

A photograph of a residential yard, possibly in Sweden, showing a white door with a window, a trailer with a large object on it, and a shed. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Architecture & Retrenchment

Neoliberalization of the
Swedish Model across Aesthetics
and Space, 1968–1994

Helena Mattsson

BLOOMSBURY

ARCHITECTURE AND RETRENCHMENT

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To my mother

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PREFACE

In the face of the polarized positions and violent confrontations of the present moment—including clashes on matters of climate crisis, migration, housing shortage, and escalating economic and social inequality—the call for a politically and socially engaged architecture is pressing. But the role of architecture in societal change is far from obvious. While architecture clearly does not stand outside politics, its political complicity and contribution to societal change is not easy to pinpoint. This book results from my engagement with questions pertaining to architecture's changing social contract and the discipline's decreasing involvement in the creation of the common good. For many years, I have tried to think through the architecture-politics-society-complex together with colleagues, friends, and students within architecture and in fields such as history, anthropology, economic history, media studies, philosophy, and art. My ambition to understand how the discipline branches out and materializes ideas in relation to a physical reality has led me to view architecture in an expanded sense.

In returning to a number of late-twentieth-century sites within architecture—places and moments where alternatives were in fact put forward, debated, and superimposed—it is my hope that this book might contribute to knowledge about how architecture acts upon the world. The book does not shy away from describing the tangled character of these realities by deferring to more utopian accounts (even if such dreams were often present). In each example discussed, we witness a tug-of-war between different interests; the forces of change vary radically between the different cases. Instead of showcasing “good examples”—which tend to exclude the more complicated aspects of a project's realization—I rather attempt to locate points where a range of different actors and intentions became enmeshed, interacting in such a way as to *intervene in* and *shift* the processes that are already at work in the situation.

Architecture is central to a society's aesthetic sensibility, living environment, and systems of cultural representation; it motivates political decisions and takes part in processes of state formation through its interactions with laws, decision-making processes, and representation. The architects who were embedded within the developments discussed in this book did not have the possibility to stand outside that which transpired around them—as such, this account of their work offers a timely reminder that even today, the architecture discipline must be understood as always performing some form of “social support function.” *Architecture and Retrenchment* is thus a book for those who find themselves operating outside of the comfortable interior of the architecture discipline or those who are curious to explore the battlegrounds that surround that disciplinary interior.

The present publication stands in relation to *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* (the anthology that I edited in collaboration with Sven-Olov Wallenstein, 2010), which in part stemmed from a frustration with the limitations and path dependencies that dominated Swedish architectural history at that time. That book focused on one of the most mythologized and “heroic” events in the country’s architectural history: the advent of early modernism and the formation of the welfare state through the *Stockholmsutställningen* exhibition in 1930 and the manifesto *acceptera* from 1931. If the idealization of the Swedish model that occurred in the opening years of the twenty-first century demanded critical interrogation at that time, today we rather confront a situation whereby that model has, as the result of its restructuring, become unrecognizable: the neoliberal struggle for freedom turns out to have been accompanied by a neoconservative, populist, and authoritarian movement, which acts as its afterimage.

Architecture and Retrenchment is written from within this changed ideological landscape and its primary task is not to ask whether or not the Swedish model existed but, rather, to identify the various models (Swedish or otherwise) that were in operation in the field of architecture in the twentieth century. What was architecture’s role in the neoliberalization of Sweden? The transformations that occurred at the end of the twentieth century were as radical, in their own way, as those that occurred in the 1930s, and they form a history that Sweden shares with many other Western countries. How, the book asks, were the spatial and aesthetic articulations of a series of new social models respectively interwoven, resisted, or constructed? How did some models come to dominate and how did others become marginalized? I understand the historical processes described here as conflictual and replete with battles. As such, that which we now view as a process of neoliberalization may in fact in the future be understood to have led to something entirely different.

*

This book would not have been possible without collaborations. Most of the material has been presented and discussed in so many different contexts that it is impossible to trace all the important input I have received over the years. Together with Catharina Gabrielsson, I ran the research project *Architecture of Deregulations*, which has been an invaluable opportunity to develop ideas elaborated on in this book; I am grateful to Catharina for the countless stimulating discussions. Another cornerstone is my ongoing collaboration with Meike Schalk and Sara Brolund de Carvalho in *Action Archive*. Without their vision of architecture and participation, which encouraged me to reflect on the historiography, many silenced witnesses would never have started to speak. I also want to thank my colleague Jennifer Mack for her extraordinary capacity to see the big picture in the details. This book draws on first-hand experiences, and I would like to thank, among others, Gunilla Lundahl, Kerstin Kärnekull, and all the other members of BiG, and the architects Svante Berg and Ylva Larsson for their generous contributions.

Preface

I am grateful to everyone in the collaboration *Exploring Nordic Models of Architecture and Welfare* for the vivid perspectives on welfare far beyond the Nordic context, and especially I want to thank Thordis Arrhenius and Guttorm Ruud. Discussions with my Danish colleagues Heidi Svenningsen Kajita and Svava Riesto in our impromptu “solidarity group” have shed special light on the Nordic welfare model, and as a member of the advisory board for Spaces of Danish Welfare run by Kirsten Marie Raahauge I have been able to take part in a rewarding research environment.

Innumerable conversations and seminars with colleagues, students, and PhD students at KTH, Stockholm, have inspired me to take steps in directions not earlier explored. My special thanks go to Anders Bergström, Bojan Boric, Brady Burroughs, H  l  ne Frichot, Katja Grillner, Christina Pech, Helen Runting, and Erik Sigge for providing a rich intellectual climate. Ongoing conversations over many years have had an important impact on my thinking and especially I want to thank Sven-Olov Wallenstein, Reinhold Martin, Mary McLeod and Joan Ockman.

Many important conversations have been held in conjunction with lectures and presentations, and I wish to thank Tom Avermaete, Pier Vittorio Aureli, Petra Brouwer, Salomon Fausto, Janina Gosseye, Maros Krivy, Andres Kurg, Hilde Heynen, Mari Lending, and Tim Verlaan for providing such opportunities. I am grateful for a fellowship in 2018 at Architecture Criticism History (ATCH), University of Queensland, and the conversations with John Macarthur, Janina Gosseye, and Deborah van der Plaats. I also wish to thank Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen for her generosity in inviting me to a visiting fellowship at Yale in 2022, and Jenny Andersson and Orsi Husz for inviting me to join in the invaluable discussions in the network *Neoliberalism in the Nordics*. My warmest thanks go to friends and colleagues who have commented on parts of this book and provided important feedback: Irina Davidovici, Isabelle Doucet, Janina Gosseye, Jennifer Mack, Kristina Riegert, and Meike Schalk. I am thankful to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, whose generous sabbatical grant made it possible to finish the book. I also wish to thank the publishers, Bloomsbury, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, and Charlotte Merton and Helen Runting for being protectors of the English language in any and every situation.

Finally, my thanks are for Mattias Tyd  n, who has been my greatest inspiration, toughest critic, sharpest reader, and most loving partner.

INTRODUCTION: CONSTRUCTING THE SUPERMODEL

When the “the next supermodel” appeared on the cover of *The Economist* in February 2013, he was armed with a Viking helmet and a face ready for war, the message “Why the world should look at the Nordic countries” printed across his breast.¹ This cover story followed up on “The New Model: A Bit More Unequal, a Lot More Efficient,” a piece published in the magazine the year before.² Both articles conveyed the same message: the restructuring of the Nordic model of welfare had been, in comparison to other countries, *extraordinary* in terms of the speed and efficiency with which market mechanisms had been introduced. The narrative was clear: thanks to “an extensive overhaul of the welfare state, Sweden’s economy has been transformed in the two decades since its banking crisis.” The new model was thus presented as an example of “how to reform the public sector, making the state far more efficient and responsive”—to such an extent that, with reference to the standard market-based reform-package of the 1989 Washington Consensus, “Milton Friedman would be more at home in Stockholm than in Washington, DC.”³

Architecture played a pivotal role in the formation of the “supermodel” described above; entangled with market deregulations, the discipline helped to drive the emerging logics of financial speculation forward. The new model first reached full operating capacity following the bank crisis in the early 1990s, when Sweden’s overheated property market imploded, resulting in a slew of bankruptcies and shutdowns; architecture and building’s realpolitik had thereby ushered in a deep economic crisis that left Swedish society and welfare in flux.⁴ Once the cornerstone of the welfare state, architecture now played a decisive part in its demolition. How could architecture’s role have changed so dramatically? From a form of public investment under Keynesian politics (acting on the labor market and constituting a form of capital for the state), architecture became an asset for public and private investors. Today, we live in the aftermath of this shift: not only has architectural production almost entirely disassociated itself from social welfare, but the built environment itself has become deeply inscribed in the derivative market and is now to a large extent determined by acts of speculation performed in relation to the future value of a given “asset.”

Despite the radical nature of the sociopolitical changes witnessed in the early 1990s, which were as important as those that occurred in Sweden in the 1930s, this shift was not instantaneous: it was the result of processes that gradually transformed the welfare state from within, over a much longer period of time. Various state institutions, administrations, and bureaucratic systems all took part in these changes, which engaged

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most societal functions, including the discipline of architecture. This uneven process of gradual transformation not only affected policy making, economics, and forms of governing within the Swedish welfare state, it also—and perhaps more importantly—affected ways of thinking and what can be termed “a neoliberal reason.”⁵ In turn, this reorganization of notions of value and the common good established the grounds for the emergence of a new cultural and aesthetic landscape. This book investigates the redefinition of the relationship between architecture and society that occurred through this slow and gradual transformation of all sectors of society.

Thomas Piketty has demonstrated that, by the end of the twentieth century, inequality again began to drastically increase, a development he describes in terms of a “return” to the societal conditions of the period preceding the welfare state.⁶ In *The Asset Economy*, Lisa Adkins, Melinda Cooper, and Martijn Konings build on Piketty’s work in order to show that what we are experiencing today is not simply a return to the inequalities of the early 1930s, but the effects of a systemic change that has permeated the very fabric of social life.⁷ Today, the authors show, as a result of policy changes and institutional reconfigurations pursued since the 1980s, the ownership of assets generates more income than salaries. Furthermore, the “democratized asset ownership” (e.g., housing and real estate) that is made possible through loans and debt has ensured that buy-in to this system is not only a possibility for the richest but a reality for all citizens.⁸ With these developments in mind, this book contributes to existing knowledge about architecture’s role in the long and slow shift into neoliberalization, whereby resources and commodities became assets for future profits through processes of democratization, participation, and emancipation.

This is not, however, a book about architecture as an asset, viewed through the logics of today’s finance capitalism. Rather, it is an examination of how architecture was comprehended and used as a *resource* for neoliberalization—and deployed as such in acts of state retrenchment, privatization, and marketization. Through it, I revisit a conflictual landscape, which is redolent with contradictions and opposing forces, at a point when things were still in formation.⁹ This was a moment when movements and countermovements interacted with, and worked through, architecture; architecture was thus mobilized in the service of contradictory goals. This is a blurry and murky path to walk. The entanglements of architecture and neoliberalization, often embedded in phenomena associated with other ideological agendas, are not always easy to detect and have tended to attract less critical attention from scholars of these processes.¹⁰ Today, however, it is impossible to maintain that architecture stands outside the neoliberalization of the welfare state. Similarly, it must be acknowledged that the new welfare model which came to the fore in Sweden relied on state-led retrenchments and renewals, and a state-led neoliberalization of the built environment. As a result, this book dissects the reconstruction of the Swedish model of welfare from the perspective of architecture’s engagement in state affairs, showing that this engagement brought about wide-reaching effects that affected individuals, market actors, and civil society as a whole.

A growing body of literature exists which addresses questions of welfare in architectural history of the recent past,¹¹ and a number of works by younger scholars have examined

such histories in relation to the Swedish context.¹² Despite the increasing volume of research on the relation between architecture and neoliberalism, a gap still remains in the architectural historiography of the discipline's role in the neoliberalization of the welfare state and thus its capacity to change society.¹³ One reason for this gap might lie in the dominance that theories of architectural autonomy, often with a basis in art history, have exerted in defining canonical thinking about architectural history.¹⁴ A challenge thus lies in locating intertwined understandings of aesthetic and spatial practices and the architectural object, and particularly ways to refigure the latter in terms of a constellation of multiple, material, and immaterial forces. Therefore, the contemporary history outlined in *Architecture and Retrenchment* tries to expand the notion of "architecture" in order to understand, on the one hand, how the discipline became a resource (and potential asset) for several actors in steering the transformation of the welfare model, and, on the other, the ways in which architecture itself was affected by the shift. In this task, the book draws on earlier work such as *Architecture and the Welfare State* by Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, and employs concepts not only from architectural history and theory but also from welfare studies, economic history, and other related subject fields.¹⁵

Despite the fact that I address events that played out in Sweden (and particularly in Stockholm), the local context is treated as an inseparable part of broader international political, economic, and social geographies. What may seem unique about a given situation is, after all, often shared with sites far beyond the edges of a national context; as such, I chose to focus on the role that such situations play in materializing forces that are understood as being simultaneously local and global. Today, it is not possible to talk about the nation state as a determining factor without acknowledging its intersectional character, as something inextricably crossed by lines of class, gender, race, geography, climate, politics, materials, and social conditions. While the example I discuss *situate* the often abstract and generalized discourse of neoliberalism in particular spaces, they also hold a geographic relevance that extends beyond Sweden's borders. The structure of the book is, as a result, deliberately designed to combine detailed readings of local situations with both more theoretical and more general thematic discussions. Empirically rooted *sites* are interleaved with more discursive *themes*, which elaborate on concepts that I see as crucial to architecture's role in the societal transformations that are the focus of this book.

Mapping the Borderland

Architecture and Retrenchment can be read as an incomplete map of the borderlands where architecture and neoliberalism came together, structured around six particular sites of "tension and restructuring" between 1968 and 1994. The narrative takes its point of departure in the critique of the Swedish model in the late 1960s, exploring two perspectives—those of the activists and the private enterprise—in order to demonstrate how notions of exclusion and inequality became foundations for a

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critique of modern architecture and of the welfare state. Through a series of empirical inquiries into the domestic sphere (housing) and spaces for leisure (a multi-arena and cityscapes), domains central to the welfare model's regulation of private and common space, I show how architecture was understood as a tool for societal transformations through state retrenchments and concomitant reorganizations. Unfolding over time and in space, the sites that I engage with emerged from the midst of moments when concepts changed in their meaning and means and ends switched places. As such, it is only by means of a local excavation that one can reach the deep lines that connect these sites, at their most intimate microscale, with the national and even global macroscale shifts which gave rise to their formation.

By considering architecture in terms of a landscape containing diverse networks of things and affects, I hope to reveal perspectives that lie outside of the world of architects. Rather than sole protagonists, in this book architects instead form one category of agents among many, acting within a complex diagram of interests, agendas, regulations, and power structures. Here, my historiographical walks follow in the footsteps of Mary McLeod and her seminal 1989 text "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era," which elaborates on the notion that architecture's intersection with politics is twofold: as a production process, architecture is obviously tied into economy and politics, and as a cultural object, it is inseparable from its formal aspects.¹⁶ These dimensions of architecture are at times so deeply connected that they are impossible to distinguish, but at other times they are highly differentiated, independently activating very different worlds. Importantly, this book adds a third point of intersection between architecture and politics, expanding McLeod's twofold scheme to advance a view of architecture as not only a production process or cultural object, but also as a *discourse*.

This way of working requires shifting not only between different disciplinary networks but also between radically different scales. The book therefore drifts between the macroscale of economics and politics (regulations, policies, forms of governance) and the microscale of the subject and everyday life. This perspective also aligns with methods advanced by scholars of neoliberalism and the built environment who, like Jamie Peck, stress the value of connecting large-scale, abstract readings with "on the ground" specific situations—what Peck calls a "relational neoliberalization."¹⁷

Over the course of the 1980s and early 1990s, citizens were confronted with not only a series of societal transitions but also an administrative apparatus that had taken on a radically new form. Architecture was one of the infrastructures that supported these changes. To give an example, a 1993 memorandum from a meeting between inhabitants, the architects, and the Stockholm public housing company Familjebostäder (Family Housing) shifts the perspective from the macroscale of the "supermodel" to the very concrete effects of the same policy on a micro level. The document describes the final phase of an initially ambitious renovation project whereby architects, in line with the newly instigated Planning and Building Act, worked in close collaboration with the residents:

The basements storage is carelessly built [...] nothing is painted. All concrete and rubble remain. It can't be that we are supposed to clean ourselves. In the basement, the pile of faeces that was discovered in April was still there [in October] [...] Is there really no money for cockroach extermination in the one-room apartment? The rebuilding work is at a standstill due to this. [...] A few years ago the balconies fell down in Flemingsberg, were they on similar consoles as ours? The County Council has abandoned the project.¹⁸

This short report presciently identifies a number of the effects that followed in the wake of the crisis, including: inadequately realized and poorly built architectural projects; the abdication of cleaning responsibilities, which were instead devolved to the inhabitants themselves; internal divisions within public institutions and companies; and the withdrawal of those institutions and indeed the state itself. This was part of an active policy, advanced by the municipality together with the public housing companies, to transfer responsibility from the top to the bottom and thereby prepare inhabitants to take on the role of “property owners” in the coming sale of public housing (which was to turn some into millionaires and plunge others into lifelong debt).

I came across this memorandum in an archive of unsorted documents which had once belonged to the local district committee for the Stockholm suburb of Tensta, an institution that was dissolved during a subsequent period of restructuring. This discovery is rather indicative of the way in which the neoliberalization of the 1980s tended to erase its own tracks by moving things around: papers changed files and files were packed into boxes and then moved to new archives, where they were stacked on new shelves and catalogued differently. Archives constitute memory's infrastructure: the difficulty in locating the microhistories of Swedish neoliberalism indicate that a dilution of our collective memory occurred during this period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this erasure has tended to affect society's most vulnerable groups (those who, for instance, received benefits)—and these groups were deprived parts of their own histories as a result.

By returning to the sites where architecture became a locus of conflict and moments where overlapping ideologies, needs, and wishes met, this book attempts to retrieve a history that is, at the present moment, largely missing in action.¹⁹ In addressing material that lies outside of the established archives of architectural history, architectural references and art history perspectives have at times been required to take a back seat in this inquiry. This does not mean that architecture has been allocated a secondary role: to the contrary, architecture is my focus, even if I understand the discipline as operating within an “expanded field” wherein overlaps and connections can be traced between the aesthetic, spatial, and linguistic qualities of architecture and the categories of the social, the economic, and the political. The category “architecture” is impossible to define; it is under continuous transformations and takes on a variety of cultural meanings. Architecture is here addressed as an *assemblage* that is made up of material and immaterial components (e.g., discourses, drawings, models, bricks, concrete, architects, building workers, politicians, and planners),²⁰ and each site that I address is

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treated as a rich source of not only material but also narrative accounts—as a result, witness seminars and other oral history methods have also been employed in the task of constructing particular archives.²¹

If we understand these sites as the battlegrounds that they once were, the word “retrenchment”—a word, foregrounded in the title of the present work, generally understood as a synonym for austerity, layoff, or downsizing—takes on new meanings and associations. My decision to use “retrenchment” also consciously alludes to the military meaning of the term, which describes the creation of defensible structures inside, or behind, a fortification. Through the architecture discipline’s engagements in neoliberalization, new assemblages (movements and countermovements) and retrenchments emerged, whereby space and material were articulated anew—and as the Swedish Model was “remodeled,” architecture itself was also re-constructed. *Architecture and Retrenchment* thus plays upon the conceptual ambiguity of the term “retrenchment” to invoke the multifarious ways that architecture has actively constructed (and perhaps even fortified) new worlds and new subjectivities that have both collaborated in and resisted neoliberalization. Beyond engaging in acts that *defended* architecture through expressions of resistance, some of the architectural protagonists addressed in this book also created new constructions that managed to traverse and at times even offer lines of escape beyond existing disciplinary fortifications.

Postmodernism can be understood as one such “retrenchment” in the battleground that is architecture’s disciplinary interior. The term “postmodernism” does not, however, play a prominent role in this book; while I do not avoid the concept, it is discussed only when invoked in the material that is being examined; such occasions are, however, rare—other concepts turn out to be more active in the debates and archives addressed here. There is another reason for my reluctance to make postmodernism a dominant perspective. In favoring other spaces, sources, and archives in the writing of this work, I found that the void created by postmodernism’s absence left room for other interpretations. As Reinhold Martin argues, to critically speak of a neoliberal architecture, we need to “denaturalize” categorized periods, such as “modern architecture,” and move away from architecture as a “timeless invariant.” Instead, we must study how neoliberalism reshapes architecture as a regime of cultural significance.²² In line with this thinking, this book foregrounds four alternative themes where concepts and techniques take on new meanings: corporatism, the code, human capital, and emancipation. Corporatism and the (building) code were, for example, systemic and legally instigated infrastructures that played crucial roles in the creation of a democratic, universalist society and were deeply involved with the architecture. Whilst only two of many infrastructures that were part of the neoliberalizations of the 1980s, in the material discussed in this book these stand out as areas where radical shifts took place. The themes of human capital and emancipation, in contrast, demonstrate two of the shifts in mentality that accompanied neoliberalization.

The Welfare Model: The Middle Way

To speak of existing social and political structures in terms of “models” is to enter a fraught territory from the outset—this terminology brings with it a range of problems. Whether it takes the form of a physical architecture model, a scientific description, or a mathematical model, a “model” generally constitutes an abstract image of an existing reality or a clear set of instructions regarding how a given operation shall be undertaken. Similarly, the idea of a Nordic, Scandinavian, or Swedish model (the nomenclature changes) implies the existence of a static model of governance that is not subject to change. This is, of course, not the reality of the matter. The idea of a singular Swedish model has created a highly simplified understanding of how Swedish society has functioned and been governed, which in turn has led to idealization on one hand and demonization on the other. Acknowledging this issue, recent scholarship has sought to problematize and dissolve existing static understandings of the Swedish model.²³ The aim of writing a more complex and open history has, further, sought to challenge the tendency to focus on the dominant influence exerted by the Social Democrat Party in order to make room for other actors (and conflicts) to take the stage.

In historical accounts of the twentieth-century Swedish model of welfare—often referred to as *Folkhemmet* (The People’s Home)²⁴—a standard reference has been the North American journalist Marquis Childs’s book *Sweden: The Middle Way*, which noted the strength of a system capable of balancing tensions between different interests.²⁵ The book was written after a visit to the 1930 *Stockholmsutställningen* (The Stockholm Exhibition, an event which introduced modern architecture and design in a Swedish context) and a period of study of the Swedish housing and consumer cooperative movements. Childs’s description of Sweden as pursuing a “middle way” between extreme individualism and collectivism, and between communism and capitalism, was widely disseminated and came to form the characteristic image of Sweden already in the 1930s. The formation of the model can, however, also be understood as part of a broader formation of a Nordic modernity and a response to the Great Depression. In the Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland), the Social Democratic and Farmers’ parties (of which the Social Democrats were the largest party) formed coalitions in order to deal with the economic crises of the 1930s.

This “politics of crisis” had its basis in broad political agreements and negotiations between the trade unions and private corporations, and emerging social reforms such as *bostadsociala utredningen* (The Report on the Social Condition of Housing), which lay the groundwork for the coming post-war housing policy.²⁶ In this, Thomas Piketty argues, Sweden offers an “astonishing example” of the importance of mass mobilization and sociopolitical processes in the transformation of inequality regimes—as he puts it, “Once the most restrictive of ownership societies, Sweden became easily the most egalitarian of social democracies.”²⁷ Architecture was from the start deeply involved in this transformation of inequality. The four pillars of the welfare state—education, healthcare, housing, and social security—relied on qualitative architectural organizations of material and social reality. To deliver this, after the Second World War large-scale

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state institutions constructed an infrastructure of architectural design and production that included *Bostadsstyrelsen* (The Swedish Housing Board), *Svensk Byggnorm* (Swedish Building Codes), *Byggnadsstyrelsen* (The National Board of Public Building), *Statens Planverk* (Swedish National Board of Urban Planning), and *Bostadsdepartementet* (The Ministry of Housing).²⁸

The “first” Swedish welfare state model was, however, short-lived, taking form in the 1930s, only being implemented after the war, and coming to an end in the 1980s. Traditionally, this model has been described as comprising of three elements.²⁹ The first was a “well-functioning” labor market, characterized by a rare use of strikes and salary levels that were decided by way of collective bargaining, through negotiations between the employer and the union (in the spirit of *Saltsjöbadsavtalet*—the Saltsjöbaden agreement).³⁰ The second was a large, tax-funded, universal welfare system, the technologies of which were directed at the population as a whole and not selected groups. This system came to characterize housing politics and construction for the entire postwar period. The third element was a corporatist political system (to which an entire chapter of the present volume is dedicated), which is often referred to in terms of *Harpsunddemokratien*, after the name of the large State-owned manor where industrialists, the union movement, and the organizations of civil society met at least once a year.

Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s oft-cited analysis of different welfare regimes stresses “decommodification” as a distinguishing feature of the Scandinavian welfare model, whereby decommodification is defined as “the degree to which [the regimes] permit people to make their standards independent of pure market forces,” and in this way “social rights diminish citizens’ status as “commodities.”³¹ It is, however, possible to question the degree to which Sweden has been characterized by “decommodification.” When the Social Democrats came to power in 1932, the (then) finance minister Ernst Wigforss introduced a crisis-oriented policy platform which maintained strong similarities to that advanced by John Maynard Keynes in its emphasis on controlling the economy through central planning via “counter-cyclical” policies.³² In this way, social democracy developed a way to balance socialist and liberal politics, whereby private consumption and entrepreneurialism were supported. Elsewhere, I have outlined how already in the 1930s, in line with the introduction of functionalism, architecture and design were clearly addressed as strategies for producing the consumer: the citizen should be a consumer aligned with a market and in this way they were made governable.³³ The central role that the individual was allocated as a consumer in fact contradicts the decommodification thesis.³⁴

Notions of exclusion and inequality were not only starting points for the critique of the welfare state model and its architecture in the 1960s: these concepts were also part of the model’s construction and were present from the start. The empowerment of the labor movement was accompanied by a host of exclusions predicated on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, or other categorizations.³⁵ The strong housing and consumer cooperative movements, together with the corporatist system, opened up for voices otherwise not represented in the political democratic system; however, the actual effects of these movements can be debated—as we will see, it is, for instance, quite obvious that

they did not give voice to important initiatives occurring within the field of architecture. The welfare model that aspired to be universal—to account for *everyone*—was, as it turned out, neither equal nor equitable. Instead, it was plagued by a “gender conflict” which stemmed from the contradictions of a double movement whereby on one hand, democratization and industrialization in the postwar period pushed women into the workplace and the public sphere, and on the other hand, the segregation that was built into the existing gender order held back these tendencies.³⁶

This inherent tension, which limited the development of society and architecture, forms a red thread that links many of the sites addressed in this book. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the social contract of the welfare state, which managed to contain and incorporate labor movements in various stages of revolt, segregated not only on the basis of gender but also of race and ethnicity (Site 6).³⁷ Although conceived in the 1930s, the prerequisite for the construction of the Swedish model in the postwar period lay in the high volume of migrant workers arriving in Sweden: men who worked primarily in factories, and women who worked in factories, healthcare, cleaning, and domestic services. These workers kept an ethnically divided labor market afloat. During the 1970s, though, labor immigration became increasingly regulated and another group entered the workforce in the form of non-immigrant women (Site 3: The Collective House).

Neoliberalization and Retrenchments: The Third Way

The processes of deregulation, privatization, and neoliberalism are not possible to understand in terms of the position of political parties on a traditional left-right spectrum, even though most of the dramatic transformations in Sweden were made under a Conservative government in the early 1990s. Unlike most countries in the Western world, Sweden pursued an expansive Keynesian economic policy during the crisis of the 1970s. When the Social Democrat government lost power in 1976, the same support policy was continued under the Conservative government. It was first when the Social Democrats came back into power in 1982 and introduced a “Third Way” policy characterized by deregulation and neoliberalization that the political strategy radically changed. The Minister of Finance Kjell-Olof Feldt started the “politics of crisis” with a devaluation of Swedish currency that triggered a financial recession. After the devaluation, the high foreign debt level increased costs for the state and increased liquidity for businesses through exports; this transfer of capital to the private sector was the beginning of a more expansive transformation of Sweden.

After a long period of resistance from politicians, the deregulation of the Swedish credit market finally happened on November 21, 1985. Echoing the experience of most other Western countries, this may well be the most important monetary policy decision made in Sweden during the postwar period. It meant that the collateral requirements placed on banks were reduced, which in turn led to real estate and other assets such as shares being mortgaged at a higher value than previously. The Swedish Central Bank’s (Riksbanken) control mechanisms had been removed, and individual banks could

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lend large sums to financial institutions, companies, and households. Speculation and borrowing hysteria ensued. In 1986, Sweden had left the crisis years behind—as a result, Feldt received much praise for his Third Way. Unemployment was low, purchasing power was high, and Swedish society seemed to flourish again, even if this prosperity turned out to be short-lived. The deregulation of the credit market was, however, also heavily criticized both at the time that it occurred and afterward; Ingvar Carlsson, deputy prime minister in the period 1982–6, has called the deregulations a “revolution” that was staged behind his back.³⁸ Mortgages and property prices increased rapidly during these years; commercial properties could be mortgaged for up to 100 percent of their value. The large amount of capital on the market created extreme growth in the value of real estate. The deepest recession since the interwar years was abruptly triggered when investors canceled payments on loans in the early 1990s and the Swedish Central Bank increased the interest rate to 500 percent for a short period in 1991.³⁹ However, this crisis was itself relatively short-lived and by 1994, it was over.

Obviously, the real estate and building market played a central role in Swedish economic development during the 1980s and 1990s. Together with shares, properties were the main objects of speculation and the construction industry rapidly “overheated” in the face of high land prices, a construction boom, and strong demand for labor. The housing market and housing policy were also heavily transformed during the 1980s, both as a result of the criticism directed at the Million Program and attempts to cater for demand for commercial properties and offices for the booming private service sector (itself a product of the economic policy of the time).⁴⁰ But it was not only private actors that carried out major projects during the 1980s: the municipalities were also key players. The City of Stockholm initiated a number of major housing projects during the 1980s, two of which are discussed in this book: Södra Stationsområdet (1986–91) and the Stockholm Globe City (1985–9).⁴¹

In most historical narratives, the transformation of the Swedish model at the end of the twentieth century is not labeled as a result of “neoliberalism.” The standard accounts are, however, now being questioned on this point, with recent scholarship describing neoliberalism as a long and conflictual process that is not primarily economic but rather systemic.⁴² David Harvey has described Sweden as an example of “circumscribed neoliberalization,” given that it avoided the dramatic increases in inequality witnessed in the United States or the United Kingdom.⁴³ This may well be true, but if neoliberalization is viewed as a shift to a new rationality that is based on competition, free choice, and entrepreneurship (this would be a view which aligns with the analysis conducted by Wendy Brown),⁴⁴ then Sweden was one of the most progressive neoliberal countries, effectively paving the way in the question of how to reorganize the cornerstones of the earlier welfare state in the form of education, healthcare, and housing. The country has been described as moving from one extreme to another; from the strikes and employee funds of the 1970s to experiments in privatization of a scope unparalleled in the Western world.⁴⁵

This book addresses the Swedish “neoliberal turn” in terms of a sequence of changes that, while they operated within and through existing policies and networks, ushered in

a new political economy. The relationships between the Third Way and the knowledge economy outlined by the historian Jenny Andersson in *The Library and the Workshop* is a central theoretical reference here. Andersson argues that the Third Way “contains a distinct interventionism” that goes beyond the former social democracy in order to infiltrate the social sphere, whereby the object of regulation is not the economy but the capital that is located within the worker (and the citizen).⁴⁶ Under such a paradigm, goods that were historically considered to be non-economic, such as creativity and curiosity, were turned into new forms of capital; as she puts it: “In the Third Way, social democracy’s critique of capitalism has been replaced by a theory of capital, by a theory of how to create value in the knowledge economy.”⁴⁷

Three perspectives on the neoliberal project frame the investigations outlined in this book. First, the neoliberal turn is comprehended as a systemic shift, not only in economic or political terms but also in social and even mental ones—it plays out through the introduction of a “neoliberal reason.”⁴⁸ Second, I draw on scholars who prefer to use the concept of neoliberalization (over neoliberalism), which I understand as an uneven and contradictory process, the local variations of which are constructed by affirmations and resistances that occur on the ground. This position exists in opposition to the use of “neoliberalism” as an ideal and abstract concept relating to a fixed state of being. Third, in line with Michel Foucault’s thinking, I relate neoliberalization to a “crisis of governmentality” and to *the biopolitical* in architecture.⁴⁹ Through the term “governmentality” (which addresses the “conduct of conduct,” or the way in which individuals, groups, and institutions exercise power over one another), we can understand power as being *both* subjugating *and* emancipating, and this perspective forms a thread that runs throughout the chapters of this book: neoliberalization must be understood as *both* enabling certain freedoms *and* instilling particular limitations. Foucault’s understanding of the neoliberal as “not identified with laissez-faire, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity and intervention” is furthermore essential to the argument that I will go on to make: namely, that architecture was fully involved, along with other forces, in the very process of neoliberalization.⁵⁰ The architecture assemblage has contributed to both continuation and change; it has acted as an institution supporting path-dependency and as a site for the radical transformation of thinking and acting in areas such as policy, the social field, consumerism, and housing.

I have already briefly discussed the concept of “retrenchment,” but I will shortly return to it. The term came into use in comparative welfare state research in the late 1980s, and was used primarily in relation to the cutbacks proposed by the Thatcher and Reagan regimes in and around the 1980s, even if they were not fully realized to the magnitude envisaged.⁵¹ The debates around retrenchment intensified in the 1990s with the publication of Paul Pierson’s *Dismantling the Welfare State?*, which argued for welfare state “resilience” as an explanation for the lack of large retrenchments.⁵² One critique of the concept of retrenchment is that it downplays the role of neoliberalization: by confining itself primarily to economic aspects, it offers a relatively limited perspective that precludes the analysis of major systemic shifts across social, cultural, and ideological registers. I wanted to provide this background, even though it is not the aim of this book

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to draw on these theories. My intention here is rather to borrow the concept, with the purpose of employing it within the field of architecture, in terms of a state retrenchment but also, and mainly, as a built (and unbuilt) retrenchment. In many cases, these aspects intermingle—for example, in an urban planning discussion, I note the way in which the limited sphere of action afforded to the City of Stockholm Planning Office in an increasingly market-dominated planning system was met with the use of postmodern architecture and aesthetic regulations as a way to regain power (Site 5).

State retrenchments are in some way present in most of the sites addressed in the book (the exceptions being the first two sites, which take place around 1968), wherein they create events that contribute to the construction of both architecture and the state/society. I understand the *site* as constituting several different things at once: it is an architectural assemblage (a constellation of material and non-material agents) and a “statification” (referencing Foucault’s notion of the state as a series of practices); it is also a set of transactions that modify or change “sources of finance, modes of investment, decision-making centres, forms and types of control.”⁵³ The use of assemblage and statification supports the conceptual overlap between architecture and state formation. When looking into each site, the act of retrenchment (both as cutback and as counter-structure) is part of a given statification as much as it is part of the construction of situated, everyday life. This doubled nature reflects architecture’s ability to act at a broad range of scales.

Deregulations, Reregulations

The neoliberalization of the 1980s is often described in terms of a dominant character of *deregulation*, but what were the deregulations that are actually being referred to in such accounts? For one, it is important to note that deregulations often lay the groundwork for the introduction of new regulations at a later time—for this reason, it is more reasonable to speak in terms of *reregulations*. In Jamie Peck’s understanding of neoliberalization as an uneven process, the notion of initial “roll-back” phases, or deregulatory processes, are followed by constructive “roll-out” phases, which can also be called “reregulations.”⁵⁴ I will confine the coming discussion of de- and reregulation in this book to four particular aspects of the process, namely: the de- and reregulation of the legal frameworks that protected the public sector (and “the public good”) from the effects of market forces; economic deregulation; aesthetic reregulation; and, finally, the reregulation of the building codes.⁵⁵ All of these aspects are addressed in the material investigated in this book, and all have, as we will see, pivotal significances for architecture. In the face of the dynamic nature of neoliberalization, it is not possible to separate these processes from one another—the cases discussed here demonstrate how economics, politics, aesthetics, and building regulations are all intertwined in the architectural assemblage of practice and discourse.

While “new public management” (NPM) first made its entrance into Sweden’s municipalities in the beginning of the 1980s, it wasn’t until the 1990s that this new

system of control broke through into mainstream usage.⁵⁶ An import from the business world, NPM was adopted in the public sector as a replacement for “progressive public administration” (PPA), with its clear opposition to the commercial interests and markets of the private sector.⁵⁷ PPA, which was meant to guarantee an effective public administration, relied on two basic conditions: first, that the public sector was radically different from the private sector and thus required different policy instruments; and second, that this form of governance should be regulated and protected in order to prevent corruption.⁵⁸ The implementation of NPM in the 1990s demanded that fundamental changes be made to the concept of “the common good,” the role of the individual, and the requirements of market actors. New faith was at this time being placed in the citizen as a responsible consumer, whose power could be exerted over private and commercial markets. This reorientation affected the earlier idea, popularized under the PPA paradigm, that the role of the public sector was to facilitate, to the extent that such a move was possible, the independence of the citizen from the market. Education, health care, and housing were three of the most crucial sectors to protect—these sectors were given similar importance in the transformation toward a new public management.

The other form of deregulation to be addressed here, economic deregulation, began in Sweden in the 1980s, eventually contributing to shifts that culminated in the economic crisis of the early 1990s (Epilogue). As mentioned earlier, the property bubble which resulted from this policy led to the worst economic crisis that Sweden would face in the entire postwar period, leading to a transfer of capital from the public sector to its private counterparts. This redistribution of capital exerted a noticeable influence on urban planning, whereby public actors like the City of Stockholm’s Planning Office found themselves occupying a weaker position in the planning process (Sites 4 and 5). A shift in mentality was taking place through new notions of work, leisure, and spatial organization, but also of space and organization more generally. These changes can be observed in the design and realization of a new multi-arena in Stockholm (Site 4).

The third and fourth aspects of deregulation are so deeply integrated that I will address them together: the formal and aesthetic aspects and the building code. The emergence of an aesthetic-regulatory-complex under neoliberalization was driven by a desire to emancipate architecture, and maybe foremost architects, from the alleged burdens of a normative modernism.⁵⁹ The postmodern discourse—which revolved around how to find new aesthetic and organizational frameworks—is here understood in relation to radically new economic conditions. The Swedish architectural discourse on postmodernism of the 1980s was characterized by a denial and repression of its own existence, or a “pomophobia” (postmodernism was seen as “American,” commercial, and superficial) and instead ideas about returning to the roots of modernism, a search for “neo-modernism” and a “new architecture” flourished.⁶⁰ In line with Reinhold Martin’s proposal that postmodernism’s withdrawal from political and social engagement increased its participation in networks of power, this book shows how Swedish architects’ (with few exceptions) avoidance of postmodernism paralleled an increasing engagement in new economic and political networks⁶¹ (Sites 4 and 5). The aesthetic reformulations were thus integrated with a critique of building regulations (and of the broader welfare

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state bureaucracy), which were targeted by architects and planners for the limitations that they supposedly imposed upon the possibilities of experimentation and variation. Methods of designing housing became controversial. Earlier modernist prioritizations of interior functionality and organization were questioned by those who stressed the value of the exterior space as a designed “room.” Socially oriented mass housing on the outskirts of town, delivered through projects that were designed from the inside out, was abandoned for the production of housing for an affluent middle class in the compact inner city, mostly through infill and renovation/rebuilding projects, which coincided with theories on “genius loci” (Norberg-Schulz), the use of historical elements, and deformations of the modernist object (often due to limited sites).⁶² The Stockholm City Planning Office employed postmodernist ideas both to encourage “city-likeness” in new development and to control the private sector’s increasing influence (Site 5). The Director of Swedish National Board for Urban Planning Lennart Holm accused the planning office of regulating architects against building from the inside outward, referring to the resulting “architectural drama” as a “masquerade and a panegyric over the loss of will suffered in the late 1970s.”⁶³

It is not, however, possible to equate postmodernism with a neoliberal turn. In the public discussion one can find very different arguments for enhancing the notion of variation and individualization, including neoliberal and anti-capitalist voices, and the arguments that converged to instigate a radical shift in architectural discourse were in themselves highly disparate. The deviation from modernism was, on one hand, seen as a subversive act directed at the capitalist consumer-oriented architecture of the suburbs, which was expendable in its repeated form, and on the other hand, the exterior and urban spaces, which were emphasized as belonging to citizens to such an extent that facades were treated as “walls” of these urban rooms. For more pragmatic economic reasons, politicians saw the diversified housing environment as a reaction to the repetitiveness of the neighborhoods that were built in the 1960s and thus as responses to the popular critique of the welfare state. In the overall call for the deregulation of the building sector, different actors (each with their own specific agenda and goals) also came together. Here, the architectural discipline and its aesthetic-spatial discourse became entangled with forces seeking profit and with conservative/(neo)liberal politicians, all of which in combination worked to fight state regulations.

The Long 1980s

This book starts in 1968 with the calls of urban activists for a new model of a “qualitative society,” which would replace the allegedly “quantitative” model of social democratic regulation, bureaucracy, and expertise. The welfare model was attacked from two directions—from the left in the 1960s and from the right in the 1980s. The first critique aimed for more equality and direct democracy, while the second was founded in a vision of a new economic order characterized by a decreased public sector and increased privatization, formulated in part as a call for individual “freedom of choice.” “The long

1980s” thus chart a movement from the activism of the late 1960s to the architectures of the Third Way policy of the 1980s and 1990s. The year 1994, which marks the endpoint of the book, is symbolic in relation to the breakthrough of a neoliberal rationality in Sweden. The Conservative government of Prime Minister Carl Bildt—which came to power in 1991 on the back of a neoliberal promise to bring about a “freedom-of-choice revolution in welfare politics”—had, over the course of the three-year crisis, managed to revoke the existing housing policy platform, dissolve the Ministry of Housing and reformulate the contract between the state and architecture.⁶⁴

When the economy regained its footing in record time in order to overcome this crisis, Sweden “awoke” to a new economic, cultural, and social landscape. The state and public policy instruments that had previously existed across the social sectors, including the built environment sector, were replaced with new investment and policy strategies whereby architecture, like many other fields, was treated as a social and economic asset.⁶⁵ In this way, a shift was initiated whereby Sweden became the site of not only one of the greatest public-private debt transfers to ever occur in a Western country but also one of the most radical increases in inequality.⁶⁶ This new position, which followed broader political shifts in Western Europe, was less characterized by concrete budget cuts than by the introduction of a new mentality, described by Anthony Giddens in his 1998 *The Third Way* in the following terms: “The restructuring of government should follow from the ecological principle of ‘getting more from less,’ understood not as downsizing but as improving delivered value.”⁶⁷ This was an attitude that was also underscored at a European level by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, prominent proponents of a model of government whereby “The state should not row, but steer: not so much control, as challenge.”⁶⁸

Not only is the present book framed by these two models, but importantly it also rejects the thesis that the 1968 movement paved the way for later neoliberal developments. Rather, I argue the opposite: neoliberalization was a conservative response to progressive societal critique (Site 1). The long 1980s was most often a period when a series of ideas were put in motion; movements and countermovements clashed and interacted. Concepts and ideologies floated around and were often as a result hard to pin down. And corporatist Sweden—with its politicians, business, unions, and interest organizations—rewrote the social contract in the framework of the new economy and policies of the Third Way. This contract, albeit in a more refined form, still governs the discipline of architecture to this day.

Moving through the Book

Six *sites of restructuring* are investigated in this book; these are presented in a loose chronological order—the events discussed are unfolded in time and thereby also overlapping. The first two sites demonstrate aspects of the critique that was levelled at the model, while the subsequent four sites show how neoliberalization took form through already existing institutions, materials, and actors. In each site, architecture plays the

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lead, although it is sometimes embedded in other disciplines and discourses. In each site, architecture is shown to have become a resource in a particular neoliberalization. I see the sites as fully interconnected in the larger nexus of societal transformation, but the book tries to unfold specific aspects in each chapter. The retrenchments (economic, social, ethical) performed by the public sector—the state and the municipality—and the concomitant responses to them construct a backbone that traverses the different narratives. Four *themes* which I see as being particularly active in the processes of transition—corporatism, human capital, code, and emancipation—punctuate this chronological narrative, vertically cutting across an otherwise horizontal reading of the sites.

Site 1, *The Model*, analyses urban actions in 1968 and the exhibition *Modellen* from the same year, describing these as early turning points in the discourse on the welfare state and noting the way in which these events articulated a social critique of regulations and bureaucracy. These works questioned the Swedish model, but they also provided models for the creation of a society by future generations—a promise which the 1968 generation never fulfilled. Through architectural experiences, the “system” was supposed to break and take new directions.

The second site, *The Suburb*, outlines the dark horizon against which the actions discussed in Site 1 played out, demonstrating how architecture and urbanism became targets in the general accusation of the social democratic welfare state government. This site highlights the importance of other actors in the corporatist Swedish system, who today are often hidden in the records. Furthermore, the role played by emancipatory forces stemming from the environmental movement and women’s movement are also analyzed.

Picking up on a concept introduced in the preceding site, the first theme—Corporatism—outlines an understanding of architecture as negotiation, dissecting the role of the large-scale architectural project in a corporatist decision-making process involving public, private, and civil actors. Here, I discuss the limits and possibilities embedded in the corporatist system, including the growing emancipatory forces such as feminism and environmental movement which increasingly demanded to be heard.

Site 3, *The Collective House*, demonstrates how the first wave of collective housing developed in the 1930s only to collapse in the financial crises of the 1970s, and how a second wave took form in the 1980s, materializing a refigured idea of social reproduction and the distribution of labor. I outline how the feminist group *Bo i Gemenskap* developed a new format for living (and building) in collaboration with developers in the 1990s; the deregulation discourse here plays out in the feminist movement as an act of emancipation.

Following up on discussions in previous chapters, *Human Capital* elaborates on the theme’s relation to architecture in the 1980s through Third Way politics. In this era, growth was understood as essentially being driven by innovation, knowledge, curiosity, and creativity and the chapter elaborates on how a “capitalization” of the social domain and the production of architectural spaces are imbricated.

Site 4 sets out a study of the multi-arena Stockholm Globe Arena in the 1980s, from its planning to its use. This site dissects the planning processes leading up to spatial

re-articulations of the public good, overlapping leisure, work, and consumerism. The project saw the creation of new economic networks (public-private partnerships) wherein land became a commodity to trade for the City of Stockholm planning office, and the chapter shows how the architects, and the architecture, became the driving force in this transformation.

Starting with the building code as a practice and a project in continuous flux, the third theme, *The Code*, discusses how regulations interlace the micro and macro-scale in order to both control the building process and arrange everyday life. The relations between the code and the law demonstrate how two levels of decision making—the spatio-aesthetic and the economic-political—overlap. This chapter also traces the transition from prescriptive to performance-based building codes, following up on discussions raised in *The Collective House* and *The Globe Arena*.

Site 5, *The Postmodern Housing Area*, investigates the processes of de- and reregulation in the Södra Station neighborhood in inner-city Stockholm. Taking the formation of welfare state housing in the 1930s as a backdrop, this chapter investigates the effects of new performance-based building codes in relation to the use of postmodernism in architectural theory. It is shown that in parallel with the emerging codes, new restrictions and programs influenced by postmodernism began to regulate the public sphere and the planning process.

The last theme, *Emancipation*, tries to understand a series of liberatory forces that exerted crucial impacts on the very notion of architecture through their re-articulation of the relationships between civil society and the state. This chapter shows how the feminist and environmental movements in architecture were crucial, not only in the architectural discourse on postmodernism of the 1980s, but also for the development of techniques relating architecture to the forces stemming from the market. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's discussion of a "triple movement," these emancipatory forces are, I reveal, deeply related to macro-economic matters.

Site 6, *The Renewal*, returns to discussions from previous chapters in order to analyze the "community building" and participatory planning projects initiated by the City of Stockholm in the suburb of Tensta. It demonstrates how ideas from the civil protests of the 1970s were transferred into the sphere of new public management in the 1990s. Contrary to the intentions of these projects, the chapter shows how the discourse on participation contributed to a policy of discrimination and public retrenchment.

The Epilogue, *The Elephant & Castle*, elaborates on the pivotal crises of the 1990s and its effects on our contemporary situation. This chapter also gives a summary of the main topics addressed in the book.