

The Light Tower at the Lágymányos University Campus

by Károly Polónyi

On the occasion of the Millennium the sponsoring of the events organized by the different cultural institutions, the awarding of literary prizes and the endorsement of programs relating to archaeology or the conservation of monuments does not in any way guarantee that the festivities planned on the occasion of the one thousandth anniversary of the creation of the Hungarian state will not share the fate of the scrapped Expo or the millecentenary of the first Magyar settlers of Hungary.

The Millennium of 1896 was celebrated with a vast array of splendid architectural creations. Industrial civilization and the various national ideologies arrived to Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. With the exception of London, Paris and Vienna all major European capitals were built in this period. In 1902 a committee of the Washington Capitol travelling in Europe stated in their report that among the newly built capitals of the continent they found Budapest to be the most beautiful. The great flood of 1838 was well remembered, and the banks of the Danube were accordingly fortified into a system of wharfage, thus creating a spectacular backbone for the city. With the exception of London and St Petersburg there is no town where a river of such magnitude flows right across the centre, and though a little late for the Millennium, by 1902 the construction of the Parliament, the Castle the Matthias Church and the Fishermen's Bastion was completed. To the already existing trio of the bridges on the Danube (Chain Bridge, Margit Bridge and Franz-Joseph Bridge) Erzsébet Bridge was added, which at the time of its construction was the largest such construction in Europe. This is the period when the unique and unmistakable appearance of Budapest was created.

The majestic sight of the Danube illuminated by the myriad of ornamental lights or bright sunshine of a dazzling summer day could even today elevate Budapest among the most spectacular sights of the world, were it not for the astonishingly vulgar and deplorable infestation of billboards and signs on the facades of the once-beautiful palaces, not to mention the unstoppable mushrooming of kiosks on every square and avenue. Unfortunately even buildings as well-known as the Parliament and the Basilica can only be photographed with the cracked patchwork of the pavements covering their foreground. The life-work of *Márta Pán* contains many wonderful examples of remedy which could readily be applied - surface wrapping, statues, modern industrial and artistic objects, the applying of large glistening planes of water, and spectacular lights could revitalize the ever popular tourist attraction of the inner city, which would also change in accordance with the seasons of the year and the day.

In the period between the two world wars the development of the town continued along the banks of the river: to the north Újlipótváros and to the south Szentimreváros were built. The market-economy incentives of "New Economic Mechanism," introduced in 1968, made possible a new attempt of European modernization. The boom lasted for one and a half of two five-year plan periods, resulting in a further northward expansion. In the north the landscape is beautiful, the air is cleaner, and as it is upriver the sewage problem is easily solved. Accordingly, on the northern point of the Margit Island the Árpád Bridge was built.

Nowadays the two major construction activities contributing to the transformation of the metropolis are the *West End City Centre* constructed as an admirably swift city-development project effecting the environs of the Northern Railway Station near the governmental and business district, and the venue of the fizzled-out Expo, where the Lágymányos Campus and Information Science District is constructed. With the recent completion of two southern bridges the southward development of the town seems imminent. The University Campus is almost

complete, the nearly finished Sports Stadium would be a convenient location for celebrating the jubilee of the turn of the Millennium and the founding of the Hungarian State. The square located between the Stadium and the newly completed buildings of the University is practically the central square of the new campus. Here the Light Tower devised by *Attila Csáji* could still be created in time for the festivities.

The building is planned as a gigantic obelisk consisting of three main parts:

1. a steel structure supporting a 30 m high frustum of cone with a diameter of 12 and 8 m. The cone would be made of glass, the colour of which would gradually be transformed from the black at the bottom through the shades of silver into lighter colours, constructing the visible part of the construction. This would, from a certain point upward, be converted into a surface onto which film could be projected, and would serve as an immense surface presenting a dazzling visual performance, accompanied by music, showing pictures describing the eleven hundred years of the nation's presence in the Carpathian basin, the founding of the state, the history and cultural heritage of the country, the two thousand years-old history of the town all composed into a metamorphosis of optic experience.
2. the centre of the space on the ground floor would open downwards, the axis of light would here be continue towards the depth hiding the roots, converted into a holographic space of light. A pair of non-overlapping spiral ramps would serve the purpose of the upward and downward circulation
3. the laser-vision would be created in the glass-prism situated at the top of the obelisk. The inner hologram would exit into the infinite space as a vast green exclamation mark. The axis of light would be perceivable from a great distance, and due to the modulation of the lasers it would be enriched by branches of rainbow, as a double wave of different geometrical formations revolving around the axis

In 1977 *Attila Csáji* together with *Norbert Kroó* began in the Central Institute of Physics the adventure of exploring the visual possibilities created by laser. The architectural planning would be carried out by the *IPARTERV* joint-stock company. The plain of the holographic pool of light and the cylindrical wall fortified by the pair of spiral ramps would be constructed by water resistant concrete. The structure of the tower is a framework made of three pipes of steel, stabilized by the frustum of cone. This structure would also serve as the supporting framework of the elevators and the stairs.

The building could be completed till the 20th of August 2001. Built on the central Square of the *Lágymányos University Campus* the grandiose structure would serve as the basis of the *György Kepes Foundation* and would undoubtedly be a monumental landmark of the southern Danube-bank, with important visual and tourist potential. The building would also suite the image of the departments of the *ELTE* and *BME* residing in the are, and the *Info Park* which is currently being built south of the campus.

Seeing the possibilities created by the new media as pointless worship of the technical advancement would be a gross misconception. The concept is entirely different. The possibility of a visual creation can not be forfeited to people with exclusive technical interest, as this would result in the exclusion from the development of the very same creating and visual force the presence of which would encourage the humanization of the topic.

The whole affair has a history of Hungarian origin, the importance of which is yet to be demonstrated. In the *Bauhaus* movement *László Moholy Nagy* prophesied that from painting with paint and pencil the painter of the future have to move on to the paining with instruments.

Among the pioneers of the kinetic and light-art there are such people as *Sándor László*, *Miklós Schöfer*, *Vasarely* (the founder of the OP ART, *Csuri C. A.* and *Vera Molnár*, pioneers of computer graphics, *Dénes Gábor* (*Dennis Gabor*), the creator of holography, *Sándor Holly*, technological innovator in the field of the visual utilization of lasers. They are the people who contributed to the completion and internationalization of the Hungarian culture of the twentieth century, comparable to such musicians as *Liszt*, *Bartók*, *Kodály*, *Ligeti*, *Doráti* and *Solti*, or the group of scientists commonly known as the "Martians": *Hevessy*, *Tódor Kármán*, *Leó Szilárd*, *Wiegner*, *Teller*, *János Neumann*, *Albert Szentgyörgyi*, *Zoltán Bay* or *János Kemény*. We believe that it is of a crucial importance to remind this country bereft of its traditions to the role occupied by Hungarians in the expansion of the boundaries of understanding. We believe that this tradition must be revived and continued, and this would be much more important than the return to the thoughts of *Rudolf Steiner* rejecting the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage, the effect of which could be witnessed quite recently when *In Bluebeard's Castle* and the Parisian bedchamber of *The Miraculous Mandarin* had been placed among a scenery reminiscent of the huts of the Celebes savages.

This is way it is of an extreme importance that the Tower of Light utilizing the visual possibilities of the most modern technology, built on the central square of the Lágymányos University Campus, and also housing a research facility of the *György Kepes Centre of Visual Culture* should be one of the main attractions of the Millennium festivities.

Translated by György Dragomán