

## The Use and Abuse of Paper Essays on Alvar Aalto

Kari Jormakka, Jacqueline Gargus, Douglas Graf  
Tampere University of Technology, Finland, 1999

ISBN 952-15-0267-3 (DATUTOP 20)  
A5, 200 pp. Paperback, FIM 120, EUR 18, USD 20

---

This book was published as the 20<sup>th</sup> part of the DATUTOP (Department of Architecture Tampere University of Technology Occasional Papers) series in October 1999. The architecture of Aalto was defined as: Finnish, human, democratic, anarchist, sensitive to the site, natural, organic, free-form, synthetic, random and intuitive in the preface written by Kari Jormakka. Different strategies of architectural criticism ranging from formalist to post-structuralist had been used, giving a special reference to the architectural identity of Aalto.

The first chapter, which is titled "The Constructions of Aalto" began with a quotation from Giedion's book *Space, Time and Architecture*; "Aalto is the strongest exponent of the combination of standardization with irrationality". Another opinion of Giedion is given by the authors as; "Aalto maintained that the main task of architecture is to humanize the machine age". Human architecture, the mechanical and organic, Giedion's synthesis, Finnishness, nationalist syntheses, organicist rhetoric, and beyond reason are the sections of this chapter. The section titled "Analysis" gives the idea that "the possibility emerges to look at his buildings from perspectives that reveal previously unexamined sides and unearth new layers of meaning". The following buildings were evaluated in this book, according to the concepts given: Villa Mairea - relationship to nature and architectural traditions, Baker House - material usage and context, House of Culture - free form, Mount Angel Library - Aalto's typological design method, Riola Church- geometry, perspective and vision.

The architectural works of Aalto might be classified in three stages: Historicist before 1928, modernist between 1928 and 1938, and synthetic after 1938. Villa Mairea is defined by the authors, in the following sentence based on the opinions of Pallasmaa; "the villa is not a traditional organic unity but rather like a Cubist collage, in which the elements are randomly combined like individual brushstrokes in a painting". Villa Mairea covers the strategy of dual formal composition and rustic opinion. Geometrical analysis is used for the grid system and spaces which were obtained by proportions related with grid systems. Using an edge of the hot room of the sauna as the main unit of this analysis is a big surprise. Many concepts are used to evaluate the buildings in relation to dialectics of concepts and continuity.

The second building in the book is Baker House, which is my favorite Aalto building. The evaluation starts with material usage as being the most important characteristics of Baker House. The opinion of using traditional materials in modernist approaches was a trend in the 1930's for Scandinavian architecture. The section titled as 'Honesty of Materials' emphasizes that Aalto preferred to use materials as they exist. The

serpantin form causes unusable spaces in Baker House. Aalto's contextualism is based on the opinion of "new buildings must not be adjusted to fit in the surrounding built environment but must be able to develop in a healthy way". The authors discuss relations and resemblance of Baker House with other buildings in the MIT Campus. Critics of this building is finished by saying "Baker House thematizes its surroundings in a way which ultimately cleaves it in two, sacrificing the unity of the work of art for its complex unification of the environment".

The chapter examining the House of Culture building is related to the title of the book. Aalto said that "God created paper for the purpose of drawing architecture on it. Everything else is at least for me an abuse of paper". He discussed drawings rather than buildings. The authors emphasize the opinion that the best use of paper would be drawing architecture on it; which depended on producing more drawings than buildings by architects. It is discussed that architects draw structural elements, walls and other elements instead of drawing voids, just like using lines for buildings and blanks for open spaces in maps. Free-forms of Aalto are evaluated and some examples of free-forms used in his buildings are given. The House of Culture is the best example for free-form usage of Aalto. This building was designed with orthogonal forms except for the wall of the concert hall. A mystical proportion "quadrature", which is based on the relations between a square and a circle, is used to explain the geometrical formation of the building. Some other planimetric divisions and their proportional relations are also evaluated in this section. It is emphasized that Aalto had used the same relations in his other buildings. Influences on geometrical approaches in Aalto's designs are evaluated by using some geometric series and mathematical approaches in the section titled "Modernism and Geometry" starting with Vitruvius. This chapter ends with the following phrase: "Whether or not Aalto's method in designing the House of Culture constituted an abuse of paper, it in any case offers an urban strategy for dealing with the multiplicity and imperfection of the city with its conflicting formal orders, temporal layers and social meanings".

Mount Angel Library is one of the buildings in which Aalto used the fan shape. It is explained that Aalto had used this shape in his buildings distinct from the function of that building. The authors define that radial forms are evaluated as morphologic rather than typologic in Aalto's buildings. The roof lighting solutions in the libraries designed by Aalto are discussed. The effects of walls which don't have openings, are evaluated for whether they are useful for concentration on the activity in the library or not.

The last chapter covers critics of the Riola Church. The form of roof lighting and its rhythm are evaluated on the drawing of the section of the church. It is emphasized that the real situation can not be the same as two dimensional evaluations, and various examples on this subject are given. Another important detail for the church is the relationships between the shapes of furniture and structural elements of the building. This relationship is explained by Richard Weston's resemblance; "legs of the chairs are the little sisters of columns". Aalto tried to obtain perspective deformation and visual effects that are hard to remember in relation to perception and cognition. It is emphasized that Aalto mainly takes care of representative reality instead of physical reality in this building.

The Use and Abuse of Paper (1) is an approach which covers both descriptive criticism and geometrical analysis together. The architect' s thesis and antithesis of other authors and researchers are combined together very well.

(1) Correspondence: Tampere University of Technology Library PO Box 537 FIN-33101 Tampere Finland Fax: ++358 3 365 2907

Orhan Hacıhasanoğlu