

Dear Friends,

Geography, along the path of the World Atlas Maps and of other descriptions, ever since Mercator's days, has lent a space dimension to history itself. It has put to work a set of mnemonic devices which make up an itinerary aptly read by our imagination as an orderly articulation, as a sequence of rooms, whose inhabiting substance, well beyond the spur and flame of the moments now gone, carries on the episodes of the past, no matter how unwonted - Alexander's or Caesar's gesta for instance -, in ever present reverberations that transcend time. However, the breakthrough into the Farr North and the conquest of its fabulous geography failed to follow exactly in the steps of such a typically European frame of mind : its uses had less to do with an art of the memory, useful for lending a space dimension to the high winds of adventure. "Je vous félicite, messieurs, d'avoir aplati la terre", Voltaire said, from a different viewpoint, to the members of the Maupertuis-headed Academy expedition, that had reached Lapland, way back in 1736. That was an undeserved sarcasm, even though the measurements on the meridian had testified to some flattening of the would-be sphere, toward the Pole ; yet, that had less to do with flattening the ends of our world, and more, or course, with an increase in man's feeling of the world's unpredictable character. In its roundness and plenitude, this Earth of ours seems indeed to germinate inexhaustibly new horizons ; and the Farr North of the sphere is far from fostering memories of some exotic brand of escapism : by way of a splendid paradox, it has given rise to new suns of self-conscious



identities. Way back in the 17th century, the task of drawing a unitary map of France had necessarily implied a rigorous measurement of the meridian and this activity, extending over a century and a half had been marked, propitiatorily, by the starting point of a Hyperborean confrontation: l'Abbé Picard, the officious executive of such an enterprise, set out in 1635, as in a ritual pilgrimage of sorts, to the Danish island where the ruins of Tycho Brahé's Uraniborg Observatory were to be found. The very beginnings of this epic of scientific precision, accomplished under the aegis of the Roi Soleil were this being set under the power-inspiring chimera of a far Northern milestone.

This, of course, is but an episode, mostly metaphorical in its overtones; for the inexhaustible inventory of the treasures of this world, with its stars, its species, its chemical elements - does owe a lot indeed to the creative endeavours of the North, to such giants of taxinomies as Tycho Brahé, Linné or Berzelius. The same holds true about the arts: for what, if not a rich corpus, a wealth of active disponibilities, has brought us together here in Helsinki at this time, we artists and art critics from all over the world? Here we are together, having convened in the spirit of a deep esteem for the world's diversity, that solid, organic quality of a diversity that has made it possible to a number of amazingly efficient master-minds to assert their own achievements in an exemplary way: Alvar Aalto, for instance, first and foremost, if one were to mention only the most famous of the contemporary artists of this nation, to whom we are now paying homage, in the very heart of her home landscape, the home of such ineffable and severe beauties.

It is a homeland that has truly become, what I would make bold to term now, a privileged territory of communication, in



the most unrestrictive and no less responsible sense of the word, as becomes intrepid voyagers across icy seas. Tellingly, it was the merit of Helsinki-born A.E. Nordenskjöld, over one century ago, to have made the breakthrough of the North-East path which first opened the sea-link between the Arctic and the Pacific. Such a valiant confrontation with the Polar threats is symbolic of a vocation of undiminished relevance to the field of human relationships. Our Congress, as we all know, is to hold its most important meeting in a place equally illustrious and cordial, in the congenial vastness of the Finlandia palace, whose design seems very much evocative of that of an ice-breaker in the recent history of Europe. Alvar Aalto has anchored this splendidly quiet, immaculate vessel in the haven of a future which one would like to view as hope-inspiring; a future fused, as far as Finland is concerned, with an unflinching continuity of the past and an unshattered belief in the power and magic of the word. To voice it, to scan the epic runoes, the custom of time immemorial used to request (mostly in the farthest Northern regions), that the old tellers should touch their hands, interlocking fingers and swinging by turns toward each other, in the rhythm of the song: a vivid metaphor of communication, indissolubly, doggedly cast in the mould of obscurely vital rhythms, of a whole people's faithfulness to the irrepressible powers of the word.

An Iliad discovered alive in the 19th century, by a Schliemann whose lucky unearthings have reached the depth where poems are perpetually engendered, - for such would be the right way of describing Lönnrot's achievement in the collecting and editing of the Kalevala. Could one think of such an accomplishment without a firm belief in the power of unswervingly building the world by means of the word, by means of art? When forgetting only



three words of the magic runo necessary to the building of a ship, Väinämöinen had to go down into the realm of the dead to help complete their work. A fine example of scrupulousness in the achieving of any pursuit: such a bard and magus, the chief hero of the Kalevala could stand for a living symbol of our most ambitious virtues. No one has forgotten anything essential here, I feel sure; and I take this opportunity to pay a tribute of gratitude to our distinguished colleagues of the Finnish Section of the AICA who have done this work, above all to Jaako Lintinen and Erik Krauskopf.

The programme they have prepared will enable us to come into touch with a variety of manifestations likely to enlighten our understanding of this country's standard of civilization and cultural scenery. We shall be coming across the specific aspects of Finnish originality, not only in our natural confrontation of the arts, but also in their mutual interferences with traditional crafts and workmanship, with design, and, in a more special way, with the space formula offered by architecture; with its sober freshness, so robust and friendly, even when reflective, architecture is the pursuit of which, way back in 1938, Alvar Aalto was dreaming of as of a thing free from outer and formal constraints, apt "to take a most intense part in the great battle of life".

It is with such goals in view that we embark on the task of building new bridges between cultures, a pursuit we wish to further and illuminate throughout our debates here. Difficulties in such a process - some of them even serious, perhaps - could, of course, be expected. Yet, one would wish that the promise of hope held in this miracle season of the nightless nights would bridge in all gaps. The Summer of the North, so close to us these days, is indeed a fragile gift, which makes it all the more valuable. It is with intense feelings of joy that all of us are looking forward to

the fulfilling of the noblest wishes one could for such a week of high friendship. The time has come: and we all know that, by a happy coincidence, the word for time in Finnish sounds exactly like the acronym of our signum: AICA.

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