



Stockholm/Brussels: a retrospective in fine prints

by
Emil Ems

emsVision

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FOREWORD
BY
AMBASSADOR AHNLIID

I was pleasantly surprised upon receiving the author's manuscript. I very much appreciated the captivating stories and the sensitive pictures from his life in Stockholm and Brussels, two towns that are now also mine. What a well designed book!

I was also astounded. I have known the author since the mid-eighties as a diligent and striving civil servant as well as an outstanding economist and analyst. But I was not aware that he is also a master in the art of photography. This book reveals him as an ardent pursuer of city views, treading the streets of Stockholm and Brussels laden with a heavy view camera and scrutinising the urban landscape in search of suitable motives. I am thankful that he chose such an arduous pastime. His labour is our gain!

Moreover, I was intrigued. Behind the carefully crafted pictures and text I perceived the story of an idealist, ever searching for the "Gaal". This search brought Emil Ems first to Sweden, and later to other countries, never quite satisfied with what he found. At long last, it seems, he realized that finding the "best of all possible worlds" was an illusion and that one must deal with the world as it is. I sense this in three of his pictures, on pages 100 to 103, which I would like to designate as "My ship has landed". When it was time to retire, after a fulfilling career involving many

moves and changes, he found his way back to Stockholm, like to a "Haven" after a long and dangerous voyage.

Isn't there a touching "sens moral" in this tale that might appeal to national and European politicians? In a not so distant past, there was much concern with Europe becoming a "Fortress". Since then, great political progress has been made in abolishing fences, within the European Union as well as toward the world outside. But this is still a work in progress. At present we again hear many voices proposing to rebuild fences. Is not creating an outward-looking "Haven Europe", where all its diverse citizens feel at home, a worthy aim to strive for, to counter those forces that aim to move us back to "Fortress Europe"?

Anders Ahnlid

Ambassador

Head of the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU



FOREWORD
BY
PIERRE SCHELLEKENS

I approached this book with some trepidation. Could a former colleague from the Commission, a civil servant busy with administering European affairs, really be able to produce an artistic retrospect with quality in pictures and text? I know I would not be able to do so myself. But I was wrong to be worried. As soon as I opened his work and started perusing it, I quickly realised that I had before me an imaginative and enticing combination of pictures, text and page design that together form an artistic whole; I am tempted to call it a "Gesamtkunstwerk".

I have lived in both Stockholm and Brussels, just like the author, and was soon engrossed in his views of the two towns. Sweden and Belgium have much in common as medium-sized European countries that built their wealth on trade and an open economy. History also brings them together. When I was a child it was still common to find a picture of Astrid, Queen of the Belgians but born a Swedish Princess, on the wall of many a home in Brussels. I also recall that numerous Belgian women from the resistance were saved from the horrors of Ravensbrück by the Swedish Red Cross. Yet there are also differences. Compare the Swedish zeal for high-flung principles with the survival capacity and consensus building of the Belgians. And, as the author rightly notes, in architectural terms, while Stockholm in-

trigues you with its yearn for modernity, Brussels grows on you never to leave you again.

Far more than a comparison between two European capitals, this book provides a fresh introspective by a European in search for a home; or as the author puts it "his tribe". I too have laboured long to find mine, only to conclude – as the author does – that this is a vain quest, given the reality of being a European citizen. Also I have accepted that I could never find my sense of belonging within the constraints of what Benedict Andersson labelled the "imagined community" of the nation state. To find your home by accepting that you have none, relying only on the inclusiveness of the European identity, which so strongly distinguishes it from other forms of identity, shows to me a frame of mind that I share with the author.

It is therefore a pleasure and privilege to preface this book. It presents a voyage to two impressive cities, but is foremost about travelling within the mind.

Pierre Schellekens

Formerly Head of the EU Commission Representation in Sweden

Now working in a Commissioner's private office in Brussels

I owe this book to four Masters

Frau Pieber, who put me on the right track to life-long learning;
Ansel Adams, who taught me how to organize the world into pictures;
and Printing Masters *Richard Benson* and *Martin Senn*, who showed me
how to put ink on paper.



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1 Modernity

Moderne
Modernité

THE SUN WAS shining on a cool clear summer day in early July. I was standing close to a large wooden building, painted dark red with white trimmings. In front of me an elderly man stood towering above me, not unlike an English country gent, at least two heads taller than me. His gaze was firmly placed about half a meter to my right and appeared focussed on the far horizon, whilst he was announcing, with a voice dry as tinder: *Der Herr Ems wünscht bei uns zu mieten?* (Mr. Ems wishes to rent one of our cabins?). It took me a moment or two to realize that he actually was addressing me, before I could attempt an affirmative nod.

This was my first encounter with Sweden. I had arrived in Stockholm in the summer of 1962, and made haste to contact an acquaintance from our village back home in Austria. He had worked as gardener at a small estate on Stockholm's western fringe, *Riddersviks Gård* in *Hässelby Villastad*, and took me there to find out, whether I could get lodging and work at the Manor.

I didn't get a job, but they let me rent a small labourer's cabin, without water or electricity. It was really just a small room with a kitchenette attached to it. It must have been at least a hundred years old and was located on the edge of a potato field, with a small path that led to the main buildings of the estate. However, I did find work nearby eventually, having secured a gardening job in a newly built neighbourhood in *Skälby*.

Even if my first Swedish experience was with the Sweden of yore, in the form of a gentleman's eccentric way of addressing me, I would soon understand that this was the exception rather than the rule. My life during that summer centred on the western outskirts of Stockholm. This was where suburbanization had begun just a few years earlier.

From my cabin it was only a 20 minutes' walk to the T-station (metro station) *Hässelby Strand*, the terminus of the (then) only metro-line in Stockholm. This station had been established only four years earlier and still looked shiniingly new to me. There was nowhere like it in Graz, the major town that I had left behind me to come to Sweden.

Since I was working just north of *Hässelby Villastad*, I had no business in the town of Stockholm itself. On Saturdays, I would take the metro eight stations to *Åkeshov*, where I would have a sauna and a swim in a brand new swimming hall. In evenings, when I felt like it, I would take it three stops to *Vällingby*, to go to the movies.

On route, my wondering eyes would rest on a manifold of fairly new buildings along the way, each more interesting than the last. After the low apartment buildings in *Hässelby Gård*, via the intriguing centre of *Vällingby* – with its (now world-famous) concept of combining a garden city with modern temples of culture, leisure and commerce – I passed a wall of a building in *Räcksta*, that looked like a skyscraper to my provincial eyes – the headquarters of *Vattenfall* – and saw the many villa quarters located in between and thereon. All were embedded in a lush carpet of vegetation, with green lawns crowned by feathered pine trees, as if unconcerned with the newly arisen building frenzy of the Swedes. I was lucky to have arrived just in time for Sweden's post-war *Gründerzeit!*

On Saturday evenings, I would sneak past the fence of *Hässelby Strandbad*, where there was dancing and merry-making till midnight. No waltzes, polkas and marches were being played there! Rather, big band music in syncopated rhythm. One song in particular tickled my fancy, and from it I learned my first Swedish words:

*På Västerbron i den himmelska ron
en spårvagn går ensam och tom ...*

I soon started to gather more words, eager to learn the language by applying the Schliemann method, reading texts in Swedish aloud and memorizing them. My favourite text was an article in an abstruse little journal, called *Häpna*, which appealed to my interest in science fiction.

Eventually, I was able to read the main newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, which gave me a broader perspective on Swedish "Modernism". The debate articles in that paper fascinated me. Here I learned advanced views on society that I had hitherto never seen in newsprint. For instance, a first

for me was the liberal view on how to treat criminals. Instead of the usual ideas of revenge and prevention through punishment or the simple act of locking someone up, there was a view of teaching the deviants the right way through re-education in prison!

I often get the question what made me come to Sweden as a youngster, immediately after having graduated from high school. The answer to this query is easy; youth is adventurous by instinct and driven to travelling and gaining new experiences. It is far more intriguing for me to explain why I came back after that first summer visit and eventually stayed in the country.

We are all hostage to our upbringing. My first formative years were spent in a small village in South-Eastern Austria. There I experienced a fulfilling childhood in a close-knit conservative society characterized by self-sufficiency, rarely touched by outside influences. But, at the early age of nine, I was brusquely uprooted and replanted to Graz, the capital of Styria (one of Austria's Länder).

In those days, the Austrian State believed in the merit of identifying, and making special efforts to educate, its most intelligent youth, irrespective of family background. All elementary-school teachers were asked to single out, among their fourth-grade pupils, the most gifted and send them to Graz for entrance tests to a boarding school, which enlisted some 90 pupils for an eight years elite high-school education. I happened to be one of those admitted to the class of 1954. This thanks to *Frau Pieber*, my first teacher, who had prepared me for the tests with special tutoring.

The education we received there was not only utterly comprehensive, encompassing both humanities and natural sciences, but also strived to imbue us with a modern, liberal attitude to life and society. This was deliberate, to counter the lingering "evil spirits" of the totalitarian regime that had broken down less than a decade earlier.

After having thus been won over to the merits of (for old Austria) modern concepts, such as liberty and equal opportunity for all, I had, when leaving school, to experience the real Austrian society of the early sixties. Suffice it to say

that I felt a pronounced cleft between ideals and reality that became increasingly difficult to accept for an impatient and uncompromising youngster.

Sweden to the rescue! Experiencing a new country for the first time lets you concentrate, if you are a young idealist, on the positive aspects of this other society. This is especially true if it shows all signs of vigorous and righteous progress. One easily neglects the negative that is also present and is rounding up the overall picture.

Of course, the perceived accord between my ideal society and what I experienced in Sweden was not the only reason why I stayed. Falling in love with a woman certainly played the main role. But had Swedish society been like Austria of the early sixties, I doubt whether I would have put down roots in this country as my new homeland.

As I grew older and more knowledgeable about society, I had to revise my first impressions. In addition, Swedish society itself changed over the years. What at the outset seemed to me a country of liberty, equal opportunity for all and progressive humanistic ideals, eventually turned out to be a country where socialist inspired statism gradually took charge and brought society into relative decay. It took a great financial crisis in the early 'nineties to bring a stop to this sad development and reintroduce vigour and progressiveness in society.

I also got a more comprehensive grasp of the many faceted town of Stockholm, once I had moved there for good and taken up residence in various parts of the city. A decisive moment came when I saw, for the first time, in early 1964, an enormous void expanding throughout the town centre. This deep wound in the city landscape took almost a decade to heal and its scars are still felt, by myself and Stockholmers alike, to this very day. Thus, with increasing insights and age, my interest in modern buildings decreased and I have become more and more fond of the Stockholm of yore, or what remains of it.

Some parts of the city are still uniquely well preserved, such as *Gamla Stan* and *Riddarholmen*, and a delight to revisit. There is also a treasure-trove of architecture from the early

parts of last century, which has a uniquely Scandinavian flair. Let me just mention *Stadshuset* (Town Hall), *Högalids Kyrka* (Högalid Church) and *Stadsbiblioteket* (Main City Library).

Still, my taste for modernity remains firmly entrenched at least concerning the living quarters I prefer to reside in. Ever since leaving the century old cabin in *Hässelby Villastad*, and after staying a short time in an equally old small flat on *Söder* (without central heating or hot water) together with my wife, I have taken care to always find lodgings in recently built quarters.

This brought us first to *Fagersjö*, then back to *Söder* (*Drakenberg* area), and thereafter to *Huddinge* (*Myrstuguberget*, a site designed by Ralph Erskine). Today I am living in *Hammarby Sjöstad*, an area bubbling with vitality and so new that it is still awaiting its completion. *Sjöstaden* has a certain flair, reminding me of the perceived modernist Sweden of yore which I experienced and loved so many years ago, even if my new quarters more rightly deserve the term *Post-modernism*.

I am an old man now, but I realize that my inner core still appears to linger in the early sixties, when I fled to modernity and never looked back.

ES WAR EIN kühler, klarer Sommertag Anfang Juli. Ich stand neben einem großen dunkelrot gestrichenen Holzhaus mit weißen Fensterrahmen und vor mir baute sich ein Mensch von beachtlicher Länge auf, ein älterer Herr, der mich an einen Landjunker erinnerte. Er starrte etwa einen halben Meter an meiner Rechten vorbei, auf einen Punkt am fernen Horizont und sagte, gute zwei Kopf über mir, mit knochendürerer Stimme: *So, der Herr Ems wünscht bei uns zu mieten?* Ich brauchte eine Weile, bis ich begriff, dass er mich meinte. Ich nickte.

Das war meine erste Begegnung mit Schweden. Ich war im Sommer 1962 hierher gekommen und hatte als erstes einen Bekannten aus meinem Heimatdorf in Österreich aufgesucht. Der war auf einem kleinen Gut am Westrand von Stockholm, im *Riddersviks Gård* in *Hässelby Villastad*, als Gärtner beschäftigt und brachte mich nun dorthin, um zu sehen, ob es auch für mich Quartier und Arbeit gab.

Arbeit hatte der Gutshof keine für mich, ich durfte aber eine winzige Keusche als Mieter beziehen. Die bestand im Grunde aus nichts anderem als einem kleinen Raum mit noch kleinerer Kochnische. Wasser und Strom gab es nicht. Die Hütte musste mindestens seine 100 Jahre auf dem Buckel haben und lag am Rande eines Kartoffelfeldes, von welchem ein schmaler Pfad zum eigentlichen Gutshof führte. Eine Arbeit fand ich dann schließlich auch, ebenfalls als Gärtner, in einer kurz zuvor errichteten Wohnsiedlung im nahen *Skälby*.

Ein Schweden hatte mich empfangen, das noch der Vergangenheit angehörte, wie die Ansprache des Junkers es bezeugte. Aber bald wurde mir klar, dass Begegnungen dieser Art schon eher selten waren. Mein Leben in jenem Sommer spielte sich in den westlichen Randgebieten von Stockholm ab, die erst wenige Jahre zuvor von der wachsenden Großstadt erobert worden waren.

Von meinem Haus hatte ich nur 20 Minuten Fußmarsch zur T-station *Hässelby Strand*, der Endstation der damals einzigen U-bahnlinie Stockholms. Die Station war vier Jahre zuvor errichtet worden und erschien mir immer noch funkelnelneu und prächtig, im Gegensatz zu Graz.

Mein Arbeitsplatz in *Skälby* lag unmittelbar nördlich von *Hässelby Villastad* und so führte mich nichts in die eigentliche Stadt Stockholm. Samstags begab ich mich gewöhnlich die acht Stationen nach *Åkeshov* ins Schwimmbad zum Saunen und Schwimmen, und an den Abenden fuhr ich hin und wieder, wenn ich gerade Lust hatte, die drei Stationen nach *Vällingby* ins Kino.

Unterwegs blickte ich von der Bahn aus mit staunenden Augen auf eine Vielfalt mehr oder weniger neuer Bauwerke, eines interessanter als das andere. Nach den kleinstöckigen Zinshäusern in *Hässelby Gård* tauchte der spannende Ortskern von *Vällingby* auf, mit seinem (mittlerweile weltberühmten) Konzept einer Kombination von Gartenstadt und modernen Kultur-, Freizeit und Kommerztempeln; ich fuhr an einer Gebäudemasse in *Räcksta* vorbei, das meinen provinziellen Augen wie ein Wolkenkratzer erschien – das war der Firmensitz von Vattenfall – und sah die vielen Villenviertel dazwischen und darauf. All das war eingebettet in einem üppigen Pflanzenteppich aus mit Kiefern befiederten grünen Wiesen, so als ginge sie die eben aufgeflammete Bauwut der Schweden gar nichts an. Ich hatte das Glück, gerade zur richtigen Zeit gekommen zu sein, um Schwedens Nachkriegs-Gründerzeit zu erleben.

An den Samstagabenden stemmte ich mich durch den Zaun des Strandbads von *Hässelby*, wo bis Mitternacht getanzt und gefeiert wurde. Da gab es keine Walzer, Polkas oder Märsche, sondern Big-Band-Musik mit ihren synkopischen Rhythmen. Ein Song beschäftigte meine Fantasie besonders, da lernte ich auch meine ersten schwedischen Worte:

*På Västerbron i den himmelska ron
en spårvagn går ensam och tom ...*

Bald kamen weitere Wörter hinzu. Ich arbeitete eifrig daran, die Sprache zu beherrschen. Dabei bediente ich mich der Schliemann-Methode, indem ich schwedische Texte mir laut vorlas und auswendig lernte. Mein Lieblingstext war ein Artikel aus einer abstrusen kleinen Zeitschrift namens *Häpna*, der meinem Interesse an *science fiction* entgegen kam.

du début du siècle passé, qui ont un style particulièrement scandinave. Je ne citerai que *Stadshuset* (l'hôtel de ville), *Högalids Kyrka* (l'église de Högalid) et *Stadsbiblioteket* (la bibliothèque principale de la ville).

Cependant, mon goût pour la modernité restait bien ancré en moi, du moins pour les quartiers où j'aimais vivre. Depuis que j'avais quitté ma vieille cabane centenaire d'*Hässelby Villastad*, pour vivre avec ma femme pendant quelques temps dans un tout aussi vieux et petit appartement de *Söder*, j'avais toujours veillé à trouver des logements dans des quartiers de construction récente.

Ainsi cela nous a d'abord menés à *Fagersjö*, ensuite, retour à *Söder* (dans la partie de *Drakenberg*), puis à *Huddinge* (*Myrstuguberget*, un lieu conçu par Ralph Erskine). Aujourd'hui, j'habite à *Hammarby Sjöstad*, un quartier débordant de vitalité et tellement neuf qu'il n'est pas encore terminé. *Sjöstaden* a un certain style. Il me rappelle la Suède moderniste d'antan que j'aimais il y a si longtemps, même si mon nouveau logement mérite plus exactement d'être qualifié de postmoderniste.

Je suis un vieil homme maintenant, mais je me rends compte que mon âme reste attachée au début des années soixante, quand je m'envolais vers la modernité et ne regardais jamais en arrière.





2 Genteel decay

Vornehmer Verfall
Délabrement raffiné

A WARM EVENING IN June it was, after a day of sweltering heat. I was standing on a cobblestone square gaping at the scenery around me. The square was quite large and completely enclosed by buildings, none of them younger than 300 years. One large cathedral like gothic edifice with an immense spire dominated the southern side. Opposite to it I could see a smaller palace from about the same period, richly adorned with small arcades on several planes and with smaller spires on top.

However, grand as they were, these two palaces did not account for the impressiveness of this place. Instead, a host of smaller buildings – clearly from a later period – that harmonized together in an immensely pleasing way, incited my admiration for this square. They were guildhalls, indicating with proud self-confidence and splendour the valour of industry and commerce; for was it not those two that provided the basis of wealth for the city and its sovereign?

This was a glorious ending to a laborious day. At that time, I was working as senior economist at the EFTA Secretariat in Geneva. Negotiations about the European Economic Area (EEA) had just begun and country delegations, supported by us Secretariat experts, had assembled in Brussels for the introductory meeting of one of the negotiating groups. We were led to a somewhat worn-down and shabby building on *Rondpoint Schumann*, called *JECL* (It has since been replaced by the *Triangle Building*). The deliberations began with an elegant opening statement by Mr. Antti Satuli, the Chairman of the EFTA group.

Opposite Mr. Satuli, the great Finnish diplomat – who later would be honoured by having an EU Council room named after him – sat his Commission counterpart, a serious but more plain gentleman by the name of Ewig. He put the conditions for the negotiations on the table with a dry voice not unlike that of a government official. Thereafter, “Federführer” after “Federführer”, as they appeared to me, from the Commission took the floor to present each and every line of legal text underpinning the *acquis communautaire*, starting with the EC Treaty Articles and ending with Regulations, Directives, Decisions and Resolutions.

Quite exhausted after this lengthy legal lecturing, Per Wijkman, EFTA’s Chief Economist, took me aside and exclaimed: “We have to let this day end in a more benign mood!” We ordered a cab and before we knew it we arrived at the wide square described above, which of course was the *Grand-Place* of Brussels. I will always remember this day, when high-flexed expectations met dry legalism, and shabby administrative buildings were followed by the most glorious collection of buildings known to man. This would be a foreboding of my future experiences when moving to Brussels some years later. As an aside, this day also led me to revisit an old Swedish proverb: *Land skall med lag byggas!* (A country shall be built with law!).

But let us not rush ahead. After my definitive move to Sweden, in the winter of 1963, I had lived in Stockholm for 25 years already. Towards the end of that period I had increasingly felt as if life had come to a standstill. I had divorced, work on my Ph.D. Thesis had gone astray and my stay at the University of Stockholm had come to an end. This stagnation in my private life was mirrored by an increasing staleness in Swedish society, at least as it had appeared to me in those days. The days of optimistic progress were long gone.

Suddenly, things started to improve. I got my act together and managed to finish the thesis at long last. Soon thereafter, there was an opening at the EFTA Secretariat that I was eager to apply for; to my surprise and great joy I was engaged there as senior economist in the autumn of 1988.

Although the first months at the Secretariat proved to be rather sedate, there was a sudden change in working pace in early 1989, when the EC invited the EFTA countries to participate in its Internal Market and the EEA negotiations started. Thereupon, events followed events. The iron curtain disappeared; the EEA was created; the EC intensified its internal cohesion and became the EU, with the euro as its common currency; three EFTA countries joined the EU; and the great Eastern enlargement process was initiated. I was lucky to be right in the middle of all those

developments as well as their repercussions. During those eventful years I was mostly engaged in Geneva as an international civil servant, with only two short working spells in Stockholm.

My stay in Brussels started in 1998, when I was engaged as principal administrator at the EU Commission, and I remained there for ten years. I arrived in the city full of expectations, about the importance of the tasks I would have to carry out, as well as the splendours of the city that I would savour in my spare time.

As to the latter, disappointment awaited me. At the outset my mind was firmly set on Brussels as a splendid city, with monumental buildings from medieval times through the beginning of last century, as well as a grand cuisine. These beliefs were underpinned by flashes of memory from numerous short committee meetings, followed by official dinners in palace-like restaurants. Reality proved to be somewhat different.

It is true that Brussels has a right to be proud of its heritage, with places like the *Grand-Place* and other monuments. But, notably, these are rare treasures in the midst of either worn down city quarters of age-old buildings (especially in the centre), as well as a sea of post-war buildings that defy architectural aesthetics. At least this was my impression after my first few months there.

Let me give you two examples that underpinned my early disappointment. In the old days, the river *Senne* flowed right through the city, just to the west of the *Grand-Place*. In the late 1880s, Mayor Anspach had the river covered and a grand boulevard built on top of it.

This boulevard, named after him, started at *Place de Brouckère*. As originally conceived, the place was a beautiful square, surrounded by elegant apartment buildings and a hotel from *fin de siècle*. Its northern end was dominated by a neoclassic triangular building of impressive stature, crowned by a sculpture of substantial, albeit proportional size, which had its counterpart on the roof of *Hôtel Métropole* to its left. I believe there was a large apartment building to its right that may also have contained a statue on the roof.

Nowadays, a Coca Cola sign has replaced the impressive sculpture on top of the triangular building. That signboard is completely disproportional and disgraces the elegant neoclassic columns underneath. The only statue left is the one on top of *Métropole*. The latter building, with an impressive atrium, remains essentially preserved from the original site. Other buildings are at best reminiscent of the original façade, or have been replaced altogether by disharmonious post-war buildings. The most irritating element is a façade hiding a gigantic movie theatre in a way that counteracts anything that would render it pleasing to the eye.

The second example is more mundane. It concerns the general wobbliness of the city’s sidewalks. Many a newcomer, used to well-built pavements in his hometown, receives a nasty welcome. If the first promenade is taken in rainy weather, the surprise will consist of a sudden surge of muddy water that soils your trousers to the knee. In dry season, the stones, by getting unbalanced when treading on them, may cause a nasty fall, scraped clothes or, even worse, a broken knee or two. This quickly induces you to keep your eyes firmly fixed on the pavement ahead of you during your city walks, rather than allowing you to glance at fellow walkers or the architecture around you.

Still, after having lived in Brussels for more than a year, I gradually got used to this idiosyncratic mix of new, old and wobbly, and started to realize that many architectural jewels were embedded in the general hodgepodge. This was emphasized when Richard Murray, an old friend from Stockholm, came to visit. He had been a municipal politician in his youth, with an emphasis on city planning, and he brought with him a keen interest in architecture. He incited me to go on a city tour with him, organized by ARAU (*Atelier de Recherche et d’Actions Urbaines*). This excursion, where many a splendid Art Nouveau building was shown, opened my eyes to the extraordinary beauty in decay that characterizes the capital of Europe.

I later learned that Belgium was among the first countries on the continent to be industrialized in the 1800s. This created great wealth among the leading industrialists

and led to a host of new city quarters and individual town houses in various styles, from *fin de siècle* neo-classical to Art Nouveau. Even if partly erased by subsequent building frenzies, enough of these artefacts remain to lead you to love the city. It just takes some selective viewing, closing your eyes to the worst examples of new city planning and opening them again to savour the splendours of yore.

Many spacious parks, boulevards and squares that were built during that period were initially planned by the Sovereign himself, King Leopold II, who also contributed partially or fully, with the financing. It is an irony of history that his capital stemmed from exploiting the *Free State of Congo*, which was managed by the King more or less as a private enterprise. As a relic from that period one can still visit a “temple” of that exploitation, the town house of Baron van Eetvelde (the King’s chief administrator of the colony). The inside of that house is like a jewel case, built with precious materials from the Congo.

Besides opening my eyes to architecture from the turn of the last century, I also gained some important insights about myself during the decade I spent in Brussels. This was brought about through interaction with other newcomers and ultimately, the native inhabitants of Brussels. As to the latter, contacts were established only gradually, but deepened towards the end of my stay, when I had already retired and decided to stay on for another year in the city.

I started to realize that the Belgians, at least those living in Brussels, were a very sociable and jocular bunch. I am a loner by nature, but was often drawn into friendly discussions with strangers, whilst walking along the street or sitting in a pub. Furthermore, when having Sunday lunch at my favourite Italian restaurant, as was my habit, I couldn’t help observing that the majority of guests were extended families, from grandparents to grandchildren, who took great pleasure in going out together and having a good time.

It may sound strange, but I felt very much at home among all this *bonhomie*. It was as if the Austrian in me, suppressed for many years, was resurfacing when experiencing those social contacts. In fact, if you think about it,

there are many similarities between Belgians and Austrians. They both share a recent history of trauma, they are both traditionally Catholic, with all that implies of “*joie de vivre*” unburdened by bad conscience, and they both have a sincere feeling of belonging within the family.

Gradually it dawned on me that it might be time to make peace with my birth country. If I could enjoy myself in the company of people who were so like my countrymen, why should I continue to feel resentments towards Austria, resentments that had been rooted in early youth experiences of more than fifty years ago?

Since that awakening, I was for the first time in many years ready to revisit my birth country without rehashing memories of yore. I had become a free man at long last!

ES WAR EIN warmer Juniabend nach einem feuchtheißen Tag. Ich stand auf einem kopfsteingepflasterten Square und betrachtete die Szenerie. Vor mir breitete sich ein großer Platz aus, umrahmt von alten Gebäuden, keines jünger als 300 Jahre. Ein gotisches Gebäude mit riesigem Turm, das einer Kathedrale glich, beherrschte seine Südseite. Gegenüber erblickte ich ein Palais aus etwa derselben Zeit, das mit sich überlagernden Arkadenreihen geschmückt und von kleineren Türmchen gekrönt war.

Trotz ihrer monumentalen Größe waren jedoch nicht diese beiden Bauten die eindrucksvollsten zu Ort. Stattdessen erregte eine Unzahl kleinerer Gebäude meine Bewunderung für diesen Platz. Sie stammten sichtlich aus einer späteren Epoche und bildeten ein ungemein hübsches, harmonisches Ensemble. Zunfthäuser waren es, die mit ihrer Pracht und ihrem stolzen Selbstbewusstsein auf den Wert von Handel und Gewerbe verwiesen, die beiden Säulen, auf denen der Wohlstand der Stadt und ihres Souveräns ruhte.

Ein großartiger Abschluss eines arbeitsreichen Tages! Damals arbeitete ich als Wirtschaftsexperte im EFTA-Sekretariat in Genf. Gerade hatten die Verhandlungen über einen europäischen Wirtschaftsraum (EWR) begonnen und die Delegationen, unterstützt durch uns Experten vom Sekretariat, hatten sich in Brüssel zur Einführungstagung einer der Verhandlungsgruppen versammelt. Man führte uns zu einem etwas heruntergekommenen, schäbigen Gebäude am *Rondpoint Schumann* namens *JECL* (das inzwischen durch das *Triangle Building* ersetzt worden ist). Die Verhandlungen begannen mit einem eleganten Eröffnungsstatement des finnischen Vorsitzenden der EFTA-Gruppe Antti Satuli.

Gegenüber von Antti Satuli, dem großen finnischen Diplomaten (der später dadurch geehrt werden sollte, dass ein Besprechungsraum im EU Rat nach ihm benannt wurde), saß sein Ansprechpartner in der Kommission, ein etwas schlichterer Herr namens Ewig. Dieser legte mit trockener Stimme, eher in der Art eines Regierungsbeamten, die Bedingungen für die Verhandlungen auf den Tisch. Danach

ergriff “Federführer” nach “Federführer” – so erschienen sie mir – aus der Kommission das Wort, um buchstäblich jede einzelne Zeile Gesetzestext zur Untermauerung der Verhandlungsthemen darzulegen, beginnend mit Artikeln des EG-Vertrags und endend mit Verordnungen, Richtlinien, Beschlüssen und Entschlüssen.

Völlig erschöpft nach dieser langwierigen Juvorlesung nahm mich der Chefökonom der EFTA Per Wijkman beiseite und rief: “Wir müssen diesen Tag unbedingt etwas strahlender ausklingen lassen”. Schnell war ein Taxi bestellt, und schon standen wir auf dem oben beschriebenen Platz – und, wie sollte es anders sein, es war der *Grand-Place* von Brüssel. Ich werde diesen Tag nie vergessen, als hochgeschraubte Erwartungen auf trockene Juristerei stießen, und auf schäbige Verwaltungshäuser das herrlichste Gebäudeensemble folgte, das je ein Menschenauge gesehen hatte. Das war wohl eine Vorahnung auf zukünftige Ereignisse in meinem Leben – Jahre später sollte ich nach Brüssel übersiedeln. Nebenbei ließ mich dieser Tag an ein altes schwedisches Sprichwort denken: *Land skall med lag byggas!* (Ein Land baut sich mit Gesetz!).

Doch will ich nicht vorgreifen. Nach meiner endgültigen Übersiedlung nach Schweden im Winter 1963 war ich 25 Jahre in Stockholm geblieben. Gegen Ende dieser Zeit bekam ich mehr und mehr das Gefühl, das Leben sei zu einem Stillstand gekommen. Ich war geschieden, meine Dissertation befand sich in einer Sackgasse und meine Tätigkeit an der Universität von Stockholm war zu Ende gekommen. Diese Flaute in meinem persönlichen Leben fand eine Entsprechung in der zunehmenden Schaltheit der schwedischen Gesellschaft – so schien es mir zumindest in jenen Tagen. Die Tage des optimistischen Fortschritts waren seit langem vorbei.

Plötzlich aber begannen sich die Dinge zu bessern. Ich nahm einen beherzten Anlauf und schrieb endlich meine Dissertation fertig. Bald darauf gab es eine Vakanz im EFTA-Sekretariat. Ich bewarb mich sofort. Zu meiner Überraschung und großen Freude wurde ich im Herbst 1988 als Wirtschaftsexperte aufgenommen.

il s'était occupé en particulier d'urbanisme. Son vif intérêt pour l'architecture n'avait pas disparu. Il m'incita à l'accompagner lors d'une visite de la ville organisée par l'ARAU (*Atelier de Recherche et d'Actions Urbaines*). Cette excursion, qui nous fit voir de nombreux bâtiments art nouveau, m'ouvrit les yeux sur l'extraordinaire beauté en décrépitude qui caractérise la capitale de l'Europe.

J'appris plus tard que la Belgique fut parmi les premiers pays d'Europe à être industrialisés au début du 19^e siècle. L'industrialisation enrichit les grands industriels qui firent construire de nombreuses maisons de maître et hôtels particuliers de différents styles, allant du style néoclassique fin de siècle à l'art nouveau. Même si de nombreuses maisons furent ensuite rasées au cours de périodes de constructions frénétiques, suffisamment de ces chefs-d'œuvre ont survécu pour arriver à vous faire aimer la ville. Il suffit juste d'avoir l'œil sélectif : savoir ne pas voir les pires avatars de l'urbanisme plus récent pour savourer les splendeurs d'antan.

Nombre de grands parcs, boulevards et places qui furent bâtis pendant cette période furent dessinés par le souverain de Belgique lui-même, le roi Léopold 1er, qui contribua d'ailleurs à leur financement, ou les paya même intégralement. C'est une ironie de l'histoire que sa capitale soit issue de l'exploitation de l'*Etat Indépendant du Congo* que le roi gérait plus ou moins comme une entreprise privée. On peut toujours visiter une relique de cette période, un « temple » de cette exploitation, l'hôtel du Baron Van Eetvelde, administrateur principal de la colonie. L'intérieur de cette maison est comme un coffret à bijoux, fait de matériaux précieux en provenance du Congo.

Outre mon ouverture à l'architecture née au tournant du siècle passé, je pris conscience lors de la décennie que j'ai passée à Bruxelles de quelques aspects importants de ma personnalité. Je le dois aux contacts que j'ai eus avec d'autres expatriés et en fin de compte, avec des personnes originaires de Bruxelles. En ce qui concerne ces derniers, les contacts se firent seulement peu à peu mais s'approfondirent vers la fin de mon séjour, quand j'étais déjà à la retraite et décidé à rester une année de plus dans la ville.

Je commençai à réaliser que les Belges, du moins ceux vivant à Bruxelles, étaient très sociables et formaient une bande de joyeux drilles. Je suis solitaire de nature, mais souvent, je me trouvai engagé dans d'amicales conversations avec des étrangers alors que je me promenais dans la rue ou me trouvais dans un café. De plus, en prenant mon repas dominical dans mon restaurant italien favori, je remarquai que la plupart des clients étaient des familles élargies, allant des grands-parents aux petits-enfants, et qui prenaient plaisir à sortir ensemble et à partager du bon temps.

Cela peut paraître étrange, mais je me sentais vraiment à mon aise dans cette ambiance bonhomie. C'était comme si l'Autrichien qui sommeillait en moi depuis des années resurgissait à ces contacts. En fait, si on y pense, il y a beaucoup de similitudes entre les Belges et les Autrichiens.

Les deux peuples ont vécu un traumatisme récent et sont de tradition catholique, ce qui génère une joie de vivre délivrée de toute mauvaise conscience. Tous deux aussi partagent un sens aigu de la famille.

Peu à peu, il me vint à l'esprit qu'il était peut-être temps de faire la paix avec ma patrie d'origine. Si je pouvais me plaire en la compagnie de personnes si semblables à mes compatriotes, pourquoi devais-je garder à l'égard de l'Autriche un ressentiment qui trouvait son origine dans ma prime jeunesse, il y a plus de cinquante ans?

Après cette prise de conscience, je fus pour la première fois depuis de nombreuses années prêt à me rendre dans mon pays natal sans ressasser les souvenirs du passé. J'étais enfin devenu un homme libre!





5 Stockholm

The pictures of Stockholm included here start at the early 'seventies, when I had acquired my first SLR camera. The initial takes still show some interest in street photography and the human condition. But soon, the urban landscape took hold of me and never again released its grip.

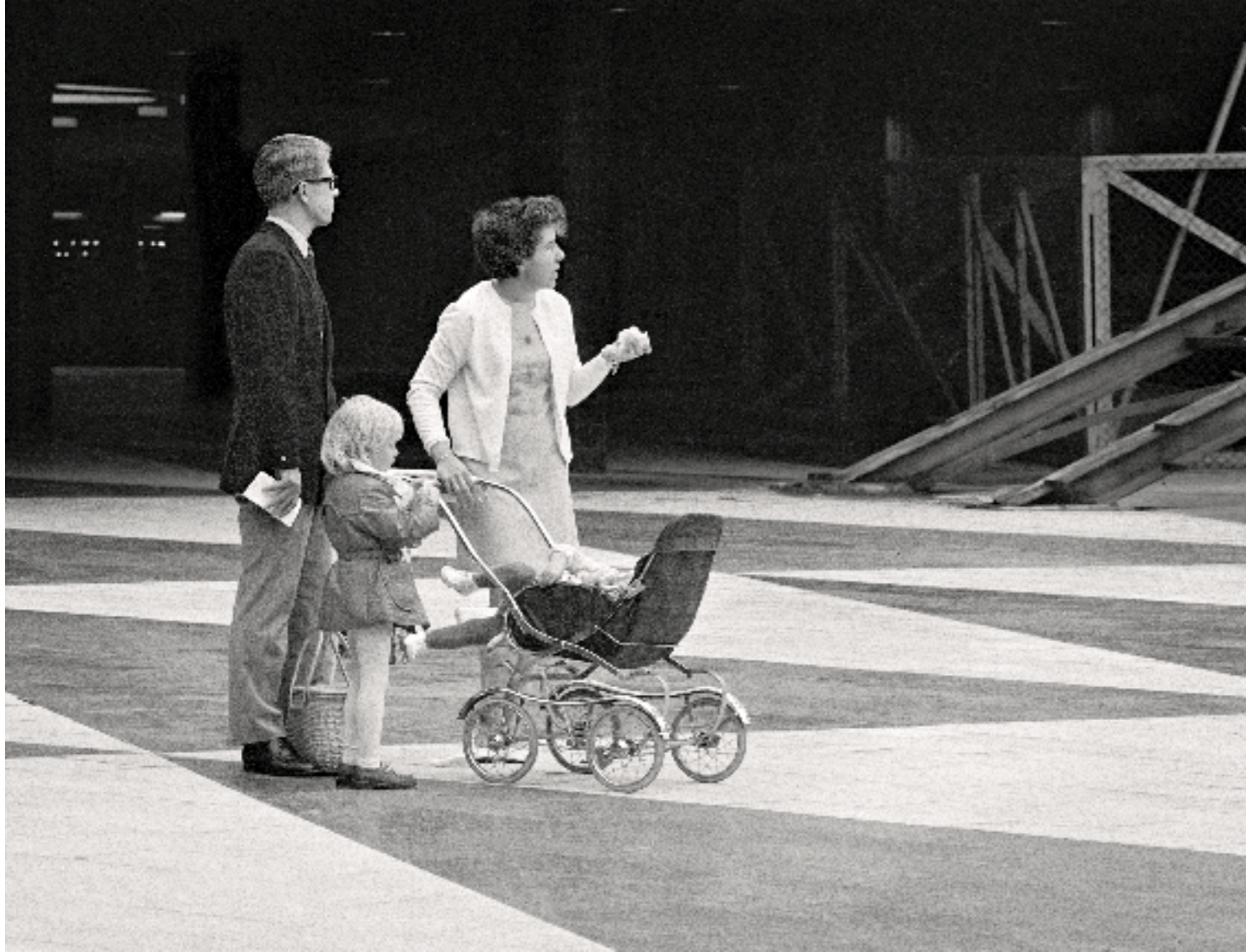
Later pictures, taken in the early to mid-'eighties, fully concentrate on that scenery. By then, I had acquired a much worn large format technical camera with vintage lenses, which had a disciplining effect on my compositions.

In those years, I had caught a life-threatening disease that urged me to revisit early childhood traumas from way back at War's end. These troubles seem also to bear on the content of pictures taken within that period.

From the late 'eighties onward, I spent nearly twenty years abroad. At my definite return to Stockholm, in 2009, I had already "converted" to digital photography. This brought with it a loosening of technical restrictions that suited an aging photographer.

The pictures taken during those early retirement years will most probably represent my last photographic outburst, explained by career pressure subsiding and leaving space for what remains of vitality when still being a "young" retiree.

















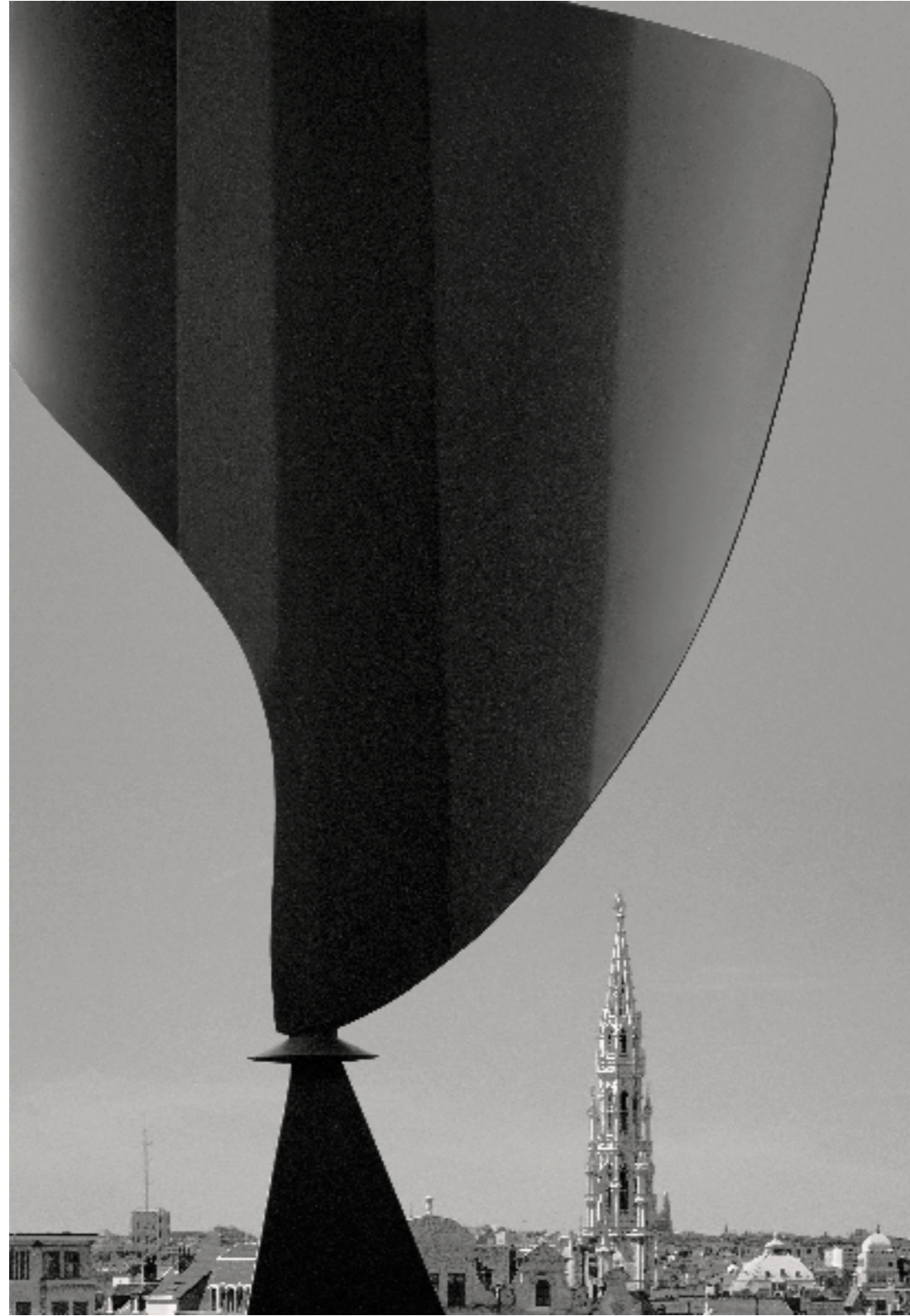












6 Brussels

When I first arrived in Brussels, I was having difficulties in “reading” the city. The first pictures taken were rather eclectic, representing more or less “snapshots” of the town and its surroundings, shot whilst ambling through the centre or venturing farther out on weekends to let off steam from heavy working weeks.

But, gradually, I began to see Brussels with new eyes and to get an understanding of its somewhat peculiar apparition: a curious mixture of the sublime and the quixotic, which seemed to mirror my own personality.

So I started exploring the city with increasing purpose, documenting sights of particular interest to me.

During my stay in the city, I began also to collect vintage cameras, which I always tried to put to good use. To mention a few: several Graflexes, two Toyo View Cameras, small and large, and a Hartblei/Kiew Hasselblad copy. They all rose to the occasion, I am glad to say.

















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www.emsvision.com
emsemil@gmail.com

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En ängel utan ansikte omfamnade mig
och viskade genom hela kroppen:
"Skäms inte för att du är människa, var stolt!
Inne i dig öppnar sig valv bakom valv oändligt.
Du blir aldrig färdig, och det är som det skall."

An angel without face embraced me
and a whisper made my body tremble:
"Don't be ashamed that you are human, be proud!
Vault after vault opens endlessly within you.
You will never be complete, that's how it's meant to be."

Tomas Tranströmer, *Romanska bågar*