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## ...SLOW ARCHITECTURE ...

Is a new definition of architecture possible? Surely it is, but definitions do not change reality, maybe the point of view. The contemporary architecture needs deep reflection. The author proposes to “slow architecture” in conjunction with both retrospective and creative reflections. The starting point for revaluations in architecture should be the slowdown of current urban development.

*Keywords: Contemporary architecture, definition of architecture, creativity, slow architecture, creative philosophy*

What architecture is like today is a fact. However, we could also say that today – as a notional category – does not exist in architecture; what exists is yesterday – what has already been built – and tomorrow – what is being created.

Today – as a temporal category – extends between the past which happened and visions of the future which may come true. In the process of the creation of an architectural work, the extension of time between the past and the future is a continuous, permanent phenomenon which proceeds at various paces: it could be a slow continuation of the ideas of the past, a sudden action, a breath, a great creation, a great idea, a great work which fastens the heartbeat and the course of history. However, such moments in the vicissitudes of architecture are exceptions.

Retrospective reflection enables us to think about the future in analytical, valuating, selective categories. Creative reflection is inclined towards the future, it is an attempt to anticipate future developmental trends and needs. Will they continue the trends of the past? This question is open. To a large extent, creative

reflection means the self-improvement of creative sensitivity and an attempt to anticipate the future and its spatial vision.

A work of architecture expresses the creator’s attitude towards the social and economic reality he must create in. Unlike a work of art, a work of architecture is inseparably connected with reality. It is an important statement because it means a bond between economic and social conditions and creativity. Thus, it is obvious that when a period of an economic slowdown comes, the development of investments as well as architecture slows down, too. Can we consider this phenomenon positive? Let us try to look at it sympathetically. The slowdown of architecture produces numerous profits. First of all, there is some time for reflection. Before the next wave of development, we can “redeploy”, “reconsider strategies”, take a look around, slow the pace.

The ideas of so-called slow architecture (reference to slow cities) shoot past the reflections of an economic slowdown. A reflection of a slowdown is

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a thought about the uselessness of many new arrogant architectural cubatures, monuments to great architects, deep faith in the necessity of unstoppable progress, absolute power supported by monumental architecture, great architecture created by “archistars” which could be called “the most unusual architecture”. Orientation towards the quality of architecture and its space, the human scale, a created atmosphere builds up hopes for a change. Giving the Pritzker Award to the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor – the master of minimalism and mood – in 2009 [1] was quite symptomatic. Slow architecture is the architecture of quality and hopefully the architecture of the future. So, we must slow down, take a look around, revalue previous activities treated as achievements, roads or rather ruts of conduct, define new creative ideas and objectives.

These tendencies can be felt by the young generation of architects, too. Educational work in Poland and numerous architectural workshops [2] I have taken part in lately show that the future architects are unusually sensitive to poverty, social injustice, the arrogance of architecture which becomes a tool in the hands of power and money instead of serving social issues.

A part of exhibitions at this year’s Biennale of Architecture in Venice was devoted to a slowdown. The Romanian exposition with an empty white space invites a reflection on the notion of space. How strongly an empty uniform space can influence! The theme of a slowdown in architecture is illustrated by the Dutch exposition in a very interesting manner. It has got one significant message – to use the countless existing uninhabited objects in the Netherlands. Before new cubatures are built, the existing ones must be used. This message is especially strong considering the number of new architecture in the Netherlands and the way Dutch architects try to compete each other

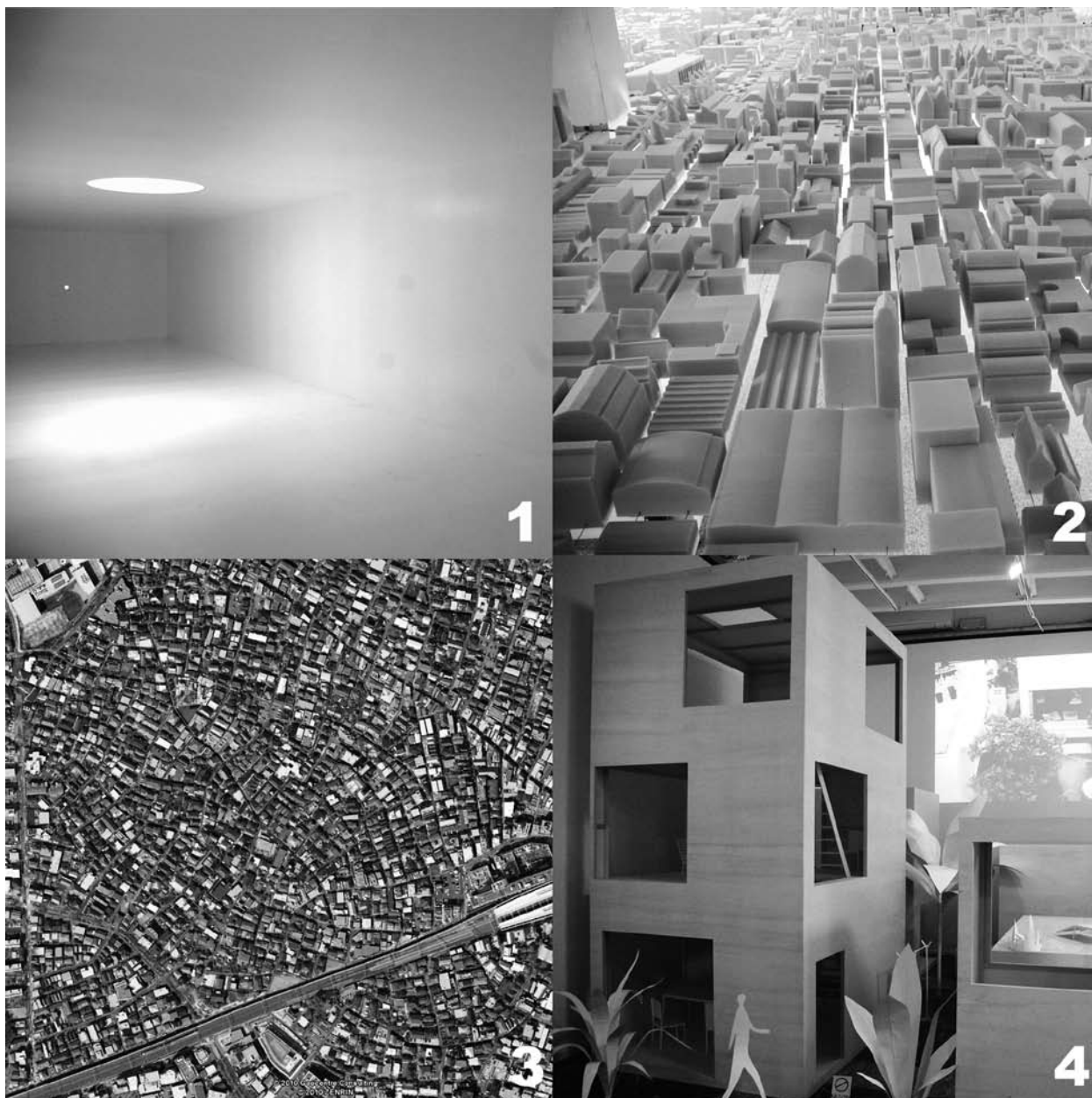
in finding new spatial solutions in order to... Well, what is their objective?

Another unusually interesting presentation at the Biennale of Architecture in Venice was proposed by Japan [3]. The mechanism of the transformations of the structure of Japanese metropolises in time was shown. Metabolism – this notion defines the continuous process of adjusting small-scale, organically accumulated architecture to the changing individual needs. A city, seen as the sum of millions of “pixels” and changeable micro-objects, is also altered by this metabolic process. However, it is a bottom up process, too, as opposed to the top down urbanism of power and money applied in European and American metropolises.

**SLOW ARCHITECTURE!!!** This is the slogan for today. It includes a necessary reflection on the condition of Polish architecture – seemingly very good because global, because cheap, because simple, because vernacular, because international, because... nondescript. Today’s Polish architecture is mainly characterized by solutions with low spatial and aesthetical value, by catalogue products or those resulting from compromises between a designer and an investor, a developer and a municipal office. The potential of the context, topography, local culture and artistic sensitivity has not been exhausted yet.

**SLOW ARCHITECTURE.** This slogan indicates assignments for the nearest future: look around and identify with yourself. Put your surroundings in order, develop wastelands, refurbish your house. Reflect on the sense of creation, the durability of material things in the face of the frailty of myths and ideas whose material remains accompany us for a lifetime. Or maybe the other way round – on the frailty of the material world and the unusual power of the duration

1. Romanian exposition at the Biennale of Architecture in Venice 2010. Emptiness of white space as a space of reflection. Photo by author 2. Dutch exposition at the Biennale of Architecture in Venice 2010. Model of a city composed of uninhabited objects located in the Netherlands. Photo by author 3. Satellite view of the district Kyodo in Tokyo, Japan. Metabolizing city. Google Earth 2009 4. View of the Japanese exposition at the Biennale of Architecture in Venice 2010



of the philosophy of space, a creative thought, culture and the system of spatial values.

SLOW ARCHITECTURE. This is the slogan for the future of architecture. The creation of architecture ne-

eds reflection and experience to emit its inner beauty. Calm your restlessness down and get ready for the creation of great and beautiful things. Write a new definition of architecture which you believe in and which you will be implementing consistently.

## ENDNOTES

[1] Information on Peter Zumthor as the laureate of the Pritzker Award: [www.artinfo.com/news/story/33833/peter-zumthor-speaks/](http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/33833/peter-zumthor-speaks/)

[2] The author participated in the international workshop at the Winter School of Architecture in Ankara, in a workshop organized by Prof. Ado Franchini of Milan University of

Technology and workshops at the Lusofona University in Lisbon.

[3] TOKYO METABOLIZING. Japan Pavilion at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 29 August – 21 November 2010, Superintendent: Koh Kitayama.

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