

THE DISSOLVING CORPORATION

Contemporary Architecture and Corporate Identity in Finland

Peter MacKeith



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PREFACE

In the past few years, the Finnish Business and Policy Forum EVA has treated the issues of creativity and business-culture interaction with growing interest. This report is an extension of the June, 2004 EVA conference on “*Creativity through Competitiveness*” and is published in co-operation with the Creative Finland Association. Entertaining a subject quite different from past EVA report themes, this essay offers one perspective on the state of Finnish corporate architecture within the more general context of corporate management practices and architectural innovations.

In this report, Professor Peter MacKeith argues that in the contemporary moment of global, open-market economies, Finnish architecture is at a critical juncture. This condition is reflected precisely in recent headquarters architecture produced by Finnish corporations. Whereas a hundred years ago corporate headquarters were central elements of the surrounding cultural and urban environment, expressing values of the emerging national consciousness, today’s Finnish corporate headquarters have adopted a style of neutrality and anonymity, and situated themselves outside of the public realm. Professor MacKeith calls for a corporate architecture that takes into account issues of sustainable development and the corporation’s relationship to the society, culture and civic realm in which it is physically situated.

Along with the desired image and values communicated by a building’s form to the outside world, corporate office planning has also adopted new objectives. The author strongly questions whether open-plan, glass-walled working environments truly result in increased creativity, positive encounters and productivity – or whether this is simply a case of parallel rhetoric in management and architectural ambitions.

Nevertheless, Professor MacKeith is hopeful: he believes that thanks to its highly educated, design- and environment-conscious society, Finland possesses the means to demonstrate the benefits of “*a design culture*”. Superseding the structures and values of the information society, such a culture has great potential for being the pioneer of original as well as culturally and environmentally sustainable corporate architecture.

We sincerely hope that this report will provide interesting reading for amateurs of architecture, and offer new perspectives to experts as well. We shall emphasize that the views expressed are the author's. We also wish to give our warmest thanks to all those that assisted in the process of creating this report, as well as the project's coordinator Kati Heikkinen.

Helsinki on August 3, 2005

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Within EVA, the project has been energetically guided and facilitated by Kati Heikinheimo; the essay in particular owes much to her thoughtful editing. The essay is an expanded version of a lecture entitled “Architecture, Incorporated”, originally given as part of EVA’s June, 2004 symposium on “Creativity through Competitiveness.”

In Helsinki, I have benefited from discussions with Jaakko Tapaninen, Juha-Pekka Raeste, Trevor Harris, Mikko Heikkinen, Kimmo Friman, Juha Ilonen, Jouni Kaipia, and Juhani Pallasmaa. Petteri Kummanen of the Museum of Finnish Architecture assisted with image research.

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My thanks to all.

St. Louis, Missouri, USA and Helsinki, Finland
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“There has been a wholesale reinvention of the cultural perception of business and capitalism. Business, particularly business associated with the new technologies, is now seen as the embodiment of modernity.”

Will Hutton, Anthony Giddens: “Global Capitalism”¹

“The great ‘Modern Project’ is still part of Finland’s cultural heritage [...] In a country where only one building in eight is over sixty years old, Modernism is a tradition.”

Riitta Nikula: “Architecture and Landscape: The Building of Finland”²

1 PRECIS

The turn of the 21st century in Finland has seen the rise of an information technology fueled domestic economy, one with global reach, as well as the construction of a number of visible corporate headquarters and research and development facilities. At the same time, the recent identification of Finland as a world leader in “creativity”³ links the country’s economic vitality to creative factors of talent, technology and tolerance. This convergence of business, creativity and design at its largest scale offers an opportunity to evaluate the image of Finnish business projected by its architecture, and to set that evaluation into the larger context of contemporary practice.

Throughout the 20th century, modern architecture and design were closely identified with the cultural identity of Finland. By extension, Finnish business practices often sought to cultivate thoughtful design and well-made architecture, as both an indication of economic vitality



**HPY Building,
Helsinki.**



**Pohjola Insurance Building,
Helsinki.**

and as a representation of corporate values. Lars Sonck's *HPY Building* and Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen's *Pohjola Insurance Building* form century-old reference points in Helsinki's city center; the SOK cooperative built a strong identity through modernist buildings in the



**Enso-Gutzeit Headquarters,
Helsinki.**

**SOK,
Helsinki.**



Sanoma House, Helsinki.

1930s and 40s; and Alvar Aalto's *Enso-Gutzeit Headquarters* is a prominent, if still controversial, landmark in Helsinki's South Harbor. Two recent contemporary examples are Pekka Helin's *Nokia House* and SARC's *Sanoma House*.

Expanding upon these local precedents *The Dissolving Corporation* examines and critiques the most public faces of the corporate world: the architectural designs of corporate headquarters, in Finland and beyond.

The three central messages of this essay are first cautionary, then realistic, and finally hopeful:

- 1) Finnish business development, Finnish design and Finnish creativity are inextricably linked, and must be simultaneously examined, critiqued and enhanced. The concept of "the creative workplace" can be examined effectively in Finland's smaller-scaled economy, given its highly-educated and highly design-conscious culture.
- 2) Finland's development from a closed society to an open market economy is reflected in Finnish architecture and urban design – for better and for worse. One cannot examine the architecture of a culture without examining the economic forces that produce it.
- 3) Finland possesses the creative means to demonstrate design, architecture, and urban design that reflects both a *political* and an *eth-*



Keilaniemi, Espoo.

ical economy: a sustainable, urbane, dignified culture of knowledge and design.

The initial case study subjects for this inquiry consisted of examples of contemporary corporate headquarters architecture – those of Nokia and Sanoma in Finland; Wal-Mart, Microsoft, Ford and USA Today in the United States; Nike-Europe in the Netherlands; Volkswagen in Germany; and Telenor in Norway. These examples were examined on the basis of both business characteristics (type of product or service, scope of operations, location of facilities, among them) and architectural determinants (design team, design ambitions, and attitudes towards issues of site, materials, tectonics, sustainability, and workplace design).

Architecture possesses a strong potential for symbolic representation, as well as for forming stimulating working environments. Equally, any corporation desires strengthened public relations and enhanced productivity. The corporate headquarters fuses these ambitions into both a workplace and an image. On these terms, the corporation's represented character in Finland and beyond is increasingly problematic.

Despite the historical co-dependency between architecture and the corporation in the 20th century, a detailed, critical survey of that relationship has not yet been attempted.^a The tower and the office, as realized in the corporate headquarters pose complex issues of intention, patronage, technology, and capitalist economics. An analogous history, however, can be found in the survey of the parallel modern building type, the factory. Architectural critic Gillian Darley⁴ has summarized the current state of that building type thus:

“In its own way the age of Information Technology is as hungry for gadgets as was the era of the Industrial Revolution. [...] The profiled steel and glass paneled sheds that typify the anonymity and slickness of nameless industrial-scale operations, whether chip assembly or car plants, call centres, or research and development laboratories for biotech or electronics multinationals, form the invisible background to our lives. The imagery of the modern factory – however we define it – is essentially hermetic, with no references given or even hinted at. The journey from those belching furnaces reflected in the River Severn at Coalbrookdale that provoked such wonder and fear to this curious anomie has been traveled at breakneck speed. Where next?”

^a What does exist are numerous pictorial surveys of contemporary office design; a recent example is that of Ana G. Cañizares, editor: “Offices DesignSource”. New York, 2004: Harper Design and LOFT Publications.

Hermetic, self-sufficient, a curious anomie? Where next, indeed, for a corporate architecture in Finland in the age of information technology and the global corporation?

Arkkitehti-lehti (the Finnish Architectural Review) has expressed this concern for Finnish architects over the last five years by addressing the issues of office design, glass as the contemporary material, and the urban design implications of an open market economy. One distressed conclusion was expressed by architect Trevor Harris⁵, the Professor of Urban Planning at the Helsinki University of Technology, as he regarded recent corporate design at the edge of Helsinki:

“[...] I can't help but wonder what demonic Miesian figure is behind this strangely hypnotic assemblage of glass giants? Like the sentinels of Easter Island they stand silent and uncommunicative, reflecting themselves and their neighbors like images from some funfair's House of Mirrors, grey-painted steel and glass panels arranged in a reinterpretation of some 1960s curtain wall manufacturer's catalogue [...] The challenge of building on such a monumental shoreline, next door to the Fortum Company's concrete skyscraper [...] seems to have confused our heroes temporarily. Shall we go up or down? In or out? Transparent or solid? “

Professor Harris identifies an evident gap between the interests of the corporation and the interests of the civic polity, a gap in ambition that results in an equally evident banality:

“We've seen this scenario so many times before in Frankfurt, London, L.A. and Kuala Lumpur. But whatever made us think Finland would escape? [...] Given more reasonable timetables, enlightened clients, a less one-sided room programme and a stronger input by the city-planners, I have no doubt that some of the gifted design teams involved would have been capable of producing a richer and more sympathetic totality. Keilalahti could have become a significant example of collaboration between Capital and Commune. Now it is a silent collection of over-cool heroes, irresolute and defiant, which could have emerged anywhere, in any culture, beside any motorway.”

These concerns are symptomatic of much architecture around the world. In the last decade, corporations have increasingly emphasized the transparency and flexibility of their operations. Almost reflexively, translucent, glass-sheathed corporate designs have emerged to symbolize this commitment. Simultaneously, while there has been a necessary call for the material application of ecological sensibilities in all types of design, these values have now become nearly a norm in corporate strategy and marketing.

Lastly, much of the history of corporate architecture is defined by a parade of monuments – tall, proud buildings marking a city skyline, their commerce-driven spires succeeding those of the cathedral or temple. Many of these corporate landmarks have effectively “branded” a city, providing a globally recognized, touristic ideogram for postcards and T-shirts. While calls for such a signature to the Helsinki skyline have been heard, this essay maintains that such ambitions – corporate and architectural – are misplaced. The demonstrable strengths of a Finnish knowledge culture, and of a Finnish design culture, lead away from such singular monumentality. These strengths instead lead towards an “archipelago” of more diverse, more finely-scaled, more sustainably-principled designs^b.

^b For insight into this question, see architect Pasi Kolhonen’s 1999 diploma work for the Department of Architecture, Helsinki University of Technology, entitled “Mainoskatko Kaupunkikuvassa: kaupallisen kulttuurin vaikutuksia julkiseen tilaan ja arkkitehtuuriin (Commercial Break in the Cityscape: the effects of commercial culture on public space and architecture)”, submitted May 3, 1999.

2 PRELUDE: QUANTITIES AND QUALITIES

The stereotypical image of Finland in the past has been that of a northern land of forests and lakes, churches and saunas, midnight suns and winter darkness, Sibelius and Aalto, Fiskars scissors and Marimekko dresses. But the ideal information society and a paragon of corporate competitiveness?

2.1 COMPETITIVE, TRANSPARENT, CREATIVE

The qualitative image of the Finnish economy and the nation's business practices has never been quantifiably stronger than it is for the year 2004-2005. Objective evidence of this assertion is immediately at hand to any citizen and visitor. "Finland Remains the World's Most Competitive Country," announces the December 2004 issue of the Helsinki City Information Office Newsletter⁶, seeking to convert this competitive status into a source of cultural and urban magnetism.

"For the second consecutive year, Finland tops the ranking in The Global Competitiveness Report 2004-2005, released by the World Economic Forum in October 2004," the information broadsheet elaborates, "Finland is number one in the Growth Competitiveness Index rankings and holds this position for the third time in the past four years. The World Economic Forum says that Finland is well managed at the macroeconomic level, but it also scores very high in those measures that assess the quality of its public institutions. *Furthermore, the Finnish private sector shows a high proclivity for adopting new technologies and nurturing a culture of innovation* (italics by author)."

Coincident with this positioning, Finland achieved a rare double last year in worldwide rankings by also remaining "the least corrupt country in the world, according to the annual corruption index compiled

by Transparency International [TI]. TI does not focus explicitly upon the converse of its indexing method – estimating the corruption of the private sector – but its criteria does suggest a relationship between the apparent “transparency” of the political activities of public office holders and an apparent “transparency” of the economic activities of private individuals or corporate entities. Implicit in this indexing of “transparency” is a semantic equivalence of “incorruptibility” – in essence, the qualities of honesty, openness, and integrity – with both a desired sensory effect of unimpeded vision and a consequent material sensibility of glass-like character.

In a further manifestation of Finland’s indexing power, the 2003 assessment of knowledge bases in European urban regions⁷ gave Helsinki the highest index rating – over those of Oslo, Stockholm, Munich, and Paris. Helsinki’s index rating is, in fact, synonymous with that of the province of Southern Finland. The analysis implicitly depicts a primary European urban region of well-educated “white-collar” employees predominantly employed in technological R & D activities.

In their mathematical determinations, these qualifiers of the Finnish economic and business character – *competitive, transparent, technically knowledgeable and technologically innovative* – might well remain extremely abstract and distant. The necessity of perceiving this character in terms other than straightforward economic and financial quantifications is arguable, perhaps, in strictly defined and constructed capitalist societies. Stronger currency values, stronger interest rates, higher and more stable employment, greater market presence: one set of mathematical determinants is appropriately validated by another, and “the quality of life,” as assessed in economic terms, is understood to be measurably “better.”

Yet to understand quality of life through sheer economic and quantitative terms is to limit the dimensions of our experience, restrict the means of our expression, and bound our active engagement in the world. Design Forum Finland’s declaration of 2005 as the Year of Finnish Design emphatically asserts that Finland – as a society, as a culture, and as a nation – demonstrably allies “design” with both economic and societal health: “The theme year stems from the awareness that *design plays a key role in Finnish corporate and national competitiveness*, next to technological competence. *Design is also crucial in promoting*

and maintaining a healthy society (italics by author).” Significantly, the importance of design and architecture as recognized components of the quality of life and of national character has been codified recently in separate policy statements by the Finnish Council of State and the Finnish Parliament (specifically the Finnish Government’s Architectural Policy Program of 1998 and the Land Use and Building Act of 1999).

The agenda announced by the Design Forum includes events and presentations from a broad range of educational institutions, and state, provincial, and municipal authorities. The explicit and expansive attachment of Finnish design quality to Finnish economic health, and by further extension, to societal health, is notable, denoting simultaneously the economic (not solely aesthetic) benefits of “good design,” and suggesting an intrinsic identifiable Finnish character to that design quality.

2.2 THE PROJECTION OF VALUE

The Design Forum identifications are not, in and of themselves, authoritative. But an extensive material and even popular history in Finland attests to the constructed relationships between the nation’s culture and its artistic expressions. Finland’s evolving political, economic, and social ambitions as well as its character can be viewed through the tangible expressions of its visual, literary and performing arts, alongside of those achieved in design and architecture. Indeed, it could be asserted that Finland presents a prototypical example of what the architectural theorist Dana Cuff has termed “a design economy”.

Architecture has been defined as “a practice concerned simultaneously with both image production and building production”⁸. The coincidence of these modes of production resonates most powerfully in Finland, given the nation’s emergence in cultural, political, and economic terms in last century. This 100-year period of identity development precisely aligns with the appearance of an evolving understanding of “modernity” in the arts and architecture.

The contemporary manifestation of these relationships – in particular regard to those constructed through architecture for the projection of

Finnish economic and business vitality – pose intriguing questions for both architecture and the private sector in Finland:

How is the contemporary Finnish business identity, so quantifiably advanced, represented in architecture?

How are qualitative evaluations of the Finnish business character – competitive, incorruptible, proficient, and innovative – rendered explicit and tangible for all to view and comprehend?

How is the contemporary Finnish workplace truly “creative”?

Can there be a corporate value to the claim of an authentic “Finnish” design?

3 PARABLE: FROM GRANITE TO GLASS

The contemporary representation of corporate character in architecture runs parallel to issues of urban design and architecture's symbolic value. The departure of the Elisa Corporation from its century-old granite headquarters in the center of Helsinki for suburban leased spaces in September, 2003, illustrates a historical shift in the relationship between corporations, architecture, and society. Together with the development of Nokia's headquarters in 1999, the architectural choices of the two telecommunications companies tell a fascinating story.

3.1 ELISA'S JOURNEY

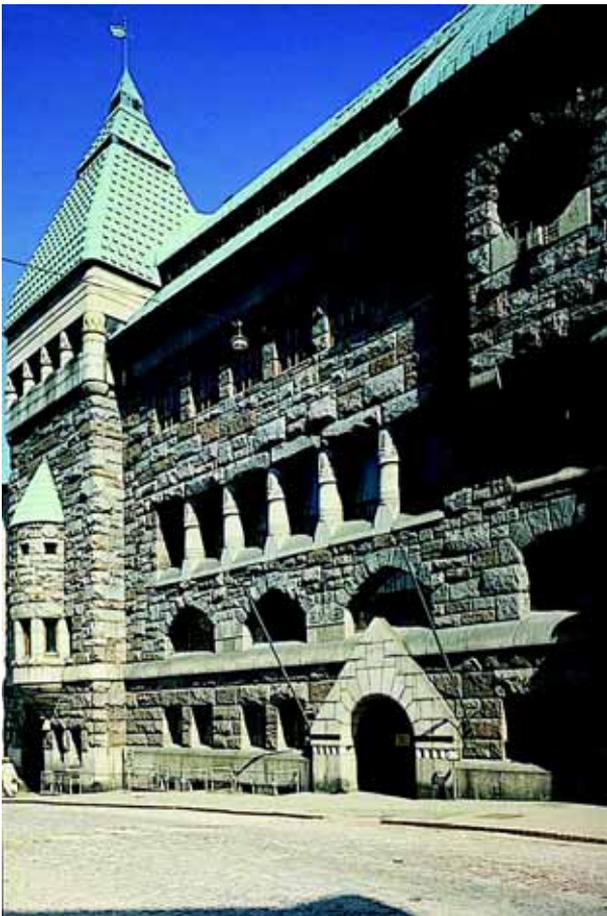
Elisa is the "re-branded", feminine appellation of what was the century-old Helsinki Telephone Company (HPY in its Finnish acronym, founded in 1891). Under the leadership of its new director Veli-Matti Mattila, the company has moved vigorously to re-position itself competitively in the intense Finnish telecommunications market. Assuming his post in July, 2003, Mattila soon announced the departure of Elisa's top management from its iconic, 1903 Lars Sonck -designed "granite castle".

No longer representative of Elisa's contemporary corporate ambitions, except for its desirable (and financially valuable) central capital location, the HPY building would be left behind for leased space on the city periphery. In an interview with the *Helsingin Sanomat's* Juha-Pekka Raeste⁹, Mattila averred that "although traditions are important, a company must work each day to deserve its own future". Therefore, this building of "useless sensibilities" as he described it, could not be the future of the brand, no matter its historical and cultural significance.

In fact, Elisa's departure from its iconic headquarters building concretely postulates a contemporary business maxim: the brand is both bigger,

and better, than any corporate tradition, than any permanent building, and than any city limit.

Mattila's characterization of Sonck's headquarters design neatly summarizes the tensions of building and image production. As described in *Helsinki Jugendstil Architecture 1895-1915*¹⁰, Sonck's design (the first in a long series of designs as HPY's architect), was built in a period "of incensed nationalistic feelings, when romanticism [in architecture] was at its height in castle forms and granite construction." The HPY building is "a massive stone tower-wall expression," powerfully crowning a topological high point in the Helsinki center with its picturesque massing, rough-hewn granite blocks, and detailed ornamental devices representative of the Finnish forest.



HPY Building, Helsinki.

Here, it is important to note the strategic employment of an architectural language of mass, weight, density, and organic detail to enclose and represent what was at the time a new, radical, (inorganic) technology for the near-invisible transmission of disembodied voices.

At the time of the HPY building's construction, Sonck was working within the larger context of an emergent, distinctively Finnish consciousness of strength, independence and self-reliance. The tension between the all-too-apparent massiveness of the building and the utter weightlessness of its technological purposes was noted with prescience by K. S. Kallio¹¹ in his 1907 review: "The aim for an effect of strength is especially visible in the Helsinki Telephone Company Building. Its rough granite wall surfaces, into which windows are gouged like openings to caves, create a very strange and archaic feeling for a modern telephone exchange." The "strange and archaic feeling" of 1907 resounds, albeit altered by the shifting corporate winds, in Mr. Mattila's "useless sensibilities" of 2003.

3.2 CITY OF STONE, CITY OF GLASS

Sonck was certainly not alone in these Finnish efforts to reify the abstract and invisible elements of commerce into stone and to impress upon those surfaces a concentration of narrative details drawn from the natural world. In 1901, only blocks away in the Helsinki center, north across the Esplanade, the partnership of Eliel Saarinen, Hermann Gessellius and Armas Lindgren had completed the Pohjola Insurance Building. The Pohjola design, achieved simultaneously with the partnership's designs for the 1900 Finnish Pavilion at the Universal Exposition in Paris, represents "the vigor of National Romanticism [in that] each material speaks its own natural, characteristic language, and that in ornamentation only motives from the Finnish flora and fauna are used [...]". Additionally, in 1904 the Helsingin Sanomat began publication from stone-clad properties and presses on Ludviginkatu. By 1905, Karl Lindahl and Valter Thomé had begun their designs for the Otava Publishing Company just west of the Esplanade, a sequence of granite-faced structures for the editing, printing, and sales of books under the Otava imprimatur.¹²

Together with other public designs for theaters, museums, transportation stations and residential housing, these commercial buildings outline the more general development of the Helsinki city center throughout the 1890s and across into the new century. Helsinki developed as a coherent “city of stone,” one of permanently constructed structures, contextually related to each other by adjacency, similar scale, dense material and ornamental similarity. These buildings were possessed with a more general ambition to represent both their individual identities and that of the developing cultural identity.

The swiftly emerging 20th century commercial culture engaged many architects worldwide. Simultaneously, for instance, the American Louis Sullivan was also designing for the modern, technological, increasingly commercialized world, as well as for the emerging sense of an American identity. Sullivan’s observations were constructed in the guise of “tall” office buildings and department stores (the Wainwright Building in St. Louis, the Carson-Pirie-Scott Store in Chicago) and then in a series of more modestly-scaled banks throughout the American Midwest



Pohjola Headquarters, Helsinki.

(the National Farmer's Bank in Owatonna, Minnesota (1907), for example).

For these architects, the creative search was for the means to imbue the imperatives of efficient management organization, retail profit maximization, and financial instrument administration with the humane characteristics of monumentality and individuality, dignity and security. All the while, a knowing architect – and their corporate patrons – could sense that the typewriter, the telephone, and the automobile, along with the elevator, manufactured float glass, the steel frame and reinforced concrete construction were advancing technological influences.

Their struggle was for an architectural language responsive to the commercial and technological imperatives, yet also still embodying a particularly national identity. These architects believed that this architectural language should express more of the agrarian or forest sensibilities of the nation and less of the abstractions of commerce or technology.

However, in 1900 the waves of a more hard-headed architectural modernism were already washing upon Finland's shores. Elisa's management today might well have been (and can still be) inspired by the passionate and far-seeing critiques of architects Gustaf Strengell and Sigurd Frosterus. In the wake of the controversial 1904 competition for the Helsinki Railway Station (a commission awarded to Saarinen, Gesellius, and Lindgren), Strengell and Frosterus published a review of Finnish architecture entitled "Architecture: A Challenge". Rejecting the romantic ideals of a forest-based culture and architectural language, their critique of Finnish architecture was radical, direct, and unsentimental:

"Architecture is not (or not only) an art of arbitrary fantasy, it is also an art of calculating reason [...] Modern commercial life and modern people have strictly speaking very little to do with wilderness romanticism and fairy-tale twilight [...] the architect of the future has to learn about the transatlantic steamship and the electric tram, the racing car and the automobile, American office interiors and English lavatories [...] Leading motives for the architecture of the future: the most rational use of materials, economy of materials, and unscrupulous concentration of power. A building is no longer a picturesque silhouette, a dead, static, imposing mass, but a living organism, corresponding to a given purpose, adapted to circumstances."¹³

Strengell and Frosterus bring "modern commercial life" and "modern people" to the forefront of consideration, advocating precise terms of

“concentration of power” and “rational use of materials” for the production of an architecture imagined as a purposeful and adaptive “living organism”. All in all, they dictate a most business-like manner of producing architecture, harnessing techniques of conception to technological methods for the projection of purpose.

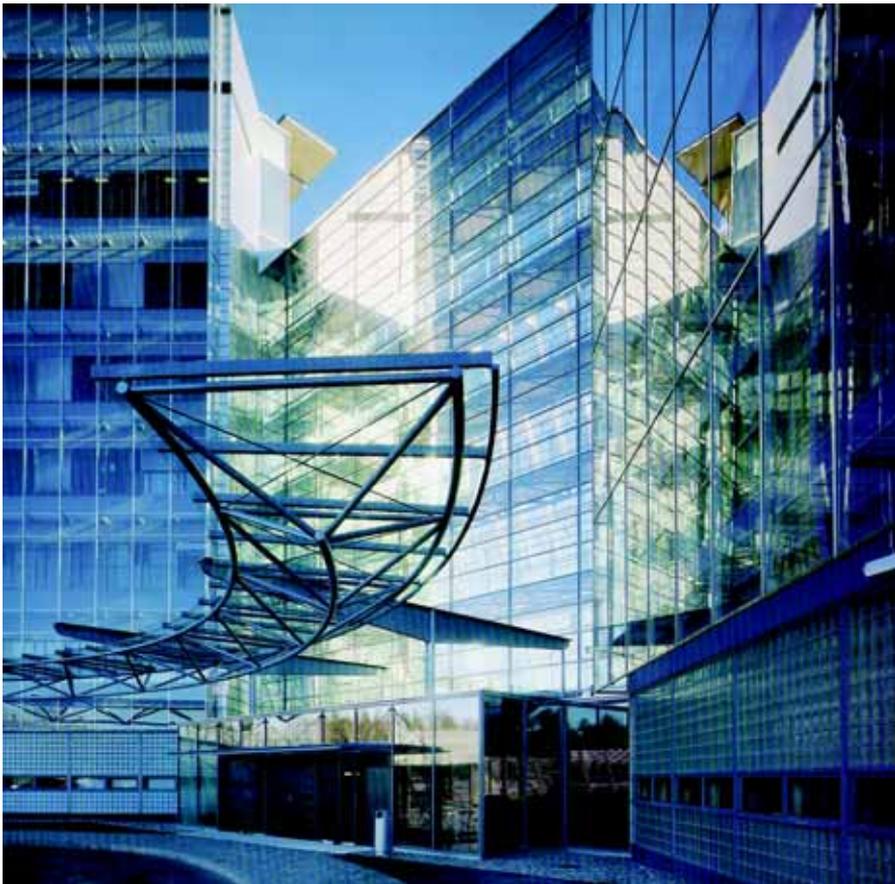
Their climactic, ultimate demand for “AN IRON AND BRAIN” architecture of rationality, technique, and new materials and technologies, was extended to include “AN IRON AND BRAIN ARCHITECTURE FOR BUSINESS PALACES (capital letters theirs),” describing to our ears a form of architecture we know well today, a proto-modernist brand of corporate architecture. “I remember,” says Strengell, “a newspaper building in Amsterdam. It was a simple construction without any ornamentation, defiantly harsh, even. But the huge, reflecting-glass windows, making the façade into a single opening, were almost geometrically even on the surface, and you could have seen the head of pin in the farthest corners of the rooms. Without any kind of embellishment this façade gave an impression of tremendous power. It was like a giant-scale projector through which pictures of events all over the world were hurled out every day. Its character was obtained by the simplest of means, and though ‘aesthetically’ it was perhaps not beautiful, because of its honesty the building was nevertheless *ethically* (italics by author) beautiful.” (ibid.)

At the time, here was architectural criticism well ahead of Finnish corporate ambition and architectural practice, almost prescribing the design of Sanoma House. Strengell and Frosterus eerily anticipate the evident “city of glass” of contemporary Helsinki, both public and private. A translucent Sanoma House, a glowing Kiasma, a sleek Holiday Inn and Scandia Hotel, the vitrines of the Kamppi commercial plaza, and the reflective extension to the House of Parliament increasingly characterize the city center of the 21st century. On the swiftly growing urban perimeter, the horizon is now outlined by the monochromatic development of the Ruoholahti business district, and the prismatic forms of Nokia House, Kone Headquarters, and Radiolinja Headquarters.

3.3 TWO CORPORATE FACES

A one hundred year span leaps over numerous strains of development in Finnish and world architecture, but the comparison of two headquarters buildings separated by a century but no more than ten kilometers remains available to both ironist and idealist.

The massive, dense, granite-block pedimented entrance of Sonck's 1903 HPY building in the center of Helsinki, embedded in the city's public spaces, stands in expressive comparison to the transparent, lightly-structured, glass-faceted, and flat-canopied entrance of Pekka Helin's 1998 Nokia House at the city's periphery, an object building bounded by its own property.



Nokia House, Espoo.

At this juncture in time, the contrasts between HPY and Nokia are instructive. The two corporate faces present starkly different values: between their material and structural sensibilities, their corporate products and presence, their central and peripheral urban locations, their ornamental devices and technological displays. The contrasts highlight the relative values of brands over buildings, of economic decisions and civic ambitions. The two buildings demonstrate a set of critical studies in architecture, political economy, culture, and the ethics of building amidst the increasingly fluid pressures of a capitalist global economy.

Setting aside the difficulties of evaluating the current moment on the same terms as the historicized one, suffice it to say that HPY exemplifies a coherent moment in architectural and cultural development. The era of 1905 was as attached to commercial agendas of image production as to those of national consciousness. HPY's image is one identified by material (granite), by compositional technique of form (the picturesque), by ornamental agenda (the literal representation of nature and the *The Kalevala*), and by advocacy of a coherent urban fabric of similar buildings, both private and public, constructing a durable city center of civic integrity. Further, the discarding of the HPY building by its new owners – so calculating in their re-branding – is symbolic of the fluidity of corporate ambition and image projection.

By contrast, Nokia House may be, at best, only anecdotal or provisional as a representative of a similar coherency in architectural and commercial imagery at this end of the century. The expressed architectural values of Nokia's headquarters can be identified by its materiality (glass), by compositional technique of form (the prismatic), and perhaps by detailing strategies (the absence of external referents, natural or otherwise, and scale-giving elements). Distressingly, the values can also be identified by the building's clear detachment from the public space of the city center.

In 1903, it was possible and desirable for the HPY building to represent corporate ambitions as well as national aspirations through a stable, dense presence in the civic realm of the city. In 2004, is it similarly possible – or even desirable – for the same to be said of Nokia House?

4 POLITICAL ECONOMY, INCORPORATED

The comparison between HPY and Nokia House exemplifies the gradual disappearance of specific and durable cultural referents from contemporary corporate architecture. As well, the contrast highlights the difficulties of obtaining a substantial, specific architectural language within the larger realm of a dynamic world market economy.

4.1 A RESTLESS ECONOMY

According to sociologist Richard Sennett¹⁴, the architecture of the city and the civic realm are reflections of the forces presiding in a political economy, and this relationship can be perceived in distinct terms at both ends of the 20th century.

Sennett's observations repeatedly employ the concept of "embodiment" as a method of sociological and architectural critique, a concept paralleled by that of "incorporation" in business terms. His focus examines the successive conversions of economic activity into incorporated financial entities, then into tangible architecture, and ultimately, into the inhabited civic realm at municipal and national scales.

Sennett illustrates his argument by contrasting the expanding economy of 19th century Bismarckian Germany to that of the modern global economy. In the former, he identifies an evident "rigidity" of the political economy reified into material form: "[...] you would only have to look at the insurance companies, banks, and railroad corporations housed in structures meant to resemble Egyptian temples or Renaissance palaces to see the realization of the desire for economic stability in stone." The European and American city of 1900 "embodied" the dialectical desire for a stable, rigid economic order, even as immense waves of immigrants diversified its population and opened "the promise of freedom" within that same civic realm. Although the Helsinki of

1900 was less affected by immigration, the intention to realize economic stability in the guise of stone is readily apparent in its city center.

By contrast, Sennett elaborates, in the global city of 2000 the dialectic of “flexibility and indifference” predominates. He describes a contemporary contradiction: “We now have cities of globally mobile corporations, flexible workers, a dynamic capitalism bent on erasing routine. Paradoxically, in the city [of 2000], this restless economy produces political disengagements, a standardization of the physical realm, new pressures to withdraw into the private sphere.”

For Sennett, this “restless economy” is embodied architecturally in the form of neutralized environments. The contemporary city of corporate architecture is constructed of standardized elements, homogeneous in their glass-enclosures, planned for maximum flexibility, and insured for limited time periods. This architecture “need(s) the uniformity, the transparency, of money. This is why the style elements of new economy buildings become what [architecture critic] Ada Louise Huxtable calls ‘skin architecture,’ the surface of the building dolled-up with design, its innards ever-more neutral, standard, and capable of instant refiguration”. This environment, Sennett argues, is in fact founded on impermanence, on an extreme mobility of both labor and capital. As such, the flexible and transparent environment ultimately begets indifference to the workplace, to the city, and to the civic realm at large.

Although Sennett does not precisely illustrate this environment, Silicon Valley’s landscape of leased, glass curtain-wall or tilt-up concrete slab construction R&D “parks” constitutes the extreme example. In that archetypal IT-driven landscape, the buildings are differentiated only by their corporate signage, and employee turnover occurs every eight months on average.

But Sennett’s critique also opens a window onto more typical contemporary references, available on our own streets and in our own cities.^c Rather than the segregated, translucent corporate architecture, it is the

^c For further commentary on the architecture of Silicon Valley and its represented values, see Mitchell Schwartz: “Beyond the Valley of Silicon Architecture,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, Winter/Spring 1999.

density and diversity of the Helsinki city center that are precisely the conditions in which innovation and creative engagement thrive. As John Thackara, former director of the Netherlands Design Institute, writes:

“The penetration of systems-based design into public space is also bad for the body politic. Innovation thrives in conditions of diversity, not efficiency, and spaces designed for a single function – be it movement, sport, entertainment, or culture – are unlikely to foster innovation. This is why old-style cities remain unmatched as sites of creativity: Diverse peoples and cultures are crammed into them in a most under-designed manner. Monofunctional zones, gated communities, and themed districts all exclude the opportunity for surprise encounter and combination – the urban equivalent of the mutation and adaptation that determines evolutionary success in nature.”¹⁵

Sennett’s argument of indifference resulting from flexibility, of course, runs counter to the professed ideals and ambitions of contemporary corporate management as well as to the intentions of the architects in their service. Indeed, it would be impossible today to hear, from either party, anything but rhetorical desires for “creativity” or “innovative thinking” to be inspired by the workplace environment and equal desires for “productive interaction” and “positive encounters” to occur among all those working there.



Oracle, Silicon Valley.

4.2 THE CORPORATE MANTRA: CREATIVITY, INNOVATION, FLEXIBILITY

The recent examples of corporate headquarters design in Finland are as ambitious as anywhere else in the world in these desires for “innovative thinking” and “positive encounters”. If the recent competitiveness rankings are to be believed, Finnish architecture is more successful than anywhere else in the world in achieving these ends. But is the relationship conclusively demonstrable, or is it simply a case of parallel rhetoric?



Nokia House, Espoo.

Architect Pekka Helin¹⁶, writing in 1998 of the design intentions for Nokia House, provides a near-perfect charter statement of both corporate and architectural intentions: “The leading objective for the design was to build a working environment for the new millennium that could inspire creative thinking and interaction. This has been achieved through a repetitive, easily altered spatial unit catering equally well for both individual and group working. Communication is enhanced through transparency between the different areas. [...] A versatile and flexible working environment is achieved through the repetition of the basic spatial unit [...] in which the number of restricting, fixed structures and installations has been kept to a minimum. [...] The internal communication plan within the building encourages positive encounters; informal interaction has been acknowledged as a platform for innovative thinking.”

Similarly, when addressing Nokia’s desired relationships between innovation, design and financial success in his November, 2002 lecture in the United States, Nokia CEO Jorma Ollila¹⁷ relied on the architect’s words to describe corporate intentions. Much the same language of corporate ambitions and workplace environment prevails in the archi-



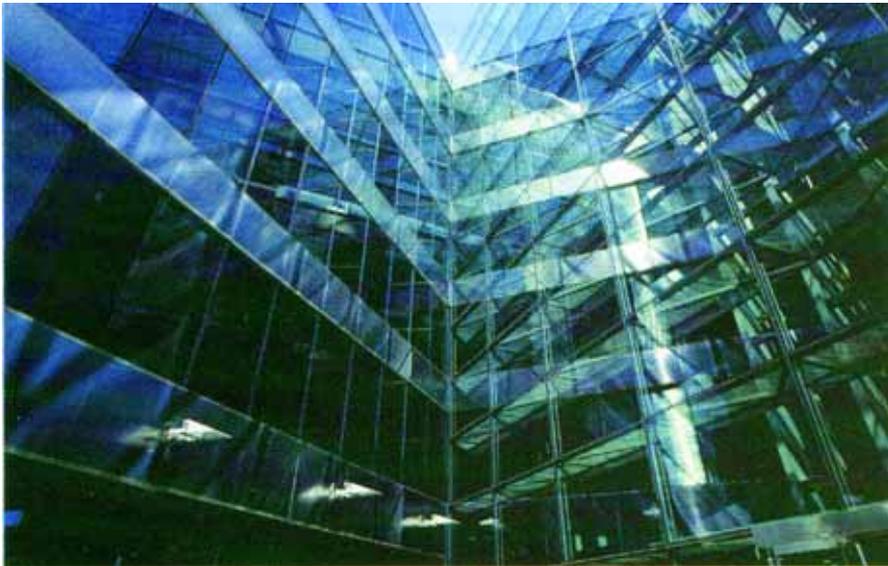
Union Carbide, Headquarters Office Interior, New York.

tectural descriptions accompanying the Kone Headquarters, Sanoma House, and the Sonera Headquarters. If anything, the descriptions of these buildings possess less glossy rhetoric of “creativity,” and more simply, the laconic identifications of materials and building systems.

Absent from these assertions, however, is the true need to control design and construction costs. Surely modular planning, and repetitive structures, systems, and surfaces bear upon both corporate calculations and the efficiency of architectural production.

With all respect to the financial success emerging from the management of these Finnish corporate “cultures of innovation,” the design techniques employed by their Finnish architects are by no means guarantors of enhanced creative work. The employment of standardized and repetitive construction, transparent walls and volumes, and parallel-piped object buildings dispersed in peripheral urban locations have not necessarily led to greater psychological satisfaction in employment or citizenship – nor, I would argue, in long-term productivity.

Such architectural strategies and tactics are, in fact, simply the default settings of, first, an increasingly historicized “modern” architecture (especially in the immediate post-World War II period) and second, of a



Sonera Headquarters, Helsinki.

long-developing cost-efficient culture of production. Throughout it all, corporate architecture has been reliant upon an illusory scientific methodology, woefully misguided urban planning policies, and on what architectural historian Kenneth Frampton has defined “the totalitarianism of technique.” On these terms, corporate architecture in Finland is as much in default as anywhere else.

Put simply, the correlation of transparency and flexibility in office planning with creativity and productivity *is an illusion*. The correlation of open-plan, executive-in-the-open, glass-walled environments with openness, trust, cooperation, and informal brainstorming *is an illusion*.

To begin with, there is no contemporary equivalent of Frederick Taylor’s early 20th century studies on workplace productivity (those that resulted in the Ford factory line, for instance). Productivity evidence in the knowledge worker office setting is essentially anecdotal and usually the result of the corporation’s own surveys. In fact, the few academic studies that are emerging contradict the conception of the open office as the most productive office.



Telenor, Headquarters Office Interior, Oslo.

As a *Fast Company* article recently reported, Tom Davenport, professor of management and information technology at Babson College “found that three factors determined white-collar performance: management and organization, information technology and workplace design. The last, he says, has a measurable effect – for good and ill. ‘Open offices do lead to more unstructured communication,’ he says. But, ‘those same offices can lead to problems of concentration. If you value reflection or deep thought, it gets tough.’ Call it the attention-deficit office.”¹⁸

Equally, another researcher has found evidence to refute the creative environment claimed for the glass-walled box. Dr. Peter Suedfield, of the University of British Columbia, has studied extensively creativity and ways to improve it. One method he has examined “is what he calls the Restricted Environment Stimulation Technique (REST) – putting people into places with no light or outside stimuli. ‘What I’ve found,’ he said, ‘is that far from making people crazy, moderate deprivation lowers blood pressure, improves mood, and makes people more creative.’”¹⁹

Seductive as the conceptions of the “creative workplace” might be, the shifts in office planning – from traditional wall-and-door offices to the “open plan” landscape of dispersed workstations to the untethered, “wired” employee – are, I would argue, as much due to the corporate need to maximize return on its spatial investment as they are to changes in information and communications technologies.

As *The New York Times*²⁰ reported last year, for instance, PricewaterhouseCoopers has developed a higher employee density in “an updated office design it calls Global Workplace. But the point, naturally, is to save money, since office space is leased by the square foot. In doing so, PricewaterhouseCoopers is also trying to crack the longtime link in employees’ minds between space and status [...] It is not just cost but rather the changing culture of the workplace that is driving the changes in office design, real estate specialists say. Richard McBlaine, president for strategic consulting at Jones Lang LaSalle [...] said that companies want to encourage interaction and discourage workers from viewing an office as a status symbol. ‘In the past’, he said, ‘space was used as a psychic form of compensation. To a large extent, that’s changed.’”

The true trade-off, or gamble, in this contemporary calculation of human nature is on the qualitative need for both privacy and stability for productive and satisfying work. These qualities are tangibly (and often intentionally) less available in the contemporary open office plan and in the context of the glass-walled corporate design. Current innovation in workplace design and corporate management theory is very divided at how to proceed. In 2001, the Museum of Modern Art mounted “Workspheres”, an ambitious exhibition devoted to current research in workplace design. If the intellectual survey of perspectives was wide-ranging and incisive, the display of exemplary office systems was ultimately still governed by the limited array of industrial manufacturing processes available to furniture and partition makers.²¹

Research is increasingly attentive to the sociology of the workplace, as advanced through design. Carnegie-Mellon University now hosts a “Living Laboratory” devoted to the intelligent workplace^d. The Norwegian telecommunications giant Telenor has taken the sociological gambles to their extremes in initiating a new, patented workplace system of mobile operations for employees in its new suburban Oslo headquarters. Herman Miller, the American furniture manufacturer (and distributor of Artek) is more cautious and skeptical as to the merits of such mobility. The dominant force in workplace design is “re-thinking both the cubicle and the office landscape and plans to unveil new designs in the new future”²².

Any new designs will need to address more than just productivity, however. Indeed, there is a growing sense that the workplace of the information society, of the New Economy, is actually counterproductive to our individual and societal health, both physically and psychologically. Design researcher John Thackara describes three unhappy checks on the reality of the information society. One, “we are not living in an information society – we are living in an information market [in which the] economic forces – downsizing, globalization and acceleration – are fragmenting the social fabric.” Two, “work today is bad for our health, both physically and psychologically”. Thackara quotes employee surveys in both the European Community and the United States docu-

^d See <http://www.arc.cmu/cbpd>.

menting this point and summarizes: “All recent studies of working conditions in the world’s most prosperous regions make similar points: New-economy patterns of work lead to ill health and early mortality.” And three: in the segmented, high-pace, multi-tasking workplace, “we tend to be judged by what we do, not by who we are.” His judgement: “New economy work leads to loneliness, disconnection, and a loss of identity.”²³

Finally, as is often the case, the creative work of an artist can provide the most telling and poignant observation on the state of culture. The Dutch artist Jacqueline Hassink has systematically surveyed contemporary corporate spaces through her photographic work “Mindscapes”. The six projects document the infiltration of technology into “work environments [...] fundamentally changing the values of private life and public life.” Two projects in particular soberly present the minimal amount of individuality available to the knowledge worker in the contemporary corporate environment: the personal coffee cup and the computer monitor screen-saver image.²⁴

Within immediate Finnish circumstances, the irony of the Sonera telecommunications company’s recent travails is not only that management distrusted its workforce to the extent of violating employee privacy laws. What is most incongruous is that the mutual distrust (and ultimately criminal acts) occurred within an all-too familiar glass-walled, “transparent” corporate headquarters. The disconnection between corporate rhetoric and corporate behavior, and between architectural intentions and the unpredictability of plain human nature, has never been more evident.

4.3 LESS IS LESS

Any competitive corporation is engaged in public relations activity at all scales of communicative media. The positing of a new headquarters building demands attention to its promotional value in its choice of location, form, and materiality. Architecture, at this scale and expense, must be symbolic – not because the architect intends it, but because the corporation requires it.

In this task, the Finnish corporations' recent design choices have reflected the design choices of the larger architectural culture beyond their borders. But in adopting a design vocabulary of abstracted geometric forms rendered in glass, these corporate giants have approached the minimal limit of architecture's communication value. The resulting transparency or translucency and overall neutrality produces, at their best, phenomenal effects. However, any symbolic content – especially when repeated in the neighboring boxes or cylinders – is lost, absorbed into a fetishized display of material effect and technical systems of construction.

This loss of symbolic meaning – or at least, meaning reduced to simple displays of technological prowess – is a significant issue in contempo-



Nokia Research Center, Helsinki.

rary architecture (along with the growing necessity of sustainably principled design). The emphatic reliance on glass enclosure systems at increasing scales has been identified as a major culprit in this loss. As architect Juhani Pallasmaa²⁵ stated at a 2004 glass technology conference, “the development of the window from a metaphysical device of focusing and mediating our perception into an entire wall of glass, a wall which evokes the total absence of the wall – as well as the disappearance of the window altogether – certainly also raises critical concerns. The entire house has now often turned into a window; we are invited to live in a window, as it were. Such inversions may be exciting and thrilling, but they may also impoverish architecture by annihilating its primary architectural essence.”



High Tech Center, Helsinki.

Pallasmaa is not entirely pessimistic in this identification, holding out hope for an invigorated use of glass in design: “In today’s architecture, opacity and depth is often replaced by the enmeshing and layering of translucent, perforated, and transparent surfaces. The currently popular application of screening veils on top of glass surfaces is clearly an attempt to reintroduce mystery, ambiguity, fragmentation, and a distinct tactile eroticism to all-glass facades. Even ornament and decoration have reappeared in entirely new forms – as images imprinted or engraved on sheets of glass.” (ibid.)

The transparent building of glass had been the long-held dream of modern architecture. Significantly, the prototypical application of a standardized glazed surface was the 1850 Crystal Palace in London, an exposition building devoted to commercial display. While modern architecture sought to realize its dream of an optimistic, democratic architecture through glass design, the demonstrations of the material’s possibilities increasingly occurred in corporate architecture. The 20th century work of architect Mies van der Rohe epitomized this search for absolute transparency; his design for the Seagram’s Building in New York is a supreme alliance of corporate and architectural ambition in the immediate post-World War Two years.

Following Olivetti’s European example of employing design as an overall corporate strategy, in the 1950s IBM initiated an in-house total design program to develop and reinforce its corporate image. The computer technology giant employed Eliot Noyes, Paul Rand, Charles and Ray Eames, and Eero Saarinen to refine and integrate its corporate identity at all scales, with an evident emphasis on what is now known in architectural culture as both “literal and phenomenal transparency”.

In fact, as architectural theorist Reinhold Martin²⁶ describes, much of Eero Saarinen’s work for corporate clients after World War Two employed glass curtain wall systems in a parallel attempt to represent corporate character:

“[...] Eero Saarinen, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and others throughout the 1950s had [...] begun to stage this process: a potentially infinite mutability, in which the architectural module was a unit of variable content (partitions, glazing, lighting, etc.) through identification with – and the visual identity of – the integrated system of the corporation was engineered. [...] Such an image – of the corporation as a

flexible, integrated system – is seen to correspond with a “humanization” of corporate life, as corporations decentralize both spatially and administratively.”

However inspirational the corporate work of van der Rohe and Saarinen may have been, the reliance on these forms and material systems has been judged to have reached both its technological peak and its symbolic low point at the present time. The contemporary collective indictment of these stylistic preferences is summarized succinctly by Dutch critic Hans Ibelings. Labeling the contemporary works of minimal form, minimal material, and minimal character as “Supermodern,” he describes their disabling abstractions and transparencies in profoundly, disturbingly critical terms:

“Today’s [architectural] minimalism, incidentally, is purer than ever before, thanks to improvements in technology and materials. This purity is found both in the extraordinary aesthetic architecture of the likes of Tadao Ando, Wiel Arets, and John Pawson, and in the ‘almost nothing’ of today’s average glass box, the shape of which is also more abstract than ever before [...] This simplicity is not primarily a reaction to the aesthetic of visual excess, although that aspect certainly plays a role. *In essence, the new abstraction is an expression of a fundamentally different attitude to archi-*



General Motors Tech Center, Detroit.



Seagram Headquarters, New York City.

ecture which it sees less and less as significant and filled with symbolic meaning, and more and more as a neutral object. (italics by author)”²⁷

The development of the glass curtain wall – now reaching its apogee in the current period of advanced glass technology – has not necessarily led to greater expressiveness of individual corporate character. Indeed, it is precisely the ubiquity of the technology that is implicated in the downfall of architecture’s representational power. As Richard Sennett and Ada Louise Huxtable point out above, this “skin architecture” has “the transparency of money”. The neutrality of transparent form and character communicates both indifference to the environment and a sense of impermanence. The architect Mies van der Rohe’s oft-quoted dictum of “Less is more” has instead led, at least in the corporate world of its application, to “Less is less.”

4.4 THE CORPORATE ARCHITECTURAL EQUATIONS

Style, architectural modernism, the premium placed on the flexibility in and transparency of the workplace in both literal and figural terms – these issues are central to corporate considerations of building form and character. Much of what has been sketched above attempts to indicate the very thinness of the premises that have dominated the conception of modern architecture in these regards. As well, the three cardinal rules of real estate – location, location, and location – remain the contemporary corporate imperatives. In the midst of open, real-estate driven economies, what remains at issue, for both management and designer, in Finland as elsewhere, are three corporate/architecture relationships:

- 1) between the innovative thought and work of people; and the repetitive, flexible spaces and installations of the work environment;
- 2) between the desired positive encounters and informal interaction among employees; and the literal, material transparency of the workplace;

3) between the resultant transparent (and often double-glazed) prism of the building's architecture – in both urban and suburban locations; and the projected public image of the corporation.

But with the positing of these relationships, deeper questions arise: Without privacy and stability at work, what value will such qualities have for the individual outside of their workplace? What symbolic civic value can be attained when the agenda for corporate representation is shorn of all identifying marks, save that of “high-quality”? Additionally, as the urban realm of Finland continues to expand on commercialized terms, what will happen to the bonds between community and corporation realized in previous periods by architectural design?

The driving force of Finland's decade long economic surge may provide an emblematic forecast. Even as Nokia's CEO can espouse the Finnish location of the corporation's headquarters, he emphatically de-emphasizes the reliance of the Nokia brand upon any perception of its Finnish origins. In a 2002 lecture at an American university, Jorma Ollila²⁸ described this seeming contradiction: “The Nokia brand is based on the perception of quality. We discussed at length whether we would seek to characterize our products as identifiably ‘Finnish’ in their marketing, and ultimately set aside this idea. Nowadays, the Nokia name and brand is often understood to be of Japanese origin. This doesn't bother us; our concentration is simply on products of the highest quality”.

Having invested in a headquarters in Finland, Nokia should still not be relied upon for permanent residence. Heretical as it may be, in today's fluid global economy, the flagship of the Finnish economy may well re-locate to Asia or South America at some point in the future, or actually vanish as a corporate entity into another brand and structure. The dynamics of the global economy and the all-too-clear instability of contemporary architecture (even in Finland) necessitate this consideration.

5 DISSOLUTIONS: THE DISSOLVING CORPORATION, THE DISSOLVING CITY

“Capitalism is evolving continuously from its own inventive energies and presently, the corporate institution is exploring the potential of a new, dematerialized form, sometimes described as the “virtual corporation”. This power to coordinate and control [production from afar] is based primarily on the corporation’s knowledge, not its real estate, its capital value anchored in brand names and products.”

William Greider, “The Soul of Capitalism”²⁹

Architecture always affects its surrounding environment and always represents values, whether banal or bombastic. Over the last year, my survey of leading corporations found such physical and representational issues at work in the contemporary corporate headquarters architecture of Europe and the United States. The physical transparency, flexibility, hermeticism, and dispersion of corporate culture and architecture suggest that the contemporary corporation is both “dissolving” in front of our eyes and a “dissolving agent” of our cities.

“All that is solid melts into air”, was Marx’s description of the dissolving effects capitalist development would have upon the material products, human relations and civic institutions of a culture. Ironically, his words at the least ring true in the corporate world of today, in which corporations are in literal physical dissolution. Maximizing the flexibility of their operations, distancing and disassociating themselves from production, corporations move their headquarters to suburban peripheries, and still further from the centers of the developed world to locations on the global periphery. This acceleration is visible in architectural form.

And while “the dissolving corporation” accelerates its material transformation and dispersion, simultaneously corporations must be seen as potential “dissolving agents” of the cities in which they have chosen to

locate. Legally, the responsibilities of their designs end at the site-line. More and more, their headquarters designs internalize their communities of employees and workers. Headquarters now provide cafés, gyms, banks, day-care centers to such an extent that daily contact with the external life of the city is no longer necessary. In addition, all continue to rely upon automobile transport and parking.

5.1 A CORPORATE SURVEY: COCOONS, CAMPUSES AND GLASS BOXES

Wal-mart, headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas, is the world's largest retail sales corporation – indeed, a corporation whose gross revenues place it 24th on the ranked list of national economies (Finland, for example, is 31st)³⁰. Described by Robert Reich³¹ as “the logical end point and future of the economy in a society whose pre-eminent value



Wal-mart, Lawrence, Kansas.

is getting the best deal”, Wal-Mart relies upon both information technology and a globalized economy to obtain its market power.

Its architecture is also a resultant of this “best deal” ethic. While a central location geographically for North America, the corporation’s nondescript, low-rise brick headquarters belies its assertive “super-store” strategy: 3,079 stores and affiliates across the American landscape and 1,068 more in 18 countries.³²

In Bentonville, Wal-Mart’s prosperity has turned northwest Arkansas into one of the 15 fastest growing areas of the United States. The corporation’s requirement that its vendors have a representative office in Bentonville has profoundly affected population growth and infrastructure. It has spurred the construction of a new airport and entire housing sub-divisions, with the consequently necessary schools and shopping centers. The 19th century saw the development of the “company town”; Wal-Mart has produced the “corporate region.” (ibid.)

More importantly, the sales giant operates on a massive economy of scale, with simultaneously immense geographical reach. The localized –



Wal-mart, Lawrence, Kansas.

and international – economic effects of Wal-Mart’s business strategy have been debated elsewhere. Its effect on real-estate values, highway construction, urban sprawl and the increasingly banal, over-scaled landscape of the contemporary city (not only in the United States) is the subject of academic critique and real-time protest.^e

And yet the corporation pursues other architectural avenues, perhaps strategically, perhaps genuinely. Its first Eco Store opened in 1993 in Lawrence, Kansas, followed by others in Oklahoma and California. Although this effort can be understood as an element of corporate marketing strategy, as Rem Koolhaas’ study on shopping has observed, nonetheless, “these Eco Stores feature many energy-saving measures such as solar lighting, a special plumbing system that reduces water use, and a futuristic HVAC system that consumes very little energy.” (ibid.) Such designs come at a high initial investment cost to Wal-Mart; the company is hesitant to duplicate them. Speaking of the most recent Eco-Store slated for construction in Vancouver, B.C., Wal-Mart spokesman Kevin Groh admitted that the company would re-coup its initial outlay through energy savings and other efficiencies. “However,” said Groh, “this specific design has not been slated for replication. It’s one of a kind”.³³

USA Today, or more precisely, the Gannett Corporation, constructed its new headquarters at the periphery of suburban Washington, D. C., adjacent to the northern Virginia access road to Dulles International Airport. Kohn, Pederson, Fox (KPF), the New York-based corporate design firm, rejected the “familiar recycled modernism look of most corporate campuses”. Instead, the designers dispersed the corporation’s two halves into a series of interconnected glass prism towers, each enclosed by a sleekly tailored curtain wall, and based on a common four-story podium. The public relations rhetoric accompanying the corporate design is paradoxically civic-spirited in nature: “The podium is modeled after a town square – an open community with people gathering and moving about. It has a common lobby and courtyard that bring people together.”³⁴

^e See, for instance, Thomas Friedman: “The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century”. New York, 2005: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, pp. 128-141.

The building, recognized by *Business News* and *Architectural Record* in 2003 with a design award, is described by its' architects as a "landscape" of forms and courtyards. " Rooftop terraces and extensive landscaping integrate a green environment into the building's work areas." (ibid.)

Microsoft worked with Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum (HOK), a giant among world architecture firms, to develop a suburban corporate "campus" in Redmond, Washington. Its commitment to a permanent headquarters has been paralleled by its astounding rise in stock prices. The sense of permanence is communicated by the design's careful integration of buildings with landscaped open space. This planning, together with the precisely detailed stone panels of the construction, places Microsoft in deliberate contrast to the uncoordinated and thinly constructed leased spaces of Silicon Valley.

Nonetheless, the traditional image of a campus tends to evoke perceptions of an open academic community engaged in unbounded inquiry,



USA Today, McLean, Virginia.

selflessly disengaged from political or economic pressures. As an economic entity, Microsoft is truly a gated community, and in reality, the protective security measures surrounding this community are tight.

The enveloping rectilinear architecture seems to reflect the corporate ethos. Amidst “the manicured lawns and sculpted berms and softball fields and fancy cafeterias [...] Microsoft moves slowly and doesn’t make sharp turns”. Bill Gates himself facetiously refers to his headquarters as “The Borg”, a telling reference to Star Trek’s monstrous, black cubic hive structure that is the antithesis of humane values in the universe.³⁵

Interestingly, when developing its newest product, the Xbox 360 video-game console, Microsoft management “went outside the (campus) box,” to the Silicon Valley model. The Xbox design team purposefully isolated itself in a generic office park, some distance from the home campus, setting up a “separate division that is physically, geographically, psychologically, and spiritually different”. Creativity and innovation... but outside the Borg campus. (ibid.)

Ford, under the leadership of CEO William Ford, has moved to re-brand itself as a 21st century environmentally responsible auto manufacturer, an extreme indication of “enviro-preneurship.” Ford has moved rapidly to the pace of environmental architect William McDonough, re-conceiving its overall design and production approaches, from the individual automobile to the design of its new Rouge truck plant. The company is investing \$2 billion in re-making its 87 year old, 600 acre Rouge manufacturing complex from “an icon of vertically integrated manufacturing in the twentieth century to a model of sustainability in the twenty-first”.³⁶

Opened in April, 2004, the new Rouge truck plant, southwest of Detroit in Dearborn, Michigan, is the most visible and substantial evidence of this effort to date. Described as “one of the biggest experiments in eco-friendly design on the planet”, the 1.16 million square foot aluminum paneled box is plain and undistinguished from the ground. But its 10 acre “green, living roof”, punctuated by large skylights, is the world’s largest, according the Guinness Book of World Records. The big roof is planted with sedum – a small, invasive succulent that blooms in spring with tiny white, yellow, red and purple flow-

ers. The vegetation, which is expected to double the life of the roof from 15 to 30 years, provides insulation and protection from ultraviolet light. (ibid.)

Most important, the roof is designed to soak up 4 million gallons of storm water a year, releasing it slowly into a constructed wetland immediately to the east, where it collects in terraced ponds. The strategy is estimated to have saved Ford as much as \$5 million that the company would have had to invest in a water-treatment plant. (ibid.)



Ford - Rouge Truck Plant, Dearborn, Michigan.

The roof's light monitors flood the interior assembly floor with daylight, reducing electricity needs and keeping workers attuned to the cycle of the sun. The interior is also remarkably free of heating and cooling ductwork, as traditional air-conditioning approaches were set aside in favor of a mechanical system designed to provide an even air flow.

Ford officials expect the building to save them millions of dollars by increasing worker productivity and reducing outlays for energy, maintenance, and storm-water treatment. But these are early days for such performance measurements. For now, the effect on the environment is already in evidence, with birds nesting on the roof and mallards gathering in the constructed wetland. Public tours of the building sell out regularly and advance reservations are required. The company has won 20 awards for various parts of the site or for the whole complex itself, including Facility of the Year from the Environmental Protection Magazine, and the Gold LEED (the U.S. environmental design rating system) Award from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Ford's efforts do not lack critics, however. Daniel Becker, director of the Sierra Club's global warming program, admires the plant's achievements, but is skeptical: "Whatever they did to the plant is marvelous, but if they're producing pick-up trucks that pollute too much, what are they accomplishing?"³⁷

A \$2 billion in capital investment is a considerable sum, however, as is the personal and corporate gamble that Bill Ford is taking with the company. Architect William McDonough sees the corporate direction as one of the strongest indications yet of "the new triple bottom line" informing contemporary corporate performance: economy, ecology and equity.³⁸

Telenor, the Norwegian telecommunications giant (the world's largest operator of mobile satellite services) has consolidated nearly 6,000 employees into a new, glassed, prismatic headquarters on the Oslo fjord. The largest headquarters of any Scandinavian company, Telenor's effort simultaneously addressed its desire for a more singular, identifiable corporate location – and its aim to reduce overall corporate direct and indirect energy consumption costs.

Equally, the concurrent shift in workplace culture to Telenor's desired "office of the future" could also be accomplished more effectively and comprehensively during a transition to a new, collective building. "The office of the future" for Telenor is a now patented, virtually paperless, highly mobile, literally transparent, intimate environment. Employees are reliant upon digital and wireless technologies; this frees them from a specific desk in a specific office. The floors lack even a patterned open 'landscape' of work stations.

On the basis of a limited competition, Telenor selected architect Peter Pran, working with American-based firm NBBJ. Strategically, for both designers and corporation, the project signified another level of ambition in corporate design: "This is well beyond a brand statement for Telenor ... this is a building that seeks to encourage more creative thought, and more effective decisions."

This attitude towards the desired psychological effects of the design, combined with the natural illumination requirements of the Norwegian building code, condition the Telenor design essentially into a series of thin, glass-and-travertine-sheathed volumes, in which the corporate ambition for openness and transparency in workplace activi-



Telenor Headquarters Office Interior, Oslo.

ty is met literally by the materiality, illumination, and flexibility of the design and construction.^f

Nike-Europe, at the directive of their CEO of European Operations, chose to locate in 1999 in Hilversum, just outside of Amsterdam, and proximate to continental highway access and Schipol Airport. Essentially a design, sales and marketing center for the corporation's operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Nike-EMEA has the appearance of permanent, low-scaled collegiate campus centered around a lawn and reflecting pool in the midst of the Dutch neighborhoods. As with Ford's re-branding efforts in social and environmental responsibility, Nike too employed eco-architect William McDonough to give his attention and imprimatur to the 375,000 square foot program of offices, retail space, restaurants, a health and fitness center, and commons areas.

Despite the air of permanence, Nike-EMEA is latently possessed by flexibility and mobility. The extensive program of spaces places a high



Telenor Headquarters, Oslo.

^f For a longer architectural description of Telenor, see Peter MacKeith: "Telenor's World Headquarters", *Architectural Record*, May 2003.

premium on employee comfort because of the competitive market for design, sales and marketing employees; in these fields, the average turnover is within 18 months. To increase employee satisfaction and mitigate turnover, Nike follows the corporate trend in providing an internalized community of banking services, restaurants and cafes, gymnasias and other recreation areas.

Nike-EMEA is of course a commendable “green” building, one of the first in Europe to be heated and cooled by an efficient geo-thermal system, incorporating a “gray-water” recycling system, and mindful of natural illumination throughout all its levels. The outdoor basketball courts are made of recycled Nike training shoes. These aspects also lend themselves to community relations, to employee appeal, and to more general marketing efforts.

But again, Nike-EMEA is not quite a permanent corporate presence. While constructed to its environmental specifications, Nike leases the building from a separate development corporation. This flexible financial arrangement is reflected in the design – should Nike depart for



Nike-EMEA Headquarters, Hilversum.

other premises in the future, the complex can be converted into a number of other possible programs: other commercial uses, but also (and notably) for housing. As of 2004, the company had already outgrown the dimensions of the new construction, and was seeking additional space adjacent to the campus.

Volkswagen describes itself as basically a two-model company – the Golf and the Passat – but it is the Golf that drives its fortunes, and by extension the fortunes of Wolfsburg, Germany, home of its Golf production plant. Perhaps it was no surprise then, when in fall, 2003, the mayor of the city ordered the name of the city to be officially changed to “Golfsborg” for six weeks, as a means of assisting the car manufacturer in launching its new, 5th generation Golf model. The identification of the city with the corporation and a particular corporate product is not unique, but it is at an extreme. Wolfsburg “is the quintessential company town – a city of 125,000 that was founded in 1938 by Hitler to turn out Europe’s first mass-produced vehicle, the Volkswagen ... six decades after its founding, (the city) remains a support system for a gargantuan car factory”. Although Wolfsburg can point to a cultural center by Alvar Aalto, a theater by Hans Scharoun, and now a science center



Volkswagen, Wolfsburg.



Volkswagen, Wolfsburg.



Volkswagen, Wolfsburg.

by Pritzker Prize-winner Zaha Hadid, it is the factory exhaust stacks that punctuate the skyline.³⁹

In fact, the city is working beyond its temporary “re-branding” exercise to promote its virtues as a tourist destination rather than as an industrial site. Partnering with Volkswagen, Wolfsburg constructed the Autostadt, a 62 acre automobile theme-park complex directly adjacent to the VW factories. Designed by Gunther Henn, the architect responsible for Volkswagen’s “transparent factory” in Dresden, Autostadt displays many of the same architectural intentions of seeming openness and technological theatricality. While a visitor can stroll through pavilions devoted to the range of VW brands and automobile history, central to the theme-park’s intent is the intensification of car desire and ownership through a highly choreographed product delivery center. The sequence attempts to render the point of product delivery into the most intimate, or sacred, human experience. Significantly, the new vehicles are kept secluded in two cylindrical glass towers until their new owners arrive; the Wolfsburg information center now proposes that these “Auto-Towers” are the symbols of the new civic identity.

Simultaneously, BMW, Audi, and Mercedes-Benz are all initiating newly-designed research and development centers. Alongside theme-park-like product delivery centers, these engage in their design an almost predictable series of high-profile architects: Hadid, Coop Himmelblau, Asymptote, Morphosis. These designs are typically experiments in form – dynamic roofs, structural systems, circulation ramps, etc. – with an emphasis on demonstrating the sophisticated technology employed in the automobile and on heightening “the delivery experience” for the purchaser. (ibid.)

5.2 ACCELERATED MOBILITY, BUILDING TO SUB-LET

For the last 15 years at least, leading business executives and academics have proclaimed the death of traditional corporate operating structures. In their place is “the new corporate architecture,” constructed by a triad of innovative management structures – the modular, the virtual, and

the barrier-free. These are extolled as the building blocks of “the boundaryless organization,” a contemporary corporate form described by GE’s former CEO, Jack Welch, as “a company [...] where we knock down the walls that separate us from each other on the inside and from our key constituencies on the outside.”⁴⁰

In its purest form, it is said, the boundaryless corporation need not have a central office, an organizational chart or a hierarchy. In its architectural form, the organizational terms of the boundaryless corporation lead into the virtual disembodiment of the corporation in architectural terms: total spatial flexibility, utter material transparency.

Given the extreme financial pressures and rapid shifts in the make-up of corporate management, as well as the indications of contemporary architectural expression, nothing should be regarded as sacred territory - certainly not national character. *The Economist’s* 2003 year-end statistics and forecast summary⁴¹ on corporate movements and re-locations predicts that an increasing number of multinationals will shift the operation and control of key business functions away from their head office, dispersing headquarters functions to different regions. According to the article, “a recent UNCTAD survey found that 829 ‘HQ operations’ of multi-nationals were relocated between January 2002 and March 2003, nearly a quarter of them in developing countries”.

Architecture’s potential to keep up with this accelerating pace of business development is limited. But this is true only when architecture is understood as design reliant upon a stable geographic location, the provision of stable enclosures, and commonly held symbols of meaning. On these terms, architecture’s contribution to corporate identity and profitability may simply be beside the bottom-line point. In Harvard Business School professor Donald Sull’s view⁴², “building to last” in corporate headquarters can be seen as a sign of arrogance and incipient decline:

“Modern business executives often satisfy their “edifice complex” by erecting elaborate new corporation headquarters. Like Augustus’ building programs, these headquarters can mark the beginning of corporate decline. Building a grand corporate headquarters [...] can signal that management has declared competitive victory and wishes to commemorate its triumph. Executives who memorialize their success rarely question the commitments that enabled their success in the first place.

Building an elaborate corporate headquarters can also lock a company into a community – a double-edged sword [...] Erecting enduring buildings makes a strong symbolic statement. By literally “setting commitments in stone [...]” building projects signal permanence and continuity that may inhibit managers’ ability to re-think and reverse their former commitments. The nondescript office building in Silicon Valley can quickly adjust to new tenants, whereas the corporate monument can easily outlast the corporation, making a mausoleum of the coliseum. Instead of ‘building to last’[...] maybe we should think more about ‘building to sublet’?”

This devaluation of architecture (understood in these business terms as an art of unnecessary permanence and arrogant symbolic meaning) is furthered by Sull’s sharpened point in a 2004 *Forbes* magazine assessment⁴³. Using Time-Warner’s new Manhattan headquarters – and its subsequent 65 percent decline in stock prices – as an example of corporate pride coming before its fall, Sull provides a damning tip to investors and business managers: “steer clear of companies whose headquarters win architecture awards”.

Indeed, numerous examples can be found on correlating award-winning headquarters construction with share price decline. By this method, Levi-Strauss, The Gap, and Alcoa can all be depicted in financial decline after winning their architectural recognition, while Gannett (USA Today), Bayer and Time Warner are on the brink or already sliding.

5.3 ARCHITECTURE’S LOSS OF IDENTITY

This brand of bottom-line equations encourages the corporation to reject architecture in all but its most debased form – in favor of an enhanced financial result. Simultaneously, the discipline of architecture, so qualitatively based, has struggled with its own identity throughout the evolution of capitalist society. The discourse of contemporary architecture describes an increasing series of internal critiques, which have autonomously attempted to re-define architecture’s ambitions and possibilities within corporate culture.

Madrid-based architects Iñaki Abalos and Juan Herreros⁴⁴, for example, produce a devastating critique of modern architecture. Their analysis links technological advances in building practice in the 20th century to the new organizational forms of the global capitalist economy.

Through this association, Abalos and Herreros identify a fundamental shift in our culture's understanding of architectural form and urban space. Examining systematically the characteristic architectural forms of the modern corporation, they conclude that "material practices and the production of contemporary space reflect technological change, particularly the new popularity and central role of communications technology, which at the global level has produced instability and at the regional level a lack of articulation associated with flexible accumulation".

Abalos and Herreros indict and convict a century of modernist architectural models, proposing a dystopic contemporary circumstance: "A different concept of the skyscraper, a different concept of the periphery, a different concept of type and function, a different concept of urban space, and a historical topos lacking any kind of function: the destruction of modern technical, typological, and urban paradigms is complete".

In this state of internal crisis, a number of subsequent architectural critiques since the early 1990s simply admit powerlessness to represent either nation or community in the face of an overwhelming foe. Architecture has been co-opted, it is argued, and is now a part of the corporate culture. Its program, so to speak, is the corporate program, not a system of meaning outside of the commission. Architecture, and even the choice of architect, has become an extension of marketing, brand-building, and a media culture fixated on celebrity. As one European critic held, "the stars of architecture are necessary because only they, through their name, can attract the necessary publicity for large-scale projects [...]. Nobody would know that the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank existed if it hadn't been built by Norman Foster".⁴⁵ Think: Guggenheim-Gehry-Bilbao.

The supposed celebrity of the designer is harnessed into the Corporate Identity machine, as the struggle to define the identity of anonymous corporations becomes ever more difficult: "Potential clients of architectural projects are becoming increasingly anonymous. Anonymous investment companies, anonymous cities. Companies that no longer have owners [...], cities that have become interchangeable: only corporate culture offers the possibility to create a "distinguishable identity" [...].

In the future architecture must be understood as part of just this corporate culture”. (ibid.)

Others are more pragmatic, realistically attempting to identify a way forward for architecture in a commercialized world. As Anna Klingmann⁴⁶ writes, “architecture needs to rethink its position as an integral constituent of contemporary social networks, that is, as a complex entity of globalized market forces, communications, and design. [...] Architecture has already become part of a package that may best be described by the idea of Corporate Identity. [...] In order to secure its survival as a ‘singular commodity’, it needs to engage some of the interdisciplinary thought of marketing, to the degree that it may compete with other products on the market”.

Thus a tragic summary can be stated: even as the corporation is effectively dissolving its physical presence in its elected “mobile workplace”, in its transparent appearances and ever more dispersed locations, contemporary architecture in the service of the corporation is itself dissolving. First losing its coherence as a discipline, architecture then disappears into the corporate image-making systems. The corporation dissolves its physical presence and dissolves the historical city as architecture abnegates its ethical position.

6 THE CORPORATE CHALLENGE

“New information technologies (including ethically controlled genetic engineering) could yield their promise of a virtuous interaction between the power of mind and the well-being of society. No need to look into the future: just look around at courageous efforts such as those taking place in Finland. The Finns have quietly established themselves as the first true information society, with one website per person, internet access in 100 percent of schools, a computer literacy campaign for adults, the largest diffusion of computer power and mobile telephony in the world, and a globally competitive information technology industry, spearheaded by Nokia. At the same time they have kept in place, with some fine-tuning, the welfare state. Finnish society fosters citizen participation and safeguards civility. It is probably not an accident that Linus Torvalds is a Finn [...]. The catch is that Linus Torvalds now lives in Silicon Valley.”

Manuel Castells: “*Information Technology and Global Capitalism*” in *Global Capitalism*⁴⁷

Having allied itself to modern architecture for the development and representation of its institutions, Finnish architectural culture has also attached itself to modernism’s relentless dynamic, one turbocharged by the dynamic of capitalist economics. The difficulty of this relationship has only become acutely apparent in Finland in the last decade.

6.1 THE MODERN DYNAMIC

Writing in the centenary issue of *Arkkitehti-lehti* in 2003, architect, professor and former head of the National Board of Public Building Matti K. Mäkinen⁴⁸ outlined the contemporary conditions for architects in Finland in directly economic terms, without reference to aesthetics, representational techniques or cultural discourse: “The mantra of our times is the trinity of economy, growth, and competitiveness. The real estate and building conglomeration in control of the business wing of the profession wants to have responsibility – or at least the power – for the concreteness of building. Social debate has been reserved for the pastures of researchers, and the fences of thinking are set by sponsoring systems.” Mäkinen’s insights are stated realistically, as the new *Zeitgeist*, although not without a tinge of melancholy.

Architectural historian Kenneth Frampton⁴⁹, himself an observer and advocate of Finnish architecture, echoes Mäkinen's dark vision in a larger perspective: "Architects are confronted today by a crisis of value comparable to that experienced by [the 19th century architectural theorist] Gottfried Semper in 1851, when he first realized the cultural depreciation that had already been effected through machine production and the substitution of materials [...] Over the last century and a half this cultural devaluation has greatly increased in scope, and its main effect has now shifted to the "spectacular" side of the economic cycle [...]"

Steeped in the Frankfurt School of political and moral economy, Frampton remains resistant and defiant in the midst of this continuing "crisis": "If this assessment is essentially correct, then two critical holding strategies suggest themselves. In the first instance the manifest necessity for architects to maintain their command over the art of building as a spatial and tectonic discipline; in the second, the equally pressing demand to educate and sensitize their potential clientele, for as is obvious from the spectacular nature of late capitalism, little of cultural significance will be achieved in the future without the presence of an enlightened client."

If Finnish business culture can be characterized as "creative" and "innovative" – and here we should be wary of the business-school sheen given to these words – it remains a very open question if its accompanying architecture is its match. The transparency envisioned and valorized by modern architecture, often in the name of a more democratic, optimistic world, has become the default appearance attached to any corporate brand.

The confluence of Finnish corporate practice and Finnish architectural practice has produced a limited, operative set of design monuments. Neutral, transparent and abstract in appearance, these designs are still active presences in the public perception of the corporations and in the urban and suburban landscapes of their occupation. But the corporate ambition is solely for a "high-quality" product, and corporate responsibility for the character of the city and the quality of the environment ends at the sidewalk or parking garage. Will the resulting architecture have any necessary relationship to the society, culture and civic realm in which it is physically situated?

6.2 FINNISH OPPORTUNITIES

Finnish architecture has shown that it can more than keep up with the swings and shifts of design formulations and building technologies. Nevertheless, true innovation in corporate design conception and production remains necessary – as for the larger design culture. Even a cursory survey of corporate architecture across the world reveals a landscape of design still largely vacant of consistent, positive models. But, by virtue of Finland’s education system and knowledge base (which includes an awareness of design), its historical development, and a cultural consciousness still rooted to the natural landscape, the Finnish culture offers the precise location in which to research and develop responses to the debilitating consequences of contemporary corporate architecture.

A real, contemporary cause for optimism amidst the Finnish circumstances can be found in the recent research into the thinking behind open-source software by Pekka Himanen and his colleagues at the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development. Their investigations into “open-source approaches” to learning and community development have given rise to a concept they term *civil communities of practice*. As they describe the possibility, “the tools and governance principles of the open-source software community, in some modified form, could yield new approaches to community organization and planning”.⁵⁰ Design, always understood as a collaborative, integrative enterprise lends itself easily to these open-source approaches.

In the Finnish juxtaposition of corporate culture and architectural culture, three areas of research and development are of particular relevance and importance to a civil community of practice. First, in the deep examination of the relationship between “creativity”, “innovation”, and workplace design; that is to say, the *understanding of the creative individual*. Second, in the comprehension, valuation, and articulation of those civic “spaces in-between” the transparent walls and lot lines of corporate constructions; that is to say, the *understanding of the civic realm*. And finally, in researching and obtaining a true sustainable architecture, through a knowing “natural capitalism”. Such an architecture would incorporate life-cycle studies, adaptive re-use strategies, and the

full range of environmentally responsible materials and technologies. Thus, the *understanding of the environment*.⁸

New frameworks of integrated and responsive design thinking are present in certain corporate architectural strategies nowadays, from Herman Miller's headquarters in the United States to the new Deutsche Post Tower in Bonn, Germany. Boeing in the United States and



Deutsche Post Tower, Bonn.

⁸ Relevant material to this understanding ranges from Herman E. Daly and Joshua Farley's new textbook for economics, *Ecological Economics* (Washington, D. C., 2004: Island Press) to the oft-quoted *Natural Capitalism* by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins (New York, 1999: Little, Brown and Company) to an ever-expanding list of architectural resources.

BMW in Germany have recently opened new production facilities integrating administrative offices, placing designers, engineers, and salespeople directly adjacent to the factory floors and giving real attention to the conditions of the office workers.^h Indeed, *Architecture* journal recently heralded a changed “sensory and moral climate” in office design. Announcing “A New Age of Officing” in its May, 2005 issue, the article highlighted postmillennial facilities “project[ing] a new attitude toward today’s knowledge worker. Focusing on basic human needs – daylight, fresh air, elbowroom – and our society’s often-tenuous relationship with the outdoors [...] the designs appeal to current philosophies of high-performance organizations, but they tame the inevitable production mindset with the means for stress reduction: exercise, socializing, and interacting with nature”.⁵¹

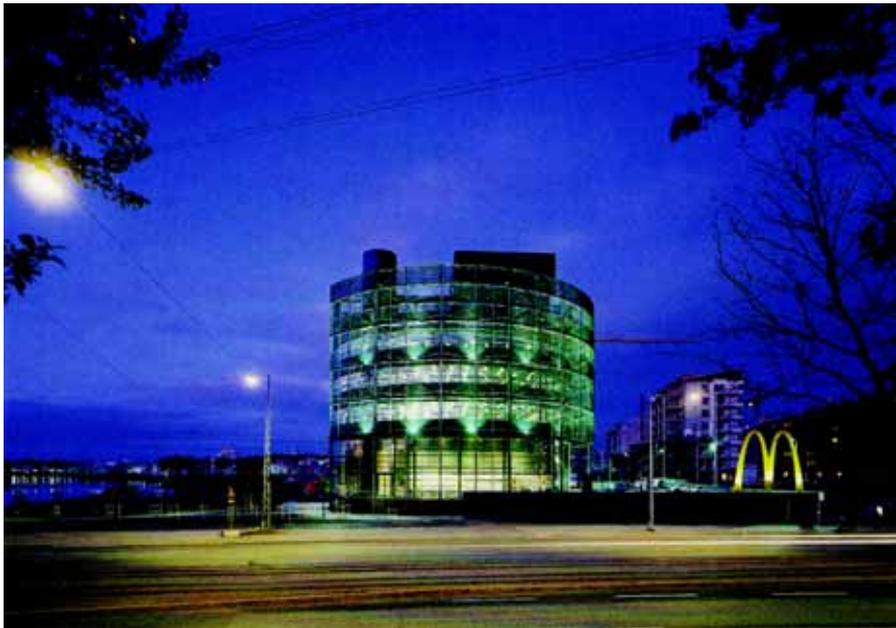
At least two prototypes of these overlapping forms of thought in design are to be found already in Finland. The first, Heikkinen and Komonen’s 1997 design for the headquarters of McDonald’s-Finland, is notable for its resistance to the corporation’s generic design manual in form and materiality. No sentimental recollection of American diners here! In large measure, this was initially due to the then CEO of McDonald’s-Finland insisting on a building of “modern, Finnish, design” – and then to the selection of Heikkinen-Komonen through an invited competition.⁵²

The headquarters can be characterized as a predictable geometric object of evident transparency and open-plan interiors. However, its apparent simplicity belies a more complex reality. The design is civic-minded in its gate-tower structure at the city’s edge, and in its detailed attention to its immediate landscape. Equally, the building is informed by a tangible environmental consciousness. The roof is covered in crushed recycled glass and the glass cylinder itself is wrapped in a wooden shade-trellis constructed of a product called Thermowood.

^h See Fred Moody: “Boeing’s Building Boom,” and Phil Patton: “Drive-thru Office,” *Metropolis*, July 2005. Boeing’s facility designer, Scott Wyatt of NBBJ, speaks of “transformational design” in corporate work, design that transforms company morale and productivity. The BMW plant in Leipzig, designed by Pritzker Prize winner Zaha Hadid, attempts to address the concept of “the space of flows,” – of ideas, people, and products.

The material is a Finnish product developed by the State Technical Research Center (VTT) to serve as a substitute for environmentally endangered woods such as teak and mahogany. Lastly, the corporate “sign”, perhaps the most powerful corporate icon in the world, is a pop-art installation in the townscape.

While there are state-supported examples of environmentally conscious designs at the developing University of Helsinki campus in Viikki, a more recent and relevant example is SARC’s recent design and construction of the Metla House in Joensuu. This newest research center of the Finnish Forest Research Institute is built on the campus of the University of Joensuu, embedded in the street pattern of that city’s center. A state-sponsored building devoted to the study of the forest, Metla proposes a multi-story office and laboratory building, one structured, clad and detailed largely of wood, with inspiration in its forms found in boat design and vernacular architecture. Its open courtyard is a public space, and its glazing is attuned to the character of the interior spaces. Both the architects and the sponsoring agency espouse



McDonald’s-Finland Headquarters, Helsinki.



Metla House, Joensuu.



Metla House, Joensuu.

the ambition of the building as a “realistic alternative” in wood for multi-level office construction.ⁱ

Although Metla is but one (admittedly limited) anecdote, and not yet fully transferable, its design demonstrates that none of these areas of innovation are solvable on technological terms alone. All rely upon liter-



University of Helsinki - Viikki Infocenter, Helsinki.

ⁱ For more, see “Metla-talo”, “*Arkkitehti-lehti*”, The Finnish Architectural Review, volume 2, 2005.

ate, sensitive, reflective thought, upon a creativity borne out of a culture of “noble poverty” and “civil community” more than through a culture of consumption, upon an awareness still of the immediate proximity and value of nature.

In doing so, Finnish architecture may well return to its early 20th century indebtedness to nature, to the forest landscape, and to the sense of community fostered by that landscape. This architecture will not be achieved through the literal, naive depiction of bears and pine cones, but through a biomorphic comprehension and transformation of the forest landscape into a truly environmentally sensitive and intelligent architecture, one that engages its inhabitants as individuals and citizens.

6.3 CONCLUSION: FROM INFORMATION SOCIETY TO DESIGN CULTURE

Finnish business and Finnish architecture faced severe challenges in the 20th century and demonstrated admirable qualities of self-examination, planning, and development. The recovery and invigoration of the post World War II industrial economy was accompanied by an equal invigoration and production in design and architecture. The last 20 years of economic cycles, and the rise of the information technology economy, have been accompanied by similar design intensity.

If there is now public distress over the loss of heroic ambition in Finnish architecture – where is the exuberance of Aalto, or Pietilä, or the optimistic planning ideals of Tapiola? – the quality of the built environment at least remains directly reflective of the economic stresses under which contemporary architecture must operate (indeed, under which much of society and culture now operates). Value-engineering, low-bidder contracting, fast-track construction schedules, and optimized floor-area ratios, along with the blunt privatization of urban life, all combine to slowly erase architecture’s social contract with the public, and place it solely in the service of the bottom line and the brand.

Working together, citizens educated to the pressures on the environment posed by a solely financial calculation of “quality” and government policies in support of a deeper quality to the environment can

counteract such market-driven economic forces. The Prime Minister of Finland, Matti Vanhanen, and the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament, Paavo Lipponen, have both been clear in their perspectives on these necessities. As Prime Minister Vanhanen stated recently, “quality [...] should not be restricted to technological and economic aspects. Functional, social, and aesthetic quality are just as important for the individual and the community.”⁵³

Yet as highly educated, dedicated professionals, architects of any nationality cannot simply be coerced, co-opted, or silent under the influence of the corporate world. Nor can architects propose to the public the autonomy of their work, neither as pure form, nor as pure technique, nor as pure branding. All such positions are states of denial and denials of responsibility. Architects must be engaged in the advocacy and construction of an ethical economy out of capitalism, not simply to represent its political economy. Finnish architects as a group – setting aside for now the history of a cultural reliance upon singular, “heroic” figures – are uniquely qualified to do this.

The challenges to both Finnish architecture and to Finnish corporate practice are not those of technical knowledge or technological innovation, and certainly not ones of creative ability. Rather, they are ones based on the complement to the idea of a political economy, that of an ethical economy. Equally, the challenge is to transform the romance of “an information society” – the contemporary, unqualified, relentless stream of data and images – and the commerce-driven ideal of a “design economy.” As John Thackara writes, such a transformation will be guided by “a belief that ethics and responsibility can inform design decisions without constraining the social and technical innovation we all need to do.” The new paradigm is the more significant, responsible, empathetic responses of a *design culture*.^j

^j There are several advocates of this desirable cultural shift. For those attuned to business practices, management guru Tom Peters outlined ideas of “design mindfulness” and “a culture of design” in 1996 at the 45th International Design Conference in Aspen (Tom Peters: “Design Mindfulness,” in *The New Business of Design*. New York, 1996: The Allworth Press, pp. 16-45). Also see, for instance, Daniel H. Pink: “A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age” (Riverhead, 2005), and John Thackara: “In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World”. (Cambridge, Mass., 2005: The MIT Press).

The challenge articulated here to Finland's corporate culture and to its building practice is to acquire and act upon a deeper knowledge, more searching and more critical in its conceptualization, acquisition and application. The challenge is to engage another form of creativity, directed and qualified by Finnish circumstances in the use of limited resources and in the invigoration of public space. The challenge is to comprehend and re-conceptualize the representational, spatial and cultural effects of "dissolving corporations".

Innovation and application in these areas, irrespective of style and symbolism, yet mindful of costs and consequences across a longer duration, will benefit architecture, corporate image, public perception, and all citizens. Such design works will be verifiable hallmarks of an ultimate Finnish creativity: a means of living and working, grounded in an ethical sensibility and in the natural world.

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