

## STEFAN MÜLLER

– Architect, urban planner, architectural theorist and educator. Müller was born in 1934 in Lwów (Lviv). He worked for many years at *Miastoprojekt Wrocław* and the Wrocław University of Technology, and is the owner of *Terra* design studio. He is the author of numerous projects, mainly in Wrocław and Lower Silesia, including a deck access block on ul. Grabiszyńska (designed 1962–1963, built 1966–1967), a multi-storey car park with services on ul. Szewska (both in Wrocław), buildings on the eastern and southern side of the market square in Jawor (designed 1958–1960, built 1963–1965), the “Granit” holiday resort in Szklarska Poręba (designed 1974, built 1974–1981), the “Kamienny Szaniec” hotel and recreation centre project in Kołobrzeg (1977), and numerous churches.

In 1973 he prepared the Terra X project – a concept of global urbanisation, whose skeleton was to be a self-supporting structure located above the whole planet at an altitude of about 2000–2500 metres. Due to the transfer of most human activity above the Earth, according to Müller, it would be possible for nature to reclaim those areas of the Earth that had previously been taken over by humans. The surface of the Earth would be used only for agricultural and recreational purposes, and only the most valuable products of human civilization would be preserved on it.

Stefan Müller was the originator, initiator and organiser of Terra-1 and Terra-2 – International Exhibitions of Intentional Architecture. Organised in 1975 and 1981, they were the most interesting exhibitions linked with architecture in post-war Poland. Outstanding creators of the contemporary world – not just architects, but also artists – were invited to participate. The list of participants in the second exhibition was expanded to include

publicists, economists, writers, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians. The author’s conception of Terra was that it was to be a testing ground for the latest architecture – where its peripheries and boundaries could be explored and studied. The themes announced by Müller were at the same time questions that were to be addressed by the invited participants. They oscillated around the relationship between nature and human products and the issue of global treatment of the Earth as material in urbanisation processes. The exhibitions were extraordinary reviews of ideas and futuristic and visionary projects from around the world.

The lists of participants included such persons and groups as: Hanna Adamczewska and Kazimierz Wejchert, Włodzimierz Borowski and Tomasz Osipiński, Constantinos Doxiadis, Yona Friedman, Superstudio, Oskar Hansen, Jadwiga Grabowska-Hawrylak, Arata Isozaki, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Aldo Rossi, Paolo Soleri, Minoru Takeyama, Tadao Ando, Henryk Buszko and Aleksander Franta, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Alison and Peter Smithson, Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis, and Alexander Wallis. In total, over 200 projects and buildings were presented at the two exhibitions.

The first of the exhibitions accompanied the Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), taking place in 1975 in Warsaw. It was held in the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław from 14 September to 12 October of the same year. The second was held in the same museum, between 9 June and 5 September 1981, as an event accompanying the 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Union of Architects.

Currently, the Museum of Architecture is preparing a publication summarising the two exhibitions.

### *An excerpt from Stefan Müller’s letter to participants in the “TERRA-1” International Exhibition of Intentional Architecture*

The aim of the “TERRA-1” *International Exhibition of Intentional Architecture*, organised [...] under the banner “The relationship between art, science and technology as a social development factor of our era”, is to present and compare progressive world architectural thought. The organisers of the Exhibition expect, above all, to receive answers from Authors of works to the following questions: What areas of material creations (or ideas) fall within the concept of current architecture? Is there a distinction between architecture and urbanism, and if so, what is it? What relationships exist between the natural and biological environment and total urbanisation processes?

[...]  
Presentation of architectural thought – intentional architecture – may encompass statements formulated in any graphic, textual or model form (or combinations of them), aiming to express the attitude of the Author (Group) to the issues considered most important by the Author (Group) in the field of current and progressive factors delineating the functions of architecture, how it is understood, and possibilities of implementation in the name of aesthetic, social and cultural values of our times.

[...]  
Works may fall within broad conceptual frameworks – from predictive through to the futurological... and onto architecture of the fantastic.

# TERRA

Michał Duda  
and Roman Rutkowski  
talk to Stefan Müller

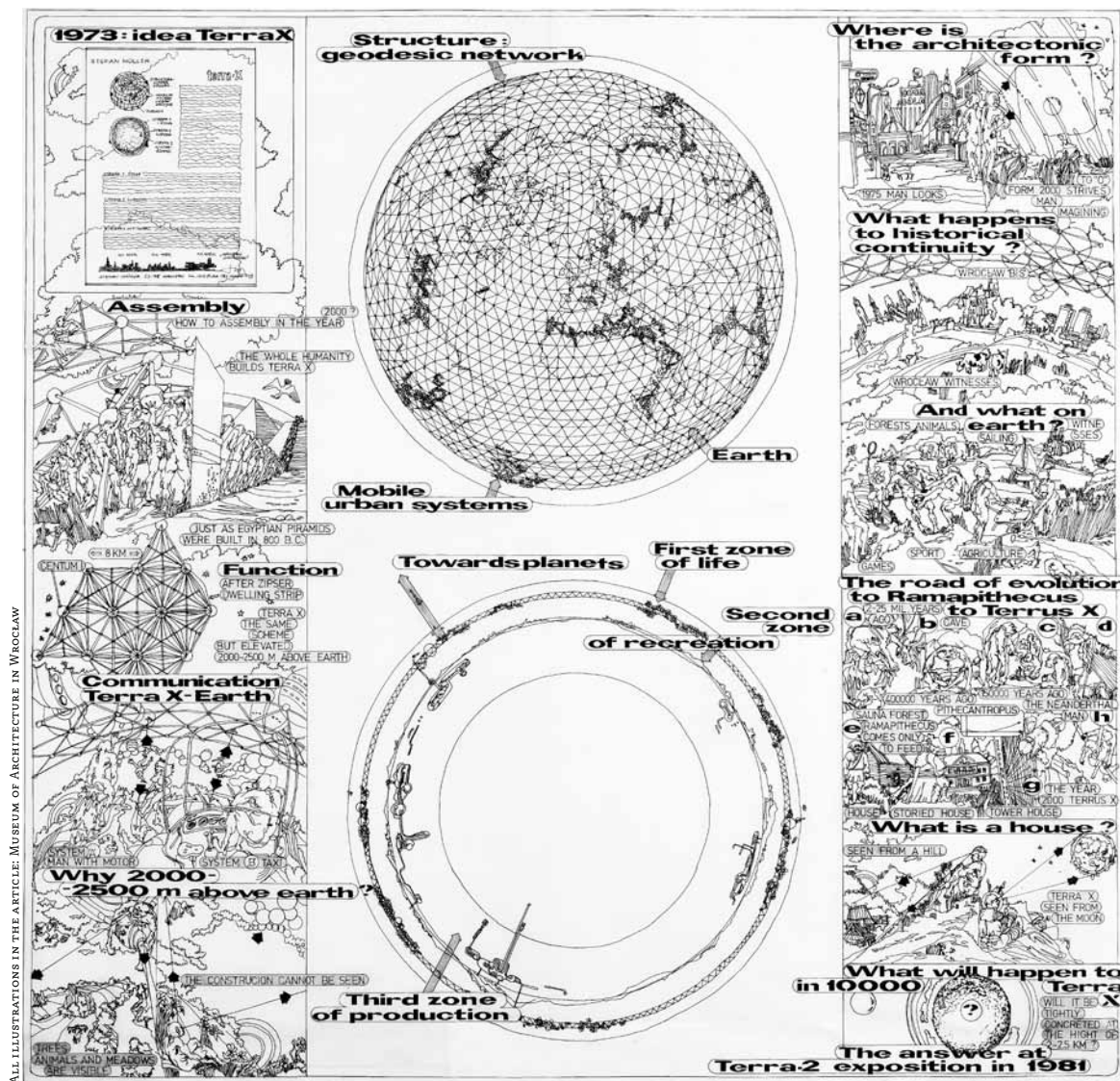
**STEFAN MÜLLER:** What are we actually going to talk about?

**ROMAN RUTKOWSKI:** About Terra. In the context of utopia. And about how it is that once architects were not afraid to think boldly and uncompromisingly, but these days one has the impression that we are overwhelmed by prosaic reality.

**S.M.:** What exactly do you mean by “utopia in architecture”? One can look up the

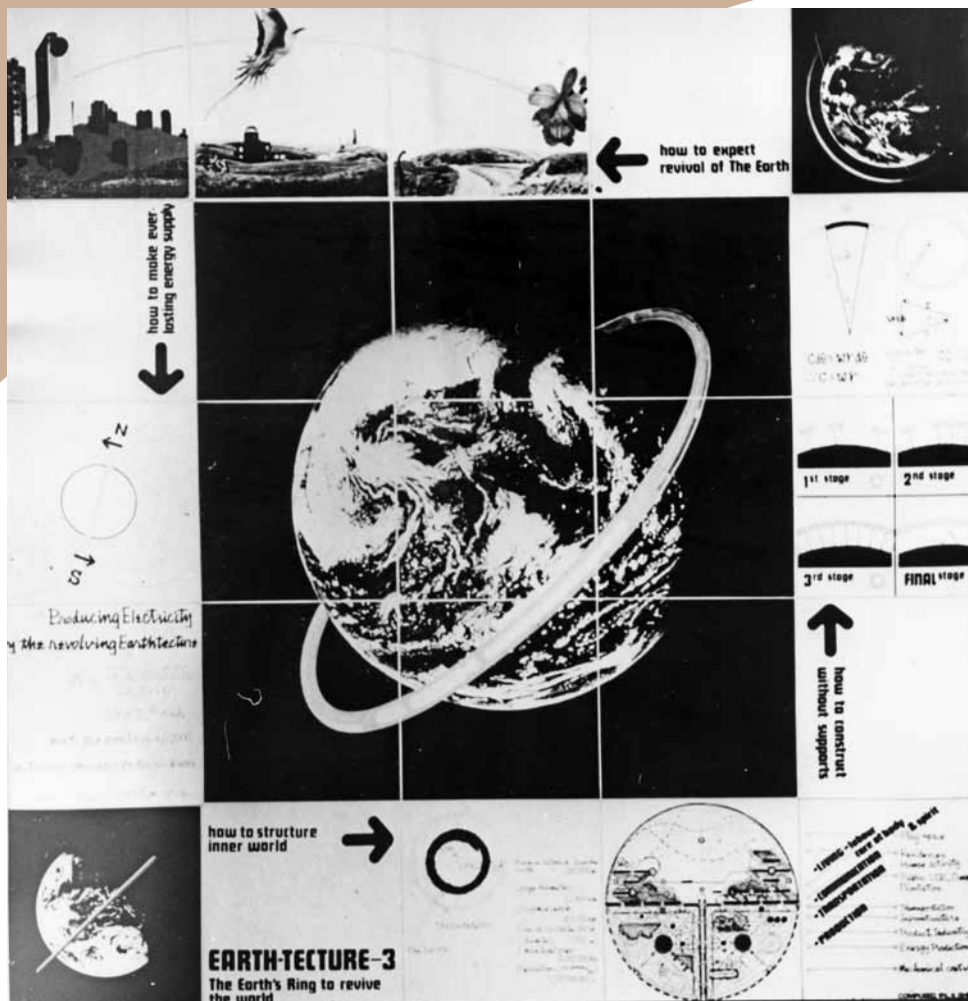
dictionary definition. However, all these definitions just tend to be verbose rambling. Utopias are places that do not exist and cannot exist – this is clear. Actually, I was wondering whether one can talk about utopia in architecture at all. Furthermore, it seems to me that this word is heavily overused. It has passed into slang and lost its original meaning. You say: Terras and utopias. Well, let’s take my Terra X project, from which it all began – after all this is a completely realistic project, which could be built even today. If a small fraction of the money spent on arms and other destructive activities were allocated to the implementation of Terra – it would be possible. Technically speaking, building a Terra X structure is no problem! Minoru Takeyama, who attended both Terra exhibitions, thought in a similar way; he designed something similar: a type of ring, such as one possessed by Saturn, except that under Takeyama’s plan, the ring would be 25 kilometres from the Earth. His design was much more structurally complex, but possible to construct – in other words it wasn’t a utopia.

I used to fly frequently on the Wrocław–Warsaw route, and as I was friends with the pilots – and with Terras constantly on my mind – I sometimes stayed in the cockpit and asked the pilots to change altitude, in order to take photos and observe the Earth from various altitudes. In this way, I empirically established the height of Terra at about 2–2.5 kilometres above the Earth. I had the same thing as Takeyama in mind. The difference consisted



ALL ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE ARTICLE: MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE IN WROCLAW

Stefan Müller, project Terra X



Minoru Takeyama, *Earth-texture-3*, Terra-1

**MICHAŁ DUDA:** I would insist that Terra X was a utopian project. Utopia, but not a fairy tale. Precisely because, theoretically – as you say – it was feasible.

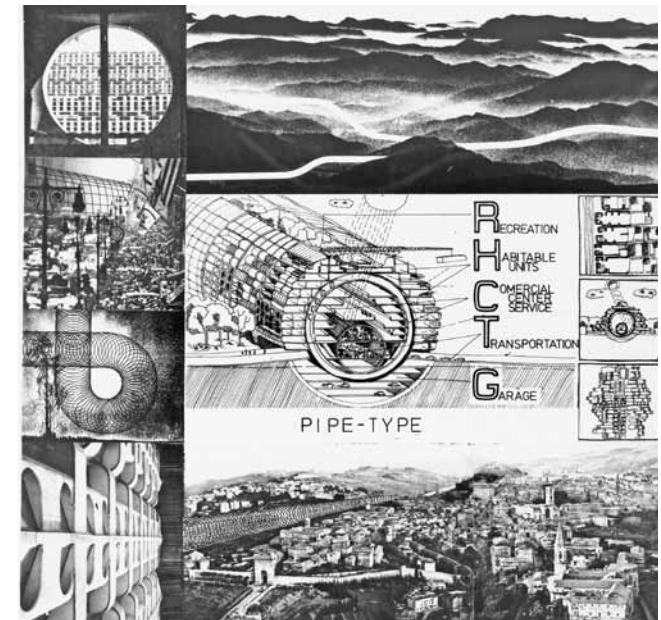
**S.M.:** In that case, what is utopia according to you?

**M.D.:** Utopia is a certain theoretically constructed ideal world, which *de facto* cannot be realised, although theoretically there is nothing to prevent it – in terms of social, economic or constructional factors. It is only when confronted with the human factor – which by its very nature cannot really be accommodated into any of these kinds of preconceived schemes – that utopia turns out to be a fiasco. And that is precisely why, in my opinion, Terra X has all the hallmarks of a utopian project – because if everything were thoroughly worked out, it turns out that it would be achievable, only...

in the fact that he wanted to “evacuate” people from the Earth, and I wanted to maintain contact between people and the Earth. Where did all these ideas come from? Well, as a child, I wanted to be a forester like my father, who was a role model for me. This isn’t just a pose – I’m not kidding, I became an architect by chance. There were no architects in my family, apart from some distant forebear, Dietrich Müller – a builder, actually – who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century came from Brunswick (Braunschweig) to Krakow. I was born in Lwów. Due to my father’s occupation, I spent my childhood in Podolia borderland villages

and forests, and I swam in the Dniester. For no particular reason, I developed a liking for the word “architecture” – because it’s such a nice word. Well, I became an architect. All the time, however, the most important things for me were forests, earth, animals, water and grass. That is why practically everything I did in architecture as a student was what is now referred to as “eco”, it was and is somewhat beyond my consciousness, but of course it didn’t have and doesn’t have anything to do with any sort of utopia. And in this context Terra X is not utopia, but only what you refer to as “eco” architecture.

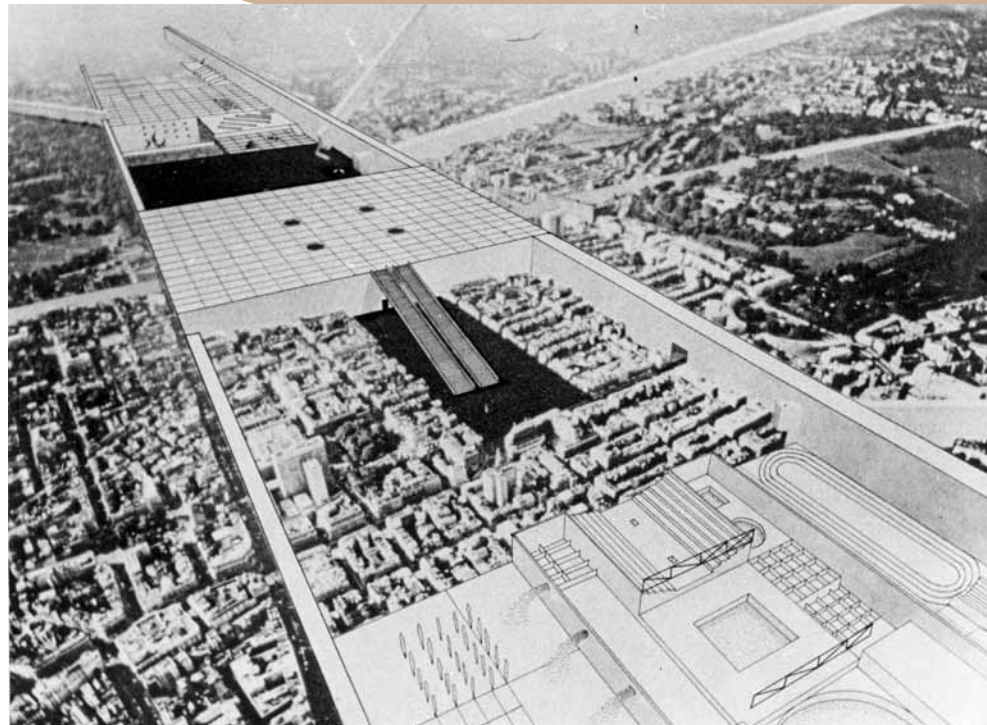
**S.M.:** Only what? Only human will is lacking. That is the only obstacle. People simply do not want to do it for obvious reasons. Is that sufficient to define such architecture as utopian?



Jadwiga Grabowska-Hawrylak, *Pipe Type*, Terra-1

**M.D.:** But is it people who are against utopia or utopia against people?

**S.M.:** People – well, not only people, animals as well, for example – need a hierarchical world. Just as in medieval panoramas of cities, at first glance one sees dominant towers and one knows: church authority is here, secular authority there, rich people live nearby, poorer people further way and even poorer people, still further. Even further is the border, and then the end. And in this world people are peaceful and happy. They know their place. Just like in the natural world – dogs, birds, insects, trees, grass – everywhere there is some sort of hierarchy. And in the times in which we live now, all these types of systems have broken down. There are no core values, neither in political or social life, nor in architecture. Social interactions are disappearing. Total chaos. Speaking of architecture – what exactly is architecture today? What kind of architecture do we have in 2011, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The vast majority of architecture is simply eclecticism. Any bit of old wall, some pretty worthless factory... are considered to be monuments. The impotent architect is delighted and builds on to them what he or she can: glass walls, escalators. This little wall is just a pretext, the architect makes use of this pretext... and that's it. All the latest technology – everything that is needed at a given time – is packed into these buildings (which in any case will be demolished in the near future). Today, architecture is thought about in a completely dif-



ferent way than in the past: architecture is a disposable object, like for example socks or tights, which after brief use are thrown into the rubbish bin. Do you remember how, not so long ago, in nearly every shop there was a lady who repaired stockings, socks, etc.?

**R.R.:** That is precisely why it seems very important to me: that utopian courage, which participants in both exhibitions had. They weren't afraid to think outside the box, they had the courage to leave behind all frameworks and limitations. And we today are constantly afraid. We are stuck in archetypal forms, for fear of annihilation or weakening of values which come somewhere from the past. I don't want to enter into lengthy discussions on dictionary definitions of utopia, but what was "utopian" in projects shown at both Terra exhibitions, was precisely this unusually bold move forward, away from the average.

**S.M.:** That's exactly how the task was set. I wrote exactly what I meant in letters to potential participants. Besides, people I turned to – although I didn't know the vast majority of them personally – were not ordinary, run-of-the-mill practitioners. I knew them from professional journals, from the recommendations of friends who thought similarly to me. I knew what I could expect from them, which, *nota bene*, was not always confirmed.

**R.R.:** But the very fact that so many of those who received invitations replied to a letter from an unknown person from the other side of the world attests to the fact that they had such a need. And on the list of participants in both exhibitions we have a whole selection of names which were not so well known then, but today are architectural stars. How did you draw up the list of participants and how many of those invited replied?



**S.M.:** I don't remember exactly, but perhaps about two thirds of those invited responded. And where was the list from? It was drawn up on the "grapevine" principle. I was always much more interested in "non-architecture". As I have already said – I am actually an architect by chance. I never felt an architect, and now with complete certainty I know that I am not one. I was always mostly interested with peripheries. All my contacts, including social ones, were concentrated around people from outside the "profession". I simply always liked life. And life is not the same as architecture. It's much more. It was theatre, film, music, women... And these people had similar friends. And various people recommended other people, etc. Although I often didn't know the

surnames passed on to me, I noted them down carefully, trusting people of a similar outlook on the world.

**R.R.:** And what percentage of those invited were architects?

**S.M.:** .Quite a large percentage. It was simply easier for me to contact architects, so there were more of them.

**R.R.:** This is significant precisely in the context of the borders of architecture and going beyond the profession. Because, anyway, the exhibitions were labelled as architectural. And what is in itself interesting is that persons outside the architectural field were invited to the exhibition. The number of

Daniel Grataloup, Terra-2

non-architectural participants was impressive.

**M.D.:** Well, yes, only it seems to me that the key here is contained in the description of the subheading: "intentional architecture".

**S.M.:** Exactly. This word thought up by me – intentional – contains in itself a certain element of utopia. Because intentional is staying in the sphere of intention, and not matter, but is it utopia?

**M.D.:** So intentional architecture is actually "architecture in its pure form", devoid of any material limitations, reduced to ideas and thoughts.

**S.M.:** In a way, yes, but it is possible for it to exist in the near, undefined future? In spite of the wording of the title and questions contained in the letter, the replies sent were very varied: from the very naïve to the unusually interesting. Once someone had sent something, I had to exhibit it – because the premise was that there wouldn't be any



Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński, *Neo-Spontanic Architecture*, Terra-2

form of selection. As a result, projects that didn't really fit in with the exhibition were submitted: for example, someone sent in a hut – the building itself was nice, but it didn't have anything to do with the proposed intentionality. In spite of everything, the issue was probably well presented, because it turned out that the vast majority of participants understood my intention well.

It is hard to say whether before Terra anyone had done anything similar. Probably many people in the world thought similarly, but I, through my audacity and whippersnapper age, threw down the gauntlet and it worked. Since there was no other similar plane, participants threw themselves at Terra like flies to honey. Probably many people thought of similar initiatives, they probably also had better conditions and were cleverer than me. It's just down to chance that it was me who succeeded.

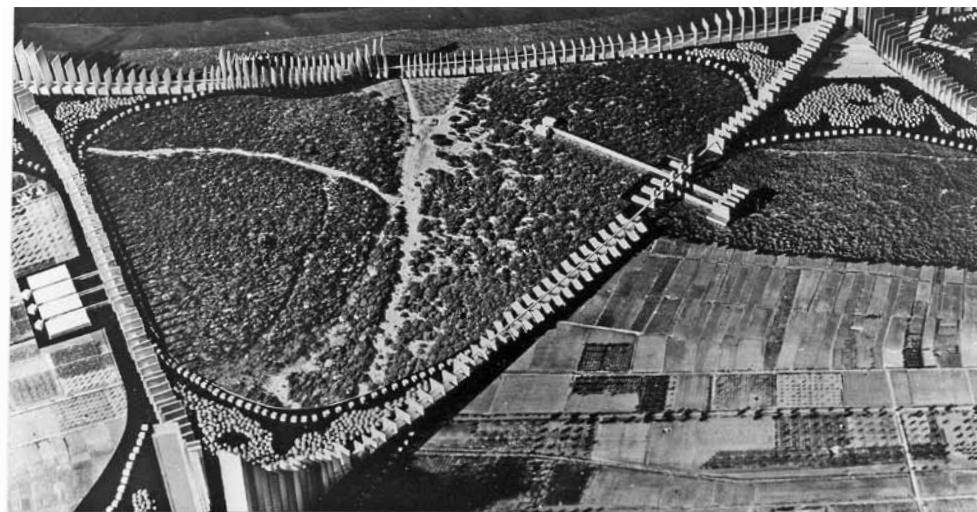
I would put forward the thesis – I immediately stress that I didn't think of it, I think it was René Dubois – that at various times something is in the air. And this doesn't just relate to architecture, but much more to life in general. There exists a certain need and in the whole world certain thoughts and ideas function in parallel. It is as though you were cooking goulash in a great big pot, the world is a great big pot of bubbling goulash. And whether it be 1010, 1500, or the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there exist some universal needs and ideas, which "are in the air". When the first Terra was held, it was 1975 and at that moment, many people in the world thought

very similarly, not to say identically. Be it in architecture, art, or politics.

Let's take Minoru Takeyama. I had never seen him or his works before the exhibition. He came to Wrocław and brought his work. He saw mine and for a long time we were literally cackling! Because we had been doing the same thing at opposite ends of the earth, at the same time, without knowing anything about each other. Of course, he was doing things slightly differently and I was doing things slightly differently, but it was the same way of thinking. And there were lots of Takeyamas and Müllers then. But not everyone was implementing their ideas. It was such a time and such ideas were flying in the air.

Here a certain interpolation is necessary. It turned out that Takeyama and I were born in the same year, 1934. Does way of thinking, sensitivity, irrespective of global trends, have some generational link? I don't know, but maybe...

R. R.: Another interesting topic is the relationship with conceptual art, which, similarly, is not concerned with physicality. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, works of art arose that were projects on a huge scale, that were supposed to remain in the sphere of ideas. The situation was similar in the case of many projects from Terra-1 and Terra-2. I consider that the Terras were a synthesis of three aspects. Firstly, the inten-



one of the "problems" of our present moment in life seems to be the result of fast multiplications with effects such as over-densities of almost every thing in every field, a sort of total inflation resulting too often in pollution...economic pollution, products pollution, architectural pollution, ideas pollution...waste....most of our cities show all this quite clearly.....and almost like stars, they swell, now faster and faster....becoming giants, soon uncontrollable.....the pull of "natural economy" is too strong...we need to talk to each other....to exchange.....more and more of us have more and more to exchange.....all leads as always to the symbolic market place.....and as always the problem is the chaos of the resulting flows.....and we can not nor should, erase and start from a tabula rasa.....our most tangible proofs of humanity stand among the very things that now appear to be "in the way".....we just need to slowly draw a sensually linear network of infrastructural conduits.....on and around the various textures of our earth.....our old cities.....our old rivers.....forest.....fields.....seas.....without destruction.....to allow freedom of flow, energy flow, vehicular,.....channelling without borders.....letting the natural seesaw of organic equilibrium reestablish itself almost by itself while we, fulfilling our lives at our obscene levels, say still be able to enjoy it and join it at will.....



WILLIAM MILETO · ROME CONSULTANTS  
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tionality of artistic activities. Secondly, the production of unusually bold scenarios for the future – I am referring here to the creativity of such groups as Archigram, Archizoom and Superstudio, which produced visions of completely new worlds. And thirdly – and this is again a relationship with the fine arts – is the idea of the “net” thought up in 1970 by Jarosław Kozłowski and Andrzej Kostołowski, which satisfied then a strong need for correspondence and exchange of ideas between creators, which was not as easy then as now.

**S.M.:** There is no doubt that to a large extent I was also inspired by artists. It is easier to be an artist, a so-called fine artist than an architect, if you want to do conceptual things. On an everyday level, architecture is investors, big money and similar mundane matters. And the idea – the thought – is quicker than the material which the architect has to work with. The most outstanding creators go far beyond today’s possibilities. Because of course it is not true that we have achieved everything, that ‘zero point’ thought up by Ludwiński, when it comes to material. Technical possibilities are of course huge – we tunnel through mountains, erect very long bridges, dig tunnels under seas, build skyscrapers and ships and airplanes that are really moving cities. However, all this raises the question: where are people? What do they need in the psychological sphere, how many of these new “toys” are they able to consume?

**R.R.:** And actually, what was the intention of these intentional architectural exhibitions?

**S.M.:** . To do things on the borderline. So that it wasn’t architecture. Because, speaking seriously, I really wasn’t and am still not interested in architecture. And there aren’t many architects I want to talk to. My good friend, designer Krzysio Meissner, who had a similar view on the matter, once described our profession aptly when he said that an architect was really “nothing” – neither an engineer nor an artist nor a humanist, and mainly a buffoon. This is because it is a profession embracing many disciplines – but none of them “in full”. In my life I have had little contact with architects – what they do, their assessments and ways of thinking do not interest me. That does not mean that I am negating the architectural profession, but I prefer to talk, for example, with a taxi driver, or an ordinary labourer, because in such a conversation I really learn more about life, and that is what interests me primarily, or rather exclusively.

**M.D.:** Then people felt the need to reply to your invitation – to draw up a project and send it somewhere to the ends of the earth to a guy they hadn’t heard of, who wanted to organise an exhibition of these projects somewhere in Wrocław. How is it that now, though the problems of the world have not changed fundamentally, and there are even several new ones, architects are somehow less enthusiastic about dreaming up visions of world salvation?

**S.M.:** Architecture is only a result – or rather a derivative – of life. As life changes, so too does architecture. Once there was a hierarchy, a structure – which related to interpersonal contacts as well. In today’s times, each person takes up a huge amount of space. He lives here, works somewhere else, rests in yet another place. In several hours he can be in Paris or New York. But because of this, social interactions have weakened, even disappeared. Specialisation in particular hermetic disciplines also means that when you’re deeply entrenched in your own field, it is impossible to communicate with anyone outside it. Everyone wants to have their own such piece of space, protected and “fenced off” – be it in the form of a walled residence or a guarded estate, depending on financial status. What is worse, even within these closed communities, ties are not formed either. There are no social ties and no hierarchy of values. These are the main causes. We live, not only in Poland, here and now. Consumption is now, but what about tomorrow? It’s hardly worth mentioning, as almost no-one is interested. We are now in an era of eclecticism – in the broadest sense of the term: we believe that the richer we are, the more we know and the more power we have, the happier we will be. We think we have the world in the palm of our hand, but in my opinion, the time to sober up is just around the corner. Tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, unimaginable droughts – all this, I believe, helps us “masters of the world” understand our true place.

**R.R.:** But wasn't it the case that the Terras, through reaching out to the world beyond the immediate surroundings and also attracting participants from the other side of the globe, creating networks of "virtual" contacts and promoting architecture, which was also to a large extent completely unattached to the place, were anticipating features which you mentioned?

**S.M.:** I'll be honest: I've never thought about it. I am a man directed by senses, I have limited knowledge, I don't remember. I act like a blind man – on intuition.

**R.R.:** In other words an intentional-intuitional look at architecture from various angles.

**S.M.:** Not only at architecture, but simply at life. But inevitably – because of course I am an architect by training – the focus has been on intentional architecture.

**M.D.:** The first Terra in 1975 and the second in 1981 were separated by 6 years. During this time, a lot changed in the world. From your point of view, were these exhibitions very different? Were different issues on participants' minds?

**S.M.:** No, they were very similar. They were generally about the same thing: about the contact between the material and non-material aspect, between nature and what people add to it. The effects of the exhibitions were also similar.

**M.D.:** In the interview which Ludwiński conducted with you, you said that one of the sources of inspiration for organising the Terra-1 exhibition was a lack of a plane of confrontation of views on the superficially truistic question "What is architecture?". After two editions of Terra it was possible to answer the question even if only to a certain extent?

**S.M.:** I perfidiously assumed that such a question could not be answered. In short, it was a provocation. Except that I left myself a note of hope that in spite of everything someone would surprise me with something and address the above doubt.

**R.R.:** Why did the exhibitions stop after the second Terra? After all, you had assumed that it was to be a cyclical series.

**S.M.:** Many people were upset with me about that, but I felt that this formula had exhausted itself. Then, I wanted to do another edition, but in a somewhat different form. I wanted the third Terra to no longer be drawn, but rather based on text, and of course I also wanted the participants to be mainly people from other professions.

**M.D.:** So the next step would be a total reduction of form to the pure idea?

**S.M.:** In a way, but not necessarily. In those days I was a young, stupid and knowledge-absorbing man, and believed and expected that I would gain an answer to questions that

were vexing me: What is art? What is architecture? Today, from the perspective of age, I know that these are questions to which there are no answers. Just like the question about what happens after death. Is there a God? Such questions are asked by thinking people – apart from people who deeply believe and do not have doubts, whom I envy very much. They've got the most important problem out of the way.

I felt and knew that the formulae for the Terra-1 and Terra-2 exhibitions had been exhausted. I wasn't fully prepared to undertake Terra-3. Something dawned in my mind, but... And besides, there wasn't enough time. If you wanted to do another Terra today, then the issue should be presented completely differently. There should be questions about life, biology, psychology, ecology, and only at the end, possibly, about architecture.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY GEORGE LISOWSKI

Below: Studio of Emotional Composition, Grzegorz Kolański, Jerzy Ryba, Wojciech Szutkowski, Terra-2

#### STUDIO KOMPOZYCJI EMOCJONALNEJ

ma obowiązek zawiadomić, że m.in. od Pana /Pani/ zależy czy między 6 czerwca 1981 r. a 6 września 1981 r. we Wrocławiu przy ul. Bernardyńskiej 5 w Muzeum Architektury dojdzie do unikalnego faktu artystycznego.

Grzegorz Kolański  
Jerzy Ryba  
Wojciech Szutkowski