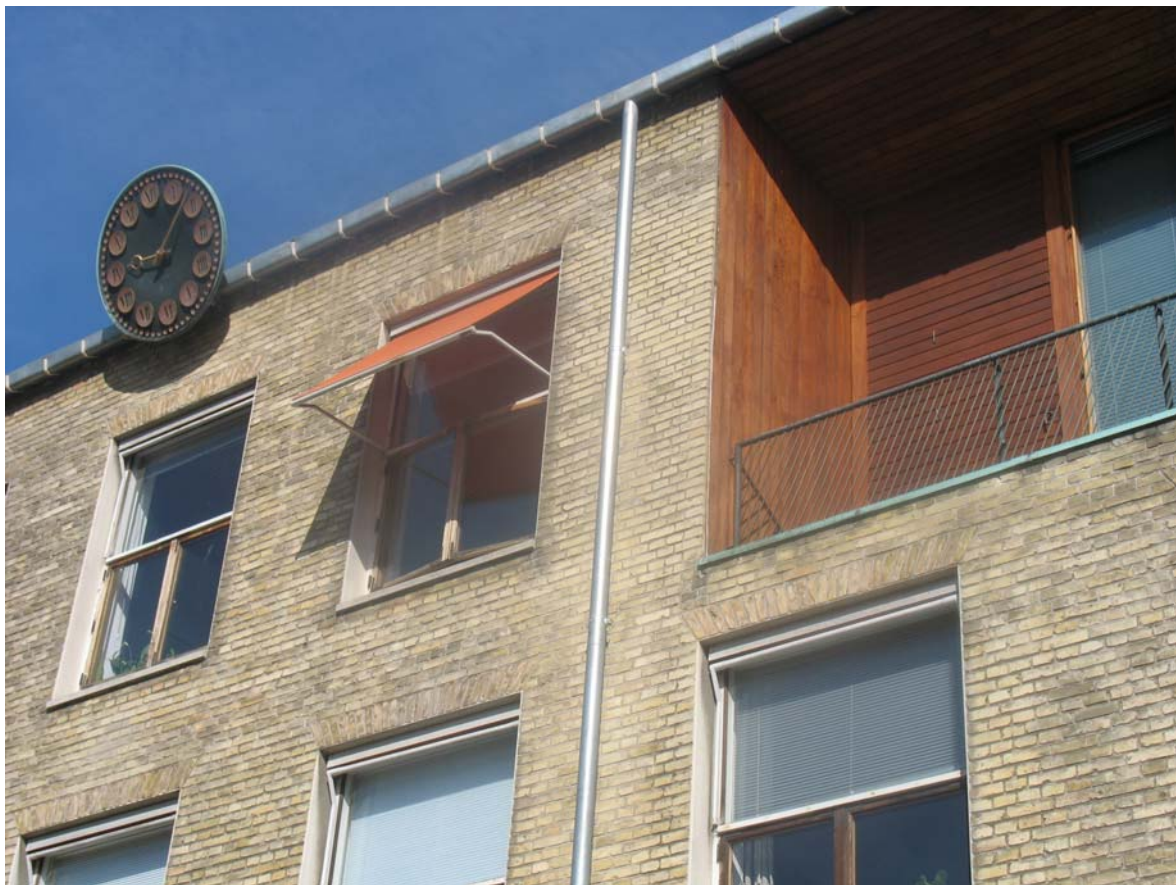


The radical in the ordinary

This paper raises two basic questions as its central point: How can architects combine the plain and ordinary with the radical and monumental? And in this respect, can you be monumental and yet still be empathetic and contextual?

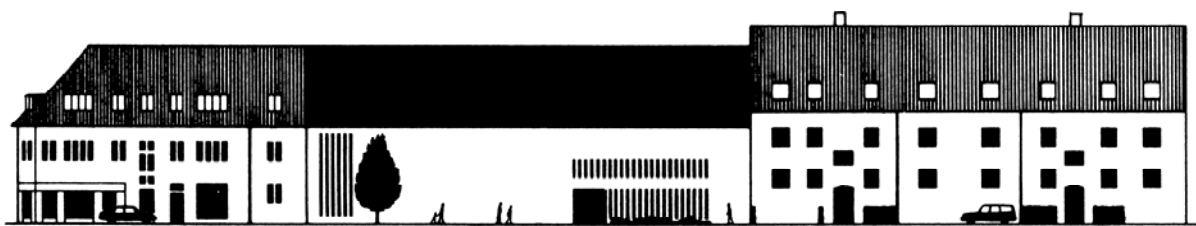
From a quick journey through some key monuments in Danish pre-modern architecture, the paper concentrates on two Danish post-war examples in which a common building type is combined with a quiet but precise monumentality.

The first example is the Copenhagen County building (today the Danish Red Cross), designed during the Second World War but built in 1953. This building is almost ‘insistently ordinary’, with a tight budget and lack of building materials at the time of its conception leaving their mark.



The Copenhagen County building was designed by the architects Poul Ernst Hoff and Bennet Windinge, who have been important innovators in the regionally-based post-war building tradition. The building is a straight long-house with a gable roof but with some distinctive refinements in the yellow brickwork and in other details, which make it rise above the general standard. Insistingly common but yet quite uncommon so to speak.

The second building the paper presents is a little church, Søbormagle Church, designed by Holger Jensen in 1964. Søbormagle Church is a rare example of what I would call ‘radical ordinary’, in which a plain yellow brick building is refined with features which are closer to industrial buildings than to church architecture and more familiar to the radical minimalism than to the local building tradition. The church is an infill building situated on a square surrounded by typical two storey apartment houses from the fifties. The building is a simple extension of the existing brick houses surrounding the square. With its strange making features, the church combines the anonymous outline with a compelling monumentality, which gives the gloomy suburban environment a more distinct character than before. With Søbormagle Church, Holger Jensen has made a heroic attempt to monumentalize the dull and ordinary.



You cannot reproduce the ordinary but need to tackle it sensibly, the paper argues. The two examples point out a path in which a specific building tradition is renewed by using common features as a key to radicalisation and monumentality, yet on a human scale.

Thomas Bo Jensen