

RAKENNUSTIETO®

**YOUNG**  
**ARCHITECTS FROM FINLAND**  
EDITED BY ROGER CONNAH



CONNAH  
**40/40**  
YOUNG ARCHITECTS FROM FINLAND



40/40 is a contemporary mapping of new architecture, the 'hip' 'hop' and 'house' of young Finnish architects and painters. 'Hip' might be cool, 'hop' might be a transition, and 'house' might be the destination of architecture which must envelope us in the future.

Besides musical nuance, 'house' is the destination for an architecture often, at present, only partially defined. A place, like infinity, where things happen that don't! But today, just as in jazz improvisation, the legacy of the past is important, looping is essential. Ideas go back and forth, spiral, testing the very critical subdivisions we sometimes feel so comfortable with.

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A contemporary mapping, a 'sampling' of architectural projects and ideas produced by young Finnish architects and painters, 40/40 illuminates the differences within shared, blended concerns, whilst at the same time still hinting at something peculiarly talented about the young architects of this part of the world, and their uncanny habit of releasing new energies.

Some of these young practices are of course already known for their successful competition career, some are yet to establish themselves, whilst others persist in working in the margins of architecture itself. To control the collection yet allow diversity to be expressed,

*Hip, Hop and House* are useful subdivisions for the purpose of collecting and ordering the work. This is not a critical imposition, though of course the very fragmentation of hip, hop and house is not arbitrary but has contemporary nuance. 'Hip' exists on its own. It means of the moment, topical, possibly synthetic, even at times 'cool' as used in the colloquial sense of 'now'.

"Hop" is also a jump, the transition from one place to another, suggesting the way ideas might pass, develop and transform into something else. 'House', of course, is the place we end up in, ultimately architecture as home, as shelter. In this case, in whatever form or envelope its architecture chooses.

Besides its musical nuance, 'house' is the destination for an architecture often, at present, only partially defined. A place, like infinity, where things happen that don't! Though the book moves toward architectural ideas that may reveal a more experimental approach, some even de-limiting architecture, these do not necessarily indicate more avant garde practices.

'Hip' might be cool, 'hop' might be a transition, and 'house' might be the destination of architecture which must envelope us in the future. But today, just as in jazz improvisation, the legacy of the past is important, looping is essential. Ideas go back and forth, spiral, testing the very critical subdivisions we sometimes feel so comfortable with. (Roger Connah 2001)

## HIP

It is no accident that we begin our sampling of contemporary architecture in Finland with the word ‘hip’ and the black house, *Villa Sälteskär* in Inkoo by Minna Lukander, and end it with the word ‘house’ and the digital creations and fusion of the group *Ocean North*. Nor is it any accident that Lukander worked recently (with Pia Ilonen) on the careful and skilful renovation of one of the most important functionalist icons of the 1930s in Finnish architecture, Viljo Revel’s Glass Palace (1936).

It is the vast range of new work, the relationship to architectural history and the understanding of the ‘continuum’ legacy that begins here, as both departure and, as we pass through to the second section called ‘hop’, transformation. A ‘legacy’ can, of course, indicate a programmatic hold on the present by the past. But is it not too simple to assert these young practices are only altering an accepted and refined ‘continuum’ in Finnish architecture?

The concept of re-treading, in tires as in architecture, may not be quite as simple as it seems. Whilst there are new practices that affirm an identifiable signature, there are others sampling wider source, fusing new disciplines and varying architectural experience itself. The combined aim of these works is ‘difference’. Most of them experiment within the limitations of the profession and though their works may not be clouded with critical theory, their architecture is still *thought through* differently.

In many ways the works in this first section – Hip - allow us also to demonstrate the strength and the potential misunderstandings that have gone unchallenged within the notion of ‘Finnishness’. For many years this notion has been a critical paradigm with which to appraise the work of very many different architects. Natural, human and Finnish! Perhaps this notion still allows us to identify works that not only appear

to signal a relationship to the past, a legacy to previous work, but seek that promised 'timeless' solution to architecture which Petri Rouhiainen describes as 'unplugged': "I've always thought of my work as an example of *Unplugged Architecture*. Like music that real people play with real instruments. Think of Crosby Stills Nash & Young and "My House". Or Neil Young and "Old Man". And listen to the harmony of voices and the somewhat ragged guitar sounds and the contrast between the two. These appeal to me!"

Rouhiainen speaks for others in the respect given previous architecture whilst expressing a desire to avoid facile national myths. He helps us understand why it would be a mistake to read these projects only as a development in relation to increased technique and material technology, or as a new answer to old issues. This would deflect critical enquiry away from the innovations, the serious planning ideas and the genuine desire to attack issues thought already irrelevant in more urban, media-rapid societies. Issues like rural planning, ecology, sustainability.

Of course, in these works there are echoes to Aalto's vast legacy. But the works also demonstrate an ongoing, even ambiguous, debate with one of the most influential thinkers and teachers in Finnish architecture, Aulis Blomstedt. To debate the merits of Blomstedt is to take on the classical modern spirit in Finnish architecture and suggest new ways of finessing architecture's constant mission; to shelter those wishing to dwell, to house architecture. Blomstedt's echoes are still heard in many of the young; to house more naturally is to understand the nature of place itself! In relation to an understanding of the history of modern architecture, this is a synthetic process, a series of re-mappings which of course never can, and never will, quite close on any original.

That said, many of the works shown here also demonstrate an interest in not only understanding Alvar Aalto in a more contemporary way but allowing the past in the form of Saarinen and Lindegren, Aalto and Blomstedt, Pietilä, Revel and Petäjä and others, to become part of the sequence. The check to a strict binary thinking in the 1990s allowed younger architects to look again at Aalto's alleged softer line.

Following the sensitive work of Sapanen and Sarlin, or Saara and Janne Repo, to the housing of Mäkipaja and Hannunkari (seeking the ordinary in everyday life minus any gimmicks), the sensitivity of Mustonen and Keskkikastari, the ecological programme for HKM onto the larger, significant works of Bruun & Murole, JKMM architects and APRT, culminating in the latter's acclaimed Sibelius Hall in Lahti (Tikka & Lintula) we can see how the rational line of Aulis Blomstedt and Aarno Ruusuvuori has been fused with a tempered, even playful tectonics.

The strong use of wood amidst steel and glass, the careful, even excessive detailing and rhythmic elegance, indicates a return to accepted Finnish values; something natural, human and, of course, those 'Scandinavian references' critics will identify. The difference here is the extent to which these works extend that spirit beyond the present.

To balance the classical 'modernist' line of some of the larger civic products shown here, it is rewarding to scrutinise the apparently more modest works, those of Tuomas Silvennoinen in his approach to the Orthodox Centre for Religion and Culture, Jenni Reuter for her Straw Bale Cabin in West Finland and her collaborative women's work in Senegal, and Jari Tirkkonen for his Architect's Nest.

Here one senses the subtext within the Blomstedt programme for Finnish architecture; that desire for an uninflected, modest, utilitarian architecture which proves as economic and as attractive as some of the larger projects. As Aulis Blomstedt was fond of narrating, he saw an image on the beach after the more fashionable modernists had left. There, alone, he would be picking up the flotsam and jetsam from the past and making once more significant architecture.

The idea of practices fusing and transforming as they do in Finland, in size and idea, is of common interest. The group Hunga Hunga formed and then de-formed (or trans-formed). It is a pattern than we see repeat itself as young architects seek new ways to work and collaborate. In such institutionally provisional structures, new architecture is created. Currently Hunga Hunga now go under the name HKR Architects' Cooperative. Their working methods reflect the debate mentioned above.

Fusing discussion, argumentation, mutual rivalry, independent decision making and collective responsibility' is, they admit, sometimes laborious, often painstaking but mostly energetic and beneficial. Like many of the earlier known modernists in Finland, it is a method which requires an office small enough - metaphorically and literally - to be able to continue working around one big drawing desk. In this way, the young repeat the ambitions of the 20th Century Finnish architects as they attack issues that vary in scale from urban planning to miniature design projects, whilst at the same time many if not all - in some way - seem to be involved in teaching and research.

The strengths and loyalties continue. Architectural competitions have been important for the 'hip' architects, many having been awarded prizes. As diversity encourages innovation, as the past is continually negotiated, the lack of universal rules and fundamental truths proves irresistible. HKR are worth citing:

“Ecological thinking is - however - a uniting theme in all our work. Instead of being post-modern, we think of our work as post-humanist. This means that we want to challenge anthropocentric thinking and promote a bio-centric approach instead. We want to emphasize a shared human responsibility over environment and solidarity with nature. Furthermore, we think architecture is not simply an activity restricted to the architect. It is as much an activity for those who enter, use and experience the built environment.”

Whether these architects attempt private houses, housing design schemes or civic projects, whether they opt for experiments in mobile dwelling, open building and sustainable development, there is also a mutual interest in the integration of working and living. Time and again we notice here a serious echo to the natural and the debate on a contemporary loss of spirit. Perhaps Tuomas Silvennoinen’s words might be more generally applied, for he seems also to speak for others:

“Though I have never felt an affinity to natural forms as direct models for architecture, I do regard the logic and genius of living organisms as a suitable model for man’s imperfect construction skills. Although I have spent my life in the city, the peasant building tradition has become the most important model for me. In the peasant tradition, buildings were always parts of a whole moulded by man and nature. They lacked sculptural heroism and uncontrolled outbursts of emotion.”

## HOP

In the 1980s the application of ideas and thinking from other cultures and disciplines infiltrated Finnish architecture. *Postmodernism* offered an influential if ambiguous source of motifs for architectural unrest. Phenomenology negotiated geography, new subjective humanism encountered chaos science. Yet despite these pressures, young Finnish architects seem to have retained a remarkable sense of their own history and their own legacy.

If this legacy helps temper the rage for instant style and novelty and offers opportunities to rescue a type of architecture that might otherwise have gone missing as we saw in the first section, we open our enquiry here to practices involved in transforming their experiences, fusing their ideas and breaking with convention.

Resistance to the globalism of images began to prove difficult as the 90s progressed. As trends gathered pace, it was personal mythologies and a personalized poetics of space which narrowed into a new symbolism. In Finland thinker-architects like Pallasmaa and Warttinen followed in the footsteps of Reima Pietilä and searched for ways of offering a constructive resistance. Meanwhile theorists like Nyman, von Bonsdorff and Kuusamo widened the site of architectural writing as criticism began to explore new ways of challenging historicist frames.

We used the term 'hip' to speak of younger practices negotiating legacy and seeking a re-invigorated modernism. In this section, playfully and seriously, 'hop' suggests practices that emphasize collaborative, even transformative strategies. Here, too, we are also trying to capture those whose architecture might result from a fusion of different places, people, ideas and images.

This is likely to be true of an increasing number who, as Eeva Pelkonen writes, ‘have worked and studied abroad and who, in great numbers, choose a collaborative practice opposed rather than one dominated by single individuals.’

Such practices in Finland are numerous and perhaps indicate a move away from the idea of an isolated architect guru, something we find critical history still regards as a singular creative and cognitive subject. In this section (Moga)M3 were prized in European for a Bucharest project, Mannberg speaks of Venice, Steinberg teaches in Harvard and Pelkonen at Yale.

Further emphasizing this, we begin with two younger researchers and thinkers, Mannberg and Vartola. Both use research to fuse their words into thinking about architecture, and thereby also challenging the critical histories we are used to. And if we begin with the poetics of a site like Venice we see through these to the wood transformations and net structures of Pook Architects, another practice not unconnected to the significant projects of Pelkonen, herself fusing an organic temperament with a slinky, hovering tectonic architecture in Vermont. From here we move almost seamlessly onto the accomplished tectonics and suggestive organic work of Matti Sanaksenaho.

Accepting no easy critical identification, we observe the micro scale of Adlercreutz and Anttila, the light work and furniture design of Karola Sahi, along with the solar experiments and sustainability exercises of Heikki Viiri. Here ‘minimalism’ is not only aesthetically grounded but roots out more economical conditions for an intensely scaled architecture. Steinberg’s plywood and bamboo studies deserve deeper scrutiny as does his plywood wheelchair prototype. This critical re-mapping of plywood back onto the modernist chair and then rigorously diagrammed into studies for a plywood wheelchair extends the boundaries of a modern material we thought we knew!

*Finnishness*, though we have seen still offers instant identity, is a paradigm that has critical consequences for the young. In this second section, though most of these architects and practices might not agree on '*finnishness*' in terms of their background, their thinking, their education, all would probably agree to the role of architecture as a transformation of critical conditions, the extension of its boundaries.

The work of Pelkonen in New Haven and Steinberg in Harvard, deeply involved in what might be described as Finnish material concerns, are transforming accepted conventions. This re-mapping involves an understanding of the past in relation to influence, originality and innovation. The past is suddenly fertile for answers to quite different architectural solutions asked for in the 20th Century. Here 'transformations' expand ideas, issues and materials we might have considered already abandoned in favour of newer, trendier materials and increased novelty. Here the past is no static resource but an acquired learning tool increased and amplified, as Pelkonen says, by elective affinities and collaboration.

Let us allow Pelkonen define this pull toward collaboration: "I would argue that we have to approach collaboration first and foremost as a basic human condition. We are, as human beings and architects, conditioned by places and people we are surrounded by, ideas and images we are exposed to. I endorse the fact that the boundary between an individual and its surroundings tends to blur. The process resembles that of mimesis: we identify with the people close to us both mentally and physically. To collaborate means to let loose and subject oneself to influence."

Others shown here, by transforming their work, seek fresh answer to older content, a wider approach to familiar and newly posed issues. Re-framing the architectural story is part of this resource. Seeking to explore and position oneself within 'Finnishness' but transcending it at the same time relieves one of the heaviness of legacy. We are not talking here of adding weight and soul to Finnish architecture, we are seeing works here that do not seek such position, nor in fact strive for such accessible identification.

Though it might be a mistake here to ignore the solidarity and sensitivity a Finnish education may have produced, time and again, it is this sensitivity which is turned back on itself and reinvented. And special mention should be made here of the *Arkki* Day Care Centre located in the milieu of the old silk factory in Tikkurila, outside Helsinki in Vantaa.

The new lightweight structures designed by Meskanen and Pursiainen reflect the Reggio Emilia education philosophy. Here we are speaking of a fusion of idea and reality, an architectural kindergarten where the architecture itself offers the flexibility and invitations to the child to observe and explore architecture, to learn to perceive their own location in relation to spatial configurations. Different materials create varied sensory experiences aiming for an operational strategy for child development containing architectonic, pedagogic, social, and economic elements.

We might loan this for ourselves. The transformations here begin to suggest how tectonic and exploratory adventures can go hand in hand with fantasy. Once again, though transformed and fused into newer patterns we come across a shared approach, as Meskanen and Pursiainen state:

“Architecture is the interpreter of humanity, of people's existence in the world. In our architecture we bind together the physical and the mental environment. We want to evoke multi-sensory experiences. Finnish nature has an important influence on our architecture...Architecture provides the settings for human functions and, at its best, it enhances the probabilities of different actions.

As we observe the transformations many of these young Finns have gone through, both in Finland and abroad, both individually and in varying collaborative and interdisciplinary practices, we notice how unnecessary it is to invent new institutional slogans, new critical manoeuvres to rein in their work. In fact, the work thrives on the very differences within shared intentions: the natural approach, the new typologies, the material discourse and sensitivity to landscape all in a way speak for themselves.

“By touching humanity, it is possible to create environments to which different people can relate to, spaces they can fill with their own meanings,” the Arkki architects state. “In our planning we consider ecology as an aspiration of durability, both materially and immaterially. Good architecture and its values are eternal. It always allows new interpretations.”

## HOUSE

In the 1990s Finnish architects begin to ask themselves how the seduction of chaos and disorder which pluralism invited could be trimmed. It was important to find a strategy to co-opt the apparent plurality and licence available in the 1980s. To move on, to transform, it was important to keep one's own version of architecture under control.

It might appear, as we come to the third section - 'house' - that we have done some sort of 'hip-hop' and jump to arrive at the more radical practices in contemporary Finnish architecture. It is of course possible to argue that these practices shown here seek more radical transformations, wider disciplinary contact for architecture, and an increased energy and fusion.

Yet at the same time this work can be seen to be formed from many of the ideas discussed in the first two sections. And it is because there are clear innovations in the previous projects that we begin this section with the increasingly successful work of Quad, a group of young architects who express a strong interest in 'inconspicuity', and end our collection with the creative digital movements and inventions of the architects, Ocean North.

In between we show the successful larger works of practices like Siikala and Narjus, Parkkinen and Berger, and Rantanen whilst introducing the reader to more unknown works from Hautajärvi, Jääskeläinen, Soini and Ahlava. In this way we bring together architectural ideas that are not always fully formed, ideas that may not always make up an architectural site or project which we might be familiar with.

These may be ideas which may have begun beyond the field of architecture but by doing so may wish to widen the site of architectural production itself. Whether this widens the architectural solutions into something as yet unknown remains to be seen.

Here we also see the multiple and fused talents of Amen, Livady, Reflex and Valvomo where architecture invites musical echo, integrates with graphics and advertising, navigates itself through research and product semantics. Here architectural intervention blurs the constants, blurs the predictable and de-limits architecture. Some are instant solutions, fast-track ideas leading to installation architecture, interior designs, restaurants with attitude. Others are installations needing to avoid the architecture they suggest too easily.

As young architects begin to understand the legacy of the 20th Century and the role of artistic influence, as they slowly widen the site of architecture itself, the imagination seems to resonate with a new horizon, Do we enter a new unassertive, unimposed architecture, full of fun, fashion and trends? Or, fused together, is this an architecture entirely dependent on everything, learning to accumulate its own notions, avoiding its own fashions?

The words of Mikko Metsähonkala, a member of Quad, help us identify a more rigorous, programmatic hint on how to avoid the constant fashion in architecture. Many agree. Considering renovation and infill may form an increasing part of the architects' work in the 21st Century, buildings will be perceived more as part of a much wider drama, rather than autonomous artefacts.

Inconspicuous architecture, according to Metsähonkala re-scripts context: "an indicative building will be posited in a relative zero-point within the surrounding structure." Importantly this leads to the disappearance of the independent unit as work blends, fuses if you like, into larger structures, wider networks which include more than the built form. "Inconspicuous architecture," Metsähonkala continues, "does not impose any demands on the user, yet by yielding to the conditions of its surroundings it resigns from momentary whims. People and ideologies change, buildings stay."

The careful, controlled, 'rationalist' strain of Finnish architecture represented by the astonishing number of successful projects coming from established Finnish firms in the 1990s saw a new 'Internationalism' appear. Spectacular steel and glass buildings, double facades, proliferated. These buildings offered a way to re-assess Finnishness whilst at the same time questioning the critical label itself. For what was so Finnish about steel and glass?

As if to answer the impossible question, the careful uninflected works of Quad can be seen in relation to the more spectacular, totemic images produced by Siikala and Narjus. Both are remarkable for their tectonic finesse, both are programmatic in the way they wish not to bring more to their architecture than they wish, whilst both also share similarities with the contemporary images we see used by Rantanen and Parkkinen.

Architects, painters, artists and students, with new ideas, do not always conform to the ways these ideas can be integrated within the profession and society. Along with plurality there is a 'horizontal' which the young take for granted, a thrill in the unrest and an accommodation of uncertainty that must spill over into new architecture.

Here it is worth noting the similarities yet differences between the experimental works of Hautajärvi, Jääskeläinen and the painterly experiments of Soini. Perhaps Soini in her 'Paintings of Architecture' indicates the pull away from architecture which always invites architecture back in, whether through canvas, exhibition or space. Intrigued by, and taking off from, Borges' story of the cartographers, the drawn, the representation of and for architecture and the built form, produces the gap within which Soini positions her work.

"I have been intrigued by this story when puzzling out the two realities in architecture: drawings or representations and buildings. They do not strictly coincide but rather create a space or a gap in between. This has been the space for my work. Buildings are coded in architecture drawings. The drawings are based on projections that orthogonally section the built object....whether these drawings are just a means to the end or whether they have a bearing on the resulting buildings is arguable. Consequently, the space concept of drawing continues to hold an unsettling grip on architecture."

Not all these 'house' practices seek a unique aesthetics and sense of expression, but all probably discover their own sensuality in architecture, developing their own compositions from the hand, the eye, the touch. Soini invites us to be more circumspect: "Just as the human body is present in the act of drawing so the changing weight of hand, tension, sensibility, hesitations, errors and their corrections are also present."

We should therefore be intrigued by error as much as certainty. It is also clear that today inter-disciplinary and collaborative work no longer need definition, so mutual and so widespread have they become in architecture. Fused between innovation and responsibility, many of the new works in this section acknowledge the strength of the past, whilst they begin to edge us away from the grander mission architects dreamed of in the last century. That 'brave' attempt to organise architecture into an organisation of life itself!

New attitudes invite new gaming strategies and imaginary soliloquies for architecture. These became momentarily as inhabitable and inevitable as they were improbable. No purpose, no agenda, there results a privatization of architectural meaning. This is why the works of the last five practices indicate why collaboration is likely to de-limit architecture itself: Ahlava's machine metaphors, Reflex's careful design extensions allied with research, Livady's attempt to widen their own visions constantly yet carefully, the already known work of Valvomo - 'Snowcrash' & 'Glow' - ending finally with the digital excitement and pulsing rhythms of Ocean North.

Ocean North look likely to pioneer information transfer, data visualisation and an increasingly choreographed architectural site within and, of course, beyond Finnish architecture. And if we talk of a choreographed or a sculptured site for architectural drama, this should not frighten us, nor is this taking us beyond the concept of 'house'. Liquid the drawn images may be, liquid we might become, the envelope will answer back, the buildings stay!

For now at least!

Whether 3D geometry leads to a 4D architecture negotiating time itself, we are pulled back to business. Impossibility in the drawn leads to looped infinities, universal data flows and hypertextual architecture. The attention to detail goes elsewhere and the soul laments whilst nature's call for 'unplugged architecture'. In many ways these digital creations bring us full circle, back yet on to Lukander's Villa Sälteskär, the black cube!

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## **THE ASSEMBLAGE**

*re-siting architecture*

Nevertheless, to simplify matters,  
we use the word 'architecture' where  
the word 'collection' or 'assemblage'  
would in fact be enough.

**Reima Pietilä**

Toward the end of the 20th century much talk on architecture centred on the critical and radical undoing of the discipline. Philosophy crept into its schools and universities, sometimes rewardingly, sometimes at the expense of a more conventional, comprehensive study of history, tectonics and theories of architecture. Few foresaw how the legacy of French thinking would remain strong, trickling down as it did into a bewildering number of other disciplines.

Though it is clear that younger thinkers certainly came through the last years of the 20th Century with some attraction to philosophy and theory, it is just as true to say however that very few were breaking open the champagne bottles. Whilst various philosophers and philosophical works created a real awareness of comparative validity and critical generosity, we are less sure today whether this thinking pre-empted a new way to negotiate theory, or even fuse theory with architecture.

In the global access to information, in the bewildering increase in software and the media's control of architecture, there was a growing sense that thinking could only be timed for the present. In the very urgency of 'now', critical language and claims made for and against architecture were suddenly as exhausting as they had once been exciting.

Whilst original interiors from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were destroyed, these very decades can now be recycled and fused within 'new' interiors. Restaurants take on names like Mockba, Pravda, Soda, No.9, Erotica. Cities become seamless too. It is sometimes difficult to tell which city one is now in: Vienna, Stockholm, Tallinn or Helsinki. Finland had arrived into the 21st Century. The mobile phone carried out a quiet revolution. And the next stage was to be a Virtual Helsinki.

If the *Postmodern Condition* was a question of tolerance, flexibility and comparative validities, we now know it was also a broken contract with meaning itself. Architecture looks as if it will now attempt to become a self-correcting project. In this way will it follow contemporary politics and culture?

If reality can be denied, as J.G. Ballard encourages us to imagine, how are we to recognise architecture going the same way? Language itself still invests architecture with promises that it doesn't, cannot, always live up to. Some younger thinkers imply that the theoretical fetish will lead to a grand embarrassment with the architectural archive. We are useless writers, they say. Can't put two words together, but we can build, we can invent. They do, often brilliantly!

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Is it only today that fashion touches the very core of architecture's activity? All night utopias are fast on their way to becoming our own virtual realities. An improbable set of invisible architectures encouraged by cyberspace might include us in its own script, whether we like the menu or not. Danger: today the future in architecture is beginning to ask more of the souvenirs it feels familiar with. Or is the past truly free?

Caught up in the necessity to pitch and advertise their own work, students and young architects also had to learn how to write the press

release, prepare the press pack, plan the exhibition, design the poster and organise the vernissage of a project. Talents had to be widened, extended. Sampling, spinning, weaving and diagramming became part of design methodology. Architecture became the hot medium in McLuhan's sense.

Increased competition within the profession and the building industry combined with critical exhaustion and changing trends produced a levelling of all horizons. Notions of the avant garde were suspect. This might usefully, and momentarily, be described as a *deradicalism*.

'Deradicalism' works at many levels, sometimes revealing, sometimes disguising its own creativity, talent and tension. Issues are re-framed, ideas about architecture are held back by failed progress or then explode into invention. A notion like 'legacy' is no longer negative. Influence, too, is acceptable under the right conditions. Assimilation of past ideas no longer causes constant unease, as strategies fuse to be made new again. Heroism is, of course, assumed to be less of a concern. Hindsight trembles.

\*

Surveying this assemblage of work by younger practices in Finland we would in fact be advised to use the word 'legacy' with extreme caution. Through the respect with which earlier Finnish 'modernism' is now held, we must acknowledge in much of this work the strength of an architecture that attempts not to assert more than its past, but treats that past with an inventiveness belonging and stemming only from the present.

Most of these young architects are aware of their own legacy, aware of the 'continuum', the strength of the architecture of their elders and the status it has given to the profession. Avoiding concessions to popular taste, there is also an acknowledgment that architecture has come a long way since *Postmodernism* offered its own disco-world. Modernism, it seems too, has not quite been healthily relieved of its weightier heroism. Is this why it is now creating the images it could not quite achieve in the past? Is this history playing games with itself, or the way progress 'progresses'?

There has been an attempt to create from these attitudes a radical new architecture, visible and invisible, conspicuous and inconspicuous. Own houses, house for parents, summer cottages, clubs, surfing interiors and restaurants once again proved an invaluable laboratory. Already many of these young practices suggest a seamless architectural thinking within fluid design teams. They prefer altering their skills and collaboration, where necessary, to take in newer briefs and wider challenges.

Yet many of them too remind us of the importance of nature, of the earth, of the fragile balance siting their architecture creates. Some may pre-empt the *improbable architecture* Paul Virilio speaks about: "given the interactive image and the interactive city, and if every image is destined for growth, in the epoch of non-separability this destiny is accomplished before our very eyes, thanks to the mutual development of the electronic urban environment and the architecture of systems, an improbable architecture whose efficiency none can deny." Others naturally retreat from such improbable architecture.

In thinking about the way the 19th Century differed from the 18th century Michelet wrote in 1892: “Those who believe that the past contains the future, and that history is a stream forever flowing one and the same, forever impelling the same waters between its banks, must here reflect and see that very often a century is opposed to the preceding century, sometimes furnishing it a harsh denial.”

There are as yet no real signs of any harsh denial, and despite the passionate call for a felt architecture with affinities towards nature and the environment, remote-controlled environments, spaces, walls of shadows and screens operable by more-than-mobile phones are all likely to configure a digital architecture in the future as much as they configure electronic access.

Today, in the new century, Finland looks likely to become once more the place to be. It is a society constantly open to change and novelty, whilst holding onto its proud existence as a young nation. This has immense advantages over wearier cultures. Yet we must balance the brave new technology and vision, the belief in siting nature within architecture, with an edgier, even radical, nostalgia.

The large urban projects continuing to fill the ‘voids’ in the Helsinki Centre are currently balanced in their eagerness for progress, spectacle and public space by the under forty-year old anarchists supporting the action to save the old buildings, once the Czar’s stables. These railway warehouses, now a mesmeric labyrinth of flea markets, were about to be bulldozed by contractors until the Green Party put the immense Helsinki Music House project on hold. For how long no one can say. Not for too long, one suspects!

Meanwhile the extension into *electronic systems and the research into environmental controls in the Virtual Helsinki* project look likely to transform the environment within which silence as communication and neutrality can work. The obvious question to pose: how will architecture have to alter to allow control systems greater use and commerce without professional and economic censorship? And, following on, how will control systems and commerce alter to allow architecture its own response?

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The strength of Finnish architecture in the last century emerged from a rare talent and solidarity within the profession. As it negotiated a relatively narrow band of 'modernism' it produced an inventive, pragmatic, sometimes neutralising, brilliance. This is still recognised all round the world for its 'Finnishness' or, less generously, its 'Scandinavian references': an architecture that was, and still is, considered more natural, whether the Finnish Embassy in Washington or the Finnish Embassy in Berlin.

Turned into a remarkable and flinty lyricism, we also recognise in the Finnish culture its reluctance to theorise, its ability to understand influence without over anxiety, and its talent to sample, synthesise, fuse and invent from within and elsewhere. Perhaps it is now time to re-discover what has already been discovered.

In 1959, Stein Eiler Rasmussen wrote about Alvar Aalto in his modest but still remarkable book, *Experiencing Architecture*: "If we compare his Finland building at the New York World's Fair with its undulating interior wall, with Frank Lloyd Wright's glass shop, I am sure most people would find Aalto's work more natural. But he must be judged by his everyday architecture.,,

...His extraordinary employment of contrasting textural effects and the organic manner in which he builds up his structures are immediately apparent. But it is his firm grasp of the whole that makes his buildings so amazingly vital. They have something to say to us; he has brought about a union between architecture and life.”

This is fine, this is so fine, as fine as can be. As with most critical sentences we are released by their accuracy and their claims. Then we pursue other trajectories of thought. We can move on. The *union between architecture and life* is difficult indeed. We must therefore honour the intensity with which some of the younger architects - just as Aalto did - are able to stimulate and assimilate ideas within their new architecture.

Aalto would have recognised, and no doubt smiled ‘ironically’ at the idea of *deradicalism*. Reading it positively, would he not have been in favour of younger architects wishing - metaphorically - for their architecture to stop (once and for all) the pretence of any avant garde? He would also surely have appreciated the modesty which is embedded in a strong, at times modest, or even inconspicuous, neutralising contribution to architecture. And would he not have seen this, too, as an urgent antidote to the ill-founded, ambiguous ecstasy that still rules the too easy imagery and seduction of contemporary architecture?

To close we might be allowed some licence here. Within an inconspicuous architecture, a selfless architecture, is this a transition to a new architecture which might emerge from a horizontal activity? Like the improvisation in jazz, the fusion shown here in this Finnish architecture is both a new and ancient talent.

It is also a comparative and generous talent that must perform in the provisional and restless present as much as it acknowledges the past. Ultimately this might be a strategy for architects to resist the words and theories that architecture so likes to invent for itself.

Finland has certainly moved from the margins to the centre. Along with one or two other cities, Helsinki now leads the electronic revolution. If the contemporary moment does not hit a country like Finland in the way it hits and moves in, say, New York, Berlin, Vienna or London, it is certainly leading its own pocket revolution.

Finnish architecture performs best to an expected myth, some claim, and will go on presenting a near-perfect 'hindsight' model for an architecture measuring up in this century to the hopes and promises of the Twentieth Century. This too presents the challenge facing the talent of many younger architects and students who wish from their métier at least some contract with the contemporary world.

The young architects seem to appreciate this dilemma. There are signs that they have stopped asking what the foreigner wants of their culture. From now on, heritage behind them, they are free to move on. Healthily 'de-radicalised' they also appear free to see architecture for themselves. Paradoxically, this now looks as if it not only allows for quieter, more subtle change, but we might speak again - albeit carefully and gently - of a talented and simmering re-invention. Fused, architecture can be re-sited, the profession re-occupied! **(Roger Connah 24.4 2002)**



## **FUUSIO - NEW FINNISH ARCHITECTURE**

why is finnish architecture so good? what is its secret? Intended as a contemporary mapping, a 'sampling' of architectural projects and ideas produced by young Finnish architects and painters, **fuusio** illuminates the differences within shared concerns. There are countless ways to order the works of forty young practices. Symptomatic of a strong fusion and using the word in Finnish, 'fuusio' indicates both the home and abroad of architecture today. As the works spiral back from digital rhythms to a black cube, the collection asks why and how are these the images which we remember architecture by?

Architects look likely to promote their business as well as promote a new range of talents. Just as buildings can change their form, morph or loop, so it seems the young can. The term 'to house' may ultimately, if any of these are an indication, be re-defined. The young often go universal to go local once more. The geography of everywhere becomes the geography of nowhere. And then, as Alvar Aalto realised, architecture also offers the geography of elsewhere.

Are younger architects lost if they do not keep up with the turbulence of architectural styles, with the vocabulary and the fetish of jargon and machine where propaganda becomes the last refuge? Or can the work of a small nation appear more natural, more grounded because of the very strength of its own modern architecture?

Finnish architecture may be so good precisely because some of the younger architects began to recognise all this, recognising too, the futility of theory knocking on its own window with a sponge. Deepening what they did throughout the last century, can they turn their own influence and passion for new ideas and other disciplines into deeper, imaginative architecture?

Where are the new projects displaying a thinking in the present? Where are the new architects, talented to intervene in the past, its legacy and history in order to release the future? From spectacle to the minimal, from lightness to clarity, from the labyrinth to the flame? What happens when the margins move to the centre? How many of these young architects talk a good game? Do they really need to when the work speaks for itself?

Fuusio is the Finnish for fusion. The idea is not new but the way it might work within a society could be.

**fuusio** is a unique *sampling* of new finnish architecture.

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