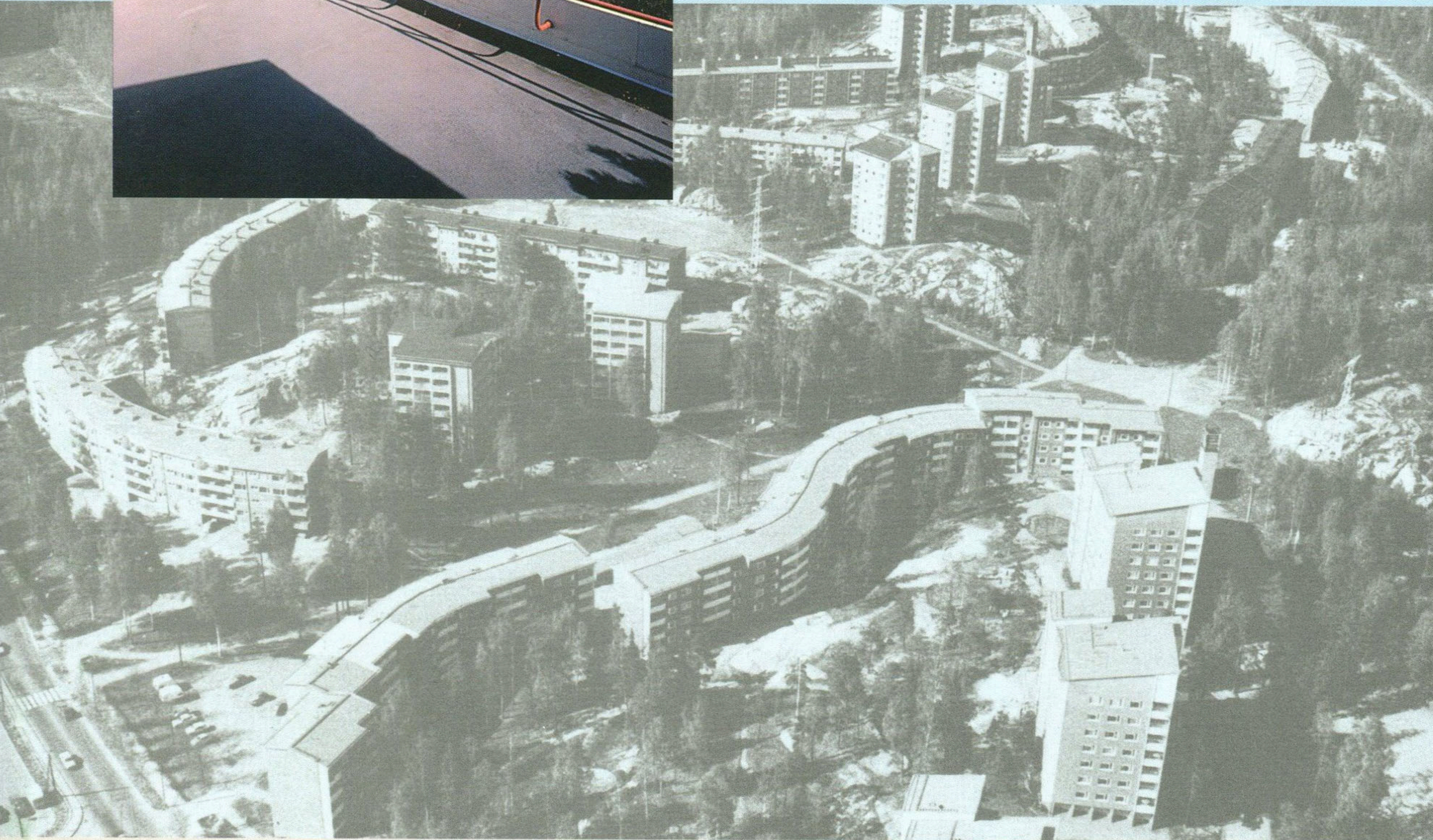


FINLAND

Roger Connah



modern architectures in history

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their own past, Sweden and the Russian empire, and partly because the mood of the times demanded action.

The nature of the small society, mediation and the continuing development of self-promotion through the Museum of Finnish Architecture meant that architects participated in strongly partisan games. The integrity of Blomstedt, the possibility of the neutral, equalizing façade, the wall of the building as an unspeakable, functional, absolute, neutral zone made it possible to combine the higher architectural ideals of Modernism into a purism. Elsewhere on his own to the side, yet central for a period, the architect Reima Pietilä was to remain for many years the natural successor to Aalto and the maverick in the modern code. His Dipoli Students' Centre (1966) became an expressive work that garnered international praise and put Pietilä into the third generation of pioneers of modern architecture, but caused a furore at home. The building was simply outrageously expressive; Pietilä proved able to take space, puncture it and see it flow against the convention. Sequentially Pietilä was designing a labyrinth; the building's interior was cavernous and the roof contoured to echo the existing typology of the site. Concrete, timber and copper were boldly used; tilted and gauged masses and walls could appear overbearing and inviting at the same time. Details and solutions in Dipoli were inventive and spontaneous; although varying in success, the courage and shock of this and later work were undeniable. But Dipoli was considered romantic, nationalistic and awkward; inappropriate to the rational moment. The more famous and international Pietilä became, the more this set the tone in Finland for his work over the next 20 years. Yet the more appreciated Pietilä was abroad, the more ambiguous and resistant was the profession to his architecture. After Dipoli (1966) there was an attempt to suppress Pietilä. Both Kirmo Mikkola and Juhani Pallasmaa would ensure his marginalization well into the 1970s. Although his work would eventually find its way back into the agenda of Finnish Modernism, Pietilä was well aware of this resistance to his work and the 'intermediate zones of Modern architecture' and – unusual in the Finnish circles – he used his position and writings to explore just this estrangement in relation to a lost or unfinished Modernism.

Although there are significant works, not dissimilar to the free spirit of Dipoli, by many other architects in this decade, especially the Suomalainen brothers' Temppeliaukio Church, Helsinki (1961–8), and Timo Penttilä's Helsinki City Theatre (1961–7), Pietilä's polemic outpourings ensured a position for himself on the edge of Finnish Modernism.²⁹ Talk of an *incomplete Modernism*, of the Third Generation architects who would fill in where the pioneers left off, of phenomenological factors,

Raili and Reima
Pietilä, Dipoli
Students' Centre,
1966.



Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen, Temppeliaukio Church, Helsinki, 1961–8, as portrayed on a 1970s postage stamp and in aerial view.



were common themes in Pietilä's texts, lectures and exhibitions. Ironically, the current twenty-first century reappearance and appreciation of architects like Gehry and Libeskind, the 'blob' and 'morphed' architecture, may all invite a new interest in Pietilä's work. Signs are that the new computer-aided designs will echo if not simulate Pietilä's more personal and agonizing stubbornness to create such expressive poetry. Yet in Finland the backlash to such expressive architecture still exists, and, despite the seductions of the new sensuous architecture, it is the renewed interest in Ruusuvuori that reveals the architects' seeking once again their own model of discipline, restraint and the timeless.

While the modern agenda was supposedly taking on a renewed social commitment to change and solving issues of poverty, injustice and deprivation, the tectonic exercise narrowed. The history of *serialism* from the 1940s and '50s returned to haunt the Finnish agenda. Systematic thinking was married with the neutrality expected from social equality. There was a flattening of hierarchical structures and processes. The spatial response to man's action and psycho-social needs represented a new democracy. No one was to stand out, and although everyone did stand out, the young architects did it together. In response to the aesthetics of Modernism communicated by the Museum of Finnish Architecture in the first ten years, Finnish architecture post-1967 suddenly became pragmatic, un-talkative and dull. Professionally it shaped the future; publicly it would lead to attacks against an architecture of little or no poetry.³⁰ The propaganda machine was convincing the world of a Finnish architecture of supreme ethical and aesthetic competence. Yet at home things were going wrong; the 'revolutionary turn' had quite simply been responsible for an exquisite, professionally controlled small-scale rational experiment in



Timo Penttilä,
City Theatre Helsinki,
1961-7, and on a post-
card (above) *in situ*.

Modernism. Thinking had been extended in the 1970s to a quite brutal and often banal neo-Constructivism, known as 'Structuralism'.³¹ In an exercise of passion and forgetting, the sensitivity of Bryggman, Ekelund, Revell, Lindegren and Blomstedt had somehow disappeared. Planning strategies would explode into myth. By the end of the 1970s Modernism in Finland had atomized.

Such sophisticated planning solutions were not allowed in the housing production of the 1970s. Rectangular urban block designs were dictated by crane tracks. It was not possible to speak of the scalar articulation of the buildings; the grim architecture was accompanied by a half-finished environment, and to crown it all, services were to be found kilometres away.⁶

Grim it was, but not always for the professional reasons offered. The analysis of this period has barely scratched the surface; alibis for a lost Modernism surfaced.

Finland, of course, was not unique in the growing disenchantment with modern architecture, though it would survive this disenchantment better than many other countries. We might put this down to the obvious; by embracing and assimilating the modern agenda so consistently, Finland had less 'historic' resistance to large-scale modern developments. This was still a time, however, when the West really knew little of Finland. To many it was still considered under, if not part of, the Soviet Union. This was to change. Kekkonen's policy of neutrality triumphed in 1975 when 35 countries signed the Helsinki Agreement at the final state of the European Conference on Security and Co-operation in Finlandia Hall. Finland not only opened up a little more internationally but the moral and ideological change in its urban character was beginning to be seen. Having claimed so much for its agenda of social progress and fairness, modern architecture was about to be blamed for just about every failure in the environment.

The promising students and architects from the 1960s and '70s began to react with the same fervour as those at the beginning of the century. Flirting with postmodern symbolism and classicism, gaining from the poetry of structure and tectonic invention, bulky forms, postmodern vocabulary, phenomenology and the twisting and angling form as in later Deconstruction meant that Finnish architecture began to resemble the repertoire of international magazines. There were, of course, successful exceptions. The older 'heroic' architects remained, working abroad sometimes, or their production gradually decreased. Aalto had died in 1976, causing a revision of the anti-hero. The Siréns, the Penttiläs, the Suomalainen brothers and others such as Heikki Castren, Kalle Vaatola, Pekka Salminen and Ola Laiho, would still be building, negotiating Postmodernism, but their professional participation in the imaging agenda naturally lessened. Penttilä, a particularly strong figure in Finnish architecture during the 1960s and '70s, finally left the country to teach in Vienna in the early 1980s, disillusioned after being treated somewhat brusquely by his fellow signatories.⁷

- 29 See my *Grace & Architecture* (Helsinki, 1998) for Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen, and *Timo Penttilä*, exh. cat., Royal Institute of British Architects (London, 1980), with an introduction by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani.
- 30 Kalervo Siikala would identify this in the late 1970s: 'Finland's world renown as an architectural pioneer is based on a few magnificent exceptions to its general rule of standardised, tasteless and unimaginative buildings, all of them a great injustice to their natural surroundings.' See also the latest work to try and express the mechanics of these myths and planning strategies: Kaj Nyman, *Sinisilmäisyyden aika* ['Blue-Eye Years': Planning Myths, 1950–2000], (Helsinki, 2003).
- 31 Although 'Structuralism' on hindsight should be kept to the direction of philosophy, from Saussure to Lévi-Strauss, there is a historical use of the -ism term in Finland as the literal application of material constructions. This usually mistakes the literal identification of steel construction, which is uncomfortably linked to 'structure' and the 'structuralist' thinking itself.

chapter seven: Deconstruction and Reconstruction

- 1 Pentti Saaritsa, 'Hommage au Travail des Chiens', from Herbert Lomas, *Contemporary Finnish Poetry* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1991), p. 214.
- 2 For a clear view of this exchange, see J. Pallasmaa, 'Vastapoli', and the response 'Vastavuuspeli' by R. Pietila in *Arkkitehti* (June 1966).
- 3 The Japanese magazine *A+U* (Tokyo) became very important as a vehicle of the new throughout the late 1970s and '80s. Most offices subscribed to the journal and new American works were lavishly photographed and displayed. The architects' interviews became required reading. For a view of these changes in Finland during the 1980s, see the design magazine *Muoto*, published by Ornamo, the Finnish Association of Designers. Under the editorship of Heikki Hyytiäinen and printed by Valtion Painatuskeskus there was much new experimental work in design, architecture, advertising and fashion as *Muoto* became a meeting point for young new designers and design writers.
- 4 Statement by the Finnish participants in the Europe–America Architecture Seminar on the Future of the Modern Movement, 19 September 1980. For more on this, see my *Sa(l)vaged Modernism* (Helsinki, 1999). The Second Alvar Aalto Symposium in Jyväskylä 1982 continued this dialogue under the heading 'Classical Tradition and the Modern Movement'. Matti K. Mäkinen was chairman and opened the symposium, while Juhani Pallasmaa delivered the closing words. The symposium also coincided and was shaped somewhat by the publication in 1980 of *Farväl till Funktionalismen* [Farewell to Functionalism'] by Gunnar Asplund's son Hans.
- 5 Bertel Jung, 'Functionalism', *Arkkitehti* (1930), p. 59 (in Finnish).
- 6 For a sensitive English-language overview of the decades 1970–90, see Marja-Riitta Norri, 'Interpretations of Contemporary Reality: Sketching a Portrait of Recent Finnish Architecture', in Marja-Riitta Norri and Wilfred Wang, *20th Century Architecture: Finland* (Helsinki and Frankfurt am Main, 2000), pp. 107–17.
- 7 This is not well documented as yet but the events surrounding the Nokia Headquarters competition(s) in the early 1980s and the rivalry between Penttilä and others, such as Pallasmaa, Helin and Söderlund, would also indicate how the agenda for Finnish Modernism was shifted from the more solid pragmatic realism advocated by Penttilä to the leaning towards poetic structure and tectonic

symbolism that emerged from these architects. Penttilä would take up a professorship in Vienna, occupy Otto Wagner's room in the Academy and have very little to do with Finnish architecture henceforth. For more hints on this, see my *Sa(l)vaged Modernism*.

- 8 See my *K / K: A Couple of Finns and Some Donald Ducks* (Helsinki, 1991).
- 9 For a general survey up to this moment, see Markku Valkonen, *Finnish Art over the Centuries* (Keuruu, 1992), in Finnish, German, French and English.
- 10 For more on these buildings and Pietilä's re-emergence, see my *Writing Architecture* (Cambridge, MA, 1989). Frampton identifies what many other Finnish architects have not been able to put into words but have similarly felt: 'with the exception of his New Delhi Embassy and the Finnish President's Residence he [Pietilä] fell into one digression after another'. Frampton, Foreword to M. Quantrill, *Finnish Architecture and the Modernist Tradition* (London, 1995).
- 11 Signs of this can be seen in Finland: *Nature, Design, Architecture*, exh. cat., Museum of Finnish Architecture (Helsinki, 1981).
- 12 Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. H. Foster (Washington, DC, 1983), pp. 16–30. Relate this to *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1998), and the various essays by Frampton, Reid, Treib and Pallasmaa as they continue to read the authentic modern in Aalto, picking up from Frampton's original 'critical regionalist' thesis.
- 13 For more details of this and an analysis of Frampton's critical writing on Aalto's Säynätsalo Civic Centre, see my *Grace & Architecture* (Helsinki, 1998).
- 14 Since the 1980s Pallasmaa has literally guided the phenomenological debate within Finnish architecture. He became the main figure in resisting the contemporary and realigning Finnish architecture theoretically. For this shift to 'interpretive' mode, see *The Two Languages of Architecture* Abacus 2, MFA yearbook, Museum of Finnish Architecture (Helsinki, 1981). For more on Pallasmaa's role in Finnish architecture, see my *The End of Finnish Architecture* (Helsinki, 1994), *Sa(l)vaged Modernism*, and *Aaltomania* (Helsinki, 2001).
- 15 For more figures, see Max Jakobson et al., *Facts about Finland* (Helsinki, 2000).
- 16 Works from Helin and Siitonen, Käpy and Simo Paavilainen, the Valio Office (Mäkinen, Löfström, Katajamäki), Nurmela, Raimoranta & Tasa, Kairamo, Gullichsen & Vuomela, 8-Studio (including Kaira, Mahlamäki, Lahdelma) Kareoja & Jokela, Warttinen Architects, Söderlund & Co., Penttilä and Saari, Piironen, Airas & Järvinen, Ilonen, Erholz and many others range from an assimilated postmodern repertoire to a refined, restrained late Modernism and on to what some see as a neo-Constructivism.
- 17 Dominique Beaux attempted to chart the 'other' marginalized direction in his *Les Chemins de L'Après Aalto, pour une architecture humaine*, exh. cat., L'Institut Finlandais (Paris, 1993) – the works of Pietilä were put alongside Adlercreutz, Mikola-Saurama-Tervaoja, Monark, nvo, Serola-Autio, Studio 8, Valovirta, Leiviskä, Grotenfelt, Louekari, Littow, Järvinen and Airas.
- 18 For further details on these two important buildings, see my *Writing Architecture* and *Sa(l)vaged Modernism*.
- 19 See Anna-Maija Ylimaula, ed., *The Oulu School of Architecture* (Helsinki, 1993), in English and Finnish. Architects who have contributed to this significant movement include: Reijo Niskasaari, Keijo Niskasaari, Lasse Vahtera, Jorma Öhman, Pekka Littow, Ilpo Väisänen, Kaarlo Viljanen, Anna and Lauri Louekari, Heikki