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Architectural Competitions

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IN MEMORY – MINNEORD

In memory of our friend, the lecturer, scientist and president

Lena Villner

Lena passed away on Saturday 19 September 2009 after a short illness. Lena was a university lecturer of architectural history at the KTH School of Architecture and took an active interest in several areas, including teaching, research, administration and public activities. In 1997, Lena defended her dissertation about Tempelman, which was as interesting as it was liberating in its ease of reading. In 2005, her academic career brought her to the position of director of graduate studies. In 2008, she became a reader in architectural history. We will remember Lena in particular for her strong commitment to the journal on Nordic architectural research, Nordisk Arkitekturforskning, and for her hard work for the association. Lena was a knowledgeable and highly respected member of the supervisory board, and in the period 2002-2004, she served as president of the association Nordisk Arkitekturforskning. Lena will be sadly missed by us all.

Vännen, läraren, forskaren och presidenten

Lena Villner

Lena lämnade oss lördagen den 19 september 2009 efter en kortare tids sjukdom. Lena var universitetslärare i arkitekturhistoria vid KTHs Arkiekturskola och aktiv inom flera områden: utbildning, forskning, administration och utåtriktad verksamhet. 1997 disputerade Lena på en intressant och befriande lättläst avhandling om Tempelman. Hennes akademiska karriär fortsätt 2005 med uppdrag som studierektor för forskarutbildningen. 2008 blev hon docent i arkitekturhistoria. Vi minns särskilt Lenas starka engagemang för tidskriften Nordisk Arkitekturforskning och hennes arbete i föreningen. Lena var en kunnig och respekterad medlem av styrelsen och under perioden 2002-2004 var hon president i föreningen Nordisk Arkitekturforskning. Det är med stor sorg och saknad som vi minns Lena.

Tracing competition rhetoric

Elisabeth Tostrup

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Nordic Association for Architectural Research
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Abstract:

This paper explores the rhetoric involved in architectural competitions based on Norwegian cases from mid 20th century up until today. How does the promotion of the best projects reflect prevailing values? From the preoccupation with health in the early Welfare State to the inflation of 'landmarks' of today's diffuse power relations, the successful competition rhetoric also appeals to consensus.

Keywords:
Rhetoric, judgement, modernity, landmarks

Introduction

Architectural competitions are about having a number of architects make projects or proposals to solve a particular task. The competitors do this simultaneously, responding to the preconditions and requirements set forth. The Latin origin of the word *compete* means to strive or to seek together, and the Norwegian word for competition – *konkurranse* and the verb *konkurrere* equals the English concur or Latin *com currere*, that is: to run together. By definition, the point of a competition is to select the best among those who 'run' together. Often this can become a surprisingly complex evaluation, with the criteria of 'the best' relative to the prevailing cultural values in the field as well as open to further reappraisal. In a running competition, the criterion of *the bes*t is clearly measurable; it is to run a certain distance in the shortest possible time. In the world of sports, this is internationally agreed upon. However, in other fields of competition such as in the arts, the criteria are essentially subjective and dependent on the norms within the particular field or culture.

From my window overlooking a hill on the outskirts of Oslo, Norway, I am able to follow the consequences of a recent architectural competition - the new Holmenkollen ski jump. They tore down the past jump during some autumn weeks in 2008. The rebuilding provides the opportunity to pay a brief visit to another kind of competition, that of ski jumping and to examine its history along with the corresponding developments of its architecture. In 1892, when ski jumping competitions started in Holmenkollen, the arena was merely a clearing in the woods; the jump consisted of a heap of twigs covered with snow, and the entire slope followed the hill's natural contour. Nonetheless, then – as today – ski jumping competitions at Holmenkollen were big events, assembling a large number of spectators.

The Holmenkollen arena was reconstructed and extended several times during the last century: in 1914, 1928, 1952, 1963, and in 1982. Each iteration aggressively increased the angle of approach which in turn corresponded to increasingly longer jumps - from 21.5 meters

Fig. 1,
Holmenkollen Ski Jump, 1917

in 1892 to 111 meters in 1982 (This is counting *standing jumps*, which means that the ski jumper has to remain in an upright position after landing). Each iteration also relates to developments in material, construction, and form. In 1928 a wooden tower was imposed on the arena, elevating the inrun above the hillside. This tower was replaced by a larger concrete structure for the 1952 Olympic Winter Games. The ski jump was restructured again for the 1982 World Championship and remained essentially the same until last autumn. Thus, the profile or the contour of the slope and the built constructions were altered a number of times. As part of the later developments, the jump tower was painted white and for many years has been flooded with artificial light creating an imposing icon on the skyline west of Oslo. Skiing is inextricable from Norwegian culture, whether one considers the mythic past or contemporary rituals, and with this most-visible structure, the Holmenkollen ski jump has attained the status of a national icon, subsequently becoming the most frequently visited tourist attraction in Oslo.

In ski-jumping, competitors are judged based on *length* and *style* of their jump. Length is measured on a metric scale and style is judged according to how well the skier performs in relation to the prevailing norms of the time. These two parameters are obviously interrelated: as the arena was extended and allowed for longer jumps, the skiers adapted their style to take advantage of the new conditions and maximize the distance of their 'flight'. First there was the Telemark style, in which the skier stood upright in the air, using his arms to steer and balance the body. A famous photograph of Olav, the Crown Prince of Norway jumping at Holmenkollen in 1922, illustrates this style (his is not perfect Telemark style because the skis should have been nicely together - parallel. Nonetheless he was a good jumper). The Hip-bend style was prevalent for a long time and later the so-called Finn-style which has the jumper leaning even more forward, still with the skis close together and parallel. More recently, the V-style developed which benefited from a greater aerodynamic effect. In the latest W-style, the skier is gliding, hovering even better in the air.

In ski jumping competitions, there are five judges - as often is the case in architectural competitions; they award points for style, evaluating take off, gliding while in the air, and landing. Thus, besides having a clearly objective, measurable criterion - the length, ski jumping competitions also depend on aesthetic, more subjective parameters. Significantly, these two parameters are closely interrelated - the style is dependent on the technical conditions and constructions involved.

Promoting architecture with visual and verbal means

Architectural competitions and sports competitions share value systems typical of modernity. However, ski jumping competitions as an analogy or allegory for architectural competitions should not be pushed too far as the assessment of architectural quality is much more complex and the objectively measurable factors are more fragmented, less decisive, and more tentative. Most importantly in this comparison to ski jumping, the question of style is more complex in architectural competitions. In a wide sense, style is architecture or architecture is style.

Rhetoric – the means of persuading - is a core issue in architectural competitions, since the essence of competitions is to select and to promote the best solution among a number of parallel proposals. Admitting that architecture is a field in which we can have no objective, certain knowledge, the choices and judge-

Fig. 2,
Crown Prince Olav jumping in Holmenkollen, 1922

ments must be sought and substantiated within that which is probable. Søren Kjørup, the Danish philosopher writes, 'Rhetoric does not deal with "truth", especially not truth with capital T, but with that which is sensible and reasonable and well argued. And it deals with presenting this in a convincing manner'.[1] In line with Kjørup's position on rhetoric and truth, the winner of an architectural competition does not win by an objectively measurable performance, but by executing his project in the most convincing manner - by all means of available argument. The language and visual expressions of competition proposals are acts strategically directed towards an audience prejudiced in terms of preconditioned desires, knowledge, and emotions. In architectural competitions, as in classical rhetoric, the 'speaker' must inform *(logos)*, delight *(ethos)* and appeal to the emotions *(pathos),* in order to obtain adherence from the audience.

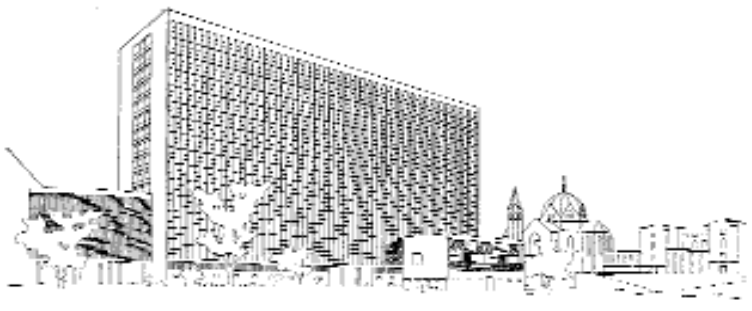
Moreover architectural competitions are a public matter, especially so in the Nordic countries. Rasmus Wærn points out in his 1996 dissertation that in competitions, the classical triangle of 'client – architect - master builder' is replaced by 'client – architect - public'.[2] This triangle constitutes the field of reference for evaluating the best project. One goal of classical rhetoric is to speak in such a way that professionals think it is good, and non-professionals think it is true. Good rhetoric persuades the audience to the speaker's point of view and competition rhetoric must be effective in this manner *both* to professionals and to laymen. This broad audience influences the competition rhetoric and makes it slightly different from rhetoric used solely among architects in purely professional spheres (such as in the schools of architecture).

In order to succeed, then, competition rhetoric must operate within a shared field of values and ideology; it must to some extent appeal to the prevailing doxa in order to be understood and appreciated. Hence the competition material expresses hegemonic architectural values of any given time - hegemonic in Antonio Gramsci's sense, referring to a broad network in which political, economic and social groups attain dominating positions in various fields of society by exchanging services within the framework of a mutual ideology. Dominance is not executed by coercion but through acceptance and adherence to shared norms.

The specific rhetorical material in architectural competitions comprises both visual and verbal forms of argument. Moreover, the visual material has two dimensions which operate separately. Firstly, the proposed building is an argument in the ongoing debate on good or bad architecture. Secondly, the visual renderings – drawings, photographs, models or other visualisations - have their distinct rhetorical dimension which can emphasize, exaggerate or veil and ignore certain aspects of the proposed architecture and its context. Thirdly, there is the text material which comprises the programmeme and the jury's assessment as well as the architects' texts accompanying the projects. Thus, in the case of architectural competitions we have three kinds of rhetorical means, and this threefold rhetoric enables a many-sided communication legible at different levels and accessible to a broad audience.[3]

The rhetoric examined in the following is from architectural competitions held in Oslo, spanning a period of seventy years – from 1939 to 2008. Today, Oslo has around 530,000 inhabitants (with a population of around 1 million people in the greater Oslo area), while in 1939 it the population was around 390,000. Oslo is situated in the innermost part of the Oslo fjord, which extends from the North Sea connecting to Sweden on the east side and Denmark to the south. The city centre is down by the fjord and the harbour, and the city is surrounded by large areas of woods and hills which are open to public use for hiking, skiing and so forth. Looking at these projects and their reception we can see changing values within the architectural community as well as society at large.

Fig. 3,
New Government Building, motto 'Rytme'



Newness with 'the force of an avalanche' around 1940

Seventy years ago, in the 1939 competition for the New Government Building, the jury was not able to agree on a winner and as a result there

were four shared-prizes.[4] The prevailing ideal as expressed in the competition material referred to the 'Hygiene Gospel' demanded *sanering* - from the original Latin *Sanitas* – to make something healthy; sanitized in English, meaning to remove unpleasant or undesired features. In this case, removing the undesired features by and large implied the total removal of the old buildings. *Sanering* – to sanitize - was for a long period, up until around 1970, the common term for reconstruction in debates on urban development and architecture in Norway. In this way, it is a deeply charged term linking health and a particular model of urban development so that only radical reconstruction - implying demolishing of the old - was regarded as adequate to provide healthy buildings and healthy neighbourhoods. And who would not be in favour of good health? Some quotations from the town planning underscore this relationship: One of the main issues of the Labour Party manifesto in 1915 called 'to level the old buildings to the ground, make plans and erect new buildings so that there can be light and air in the streets and in people's dwellings'[5]. The trend was that, as a journalist put it in 1915, 'The new pushed the old aside with "the force of an avalanche"'[6].

The text from the New Government Building competition included harsh criticism of the existing buildings: they were regarded as dirty, derelict, decayed, ugly and thus above all, unhealthy. One of the shared-prize projects, 'Rhythm' (Rytme), made by the leading Norwegian functionalist architect Ove Bang, showed a high-rise building placed exactly in the North-South orientation, creating an oddly oblique relationship to the old Government Building. The drawings are abstract and schematic, illustrating a row of offices with a structural system set in a regular module and featuring a façade with a conspicuously neutral grid pattern evoking distinctly egalitarian ideals. (Fig. 3)

The building's monumentality – and most memorable aspect - is secured in its contrast to the existing situation; marked by cleanliness, simplicity and lack of ornament, Ove Bang's proposed building is much higher than *all* of the surrounding buildings. In the rendering, the surroundings are subdued graphically and partly omitted. Such is the case with the old Government Building to the left in the perspective drawing. There was, in fact, a disagreement among the members of the jury on the matter of the relationship to the existing Government Building in several of the prize-winning projects - since the programme *required* that the new should form a whole together with the old.

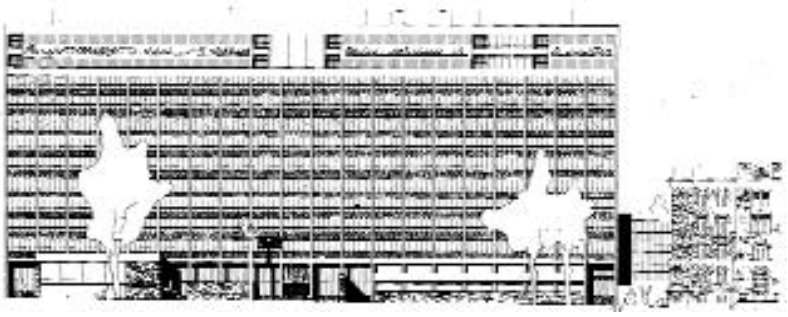


Fig. 4,
New Government Building, motto 'Vestibyle'

Another shared prize project, titled 'Lobby' (Vestibyle), was chosen for realization after WW2. It too is a high-rise building decidedly different from the surroundings. Interestingly in this project, although the contrast is pronounced, the visual material indicates attempts at relating more to context. The granite proposed on the façade of the new building is sympathetic to the existing Government Building on the adjacent site. The competition presentation graphically emphasized an association between the proposed and the existing; between the new and the old. (Fig. 4) Moreover, the plans demonstrate a greater degree of concreteness, of spatial identity and character by showing a higher degree of detailing.

Inventive and seductive arguments

The problem with this competition was the size and the programme, especially as the prevailing ideal of light and air efficiency was exclusively conceived to be solved by high, clean buildings which were situated at large distance from each other and from the existing buil-

Fig. 5,
New Government Building, motto 'Vestibyle' viewed from Royal Palace Park

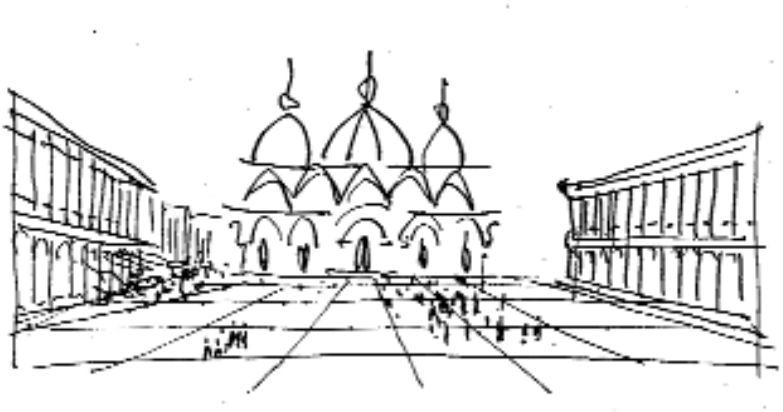
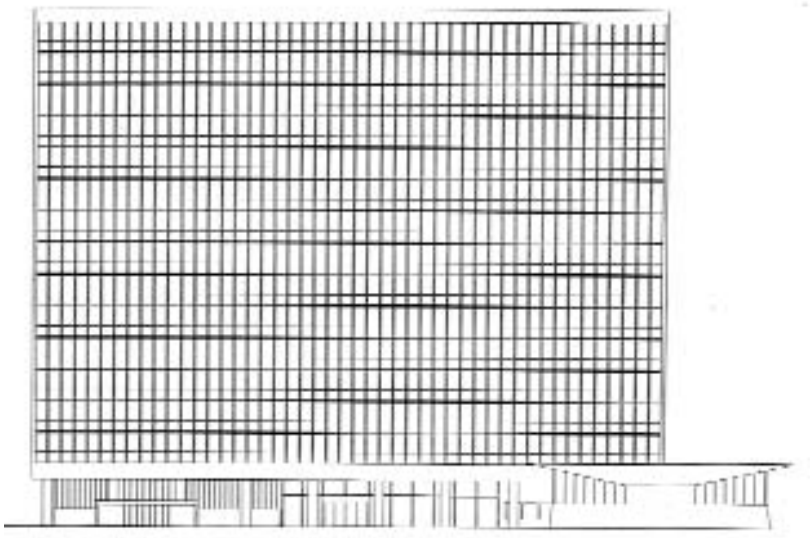


Fig. 6,
Viksjø's visual argument: San Marco in Venice

dings. The issue of height caused the Oslo Association of Architects to address the Government, stating that the association supported the majority of the competition jurors' conclusion that the site was not suitable for the New Government Building. To make the case, an architect jury member inserted one of the prize-winning high-rise buildings into a photograph taken from Royal Palace Park (Fig. 5).

Finally, after WW 2 architect Erling Viksjø, who had been awarded a prize for his project titled 'Lobby', was commissioned to carry out the project, however with a much smaller programme (and in the end was solved with a smaller high-rise in the centre and a low Y-shaped building in addition). Building a case for his project, the architect compared the contrast between the new architecture and the adjacent, old Trinity Church with that of the buildings on Piazza San Marco in Venice. This was an inventive and seductive visual argument (Fig. 6). The final façade of the new office building expresses the egalitarian ideals of the ruling Labour party in Norway (the Labour party had been in power since the mid-1930s except for the five year long German occupation); the grid of the façade composition is even more strictly neutral than in the competition project, showing no differentiation of spaces whatsoever (Fig. 7). It is noteworthy that the New Government Building – virtually the building for the Nation's highest power - for many years simply was called 'the State Office Building' (Statens kontorbygning) just like any State administration office building such as the State Telephone Works or the State Electricity Works. This understatement can perhaps be seen in-line with the strong anti-monumental attitude that was typical of the 20th century architectural competitions in Norway up until around 1990.[7]

Fig. 7,
New Government Building, final elevation



Promoting adaptation yet a distinct modernity around 1970

Thirty-four years later the situation for competition-architecture and its rhetoric had again changed in significant ways. There had been intense riots and broad political protests in the late 1960s. Radical left-wing activists and moderate cultural-conservative groups joined in attacking what they perceived to be an alliance of Labour Party and large scale capitalist power. This activity was influential and led to large development projects being rejected in Norway. The New Ministry of the Environment was established and preservation and adaptation of existing buildings were a prevailing agenda when the competition for the New Head Office of the Bank of Norway was held in 1973. The site was in a central city area which was proposed for preservation. The competition programme states that a new building could be considered '(...) if the façades were adapted to the rest of the built environment'. A large part of the competition text deals with the issue of preserving the historic buildings and adapting the new structures. In the words of the jury, the objective was:

(...) to invite the competitors to work towards development principles and solutions which not only take the existing buildings into consideration – but which, moreover, in relation to the dimensions of these buildings, the environment and proportions, give the new buildings adequate expression. (...) Not only would a new edifice for the Bank of Norway give the block a new distinctive character but it would also lead to a refinement of the existing buildings that would be preserved.[9]

The author of the 1st prize project, Lund & Slaatto architects, had conducted an extremely thorough analysis of the site and the surrounding area. The clue here was that the large masses could be decomposed into units which, when it comes to height, scale and dimension, form and character, relate to the existing buildings slated for preservation (Fig. 8). The development system of Lund & Slaatto's winning proposal was based on 11.5 by 11. 5 meters one storey high construction units, which could fill in larger or smaller parts of the site. Model photographs show a variety of examples depending on how much of the existing buildings were preserved. The architects even extended the grid into the surrounding area, and laid it down in the paving of the entire Bank Square (Bankplassen). The New Head Office of the Bank of Norway is exemplar of Norwegian *structuralism*. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s several outstanding structuralist projects won prizes in architectural competitions, but only a few were realized. For instance, merely a tiny part of the prizewinning projects for the universities in Oslo and Trondheim were built.[10]

The verbal rhetoric in the case of the Bank of Norway Head Office competition was most convincingly elaborated on the metaphor *chess set* and *chess game*. In the words of the jury:
The starting point of the author is a *construction system* which can incorporate the buildings evaluated for preservation and the urban dimensions of the quarter, and simultaneously permit the functions of the bank to develop with flexibility and elasticity within the given framework. (...) Alterations in the interior can easily be made. The construction unit is developed into a *dynamic and elastic three-dimensional chess set* (author's italics).[11]

The metaphorical expression quite succinctly and poetically points to the essence of the project: the construction unit and its three-dimensional grid system are compared with the chessboard and the fascinating possibilities inherent in the rules of the game of chess. On the one hand, there is the spatial unit and the simplicity and regularity of its structuring order creating similar situations throughout the entire complex; on the other hand, there is the apparently infinite range of possible options for forming and inhabiting the building. Small moves may be of crucial significance, but it is invariably necessary to follow the rules. In this case the system not only permits a flexible adaptation to different internal needs but simultaneously provides a sensible tool for adapting to the external spaces.

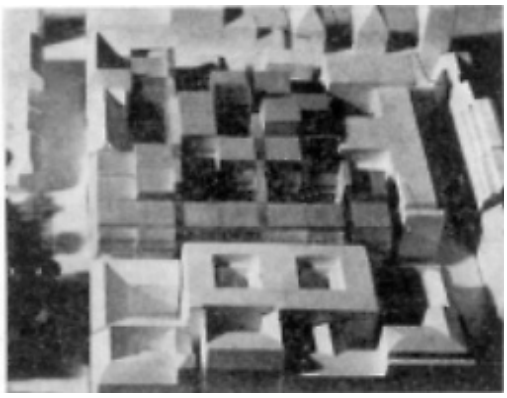


Fig. 8,
Bank of Norway Head Office,
1 st. Prize project, model photo

The chess allegory gives priority to the *process* of designing and carrying out the project. Once the edifice is built and inhabited, the play of multiple options - similar to those of the chess game - is limited and not immediately visible to the beholders, although it is underlying the architectural appearance. Providing rather strict guidelines with an aura of enthusiasm and sophistication while embellishing the idea of freedom, it became a useful tool guiding both the architect and the client through the lengthy planning process.

In correspondence with the text, the visual argument underpins the proposal's main thesis. The plans emphasize the grid showing the

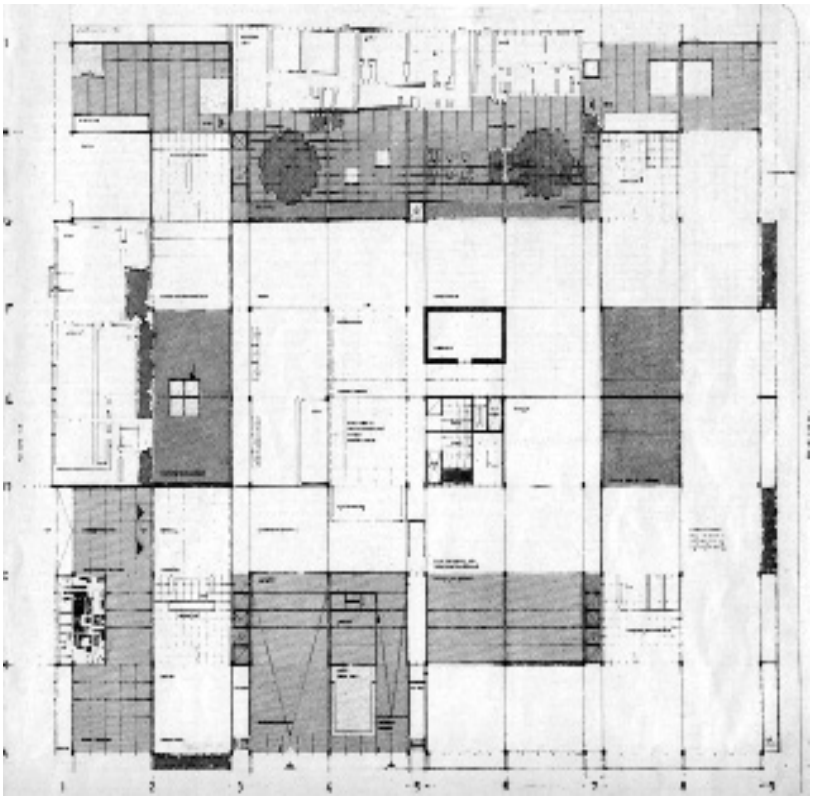


Fig. 9,
Bank of Norway Head Office,
ground-floor plan

Fig. 10,
Bank of Norway Head Office,
1 st. Prize project, elevation

positioning of the structural system with its columns, beams and floor slabs - the construction units. Walls and vertical spatial boundaries are left out and ignored, thus exaggerating the impression of freedom and transparency (Fig. 9). The spatial framework reigns with an overall impression of regular order and uniform calmness, but the spatial openness and continuity allow individual solutions within the framework and thus enable the ground floor plan to appear with a certain degree of variety or disorder.

There is a distinct contrast between the new architecture and the old, which is in accordance with the jury's statement that it 'rejects proposals for building new edifices in the old timber frame style'.[12] Nonetheless, the new is graphically toned down both in the elevations and the perspective to give a 'decomposed' and transparent impression. The graphic technique emphasizes the figurative and material lineaments of the existing buildings and displays the light, ambiguous transparency of the new walls. Notably, the shading of the façades featuring reflections of the buildings across the street graphically distorts the actual uniformity of the façades, making them appear to have smaller dimensions and a more varied image than is probable (Fig. 10). This toning down of the impact of the new edifice represents a significant difference from the New Government Building competition a generation earlier. Perhaps the quality of lightness and transparency during the planning process was felt to be too fragile for guarding the Nation's gold and assets, because the finalized Bank of Norway façades are dominated by large stone components marking the structural grid and thus providing concreteness and texture to the walls (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11,
Bank of Norway Head Office,
façade as realized

In the Bank of Norway competition rhetoric it was especially the *human scale* of the building, rather than façade features, which was stressed. As long as this imperative was achieved by adapting the dimensions and masses of the new to the existing environment and its scale, a totally different and modern architecture could be promoted successfully.

'Landmarks' in the 2000s

After an intense fight about where it should be located, in the western or eastern part of central Oslo, the competition for the New Opera House in Oslo was completed in 2000. Bjørvika, the main bay in the eastern harbour area, was finally chosen, a site then marked by decay which was earlier occupied by timber yards and other storage buildings. In recent years culture is seen as a motor in Norwegian town development, echoing the Bilbao effect. It was an open international competition with a huge number of entries which attracted long queues of visitors when they were exhibited to the

public. The competition was won by Snøhetta, an Oslo based architects' office (Fig. 12).

A kind of poetic and metaphorical language runs like a connecting thread through the publication of the competition result. Metaphors have been especially popular and useful for a very long time in architecture. However, during the last ten to twenty years it is arguable that a metaphoric-shorthand has exploded not only in architecture, but in mass media as well – replacing the specifics with platitudes.

The heading of the introductory chapter of the opera publication goes as follows: 'Elements of ice, earth, fire, water and air capture distinct spaces'.[13] The opera rhetoric displays an interesting bridging of opposites further expressed in the following chapter headings: 'Soft versus hard describe indoors from out' and 'Landmark quality is obtained through a memorable yet discreet silhouette'.[14] 'A contemporary monument' was an important issue for the promoter, but in what context? The new development behind the opera site will be dense and high, consisting of tall individually shaped buildings when it is finished. In relation to this, the opera architect stressed that they wanted the Opera House to have a kind of low-key monumentality. The quotation 'Landmark quality (...) through a memorable yet discreet silhouette' is intriguing as a 'discreet landmark' would seem a contradiction of terms. If it is discreet, it cannot act as a long distance landmark, but perhaps distinguish itself in the immediate surrounds; which is in fact what the new Opera House in the Oslo harbour does.

However, the discreetness, the fact that it is not a very high nor ornate building matches the functional programme of the Opera House, which demanded a logical solution as treated in the chapter called 'A sculpted landscape veils a direct functional solution'.[15] The word 'veils' makes the argument charmingly mysterious and somewhat theatrical. Is functional by definition contrary to being a sculpted landscape? The edifice is not a landscape, but a man built structure. However, the landscape metaphor conveys positive connotations, and the edifice is 'sculpted' – which includes the artistic component. Finally the two last chapter headings relate that 'The platform meets the water, renewing coastal conditions in the city centre' and noting that 'Connecting land and sea, a public platform rises from the fjord'.

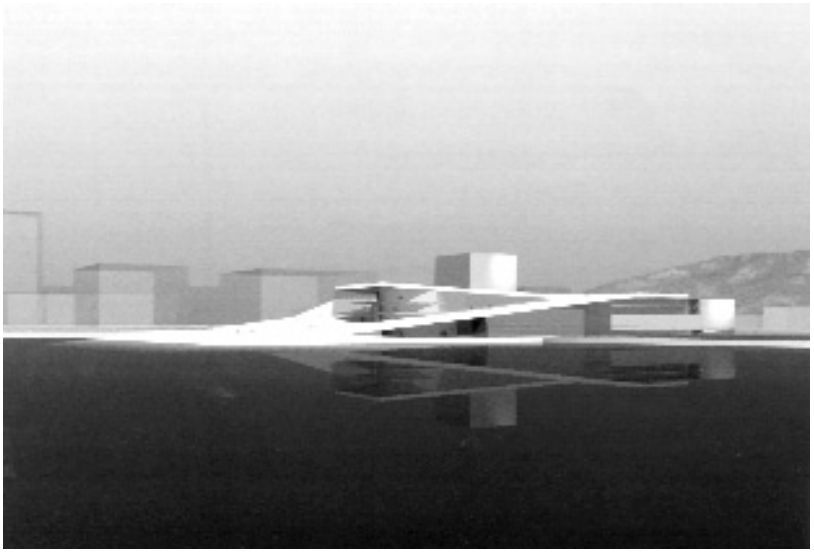


Fig. 12,
Oslo Opera House,
1 st. Prize project, rendering

These passages underpin the poetic bridging-of-opposites rhetoric typical of the Oslo Opera House competition.

The Opera House 1st prize drawings are quite simple and easily understandable, insofar as the zoning of function categories in the plans is emphasized by colour-shading. In a similar way as the ground floor plan of the Bank of Norway Head Office, you can grasp what kind of space and use are intended here and there. In the case of the Opera House, however, the spaces are far more specialised than in the bank. At the same time the tectonic components and the structures of the Opera House

Fig. 13,
Oslo Opera House
after inauguration

Fig. 14,
Oslo Central Railway Station
1 st. Prize project

are more superficially presented: The renderings make the constructions appear like the building is made of card-board, just indicating the surfaces and the bare volumes with no characterisation of structural or material qualities.

Although opera is an art which only an extremely small segment of the population appreciates, the new Oslo Opera House has become a tremendous success. The entire project has from the very beginning been promoted and handled in an exceedingly clever way by the commissioner, by the politicians involved and not the least, by the architect. In a poetic as well as a concrete manner the project manages to provide an empowerment of the common-man. Giving access to the roof of the building is similar to saying: you're welcome to step on top of it! During the first eight months after the inauguration more than 800,000 people visited the site. One of these was the taxi driver who, he told me, in the middle of the summer night brought some food to spend his break high up on the opera roof (Fig. 13).

Fig. 15,
Culture Struggle in Bjørvika
(Aftenposten)

Inflation of landmarks

A wave of architectural competitions and development proposals related to the Bjørvika area has followed in the wake of the Opera House project. Both the projects and the accompanying rhetoric are thought provoking. The invited competition for the extension and reconstruction of the Oslo Central Railway station, Oslo S, illustrates further some typical features of Norwegian early 21st century competition rhetoric. In the words of the jury, the first prize project 'signals a classical station and a modern metropolitan point at the same time'[17]. As in the case of the Opera House, the pairing of two ostensible opposites - a classical station and modern metropolitan point - is seductively inclusive and wide when it comes to qualities that are promoted. It shall be classical and modern! The old station building can vaguely be seen in the dark behind the proposed tall, modern building called 'The Crystal', which in the 'night perspective' rendering stands out fully lit by contrast to the surroundings (Fig. 14). Another rendering displays a series of huge vaults gleaming in reddish sunrise while two high-rise edifices appear more discreetly in the background.

Influential politicians in cooperation with investors have now decided to arrange a limited, international competition for the new Edvard Munch Museum and another for the major public library, both prospectively sited directly adjacent to the new Opera House. Twenty architects will compete in each case: ten selected after a prequalification process, and ten 'starchitects' who are invited specially to tender their vision. A 'culture struggle' has been going on about the Bjørvika area. The drawing accompanying the editorial in a major Oslo newspaper in September 2008 illustrates the jumble of competing wishes and ideals in this respect (Fig. 15). Meanwhile critical voices have been raised against this boom of bigger, higher, faster and more spectacular development projects. Rasmussen, professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, writes about the 'Mini Dubai around Oslo S' as the result of negligent town authorities who have given in to the market economy of private investors.[18] Moreover architect and editor Malmquist points to the superficiality of the 'post-card' architecture as principle of urban development and claims that Bjørvika needs a sustainable commitment.[19]

Relentless competition smoothed by consensus rhetoric

During the last 15 years, architectural rhetoric in Norway has been increasingly dominated by an inflation of 'landmark' architecture, and 'flagship buildings'. Every commissioner, every institution or company almost automatically proclaim that they want their edifice to be a landmark or flagship or lighthouse, be it a regular office building or a cultural institution. Politicians try to legitimate new development proposals by using the term 'signal edifice' (signalbygg) as if a signal edifice is self-explanatory and by virtue a vehicle of unambiguous goodness. Appealing to vanity and conceit, the superficial persuasiveness of these ideas is misleading: it conceals important aspects of the problem and acts as pretence for relentless profit maximization and conspicuously high exploitation of the ground. With landmarks becoming the ordinary and normal, everywhere, soon there will be no land left and presumably the landmark effect will disappear. Similarly extending the metaphors of 'flagship' or 'signal edifices': there are no flagships without a number of subordinate ships to command, nor signal if you cannot discern it from surrounding sounds or images. The real and truly fascinating lighthouses are very far apart or else the shipping lane, as well as all other functions which meaning is defined by short range qualities, are disturbed and disregarded. Lighthouses are distant beacons one approaches and passes. This kind of rhetoric favours the long distance effect and neglects the near environment and people's use of the buildings, the surroundings and the city.

Architectural critic Lotte Sandberg addresses this problem in a recent commentary on the question of professionalism and leadership related to National cultural institutions. Pointing to the importance of professional quality in the activities of museums and other cultural institutions, she states that 'There is evidence that content is losing to the advantage of façade and veneer in Norwegian culture life'. She argues that

The new Opera House in Bjørvika is but one example of results measured by the number of visitors – in this case 800,000 people have so far walked on the roof. The fact that opera – which is the reason for the new building – has become underfunded, does not seem to worry many.[20]

Fig. 16,
New Holmenkollen Ski Jump,
1 st. Prize project

An architectural rhetoric preoccupied with landmarks, lighthouses, and flagship and signal edifices impoverishes the debate on architecture and reduces its protean aspects to a single facet. We need to enhance the communication with more nuanced terms and expressions to describe and promote architectural quality.

Returning to the architectural competition for the Holmenkollen Ski Jump, here too we find a bridging-of-opposites rhetoric. The motto of the 1st prize project 'New Holmenkollen Lighthouse - Extending Tradition'[21] implies connecting to the past, appreciating tradition, yet at the same time expanding it to become bigger and more gleaming – yes, like a lighthouse. The proposal shows artificial lighting projecting from and visually extending the contour of the jump inrun far beyond the top of the actual tower. The arc of the line beams up into the sky (Fig.15). In the debate that followed the publication of the competition result, several architects and laymen claimed that the jump would be better placed on the other side of the road. Their arguments were that wind and fog problems would be better taken care of, and that the slope would follow the natural hillside instead of having to excavate a much deeper hole in the rocky ground to accommodate the bottom of the slope. For the moment, the old jump has been torn down, but financial problems connected to the new have already led to restrictions and drastic simplifications of the proposed project. Yet, the new Holmenkollen ski jump can indubitably be called upon as a unique landmark – as it has been a famous, as well as conspicuous icon of Oslo.

On the other hand, one could well imagine a totally different approach: a dark coloured arena discreetly hidden in the woods, closer to the topography, which once you were gathering there, revealed fantastic ski jumping events; something more in the line of the Paul-Ausserleitner-Schanze arena in Bischofshofen, known from the annual German-Austrian international ski jumping contest (only more beautiful). Then, from long distance, the natural hillside would dominate visually as a specific asset of Oslo, just as I saw it the other night: with dense spruce woods outlining the familiar contour of the ridge, with scattered lights from the houses glimmering as small gems in the hillside, and most wonderfully: the evening sky undisturbed by obtrusive earthly lighting embracing us with sparkling stars – Orion's Belt, the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia and brightest of all, Venus, - not to forget the moon.
Dag Østerberg, the Norwegian sociologist-philosopher, maintains that:
Sports - functioning as culture, institution and social apparatus - is the newest legitimatizing and integrative institution in society. It expands increasingly with sports halls, sports colleges and elite sports centres, golf courses (instead of fields and meadows), marinas, slalom- and ski jumping arenas, football grounds, buildings for sports associations and clubs, etc., (...) professional managers, equipment industry with marketing of branded articles and logos, sports biographies and television recording – all this constitute a huge socio-matter which demands attention and adherence. (...) Sports today relentlessly demand more and more.[22]

Like science, sports embodies the struggle for progress of modern culture, a struggle that until recently also was typical of the arts. Architectural competition-rhetoric, as shown above, has developed increasingly in the direction of sports culture, promoting bigger, higher and more spectacular enterprises in the perpetual rush for ever new records. Surfaces and simple image symbolism are easier topics to handle in public debates by the man in the street than detailed knowledge of various aspects of the architectural complex. The implicit value systems - size, numbers and degrees of intensity - seem more 'measurable' than the 'subjective' complexities of architectural quality. Urban development schemes and public building projects, especially in central areas, depend on continuous political commitment, and as pointed out by Kjeldsen, political rhetoric tends to be more and more marked by consensus and manoeuvres to avoid rejecting people.[23]

Such consensus rhetoric can be traced in the Oslo architectural competitions from the use of granite in the Government Building façade smoothing the hygiene imperative of around 1940, via the playful cult of freedom dressing the adaptation of huge built masses of the New Bank of Norway, to the typical and metaphorical bridging-of-opposites competition rhetoric of today which promotes an unprecedented grandiosity. As in the case of the Opera House, activities appreciated by the very few are dressed to be recognized as a mass culture phenomenon and this rhetorical process may appear to be an unavoidable aspect of democracy. Østerberg points out that the art friends and devotees of art often look favourably upon sports, but the goodwill is not necessarily mutual. The sports devotees may not hate art, but are nevertheless dangerous for art, because the socio-material of sports veritably swells out and occupies ever more resources and more attention in relation to the arts.[24] The challenge to architects now is to contribute to a far more nuanced rhetoric that can balance the extreme cult of the extraordinary and grandiose, that can provide sustainable, functional and beautiful everyday environments.

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NOTES

[1] Søren Kjørup, *Menneskevidenskaberne: problemer og traditioner i humanioras videnskabsteori* (Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1996)., 221.

[2] Rasmus Wærn, *Tävlingarnas tid arkitekttävlingarnas betydelse i borgerlighetens Sverige,* Arkitekturmuseets skriftserie nr 5 (Stockholm: Arkitektur förlag, 1996)., 13.

[3] Further on architecture and visual rendering as rhetoric, see Elisabeth Tostrup, *Architecture and rhetoric: text and design in architectural competitions, Oslo, 1939-1997* (London: Papadakis, 1999).

[4] "Konkurransen om ny regjeringsbygning i Oslo," *Byggekunst* 22 (1940).

[5] One of the main issues on the Labour Party manifesto in 1915, quoted in Knut Kjeldstadli, *Den delte byen fra 1900 til 1948* (1990)., 367.

[6] *Morgenposten*, 1915, quoted in Kjeldstadli, 366. See also Tostrup, *Architecture and rhetoric: text and design in architectural competitions, Oslo, 1939-1997*., 68-82.

[7] Nytt hovedsete for Norges Bank i Oslo, *Norske arkitektkonkurranser,* no. 192 (Oslo Norske arkitekters landsforbund, 1974)., 25.

[9] *Ibid*., 3.

[10] See also Ulf Grønvold, *Lund & Slaatto*, Norske arkitekter 4 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1988)., and Tostrup, *Architecture and rhetoric: text and design in architectural competitions, Oslo, 1939-1997*., 101-113.

[11] *Nytt hovedsete for Norges Bank i Oslo*., 9.

[12] *Ibid*., 28.

[13] Nytt operahus i Oslo: åpen internasjonal prosjektkonkurranse for arkitekter : juryens vurderinger og konklusjoner, *Norske arkitektkonkurranser*, no. 356 (Oslo: Norsk arkitekturforlag, 2000)., 3.

[14] *Ibid*., 7 and 21.

[15] *Ibid*., 25.

[16] *Ibid*., 43 and 51.

[17] Quoted in Jan Carlsen, "Bringer byen til jernbanestasjonen," *Arkitektnytt* 57 no. 7 (2008)., 9.

[18] Tor Fr. Rasmussen, "Mini-Dubai rundt Oslo S," *Aftenposten Aften*, 5. september 2008., 15.

[19] Einar Bjarki Malmquist, "Bjørvika trenger en bærekraftpakke," *Aftenposten Aften*, 8. desember 2008., 14.

[20] Lotte Sandberg, "Primadonnaer, hæh?," *Aftenposten*, 4. januar 2009., 11. The last sentence refers to the fact that the recent financial budget for the Opera and Ballet granted by the Parliament was reduced and puts down severe restrictions with respect to the activities.

[21] Nye Holmenkollbakken: åpen internasjonal arkitektkonkurranse, *Norske arkitektkonkurranser,* no. 417 (Oslo: Norske arkitekters landsforbund, 2007)., 1.

[22] Dag Østerberg, "Fragment av en syntese," in *Frihet og klasse tekster til Dag Østerberg* ed. Håvard Nilsen (Oslo: Res Publica, 2008)., 222-223.

[23] Jens E. Kjeldsen interviewed in Jan Zahl, "Mens vi venter på tallenes tale," *Forskerforum* 39, no. 4 (2007)., 9.

[24] Østerberg, "Fragment av en syntese.", 223.

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