

## ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION 'POETICS OF URBAN ARCHITECTURE'<sup>1</sup>

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1. This text is based on a lecture delivered by I. Valjakka at METU Faculty of Architecture in April 1992, prior to the opening of the exhibition mentioned here.



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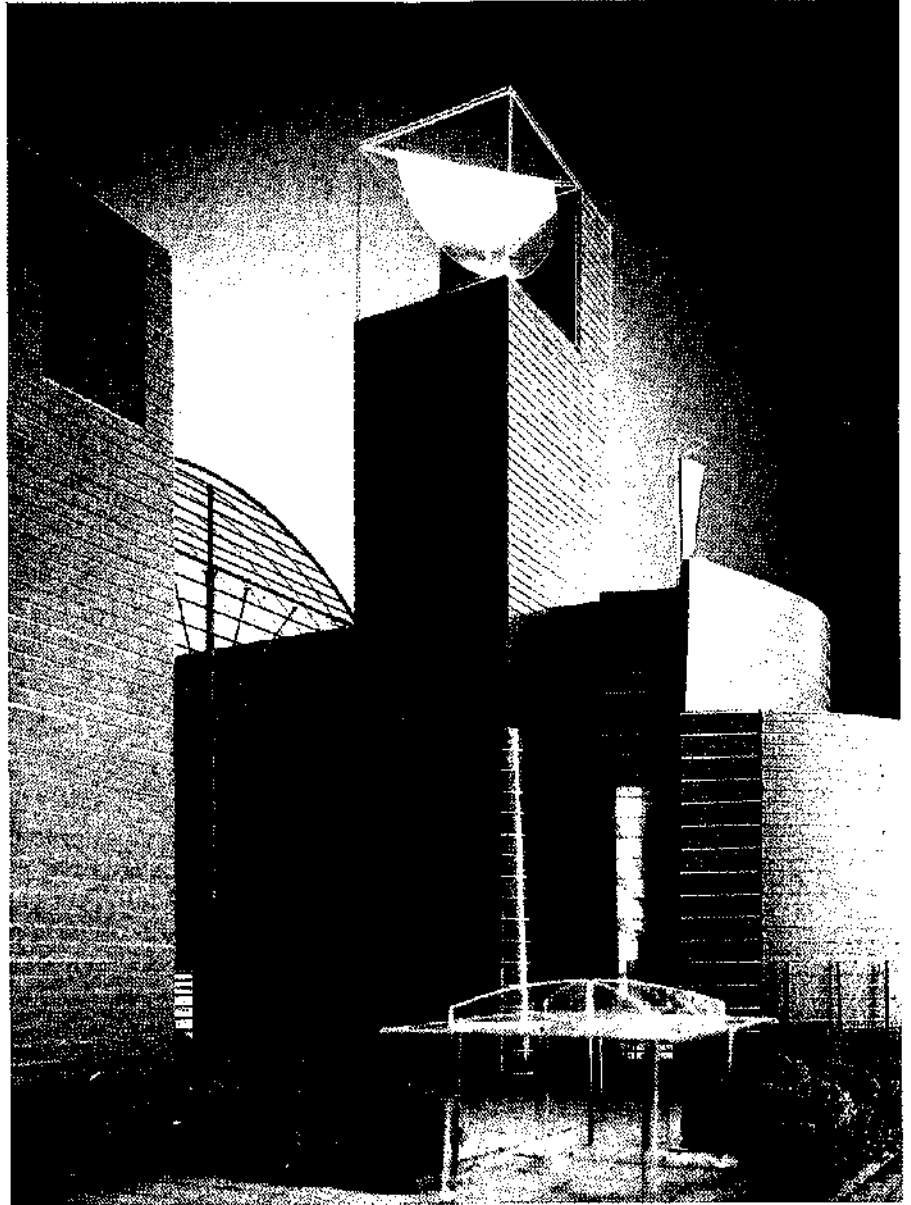
Our built heritage is a continuous process from past to future. It contains an ongoing story of life, the presence of which we live today, and to which we have to create a possibility for a future. As a practicing architect, I want to underline the meaning of life and the way of life as a starting point of architecture. Cities and buildings should be seen as results of life. The preservation of the quality of life within the new buildings and environments should simultaneously be the preservation of our heritage.

This is why the understanding of the layered structure of a balanced and healthy city environment, in terms of physical, social and psychological lives, is essential. While preserving the quality, we should see both buildings and city structures as springs of life and creativity. We have to understand that spiritual values in the cities are forming the base in raising the quality of our lives.

Basically architecture is solving everyday problems in a very practical manner. By the help of building, needs generated by life are being solved. One would think that it should not be too complicated a thing to do. However reality proves the opposite. It would be a natural thing to expect the increasing knowledge and know-how to produce increasingly better environments. But this is not so. On the contrary, the physical, psychological and social condition of the living environment seems to be further declining. On top of all, this seems to be the outcome of the will of the people, of the purposefully planned actions.

Our built environment is the mirror of the set of values of our society. It uncovers all that is positive within our set of values, but also all shortcomings and weaknesses. The materialistic, modernistic world-view has come to its end. It is clear that changes needed for redeveloping our environment require major changes in our values and goals. The world is now in an unparalleled period of transition. At the moment the situation in some parts of the world is chaotic, and it is impossible to forecast the future. However, there is a deep change that will

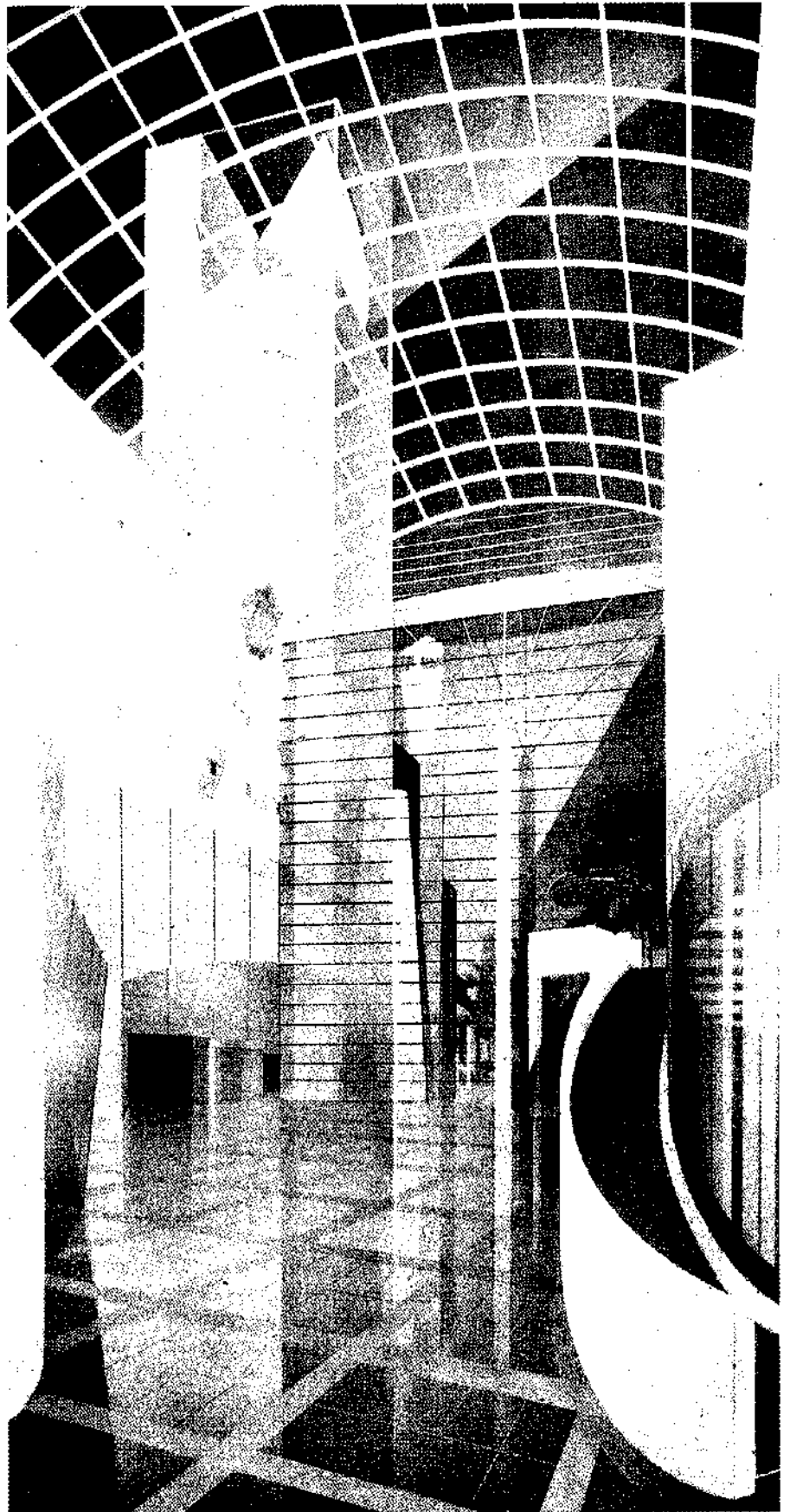
Finnish Broadcasting Company, 1991.



also reach the set of values in architecture. This century has been characterized by superficiality and the shattered portrait of the man. One can think, or at least in a positive way wish, for the next century to be the time of healing, of integration of the man and his world. This is for the reason that there hardly exists any other alternative for survival.

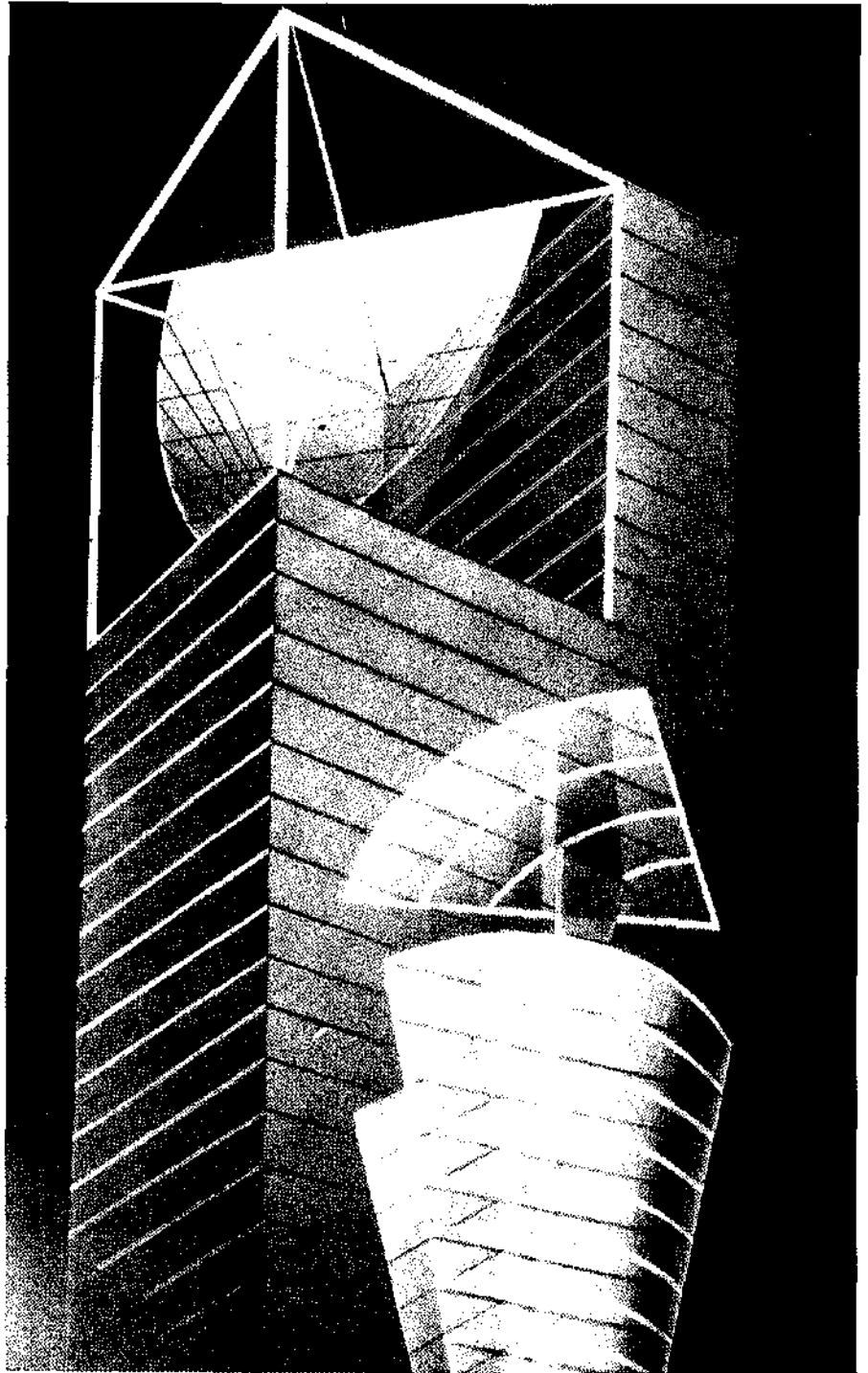
Why would't we architects, already now, declare ourselves as the integrators of our architecture and environment, and therefore create the prerequisites for the integration of the human being, for the integration of life, for rediscovering the richness and diversity of man?

The Odyssey of modernism is over. Diversity, the natural order of the world will return to architecture. One will, once again, appreciate the past and the necessity of continuity. Past will regain its importance as the spring of the present and future of architecture. Maybe now we can say history is over; long live history! Architecture should treat the man as a whole (it should correspond to the content of life, state of life); it should be born out of life. This requires sensitivity towards



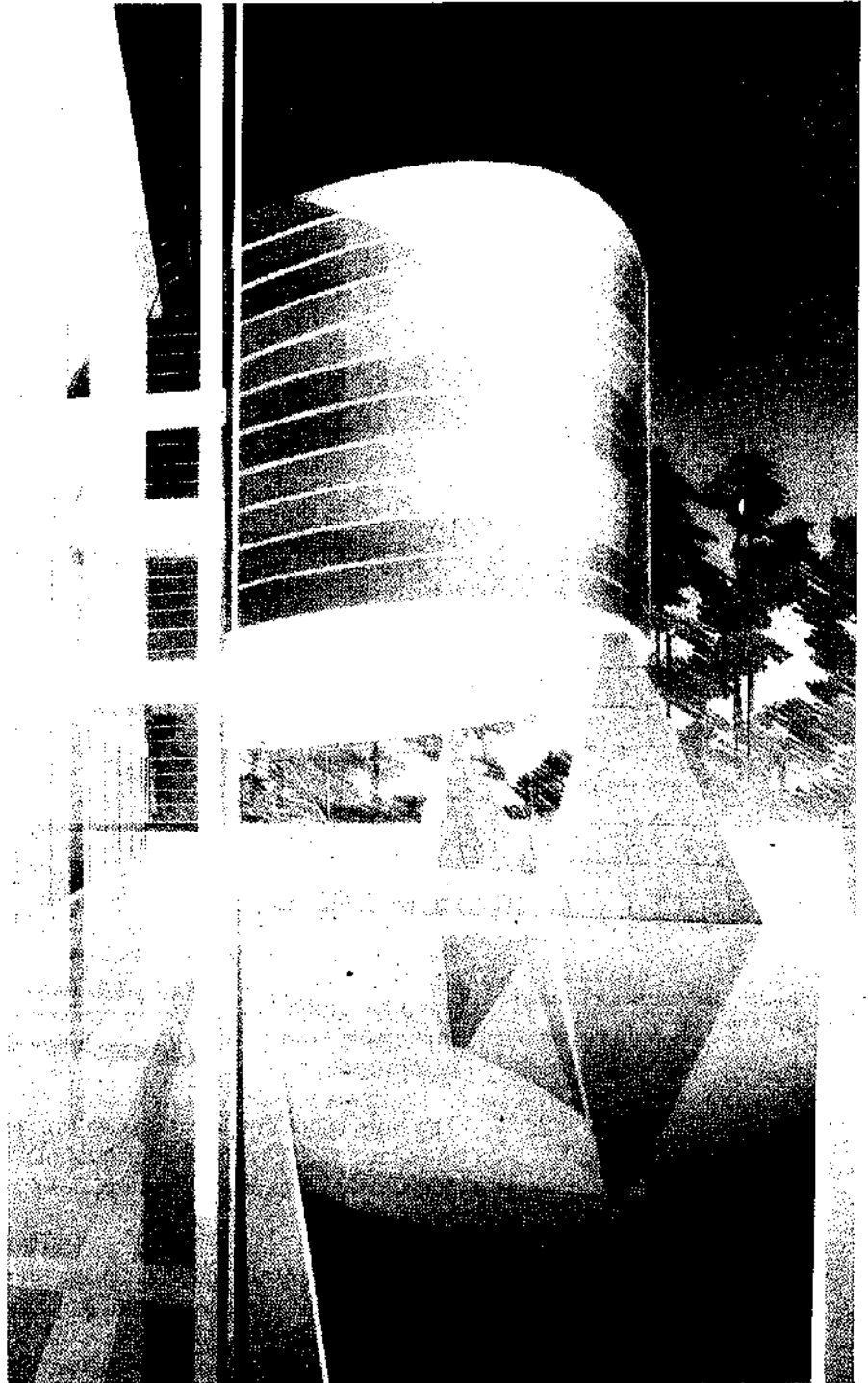
Finnish Broadcasting Company, 1991  
(Courtyard).

Finnish Broadcasting Company, 1991;  
 'Orbit of the Birds' at the top of the tower;  
 'Poetress' at the front.

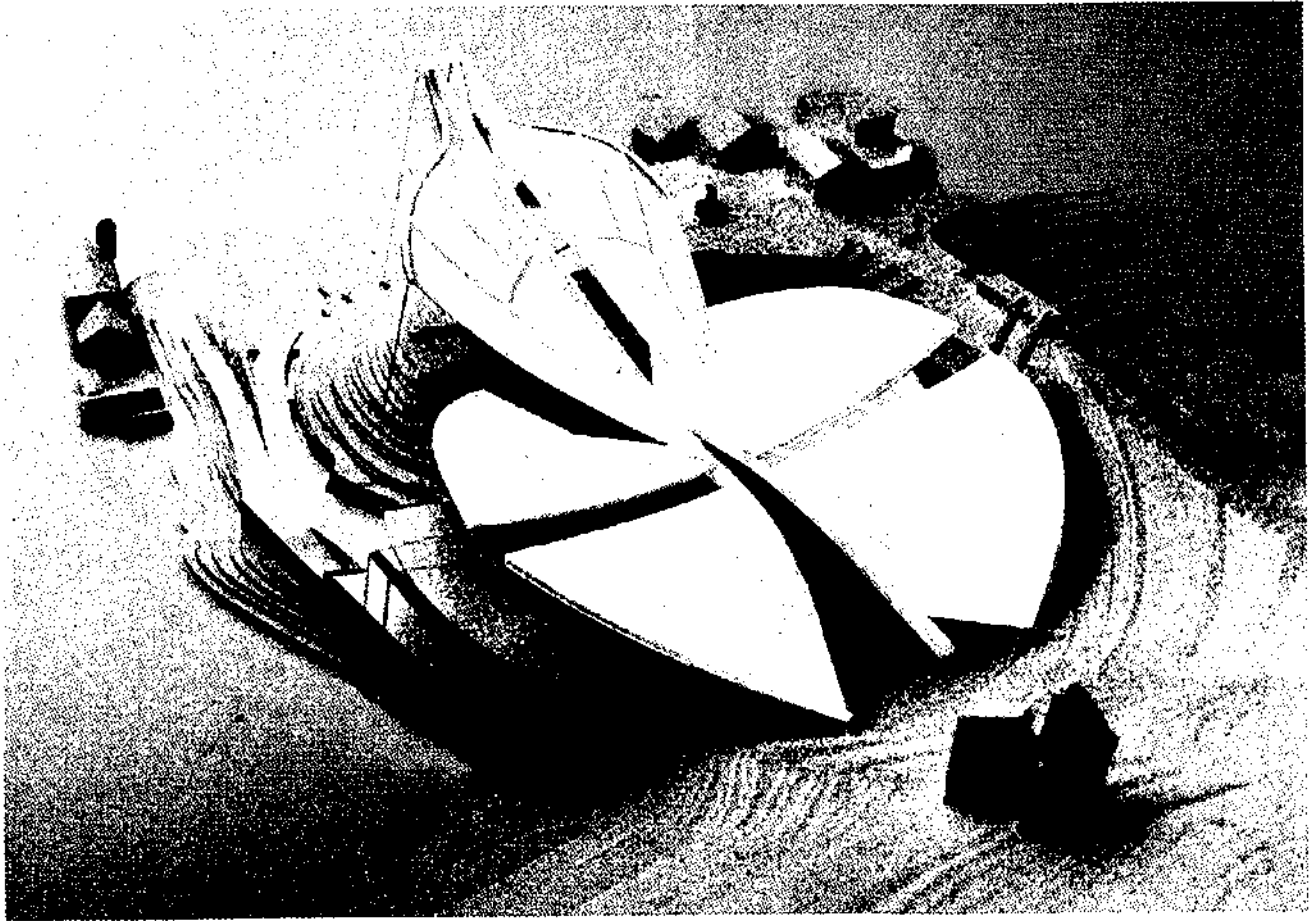


meanings, ability to listen to and to get anxious about connections, the ability to internalize an experience. It means adopting a totally new kind of a stand, returning to the roots of the original man that had the ability of feeling and experiencing strongly; and in a natural way, the existence of life and the environment. I think that this quality has not totally disappeared from the modern man, not even in the countries of modern civilization. It is existing within us, as a hidden feature in the background, while we get stressed in the world that has requirements against our nature, against the man within us. I am positive that it is a necessity to re-evaluate our way of life and our goals, and this is exactly why it will happen.

Finnish Broadcasting Company, 1991;  
One of the 'Swans' above the water image,  
along the summer set.



This in mind, I have been reasoning my own background as a Finnish person. One point of departure for the way of life of the Finnish related people is given by the engravings of swans with long necks, found in Karelia rocks. They were done some four to six thousand years ago. These swans, the birds of the souls of our national myths, had the special task of transmitting between the hereafter and present. Those birds that in long ribbons used to fly across the sky in autumn and spring times marked the orbit of birds, the meaning of which in English is the milky way: In other words, not just any milky way, but the orbit of the sacred bird. Nature was a big spiritual whole for the Finnish man during the Stone Age. His cosmic belief system was the womb, center of the universe, center of the



Project for covering the Bergisel Stadium in Innsbruck; 'Manifestation of Nature', the Bergisel Butterfly.

family and home as well as the center of woman; the center of her body-weight and the cosmic world of the fetus, macrocosm and microcosm experienced simultaneously. The centre of the universe was the huge tree of life that rose up supporting the sky. The sun, the moon, and all the stars were on the branches of this tree.

The word space did not mean just the space occupied by man; he himself was the space. If one will consider the inner space of man as his physical, mental and spiritual life, it is by nature, not static, but active, dynamic and variable space.

In the dictionary of Finnish language there are three full pages of meanings for the word space as a measurable concept; physical space, psychological space, social space, health space, (the word space in each carries the meaning of condition). This explains how relevant and crucial the concepts of the universe and space are in the Finnish way of thinking, and how natural this is for experiencing in a total way. How fascinating this version is for the architect at the very moment, at the threshold of a new architecture!

When I was writing this text in my study, I saw through my window that opens up to a bay of the sea, eight white swans gliding in front of my eyes in the waterway opened up in the ice. They were the first swans of the spring. This sight is always most charming and graceful, and I can just imagine what these birds of souls, those bringing the spring with them, had to mean to our forefathers.

How close the past is with us!

Right there, on the bay, on these waters, in the rocks and forests, within ourselves.

What a wonder it is that still today, we actually have such charming sights right in front of us.  
Couldn't life and nature once again become the spring of creativity and architecture?

No other starting point than the deep internalization of life and tradition can bring about remarkable results in art. That is where true creativity rises from. This is most often part of the character of an artist, the inner demand and therefore the natural way of seeing things, and therefore still alive.

The basic reason for our problem and alienation is that the Western philosophy is built upon concepts and abstractions; single things are interesting only through abstractions. The force of experience has not been considered an essential spring of knowledge and recognition leading to objective truth. Today one has started to understand that force of experience is far more important than what we can read from history.

Since the time of Plato, philosophy has considered nature always to be submitting to ideas. The Western society is built upon abstractions to such a degree that we are led to consider them as natural. The modern philosophers are questioning our view of the world. According to Lyotard, the decadence of goals, decadence of work and truth as well, have already for a long time been present. 'Trust', 'Belief' and the 'Sacred' are gone: the modern world is a pagan world that is questioning and testing limits. Maybe one of the best examples of experiencing is modern art. It helps to restate the question: Is this still art? The above can be transmitted directly to architecture.

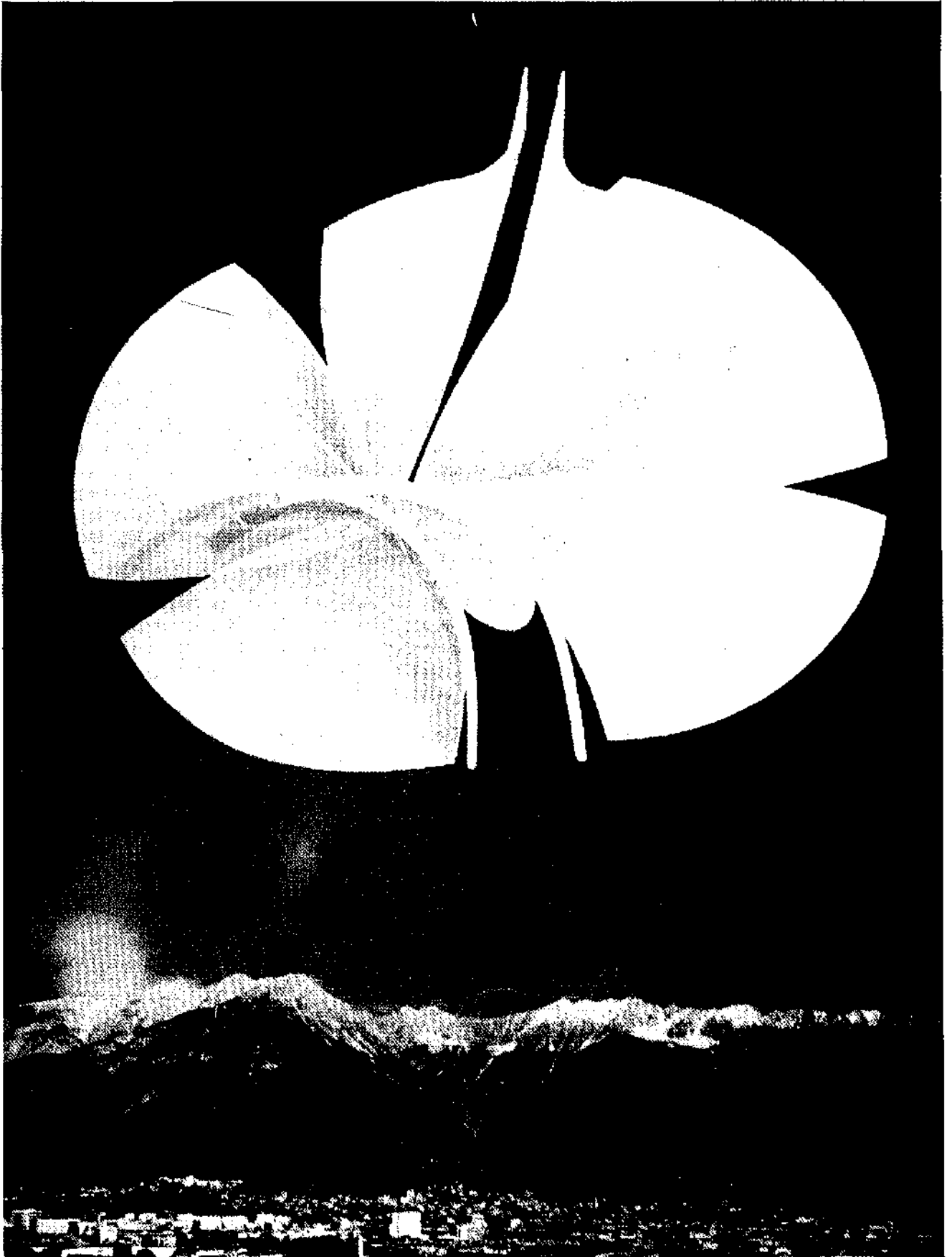
This period has been oversaturated with shocks of new. Experiments with different styles follow one another on the level of abstractions without growing roots into the reality, since they have been alien to the tasks of architecture. I think that the 'blood freezing' conditions of changes happening now will deeply remold our values and reality, also architecture.

For some reason I am very optimistic. I suppose I expect architecture to regain its relation to nature and to the human being. Maybe architecture will be needed to create new hope, to tell people about the choices that there are for a meaningful and rich life. Maybe we are creating architecture that is too tightly fixed to life, where man exists intact. Architecture should be created through internalized experience; architecture should have the quality of touching man; just like good music, one should be able to experience it without explanations, through experiencing.

Architecture should feel safe; and why not also be exciting and cheerful. Architecture should feel like good company as in Venice and Florence, where the form language of architecture is radiating beauty and life, where the heritage is strongly present.

As architects we have to understand that our built heritage is a continuous process from past to future. It contains an ongoing story of life, the presence of which we live today and to which we have to create a possibility for a future. Growing up to know the secrets of architecture is often said to be a profession of old men.

Knowledge and information alone, in this profession, are relatively easy to acquire, but that which is much more valuable and hard to acquire is understanding and the internal consciousness of ideas. It is this consciousness that should be awakened in us in order to understand our built heritage, the richness of the poetics of urban life around us.





**WORKS OF ILMO VALJAKKA****PRIZES AND EXHIBITIONS**

Innsbruck Bergisel Stadium, special mention prize 1991,  
international competition (185 entries).

Concrete Structure of the Year, 1st prize in 1986,  
United Magazines Headquarters, Helsinki.

Steel Structure of the Year, 1st prize in 1988,  
Nokia Meripuisto, office building, Helsinki.

Open Scandinavian competition for the City Center of Helsinki,  
(Kamppi-Töölönlahti) 1986, shared 1st prize (116 entries).

International competition of the Arctic Museum in Rovaniemi, Finland  
2nd prize in 1984 (184 entries).

Art and Cultural Centre of Hyvinkaa, Finland,  
general competition, 1st prize.

Biennale di Venezia, Third International Exhibition of Architecture 1985,  
Venice Project, Ca' Venier dei Leoni, invitation for the permanent exhibition.

Triennale di Milano 1988, international exhibition of city-planning,  
Helsinki City Center project.

Second Belgrad Triennial of World Architecture 1988,  
'Fifty Outstanding Architects of the World'.

Art and Architecture, Exhibition in Norway and Denmark, 1990.

New Form from Finland,  
Great Britain, Edinburgh in 1988 and Spain, Madrid, Bilbao and Gijon in 1990.

Finland Builds, 1963, 1976 and 1986  
exhibitions of modern Finnish architecture.

**OFFICE AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS**

United Magazines Headquarters  
Helsinki, Concrete Structure of the Year, 1986.

Administrative building for the Broadcasting Company of Finland  
under construction 1990-

Administration and office building for Nokia Helsinki,  
Steel Structure of the Year, 1988.

The Finnish Embassy in Budapest, Hungary, 1988.

Art and Cultural Center, Hyvinkaa, Finland, 1980.

The State Statistical Office of Finland, headquarters  
being planned 1990-

Lohja-YIT, Construction companies' office building

New development area in Helsinki city center

being planned 1990-

Kansallis-Osake-Pankki, bank of Finland Central Computer Center with offices  
realization, 1974, renovation, 1992.

Mortgage Bank of Finland Ltd. main office, Helsinki  
renovation, 1990.

Hvittorp, an old *art nouveau* villa built in 1902,

designed by Geselius-Lindgren-Saarinen

restoration being planned 1991-

## HOTELS

Imatran Valtionhotelli, an *art nouveau* hotel (built in 1903)

restoration, 1987, new congress building, 1985.

SAS Royal Hotel, Helsinki 1991.

Hotel Metropol, Moscow (built in 1905)

restoration of an *art nouveau* hotel, 1990, in co-operation with the restoration  
experts and planning organization of Moscow.

Hotel Astoria, Leningrad (built in 1913)

restoration of an *art nouveau* hotel, 1990, in co-operation with the restoration  
experts and planning organization of Leningrad.

## SELECTED PROJECTS RECENTLY PRESENTED IN FINNISH AND INTERNATIONAL JOURNALS AND PUBLICATIONS

United Magazines Headquarters

European Masters, *Annual of Architecture* (1990, 2) Ediciones Atrium, S.A.,  
Barcelona, Spain.

*Poetics of Architecture: Theory of Design* (1990) Anthony C. Antoniades.

Seventh Annual Review of Recent World Architecture, *Architecture ALA* (Sept.,  
1988).

*De Architect*, Holland, Tenhagen BV (Dec. 1987).

*Living Architecture*, Copenhagen, Denmark (1988).

Design and Visual Communication, *L'Arca, The International Magazine of Ar-  
chitecture*, (1988: 13) Milan, Italy.

*Architecture, International* (1988: 2) Grosvenor Press International, London,  
England.

*Baumeister, Zeitschrift für Architektur*, (Nov., 1988; 1991, 3) Germany.

*Beton Prisma*, Beton-Verlag (1991: 60) Düsseldorf.

*Forum Narmiljö* (1988: 2) Stockholm, Sweden.

*The Design Journal, International Magazine for the Entire Design Portfolio* (1989: 9) Seoul, Korea.

*Abitare 263*, (1988: 4) Milan, Italy.

*DBZ Deutsche Bauzeitschrift* (1990: 9) Germany.

*Arkkitehti-lehti* (1987: 4-5) Finland.

*Pro Functio* (1987: 4).

*Space and Place, an Annual Review of Finnish Interiors* (1988).

*Talo-The House, United Magazines* (1988).

*Finnish Music Quarterly* (1988: 4).

*Form Function Finland* (1988: 2).

*La Finlande* (1988).

*Business Finland* (1990).

#### PUBLICATIONS OF OTHER PROJECTS

The Arctic Museum, *Architektur + Wettbewerbe AW 127* (1986: 9) Stuttgart, Germany.

Helsinki City Center, *Architektur + Wettbewerbe AW 140* (1989) Stuttgart, Germany.

Imatran Valtionhotelli, Hotel Restoration and the New Congress Building, *Living Architecture*, (1988: 8) Copenhagen, Denmark.

Helsinki City Center, *Casabella 530, International Architectural Review* (1986) Milan, Italy.

*Aftenposten* (12.01.1990) Oslo, Norway.

SAS Rolay Hotel, *Construire* (1991: 11) Milano.

*Finland Today* (Nov. 1991).

## 'KENTSEL MİMARININ ŞİİRSELLİĞİ' BİR SERGİ AÇILIŞI İÇİN SÖYLEM

### ÖZET

Alındı : 29.4.1992

Anahtar Sözcükler : Mimarlık Söylemi

Mimari miras geçmişten geleceğe bir süreçtir. Yaşamın anlamı ve yaşam biçimi mimarinin başlangıç noktasını oluştururlar; kentler ve binalar yaşamın sonuçlarıdır.

Mimari, yaşamın ürettiği gereksinimlere ve günlük sorunlara pratik çözüm getirir. Gelişen bilgiye karşın, çevre şartlarında büyük bir gerileme olmuştur. Çevreyi yeniden yaratmak için gerekli olan, değer yargılarımız ve amaçlarımızdır. Bugüne kadar yaşanmamış bir geçiş dönemi içindeyiz. Dönüşümler değerler sistemimize ulaşacaktır.

Materyalist ve modernist dünya görüşü gününü doldurmuş bulunuyor. Bu yüzyıl, insanın yapaylaşma ve parçalanmasını getirmiştir. Bugün ve gelecek için çevreyi bütünleştirmemiz gerekir. İnsanın zenginliği ve çok yönlülüğü yeniden keşfedilip yaşam, bütünlüğe kavuşturulmalıdır. Geçmiş ve geleceğin sürekliliği anlayışı benimsenmelidir. İnsan, köklerini güçlü bir biçimde duymalı ve yaşamalıdır. Bu yeti bizimle her zaman beraber olmuştur. Bu da yaşam biçimimiz ve amaçlarımızı yeniden değerlendirmemizi gerekli kılmaktadır.

Taş devrinde bir Finli için doğa tinsel bir bütünlük oluşturmaktaydı. Evrenin merkezi, dallarında gökyüzü ve yıldızları taşıyan bir hayat ağacı idi. Mağara duvarlarına resmettiği kuğu resimlerinin tinsel bir anlamı vardı. Bu kuşların manzarasının onda yarattığı anlamlar bugün de bizimle sürmekte ve geçmişle bugün, içimizle dışımız arasındaki aralığı doldurmaktadır. Fin düşünce biçiminde evren ve mekan kavramları çok önemlidir. İnsanın iç mekanını düşünürsek, insan kendisi mekandır. Mekan yalnızca doldurulan bir boşluk değildir.

Sanatta söze değer sonuçlar, gerçek yaratıcılığın kaynağı olan yaşam ve geleneğin içe sindirilmesi ile olasıdır. Batı felsefesi, kavram ve soyutlamalar üzerine kuruludur. Bugün yaşam deneyiminin verdiği gücün değeri artık anlaşılmalıdır. Modern felsefedeki görüşler yaygın olarak varolan dünya görüşünü sorgulamaktadır. Yaşam deneyimine en iyi örneklerden biri sanat olup olmadığını sorgulayan modern sanattır. Bu, mimarlığa da doğrudan aktarılabilir.

Günümüz, yeninin yarattığı şoklarla doyuma erişmiştir. Yaşanan dönüşümler değerlerimizi ve gerçeği yeniden biçimlendirecektir. Mimarlık, doğa ve insanla olan ilişkilerini yeniden kuracaktır. Bu mimari, umut veren, yaşam deneyimi ile yaratılan, yaşam deneyimini anlamlı ve zengin kılan bir mimari olmalıdır. Mimari güven verici, ancak neşeli ve heyecan verici, dost yüzü olmalıdır. Bu meslekte bilgi edinmek zor değildir. Ancak çevremizdeki kentsel yaşamın şiirsel zenginliğini kavramamızı sağlayan bilinç çok daha değerlidir.