

Ex-urban urbanity: prolegomena to an understanding of the architectural provision of urbanity

Stephen M. Anderson

Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

ABSTRACT: If happiness is associated with concepts of full-living, and if full-living is associated with city life, the tasks of architecture relative to the city assume an ethical cast. A better understanding of that nexus—full living, urbanity, city, architecture—will help inform those tasks, but the interrelation of those ideas is not obvious, and conventional presumptions regarding those relationships are inadequate. Despite conventional conflation of the two terms, *cities* do not guarantee *urban living*: even a dense, expansive city might lack or only weakly exhibit qualities associated with urbanity. A partial explanation for this non-synonymy between city and urbanity is that inasmuch as cities are physically composed of architectural works, neither does architecture guarantee urbanity: as with the city of which it is a part, a building, even if successful in other ways, might neglect or eschew provision of conditions conducive to urbanity. Much like a dining table's essentiality to certain social structures of the meal, architecture is essential to the structure, character, and perpetuation of urbanity.

Of the many sets of architectural questions that emerge from those premises, two are primary. If detachable from concepts of *city*, how should we understand the term *urbanity*? And, what kinds of architectural attentions effectively engage urbanity and render it more available, more probable? In short, what is urbanity and what is its architecture?

As a preliminary move toward exploring those questions, this paper turns to Sverre Fehn's *Hamar Museum* (1972). An unlikely building to bring to consideration of the architecture of urban life, a strong and purposeful concern for urbanity is nevertheless evident in its architect's thinking and design. Fehn's project helps inform an understanding of the nature of urbanity, and shows how an architectural concern for urban situations manifests at the scale of a building, from conceptual approach to the finest of constructed details.

KEYWORDS: city, Fehn, culture, history, theory, ethics

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary architectural parlance, the Greek word πόλις, or *polis*, is typically translated as *city-state*, the two being commonly regarded as interchangeable. But the word's translation disguises a host of subtle distinctions that have rendered that simple formulation problematic. For example, the Greeks did not refer to every city as polis, and the determination seems not to have been based on quantitative thresholds like, say, geographical area or population. Most scholars interested in the distinction have sensibly argued that the qualities of city that warranted the status of polis were juridical ones, with many modern translations, in a particularly obfuscating instance of era-bias, simply substituting the word "state." Aristotle, however, though deeply interested in governance and its relation to the polis, was convinced that the essence of the polis was to be found elsewhere, that a political account of the city was subordinate to an account of what the city *is*. In attempting to delineate what made a polis a polis, he mused that you might have a diverse population living harmoniously in light of a system of laws, that all of those people's needs might be met with a functioning economy, with provisions made for their defense, and that the size of that population might be vast, their proximities dense, and, yet, you might still not have a polis. That is, Aristotle intuited that the polis in its essence is not to be found at a particular scale, nor in systems of laws, nor economies, nor even in the peaceful coexistence of large numbers of people. It suggests, paradoxically, that the essence of city-ness—whatever that may be—can be decoupled from definitions of city: you might have one without the other, or both but to varying degrees. [In part to avoid confusion of terms going forward, I will use the term city in keeping with its common contemporary usage, but in place of city-ness I will use the term urbanity.] Contemporary theorists of urban life from diverse disciplines have continued consideration of this paradox of the mutual independence of urbanity and city. Ethicist and theologian Max Stackhouse, for example, has elaborated on problems arising from the spread of urbanity beyond the city, and, concurrently, the exsanguination of urbanity within cities; and political and social theorist Murray Bookchin has argued that modern "urbanization" is actually antithetical to the urbanity of the city. A less esoteric, well-known example from the last century, Gertrude Stein's now infamous critique of Oakland ("There's no *there* there.") rehearses Aristotle's thinking: no one could reasonably argue that Oakland was not a city, but the idea that it (or some part of it) might be lacking some ineffable and essential quality associated with urbanity, even if debatable, was within the realm of plausibility. Especially for those charged with the design and construction of urban configurations, a critical

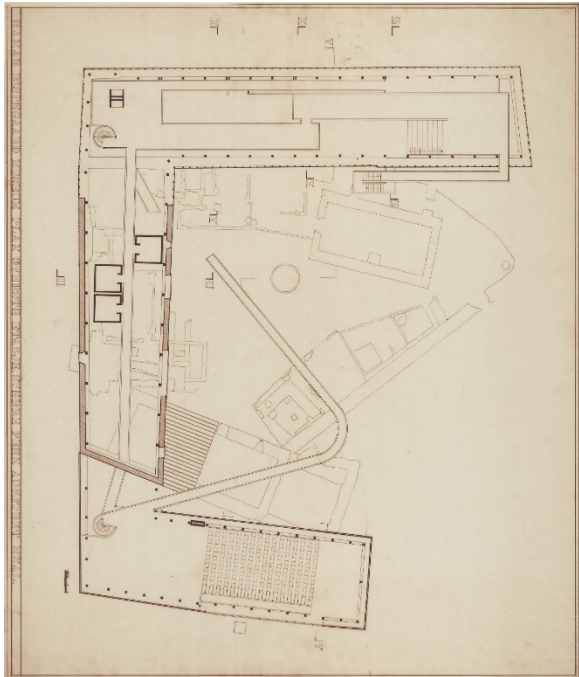
question emerges from these observations: what, exactly, might that ineffable quality, essential to urbanity, be? As readers will have anticipated, answers like “philos,” “tolerance,” “compassion,” and “love” arise – and, yes, in keeping with the formative idea of this conference, also the term *happiness*. Aristotle, too, arrived in that conceptual territory, making appeals to concepts of both love and happiness as foundational to city. Among those ideas, to cite a more contemporary example, James Hillman has argued that the city is not just soulful, nor the place where the soul flourishes, but that the city *is the soul* of humanity – a formulation that, subscribed to, rather increases the stakes of urban policy and design. But no matter how compelling or truthful we may find them, such ideas do not offer much of immediate use to us as architects – “make your buildings more loving, more soulful,” might make a fine credo, but it is not at all clear what that might mean for design, for materialization. If density and efficiency and infrastructure and busy-ness and publicity do not on their own or together add up to urbanity, how, exactly, might an architect otherwise conceive, engage, and sustain configurations conducive to urbanity? What design habits might inadvertently render urbanity *less* probable? What, even, is the vocabulary for such a conversation? How might it be taught? Such is the conceptual topography I have in my sights, but I do not pretend that I might satisfactorily map those broad questions in this short paper. My aim, rather, is to offer an entrance, a landing of sorts, from which deeper explorations might be launched. Generally, my method involves bringing one simple question to architectural works: “In what ways and through what design decisions might one understand this project as *urban architecture*?” In what follows, more narrowly still, I bring that question to one unlikely work. It is its unlikeliness, I hope to show, that makes it especially illustrative: if we can isolate and consider those qualities of place that are at their fullest in cities but which can exist outside of cities, and which some cities, in their misconfiguration, might actually diminish or preclude, then those designers who deem it important may be afforded a better understanding of how they might materially engage and facilitate an architecture of urbanity.

1.0 Sverre Fehn’s Unlikely Urban Project

As an entrance to foundational questions of urbanity, Sverre Fehn’s Hedmark Museum in Hamar, Norway, makes an unlikely beginning. For starters, Fehn was not an urbanist in the mold of peers like De Carlo, Bakema, and Van Eyck, and even less so in comparison to urbanism’s Post-Modern devotees. He knew those sets of ideas well, even participating at times in their dissemination, but he made no attempt to emulate that work nor ever presented himself as “an urbanist.” In fact, he explicitly distanced himself from the term, a position that likely factored in his reluctance to align with his colleagues (like Geir Grung) under the aegis of Team X, even though important pieces of his design thinking exhibited sympathy with their ideals. Second, modern Hamar is relatively small, and, while the town holds several urban lessons, the Hedmark project itself is peripheral to the town. It is a topographical setting more accurately described as rural than urban, and at the threshold of wilderness: the Hedmark Museum is an isolated project on the outskirts of an isolated town on the edge of a lake in sparsely populated territory. Third, the project is a museum, a building type regarded as a symbol and agent of urbanity but almost always contrived, paradoxically, as a citadel apart from that context. Furthermore, the two-centuries’ rise of the museum as a centerpiece of both city and high-style architecture is indicative of forces which can be understood as at odds with urbanity – a line of criticism to which Fehn himself subscribed. Yet for all that, Fehn understood the Hedmark project to be essentially urban. He wrote, “Someone without an urban sensibility in his or her subconscious could not have solved Hamar. One must understand the building as an urban reality. The exhibition became culture born again, new.” An understanding of Fehn’s link between the conditions of this project and, as he says, “urban reality,” will inform more general understandings, first, of urbanity as the impetus, not merely the descriptor, of city; and, second, of at least one set of architectural considerations with which a designer might approach the founding, perpetuation, and structure of urban settings.

The site’s history is critical to understanding the present-day museum, so, while too complex to expound here, a summary is necessary. In the 11th century, the site became the new center of an important farming network that had been operative in eastern Norway for several hundred years. The new site was linked to the landholding interests and personal history of Harald Hardråde, the cosmopolitan warrior traditionally regarded as the last of the Viking kings. A medieval village arose around the extensive farm and emerged as a center of trade and of Christianity as conversion from Germanic paganism falteringly advanced. Hamar was made the seat of a new bishopric, and the construction of the Romanesque Domkirke there was underway by the middle of the 12th century. The medieval town thrived as a center of commerce, production, and political and religious power into the 14th century, but was then decimated by bubonic plague and began a long process of decline. The remnants of Hamar and its defining buildings were further diminished in the aftermath of the Reformation, during which the vacated cathedral and bishop’s house were converted to a sheriff’s residence and fortification. War with Sweden in the late medieval period provided the final blows, and the area fell into complete disuse and ruin as the region’s dwindling cultural and mercantile interests shifted south to Hanseatic Oslo. For all practical purposes Hamar ceased to exist. The site, rural once again, was eventually converted to private property, and a farm known as Storhammer, comprising a few agrarian buildings built into the medieval ruins, was operated there from the mid-18th century. It was not until the middle of the 19th century, amid a zeitgeist of Romantic nationalism and economic expansion that modern Hamar was founded from

scratch just to the south of the medieval site, rising as a rail-connected tourist destination and minor lake port by the new millenia. Though almost all of medieval Hamar had vanished into the landscape, the remaining ruins of the cathedral and of Storhammer became objects of curiosity, eventually attracting archaeologists to its 1500 years of layered history, and so it gained recognition as a site of significant regional, national, and European heritage. So it was that in 1963 a project was initiated that would make a museum of the ruins, one that would allow for archaeological work there to continue while making the findings of that work and other regional historical traces legible and available to the public. Fehn was charged with the project, dubbed the Hedmark Museum, through a bit of happenstance in 1967, and was periodically occupied with the design and realization of this first phase of the museum until 1979.



To reiterate, at the time of Fehn's initial design work, the site was an active archeological excavation – fieldwork that was to remain, and does remain, ongoing. The project is situated so as to reoccupy, stabilize, and largely enclose the existing ruins of the bishop's estate, later fortress, and barn. The Hedmark museum (Fig. 1) is loosely comprised of 4 areas -- three sides of a "C" and the courtyard space they collectively bound. Starting with the northernmost section at the top of the "C" and proceeding counter-clockwise, those 4 parts house, respectively, a series of exhibits featuring historical objects of daily farm-life aptly arranged in the ruins of a barn that had been appended to the remnants of the medieval defensive walls; a series of exhibits focusing on the site's earlier medieval history; an area given mostly to administration and assembly; and the roughly three-sided courtyard that stages the majority of the contemporary archeological work. Fehn's design solution might be described as riparian in its approach, a streaming path of rough-shuttered concrete that in places narrows and accelerates, and, at other points, opens and slows, staging an array of proximities and perspectives of ruin and artifact as it winds, rises, and falls through epochs. On an archeological site, the "layered-ness" of history is not only a metaphor, but also a physical condition, and Fehn's design wanders vertically between those layers as much as it wanders laterally above them.



Figure 2: Detail, west facade, primary entrance.

I want to open an analysis of the project by emphasizing two themes, recurrent in many essays on the work, in order to set up a more narrow exploration of how such an isolated project might help us better understand the relation of architectural design to, as Fehn puts it, "urban reality."

First, observers have thought it important to characterize the project's relation between old and new as embodied in the structural-architectural conjoining of old and new components. That relationship is introduced upon approach to the project's primary point of entry (Fig. 2), where tempered glass enclosure meets medieval rubble wall. Using meticulously cut glass in a mullion-less design, Fehn preserves and presents the jagged jambs of the existing opening in a sharp contrast of wall-building techniques from different ages, accentuated by their contrasting haptic and optic qualities –smooth/rough, shiny/stony, precise/coarse, contemporary/ancient. This treatment, a technique in opposition to restoration,

and which is preservatory only in the sense that it preserves ruin as ruin, is deployed throughout the project wherever windows, doors, or partially collapsed wall had created existing apertures.



Figure 3: Laminated lumber post bearing on existing rubble wall.

ruin. But this “touch the past lightly” thematizing requires turning a blind eye to those aspects of Fehn’s designs that are rather intrusive and forceful in regard to their engagement of the ruin. The cordoning of details inconvenient to a reading of deference props up a clear and morally satisfying narrative, but neglects the greater complexity of the project’s orientation to past and ground.



Figure 4: Cast concrete ramp curving above excavations at court.

of the past that Fehn’s direct engagements defy. In this light, those instances where Fehn exhibits “a light touch” can be understood not as the fetishization of the ruin, but as one move in a more varied effort to bring the past into active dialog with what is unfolding *presently*. Like any good dialog, it is facilitated by establishing equal footing for the participants, or at least balanced footing – it is the disproportionate force of the present that Fehn’s moves check, not as apology, but as preparatory to reciprocal dialog, an opening.

In several places the structural system supporting the new enclosure is consonant with that reading of the openings. For example, the glued laminated wood posts that support the new roof at the ruins of the barn slip past the existing walls to bear on new concrete footings poured alongside, and the concrete bond beam, necessary for stabilizing the rubble wall and simplifying its enclosure, is used only for lateral bracing. Such a detail suggests a “light touch,” a somewhat curatorial regard of the existing condition.

Second, and in keeping with the first theme, the project’s curious relationship to horizon and grade has widely been recognized as essential to its character. Foremost in those considerations is the arcing ramp that presides over the courtyard and then continues, variously defined, into the project’s interior. At the courtyard, the ramp’s monolithic section requires only four thin concrete piers to support its spans, minimizing the disturbance of the archeological site below while its circuitous route provides visitors good vantage of the partially excavated court’s zones and layers (Fig. 4). Upon passing into the project’s interior, the ramp’s configuration becomes more complex, but largely continues in this function, conducting visitors through the museum while establishing measured separation from the ruins.

Both of these – a delicate adjacency, a floating promenade—show Fehn’s care for the artefactual. For examples, Fehn’s three elevated tomb-like vaults (Fig. 5) –“treasuries,” Kenneth Frampton calls them—cannot rightly be understood as receding or deferential, and they compete with the medieval ruin for dominance in the spatial configuration. Also, the ramping walkway that winds through the museum (Figs. 4, 5, and 6) is not delicate (as, say, in the designs of related projects by Scarpa and Zumthor), but massive, opaque, even clunky, and detailed with an intentional coarseness. And, yes, in many places the new structural elements are arranged to minimize contact with the ruin, but in other places that contact is surprisingly direct, making structural use of the ancient walls (Fig. 3) even where such incorporation could have been at least as easily avoided. The causes of restoration of ruin and preservation of ruin differ in approach, but both belong to a conservative, romanticizing regard



Figure 5: Pod-like concrete exhibit rooms and walkway

This way of thinking can also be brought back to the exterior ramp to make sense of its circuitous route through the courtyard.

The ramp's indirect arc opens it to the landscape. Or, being a little more careful, the ramp's arc presents the landscape to the walker, and opens the possibility of the walker bringing the landscape into consideration of the experience of the museum. The ramp structures (makes provision for) an open-ness of walker, ruin, and land. In contrast to museum designs that foreclose circumstance in order to accentuate the artifacts, Fehn's design enlists circumstance. On the one hand, it is nothing more than a concrete ramp connecting courtyard to the museum's upper level. But its eccentric configuration and detailing and orientation toward

what is distant establish the possibility that the lake-cove, the peripheral town, the air, the topography itself, might be brought into dialog with the ruin and its historical artifacts. In some ways architecturally aggressive, in other ways recessive, the ramp helps negotiate a temporal balance conducive to that dialog, or its possibility.

Fehn makes great effort not to diminish the site as given, then, but neither is he timid about its appropriation. As if in opposition to the science fiction trope in which time travelers mustn't engage the past lest they distort their future, Fehn meticulously establishes conditions for imaginative tampering. One such detail appears in



Figure 6: Curving laminated beam above farming exhibit

the elevated concrete walkway that passes above the medieval section of the museum and which serves the three "vaults" like a causeway. In a move wildly difficult to effect in cast concrete, that walkway very slightly undulates. Why? What could justify expending so much design and construction effort on so subtle an effect? The related and more pronounced undulation of the massive laminated hip-beams at the roof (Fig. 6) brings structure into relationship with, and subordinates it to, the room it helps define. But that explanation does not suffice at the concrete walkway, as its concavity does not describe volume. The wave of the viaduct, barely perceptible visually, is unignorable viscerally. It is a detail that appeals not through formal or volumetric coherence, but through bodily movement, an architectural idea given to the gut and the inner-ear. The undermining of the expectation of a level, stable walking surface fleetingly renders it *conspicuous*. In

a strategy reminiscent of Surrealism, the ordinary is subverted so that the ordinary, typically opaque, might be made available to imaginative consideration. Maurice Merleau-Ponty understood the problem this way:

We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakably.

Fehn's design stages a productive instability, gently shaking museum goers from expectations regarding distance and separation in an effort to effect conditions conducive to more engaged and imaginative consideration of the museum's artifacts.

2.0 Urbanity Exhibited

These ideas take on a finer scale where Fehn applied them to the presentation of the object-artifacts that the museum was intended to display. Just as Fehn deployed frame, structure, and bodily position to help bring landscape and ruin into active dialog, so too does he approach the display of the museum's artifacts. Fehn insisted on having access to the objects to be displayed as he worked on the design of their exhibition. Rather than develop a universal system of display adequate to the artifacts as a set, each presentation device is tailored to the unique artifact it displays. Some of those devices are simple and quiet, others more complex and forceful, but in total. Whereas museum-goers are generally accustomed to devices of display that tend toward passivity (and typically minimalism), Fehn's devices are often active participants in the dialog between viewer and artifact. Two examples will illustrate this characteristic, and will help describe the kind of participation those devices structure.



Figure 7: Unified display of crucifix and sepulchre fragment.

Yet the crucifix is mounted upright in a drilled hole along the top edge of the sandstone slab, suggesting-- in a curious scalar inversion --horizon. If there were any doubt about that reading, it is cleared by two additional details. The stone surface into which the crucifix is mounted is slightly canted and rotated relative to the axes of the slab, and that portion of the slab's top edge is also slightly raised: the sandstone slab edge becomes landscape, the crucifix, topographically set, stands on a hill, and what is small relative to the stone fragment now dwarfs it. Or if this imagined landscape is expanded rightward to include the soapstone fragment, the soapstone's position between mass and air, spanning horizon and breaching the bounds of the sandstone's geometries, then the faint figure carved in its surface assumes a spirit-like cast, augmented by the word etched into the medieval slab's edge, made visible through its precise positioning within its sandstone setting: "GOD." [Norwegian: "good"]. Once that particular scale is apprehended, a third scale opens, as the polished sandstone can in that context be read as a section cut deep into the earth, inviting imaginative inquiry about the relationship between the crucifix, the events it is meant to commemorate, and the subterranean fissures and joints in the depths of the rock. Geological relationships are evoked: the sandstone *is* a section of deep earth, excavated, now finished and exposed to view, spurring speculation about the circumstances that had

The first of these is Fehn's design for the dual display of a medieval fragment of an ornately carved soapstone tablet --possibly a piece of a sepulchre-- and a relatively small crucifix, barely visible here in a small glass case fixed to the top left edge of the white stone (Fig. 7). Both objects are set within that field of two symmetrical polished slabs of sandstone joined by a set of carefully designed metal insertions that ornament the stones' surfaces. There are several striking features of this ensemble. By bringing the two artifacts into relation with such a device, manifold scalar relationships are created. The crucifix is diminutive and fragile compared to the mass and size of the soapstone fragment positioned to its right. The first belongs to the scale of the hand and invites very close inspection of its fine detail -- perhaps inches of distance between the face of a curious viewer, leaning, and the cross, with its canted glass enclosure beautifully anticipating both that proximity and that bodily posture. The positioning of the stone fragment, itself weighty, suggests its relatively larger and unwieldy whole.

surrounded the quarrying, movement, and inscribing of the contrasting soapstone. Scales of time layer up: the event of the Crucifixion, its rehearsal in totems and carved imagery centuries thereafter, the distance to Golgotha, the aeonic timescales of the sedimentary and metamorphic rocks, the labors of the cast of craftspeople involved in the various components of the ensemble, the lives of which the artifacts had been a part, the present appeal to the observer invited to bend closer, the silence of the vault in which you stand.



Figure 8: Plough exhibit installed on cast-concrete wall

In a second example, excavated from the archeological site's farming history, a plough is mounted to a display device that is in turn mounted to a rough-shuttered concrete wall (Fig. 8). That device is primarily composed of two metal plates welded along a diagonal edge like a fold. The topmost plane supports the artifact, and it is canted to restate the angle of the plough when ploughing, the lateral force of the ox's movement driving the wedge into the earth. This upheaving is mimicked in the mounting apparatus, where the metal plate is torch-cut in a T-pattern, the resultant triangles folded upward like lapels. Those steel tabs hold and support the artifact, but it is as if the mounting

surface is sheared by the plough. That trope is furthered by the deep rust finish of the metal plates, recalling rich, wet loam, and also by the second plate that folds behind and beneath the plough, suggesting earthen depth. The long slot-cuts in that second plate receive the two bolts that connect the ensemble to the wall beyond, but which clearly double as figures of some sort. Are these signature decorative flourishes, in the spirit of Scarpa's corbelled leitmotifs? I doubt it: conceptually rotated and in a scalar shift similar to what was effected in the previous example of the soapstone, the lower plate of the plough's mounting device can be read as a plan --a long, straight row cutting into the surface of a dark expansive plane.



There are many others like these two. A small boat, for example, hung unexpectedly high and adjacent to a partial wall, setting up a fish's-eye view from below and, then, having continued up the ramp to the mezzanine, the boat is encountered anew at a more familiar angle and set of distances -- as if moored along a dock. Judging from the abundance of images uploaded to the web, an inventive device for displaying glass urns and backlighting them with daylight may be the most popular of Fehn's exhibition designs at Hamar. It is a two-armed fixture-- one holding, one stirring.

Conspicuously absent from most of these installations are the otherwise ubiquitous informational placards that we are so accustomed to finding next to artifacts and artworks in museums. At Fehn's Hedmark Museum, the artifacts are not "solved" for the visitor through textual explication. The overall effect can be understood as direct, provocative, and communicative: the exhibits aren't

read so much as encountered, each with its predisposition, but open to the visitor's imaginative rejoinder. The museum's widening and narrowing, accelerating and decelerating conveyances hold and disclose these encounters, presenting artifact as entity -- not quite the same kind of entity as the other visitors wandering past or gathered in the rooms and room-like spaces, but among them. One way to describe this quality of the exhibits is the difference between someone showing you an item and handing it to you, diminishing the effects of distancing -- whereas the former maintains separation, the latter more directly implicates you --your body, your imagination, and your intentions--in the characteristics and narrative of the object.

It is precisely that quality that Fehn's design decisions build up to, an endeavor that sheds light not only on the exhibit designs, but also on the larger architectural moves discussed above, and in which the several scales of design cohere. In the case of the soapstone ensemble, if the crucifix were, for example, just laying on a pad of felt in a glass case, such connections and avenues of consideration would not thereby be rendered unachievable, only far less likely, less communicative. Similarly, at the larger scale, the up and down, the undulation, the circuitous ramp and stair, the constriction and release of route, the comingling of past and present, the odd positioning of landscape and horizon, sets up conditions for imaginative connections not obvious at the most surficial levels. Establishing an ambiance of a kind of bodily and imaginative drift, it is like one of those visits to the attic where you don't rush in, grab what you need and leave, but when you find yourself pausing, unplanned, and get caught up in what is in front of you -- you do not merely make an account of what you see there, object and setting comingles with memory and imagination, you are not apart from it, but conversant with it.

The attic analogy is helpful, but as a descriptor of the museum it overly emphasizes personal reverie and private introspection. If reverie is even the right term here, it is not an exclusively personal reverie that Fehn sets up, but also a public and communicative one. In this sense, *attic* is less apt than another archetypal configuration where historical depth, personal memory, imaginative enticements, everyday life, and alterity all layer-up: *street*. Fehn himself advanced such an understanding of the Hedmark museum:

The path is no longer a ramp, but a street...a marketplace for exhibition and display, a reflection of different personalities and ambitions. Here we can feel the dimension of the old barn and the sled gallery, a dimension mediated by the resistance of stone. The image is of people striving together to overcome privation and to fulfill their hopes and dreams.

There is nothing particularly novel in observing that the street is a place of exhibition and display, nor that it is a place that puts diverse people and their aspirations into relation and makes them available for imaginative speculation. In this case, however, we are apart from any conventional definition of city, and many of the people with whom we are mingling, the ambitions of whom we're mulling and connecting to our own, the

objects and strategies of whom we are now taking up, are not present except through the tokens and ruins that once structured their lives. Those lives find expression again through our ability to construct from those remains narratives that bring them usefully, meaningfully into our active consideration. In this sense, Fehn's opening assertion about the Hedmark Museum and "urban sensibility" is not the non sequitur that it first seemed. His designs suggest that the essence of urbanity is to be found in an orientation toward, and concern with others, some where – even when those others are not present except by proxy through physical traces. Fehn's thinking, then, echoes Aristotle's but ventures further into the physical characteristics of settings, showing how such orientation can be facilitated and provoked through architectural configurations. At Hamar, Fehn's designs engage and apportion temporal depth, circumstance, self, and other. In creating conditions conducive to bringing those four factors into active relationship, the presumed limits of each are exceeded and an urban architecture is realized.

Returning with Fehn's example to the broader questions outlined at the outset, the work suggests that temporal continuity and attention to environment and circumstance do not belong to a conservative allegiance to a status quo, but, on the contrary, to the potentially liberating and expanding connection to others that creative engagement with the past and with circumstance renders more available. It also suggests that those conditions, while embodied in the archetype of street and closely associated with concepts of urbanity, can exist apart from cities. And if evidence that cities can exist apart from those conditions is all around us, Fehn shows how architecture can yet make urbanity primary to design, inscribe its possibility in physical configurations. And might such architectural attentions yield greater happiness? When Fehn's fellow Pritzker Prize laureate Glenn Murcutt – the great pioneer of ecologically concerned architecture—was once lecturing in Oslo, he was escorted on a three hour drive to the Hamar project, with which he was utterly unfamiliar at the time, not even knowing of its existence nor its designer. It was an experience that would lead him to seek out Fehn, and to become a devotee of his architecture. Murcutt has since described the Hamar project as "the most significant architectural experience of my life," and has returned to it many times. Happiness may not be the most apt term for the overall effect of Fehn's designs at Hamar, especially if our definition of happiness cleaves close to the "don't worry" variety. But if our consideration of happiness is extended to include concepts of fuller living through expanded and creative interconnectedness with others, in place, then perhaps the term obtains. Like Murcutt, many have found in the Hamar project something undeniably potent, alive. It is that understanding of happiness –a potent, expanded, engaged, fuller living-- that Fehn connects to urbanity at Hamar.

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