A typical example of his sensitivity to the relationship between man and the ever-growing encroachment of technology is illustrated by his biographer Goran Schildt. Whereas in the church at Imatra Aalto incorporated a technically sophisticated mechanism to allow the massive concrete dividing walls to slide open and closed, he indignantly refused to include in his crematorium design at Lyngby the conventional mobile conveyor that removes the coffin after the service. The distinction between the two mechanisms 'may seem trifling but for Aalto it is basic... he wants the living to carry away the dead'.

When he received the Royal Gold Medal in 1957, he opened his discourse by saying 'The modern movement like every revolution began with enthusiasm and ended in dictatorship'. As early as 1940 he had talked of 'the first (and now past) stage of the modern movement', arguing that 'it was not the rationalisation that was wrong, but the fact that it had not gone deep enough... The newest phase of architecture tries to project rational methods from the technical out to human and psychological fields.'[1]

He had great professional authority, but also great irreverence for received ideas or grand reputations. When I was about to visit America in 1960, I asked him 'What are the great buildings that I have to see?' and he said 'There aren't any. None of the stuff now is great'. And when I said, 'How about Frank Lloyd Wright?', he replied: 'I'll tell you a story about Frank Lloyd Wright. One day he said to me, "We'll go for a drive in the car. You sit on the left, I'll sit on the right and we'll count the buildings influenced by me". All the buildings were on the right'.

One organisation which he held in friendly irreverence was the International Congress of Modern Architects whose first meeting was held in 1928. The redoubtable Helène de Mandrot, whose castle at La Sarraz in Switzerland was the meeting ground of many an avant-garde congress, invited a large international group of architects to come together in order to establish a central focus upon the nature and aims of the Modern Movement. She had already consulted with Le Corbusier who promptly drew up his 'plan de bataille' in the form of an agenda of 'six questions we have to answer and no more. They are: Modern Technology, Standardisation, Economy, Town Planning, Education and Implementation (Architecture and the State)'. In a trice, the programme of orthodox modernism was drawn up replete with its architectural canon of five formal characteristics, its town planning canon of four functions, its commitment to mass-production, the whole grand Cartesian vision of a Brave New World: the revolution was duly launched.

At that meeting one of the delegates, who was the leader of the Berlin group, Hugo Haering, protested against the very notion of imposing such a pre-ordained 'rational' order, arguing for a gentler more exploratory approach to the needs of society. But revolutions have no time for a sensitive approach; he was silenced and shortly after expelled from his position as delegate by Gropius. From all of this I argue that at that moment a kind of 'resistance movement' against the self-appointed orthodoxy of CIAM came into being: and for me it is Aalto who above all epitomised that resistance both in his buildings and in his writings. He attended a number of CIAM meetings but always with reservation (for instance he rejected the notion of the 'Existenzminimum'). When he received the Gold Medal, he argued that the battle against bad faith was a running battle and that you could never relax your vigilance.

Aalto's early architecture was rooted in the National Romantic movement of the 1890s, an architecture which was itself generated from a movement that started in this country earlier in the 19th century. I am referring to the so called English Free School, eminent examples of which would be the work of Butterfield, Street, Scott, Waterhouse, Shaw and Mackintosh. It was a school of thought that tried to respond to an entirely new set of building programmes that were vastly wider in scope and much more complex in their requirements than anything called for in the 18th century, a great new range of building types – museums, libraries, schools, railway stations, theatres... Many of those very diverse building types served programmes that were subject to growth and change and furthermore were located on complicated urban sites. These architects developed a kind of architecture more closely related to Gothic than to the classical and enjoying the great variety and irregularity flowing from the freedom to accommodate such diverse and contradictory requirements.

It is noteworthy that this was the first time in the history of architecture that this country has made a

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really original contribution to the development of architecture in a way that has affected architecture around the world. It was a school of thought that was carried across to America, where it was picked up by Henry Hobson Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright and was made by them more articulate before it returned over the water with the famous exhibition in 1910 of Frank Lloyd Wright's work; and that exhibition had a profound effect upon the up-and-coming generation of the modernists, particularly in Germany and Holland.

Aalto's first significant buildings were nevertheless, in the manner that has been called Nordic Classicism. The unique significance of the neo-classical movement in the 1920s in Sweden, Finland and Denmark is that it was not seen as an escape into the past (as certain people today would like to use the language of classical architecture) but was in the nature of a stepping-stone forward – a tightening of the discipline on the way into modernism. In the early days of his practice Aalto made some remarkable buildings in his home town Jyvaskyla; he was trying to turn it into the 'Florence of the North' and he demonstrated remarkable skill in that endeavour. The fact that he later found the Classical language to be too limited for what he needed to do has in his case some authority in its claim since he had demonstrated that he could practise that language very beautifully.

However, as his advance into Modernism quickened it was not haunted so much by the ghost of Classicism as by the Free School whose control of the Irregular offered the working discipline that he needed in order to respond to the growing breadth of his interests. He was above all a man who made a virtue of taking aboard contradictions however awkward they may be to handle: and that is the key to the great humanity of his architecture. In this he differs not just from the other Masters for whom (and this is particularly the case with Frank Lloyd Wright) the intention was to invent an order that would at all hierarchical levels sustain a common theme without any inconsistency. It was said of Mies van der Rohe that he made great buildings because he was so selective in what he chose to incorporate in his buildings – which is one way of saying that he left out whatever did not accord with the kind of order that he was seeking. Aalto on the other hand loved the contradictory perversity of life and argued that it was precisely the role of art to resolve contradictions that could not be resolved in any other way; that indeed it was the very alchemy of art that could, in the classical definition of a Practical Art, 'serve an end other than itself' and still make art out of the resolution. Architecture is under a categorical obligation to serve ends that are born outside the discipline and yet to transform them into something enjoyable, fulfilled and endowed with its own true identity.

Aalto's independence is well demonstrated in the competition for a Town Hall at Marl in Germany in 1958. The majority of the submissions were in the conventional mode of a Mies van der Rohe curtain-wall cube: box after box. Two submissions, one by Aalto and the other by Hans Scharoun, radically flouted that convention and we have only to see how, in their submissions the dynamic breakdown of the elements of the Brief into the form of a fan or an outspread hand, lead us to wonder how on earth the individual elements that were to go in to the Town Hall could ever have been shoe-horned into a Miesian box for any other reason than obedience to a preordained dictatorship of form. What both Aalto and Scharoun show is that the more the elements are given their own shape, size and identity, the more they relate to the human scale and the more the whole complex will enjoy a form that is intelligible and has its own identity – which is surely what a public building requires.

If we now focus upon the Villa Mairea, we will find that to enter and move through the house is to be drawn into a narrative whose variety within the compass of a single work is unique in its time. Like Fallingwater it is sited in a dense wood and our approach along a winding road leads us obliquely across the east face of the building which at first blush presents us with a representative image of a purist cube of the 1920s, replete with the nautical stair winding up onto a roof terrace. In the north-east corner the entrance is protected by a large free-form curvilinear timber canopy. The canopy is supported on a clustering of timber columns and thin poles some of which are bound together with thongs and some of which are not vertical. At once we are introduced to two characteristics of the design of the building: an artful play upon the metaphor of trees in a wood and the first hint of a compounding of stylistic idiom (or rather abstracted reference to stylistic motifs) which is deployed throughout the building.

The compounding of motifs is immediately apparent on the outside of the building on turning the corner to view the north face. The eastern half of this façade is largely a simple white masonry cube penetrated with

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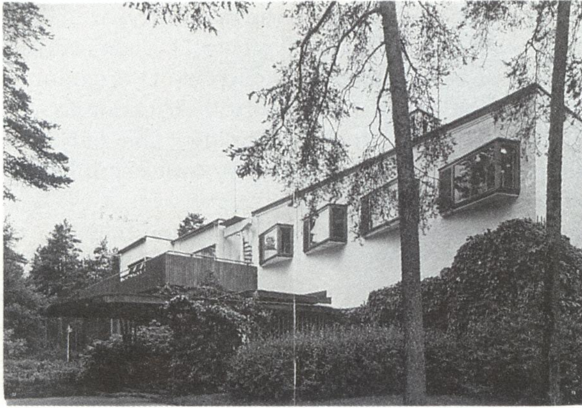


photo Futagawa

Villa Mairea: the entrance on the NE corner

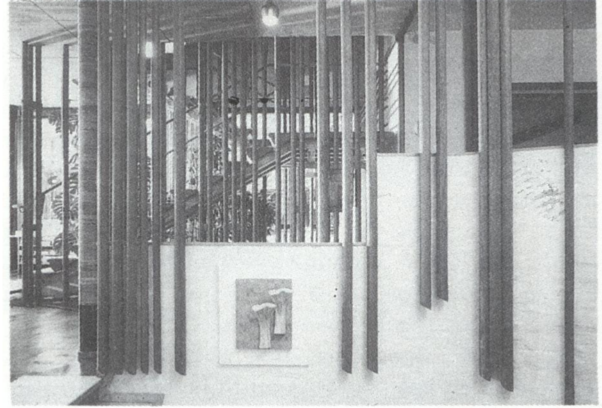
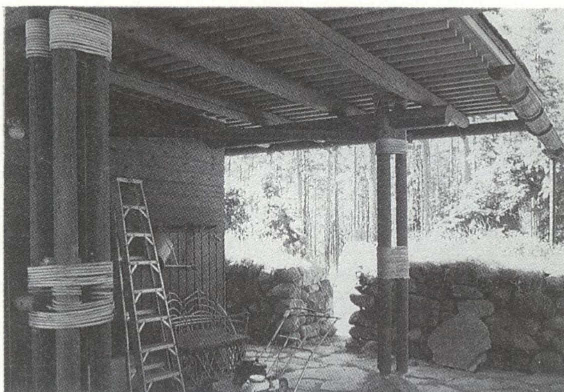


photo Rauno Traskelin

Villa Mairea: the view from the entrance hall

random fenestrations and lightly dressed on one corner by a structure for climbing plants. To the right we can discover a change of pace in which the purist column and beam system is overlaid by a rustic timber earth-topped superstructure which concludes in the north west corner with the sauna in which motifs from traditional Karelian vernacular are compounded with memories of the Japanese tea-house. The degree to which such design procedures outrageously flout the tenets of the International Style is itself a measure of the extent to which Aalto's architecture is impervious to the subsequent counter-critique of Post-Modernism. What is remarkable is the wit and tact with which Aalto controls such sensitive material by a consistent touch that never leaves us in any doubt that ultimately the language is his own. There is no hint of pastiche.

The handling of the forest metaphor is equally entrancing. Passing under the canopy into the entrance hall one is deflected to the left by a curved wall (that reaches to eye-level and screens the dining room ahead) to ascend a short flight of steps into the living room. To the right a random sequence of vertical poles leads to a staircase which is wrapped in a thick cluster of poles whose grouping (single, paired and triple) is further elaborated by bracing-bits and stiffening-battens to create an extraordinary evocation of the forest. Moving deeper into the living room we become



Villa Mairea: the Sauna in the NW corner

Villa Mairea: the screen in the entrance hall

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Villa Mairea: the main staircase

photo Martti Kanapen

aware of an apparently modular frame system of nine square bays two of which (the library and the winter-garden) are enclosed. And then the exceptions to the system begin to disclose themselves. The bays are not square nor is the frame a regular grid of columns. The columns, which are of steel, filled with concrete, lacquered black and bound around (to varying heights) with protective rattan or vertical birch wood battens, are disposed either singly or bound into pairs or clustered as a trio. In the middle of the library a sole column is in concrete, unbound but painted white and faceted as if to carry a reference to classical fluting. Similarly the floor surfaces change from granite to slate to tile to beech strip shading with subtle difference the identity of separate zones. All in all the abundance and variety of inflection reward revisit inexhaustibly.

Maire Guillichsen was a serious collector of works of art and Aalto's idea was to enclose the library within a movable screen clear of the ceiling but which could store both books and works of art and also allow the library itself to grow or change in form. Harry Gullichsen, however, required a greater level of sound insulation for confidential discussions in the library and so Aalto invented a motif of curved elements, alternately solid and translucent closing the gap to the ceiling and yet allowing light through (almost like trees in the wood) along the top of the screen wall thereby providing acoustic privacy. Time and again such inventive improvisation allowed Aalto to overcome contradictions by having it both ways. The detail of the sauna again presents the theme of grouped columns bound together that we saw in the entrance canopy only this time elaborated with a further shift in language towards the 'primitive'.

I want to draw upon one or two hints and suggestions that other people have offered about this building. One of them, talking about what he calls 'forest space' says: 'Walking around the living room, one experiences neither the containment of traditional interiors, nor the open flowing space of modern architecture, but something very much akin to the feeling of wandering through a forest in which spaces seem to form and re-form around you. In a forest the individual feels himself to be the centre, moving through it, but always being the centre'.[2] For Aalto such forest spaces provided both a means of relating his architecture to Nature and also of achieving a sort of democratic and non-hierarchical organisation, conceived around the person for whom it was being built, the 'man at the centre', not designed *sub specie aeternitatis* in some abstract way, but to be perceived, inhabited, lived in, experienced, touched. Rather than the hierarchic order of Classicism, we are offered a polycentric field of force.

That is one way of talking about the elusive but none the less pervasive order of this space. Another writer introduces a relationship to painting: 'Some surfaces and materials appear only once as isolated brush strokes or pieces of newspaper or cane surface or other found materials in a cubist composition'. There is also an analogy with the idea of collage: 'The collage principle allows with Aalto the shameless fusion of contradictory elements, images of modernity and peasant past, continental avant garde and primordial constructions, primitive simplicity and extreme sophistication of detail. Whereas the international style is aimed at a cohesive development of the main idea . . . Aalto creates deliberate discontinuities and keeps shifting the elaboration to completely new keys. He constantly

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photo Akira Muto

Villa Mairea: the south east corner of the living room

contrasts polarities, romantic/rationalist, modernist/vernacular, novel/traditional, nature-formed/man-made, freeform/geometric and so on'. [3]

Finally, one should comment on the continuity of such a fusion of themes in the garden that is separated by its own dry stone enclosure from the 'wilderness' of the surrounding forest. The diving pool for the sauna certainly follows an 'organic' form but at the same time it must be acknowledged that, in reality, its artificiality owes as much to the work of Jean Arp as to any form in nature. Here again the element of play has an autonomy that is wittily detached from the source to which it makes reference. The timber superstructure of Maire's Studio is a further translation of the Karelian vernacular into a pure and utterly new invention.

What I would like to suggest to you is that Aalto is using architectural means of a very subtle kind in order to engage with the sensibilities of the person who is inhabiting the building: he is trying to put into practice what is entailed in his statement 'True architecture, the real thing, is only there where man stands at the centre.' If you then recall the other statement of his, quoted earlier, to the effect that it is necessary 'to try to project rational methods from the technical field out to human and psychological fields', you can begin to grasp the measure of his ambition.

Perhaps the first thing to understand is that Aalto is pre-eminently one of the architects (alas, only too rare!) who thinks, feels and designs in terms of spatial experience; and in order to grasp what that means it is necessary to discriminate between two complementary aspects of such experience. On the one hand there is the objective description of the parameters in question. The architect Luigi Moretti has set these out very clearly in the context of a number of models in which liquid

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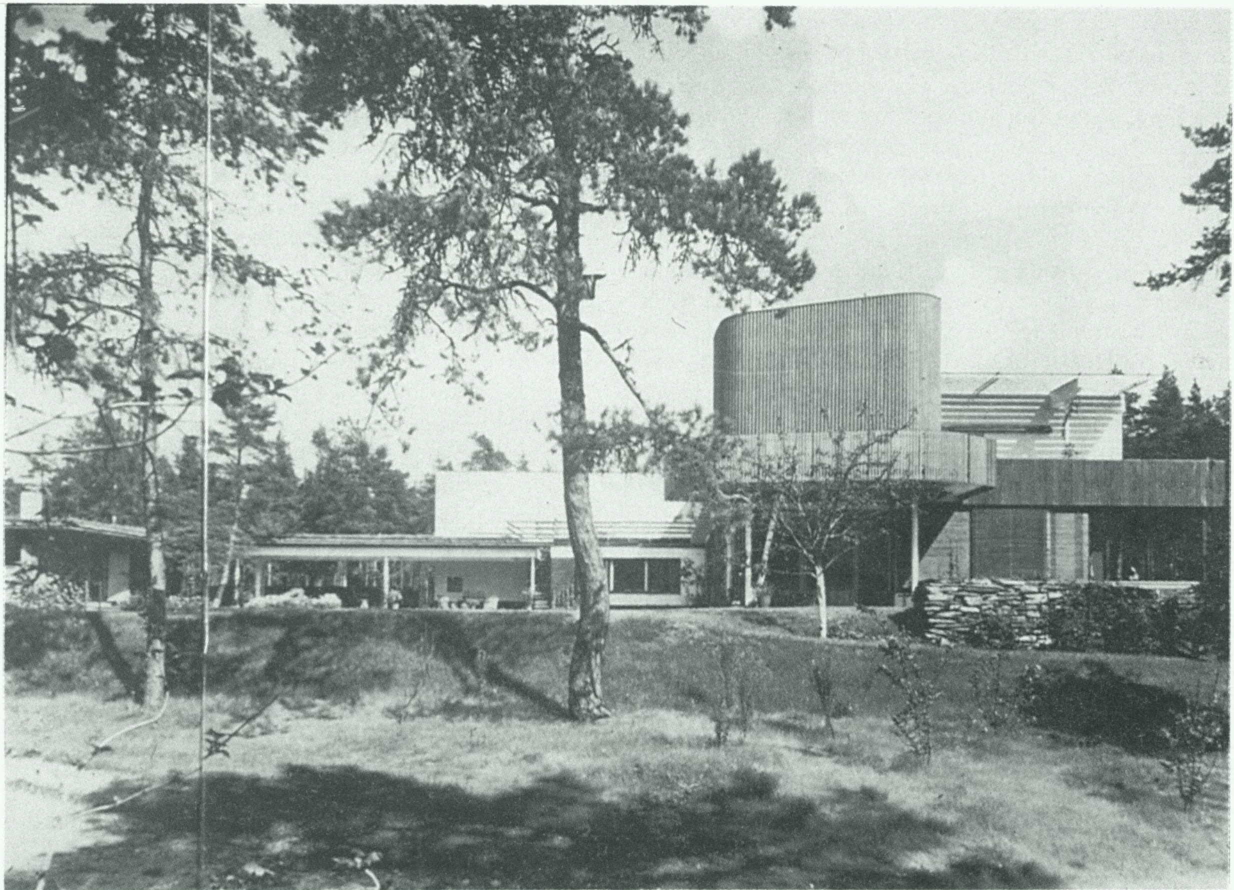

photo Welin

Villa Mairea: the south façade

plaster was poured into the modelled shell of a building and allowed to set so that, when the shell was removed, the volumetric form of the enclosed space stood as if carved to form a positive object with characteristics of size and shape clearly articulated. To these factors he added the quality derived from the distribution of light and a further, more abstract, concept in which he suggests that space be conceived of as a form of pressure acting upon the occupant of the space in terms of compression and release in direct correspondence to the volumetric properties of the space. In these terms the surfaces of wall, ceiling and floor exert a varying charge of energy between each other so that the inhabitant is immersed in a field of force albeit without overt conscious awareness of what is at play.

And then to that half-conscious awareness we can add a deeper, more emotionally-charged and ambiguous sub-conscious layer of experience about which Adrian Stokes has written so eloquently. He took certain ideas from the work with infants of Melanie Klein who made the point that we all, in early infancy, go through two radically opposed states of awareness. The first state is that of being enveloped by the mother-figure, not so much enclosed as completely at one with the world, almost as if the whole world is breathing in unison with you. The architectural analogue to that state would be Hans Scharoun's great Philarmonie Hall in Berlin where the performance of the music is enacted in the centre embraced by the audience which is disposed on terraces surrounding it.

Melanie Klein then argues that there is a contrary psychological 'position' (and it is very telling to an

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architect that she uses the word 'position') in which the infant is suddenly made aware that the world is not his or hers at all, that he or she is now something other, all of a sudden exposed, and confronted by an indifferent (if not actually hostile) presence 'out there'. A typical architectural analogy to that position would be the confrontation with the great formal façade of the Farnese Palace by Sangallo and Michelangelo.

It is not difficult to understand that the transition between these two psychological positions induces in the infant a traumatic shock; and that being so it follows that for all of us the experience of space is deeply charged in a mysterious, and potentially disturbing way. Stokes then makes the tantalising suggestion that great architecture has the power (alchemy again) to do the impossible thing – to reconcile and fuse together these twin poles of experience.

We are here considering a phenomenon which has a direct impact upon the nervous system of the beholder and I believe that this operates through a body-language that we all have learnt long before words, in the earliest days of infancy. It is a kind of sixth sense. And I find it significant that when one is trying to account for it one tends to use images from Michelangelo because it was he who said, 'Anybody who does not understand the human body knows nothing about architecture'. Le Corbusier was alert to it and certainly it lies at the root of what Aalto meant when he said, 'Architecture must take the rationalisation further into psychological fields'.

The title of this talk is 'What is it like 30 years later?', which is derived from a comment by Aalto that 'It is not what a building looks like on the opening day that matters but what it is like 30 years later'. The fact that no such hostage to fortune was ever offered by any of the other masters of the Modern Movement is in itself a significant insight into Aalto's values but his brave suggestion was well borne out by the following outcome to one of his buildings.

Shortly after the Second World War he was doing a stint of teaching at MIT (Massachusetts Institute for Technology) and was commissioned to build a students' hall of residence (Baker House) on a site overlooking the Charles River. The width of the frontage was strictly limited by a neighbouring block on either side and the brief required that there should be one entrance only for reasons of security. Out of these constraints he evolved a form of great inventiveness which was instantly castigated by Henry Russell Hitchcock as a predictably irrational exercise in 'Expressionism' carried out in out-dated technology (brickwork). Now what is particularly interesting about this case is that some aspects of the working method adopted by Aalto were carefully documented. He involved the students in the design process which itself entailed the establishment (right at the beginning) of a number of mutually conflicting criteria that were to be resolved: view of the river, privacy, relationship to the sun, economic cost per room. There is a chart which depicts 12 alternative configurations each of which is assessed against those four criteria. The first thing to be said about that method of work is that it has absolutely nothing to do with Expressionism (*pace* Hitchcock): on the other hand it has much to do with 'seeking the proper end to be served'.

The design solution took the form of a building whose sinuous frontage to the river maximised the number of rooms to enjoy the view and orientation to sun and whose northern façade housed a giant staircase that, starting at a central control point branched in two directions to climb like a vine up the back of the building feeding in at each floor via a common lounge to the individual private rooms. It is indeed an astonishing invention.

Whether or not it served the ends that were stipulated in the criteria was in this case fully explored in a study which was carried out by two of the student-occupants very aptly exactly 30 years after completion of construction.[4] Such feedback reviews of a building are rare. In this case the survey applauded 'the effectiveness of Aalto's simultaneous concerns for the particular needs of the individual inhabitant and for the support necessary to develop a group living experience... If the design was that of a Master the result has been active participation'. As confirmation of this point the students wished to restore the lounge rooms that, in an earlier attempt by the authorities to reduce the rent per capita, had been converted into student rooms. Aalto in other words, had got it right in the first place.

Aalto (like Scharoun, like Loos) had no time for pretty drawings or photographs; requests for either were met with the response: 'Go and see the building'. Any architect who designs in spatial terms knows that that experience is existential, not transferable. What is so masterly in Aalto's architecture is his ability to tune those parameters of spatial experience with such finesse and humanity to an understanding of the ends to be

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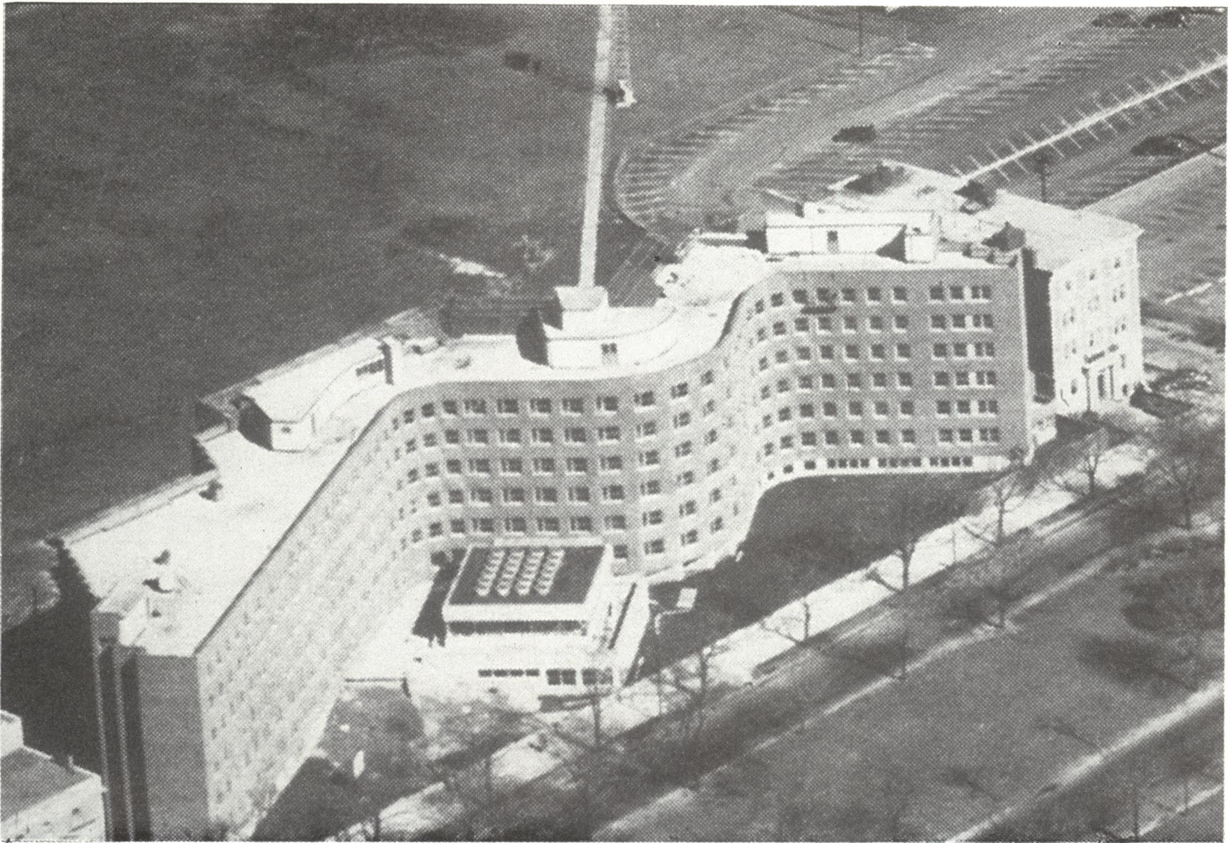

photo Architectural Forum

Baker House, MIT. Air-view of the river frontage.

served by a building that the inhabitants respond in return with loving care. I have yet to see a building of Aalto whether it is 30 or 60 years old that is not as much appreciated by its inhabitants now as it was on its opening day. That is not something that can be said of many architects. It may well have a lot to do with the fact that of all the Masters of the Modern Movement Alvar Aalto is the one whose reputation has not only held fast since his death 20 years ago but rather continues to rise year by year.

Professor St John Wilson then illustrated with a series of slides the design of the British Library building at St Pancras, London, of which he is the architect.

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DISCUSSION

BRUCE MARTIN (Chartered Architect): I met Alvaar Aalto at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in 1946, and have always remembered him looking at a student's drawing-board and saying, 'Would you have the same column in a bookstore as you would in a lady's bedroom?'

THE LECTURER: There is a famous joke, from a time when all the talk was about standardisation, of a student who came from India to see Aalto and asked what module they used in the office. Aalto said, 'One or two millimetres'.

BAJRANG MATHUR (Architect/Planner, the BM Design Consultancy): It was pleasant to see the design of the gates for the new British Library and the installation of a sculpture. How optimistic are you about having other pieces of art in the building?

THE LECTURER: I drew up a programme for the acquisition of new works of art and for placing what I call the 'family heirlooms'. There are about 105 places for works of art. It is difficult to say how far we will get on this, but I believe that it all will all finally happen. A fair amount of money is coming in towards the tapestry planned because it is in part a memorial to Lord Bute, who was one of our great supporters. I suppose a government in difficulty will say when money is short that it has to go on what is absolutely essential. I consider art is absolutely essential, but it is understandable that some people do not.

A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE: Who was responsible for choosing the mobile book stacks for the British Library?

THE LECTURER: Mobile book stacks, which allow a small avenue for access into a range of books, are a legitimate technical method and the only logical way to maximise space. The fact that there were problems in making these enormous weights move easily is not in the least surprising. There are many stories, most of them mythical, about what went on during the prototype period. The whole point about a prototype is that you try to get rid of the bugs in the system. There were no bugs in the system for distributing books on trays to the reading-room.

J.M.WICKHAM: There could be no end to the size of building to store books, but in future much of what people write may appear on a screen or in some other form. Who decided the size of the British Library?

THE LECTURER: The size is not yet quite adequate. The library would argue for more reading spaces but it may not need all of the original three phases. The way they intend to deal with number relates directly to the computer, because they can now record the history of accessing every item and can identify the books or materials that are most frequently used. Those that are rarely consulted could be outhoused at Boston Spa, where there is a big repository. Sooner or later you have to fall back on outhousing.

TONY McGUIRK (Architect Partner, Building Design Partnership): Given Aalto's approach of designing for the user, why has Aalto's influence been so small within the Modern movement?

THE LECTURER: The people who live in his buildings really love them. I believe his influence has been small because he has been marginalised. The Americans tend to think of him as a hard-drinking Finn who refused to play the game with people like Philip Johnson. He built most of his buildings in Finland because he believed passionately in Finland. He is a bit like Asplund, who never promoted himself outside Sweden.

I believe the only hope for what has been called 'the uncompleted project' lies in the kind of work that Aalto was doing and in the principle of seeing architecture as something which serves an end other than itself and extends its capacity to serve in that way. Most orthodox modern architecture has tried to serve itself rather than serve such purposes. The problem began when Kant said 'The beautiful is the useless.' When the architects got hold of that idea the Beaux Arts was created but that is another whole lecture.

MARK POWER (Architect): Do you see a future for Aalto's approach in Europe? Do you see a future in houses of concrete knowledge in the information technology age? When I went to the Seville Expo they were enthusiastic about soon being able to access the whole of the Seville library in California.

THE LECTURER: We each have to make our own decision about whether Aalto is going to win out. I would have thought that the fact that many of his buildings have been successful, while many famous modern masterpieces are not being used for their original purpose or have been pulled down, shows that there must be something behind them.

As far as information technology is concerned, *Ode to a Nightingale* is not information. In one sense culture is almost juxtaposed to information in that sense. The British Library has the greatest collection of unique materials – manuscripts, maps, miniatures and so on – anywhere in the world, and people will always want to see and handle them. A book itself is a marvellous tool. You can have three or four of them open and can keep flicking back and forth. I have no fears for the book, and I do not think serious scholars have.

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