Figure 1. From left to right: "The Castle" - "The Cylinder" - "The Calendar of Light"

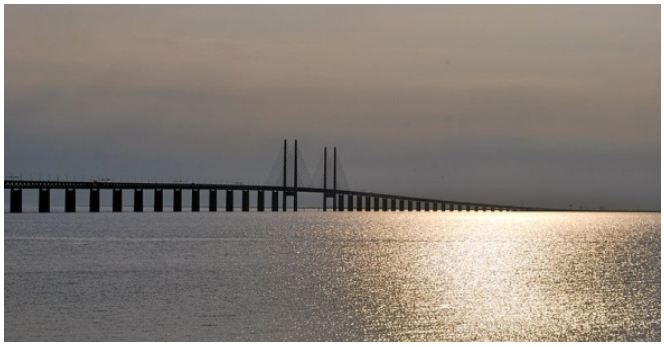
“Pavilion in the Park”: Malmö City Library

By Devin Higgins

The Malmö City Library is an expressive symbol for the city of Malmö itself.

Situated on the edge of the centuries-old *Kungspark* (King's Park), the library building reflects the past but also the future of its city. As scholar Gunilla Konradsson has put it, the library "has two faces[,] one turned toward history and the other toward the future, [to] showcase and illuminate the library's activities and its contents and reflect history and the future, memory and utopia" (qtd in Koulikov). The Malmö library embodies this mission statement extremely literally: Composed of an original structure, labeled "the castle" (representing the past), and a two-part addition composed of "the cylinder" and "the calendar of light" (representing the future), the library both hearkens back to a nineteenth-century version of the library as a sort of fortress, and a more modern conception of the library as an open space for work and play. But the library not only encapsulates this division between concepts of what a library is, but represents the past and future of Malmö, a city that has, for several decades, been undergoing radical change -- from fringe industrial city to information economy connected to the heart of Europe.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, by several measures, Malmö was a city in decline. The formerly strong shipping and manufacturing industries that had grown and thrived during the first half and middle of the twentieth century were deteriorating (Qviström). Unemployment was on the rise, and the city's population had shrunk from its previous high of about 260,000 in the 1930's to fewer than 230,000 by the 1980's ("Malmö"). With fewer people and a shrinking economy, Malmö was becoming a rather more isolated locale. Yet the catalyst for Malmö's remarkable reversal of fortune was undoubtedly its location. At the southern tip of Sweden, just across the sound from the metropolis of Copenhagen and its robust economy--and from there connected to the rest of mainland Europe--Malmö was in fact well-situated to become a new hub of transportation and commerce.



The eventual revitalization of Malmö can be tied most directly to the completion of the Øresund Bridge (*Øresundsbron*, see Figure 2) in 2000, although the improving Swede economy seems also to have played a role (Tzortzis). With the help of the bridge, the distance between Malmö and Copenhagen, previously traversable only by boat or ferry, could now be crossed in a fraction of the time by rail and road. The culture and economic activity of Copenhagen drew Swedes across the border, and Danes were enticed, for their part, by the relatively inexpensive real estate in Malmö, not to mention the undeveloped land available to build new infrastructure (Tzortzis). Shipping and manufacturing being less viable industries, Malmö was primed to grow into a high-tech information economy. A writer for The New York Times, at the time the bridge was completed, was able to describe the Swedish countryside surrounding Malmö in rather idyllic terms, as "a largely undiscovered land of fishing villages, forests and bicycle trails" (Margolick). Such a characterization can seem quaint now, after a full decade of development, including yearly increases in population: There was a rise of over 20,000 people in 2010 alone, with total population predicted to reach 400,000 by 2032 (Simpson). The city has so effectively merged with Copenhagen across the sound that some have called Malmö a suburb, in effect. High tech industries are flourishing, with the "newly

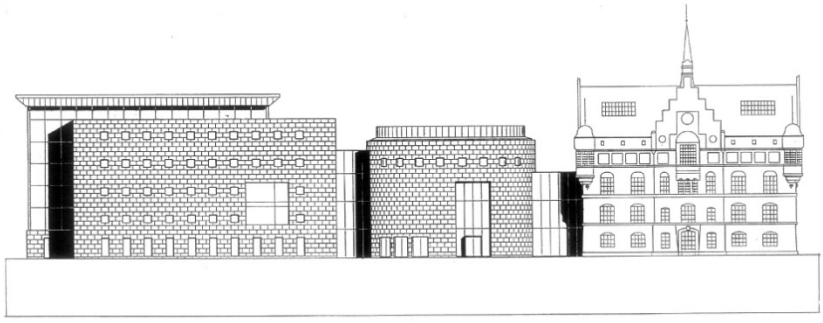
established Malmö University feeding surrounding information technology, biotechnology and media companies with a steady stream of graduates" (Tzortzis).

Figure 3. Santiago Calatrava's Turning Torso

Architecturally speaking, the most widely reported development has been Santiago Calatrava's Turning Torso, a striking white apartment tower whose structure rotates by 90 degrees from top to bottom. Completed in 2005, it's the tallest residential building in Scandinavia, and the tallest building in Malmö by far (Ferro). The building has been hailed as "the crown jewel in one of the most talked about waterfront reclamation projects in Europe" (Tzortzis). The Sweden tourism authorities describe it as the "gateway to continental Europe," a description which builds on Malmö's new status as the connecting link between Sweden and the rest of Europe ("Malmö - Sweden's Gateway…").

The Turning Torso is a fitting emblem of Malmö's new international status, but it's arguably the city library that represents the more compelling narrative vision of the rapid transformation of the city. While the Turning Torso rotates, the library translates; the language of the past becomes the language of the present, and older architectural concepts are transformed into new ones. The library makes visible the connections and disparities between separate understandings of the library, of buildings, and of the city. The movement from a relatively more isolated shipping outpost to a high-tech city integrated with the rest of Europe is made visible in the form of the library itself, which acts as a bridge.

Plans for a new library began as early as the 1980's, nearly two decades before the Øresund bridge to Copenhagen was completed. In 1992, Henning Larsen won a competition to build an addition to the existing structure, and by 1997 the building was complete. It was Larsen who dubbed the original library structure "the castle," to which he added "the cylinder" and "the calendar of light" (See Figure 1, above).



In Konradsson's terms, the castle is surely memory, and the calendar of light is utopia. The cylinder is the bridge between, taking elements from the castle, such as the even gray brick exterior (visible in Figure 4) which plays upon the brick of the castle, and passes them along to the façade of the calendar of light. Even the regular distribution of windows along the wall, across the structure, signals a connection to the castle. Yet the cylinder also prefigures, as one's gaze moves from one end of the structure to the other, the openness of the calendar, with its high windows and open spaces, that greet visitors upon their entry to the library. From this middle point, between the airy light-soaked world of

the calendar of light, and the enclosed and relatively darkened sanctity of the castle, each visitor is presented with two choices, or, perhaps, is allowed not to make a choice, between two worlds. One is allowed to hover at the juncture. This entryway acts as a bridge, much like the Øresund, that spans the two worlds, creating connection and integration out of isolation. The linear layout of the library seems to confirm this notion, as it reveals something bridge-like even in the shape: A long and narrow structure when viewed from above (see Figure 5), the visitor must, literally, *climb* in either direction, to reach the main library spaces. A set of stairs leads to the calendar of light, and a set in the other direction points toward the castle (visible in Figure 6).

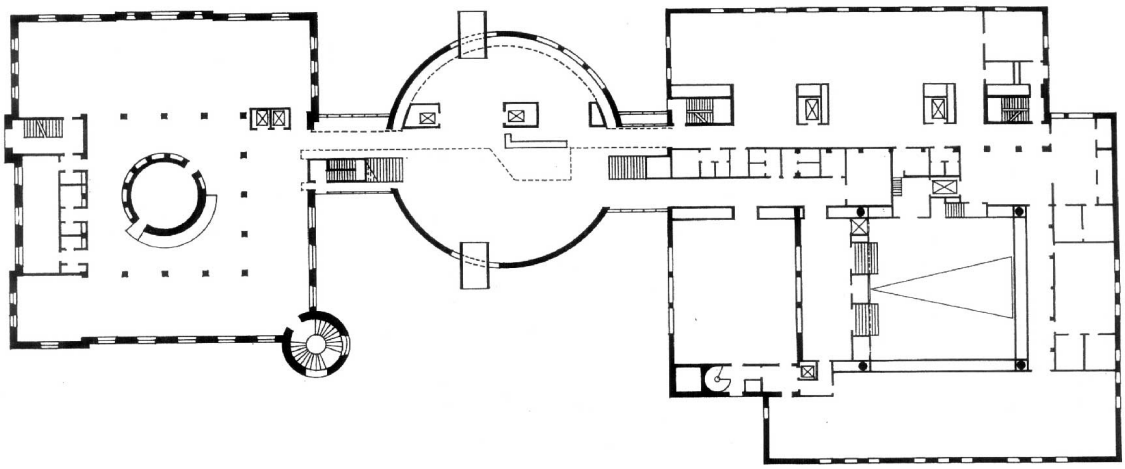


Figure 5. Floor Plan of the Malmö City Library

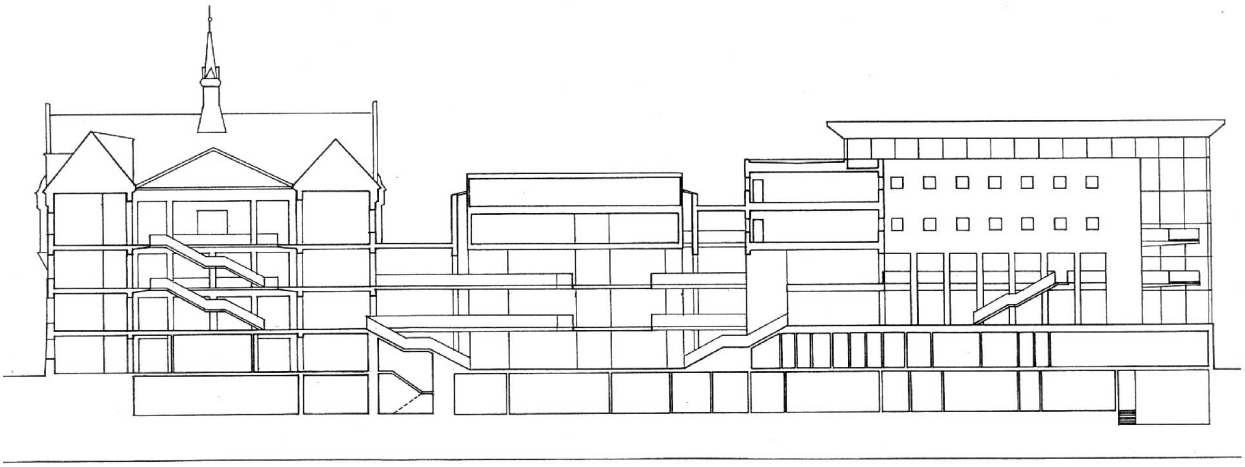
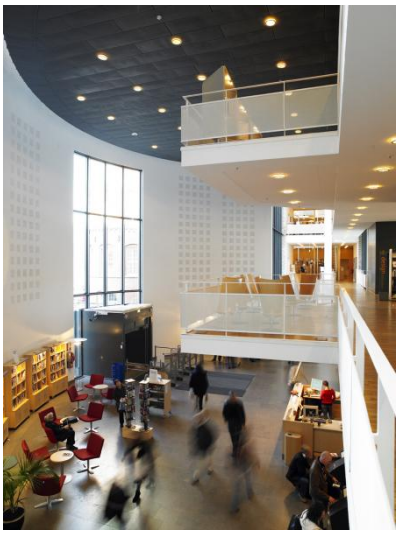


Figure 6. Cross-section of the library: Following entry in the center "cylinder," one is faced with stairs in either direction.

Built originally in 1901 as a museum, then converted to a library in 1946, the castle features turrets, a red brick exterior, a nearly-square shape, and relatively few windows -- a perfect design for the guarding of valuable treasures. The monolithic design signifies strength. Henning's addition, on the other hand, takes a radically different approach. Walls of windows let light and the surrounding park's landscape into the building, allowing the scenery and seasons of the outdoors to shape the experience of the library's interior. The library thus presents, in itself, a "journey" from the library as protector of valuable commodities, as bearer of grandiose facades that divide the experience of inside from outside, and as a beacon for the pleasures of interiority -- to a version of the library that represents the values of integration, in which the landscape of knowledge is free to merge with the natural landscape that surrounds it. Knowledge is not enclosed but rather more free to emanate through the air.

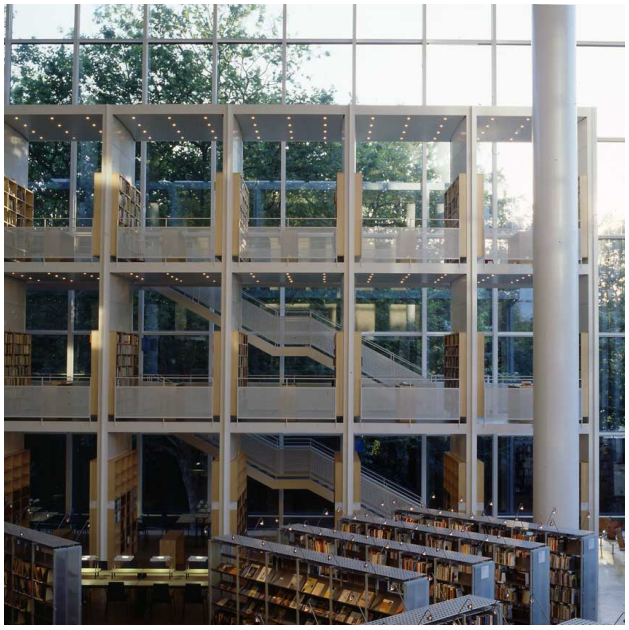
In his review of the library for Architectural Record, Peter Davey discusses this new attitude toward knowledge in terms of the pathway to enlightenment so often invoked in discussions of library architecture. Abigail Van Slyck describes the passage from the dark entryway of the Bibliotheque Ste.-Geneviève to its bright and open reading room as a "journey toward enlightenment" and a "struggle that redeems the uncultured and makes them worthy to receive culture's benefits" (70). In this sort of analysis, the library in its built form becomes a figure for knowledge and the set of values that surround it. Peter Davey compares Malmö's library to the Stockholm Public Library, designed by Gunnar Asplund and completed in 1928. In the form of the cylinder, Larsen's structure recapitulates, in likely homage, the famous "drum" reading room that crowns the red Stockholm building (another way in which the cylinder has connections to both past and future). For Davey, despite the similarity in form, the buildings express divergent attitudes toward knowledge, design, and function. Using terminology similar to Van Slyck's, Davey describes the Stockholm experience as a pilgrim's progress that begins in a "dark vestibule," from which one is pulled to the light and openness of the drum reading room; a markedly different experience from what one finds in Malmö:



> In contrast to this magical, almost shamanistic, progression, at Malmö, all is open, clear, and generous. Instead of knowledge being approached as a distant treasure, attainable by only one arduous route, you are made aware that it has many facets (Davey 55).

The word “generous” proliferates in Davey’s article. The Malmö City Library does not secret away knowledge, or create labyrinthine narratives of discovery. Though one should remember its walls are no less real for being made of glass, Larsen’s structure attempts to configure the potential openness of information in physical space. Light, information, and bodies are free to intermingle in an undivided atmosphere. Whereas Asplund’s reading room, based on the British Library reading room, is a place to concentrate and distill knowledge, the calendar of light is a “pavilion in the park, open to the outside world” (Davey).

Yet there is more to the calendar of light than simple openness. Though the use of the word “calendar” in Larsen’s design refers simply to the play of the seasons within the library space, the aptly named “bookshelf” section of the library (see Figure 10) actually resembles a calendar page, each “shelf” representing a day, or month. And the grid that’s formed divides incoming light into discrete blocks, rectangular chunks of light that could represent the passage of time in moments, or minutes, and the human proclivity for the categorization of natural phenomena. The abundant light becomes a set of distinct, even measurable, units: a commodity rendered of the Enlightenment drive to master nature. Larsen’s approach, however, is all softness -- the atmosphere is sensual and bright, without diffidence to grand ideas that would diminish the sensory attention the space engenders.



The “calendar” idea is thus an analog for the role of the library itself. While the calendar divides time and light, the library divides and distributes knowledge.

The actual availability of information is of course also founded on more practical matters. The particular way in which knowledge is distributed at Malmö was the subject of careful study, and efforts were made to allow users to approach content in ways that would suit them. Before the design for the addition to the library was completed, numerous usability tests were undertaken and research was done on the library’s current usage patterns (Petterson 136). Building on such research, it was decided that the library should include a variety of study areas, both formal and informal, each with varying degrees of noise: “quiet and sheltered nooks, formal tables overlooking the main library floor, open spaces with direct access to stacks, and informal spaces with seating of various types” (Koulikov). Since the circulation procedures are fully automated, it’s also possible at Malmö for librarians and other staff to move around the library more freely, encountering users not as authorities, but as consultants or colleagues (Koulikov).

Thus emphasis was placed on the idea of eliminating any sense of hierarchy. Public and staff areas were situated in close proximity to one another, and in addition to a central reference desk, smaller reference stations and librarian work-desks were positioned throughout the library. Likewise, places to sit were set up throughout the stacks to allow users to browse comfortably, read for a few moments, then move on Great care was taken in planning for ergonomic furniture that could be easily adjusted or adapted to serve the needs of all patrons (Petterson 136)..

The very openness of the calendar of light, though, has been found to generate some of its own problems. One of the criticisms librarians have had for the space include that the makeshift, flexible work-spaces, which allow for work areas to be constructed in proximity to users, also amplify noise. The portable and rearrange-able walls do not extend from floor to ceiling and therefore do not block sounds from travelling between librarians' work areas, and between public spaces and staff spaces (140-1).

Another problem, perhaps completely unforeseen, was the cross winds generated by the north and south entrances in the cylinder, causing "severe climate problems for the staff, who could be seen working dressed in caps and woolen gloves" (135). One of these entrances was later closed. Furthermore, budgetary shortfalls during construction led to the abandonment of certain more costly finishings for the library, and the use of some materials (including the stone in the main walls of the calendar of light) that were not approved, and in fact, were rejected, by Larsen (Davey 57).

Figure 11. Arrangement of Stacks

These issues aside, construction overall seems to have gone smoothly, and the building has been greeted with widespread public approval. The library has become a tourist attraction in its own right, with daily tours being offered (Petterson).

Perhaps the success off the building is accountable for in terms of the values it expresses and in the way these values have been expressed. The Malmo City Library seems a building both well considered conceptually, and exquisitely realized as a physical space. The value the library holds for the notion of freely available information, for the importance of the connection between the built environment and the world of nature, and for the inspirational potential of egalitarian public spaces, are readily

perceptible in the building itself. And the motivation to embody these values has been seamlessly interwoven with a commitment to manifesting an appealing sensory environment.

As a statement of the future which also connects, physically and conceptually, to the past, without resorting to simple attempts to recreate, or blend with that past, the library takes on a hybrid identity. It becomes a space possessed of both a forward-looking utopian vision, and a vivid memory for the past from which that vision was born.

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