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THE PAST STILL EXISTS

I decided to make word-for-word citation from my own texts prepared previously for Cracow Conferences, to check to what extent my approach to the problem of changes in architecture and town planning has been evolving – or maybe not. I fact, I am still of the same opinion in many points, so it means the past still exists.

Keywords: past, architecture, urban planning, change

2011

The topic assigned by the Organizers induces us to ponder on the ups and downs of our creative activity as well, especially when most of it is written work: are we departing from our old opinions or (obsessively, stubbornly, justly) sticking to them? It is right when an analysis can be exemplified by texts written cyclically, yearly, presented in the same place and to the same community. I am a lucky one – I have been an active participant in this conference for ten long years. Now, it is time for our eleventh meeting.

From among various texts, I choose what has formed my outlook on changeability and durability in architecture and urban planning. The selected sentences and paragraphs are supposed to make a whole convincing me that I have always treated this problem in the same manner. It is quite important. The need for a change as such is the basic cause of creating urban plans; generally speaking, pretty much the same applies to architecture. In spite of all these changes, we want a number of the features of a space to be left untouched. Thus, one of the objectives of our work is the virtual equilibrium of memory and oblivion. This motif must be emphasized: this kind of the durability of an outlook on creativity in a space is worth preserving forever.

2006

Let us begin with the year 2006 when I recalled Lech Niemojewski's words from "The Carpenter's Sons": "There are three (elementary) ideas of architecture: truth, beauty and wisdom which mostly refer to the creators of works, while the idea of perpetuity, the idea of durability and the idea of immortality mainly refer to works themselves." It means that unlimited durability is possible.

2003

Crossing the borders means freedom. While crossing the borders, an architect usually knows what he is doing. He is using practical knowledge, experience and tradition as well as knowledge acquired from other people and other groups. Laymen sometimes consider this process as an unconscious game.

All this expresses faith in spontaneity, too. It is characterized by numerous variables. Searching for them means expressing the opinion that the human mind can control its own development which is untrue. Control is a barrier to development which leads to the decline of thinking.

Such kind of reasoning draws our attention to the great utopia – attempts to reconcile group perception of architecture and its assessment with an architect's

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right to create his own architecture. To freedom. Unfortunately, assessments oscillate between calling an architect an enlightened romantic or a romantic positivist which resembles putting a colourful cap on the head of a sad-merry clown.

2005

In spite of this inability to assess the right to creative freedom, architecture does not lose its high position in the common system of values – since a building is a work of art and real property as well, its price is double in a way. This thesis assumes that the architecture of the future may be better off than today's.

Firstly, architecture is not threatened (like other arts) by creators aiming to produce a vision of human existence even though it can be receptive to accidental complements and fed on the media noise.

Secondly, while the creator of fine arts becomes the producer of incomprehensible goods these days, whereas an architect does not stay in such a paradise of free choice. He cannot entertain people with a game of false appearances or offer his body instead of a work. The only thing he can do is build a house. When he is a genuine creator, he slips out of classifications but his office is evaluated in the market ranking of better and worse establishments. They may be treated as cold laboratories or the places of creating ostentatious beauty but both of these extreme visions of creative activity is corrected by the mechanisms of commissions.

Thirdly, architecture and urban planning are still involved in public debates on serious themes, from politics to philosophy. Therefore, attempts to shock a viewer and a listener with humorous suspense would be improper even though architectural mani-

festations are welcome. We should look for some examples showing what architecture could look like if we, disregarding gravity for instance, allowed for the physical disintegration of the world, for the fragmentation of what we have created so far. There are lots of examples which prove that constructing a new world of some fragments of the old one is possible. Each of them is different. Let us take the well-known: Tsukuba Centre, Japan, by Arata Isozaki; Wexner Centre of Art, Columbus, Ohio, USA, by Peter Eisenman and Richard Trott; Parc de la Villette, Paris, by Bernard Tschumi.

2004

Now for the problem of novelty, the problem of architecture as modern art. In comparison with other fine arts, it is easier for it to be modern because new materials, facilitating the implementation of once unimaginable buildings, are invented for its purposes. Electronic virtual matter is the most important. It is a special material capable of cooperating with a creator.

An architect mastered it or at least uses it with better and better results and, which is essential, can transfer virtual reality to traditional materiality. This conceptualization of the ability to travel between the imaginary world and the physical world is important because architectural art must deliver artifacts, proofs of its existence – right here, right now.

Fortunately, it turns out that an architect is a genuine *dilettante* in its seventeenth-century meaning but we may also say that the results of this “omnivorous diet” resembles tricks of a prestidigitator who takes the audience's favourite things out of his hat. It is the result of blurred divisions between high culture and low culture which rule the souls of the participants in today's “trendy

reality". Neighbourhood does not mean, however, that a borderline is nonexistent; quite the contrary, there is no neighbourhood without a borderline. This fact enables us to make free choices which is of highest importance for a creator.

In architectural art, we can afford temporal or partial transgression. The notion of in-between, which appeared years ago, authorizes us to create works which take the fine line between sense and nonsense. An architect received this privilege when he decided to defend the opinion that what he creates is not just construction. We are the carpenter's sons or the ones who build a new civilization. We look to the future rather than look back. Hence a praise to modernity, hence permission for otherness which gives birth to it or even leads to excess and provocation. Every day, we allow ourselves to depart from the well-known models of thinking – for the sake of otherness, novelty, art which has the right to be "other" after some time.

2007

We must say that what seems conceited – either standing out against its context or wanting to dominate it – cannot be comprehensible. We know that it is difficult to demarcate the border between acting through the context and a counterpoint and ignoring the surroundings but we are artists in order to be able to move along this border. It also concerns a border in time – to be or not to be the vanguard. If the only thing that today's creator has in mind is originality and queerness at any cost, he will fade away rather than remain in the pantheon of fame.

2008

Different laws concern urban planning these days. Firstly, regional planning – which acts as the coordinator in the field of economy and ecology for cities

extending beyond the limits of imagination – disappeared in Poland after the year 1989.

Secondly, the need for urban design was called into question, while the importance of public spaces was reduced. Plans were passed where anyone could build anything anywhere provided that they showed the certificate of land ownership.

Thirdly, financial mechanism, which were expected to accelerate the flow of money for the simplest and shortest manners of developing areas, were used. As a result, control over investments and locations was passed from the hands of the municipal authorities to the hands of banks and developers whose objective was to maximize the profits.

Fourthly, the construction of motorways (which we miss so much in Poland) opened new possibilities of location, farther and farther from the cities, which made it easier to purchase cheaper areas and resulted in the dispersion of buildings and construction (i.e. moneymaking) beyond any urban context.

Let me draw your attention to most architectural designers' eagerness to accept the "fuck the context" slogan treating it as a justification for the very obvious perfection of themselves and their works. Architectural stars and starlets are also the authors of manifests, musicians, theologians, philosophers, poets. Each of them wants to sell his/her work to an investor. Just like self-governments and private owners got rid of their lands at record speed, the liberal doctrine creates cities.

Such a mode of thinking results in the construction of detached houses produced quickly and randomly, without any streets, squares, directions or axes, without any features of urbanity or memories

of rural life, not inspiring imagination, insignificant for the theory of a place, not creating an urban motivation for architectural design. This is not a fight for amount and density which aims at restoring the traditional urban space – this is the construction of a reality concurrent with the existing reality – remains of the old city for themselves and we for ourselves. The city is a money factory here. It cannot be an image of collective memory anymore; as a palimpsest, it is consciously deprived of its layer of the present related to the past. That is why the notion of chaos is introduced as a method of creating an urban space, that is why the method of “research by design”, which could be exchanged for the military “reconnaissance by struggle”, is introduced in city planning, especially where urban composition is discussed.

What can we do in the described situation? We can write long pages but no argument is weighty for the economic doctrine so we can only hope that neoliberalism is being discarded. For the time being, new cities threaten the existence of nature.

2009

Vitruvius is the author of the triad of necessary features for the existence of architecture and, consequently, a good city. Durability, utility and beauty must appear wherever we want to talk about grand architecture. They must appear together.

Vitruvius promoted his triad living in a world where nature was in control of man. It is true that Rome was a city with one million inhabitants and great technical infrastructure in the first century BC but it did not mean anything in the scale of the world or even the Roman Empire. The architecture of the Vitruvian epoch as well as hundreds of years after was a mini-supplement to the natural landscape.

Enormous edifices quickly became its part and were referred to as natural quarries delivering material for the construction of other objects. It so happened to the Pyramids and the Coliseum.

Vitruvius did not know, although he might have had an inkling of it, that in the future – in our reality – everything would be different; what people build would threaten the existence of nature. Even paradise will be constructed, not to mention forest breeding, attempting to reverse the course of rivers, modelling the seashore, smoothing the mountains and covering all that is left with billboards which advertise the dispersion of cities.

2010

Will we comply with Vitruvius' recommendations? Rather not because today the fact of building more does not mean that we are better builders – it is enough to browse through a year's issue of the quality magazine “Eurobuild. Central & Eastern Europe. Construction & Property” which has its seat in Jerozolimskie Avenues in Warsaw. It shows the process of averaging architecture because such architecture is a bestseller. Obviously, it concerns architecture as well as city planning because the rate of land exploitation is much more important than urban composition for sales departments. We should not be surprised but we must notice this regularity. The process of averaging architecture also means increasing resemblance between individual implementations. The abovementioned features of contemporary architecture concern residential houses as well as everything that is built, including shopping centres and office buildings.

Perhaps, however, we need not be alarmed because a brand new architectural style without a name is coming into existence in front of our

very eyes. Its representatives design in a similar manner, in a unanimous rapture, in the unity of souls and computer screens – just like it used to be, only without the screens. It is highly probable, especially when we compare course works at various universities which do not stay in touch. The

architects of the future may know something that we are unaware of.

2011 for the second time

My outlook on the fleetingness of architecture has not changed – *quod erat demonstrandum*.