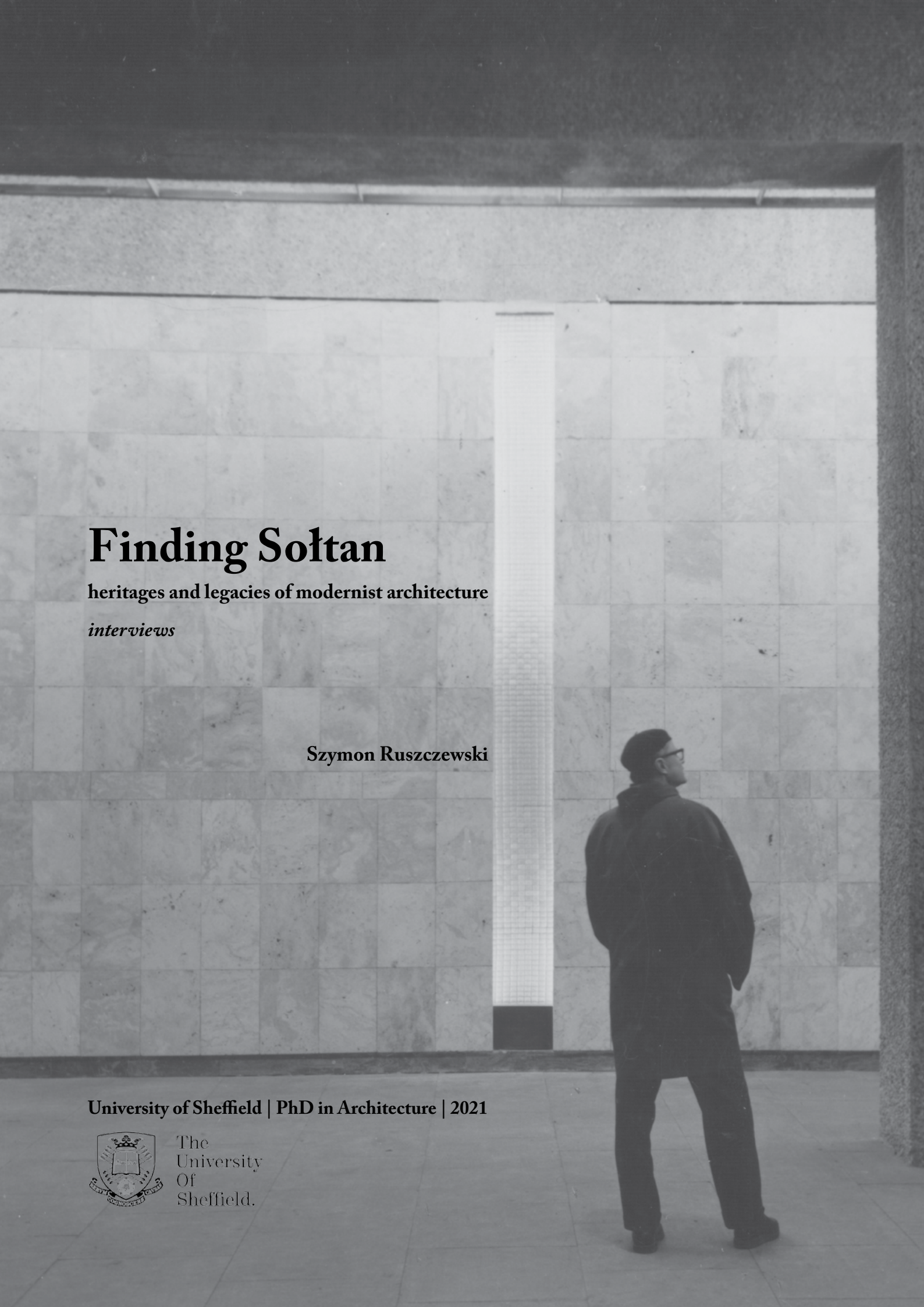
Finding Sołtan

heritages and legacies of modernist architecture

interviews

Szymon Ruszczewski



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interviews

Szymon Ruszczewski

PhD in Architecture, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield
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archive abbreviations

AASP-JS	Warsaw, Fine Arts Academy Archives, Jerzy Sołtan Legacy Collection (KD 119)
AIA-JS	Washington DC, AIA Archives, Jerzy Sołtan's Nomination
FLC-DN	Paris, Fondation Le Corbusier, dossiers nominatifs
GTA-AR	Zurich, ETH GTA Archiv, Alfred Roth Collection
GTA-JLS	Zurich, ETH GTA Archiv, Josep Lluís Sert Collection
GTA-JT	Zurich, ETH GTA Archiv, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt Collection
GTA-SG	Zurich, ETH GTA Archiv, Sigfried Giedion Collection
HGSD-JLS	Cambridge, Harvard Special Collections, Josep Lluís Sert Collection
HGSD-JS	Cambridge, Harvard Special Collections, Jerzy Sołtan Collection
HGSD-JSM	Cambridge, Harvard Special Collections, Sołtan Memorial Collection
HGSD	Cambridge, Harvard Special Collections
HNI-JB	Rotterdam, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Jaap Bakema Collection
HNI-TT	Rotterdam, Het Nieuwe Instituut, Alison and Peter Smithson Collection
ISPAN-BU	Warsaw, Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Special Collections, Bohdan Urbanowicz Collection
ISPAN-JS	Warsaw, Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Documentation of Polish Contemporary Art Collections, Jerzy Sołtan Collection
LASP	Warsaw, Library of the Fine Arts Academy
MASP-JS	Warsaw, Fine Arts Academy Museum, Jerzy Sołtan Collection
P-AW	Anne Wattenberg private archive
P-JS	Joanna Sołtan private archive
P-MKD	Marleen Kay Davis private archive
P-TH	Thomas Holtz private archive
P-UG	Umberto Guarracino private archive
RIBA-JT	London, RIBA Library, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt Papers

contents

This research has been produced as a part of the Doctor of Philosophy programme at the University of Sheffield by Szymon Ruszczewski, *Finding Sołtan - heritages and legacies of modernist architecture*, and it contains a collection of interviews on Jerzy Sołtan's work, teaching, and ideas. This document contains documents helpful in illustrating the research process consisting in oral histories interviews on Jerzy Sołtan's work. It contains detailed research statistics and all interview transcriptions. The entire process was approved by the University of Sheffield on February 19th, 2019 with the reference number 024608.

statistics

During the research process, twenty-six interviews and four written statements were collected, whereas further fourteen participants either declared themselves available for interviews, participated in casual conversations, or provided the researcher with suggestions and useful information concerning the research theme. The statistics below indicate location of the face-to-face interviews or locations of the interviewees in case of video interviews.

recorded interviews: 26

Anthony Ames, architect (Atlanta, GA), 05/10/2020
Shamay Assif, architect (Tel Aviv, Israel), 22/04/2020
Edward Baum, architect, dean at the University of Texas Arlington (New York City, NY), 12/04/2019
Christopher Benninger, architect, teacher at the Ahmedabad Educational Society (Balewadi, India), 29/11/2020 and 20/01/2021
Jacek Damięcki, architect (Warsaw, Poland), 28/09/2019
Marleen Kay Davis, architect, dean at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville, TN), 15/01/2021, 02/02/2021, and 13/04/2021
Karl Fender, architect (Melbourne, Australia), 19/10/2020
Urs Gauchat, architect, dean at the University of New Jersey (Cambridge, MA), 04/04/2019
Umberto Guarracino, architect (Boston, MA), 11/05/2020
Thomas Holtz, architect (Hyattsville, MD), 11/04/2019
Paul Krueger, architect (Watertown, MA), 27/03/2019
Joanna Lombard, architect, teacher at the University of Miami (Miami, FL), 06/10/2020
Edward Lyons, architect (Sharon, MA), 02/04/2019
Rocco Maragna, architect (Montreal, Canada), 25/06/2020
Larry Philbrick, architect (Cambridge, MA), 03/04/2019
Carl Rosenberg, architect (Cambridge, MA), 03/04/2019
Simon Smithson, architect (London, UK), 21/05/2020
Bogusław Smyrski, architect, teacher at the Fine Arts Academy (Warsaw, Poland), 27/09/2019
Joanna Sołtan, artist (Watertown, MA), 28/03/2019
Stan Szaflarski, architect (St. Catharines, Canada), 29/06/2020
Atef Tabet, architect (Beirut, Lebanon), 20/01/2021
Susan van der Meulen, architect (Chicago, IL), 06/01/2021
François Vigier, urban planner, teacher at Harvard GSD (Cambridge, MA), 25/03/2019 and 01/04/2019
Makoto Shin Watanabe, architect, teacher at Hosei University (Tokyo, Japan), 28/12/2020
Anne Wattenberg, architect (Denver, CO), 24/04/2020
Wojciech Wybieralski, designer (Warsaw, Poland), 27/09/2019

Written statements: 4

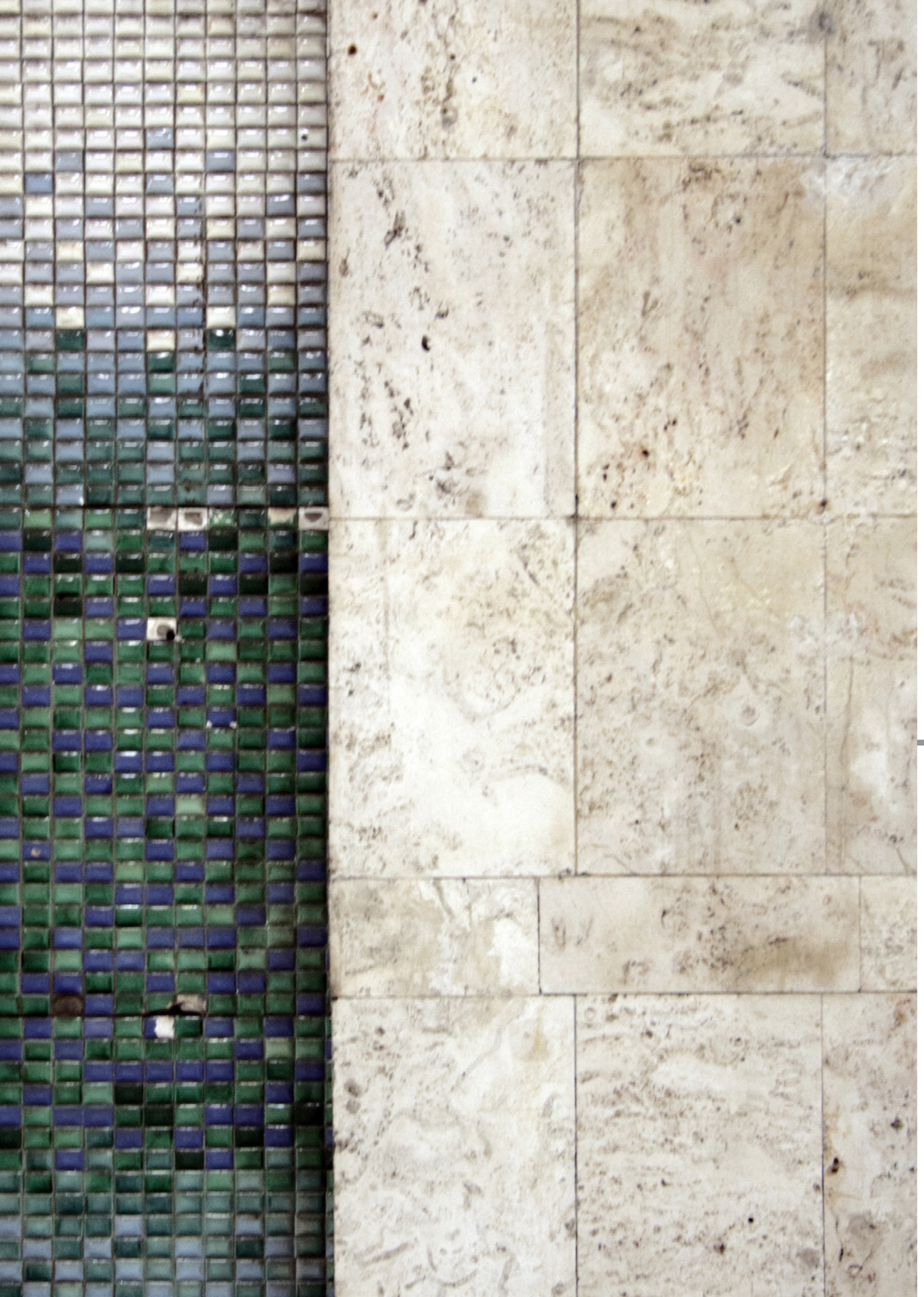
John Carney, architect (Wilson, WY), 14/09/2020
Lydia Rubio, artist (New York City, NY), 29/03/2021
Kiyohide Sawaoka, architect, teacher at Kogakuin University (Tokyo, Japan), 15/09/2020
Bartholomew Voorsanger, architect (Napa, CA), 13/05/2019

Casual conversation, availability, and suggestions: 14

Pierre Jampen, architect, teacher at the Université Laval (Montreal, Canada)
Richard Wesley, architect, teacher at Penn University (Philadelphia, PA)
Robert Campbell, architecture critic (Boston, MA)
Viola Damięcka, architect (Warsaw, Poland)
Eduardo Leston, architect, teacher at the Universidad de Palermo (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
Michael Palladino, architect (Los Angeles, CA)
Brenda Lewin, architect (Los Angeles, CA)
Li Pei, architect (New York City, NY)
Rod Knox, architect, teacher at the Cooper Union (New York City, NY)
Emily Kuo, architect (San Francisco, CA)
Pedro Urquiza, architect (Mexico City, Mexico)
José Gómez-Ibáñez, architect, teacher at Harvard GSD (Cambridge, MA)
Amelie Rennolds, architect (New York City, NY)
Salley Razelou, gardener (Sparoza, Greece)

Refusal: 2

No answer: 6



Fine Arts Academy and Artistic and Research Workshops - Poland

Jacek Damięcki

September 28th, 2019, in Warsaw, Poland

Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw alumnus (1954–1961), member of the Workshops (ca. 1956–1962), architect and artist working in Warsaw, Poland. In the Workshops, he was working on 'Warszawianka' sporting centre (1959), on 'Dukat' department store in Olsztyn (1959–1962) and on 'Wenecja' bar in Warsaw (1959). Before working individually, he was a member of Candilis–Woods–Josic atelier in Paris and he obtained his second diploma at the Polytechnic of Warsaw under Helena Syrkus.

S.R.: You have many experiences of work both in Poland and abroad, some successes too. What is Jerzy Sołtan's place amongst them?

J.D.: As far as I am concerned, I was feeling strength and some kind of force in Sołtan – in his personality and in his broader ideas. He was looking for some higher diapasons in architecture – for poetics, as he was defining it. Since my diploma from the Academy was well done, after the studies and after I spent some time under Sołtan at the Workshops, I got a scholarship to go to Italy as a reward. However, Sołtan organised for me also an apprenticeship at Candilis and Woods' atelier in Paris, so I stayed in Italy for a shorter time and I gave more importance to the work with Woods. He was formulating his theory of polycentrism. First, there was the University of Frankfurt: I participated in the competition and I remember that I am mentioned as a group member.[1] Then, there was the winning entry for the Free University of Berlin competition... I have to say that already at that time, there was more to me than the emotional Sołtan alone: there were both Sołtan and Woods. It was a duet: at one end – poetics and Sołtan, and at the other one – systematic thinking and Woods. Sołtan gave me a great present: I stopped believing in him as in one God. Until today, I have three of them. First, Sołtan and his search for higher reasons – poetics – that are necessary in architecture. Second, the systematic and absolutely rational approach of Woods. Third, a social approach from Helena Syrkus. These are my three pillars.

S.R.: Where does Helena Syrkus come from?

J.D.: I believe it was when I was an adjunct at the Academy, and after a talk with Sołtan. I started a second degree at the Polytechnic. After my coming back from Candilis and Woods from Paris, I came to Sołtan in the Workshops atelier and I asked, "Professor, may I design here something for my own account, even a toilet?" – but he answered, "no, the atelier has its own profile and I must answer to your question directly: no". I thought then that I had to go to the Polytechnic, because it was no more enough for me. I enrolled at the Polytechnic starting directly from the second year, and when I had to choose specialisation, I chose Syrkus, since I was curious how she (as a CIAM secretary) was seeing architecture from the social point of view. I have to tell here clearly that according to me, the groups within CIAM were not uniform. Syrkus was definitely committed to the social side, as she was designing working class neighbourhoods at a minimum standard. They were very much cleaned out from any luxury – I think here for instance about Warsaw housing in Koło or Mokotów. In the poetics of those neighbourhoods, one can feel that architecture is cleaned from the pathos and from that slight flavour of fascism. I speak of course too harshly – fascism – but such poetics were often balancing at a dangerous edge, as in the case of the gigantic human hand designed by Le Corbusier...

S.R.: And there is no such thing in Syrkus...

J.D.: Absolutely. To be frank, I consider those Russian competitions by Le Corbusier – for instance, when he was designing the Palace of the Soviets – as avant-garde, but such expression is quite often close to some kind of dangerous issue.

S.R.: It makes me think about Sołtan: when he was speaking about the poetics in architecture, in the poetic tendency he was aligning apart from Le Corbusier also Ivan Leonidov and Giuseppe Terragni, who designed the Casa del Fascio in Como... and the latter is as far as you can get when considering political buildings. However, you mentioned these experiences – both in France and later after in Poland – and I have an impression that it was Sołtan who gave you the impulse to act...

J.D.: If not for Sołtan, I would have been dust and ashes. I have to tell you that the encounter with Sołtan and the fact that he sent me to France was amazing. I was working there, in rue Dauphine, for probably over a year... I remember that the secretary was answering phones from Le Corbusier for instance. Once, I heard as she talked to him and later she said, "the boss called and he is not accepting a work, and he asks whether the atelier would design a chapel somewhere in the mountains". When I heard "a chapel in the mountains", I did not sleep for three days and nights, but I was sketching that chapel thinking that if I were to be the one to develop it, I would know how to start. With no information, but based only on that phone call... You could feel then – or at least I was feeling – that I was at the very source; that where I stood, there was flowing a pure stream of silver; that I was in the centre of something important – something happening to architecture. Such a sensation and awareness alone, awareness that you are at the source, it is worth millions. And it does not happen to anyone... It is a completely different sensation, at a different level. It is not an artisan's sensation, yet something at the cosmic level, some kind of *genius loci*. With Syrkus on the other hand, it was a completely different story. I was there doing a second degree, and she was treating me as a junior colleague, as she wrote in her book.[2] We also had different kinds of conversations with her, but I was trying to understand them too, as she was a CIAM secretary. It was for me difficult too, because Sołtan claimed that during social realism she had behaved awfully...

S.R.: Indeed, I wanted to come back to this. In a letter to you, Sołtan writes that behind Le Corbusier's and CIAM's back, she was agitating against modern architecture during social realism.[3]

J.D.: Yes, he was very critical of her... He claimed that even within CIAM, when she had been a secretary, she had been considered very critically: actually not only critically, but also ironically. I do not know on what basis he claimed that. I may only suppose, after I have read a book with her correspondence... I have found there a text, in which she writes to Gropius that she would like to work for him even as a secretary or typist...[4] She tried to get out of Poland. That letter is in fact so submissive, and she pleads almost kneeling for help to get a visa to the US. She writes that she knows five languages – German, Polish, Russian, English, and French – and that she would like to get a US visa and she may do anything... so this letter is indeed with no ambition. Perhaps it angered Sołtan that they wanted to get out to the United States with their ideas, or that they wanted to get out from Poland at all.

S.R.: I can tell you that when you read some comments on the CIAM congresses, especially on the congress in Bergamo, you can have an impression that Syrkus was somehow distanced from her role in the organisation. For instance, before the congress in Dubrovnik, Helena Syrkus was mentioned as the CIAM representative in Poland, but after it, Sołtan was the main representative.[5] After the Bergamo congress, she considered very negatively the direction CIAM was taking and she claimed that Le Corbusier, Roth and Giedion were pushing it towards its ruin.[6] Moreover, before that, she had been trying to convince Giedion to read some texts on art by Stalin.[7]

J.D.: Well, this alone could have been a reason for such treatment. That letter you mentioned, it was very rough. Sołtan was literally writing there that Syrkus was being laughed at by the entire CIAM. I was astonished that he was writing in this manner, while he had such erudition... but if she was proposing reading Stalin, then that alone would be enough. Anyhow, according to Sołtan, she compromised herself during the Stalinist period. She went along an entirely different path, and she was denouncing people... It seemed almost impossible to me. Given that she had such a negative period, I was asked about her, but I claimed, "I look at people's best side". I knew her after all of that, and I had no idea about what actually happened.

S.R.: So you met her only after the Stalinist period, when was that?

J.D.: It was in the second half of the 1960s. She published the book *Ku idei osiedla społecznego*. My diploma was

1 'Recherches d'architecture', *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 114 (1964), 14-19.

2 Helena Syrkus, *Ku idei osiedla społecznego* (Warsaw: Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1976).

3 Sołtan to Damięcki from February 26th, 1984, see: MASP-JS.

4 Although in all the letters one can see that Syrkus looks up at Gropius and she usually uses formal expressions, there are no letters, in which she would be pleading to get the visa. She proposes Gropius that she may work for him as a secretary in a letter from January 28th, 1937, see: *CIAM Archipelago. The Letters of Helena Syrkus*, ed. by Aleksandra Kędziorek, Katarzyna Uchowicz and Maja Wirkus (Warsaw: Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, 2019), pp. 28-29.

5 Lists of the CIAM members from 1955 and of the reorganised CIAM after the congress in Dubrovnik from 1956, see: GTA-AR, 42-AR-22-72, 42-AR-22-24 and GTA-JT, 42-JT-22-7/11.

6 Syrkus to Stam from July 10th, 1949, quoted in: Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972* (Zurich, GTA 1993), p. 50.

7 Syrkus to Giedion from February 24th, 1948, see: *CIAM Archipelago. The Letters of Helena Syrkus*, pp. 238-243.

there, and she included an opinion on me, stating that she was treating me as a junior colleague. I was able to understand her housing designs and some observations she was making while designing. For instance, when you place a door to a room... you need to place it distanced from the wall, so that you may place a bookshelf there. Sołtan was not interested at all in such things. It was purely a social approach, an awareness that you need to do something this way, because then one may put there a shelf or something else. It was a completely different feeling, and a totally different perspective.

S.R.: When I think about Sołtan's opinion about Syrkus, it seems strange to me that he sent you to her. Was it actually Sołtan's idea for you to go to the Polytechnic?

J.D.: No, it was a consequence of that conversation and him saying that I could not make anything of my own in the Workshops; it was my decision. At the beginning, I was thinking, "man, you were pushing me forward before, and now nothing" – but I understood that later, because Sołtan was given a similar answer from Le Corbusier. When he had been there for several years, and when according to Le Corbusier he had learnt everything from him, time came to say, "good-bye, go back to your countries and spread the best of what you have learnt here". I remember that from Sołtan's own account, from when he was given the *honoris causa* PhD at the Polytechnic. According to Sołtan, I simply had to go somewhere else, and try to take care of myself outside, not next to him. He did not want such an apprenticeship under his wings: the Workshops were for them, as they created it and they were leading it. You could have been doing a short stage, but then you had to go out and start swimming. However, if it were not for me studying under Sołtan, and not for him throwing me away, and for him sending me to Woods, I would have stopped at Sołtan. Meanwhile, I knew that there was also Woods and systems, and I knew that there was socially inclined Syrkus. Such a greater breath of architecture – Sołtan was calling it "poetics" – it is still important for me, I still think about it, and I find it continuously in the remains of the Warsaw Midtown railway station and in the destroyed 'Warszawianka'... However, for instance in this drawing, I cannot see such poetics. [points at an artistic drawing given by Sołtan] I see here rather some kind of stylisation, which I consider as something dangerous. I talk about the idea of stylisation as a signal and an alert for painting students – because it is something extremely dangerous. I think that Sołtan is at the limit of such danger. Woods does not enter this area at all, because he has his own rationally established system and he realises it consequently: he makes a scheme, and that means for him formal purity. With the visual approach, like Sołtan's one, there are dangers of overdoing and overdrawing. It means that classical modernism was minimising the means, but in Le Corbusier's work, there was some 'baroque' tendency.

S.R.: Well, Sołtan too, when he was analysing Le Corbusier's position in modern architecture, he was calling his modernism "poetic" – contrarily to the functionalist matchbox style...

J.D.: And Le Corbusier is poetic even in the early designs, as for instance in Pessac. Architecture of those small houses is simple and poetic. Given their small scale, there is some deeper thought in these forms. On the other hand, it seems to me that Chandigarh aims at great poetics and great forms... as if they were cathedrals. Why did he write *Quand les cathedrales étaient blanches*? Because he was seeing those cathedrals, the diapason was there... and Sołtan was very close to Le Corbusier. During our honeymoon, we were visiting La Tourette and we sent to Sołtan to Warsaw some photographs we took, so he sent them to Le Corbusier, as postcards from Warsaw showing that his students were able to see La Tourette under construction.

S.R.: Coming back to how it was in Poland... You mentioned how Sołtan considered Helena Syrkus. How was it in the other direction? How was Sołtan considered by other architects in Poland? At a certain point he left the country – is it possible that people were jealous of him?

J.D.: It seems to me that they were.

S.R.: Changing the subject, does your interest in painting have any connection to Sołtan's influence?

J.D.: No. My mother was a humanist, she graduated from the University of Nancy, I was drawing from my earliest age, and I got a diploma from an artistic school. I started being artistically moulded at the age of thirteen or fourteen. At that time, I started drawing and painting. Sołtan recognised the quality of my hand drawing based only on the signature, and it was the merit of pages of calligraphy writing at school.

S.R.: And did you have a similar opinion on arts in general?

J.D.: At a certain point, when Sołtan came back to Poland, I gave him a dedicated catalogue from an exhibition with my paintings and installations we were doing together with Jan Goots from Belgium. However, he said then that I was copycatting him – those paintings were for him some kind of shitty 'blah-blah'. For me, it was

a disruptive sensation: you first learn from a master, but then the master develops you so much that he has a critical opinion about you. It is both good and destructive. On one hand, you love that man, because he gave you so much in your life, but it is also dramatic that he sees you so critically. Paul Valéry formulated a term "form dilemma". Its basis is the fact that if we are within a qualitative formal system, and then there is a breakthrough and we pass on to another formal system, we must negate the existing one and move on. The tension linked to this passage is dramatic. Leaving the existing formal system and moving towards a new one is indeed a sort of a drama, because when a new system is born, you sentence to death the old one. And I feel it in myself. Because of that history, I must answer continuously and honestly about what I accept today, and what I do not accept. I have another letter from Sołtan, in which he writes that what I do, it would be actually called in America 'blah-blah' – meaning it is something unimportant. He writes in that letter that he hesitates whether it is his fault or mine. It is amazing, because I am dealing with this even today. If I do something in good faith, as my stripe paintings, where there is a certain formal system, I do not believe that it is bad. When Sołtan came back to receive the *honoris causa* PhD, I already had no contact with him. It was a certain caesura: his attitude was more critical, and I could not go back. I had no contact with him, and from my position, I could not talk to him: there was no time nor occasion to do that. It was simply impossible. His last reactions to those letters were moreover doubtful – there was no discussion on what is good or bad. There is by the way such a moment in human life, when – if one believes in something – others' opinions do not have any meaning. They only point and show the general climate, but you are set on your own course.

S.R.: I have found a letter from Sołtan, where he writes that according to him, in your paintings there is "no effort of showing the poetics", and then he adds that your art should be commented and analysed more critically in order to develop.[8]

J.D.: For Sołtan such a painting was 'blah-blah', because he did not see any meaning to it. On the other hand, according to Jacek Sempoliński,[9] one needs a longer cycle in their own work, such as for instance in Jan Sebastian Bach's music, where one melody is constantly present. I believe thus that making something for an entire life is some kind of calligraphy. I have it in my blood, I can do it, and I want to do it. Sołtan, on the contrary was very critical regarding Opałka and his numerical paintings.[10] Whereas I processed it, I took the same subject from Opałka, and I made a calendar starting from 1939 through the entire German occupation until 1945. It is quite a huge series – I was working on it for several months. Theoretically, I should be ashamed of it, as I did something like Opałka. The difference lies in the fact that he was doing numbers and digits, whereas I did it in the form of a calendar. However, the very fact that I did it, it means that I felt I had to do it: I cherish it, and I accept Opałka too. The fact that Sołtan calls it 'blah-blah', it is for me completely incomprehensible, and it is a tremendous burden, this "form dilemma". I stress here my doubts, because I do not mean to paint a pretty picture of Sołtan. Even though he was a man from another generation, he formed me and he built me, and I owe him a real and objective opinion. I wish to reach such limits, because it is important in art criticism and in poetics. Polish poet Herbert wrote a poem *I pray for a long sentence*.[11] For a long sentence, therefore not for short verses, but for long phrases. That is how I understand Opałka, who for his whole life was writing those paintings as a long sentence. It reaches poetics from another place or another planet, perhaps in its cosmic dimension. At the same time, Sołtan's poetics seems to be more baroque. This is the only way I can understand it: Sołtan's poetics is enclosed within a sentence he makes – it is a clearly defined work. Meanwhile, it seems to me that there is no such thing as framing definition in the cosmic dimension.

S.R.: In what you say, I can see in fact that dualism: on one hand, you consider Sołtan critically, but on the other one, you seem to be attached to him...

J.D.: The criteria of evaluation are cruel and ruthless. I met with such an opinion when I was taking part in the Milan Triennale[12] with a design for the centre of Warsaw and I was giving a lecture. A critic who was the Triennale's director proposed that we should be descriptive: we were to describe what was done and how it was done, but without giving a critical evaluation.

S.R.: So that one can evaluate it themselves.

J.D.: Yes, exactly. We were to abandon critical evaluation. Following this thread, I formulated a syncretic-

8 Sołtan to Damięcki from January 6th, 1996, see: MASP-JS.
9 Jacek Sempoliński (1927-2012), Polish painter, graduated in 1956 from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw, and teaching there since 1956.
10 Roman Opałka (1931-2011), Polish painter, graduated in 1956 from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw. Jacek Damięcki refers to his series of paintings called *Program*.
11 Zbigniew Herbert, 'Brewiarz II', in *Epilog burzy* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1998).
12 XIX Milan Triennale in 1996.

topological system. As I am personally on the crossroads of various tendencies, I assumed such syncretism, which does not refuse anything, where there is no "yes" or "no". I make an effort thus not to throw away Sołtan, not to throw away Syrkus, not to throw away fascism, not to throw away communism, but to try to order them in a single-sided matrix – of course rejecting crimes.

S.R.: Please tell me, given the differences between yourself and Sołtan... Have you talked about the centre of Warsaw and the Palace of Culture and Science? Both of you made designs or sketches, and it seems to me that they are quite aligned.[13] Both in yours and in Sołtan's proposal, which he made in the 1990s, there is a similar logic of decentralising the space around the Palace of Culture and Science. Do you know Sołtan's opinion on the matter?

J.D.: No, I have never talked to him about it. Our proposal was made for a huge international competition.[14] There were several hundred designs, but with our one, we passed completely unnoticed. The first prize was given to an extremely monocentric proposal. The theme of the competition was freedom, whereas the winning entry was Stalinist in its meaning. Again – a paradox.

S.R.: Sołtan indeed wanted to build around the palace. He made several sketches and you can see there the central building surrounded by high-rise constructions. The space is no longer centralised.

J.D.: We developed this idea later on. Our proposal in the first competition design was interested in the entire area, but then we decided that it is necessary to build the western side of Marszałkowska Street. Not to do everything, as the earlier complex design was utopian, but to build just one side. It would have liberated from constant referring to the palace. It has such a position that it paralyses the entire area. The new building would have had a form of a meander. In the idea of a meander, in the rejection of the palace and of the Parade Square, both of them monocentric, there is again the idea of polycentrism. Along with the meander, three new squares would have been formed. While the application of Woods' theory is present already in the first design, here we decentralised the palace's position. It is so much surrounded that it no longer has the central position. It shows Woods' ideas materialised.

S.R.: How it was when you were a student? Listening to yourself, one may get the picture that Sołtan's opinions on art and architecture were quite decisive and categorical. Was Sołtan also similarly critical towards his students?

J.D.: He was always open-minded, and in good faith. He was opening the world for us. It was never something inhibitive. It was a search for poetics and expression. In the era of communism, when everything was about indoctrination and about some kind of atheist religion, it was an oasis of fresh air and freedom of thought. In general, the entire Academy was like that, even at the time of communism and Jews persecution. I remember a statement from the dean Kazimierz Nita,[15] a traditional socialist and a member of the communist party. It was perhaps 1968, and he said something like, "there was no antisemitism in the Academy before the war – and neither there will be now". One can then imagine the surrounding climate... I was doing my diploma under Nita, but *de facto* under Lech Tomaszewski, because Nita was busy as a dean. Sołtan himself had very fond memories of him. It was an oasis, within that entire surrounding communism, and we had the luxury of being taught ideas and positive approach. It was not a 'this is bad, this is wrong' method, it was rather 'what you did has a value' – the idea was to maintain those elements.

S.R.: Was such an approach typical of Sołtan, or was it present in the entire Academy?

J.D.: There were also different ateliers... However, there were people of similar ideas within the Academy, such as Sołtan, Hansen, Gierowski and Tomaszewski...

S.R.: And what do you think about the separation of the Faculty of Industrial Design at the Academy?[16]

J.D.: I was contrary to such division. With my program-based thinking and the idea that everything may be positioned somewhere in one common structure, I have experienced deeply this division between industrial and interior design. Until today, I define myself as anti-objectifying: for me, designing an object is totally different from designing a space. I think that the functional aim of an object is like putting the cuffs on the human mind.

13 Sketches by Jerzy Sołtan show the building surrounded by other skyscrapers, see: HGSD-JS, series CB, 6B-27.
14 Urban design for the surroundings of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw by Jacek Damięcki and Jan Goots for the international competition from 1992. Another design by Damięcki and Jan Goots in the same area, an estate along Marszałkowska Street, is from 2017.
15 Kazimierz Nita (1907-1983), dean of the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw 1967-1972.
16 The Faculty of Industrial Design was separated in 1977 from the Faculty of Interior Design, where Jerzy Sołtan was teaching.

I understand that such thinking is necessary, but I dissociate it completely from architecture. I believe that studying such a corner [shows a computer's edge] and the issue of how it should look, it is something aberrant, because it is no more a question of the object itself, but a question of wrongly understood aesthetic issues. To evaluate whether one corner is better than another is simply absurd. To work only on such issues is aberrant, and it has nothing in common with the universe, architecture and poetics.

S.R.: I was reading recently Wróblewski's memories where he writes that Sołtan was against the division within the Academy and a separation of the Faculty of Industrial Design.[17] How was he teaching industrial design?

J.D.: To be short, Sołtan absolutely was not an industrial designer. He was considering design in a totally different way than it is taught today, as a concrete subject.

S.R.: Was Sołtan heavily influencing students' own designs?

J.D.: Well, during my first architectural design atelier, I was studying under Ihnatowicz, and when they were enrolling students for the second one, they were sitting in one room, *vis-à-vis*: Ihnatowicz and Sołtan. Ihnatowicz was already smiling towards me: he knew me as one of his students, whereas I went to Sołtan. It was for me something cruel and brutal. Quasi a *seppuku*. I have to tell you that under Sołtan I designed a plain Marseille-style building with a freestanding staircase. There was no ferment nor discussion. It passed unnoticed, like water on a window glass. It was surely my fault, because it was a semester-long design, but I simply did something with no passion at all. On the contrary, during that first semester under Ihnatowicz, he got me curious. I remember that I did for him a design where I was able to imagine something. Under Ihnatowicz, I was feeling capable of proposing something, and capable of taking decisions. Perhaps it was respect towards Sołtan, it strangled me and I did not try to do something more. Something must have crushed me under Sołtan, and then that design was made somehow in the void. There was no satisfaction: it was simply a block on a flat surface. Perhaps I was not mature enough for more creativity.

S.R.: On the other hand, when I was talking to Sołtan's former students in the United States, most of them told me that his biggest legacy does not lie in architectural production, but in the teaching he left them.[18] What do you think about it?

J.D.: I think that when young people with generic education have the first contact with architecture and enter some faculty of architecture, Sołtan is an ideal person. There is no better person for setting you in motion, pushing you and fascinating with a new discipline and its possibilities. I am absolutely sure about this. Sołtan could even restrain from talking for a long time, but only start a subject, for instance by telling a joke. All of this is inspiring and I am one hundred and five per cent sure about it. My father was an architect too, but it was simply his job. When speaking about initiation, Sołtan is unbeatable. It is like with the fear of blank paper: one is paralysed in front of it. One has a pencil and carbon paper, but does not know at all what to do with them. You need then Sołtan to position such a person and to give the right topic. He would say, "here you go, here is a paper stripe and you should make a rhythm of vertical lines". One should know that when speaking to such young people, one should use a special code they can understand easily. Not to paralyse them, but to believe in them and to give them a chance to present what they may think of within two or three days. If such a young person pours their entire energy into it, and the professor arrives, tears it to shreds and says that it is bullshit, it is a shocking experience for them. Pedagogy, as it was conceived by Sołtan, it was indeed ideal: it was inspiring and open-minded. It astonished me that when I wrote on a paper "Jacek Damięcki", he said "oh, what a culture". Based only on the signature... Afterwards he asked everyone to design their own house mark. Mine was a circle, a second one, and a third one inside, and oblique rays coming from the centre. Everyone had their own one.

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan, when he was designing?

J.D.: In Sołtan's apartment, in one room, there was a cage he built himself, where was entering where he needed to be isolated. He was opening a door, and he had there a table and a chair. By the way, in Le Corbusier's writings, I have found a passage, where he mentions the state a designer should be in when working. He calls it, "*être en état de jugement*", i.e. to be in a judgement state. This is crucial: if you go to an architectural office, and there is a radio on, it means that it has nothing in common with creation. Le Corbusier himself, he built

17 Wojciech Włodarczyk, 'The social history of object (design)', in *Ineffable Space*, ed. by Jola Gola and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Museum of Fine Arts Academy 2018), p. 38.
18 Interview with Urs Gauchat and interview with Edward Baum.

in southern France *le cabanon*, and he was going there often. It means that both Sołtan and Le Corbusier were working in such a manner. Sempoliński too was talking about it: one has to concentrate all the energy within themselves. You can say eventually that such creation is a para-religious act. If one has to concentrate for a two-week time, they need to reach such a meditative state and trace the main coordinates that will determine the design that will be later created. It was wonderful with Woods and his systems. For instance, with the competition for the Free University in Berlin, he drew a modular grid with internal streets, and he gave every one of us one department to design. I designed an empty field in the middle and all the functions placed along the communication axes – I think it was the experimental physics department. Woods took that department of mine, he put it inside, and that was it. He only drew that grid, and gave the actual drawing work to us: everyone got the competition tender with specifications for one department, and in a group of fifteen, everyone was drawing one of them.

S.R.: It makes me think about Sołtan's assignments for students at Harvard. One of the recurring themes were fair pavilions. The students were to decide about the dimensions of a grid and about the rules common to all the designs, and then all of them had to choose one country and design its pavilion so that it would respect the grid and the rules that were decided before by them.[19]

J.D.: It is interesting. Of course, they had contact with each other. It was in fact extraordinary that when one is twenty-years-old, everything seems fantastic, because you absorb it as a sponge. When I had some important tasks, I was going back home to sleep for a couple of hours, and then I was coming back to the atelier to work during the night and I was drawing for two or three days.

S.R.: What designs were you working on in the Workshops?

J.D.: The first task I was given was a retaining wall for the 'Warszawianka' stadium. I remember that it was a long stripe, something like two hundred or two hundred and fifty meters, and Sołtan told me, "you have to *nervure* it", meaning I had to add *nervures*, to give structure to that metres. I started doing it as a system of vertical rhythms, gaps and dilatations in order to overcome the monotony of that wall. I did it, but then Tomaszewski designed those elements that exist until today. Afterwards, as I remember, I was working on a department store in Olsztyn, and I was doing all the window joinery... tons of drawings of steel and windows.

S.R.: So it was rather a technical part.

J.D.: Very much technical, with the steel diagrams with one-millimetre precision... However, it was mainly Ihnatowicz who taught me that... one element in every sheet, with its dimensions and details. I learnt there to draw with millimetre precision... Until today, if I have a steel products catalogue, I can draw from the concept sketch to the 1:1 scale drawings. Afterwards, in Paris, others were surprised that I was able to draw such details. Moreover, for that department store, I also designed concrete furniture, but they were not accepted. I was imagining that it would be possible to make casts of concrete furniture and then to assemble them – it would have been some kind of prefabrication. I also did a first-colour sketch for a bar in Wola in Warsaw. I remember that I made a red drawing with brick walls, because I was imagining a red building. However, it was only a very simple sketch. Wola was back then very communist, and there were many bricks... I do not know where I got this idea from. However, that was something they were giving us. Giving such a decision as the choice of a colour to an inexperienced person, it is based on the principle of a child and diamond cutters... Tomaszewski was giving it as an example of optimising: you have a diamond of a great value and you need to divide it into the optimum number of parts. The professionals give a chisel and a hammer to a child and say, "smash it". The child takes the chisel, smashes the diamond with the hammer... without any issues. Professionals would not do it, because their hands would be shaking. It is such a principle. If you have a difficult problem, you hand it to a child, the child solves it, and then you know what to do.

S.R.: How was this work reflecting in the production of the Workshops?

J.D.: Undoubtedly both the experiences we lived there, and who we are today, it is the merit of Sołtan, the Workshops and that entire environment. Wnuk,[20] who formed the Workshops after Sołtan's suggestions, found a way to circumnavigate the regime, and he created at the Academy a creative organisation, where there was no bureaucracy, only selection of people and working groups, some strategy and real achievements. It distinguished designs from the Workshops, compared to such normative residential hodgepodge, incomparable to the pre-war modern housing by Syrkus or Brukalski couples.

19 Interview with Edward Baum from.
20 Marian Wnuk (1906-1967), Polish sculptor and dean of the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw 1959-1967.

S.R.: We talked before about the role of Sołtan for your career and development. Given what you have just said, can also say that he gave something to Polish architecture in general?

J.D.: Surely, the importance of Sołtan and of his role in Polish culture is undeniable. He had a mission: he came back from France to Poland, he was forming the Workshops... Wnuk authorised that, but Sołtan was somehow anathematised... When he came here, the entire Polytechnic was against him, because he was connected to Le Corbusier and Western Europe.

S.R.: You mentioned a 'normative hodgepodge' that characterised most of Polish architecture. What was the difference between architecture designed in the Workshops and Polish architecture in that period?

J.D.: Design office, it was something scary. My father was a pre-war architect – he won the first competition in free Poland for Sailors' Club in Gdynia, when the new harbour was under construction. On the other hand, the office work was a kind of a factory work producing boxes... It was very mechanical – only regulations, surfaces and estates. People who were designing according to those regulations were not even questioning them. They had no other ambitions outside. Whether it was greenery or other issues, everything was normalised: how much greenery, how many kindergartens, etc. The only important aspect to qualify a design for construction was to satisfy the programme requirements.

S.R.: I have indeed an impression that in Polish publications on architecture from the 1960s or 1970s, much space was given to the Athens Charter. Often it was presented as the culmination of urbanism achievements.

J.D.: They were in fact such principles... There are two ways of thinking: receptive – where I receive information – and prospective – when I propose something. In general, there was no prospective thinking. Skibiniewska was different on the other hand, she knew how to design a residential neighbourhood.[21] Others however, they had no ambitions. What counted, it was to pass through the commissions, earn money, and 'good-bye'. It was not cynical, but when it became standardised, opportunistic people applied such a model and they navigated with the current.

S.R.: Sołtan was in fact writing on "bad modern architects", who stylistically took elements from modern architecture, but they were using them with formal logics – exactly how it was before done by classicist architects.

J.D.: Exactly – here we come back to the issue of stylisation. It is dangerous. Recently, I have been thinking that as one sets on stylisation, there is nothing left to do... It is dangerous, because such microbes are difficult to detect. On one hand, we had such a great environment of recognised visual artists and creators from the Academy. On the other one, I remember that I went once to the architecture office in Królewska Street to see how they were working there. When I saw how three women were designing an entire neighbourhood, it was hair-raising. Literally, it looked as if they were working with matchboxes. They were moving and placing them passively, "is it better this way or the other?" – it was simply positioning boxes in a flat surface... extremely childish things. Even in kindergarten, you do things that are more creative. You could see that they were doing something, and themselves did not know how to do it. I had an impression that I was in some kind of insane asylum. When I saw that it was how a professional architecture office looked, I thought, "sweet Jesus, it is a tragedy". Their building was some one-hundred-metres long, there were fifty of such offices... you start to ask "what happens here?" when you multiply it.

S.R.: Looking at another aspect... what can you say about how designs from the Workshops are considered today?

J.D.: Actually, quite recently architect Budzyński[22] told me that in the design of Warsaw Midtown railway station, he could feel Sołtan's class. He underlined quite decisively that he feels there Sołtan's work and that it is an amazingly done masterpiece.

S.R.: And it is the best-conserved Sołtan's design in Poland, even if many graphic, lighting and spatial elements are simply gone...

J.D.: Yes... The pavilion in Wola is completely deformed: there is nothing inside. 'Warszawianka' has become completely derelict. There was a symposium organised by Fundacja Sztuki Nowoczesnej and they were showing

21 Halina Skibiniewska (1921-2011), Polish architect and professor at the Polytechnics of Warsaw 1975-1985.
22 Marek Budzyński (1939-), Polish architect, graduated in 1963 from the Polytechnic of Warsaw.

a film...[23] Before that, someone shot a film on 'Warszawianka' – about how it looked like after so many years. They took it to Sołtan, and they were filming his reaction... He only clutched his head like this. [closes his eyes and clutches his head] I thought his heart would break. It was like killing a man at the end of his life... and not because of war, but because of envy or stupidity. It was such a fantastic place...

S.R.: What do you praise most in this design?

J.D.: I think that within the entire polyphonic and total concept of 'Warszawianka', the swimming pool designed by Sołtan was the most particular architectural problem in the then-complex situation. Making this arch with the roof and openings, it is for me his masterpiece. I think that to design such a swimming pool, as he drew it, it means architect's dreams coming true. If he did that and if it existed until today, it would be an architectural masterpiece without those excessive measures, without those Corbusian principles. There is no anthropocentric concept, where a building looks like a strong woman, with sturdy legs, with her waistline tightened, with a bust and arms... In Le Corbusier's buildings, that is the resulting picture. Here, there are no such superstitions. The form is so transparent, so inscribed in the landscape, and so directed towards the horizon, making it work at every scale, and from each side... Meanwhile, today there is some vertical crap standing. Really, if I could, I would tear down that box and build up Sołtan's swimming pool.

S.R.: Today there are no open-air swimming pools either...

J.D.: The fact that they are not there anymore, it was too an act of vandalism, as they were terrific... There was a time when I was going there at night when the swimming pools were closed. I was going through the fence and at night, I was swimming alone. It was so well displayed and it attracted so much, that when I was awake, I was able to come there at night, go through the fence and swim.

S.R.: Talking about other designs, do you know the American designs, mainly the schools?

J.D.: Those schools seem to be a little mechanically conceptualised... You could see that they were a compromise between Sołtan and other co-workers. You can see there a work of a group of people, who have mutual respect for each other and they want that respect to enter the design... even if it is impossible. In 'Warszawianka', there is no such thing, even though it was designed by Strynkiewicz, Sołtan and Fangor: a sculptor, an architect and a painter... You cannot feel there the terrible compromise you can sense in the American designs. Perhaps the situation here was so clear and so contrasted with the regime, that it all moved towards some kind of volatility. The designs in the United States are *degonflé*s. They do not have such a pure sound Patkowski[24] writes about – he was a musicologist I have been collaborating with towards the end of his life. He was saying about purity, "a pure and well composed work, you can feel it as you get shivers". The same should be experienced through designs.

S.R.: Concerning the designs from the Workshops and their conservation, their present-day state, what is your opinion?

J.D.: Even though I am a syncretist, I would indicate 'Warszawianka' as an entire complex to be reconstructed... And it is possible. For me, a proof for that is the fact that after Le Corbusier's death, they took the original documentation for the construction.[25] Based on 'Warszawianka', there are some mutations appearing, although they are done by other groups. I would demolish both the new swimming pool and the gym pavilions in order to re-create the superior terrace. It would mean a total landscaping reconstruction of the stadium, greenery and the small hills... All the excrescences and the added tennis courts, you need to fuck it all up... Instead, one should take the initial design, and apply to the European Union for reconstruction. It would be necessary to inscribe 'Warszawianka' in some kind of European programme so that one can extrapolate its intellectual value, which appeared there under such a regime, and then one should be able to inscribe it within the concept of sustainable development, as an articulate relationship between architecture and nature. There is no domination of architecture, nor is it a meadow. It is a phenomenon, which may be equaled with ancient Greek art. Both of them are examples of art of inscribing within natural context with prefabrication – as in the end, ancient Greek architecture, it was stone-based prefabrication, whether you talk about the columns or other construction elements. It is an example of some mental strength, thanks to which the prefabrication dies and a masterpiece is created. Whereas nowadays, if you use prefabrication, it remains prefabrication... With such a complex reconstruction, you would need to re-create the open-air swimming pools, the whole stadium concept and then you should add the swimming pool building... and perhaps add some coverage over the stadium so that in summer time it could be an open-air one. You could organise there for instance horsing competitions, and in winter, it could be used as an ice rink or hockey field. I think that re-creating it in the initial form is still possible. We went there recently with Jan Goots, and he told me that you should build some underground changing rooms so that the competitors have some indoor space, but without showing anything outside. Indeed, now you need both changing rooms and showers – but it is possible to build them underground, as everything is on an escarpment. You can build it under a terrace surface. Like this, it would have the necessary services. Of course, when it was designed after the war, everyone was coming with their own backpack and leaving it next to the goal... There was no mention of changing rooms or showers.

S.R.: Where does the abandon come from? It is almost in the centre of Warsaw...

J.D.: Do you know the genesis of such destruction? There was a movie[26] and then, an enormous set design was put there: tribunes, chariot and horse tracks, etc. That is when the destruction started... Even though I define myself as a topological syncretist, meaning that I do not have the word "no" in my vocabulary – but here, that is a definite and absolute "no". Even Hansen, who was so radical said about 'Warszawianka' that it looks like a human being leaning against the escarpment.[27] There is anthropopressure, but it is sensitive and delicate, very poetic. It is an example where it is balanced: not too brutal nor too strong.

S.R.: You have mentioned several times topological syncretism – how would you refer this idea to Jerzy Sołtan?

J.D.: I have been reading articles by Jacek Sempoliński on painting, and he wrote there that the question is not to make interdisciplinary things – and that is what Sołtan was promoting through group work. Sempoliński writes that the most important thing is one's interior integrity. When we call for construction a builder, for graphics a painter, etc., those people separately are not integral. Here I see a danger: I look at Sołtan as someone, whose integrity is total, but the teams he was creating, they were not so integral, and they were conducted by one or two people.

S.R.: However, the idea of syncretism seems to me close to what was done in the Workshops. For instance, in the design for the Brussels Pavilion, the team was formed also by Fangor with his graphics, by Tomaszewski with his structural solutions, by Skrowaczewski with his music, and there was nature that was entering the pavilion...

J.D.: Naturally, you are right, that was a tendency to work syncretically, with no elimination of purism. Not "less is more", but "more can be also more". I think that it is a very precious thought that one can see syncretism. Syncretism, meaning adding, which does not make things worse, but which saturates the form. That is what Jacek Sempoliński was referring to. That is the plenitude. Apparently, such plenitude may be achieved both individually, and in a team. Individually it is possible, because it is biological... but to reach plenitude and syncretism in a team, it is a great achievement to coordinate thoughts of many people to create something of great value. Both 'Warszawianka' and Brussels Pavilion have it – and this is phenomenal.

23 *Jerzy Sołtan – the Man who didn't build Poland*, dir. by Marcin Giżycki and Sławomir Grünberg (1995), <https://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka/praca/gizycki-marcin-grunberg-slawomir-jerzy-soltan-czlowiek> [accessed October 6th, 2019].
24 Józef Patkowski (1929-2005), Polish musicologist.
25 For instance, the Sporting Centre in Firminy was built in 1966-1968 under André Wogenscky's supervision, after Le Corbusier's death in 1965.
26 'Warszawianka' was film set for *Quo vadis?* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz (2001) from June 27th until July 31st, 2000. In the main stadium area, a Roman amphitheatre was built. See: Sylwia Malchar, *Warszawianka dla Nerona...* (2000), <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/warszawianka-dla-nerona/> [accessed December 21st, 2019].
27 Oskar Hansen, 'O moim mistrzu – Jerzym Sołtanie', 1993, see: MASP-JS.

Bogusław Smyrski

September 27th, 2019, in Warsaw, Poland

Graduate from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw (1953–1959), student in Sołtan's specialisation studio, and member of the Workshops (1959 until closure), architect working in Warsaw, Poland. In the Workshops, he was coordinating the design of Warsaw Midtown railway station. Teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts (1972–2002).

S.R.: You worked in the Workshops on a number of designs, but you also studied at the Academy in Warsaw. Was it back then when you first met Sołtan?

B.S.: I met Sołtan for the first time when I was taking the entrance exam at the Academy. There was an artistic part, which I had passed, and then there was a practical design exam – and that was when I first saw him. We were to design some kind of a monument in a park... and then that tall professor entered and started to look at the designs – that was my first contact with Sołtan. The second one was when I was already a student and Sołtan started to lecture on construction. He was was not allowed to teach design subjects due to some political issues... but they let him teach technical ones. [with emphasis] He started to talk about a carriage with six white stallions, and with Marysieńka sitting inside... it was just an introduction, and then he talked about [the palace in] Wilanów.[1] The third time was when I had already finished my first two years, and when specialisations came, and I had to choose the studio. It was possible to choose from among furniture, exhibition, and architectural design, which were led by Professors Gutt, Zieliński, and Sołtan. At that time, I was increasingly interested in space and architecture... and I wanted to go to Sołtan's studio – everyone back then wanted to study with him. There were also seven or eight architects, already with a degree, who enrolled at the Academy – and that was a huge number as there were around ten people admitted to that architecture studio...

S.R.: Already with a degree?

B.S.: Yes, because back then it was possible to study for three years at the Polytechnic and then work on the diploma at the Academy. Such people were able to start directly in the third year and promptly enrol for the specialisation. I remember Sołtan told me, "Bogusław, you must be careful – these people have already won some competitions". He made it clear that I had to hold on – and indeed, with my colleagues from the Academy, we were holding onto it, while the architects from the Polytechnic were gradually dropping out. One of them told me just before he left, "listen, it is easier to design a hotel than an armchair". Eventually, only two of them remained... They seemed so great and proud, nevertheless they did drop out. When Sołtan was travelling – he spent half a year here, half a year in the United States – we had an important critique. I was preparing a lot for this... but one of them arrived with a car and clad half of the classroom with drawings, and when the critique started, Sołtan asked, "what is it here?" – and the student answered, "this is my design, Professor". Sołtan replied, "but we do not know each other – when we get to know each other, you can come with this design" – and that student also left the Academy. As I mentioned, there were many of us who wanted to enter his studio, so Professor organised a kind of admission exam to the studio, because he wanted to select students in an elegant manner. I do not remember exactly what it was about, but it had also something to do with languages...

S.R.: Indeed, I have seen that there were foreign languages in the entrance requirements at Sołtan's studio.[2]

B.S.: And it was not Russian... When socialist realism came, we had compulsory subjects such as Russian, Marxism, and military training... I was there when all of it began, and our year was the first one. The military training took an entire day without other courses... but it lasted from seven in the morning until six in the afternoon – and it was the most important subject. We had many issues with those modules. I had problems especially with Marxism: I have an "unstatisfactory" grade in my credit book, which I asked the professor to write down – and he did, but when that ideological stage ended, he left the Academy.

1 Marysieńka is the unofficial diminutive name of Marie Casimiere d'Arquien, queen consort to king John III Sobieski, whose official residence was the palace in Wilanów, close to Warsaw.
2 "Programme of Studio No. 1 1962/1963" in *Ineffable Space* ed. by Jola Gola and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, 2018), pp. 197-198.

S.R.: Why did you decide to study at the Academy?

B.S.: I graduated from an artistic high school in Zamość and I was applying for studies at the Faculty of Architecture at the Polytechnic of Warsaw, but minister Sokorski[3] redirected my application to the Fine Arts Academy as from that year – 1953 – the Faculty of Interior Design was to be recognised equally to the Polytechnic of Warsaw. At the beginning we had modules like mathematics, statics, economy, and urbanism at our Faculty of Interior Design... The same ones that were also taught at the Polytechnic. Of course, as usual, there were tensions between visual artists and architects – which continues up until today. It was something Sołtan himself was fighting against. The Polytechnic and other schools were fighting to keep the title of "Professor" to themselves, and to call the staff at the Academy "artist-researchers". Sołtan was calling for equal rights, and he insisted that there could be "Professors" at the Academy too. He said, "on 22nd of July 1944, in Poland there was a manifesto which introduced equal rights, so it seems to me that they should be applied here too".[4] True and productive collaboration between architects and visual artists was really rare. I was fortunate because I was working in design offices, and because professors from the Academy were giving me these opportunities. For example, Professor Ihnatowicz, Sołtan's closest colleague, brought me to the best design office in Warsaw after I graduated from the Academy. It was founded as early as in the 1940s in the Arsenal, then it underwent modifications and many changes until it was structured in the chemical industry and it was named Office of Chemical Industry Constructions.[5] He asked me to create a small team working on interior designs there, since the director wanted to have such a section... He was dreaming of a huge one, but he did not last to see it, as he got sacked when the changes of 1955 came... They sacked him in twenty minutes.

S.R.: Could you tell me please how you ended up in the Workshops?

B.S.: The Artistic and Research Workshops were another connection to Sołtan. Towards the end of my studies, just after the discussion of the final diploma, I was leaving the library building. It was an evening before Christmas, I think. I heard someone calling after me, "Bogusław!". I turned to see Professor, who asked me, "Bogusław, are you in a rush?" – and I actually was asI was going to have dinner in the students' lodgings. However, since Professor was asking me whether I was in a rush, I thought that something must have been going on, so I said, "not at all, Professor". "Let's go then", he said. Just in front of the Academy, there was a bus stop, so we got on a bus and went to Myśliwiecka Street to the Workshops. We entered and Professor introduced to me the head of the office, Gessler, "this is our new employee and Wiktor, please give him something to do". It was already seven o'clock... I got a board and a sheet of paper with three ovals drawn there, with some dots. As I learnt later, it was a drawing that Jacek Damięcki was working on – he was making a model and that was a base for that model. I had to cover the dots with ink. That is how our collaboration started.

S.R.: So it was even before graduating.

B.S.: Yes, it was. I became very engaged in this work and I really enjoyed it, even though I still had the diploma to work on... Back then, the Academy lasted six years and the final year was for preparing the diploma, and I was already working in the Workshops. A commission came for Warsaw Midtown railway station and Sołtan told me, "you are going to coordinate it". I thought, "I am a young student, still without a diploma, and he wants me to be a coordinator?" – but the project started and the first thing I had to do was a model of the railway station. In the studio Professor noticed that I was manually skilled and I worked well – especially because at the very beginning I had been attending a studio of residential construction structures under Professor Tomaszewski. It was about imagining various structures and constructions for the future residential architecture. I had made dozens of small models, which were later published and filmed. Sołtan had seen these small models, so he knew what I was able to do... and he gave me the task to make a model of the station. And it was almost five metres long! I started to work on it in the old chapel at Myśliwiecka Street and in the meantime, Sołtan left for the United States and brought me back a small prism and said, "Bogusław, when you want to understand the human scale of the building, you must put this thing inside along with a mirror and you will see on this 1:50 scale how a person would see the interior, you will see what the proportions of these elements are". So I made this five-metre-long model, and at the same time I was working on the drawings: not only technical drawings, but also the construction ones. As a result, I was working on stone cladding and electricity too... I drew the entire station

3 Włodzimierz Sokorski (1908-1999) was Minister of Culture and Arts (1952-1956) and member of communist parties since 1924.
4 The Polish Committee of National Liberation Manifesto of July 22nd, 1944 was a political manifesto released by a puppet Soviet-supported local authorities, in contrast to the Polish government in exile in London.
5 Office of Chemical Industry Constructions (Biuro Budownictwa Przemysłu Chemicznego) was the official name of PROCHEM in 1963-1971, a design office created in 1947, and afterwards renamed several times. The name PROCHEM appeared in 1963 and since then has remained in the official company name.

on the right scale and I was coordinating the project simultaneously. One of the most important tasks Sołtan gave me was the visual information at Warsaw Midtown. Even though I had to supervise everything, I was also given this very specific task. Actually, coordination alone was a huge responsibility, as it was customary back then to have meetings with both employees of the railroad traffic services and designers from the Academy – which sometimes meant meeting several dozen people. The workers could earn as little as thirty złoty – it was almost nothing, but for them, it counted. I would like to mention some things related to this collaboration...

S.R.: Of course.

B.S.: To begin with, I shall mention that I was one of the first students who descended to where the station was to be built, and I could see these four hundred columns. The smallest ones were about fourteen metres high... The entire concrete structure which covered the station – the one that we walk on today – was designed by my construction teacher, Professor Wasiutyński.[6] When we were students, Professor showed us what you needed to do, how much you needed to make it vibrate, in order to make it stronger. It was so strong that later, when we were working on the interiors of the station, we were unable to hang the suspended ceiling. No pistols, which were available back then, were strong enough, and everything was falling into pieces... the concrete was so strong.

S.R.: You mentioned the visual information. What did it consist of?

B.S.: There were two main elements – lettering and colours. It started in Jerozolimskie Avenues with the two entrance pavilion buildings parallel to the Palace of Science and Culture. The short elevations of these pavilions were marked with colours on both sides: eastbound direction marked in red and westbound direction marked in blue. Changeable letters were clad with artificial material and thanks to them everyone in the street was able to see in which direction and at what time trains were leaving. When entering the pavilion you could see the stairs marked in red on one side, and marked in blue on the other. Following these corridors, you would take the stairs to the hall and further on, to the platforms. The system worked like this: there were three platforms, southern, northern, and a central one. The two lateral ones were for departing passengers, while the central one was for arrivals. As a result the passengers leaving and boarding the trains were not confused. Additionally, the platforms were connected by a passage below the tracks, which is now closed.[7] At the end of the station there is also a space, today inaccessible and walled off, which was intended to be a passage to the underground, something that very few know about.

S.R.: Was it decided back then that the underground was planned?

B.S.: Yes, we knew that there would be underground, and we also knew there would be the new central station. We designed a connection with Warsaw Central railway station and it still exists, but that other one was walled off – probably when that disastrous renovation took place, when the divisions between the platforms and the waiting rooms were walled off too. Today, the original feeling of the open space is no more... Anyway, at the same time, we started to work on the lettering. Professor Noszczak was our lettering consultant: I chose the typeface, and he accepted it. In the meantime, we needed to add some mechanical elements to the basic information: those rolling panels with destinations and station names. They had been made by Italians, who had their own lettering... but I do not know whether they were mocking us – we did not accept what they had done. It was a horrible font, and we did not want to agree to that... so I took this task over.

S.R.: Could you tell me more about the lettering across the station, please?

B.S.: Apart from the colours, the passengers were also guided by the lettering. For example, in order to exit to Marszałkowska Street, there were three signs, and when one was approaching, the first sign was gradually staying behind, the second one was moving closer, and the third one was at the very end. These were carefully custom-designed thick light-boxes. They were designed in such a manner so that they would be very easily accessible and that the light bulbs were easily replaceable. One panel at the bottom was removable in order to replace the light bulbs, which were fixed in such a way as not to create any shadow between the two glass panels. The second kind of lettering was a carefully studied font applied on the walls. I remember making models on these in 1:1 scale. For example, under the pavilions, there are big letters "Warsaw", and smaller ones "Midtown" – these elements actually remained until today. There were also letters "Platform 1" and "Platform 2". Other information was painted directly on the wall surfaces, and it should have survived somewhere. Those were letters painted on the stone walls... Stone walls, because in the end, in spite of the initial version, bricks were replaced by stone. It was a higher standard. Still, it was a very simple and natural stone: travertine stone, whose texture in some places looked as if there was a grenade explosion. Sołtan agreed to that...

S.R.: The walls were to be made in bricks then...

B.S.: That was the first version of the station, brick-clad. The idea was that there would be no possibility to incise hearts or other things with a knife – because with a PVC board it would have been possible. It was studied in a ceramics institute, but it was too simple for the investor... so they asked for marble. There were some thirty versions of the station before with different versions of patterns in the floor and wall cladding... When they finally decided to use travertine, I drew all the wall proportions: and there is an important aspect which nobody notices... There is a stripe at the eye-level, which brings the walls to the human scale. On the one hand, it gives scale, on the other one, it breaks the monotonous rhythm.

S.R.: Do you mean a stripe of differently cut stone elements?

B.S.: It is simply a fifteen-centimetre-high stripe of stone. It was a stone cladding – and it should be clear from the beginning that it was cladding and not structural elements. Architects often get them confused... It is why there is that decorative pattern: not an elaborate motif, but the large panels at the top and at the bottom are simply interrupted by a stripe, which has different dimensions.

S.R.: Sołtan was complaining about lack of construction materials when building 'Warszawianka' – did you encounter similar problems when working on the station?

B.S.: For example, the lettering applied to the walls was made of steel sheets painted in graphite colour. It was a problem – where to get graphite pigment at that time... The letters on the displays – both light-boxes and regular ones – were painted on the glass and were of different size: small and larger, with different heights... When I had already designed those and when we had accepted that, the railway workers 'woke up' and started to claim that the letters were too small. I went to the ministry and a department director told me, "you have to change it: until now, you have assumed that a letter was seven centimetres high, and now you should make it higher, up to ten centimetres". I replied, "all right, we will make it up to ten centimetres high, but finally you will choose the letter size yourself". We scheduled the next meeting ofr the following week and I made both ten-centimetre-high and seven-centimetre-high letters, I made two panels, I went to the Ministry of Communication, I hung it at the end of the corridor and I asked the director to go out of the office and choose which font size he preferred – which was readable for him. And he chose the ten-centimetre one. I said, "let us come closer", and the director chose the seven-centimetre letters... These were the problems we were to solve. One day, Sołtan called me and said, "Bogusław, bad news – a meeting about the lettering with the railway workers is coming, with the minister himself". But he immediately added , "do not worry though – they are coming with a minister, but I asked for the deputy prime minister". He had good contacts with the deputy prime minister thanks to the industrial design work. And thanks to that, Sołtan was able to find a way around. When we were about to leave for the meeting, he said to me, "you know, they cancelled it – probably they were afraid that the deputy prime minister would be there". It is not commonly known that we had to overcome all these problems. Mrs Lipkowa wrote[8] for example that Sołtan went to Rosa Luxemburg Factory[9] in a freezing blizzard to get fluorescent tubes for the station design – but it is not mentioned why he had to do that... We designed those mistreated and now desecrated mosaics and mosaic stripes... They were made out of small tiles, small convex square tiles. We had numerous trials, we burned these elements, but they were collapsing. Only afterwards, a specialist told us that the shell should be uniformly thin. The final elements were to be made in Włocławek,[10] and the faience production in the factories had to be partially halted and one of the production lines was assigned to produce those tiles. However, as it was normal back then, some ceramic producers appeared and they were given the commission by the Visual Arts Laboratories,[11] quite a corrupt institution... There was a group, which had already worked on the mosaics: Viola Damięcka, myself, Adolf Szczepiński, and Jolanta Bieguszewska. We were to make them through those Visual Art Laboratories, but the director said, "who are Smyrski and Szczepiński? I do not know them, and I am not sure whether they would be able to do that. It will be done by those who know how to make mosaics". That is why they were commissioned from Grzeszkiewicz.

6 Zbigniew Wasiutyński (1902-1974) was a Polish engineer specialised in construction of bridges using pre-compressed concrete. He was also a teacher at the Polytechnic of Warsaw.
7 The passage between the first and the third platforms is presently inaccessible for the public.
8 Barbara Lipkowa, 'Myśliwiecka', 1978, see: MASP-JS.
9 Production Factory of Electric Lamps (Zakłady Wytwórcze Lamp Elektrycznych) named after Rosa Luxemburg was a lamp and lightbulb manufacturer in Warsaw.
10 Włocławek has been known for faience production since the nineteenth century, and faience factories are still operating in the city.
11 Visual Art Laboratories (Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych) created in 1949 was an artistic organisation aimed to gather artists and promote the reconstruction of Poland after the Second World War.

S.R.: Apart from the realisation, the design was still the same that had come out from the Workshops, wasn't it?

B.S.: Yes, the design was by Fangor and it remained unchanged. However, with these tiles in Włocławek, it would have cost some ninety dollars for the pigments alone, because they had to be imported...[12] We were yelled at that it was impossible and instead those who were to produce the tiles were sent to Italy with dollars to pay for the pigments. As a result, the station was opened three months later, because they delayed the production. What is more, not all the mosaic tiles, even if they were made, had the right colours. They were to be beautiful, saturated colours. Whereas red was perfect, orange was perfect, and ultramarine was pretty, all the green shades were somehow faded... In order for those mosaics to sparkle, we needed to add coloured lights there... A complete nonsense: add coloured lighting to the mosaics. That is why Sołtan had to go to Rosa Luxemburg Factory: they were to produce these coloured fluorescent tubes...

S.R.: Were these tubes finally coloured?

B.S.: Yes, they were coloured, some were white, some were blue... Somehow, they brought the mosaics back to life... Another thing, which united visual information and acoustics were the track ditches. There were perforated panels so that if someone fell down into the ditch, it was possible to hide behind them. It was also the biggest sound insulation device within the station. Inside, there was sound-absorbing material, similar to the one filling the aluminium rack at the top. I think they are still there, but one cannot see them today, because there is no lighting and no colours... Owing to the acoustics properties of these elements a train entering a platform was actually inaudible because of the sound absorbing elements in the ditch, around the columns, and along the walls... Everything was somehow sound-absorbing. The rail ditches were once again coloured – one was red, and the other blue. At the same time, they were squeaky clean and they were illuminated... It was one of the most common criticisms against the Academy back then: we were said to "illuminate rubbish". But when I went there a week after the opening, I talked to a railwayman working at the station, and I asked him, "please show me a cigarette butt in this ditch", and he told me, "you see – no one throws them away there, there is nothing there". It lasted for a long time – the lighting was very useful for that. And the visual information itself, together with the coloured elements, was present throughout the station in the vertical mosaics, in the ditch panels, and in the ceiling mosaics, which today are either blackened or covered by some kiosks...

S.R.: You were the design coordinator – so what was Sołtan's role in the design?

B.S.: Sołtan was our master. The very word "master" at that time referred to the programme of the school. According to socialist realism, which was already in decline, a master would have his programme, and he would influence his students... It was the same in the Workshops. Sołtan was the leader, the leading designer. Ihnatowicz was the co-author, and he took the role of a construction specialist. And there was Fangor, who designed the mosaics. The group consisted of the professors and of the rest of the team. Of course, there were also specialists, like acousticians. For example, instead of having two loudspeakers, the so-called "columns", we had around four hundred small "whispering speakers", which you could hear anywhere at the ration. It is also often forgotten that Lebecki designed the rack... That is a core element of the station.

S.R.: You mentioned the rack was acoustic too, right?

B.S.: Yes, definitely! That rack is very light, made of a very thin steel sheet: it is a kind of four-centimetre-high perforated U-profile... Another question was who would perforate that... We found someone who had a sieve production site and had ready-made perforating elements with nails... We needed to find a technology to make it, because it had to be perforated and – at the same time – the construction had to be rigid enough as some of the elements were to be four-metres-long. These steel sheets were filled with an insulating material, so the rack became one of the main sound-absorbing elements: at the same time, it absorbed noises, hid the construction, and hid the speakers. Moreover, the rack was related to the issue of lighting and its dispersion. I prepared a concept and showed it to Sołtan, and he approved it: the fluorescent tubes were to be positioned in rows, either more densely or more sparsely. Where the main part of the platform was and where people were staying, they were positioned more densely so that the light was brighter, whereas the areas used only as passages were darker. That was another issue, since the railway company invited its employees to the meetings and some of them – elderly retirees, who remembered lighting gas lamps at railway stations – claimed to know better how to organise lighting within a station. During that discussion on lighting, we had our lighting specialist and two professors from the Polytechnic of Warsaw who wrote a study about the optimal lighting for a railway station. I must here add that Sołtan really wanted the interior to be bright. Back then, according to standards in Moscow there should be around one thousand or five hundred lux of light... We quite modestly proposed around three hundred lux – because nobody would have agreed for five hundred – but one of the two professors proposed twenty-five lux... When he was reading that, our electrician took out the national standards and said, "Professor, our Polish standards say that twenty-five lux is used in toilets and secondary military spaces".

S.R.: ...not inside a railway station in the very centre of the city.

B.S.: No, not in the centre... That is how we defended it. I can tell you about yet another discussion, because it really well illustrates the atmosphere we were working in... There were so many of those... At the beginning, when we were talking about the materials, and in particular about the spatiality of the platforms and the waiting rooms, we assumed that there would be a glass wall dividing platforms from the waiting rooms. Back then, it was a problem to get glass which would not deform human faces... Only such a low quality glass was available in Poland. Back then, dollar was very highly valued, and since the cost of importing them from the West would be around – I think – ninety dollars, our government refused. You simply could not import it from the imperialists. You could import only from socialist countries. Finally, they chose Czechoslovakia, which had good quality glass. But apart from that, Sołtan got a list of materials, which were to be used in a railway station construction.

S.R.: An imposed list?

B.S.: Yes, imposed, directly from the ministry. There were some twelve or sixteen materials, which we could use. Sołtan started reading it aloud during one of those big meetings, "hard fibreboard, soft fibreboard, brick, chipboard, glass, steel", and at the end, Sołtan asked, "dear Minister, I am really sorry, but can we also design a station out of dried shite?" – and the discussion ended there...

S.R.: Was it one of the first meetings?

B.S.: Yes, but in general, there were many stories like these, because Sołtan was attending those meetings. As far as the stone is concrned, there is yet another story about the samples we got and what we actually received. It was a disaster.

S.R.: Among all of these elements – cladding, colouring, lighting, acoustics, mosaics, lettering – were there any elements that were particularly important for Sołtan in this design?

B.S.: He was interested in the general outcome... But the mosaics were a kind of central aspect to it. However, one of the first ideas was not to give travellers a kind of a cellar feeling. The idea was to avoid the sensation of leaving a dark dungeon when going outside into bright sunshine – that was the first task. It was achieved thanks to the rack and the lighting. The exits had to have more artificial light, because one was leading outside directly toward the sun. In the evening, these lights were dimmed because it was dark outside. All these things were designed and studied very carefully. It was something that Sołtan paid a lot of attention to. I remember for example that later, when I was working in a design office, people were coming to me with projects so that I would design the lighting, its layout and its colour. Sołtan, when he was designing a building, was telling that it ought to be clearly read both during the day and at night. That is why he was so careful about how the night illumination would look like, in order not to allow a cacophony of five different types of lighting... He made us sensitive to that. A second important thing at the station was the passengers, both arriving and departing, which was connected to the mosaics and how they were perceived. Viola Damięcka did some studies after Fangor with diagrams showing how these mosaics would be perceived by someone in a moving train.[13] Of course, there were also some minor facts, like a nursery space in the waiting rooms. The waiting rooms were a completely different world. At the platforms, the light was coming from fluorescent tubes, while in the waiting rooms there were normal lightbulbs. The walls were clad with black suede in order not to have flashing lights... it was quiet, there were some benches for the passengers to sit. That was the third thing. Then, there were some minor elements – for example cleanness – that was also a success. Once the New Year's Eve gala was organised at the platforms – the movie chronicle shows for example Jacek Damięcki dancing... Back then, the station was called "Warsaw's salon". We also used very simple materials. A special study was made for those four hundred columns, which sustain the square above – they were to be clad with the simplest, the roughest lacquered

12 The value of ninety dollars in 1961 was equivalent to around 7,300 Polish złoty according to 'Historical Currency Converter', *Historical Statistics* (2021) <https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html> [accessed on March 25th, 2021]. The average one-year wage in Poland in 1961 was 19,500 Polish złoty, see: 'Przeciętne wynagrodzenie od 1950 r.', *ZUS* (2021) <https://www.zus.pl/baza-wiedzy/skladki-wskazniki-odsetki/wskazniki/przecietne-wynagrodzenie-w-latach> [accessed on March 25th, 2021.

13 Drawings of the perception studies are kept by the Museum of the Fine Arts Academy, see: MASP-JS.

fibreboard, which was soaked with water in order not to bend. All the installations were hidden there – heating, ventilation, *et caetera*. They also included acoustic panels. Sołtan wanted to show it was possible to be creative even with such simple materials. It was later repeated in other designs in many cities.

S.R.: Do you know Sołtan's opinion – or a general opinion in the Workshops – concerning the realisation? Were all the things realised as they should have been?

B.S.: I think it was received as it should have been. By the way, I am very grateful to Sołtan for taking me on board for this design, even if I was not there during the last days of the work, because I was conscripted into the army. But people were still calling me when I was in the barracks in Wrocław and they were asking me different questions...

S.R.: Did you work on other designs in the Workshops?

B.S.: I worked a little on the stadium, but it was mainly with Ihnatowicz. I also worked on 'Wenecja' bar and on a competition design for a complex for the Voivodeship National Council buildings in Kielce. The design group – Ihnatowicz, Brejowski, and myself – won this competition, we took the first prize and the design was assigned to be built, but eventually it was not realised. The design consisted of three main volumes. One was a ten-floor office building, another was a theatre hall, and the third one was another office building. I was working on that thirty-metre-high office building. This design was a kind of Sołtan's prize, because I had been taking part in a design of another high-rise building, and then I had to leave the group, but Sołtan told me, "Bogusław, please do not worry, there will be a design you will be doing here".

S.R.: What was the work in the Workshops like?

B.S.: There were groups working on specific designs: for example 'Warszawianka' stadium was led by the head of the office, Gessler, 'Wenecja' was led by Szczepiński, 'Dukat' department store was led by Brejowski, and I was leading the railway station. Actually, the design was led by Sołtan, but I was managing coordination and organisation. Then, there were also other designs... But these were the most important ones back then. 'Warszawianka' and its stadium continued for many years, because it was quite a long design. In general, the entire team was at the office head's disposal, but the design coordinators were helped by others. For Warsaw Midtown railway station for example, the speakers were studied by Brejowski. My schoolmate, a graduate from the Polytechnic and Sołtan's student, Tadeusz Stefański, worked on the kiosk design for the station. Terlikowski designed three phone booths in the middle of the central platform, which were introduced there by Ihnatowicz – even if you cannot see them in the drawings. Apart from those, there were also some booths at the very end of the first and third platforms at the exit to Emilia Plater Street. There were around five booths with doors. Another very important design, which disappears in the descriptions, was the cladding of the columns designed by Bogusław Winiarski. Szczepiński was working on a beautiful design of the ticket desks... He was drawing them with a one-millimetre felt pen in 1:1 scale. In the meantime, I was drawing the handrail, stone cladding divisions for the floor and the walls... Lebecki was the mechanic for the rack, and Sadowski was working on the acoustics. In general, people were leaving other designs when more work was needed. It was typical of many designs. In addition, Sołtan treated all of us equally, whether one was a professor or a janitor. The carpenters – he called them "artists". He always greeted everyone, he talked with everyone. Everyone was an equal member of the Workshops.

S.R.: What were you doing for the design of the stadium?

B.S.: I was working mainly with Ihnatowicz. There was a building with a cafeteria, and I was designing its interior. But at that time I was already working on the railway station. For 'Wenecja' I had to design the staircase and the main hall. It was like this – someone was working on the stools, someone else on the counters...

S.R.: So the role of Sołtan and Ihnatowicz was to make sure all of these elements would work together, wasn't it?

B.S.: Naturally. The atmosphere was fantastic. By the way, everyone came when they could, and everyone would mark on a piece of paper when they would be there.

S.R.: Is it possible to say that in the Workshops some designs were more by Ihnatowicz, and others were more by Sołtan?

B.S.: In the Workshops it was not that like one design belonged to the former and another to the latter. Ihnatowicz was leading Olsztyn and he was the main designer for 'Wenecja', but Sołtan was involved in those too – as our entire team was. The only thing – one of them was the project leader, and the other was not.

S.R.: Well, someone had to...

B.S.: Yes, they were the main designers, and apart from that there were different design coordinators responsible for the organisation – like I was in charge of the railway station design.

S.R.: When you finished your military service, did you come back to the Workshops?

B.S.: Yes, but only much later. Then Ihnatowicz dragged me to a design office. When the Workshops were dissolved, I remained at the Academy. That dissolution was a terrible mistake... I was there and I saw it happening. It was because of envy and jealousy of one another, even though the Academy itself owed much to the Workshops, and the students could also learn a lot. There was some kind of envious feeling all the time, and Sołtan was the one whom many felt jealous of, for example of his freedom. The fact that he was able to travel freely – that was just adding to that feeling. But we did gain from his travels. Groups of Japanese were coming to Warsaw Midtown to see that famous railway station, and articles were written about it... Once I was asked by Tomaszewski, "Bogusław, please let me know, what the Academy gave you?", and I answered him "Professor, almost nothing – but the Workshops, they did". There I learned about design and about realisation. At school there was little concern about that: Sołtan was often leaving and we were doing one design per semester... When working in the Workshops, one could have a look at what the colleagues were doing. It was a fantastic school...

S.R.: Do you remember any moments when your work was criticised by Sołtan?

B.S.: It was during one of his longer stays in Poland, on the first day after his arrival at the Academy from the United States. He criticised me so much that I could have hidden under the table... I was working on a design for Sołtan's studio, it was a cinema building, for which I had also done a model. Tomaszewski had seen that model and got interested, because it was a completely different cinema layout, a completely different form. I was told then that I should stick with this design as it was to be continued to be studied and further developed by the graphics students – apparently Professor Mroszczak asked for this. That is why I had to make some technical drawings, and since Sołtan was to come, and those graphics students were starting to work on that design too, I started to make more detailed drawings on 1:1 scale. When drawing these, I started to add some structural elements, and I think I drew something like three steel bars in reinforced concrete... When Sołtan saw that, he got furious: "do you think I know how many bars there will be? Do you? Because I don't! That is something for a structure specialist".

S.R.: So it was not about the form of the building, was it?

B.S.: No, it was about the details. He meant that I drew these bars without a reason. The drawing was clear in showing it was reinforced concrete, and that would have been enough... Afterwards, it was completely different to look at the designs and to prepare them.

S.R.: Let us talk more about when you were a student...

B.S.: From the very start Sołtan was a demigod for us. Everyone tried to get into his studio. That is why he had done what I told you about before: he had organised a studio admission exam to select the students. He was surely demanding and he forced us to think. He was also famous for his drawing line, a Corbusian line... Somehow, I had a similar way of drawing. I am not sure why, but probably it came from following Sołtan's example. Anyway, in the Workshops, Mrs Lipkowa was calling me "Little Le Corbusier". I was doing Sołtan-style drawings, and probably because of this he somehow dragged me along. Then it was also a question of punctuality and discipline. Until today, I have been like this thanks to Sołtan. When we arranged to meet at the station with Sołtan, he was coming from one side, and I was coming from the other one, and we were meeting right at the place. He would look at his watch, and say, "Dolo [diminutive for Adolf Szczepiński] should come in twenty minutes". Up until today, I cannot enter someone's house more than a minute earlier – I would wait in front of the door but I would not enter... Besides Sołtan had such a strong sense of freedom and duty... When we were working in the Workshops, it was not a full-time job, we were just coming to work for the professor. I had my key to the Academy and I used to come on Sundays or in the evening to stay until midnight. When we had a deadline, Professor Sołtan was coming, as did Professor Ihnatowicz with his wife and his son. His wife was cutting the drawings, and his son was folding them. It had a huge impact on the students, to show that kind of working culture. There was also a great freedom of life in general – not to mention Sołtan's sense of humour and wit... Sołtan could go around wearing a white suit with a red bow tie, but he also could wear black trousers

and a red chequered shirt with holes at the elbow level as well. In the Workshops, he was sporting a cleaning woman's apron tightened with a string. It was so normal...

S.R.: How about the Academy and the Workshops as regards Le Corbusier, CIAM, and general contacts with the West? How were they mentioned?

B.S.: Actually I know the others much less, I did not have good contacts with them...

S.R.: With whom?

B.S.: With other teachers... I do not know whether it was envy because I was following Sołtan and not them... Through my colleagues, I can say that they were well aware of Le Corbusier's work. For them, it was a completely different story, but they definitely were not opposed to his work. They were simply doing other things. The difference was huge. In our studio, we were all very close to these issues. Sołtan gave us all Modulor tapes and everyone was keeping them. When I received mine, I tried working out a different scale based on the Polish medium height – which was much appreciated by Sołtan by the way. I started to apply this and I do still apply it until today. These dimensions are now part of me and I use them when I design.

S.R.: How was Le Corbusier's work present in Sołtan's studio and practice?

B.S.: All the designs he knew or had worked on, he studied with us. His assistant Wittek – it was also his life. Sołtan said to me once, "Bogusław, if you have any difficulties with Le Corbusier, just go to Włodzimierz", as the latter was a walking encyclopaedia.

S.R.: As you talk, I get an impression that Sołtan was somehow different from other teachers...

B.S.: He was different due to his general style. I can compare Sołtan to Ihnatowicz and Zieliński – to those who were also teaching architecture. Those were the three architecture studios that we were able to choose from. Other professors were not architects. Whereas Ihnatowicz was very similar to him, in that other studio it was different. You could have seen that through designs and discussions.

S.R.: Could you tell me more about these differences? Were there more discussions in Sołtan's and Ihnatowicz's studios?

B.S.: Well, the amount of discussion perhaps was the same, but the approach was completely different. In Sołtan's studio there was that intellectual atmosphere, a connection to the broader world. We were working with universal issues... It was like what I mentioned at the beginning, when Sołtan was lecturing construction. He started talking about that carriage and everyone remembered it. It was his ease in teaching. A part of his lifestyle.

S.R.: You mentioned that many people – whether they were Sołtan's students from the Academy or were coming from elsewhere – wanted to work in the Workshops... Were the Workshops something exceptional when compared to the rest?

B.S.: It started with a very small workshop producing pigments for students, and afterwards, thanks to Sołtan and thanks to the connections he had, and thanks to the dean – the actual Workshops opened. However, at the end, when Sołtan had already left, I could see some things going on there... but still, many people from other faculties – for example from the Faculty of Sculpture – were amazed by Sołtan and the Workshops.

S.R.: How was it possible to organise something like that in communist Poland?

B.S.: It should actually be credited Sołtan, who had some connections thanks to his fellow prisoners from the camp.

S.R.: For example, Urbanowicz worked in the ministry...

B.S.: He was a department director. Still, he did not always agree with Sołtan. There was a controversy about how many faculties should be at the Academy. The authorities wanted only the three classical ones – painting, sculpture, and graphics. Not architecture, because it was already taught at the Polytechnic and they did not want to double the curriculum. Then, there was an idea that there actually could be two architecture faculties. Then someone claimed there should be one faculty only. It was constantly changing. I entered the Fine Arts Academy, then I attended the Higher School of Visual Arts, and then I was back again at the Fine Arts Academy. I got the graduation diploma from the Fine Arts Academy, and the following year I got the title of Master of Art. All the time there were controversies concerning professors, and concerning artists... Sołtan

did believe that architecture was related to arts, and many were unable to understand that. The same was with the Polytechnic. A fellow faculty member who was teaching construction at the Academy before I took the module over, graduated from the Polytechnic, and students from the Polytechnic were coming to us to attend his lectures. I had knew him since he was a student and when he was preparing the diploma at the Polytechnic under Professor Pniewski, he asked another colleague of mine and myself to help him to develop his design visually. We made two-metre-long drawings, almost as the drawings for the Brussels EXPO pavilion from the Workshops. When the professor's assistant came, he said, "well, it will be a graduation with honours". But then came Professor Bogusławski whom Sołtan disliked. Pniewski did a very short presentation and concluded, "what more shall I say, let the work defend itself". The former started to criticise details, and basically two camps of professors were formed... As a result, the student barely passed with a "satisfactory" mark.

S.R.: You have mentioned a few times the unwritten conflict between the Academy and the Polytechnic. Does this mean that the Academy had more freedom or leeway than other schools?

B.S.: I think it did. What we heard about the Fine Arts Academy in Cracow, it seemed much more schematic. In our Academy, at the Faculty of Interior Design, I think there was only one Party member as a teacher and another one as a student. That Party professor once said to Kamiński to shut up, "because I am from the Party and I actually can say something about socialist realism".[14] Moreover, I worked for a while in Pniewski's practice and elsewhere, and I could see and tell the difference... and the discussions... the discussions were the worst. When I once read in some study that Sołtan was criticising Bogusławski, that was really heartening... because I know that Bogusławski was fine when working on the concept, but when speaking about the details, he was not so good. That was the difference between the Academy and the Polytechnic – we studied details. As I mentioned, students from the Polytechnic were coming to audit construction lectures. Lectures in mathematics by Professor Zonn were audited by some girls from the University of Warsaw from the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. Statics by Professor Hempel, the designer of the Poniatowski Bridge, were audited by actual constructors... That was the difference between the Polytechnic and the Academy. Sołtan once told me, "dear Bogusław, the fact that you are here at the Academy and not at the Polytechnic, has been like winning a lottery ticket. Here you can think. And there they just draw". That was the difference – and that was so true.

S.R.: So the Academy was much more interested in the details...

B.S.: It was! I once asked an engineer to calculate one letter from the "Warsaw Midtown" sign. Later, I was working on very similar letters, but bigger, for a three-metre-high neon on a metal rod support for Zakłady Azotowe in Włocławek.[15] I made a drawing of that support and gave it to make calculations, and an engineer came to me and asked, "please let me know your secret and tell me how it is possible that you draw something, I make the calculations, and they simply confirm your drawings". I told him, "that's because it's Sołtan's and Ihnatowicz's school – drawing and observing things in real life". When the American Embassy was built in Warsaw and there was an exhibition of graphics there, I went there with some papers, I sat next to the window, I took a sheet of paper and a pencil, and with the pencil I started to measure aluminium profiles from the window's frame to use them in a design later. They were the first ones in Poland!

S.R.: Was it difficult for the Workshops to get commissions?

B.S.: I think that one somehow dragged another. When people saw that what we were doing was good, then other things came. On the other hand, some connections were helpful. For example, Sołtan knew the communication department director Kupciński – who collaborated with the Academy very well

S.R.: Can we say that there was a difference between what was designed in the Workshops and what was designed in Poland in general?

B.S.: There was a tremendous difference, for sure. It is enough to look at the designs we now try to restore – for example the Central Department Store in Warsaw designed by Ihnatowicz. If you look at 'Wenecja' – it was once a beautiful building, but it was painted with pink oil paint... Now it came back to how it looked before. There was a cafeteria and a fountain inside, and everything was so connected within the space... it was very much unusual back then. Take even the heating plant building in Dzierżoniów. It was a complete revolution too. There were many factories back then, but this one stood out easily. Such things were simply neglected in general... In 'Wenecja' someone was making installations without looking at the design, and when Ihnatowicz

14 Sołtan's lack of appreciation for Kamiński and criticism of the latter's allegiance to the Party's propaganda, see: Andrzej Bulanda, *Rozmowy o architekturze* (Warsaw: Muzeum Akademii Sztuk Pięknych, 1996), p. 43.

15 Zakłady Azotowe in Włocławek is a chemical industry company, which produces nitrogen-based chemical products.

came, he said, “wait, there is a window here and barrels will be entering through here, and you have traced the installations in the middle of the window”.

S.R.: How was it in the Workshops when Sołtan started to go back and forth between Poland and the United States?

B.S.: I think it was simply about us waiting for him. Afterwards, after these six-month periods, he went there permanently quite soon – and of course he was not there in the Workshops. After a while, the school’s administration was dominated by some Party-based colonels, who did not feel that – they did not feel the atmosphere of the school.

S.R.: You mentioned before your own didactic work. What were you teaching?

B.S.: These were different things. The first lectures were part of a technical study. It consisted in studying elements of the outer shell and everything inside: division walls, interior decor, elevations, and cladding. It was led by three lecturers. One was specialised in concrete, another one in plastic and artificial materials, and the third one in wood – and I was the third one. It was a module continued from the second year up until the diploma, and it was supposed to help in working on the designs and diplomas... But then I was burdened with teaching construction for the first-year students. I was leading this module for many years... It was possible back then to feel that architects did not have contact with the design, and sometimes I was pointing to that. For example, I rigidly opposed the use of the scale 1:2... It does not exist. Ihnatowicz was drawing in 1:1. But architects use the 1:2 scale, which is a very misleading scale, because the drawing actually could be in 1:1 or in 1:2... It occurred to me once when I was looking at a drawing of a suspended ceiling. I thought it was in 1:1, but it appeared it was in 1:2. I thought it was a two-millimetre layer of fibreboard, while it was a four-millimetre steel sheet... It was a ceiling which weighed some sixty tons. It also meant lack of critical thinking. Sołtan was different – he was very thorough and everything had to be thought through. When I was teaching in a studio, everything started from thinking – and not as it happened once when a student came claiming that she knew more things than I did because she had worked three years in an advertisement company... I showed her kindly – as Sołtan would have – that she knew nothing... During one review, during two reviews, during three reviews... for the fifth one, she came in and apologised.

S.R.: When you were teaching at the Academy, were you somehow referring to your experience with Jerzy Sołtan?

B.S.: All the time, all the time – and I had been within these walls in Myśliwiecka Street for fifty-five years.

S.R.: And concerning the construction module taught by Sołtan...

B.S.: It was very short... I do not remember the whole story, why Sołtan was removed from architecture and design studio teaching and why it was decided that could teach technical subjects only. He lectured that only for a couple of weeks, and then Zieliński stepped in and lectured construction himself. I do not remember many lectures by Sołtan from this construction module, probably because he was away... Zieliński taught it as ‘interim’, somehow replacing Sołtan, but then more construction specialists came from the Polytechnic, as for example Wasiutyński, who lectured it for two years and who designed that square structure above Warsaw Midtown railway station. But it was clear that it was Polytechnic-style teaching. The professor came for the inauguration and for the final exam, and assistants were actually lecturing... Wasiutyński had about seven assistants.

S.R.: In one of her texts Jola Gola writes that Sołtan had an extraordinary capacity to find talent in people[16] – how would you comment on that?

B.S.: Yes, and an example could be the fact that he realised I had some manual and drawing skills. Afterwards, in 1984, when he was in America, a postcard came from him to the Academy because he saw a design of a house in New York I did. He wrote then, “dear all, Eugeniusz Bolesławski showed me drawings of his house. I was touched by the quality and by the elegance of these drawings so much that I need to write to congratulate you. Best regards, Sołtan”. That is what he was like... Until today I regret that I did not send him the design of a church I made for a competition...

S.R.: Church designs were important for him...

16 Jola Gola, ‘Jerzy Sołtan’, in *Ineffable Space*, p. 100.

B.S.: Very important – and he got burnt with the one in Sochaczew... I think that he would have liked my design for a church in Siedlce very much.

S.R.: What were your contacts with Sołtan after he emigrated permanently?

B.S.: I was preparing the specialisation under Sołtan and somehow, I continued to live that vision all the time... It accompanied me at each step throughout the school: Sołtan was somehow present, and we even called it “Sołtan school”. However, I have to tell you that about five years ago I was talking to some colleagues who continue to work at the Academy and a couple of them snorted in disdain, “what is Sołtan and what is Le Corbusier?”. Towards the end of my work at the Academy, in 1995 when Sołtan came, I got an award from the dean and I was called by him. I was given the award, I turned back to sit at my place, but Sołtan jumped from where he was sitting, hugged and congratulated me... Wittek told me afterwards, “See, Bogusław, the award – it’s not worth anything – but look at Sołtan’s reaction”.

S.R.: His congratulations were worth much more...

B.S.: But of course. Even more, once Sołtan helped my colleague to find a job in the United States. Everything was scheduled, but just before the departure, when everyone knew that he was leaving, he went to the American Embassy and it then turned out that he had water in his lungs and he would not be permitted to leave the country in such a state. Instead of the United States, he had to go to Zakopane to take care of himself. But still Sołtan told him, “Andrzej, do not worry, they are waiting for you”. He got better and left. When Sołtan said that someone was good, it meant they were worth waiting for...[17]

17 Collection of articles by Andrzej Pinno, ‘Wędrówki architekta’, 2004, see: Warsaw, Library of the Fine Arts Academy, PM 656.

Stan Szaflarski

June 29th, 2020, with amendments based on Bliskie z daleka *draft by Stan Szaflarski*

Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw alumnus (1964–1969), where he was taught by Sołtan. Later student at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1971–1975). He worked at the practice ATMO (Atelier des Maîtres d'Œuvre) in Paris on the renovations of le Corbusier's designs: Unité d'Habitation and Chandigarh buildings (1972–1973). In 1990, he worked in Canada with Sołtan on a marina building on Lake Erie. Independent architect working in St. Catharines, Canada.

S.R.: In your memories, you write about the Academy in Warsaw, "*Academy of Fine Arts with the Faculty of Interior Design, whose dean and professor was the architect Jerzy Sołtan*".[1] You do not mention other names, and you do not include other professors. What was particular in Sołtan?

S.S.: (...) For me, Sołtan's message was invaluable from the artistic and architectural point of view as disciplines going beyond the established teaching framework of the time. Since 1959, Sołtan was leading only the spring semester at Myśliwiecka, and in 1966, he left permanently for the United States. During that spring semester Sołtan was organising critiques of our designs, along with other professors, practicing architects, sculptors, graphic artists, writers, and journalists. They were held in the school ateliers in Krakowskie Przedmieście, in Myśliwiecka, or in the premises of the Workshops.[2] The structure of the studies made it easier for us to understand the requirements to pass every semester. In Myśliwiecka, in the Workshops, we were also able to see evolving or finished designs, like for example the 'Warszawianka' sporting centre or the Warsaw Midtown railway station. Some of the students could get the job in the Workshops, and we treated that as a true distinction. One day, Zenon Kliszko[3] came to the atelier in Myśliwiecka. He was an important member of the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. It became a turmoil. Tomaszewski, as the head of the faculty, introduced the guest, who later gave a lecture on the structure and aims of Eastern (USSR) and Western (USA) propaganda, based on the examples of Russian constructivism, Bauhaus, American cinema, car industry, and New York skyscrapers. The reason for this visit could have been Sołtan, but nobody mentioned it... Every six months, a yellow Fiat Simca appeared in the courtyard in Myśliwiecka, and we knew that Sołtan was coming in the car Le Corbusier gave him. We were taking a deep breath, as "our Master was coming". He had something in himself, you had no doubt he was an extraordinary teacher. He had a strong voice, yet without a nervous tone, and that is why it made the impression of an open peacefulness, of casting a line when asking questions to the students, and then going deeper and deeper, with more details and more convincingly. He spoke about Tomaszewski calling him "this wonderful Lech" – his scientific mind was somehow a completion for the Master's freedom, who sometimes during critiques was able to include some juicy words. I was not surprised when during our meeting in Montreal years later, he said simply "in the roof of the building you need to make a (...) big hole".

S.R.: I have actually realised that too in some letters.[4]

S.S.: It was part of his method, or perhaps some way of hiding his frustration. After the Second World War, his idea of contemporary Polish architecture collapsed with the rejection of the Modulor and of the *Athens Charter*.[5] He hoped that after the complete destruction of Warsaw, there would be a possibility of rebuilding a modern city. He came back there with Le Corbusier's ideas and designs he worked on, but along with the vision of architecture from the Academy, such ideas were clearly rejected by the local architects. The Polytechnic of Warsaw kept the monopole for architecture teaching. I have never heard him complain, but such a failure must have been difficult. Many times, I wanted to ask him about it, but I did not know how to do it, and I did not have enough courage to do so. Similarly, I wanted to know about Le Corbusier's death. It was 1965, I was a young student, and I have not yet clearly understood the meaning of the Modulor and the *Athens Charter*. For sure, I did not think that later, I would leave Poland for France. At the school, we talked about Le Corbusier's death, even about some suppositions concerning suicide. I think it was possible, and I realised that in particular when I was working in Paris in the practice ATMO in rue de la Bourse. We worked there along with Olek Kujawski with the Modulor: or more precisely, we were preparing documentation for the renovation of the Unité d'Habitation building in Marseilles. I thought then that the rigid Modulor system could have been one of the reasons for the devastation of the building. When I visited it, I was shocked by the devastation. Perhaps the residents could not stand the functional divisions and the limitations of concrete architecture. Did Le Corbusier know that his Modulor was not successful? Perhaps yes. Olek Kujawski once said, "the Modulor is an example of modular architecture, which should be used, assessed based on the contemporary needs". Many times, I wanted to talk about it with Sołtan, especially about the height of the extended hand: 2.26, and later changed for 2.38, but I did not make it in time – a pity.

S.R.: Here, I can mention what I have found in Sołtan's texts, in which he remembered some discussions with Le Corbusier on the Modulor. After Le Corbusier visited America, the base series was changed, because the Americans were higher. Later, Sołtan and Le Corbusier were discussing a possible different series for the Asian nations, who would be shorter. Whereas for Sołtan, it was an elastic system, where one could find their own Modulor scale, for Le Corbusier it had to be something universal, something univocal.[6]

S.S.: I suspect that Sołtan was aware of the limitations of the rigid Modulor, but at that time, I had not enough experience to talk about it with him. At this point, I am not sure what he meant, when during the meeting in Montreal he showed me some pictures of the Salem High School and mentioned nonchalantly, "Staszek, this is Modulor". Was he talking about his own Modulor scale or did he use the original one? I have seen the first use of Modulor in Zbigniew Ihnatowicz's atelier in the design of the 'Wenecja' bar. Sołtan had already left Warsaw and he was showing up every half a year, almost as if he was on a trip, so actually, it was Ihnatowicz who taught me architecture of buildings. He had enormous technical knowledge and great creative achievements: that is why his buildings are astonishing, especially when related to the difficult post-war time. Not many realised that in spite of the difficulties of the 1950s, Ihnatowicz and Sołtan were able to find a way to build them... Actually, I was employed in the ATMO practice in Paris also because I was coming from Ihnatowicz's atelier and because Sołtan was said to Olek on the phone that he had to accept me. I was speaking no French at that time, I came there as a completely mad person, who knew that one needs to go upwards and to know how to answer Sołtan's questions. Later, I met Sołtan in the school of architecture in Paris, a couple of years later in Montreal, and finally in Utica, NY. Sołtan's departure from Poland was for us tragic, but actually, nobody realised entirely that from that day on, we would be left alone, immersed in uncertainty. On that day, we lost a teacher, and along with him, the main reason of the existence of that school.

S.R.: Was Sołtan's support important in finding work?

S.S.: Yes. His signature was very much helpful not only when I was validating my diploma, but also when I was to be admitted to the school of architecture in Paris. I had to have my diplomas checked again in Montreal. At that time, Sołtan was giving lectures in Montreal, and apparently, he confirmed that I was his student from the university, making it possible to recognise my studies, my diploma, and to give me the professional licence as an architect.

S.R.: Why the decision to study under Sołtan?

S.S.: I knew that Sołtan translated the Modulor, that he worked with Le Corbusier, and that he created a contemporary architecture-based faculty at the Academy in Warsaw. Halina Kenar in the Kenar School[7] said that one has to study under Sołtan, because he was recognisable in the world. He knew Halina and Antoni Kenar well, and he visited them in Sobczakówka in Zakopane. That was the same type of people.[8] (...) When I was in Warsaw, eye to eye with Sołtan, I felt as if I was in Zakopane. Warsaw was for me the first emigration place. People were talking there with a different accent, and I was speaking the highlander dialect. In Warsaw, Sołtan was a kind of familiar oasis. It is a pity that he was there with intermissions every six months. After his departure, Tomaszewski became the dean of the school, but unfortunately, in spite of his enormous effort, the

1 *Bliskie z Daleka* draft by Stan Szaflarski from September 1st, 2020, p. 80.
2 Stan Szaflarski refers here to the different buildings of the Academy of Fine Arts. The main building is in Krakowskie Przedmieście in the city centre, and the Faculty of Interior Design is in Myśliwiecka, at the same address as the Artistic and Research Workshops.
3 Zenon Kliszko (1908-1989), Polish politician and secretary of Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in 1957-1970, very close to the Party leader Władysław Gomułka.
4 Letters from Sołtan, see: MASP-JS.
5 Actually, after the socialist realism era, the Athens Charter was often referred to in Polish text as the ultimate achievement in urbanism, but it was considered from the prescriptive, normalised and standardised point of view (Chapter 4).
6 Lecture 'The Modulor revisited' from the late 1970s, see: MASP-JS.
7 Halina Kenar (1915-1998), Polish writer and pedagogue, between 1939 and 1947, she was living and working in France. She was teaching at the Visual Technics High School in Zakopane in Poland in 1948-1970.
8 Sołtan's interest in Kenar's art can be seen for example in the article 'Antoni Kenar i nowe czasy – stare ślady na nowych ścieżkach' from 1995, see: MASP-JS.

faculty was dying more and more every day, and this fall was well visible for himself and for us too.

S.R.: And when Sołtan was going back and forth between Poland and the United States?

S.S.: His returning could not reverse this tendency. The Workshops were losing commissions, their very reason for existence. Ihnatowicz continued to work there, but with time, he lost commissions too. The students lost the possibility of an extremely important professional practice. I was often going to the Workshops, when Sołtan was there, to attend the end-of-semester critiques, and to check the possibility of work there, or at least for the opportunity to sweep the room and have at least a glance at the drawings... A couple of months ago in Niagara, the Ontario Association of Architects showed the movie *Built to Last – Relics of Communist Era Architecture* directed by Harun Honcoop on the 'horrors of the communist architecture'. I was disappointed. The movie was almost a propaganda image of those times, but we still have to remember that next to socialist realism and to the normative buildings, there were also other designs, as the 'Warszawianka' sporting centre, the Central Department Store, the Warsaw Midtown railway station, and 'Wenecja' bar. At the same time, it was not much better in Canada. Those HLMs[9] around Toronto and Montreal today are scary... Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 was an exception. When I said that, a silence fell, because the architects gathered either did not know the subject or they did not want to engage in a discussion. I added that the movie had not shown the work of other architects, who in spite of the communist oppression had tried to design with courage as free people, against the imposed opinions on the reconstruction of Eastern Europe and Warsaw, as in the MDM complex and in the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The movie did not mention Jerzy Sołtan, his vision of contemporary architecture at the Academy in Warsaw, nor the proposal to use the Modulor in rebuilding the city. I do not know why such achievements were neglected.

S.R.: I think that his work was also neglected in Poland. When I was looking at the Polish publications on architecture published at the time of the People's Republic of Poland, I saw that there was not much written about Sołtan, about the Workshops, and their designs. The most attention he was given to by Szafer, but it was natural, as they were both teaching at the Academy.[10]

S.S.: Yes, Szafer was our professor of history of contemporary architecture.

S.R.: When Sołtan was mentioning Paris, did he mention Le Corbusier only, or also contacts with other artists, such as Fernand Léger, George Braque, and Constantin Brancusi?

S.S.: Probably yes, but I do not remember that from my Master, as I was attracted by something completely different. I was fascinated by the Modulor and its simplified manner of architecture design. This method was close to building modularity used by my father. The Parisian artists and their creative difficulties after the Second World War were mentioned by Halina Kenar during her lectures on the history of art in the school in Zakopane. During the war and shortly afterwards, she was along with Antoni Kenar at the centre of the artistic community in Paris. She was showing us pictures of meetings with Léger, Braque, Brancusi, Picasso, Zadkine, and other artists. I was back then fifteen- or sixteen-years-old, and I did not know whether I was to be shocked or amazed by those 'citizens of the world'. She told me then that I had to go first to Paris, and only afterwards to Chicago, not the other way round.[11]

S.R.: Did you have any contacts with Sołtan or have you talked later about your work on renovations of Le Corbusier's buildings in ATMO?

S.S.: No, because when I started to work in Paris, Sołtan was already in the United States. I have lost contact with him in Myśliwiecka. Afterwards, I met him in 1972 or 1973 in Paris, and afterwards when we were working on the design by Lake Erie.[12] On that day, I grasped his hand, and for the first time, I felt as if I was equal to him, ready for discussion or even for his criticism. When I showed him all the drawings, and there were about twenty plates, Sołtan started, almost literally, dancing around them mumbling something and sketching with charcoal. He asked, "how have you thought about this?", and I answered, "we have been taught like this". He looked at me with suspicion. I do not know whether he was content or surprised. It was one of those extraordinary meetings. Unfortunately, the design was not realised, because the harbour authorities claimed that a building designed with the Modulor was too expensive. It was a great pity both for ourselves and for the Colborne Port, where the building was to be realised.

9 *Habitation Logement Modéré*, French term to designate social housing.
10 Chapter 4.
11 *Bliskie z Daleka*, p. 81.
12 *Bliskie z Daleka*, p. 101.

S.R.: How did you start your collaboration with Sołtan on the design?

S.S.: One day in Montreal, Sołtan's relative architect Andrzej Sierakowski started to talk about him. His wife, Wanda Serwatowska, often advised to visit Sołtan. I did not know how to start that, because I did not have that much to show my Master, and I knew that when we would meet, there would be a thousand questions, similar to those in Myśliwiecka in Warsaw. In 1975, after moving from Paris to Montreal, I was working on a government design of the Palace of Justice in Gatineau-Ottawa, where the construction was managed by a Toronto-based firm, Cadillac-Fairview. I have received from them an answer saying that the window divisions can be modular, but they have to be typical, and similar to those that are used at another construction site, because it would have been cheaper. I tried to explain it using my French experiences, but eventually I was told that either it would be standardised, or another architect would be doing it. That is what happened. With such a failure, I did not want to meet Sołtan to tell him, "Master, I screwed up". However, the design on Lake Erie was important and it needed consultation. In 1990, I went to look for Sołtan at the faculty of architecture at the university in Montreal.

S.R.: What do you remember from studies under Sołtan in Warsaw?

S.S.: During the studies until his departure, it was similar to the meeting in Montreal. During an individual or a group critique, Sołtan was listening carefully to the student, he was checking the diligence of the design, and then he was asking questions that had to be skilfully answered, because otherwise there would have been the next one and the next one. At the shelf in his atelier, there were multiple books, catalogues, and magazines in different languages, including the Modulor. At the end of the critique, the Master was explaining to the student the need of further research and the necessary design alterations needed to pass the semester. He was pointing to the requirements of the profession of an artist-architect, in particular the importance of the portfolio of works, especially of those with a signature or comments of the studio leader. Then, he was pointing to and he was explaining the importance of the *Athens Charter* and of the Modulor, but unfortunately, those ideas were helplessly far in communist Poland. What counted, it was his way of teaching and his former Parisian address. Our manuals from architecture, geometry, perspective, psychology, urbanism, building mechanics, mathematics, basis of technics, economy, and building construction, in addition to the workshops in painting and drawing, to the lectures in those subjects, to foreign languages courses and equally foreign political sciences, and to the army training, all of it was necessary to pass the semester. When Sołtan was entering however, it was all becoming unnecessary. He was an unparalleled example of a free man who, as one of the very few in communist Poland, had a passport valid for the entire world with multiple entry permission. He was able to live abroad, to work there as an architect and professor, to have there his family, and then to come back when he wanted to – and such a position was astonishing in those times, even if he could have had some administrative difficulties.[13] We were listening to him to learn that and to be able to do the same afterwards. Later, the faculty was led by Tomaszewski, who was a theoretician, a mathematician, an engineer, a constructor, and an architect in the sense of 'space topology'. I have understood what he meant only afterwards. Today, it would have been much easier with the use of the computers, but back then, he was writing with white chalk on a blackboard thousands of formulas and spatial calculations, while we were to copy that down, and understand – something unheard of! He talked about the tension of surfaces, and he was illustrating it with models covered with diluted soap. If the bubbles were popping, it meant faulty calculations or a wrong choice of surface. One has to remember that in those years, standardised normative buildings were dominating architecture. You had to have courage to teach students the basis of mathematically defined architecture instead of the norms. The problem was that such education did not guarantee employment in the same sense as did the Polytechnic, and that is why perhaps at the end of his lectures, he said, "all the students will pass, the courageous will get a good mark, and there will be no other".

S.R.: In your memories, you mention a quote from Le Corbusier: "*il faut que ça soit beau*".[14] Was it much present in Sołtan's teaching?

S.S.: He was repeatedly mentioning this phrase at different occasions. Perhaps he did that even in a slightly comical touch, in order to start a discussion with us. He liked to talk long and in a humorous style, but at the same time, he talked in a very precise manner, so you had to pay attention when he was asking an unexpected question. During those times, the Polytechnic was teaching more technically able architects-engineers, but their capacity of designing beautiful architecture was rather meagre, because of the government prescriptions

13 Actually, Sołtan did have limitations due to his Polish passport and it caused him issues when travelling and when planning to attend Team 10 meetings (Chapter 5).
14 Sołtan mentions the quote "*il faut que ça soit beau*" by Le Corbusier many times, as for example in Bulanda, p. 29.

on educating normative specialists. They were compulsory in all socialist countries, from Vladivostok to Berlin. Perhaps the change of the serial elements production based on Sołtan's Modulor could have been possible, but it would have also required changes in education and coordination in the entire communist bloc, so mainly because of these political reasons, such a revolution could not be introduced. With a diploma of an architect-engineer, one had a guaranteed work in a public urban design office, and there were no other ones. One has to remember though that the need for new apartments in the war-ravaged Europe was colossal. In addition, because of the strategic choice of the cold war, each urban and architectural plan had to be validated by the military. In such hopelessness, there was not much of actual design going on, apart from the Artistic and Research Workshops in Myśliwiecka. The correct arrangement of the blocks was compulsory at the Polytechnic, and therefore in construction in general.[15] I am sure that Sołtan, with Le Corbusier's "*il faut que ça soit beau*", wanted to teach us a different manner of designing, and at the same time to show us the fascinating range of its potential success, much more important than the detailed drawings of the normative-based buildings. This saying was well understood by the students at the Academy!

S.R.: It makes me think about a conversation I had with Bogusław Smyrski, who worked in the Workshops on the railway station design. He remembered Sołtan saying to him, "dear Mister Bogusław, the fact that you are here at the Academy and not at the Polytechnic, it has been like winning a lottery ticket. Here, you can think. There, they draw".[16]

S.S.: Yes! They were drawing at the Polytechnic, while we were designing under Sołtan. Every end-of-the-semester exhibition of our designs was interesting for the colleagues from the Polytechnic. I suppose that they could have been even envious, because it was not there where Gut, Ihnatowicz, Tomaszewski, Nowak, Sołtan, and Zieliński were teaching. Those masters were not only architects, but also very courageous people to praise the Modulor and the *Athens Charter* during socialist realism. Sołtan's departure 'forever' was for the 'School of Contemporary Architecture' at the Academy tragical, but no one realised then the consequences of this decision, and the consequences of the conflict between these two schools with different approaches to teaching the discipline. Unfortunately, at the Academy, we were the victims of that conflict, eventually with no possibility of appeal and with no possibility of open discussion on the matter. The Faculty of Architecture at the Polytechnic benefited from the authorities' support, so they could continue their programme of 'construction drawings of socialist realist architecture', with no debate about designing by an 'artist-architect'. There was no place for such a profession in the communist education. Therefore, the faculty at the Academy was left out in the cold, heading towards the unknown. On that day [when Sołtan left the Academy], we lost a teacher, but also his faculty, first Architecture, then Interior Design and Industrial Design, along with the Workshops, lost the reason to exist. What remained was a picture of an audacious experiment with a remote memory of great masters-professors as a 'beautiful canon'. With their departure, the possibility of a broader discussion on the 'horrors of the socialist realism buildings' disappeared. Halina Kenar told us once that in some kind of survey (I am not sure whether it was a true one), people were asked about what kind of dwellings should be built in Poland. It resulted that around 87% of participants wanted to live in noble manor houses, and not in rationally designed buildings. Thus, according to her, studies at the Polytechnic meant losing time. "What kind of mentally ill person would authorise to deconstruct stone-built historical manors around Warsaw in order to build the Palace of Culture and Science as a gift of the Soviet Union and as an example of Polish architecture, while our architecture is not stone-based, but brick-based or wooden?" – she added. Years later, when I was standing in front of the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, I understood why queen Bona Sforza's old Cracow looked similar. There were no stones either. Around Milan, there are plains, marshes, and that is why they used clay necessary to make bricks. After my studies, I wanted to change architecture in the Podhale region in Poland. In 1962, for the FIS championship in Zakopane,[17] a series of concrete horrors was built: commercial buildings, apartment blocks, and a new bus station simply collapsed. Unexpectedly, a warm mountain wind came and – since apparently concrete in the girders was substituted by water from a mountain stream – the building simply melted down. On that day, Halina Kenar told me, "you will deal with the architecture of Podhale later, but now you must go to the school where Sołtan teaches". That was it!

S.R.: You mention in your memories that once you grabbed Sołtan's hand saying, "I am holding the heritage of Polish architecture".[18] Of course, I understand, it was partially humoristic, but why did you say so?

S.S.: I will use again Halina Kenar's words, who said that Sołtan is the only one, who was to look at us without any inherited burdens and with no mindless repeating of national architecture. Differently from a design of a railway station in the Vilnius region in a Zakopane style, or of a tenement façade in Warsaw in Mokotowska with sculpted silhouettes wearing Cracow and highlander traditional costumes. "Are such folklore elements necessary to define the value of national architecture?" – she asked. I think that Sołtan wanted, thanks to the Modulor and to the support of the Academy's design faculty, to continue the line drawn by the pre-war ŁAD,[19] an interesting direction in contemporary architecture in Poland. Such a continuity was a logical extension of the local architectural thought based on the achievements of the Western traditions. Kenar suggested that one needed to learn from others, but with a reasonable preservation of their own heritage, claiming that Sołtan's vision was interesting and that he knew what was important, making his ideas part of Polish heritage. Today, as a practicing architect, I share my professors' ideas and their message. Of course, one needs to preserve what is worth being preserved, but it includes also preserving the rational thought based on the needs, according to the rule "form follows function", according to the Modulor's dimensions. This rule is the result of a thorough analysis of who we are, of what we pain for, and of what we value. Sołtan was that person who looked for the optimum manner of defining this heritage, through using contemporary tools, such as the Modulor, and through rational methods in architectural research fitting our needs and looking for beauty, grace, and proportion. It is important who our forefathers were, but it is more important who we are now. Sołtan's research, his architecture, and his didactic work, were amongst the important achievements in Polish architectural theory, and Polish architecture – that is why it would be part of national heritage. Through his work, Sołtan brought a lot to Polish architecture, full of complexes and insecurity. His "line", as he would have put it, contributed to Polish architecture showing that we are not worse or better than others, that we are not rejected by the neighbouring countries and friends. It showed that we are not unique, but we are able to show our identity and diversity. It is important who our teachers were, but also who we are now.

15 See also: interview with Jacek Damięcki.
16 Interview with Bogusław Smyrski.
17 FIS World Ski Championships on February 18th-25th, 1962.
18 *Bliskie z Daleka*, p. 119.
19 Spółdzielnia Artystów ŁAD, Polish collective specialised in design of furniture, textile and other itmes for interior design. It was formed in 1926 in Warsaw by a group of professors and students from the Fine Arts School (back then, the official name of the Fine Arts Academy).

Wojciech Wybieralski

September 27th, 2019, in Warsaw, Poland

Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw alumnus (1960–1967), and since 1968 teaching there at the Faculty of Interior Design. He collaborated occasionally with the Workshops (1967–1989). He participated in the commission preparing the separation of the Faculty of Industrial Design from the Faculty of Interior Design in 1977, and he was dean of the former (1984–1990).

S.R.: When did you meet Sołtan for the first time?

W.W.: As far as we are talking about meeting in the corridors, it was at the beginning of the 1960s, around 1962. Then, studying under Sołtan, it was in 1965-1967.

S.R.: What was he teaching you then?

W.W.: Studies at the Faculty of Interior Design lasted then six years, and they were mainly based on solid architectural training, since the teaching staff, including Sołtan, did not have any bigger industrial design experience. Sołtan was teaching then a three-semester-long specialisation atelier, and in my index, it reads "Professor Sołtan, industrial design specialisation". Such industrial design was based on different examples of everyday objects: going from home appliances, such as TV sets, to a cheap low-bore engine car. The latter appeared, since someone from the staff – a very experienced automobile engineer – was designing at that time a Polish car for the disabled. Sołtan was coming and going to the United States, and then he was substituted by Professor Stanisław Kucharski. We had to design some airport furniture... At that time, the Okęcie Airport was being built[1] – or it had been shortly finished – and Kucharski as an experienced interior designer was taking part in that design. He gave us as a topic a counter with ticket services – whereas I have never seen such a thing... I remember that all of them were basically quite functional furniture-based assignments aimed at efficiency. Objects and furniture were produced then based not only on aesthetic reasons, as the functional aspect was stressed too: we all hailed functionalism, and it was also easy to base your production on something sure, verified and rational.

S.R.: So, even though it was an interior design faculty, there was quite a lot of industrial design too...

W.W.: Parallel to the industrial design specialisation – it was the last three years, including the diploma design – there was also more general education, in architecture and other arts: there was painting, history of art, artistic drawing or technical drawing... Among other things, parallel to the specialisation module, there was a bigger architectural design one. I was in Professor Tadeusz Zieliński's atelier,[2] a well-experienced architect from an architectural family, and with many built designs... He designed for instance a hotel for the government offices or a residential estate near Belweder in Warsaw – everything in modern style. However, I think that if I knew better who was who, I would have gone to Ihnatowicz's atelier...

S.R.: And the choice was between...?

W.W.: The choice was – for the architecture atelier – between Ihnatowicz, Zieliński, Michał Gutt and Wiesław Nowak. They were working then with assistants, and they were able to have more students.

S.R.: What was Sołtan specialisation atelier's place in the programme?

W.W.: As for specialisations, the choice was also between Jan Kurzątkowski[3] and furniture design or Czesław Knothe.[4] Kurzątkowski was a furniture designer and one of the creators of ŁAD. Knothe – similarly – he was also a true furniture designer and his works yet they were individual, they were suitable for small-scale serial production. However, when Sołtan appeared – and I was then young, I was some twenty-four years old – I was attracted by his different and novel approach. Especially because architecture did not seem interesting for me... I had been for a year at the Polytechnic, and architecture was so schematic, grey and standardised...

1 The extension of the Okęcie Airport in Warsaw took place in 1962-1969.
2 Tadeusz Zieliński (1914-1986), Polish architect, member of the faculty at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw 1950-1984.
3 Jan Kurzątkowski (1899-1975), Polish designer, since 1926 involved in ŁAD collective and a long-time member of the faculty at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw.
4 Czesław Knothe (1900-1985), Polish designer, since 1926 involved in ŁAD collective and member of the faculty at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw 1945-1970.

S.R.: Was it schematic at the Polytechnic or in general?

W.W.: At the Polytechnic, but above all, outside in general, because it had to be in that way. It was a poor, destroyed and panting country, with no economic or political continuity even within one imposed party.[5] You needed to guarantee a roof over people's heads. You could try to figure out something else, but there was no other option. Meanwhile, with Sołtan, it was some wonderful miracle: it was the novelty and promise of something better, of an opening towards the world...

S.R.: Therefore Sołtan did not have his own architecture atelier back then...

W.W.: No, not an architectural one, but the specialisation one. Earlier, before I started studying, he had been teaching construction for a while. In his specialisation atelier, he was always team teaching with Lech Tomaszewski, Andrzej Jan Wróblewski and Cezary Nawrot.

S.R.: How did you perceive their collaboration within that one atelier? Did the single teachers have different tasks? Was there a difference between them?

W.W.: I have only memories of how it looked from a student's perspective. I have an impression that Sołtan was giving the main general direction, whereas all the rest: tasks, both the main ones and the smaller ones, juries and marks... it all was decided by the team. Tomaszewski gave methodical thinking, his structural and generally construction-based ideas. Andrzej Wróblewski – with his experience as a sculptor – contact with visual problematics in its modern conception. Cezary Nawrot – engineer and automobile designer – contact with the basis of construction and main industrial production technologies.

S.R.: What was that innovation and novelty you mentioned in Sołtan's approach?

W.W.: He was interested in new things: it was an uncharted territory, difficult to define, especially in Polish social-political and economic reality. As far as pedagogy was concerned, one thing is stuck in my memory... and basically, we still follow this idea until today. It was an open system: one leader or professor was directing a small group of five to eight students, not more. They were working along with him, and it consisted in designing, open discussion, and reviews open to all... It was not anonymous marking, but a jury: he transposed pedagogic methods he saw in the West. At the Academy, it was a rarity. Such discussion openness and 'discutability' was a novelty, whereas the topics were less furniture-based – because the traditional furniture design was taught by Kurzątkowski and Knothe. With Sołtan, there was no metaphysic of wood, but you were talking about different materials – such as metal or plastic, about different ways of using, of production, and also in some ways about the users. Against what it might seem now, the users were important back then: some of the PPR[6] production since the 1970s was exported worldwide, meaning to the West. Probably it was sold quite cheaply, as the country needed exchangeable currencies. In order to export for instance radios, often even with no licence, as they were designed at the Workshops, they had to correspond to Western culture. Therefore, Sołtan's teaching meant opening – from one side it was open pedagogy, and from the other one, it was an opening to another type of thinking, a market-based one. Not to mention that we still had many examples to follow: we were not so cut off from the contacts with the West.

S.R.: Do you mean in general in Poland or only at the Academy?

W.W.: I mean generally. Perhaps not in a systematic way, but we had access to professional publications and magazines from the world. People were travelling – not as freely as today – but still, they were travelling and spreading information. Moreover, national electronics, automobile or other industries were participating in Western economics. One was going to fairs in Cologne, Frankfurt, Paris or Poznań. Those were direct contacts with concrete information. The teaching staff had to participate in them – and it was affecting us too...

S.R.: You mention different foreign visits – Sołtan for instance was often leaving to work on exposition pavilions designs at international fairs...

W.W.: Yes, they were designed at the Workshops. I remember that Sołtan, Tomaszewski and Hansen were working on them. They also made some wonderful models here, including both the terrain and the designs

5 While talking about the communist period, the word "party" refers always to PUWP, Polish United Workers' Party, and the governing party in the communist Poland in 1948-1989.
6 PPR (Polish People's Republic), official name of Poland under communist regime, used to designate Poland 1947-1989.

themselves – and some 1:1 scale elements. By the way, those models and drawings remained here for a long time. I have to say that I helped in salvaging one enormous colourful drawing from Brussels. I started to press for it to be taken to the museum...

S.R.: Was it one of Fangor's works?

W.W.: Yes, exactly. Their atelier was designing quite a lot of exhibitions, so naturally there was quite a lot of graphics and colour studies. As a young man, I had the possibility of either working on these, seeing or touching... No one was chasing you in the corridor, and when you entered an atelier, you could sit and look at people working. It was some kind of a second university, perhaps even more important than the actual one.

S.R.: Do you remember some designs – not the exhibition ones – that Sołtan was working on in the Workshops?

W.W.: I think that in half of the cases, people from the Workshops were maintained by those exhibitions, because the architectural commissions lasted for a very long time – such as 'Warszawianka', the department store in Olsztyn or Warsaw Midtown railway station. I remember for instance that when we were at the second year, we were called to finish the filling in of the mosaics,[7] so we went from *plein air* painting to the construction site... There was a call for fast mosaic completion, because the opening was coming, and they were not finished... We had rules about how to fill the colours in the slots, and we were doing it under some superior's supervision. Sometimes I pass through that station, which of course is no longer the same one, but it still has the same scale and proportions. Details have perished, as they were done a long time ago... After the authorities decided to build a beautiful railway station, then for twenty-five years, nobody touched anything. Then, the time of free-for-all complete freedom came, and the kiosks and sheds appeared at the station... such a dump-site rubbish...[8] I am not laughing at it, as I know that it had to happen... but against all of that, the station still persists. There was also another wonderful railway station in Katowice... and it became one big marketplace.[9] It was extraordinary how that architectural brutalism was managing to cope with an entirely different kind of everyday brutalism...

S.R.: What kind of topics do you remember from Sołtan's atelier at the Academy?

W.W.: When talking about pure design, there were some objects, such as projects of cutlery with commercial packaging, low-bore engine car based on some existing mechanics or a mountain rescue service cabin. We always had to make models of those designs. During the semester, we had some bigger assignments, but there were many smaller exercises done as part of the course. It was not a stark 'design a TV set or something else'. I remember one slogan that I recall until today while working with students: "time is part of the design".

S.R.: So you had some smaller designs, for which you had say two or three weeks.

W.W.: Yes.

S.R.: You mentioned before about substitution for Sołtan: how did it work?

W.W.: He was substituted by Stanisław Kucharski. Whereas Sołtan was an architect, who wandered into the design area, Kucharski was a classical interior and furniture designer and a visual artist: he had artistic education. He was accepting different commissions, and that was transposed onto pedagogy. For instance, one example may be an enormous design, in which I participated as a student: humanisation of Ursus next to Warsaw. It was a huge factory producing tractors and – let us not hide it – tanks. It consisted in work organisation, visual information, colours, lighting... It was done by several groups in different thematic areas, with student participation and it was led by Kucharski. Afterwards, you can find Kucharski's name together with Ihnatowicz and Wittek in many interior architecture and applied art exhibitions.

S.R.: However, it does not occur to me that he was collaborating in the Workshops on some designs with Sołtan...

W.W.: As far as I know, he was participating in the design of mosaics for the Warsaw Midtown railway station. However, the work at Ursus for instance was done by huge groups from the Workshops after Sołtan's departure.

S.R.: Concerning Sołtan himself and his teaching, do you remember something specific in his work with students and his approach to them?

W.W.: Basically, we still work in small groups... As it was with Sołtan, it is based on open individual conversations. Moreover, as the subject obliged us to be more open-minded, we did not have classical assignments, such as for instance a classical design of a wooden armchair with traditional carpentry joints. Much more weight was given to general thinking, to method – much more than to artisanship or technical abilities. Technical issues in the field of mechanics was taught then by engineer Cezary Nawrot. With Sołtan, there was openness and freedom of discussion: for sure, there was no professorial pride... for sure, there was none. What remained with me is giving importance to the clarity of thinking, to the design method – more than to the artistic freedom. Sołtan himself was not for sure a decorationist in architecture – and there was even no such idea in industrial design. Here, the dominating ideas were coming from such schools as Bauhaus or Ulm. It was also a result of severe economic and technological limitations. There was no mention of excessive decorations, even though now such things do happen.

S.R.: Was there something particularly important in students' work under Sołtan?

W.W.: Classically – gathering information, research, comparison, observation, presenting different ideas and discussions...

S.R.: When Sołtan was discussing the designs, it was often not a problem about, say, how to design a chair, but why to design that chair, and why not to use something already existing...[10]

W.W.: Exactly, that was included in the discussions.

S.R.: If Sołtan's teaching was concentrated on design and interiors, was he mentioning Le Corbusier or CIAM?

W.W.: Such information was present between the lines. Firstly, we knew that. Then, it was lectured during history of art and history of architecture classes... History of architecture was taught then by Przemysław Szafer,[11] who for many years was also the editor-in-chief of *Architektura*. I remember him, as he had long and interesting lectures on the history of architecture: it was giving some general information. Even though there was not much Polish literature in the matter in the 1960s, there was actually a funny and interesting thing... there were Russian publications. The Russians, in spite of the fact that they officially cut all the connections with the West, they were publishing much of such kind of literature on international modernism. It was available here for reasonable money in some Russian bookshops. We did not produce such publications, probably because of financial issues.

S.R.: Was Sołtan himself mentioning something on those matters though?

W.W.: In conversations – yes, but there were no regular lectures for sure. It was simply... present.

S.R.: Were there some mentions about Team 10 for instance?

W.W.: No. However, Sołtan was inviting many people. For instance, Jacques Famery[12] visited us once or twice at industrial design. Because of different people who came here thanks to Sołtan, it was also some kind of information transfer. Moreover, Sołtan had *Modulor* text and through the Academy and through some students' efforts, it was translated. They were not *ex-cathedra* contacts, but they were based on normal conversations, such as showing new tendencies, making us curious, etc.

S.R.: Was it possible to see a difference at the Academy when Sołtan stopped coming back?

W.W.: In this matter, I do not think so, because – it may seem too rational – all the architects remained. Ihnatowicz remained for many years both in the Workshops and in pedagogy. They were, too, followers of the Corbusian and functionalist doctrine.

S.R.: I have an impression that there is much more talking about Hansen or other architects, whereas there is not much about Sołtan. In the publications, there is not much about his buildings... May it be somehow linked to the fact that he left?

7 Wojciech Wybieralski means Fangor's mosaics for the Warsaw Midtown railway station.
8 Interview with Bogusław Smyrski.
9 The Katowice railway station designed by Wacław Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki was opened in 1972. Due to lack of maintenance, it was partially demolished in 2010-2011 during modernisation works planned before the UEFA Euro 2012 organised in Poland and Ukraine.
10 Wojciech Włodarczyk, 'The social history of object (design)', in *Ineffable Space*, p. 36.
11 Przemysław Szafer (1920-2017) was a Polish architect and professor at the Fine Arts Academy, as well as author of *Polska architektura współczesna* (Warsaw: Interpress 1977).
12 Jacques Famery-Sage, French architect. He was teaching at University Paris 1 – La Sorbonne and at architecture schools in Strasbourg and Paris La Villette.

W.W.: When one disappears and the works are bleared or ploughed under, it simply happens... There may have been in the world of architecture some kind of envy, but he was not stigmatised nor people talked badly about him...

S.R.: You say that Sołtan was not stigmatised. Does it mean that there was no political hostility towards him, given that he left and went to the West, to America?

W.W.: No, I do not think so. He was travelling and thanks to his travelling and transfer, there were some benefits for the Academy too. Even though Academy was a national institution and it was somehow under political control and surveillance, and it had its own party organisation, at the Faculty of Interior Design amongst the faculty staff there were maybe five party members, when there were around thirty teachers in total. Those who were more politically involved at the Academy, they were mostly from the Faculty of Sculpture, but I think that it was linked to commercial reasons too, as they had big commissions. However, they still acted as if they did not belong to the party. For instance, Arnold Juniter was an excellent administrative manager of the Workshops.[13] He was Jewish from Lithuania and he was an air force colonel until 1968. As a young boy, he was conscripted to Soviet army and through the entire war, he was part of Soviet aviation, and afterwards, he was in the Polish one. Until 1968, until the time of anti-Jewish persecutions, he was a very important person in Polish army. Afterwards, when he was downgraded, he ended up here as administrative manager. He had to be a highly positioned party member... but the Academy, it was a different and strange world, and up to a certain point – as much as it was possible – a different territory. By the way, Nita, dean at the time, was a traditional communist and there were no issues either. Everything was game and convention.

S.R.: So, it seemed one thing officially, but...

W.W.: I suspect that Nita was also helping and shielding if he saw that something or someone was needed and beneficial for the Academy. He saw people's value. Eventually, he let me go to the United States...

S.R.: Was Sołtan somehow involved in this?

W.W.: Not directly, but when I went to the States for the Fulbright Scholarship, I met up with him in Boston.

S.R.: While talking about the Academy as a whole, do you remember anything else related to social realism?

W.W.: No, there was no such thing here at all. However, it seems to me that within the Academy, there had to be a new faculty created, the Faculty of Architecture instead of the Faculty of Interior Design. Because of that, some of the teaching staff from the Polytechnic was sent here. For instance, the entire atelier with Romuald Gutt, Zieliński, and Michał Gutt, or other two architects – Jerzy Brejowski and Wiktor Gessler. It did not change much though: at the Academy, we were hardly defined, and it was giving us some freedom. It seems to me that architecture was treated then as an element of the government's control over the land. Architecture and urbanism were political and official professions. Here at the Academy on the other hand, there were only traces of such social realism... I did not experience that.

S.R.: Was the climate at the Academy different from other schools?

W.W.: I was attending the Polytechnic for a year as an unenrolled student and it is difficult for me to say anything about it – you would have to look at the designs that were made there. Here, there was a relatively small group of people from – let us say – the intelligentsia class. There was some natural selection, concerning both students and the staff. For instance, at the Faculty of Industrial Design – but I think that at Interior Design too – there was no official party organisation.[14] Since certain administrative procedures had to be done in presence of someone from such a unit, the dean was sending someone *pro forma*, but such people were considering it with a grain of salt, and they were simply leaving... It was all a very specific act. Of course, if there was a situation in which they wanted to harm someone quickly, there were ways to do that.

S.R.: Talking in general about Polish architecture... I have an impression that in Polish publications from the 1960s and 1970s, the ideas were late, especially when compared to Western Europe. At the same time when in Europe proposals of Team 10 were well defined, in Poland the Athens Charter was presented as the epitome of architectural thinking. What is your opinion on that?

13 Interestingly, there are some completely different opinions concerning the late years of the Workshops and the staff. Adolf Szczepiński in an undated letter to Sołtan from the late 1980s wrote, "wrong people at high positions in the Academy and in the Workshops caused that any collective of mentally disabled has better design results than the Workshops. That damned Kaliszek and that stupid Polish Jew Juniter are a couple of idiots who buried both the Academy and the Workshops", see: MASP-JS. Translation from Polish (SR).

14 Wybieralski means here there was no Podstawowa Organizacja Partyjna (POP), a basic organisation unit of the governing party, PUWP.

W.W.: There was for sure such a period. I feel safe until today while working with functional and rational basis. Today it is overcome for many reasons, and it is not considered. Moreover, the Athens Charter was actually realised in Poland and in the communist countries – you have only to go for a walk in some bigger modern neighbourhoods to see that. Politically, in some strange way, the Charter was overlapping with a pseudo-socialist vision of a country.

S.R.: Have you worked in the Workshops on architecture?

W.W.: Yes, as a student I dabbled in some Workshops work: for instance, when you had to design something according to the professor's drawings, mainly Zieliński's. Afterwards, for quite a long time, for some fifteen or twenty years, I was in the industrial design atelier, which was very actively collaborating with Polish industry. (...) We were making magnifiers, slide projectors or other equipment for Polskie Zakłady Optyczne... It was by the way one of the last situations when the Workshops were working – as it was reducing its activity over the years... Another part of the Workshops I collaborated with – it was overlapping a little – it was work with Polish automobile industry.

S.R.: Why were the Workshops closed? Was it impossible for the Workshops to continue working?

W.W.: It is my opinion, but it seems to me that given its connection to the Academy, the Workshops were a kind of big design atelier gathering many specialists and offering a certain guarantee in the area of architecture, exhibition and industrial design. Moreover, there was no market rivalry, and there were not many of such institutions. Here we had a well-organised team working basically as a big architectural practice somewhere worldwide... It was important for the prices to align with the national price lists, and then, the investors were not worried... If it was ok, they simply paid, that was all. However, when the economy model changed, such a way of thinking and managing designs ended dramatically. I suspect that the Workshops should have been transformed into a commercial institution to take part in tenders. Moreover, in many cases, the leaders – when it was possible and easier – opened their own practices and they started to work individually.

S.R.: Towards the end?

W.W.: Yes, such a process started in the mid-1980s. The political and economic conditions simply changed...

S.R.: So the team started to dismember. You mentioned that the very team had a huge role in the Workshops' success. How was it created?

W.W.: In the architectural ateliers, they were choosing collaborators, and some of them were students. For instance, Viola Damięcka was working there with Sołtan as a student. Those were not very big needs: if someone was more interested, they could simply come in and work.

S.R.: It was not an obligation then.

W.W.: No, it meant working on the basis of professional selection, simple trust, and free attraction between people. In the design atelier in the Workshops, it was working in a similar way.

S.R.: How would you evaluate your experience at the Academy and at the Workshops?

W.W.: Basically, these experiences formed me. Even though some things were not officially commissioned through the Workshops, they were done here anyway. There were for instance some limitations, according to which an Academy faculty member could not earn in the Academy more than a given amount of money, but on the other hand, the commissions could not cost less... So some of them were passed through another institution that was controlling the visual arts market – Zakłady Artystyczne Polskich Artystów Plastyków ART. The commission was accepted there in financial, economic and administrative terms, but the actual work was done here at the Workshops. Here, we had the capacity, we had teams, and we had people... Within this, I was actually formed by the Academy, and within it, by the faculty and the Workshops.

S.R.: What about your experience of studying under Sołtan?

W.W.: There was a spirit here, such as in the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel... By the way, before I leave, I have to magnify Sołtan's photograph and hang it in a room where the deans' portraits are. Even though he was never a dean, he has a very important place here.

Harvard Graduate School of Design - United States

Anthony Ames

October 5rth, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II studio (1977-1978). FAIA architect working in Atlanta, Georgia.

S.R.: What was your contact with Jerzy Sołtan?

A.A.: As you know, Jerzy Sołtan taught a studio that I participated in at the GSD. It became almost a kind of tradition to have an M. Arch. studio under Jerzy... part of being there was to have been exposed to him. I might have been there for one of the last semesters he taught there. I graduated in 1978 and Jerzy retired in 1979 so that might have been his last dance.

S.R.: How do you recall his teaching?

A.A.: I was fortunate to have had exposure to a caring, thoughtful and wise educator. I believe he sincerely loved his students and loved teaching. We never particularly connected although I had enormous respect for him. Jerzy was a kind man and we all liked him. He particularly spent time with the students that he felt could learn the most from his particular architectural guidance and with those he thought needed his help. I was not that close: I had only crits with him during the studio... In general, he was good with the students. He joked around in his own way and he was passionate about design: but it was not a way to design, it was just an attitude about being passionate. I remember a profound moment when Jerzy interrupted a lecture at a conference, it was a symposium called 'Beyond the Modern Movement'.[1] Jerzy got up from his seat, hopped to the stage and without skipping a beat said that he smelled 'something fishy'. He was dead-on. It was his reaction to postmodernism: he opposed it obviously. He explained then what he thought about architecture and made a passionate plea for rational thought and sensible architecture, which this symposium needed... It needed someone with passion and pedigree to speak up. He was really passionate about that, and I admired him for that. Everyone loved him that day. To get up there, it was great of him: he was obviously in a later stage of his life and career, and yet he still seemed passionate about architecture. It was not just a game or a fashion for him.

S.R.: Do you remember something from his approach?

A.A.: Jerzy had a significant presence at the GSD and was highly respected in regard to his association with Corbusier. He spoke of Le Corbusier and his methods. He became teary eyed when speaking of his passing. It is difficult to ascertain what I learned for Jerzy. I do not remember his talking of the Modulor but I know that is what he did with Le Corbusier – talked about the Modulor. My work is certainly modular – if nothing else.

S.R.: Some of your works seem to be influenced by Le Corbusier's architecture. Is it somehow connected or influenced by Sołtan?

A.A.: My interest in Le Corbusier came around that time, but it was more actually from the contact with people at Cornell. Jerzy I think worked mostly on the Modulor when he worked at Le Corbusier's practice. The Modulor is definitely an influence: all my buildings are modular, they follow a grid, but they are not modular in the terms of a modular man or something similar. The grid is actually more important to me than the Modulor.

S.R.: Did he have an impact on you or your work?

A.A.: In terms of his philosophy of architecture, of his teaching, I am not sure whether he had that much an effect on me. For example, he encouraged us to work with plastiline and with clay, with charcoal, with chalk – to get our hands dirty. I never touched them. I was always more interested in pristine, sharp lines.

1 Conference sponsored by *The Harvard Architectural Review* in November 1977.

Shamay Assif

April 22nd, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' (1976-1977), and member of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa since 2010. Architect and urban planner, he was the city engineer of Tel Aviv Yafo (1984-1994) and he worked on the conservation of the White City of Tel Aviv (1989-1994). Founding partner in Shamay Assif Naama Malis Architecture and Urban Design (1994-2004), Head of the National Planning Administration (2004-2010). Head of the Technion's Urban and Regional Research Center and partner in Gutman Assif Architects (2011-)

S.R.: Please let me ask you at the beginning about the first time you met Jerzy Sołtan...

S.A: It was in 1975, when taking his course.

S.R.: Do you mean the one that you have written paper for, the seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture'?[1]

S.A.: Yes.

S.R.: Why did you decide to take it, had you already known Sołtan's name before?

S.A.: Not much, but the subject was very interesting to me.

S.R.: What was interesting for you?

S.A.: Considering my basic architectural education one decade earlier, I was raised, in a way, into the modernist movement, its atmosphere and concepts. This is the way we were educated at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion. Let me give you an example: when I started my architecture studies at the Technion in 1963, the concept was that you do not need to study the history of architecture. It was not considered important, and even harmful to your architectural education. Three years later, this concept changed and they introduced history of architecture courses, actually rather intensive history courses...

S.R.: Still at the Technion?

S.A.: At the Technion, yes. There was a big debate between the professors, and at the end, the decision was that the history of architecture is extremely important. History of architecture was then introduced into the curriculum – both classic and contemporary, which followed modernist architecture the way we perceive it now: Bauhaus, Le Corbusier... as for example *When the Cathedrals were White*. Of course, the initial reason why history was not taught, was because you didn't need history, you just did your studios, you learnt about what's up at that time: "form follows function" and not history...this is how good architecture would emerge. Then of course, things changed: we did understand the links between past, present, and future. Just to mention the fact that during the two first years, we studied in one of the first early modernist building that were built on the site of the new Technion City outside Haifa.

S.R.: The one on the hill?

S.A.: Yes. designed by an architect Yohanan Ratner[2] who was at that time the head of the Faculty of Architecture. Later on, while the Technion moved gradually from the old, urban campus, in the heart of Haifa, the Faculty of architecture moved back to xAlexander Baervald's[3] historic Technion building in the old campus. It was built more than hundred years ago, when the Technion was established. This extremely beautiful, rather monumental sandstone building, probably the best example of early Israeli architecture, is where I have spent three formative years of my studies. This, I assume, contributed to my own understanding of what architecture is all about... Later, a decade later, coming to Harvard, I lived with my family in the Cambridge Peabody Terrace complex

1 Shamay Assif wrote a paper for Jerzy Soltan's seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' entitled 'Thoughts on Permanence and Change' in May 1976, see: HGSD-JS, AA009.
2 Yohanan Ratner (1891-1965), Israeli architect and head of the school of architecture at the Technion in Haifa in 1930-1963.
3 Alexander Baervald (1877-1930), German Jewish architect, who worked since 1912 in Haifa. In 1925-1929, he was the head of the faculty of architecture. He designed the original Technion building, today occupied by the Israeli National Museum of Science.

by Sert... and of course, for me, coming to Harvard, it was almost going back to the place where the roots were: Gropius, Sert. Earlier, right after my graduation from the Technion, in 1968-1969, I worked in Chicago. It was a huge office, A. Epstein and Sons,[4] and it had multiple commissions to design industrial plants and parks: one of those huge open space halls with architects, engineers, and different professionals working together. At a certain point, we were working on an industrial park somewhere outside Chicago. The chief of design of the firm came to me, with a pile of books on Mies van der Rohe, telling me "our client wishes to have his main three-storey-office building within the plant site as a Mies-type building". That was his wish, and I was coming from the Technion, loaded with ideals of sincerity and self-expression in architecture ... I asked, "what do you mean by a Mies-type building?" and ironically, across the street from our office, there was the office of Mies, still alive and practicing. I told my chief of design, "if he needs a Mies-type building, send him across the street". He smiled and said, "well, it would cost him double or triple the fee. We are committed to the whole project, and that is our client's wish, so your job is to design a Mies-type building". Fortunately enough, one of my seminar works in history of architecture at the Technion was about Mies van der Rohe, so I was familiar with all those books. So I designed my own "Mies type building"... Another office project I was involved in was a modern high-rise thirty-storey building, at the corner of Jackson and Wells in Downtown Chicago. I was assigned to work on the details of the lobby. There were actually two teams, same size, one was working on the whole building, while the other was working on the lobby itself, just to give you the sense of how important it was, as opposed to any other space in the building. The client asked to clad the interiors with the extremely *nouveaux riches* onyx marble, a very expensive and semi-transparent material... I hated it. This is just an episode to put you into the perspective of how seven years later, after having practiced in several other offices, with modernist architects, I came to Harvard and took Sołtan's seminar...

S.R.: How do you remember the general architectural climate?

S.A.: First, the degree I took at the Harvard GSD was in urban design, so our preoccupation with architecture styles and expressions were less present, for me at least. I cannot really tell what was at the core of the Department of Architecture at that time. The 1970s were very different from the 1960s and the pre-war period. Things were changing. We had a very interesting course about the history of American urbanism, and I remember that *Learning from Las Vegas* was very present there: it was something that I got from Harvard. This was the obvious shift from modernist architecture to postmodernist architecture, and this is where I was exposed to that shift.

S.R.: Postmodernism at Harvard?

S.A.: For me, it was a real change, although I never identified with the architectural interpretations of postmodernism. In this respect, I was always arguing, and I continue to argue today, that I am still a modernist architect.

S.R.: Actually so was Sołtan until the end of his life...

S.A.: Well, I have been arguing until today that I am a modernist architect, you may perhaps refer it to Harvard, and we might say that this seminar and Sołtan contributed to it. Later on, after I have done much work and after I have taken public positions, there were arguments that I am far from being a modernist. Two books are now written about the postmodernist time in Tel Aviv, and they argue that I was one of the main contributors to postmodernist Tel Aviv. Things change, and it depends on how you look at them. If you look at them from the social and cultural point of view, then I am perhaps very much a postmodernist. But the postmodernist interpretation in architecture stayed very much away from my work. You know, Philip Johnson was for me 'a big joke', and even if some claim that big jokes are within the essence of postmodernist architecture, I don't buy it as a real value. I hate much of the postmodernist architecture that was done around the world at that time... there are of course excellent examples, such as Stirling, who I really think did excellent designs, and humour should be a part of good design. Still, as a whole, I do not identify with this kind of architecture.

S.R.: Was it something that you were able to see also in Sołtan's commentary to architecture during the seminar? He was really loathing postmodernism, and just to quote how he described postmodernism, he called it "a parasite of modernism", "a birth contraction of modernism", "a shiver pre-announcing death of culture", "a dead-end", "a caricature". For Sołtan, postmodernism was perverse, absurd, nihilist, and mocking. These come all from his lectures and texts on modernism and postmodernism.[5] Was such an attitude visible in his teaching and at Harvard in general?

4 A. Epstein and Sons, founded in 1921, is a design firm originally from Chicago, developed into a present-day international design corporation.

5 Chapter 3.

S.A.: I do not recall within the module of the seminar much hostility against things. There was an attempt to teach us modernism, to teach us what modernism was all about, and I guess the name of the course was very clear in that – that is what I remember. I can mention another episode, when Sołtan was criticising our urban design studio final presentation. Sołtan attended the presentation as a visiting critique. In his turn, he stood up and said one word: "Tchaikovsky" and set down. At that time and within this context, this was a very clear statement of an extremely negative criticism, I never agreed with this criticism.[6] Not surprisingly also Tchaikovsky as a composer became much appreciated... In retrospect, the way I see and practice urban design is more postmodernist than modernist, or perhaps some kind of a mixture of the two. The notion of permanence and change, along with extensive preoccupation with preservation throughout the years, is perhaps very much what characterises my whole work. My main interest is in the conflict and synergy between things. In this case, between old and new, tradition and innovation. How to introduce new into the old, and how to merge them to one piece, no matter in which scale. Continuity and change, preserving the old and introducing the new. I would always prefer to see how old and new are juxtaposed: distinct from one another and yet well integrated to create a new, very present expression. Not a replica or a distant echo. Sołtan was talking about ways to extract from historic buildings certain attributes or parameters that could inspire any contemporary design. This is something that may go back to his seminar. It was about classic architecture and proportions, about the golden section, and about the tension between the vertical and the horizontal. These things stem from the Corbusian philosophy, which – if I look back to that time – history is the essence of culture. But culture, and certainly architecture, means being aware of the presence of history and making very relevant and creative choices of what to take from history – which is perhaps what we are doing all the time...

S.R.: Like not everything is heritage...

S.A.: Heritage is always a matter of choice. Distilling historical architecture, deciding what to take from there and how to use it as a new aesthetics, how to use it within the actual social, economic and environmental contexts – these are perhaps things that I took from Harvard. And I guess Sołtan's course had much to do with it. It is of course a matter of choice to take the architecture of ships, and use it in buildings, arguing that this is the new aesthetics- with circular windows, etc. in a way, is no less eclectic or no less postmodernist than introducing, for example Ionic or Doric capitals in your design. Of course, it is debatable, and if I had this conversation with Sołtan, it would have sounded different...

S.R.: Why would it be different?

S.A.: Sołtan would argue, perhaps, that ships are beautiful because they express efficiency and tight constraints and do not carry the heavy burden of decadent cultural expressions... However, this is not necessarily true in ships, and certainly debatable in buildings that sit there within a very different context.

S.R.: Since you mentioned permanence and change, which was the title of your essay, do you remember any discussions with Sołtan on that topic, or how it was relating to his module at Harvard?

S.A.: Not really. I have a general feeling or remembering that he very much liked my presentation...

S.R.: Well, this may be in fact the case, as there are only a handful of students' essays left in his personal archive, and yours is one of them.

S.A.: These topics were very much present in the course: it was not something that came up from nowhere. These ideas were already present in CIAM and in Team 10, which Sołtan was in a way part of. Team 10 were talking about these things, this was already in the 1960s. The seeds were sown earlier. This was already present in the late 1960s at the Technion. Few of my studio projects were dealing extensively with the same topic of permanence and change, more than seven years earlier. Of course, many of the things that I was doing later in Tel Aviv, in the 1980s, were influenced by my studies at Harvard. For example, preservation as a lever for development was very much introduced in another urban design studio at Harvard. Through this studio, we were actually involved in redeveloping the city of Lowell in northern Massachusetts by preserving and adapting its unique heritage.

S.R.: Who was the studio tutor for this design?

S.A.: It was an urban designer and architect by the name of Jonathan Lane. He was commissioned to do this

6 The word "Tchaikovsky" as Sołtan's criticism refers to his own recollection of work in Le Corbusier's practice in the 1940s. Le Corbusier was using this name to describe an unnecessarily flowery and complicated design, as Sołtan referred to it in M. Arch. II Conversatorium in fall 1976 and in 'Grassroots of the Contemporary Movement' seminar in spring 1977, see: HGSD-JS, AA020.

project by the city and he offered this studio at the GSD involving students to broaden the scope and get more ideas. The studio team had his final presentation to the city council of Lowell. This was a big thing, and I remember myself carrying three heavy slide projectors, Kodak Carousels. This was what architects used for presentations before PowerPoint was invented... just to give you the taste of that time at Harvard. The city council actually adopted the design proposal... Amazingly enough, the project was eventually realised and when around, you should visit Lowell.

S.R.: Do you recall anything specific from Sołtan's module? Anything that struck you particularly?

S.A.: There was an exercise. We were asked to do something – I do not remember precisely what – with the golden section. I came into this exercise with the idea that the golden section is some kind of a rule of thumb to how to ensure 'good' proportions and draw beautiful facades. A magic rule of how to do good architecture: if you apply the golden rectangle in your work, you come up with good architecture... meaning it looks well, it comforts you, it is aesthetic, and people would like it... Some were talking about it as something universal, even divine – more than universal. I was a little cynical about it, it was not something that comes from within, but I think that Sołtan managed to bring up this very subtle relationship between the poetic and, in a way, even the romantic (that is something Sołtan would perhaps hate to admit). Almost touching the divine beauty, that comes right off the shelf of simple geometry... It was very intriguing for me, trying to find out where I stand within this attempt to rely on geometry, looking at the ways we construct things in our minds and in reality. It became a little clearer through this course with Sołtan. I am not sure, but I think it was there. Through doing this exercise, I could then understand many things about the ways rules are discovered, implemented, and interpreted within multiple contexts. How we combine rules, and choose the ones that come from within. How to relate them to the site, to its social, environmental, cultural, and physical contexts. Going back to these basic rules, help us develop the vocabularies we use. It does not mean that they automatically produce aesthetic values, but they are part of a complex dialogue between multiple rules and sensitivities that eventually make good architecture.

S.R.: Was the main focus then on Le Corbusier's composition like regulating lines, harmonic diagrams, the Modulor, golden section, etc.? Or was it only a part of the program?

S.A.: I am not sure if I remember. It certainly was there...

S.R.: Do you remember anything else being related to during this module?

S.A.: Unfortunately not, and it is hard for me to distinguish between the course and my own readings of Le Corbusier, relating to his work and writings in various moments of my life. I was going back to Le Corbusier very often in my career, and I am not sure to which extent it was related directly to the course.

S.R.: When I was looking at the reading list from your module – it may be another question, which is too specific – I was struck by the fact that there were some poetry books. Do you remember why they were there in the reading list?

S.A.: Well, the simple answer is that I do not remember. The more complex answer is that I can see a perfect connection between poetry and architecture. It is not obvious, but it is there. And in a way, if you take poetry and if you understand to what extent it can, as opposed to prose, incorporate complex ideas in a very simple structure, just by a set of relationships between words, or the sound of them – this is for me architecture. This is perhaps something that was there, in the modernist movement, and what Sołtan was talking about. Actually, in many of my own lectures I quote poetry...

S.R.: As Sołtan did: he was often quoting for example Guillaume Apollinaire.[7]

S.A.: It helps to see how in ten words you can tell so many things, and how the relations between the words are what gives them shape: rhythm, contradiction, and memories they bring. It is something, which is very much close to my way of thinking, as I am fond of literature and poetry, especially poetry. I do not know whether Sołtan is responsible for that, but I was doing some poetry translation and writing.

S.R.: You mentioned that Sołtan's module was about defining modernism. Do you remember what that definition was?

7 Sołtan mentions Apollinaire since the 1940s until the 1990s in various articles and lectures, for example: lecture 'The Eternal Seesaw' at Harvard in April 1965, see: HGSD-JLS, SA503; lecture at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw in 1995, lecture in Montreal in September 1990, lecture at the Académie d'Architecture in June 1984, article 'Wycieczka w dżunglę architektury współczesnej' from 1984-1985, and lecture 'Impresje Paryskie' at the National Museum in Warsaw in March 1948, see: MASP-JS.

S.A.: I really have difficulties in distinguishing between what I think about modernism and what Sołtan could have brought up, or taught me...

S.R.: A very delicate question then: would you say there that there might be some overlapping between how Sołtan was seeing architecture and how you see or have been seeing it?

S.A.: Well, it would be trying hard, in a very elegant way, to push towards seeing these relationships, these overlaps. My general feeling is, when looking at the bibliography of Sołtan's module, and looking at what I have been doing for many years, that it makes sense that something may have been there. Perhaps the mere fact that I chose the course could serve as a lead. As I mentioned, I was very much modernist movement-oriented throughout my architectural upbringing and practice. Still, there are links that can be traced, some threads...

S.R.: Of course, I am trying to push you and say to me "stop, it's too much", and such a comment is very valuable. Relating to that module, you have mentioned the exercise on the golden ratio: do you remember any other ones?

S.A.: No, this is the only thing.

S.R.: And did you have any contact with Sołtan after the course?

S.A.: No, the only one I can remember was this critique, and it was, I guess after the course: I was already familiar with Sołtan. He was a very impressive person: tall, with a very impressive presence, with a roaring voice, he was very present...

S.R.: Those students who had him as a design tutor – at least those whom I talked to – they were really appreciating his teaching. From your brief experience, do you remember how his teaching was, whether there was something different in his teaching method from other professors?

S.A.: I would not remember. What I do remember though, is his special personality, which was really impressive. He was like an actor coming into class.

S.R.: Did he show you anything of his own designs during the module?

S.A.: I do not remember, and to say the truth, I have never been exposed to any of his works: not before and not after.

S.R.: Let us finish with a broader reflection. Do you think that any issues expressed by Sołtan in the module, relating closely to modern architecture ideals, do you think that they may be still of use today? Would modern architecture ideals be still of use?

S.A.: Absolutely. Modern movement architecture was looking at light, climate, openness and ways to express technology in architecture. Looking at the present-day technologies and way of thinking, and expressing it in architecture, it means modernism for me – and this tradition relates to these people and these times. It seems that we somehow lost the ability to look at climatic issues, even though it is critical in our ability to cope with global warming. We also lost some ability to extract poetics and aesthetics from very specific and intricate relations between various parameters that inspire or constrain our designs. These were somehow present in modern movement thinking and architecture. Another very important and strong lesson that we learned from modernists is that you have to be extremely critical about whatever you do; that you have to dig deep into the roots of what you do; that you have to understand that there are always dialectics and tensions. It is not looking for some perfect and static harmony: tensions and changing relations matter. For me, all this stems from the modernist movement. It was perhaps embedded in the seminar itself, and in Sołtan as a teacher and as an architect...

S.R.: Can such modern ideas be declared heritage? Can Sołtan's teaching and his own ideas be considered as heritage?

S.A.: I have met Sołtan only for a very limited time, and I could not comment on that. However, I would mention something else, even if not directly related, it might serve as a partial answer... This is the story of the 'White City' of Tel Aviv,[8] an attempt to preserve the unique fabric and architecture of about 4,000 buildings

8 One of the initial events introducing the project was the 1984 exhibition 'White City: International Style Architecture in Israel, a Portrait of an Era' curated by the American writer and critic Michael Levin. The planning and conservation process included among others Nitza Metzger-Szmuk, an Israeli architect awarded with the Emet Prize, the Israeli annual prize for architecture, for her contribution to the conservation of modern architecture in Tel Aviv.

in the central part of Tel Aviv, laid out by Patrick Geddes in the 1920s, and built during the 1930s and 1940s. Construction took place rather quickly to accommodate the wave of immigrants who fled Europe. A very high percentage of the buildings were built in what was later referred to as the International Style and the Bauhaus tradition. Some of the buildings were built in a very Corbusian spirit. This fabric turned out to be one of the best collections of this architecture and although not yet appreciated by the general public, we set out to preserve it. As the city engineer of the City of Tel Aviv Yafo (1984-1994), and with my professional and academic background, I saw there the great potential and eventually, with a few others, made it happen. The White City of Tel Aviv was later declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.[9] The preservation effort became very complex. Most of these buildings were privately owned and were already zoned to be demolished or extended, and we had to come up with innovative tools and procedures to cope with the challenge. The point that I made at that time was that preserving modernism is a kind of an oxymoron: in the modernist way of thinking, buildings are there for a limited time, like Corbusier's *When the Cathedrals Were White*. Modern buildings were not built to be preserved... According to this dialectics, preserving modernist buildings means assuming value and permanence to something that was meant to be temporary and replaced by the next contemporary architecture. This tension between the original intent and the dynamics of time is for me no less modernist than the intent itself. Was it Sołtan who made me better understand it? Perhaps.

9 Chapter 1.

Edward Baum

April 12th, 2019, in New York City, NY

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's design studio (1961–1962), and member of the Harvard faculty (1968–1977, 1983). He collaborated with Sołtan on the Museum of Art in Berlin (1965) and he was member of Josep Lluís Sert's practice (1965–1968), and later opened private practice (1968–). He was member of the faculty at the School of Architecture at the University of Texas Arlington (1987–2013) and its dean (1987–1999).

S.R.: Do you remember the first time when you met Jerzy Sołtan?

E.B.: I met him as a sophomore at Harvard College... that would be in 1958-1959.

S.R.: Was it still when he was going back and forth between Poland and the US?

E.B.: Yes, he was a visiting critic at that time at Harvard, teaching at the Master Class. As their task, he assigned to them a portable pavilion for one of the United States international fairs... it was an American pavilion. It was to be made out of components and thus easily transported by air. Thus, it was to be in steel or other kinds of metal... Actually, it was the time of such trade expositions. The most famous was in Moscow at that time, where countries would put up temporary pavilions and show their products. It was part of propaganda for each country to see who will be able to make the most impressive display... I think that actually, the most famous American one was that in Moscow: it was a Buckminster Fuller dome,[1] which I think Sołtan probably took the programme from – i.e. it was reusable, collapsible you could take it apart and put back together again, like Buckminster Fuller domes... He assigned this to the Master Class and then, he had the idea of taking undergraduates, sophomores at the time, to help the Master's students with the designs.

S.R.: And there were no undergraduate courses in Architecture at Harvard, right?

E.B.: There still is none. Architecture is a graduate subject at four universities: Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Penn. What you could do, you could take prerequisite courses, as I did – they were studio courses in basic design, whatever that is... Then, there was an introduction to modern architecture courses, history courses, and physics beyond what you learned in high school. It was in one of those basic design courses that Jerzy got students to help the Master's. His idea was to put together students from different levels, so each of us was assigned to a Master student as a kind of... I will not say slave, but definitely a very junior employee... [laughs] However, in many cases we were like, "why are you doing this? Why won't you do it this way?" –somehow questioning some of their ideas. Actually, Master students at Harvard once were coming from every other school but Harvard. They came for one year – now it is a year and a half – but then for one year. In most cases, they came from five-year undergraduate architecture courses, which were then the dominant ones. They started architecture right after high school, they had five years of course and then they got Bachelor's. However, they really had less general education than we did, as the sophomores in college. They had technical education, but not much upside. That was when I met him for the first time: he was in charge of Master's and he would come to talk to us too. Then, I had not seen him until I went to graduate school. He was then a teacher in the second year, which would be in 1961-1962. He taught, I think, the first semester – he and professor Gourley,[2] and professor Bruck.[3]

S.R.: Were they parallel studios?

E.B.: No, they were team teaching, three professors leading a larger class. They were theoretically co-equal, but Sołtan was senior and much more respected than the other two.

S.R.: Would it be also the case of inviting Sołtan? He knew him from CIAM.

E.B.: Well, he knew him, but he also made his partners from the office faculty members. One of them was very

1 Buckminster Fuller Pavilion for the American National Exhibition held in summer of 1959 in Moscow.
2 Ronald Robert Gourley (1919-), British American architect, member of the faculty at Harvard GSD (1953-1970), and partner and co-founder at Sert, Jackson & Gourley (1958-1963).
3 Ferdinand Frederick Bruck (1921-1997) American architect and member of the faculty at Harvard GSD (1953-1964).

good, another Polish man, Zalewski. Jackson[4] and Gourley were not among the strongest design critics in the school. Actually, there was some ideological tension between Sołtan and Joseph. I think that Joseph was a much more canonical LeCorbusian. Joseph was much more of a formalist, following Le Corbusier in terms of forms and of systems. Sołtan was less of a formalist. He responded to Le Corbusier's humanitarian vision, and not so much the forms... I mean, he loved the forms, but he did not teach them.

S.R.: Do you mean that he was more into the theoretical aspects?

E.B.: No, not theoretical, but I think he was frankly more into the program. However, a programme very broadly conceived: "what the purposes of this building in human terms are" – not the purposes in terms of square metres. He liked questioning those things, as Le Corbusier did in his work. He did not do standard programs. Look at the Villa Savoye, where the car is given dominance: the whole building is lifted and the car's driving curve generates it. Le Corbusier figured that they would come in by car, so there are no pedestrians in this concept. What other building has this? That was ninety years ago, cars have been around for one hundred and ten years. It was in the country – so the question was, how are they going to come? By horse? They come by car. Quite rich people, because a car was a statement of their status, as well as their house. They got those wonderful big cars and... the grand procession became an automobile procession... The building then would protect them from the rain and from the sun when they gracefully get out of the car... and it was brilliant, even if there was nothing mystical about it, or nothing theoretical about it... It was simply honest work on the program. Rich people coming back to their villa in fancy cars. By such re-thinking of the program, we could do radical things.

S.R.: Coming back to the first experience as a sophomore... what do you think it might have given you?

E.B.: I think it was an encouragement to go outside the obvious framework of a problem. It liked the design idea to the programme and the execution as well. Actually, I remember that during sophomore year, he was not only a teacher, but he was also on the jury on another project. It was an exhibition pavilion in a park. In my design, there were four beams at different lengths, held by columns, and there was steel glazing where they converged. Most of the GSD faculty around the jury thought that there was too much Frank Lloyd Wright in it... but Sołtan looked at me and winked... that was the only comment, which was plenty. I knew I scored it – he just looked at me, smiled and winked. At that time, people really did not encourage to build in metal, because of the Corbu, Mediterranean and concrete business. Whereas actually it is a terrific building material... I liked to make projects in steel, and Sołtan liked that. He was also a kind of gadfly – it is an American fly, and it bites your butt... I mean that he liked to be a friendly provocateur and he encouraged that kind of thinking. There is a term exactly linked that in a book published many years ago, *Lateral Thinking*,[5] very popular. According to it, instead of thinking more and more about the problem in hand, one should go outside the problem, go laterally, and look at it from a different perspective. The author said that many great artists and scientists did that to make their work, rather than following the narrow path of digging and digging, and digging... One had to look at the things at a different angle... and Sołtan was like that. He encouraged lateral thinking.

S.R.: Are you aware that he did some designs of exhibition pavilions himself? He was actually working on some of those designs in the 1950s, so there may be a connection to the assignments he was giving you.

E.B.: No, I do not know about those buildings... but sure, he was giving us what he was working on, or had worked on.

S.R.: Some other alumni and colleagues of Sołtan mentioned that he was repeating, "to design requires talent, but to program requires genius". Do you remember that?

E.B.: Yes. He claimed that quote came from Corbu, but I tried to find where Le Corbusier wrote that and I could not find it anywhere in Le Corbusier's writings...

S.R.: He could have simply repeated those words in the office...

E.B.: Exactly, Sołtan spent four years working with Le Corbusier, and I am sure that in the office there are all sorts of things that never got to be written down. Anyway, he used that often. I will never forget a project we did during the second year. They had given us a site near Boston to do an electronics factory, and you were supposed to have also a certain number of parking. However, there were hills on the site, it had irregular topography, and it was small... it was impossible, and people had to build three levels of parking under the building. It was insane, because it was out, in the suburbs, where you do not do this kind of thing. Then, three of us got together. One of us was Pick Jacobs from Montreal, and another was Bob Nichols from Chicago. We said, "there has got to be a better solution to this". We went out there, and we noticed there was a driving theatre about a mile away... they were very popular then. We said that instead of spending all that money on garages, we were going to rent the driving theatre during the day – because it only shows movies at night because it is dark – and have a minibus that would go back and forth, so the workers can park there, and then take the minibus to go to work. We presented that to the teachers... and they looked at each other, and said, "yes, that makes a lot of sense". So we did not have to put the parking in... and that was the kind of thing that Sołtan loved.

S.R.: Was it his studio?

E.B.: I think it was.

S.R.: It is a strange subject for him...

E.B.: It also had to be expanded, and he liked those. We ended up being able to expand ours up to one hundred percent – just because of the idea of getting the minibuses to get to the parking lot... instead of struggling and moving huge amounts of earth away. He loved that kind of reasoning, almost the idea of a found object in the program. There was the idea of flexibility, and you can see it in the project of the Museum in Berlin too. I think it was one of the great 'mat' designs anywhere – and Sołtan liked the idea of mat building, carpet building... like the Venice Hospital, and the Free University. I think that the Berlin Museum was much better than the Free University. The idea to use the interstitial spaces came really from Kahn – who was very much evolving his vision at the same time. The idea was about the support systems that had a dedicated space, along with the primary served systems. However, people at the GSD at the time were not big fans of Kahn. Instead, there were Corbu types, and they were afraid of him. On the other hand, Sołtan knew him through Team 10. There were some differences. Kahn represented the clarity and the connection to history, and Corbu had another kind of connection to history. Kahn also made concrete sing, and it was not the brutal concrete of Le Corbusier and Sert. He made it into a precious material better than anybody did.

S.R.: Did Sołtan speak about Kahn?

E.B.: Not that I remember. Look at Kahn's role. He was not a part of Team 10, but he was part of the presentations. I think there was a link there... there was a kindred spirit among them. I think that if you look at the Berlin project, with the alternation of served and servant spaces, servant spaces being also the source of light, natural and even artificial light, you may find the same system in the Kimbell,[6] which is – I think – one of the greatest buildings of the second half of the twentieth century.

S.R.: Was there something that struck particularly in his teaching?

E.B.: Oh, sure. First of all, his sense of humour. He would always begin a critique with a pleasant or funny remark to put you at ease. He was not in a competition with the student, unlike many other professors. He used humour, or a wink and smile, to lighten everything. I think I have told you about scratching the ear on the phone.[7] That was typical. You broke up laughing, but you got the lesson. This is very different from saying, "this is crap". He used some of that too, usually towards people who did not know whether this was crap or not... but most of the students knew it. That was another advantage of having older graduate students. By the time I went to architecture, I had taken graduate courses in twentieth century Europe literature and history, economics and sociology and medieval history – but by the historians, not by the architects. Afterwards, when you come to architecture, you are equipped with a highly tuned bullshit filter... [laughs] Jerzy was then one of the people that everybody listened to, and Serge Chermayeff was another one from the faculty. Both of them were very tall, very cosmopolitan, but coming from different backgrounds. Chermayeff's family was a landowning Jewish family from the Caucasus, who had left during the revolution and gone to England. They were wealthy, so he went to very fine schools, and then he went to Berlin in the twenties and he collaborated with Mendelsohn. He was our first year teacher and then I got Sołtan for half of the second year... I thought I had the best of the world. Then, I had Joseph in the third year. He was very different from Sołtan, he was very dour, always with a frown on his face, but he had a tender heart underneath. His compliment on your work would have been, "I do not dislike it". I find that the Slavic use of the double negative is quite common actually... Although his English

4 Huson Jackson (1913-2006), American architect, member of the faculty at Harvard GSD (1953-1970), partner and co-founder at Sert, Jackson & Gourley (1958-1963) and since 1963 partner at Sert, Jackson & Associates.
5 Edward de Bono, *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
6 Kimbell Museum of Art in Fort Worth designed by Louis Kahn was opened in 1972.
7 Referring to an earlier phone call. Sołtan would comment an indirect and laborious approach by comparing it to scratching the ear by reaching the opposite hand over the head.

was not nearly as subtle as Sołtan's.

S.R.: Was it because of the connection to Zalewski that you worked at Sert's office?

E.B.: Because of Joseph, yes. I have never had Sert, Sert taught the Master Class. I worked there for three years. Then, I left because a friend of mine had a small commission, and I was asked to teach too. I taught the first year with three other people, and basically I spent most of my ten years at the GSD teaching the first year that I was eventually in charge of.

S.R.: While being a student, have you noticed that Sołtan was more attentive towards some students, and more dismissive towards other ones? Some of his former students remarked that.[8]

E.B.: I did not notice that. Of course, one is more attentive to students who do their work. If everybody has fifteen minutes for a review, and if students have nothing to show, it is ridiculous... You will not talk about the weather for fifteen minutes... However, he was always encouraging as a teacher.

S.R.: Was it only design that you had to do, or also some parts of theoretical research?

E.B.: Oh, it was design.

S.R.: Did he put pressure on some specific preparation, like readings and such?

E.B.: Not so much. Unlike what we do now – nowadays we do much more of that.

S.R.: How about the connection to the arts – he was personally drawing, painting and sculpting... Was his interest in arts somehow influencing what you were doing as students?

E.B.: No. There was never any requirement or anything like that. He liked nice drawings and models, but he was not unique in that... No, I think that if there is any connection to the arts, it would be this lateral thinking, this going outside, but not to the extent that art is a key to architecture. It was not more important than, say, technology or construction... and actually, he really did appreciate getting involved in the construction – into designing how things work. "How big is that piece? What does the joint look like? How are you going to keep it from falling apart?" – all of that in the design studio. That was one of the refreshing things about Harvard in general. At that time, architecture teaching was still influenced by the cleavage of the Beaux-Arts, between those who design and those who make. The Bauhaus tried to bring those together. Today on the other hand, many American schools are about getting the feeling, getting the shape, as opposed to "what it is doing and how it is made". You are not making a Fabergé egg. Now we make museums and concert halls...

S.R.: About that, have you ever heard him saying, "there is no time to grieve for roses when the forests are burning"? I have found it in some texts...[9]

E.B.: I do not remember that one, but it is wonderful.

S.R.: He referred that to the pressing problems of habitat, and masses of people needing shelter.

E.B.: Exactly. That is a statement of the programme, it is not about "does the façade have certain movement to it?" or something similar. Absolutely... If you are going to talk about his social vision, that would be a great statement to start with, which again separates him from most of architecture contemporary to him. Such an attitude was more common in the origins of the modern movement, when it was ultimately influenced by the social and economic terms – that was the revolution, not moving rectangles around. It was about questioning whether architecture has a role to play in improving the lives of masses of people through democracy, and technical and economic progress. It was to understand that architecture has a role to play and to know how to do it. That was the definition of modern architecture, and not so much just systems. He was very much part of that, and enthusiast of it. It was just the opposite of someone like Philip Johnson, who denied that, and who stunted American architecture... and much of the world's architecture follows that.

S.R.: Actually, do you remember anything he said about Johnson or Venturi, or postmodern in general?

E.B.: I would agree with Sołtan – or with what I imagine Sołtan would say – that to a certain extent, Venturi was not a populist. He was using a formal language of the vernacular as a kind of in-joke. Someone once said about Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*[10] – it is entertainment for people who have never eaten Campbell soup. It was a little like Marie Antoinette going to the farm and acting like a maid...

S.R.: Coming back to the student time, did you have the liberty of aesthetics to choose?

E.B.: Most of us were inclined to follow Le Corbusier anyway... and most of the programs were some kind of social responses – housing, schools, factories, neighbourhood exhibition pavilions...

S.R.: Was it only Sołtan's studio or generally at the GSD?

E.B.: Oh, no, it was general at the GSD... and the GSD was always very strong in housing. We actually never did a single house at the school. It was thought to be beneath architecture as a social instrument.

S.R.: Was Harvard's position shared by other schools?

E.B.: No, at this time many universities were still more or less in the Beaux-Arts influence. It was not necessarily about the forms, but about the philosophy... Otherwise, many of them were highly technical and their design was very banal. They felt they were training people to work in offices and fulfil the needs of the profession, which were mostly technicians – as opposed to designers. However, it was different in the schools as Harvard, Yale, and Penn. Not so much Columbia... Columbia was a long time in the Beaux-Arts. Harvard and Penn were the two leading schools at the time. Penn was actually better at that time with Kahn and few other people. First, Venturi was there – but it was the first Venturi who did some beautiful things. Then, there were a number of other people. At Penn, they also integrated technology much more actively in the design curriculum. They had excellent educators – August Komendant[11] who was Kahn's engineer, and a couple of others. There was nobody like that at Harvard. Engineering and structures were seen as a service course, and the guy who taught first year structures, was a fellow from Harvard Square, an engineer who did houses... I mean, he was not speculative at all. There was no one though, no engineer, who would bring in a body of work...

S.R.: Is that why you said Sołtan's interest in construction was refreshing?

E.B.: Right, I mean, for many of the other teachers the question was "is the structure adequate? Will it fall down? Is it stable?" – well, architects go beyond that. "Is it part of the design, is there a kind of architectural narrative that goes with the construction and structure?" – those are the questions. Then, there was the issue of environmental control. We had a very good teacher for that, but it was only one semester... and even at that time, forty percent of the building cost was the environmental control systems and add-ons, while twenty percent was the structure... I had an actual background in science, so I found his approach very interesting and so simple. By the way, Penn integrated those issues much more than Harvard did.

S.R.: What about the Team 10 influences at Harvard? Was it visible according to you?

E.B.: Oh, sure, absolutely. The spirit of Team 10 was there. Sert was a kind of a natural bridge between the Corbusians and Team 10, because he was a strong advocate of a human reinterpretation of canonical modernism. His book *Can Our Cities Survive*[12] is a critique of modernism, as well as an explanation of his own work, dealing with housing, education... It deals also with the issue of repetitive systems: how one finds variation in terms of repetitions, what legitimate variation is... Sert was actually a very comfortable host to a number of different points of view, including Team 10. His own work was often in steel, he was a passionate advocate of that. Moreover, he was basically an American architect since 1940 – he came from Spain, it was on the architectural edge of Europe. Then, he left Spain in the late thirties for political reasons, and came to the United States... He was a connection between the two. I think that Team 10 ideas were dominant at the school: the system building, urban design and architecture integrating... those were very present.

S.R.: You started to work at the GSD in 1968. Was it somehow connected to the fact that Sołtan was chairman at the time?

E.B.: Actually, I am not sure: it was either Ben Thompson[13] or Sołtan who hired me.

8 Interview with Urs Gauchat.

9 A quote from a nineteenth century Polish tragedy, Juliusz Słowacki, *Lilla Weneda*, Prologue. It was often quoted by Jerzy Sołtan to describe the general tendency in architecture before World War II, see for instance: notes for a lecture at the Université Laval in Montréal from November 15th, 1990; notes for an interview at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw in 1995; notes for a conference at the Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in March 1984, MASP-JS.

10 Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1961-1962, synthetic polymer paint on canvas.

11 August Komendant (1906-1992), structural engineer and professor at the University of Pennsylvania (1959-1974). He designed structures for many Louis Kahn's designs – Richards Medical Research Laboratories, Salk Institute, First Unitarian Church, Olivetti-Underwood Factory and Kimbell Art Museum.

12 José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944).

13 Benjamin Thompson (1918-2002), American architect and chairman of the Department of Architecture at Harvard GSD (1963-1967).

S.R.: How was the Department of Architecture while Sołtan was the chairman?

E.B.: We made some radical changes under his leadership. He did not impose them, but he basically told the young faculty, "you make the changes". Up until that time, the only Master degrees were given to the people who came for nine months, whereas some of us spent three and a half years to get the Bachelor of Architecture. We spent almost as much time at the university as the physicians to get the Bachelor's... and the lawyers spent only three years at school to get their licence. We spent three and a half years there for a Bachelor's degree – whereas it was OK for us, vis-à-vis others, it was crazy. Those who came for Master's were often younger than we were. They were coming for instance from Mississippi State, or something similar. Starting in September and leaving in June, they were Master's degree. That was not right, so as a committee – that I was part of – we changed the curriculum, and Sołtan backed it. My role in that was writing the programs.

S.R.: Was it Sołtan's idea to change it?

E.B.: No, it was everybody's idea that something had to change. This was 1968-1969. Up until that time, there was a hierarchy of the first year, the second year, the third year and finally the thesis semester, which actually was not a thesis. It was an independent project. Staffing had always been a problem too...

S.R.: Not enough?

E.B.: Not enough, not good enough... spotty. I was lucky enough to get good teachers, because I took a year off to go to Europe... but my classmates had terrible teachers, they did not have any choices. We came up with the idea of the core – core courses that would be a year and a half and they would design all the core courses, the basics: design, structure, and a new course called approaches, which was basically reading and discussion of theory – it was a theory course. Those three. They were to be integrated with each other, if possible, and then, at the end of that, one would go to the options: four semesters of individual studios, each focusing on different things. Instead of travelling a linear path through the whole curriculum, one could choose. One could do more housing, or a collaborative studio with landscape architecture, *et caetera*... The core was to be team taught, and the options were taught by individuals. Thus, most of the full-time teachers spent half their time doing core, and half their time doing options, which was great for the teachers too, since they would not do the same thing over and over again. It was fabulous. Then with team teaching, you worked as a group. Jorge Silvetti[14] came to our team, I learnt a lot from him, and he learnt a lot from us. That model, which is still there at the GSD, was done under Sołtan... and it was done basically by a group of assistant professors, because he had faith in us. Actually, there was so much turmoil that he did not really have any choice. This was 1969. The university was half shut-down. There were strikes, people demanding this or that, calling for changes... We came up with this sort of a constructive change that I think both strengthened the traditional courses, like Chermayeff's and Sołtan's early courses, and then allowed more freedom. It broke the scheme of marching all the way through the curriculum.

S.R.: How was it received by the students?

E.B.: Fine, they are still there. The only difference is... students years ago petitioned to increase the core, because it was so effective. We also had internal teaching strategies within that model. For instance, we had six people teaching first year, and I was in charge. We would rotate. Say, there were six major problems over the year, so we would rotate in a way that the person who was sitting at your jury was the person that you had for the next problem. By the end of the year, you knew six teachers very well, and you worked with all of them. It also encouraged that if you had a problem in your studio and you needed help, you could go to the teacher you had before. Two or three teachers would then get their groups together and prompt up a discussion... Each section, each studio had about fifteen students, which is something you can manage. The whole class would be seventy to eighty people, but by that time, we moved to Gund Hall, so that everybody could be together, and you would meet together. Then, we started a system of doing an analytic problem before every semester: it was the first problem to be done. I realised that people acquire skills and ideas faster if they do not have to defend their own work... You have so much anxiety about your own work, that your mind is not open.

S.R.: Was it then some kind of theoretical research before designing?

E.B.: Yes, but always with the drawing and model-making component. One of our best ideas was to expose theory that explained the form of a building, starting with a simple singular object and then describing transformations of that object step by step that might account for its final form through rotation, subtraction, distortion, or repetition. It was about using the terms that are used in design, and trying to do axonometric drawings of each stage... it was like an animation. It helped the students in thinking beyond the surface of things, and pretty soon, for the next problem, they were told, "do this on your own, describe how you came up with your scheme".

S.R.: What were the other changes?

E.B.: We also got rid of the thesis, because it was a source of problems linked to staffing. Instead, we let people do an independent project anytime they wanted during the last four semesters. Instead of forcing everybody to do it at a certain time, those who wanted to do it, they were able to do it anytime. All you had to do, it was to find a convincing programme and find a teacher – finished. Same with international travel. If you want to go to another school, if you can find a relationship between a teacher here and a teacher there – finished. We actually centralised the first three semesters and radically decentralised the last four. It worked very well – it is still there. These were actually the most radical changes since Gropius came.

S.R.: Who was the deciding body of that?

E.B.: It was the committee of the faculty, with the chair being informed and often participating. However, the chair of the committee was not the chairman of the department. It was traditional in American universities that those things are discussed and implemented by the faculty. Nothing can be done without the leadership of the chair, but he does not decide that. Which makes sense, because you cannot implement anything if you do not have the consent of the faculty. Thus, by the time it came by, everybody was ready to implement it, and it was not a political problem. The fact that Sołtan had very young people to do this helped – some of us were not much older than the students who were striking – we were often the conduits between the faculty and the students. Thus, by having young people do these committees, you got acceptance by the students and the faculty. We also had the energy to put into it. It was very important, his faith in the younger faculty to make these changes.[15]

S.R.: Let us move towards design... You have been working with Sert for a while, and you worked with Sołtan on the Berlin competition. Have you seen differences in their approach to design?

E.B.: I think that Sołtan was much more interested in making a unifying generic system. Which I found much correct, since the Berlin programme was so complicated... It was that thick... [showing over one inch with his fingers] Only the Germans can think about something like that...

S.R.: What was your role in the competition?

E.B.: I was a model maker, a draughtsman... I was not designing. Von Moltke was in the team too, he was head of Urban Design at Harvard, but his role was actually translating the program... [laughs] Otherwise, you would go mad. With this complexity, Sołtan was very much interested in testing the Team 10 ideas of this big cliché "city is like a building, building is like a city".

S.R.: In fact, the first time I saw the competition entry, I thought it was a small city.

E.B.: Exactly! That was the problem: you had three masterpieces in your neighbourhood – the library and the philharmonics by Scharoun, and the gallery... What do you do? Each one of those in an individual building... It is the genius of Sołtan not to make a building, but to make a neighbourhood and leave the other buildings completely intact. At the same time, it made a much better building, because he organised it like a city. It is modulated as a system of circulation – street and open spaces – and of buildings. What normally in a city would be streets, here it works as service spaces. Then, once you have woven the fabric, then you can make the suit to order, it is very simple... Sert on the other hand would start with some nice prototypes – he would be very sensitive about opening a street here, voiding and setting up an axis, making the space come through and linking the major pieces... However, in his museums, in the Maeght Gallery and in the Miró Foundation, he is closer to a model similar to the Berlin project. He would create fragments of this fabric with alternated courtyards and strips of space, some generic spaces that are made specific by what is next to them. Although normally, Sert would never do what Sołtan did: he would never take a room and arbitrarily mess with it. He would bring different ways of light into the room, work on the views and levels, but he would not simply play with it... Actually, Sert always built to a budget, unlike today's hero architects... always on budget, and always

14 Jorge Silvetti (1942-), member of the faculty at Harvard GSD (1975-1983, 1990-), and chairman of the Department of Architecture (1995-2002).

15 See also: interview with Christopher Benninger.

on a modest budget. Even the Carpenter Center was at the average cost of a university art building for that year... just the average, not above the average. For me, Sert was an excellent example that for the same amount of money, instead of having ordinary buildings, you could do something better.

S.R.: While working on the Berlin competition, did bring into the design some of your ideas? Was it possible for you as a draughtsman to do so?

E.B.: Sure, I remember one thing about the façades... it was about the process. While designing, Sołtan made a system of modules and panels for the façades... walls would go to certain places, they would create void... it was very much a model of what Sert would do. There were repetitive units, different families of closures – solid, transparent, translucent... depending on the programme behind it. Sert experimented like that with several buildings in Cambridge in the late 1950s. Sołtan's idea was in fact about a unitised, probably prefabricated façade system... that would be also because he was also an admirer of Prouvé. Anyway, we had a Swiss guy, who was the office boy. I think he was an architecture student, so he was taking things from the printer and so on... and Sołtan said, "if my system is right, he will do the façades", which is usually the most sensitive thing that an architect, a Beaux-Arts architect, will do – his manhood is tied up with the façades. Obviously, it did not happen that way, Sołtan did the façades too, but it would have been possible because the façade here was a texture, not a form... like a city.

S.R.: Sołtan was designing, teaching, doing art... What would be the connection between all of them?

E.B.: Actually, amongst his own designs, I only know from the Berlin project that I experienced – and when I got there, he already had a system. I do not know when that occurred in the design process. Probably he did that in notebooks before anybody else got started.

S.R.: Actually, when I was talking to Paul Krueger, he told me that those [pointing at the freehand detail sketches] were the first drawings, based on Sert's building in the South of France.[16]

E.B.: However, these preclude an idea of strips in plan... I mean the decision of making a map must have been there. Then, if you look at the Maeght Museum in the South of France, it looks like a mini map, but there are not enough forms, not enough repetition to really form a map... I am not so sure about that thing, about the reference to Maeght. Not all of these sketches can be explained by Maeght. I think that there is still more Kahn in here – but people in Cambridge do not like this.

S.R.: Apart from working with him, you knew Sołtan for a long time. Through the years, did you notice some changes in his views on architecture?

E.B.: Not so much. There is one story though... When I was working on those little courtyard houses that are on my website,[17] which are very much influenced by Chermayeff and Sert, and the Californian case study analysis, I was in Cambridge visiting my daughter... and whenever I was there, I would go see Jerzy. At that time, he was bed-ridden, so I went to his house. We talked, and I asked, "would you take a look at the drawings of what I am doing?" – and he did. He looked at them and then he said, "my dear Edwardo, too much Mies". And I said to him, "Jerzy, it will not be when it is built". Actually, it was not, you know. The client wanted dramatic clarity and ruthlessness, but then it was all made of wood and very soft.

S.R.: He was never very affectionate about Mies though.

E.B.: No, no... but obviously, he respected him. Mies had such a clarifying effect on modernity. However, Jerzy's socialist vision conflicted with people like Mies or Wright. There was a joke that the only reason for which Mies left Germany was because they decreed that you could not do any flat roof anymore. Everything else was all right... [laughs] Actually, Mies after the war became the Mies I did not care for... However, I think that for example his schemes for Berlin skyscrapers are still the most brilliant tall buildings ever. They fit the site beautifully... and they have that combination of ruthless of ruthless order and chance almost making the façade... Sert was trying to legitimise chance, whereas for someone like Jerzy, chance was the order.

S.R.: If you think today about the influence of Sołtan, do you think there is a connection between how Sołtan had been teaching yourself and how you were teaching afterwards on your own?

E.B.: Sure. He was my most powerful teaching model. I tend to approach students similarly, in a friendly and supportive way – unless they do not do their work...

S.R.: Well, we are all human...

E.B.: Yes! [laughs] However, humour is much more effective than displeasure and threats. For instance, you can say, "*over* here, in this part of the plan, it is really great... now see if you can take these ideas to the rest of your plan". Which is a way of saying, "the rest of your plan sucks" – but it leaves the person with something to work on, with something positive. Sołtan always did that. He never walked away with the student feeling he was at a loss. He was also always tolerant of new ideas – they were worth trying.

S.R.: Is your interest in proportions due to Sołtan's teaching?

E.B.: Yes, also that. Actually, I was interested in any idea that could reproduce the arbitrariness of things. Then, Sert used Modulor and I used it in Sert's office. I always thought that Modulor was particular because of its geometric properties. It gave you a series of steps that were... not infinite. It is not as Aalto said, "my module is the millimetre". One of the characteristics of modern architecture is a demand for multiples, with multiple housing units, multiple classrooms multiple offices... very different from the old palaces. Then, the technical revolutions of mass production and serial production were very important. It was not just new uses of metal, frameworks, glass, masonry and piping. All these things demand dealing with the organisation of repetition. How do we handle an organised repetition and things in series – whether they are growing units, windows, columns, stacks, windmills, or whatever – that is the difference between the Beaux-Art vision and modern vision. Beaux-Arts would use things once or twice, and then make a nice package, then decorate it – and you are finished... For instance, Gehry does not deal with the problem of repetition: he avoids it. If you come back to the Berlin project, there is repetition of pieces that create a city. New York is a classic example of that, look at the standard blocks, and they can go on forever. As for the buildings, with the standardised system, within the lines, they have an incredible coherence, and incredible variety within that coherence.

S.R.: More generally, what do you think about the importance of Team 10 ideas today?

E.B.: Oh, I think that they are probably more valid now than they were then... and they are surely needed now, because we have tools for managing building and serialising things that we did not have then, basically thanks to the computer. We have the ability to try various alternatives of the project. Say, we were working hypothetically on the façades for Berlin. If Jerzy said, "let us explore what a different module would be on those façades", we would never have the time to draw those. Today, in twenty minutes, you would have an alternative view, and that is purely a question of repetition. I think that Team 10 vision was never matched by the political vision of the society. It was not a question whether it was not doable or rational, because we are still waiting for housing to be realistically addressed by mass production. It will not happen because architects, basically, are tailors. We are still making made-to-measure clothes. Whereas some countries, like the Soviet Union tried to make such housing – and some in the United States or in France too – but it was just so bad. Corbu tried to point a different way with his housing.

S.R.: Although sometimes it was bad because of the management... if you take the Robin Hood Gardens in London by the Smithsons, it was destroyed because it was in a bad state and basically over the years it was not taken care of...

E.B.: Exactly – that is what happened with Pruitt-Igoe when it was dynamited in St. Louis.[18] It was designed by an early Yamasaki. The social planners put the people there and then it was never sustained – in fact, it was systematically destroyed by the lack of maintenance. I remember a friend of ours, a German architect who talked about this to Jerzy, Werner Seligmann.[19] He said that if Pruitt-Igoe were in New York, it would be still operating as housing.

S.R.: What do you think would be Sołtan's legacy?

E.B.: Well, I would say that it is the way of thinking, the way of setting up a system... and not just any system, but a system of alternative systems to test things against the program, against constructability, against the pleasure and demands of human occupation, like outdoor space, storage. One of the complaints about social housing is that there is not enough storage. Poor people have boxes of things too! And they have memories they want to keep. I think that today, one of the few architects that Sołtan would appreciate would be Lacaton &

16 The Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul-de-Vence designed by Sert was opened in 1964.
17 Prototype Courtyard Houses in Dallas designed by Edward Baum and completed in 2003, Edward M. Baum FAIA, <http://emb-arc.com/portfolio-item/prototype-courtyard-housing> [accessed May 6th, 2019].
18 The Pruitt-Igoe estate in St. Louis designed by Minoru Yamasaki was opened in 1954. The complex was demolished starting in 1972.
19 Werner Seligmann (1930-1998), German architect and member of the faculty at Harvard GSD (1974-1976), and dean of the School of Architecture at the Syracuse University (1976-1990).

Vassal in France, because they have a powerful social vision, they see the limits of design with a capital D, the limits of deterministic design, and they deal with common everyday materials and technologies. They do not do this. [simulates scratching over the head with the opposite hand] Just as a conclusion, I think that what counted was Sołtan's native humanity, which covered almost everything he did. It covered charging the German tanks, and then using his time in the prison camp to do something constructive. The perseverance to do that, it was amazing... Then, it covered going to Paris, and then going back to Warsaw, and trying to make the promise of revolution work and finding that it was not working the way he wanted to... and finally, it was about coming to the States and trying to improve the school.

Christopher Benninger

November 29th, 2020 and January 20th, 2021

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's Master Class design studio (1966-1967), member of the Harvard faculty and assistant professor (1969-1971). In 1971, he settled in India founding the School of Planning in Ahmedabad as a Ford Foundation Advisor. Since 1973, advisor to the World Bank for housing projects. Practicing architect and founder of CCBA Designs in Pune, India.

S.R.: Do you remember your first impression of Jerzy Sołtan?

C.B.: Professor Sołtan was an imposing figure, but for an American boy, he appeared as a strange bird. He was very clear in what he spoke, but he had his unique sense of humour, and he would smile when he said something, he felt to be humorous. He had his own sarcasm which always bordered on humour. He was fast to correct incorrect or 'show-off' talk. He and his team partner, professor Albert Szabo, did not put up with small talk. On the first day of classes, Sołtan gave us a "sketch problem" to design a lecture poster for a famous architect of one's choice to be executed over the first weekend and presented at the studio on Monday. I chose Mies and did white lines on a red background, with black lettering. Both Sołtan and Szabo expressed that they liked it, but they were blunt about the few bad ones.

S.R.: In general, what do you remember from the studio that followed?

C.B.: Sołtan was very involved with each student and he made it a point to come to our drafting tables and interact, asking us puzzles about our work and approach.

S.R.: What do you remember about those puzzles?

C.B.: He was very insightful and 'caught on' to things immediately and deeply. He would often make a frown on his face showing wrinkles in his forehead and checks, and wait a few seconds before throwing out his critical question – and never a statement that he did not like the work. His technique was to ask the student a question that needed analysis to answer, and often it would be that there was no possible answer! That silence was the conclusion.

S.R.: Do you remember any of those puzzles in particular?

C.B.: I think so. When I was working on the studio project, it involved a lot of analysis of streets, blocks, layout, utilities... and Sołtan would ask questions about that, but what he really wanted to know was to go deeper and even if his questions were small technical ones, he was actually trying to push me into thinking about the social consequences. As a result, it was like a normal architecture course, but he was working around the idea that design is a social tool. It was more a Socratic method of asking questions to get to another step. I think it helped me to build a relationship between the physical built form and planning on the one hand, and the social impact and economic impact on the community on the other one. That was a brand new way of thinking! He asked questions, which did not require an answer – that was the positive aspect. He wanted you to think about something deeper, using questions to get you into a thinking process, to look at different problems.

S.R.: How was Sołtan's relationship with the students?

C.B.: I respect him as a brilliant and honest man who called a spade a spade. He was critical but inherently fair, and in favour of every students' development and evolution into a better human being. I think he was more interested in creating future leaders and better human beings than he was in teaching architecture. Teaching architecture for Sołtan was just a vehicle to mould more considerate, thoughtful and humanistic professionals... and human beings!

S.R.: Did you colleagues think the same? Were they also similarly positive concerning Sołtan's teaching?

C.B.: Even in a very small class, you had students with very different agendas. Many people come to Harvard to get a Harvard degree as a passport. I would say that amongst the twelve 'survivors' of the studio, there were six of us who were Sołtan-type of students. Speaking for myself, I was twenty-two, I wanted ideas, I wanted

new ways of thinking, while some of the older people in my class had already worked and they simply thought that a Harvard degree would be useful.

S.R.: Do you remember whether Sołtan could have been favouring some students over others?

C.B.: Sołtan had no patience for clichés and 'cut and paste' thinking, and he could quickly get bored with people who had little insights to offer. But this was not unique to him. At the time, Harvard had no pretensions of being a place to lift up the weak. Instead, it felt its duty was to create leaders of the future. The idea was to have a strong intake of potential leaders and weed out the weak. Many of the faculty choose to ignore and not waste time with insincere and uninterested students who never read anything, or thought of new ideas. I actually believe that Sołtan, like many at that time, thought that certain people were endowed with superior minds, attitudes, and creativity – and that these people should be encouraged. I think he thought that people who associated with him missing these basic components could not be radically changed and that 'building concepts and ideas' with more advanced thinkers was the way to go, rather than trying to change every-day-and-average-thinking 'architects'.

S.R.: At the beginning of the year, you were given a list of readings including Giedion's *Space Time and Architecture*, Le Corbusier's *When the Cathedrals were White*, Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilisation*, and Eduardo Torroja's *Philosophy of Structures*. Do you remember how these readings were important for the course?[1]

C.B.: I think these laid down the basic values and theories we were to accept in the course. Sołtan knew Jackie Tyrwhitt who knew everyone... She was very involved with Doxiadis, the editor of *Ekistics*.[2] Sołtan designed her house, where I usually spent a couple of weeks in the summer and visited on my way back and forth between India and America in the early 1970s when I was setting up the School of Planning at the Center of Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad. I must now add that Giedion was Jackie's lover: he had given her the Volvo car she drove with to the city. But you asked about the books... you see, these were like the family Bibles of a close-knit family and they were not just academic, but sacred.

S.R.: Let us come back to Master Class. In a brief from the course, I have found information that the students were asked to prepare a submission on the books I mentioned earlier, including a commentary and an annotated list with quotes from the books. Do you remember it, and was it much important for Sołtan?

C.B.: I think this was more of a way of assurance that we really did read the books! It was really not Jerzy Sołtan's nature to examine like in a high school, but rather to question like Socrates, and to assess the intellectual quality of the answers. It was more in Albert Szabo's nature to have checks on us, and that was a really good balance between the two of them.

S.R.: When I talked to Urs Gauchat, he mentioned two quotes, "so what" and "going from the general to the particular and from the particular to the general" referred to Sołtan's teaching. He actually agreed when I asked him whether Sołtan's approach was Socratic.[3]

C.B.: "So what" was just the way Sołtan showed contempt for platitudes and clichés. As I noted before, he liked the Socratic method and its way of thinking, and I think "going from the particular to the general", etc. was very much in line with a group of such insightful questions he would throw at a student, to make them think of their work in a larger canvas and more complex social and cultural settings.

S.R.: Do you remember your own designs for Sołtan's studio?

C.B.: After the brief poster assignment, we were divided into four groups of four guys each – there were no women in our class – and all sixteen were told to design a national pavilion for a different country, and each team had to coordinate their designs to integrate within a common theme or even structure of the other three team members. Influenced by the Modulor, I evolved a 'space box' three levels high, composed of modular panels, and joining extruded aluminium elements that could be disassembled and packaged, allowing one to move the exhibition from place to place. Sołtan liked my application of a machine-made system of modular parts. There was a review, after which one of the students in our class was asked to leave. He was a Korean student, and maybe thirty years old, and he'd submitted a portfolio in which there were large commercial buildings, unexpected from a thirty years old architect. After that, we were told that the semester project would be mass housing for some countries. I chose self-help housing in Medellin, Colombia. I had visited there as my father founded a local school of management, and we had an apartment on the top of the tallest structure back then in 1966 in the city, the Nutibara Annex, an eighteen-storey attachment to the old hotel. I spent a lot of time exploring the city on foot and I loved the informal *barrios* and street vendors. Meanwhile, in the Master Class at Harvard, we were allowed to take – in addition to the studio and a seminar that was run by the studio teachers – whatever we wanted to do, and we could also cross-register at MIT. I took Kevin Lynch's course there and I started working with a new group of advocacy planners, like John F. C. Turner and Lisa Peattie, at MIT and at the Joint Center for Urban Studies.[4] Turner was very famous back in the 1950s and 1960s. He wrote a book, *Freedom to Build*, and he did some first studies on how people in Peru build their own houses and how that was a better system than a government low-cost housing. He actually was the major of the year, and Sołtan let me use him as a guide. For this design, there was a mid-term presentation in late October after which our Japanese classmate from Watanabe University was asked to leave! A few weeks later a student from Taiwan was asked to leave.

S.R.: May you tell more about the self-help housing design?

C.B.: I took it up as self-help housing for the poorest of the poor in Colombia, South America. I invited poverty experts in for my reviews and also, I invited John F. C. Turner. Other boys were doing high-art kind of buildings. Louis Kizonak, my friend from the University of Florida, chose Russia and precast reinforced cement concrete modular housing and he got the highest score, while I was looking at small, narrow plots, community toilets, and pedestrian paths. Sołtan saw this as a kind of revolutionary thing to do and thanks to him, I did almost something that was anti-architecture, there was almost no architecture in my proposal... and Sołtan supported and let me do that. Since I was doing this unusual design problem, other faculty members at Harvard took a strong interest, like Jackie Tyrwhitt, who was the editor of *Ekistics* and she introduced me to Barbara Ward who later noted me in the introduction to *The Home of Man*.[5] She was a big name back in the 1960s. She wrote a book, *Only one Earth*, and she initiated sustainable conferences with the one in Stockholm, and the United Nations Environment Program headquartered in Nairobi was formed because of that. She had tremendous contacts, and she was teaching just across the street. So, I was invited to lunch with Barbara Ward who took much interest in my Sołtan's studio project. She asked casually what I was doing across the street at Harvard, and when I answered her that I was doing self-help housing, she said, "what, is Harvard University allowing students to do things like that?" – and I told her about Sołtan. At that very lunch, she invited me and paid my way to the Athens *Ekistics* Week and the following Delos Symposium in Greece. The symposium was a drinking party at which ideas are discussed, but a week before that, the Athens *Ekistics* Week was a seminar where very serious papers were presented. At the symposium, which lasted a week or ten days, there was a swimming pool, and there were Doxiadis with his wife and children, maybe ten other guests, but he told that each of the guests had to invite someone under thirty as their courtesy... because the people he invited were older, generally over seventy-five, even though they were full of life.

S.R.: Let us come back to the housing design. In Sołtan's texts, he often referred to the need of the masses to have shelter and he often quoted the issue of "habitat".[6] It seems actually very much linked to the path you have taken here...

C.B.: "Habitat" was a central issue at both Harvard and MIT, and in Sołtan's studio we were made to act on our talk! Sołtan was intrigued that I took up the poorest of the poor as a problem, though I did not handle it as something beautiful to look at, but as a process and social-economic tool for households to evolve and change for the better. At that time, at the GSD most faculty did not see architecture with a capital "A" like that. I think that some of the faculty would have me failed with such a design. Sołtan and Szabo had to argue in my final jury with the other faculty members explaining that while my design was not high art, it was where the GSD should be going! I think most of the people were into high art, such as Gerhard Kallmann and Sert with Boston City Hall, Peabody Terrace, Holyoke Center... these were the kinds of buildings that the faculty showed as examples of buildings to be built. As I worked for people who were homeless, actually at my jury, some people said that this was not it, claiming that at Harvard we should not be planners as people from MIT. As a result, my jury was a bit of a fight... In the next semester with Sert, I did a capital "A" project for the library and stood

1 Reading list for the Master Class in Architecture from July 1st, 1966, see: HGSD-JS, AA003.
2 Constantinos Doxiadis (1913-1975), Greek architect and town planner, architect of Islamabad and the creator of *Ekistics*, along with the organisation of the Athens *Ekistics* Week and the Delos Symposia.
3 Interview with Urs Gauchat.
4 John F. C. Turner (1923-), American architect and planner who worked on the informal settlements in Latin America between the 1950s and 1960s. Lisa Peattie (1924-2018), professor of urban anthropology at MIT, interested in the social change in urban planning. The Joint Center for Urban Studies was founded in 1959 as a research institution backed by Harvard and MIT.
5 Barbara Ward, *The Home of Man* (New York City: W. W. Norton and Company, 1976).
6 Chapter 7.

first in the class. That is what other people came up with in the first semester... I was the 'odd' guy in my group. Sołtan was of course also interested in architecture as high art, there is doubt about that, but he had also that 'other side' dream.

S.R.: You have just mentioned that Sołtan and Szabo had a similar attitude towards your design. Do you remember what Sołtan's role in the studio and in the Master Class programme was?

C.B.: Sołtan was the leader between the two, as professor Szabo had huge respect for Sołtan, and he followed his lead. But they 'clicked' well and it was a team effort of equals. Jerzy Sołtan made it a point to invite famous people to our seminar room in the old now-demolished Hunt Hall. Yona Freidman came in on one Wednesday and gave a very interesting lecture on the nature of 'structures' and he had actually been invited by the Harvard Physics department to speak on the topic. After his talk, a few days later we had a review of the talk, and one of our New York City classmates, Gerry Jonas, said he thought the lecture was utter nonsense. Sołtan asked for a reason and this arrogant young man said, "any of us could have given a more original and informative lecture", so Sołtan said, "OK, the upcoming Wednesday is your lecture, Mr Jonas". This lecture actually happened, and it was an utter disaster. At the end of the term, Gerry came up with nothing for his design review and left for Christmas break never to return leaving only twelve of us students. I feel that this had more to do with Gerry's own ego and self-esteem rather than fundamental differences.[7]

S.R.: Do you remember anything concerning Sołtan's position in the school when you were studying?

C.B.: I recall that I never liked the way structural design was taught to students, so I did not sign up for the elective by professor Mitchell, who was literally bullying the boys to take it, and whose classes were art night and really boring. I attended, even though I was not registered for it, and when he realised that, he threatened me that I would be out of Harvard unless I signed up. He had a laboratory down the river and he wanted us to come and make some very hands-on experiments with grids of copper. About that time, the other guys were getting really fed up, and we all, with great hesitation, decided to approach Jerzy Sołtan in this regard. We met and expressed our analysis, as well as our feelings, saying that the course was not at all theoretical, that we were only doing that donkey work in the lab... After hearing us, Sołtan asked us, "does it mean that you want to stop this course?", and everybody said, "yes", so he said, "it is done – I conclude that you do not see getting anything out of this course and, as that is an unanimous conclusion, the course is hereby cancelled". We had to control ourselves not to hoot and applaud with joy. We all hated that course and disliked the teacher.

S.R.: How was it possible for him to decide that?

C.B.: At that time, Benjamin Thompson was our head of the department. He was a very good architect and an interesting person, but he had no time for this administration job, so basically, our department was being run by a very brilliant secretary. As a result, Benjamin Thompson had really no strength in the department, and at the same time, Sołtan was to become the head himself. Thus, since the head was not that available, people started to go to Sołtan with such issues. I do not think you could do that in today's world... a senior professor cannot, without a meeting, just cancel a course. You know, the Graduate School of Design was like a tribe village. We had the leaders, like Sert and – to a certain extent – Sołtan, who were able to make decisions.

S.R.: Through his entire life, Jerzy Sołtan was fascinated with Le Corbusier's work – was it possible to see that during the modules or courses you have followed with him?

C.B.: I think I personally was a great fan of Le Corbusier's, and owned every book by, or about him, and I just fit naturally into the ethos and thinking. Sołtan knew that Le Corbusier was not only about Ronchamp and high art, but he was more about social and technological change. I think we were all on a joint search for the truth of things and at that time, we all saw Le Corbusier as our guru and leader. Sołtan was famous to me for his work with Le Corbusier on the Modulor. Once, he happened to be in a chatty mood, and he told me how he was hired to work with Le Corbusier: he wrote to Le Corbusier explaining that he was a mathematician interested in modular construction systems and Le Corbusier wrote to Sołtan inviting him home on a Sunday morning for an interview, and when he arrived at the door, Le Corbusier opened and asked, "who is this?" and when Sołtan said, "it is me, Jerzy Sołtan", Le Corbusier gave him a funny look and said, "but you are too tall", and laughing invited Sołtan in.[8]

7 See also: interview with Urs Gauchat.
8 The complete account of Sołtan's work in Le Corbusier's atelier may be found in his article, 'Working with Le Corbusier' and published in *Le Corbusier: the Garland essays*, ed. by H. Allen Brooks (New York: Garland, 1987).

S.R.: What about Team 10? Since 1959, Sołtan was a member of Team 10: was his connection to Team 10 visible during his teaching?

C.B.: Yes, Sołtan was with me on my self-help project, because the idea and attitude was really more of a Team 10 aligned one than the more physical and material approach of most CIAM members. When Sołtan hired me later, we also had Shadrach Woods on the faculty, and others. However, Sołtan was more focused on the trajectory of each student and their growth instead of being obsessed with pushing any group or theory. I would go so far as to say, most of our batch of students did not even know he was a member of Team 10. When I was teaching, Woods became my friend and I used to visit his apartment in Paris, but frankly, there was this 'big family' feeling and mutual support in a group of teachers and students, where everyone was on his or her own trip. I think it was just assumed that smart kids read and know these things and there is no need to repeat things and push anything down anyone's throat.

S.R.: Was it possible to see Sołtan's interest in art when he was teaching?

C.B.: I do think that Sołtan cherished the concept of 'the ideal man' and the idea that we need to create a new culture of advanced humanism and care for people. In this, there was a strange beckoning back to classical Greek concerns with harmony, ideal beauty, fundamental truths, and the like. Sołtan was a modernist, and he was contemporary, but while we all thought we were looking forward, we all had roots in the past, and I think that Sołtan somehow was a classicist. He believed in proportions, modular systems... I do not think he articulated that a lot, but you knew he was interested in harmony and these issues. I think that according to him, a way forward meant to build a civilisation. That was a unique thing about Sołtan, it was a value system – and finding value systems amongst people who are teaching is not easy.

S.R.: Was there something different or particular in Sołtan's approach compared to the other teachers?

C.B.: Sołtan knew that there were some great architects on hand, like Kallmann and Sert, and he knew that many, many of the thought leaders of the mid-twentieth century were Harvard graduates, such as Pei, Johnson, and others, and he wanted to build on that. But he *knew* that the pure formalists and people making sculptures out of buildings were not going to be future leaders.

S.R.: How exactly did he help you in becoming leaders?

C.B.: For example, he 'lured' me to continue this self-help project, and I think he knew I had to develop a personality and develop a strong stand, and I would have to argue my case. This is also a good learning device for a person, not only for a designer: you head off to something where there will be heavy storms, but in the end you become an advocate of your ideas, and you become a leader. For example, each of us should have given a talk about their ideas to the other students. Every Wednesday, we had a long afternoon, where Sołtan would invite someone for one or two hours and when they left, he would say, "Christopher, would you explain your project to the other kids in the class". Sołtan and Szabo would both ask questions and would have smirks on their faces to make us think... I think that both of them sort of forced us to make ideas come out. They would challenge us, and particularly Sołtan, he made people argue their case. I think it was the way he led the studio and the seminars, there were always a lot of questions... and it is another important thing in leadership.

S.R.: Do you think that Sołtan tried to cement that kind of influence – Le Corbusier, CIAM, Team 10 – at Harvard through his chairmanship?

C.B.: Yes, I feel to be in his faculty you needed a base in one of those 'schools of thought'. He was very aware of the historiography of the evolution of architectural and urban thinking in the twentieth century, and he knew we had to be a part of it. I think my association with Sert's studio and with Barbara Ward, enrolment in a PhD programme at MIT, and involvement with Doxiadis, Jackie Tyrwhitt, Balkrishna Doshi, Dolf Schnebli, Fumihiko Maki, and other 'fellow travellers' influenced Sołtan to hire me. Actually, when I was at Fulbright, Sołtan out of the blue invited me to teach at Harvard.

S.R.: How do you remember your teaching at Harvard?

C.B.: The first studio I taught at the GSD was as the assistant to Jane Drew. When I was to start, Sołtan told me, "you are going to teach along with Jane Drew, because nobody else can teach with her". She had lived in Chandigarh, she worked really closely with Le Corbusier together with her partner Maxwell Fry, and they were both involved in MARS and with the Architectural Association in London. She was also a trustee of Victoria and Albert Museum, and she became another lifelong friend and guide. It is interesting, because even if Sołtan was not a party-going person, he knew everyone! He was a really friendly person, even if his sense of humour

was a little *risqué* – and Jane Drew was the same. When I was to meet her for the first time, she sent a message that I should have tea with her... I was wearing a blue jacket, a shirt with a tie. I was to go up to her room, and there she was – an over-sixty-years-old and overweight woman, wearing black scuba skin-tight bodysuit, where you actually could see all her body... She had the zip down – and this was her stunt to see what I would do. Sołtan was similar – he would do these things to test people, to see whether they were free-thinkers or 'square'. I have some very fond memories of that. However, Sołtan's sense of humour would not fit today's schemes, and I think that is bad – Sołtan really kept us on our toes. He was unusual and full of life, and that was one way of communicating with people. In a faculty meeting, somebody would have said something, and he would have turned that into a sexual joke. Jane Drew used to do that too. Today, it would not have been considered well.

S.R.: It was a different atmosphere then...

C.B.: It was also a very different type of community back then. Many times students would throw a party, and teachers would come and tell jokes. Even in our juries, the head of each jury had to bring wine to drink after the last project for the students and teachers to drink. We were pretty high. We had a discussion, and eventually Woods said, "OK, everybody comes to my apartment". He was a visiting professor, and he was living in Peabody Terrace. We had pizza, wine, and after that, we became close friends with Woods. At the juries, there were always some beer and cheap Chianti wine, which now would have been illegal... the insurance companies would not allow that. Now you cannot have parties with students having drinks.

S.R.: What contact did you have with Sołtan when teaching at Harvard?

C.B.: I got a grant to study local housing, so I had a one-man office in Harvard Square above the old Harvard Trust. It was a small fifteen-foot-by-fifteen-foot affair, but guess who had the next office: Jerzy Sołtan! Next to my office, Sołtan was a designer for some large Boston practice and that office shared a wall with mine. That was interesting – we were together at the GSD, and then over the weekends and at night, we were over there doing designs. Actually, in the meantime, Sołtan made me an assistant professor. A lecturer was an annual contract job, but an assistant professor was a genuine position. You were a member of the senate, you were a member of the faculty... so that was a big deal. However, not even nine months after that, I had to tell Sołtan that I was going to India to set up a school of planning and he was upset with me. I think though that over the long term, he realised it was good for me.

S.R.: While you were working next door, did Sołtan show you his designs? Were you able to realise what was Sołtan's attitude when designing these buildings, how he was working with the team?

C.B.: At times, I would open my door, and he would open his, and he would say, "come and see something". He would show me some very rush free-hand sketches. I think he was working on some school buildings. He would show me those sketches of the outdoor connections and the human scale, very creative type and diagrammatic. I remember it was about how the outside penetrates into the classroom, how you use scale, and things like that... He was not into realistic sketches, but he really was into ideas and diagrams. However, I did not sit with him for long: it was like he was just having a break and he was simply showing this young person what he was doing.

S.R.: What was the general 'architectural climate' of the school when you were teaching there?

C.B.: Around this time, there were people who wanted to change the GSD. There was in fact a challenge from 'management' and managers, to get out to the 'studio' and elite designer mode. They were not part of the Le Corbusier, CIAM, Team 10 *milieu*. Thomas Stifter, Edward Baum, and others also wanted to oust the old guard and bring in more hands-on and skill oriented staff, instead of creation-oriented teachers. One day I was invited by them to a faculty club where the topic was "how to deal with Sołtan". I was a little aghast... Probably they thought that as I was young and doing planning at MIT, I could not be part of those romantic and utopian ideas. They thought we needed to have more students and to concentrate on more practical matters. They thought that even if some of the great designers came out of the GSD, the whole school should not be trained to become such. But I actually was with Sołtan: he hired me, I was his student, and I stayed at the house he designed... They even came up with a plan that Sołtan would go to a sabbatical year. At that time, every eight years, you had one year where you were allowed to take sabbatical with full pay. They thought to tell Sołtan that he had to take that gap year, and someone else would become the chair of the department, and after his return, Sołtan would not have returned as a chair. Another thing, it was the new dean, Maurice Kilbridge. He was from the School of Business and he came in to make the GSD more profitable per square foot, to use the floor space more effectively to generate fees. He even once told me that the GSD had more carpet area per fee paying student than any other faculty at Harvard. It never occurred to me that Harvard judged its quality based on the fees-per-square-foot index – that was a totally new idea, but that is how he thought. He wanted to increase the student body, which was the worst thing that happened to Harvard. Back then, with small groups, we knew each other, and now it is impossible. When I went with Kilbridge to the Carpenter Center when the classes just ended, I showed him around, we walked along the ramp, and we walked into the two-storey space. He said to me, "this is a total waste of space, we should enclose this and we should use the upper part as offices or something". I said to him, "professor Kilbridge, do you know a holy cow in India? You cannot change this building – this is a holy cow. It is not just for the people in the GSD, but for people worldwide". He was actually a good guy, but totally unaware of what the GSD, art, and design were. These groups all in effect wanted more students with more fees, more teaching of practical skills and knowledge. Teaching design, amongst this group, was considered *passé*.

S.R.: Why did you decide to leave the GSD?

C.B.: While on my fellowship in India, I proposed that a school of urban planning should be initiated at the Center of Environmental Planning and Technology, I had made an outline and brief for that, and I had shared that with Preston Andrade from the Ford Foundation. All my teachers at MIT said that I should not miss this opportunity, that never again will I be twenty-eight and leading my own institution. Joseph Zalewski and Sert too, they told me to get out of Harvard because I would get stuck there. Sołtan was the one who really helped me with my career, he brought me to the school, so I think he looked at it from a different position, he could have expected me to be more loyal and to remain with him – which of course is understandable. So, soon after being promoted to a tenured post I left Harvard in 1971, travelling overland to India to set up the School of Planning in Ahmedabad and to live in India since then. I still remain in the Governing Body of the Center of Environmental Planning and Technology and I am now designing new studios there.

S.R.: You have mentioned Jaqueline Tyrwhitt's involvement with Doxiadis and the Delos Symposia. What do you think Sołtan's connection to them was?

C.B.: As far as I know, Sołtan never attended the Delos Symposia nor the Athens *Ekistics* Weeks, which happened every year. It is interesting, but the Le Corbusier gang saw Doxiadis, even if definitely part of the CIAM group, as a different group. Doxiadis was also very self-aware of his own personality and he was the very centre of *Ekistics*. People like Buckminster Fuller liked that – he was a doer, he did designs all over the world, but his designs were never high art: they were very functional buildings. I think that people like Sołtan did not see Doxiadis as a good designer, not appreciating his mathematical approach. Doxiadis was a very good organiser, but he was not a romantic like Sołtan was. Sołtan believed in humanism, in harmony, balance, and beauty. Back then, Doxiadis was simply one big force, and Harvard in the 1960s was another one. I think there was an element of competition. Somehow, Jackie Tyrwhitt was able to have connections amongst both, everybody liked her.

S.R.: Let us come to the house in Sparoza designed by Sołtan for Jaqueline Tyrwhitt. What do you remember about this house?

C.B.: It is a very lovely small stone house in Attica, overlooking a great valley. I went there first when I was invited for the Delos Symposium I mentioned to you before, and later I stayed there many, many times. When working for the Ford Foundation, I started to travel back and forth between America and India. Today, they would give you an economy class to Newark, as a fourteen-hour flight. But then, they said that their people could not do that. So they said that I was able to stop on my way, and they would pay for any hotel. Every time you were on your home leave, you were staying two nights in a great hotel, and the same thing on the way back. I would fly often to Athens or to Milan, Paris, London. As a result, I stayed in Sołtan's house many times in the early seventies. Jaqueline became almost like my aunt, I can say. The first time, I wound up painting the metal garage door and cleaning things... There was a garage metal door at the rear of the house, and she told me that she needed to do something with it as it was starting to rust, so I took orange anti-corrosive paint, and the colour stuck and we left it. In general, I was getting to know Jerzy Sołtan's work intimately. That house had a lovely situation, and at that time, you had a great view. The bedrooms were to the back of the house, but there was an open indoor dining area, and you could look through the veranda in the front. There are also two parallel walls that create the house, but that rule is broken because of a glass opening towards a small terrace next to the kitchen. I thought it was a great idea: you broke the rule and opened a wall, and you were able to sit

in the garden. I liked that a lot. When I designed the United World College,[9] a very elite institution in India, I remembered that house, especially when designing the headmaster's bungalow. It does not look incidentally like Jaqueline Tyrwhitt's house, but if you study the plan, it is the same: there are parallel walls and when you step into the living room, there is a higher ceiling, and it also has a veranda. There is also a kitchen, a bigger one, with an outdoor off-the-site place where you could just go and have breakfast. Basically, I remember a lot about that house, because I worked on these themes. It is an entire vocabulary, and I used it many times in my early work, like the Alliance Française building.[10] Ideas from Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, such as the Modulor, grid structure, exposed materials, using brick and concrete – it was a whole school of thought.

S.R.: What would you say was the most important aspect that the contacts with Sołtan gave you?

C.B.: My studio with him became the basis of the most important work that set my career trajectory in motion, and I actually realised that in very critical points of my career, Sołtan played a role. He influenced me to go on for a degree in city and regional planning at MIT, to apply and to get a Fulbright Fellowship to India in 1968-1969, and to pioneer the concept later. During Fulbright in India, I met Sanat Mehta who was a social worker at that time whose wife was teaching in a slum school. We discussed and I took Sołtan's studio design trying to implement it, but we could not move... he was just a social worker, and no local body would support that. However, I effectively took Sołtan's studio design on self-help housing and I carried out a self-help shelter project in Vadodara for Mehta who in 1972 became the Minister of Housing in Gujarat and engaged me to design the very first Housing and Urban Development Corporation funded Economically Weaker Sections housing project in India.[11] Later, I morphed it into a massive solution for the poor through the Site and Services Project[12] as a World Bank consultant creating fifteen thousand plots in Madras, now Chennai, in 1973-1979. It also changed the thinking of the World Bank and other international agencies to lean more toward people's power, self-help, and participatory development. That first self-help Site and Services Project for the World Bank set a new global trend of investment in such schemes around the world. This little space ship that was boosted off the ground in Robinson Hall in 1968 is still in orbit here in India having worked in China, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and Africa. If you want to have an example of lineage, this is how a student project may become a living one: just about eight years later it became a real thing. Without the influence, encouragement, and guidance of Sołtan, I would not be here today.

S.R.: You are teaching yourself. Is there anything that connects your own teaching to Jerzy Sołtan, like methods, approach, content, etc.?

C.B.: You see, when I started the School of Planning in Ahmedabad, that is where I really had impact on education and on how planning was taught – that is where I used actually a lot of Sołtan's thinking, holistic and multidimensional, as opposed to making physical layouts of roads and parking lots, urban spaces, shopping, and industry. At that time, there were maybe two or three schools of planning in India. You had to be an architect or civil engineer or a geographer: nobody else was allowed to enter those courses. When I started the school, I said, "no, we should bring an economist, a social scientist, an anthropologist, a social worker". I came up with some ideas that were somehow 'Sołtanesque', in the sense of social and economic planning linked to physical planning: we were looking at social and economic phenomena, but the plans were their mirror. In practice, in a lot of work done with our students, I insisted that they go and study slums, that they go to villages, and I think all of this was very much the way Sołtan looked at things, holistically and multi-dimensionally. That is the way Sołtan looked at things: he would create puzzles... and I definitely do that. It is not necessarily about philosophy, but about how I ask questions. It was very how he taught, with questions leading to questions, leading to questions... and I would say windows opening windows, opening more windows. Each question opened a new way of looking at things, and by looking at things, you asked more questions, and you were getting a bigger and bigger landscape... That was his method of teaching, and I certainly have been using it. Another thing, I believe that Sołtan had great fun teaching. I have learned that: if you teach, it is about a great sense of adventure and joy. He was very sociable with the students, while being strict... he was strict in the studio, but if you walked outside and had tea with him, he was a different person, a friend. I do not know where he learnt to teach like that, but he was a born teacher, there is no doubt about that.

9 United World College in Pune designed by Christopher Benninger was opened in 1998. The building won different awards between 1998 and 2002.
10 Alliance Française in Ahmedabad designed by Christopher Benninger was opened in 1976.
11 Housing and Urban Development Corporation, an Indian government-owned corporation working in the field of housing. Economically Weaker Sections refers to the part of the Indian population with lowest family revenue.
12 Site and Services Project are operations of the World Bank aimed at self-help housing in less developed countries.

John Carney

September 14th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' (1976-1977). FAIA architect working in Wilson, Wyoming.

S.R.: How do you remember Harvard from your education and how do you remember Jerzy Sołtan?

J.C.: I have many great memories of Harvard from that time. The GSD was still very much under the influence of European architecture – Le Corbusier and Bauhaus, and we had just moved into the new Gund Hall, in all its concrete brutalist glory. Soon after arriving in the fall of 1973 we took a field trip to Walter Gropius' house in Lincoln, MA where Gropius' widow, Ise, was holding court. It felt like we were there to 'kiss the ring'. Gropius had passed away in 1969, but his influence at the GSD was still strong. I had not remembered taking Jerzy's 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' seminar but I recall informal interactions with him and his contributions at critiques that he attended. I mostly recall him as a great educator, highly revered within our community, and a most elegant guy who was part of the amazing intellectual scene at Harvard during that time. One detailed memory stands out that probably took place during a design critique where the student was describing a 'multi-use' space in his design, and how all these different uses could happen there. Jerzy listened patiently and then replied, "you must design it carefully to ensure that it does not become multi-useless space". I wish I could remember more!

Marleen Kay Davis

January 15th, February 2nd, and April 13th, 2021

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studios (1978-1979), including an "energy-conscious design studio". FAIA architect and member of the faculty at the Syracuse University (1981-1994), and at the University of Tennessee (1994-), where she was also dean (1994-2003).

S.R.: Do you remember your first meeting with Jerzy Sołtan?

M.K.D.: Well, the first time I met Jerzy Sołtan was as a graduate student at Harvard. I cannot recall if I actually met with him during an interview before I enrolled in that fall semester. I believe I could have, but for sure, I met him – bigger than life – during the fall of 1978. I was in the M. Arch. II programme, which was a small, one-year programme for people who had had an undergraduate professional degree in architecture. My class had around thirteen, fourteen, up to eighteen students, and we were from around the world. We were the advanced students, not the basic architecture students, and we all had a seminar course, and an advanced studio, so we were all going to be together in the fall semester with Jerzy Sołtan.

S.R.: Did you know him before enrolling in Harvard?

M.K.D.: I would say I knew of him, but I did not know him well. One of my classmates, Val Warke, had been his student two years previously in the same programme. Val had been in that programme, and I believe he was teaching that semester when I showed up at Harvard... He became a career educator, as I have, and he is still teaching today at Cornell University. He of course spoke very highly of Jerzy Sołtan, and he knew that Jerzy Sołtan and I would be kindred spirits.

S.R.: What do you remember from the "spiritual retreat" studio?

M.K.D.: Actually, I remember quite a bit. It was a wonderful endeavour. It was a great site. I worked on an urban site for what we would usually think of as a retreat away in the countryside. The precedent of a monastery with La Certosa in Florence and with La Tourette was actually very much present in my mind. Whereas it started as a retreat, I remember that very quickly I wanted my design to be an exploration of an urban monastery. When I pull out my drawings, they are labelled "Roman Catholic Retreat", I know I focussed on a Catholic chapel design and rituals during the studio, as in an urban monastery.

S.R.: You said it was an urban lot, whereas I have found that most of the students working on that design were working in the Walden Pond area... Was it different when you were taking the studio?

M.K.D.: The studio had students from around the world, and the initial site at Walden Pond was meant to be very emblematic of Massachusetts. I believe I selected, and proposed, the site on the Charles River as an antidote to that natural location, but equally meaningful and connected with nature because of the water, the sky, and the vista. Somehow, I moved quite quickly to that urban site and developed an urban monastery with very Catholic aspects. Actually, another thing that was important for me when being with Jerzy Sołtan, was the fact that we are both Catholic. I do not want to say that it was a big thing, but there was some kind of a bond.

S.R.: Was it heavily influenced formally by Corbusian architecture?

M.K.D.: Oh, there is no question, yes. I think this is where my own background made a difference. That is why I decided to study with Jerzy Sołtan, and why – I believe – he enjoyed working with me, and why I learnt so much from him. I graduated from Cornell, from a five-year Bachelor of Architecture programme. I was at Cornell in a wonderful period, with many great faculty. Cornell was often known as a very formalist Corbu school. I certainly loved the formal emphasis. At Cornell, because of Colin Rowe, we had a great deal of history, but it was not just Corb: we had Italian history, Renaissance, and urban design. History and precedents were very important for the faculty, from the design point of view. Thus, we did so much analysis and study of Corbusian architecture. This influence was there in a formal approach, so I was very aware of formal issues coming into Jerzy Sołtan's studio... probably more so than most of the other students. Another interesting thing to note about my last two years at Cornell, is that I did all my projects in the Modulor. So here I was, a student who knew the Modulor, knew the dimensions, and had design projects using those dimensions. The project I subsequently did with Jerzy Sołtan was again engaged with the Modulor. That system did underline the inherent harmony to whatever you designed. I loved to hear his stories and anecdotes about the Modulor and about how he worked on that with Le Corbusier in the atelier.

S.R.: Was there a difference of attitude between Cornell and Sołtan?

M.K.D.: Yes, the big discovery for me when working with Jerzy Sołtan was that he definitely emphasized the social-political agenda, rather than the formal agenda which had been emphasized at Cornell. I had not encountered any real social/political agenda at Cornell. Yes, we had talked about housing, but from a formal point of view: aesthetics, efficient circulation, intervention in the city, the contribution to the city, space-making at the scale of the city, space-making at the scale of the unit... Jerzy Sołtan talked about housing from a social-political point of view. Actually, everything he talked about was much more about social-political point of view. That was new for me, that was exciting and meaningful. This was a wonderful compliment to the undergraduate background I had. Jerzy Sołtan's emphasis on a sense of poetics was another surprising value that I had not encountered in the Corbusian emphasis at Cornell. He used the word "poetics" quite often, and that would not be something that was emphasized or discussed at Cornell. It would have been too ephemeral... but Jerzy Sołtan was fascinated by the ephemeral, by the poetics, and by that kind of aspect of Corbusian thinking.

S.R.: Do you remember in what sense he was referring to the poetics of Le Corbusier? Did you have discussions or readings about that?

M.K.D.: It would be discussions. I do not recall many readings. He loved to talk, and I was a great listener. I recall him discussing the poetics with the exact word: "poetics". He would discuss that in jury, sometimes he would like a project that was almost childish in nature, and he would refer to that as having beautiful poetics.[1] He had a term, a cubist one, which is present in Corb's writings: "ineffable". He talked about the ineffable, and from my Cornell formalist background, it seemed strange to do that. It is hard to capture. Sołtan was very comfortable with the vocabulary of the poetics, of the ineffable, of the transcendent, and he advocated for that kind of experience in architecture. For example, during the retreat studio, it was very much about solitude, about the specific place, and about the way architecture connected you to that place. These were the poetic and ineffable aspects.

S.R.: Do you remember specific discussions you had on your design?

M.K.D.: Yes. [laughing] He did like desk crits. I have to say that in my group, I was somehow disappointed that many of the fellow students found employment in Boston, they were working in architecture firms, and so with a job, they did not always come to the GSD, to the studio. Me, I was there for the Graduate School, I was there to be in the studio from 8:30 in the morning until 9:30 or 10:00 at night. I was often the only one. I asked my classmates why they spent most of their time in local offices, and they answered that they needed money, experience... I was completely focussed on being a full-time student. Jerzy Sołtan would like to see what I was working on, while the other students were not there, so he spent a great deal of time with me. He did actually like my free-hand drawings. He loved drawings, I love drawing too, and it of course influences my teaching. I specifically remember at a mid-term review for the retreat, I did a complete free-hand presentation, and I remember him saying, "you draw like an angel". Later, the final drawings are very Cornell-style, with beautiful lineweight, line drawings. The other thing to mention in design crits, it was about designing in section. We spent quite a bit of time working on the building section. That is where you have the Modulor dimensions. Sectionally, this urban retreat was a sequence that took you up.

S.R.: Like a *promènade architecturale*?

M.K.D.: Exactly.

S.R.: Actually, when I talked to another student from those years, she mentioned that what she found interesting in Sołtan's teaching was a plan-based approach to design, with looking at different problems separately, and linking the solution to the concept, to the *parti*.[2] Does it sound familiar at all to you?

M.K.D.: It was very drawing-based. Perhaps to that student, the easiest drawings were plans, but for me, with the three projects I designed with Sołtan – the retreat and two projects in the spring semester – all of those were

1 Similar aspect and relationship to the "grassroots" of architecture could be seen in some of his designs, where he used childish drawings, like the some of the schools in Massachusetts and the design for the 1958 EXPO Polish Pavilion in Brussels and the use of childish drawings (Chapter 8).
2 Interview with Anne Wattenberg.

three-dimensional, with many sections. The third was perhaps more plan-based, because it was a school and it was repetitive. We developed a module and then we repeated it. But the retreat was definitely section-based and three-dimensional. Essentially, I designed a cube that floated behind a wall on the Charles River at the urban scale, about six stories high. It was deeply embedded with ideal proportions, with the golden section, and with the Modulor. It also had all the Modulor dimensions, as a square by definition is part of it. I think the *parti* diagram was a chapel as a cube embedded in a cube. There was a lot of geometry, but the circulation worked too.

S.R.: There are some very Corbusian elements, in addition to the Modulor. Skylights, their sculptural forms at the courtyard at the last level, pilotis and free ground floor plan, horseshoe-shaped stairs as an isolated element in space... Was this again influenced by Sołtan or by your previous Cornell background?

M.K.D.: It would just be both. It would simply be both... That was why I had such a wonderful education, with my understanding of Corbusian formalism at Cornell, while Sołtan was more focused on the poetic aspect of design. For example, the light tower in my design and the spatial sequence of moving up. He consistently connected experience and meaning to the form, not to mention the social agenda.

S.R.: The form, the organisation, it also makes me think about Terragni and his Casa del Fascio in Como...

M.K.D.: Because of Eisenman's work, Casa del Fascio was something of a biblical phenomenon at Cornell.

S.R.: Was Sołtan mentioning Terragni's architecture too?

M.K.D.: I would not recall... However certainly, what both he and I loved about the design was the abstraction of the cube, in the sense that it was Platonic. That would be appropriate for the abstraction of church, religion, and space.

S.R.: Do you remember anything else you were discussing about with Sołtan?

M.K.D.: Well, he loved the idea of the movement up. It was always about the idea of moving up. I did find a piece of trace, where he had drawn with charcoal on my section drawing, and he had drawn a diagram going up. When I look at my work in general, there was a definite emphasis on section during that whole year. I know that another thing he loved was the dialogue of being in a city and connecting to nature. The trees, the sky, the river... and the surprising peacefulness of the urban context.

S.R.: Were you somehow encouraged to use specific techniques for drawings and conceptual work, like charcoal and clay, which Sołtan used himself and, sometimes, encouraged students to do so?[3]

M.K.D.: He did not advise me to do that.

S.R.: Was the studio co-taught by Jerzy Sołtan and Gerald McCue?

M.K.D.: Not that I could really remember. Gerald McCue was the department chair, so he was extremely busy. He would show up, he might have come to a review, but Jerzy Sołtan was definitely the intellectual leader.

S.R.: How did you end up making the other two projects with Sołtan in the spring semester?

M.K.D.: Well, I had such a good experience in the fall... Going into the spring semester, we had so many choices, but above all the others, that was the best one.

S.R.: Was it another design studio?

M.K.D.: It was the Sołtan and Michael Kim "energy conscious design studio". I do not remember what the other choices were. Whereas I was in a programme of two semesters only and certainly, I wanted to maximise the exposure to as many different individuals as I could, something was odd with the other choices. It might have been a faculty member I had been already familiar with from Cornell. At the same time, I was interested in energy-conscious design. However, I selected the studio not because of the topic, but because of Sołtan. That is how I ended up doing three projects with him. It was not a requirement for me to be in Michael Kim's studio and I do not remember who else was in the studio, I think these were the M. Arch. I students. Maybe they were in lower level studios, taking Michael Kim's required course and they were going to apply these principles in their design studio... Again, I was totally focussed on the design, I did not need to take Michael Kim's class, and I did not need to do any engineering-type calculations, but I was doing a design studio with Jerzy Sołtan. At the same time, I had other seminars with other faculty.

3 Interview with Umberto Guarracino.

S.R.: What were you to design for this studio?

M.K.D.: It was an "energy-conscious" design, and there was a pavilion. I believe it was for some kind of World's Fair and it was in Egypt, as it was to be climate-based. It was going to be open-air, and there was going to be a lot of foot traffic, a lot of movement of people. Then, the larger project was a school in Massachusetts, an American school. I know that we worked on a typical classroom, on the common spaces, and on things like that.

S.R.: Are you aware that Jerzy Sołtan designed a series of schools in Massachusetts?[4]

M.K.D.: He certainly did not talk about or take us to those schools, no. To be honest, I would say that I was not aware that Jerzy Sołtan had practicing body of work. It sounds awful that a student would not know that about their own faculty member, especially someone like me who had deep respect for him. Through the semester, I do not recall him showing his work or him advising us to learn about his schools. He certainly knew about how schools worked, about classrooms, circulations, and places for students to come together.

S.R.: What do you remember from the discussions on the school design?

M.K.D.: We spent quite a bit of time on orientation, on solar energy panels, on natural light coming in – natural light but not direct sunlight. My design itself was this idea of having an ideal classroom, and then I know that I was concerned with keeping students of a certain age together. There might be three classrooms for the third grade, three for the fourth grade, and three for the fifth grade. Thus, I had that repeating module, which was the ideal classroom with ideal orientation, and ultimately, my design had a metaphorical concept of a city. There were repetitive energy-efficient building blocks, streets for the circulation, and the public spaces.

S.R.: Was the idea of the city coming from Sołtan?

M.K.D.: You know how it is: discussions, brainstorming... Certainly, if I was sitting at a desk for six weeks, I would not have come up with this alone. On the other hand, he was talking to fifteen students, and fifteen students did not come up with the metaphor of the city. It was a dialogue. The idea of the city was definitely very appealing to me, and it goes back to Cornell, which had a very strong urban design emphasis. I was very aware of the urban design issues from my experience there. I was definitely applying these urban design principles to this metaphor of a city for young students.

S.R.: Looking at the plans of your design, I can see the different grades in different wings of the building... They are divided by open-air areas, which seem to have been thoroughly studied, with trees, recessed elements... Was it an important element for Sołtan?

M.K.D.: Actually, I cannot remember well what he emphasized, but the idea of that space was that architecture is not about looking at a building, and the children were not in a closed classroom.

S.R.: Was it common to have such open-air classroom areas in schools back then?

M.K.D.: Well, I would not be an expert on schools, but what was being built in the United States in the 1970s was called "the open classroom". It was a free plan inside, with no windows and no exterior spaces. Open classrooms were for teacher flexibility and it was an acoustical nightmare, as you would just have everything together, just with subdividers. That was the dominant theory... and that is why people come to hate architects... There were so many buildings with no windows, and the teachers felt trapped inside. It was artificial lighting all day long, it was noisy, teachers did not have their own classroom space to control, and it was just "open space." These "open classroom schools" were a dominant American viewpoint. In class, we might have criticised that as we talked about schools. I remember by the end of the 1970s, and of course, it was 1979, the hermetic "open classroom school" was not viewed favourably in the press, but many schools were still designed that way. Even today, when you drive past a building, you can say, "seventies – no windows, fortress". It is just so sad. I do not believe we talked much about that however. I think the design emphasis was linked to the whole idea of a sustainable studio and natural light. The idea of having an outdoor space for every classroom was rather unique. Today, you can see that everywhere. I do not know if outdoor spaces were unique to my design or whether it was common to all the students.

S.R.: It looks a little bit Team 10-ish to me...

M.K.D.: Exactly.

4 Schools in Salem, New Bedford, Brockton, Lynn, and Newton (Chapter 10).

S.R.: Just coming back to what you have said, it looks to me that Sołtan in the school designs criticised that "open classroom" model – there were divisions, there were windows, and there were open-air spaces…

M.K.D.: Again, I do not remember him showing us his own work. It did not make an impression on me that he was an active building architect. I really wish that we had done a field trip to one of his schools. That would have been so helpful for students…

S.R.: Did you do field trips with him to any kind of place?

M.K.D.: No.

S.R.: Let me share with you some drawings and photographs of the Salem High School in Massachusetts Sołtan designed in the 1970s. I would like to know whether you can see any elements you find familiar from the studio or which could make you think about your own design. [showing photographs of the Salem High School]

M.K.D.: Looking at this, you can see *brise-soleil* casting shadows… I can also see that the horizontal lines are Modulor-based. When I look at these elevations, [looking at the photographs of the courtyard] these are the guidelines, you can see the repetitive harmonic proportions. You could study how it overlays with the Modulor.

S.R.: Actually, when Sołtan was talking about this design, he claimed that it was built with the Modulor.[5]

M.K.D.: I can see it. Do not forget that my professors at Cornell had used that in their projects, and I had already visited Corbu's projects. You could feel it the minute you entered the space, and you can see it in this one: the repetitions are not regular, they are harmonic. I remember that I missed the first week of the school, so perhaps he talked about these when he launched the module, but I do not recall it… Actually, in 1979-1980, I worked for Josep Lluís Sert who also worked completely with the Modulor dimensions. He consistently drew interior elevations, which were so similar to the interior elevations of Sołtan that you have showed. I could tell immediately that the Modulor created regulating lines for the design. What is curious to me is that Sołtan did not talk at all about his own work. It was invisible to the students. Now, what he loved to talk about, it was Le Corbusier. He loved to talk about his personal experiences with him. That entire year, he also loved to talk about the Pope John Paul II. He was so excited about a Polish Pope, and there was also a plan for him to come to Boston in the fall of 1979, I believe. There was quite a lot of excitement about that.

S.R.: Actually, when I was talking to Sołtan's daughter, she mentioned a car Jerzy Sołtan had, where apparently he was driving Karol Wojtyła before he became the Pope during his visit to Boston as a cardinal…

M.K.D.: Sołtan gave me a ride in that car, and he was very strong to say, "you are sitting in the seat where the very Pope John Paul put his…". He was very proud of having driven Pope John Paul in his car, and anyone in that car was reminded that they were sitting in the seat of the Pope.[6]

S.R.: Actually, Sołtan was feeling connected to the religious aspects of architecture, and in the last years of his life, he was working on a conceptual design of a church, which he wanted to present to the Pope. It was linked to the church designs he drew in the 1950s in Poland.

M.K.D.: You can see how many overlapping experiences – being raised a Catholic, knowing Le Corbusier, appreciating Pope John Paul – made it a special year when I studied with Jerzy Sołtan.

S.R.: Coming back to the second studio, what were the roles of both Michael Kim and Jerzy Sołtan?

M.K.D.: There was no question: Jerzy Sołtan was the designer and Michael Kim was more of a specialist consultant. Undoubtedly, the studio was inspired by the Le Corbusier diagram, with the engineer and the architect interlocking hands[7] to demonstrate their reciprocal strengths. Sołtan brought this incredible design approach that we were going to work together with both perspectives. He was very respectful of Michael Kim and all the technical aspects. Sołtan did not treat him as a technology consultant while he was in charge himself… He wanted Michael Kim to be very present. It was fascinating. It was not about number crunching and it was not just solar angles and things like that. He would ask Michael Kim what the best solar angle was, what the best way to solve a given problem was.

S.R.: Do you remember any discussions from this studio?

5 Interviews with François Vigier and with Stan Szaflarski.
6 The same memory was shared by another student from 1976-1977, Emily Kuo, see: Kuo to Brenda Levin from October 19th, 2020.
7 Sketch 'Les tâches de l'ingénieur, les tâches de l'architecte' by Le Corbusier from July 31st, 1960.

M.K.D.: I remember a long afternoon with a big emphasis on designing sunscreens, *brise-soleil*. How do you design *brise-soleil*? You look at the angles of the sun, coming from the South, from the East, and from the West. You prevent direct sunlight from entering… I remember he could do all these diagrams about designing *brise-soleil*, and that he brought this amazing approach enabling you to calculate visually the forms and the shadows. You would end up with *brise-soleil* that curve in profile, and you would have complete shade on your primary surface. In fact, he claimed *brise-soleil* elements do not have to be straight nor identical. Although he was very technical and very energy-efficient, the design result was whimsical, poetic, and unexpected. That was what Jerzy Sołtan wanted to do: he was fascinated with the *brise-soleil*, providing shading devices that were also poetic and beautiful.

S.R.: What do you mean saying that the result was "whimsical and poetic"?

M.K.D.: "Poetic" was one of his favourite words and for me, as a formalist coming from Cornell, that was a subjective thought process. On reflection, perhaps whimsical and poetic may imply intuitive form making, rather than analytical formalism, or formalism with a rational basis. That is why it was such a nice complement to my undergraduate background.

S.R.: Do you remember their discussions, between Kim and Sołtan?

M.K.D.: Not too much. Michael Kim would be pretty quiet, and Jerzy Sołtan had a big presence on reviews. The bigger Jerzy Sołtan would become, the quieter Michael Kim would be. I would have to say, I do not know whether it was the greatest studio, but I certainly enjoyed it.

S.R.: Was it an innovative approach at that time?

M.K.D.: Yes. In the United States, 1976 was the energy crisis. After that, architects all around the country were looking into innovative and energy-efficient architecture. That was the word. In the 1990s, we would say, "sustainable architecture", and now we would say, "performative architecture". But "energy-efficient architecture" in the late 1970s and early 1980s was emphasized everywhere. This was not uncommon: many schools were developing programmes on energy-efficient architecture and solar architecture back then. However, when I was at Cornell just before that, there were no energy-efficient questions in architecture. During the studio, Jerzy Sołtan and Michael Kim spent a lot of time talking about vernacular architecture, windmills… We spent a lot of time on air circulation and on indigenous architecture because my pavilion design was very much about air circulation.

S.R.: Actually, that is another connection to Sołtan's work. In the 1950s, he was working on a typical pavilion for tropical countries,[8] **which made use of natural ventilation, shading, etc. – there seems to be a clear connection between teaching and Sołtan's design work…**

M.K.D.: Not just Sołtan's, but also Le Corbusier's. Sołtan talked about how Le Corbusier was adamant about energy-efficient and climate-sensitive design. Take the Salvation Army building in Paris, with a curtain wall… Le Corbusier was horrified that it was an internal climate disaster. After that, he never did a building without considering ventilation and amelioration of the sun. That was the agenda Jerzy Sołtan brought to the whole issue. It was very much about design, it was about poetics, and it was about comfort. It was different from other American solar and energy-efficient projects, which was rather "find-the-angle-and-get-the sun". For Sołtan, it was more about air movement, sunscreen, the aesthetics, and the experience of living there.

S.R.: Let us have a look at the design for the typical pavilion for tropical countries, do you recognise any familiar or important elements? [showing drawings of the 'Tropik' typical pavilion]

M.K.D.: It reminds me of the Esprit Nouveau, with its metal substructure. I distinctly remember a section diagram with the floor plane and the undulating roof, which would be in contrast. It is very Corbusian in the sense of a 'kit of parts', which are then assembled. There is the 'kit of parts' in the metal substructure underneath the main structure of Esprit Nouveau. That was also the *parti* for my own pavilion. The idea was that of a uniform roof structure contrasting with what was below. It is very much present in Esprit Nouveau, in the Philips Pavilion, and in my own design. The roof was independent. In my studio design, to the point my roof moved in an energy-conscious way. The idea was that when people came in, that would generate power… Such an approach was how he was constantly challenging you: to be energy-conscious with solar energy, but to be also more than that. In my case, the idea was that the movement of people could generate power with a

8 Design for the typical exhibition pavilion 'Tropik' (Chapter 8).

solenoid.

S.R.: When I looked at an assignment from the "energy conscious" studio, there was the idea of an approach where a group prepares ground rules, which are to be followed by the individual designs.[9]

M.K.D.: Yes, the ground rules were the climate and responding to it...

S.R.: Were you involved in drafting these ground rules as students?

M.K.D.: Not that I remember.

S.R.: The moving roof, which you mentioned was also linked to the idea of guaranteeing breeze and natural ventilation, managing heat storage... What was the inspiration to think of such a mechanism? Was it coming more from yourself, from Sołtan, or from Kim?

M.K.D.: Oh, it was definitely a dialogue between Jerzy Sołtan and myself. Kim did talk a lot about ventilation, especially about the climate of the desert. He talked about radiation cooling at night. The moving would flip up to promote that cooling at night before a new hot day. During the day, all the little flips would move to have ventilation so that the hot air would rise and go through the roof. That was to be sustainable ventilation. I just loved working on that project, and I loved the poetics of it. Before Harvard, I had a minor in structures and I had worked in a structural engineering firm – that is what you mentioned Sołtan had in his notes about myself: "worked for engineers".[10] I thought the idea of a single-point cantilever truss, with moveable ventilation flaps, would be a minimal structure. Then, I vaguely recall that Sołtan could say (and draw) something like "why doesn't it all move and go up? To expose the floor to the night-time sky for cooling?", and that would be a big breakthrough. There were also many discussions. The perimeter was to be like an Egyptian wall, and it was battered on one side. There were many details we had a blast talking about... I came up with the idea to generate electricity on a treadmill. Crazy things! It was real fun to be really pushing it, but I do not think other students were as excited about the project as I was. It was more like an obligatory course led by an older professor with an engineer... However, to say just something about that studio in 1979, for Sołtan, to embrace an engineer and go full into energy conservation, it was remarkable to do that. That was again the "save the planet" agenda, together with making a great design at the same time. His idea of design, with the poetic and with the imaginative, was about the poetry of the high-tech aluminium craziness and the low-tech Egyptian battered solid wall. It was his idea, to contrast the old and the new. That word, "contrast", it came up all the time. I really loved those two designs, the pavilion and the retreat. They were clearly better because of Sołtan. It was definitely a joy to talk to him about them.

S.R.: What would be the common ground between the two studios – the first and the second semester ones?

M.K.D.: Certainly, the social agenda was something I learnt from him... Then, it was about going beyond the pragmatic agenda and aiming for the ineffable, aiming for something beyond functionality.

S.R.: Let us move to the theoretical seminar taught by Sołtan you attended. Have you read through your notes from that 'Grassroots' seminar?

M.K.D.: Yes, and actually, when we talked first I had not remembered there had been an entire separate course.

S.R.: Was there anything that struck you like "oh, yes, that was so important"?

M.K.D.: To be honest, not really.

S.R.: Do you remember him mentioning other architects' works, apart from Le Corbusier?

M.K.D.: He did like Shadrach Woods, and he loved Hassan Fathy. He talked about Hassan Fathy all the time. He liked him as he was a formalist, sympathetic to cultural issues, and he had a social agenda. I think he talked about Hassan Fathy about ten times throughout the year.

S.R.: I have seen there was a scheme of Sołtan's reading of modern architecture and its different shades – formalism, functionalism, postmodernism, optimism, pessimism – in your notes. [showing the diagram] Was it different from the reading you were familiar with?

M.K.D.: Well, this diagram, he drew that on the board. It was not me trying to interpret him, and even if I do not have a mental picture of him drawing that on the board, I can 95% guarantee that he was drawing that himself. The whole business of optimism was important, and it was unique to him...

S.R.: ...and you wrote an essay on optimism too. Was it influenced by himself?

M.K.D.: On optimism, pessimism, and cynicism, yes. That was inspired by Sołtan. At that time, I was so mad at postmodernism, and I could not stand Philip Johnson. He was a complete cynic. I do not remember Sołtan saying anything bad about Philip Johnson, but the whole idea of the International Style, as defined by Philip Johnson's MoMA exhibition with that name is just ridiculous to Europeans. Modernism was not a style. It was not an ethos. It was a social agenda. That was a complete message I got the year I was at Harvard. There was no such social/political discussion at Cornell, nor in most American writing that I can recall.

S.R.: The criticism of the International Style, it would not be specific to Sołtan, would it?

M.K.D.: Actually, it was definitely specific to Sołtan because of his European background and social agenda in housing. At Cornell, it was always about the form, pilotis, the whiteness, and space... Even the approach to urban design was not social agenda-driven, and it was not about the need for housing in American cities. I think it was very European, Team 10 and CIAM-influenced.

S.R.: Do you remember any of his criticism of postmodernism?

M.K.D.: Oh, that was just before postmodernism exploded.

S.R.: You mentioned that he was an influential person for your teaching. In what sense did he influence you?

M.K.D.: I can certainly hear Jerzy Sołtan in key moments when I am talking to students, as when saying, "design in section". I remember distinctly that he talked section: when you had a flat roof, you would have an undulating floor, and if you had a flat floor, you wanted an undulating roof. I also hear Jerzy Sołtan when I talk about the contrast: contrast between the roof and the floor, between the very big and the very small. He always talked about contrast: flat versus curved, and big versus small. Contrast was a very important design strategy. As a direct quote, "you only know the very, very large in contrast to the very, very small". I also have taken with me the social agenda. It was a revelation for me to see the social agenda in Jerzy Sołtan's approach to architecture as an improvement and as making lives better... He thought architecture was very much part of that, and that Le Corbusier was very much part of this social urban agenda. That, I took it from him in a very strong way. That contrasts very directly with the American version of "Le Corbusier as a formalist" understanding. Philip Johnson with the MoMA exhibit 'The International Style' simply identified European modernism as a visual aesthetic, having nothing to do with social political agenda. Connecting a visual, formal aesthetic to a larger social/political agenda is what I learnt from Jerzy Sołtan. That is what I take to my students.

S.R.: Have you used somehow your experience with Sołtan when you were planning architecture teaching at the University of Tennessee?

M.K.D.: Actually, there is another experience I had with Jerzy Sołtan... In May 1979, he was hired as a consultant to start an architecture programme at a university in Saudi Arabia.[11] I was his assistant then and I worked with him, so I saw his vision of the entire school education. He felt that the cultural context was very important and that the cultural experience should be very respectful of Saudi Arabia. It was not to super-impose Western values, but it should be global, it should be in a large context. There was a social political agenda, and there was importance of the context, history and theory, and technology. If it was not about planning the entire curriculum, it was about the introductory course, which was to embrace all the elements of architecture. Having the opportunity to work one-to-one with him was for me significant as a learning experience and later when I became an educator.

9 Brief for 'Energy Conscious Design Studio' from 1979, see: HGSD-JS, AA023.
10 Student list for M. Arch. II design studio from 1978, see: HGSD-JS, AA021.

11 Documents on Jerzy Sołtan involvement as a consultant for the King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia concerning the creation of the School of Environmental Design and its curriculum are part of the restricted collection at Harvard, which will be accessible from 2040, see: HGSD-JS, BB series.

Karl Fender

October 19th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's studio (1978-1979), and architect in Australia. He is the co-founder of the Fender Katsalidis architectural practice which was established in 1995 and which is located in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane working both internationally and throughout Australia. He has lived and worked throughout his career in London, Rome, Cambridge Ma, Paris, Hong Kong, and Bangkok.

S.R.: Do you remember the first time you met with Jerzy Sołtan?

K.F.: Yes. It was in Cambridge Massachusetts in late 1978, but it might be useful to put that in context. Your paper will no doubt record an accurate compendium of Jerzy Sołtan's life's work, his philosophies, and his accomplishments. So maybe I can paint a picture of how this man affected and enriched my architectural journey as he no doubt also did to many other students. I was a little bit of an unusual student... I was older. I was at the ripe old age of thirty-two when selected for the Masters 2 course at Harvard while the other 13 selected students were in their mid-twenties. I had been living in Rome, working for Brown Daltas Architects, under Spero Daltas, a Greek American architect who was in partnership with Ben Brown, also an American... At that time, we were working on large projects located in Saudi Arabia, and accordingly, a steady stream of architects from our Cambridge Ma office would come over to Rome to collect design packages from us, which were then to be documented back in Cambridge. It was through those interchanges that I formed a connection with Cambridge, the place of Harvard. Furthermore, Spero was a Harvard alumni. He was quite an interesting fellow...if he liked you, you worked for him twenty-four-seven, whereas those he did not relate to were relegated to the back of the office with rare interaction. I happened to fall into the first category, so I had to work as if possessed. I must say that I did enjoy the manic nature of it all. If you were one of the favoured ones, one of the chosen ones in that office, you were deemed too valuable to ever leave. It was "not allowed"...unless you went to study at Harvard, his beloved Alma Mater! Although he looked after me very well, I resigned after a few tiring years when I gained entry to Harvard. After the years with Spero, it was definitely time to pursue the next chapter of my professional life. I was accepted into what was called the M. Arch. II program, which comprised fourteen internationally selected people each year. It was a very highly contested education, so I was very, very lucky. There were graduates who were selected because of their qualities and their potential, and the studio was curated to be an international blend. There were two Japanese, two Americans, two Australians, two Chinese, two these, two those, etc... Most had worked for a couple of years maximum, but I had been working since I was twenty, because I pursued an apprenticeship with a very famous Australian architect, Robin Boyd, whilst studying architecture at night. In that milieu, I was very, very obsessed with learning my trade and the challenge of design. After that introduction to architecture, and having worked for fourteen years, I had quite a portfolio, and I guess that somehow gained me a place in the hallowed Masters 2 studio at Harvard. That was when Gerald McCue was chairman of the Graduate School of Design, and of course Jerzy Sołtan was one of the design professors. I must confess I did not know of him...

S.R.: You mean, you did not know him before, did you?

K.F.: No, exactly. However, what I do remember very well was his very first talk to us, in the studio, at Gund Hall, designed by the young Australian architect, John Andrews. Memorably, Sołtan talked very poetically about architecture and the process of design in a manner that was a revelation to me. He was extremely focused on showing us the way to find and keep an open, searching mind while exploring design pathways. One of the main characteristics of young architects he pointed out, was their tendency to fall prematurely and superficially in love with their work, their models, and their drawings quite before an appropriate depth of cross-examination. He did not want us to simply make beautiful drawings ; drawings that would distract us from the essence of the proposition. Instead, he wanted us to think deeply about the architecture, its underlying forces and to think from a platform comprising very basic principles...again, he did not want us to be distracted from our thought process and therefore disturbed by the beauty of our physical production process. I will never forget that. Back then, Harvard had a little art shop downstairs, it was called 'Charrette'. He declared on that first day, *"I want you all to go down there and I want you to buy clay, I want you to buy charcoal, and I want you to buy butcher's paper*". It was not even tracing paper, it was rough paper that butchers used to wrap meat. In essence he was saying that, "*we are going to explore ideas through these mediums, because you are going to get filthy hands, and you are going to have filthy drawings and rough lumps of clay to explore your thinking – and this will focus you on the essence.....you will be confronting the essence of the search for a truthful architecture. With these tools, you will not fall in love with your handicraft. You will have models that honestly and basically test your options and your explorations. From rough formed clay, you will be able to see your work clinically, and without distraction. With charcoal on rough paper, you won't be beguiled by beauty over content".* To me, that was inspirational. I duly purchased my lump of clay, my charcoal and my butchers paper. However, I was a production guy and I had commercial working experience: I had designed all my life for other people. While I was working with Robin Boyd as an apprentice, I was learning and therefore I designed within his language. Then, with Spero Daltas, where it was almost "a building a day" sort of process, life was about production and getting designs out quickly, under pressure. I was thinking back then about designs from the point of view of my boss, I was thinking about what he would expect, what he would like and about what would he do to solve the required designs. I was very young and I wanted to please. I did not have the time, inclination or the environment to philosophise. I just designed for him, I was working for the boss. To get to Harvard was a relief for me, and a turning point. I was shown how to think for myself under the critical mentorship of Jerzy Sołtan.

S.R.: How did you approach Sołtan's studio?

K.F.: We had to pair up, everyone selected a design partner from within the group. This was to share the initial research load for the set studio project which was the design of a spiritual retreat. I paired up with Michael Palladino, who now runs the Los Angeles office of Richard Meier and Partners. In fact, as I understand, it is his office under licence. He and I both decided that we wanted to do a Mormon retreat because they did not have an architectural language. At the time, there was a Mormon church being built every day around the world, but no Mormon sanctuaries. Therefore, we felt, we would not be straight-jacketed by a predetermined architectural language or other constraints or expectations. We enjoyed doing this together and formed a friendship which lasts today. Later, in the studio, I pounded my clay, and I scratched some thoughts with some charcoal, but then I put that stuff aside and I quickly designed a 'beautiful' building. Slightly proudly, I announced to Jerzy Sołtan, "*here is my project*". He said, "*Karl, that seems at first glance to be very polished, but I do not think you have seen and understood the potential power of this project, and the true nature of these people who your design is for. Whilst you have done something that is superficially nice, you have not designed something that has taken you on a thoughtful journey. You have done this as a professional producer.....here it is: the product*". When he said that, with a jolt it made me reflect on the history of the Mormons. They escaped persecution in 1874 by walking from Illinois to Salt Lake City in Utah. That was a 3 month journey of desperation, something to be recognised and remembered. Utah remains the place where most of the Mormons are located today.[1] Jerzy Sołtan started to make me think far more philosophically about the design problem. As my thinking evolved, I ended up over the duration of the studio with almost a non-building thanks to his opening my mind. My developed proposition could not have been further removed from my hastily conceived starting position. I actually designed a journey in the woods, which symbolised the walk of the Mormons from Illinois to Salt Lake City. This walk arrived at a place in the forest which celebrated the finding of the 'golden plates' by Joseph Smith.[2] I wanted to create a religious moment within a protective glass cube, which allowed celebration of the plates and their place in the forest. The building itself was a non-physical culmination of the journey, with the actual retreat comprising rooms that also had an intimate relationship with the forest. This was to be an experiential place where people could gather; a place of introspection where they could remember what the founders of Mormonism went through. It was not to be a formal architectural monument. The design was to be a spiritual celebration. This is what Jerzy Sołtan dragged out of me. At the end of the day, he really made me think.

S.R.: Do you remember something particular about desk reviews you had with Sołtan during the studio?

K.F.: We all worked in an open studio, within layered, open, connected floor 'trays'. We worked amongst all of the other design studios which provoked interaction and exchange between students, professors and visitors. It could have been Michael Graves for instance standing behind you having dropped in to have a look at the student work... It was very much about exchange. There were group discussions where Jerzy would talk to us, on the trays, as a group, but there was also a lot of private discussion over your desk. It was very similar to what I was used to at the office of Robin Boyd. His was a very small office. Every morning he would come and lean on your desk with hands on his chin, like this. [imitating the gesture]. He would say for instance, "*I think we might*

1 Referring to the 'Mormon Trail' the Mormons crossed from Nauvoo, Illinois to the Salt Lake Valley, Utah in 1846-1847.
2 The so-called 'Golden Plates' are according to the Mormon belief the main inspiration for the *Book of Mormon*, one of the main sacred texts in Mormonism. They are said to be found by Joseph Smith in a forest.

try doing it like this". However, that was not Robin Boyd teaching per se; that was Robin Boyd instructing, with me receiving privileged practical experience. With Sołtan, it was about higher learning, and open thinking. It was inspirational and incredibly satisfying, although possibly I did not fully realise at that time how fortunate I was and how important the time spent under his tutelage was to me. He was with us all the time. He was a really beautiful guy; soft, fully engaged and with a profound wisdom of his craft. If I had my time over again, I would have interrogated him a lot more than I did, but I was young, and it was Harvard with many other compelling distractions...

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan's reaction to your final design?

K.F.: Yes. I don't remember him ever talking in superlatives such as, "*oh, Karl, that is magnificent...*". He was more likely to say, "*Karl, you finally fully immersed yourself into this project, you found the spirit of the problem... can you see the difference between what you have done here from where you started; how you have set up a series of experiential architectural moments, through an attitude of truth and layers of contemplation?*"... and he was absolutely correct. He certainly led me to search for the deeper meaning in the way a building should evolve, how a building communicates, and what its true potential and purpose is. Sołtan was a fabulous communicator, really fabulous.

S.R.: It does sound like a Socratic method from your description.

K.F.: Oh, yes. When he said to me after my first crit, "*Karl, you have made a handsome building, and a handsome model, but you have not nearly reached the moment of truth, you have a way to go if you embrace the opportunity*", I was a bit shocked. I was used to being told that the design work I produced was very good and fit for purpose. In retrospect, I did not yet understand what the essence and potential of Sołtan's Harvard studio was. It was a think-tank and I needed to succumb to Sołtan's navigation through its potentials. I was there initially demonstrating that I could do buildings which responded pragmatically to the program...Sołtan deconstructed all of that by bringing me right back to the basics. I think he had a profound influence on the way I look at projects now, as they sit before me, ready to be realised. He prompted me to think philosophically about what the real role of a building was in its context. How a building could and should respond beyond its pragmatic responsibilities to the emotionally moving enhancement of the place it sits in. He pursued cultural sensitivity and enjoyment; how a. building should be continually inspirational to occupants, and to anyone simply passing by. After Sołtan's first semester studio, I elected to do my second with Moshe Safdie, who remains a respected friend of mine...if I had Safdie on my first studio, I know I would have prospered, i.e. "*righto, here is the problem, here we go*". With Jerzy Sołtan, he really did open up and enrich the way I thought about the process of architecture. I was well armed after the Sołtan journey for the following Safdie experience.

S.R.: Was there anything that he was insisting during the designs, something apart from the poetics?

K.F.: He was certainly not fixated on pragmatic issues. For him, the conversation was about the spirit of the place, and not about issues such as "*the toilet is next to the kitchen, move it* ". It transcended pragmatic problem solving; it searched for deeper spiritual, philosophical, and experiential relationships; the true essence of architecture.

S.R.: You mentioned that it would have been different if you had someone else for your first design. Does it mean that Sołtan fitted well for the first semester studio?

K.F.: Yes, he opened our eyes, mine certainly, and put us in the right mental place for the possibilities of what lay ahead at Harvard. He was fantastic, a very engaging man, tall and slim, with thin white hair... very quietly spoken, very even, very passionate, and he knew his place. He knew exactly why he was there...for me, he made those days absolutely consuming. Prior to that in the 1960s, MIT was apparently the design school of choice, but I was there in the 1970s, and that trend had swung to Harvard which then became the place of amazing dialogue with people like Fred Koetter who co-authored *Collage City*,[3] and the deep thinking Jorge Silvetti. Moshe Safdie had just started teaching at Harvard, and I was in his first design studio. He was the complimentary opposite to Sołtan; a pragmatic architect, who was driven by context and needs. He found his poetry in the structure, the pragmatics, and the quest for societal equality and richness, and he is of course still a very engaged architect. To be with an architect like Moshe Safdie, telling you the secrets of the Habitat[4] and confessing that the innovation of volumetric systems building was less than a structural success was to me.... amazing! It was what he did with that flawed system through innovative urban design that was way ahead of

3 Fred Koetter (1938-2017) was an American architect, urbanist, and Harvard teacher, and dean of the School of Architecture at the Yale University in 1993-1998. He collaborated with Colin Rowe on *The Collage City*.
4 Habitat 67 in Montreal was designed by Moshe Safdie and opened in 1967.

its time in the terms of human placemaking. Even today, it is a highly cherished estate, people love living there. My studio work with him involved high density residential architecture in Jerusalem, a typology that I had never tackled before... whereas in contrast, my career since then has focused on high-rise and high-density, from building a city in Bangkok to everything we are doing here in Australia, and to what will be the second largest tower in the world once it is finished next year in Kuala Lumpur.[5] At Harvard, we also had teachers like Gerhard Kallmann and Michael McKinnell who did amongst other great work, the Boston City Hall[6] and the Boston Five Cents Bank. They were strong craftsmen, like architectural tradesman, working sculpturally with singular material palettes, as in the Boston City Hall...they were the new kind of robust constructivists. With them, I undertook the Australian Parliament House competition, but we did not finish, as they ended up not having the necessary time for it. Jorge Silvetti was on the other hand, a total philosopher, and a theorist I should say. I did not understand one word of what he put on the table because it was so complex. He was highly intellectual, and delivered his esoteric views as I recall in an intoxicating accent of some sort. I would sit during his lectures often thinking, "*what did he just say, what did he mean?*" The Harvard design professors all held such very different philosophical positions, and they were all together in the blender that was Harvard in those years. Sołtan was the counterpoint to all of that. Before Harvard, I had never time to explore architecture as a passion. It was more about architecture as a product in a business. Sołtan was very poetic, and he helped me to go beyond my business accumulated mental shackles. He showed me how to find the deeper beauty of architecture, its potential, and how profound it is as a passionate pursuit. He was able to touch the creative heart of everybody, so I will never forget his contribution. Sołtan was absolutely inspiring as a teacher and engaging as a mentor.

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan talking about Le Corbusier?

K.F.: Yes, and during all that, we learnt how fundamentally he was a Le Corbusier disciple. In fact, he even proudly (I suspect) showed us the original modular man tape he developed and made with Le Corbusier, and he showed slides of his own paintings which were very much Corb's language... Again, under different circumstances, I would have personally pursued his professional relationship with Corb.

S.R.: You have seen his artworks then?

K.F.: Yes, but only on slides, not in reality. As I mentioned earlier, he was very much a Corb disciple. He was teaching the poetic aspects of architecture, based on what he learnt in Le Corbusier's studio. He is of course also mentioned in some of the books on Le Corbusier.

S.R.: Did he show you also his own designs too?

K.F.: No. I do not know any, and I have never taken the time, or had the opportunity to research more about his oeuvre. I would love to see the built products of this teacher. I hope I would not be disappointed; sometimes the teacher is not the practitioner.

S.R.: Was it important for you as a student to have such a direct testimony...?

K.F.: ...and to be able to touch history, yes. I don't believe in remoteness. For instance, coming from Australia, architectural destinations were really distant. As an example, when I was finally able to travel, the direct architectural experiences were quite different to the expectations... when I visited Corbusier's Notre-Dame-du Haut, it was so much smaller than I had expected. This is an example of first impressions out of books where actual physical size is hard to comprehend, and the importance of the work can build up the scale in your mind's eye. Direct testimony as you put it is fundamental.

S.R.: Apart from Le Corbusier, do you remember Sołtan referring to other architects?

K.F.: No, I don't recall him ever saying "look at the work of so and so" in order to articulate his points of view, not even Corbusier. In schools today, and in practice, there is so much profound work being influenced through looking at theories and practices of others around the world, but that was not his way. His studio was straight into fundamental design without distraction by the work of others. I do not ever remember him saying anything like for instance, "*think about that project that was done by so and so, look at the way he solved that*

5 Merdeka PNB118 centre designed by Fender Katsalidis Architects with RSP Architects and Sasaki Associates is estimated to open in 2021.
6 Boston City Hall built in 1968, following the design awarded in the competition in 1962, by Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles and Campbell, Aldrich & Nulty. As a result, both Gerhard Kallmann and Michael McKinnell became members of the faculty at the Harvard GSD and remained as such for over two decades.

in structural and symbolic terms". Never any of that. His way was very much about introspection, the basics, the poetics, and the experience.

S.R.: Some pointed to me that in some cases the M. Arch. II students, having worked in practices, had much higher expectations and it could have been a problem related to Sołtan's studio.[7] Was it difficult for you to switch into architecture studying after having practiced for twelve years?

K.F.: No, I was not an upstart or there for the sole purpose of gaining my Harvard 'Ticket'. I was there because I had been living a professional life of intense work and deadline output. The time had come for me to think about architecture, to discover what made me tick, as it were. So I went to Harvard with an open mind, and a clear determination to learn. I was certainly blessed to have Sołtan as my first design professor. There were some people who were there for the fast-track to a Harvard Master of Architecture. They just ripped through things, there were others who were talentless... and then there was Michael Palladino and me...and we went through famously! Harvard is a sort of place where you receive the equivalent of what you put in, and in so doing, you can get through like I did, richer for the experience. It was also possible and tempting to cross-enrol into other schools in Boston.[8] Accordingly, and with incredible enthusiasm for further learning, I went to MIT and enrolled into Environmental Light and Colour and another course on bellows photography, and so then I had this substantially enlarged workload of subjects that I needed to pass. Accordingly, the amount of time I needed to get through in my first semester was absolutely outrageous. The drawings which I completed for Sołtan's spiritual retreat studio took many long hours into many nights. I wish I still had them, but they got lost on my travels– they were the most beautiful ink drawings on vellum, the curves were all done with by flexible rulers, with accurately parallel line work from vision alone. I was working day and night on the spiritual retreat, and studying hard for all of the other subjects, I was not there to fail. There was a lot of pressure. Richard Meier was one of the judges who came in to do the final design assessments, and the whole school came to observe the critiques. Sołtan had helped me to think more deeply, but I still felt the need to transcend the graphic limitations of clay and charcoal for the final presentation! In the second semester, that changed. I worked with Moshe Safdie, all my drawings were freehand, and I said to myself that I would not be repeating the first semester workload. I learnt about "auditing". This time I was not going to formally cross-enrol. This meant I could list the additional courses that interested me, and I could attend these as I pleased without regulatory commitment or responsibility to pass exams. I audited classes in the Business School, but when they lost my Interest, I could simply go back to my drawing board. Harvard was a fabulous centre of learning. I had discovered how to elegantly navigate my way through the myriad of learning opportunities.

S.R.: You mentioned before that Sołtan changed how you look at designs. What would be his influence on your approach to design?

K.F.: He changed, or should I say developed my appreciation of the potentials of the projects lying ahead, and he changed my methodology of evaluating those potentials. You know, when I started, I evaluated potentials in a very programmatic and pragmatic way. Thanks to Sołtan, I recognised how much more profound and compelling were the potentials and indeed the responsibilities of the architect. For example, in Australia, we design a lot of tall towers. There is a need and they construct the city, but does that make the city a wonderful place? It does when you are in the tall tower looking out and around at stunning views, but what does it mean for the people down in the streets? The obligation of those tall towers is to be responsible for their context, for enhancing the public realm, for saving and integrating heritage fabric, and for creating spaces, places, and uplifting experiences for the community. These buildings have to become producers rather than consumers in all respects. For instance, our Merdeka 118 in Kuala Lumpur, sits next to an open stadium where Independence was declared in 1957. This renders the location as probably the most important heritage place in Malaysia. So there am I designing this thumping building right above the stadium. What am I trying to do here? Am I trying to design big because of the brief and because I can, or am I trying to make a place that celebrates what happened in 1957? How does this building respond to and respect all of that? It is big, it is powerful, but what physical and intrinsic value does it give back to the city? These are the challenges that need to be answered in order to make a physical architecture that is right. It was understanding the criticality of deep design interrogation in the pursuit of a meaningful architecture, and the pathway to achieving that, which Jerzy Sołtan gave to the M. Arch. II class of '79.

7 Interview with Joanna Lombard.
8 The cross-enrol system was established earlier, see: *Official Register of Harvard University* for the Graduate School of Design for 1970-1971, p. 38, see: HGSD.

Urs Gauchat

April 4th, 2019, in Cambridge, MA

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's Master Class design studio (1966-1967), member of the Harvard faculty (1971-1983), visiting professor at Zurich ETH in 1984, dean of the School of Architecture at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (1991-2016) and Jerzy Sołtan's close friend. He collaborated with Jerzy Sołtan on his book.

S.R.: You were studying for your Master degree in 1966. Was it at that time when you met Sołtan for the first time?

U.G.: Yes, it was Sert's Master Class. I had to decide whether to study under Sert, or to go to the University of Pennsylvania to study under Kahn. Those were the two Master's programs of note then. I only applied here... and there was a very interesting mixture of people at Harvard, there was also one of Kenzo Tange's collaborators who became a very good friend.

S.R.: You described quite precisely, what the dynamics of the studio were, with Sert, Sołtan and Zalewski...

U.G.: And Szabo, he was there too, but he was less important. Szabo was the architect with whom Jerzy did the house in New Hampshire, although he was not very proud of it... He claimed that it was the Modulor to do it, but...

S.R.: Yet there are some Modulor graphics in the house...

U.G.: I know, but it was not really done with it... [laughs] But it was Szabo's commission, and he pulled in Sołtan. It is not his best house though...

S.R.: I remember that they wanted to open a practice together...[1]

U.G.: Yes, but they had only one project, this one. Then, he made the agreement with that other firm[2] to help them with the schools, but he was more or less acting as a design critic... They were not his designs. He had a secondary role – it was like his studio.

S.R.: Actually, I have just talked to Edward Lyons who was the manager of that practice at the time, and he said that Sołtan did not draw often: he was rather giving them the directives.

U.G.: Thinking about the way Sołtan designed his own projects, he would do all, he would do the sketches... For instance, I cannot tell you how many conversations we had about the project for the chapel for the pope. I was coming to visit him quite often, and he would over many years say, "look what I have done". And he did not change anything basically, but he would have shifted a window or something similar. He was working on it very intensively. And it was to him a really important project, because it was also spiritual... His sister became a nun, and himself he was quite religious. He was interested in the Black Pope[3] and all those religious offshoots. Actually, his religious beliefs were in complete contrast to his total irreverence of anything. Strange, strange, strange juxtaposition... I have never understood why he was such an irreverent and free spirit in everything except religion.

S.R.: You mentioned that Sołtan was interested only in some particular students, why was that?

U.G.: His interest was very much connected to the people. He would test students at the time by starting an intellectual conversation at a high level and if you just said, "I do not know what you are talking about" he would not be interested. He expected his students and those around him to have the same keen interest and a certain intellectual prowess. If they did not, he would not be very interested...

S.R.: If I understand you well, it was not only about architecture, was it?

U.G.: Oh, no – it was general erudition. If somebody was there and did not have a certain level of erudition,

1 Interview with Paul Krueger.
2 Haldeman and Goransson Architects and Engineers from Boston.
3 Unofficial nickname for the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, given the traditional Jesuit black robes.

Sołtan would just... [making a gesture of rejection] They did not exist. Then, while talking, he liked to make connections between architecture and philosophy in a way that was fairly unique. That is interesting how even when he was over ninety, every visit with him was stimulating. He would bring up something that he thought of, that he read: he kept up his reading until he was almost gone. It was amazing how well informed he was. He was totally fascinated by the modern French philosophers.[4] And he would totally be up-to-date, I would be ten years behind. It was dazzling... he made a sport out of it. He really was keeping up.

S.R.: Was it specific to the modern French philosophers?

U.G.: That was his focus, the French philosophers. They were very active at that time. And what he liked about philosophy was the questioning, the rigorous questioning. He liked the fact that in philosophy there is an accepted way of making a philosophical argument. He saw parallels between that and the approach to architecture that Le Corbusier represented: in architecture, you have a framework that is pervasive and in philosophy, you have methodology on how to make an argument. You have to follow that in order to have your argument heard. And I think that he liked that a great deal... that was the connection.

S.R.: Do you remember what you had to design when you were a student?

U.G.: Oh, sure. We had a project where each person was supposed to design a pavilion for an international fair, the equivalent of the world exposition. You could pick a country. There was a grid and you had to fit into it, and it had to be something that reflected that country. There was also a question of us coming up with rules as a collective: we had to decide what the rules for doing this were. There were twenty-four in my class, sixteen graduated. And obviously, it reflected Le Corbusier's role in designing the national pavilion. That was the first one. The second one was doing a library for post-college. That was very odd... and it did not give much scope for discussion. It was just a building. I do not think that project came from Sołtan. The first project of this international pavilion – that was a Sołtan kind of project, he brought this to the course. The second one, the library, and I think the idea came from Sert. Then a whole semester project was devoted to a very large housing project in very different countries, and we could again pick the country. What he was interested in, it was how you teach the fact that you have common denominators that you decide upon, and that they provide the rules for what you do, and the relationship between the constraints and the interpretation.

S.R.: So first, there was the program...

U.G.: Yes, he was interested in general in that issue and I think that the international pavilions were a perfect example of that, of how you make rules that apply to everybody and then, how you develop something extraordinary within the rules that you have created. So it was about the relationship between the framework and the interpretation.

S.R.: Were you amongst the students responsible for making the rules?

U.G.: Yes. And when we did the large housing project, it was huge. Again, we had to make the rules explicit, work with them and think that we will design a project based on them. This was a constant theme with him; he used to repeat over and over again, "going from the general to the particular". There is also one other thing that I remember very clearly and that it was the one instance that made us friends or made him interested in me, and me interested in him. He said to me one day, "I want you to do something, take a piece of paper, now write on it "so what?" and pin that up above your desk". Then, for the whole time I was there, there was that constant question "so what?", and that was such a good *Leitmotiv*, because that was the question that he always asked everybody and on everything. A very useful question: it meant that I had to look at what I was doing. I thought it was terrific: if you would make some kind of rationale, that question does away with all the rationale that comes after you do something. It presupposes that you have decided that issue beforehand, not as a rationalisation. He hated rationalisations. And it was just interesting to see how it worked.

S.R.: Were all of you so enthusiastic about his teaching?

U.G.: I remember there was one classmate who was hostile to Sołtan, and they did not like each other. Gerry Jonas was his name... he invented a fireplace that was made of an oil drum, it became quite popular and like that, he made quite a bit of money. He came from California and he drove a new convertible Mercedes sport car as a student, because he made that design. He thought that Sołtan's friends were not always intellectually

4 Sołtan often mentioned French philosophers and writers in his lectures and articles since the 1980s – such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jacques Ellul and others.

stimulating. He thought Team 10 was not really up to snuff... Once, there was a lecture by Yona Friedman. He was a friend of Jerzy's. He developed a theory and he designed this space frame over Paris, a very particular idea... A huge roof, it was like a hemispherical dome for Paris. He had also developed a theory that architecture should always rely on the number three, because in nature everything is based on three... which is of course not true. Therefore, Gerry Jonas after this lecture put up his hand, and said to Yona, "everything you say is bullshit, because nature is not just three, so we just had to listen to your bullshit and we have not been learning anything, this is just crap". It was really rude. Sołtan was offended and came to his rescue, because Friedman had difficulties in defending his idea of three being the basis of architecture. Thus, Sołtan turned around and said, "look, you are a student, you should show some respect". By the way, it is interesting that it was coming from Sołtan, because he showed no respect himself... Then, he challenged him saying, "you give a lecture then". And Gerry Jonas said, "OK, a week from now, I will give a lecture". A week afterwards, Gerry Jonas gave quite a brilliant little lecture about the role of experience in architecture. It was brilliant actually. However, he finished the lecture by saying, "well, professor Sołtan, I am not learning anything here, I am out of here". And he left. He had his car packed. Right after the lecture, he got to his car and drove off, that was it.[5] [laughs]

S.R.: When you mentioned the "so what?" question, I was wondering whether you may call Sołtan's attitude towards learning as Socratic?[6]

U.G.: Oh, yes. He never would tell you, "do this". Never. It was always making you go back and think about something. I think his teaching style was emulating what happened when he was working with Le Corbusier. I think he took it from there. Sert was physically a very small and tiny person, but he had an awful lot of authority. He ran CIAM for many, many, many years, longer than anybody else did. He was a revered figure in Spain, and he knew that he was an important person. He behaved like that, so everybody treated him this way. When he was to give criticisms, it was very much a reaction to looking at students' models. Zalewski on the other hand, he was a really superb critic, and he would find all the faults in the building, he would see it instantly and he would point to the things, and he would get every mistake. Actually, Sert and Zalewski had an interesting relationship. The only person who could criticise Sert was Zalewski. His role in the office was to criticise him. And so, in a teaching situation they would go around and there was this one-two punch between Zalewski and Sert. Sołtan was somehow hovering above, like a bird of prey, high up in the sky, circling around, and he would have a discussion that was much more abstract, less hands-on, and to me far more interesting, instead of "whether a wall here or there".

S.R.: Zalewski was then much more practical than Sołtan, wasn't he?

U.G.: Yes. Zalewski had an eye, like the ones of which I have never met before. He really was amazing. Sert relied very heavily on Zalewski's ability to find mistakes. He would then comment on some of these things, but he was not so hands-on. Sołtan was not part of this duo. They all respected Sołtan, but he was rather roving... Actually, his friendship with Zalewski for instance was interesting, because they were critical of each other, but they were friends. He also admired Le Ricolais.[7] He was an engineer at Penn, and he did some imaginary structures. The name has since disappeared, but he was important at that time.

S.R.: And you mentioned that he was talking mainly to those students who were interesting to him, right?

U.G.: Yes, very much so.[8]

S.R.: Was he showing or talking about his own designs during those discussions?

U.G.: No. Sert did not either. If you wanted to know, you could find out, but it was not pushed at you at all, no. Actually, when I was a student, there was a sense that somehow you had the gods of architecture – Team 10 and all of those people. What he did do, it was to disabuse us of the idea that there are such things as gods in architecture. Instead, we could also do something worthwhile. He blew that myth off. His idea was that we are junior colleagues to them... and that was a very important lesson. Then, our ideas and their ideas can be put on the same scale.

S.R.: Finally, after many years of teaching, in 2002, he got the Topaz Medal. What was his reaction to that?

5 See also: interview with Christopher Benninger.
6 Ibid.
7 Robert Le Ricolais (1894-1977) was member of the faculty at the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania 1954-1975.
8 See also: interview with Christopher Benninger.

U.G.: The medal is interesting, but it took several years to get it for him. It is a very political thing to get. There was Pierre Jampen[9] who tried for several years to do it, and I then entered, we both pushed, and he finally got it. However, I had to give a speech for him: he was too weak to do it. Pierre Jampen admired him greatly, but he was not critical. He just adored Sołtan unreservedly. Which Sołtan liked, but was suspicious of. I think that Jampen's opinion on Sołtan was different from Sołtan's opinion on Jampen. I think he always remained a student in Sołtan's mind.

S.R.: Let us move towards his relationships with other architects. Do you remember his interactions with some particular architects? Was there someone that he despised?

U.G.: He had incredible irreverence that few people understood. He did not like fame, and he was suspicious of anybody famous... Let me tell you a story. I was supposed to teach a course led by Kenzo Tange. At that time, I was very young: I became a professor when I was twenty-nine. Kenzo Tange was quite the opposite of Jerzy. He loved fame, and he loved recognition. When he came, Jerzy and I went to pick him up at the airport. He had just come from Mexico where four thousand students were seeing him off. There was a line, he was walking between them, they would clap... He expected the same kind of welcome here. Sołtan wrote to him saying that he was going to be in a penthouse – and he liked the idea, but we had put him up in the student housing that Sert designed. So it was not really a penthouse, it was the last floor of a four-storey building. Then, when Tange and his wife arrived, they had many suitcases. Not suitcases. [showing the size of a regular suitcase] Suitcases. [showing a size of an oversize suitcase] So I stacked them all on top of my car, which was a little BMW... I remember having to carry them up. When we arrived at the student housing, it was disgusting, it was just foul. It was terrible, revolting. I remember Tange sitting down, going, "hah hah, hah hah". His wife whispered to me, "he smiles, but he is very mad". And it turned out that he was just furious. He asked me then where my parents stay when they come to visit me. And I said, "well, they stay at the Ritz". "We go to the Ritz", he said. All the suitcases down, tie them to the car with a rope... And we drove down to the Ritz, which was then the most expensive hotel. We parked there, I took him to the reception, and he said, "I am Mr Kenzo Tange from Japan". And the guy at the desk said, "So...". "I am Mr Kenzo Tange from Japan", he repeated. At that time, he was already one of those living monuments, so he expected the world to know him... but they said they had no rooms. And he said, "you do not understand: I am Mr Kenzo Tange from Japan and I want rooms for two or three months". Immediately they produced a suite with several rooms, so he stayed there. The next morning I went there to meet with him, and he went through the programme when he was going to be there and then he was not going to be there. Actually, mostly 'not going to be there', because he was doing a project in Baltimore at that time. It was down to the minute, he would say he was going to be there from quarter past nine to quarter to eleven, or something like that – it was very accurate, and with big gaps in-between. Then he turned up and Jerzy Sołtan – being wicked – he said, "we are so sorry, and actually what we do in this country to say sorry is that we make somebody wear a big flower", and he gave him a hibiscus. He made him pin it up, whereas Kenzo Tange had never worn a flower because in Japan men never wear flowers – women do. But because Sołtan said it was a custom, he did that. And Jerzy enjoyed thoroughly his discomfort with this flower, this huge flower... this was the kind of humour he liked. It was his way of puncturing a balloon. It was a private joke, and nobody else knew it. And it was really funny to see his discomfort. Afterwards, during the course, Kenzo Tange did all his sketches on an 8.5-by-11-inch paper with his name embossed at the top. He would draw with a blue ballpoint pen and would collect all those sketches at the end, so no student had a single line drawn by Kenzo Tange. Sołtan really hated that kind of thing...

S.R.: However, this attitude seems to be different while talking concerning Le Corbusier – it seems that Sołtan admired him very much. Do you have any recollection of his relationship to Le Corbusier?

U.G.: Actually, Le Corbusier in his writings mentions only two people by their name, and Sołtan is one of them. And I have also an interesting letter that was written by Le Corbusier to Harvard to recommend him for the faculty position. In it, he talks about the fact that Jerzy was crucial to the development of the Modulor. And actually, Jerzy had in his pocket the original Modulor, the tape. He would pull it out and then it was becoming a real thing. I do not know where it ended up... He was very proud of that.

S.R.: I have noticed also that in the drawings he did in Poland, there was the very same font of letters he was using at Le Corbusier's practice.

U.G.: He used the same manner to put the date down as Le Corbusier. You know that Le Corbusier had a way of putting down the date – and Jerzy had exactly the same way.

9 Pierre Jampen, a former student of Jerzy Sołtan and subsequently member of the faculty at the Université Laval in Quebec.

S.R.: What about Sołtan's connection to the CIAM?

U.G.: Sołtan thought that CIAM was an extension of Le Corbusier's impact on the world... Although, he was very suspicious of the period when you had sociologists becoming prescriptive about architecture. There was a whole period of twenty to twenty-five years of sociologists saying, "if we study all low-income housing and find there is the best door, then one should use that door in a prescriptive way, because that is what people like". He was very suspicious of that thought: it was a felony.

S.R.: In fact, that was his education in Poland about which he did not speak well.

U.G.: He just dismissed that altogether. And it ran its course: now it has no impact anymore. Like this irony of Ford Edsel[10]. They did a whole survey to figure out how to design a car: "what is the door handle people most like, what is the grill most people like?" and they put it all together, and it was an absolute disaster. It was linked to the idea of a recipe: "you have cookies and you make thousands of them". It shows well his opinion on that. We had many discussions about that very issue and we agreed.

S.R.: What about his relationship with other Team 10 members?

U.G.: He called all the members of Team 10 to visit and it was really interesting to see their interaction between him and them. Actually, if you look at the Team 10 meetings, his special role was that of being a commentator evaluating what they had said. He always had a streak for being irreverent: he never looked for fame. Fame to him was a reason to question and he never accepted it.

S.R.: Oh yes, I remember that you mentioned that in the text you have written in the monograph about him.[11]

U.G.: Indeed, and thus he had this special role within Team 10. They all had slight trepidation of presenting something, because Sołtan liked to puncture balloons. That was his role, as he was describing it to me. Being close friends, we talked about these things more openly than he would talk to someone else. And if you had him as a close friend, he really was a friend. We would spend hours talking. Actually, he had relatively few close friends. He had many friends, but then he had an inner circle. For instance, one of the inner circle was André Wogenscky. They were close. He was also close to José Oubrerie,[12] to Julian de la Fuente,[13] and to Jackie Tyrwhitt too – they had great affection for each other. Of course you know that he did a house for her. Then, she died relatively young... but for him, it was an important project. He was very fond of it.

S.R.: How was the atmosphere at the school at the time, was it really CIAM-oriented?

U.G.: I would say Team 10-oriented. It was interesting, because Sert was CIAM, but Sołtan organised the intellectual part of the education, so he was the one that picked textbooks that we were supposed to have read by the time we got there. And they included Le Corbusier's book, *When the cathedrals were white*, and a book by Lancelot Law-White. That was a very opaque writing, and he put it in, because it was quite abstract and complicated, and it sorted out those people that could understand that kind of writing. Then, he was not so interested in those who could not understand it. Thus, he provided that, and he provided those weekly lectures by Team 10 members and others.

S.R.: Do you mean the visiting critics?

U.G.: Not necessarily, he brought them in to give a lecture to us.

S.R.: Was it when he was a chairman?

U.G.: No, before. This is when he was in that group of four. That was his role: to provide the intellectual part.

S.R.: Do you remember whom he was bringing in?

U.G.: Hmmm... Bakema, van Eyck, Woods. And also Lewis Mumford. He was not Team 10, but he was a very

10 The design of Ford Edsel consisted in a massive amount of polls tending to identify the best features of this model, but revealed to be a failure, see: Business Insider, *Lessons from the Failure of the Ford Edsel* (2015), <https://www.businessinsider.com/lessons-from-the-failure-of-the-ford-edsel-2015-9?r=US&IR=T> [accessed May 3rd, 2019].

11 Urs Gauchat, 'Pedagogue', in *Jerzy Sołtan*, ed. by Jola Gola (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademii Sztuk Pięknych, 1995), pp. 29-33.

12 José Oubrerie (1932-), a former coworker of Le Corbusier's and chairman of the Architecture Department at the Knowlton School of the Ohio State University since 1994.

13 Gulliermo Jullian de la Fuente (1931-2008), a former coworker of Le Corbusier's. He taught at Harvard, University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University.

influential person at the time, enormously influential. And Sołtan very much respected Lewis Mumford.

S.R.: What about his relationship with the Smithsons?

U.G.: Oh, it was an interesting thing, the relationship with the Smithsons. I will tell you some anecdotes that relate to that... and again, it is about his irreverence. Peter Eisenman once gave a lecture, and he had a hundred and sixty slides, or something ridiculous... where he changed the house from one thing to another. At the end of it, Jerzy put up his hand and he said, "Peter, I have to have to congratulate you, you have all these drawings and you talked about the Modulor, and you talked about Le Corbusier", and he went on and on for ten or fifteen minutes. Peter was smiling and feeling he was praised, but then he realised he was being set up and made fun of, and then they became enemies... And after that, we had dinner and the Smithsons were there. We had a break before, just a small group of us, and Smithson was saying, "Peter, your lecture was interesting, it reminded me of the F-104".[14] F-104 was a plane that the Germans bought from America, it had wings that folded into the body and they had a propensity for crashing. And he said, "you remind me of the F-104". And Peter again, was smiling, because he thought it was a compliment and asked what he meant. Thus, he answered, "you know, you are one of those brave jet pilots". Peter again grinned, and then Smithson said, "you know, what is remarkable about the German pilots is that they go up in this plane and they crash it, and then they go up again and another plane crashes. They keep on crushing those planes. Why would those pilots go up and those planes would crash?" – and it was done specifically for Sołtan. They were friends. And Sołtan loathed postmodernism and all that stuff, he loathed it. He had an intense dislike for Graves, for all the postmodernists...

S.R.: Graves was his student though...

U.G.: Yet he had an intense dislike of what he did. He hated it. And he would rant for hours about the evils of postmodernism and how that was a corrosive force that meant architecture was going back to decoration and superficial mood, and it had no basis. It was not thought out... it was not mathematical... A rant. An hour long rant without taking a breath. He was very upset by those things. Physically upset. When he got upset about architecture, it affected him physically.

S.R.: Do you know what was happening when some students wanted to follow postmodern architects?

U.G.: [immediately gesturing rejection] It meant that to him they were devoid of thought and they did not understand what architecture was about.

S.R.: What about Frank Lloyd Wright for instance? I have heard that he disliked his architecture...

U.G.: Frank Lloyd Wright was never Sołtan's favourite. He saw Le Corbusier as Christ and he saw Frank Lloyd Wright as Antichrist. It was that extreme. He rejected everything about Frank Lloyd Wright.

S.R.: What about a more general climate at the department of architecture at that time?

U.G.: Oh, it was terrific. Sołtan was the leader of that; and the faculty had an intellectual position, which it has not had since that time. It was politically left, but it was linked to the idea that it is a real privilege to be an architect, that architects design structures for people who cannot design themselves, and that architects have an obligation to do the very best for them. Sołtan dismissed the idea of building private houses for wealthy clients, as he thought that was frivolous and ridiculous. He thought those as masturbatory exercises, with the architect pleasing himself with no effect on the world around himself. He thought that we all had a social responsibility following the idea of a social contract between professional architecture and the society. It was something he believed in very deeply, and for a twenty years span, that was what Harvard was about. You designed schools, and you designed housing. Never would anybody do a private house. It was about designing places of work, it was the idea that you are the expression of the society, the embodiment of the intellectual and political movements at the time. You cannot say at this point – today – what Harvard is about – you could not ever since then. There was the idea of a social mission, and it had some kind of intellectual cohesion amongst the teachers. Sołtan's attitude was that architecture devoid of that social mission, without this social contract, was not worthwhile. It is a folly, it is superficial, it is the antithesis of what architects should be doing. He was really the person who represented that and talked about that and made that be the central theme of his time at Harvard. It had a big influence. Even though he did not work directly, he ensured the collective would act together. Everybody was united back then: he was the glue holding it all together.

14 Lockhead F-104 Starfighter was an American supersonic aircraft in service 1958-2004 in the USA. After the commission of the aircrafts by Germany, from 1961 on, many crashes occurred in Germany due to the lack of specific training, see: Thomas Thiel, *Witwnmacher mit Stummelflügeln* (2009), <https://www.spiegel.de/einestages/50-jahre-starfighter-kauf-a-948207.html> [accessed May 3rd, 2019].

S.R.: Was it also Sert's doing?

U.G.: Sert was certainly interested in that, and in CIAM many of their meetings were about that very thing... Woods and others really focussed on that. Shadrach Woods was interesting, because he was not a great designer, but he had some really interesting ideas, for instance his North African project for the Bedouins,[15] the one he talked about at the Team 10 meeting. That was really interesting for him to learn the Bedouins' habits and customs, which would led to building high-rise or mid-rise housing for them, so they could have an open fire and could do other things they normally would do.

S.R.: It seems connected to Sołtan's interest in the "grassroots of architecture"...[16]

U.G.: They were friends with Woods: they liked each other a lot.

S.R.: Have he told you anything about the period when he was assisting teaching at Beaux-Arts in Paris?

U.G.: Not much, he was dismissive of Beaux-Arts. Dismissive in the same way that he was dismissive about postmodern architecture. This dismissal was coming from the same source, because for him it was 'surface stuff', it was not anything that dealt with the essence. To him, the connection between the political conviction and architecture was very strong.

S.R.: Let us move towards his own designs. Have you ever collaborated with him on some projects?

U.G.: No... although he came occasionally to act as critic in my office, and that was interesting. But no, we never did work on the same design. We could have, but we were in different phases in life...

S.R.: I understand, I actually asked because I was thinking about those groups he created in Warsaw to work on some designs...

U.G.: But you see: they were all at the same phase of life. There is a special relationship between student and teacher, and it never gets entirely lost. There is a hierarchy that is implied between teacher and student. Maybe less so today, but then you had the professor and the student, and they were not at the same level. Only as I grew older, we rather levelled and then I worked with him quite a lot on his book.

S.R.: In the last years then...

U.G.: Yes, I read many drafts, and sent him comments on that, and we spent a great deal of time talking about it... He wanted to include in his book illustrations that he was trying to get from the Foundation,[17] and it was problematic Fondation, because they would not allow him to use images... this was very difficult. His attitude was, "concerning the projects I have worked on, I shall be able to have access to them". He was quite displeased with the response, since the Fondation thought his request was irregular, and according to them he should do like anybody else... and he thought he was not like anybody else, because after all he was a close collaborator. "That is my stuff" – that was the attitude, but they blocked him.

S.R.: Coming back to the times when he was coming to your office, what was his reaction to your designs?

U.G.: He liked my work. We spent plenty of time talking about drawings: that was interesting. He worked with Léger in the past, and he did extraordinary drawings. I remember that every time I would go there, he would open the drawer and say, "take anything you want". Of course, I did not want to, because I liked these things being together. But we would look at drawings, and he had a marvellous line. He could draw so beautifully, I hope you saw some of his drawings. They are spectacular, very Picasso-like. Actually, I stored his drawings in my office for a while. He was very interested in painting and drawing, and he did wonderful sketches. During those boring faculty meetings, he would do an obscene little drawing on a napkin. And I usually used to sit next to him, he would shift it over to me, I would start laughing while somebody else was talking.

S.R.: Architecture and art, were they close according to him?

U.G.: No, he looked at art the same way as Le Corbusier did. Le Corbusier painted in the mornings and did architecture in the afternoon – and it was a way to clear his brain. We did have discussions about the line... and about how difficult it is to reduce something to a line. To him that was really an aim, so he would do the most

15 Carrières Centrales in Casablanca designed by ATBAT (1952-1955).

16 Sołtan was teaching at Harvard in the late 1970s the module 'Grassroots of Contemporary Movement in Architecture'. For documents concerning the module, see: HGSD-JS, series AA: AA007, AA008, AA010, AA020, AA022.

17 Le Corbusier Foundation, Paris.

extraordinary obscene drawings...

S.R.: Well, not only obscene...

U.G.: A lot of them were, and he would call them "noodles", instead of "doodles", always with naked women in various positions. Some of them were quite compromising, but they were just wonderful drawings. I wish I kept them all, that I kept all his napkins... But he liked the idea of using those drawings again to puncture the balloon... so if somebody was pompous and would call forth, he would do one of those things and show it to them. Of course, once you start giggling, whoever was talking, he was undermined, always. He loved that. He would do strange things. For instance, one day we were going for a walk, just the two of us. We walked up Massachusetts Avenue and then we ended up at Goodwill Industries,[18] which is one of those places where you can buy second hand clothes and silly things. We went in – I do not know why – and he found a woman's blond wig that costed ten dollars... and he was going to buy it. However, it turned out he had no money on him, so I had to buy it for him. I did, and then we were walking back, through Harvard yard, and he took it out of the paper bag and he put it on... so there was Sołtan, with a blond woman's wig on, holding my arms, and we walked through Harvard yard... I nearly died. He enjoyed my embarrassment so much... this is the kind of thing he would do. Anyway, he went all the way to his office this way, holding onto my arm, and I could not distance myself, so I was glued to this strange creature with this blond wig... Similarly, when George Anselevicius took over from him as chair, Sołtan got a flower and had it in his hand, and before the meeting, he climbed on the table and he put a black cloth under him and he lied down... so there was this body lying down on the black cloth in the middle of the room. When the meeting started, he rose up and gave the rose to Anselevicius, who of course did not know what to do. By that one little gesture, he completely undermined him, and nobody could take him seriously ever again. It was very naughty and very brilliant. It was a joke, but it had the effect of completely incapacitating George.

S.R.: Was it different in the school when he stopped being chairman?

U.G.: Oh, yes, it was different, very different quickly. George Anselevicius was not in the same league. Take the example of the air-conditioning... it was not working and we complained, complained and nothing happened. And Sołtan sat behind his desk, his shirt off, and he called in the engineering guy in charge of that. He came in, and Sołtan was about to get up, and the engineer did not know whether he had any pants or not. So he went, "don't get up, don't get up!" and Sołtan said, "look, I have to be like this, I cannot work like this", and the guy thought he was completely naked. The air conditioning came very soon thereafter. Who else would do that? Another time, he was to interview a beautiful young woman to be a secretary and before, he turned his shirt around so the back of his shirt was in the front: it made it look like he was a clergyman... He mumbled and pretended not to see very well, so his interview with her was like... [making gestures of hands moving in front of him as a blind person] "Where are you?" – and he wanted to see how she would react. Those were the kind of semi-tests that he put people to... I thought they were really funny. Other people did not react positively as I did: they were put off that somebody at his position would do that. However, it was again his way of undermining his own authority. He definitely did not like authority.

S.R.: Thinking about your conversations, what would you say were his own designs he preferred?

U.G.: He liked very much his stadium for instance, because it applied a certain kind of thinking that was a reflection of Corbusian approach, but on a project Le Corbusier never done. I think it was probably the project he was most proud of. That, Jackie's house and the chapel. If you had to mention three projects, that would be it.

S.R.: What about the competition in the Bering Sea? I thought it might have been a personally important design, that sort of connection between the East and West at the end of the Cold War...

U.G.: [immediately] Yes. Absolutely. That was an important project because it took architecture towards a pure and symbolic gesture, very abstract and devoid of function. He thought it had purity to it, and that was important to him. He knew it would never be built, he knew that. It was an abstract exercise, but it filled him with pride... he was delighted by it. He also liked the conversations about it, the physics on how to make the sound. The sound was supposed to carry at a distance, so you could hear the sound on the other side.

S.R.: Did he show you his designs in Warsaw? Let us have a look at the railway station...

U.G.: [looking at the Warsaw Midtown railway station] Oh, it is amazing! It is quite the same. It is still in good shape. That is amazing... he would not have expected it to survive.

S.R.: What about his designs in Massachusetts, for instance the schools?

U.G.: He was pleased to work on those designs, although he never took a great pride in those particular schools. He would say he worked on those... they were not his schools. Those were his buildings. [indicating buildings in Warsaw]

S.R.: How would you describe your relationship with him?

U.G.: We had a very interesting relationship, where he was my mentor while I was a student. He was responsible for getting me to Harvard after I graduated, and then over the years, as he grew older, we reversed roles, so he would not make any decision without me playing mentor to him. It was just a wonderful and fulfilling thing for me. His role as a mentor to me was gradually diminishing and then this other role of mine vis-à-vis his life was growing. He would discuss very personal things that I will not mention to you. He talked quite a lot the war, about being a prisoner, and how that affected him. So all his life he grappled with the impact of that, of being locked up with a bunch of other people, obviously against their will. His war exploits a whole other chapter. He had a great bearing on who he was and who he became. He was very proud of his ancestry. As you know, they had a huge house and they even had a chapel... He went back to Poland and I think the house was gone, and I think it was a big shock to him. He looked at himself as a Polish nobleman, and he always saw the best side of Poland, or the upside of Poland. Strangely, the communism did not take away his early impression of what Poland was and could be. For instance, he thought that when you were going up above a certain level in the society, you had social standing, you had social responsibilities, and you had to contribute to the society. It was a *noblesse oblige*, very much. That mind-set of his was completely incompatible with communism and Stalinism. Totally incompatible. He was... I would say an intellectual snob – not in the class-conscious sense, but he had no interest in people who did not have a certain set of intellectual accuracy. He just dismissed them. He was not interested in them.

S.R.: In your contribution to the monograph, you speak about Sołtan's legacy to the students. What would this legacy be according to you?

U.G.: I think that there are many people who – like me – owe him their way of thinking about architecture. For instance, Mies had a whole bunch of disciples who did Miesian buildings. Sołtan did not do that. Sołtan gave you a way of thinking about architecture that was very strong and really did create a common bond between us. There are dozens and dozens of people who could say something similar. It was a real gift. It was more valuable than emulating something. I remember a discussion we had about the fact that he was severely critical of people like Michael Graves who would produce other little Graveses. They would emulate the style and the architectural idioms of a person, and they would become the little version of the teacher. Sołtan rejected that and he said that you have to abstract from it something... and it is the abstraction that he passed on rather than the form. He thought it was more valuable and I totally agree. That was something that was extremely strong and I think you will find among all of us who had him as a friend, colleague, or mentor – this gratitude of how to think about architecture. However, nothing formal. Really nothing formal at all.

S.R.: Actually, when I was starting my research, I was thinking of Sołtan's heritage related to his buildings...

U.G.: No...

S.R.: Although now, having read some of his texts and teaching programs, and having gathered various testimonials, I am much more inclined to think that the most important part is intangible, related to his teaching...

U.G.: That is more important, because of his way of thinking about the subject. The "so what?" question – it is ultimately more valuable than just imitating somebody else. His sense of fun and irreverence were also just wonderful, irrepressible. Another device he used: if somebody came in and was intellectually pretentious, one way for Sołtan to behave, it was to make fun of them. He could be quite cruel in that, because he had disdain towards anybody who was intellectually pretentious. Another thing he liked to do, which was brilliant, if somebody would be talking at this level [showing a level with hand], as he was extremely well read, he would then move the discussion up and talk at this level, way above their head [showing a much higher level with his hand]. It would make them appear foolish. He just had a level of erudition they could not compete with... and he did that very elegantly many times. It was cruel, but it was done very well and in a way that somebody would have no defence and look like a fool. I remember several specific people he did this to, and it was interesting to

18 Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries founded in 1895 in Boston is a non-profit social enterprise funded by a network of charity shops.

watch. If you knew him, you knew he was going to do that just sooner or later, he would puncture the balloon, but in a very elegant way. He could do it convincingly and at an extremely high level, and we were in awe of his abilities. None of us could have done that, because his level of erudition was really quite extraordinary.

S.R.: Coming back to the issues of legacy and heritage, how did he perceive the issue of heritage?

U.G.: That question has several answers. He believed in heritage in the sense he thought he was in the long line of Sołtans and that the lineage of his origin was important to him, very important to him. To him, it put certain expectations on the shoulders that he tried to live up to... so that is one kind of heritage.

S.R.: In fact, what about the heritage in the sense of architectural production? What about the recognition of, say, Le Corbusier's buildings? What was his position on that?

U.G.: He thought that Le Corbusier's buildings were very important as examples of how one should think about architecture. He was really interested in the Modulor, he was interested in having a theory that underlies design and he thought his projects shall be preserved. He would think that those things should be preserved, as monuments of architecture and as important examples. He thought that Le Corbusier changed the course of architecture and he was very proud of being part of that. His allegiance to Le Corbusier was great, he would call him the Master, he would say, "the Master said to me". I do not know any other figure that he regarded with the same reverence, so to him it was really a touchpoint – architecturally and in his life. He knew when he was there that Le Corbusier was a person of historical importance. When he arrived from Poland, it was a pilgrimage of sorts... and he embraced what Le Corbusier was about well before anybody else in Poland.

S.R.: It is interesting as you mention the "pilgrimage", because in Polish sometimes Le Corbusier is called "the pope of modernism". That would mean that Sołtan did know two popes...

U.G.: Yes, but they were different. His relationship to the pope and his relationship to Le Corbusier were different. He had a great deal of reverence for the pope too, but it was not for the pope as the individual, it was the pope as a representation of a long history. We would have discussions about the time when there were two popes and the history of Catholicism – it was important to him and he was very knowledgeable. However, it was the institution of the church as the belief system, and the pope was representing this belief system, whereas the Master individually changed the course of architecture. I remember having an argument with him, about Ginzburg and his famous project in Russia, the Narkomfin.[19] It happened before Le Corbusier did the Marseilles building, and they both corresponded. I maintained that Le Corbusier took a lot from that project, and incorporated it, and made it his own... Le Corbusier was really quite clever in appropriating other people's ideas. It was great to see, I maintained that Ginsburg was the first person who started thinking about living in that way. In the correspondence, he thought of the Narkomfin as the purest expression of communism: this was Ginsberg talking. Le Corbusier made several arguments not using communism as the word, but it was about how people should live in a prescriptive way... and it really was replying to my mind Ginsberg's argument. Eventually, Ginsberg is being forgotten by history, nobody remembers him, nobody remembers the Narkomfin complex. However, it was to me the turning point in architecture and the sort of leftist attitude towards housing and so on... Sołtan was not open to the argument that it did not originate from Le Corbusier, that it was actually somebody else's, and that Le Corbusier could have appropriated somebody else's idea.

S.R.: I remember though that Sołtan recalled that Le Corbusier had appreciated Leonidov very much...

U.G.: We had another unpleasant discussion on Le Corbusier siding up to the Vichy government... he stopped any discussion that would question the Master. I find it very interesting that Le Corbusier would side up to the Vichy government. Sołtan's view is that architecture is not political. It is a contract with the people, not the politicians. On the other hand, he thought that architecture should be for the people. It was a leftish conviction... he had a leftish political conviction himself. At the same time, he defended Le Corbusier by saying that he was apolitical. It was difficult to be apolitical at the time when the Vichy government existed. It was a rather shameful period in French history. However, he absolved Le Corbusier of any complicity.

S.R.: I remember an article on that matter,[20] he was mentioning that, yes, on one hand Le Corbusier was working with the Vichy government, but on the other hand, he was also working for Moscow.

19 The Narkomfin Building in Moscow designed in 1928 by Mosei Ginzburg is based on the same principles as the Unité d'Habitation by Le Corbusier, see: Owen Hatherley, *Ginzburg's Narkomfin building is still a viable model for urban living* (2018), <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/opinion/ginzburgs-narkomfin-building-is-still-a-viable-model-for-urban-living/10031235.article> [accessed May 3rd, 2019].

20 Jerzy Sołtan, 'Współpraca z Le Corbusierem', see: MASP-JS.

U.G.: Yes, that was his being apolitical. I did not buy it. The Vichy government was a very dirty part of French history, and it was treasonous. Another conversation we had was whether Le Corbusier was really Swiss or French. He got a French state funeral, which is pretty rare, he was far too worldly to be Swiss – and since I am Swiss, it was a funny conversation. But apart from that, I owe him a lot. There was nobody else like this in my life.

Umberto Guarracino

May 11th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studio (1978–1979). AIA architect working in Boston, Massachusetts.

S.R.: When was your first encounter with Jerzy Sołtan? What do you remember about it?

U.G.: My first encounter with Jerzy Sołtan was in September of 1978, when I started my M. Arch. II program, which was the shorter graduate programme at the Graduate School of Design for students who had been in professionally accredited degrees in architecture. Jerzy was co-teaching with Gerald McCue,[1] who was later Dean of the School of Architecture, and it was the fall semester of the M. Arch. II program. We were about fifteen students, and the only thing I remember is that Jerzy had a very gentle personality...

S.R.: And why did you decide to study at Harvard and why did you decide to attend Jerzy Sołtan's studio?

U.G.: Well, Harvard was very well known in Europe and within architecture schools in Italy, from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. I got my first degree in architecture at the University of Naples, as you know, in 1976. At that time, we were very much involved – both during the design studios with Nicola Pagliara[2] and during some classes in theory and criticism – with the writings of Bruno Zevi, who actually had been a Harvard graduate at the time of Walter Gropius during his tenure at the School of Architecture. We knew about Harvard a lot.

S.R.: What about Jerzy Sołtan's studio? Why did you choose it?

U.G.: Actually, I did not. We did not choose the studio. The M. Arch. II program, when I took it, was just for students who had already professionally accredited degrees in architecture. For example, my degree from Naples was accepted and recognised by Harvard as a fully functional professional degree. The M. Arch. II programme was specifically for this kind of students and at that time, it was very short. I believe nowadays, the programme lasts two years, four semesters. When I took the program, it lasted only two semesters. The first design studio of the first semester was actually mandatory. We did not have a choice among different professors.

S.R.: Is there something else that comes to your mind concerning this design studio? How do you recall his teaching?

U.G.: Again, it would be Jerzy's very gentle personality. Even if it was gentle, it was yet forceful with inspiration.

S.R.: What was inspiring in his personality?

U.G.: The ability to let students really follow the path they had chosen... that was very inspiring.

S.R.: Speaking of path and choices, do you remember any assignments from the studio?

U.G.: Yes. There was one project for the entire semester: it was a place for spiritual retreat in Western Massachusetts.

S.R.: Yes, I have seen it in your portfolio. May you please talk a little bit more about this design?

U.G.: Yes, it was inspiring and I really enjoyed it, because this is actually a strong aspect of my life: spirituality and retreat. I am a meditator and I have been meditating now for almost thirty years. I meditate in the morning for about half an hour. I enter into spiritual meditation, very oriental in its approach. So... that design studio was really resonating with me.

S.R.: Coming back to the architectural side of this assignment – I am looking right now at this design, and I think I can see some influence from Le Corbusier...

U.G.: Can you? Great!

1 Gerald McCue (1928-) was dean of the Harvard GSD 1980-1992.
2 Nicola Pagliara (1933-2017) was an Italian architect and since 1969, he was teaching at the University of Naples.

S.R.: Well, correct me if I am wrong, be I think there may be some memories of La Tourette...

U.G.: It is possible that Jerzy might have shown us some of such designs, some of the relevant projects with the themes of the spiritual retreat, but I do not remember precisely.

S.R.: Do you remember something concerning Sołtan's tutoring, something about his critiques?

U.G.: What I strongly remember about Sołtan's corrections, it is that they were never really felt as corrections. They were an enhancement of students' ideas in choosing and following their path. Jerzy was accepting the path that the student had chosen and his critiques were mainly about making sure that once we had chosen it, we stayed on it. Again, I am very confident in remembering that they did not feel like corrections: they were rather about being guided with strength to follow our path in case we were getting off it. Once we had chosen it, then we had to stay on it and we had to be ourselves.

S.R.: Was there something in his teaching different from other teachers' methods at Harvard? Was there any difference between Sołtan and others?

U.G.: Not that I can remember.

S.R.: Through his entire life, Jerzy Sołtan was fascinated with Le Corbusier's work. Then, he was a member of Team 10. Do you remember him mentioning any of these experiences? Was it possible to see that in conversations with him?

U.G.: ...and in his teaching, yes. He may have chosen to show us some of Le Corbusier's work, and he may have chosen to talk about Team 10, but I do not recall anything specifically. I do recall though that in general, he was very favourable towards the International Style approach, and of course, he referred several times to Corbu and Mies van der Rohe. In terms of theories, I do remember that even if he expressed it with his gentle approach, he definitely was not very fond of postmodernism. [laughs] I can remember that.

S.R.: Do you remember anything specific that makes you say so?

U.G.: He was never forceful and loud, like we Italians can be, so even if in his basic expression of not being fond, he was always very gentle. [laughs] If I remember well, he could have mentioned the name of Bob Stern as one of those architects that he was not particularly fond of.

S.R.: Speaking about his ideas and theories, in Sołtan's texts and lectures, one may find many references to interdisciplinary design, to participatory design, to systematic design: was it possible to see such interest in his teaching?

U.G.: Actually, yes: interdisciplinary design in terms of calling on the expertise and know-how of different theories and different professionals. In our case, for example, it was landscape. I remember that because the setting of our project was very bucolic, there was a vast meadow, which was surrounded by trees: it was very much related to nature. I believe everyone was strongly guided by Jerzy to follow the chosen path and to think along with nature. He wanted to make us aware that were we to bring a project like that in real life, as real practicing architects and professionals, we would need to work very closely with landscape architects. That was very strong.

S.R.: Were you also working with landscape architects or students during the studio or was it only this awareness for the professional career?

U.G.: No, it was a suggestion. He made us aware that it was a studio and we were on our own with the two professors, and they guided us. If this had been a real professional project to be built, the support and the input about landscape would have come from the landscape architect on the design team. But he did actually take the role of landscape architect himself and started to advise us accordingly. In my case, I remember that my project became very organic, following the line of trees, with specific nodes between the chapel and the access point. He made that suggestion as the node allowed to introduce a hinge point that freed the assembly of parts from stiffness and allowed some more linear sequenced elements to become more aligned with the tree lines. That was his specific input to my project, this idea of the landscape architecture working with the features of the site to organise the structure and the expression of architecture.

S.R.: Sołtan often referred to ideals of beauty, often based on the harmonic diagrams, on the Modulor, on the regulating lines, and he referred to the concept of ineffable space by Le Corbusier: was it possible to see such interest in his teaching?

U.G.: Yes, but not specifically. I know that he mentioned the Modulor. In fact, I believe that because of that I did buy a little writing by Le Corbusier: *Modulor*.

S.R.: Another issue I have encountered in his writings quite often was the idea of "beginnings of cultures" or "early periods of architecture". Do you remember him mentioning such concepts?

U.G.: I do remember that he mentioned history, but I do not remember specifically whether he mentioned just one culture or one specific period. I know that it was important to him.

S.R.: Actually, in a list of students from your studio, I have found a short commentary by Jerzy Sołtan next to each student, and next to your name, it is written, "Italy, Nicola Pagliara was his friend and teacher (Naples). Interested in history, rather archaeology".[3] That is a short note about yourself, and he underlined the words "*in history*", so I imagine it did have some importance indeed.

U.G.: So are these Jerzy's notes?

S.R.: Yes.

U.G.: It is interesting that he mentioned Nicola Pagliara. I might have mentioned him, as I was very fond of him before moving to the United States. I am still very fond. [chuckles]

S.R.: Coming to an end of Sołtan's ideas and theories, do you remember any ideas, any sentences Sołtan was repeating? Do you remember anything that was crucial for him in architecture?

U.G.: I think I do. It might be very short, but I think it would be, "*be yourself*".

S.R.: I do not know whether you know that, but Sołtan, apart from being an architect, was also an artist. Was it possible to see Sołtan's interest in art when he was teaching in the studio?

U.G.: Actually yes – and this is very important. It resonated very much with me, because it was also the approach of my professor in Italy, Nicola Pagliara. It really moved me when Jerzy told us that our first gestures on a piece of paper when starting the project should not be with a pencil, but they should be with chalk: with dark, smearing, smooth, and soft chalk. You need to get messy. I recall that very strong. I did buy a little box of black chalk sticks... The idea was that the initial creation moment of the project lies in our soul and in our mind as a fluid thought, an element that cannot be boxed at the beginning with sharper and rigid lines. He invited us to express through soft media. He believed that in that soft gesture, in the stroke, there is truth, there is a sum of who I am as a person, but also of who I am as a culture. In that first stroke, there is a memory of myself, there is a memory of people before myself, there is a memory of my history, and there is a memory of history of people before myself. The artist really came out there...

S.R.: Do you think there was something that the experience of being taught by Sołtan gave to you later work?

U.G.: Unfortunately, my later work in architectural firms I chose to work with was not in line with academia and with the teachings of Jerzy. In my later and older years, now that I have decided to be an architect, a real architect again, I am starting to go back to this idea of a soft approach. Believe it or not, but I am beginning to follow it now, now when I am sixty-nine. The idea of becoming back again true to myself. "Be yourself" and lose yourself before schematising and caging an idea that is not developed yet. In a way, he affected me. The interesting thing about the charcoal and the soft approach, it is that he said, "get dirty with your hands", I remember that.

3 List of fourteen students from M. Arch. Studio with handwritten notes by Sołtan. In a note concerning Guarracino, he names actually "Nicola Pallida" instead of Nicola Pagliara, see: HGSD-JS, AA021.

Thomas Holtz

April 11th, 2019, in Hyattsville, MD

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studio (1977–1978), he studied first at the University of Pennsylvania, then at the Technical University of Munich and the University of Cambridge. After graduating from Harvard, he worked in private practice before finally stabilising as government architect for the Navy. He created the Jerzy Sołtan fund at Harvard.

S.R.: In 1977 at Harvard, you took a studio with Sołtan. Did you know him before?

T.H.: I knew about him a long time ago, because when I was in high school, I went for an interview at the Architecture School at the University of Maryland. I wanted to go there in case I was not accepted at an institution like the University of Pennsylvania. I was talking with one of the professors about where to go to study, and he said, "Harvard is an interesting place, there is a man there named Jerzy Sołtan, who is the chair of the Department of Architecture, he has done some very interesting things". The name stuck with me, but I did not know anything more about him for a long time. I did not go to Harvard immediately. Instead, I went to Penn, but still the name stuck with me... Finally, I had the first contact with him when I went to Harvard. First, it was seeing him in critiques at the studios, seeing his relation vis-à-vis the students, and students talking about him. Then, I was automatically assigned to his studio, but I wanted to do it anyway, because it was a "place of spiritual retreat", and I was religious in nature.

S.R.: Do you remember him from those first-contact critiques at the studios?

T.H.: I can tell you that one of the first contacts... it was when he was critiquing at the studio I was in, with professor Joan Goody. He was invited by her, and I remember him critiquing someone's work. Sołtan was not entirely satisfied, but he was not too condemnatory towards the student. I do not remember the exact words, but he said something about the student needing to explore and think about the design in different terms... He was also very differential towards the women: he made very courteous gestures towards them, which I thought was quite gallant, quite nice. Then, I did not see him in the next semester, because I was in another studio, but then, in the first part of the last two semesters, I was assigned to the "place of spiritual retreat". I did not talk to him directly firstly, but then, when we assembled to discuss the studio, he said, "if any of you do not want to be in this studio, that is fine with me – I have no lust for power". [laughs] As the head of the studio, he was not interested in controlling the students, or in being the power figure. He was simply a mentor. I thought that was extremely humorous, and it made it much more flexible for us, much more informal to begin with. Then, I decided that I was definitely going to stay in the studio.

S.R.: Actually, when I was talking to another student of Sołtan's, to Urs Gauchat, he recalled Sołtan's irreverence and will to puncture the balloon in front of fame or power displays...[1] Did you see such an attitude too?

T.H.: Actually, I may tell you about him and another professor whom I had the following semester, Gerhard Kallmann, who was the designer of the Boston City Hall, along with architecture partner Michael McKinnell. There was a real tension between them – Sołtan and Kallmann – and at some point in the studio, Jerzy Sołtan said, "the work of Kallmann... is one-dimensional". Maybe he was trying to puncture the balloon when he said that, I do not know. Gerhard Kallmann definitely regarded himself as an important person, and he was, in fact, an important and a brilliant teacher. Like Eduard Sekler said, they had their differences, they came from different areas, but they had a lot to offer the school, both of them. There was just a lot of tension between them. It was regrettable I think. Another time, Gerhard Kallmann said, "there is something in the school, there is a Corbu mafia" – and I think it was meant directly towards Sołtan, because Kallmann and Zalewski got along well. I do not think that he meant Zalewski, since he had never talked badly about him... I do not think that he meant Sert either.

S.R.: But at that time, Sert was already retired from being a dean...[2]

1 Interview with Urs Gauchat.
2 José Luis Sert retired from being a dean of GSD in 1969.

T.H.: He was, but he was still very present at the school, he gave courses, and he gave talks... In fact, once in 1976, Sert came to the Catholic Student Center. He was to talk about his designs, I had the invitation to go there, and the nun, Sister Evelyn Ronan, who was at the Center, said I could invite any fellow student I wanted to. I asked a number of my friends, and they all wanted to come to see Sert talking about his work. That was interesting.

S.R.: When you were at Harvard, did you see that the importance of CIAM and Le Corbusier was strong?

T.H.: The influence of Le Corbusier was definitely present, but I did not have the sense of CIAM so much. In fact, at the school, before the Corbu contingent came, there was the influence of Bauhaus, which is a little different. Actually, I went to Harvard under the impression that it was more Bauhaus related, and I liked the Bauhaus, because I studied under a professor in Munich who was trained at the Bauhaus, under Mies van der Rohe. Gerhard Weber[3] was his name. He opened a practice in Munich, he was a professor at the Munich Technical University and I got along very well with him, I really appreciated him. Actually, I got a very good training in Munich, as well as the basic design course with Stanisława Nowicki at Penn.[4] At Harvard, it was a little different, the staff more Corbusian. I did not mind it though, but still, it was just different. Then, there were people like Joan Goody, who was excellent. Her attitude was not so much Bauhaus related, or Corbusian. She was more Boston-based: she was more on the private practice side, but she was excellent. There was also Urs Gauchat: he was my professor during the first semester. We were doing a project of a resort island with him. In my mind, he was less connected to Le Corbusier. I did not realise that he was actually close to him, until I saw the monograph on Sołtan.

S.R.: Did you see a clear difference between all those other professors and Sołtan?

T.H.: Sołtan was definitely different. The one thing that was very good in his studio, it was at the beginning. He got us away from the drawing boards just to do research on art and architecture. I do not mean history of art, but he was looking for forms: he meant going back to the simple ones. He emphasised that, the simplicity of design... and going back to archaic forms. He encouraged us to do research in the library for two weeks, and then we made the presentation, all of us. I did something about ancient Ethiopian church structures, built in pits. Then I researched artists like Georges Rouault,[5] who was religious in nature. He pointed us out to Matisse's Vence chapel.[6] He was a very great admirer of Matisse, and he thought that his chapel in Vence was extraordinary. After the two weeks, I did a presentation on those, and even if I cannot remember whether Matisse was included in my presentation, I was very much affected by him. The presentation was accompanied by music by Francis Poulenc, his *Gloria*. I also did some research in German ecclesiastical architecture from early twentieth century, but Sołtan was not too impressed with the German pieces. He just said that was not the direction to go. At least, it was not about Rudolf Schwarz[7] whom I concentrated on. I will add that in the studio Sołtan and I spoke from time to time in German. His German was excellent.

S.R.: Was he more interested in the research on the Ethiopian churches?

T.H.: Well, we did just a general presentation, he just commented on that. However, the one presentation he really did like was by the student named Michael Lauber. He was perhaps the best student in our class, because he was allowed to present his project in the GSD lobby at the end of the semester. In fact, he did a very nice design. In the preliminaries too, the research part was interesting, and Sołtan liked his research on the Cistercian abbey of Fontenay in France. He just loved that. I think that he loved Cistercian Romanesque French architecture.

S.R.: Well, he liked Romanesque in general.

T.H.: Oh, definitely, it is pretty well known that he liked it, and its simplicity. I think that Prof. Sekler liked Romanesque too in the history of architecture, because he emphasised it in his presentations on architecture. In fact, he made a particular point of showing the Romanesque in his slides and lectures. Actually, I think that Jerzy Sołtan and Eduard Sekler got along quite well: Sołtan invited Sekler to some of his critiques too. Afterwards, I had to do quite a lot with Sekler myself, because I did translations from German to English from a historical book on the German Baroque, and I did another project under him, for which I received a fellowship on Paul Philippe Cret, teacher at Pennsylvania of the architects Louis I. Kahn and John F. Harbeson.

3 Gerhard Weber (1909-1986), German architect, student at Bauhaus in Dessau and Berlin 1931-1933, and professor at the Technical University of Munich 1955-1974.
4 Stanisława Nowicki (1912-2018), professor at the University of Pennsylvania 1951-1977.
5 Georges Rouault (1871-1958), French fauvist and expressionist painter.
6 Chapelle du Saint-Marie du Rosaire in Vence was designed by Henri Matisse was opened in 1951.
7 Rudolf Schwarz (1897-1961), German architect.

S.R.: Many students appreciated Sołtan's teaching...

T.H.: Yes, absolutely.

S.R.: ...because of the manner he was leading the studios. Was there something that in a particular way struck you in his teaching?

T.H.: Well, he was very present and very attentive to what you were doing at the time. When I went to the studio, I must admit that I was not too interested in Le Corbusier. I knew his work and I had seen it. However, at the beginning, I was not sure how I should start sketching. Then, when he told us to come up with ideas to sketch, to do something, I said, "well, I will do it in the style of Le Corbusier". [laughs] I did some pilotis, some glass walls, and he liked it. Then, I said to myself, "this is interesting, maybe there is something to this, maybe there is something to his methodology that he is teaching and maybe I should really immerse myself into it". I was encouraged by him. First, I was not sure about it, and I think that some of the students' opinions on Le Corbusier were somehow distant. Even if he was taught at the GSD, he did so little work in the United States – just one building. He was also already deceased by that point in time. I also had a friend, and a good colleague of mine... who just wanted Alvar Aalto, everything for him was Aalto, because of the publications and the interest... Maybe I am saying this from a limited perspective of my circle of friends, but also at Penn, the *milieu* was influenced by Kahn. However, it clicked with Sołtan, so I tried to immerse myself and tried to develop that. It was not the fact that he wanted people to do as Le Corbusier did, I do not think that was his intention. I do not think that his intention was to do everything in the style of Le Corbusier. His intention was for the student to develop himself in the process of designing, and to make himself better and better.

S.R.: Do you remember other students from the studio?

T.H.: I do. By the way, that was the first time he did the "place of spiritual retreat", that was our studio. He repeated it a couple of times, but he wrote to me and said that amongst the studios that he had later taught on that subject, ours was the best. I have a feeling though that he told that to everybody, I do not know... [laughs] Actually, we had to choose the faith for each project. We were not able to say just a general, non-denominational theoretical kind of religion... So among the other students, there was Susan van der Meulen – she was one of the few women students at the school at that time, and I think that she was really good. She was the only woman in Sołtan's studio. Then, there was Michael Lauber, whom I mentioned: he did a Catholic one. There was also Frederic Schwartz, and he did a Jewish design. He also had a brilliant career afterwards – he worked very closely with the Venturis. There was also Aubrey Raymond, and I think he did a Catholic one. There was also Jeffrey Horowitz, who did a Jewish design, and who was also a very good student. Another person was Paul Westlake, a very good student, and he has since moved to Ohio and I think he has his own firm now. Then, there was one Asian student and I cannot remember his name, but he did a Buddhist place of spiritual retreat, which was really interesting. Those I remember...

S.R.: Coming back to your design assignment, you told me that Sołtan did not push towards Corbusian design, did he?

T.H.: I think not. . Fred Schwartz was very good, but I think that he was more aligned with the Venturis in this regard. He was actually partial to the Venturis, when he was young. I know that in a previous studio, Fred had produced a building design that was very much influenced by them.

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan's attitude towards his design? He was really despising Venturi and postmodernism...

T.H.: I remember that Fred's project was non-hierarchical: he designed eight little huts, because we had to have eight retreat rooms in the program. He made them into huts, concrete huts that were arranged along a semi-circle or an arc, and they were looking out. They also had peaked roofs, whereas Le Corbusier would have had a flat roof. Sołtan had no objection though, and Fred did very well in the final review with it. I do not know whether it was Venturi-like, but it was certainly not typical of Le Corbusier, what he did. I think actually that Sołtan was quite accommodating. There were some design principles – and if you did not follow the design principle, then he would object, but I am not sure that he tried to push you by doing a pastiche of Le Corbusier. My project turned out differently too. He did not say anything about the Venturis to me, but I am not too surprised. That was 1977 – it was only the beginning of the postmodern, which was only starting to flourish... or whatever you call it. The real announcement of the postmodern was the AT&T Building in New

York designed by Philip Johnson, and that was 1979 when it was built. Actually, it was interesting what Jerzy Sołtan's son Karol told me, that his father was disenchanted by the postmodern.

S.R.: Actually, while talking to some former students, I was told that at Harvard, they did not teach Venturi, they tried to diminish his importance.[8]

T.H.: Oh, that would be definitely true, compared with Pennsylvania. I met both Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown, as they were very active in Philadelphia.

S.R.: Do you remember some particular discussions from when you were talking about your design with Sołtan? Some references, some architects that popped up in the conversations...

T.H.: Well, I do know that he liked Aldo Rossi very much. I talked to him a little bit about Shadrach Woods and the Free University of Berlin, and he was interested in that. I cannot remember what he said precisely, but he said that he was aware that it was an important project.

S.R.: What was interesting about Also Rossi?

T.H.: He liked his projects, and he said they were good... Then, I think that he liked Richard Meier very much, he thought he was a very sensitive architect. I think he said only that he did not use different materials enough. His designs were plainly white at that time. However, he liked him: he definitely liked him.

S.R.: Apart from the research at the beginning of the year, did he point you to other texts, like theoretical writings on architecture?

T.H.: I think he believed in doing in the studio. He said, "just do". He said that Le Corbusier was someone who developed himself as an architect, he explored the arts, he was a painter, he was a draughtsman and he was an architect. He developed his craft: that is what Le Corbusier did, and for Sołtan it was the model. For instance, he said there is a difference between writing and designing for someone like Colin Rowe: he could write, but he did not design well. Once, while talking about my project, he pointed at the doors I had and said, "put a bench there for the people, but do it every other door, not at every entrance – that is what we call semi-transparency". [showing an elevation of the spiritual retreat design] He said, "Colin Rowe writes about transparency, but he does not know how to do it". Then, he said, "by doing this, you have got different rhythms – you have got the rhythm of the benches, and the rhythm of the retreat cells". He drew some of these figures actually. He would embellish my drawings – this is his tree for instance. He was very close to nature, and he was very sensitive to it. That is why the site of the project was near Walden Pond in Massachusetts.

S.R.: Actually, he was quite often going there for walks.[9]

T.H.: I am not surprised: he was really tuned in with nature.

S.R.: Did he show you some of his works? His own ones?

T.H.: No. I think he was not interested in... how should I say... in furthering his own work in front of us, no. He was interested in furthering the work of Le Corbusier, he was interested in furthering the work of Matisse, whom he admired greatly, and he had a great knowledge of modern art. I had on my board some pieces of modern art. I had Kandinsky's, Church at Murnau in Bavaria. He looked at it, and said, "you know, Kandinsky was good, he was the one who invented abstract art. What he did, he turned one of his paintings upside down. He thought that it looked good – that was the beginning of abstract art". Then he told me that he was in a prisoner of war camp in Murnau, and it surprised me that he revealed that to a student. Actually, he knew that I was quite religious... I might have had some religious pictures on my board too. He told me that it was in the prisoner of war camp that he found his faith and began to believe. He was quite serious. In fact, I think that this project, the "place of spiritual retreat" was not something that was just a vehicle for design. It was more profound than that.

S.R.: Was there something that he insisted on during his class?

T.H.: There was a phrase he was using often in the class, "go from the particular to the general, and from the general to the particular". I think Le Corbusier might have said that himself, but Sołtan said it all the time... He also said that he started working on the project with the rough ideas, and then he shaped it to become more and more refined. Then, you come to the final result. However, just working rough at first. Therefore, he had us work in clay during the class, which you can see in the project I did: I have some clay models.

S.R.: Do you remember some particular elements of design he insisted on?

T.H.: Actually, there is one student project from his studio, which shows his understanding of the landscape. First, Eduard Sekler commented on my design, and he told me that there were diagonals in it – behind the building, in the skylights – but then he said that in the front of the building, there were no diagonals. He said, "you should not do that". Then, I told Sołtan what Sekler said, and he told me, "yes, there is no diagonal here, but the diagonal of landscape is here. That is your diagonal, so you did use the diagonal in the front". [pointing to the charcoal drawing of the spiritual retreat design] He was so open to landscape... he thought that the landscape and the building worked together, in terms of form, shapes and geometry. The importance of colour was another thing. Jeffrey Horowitz did a wild colour rendition of his site plan. Jeff thought his idea was crazy, but he told us, "Sołtan loved it, he absolutely loved it!" – it was so fascinating to him, the introduction of colour. In those days, in the studios there was very little colour use. Everything was in black and white, or greys and everything... Jeffrey Horowitz had this idea, and I think that is why he was one of his best pupils. He had the clue to colour... I remember also, when I was working on the Catholic "place of spiritual retreat" under him, I think I started to try to shape the cross, but he said, "no, this is the cross, it is an autonomous symbol, it cannot be played around with, it has to remain as it is". I think I wanted to adapt it somehow, and I asked him about that, but he said one should not change it at all...

S.R.: Do you recall him reviewing students' work?

T.H.: Actually, he was very observant when people were working on something, even when he was talking to another student. For instance, once I was sitting and working on something, while he was talking to one of the other students about his own project. I laid out the concept of the building in a very rough kind of way, and while talking to that other student, Sołtan turned around and said, "that is good" to me. I did not even have any idea that he was looking at me or that he was aware about what I was doing. He was aware of things like that, and he was very sensitive. Another thing, I would say that Jerzy Sołtan had the way of being dramatic. When Jeffrey Horowitz's final review came, and even if I did not attend all his reviews since I was busy working on my project getting it ready for my review, I did go down to see Jeff's final one. I think someone was criticising it, and then Sołtan said in front of everyone, "I take dope, and this design is my kind of dope, this is what I take to get high". [laughs] It was so startling to say, "I take drugs", or "I take dope" – he would do things like that...

S.R.: Do you remember him naming other architects?

T.H.: Well, he talked about Walter Gropius. He said he was a very educated man, of great culture, and that is what he had to offer. He just said he was a person of great culture, but then he went on to say that Le Corbusier was more an artist compared to Gropius. He was very careful not to criticise Gropius at all. I think he had respect for him. He never talked about Mies van der Rohe at all though. I was interested in Mies for a long time, especially since I had studied under one of his pupils in Munich, but that never came into the discussion.

S.R.: What about the art, was he talking about some other artists?

T.H.: Picasso absolutely, no doubt about that. Who else... Matisse he loved, Kandinsky he appreciated... I think that he did talk about some others, but I cannot bring them to my mind.

S.R.: Did you meet him after graduation?

T.H.: Yes, I did. In 1984. I had written to him from Germany, just because I wanted to keep up with him a little bit, so I wrote to him around 1982. Then, I had to go back to the States, because my job had come to an end. The project I was working on, a huge bank building in Munich, it employed almost the whole office, and when it ended, they started letting people go – and I was the only foreigner in the office. I wanted to stay in Germany, but it was getting difficult, so I came home. Then, in 1984 I found a job with another firm in Washington, and I went to Boston for vacation, and I was in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When I was walking around, I saw Jerzy Sołtan walking towards me. I went up to him, and I said, "Professor Sołtan, I wrote to you", and he said, "and I replied to you". Then I realised that probably the letter came after I was gone. What I did, I sent him in 1982 a copy of the drawing I made of the monastery of La Tourette, in France. We talked a bit, but he was on his way to the bank, so we walked together, and once he arrived there, he greeted me. After that, after seeing him in Cambridge, I wrote back to him.

S.R.: What was it about?

8 Interview with Paul Krueger.
9 Interview with Paul Krueger.

T.H.: I sent him some drawings, and that is what he wrote back. Actually, it is a letter that you can frame or something... [showing letter from Jerzy Sołtan to Thomas Holtz, answer to Holtz's letter from May 10th, 1991] By the way, he wrote to me before that too, when I was to be registered as an architect. He wrote then to the State of Maryland. [showing a reference letter sent by Sołtan] Of course, that was not to me, that was a reference letter.

S.R.: What would you say is your general memory of Jerzy Sołtan?

T.H.: I felt very close to Jerzy Sołtan, but perhaps many students did. He was just so good, so supportive. He was strict about things though. Once, it was when I was doing the design, the "place for spiritual retreat". Actually, I had a part of the building coming from here and the other part coming from there – and he looked at it, and said, "do not be so painfully precise". [pointing to a detail of the plan of the place of spiritual retreat where two forms get into contact] That was very good: I had to be more open, more flexible with the design. I should not try to align all the angles, because it destroys the art. Maybe it was my tendency of being influenced by Mies van der Rohe.

S.R.: At a distance, what do you think that the studio under him and this relationship may have given to your career?

T.H.: Well, I think that my drawing changed. I became more flexible while drawing and my drawings became stronger. I think it enhanced my design experience too. I can tell you, he was the best studio professor I have ever had. He also opened my eyes on Le Corbusier. I maintained interest in Le Corbusier ever since, no doubt about that. It was in a very nice way though – he did not force that on you. He just revealed the Master as he was.

S.R.: Was it the reason that led you to create the fund at Harvard?

T.H.: That was one reason, yes... but also the experience of faith with him. Harvard can be a very secular place, and he was very welcoming and appreciated people of faith. It of course does not mean he discriminated against people who did not have faith: he was not like that at all!

S.R.: What did change about your drawings?

T.H.: I think they were very much affected by Jerzy Sołtan. I think that from 1977 on, there was a change in them. I tended to be very precise before, in the 1970s.

S.R.: That is not precise. [pointing a drawing of Sert's Roosevelt Island Housing][10]

T.H.: That is a result of Sołtan's – and Sołtan liked this drawing very much. He told me that he was very happy with that drawing. Actually, I went down to New York to see that project, because I wanted to study Zalewski and housing, and Zalewski definitely worked on this project.

S.R.: Did he also try to convince you to use charcoal?

T.H.: Yes, I wrote about it in the first part of the book.[11]

S.R.: What about your more recent drawings?

T.H.: Actually, after I retired in 2013, I have been doing still some architectural projects, mainly designs, sometimes not completed. Then, I do quite a lot of artwork, according to Jerzy Sołtan's methodology... He believed in developing yourself as an artist and architect, not just as an architect *per se*, but as an artist. I have done many drawings, and I started painting. I did some colour work before, under Nowicki at Penn, but in the last two years, I have done more intensive painting.

S.R.: Do you think that apart from the architectural production, his teaching may be an important part of his legacy?

T.H.: Definitely. To me, it was. I think that people who studied under him must have profited tremendously from his teaching. I am sure.

10 Drawing of Eastwood – Roosevelt Landing Apartments in New York designed by Sert and opened in 1976, see: Cambridge, Archives of the Cambridge Jesus College, Thomas Holtz Collection, PP/Holtz.
11 Thomas Holtz, *Drawings from 1970-2008* (2008), self-published collection of drawings.

Paul Krueger

March 27th, 2019, in Watertown, MA

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's design studio (1959–1960), and member of the Harvard faculty (1967–1972, 1980–1984). He collaborated with Sołtan on the Museum of Art in Berlin (1965) and on some elements of the design for the city of Jabail (1979). He was a member of Josep Luís Sert's practice for seventeen years, and he was working on the drawings of the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts by Le Corbusier (1963). AIA architect working in Watertown, Massachusetts.

S.R.: Let us talk about the beginning... when was the first time you met Sołtan?

P.K.: It was 1959, I was a student at Josep Lluís Sert's studio and Sołtan was a visiting critic at the time. When Sert was coming to the studio, he would bring Sołtan and then they would each go around everybody's desks and say what they had to say.

S.R.: Do you remember what you were designing at that time in the studio?

P.K.: Oh yes, I remember it very well. The first thing we had to design was a structure for a farmers' market, and that was a very short deadline, one or two weeks. Then, I designed an opera house as a part of the city plan that we hypothetically were remodelling – various people were assigned various things, and for some reason I had an opera house assigned to me. Since Sert was interested – because of his CIAM connections – of developing cores of the city, I did another little design, an office building.

S.R.: Although it was Sert's studio, he was the main professor, wasn't he?

P.K.: Yes. Actually, every one of my projects, they chose them and hung those up at the hallway in the gallery... and only very few others were chosen – I was very lucky. Then Sert hired me to work at his office. Not just to work there, but to run his office, because he was a dean at the school and he was not around very often. I was thrown into complete responsibility, even while I had not graduated at the time.

S.R.: Was it a small office at the time?

P.K.: There was no office... Sert had a small one-room office in Harvard Square that he shared with Jackson and Gourley, his partners, and with Zalewski. All four were teaching full time at the GSD. The office that I established was situated in Boston to produce the Design Development drawings, and Construction Documents for Harvard's Holyoke Center,[1] now Smith Center, so the first thing that I did, was to begin to hire young architects – none of whom were registered architects. Sert, Jackson, Gourley and Zalewski did not move to Boston, nor did they come to the Boston office during the week. Thus, I hired people, I had to get places for them to sit, I had to manage the drawing equipment...

S.R.: You were doing really everything... I remember you worked there for a long time, for seventeen years. I think you have had a similar experience with Sert as Sołtan had of working with Le Corbusier – there was a time where he was alone in the practice too.

P.K.: Very, very similar. I also became very friends with Sołtan and he became a friend, as did his wife and kids. They came here to eat dinner a lot. Then, he told me all sorts of stories about his family, about his sisters, and we would go walking in the woods. He told me all kinds of things about when he was a prisoner of war – he had many stories about what happened there... There is this pond, Walden Pond, where Thoreau – a very famous New England writer – had built a cabin and had lived in a one-room house all by himself. So we used to go to this pond: Sołtan and I, sometimes with the family... Walden Pond is a magical place. We went there often whether winter, spring, summer, or fall... I also had a house on Cape Cod and Sołtan with his family would come there and stay there during the summer when I was on vacation. I remember also that before, because of the political situation in Poland, he schemed to get all his family at one moment in time, one summer, so that they could all be able to live in Cambridge together. During the first months, years, when he came to Cambridge, he was concerned that his phone was being tapped, so he only talked politics when we went for

1 Holyoke Center in Cambridge designed by Sert was opened in 1966.

long walks, and later he made telephone calls to certain people only from my house. Then later, when he retired from teaching, I had my own busy office in Harvard Square and he would come by very often, and we would have lunch together. Sometimes my wife would have him for dinner too. He was having a hard time getting around because he was getting older.

S.R.: Even though, he did continue to teach after he retired from Harvard.

P.K.: Yes, he could speak six languages, so he could teach in South America, some places in Europe, in Montreal... It gave him a chance to travel and to do something.

S.R.: Was there something different between their approaches – Sołtan's and Sert's towards the students?

P.K.: Very little, very little, they were both synchronised. There was a difference in their approach to design, because Sert was mostly interested in larger planning issues and he did not have much experience in architecture, whereas Sołtan had experience in all kinds of stuff.

S.R.: During the studio, did he show to the students some of his designs?

P.K.: Never.

S.R.: Does it mean it was concentrated on your creativity?

P.K.: Yes, that is right. What made him the very best professor at the GSD was his boundless enthusiasm. He would be very animated, eager to talk about designs, and to tell stories of his experiences of something similar. He was very encouraging, very positive for all kinds of ideas. Whereas people were frightened of Sert, he was very demanding. I remember one time an Indian student from Mumbai who was in our class: he got so nervous he fainted. He just hit the floor because of Sert. [laughs] There was another student in our class who was affectionate of Mies van der Rohe, and neither Sert nor Sołtan knew what to do with the guy. Sołtan would come to his desk, look around and he would tell him, "I don't know what to say". [laughs]

S.R.: So they were not really approving of the "matchbox" International Style, as Sołtan was calling the work of Mies and his followers...[2]

P.K.: No, it was like "we don't know what to say... why have you come to Harvard, why haven't you come to some school where they can teach you Mies van der Rohe?" – and the guy would not change, he was just totally wasted.

S.R.: How about the role models in the studio?

P.K.: Sołtan was totally, totally about "Corbusier this, Corbusier that". Sert worked for Le Corbusier for a while, but he had a very strong Mediterranean outlook on life. Le Corbusier did not have so much influence on Sert. It was something that was part of the history of his life, but it was not his entire life. Whereas for Sołtan, it was his life. Every comment made to his students about their work was seen through a Corbusian prism.

S.R.: Does it mean that the designs he was following were becoming very much Le Corbusier like?

P.K.: No, not that. If he had experience of doing one thing or another, it would have been a way of teaching and telling about his own experiences, doing something. Instead, he was telling, "this is what Le Corbusier did" – he would not say, "that is what I did". That is how his brain worked. When he was doing his own work he did in Poland, it was not particularly Le Corbusier alike.

S.R.: I imagine that the fascination with Le Corbusier was obvious...

P.K.: It was, and when teaching, he could not refer very much to a lot of buildings, like a farmers' market. He had never designed a farmers' market. He had never designed an opera building, or hardly any building. He had done some athletic facilities, some other buildings, and he had worked with other people... He was a teacher right from the beginning, so he did not have that, and Sert did not either. What Sert had, it was some planning work he had done.

S.R.: You mentioned Mies van der Rohe before. Were there some architects or styles that he was disapproving of?

P.K.: Sert and Sołtan agreed on very much. They despised Venturi, and all kinds of things Venturi liked. They were not talking about incompetence though... incompetence was something else. They were talking about people, architectural professionals they were elevating: they thought it was inappropriate that somebody would think that Venturi has had contributions to architecture.

S.R.: Was it against postmodern then?

P.K.: Yes...

S.R.: How about some figures whose architecture Sołtan was appreciating? Were they talking, for instance also about Team 10?

P.K.: Sołtan did a lot. Sert of course was not a member.

S.R.: Would it be when he was teaching you or was it afterwards?

P.K.: That would be afterwards.

S.R.: Did you have the opportunity to meet some other Team 10 members?

P.K.: I did meet Shad Woods, I met him and we got together frequently. I saw him in Paris actually, and I stayed at his place. He did also teach here at Harvard a little bit.

S.R.: Do you remember some other names that he was mentioning of people whose architecture and work he appreciated?

P.K.: None – Sołtan had exceedingly high standards.

S.R.: Let us move to your own experience of teaching at Harvard. What were you teaching here?

P.K.: I was teaching drawing, it was under Sołtan, when he was the chair of the department. I also taught at other times, with other deans, not with Sert though, because I was really busy working night and day, even on the weekends. I loved to do it...

S.R.: You still do!

P.K.: Yes, I still do... and it is something that I cannot control, it is something I have to do.

S.R.: Both as a student and as a teacher, you could have had some insight into the school's architectural policy, into what types of architecture were favoured... How about Sołtan's position in the school – was he aligned with the general line?

P.K.: He was completely aligned. I would say that he was much closer to Sert than any other teacher was. Sert hired all other teachers of course, because he was the dean – and he hired only people who would agree with him. He did not hire people he did not like... So all the teachers who were there, they were alike. There was one teacher, Chermayeff, a good friend of Sołtan's. He had a summer place very close to mine and Sołtan used to visit him. He was a completely different person: he was left over from the dean before Sert.[3] He was Russian-born English and he was a really good teacher, so Sert kept him up, because he recognised his talent. He was also very much like Sołtan, he liked to talk. And so did Sert. Maybe that is a prerequisite to be an academic... There was one teacher, Zalewski, he did not know what to do with himself, so Sert was taking care of him, but he liked to teach and to talk, and he was saying to the students, "I could teach architecture to a dog". [laughs]

S.R.: What about your collaboration?

P.K.: You know, I worked with Sołtan only on one project, the Berlin competition and even then, I was working at Sert's, so the only way I could do it, it was to work on it very early. I went there at four or five in the morning and worked until about nine o'clock, and then worked a full day at Sert's office. Since we needed a place to do the competition and I did not have time to go driving around the place, We found Vigier – his office was across the street from where Sert's office was, so I did not have to waste any time travelling. We also needed others to work with us. I asked Ed Baum, who was also working at Sert's office and between Ed and I, we produced all the drawings for the competition. Ed also made a wonderful model. Ed is a brilliant architect. We were there when Sołtan needed us as references when he became a citizen of the USA. Ed loved teaching, and eventually became the Dean of Architecture at Arlington in Texas. Then we had one German member, von Moltke, because Sołtan wanted to add some kind of flavour of Germany into this competition. However, basically, it

2 Jerzy Sołtan, 'Eternal Seesaw', 1965, see: MASP-JS.

3 Joseph Hudnut (1886-1968) was Dean of Harvard GSD 1936-1953.

was only Sołtan, Ed and me working. Von Moltke did not draw. Vigier did not draw either: the reason he was a member of the team at all, was that he had the space right across the street and we could sit there and we could draw. You need tables, you need lamps – you need to have an office – and he had a place where we could make an office.

S.R.: Coming to the actual design, I do not know whether you remember how the design was...

P.K.: I do, I have a photographic memory of every project I have ever worked on.

S.R.: OK, let us have a look at the drawings though. In fact, what really struck me was that the Berlin project seems really like a small city. Could it be the influence of someone like Vigier, who is a planner?

P.K.: No, I do not think so. If you look at the architecture of this era, there were various architects who were designing buildings of this sort, with components like those ones. They would fit together pieces and then they would march over the landscape, so this was something that was in the air at the time, especially with the Team 10 people.

S.R.: Exactly, I was thinking of Aldo van Eyck.

P.K.: Sure, absolutely. There was also the design of the Venice hospital by Le Corbusier[4] at the time. It has many similarities to that. Sołtan was teaching at the time, he and I discussed the idea, and then I would go there and I would draw, draw and draw... Sołtan never actually sat and did a straight line: he did these drawings. [pointing at the sections sketches] But all the rest, this is my drawing. It was too bad, I was convinced that we had the winner. And in the end – no winner was selected. Ridiculous! They could have selected us, or one of the other competitors, whether or not the museum was to be built... I had the original drawings somewhere, but I gave them to somebody... Let me see some other drawings you have... I have seen some pictures of the schools when Sołtan was working on them, and I have not seen all of those, I would like to see them... [starts looking at the drawings of the High School in Salem] Sołtan actually had no experience in doing architecture, so he could never get a job at anybody's office... he had no drawings to show. However, this firm here,[5] they needed somebody to do things, and it would have helped them to have a Harvard professor, so that when they would go to interviews with clients, they would say, "we have got a Harvard professor working on that". I do not know what he actually did on those designs though – and he never talked about it. He was not very proud of it. This one however, I know it,[6] he liked to do the super graphics. That one he liked a lot. It is one of the few things he wanted me to see.

S.R.: That is actually something he did before: it was a typical wall design for the schools. Actually, this element appears in four schools.

P.K.: [laughs] That is amazing, you would think they would have been embarrassed by repeating it over and over again...

S.R.: Actually, two schools in Brockton are the same...

P.K.: Probably when they hired the company, they said, "we would like you to do two of them for us for the price of one", so they would have saved a lot of money for the design fee. There are architects now who design a high school and they go to various towns and they sell this high school... and it gets built like fifty times. [laughs] This wall though is the one Sołtan talked to me about. It was something that he finally had done and something that was his own thing. I thought it was really well done, I liked it a lot and. It was really something he would like to do.

S.R.: Were there some other designs of his own that he liked?

P.K.: I would say that one of the things that he was most proud of was the railway station in Warsaw. That was something he wanted me to see and he showed it to me. There is one particular thing that he liked... those elements, the mosaics and the lighting of them. More than any other project, this was his favourite one.

S.R.: What about this one? It is a church he designed in Poland, but then it was rejected. He was very affectionate to this one.[7]

4 The Venice Hospital in the borough of Cannaregio in Venice was designed by Le Corbusier 1964-1965.
5 Referring to the practice Haldeman and Goransson Architects and Engineers from Boston.
6 Photograph of the wall graphics at Carney Academy in New Bedford by Haldeman and Goransson, 1976.
7 Interview with Joanna Sołtan.

P.K.: No, I have never seen that.

S.R.: How about the houses – there is one in New Hampshire and one for Jaqueline Tyrwhitt in Greece.

P.K.: I do not know this one. [pointing to the drawings of the Narva House] It is very interesting, quite complex!

S.R.: He designed it with Szabo.

P.K.: He and Szabo were similar, they were both teachers, but neither had very much experience of actually doing a building. The other one, yes... He liked Jaqueline and he liked this house a lot, he showed it to me. I think he went there a few times too.

S.R.: Coming back to Berlin, when you were working on the competition, was it possible to have your ideas heard?

P.K.: Oh, yes, absolutely. He had no problems with it whatsoever. What the issue was, it was a very detailed program: "so much for this department, so much for painting"... And so, the detailed programme was about those little rooms. [pointing on the divisions of the plan] Every little room, every little thing was in the program, it was a really long one. That is where the different shapes and the different departments come from. Sołtan could not do that, then that is what I did...

S.R.: Why did you think it could have been the winning proposal?

P.K.: What I think is really interesting about it, it is the module. If you take a typical museum, usually they are boxes, big monumental boxes, but they are locked into the existing building. If they ever need to do anything, they cannot because they only have so much space. With something like this, you could start out and could build a little piece of it, if you have only so much money. And you could make it grow. If the programme changed afterwards, you could do other things, and you could expand it... It had all those things that most museums did not have. There are few ones in Denmark like this: they grow into the woods.[8] They have big open spaces and long glass corridors, so one can add one piece here and add one piece there. They are wonderful museums.

S.R.: When you were starting to work on the Berlin competition, why did you decide to work together?

P.K.: He asked me, he said, "shall we do this together?", and I said, "I cannot, I am running this firm", but then he was worried about what he was going to do, so I told him, "OK, let's try it". But it meant a monumental effort to keep up with the work for a day and a half...

S.R.: Were there some important ideas in the design?

P.K.: No, just these little sketches that he made. Actually, these little sketches were the very first things he showed me. It was a way to show that there were various things that we could do, many different options, different ways, we could put things together and make this design organic. From these sketches, I went to those drawings. I had to look also at the program, what the size of the rooms they want is, how it works, what types of galleries they need and finally I came up with this – and all these little things are in here.

S.R.: Were you using Modulor?

P.K.: We did, I usually do. Sert used the Modulor all the time too. The fact that Sołtan was so involved with the creation of the Modulor is mind-blowing to me. And like many things in life – it is only Corbu who is talked about. It reminds me of my own experience working with Sert. My name is nearly never mentioned when historians look back at his work. And that's the way life goes in every facet. Not just architecture, but in all professions, all facets of life.

S.R.: And do you still use it nowadays?

P.K.: Not exactly, because it is all in my head now. It is just a part of what I do. When I was Sert's, he had a commission for a school in Cambridge that got demolished last year, the Martin Luther King School,[9] right by Peabody Terrace.[10] While I was designing, Sert asked, "what modular dimension are we going to use?" – and I had read that Le Corbusier had suggested that in Japan you would use a scale similar to the original Modulor, but it would be scaled down because the Japanese are not six foot tall, they are five foot four. Then, he would

8 The Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk designed by Vilhelm Wohlert and Jørgen Bo was opened in 1958.
9 The Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School in Cambridge designed by Sert was opened in 1972.
10 The Peabody Terrace in Cambridge designed by Sert was opened in 1964.

have used a completely different system, based on – instead of six foot – five foot four. In this case, I said to Sert, "this is an elementary school, why should not we base it on four foot two kids?" – and we did the entire Modulor for the school based on a four foot two kid.

S.R.: In the archives, I have seen some slides marked "Persian Gulf – Paul Krueger".[11] Was it another design you were doing together?

P.K.: I hired him. In the early seventies, the *New York Times* had a small little ad about the size of this [showing a small rectangle] saying that the Saudi Arabian government was looking for architects to design a city and that they wanted to have proposals. Therefore, I said, "I can do that". I went to Vigier and Sołtan, and all other professors at Harvard and I put a team of all Harvard professors – none of which ever worked on a similar job – but it looked like it was a whole big Harvard team. I submitted it and I got the job to design a whole big mind-boggling city. Amazing! There was competition from huge big firms from all over the world and... they gave it to me. And they are still building it. They started to build it forty years ago by Bechtel, the biggest contracting company in the world and they have been working on this for all this time... I have just read the other day that they say that it is the biggest project on Earth except for the Egyptian pyramids. It is huge...

S.R.: What is the city's name?

P.K.: Jubail. They wanted a city for 800,000 people. It is right where the Saudi Aramco oil wells are – and they needed many workers for the oil wells, for that whole industry, for the research and other things. So the first thing was to figure out how those 800,000 people are going to live, what their living style is. People who are there are mostly not Saudi Arabian, so I had to understand whether they have little compounds, and how it was going to be organised. First, it had to be programmed. I had to know what the city is. I started going around Saudi Arabia taking photographs of little villages that I think would be good as a prototype. I then made the first presentation to all the sheiks and they said, "no way, why would we do that, those are terrible places, no one wants to live in those. They want to move out, and they want to be American. Go to Arizona, go to Southern California and pick a city there are do it like one of them... we are not going to live like that". So I had to wake up and well... there are no very good cities in Arizona or Southern California... [laughs] But what they wanted was a place where you can drive cars in, supermarkets...

S.R.: Like a sprawl city?

P.K.: Not exactly... and we designed it. I had a team of about fifty people that I hired, and since they were not paying very often, I offered all those people saying, "you are going to be paid twice the normal rate, because you will not get the salary for three to four months. You have to trust that it is going to happen. I have a contract with them..." So I gathered a wonderful group of about fifty architects, landscape architects, urban designers, et caetera, who wanted to do that. We designed all the little prototypes, like a prototype shopping centre, a prototype mosque, prototype little houses and apartment buildings and various things that you would have in a city, and we would arrange those into neighbourhoods and into bigger areas. In fact, we had first to find what the city was by starting some place, so we started with each of the components of it. For instance, there was a big marina. That part was easy: I visited several of the largest marinas on the West Coast. I could photograph them and then say, "you are going to have a marina that is twice the size of the in Long Beach, California". I put all those together, also all the roads and the big highways, the secondary highways. Then you have to get the utilities to all of those buildings: water, electricity... So I found an engineering firm in England that could work on all the roads, all the highways – they could do this all in one firm, so it made it easy for me to hire just one company and they could do all of those things...

S.R.: So what was Sołtan's role in this design?

P.K.: The Saudi Arabians wanted to have a monumental gate to the city. A big thing. They have them in other cities in the Middle East, they are like five-storey buildings... you can even drive around them. I could not do it, I just could not get my head to do a monumental gate, and I thought, "why not to have Sołtan to do it?". I knew that he would do something wonderful. And so, he did help me and designed it, I submitted it to them, but they rejected it saying, "we do not really need a monumental gate, that was just a Saudi Arabians' idea, we are not going to build a big monumental gate, that is ridiculous".

S.R.: So they first wanted it and then they withdrew... Is it not strange?

11 HGSD-JS, series CB, 5B-25.

P.K.: What happened was that some Saudi Arabians wanted it, but Bechtel was run by all the American people and they never wanted a monumental gate, it was stupid for them. Then, we did an enormous amount of drawings, on big sheets, something like 10,000 drawings.

S.R.: I have read that you were working on the Carpenter Center while working at Sert's... What was your role?

P.K.: Sert came to me one day that he had proposed Harvard a building, and he proposed that they would hire Le Corbusier. He talked to Le Corbusier about how they would collaborate on it: Le Corbusier would design and we would take it from then on – the construction drawings and the administration. But Le Corbusier said he did not want some old fart architect in Boston to work with him, he wanted somebody young. Somebody who had no ideas and somebody who was so young that he had nothing developed in him yet. Sert came to me and said, "I think that you are about as young, as I can find, do you want to do this job?" – and I said, "I would love it". So I did it. But Sert that year was on sabbatical, he was travelling in India and all over the world...

S.R.: So you were actually doing all the drawings, weren't you?

P.K.: We. I was project architect working with a team of about ten architects, many of whom had also worked on drawings for the Holyoke Center. We did everything, communicating back and forth with Le Corbusier, sending him the drawings... He would mark them up and send them back. I would send them back every week. Most of the time he would just make a little note and say for instance, "*décor*". Then sometimes he would put a little sketch on the drawing... Sometimes I could not figure out what the hell he was thinking and trying to do, so I would call Sołtan here – not at the office – because was not working for Sert. He was just doing it as a friend. And he was saying, "how about this – how about that?" – and of course since I had all the Corbu books, he could go to specific examples. So it was like you had a key to the sketches in the books, you could see how it was done. Sołtan was a really big help on that project. We were both trying to figure out what the hell Corbu wanted... "What would Corbu do?" was the question. Sołtan was putting himself in his old shoes, in the very same shoes he had been in when he was working with Le Corbusier. I was just the person to make it happen.

S.R.: Coming to your own work, you have designed a house in Truro in Cape Cod,[12] and it was based on the plan of one of the units from the Unité d'Habitation from Marseille. Where does this idea come from? Is it somehow the influence of Le Corbusier, Sert or Sołtan?

P.K.: It is all of that of course, but the basic idea was that the client, who was the minister at Harvard, walked into Sert's office and asked the receptionist, "who is in charge of the Carpenter Center?" – and I said it was me. He wanted to talk to me, and we sat down in the conference room and he said, "I know that you are working on the Carpenter Center, and I have a little cottage, a cabin in Cape Cod. I would like something that has some of that modern approach, I do not want a little Cape Cod cottage, and I want it to be something really unique, with Corbusian influence". I told him, "I am too busy, I cannot do this now, but when do you need it and how much money do you have?". He said, "I want it immediately, and I have 10,000 dollars". So I said, "with 10,000 it could never happen,[13] you could get something really small". And he said, "well, whatever 10,000 can buy. I have a piece of land". And it was a forty-five degrees slope – so I said, "whatever you will put there, it will cost you to build there". However, I thought that if you take one of those units that Corbu designed for the Marseille block and put it on the hillside, then it would work. I did not have a lot of time, so I said that we would do that. It was almost exactly alike, with the same width as the Unité – 3.66 wide – same as Modulor. Everything was like that, very simple.

S.R.: I was wondering about your Cape Cod designs... Sołtan was quite often underlining the importance for himself, and for Le Corbusier too, of the "grassroots of architecture" – not the classical, well-developed schemes, but the early, raw elements of human creations. You say that you are fascinated by the vernacular, traditional and quite raw constructions... Is there a connection to this thinking?

P.K.: It was when I was working on the Mark House: it had to get built in a really cheap manner. He had only those 10,000 dollars. So I was wondering what was the cheapest thing that is built on Cape Cod – and those are the old fishing shacks. They are things that people would build to store their boats and fishing equipment... They do not have big farms on the Cape, where you would have the barns – but they do have many fishing shacks. I went to see how they are built and to see what they do to make them cheap, because I did not want to waste any money. Thus, I decided that I would combine a fishing shack with the Corbusian module.

12 The Mark House in Truro designed by Paul Krueger was finished in 1966.
13 Taking account the inflation, the present value (2019) of 10,000 dollars in 1964 is about 81,000 dollars.

S.R.: Another thing I have seen, you still use hand drawings, and you do not use computers. Is there a connection to how Sołtan or Le Corbusier worked, with the visual arts important for them?

P.K.: Yes, I think so, but sadly nobody does it anymore. They do not even teach by hand, like you were. Everybody just does things on the computer. They start right out when they are in high school or junior high school: they start working on drawings with computers at a very early age. The people who are working upstairs right now, they are all drawing by hand; they are not drawing on the computer. It is interesting that you do not have to. You can draw like this and you can send it to a company, and they will digitise it, and they will make it into a computerised drawing. I have many commissions from Harvard and other places where a part of the contract is that they want CAD drawings for their files. And it is not a problem – you just draw, give it to a company that will make it into a CAD drawing. It is crazy...!

S.R.: Well... I think I have exhausted your time well enough – do you have anything to add perhaps?

P.K.: Just that I enjoyed reminiscing about my friend Jerzy... Actually, one of his favourite jokes was, "just call me George". He was an affable friend, and I have many fond memories of him. And I am sure that everyone else who was fortunate to meet him would say the same thing.

Joanna Lombard

October 6th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's Conversatorium and M. Arch. II design studio (1976–1977), AIA architect and teacher at the University of Miami School of Architecture since 1979.

S.R.: Do you remember the first time you have met Jerzy Sołtan?

J.L.: It was at the beginning of the year. The evening before the classes started, all the M. Arch. II students gathered together in Gund Hall to have a meeting with him. He asked each of us to arrive prepared to share what we were interested in, and where we were from. That was my first encounter with him. Some of the students knew who he was. While most of us did not, it was evident that he was an interesting, iconic figure. I remember that evening well for all its aspects- I had just arrived from south Florida, and it was September in Massachusetts. It was cold, it was grey. Gund Hall itself was grey and imposing. The room was dark, and there before us was someone unlike anybody I had ever met before...

S.R.: In what sense?

J.L.: Well, I had done my undergraduate degree in architecture at Tulane University in New Orleans, and almost all of the faculty were from the region, if not from New Orleans itself. In those years, students tended to go to the regional schools; it was not an era like the present with the market dominance of the Ivy League. At that time, students from the South looked to the region's leading architecture schools, which in Florida were Tulane and Georgia Tech. Students in the Northeast would go to Cornell or to Cooper Union; Midwesterners might go to the Illinois Institute of Technology... Parallel to that flow, most of the faculty in many of those schools came from the same region. At Tulane, one or two faculty members may have studied outside the region. James Lamantia, for example, was a New Orleanian, studied architecture at Tulane, then later went to the GSD, was a Fellow at the American Academy in Rome, and then came back to teach at Tulane. He was part of a cadre of designers seeking a language of modernism with a regional identity, within a genre of "critical regionalism", as it was described by Kenneth Frampton.[1] There were other connections through individual faculty, to Penn, the Architectural Association in London, the GSD under Gropius... In general, however, the people I had met were mostly US-based, and the majority of the students were from the South, Southwest, some Midwest, Northeast, and Puerto Rico. Coming back to Sołtan, he presented an entirely new model of faculty. He was striking, not because he was assertive or aggressive, but the combination of his height and personality, his passion for architecture, and even an air of intrigue. He was definitely interesting, not an American, and he was not any of the things these other people were. It was as if he were talking to us from another world... which in fact he was.

S.R.: Was it not common at the GSD that it had a number of European teachers?

J.L.: It had been, but at that point it was more multinational. Jorge Silvetti had come from Argentina via Carnegie Mellon and formed his practice with Rodolfo Machado. Harry Siedler from Australia was there... but there was a major US influence through the extended circle of the New York Five. I think that the attitude of 'go and start a big office' was more dominant than an intellectual academic environment. That may not have been true, but among my cohort, that was a commonly held perception.

S.R.: You attended two courses by Sołtan, the studio and the Conversatorium. What did the latter consist in?

J.L.: The Conversatorium was something like a cross between a seminar and a salon. The course structure consisted of students researching a topic of interest and presenting their findings to the class. Sołtan would then intersperse those presentations with issues he felt relevant to the discussions. In retrospect, I think that in order for the course to work as he may have hoped, we needed to be a well-informed group, highly motivated if not

1 The term "critical regionalism" was used for the first time by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in 1981, and it was used by Kenneth Frampton in 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an architecture of resistance', in *Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983).

skilled in dialogue and engagement... and we really were not that. We were a collection of fairly young students coming from all over the US, some from abroad, but mostly US... from an eclectic assortment of academic backgrounds: Carnegie Mellon, Arizona, California, Tulane... I remember that at one point, he started to realise that we did not know what he knew, and that even among us we did not have the same foundations at all... so he decided to step in and at least make sure we understood the work of the CIAM, Team 10, and the evolution of modernism. This was enlightening and sparked conversation, but he seemed taken aback that he had needed to provide this perspective, that, outside of the Cornellians, most of us had not been steeped in this world. That was a striking moment for me, because I realised that he represented something so significant to the discipline and we had little appreciation of the magnitude of his engagement. It must have been frustrating to him.

S.R.: This reminds me of a conversation I had with Urs Gauchat,[2] Sołtan's former student and later a friend. He mentioned that Sołtan was always interested in a conversation at a certain level, with people having a certain level of eloquence... It was visible in a Master Class in 1966, there was a rather elaborate reading list including Le Corbusier's *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches*, *Technics and Civilisation* by Mumford, *Philosophy of Structures* by Torroja, and *Accent on Form* by Lancelot Law Whyte.[3]

J.L.: I think that with us, the one reading he assigned was *The Poetics of Space* by Bachelard. He may have suggested others, or maybe I neglected his list, but I do not think he had any other required readings... Perhaps he gave up on the other materials by the time he got to us. However, honestly, if there had been that kind of a reading list, it would have been helpful. We would have had more context to the course. Without a proper context, we could not begin to understand his framework of knowledge, or even his own history, or the how and why he got to Harvard. It was difficult to discern the larger dimension of what Sołtan was bringing in with his teaching. However, Harvard was not a place that was thoughtful and gentle about people, it was a rather brutal space. I feel that it would have been more effective for students to know more about what a resource he was, in order to contextualize his relationships with us. It would have served the students better and it would have been better for him.

S.R.: What do you think was missing in framing this relationship?

J.L.: Well, just a simple introduction. When I am introducing someone to my students, and especially when I know that this person has much to offer and the students may not necessarily know that, I try to frame their encounter. I describe who this person is, and why they are important... Then, the students are primed to understand. If you just drop people on students expecting them to figure everything out, or expecting the speaker to explain themselves, it sometimes works, but more often it does not. I think that in Sołtan's case, it would have been incredibly valuable to have had such an introduction. Most of the students were not able to appreciate what a resource he was, what a unique contribution he provided to the school and to us... But as I said, Harvard was not a place that gave much attention to that...

S.R.: You mentioned a lecture on CIAM and Team 10, do you remember something more about it?

J.L.: What was interesting for me about that talk was the personal nature of his presentation. These were his own memories; he knew these people. They were not remote figures in a book as viewed by an academic historian, they were lives lived that he experienced: he had relationships and arguments with these people. He made it immediate and real, and in doing so, showed its lack of inevitability, the role of purpose and chance, the completely imperfect human actions, which I thought it was really interesting.

S.R.: For you as students, was it important to have him as a direct witness with all his connections?

J.L.: Again, as I came from that regionalist background, I tended to see architecture through the lens of place. It was an extremely powerful concept, to seek the qualities of architecture linked to the local culture and history, craft, and landscape. J. B. Jackson was teaching his legendary class on landscape history and my friends were all studying landscape architecture. I had more affinity with the idea of nature, climate, site... Coming back to early modern architecture, I just felt that these were utopian concepts with little understanding of people, relationship to place, and the basic human needs. For me, that level of architecture discourse was very far from what I felt was meaningful and potentially profound. While Sołtan knew people in that generation, my previous teachers were the people who were the followers of that generation... and many of them advocated and practiced a method of teaching that was brutal to students, and disrespectful of the *noncognoscenti*, including clients. The same generation of architects lecturing at the GSD would typically show slides of amazing Renaissance buildings and then they would present their own white cube as the natural progeny of the architectural greats. I had found it all to be so opaque and inhuman. When I listened to Sołtan's recollections, I began to realise that the people who started this movement actually had strong, socially inspired beliefs. They wanted to change the world for the better, and part of it was because of what they experienced: the war, the Holocaust, all the horrors of totalitarianism. Those who studied their work only from the perspective of form, turned these principles into a game of white boxes...

S.R.: Sołtan was also your tutor for the first semester studio. What do you remember from it?

J.L.: The M. Arch. II studio was located in a ground-floor room in the southeast corner of the Gund Hall along Cambridge Street. The two exterior walls were all glass, it was freezing cold... there was almost no heating and there was a back room with no windows. Unfortunately, we were apart from all the other studios, which were located in the trays that climbed to the fifth floor. The whole idea of the building was that the trays created a larger studio culture, and we were physically separated from that. We were a diverse group, with some students who had their own practice and others of us, just a year or less out of school. There also was a competitive environment in general. People were not typically congenial. I remember the first day very vividly because I had placed my belongings on a desk before we met as a group. Sołtan then told us that we each had two desks, and when we came back to the studio, my belongings were on the floor. The student next to me still had her items on the adjacent desk, so I asked her what happened. She answered very matter-of-factly that since we could have two desks each, my formerly designated desk now belonged to her. At this point, I looked around the glass enclosed room to see that I had literally no desk, as everybody had already claimed them. Then, several students who had claimed the back room for themselves cleared a desk for me there... That was my welcome to the GSD.

S.R.: Was such an atmosphere often present in the studio?

J.L.: Sołtan was not a person to build the culture of the studio. He was sort of a Master teacher, and we were supposed to be the Master students. What we did with each other, he may have noticed, but that did not seem to be of too much concern to him. In general, the GSD was quite a carnivorous environment, and people were often set against each other. Reviews with many faculty members were rough: I remember people in my class, men, who would cry after, and occasionally during a review. To be better introduced to the culture of the school would have been useful, and I think some students blamed Sołtan for their hardships. Actually, Sołtan had an assistant in the class, David Lord. He was from Berkeley, a thoughtful person, but as a Californian and outside the stream of regular faculty, he was not really part of the GSD culture. David taught *Energy and Environment*, and that was the period when although energy needs were increasingly pressing, architecture as taught in the studios was becoming more formalist, so his work was not considered integral. David may have been more inclined toward student issues, but he could not integrate us with the culture, because he was not part of the school's culture himself. And it was not in Sołtan's nature to do that, so I think that created barriers...

S.R.: Do you mean barriers between you and Sołtan or barriers between the students?

J.L.: Barriers between students. Several students were young men who were the stars of their previous schools, some of them were already practicing architects. These were accomplished people and they were accustomed to success. They resented being treated as underperforming students, and they did not understand why they were not succeeding, so I think they blamed Sołtan for that.

S.R.: You mentioned that the reviews were harsh and people were crying. What was Sołtan's attitude towards students in that harsh environment?

J.L.: Sołtan was never cruel to students, he would not berate people publicly. I mean, he could be distant, and he could indicate disapproval, but he was not like Eisenman, who was relentlessly cruel. I somehow think he was above it all and he simply did not take that in. Frankly, if you think about where he came from, it would have seemed irrelevant and trivial. If you have been through World War II and incarcerated in a POW camp, and then at Harvard people are rude to you on a project... who cares? I viewed his engagement as purposefully pushing us to identify what we cared about, to develop our ideas, and to do that in the most rigorous way. I think that was his mission.

S.R.: You mentioned David Lord who was the assistant. How were they teaching together?

J.L.: They were friendly, and he wanted David to talk to us about energy and environmental issues, because he believed these issues were increasingly important. They were also very different people: you can imagine a Berkeley Californian and Sołtan together... Sołtan himself was very interested in drawings, in representation,

2 Interview with Urs Gauchat.
3 Reading list for the Master Class in Architecture from July 1st, 1966, see: HGSD-JS, AA003.

and in form in general. Personally, I was more interested in landscape, and he thought it was interesting in the way it related to the building. He had these memorable remarks... At that time, I was sketching by hatching, and he would say, "one line, one line Joanna, one line" Essentially teaching me an economy of line, a deliberate and singular move; you do not need seven lines, you can do this with one line. I learned to draw the way he taught... indeed, he was deeply interested in the way that we represented things.

S.R.: In addition to that saying "one line", do you remember any other sayings that stuck with you?

J.L.: He spoke at length about form: he spoke about buildings as objects and volumes. Later, I realised that there was a whole line of thinking relating to form and to volume that was part of his theory. Without understanding this at the time, it was not clear how he was advising us to proceed. Meanwhile, some faculty would discuss how different pieces in the programme related to each other, but Sołtan did not express great interest in that, at least as far as I was concerned. It might have been different for other people. For me, it was always a conversation about form, and about drawings. I drew well and he liked that, so he would come over to see what I was working on and we would talk about what I was doing in terms of line work and formal development.

S.R.: Was he showing you his own designs?

J.L.: He did not. Apparently, when he went to give a lecture to Cornell, he showed his paintings. I did not see all that until he came to speak in Miami years later and showed them. As I listened to him in Miami I remember wishing he had shown more of his own work to us as students as it would have been enlightening.

S.R.: Actually, based on the past conversations, I think I can say that he felt it was personal, and he did not show them out of humbleness.

J.L.: I think so too. Ironically, I do not show my students my work either. I follow his footsteps... [laughs]

S.R.: Do you remember anything about the main design task in the studio?

J.L.: He asked us to design a house for ourselves, and he left it very open-ended. Coming from his perspective, a house for yourself, from a lifetime of considering architecture, place, and life, this could have been an amazing project. But for a twenty-year-old, there is not necessarily a great volume of life lived ... In retrospect, I think that it might have been not the best project for that group, and it was not as successful as he wanted it to be. I think he expected more depth from the students than we were able to bring to the class... It might have frustrated him that people's ideas were not that profound, as most students did not have the emotional and intellectual resources to bring to a project like that. Everyone was doing something more or less in the genre of the period. My project was on a canal, and it was probably International Style. But David King proposed a vernacular style house in Maine and that excited Sołtan greatly...

S.R.: Were you able then to choose the site?

J.L.: Yes, we were asked to bring our own site, and program. Most students designed houses in the places they were from. I do not remember most people's designs, but basically, you could see where students were from looking at their designs, if not the place, then the school. For example, James Harman had studied at Carnegie Mellon with Jorge Silvetti, and with some of the students, early faculty influences emerged.

S.R.: Actually, it is interesting, because that was what Le Corbusier suggested to Sołtan when he wrote from the POW camp. He was there as a young architect, with plenty of time in a difficult environment, and he wanted to use the time, so he wrote to Le Corbusier saying that he wanted to learn more and to work on architecture... and Le Corbusier suggested him, "imagine in front of you a normal man, his wife and his children, and try to live and create – as you understand it – a new setting for him. Every architect should go through such work". [4]

J.L.: That explains so much – I wish I had known that before... He could have explained that forty years ago.

S.R.: Do you remember any discussions, any desk crits on this design with Sołtan?

J.L.: I think he was generally positive. My own project was elevated, it was a white structure, more International Style than New York Five. I had set the project in the landscape of Australian pines that had been introduced to the site in the 1920s as windbreaks, so I had this very long drawing with these exotic trees that had been

4 Lecture at Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw after Le Corbusier's death, see: MASP-JS. Bulanda, p. 43. Translation from Polish (SR).

claiming territory across southern Florida. Sołtan loved that. I think that to be able to draw well was an advantage because one could tell a story beyond the building. If all one has is the building, that is difficult. However, I remember that during the review, Gerald McCue, then the chair of Architecture, dismissed the architectural language saying that it could have been built twenty-five years ago. I remember answering him that I had just turned twenty-four, which at the time was considered completely impertinent for a review. Humour was not really part of the protocol. But Sołtan did not mind at all.

S.R.: You mentioned before David King's design was close to a vernacular house. Would other teachers be critical to a design like this?

J.L.: Yes. Richard Meier's form of architecture was quite popular. So was Eisenman's. These were the main influences. Sołtan was friends with Bill McGilvray who taught the studio I took in spring. It was called 'The Middle Landscape', and he was looking into the questions of sprawl and the movement away from the cities in the US; I found it inspiring. He would invite Sołtan for the reviews, and that was always interesting when he came. Other than James Harman, David King and I, the other students did not know him at all because they were from Landscape Architecture or the Architecture & Urban Design Program; they found Sołtan to be a very theatrical character.

S.R.: Was there anyone who proposed a postmodern design in Sołtan's studio?

J.L.: Not that I recall. I remember David's because it was literally a vernacular house...

S.R.: You mentioned before the problem of framing, of the lack of proper introduction and understanding of who Sołtan was... Then, there was the composition of the group which was complex, and it was difficult to find the same level of eloquence with Sołtan. Finally, you mentioned that there was a problem for some students to enter into the architectural culture of the school. How did it impact the studio? Was it a successful course?

J.L.: I think that a group of M. Arch. II students came to Harvard expecting something amazing to happen to them by simply being there. I think that many in the group anticipated an incredible influx of information, which would make sense of the profession, their place in it, and help each person leap forward. I think that the general insecurity linked to the pressure and to the reputation of Harvard, connected with the more uncertain and not-quantitative aspects of architectural design can be toxic to growth. In addition, it was a strange semester... we had the swine flu (H1N1) outbreak, so Harvard was part of that national vaccination campaign, and some people fell ill after that. Winter came very early, and there were record snowfalls from October to May. I remember at the end of the fall semester, it was particularly dark and cold, and one of the students came to me to say that the evaluations came up for the studio with Sołtan and they were not good, and that some of the students wanted to get new evaluations done, because they thought the current crop were unfair. So, we did new evaluations. But there were some people who were still angry, and someone told me that they blamed their unmet expectations and unhappiness on Sołtan himself: because they did not find a home at Harvard... I think more reasonable people would see that GSD of that era did not typically provide that for anyone and even today, many would say that is not its purpose anyway.

S.R.: Well, his studio was the most important course for the program, was it?

J.L.: Yes, it was the central course, and then one could take an elective or maybe two elective courses.

S.R.: Is it possible that Sołtan was too demanding from the students?

J.L.: I do not think so. I do not remember him as being demanding. I remember him as being rather elusive. Thinking of *The Poetics of Space* for example: it requires a certain depth of knowledge to interpret. His interpretation of it and our interpretation were perhaps on two different levels. He was not one to say, "do this, do that" or "I expect this, I expect that". You knew when he liked something and you knew when he did not, but he would not tell you how to get from A to B. On the one hand, that kind of ambiguity is very difficult for students who are finding their way. On the other hand, for a professional who has spent a long time in practice, such ambiguity is a place where you can actually explore and find richness for yourself. I think it was simply a mismatch between us and him. Maybe if we had worked with him in the second semester or even for a seminar instead of a studio, it would have been a different experience. I think that given the level at which he was operating and the level he was speaking about, he required a refined audience. And that group of students was not that. We were not that. Then, he was not the kind of explainer, at least not to my experience... I think he assumed we knew the basics, like wall thickness, kitchen dimensions, and utilities spaces... That was all

assumed because it was the basic level. Then, at the next level, the students should understand what it means to put these things together, what they try to accomplish, and what it does... Then, there is another level where we can glimpse the arc of history. He lived at the arc of history level, whereas the students were oscillating between 'we have just figured how it works' and 'we are not sure what it means'.

S.R.: What could have been done in order to avoid the problems you had?

J.L.: I think that Harvard struggled with what to do with that second professional degree program... They ended up making it longer: when I was there, it was one year only, but then they expanded the programme to three semesters. The room that was our studio has become a review space, so the M. Arch. II students are now mixed in trays. However, the M. Arch. I programme is designed for students who arrive with limited to no background in architecture, which enables the shaping of a class and a process. I think they were not entirely sure about what to do with our class. As I have said, we were a mix of students, some of whom had worked in practice for a while, and others, as I was, who were relatively new and out of school. Just from a pedagogical point of way, that would have been a challenging group to manage in a purposeful way.

S.R.: Let us move to the contents and to the ideas that were present in Sołtan's teaching... How much was it possible to see through his comments and reviews his fascination with Le Corbusier?

J.L.: Very clear. That was clear. He quoted him often, he had him as a resource. He would sometimes have a discussion with the students who were researching or working in the Carpenter Center, who claimed it was a disaster...

S.R.: How did it end?

J.L.: Well, he explained to the students they were misinterpreting the building. But also, we did not realise how much the Carpenter Center had been altered. I saw the building last fall restored to the original layout, and all of the sudden, you could see the light coming in through the glass: it was a completely different space. When I had been there before, it had been grim, dark... Even then, it could have been interesting if we had compared the original drawings with its then current state; our understanding of it would have been different.

S.R.: What did he point to when talking about Le Corbusier?

J.L.: He talked about his writings, it was more theoretical. I think he spoke also a bit, but not that much, about the colour. He said that we were misinterpreting Le Corbusier to be black and white, because that is how it was reproduced. Actually, I never heard Sołtan give a critique of Le Corbusier, and I wonder if we could have had such a conversation, what he might have shared with us. If you look at Le Corbusier's work, it is not in totality exactly what he stood for in his writings. There would be questions one would ask... for example concerning the social program. It would have been interesting to discuss.

S.R.: I have found a brief for the design of a house for a different design studio, where it indicates that the students were to use the Modulor.[5] Did he refer much to the Modulor, harmonic diagrams, and regulating lines, all of which somehow point to both composition and Le Corbusier?

J.L.: Yes. But he did not come for a desk crit and tell us to arrange the design based on the Modulor. He looked rather for proportions, for form. I suppose he did talk about regulating lines, but I was not perhaps the ideal candidate for that kind of thinking. Colin Rowe's *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*[6] was a book he recommended to us, but I have to confess that I found that quite opaque. One could reapportion the volumes and more curiously to me, there was the idea that a Renaissance villa could be reduced to a geometric essence. For me, it skimmed away the value of the Renaissance villa.

S.R.: What about Team 10, was he referring to them?

J.L.: Not that much. Sołtan did not spend much time talking about urban design *per se*. He tended to speak more compositionally. I understood his relationship to them better when he gave us the lecture in Miami, because it was all about composition.

S.R.: Did he mention, in a good way or in a bad way, postmodern composition?

J.L.: I do not think he had much patience for that.

5 Undated assignment (own house), see: HGSD-JS, AA010.
6 Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).

S.R.: Was it present in the school at the time?

J.L.: Not fully. At that time, *Five Architects*[7] was a dominant force and it was all about the whites and greys...

S.R.: Let me ask you about some ideas that were recurring in his texts and lectures. I would like to know whether he incorporated them into the studio. For example, was he inviting you to work following interdisciplinary design? Personally, he worked very often with different visual artists, for example.

J.L.: I do not think it was much present in the studio... When I went to the GSD, I was interested in the fact that Harvard had Howard Gardener working on Project Zero in the School of Education where they were investigating cognitive and developmental psychology. I was interested in space and perception, and design impacts on well-being. Sołtan found that interesting, and we discussed psychology as an area of inquiry, but he was cautious about how such work would manifest itself in form: how would it move from the ideas into the projects... Coming back to David Lord, for example, we could see that he was bringing an environmental sensibility, but almost nobody integrated that perspective and that was something very practical and necessary. I think that Sołtan had intellectual interests in the interdisciplinary contacts, but I am not sure that he knew how to guide us. In some cases, he was aware of interdisciplinary integration, but he felt that the outcome was not beneficial. He spoke with us about Christopher Alexander, I believe he knew him from his Harvard and MIT days, and Sołtan discussed the early work on *A Pattern Language*, mentioning that Berkeley had made Alexander their youngest tenured full professor, but Sołtan viewed him at that time as a person of promise who did not deliver: one would expect that from all this great written work something astonishing in the profession would come forth... but it did not. Theory may have emerged, but there was no parallel body of architectural work. His model in fact was Le Corbusier, theory and an incredible body of work.

S.R.: Sołtan was also very much interested in the similarities and the beginnings of cultures: in the "grassroots" of modern architecture. They were to be that raw matter of fresh ideas, similar to what in his mind was happening with early modern architecture. Following that, he often referred in articles to ancient Greek architecture, to early Christian buildings, and to the Romanesque. Do you remember anything about that?[8]

J.L.: I do not think so, but it could have been that I just do not remember it.

S.R.: Actually, I thought there were some connections to these ideas in *The Poetics of Space*.[9]

J.L.: It is possible it was there, but he did not give lectures in the studio, he just did desk crits. During the Conversatorium, he gave almost no talks, he wanted the students to speak. Actually, to be honest, it would have been great if we could have heard much more from him. I can hardly remember others' talks, but I can tell you exactly what he talked about... Imagine if he had conducted the whole class. I do not know whether it was his humility or whether Harvard was not able to give him the opportunity to fully express the resources he could offer...

S.R.: Let us move to the lecture at the University of Miami... Was it yourself who invited Sołtan?

J.L.: Yes, I did because at that point I was thinking back on him, and my husband was a Cornell student, and he knew him as that Le Corbusier persona from his occasional lectures there... I wrote to Sołtan, and he said he would love to come. We brought him, and he gave a talk, which was mainly on composition: he spoke on form, colour, and proportions.

S.R.: Was it then more art-based rather than concentrated on architecture?

J.L.: Yes, but he took it onwards to architecture through the frame of proportions. At this point, he was reacting against postmodernism... It must have been in the late 1980s after the school was formed independently from the College of Engineering. It was interesting to see, because people who knew him were very excited to see him again. For those who did not know Sołtan, we introduced him because we wanted them to know who he was, what his life was. I think he too enjoyed coming.

S.R.: Do you think there may have been something that you gained from the experience of being taught by Sołtan?

7 Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk and Richard Meier, *Five Architects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
8 Chapter 7.
9 For example, see: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 2nd edn (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), pp. 29-30.

J.L.: Yes, I definitely think so. At a very fundamental, life-lesson level, the experience taught me to do more homework in advance of a situation. To be able to make the most of what one encounters, foreknowledge is hugely valuable! I think he personally taught me to refrain from judgement, because you do not know people's stories, and you cannot make assumptions until you know more. Then, because somehow, he stood apart from the currents of the GSD in so many ways, it showed me that it is actually fine to be different. Maybe distance enables a perspective that can yield wisdom. I would also say, he specifically taught me to unhesitatingly ask questions – that questioning is a good thing to do. And of course, his lessons on the economy of line translate into a more precise way of seeing and questioning oneself about what's important.

S.R.: Have you used some of this experience in your own teaching?

J.L.: I think that one of the things he taught me as a teacher, was that he wanted to create a space for us to explore. I think it is fascinating that you mentioned the exchange with Le Corbusier. It explains so much about Sołtan's reactions to the studio projects, why he could have been disappointed by the lack of profundity in our designs, because it must have been a deeply profound experience for him to have done that exercise. His teaching was not the kind where someone teaches you something and then you realise it is a model. His was rather a model where we might say afterwards, "had we known this, we could have done that". So, I have really learnt the importance of framing and understanding... On the teaching side, I am not sure that he realised how young and inexperienced we were or what our backgrounds were. Typical suburban American kids growing up in the 1960s and 1970s were not necessarily equipped with the depth of life experiences as young people from other circumstances, especially his. So this has taught me to look closely at each class as a group of individuals coming together and bringing expectations based on their different life journeys. If I can understand more about them, where they have been, where they think they want to go, and about where we want them to go professionally, then it is easier to go forward together. I think helping one another truly see is everything. Sometimes one does not realise what one missed until later. I would like to make sure the students do not feel that same sense of loss.

Rocco Maragna

June 25th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' (1976-1977). FRAIC urban designer working in Toronto, Canada.

S.R.: Do you remember your first meeting?

R.M.: In autumn of 1975, he gave a lecture on Le Corbusier, as he, of course, was one of those who had known Le Corbusier very good... At that time, the city of New York was almost destitute, and Sołtan was speaking about the concepts of Le Corbusier: the new city, the radiant city, the grid... and I challenged Jerzy. We had a little bit of a confrontation between a student and a professor, and we became friends. He then gave a course on Le Corbusier, which name I do not remember, and you had to audit it... and he asked me to attend without auditing, because we had argued the point before. All I can say about him was that he was an amazing professor, and very well respected. I learnt a lot from him. Then, when I graduated, he wrote a nice little note on a collection of books that I have on Le Corbusier – you know, the eight volumes of Le Corbusier. I still have them, and he wrote quite a very beautiful little note on it. He also attended my final presentation at my studio, but I did not take his studio, because he taught architecture, and I was in the Urban Design Program... I did my Master in Urban Design, as I already had my architecture degree. We would go for a coffee or a beer, because he loved Italy, and he loved Europe, and I was one of the few Italians back then, one of the few architecture students at Harvard.

S.R.: May you talk more about that first meeting? In which way did you confront him?

R.M.: I spent two years at Harvard in the Urban Design Program. The architecture programme was more related to Jerzy Sołtan. My encounter, as I said, it started strictly with a debate on Le Corbusier, a debate on the grid system and New York. That generated an interesting discussion at that time at the school. Before that, I studied at the University of Toronto, and then I went to Venice, where I met Mazzariol[1] who talked about Le Corbusier's hospital. In Venice, I also met José Oubrerie who was one of the last disciples of Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier was everywhere: he entered all the pores of architecture students, but I was more interested in the urban spaces, which he never admired that much. He was designing isolated buildings, and all of us, all of the architecture students, we were doing designs in axonometric. These pieces of drawings, they were almost flying free, free of context. When I arrived at Harvard to take the Maser course, Sołtan did this conference at the theatre of the Graduate School of Design and talked about Le Corbusier. Personally, I was already full of him, I was full of Le Corbusier, and I challenged Sołtan. I remember a note I wrote to him that started that dialogue. I wrote it in French, even though I do not speak French, but he did very well – so I had it translated. More or less, it is like this: "life is round, the world is round, and basically, we cannot think about life in a Cartesian way. Life is very soft, passionate, and passion does not enter into the grid. You cannot see passion in the grid. The grid is very capitalistic, very colonial, while life, after all, is round. Because of this, I disagree with Le Corbusier and I disagree with you". I left a note in his mailbox at the school and the following day in a class that I was taking, he barged in [laughs] and he started arguing with me, and of course, nobody else knew what was going on. Because of that, we started to get together, to talk about it, to respect each other, and we became friends for the two years that I was there.

S.R.: I can actually imagine him doing this based on what other students were telling about his personality and about his passion for Le Corbusier...

R.M.: At the time I gave my final presentation on waterfronts, he was there. The Graduate of School of Design, at every final presentation, they would invite professors from other universities. The idea was that the other professors were trying to destroy the students making the presentations, showing that their schools were better than Harvard was. There was this kind of challenge between various universities. When he came to see me making the final presentation, it was an interesting and beautiful story there... that is where we went to have more than one beer after the presentation.

1 Giuseppe Mazzariol (1922-1989), Italian art historian based in Venice.

S.R.: Do you remember anything more about the course you took with him?

R.M.: He gave a course on Le Corbusier, whose name I do not remember...

S.R.: I have found your name on a student list of a seminar he held, 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture',[2] which was concentrated on Le Corbusier: it should be that one.

R.M.: Yes, and on that one, you had to audit. As we already had the debate on the grid and on Le Corbusier, he actually invited me to take that course, but he said "you do not have to listen to me". So I did take the course, and I enjoyed it. I wanted to learn more about Le Corbusier, because it was affecting the way we were building all around the world. He was extremely well knowledgeable, and of course, he knew what he was talking about. Most of the students were from the Department of Architecture. I do not remember however any projects we had to do during that course.

S.R.: Do you remember any other details?

R.M.: I took courses at Harvard to challenge the system rather than to become part of it. I went to Harvard to use the professors to open my ideas, and help me with my ideas rather than to be trained to be like them.

S.R.: Was Jerzy Sołtan's teaching enabling you to do that, to enable your ideas?

R.M.: He loved sketches, and he loved to sketch. I always believed through talking to him that the image, the sketches, and the fact to take an idea to paper format are much better than talking about it... and he challenged me to sketch my ideas. Out of that, he would then reinforce me as a student, underlining that what I was doing through the drawings and through the sketches was OK. The comment he made on the book on Le Corbusier, on the eighth volume of the collection of his books, identifies that. In ten-fifteen words, he actually captured what I was trying to do and then reinforced me throughout my career how to express myself as an architect.[3]

S.R.: About these sketches, I have heard from some students that he was quite often insisting on using charcoal, soft pencil: the so-called soft media. Was it also the case for you?

R.M.: I used only pen and ink – and I still do. I do not want to get my hands dirty. [laughs]

S.R.: He was telling his architecture studio students – perhaps that is why you have not heard it – but he was telling them, "get your hands dirty".[4]

R.M.: Yes, that is very possible, and I heard that all the time when I was at the Department of Architecture. I loved ink and the old pens, where you can control the flow of ink. I still have a series of sketches I did for my last presentation thesis. What happened in that actual presentation was very beautiful. The room was all dark, the big theatre was all dark, there were hundreds of students listening, because we had to take turns, and after about the third slide, I have heard this voice, "enough, I have seen enough – this student is fine". Of course, I was nervous: you are nervous when you are doing a presentation, and I asked the speaker to let me continue, so I started all over again. After the third slide of sketches I was showing, the voice came again and because of the situation, I did not recognise it, so I said, "please put the lights on, I would like to know who is saying that". Because again, he said, "enough, I have seen enough – this student is fine, you do not have to go on". The lights went on, and actually, it was Jerzy Sołtan to have said after three slides of my sketches that, as far as he was concerned, he had seen enough of my thesis, and he gave me a great OK. Everyone began to understand what was happening, and I actually have never presented my full thesis if not for these three slides.

S.R.: What was the thesis about?

R.M.: It was on waterfronts, on the streetscape, on how to create open space rather than buildings. Buildings for me, they would fall down, they can become ruins. We talked about that, Jerzy and I would talk about it. As I was born in Italy, all I remembered were those old towns that were falling apart, and old walls, so I used to say, "things do come down, and buildings do come to an end. What is important, it is how people live". We would talk about all sorts of things related to that, and these conversations were not on architecture only, but they led back to architecture and urbanism.

S.R.: During these talks, what did you talk about?

2 Student list for 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' from February 9th, 1976, see: HGSD-JS, AA001.
3 Note in French from June 6th, 1976, "*I hope that your ideas will be always so beautiful as your sketches, which I had a chance to see here on June 1st*".
4 Interview with Umberto Guarracino.

R.M.: We talked about life... In a way, he was like a father. There was that kind of openness. He was very warm, and he was very appreciative of being challenged. I do recall that, but it was many years ago. We did connect after, because he came to Toronto to give a lecture, but I came just for the last few minutes, because these were busy times for me, and I had no opportunity to reconnect with him afterwards.

S.R.: So you have not had that much contact with him after your graduation...

R.M.: No.

S.R.: Concerning Harvard, do you remember anything about Sołtan's position within the school?

R.M.: No, I do not. I really tried to get away and to stay away from the politics and from the relationships between 'them', to stay away from the administration.

S.R.: OK, I understand. Was postmodernism present at Harvard at that time?

R.M.: It is rather an architectural question. I was in Urban Design. There was that liminal state between the end of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism, the beginning of a discussion. There was also a bit of a pushback towards the actual building itself designed by John Andrews. There was the sense of 'too open', of a 'very stark space', so people would begin to full back.

Lydia Rubio

March 29th, 2021

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's Le Corbusier Workshop in 1974, and later design and art professor at Harvard, Parsons School of Design New York, and the University of Puerto Rico. Visual artist since 1980 with vast experience, international exhibitions, and collections.

S.R.: How do you remember your experience with Jerzy Sołtan?

L.R.: Even before I studied architecture, I had a strong interest in art, being the third generation from a family of women painters. My interest in architecture was connected to my interest in the arts. During my training and later while teaching, I looked for architects who were less conventional, more like free thinkers. I associated with Europeans, like Leonardo Ricci in Florence, who had a broader cultural vision of architecture. I avoided dogmatic architects. Sołtan was actually one of the liveliest and freer human beings at the GSD, it was very refreshing to have him as a teacher. He called me "*Lidita*". He was also playful and warm, a total human being. We had '*endives au jambon*' once at Pierre Jampen's home, a colleague in the seminar. The level of communication with Sołtan was wonderful, while he made us laugh, he also had a lot of knowledge. I attended his seminar in 1974 on Le Corbusier, the Modulor, and proportions. I remember from there some very touching moments, like the anecdote of Sołtan meeting Le Corbusier for the first time in Paris as a very young architect. One of his favourite words was the Corbusian concept of the "ineffable space". The attempt to understand the ineffable in art, also emphasized by Rudolf Arnheim at the Carpenter Center, was one of the greatest gifts I received during my days at Harvard. We also made different projects during the seminar. I did a complete analysis of the proportions of La Tourette and designed a piece of furniture applying those proportions. Sołtan had a complete understanding of art, like Eduard Sekler the architectural historian. No one in architecture was talking about art then. Even today, architects fear talking about art because they simply lack the knowledge. I wanted to bridge the gap between art and architecture. Afterwards, I included a seminar on aesthetics, in my design studio at Harvard GSD in 1977-1978. I brought artists to talk about the process of creation in the arts and the usefulness of applying aspects of it to the design process in architecture. Architecture remains an influence, but from day one I never wanted to produce "architectural paintings". I plan ahead, visualize my work in series, as an architect would. My painting layouts are based on their internal geometry, and now I show these geometrical grids as external, over the painted subjects. The knowledge of proportions, the golden rectangles – are a source of harmony, specially these times. I also wanted to stay in contact with Sołtan and I wrote to him in the 1990's. When I sent images of my large scale elaborate works, he answered with a very nice note: "you are an architect who does not paint as an architect". Coming from Sołtan, I was delighted and proud.

Kiyohide Sawaoka

September 15th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studio (1976-1977) and his seminar 'Architecture Today' (1976-1977). He is professor at the Kogakuin University in Tokyo and practicing architect in Tokyo.

S.R.: What is your recollection of Jerzy Sołtan's teaching?

K.S.: I was enrolled in the M. Arch II programme of GSD in 1976, and Jerzy Sołtan was the coordinator professor of the programme. At that time, M. Arch. II was a Master's degree programme for those who had acquired a professional degree somewhere else. There was no choice for the students. I had to take Sołtan's seminar as well as his design studio mandatorily. I knew nothing of Sołtan then, and only after some weeks, I came to know he was one of the last disciples of Le Corbusier. In my memory, either his seminar or studio was not well focused on any particular topic. The design theme of the semester-long studio was 'a house'. "Whatever house you want to design, you do it". I felt lost what to do partly because it was my very first semester in the US. My English was not competent enough to join the discussion in class or to consult with the studio critic Sołtan. Sołtan looked like a formidable old man and he was not so sympathetic to my personal situation. In retrospect, Sołtan must have expected each student to propose his or her own design theme spontaneously, and 'a house' is simply a trigger word. And I was immature to take his hint. My class had fifteen to sixteen students in this programme, in which a few foreign students were included. Some students were older than others were, and they already had some working experience. Naturally, those experienced students could respond to Sołtan's teaching very well. There was one seminar day when Sołtan had a talk on Le Corbusier's last day. I heard about it from my classmate because I could not attend the seminar on that day for some reason. Sołtan described it narratively: how Le Corbusier went out for swimming at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin and did not come back. My classmate said his words were full of sorrow and grief.

S.R.: Do you remember anything about the paper for Sołtan's seminar *Architecture Today* in 1976-1977 entitled 'Architecture of Arata Isozaki'?[1]

K.S.: Frankly, it is embarrassing and even painful for me to read the paper you attached. I have completely forgotten what I wrote then at the age of twenty-four. The point in question of the paper is ambiguous and unfocused.... I am really embarrassed. I wish Harvard could eliminate this file from the Sołtan Collection. I vaguely remember that Sołtan said something like, "this account is not all that Isozaki should be". I do not know how much Sołtan knew about Isozaki's work at that time in 1976. Naturally, he was not content with my paper.

1 See: HGSD-JS, AA017.

Simon Smithson

May 21st, 2020

Cambridge and Harvard alumnus, architect, and Alison and Peter Smithson's son. He attended some Team 10 meetings (1971-1977) and he was involved in the campaign to save the Robin Hood Gardens Estate. He is a partner at Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners in London, UK.

S.R.: How do you remember Jerzy Sołtan?

P.S.: What I find amazing about Jerzy is how he arrived in architecture, in Paris, but actually I suspect in general about the office of Corb at that time, it was a melting pot, it was kind of Europe before Europe. Lots of people went through it with pretty extraordinary life experiences. If you read between the lines of this book,[1] you can see that Jerzy was a prisoner of war, and somehow within the space of months, after the war ended in May 1945, by August 1st, he was already working at Corb's office. That itself was a kind of mental and physical journey, beyond our imagination. There was also Shadrach Woods, who was an Irish rebel, actually not an architect. There was George Candilis, who was imprisoned by the British as a partisan and who again managed to get out of the prison and ended up in Corb's office again. It was a bunch of people who, somehow, were refugees.

S.R.: Jerzy Sołtan along with your parents were within Team 10. How do you remember your contacts with him?

P.S.: These are people whom I knew all my childhood, I grew up with them. They would occasionally pass through London, there would be correspondence and telephones between my parents and them, and there would be the Team 10 meetings. So I knew them... when I went to do the Master at Harvard, I arrived a couple of weeks before the term started to get myself organised and when I first arrived in Boston, I actually I stayed for a week or two, I do not know, with Jerzy and his wife in Shady Hill Square, Cambridge...

S.R.: Do you mean in the area or in Jerzy Sołtan's house?

P.S.: Yes, in the house, in the house... with Jerzy and Hanna, who was a very in-the-background type of character. I did not see her very much. I studied there for two years Master of Urban Design and after that, I worked in Boston for a couple of years, and during that period, I would occasionally see him. In retrospect, you sort of say "I should have seen him more". I remember he liked to go to a little Chinese restaurant that was up by Walden Pond. Strangely enough, it was his favourite spot even though it was wedged between a mall and a highway. Then, when my father was there, Jerzy used to take him around in what we called his "Ford Fiasco", in his Ford Fiesta... the car was always a joke between my father and myself.

S.R.: Actually, I have heard about this car from his daughter... Talking about your contacts with Jerzy Sołtan, I have found a letter from October 1980 from Alison Smithson to Jerzy Sołtan, where she thanks him for having included you in a conference. Do you remember anything about it?

P.S.: I do not remember what that conference was about. I am sure though my parents would have written him a number of times... I do not remember how it was arranged that I would stay with Jerzy, but I think he even might have picked me up at the airport. He was incredibly generous: when my stuff arrived, he helped me carrying it up all the stairs in the dorm and he must have been in his seventies by then. I am sure my mother would have written him a couple of times thanking for that. I have actually found a couple of letters from him to myself. He used that kind of Polish, jokey expressions... [shows a letter from Jerzy Sołtan] that was common, I do not know whether he used that with my parents, but he did that quite a lot. Certainly with me...

S.R.: I have found it actually quite often in letters between himself and your parents, so it was a recurring thing.[2] I was just wondering whether there was a reason for that... Of course, it is not essential.

1 *Jerzy Sołtan*, ed. by Jola Gola.

2 Sołtan is called by Alison Smithson "Sołtanski", whereas the Smithsons are called "Alisonka and Petraska" by him, for example in letter from Jerzy Sołtan to Alison and Peter Smithson from October 28th, 1976, and letter from Alison and Peter Smithson from November 17th, 1970, see: MASP-JS.

P.S.: I do think it is a part of the group... Team 10 has obviously a certain mythology built up around it, and it has been academicised. The reality is however, they were like an extended family, so there was a lot of joking around and, like in many families, arguments and falling outs. Both my parents had a good sense of humour, which would enter into their letter writing, but not into their academic writing, and Jerzy probably enjoyed that. I think they were all quite funny in their own way.

S.R.: Moving more into architecture, do you remember any discussions with Sołtan on architecture or anything that stuck you when talking to him?

P.S.: It is inevitable that I was shaped by what I heard and listened as a child, so I have to be quite honest: at one level, during our conversations we were in consensus. Things that I thought were valuable and things that he thought were valuable, they were pretty much the same. In a strange way, I was not aware of it being different from a conversation with my parents. If you meet someone who challenges you with a different set of values, you may remember the conversation more, because you may remember disagreeing. Quite frankly, it was a kind of very easy-going relationship. Perhaps it was the nature of the person? The other thing: he was incredibly enthusiastic about things, but perhaps to his own personal history, he was not taking extreme sides... It is funny, because his energy was overwhelming. I am afraid I cannot help you here very much, because it was just part of my upbringing, and I did not really see it as anything out of ordinary.

S.R.: It does connect although to what you have said about the 'extended family'... You have just mentioned that you remember him as someone enthusiastic. Do you remember something in particular that he was enthusiastic about?

P.S.: It was a difficult period for architects of that generation, because that time was the beginning of postmodernism, which was intentionally throwing away everything that generation thought was important. I certainly remember him getting upset about that. However, I think that was common... modern architecture was about the belief that you might be able to build a better society, which somehow naturally came from a generation that have been through Europe that had been destroyed. Postmodernism was only an economic form of architecture, which was very suitable for capitalism, because it did not cost much and it did not make pretence about anything. It was just decorative.

S.R.: Actually, it is very interesting to read Jerzy Sołtan's articles about postmodernism: you can really sense that he loathed it.

P.S.: Yes, it shook him to the core, because it was diametrically opposed to everything he did in his life. He was particularly vocal on it, as was Aldo van Eyck. I remember them all railing about it. Yes, he would talk a lot about that.

S.R.: You were at Harvard in 1980. Was postmodernism present at the school at that time?

P.S.: Yes. Yes, but I suspect not as much as Cornell or other hotbeds of it, but yes, certainly in the school of architecture, less so in the Urban Design Department, which was under Moshe Safdie at the time. There was an expression of the day, something I have not understood until now, which is "*habitable poché*". That was the kind of by-line in most of the design crits in the architecture school, "*habitable poché*". I completely forgot about these until you asked these questions... Luckily it seems to have been a passing fad.

S.R.: Sołtan was already retired when you met him at Harvard, but was he still teaching at the school?

P.S.: Yes, and he was occasionally a visiting critic. He actually did come and attend at least two of my presentations. However, the academic world is even more cutthroat than the professional world, and so when a new dean comes in, everything that came before, it somehow is swept aside. There were people at the school, who were extremely fond of him, particularly his old secretary who had the wonderful name, Francesca Shakespeare. He would come from time to time – anyhow, he was just around the corner, so it was very easy for him.

S.R.: Do you remember whether there were other members of the staff aligned with his ideas? People on the same architectural wavelength?

P.S.: I think I would have to say that at that time, people like Fred Koetter were in ascendance, so I do not think there would be much affinity. I always thought that Fred Koetter was quite polite, but postmodernism was a little bit as rock-and-roll or punk: they are all rejectionists and they dismiss everything that came before. What I found most difficult in that period is that it was so exclusionist. Maybe the schools are always like that, but it did reject everything that went before, so there was only one way of doing it, which was kind of the postmodern

way. Now that you mentioned that, I remember that I certainly got that feeling when I was there, and it was probably a slightly uncomfortable situation for Sołtan.[3] That was surely difficult, because he had been in that institution for fifteen years.

S.R.: ...and midway through, between 1967 and 1973, he was also chairman of the Department of Architecture.

P.S.: It is amazing how he managed to secure that job... It was a golden period of the school when Sert was there. The school had then some amazing alumni.

S.R.: Let us come back to Team 10. You mentioned the group worked as an extended family. Do you remember relationships between Jerzy Sołtan and the other members? Do you remember who was close to him, either personally or architecturally?

P.S.: I am not sure that I can answer that. The problem with Jerzy, it was often hard for him to get to the meetings. There were a couple of people for whom travel was a problem, because they could not get visas. Coderch was sometimes there, but not very often. There was one other architect, a Hungarian Polónyi: he could never get out, as far as I can recall. My guess is Jerzy was quite close to Georges, simply through the connection with Corb, but I think another important thing is that Jerzy spoke all the languages. When he was there, partly because of his gregarious character, and partly because he could speak various languages, his role was often an intermediate between things. Jaap was actually the same.

S.R.: Actually, when I spoke to one of his friends, he mentioned that Jerzy Sołtan's role during the Team 10 meetings was often the one of a commentator, who judged others' work. Do you have any recollection of that?

P.S.: Probably. Actually, what surprised me when I looked at the book on Jerzy, it is that he built quite a lot... but I think he did tend to come from a more academic background, in the end. He had this partnership in America with Szabo,[4] but I do not know how much time he dedicated to that... I think that by that time, he was a professional teacher, so that is what he brought to the discussions.

S.R.: You have mentioned you were surprised by the number of his designs. In your connections with Sołtan, did you have any opportunity to get to know his designs?

P.S.: No, I did not, and it is a regret. He never talked about it with me, certainly. He started earlier: it seemed to me that he built quite a number of projects in Poland.

S.R.: Coming back to the relationships between Team 10 members. Do you remember anything about the relationship between your parents and Jerzy Sołtan in the 1980s from when you were a student at Harvard, already after the last Team 10 meetings?

P.S.: I think I would categorise it in the following manner... First, it was an extended family, which had its tensions, as all families do. I think in terms of people who were most friendly, the most approachable, those you could joke with, they would be Jaap and Jerzy. It was a different age, when communication was not as instantaneous and continuous as it is now. There would be phone calls, say three times a year maybe, and there would be letters. They have exchanged them a lot... In direct answer to your question, the relationship with Jerzy remained very good. Aldo for example was a more complicated character, because he would get angry with absolutely everybody, and nobody would understand why he was angry. I think that their relationship is cast and framed in the history books as a conference or a study group, whereas in fact, it was a bunch of friends who somehow got on well enough so they could have deeper, more intimate conversations. I think that inevitably, the few times I attended, it looked like a great family picnic. That is something that would escape the history books.

S.R.: Which meetings did you attend? Do you remember?

P.S.: The ones I have most memories of are the one in Toulouse and there was another in Georges' country house, and there was one in Holland when we visited Aldo van Eyck's church.[5]

3 See also: interview with Christopher Benninger.

4 Sołtan collaborated with Albert Szabo on several designs: design for Gwen Bell House in Sparoza, Greece (1967), Norton Narva House in Laconia, New Hampshire (1968), design for Glenn House in Manchester, Massachusetts (1968), design for cinema theatres Zeiss-Ikon in the United States (1969), and interiors of Charity Fund in Boston (1970s).

5 Meetings in Toulouse in April 1971, in Rotterdam in April 1974, and in Bonnieux in France in June 1977.

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan from Toulouse? He was there...

P.S.: Well, I was actually very sick, so I was in bed for two days. There is a very good picture of him however, with Jerzy lying on the floor.

S.R.: In one of the letters from Jerzy Sołtan to your parents, from March 1990, it reads, "Simonaki-mon visited me at our Budy – Shacks in Upstate New York. When do I see you there?"[6] – do you remember that visit?

P.S.: Well, I will have to poke about in my memory. I remember something now you mentioned it... I think when I went up there, I pruned some trees, because it was very overgrown, and I volunteered, or perhaps he asked me to cut some branches off... I cannot remember the house though. But that visit explains some of the comments in the letters... What was your question?

S.R.: Do you have any recollection of this visit?

Yes, I drove up to his place. I seem to remember I got lost. As soon as I arrived, he pointed out that some trees needed pruning, so I suspect I got to work. It was quite a modest place and what I loved about the meals is that they had an eastern European feel about them. I'm not sure Hanna was ever really comfortable in the US.

S.R.: Let us come back to Team 10. Jerzy Sołtan actually appears almost as a background figure in the publications, as his texts and designs are very rare...

P.S.: Yes, I think that is true...

S.R.: What do you think may be the reason for that? I was wondering whether it might be because of some political and visa-related problems, because of him not being able to attend the meetings.

P.S.: It certainly affected that he was not as constant as the others were. There was always some discussion around the dining room table at home about him. I asked my parents about whether he was a part of some underground network of Polish people trying to get out of Poland... I do remember that the Polish government was giving him a hard time. We always had an impression that there was something mysterious in the background. It might have been nervousness about something, but it could have been memories of the prison camp: it affects people.

S.R.: I was imagining also that later, when he settled in the United States, another problem for the meetings, it was also the distance...

P.S.: You had to find time and money to get together. Depending on the people, it was more or less difficult... Jaap for example was one amongst those who were the most successful, i.e. affluent. It was a time when traveling and flying was a big deal. Even calling on the phone was a big deal. You could pay a very large bill for that... I think however that my overriding memory is his presence: his voice, his height obviously, his liveness – he was always very live. And lithe... even when he was old. He had this exercise regime in the mornings, which I presume came from his swimming days. When he was attending the meetings, he was a force. The most powerful memory is energy and passion.

S.R.: Passion for?

P.S.: Mainly for architecture.

S.R.: Do you remember him also as an artist?

P.S.: Obviously, in his house, there were many things. Again, I am slightly ashamed that you took it for granted. It was that *milieu*, but he had that before. You could say that he was influenced by Corb, but if you look at the book, he had that peripatetic quality before he went to Paris. It was a fertile ground... And another thing I remember is, he was simply very, very funny. I think it is a very different view of architecture. He had that slightly teasing way of making fun of people, but in a nice way – not in a vicious way, I remember that.

S.R.: Let me end with a general question about Team 10. What in your own opinion would be the most important message coming from Team 10? Something that may be still up-to-date?

P.S.: Yes, I think there is, and to a degree it was based in the origins of the group – namely a rebelliousness and a resistance to the idea of a set of rules of fixed mantra. There was something about understanding that

6 Sołtan to Smithsons from March 30th, 1990, see: HNI-TT, TTEN1.

architecture is about human emotions, family, community, history, art, culture – everything all bundled up. It was part of the spirit the group: they all brought different histories, different cultural takes, and this complexity makes Team 10 more difficult to pin down. Candilis, I have always seen him as Zorba the Greek kind of character. Shad – he was much more of the Irish poet and philosopher. Jaap was rather like a teacher and campaigner. Nonetheless, there was a belief, I think, that it all could be explained in simple human terms – that it was simply about life as opposed to being something artificially overcomplicated.

Atef Tabet

January 20th, 2021

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studio and in his seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' (1976-1977), and practicing architect in Beirut, Lebanon.

S.R.: When we talked briefly before, you mentioned that your studio had only six students – it seems very few in comparison to other M. Arch. II students whom I talked to – there were almost always more than ten students, double your group...

A.T.: My studio was around six, and actually selected his students. I was lucky to be part of his group!

S.R.: What was the selection consisting in?

A.T.: He made an interview with you.. He wanted to know why you wanted to come to the school. He was going to deliver the studio, and that was the reason why I came to Harvard: because of him, because I was accepted. I chose Harvard because of him and because of Joseph Zalewski.

S.R.: Was it an interview to enter the M. Arch. II or to enter his studio?

A.T.: It was to see whether you are fit or not to enter his studio. Maybe you were interested to work on huge housing projects... he was not interested in that. Maybe you were interested in global architecture, or mammoth architecture, in macro-architecture... he was not into that. He was more into microarchitecture, and that is why he gave us a Cap-Martin-style house to design, which is a house for a dreamer, a house that is between only sixty and seventy square metres.

S.R.: What would be other studio choices?

A.T.: At that time, there were many teachers, like Joan Goody, Gerhard Kallmann, and Michael McKinnell, but I was not interested in them. I was interested in taking one house, one small dwelling unit – that was with Jerzy Sołtan – and afterwards in going from there and working on a housing project like Roosevelt Island,[1] along with Zalewski. In my practice today, we do a lot of housing in Lebanon, but we do not create 'factory housing'. I work on a grid where each unit is totally different from the rest, where you can maintain your personality, instead of having the users become sheep in a herd...

S.R.: Was your studio in the trays?[2]

A.T.: Yes, at the upper tray, and I loved it. The building works. John Andrews had done a wonderful job! If you go to the trays, you can see the genius behind Andrews' solution. Back then, the building was becoming like a *souk* of architecture rather than a simple space. When you go to a *souk*, you feel all the merchandise with its diversities... and that is what is great about this building. It is an envelope for ideas, joining architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design.

S.R.: Do you remember your classmates from Harvard?

A.T.: Actually at that time, I was so involved in my own personal work that I did not have really much time to socialise. When we were at the GSD, engaged with the studios under Jerzy Sołtan or Zalewski, we really did not have time, as we used to work day and night to produce drawings. Especially with Jerzy: he was so demanding for what the sketchbook he called "the general and the particular". It was not easy, and I must have filled like two or three booklets. It became what you call an 'intellectual contract' between yourself and the final product, the final design... From my group with Jerzy Sołtan I remember Bill Lacey and Gilbert Rosenthal.

S.R.: Actually, I have heard from many former students the quote "from the general to the particular and from the particular to the general",[3] but nobody else mentioned a sketchbook. What was it about?

1 Referring to Roosevelt Landing Apartments on the Roosevelt Island in New York designed by Sert and opened in 1976.
2 'Trays' refer to the main open-space design studio part of the Gund Hall designed by John Andrews.
3 Interviews with Urs Gauchat, with Thomas Holtz, with Edward Lyons, and with Susan van der Meulen.

A.T.: Well, you had a sketchbook as a safe place to concise your thoughts, and you always had to refer to it. It was a booklet, quite small, like an A5, with about fifty to one hundred pages. We used to buy it at Charette, the local store in Cambridge for drafting tools. That booklet became a 'thinking war machine', with all kinds of ideas and frustrations. It was interesting, because Jerzy was not interested in the size of the project, different from other design studios, and different from other teachers like Zalewski. He was not interested in giving you to design one kilometre of architecture, where you would drift towards producing a photogenic solution. Instead, he wanted to give you one square centimetre to work with, where you could indulge in your thoughts. He was never interested in photogenic architecture. Instead, he was interested in the thoughts of architecture, and this booklet was no more than a tool to organise your thoughts.

S.R.: Was it compulsory to have it?

A.T.: [quickly] No, no. Jerzy in his nature was never compulsory. He would indicate what spices you should use in cooking architecture... He was a pure coach, and he really coached you instead of being part of the team. He never would be part of the team like a classical design teacher. However, the reference of the whole studio was very much Corbusian. In my personal experience, not for the rest of the class, as Sołtan knew that I was from Lebanon – and he knew a lot about Lebanon, much more than myself – he was gearing me to stick with architecture similar to the Jaoul Houses. He said to me not to follow the style of New York Five who were popular at that time, or of 'ship architecture'... and I was struggling with that, because I was growing up in the States, and I always wanted to design 'ship architecture'. He was drifting me back to the fundamentals, and that is why when I finished, my architecture was more rooted to the architecture of Lebanese rural areas. He was saying, "use the stone, use the earth, whatever is available rather than import things that would not fit in your area". That is why I call him "guru".

S.R.: It is interesting that you mention the word "fundamentals". As I read Sołtan's writings and when I look at his drawings, I can see that he often referred to the "grassroots" of architecture, which for him meant very basic aspects, primordial elemental basis to architecture... He often referred to ancient Greece, Egypt, to the Romanesque churches in Poland when talking about these...[4]

A.T.: Yes, very true. From what I understood, "fundamentals" in architecture are a gearing element that is what modern architecture is all about nowadays. Let us take an earth house: it is very modern. If you see a stone house, a simplistic stone house, without any style, that is extremely modern. Who said modern architecture should be out of steel, glass, and concrete? Who said that? It can be earth, it can be soil. It does not have to be very shiny and polished. "Fundamentals" for him at that time, they really stick to "fundamentals" that belong today. That is how I understood from him the word "contemporary": as opposed to "modern".

S.R.: Sołtan probably talked about these during the seminar 'Grassroots of Contemporary Architecture' you attended. Do you remember it?

A.T.: The only thing I remember is his preaching about Le Corbusier and a few others... at that time, we had visitors, such as Sibyl Moholy-Nagy from Bauhaus, and we often had visitors influenced by Aalto. To me, Aalto was important, because when I went to the United States, he had just finished a huge project in Beirut for a big bank building, which was intriguing to me. It is a bath centre now, but it is still a beautiful building. However, coming back to the seminar, Jerzy was very much geared to Le Corbusier and around his theories. He would not talk about Frank Lloyd Wright for example. I never heard from Jerzy saying anything bad about any other architects actually. The worst thing that could happen was that he did not mention them... and that was bad by itself!

S.R.: Did he show you, or do you remember him showing you any of his own designs?

A.T.: No. No. That is the thing. He never talked about himself. He did that only at the beginning, when he talked about how he left Poland and went to France, and we actually asked him and made him talk about it.

S.R.: Can you explain more about the house assignment in the studio?

A.T.: When he explained the problem of a house, he showed us many examples from Le Corbusier, referring also to the Modulor, and underlining the approach changing from one methodology to another, but keeping the same spirit. There were Cap Martin, Jaoul Houses, Ville Savoye and other examples of 'white architecture', and then there was all the concrete architecture he had done in Asia, in India and elsewhere. Then, of course, there was the Carpenter Center, which was next door. We used to go there and to talk about that building a lot. Every now and then, we would leave the class and we would go through the Carpenter Center. We were lucky... if you could not find a book, you would through it! Nowadays, the Carpenter Center might appear just as a building, but for me it is more, it stands for theories going far beyond one building. That was actually the only local building he referred to, especially when he explained the blue series and the red series [from the Modulor], which he was mentioning as a reference to us. I always wanted to use them in modules, but he said, "you do not have to use it in modules, you can use it in furniture, in the ceiling, it is simple ergonomics". He used to mention that a lot, the blue and the red series.

S.R.: Did you use one of the series in your design?

A.T.: No. He trusted us that we would understand it. Again, it was a tool, and Jerzy was not interested in tools, but in thoughts.

S.R.: Do you remember your design proposal?

A.T.: Yes, of course. I had to go and pick a site, so I went to the Widener Library, to the fourth basement underground, and I got a collection of satellite images of a land in Lebanon, and I started to make it larger and larger until I got to the contour lines. Then, I finalised the site and the area, and I started to build a model in cork for the earth, and partly carved it. Jerzy however started to be upset as my programme was becoming larger and larger. I said however that it was not a flat land, there was a slope and underneath, I created some spaces I needed to close... I did not want to put the house on *pilotis*, but I wanted it to come out from the land. The programme became therefore a little bit larger than he wanted it to be, but then, I reduced it to the best I could.

S.R.: What was the connection between Le Corbusier's design at Cap Martin and your design?

A.T.: Very simple. It was a house for myself, in an area I picked up. I did not want the area to be Cap Martin of course, but an area I belonged to. The similarity is that, as Le Corbusier, I was able to choose my own proximity, my own environment, and the house is for one person. The materials were from the site I was working with: stone, concrete, and the only thing I imported was glass... It developed between "the general and the particular" through many sketches and eventually, the house became as if I really needed to build it. I worked on the details and there were lots of drawings: orthogonal projections, axonometric, isometric, and sketches, and then finally a model... you had to do a model in one-quarter-inch scale, which is around 1:50. With all that work, I was lucky because of my undergraduate studies. I went to Rice University, and Rice had a six-year programme for the professional degree, where you had to do models, including also a model of one of Le Corbusier's houses in 1:50 scale. Therefore, when attending the courses at the GSD, it was easier for me to make models, because I already knew all the tools.

S.R.: Do you remember Sołtan's commentaries to your design?

A.T.: Yes, a lot. "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing large windows? Stone house should not be like that". When I said that I had to have light, he said, "come on, you can do openings, like in the Jaoul Houses and Ronchamp". He was gearing me not to get drifted, because you were bombarded back then by New York Five. As I mentioned, the nice thing about Jerzy is that he would coach you to become your real self. Remember that this programme at Harvard was for architects, and not for students. You already had a degree in architecture, then it was about you specialising in design. He was looking all the time at all the things you have developed and things you needed to develop. He digressed sometimes to give you more thoughts about colours. He was interested in the primary colours and in the colour theory, in the aesthetics of architecture, in how you use materials, colours, and tones. He always referred to Le Corbusier's paintings. Actually, we knew more about Le Corbusier's painting from him more than from any other source.

S.R.: Actually, another student mentioned that Sołtan was often telling him "*be yourself*".[5]

A.T.: Be yourself, yes. With my personal experience, it was even more, "be yourself, do not be someone else". Unlike for instance Zalewski during the second semester. He was interested in the product and how to resolve the product.

S.R.: Do you remember any particular ideas concerning drawings?

A.T.: One of the reasons because of which I decided to study architecture is that I liked sketching and I liked

4 Chapter 7

5 Interview with Umberto Guarracino

mathematics. While I was sketching, he used to tell me, “look at your pilot pen, you should do architecture where the size of your body is no bigger than the tip of the pen, and when you draw, look around your drawing: under the line, above the line, and inside the line, as if you referred to a nano-camera of thoughts”. When he said, “sketch your thoughts” in the particular part, not necessarily in the general part, he wanted me to think about the tip of the pilot pen and to see things not flat, but three-dimensional. When you draw a line, that is not a line: it is a wall. When you draw a square, it is not a carpet: it is a room. Back then, there was something amongst the selective schools in the North-East: vertical axonometric would become an art in itself... it does not relate to anybody, except for the fact that it looks nice in black-and-white. I was intrigued by axonometric and I did one for the Cap-Martin-like house, the dreamer’s house, and he said, “why are you doing vertical axonometric? It just looks nice graphically”. “Draw it for yourself”, he said, “but it does not show your message”. He was not interested in the presentation as long as it did not relate to the idea.

S.R.: The drawings had to relate to the ideas?

A.T.: Yes, the ideas are much more important than the product itself.

S.R.: Did he encourage you to draw using a specific technique, or was it up to you?

A.T.: He used to come to my desk, and we talked... He said to me, “you reveal more by sketching than by using a T-square”. He was more interested in thoughts than in anything else. That was his nature. If Jerzy was still alive and looked at modern architecture now, and I truly believe that, you would be surprised how many things he would have found irrelevant. Architecture is not about taking a piece of paper, squeezing it, smashing it, and putting it on a table telling, “this is a museum”. Jerzy was not interested in that. If you melt an ice cream, and you block it on your drawing table and say, “this is a public building”, Jerzy was not interested in that. If you say, “this is a product of Grasshopper”, Jerzy would hate it. [laughs] This was not architecture according to him. For him, it was about a cell that makes a group, and that group you create, it creates another one, and finally you go to the body...

S.R.: Like going from the particular to the general...

A.T.: It fits a certain area of the general – because what is general to you in certain areas, it is different from the general to others in another area. Even the users’ needs are different. The general is the context, the landscape, while the particular is your contribution to that context, a specific program. It is like a tree. You plant a tree in a field; the field is the general. There is some mediation between the general and the particular, a meeting point, it goes to the roots, it comes to the trunk, and the particular takes over the general as you come to leaves and then, at the end, you have fruit.

S.R.: Is it Sołtan’s metaphor or is it yours?

A.T.: Mine, it is about how I understood it.

S.R.: What about Sołtan’s teaching in the context of the school. For example, was his teaching different from, for example, Zalewski’s?

A.T.: Yes, very much, totally different. Zalewski was interested in the housing matrix as a whole – a very different approach, but also important. Sołtan was a school by himself. He was not the kind of a teacher saying “this is good, this is bad”. He taught, and he taught without making you feel it, because he was humble and a pleasant person to work with. It could have been an advantage since we were not too many people in the class, but he made the studio a very interesting experience, with time flying so quickly. You never felt the time with him. We discussed hours as we were sitting along in the studio at my desk. When he sat with us, he really sat and talked... sometimes we were leaving really late, we stayed there until six or seven. We did not feel the time, it would be getting dark, it would start snowing. Then, even if he was tall, he kept his head down; it reminds me of wheat when it is full of grains. When it is very full, it bends down, and when there is nothing, it stands out. He was not into flamboyancy or stage-art... whereas many architects are like this. Can you imagine Zaha Hadid or Frank Gehry without a stage to perform? Jerzy, for me, was much more important, much more important... and he was a person you could hardly feel when he came to the room.

S.R.: You say that he was almost a school by himself. How was it possible for him to be a school when he was encouraging you to follow your own ideas, and not follow precisely his own vision of architecture?

A.T.: Very easy. He separated things between theory in the theory class on the one hand and the studio on the other hand. In the studio, he reacted to what you had on paper. In the theory class, he taught theory. What he imposed on you in the studio, that was the booklet, the sketchbook you wrote and drew in every day. He would say, “that is not part of the particular, you drew something different before – you drifted”. Your rules were set directly by yourself, not by him. You had to be true to your words and to your sketches.

S.R.: When we talked before, you mentioned that Sołtan produced much architecture because he produced many architects...

A.T.: This is my own analysis... but I think that because of the scale, it was enough for him, and for whoever was designing, to think more about theory rather than about the end product. If I am doing one unit, I can go to the essentials, can’t I?

Susan van der Meulen

January 6th, 2021

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's M. Arch. II design studio (1976-1977), and a practicing architect in Chicago.

S.R.: Do you remember your first encounter with Jerzy Sołtan?

S.v.d.M.: Yes, I remember him from reviews from the studio, but I do not remember the specific studio for which he was the juror. As an important member of the faculty, he frequently attended design juries, whether midterm or final ones for design studio projects. It had to be between the first five semesters of the school, between 1974 and 1976. I was in a habit of seeing what was going around and I frequently attended reviews for other studios (as many other students did) if I had free time. However, there were a lot of notable architects around in the school – for example during one of the reviews Josep Lluís Sert sat next to me – and this was why you might not know many particulars of a given professor: because there were so many people to notice. I first got to know him more closely by opting into his studio. I would say then that my experience of Jerzy Sołtan was limited to that Catholic retreat studio project – or religious retreat – as some selected another type of retreat. I also know that he attended my final review as a juror for my Boston City Hall project with Edward Sekler and Michael McKinnell.

S.R.: Why did you opt into his studio?

S.v.d.M.: I had tried to get into Gerhard Kallmann's studio, as he was also a very important architect, but he had a specific coterie of student followers, and I did not make into the studio, I'm not sure why.[1] With Jerzy Sołtan, however, everyone liked him. I would say that he was friendly and comfortable with female students, and a pleasant person to work with, and that was why I chose to be in his studio: not only did I feel that he was a representative of Le Corbusier whom my father admired as an architect, but just on personal grounds, I could see that he was very approachable, and a kindly old gentleman whose knowledge was interesting.

S.R.: What do you remember about Sołtan in general?

S.v.d.M.: I remember his stories about Le Corbusier, but in addition to that, I think I was aware of his participation in the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne. His fame was partly due to his international and European education and involvement. I know that he also suffered to some extent during the war, he was in a camp...

S.R.: The main assignment of Sołtan's studio was a "place of spiritual retreat" at the Walden Pond in Massachusetts: do you remember it?

S.v.d.M.: I do remember it was a fun studio and I do remember that we enjoyed working on it. I do not know though why I drew such large drawings... I know we were trying to imitate Le Corbusier. I got a little confused: my drawings were half-way between Le Corbusier and local vernacular Cape Cod wooden architecture – so no wonder it did not come out so well...

S.R.: Still, Sołtan was interested in vernacular architecture, so it does not seem that strange...

S.v.d.M.: However, my late father, John van der Meulen (1913-1994), was a Chicago architect and he admired Le Corbusier, and he lent me for school his Corbusian stencils for lettering. I used them in the drawings. I also did all the drawings in black, white, and red, trying to be a little constructivist. In my design, there were little modular huts in a long row of twelve, with skylights over each chamber, and there was a chapel that was trying to look like Ronchamp, although more simplified and relating to Cape Cod. [looking at the drawings] The chapel seems to have *tracés régulateurs*, with parallel lines. The nave and the apse are generated according to proportional principles. You can also see *tracés régulateurs* in the refectory plan. Then, I also had the stations of the cross in the forest nearby... I am Protestant, but in order to try to please the professor, I decided I would design a Catholic retreat.

1 See also: interview with Joanna Lombard.

S.R.: Were all these references to Le Corbusier somehow required from you?

S.v.d.M.: I know the *tracés régulateurs* and Corbusian design principles of proportion were something we were looking at. However, it was not required. The only reason I might have done that is that I took a great interest in the topic. I was also the type of student who wanted to please the instructor. Differently, there were other pupils like Fred Schwarz and David Leventhal who were Jewish... David did an octagonal temple building, closer to the tradition of synagogues, a more centralised plan.[2] I would say that his Jewish retreat did not have any major Corbusian traits. Maybe a male student would be less trying to imitate or to please the teacher...

S.R.: Do you remember Le Corbusier as an important reference in the school?

S.v.d.M.: Le Corbusier, in terms of Harvard Graduate School of Design, is one of the presiding geniuses over the school. American architecture schools typically have a personality, like Louis Kahn at Penn. At Harvard, in earlier days, they loved Henry Hobson Richardson, but Gropius, Bauhaus, and Le Corbusier were much of interest in the first generation after its establishment in 1936.

S.R.: You referred before to the drawings you made, saying that they were large. Do you remember anything specific concerning drawing requirements for your studio?

S.v.d.M.: One thing that stands out in my memory is the bird's eye view idea that we were encouraged to develop, as well as the interior perspectives. Sołtan was a drawings person and we were asked to develop not only the plan, section, and elevation, but also a large site plan, some perspectives, and bird's eye view. Actually, I thought my freehand perspective turned out nicely. When I think about the entire education, with Sołtan and Michael McKinnell for professors during the last two semesters of my degree, we drew a lot. Both of them required many more drawings than the teachers in the previous five semesters.

S.R.: Looking at Sołtan handwritten notes for two of the introductory lectures for a similar "spiritual retreat" studio from 1978-1979,[3] do you recognise any topic that was much important to him?

S.v.d.M.: These notes and class handouts seem extremely similar to what we had from him for the project.

S.R.: Do you remember your work in the studio, or the desk critiques, discussions with Sołtan?

S.v.d.M.: The desk crits were nice, although you remember rather more the atmosphere and personality of the person, than his actual words... One felt a little sorry for Sołtan in a way, because he was gallant, old, and very thin... He was definitely a senior citizen when he was teaching me, and he would wear an old grey overcoat with the waist trussed around with a rope, so the association was with an abbot or a monk. In a way, it was a reference to his years of imprisonment and lack of food. You could sort of read the experience in his face and his manner. However, he was also one of the professors who invited us, the whole class, over to his house. It was very unusual – and Gerry McCue would be the other exception. Gerry McCue once had the whole class over to his house for a chili dinner... and it is a big undertaking to have fifteen people over for dinner! Inside Sołtan's house, I do remember paintings of his Polish ancestors on the wall, with little perruques, sort of French-style wigs and costumes, probably eighteenth or nineteenth century.

S.R.: What about Sołtan's relationship with the students?

S.v.d.M.: I feel like he was a defender of me, as sometimes in the studio male students would make fun or deprecate women... Sołtan would call me "our Lady". I appreciated that, and I think that he went out of his way to be nice to me, as he could see that there were some 'big ego' boys in the class. He helped me along with it, I think.

S.R.: Sołtan was also a member of Team 10. Do you remember any connection with Team 10 ideas or members, like Aldo van Eyck, Giancarlo de Carlo, Alison and Peter Smithson, Jaap Bakema, and Shadrach Woods?

S.v.d.M.: I think some of these personalities were around Harvard. I remember a visit from Alison and Peter Smithson to a review. They could have given a lecture... Sometimes a visiting architect would come to give a lecture, hang out, and give a few reviews as well, making it a couple of days at Harvard.

S.R.: Do you remember anything concerning particular connections with other teachers?

2 See also: interview with Thomas Holtz.
3 Notes for M. Arch. II design studio from September 18th, 1978 and from September 21st, 1978, see: HGSD-JS.

S.v.d.M.: He was a friend of professor Edward Sekler, for whom I worked as a teaching assistant in his history class. I felt I could help out with architectural history training, as it was something I was more sympathetic to.

S.R.: How do you recall the experience of being taught by Sołtan in relation to your later work?

S.v.d.M.: When I was with Marvin Herman and Associates, we were working on older luxury apartment building interiors, where the mood was more neoclassical, so it was not really possible in my specific career to adhere to Corbusian principles in that context. I think that Chicago was somewhat a tough city for women architects, so I accepted the job when I was offered one – and I stayed there for twenty-five years. The person who employed me was a University of Illinois graduate, more interested in pleasing the clients renovating inside luxury apartment buildings... and we also did more renovations than new work. Within the firm, I actually worked on a Catholic chapel once (Madonna della Strada Chapel, Loyola University lakeside campus, Chicago Illinois, originally by Andrew Rebori, from 1938). I designed liturgical details for the interior renovation, fifty-six of them, all of them hand-drawn.

S.R.: Were you also working on detailing during your studio design?

S.v.d.M.: No, the emphasis was more on the presentation drawings, mainly exterior elevations and perspectives. However, in the particular practice where I worked later (1983-2008), details were a big part of the job, like cabinet, bookcase, kitchen, bathroom details... Some people wanted art-déco, some wanted contemporary or even neoclassical style.

S.R.: Referring to details, do you remember the saying "from the general to the particular and from the particular to the general" from the studio?

S.v.d.M.: Yes, I remember that, definitely. Actually, of all the teachers at the school, I remember most my two last semesters. Both Sołtan and McKinnell were able to impart their enthusiasm for architecture and to help motivate you to work with a concept and to be able to flesh it out through the drawings.

François Vigier

March 25th and April 1st, 2019, in Cambridge, MA

Member of the Harvard faculty since 1962, Chairman of the Department of Urban Planning (1992-1998), Director of the Centre for Urban Development Studies (1987-2005). He collaborated with Jerzy Sołtan on the Museum of Art in Berlin (1965), and since 2005, he was involved in studies and preservation of non-monumental heritage within the Institute for International Urban Development, such as the medina of Fez, medieval Baku, Sintra and the Old Damascus.

S.R.: Let us talk about the first time you met... When was it?

F.V.: Oh when I first met Jerzy... In the mid-sixties, it was before he moved to Harvard stably. He was invited as a visiting critic by Sert, who was the dean at the time. They were both of the same age, both CIAM, and that is how I met him. If I remember correctly, he came to teach at one of the urban design studios – and I was part of the faculty and taught urban design as well. At the time, I was an Assistant Professor. I started in the 1960s as an instructor, and I was promoted to Assistant Professor by 1962.

S.R.: Had you known his name before he came?

F.V.: No, I had never heard of him before. Even if my initial training in the fifties at MIT was in architecture, by then I became a city planner. I took a Master in city planning at Harvard: I finished in 1960. And I was then a young Assistant Professor of urban planning. Actually, urban planning and urban design, because of the way Sert created the urban design program. We started in 1960 – so actually I was hired when the programme started, because I was both an architect and a planner. Sert's idea was for it to be interdisciplinary: there was architecture – the physical design, planning to provide spatial and underpinning of the environment that was being designed and then landscape architecture was also included. It was supposed to be three disciplines together – it was a novel idea at the time. And Sert, like all of the CIAM crowd, was an architect. Him and the others, including his master Le Corbusier, thought they were also planners. But in fact, they were not. Their urban projects were architecture at a very large scale. They were not really interested in the social issues and problem of affordability, that was somehow an aside for them. On the other hand, Jerzy was interested in those issues. That was one of the reasons for we got very well along together. He was very interested in all sorts of social issues: affordability of housing, a belief that you could have a beautiful environment even if you are poor, that was a part of what he believed in I think.

S.R.: Was the CIAM influence strong at Harvard?

F.V.: [with conviction] Oh yes. Very strong. There was a very strong CIAM cell, no question. Jerzy and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt got along very well. They had met at CIAM congresses. I became much more interested in problems of poverty, so I started to move away from the ways they conceived the city as being made up of almost architectural pieces. Jerzy I think was interested in urban issues, but I think he was much more interested in their architectural manifestation.

S.R.: Well, he did work on urban designs when he was working in Le Corbusier's practice.

F.V.: I mean, urban design is a very loose study, you can think of it as being architecture at an urban scale, or you can think of it as including engineering, practical problems, infrastructure, the whole issue of affordability, the whole issue of tenure, of governance... It is such a broad term that it is not very specific. That is probably why urban designers probably get along well together because the term is so loose. Whichever way you interpret it, it is correct... [laughs]

S.R.: Apart from CIAM, was Le Corbusier's influence strong at Harvard?

F.V.: It was significant because of Sert. The only Le Corbusier building in North America is here – and the executing architect was Sert. And the only time when I met Le Corbusier, it was when he came for the opening of the building. He then gave a lecture at the school. But the influence, yes, it was very strong.

S.R.: And was Sołtan following Sert's and school's general line?

F.V.: That is a good question... I am not sure how to answer it. I think he was very much ideologically on Le Corbusier's side – there is no question on that. He went to work for him: he worked with him on the Modulor. If I remember correctly that in the book on the Modulor, Le Corbusier described that before he came to America after the Second World War, Jerzy gave him a tape with the Modulor on it so that he could go and measure. I think the Modulor for buildings is quite an interesting tool. If you look at the Sert buildings at Harvard – Holyoke Center, the Center for the Study of World Religions – it is all the Modulor. In fact, when I was working in Sert's office, he was doing the drawing for the Holyoke Center on Massachusetts Avenue in Harvard Square... and he was using the Modulor to design the facades. There was another Polish architect, Joseph Zalewski, who was working together with Sert, and Sert and Zalewski , they were arguing in French on the use of the Modulor for the façade. Jerzy, I think he believed in the Modulor – in the museum, he was using the Modulor, but not as rigorously as Sert did.

S.R.: Do you mean that he was more flexible?

F.V.: Yes. There is one building of his here, it is a very good one, the Salem High School. It is very much Le Corbusier influenced. I am surprised that the school board of Salem accepted it, because it is very different from the traditional school architecture of New England.

S.R.: What is different in that building?

F.V.: It was very refreshing... A lot of the architecture of local public buildings... it relies on the relationship between the architect and the city council – and the architecture often is not done in a competitive manner. I think that the architect associated was very well connected if they were able to do several schools. It was a marvellous opportunity for the communities where he designed the schools.

S.R.: How did you know about the Salem High School?

F.V.: I was going to an institution across the street and the first time I got there, I thought, "my God, that's a Le Corbusier building, how did it get here?" – so I looked into it, and I discovered it was Jerzy's. In fact, I recognised the style. I could not think about anybody else, so I called Jerzy and I asked him whether he had done that – and he said yes. [laughs]

S.R.: What did strike you in this building?

F.V.: It was the design, it is a Le Corbusier inspired model architecture, and there is Modulor in it: the proportions are very striking.

S.R.: As we have come to some particular designs by Sołtan... How was your collaboration with him? Did you work together often?

F.V.: We only worked together closely twice – one was when we were doing the competition for a museum in Berlin and then the other one was when I took him with me to Poland. Those were the only times when we were working together on the same problems. The rest was much more like discussion, interaction at faculty meetings, arguing when we were on the same jury. We were not closer than that professionally.

S.R.: How do you recall those few collaborations?

F.V.: Oh, Jerzy was a very good collaborator on projects. If we look at the people who he assembled for that museum competition, there were five or six of us...

S.R.: As names, I there was for instance Zbigniew Ihnatowicz...[1]

F.V.: Oh, yes, but he was an absent member of the team. But there was Wilhelm von Moltke, there was Edward Baum who was a student at the time, and Paul Kruger who had just finished. He had pulled the team together... I asked him "why on Earth are you asking me to join a team for an architecture competition? I have not done architecture in ten years or more". And he said, "well, because the key to the museum is circulation and I want you to solve how the people will move through this environment". It was a very interesting problem.

S.R.: Actually, when I was looking at the museum drawings, I was thinking that it is not only a building: it is a small city.

F.V.: Well, maybe I have a little to do with that. [smiles] But yes, that was the way we conceived it. It does look like a city, you are right. There were also come sketches in colour showing how people were moving. I do not have them unfortunately. The sections[2] were quite interesting, because some of the inspiration for this was Sert's work – the Maeght Foundation building in the South of France where he brought light onto specific objects in the museum. Sert was the one who had dreamt that up – it was done in the early sixties, a number of years before the competition. Actually, a lot of this work was done in the evening – we all had full-time jobs...

S.R.: What was the key idea for this project – the people's movement?

F.V.: Yes. But we were also thinking about the museum, about how to organise the collection, so that people may for instance say, "today I go to see Japanese art and tomorrow I will go to the Classical Greek sculptures". They are all in different places, and then "how do you move?" seemed to us quite an interesting question.

S.R.: Was there someone else in the team apart from the names you mentioned before?

F.V.: No. But it was a very powerful team, with three senior members – Sołtan, von Moltke, and myself. Although I was more on the planning site of the building...

S.R.: How was the work going, how were the decisions being taken – was it Sołtan to decide or were there discussions and decisions taken together?

F.V.: Oh, it was up to Sołtan to decide. Sometimes it may have been inspired by us, but it was clearly understood from the beginning that he was the captain of the ship. Although he was always seeking for different ideas, which for example Sert would have never done. And I worked in Sert's office for a while, and that was a dictatorship.

S.R.: So Sołtan was not a one-man-in-command imposing his ideas, was he?

F.V.: No, Sołtan was much more for democracy – he believed in teamwork. I would say that all of the parts of this competition, he is the one to have made the decision, but often we had discussions or we suggested ideas to him. I have very fond memories of it. It was the last architecture project I did.

S.R.: What about your work together in Poland?

F.V.: It was in the late eighties, when Wałęsa was coming to power and the evil Soviet Empire was eroding. The institute I ran at the design school for several years had technical assistance contracts in the Eastern Europe, in Poland in particular. Amongst the first things we did, we were involved in the reform of the curriculum at the Gdańsk Polytechnics. They had asked the USAID mission in Warsaw for technical assistance on how to change their structure. I led the mission from Harvard and I got Jerzy to come with me. Actually, he had gone back only once since he had left Poland in the sixties. And it was extremely interesting. He was already semi-retired from Harvard. It was a long trip from the US, so when you arrive in the morning you are tired... I had meetings in the afternoon in the US Embassy, and he stayed in the hotel to rest. In the meeting there was a gentleman from the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw where Jerzy had taught and when he heard that Jerzy was there with me, he asked me to organise a meeting to bring him with me. They have all heard about him, they have never met him. A couple of days later the meeting was organised and Jerzy was with me. And... you know what a unicorn is, the mythical animal?

S.R.: Yes...

F.V.: When I walked into the room, I felt exactly as if I was leading a unicorn with me. Everyone looked at him as if he had just stepped off a space capsule. Then they switched to Polish and of course, I could not follow the conversation. But it was a very interesting meeting, the way that he was very well known, also in Gdańsk.

S.R.: Was it your decision to invite Sołtan to the collaboration in Gdańsk?

F.V.: Our task for Gdańsk was to help them reform their curriculum and bring it up to become competitive in the European context. Obviously, the USA experience was interesting to a Polish university l – I knew about American and European universities, but not about Poland. Therefore, I asked Jerzy to come with me as he was experienced both in Poland and in the US. At the time I was running a research centre, and there was a contract with this centre. It was really common to bring colleagues who had some particular knowledge to the problem. That is why I asked him to join me.

S.R.: What was his role in your mission?

1 *Jerzy Sołtan*, ed. by Jola Gola, p. 243.

2 Pointing at the freehand drawings of the sections details for the museum in Berlin, drawn by Jerzy Sołtan.

F.V.: He was an advisor. I was the person that was supposed to come up with the reformed curriculum. But then, there was a great deal of resistance, particularly with the senior faculty members at Gdańsk. They thought they were perfect. Besides, that fact that once their students graduated they had to work in a much more capitalistic and competitive environment, was not something they seemed to be much aware of.

S.R.: Let us move back to the years at Harvard... He was often praised by the students – have you heard those voices?

F.V.: I know that the students thought very highly of him as a professor, because he was very attentive and very patient. Some professors are very impatient with that and others are not. And Jerzy was not. We once or twice did teach together in the same studio. We also participated in end of the year juries. I would invite him to my studios and he would invite me to his. He was always very attentive, interested, and trying to help the student take the next step in the design process. Quite often in architectural schools, the design critics – particularly when they come as visitors – are chosen because of the quality of their professional work much more than their quality as educators. But then, very often they tend to expect the students to copy them. Good teachers do not do that. Good teachers, they have an attitude and they believe in certain things, they want to pass on those beliefs, but not necessarily to have parrots simply doing what they did. On the contrary, a good teacher – and Jerzy was an excellent teacher – wants to encourage the student to develop their own way of looking at the problem and solving it.

S.R.: Was he free to choose how to teach?

F.V.: I think he was relatively happy at Harvard and it was because of the freedom to teach what he believed in. That was the extraordinary thing about Sert as a dean: people he brought in were largely associated with CIAM; it was quite an international set.

S.R.: When he was appointed the Chairman of the School of Architecture in 1967, how was it then?

F.V.: Let me first explain to you briefly the American university system – at least the Harvard one. You can think about the university as a medieval kingdom. There is the university as the sovereign – the corporation and the president etc., and each faculty is independent within. It is independent financially, it can get help, but most essentially, it is on its own endowment. It is all tuition and it has to pay for all of its expenses, including the maintenance and the buildings. It is all administered by the faculty, where the dean of the faculty is the king and each department is a duchy within the kingdom. Jerzy was chairman, I was chairman... By the way, the chairman's job is not an easy one, because the faculty is very strong, so it is an important political job on how to convince the colleagues. At the great universities, such as Harvard, the politics are very tough. There is a story about Henry Kissinger. He was a professor at Harvard before he became National Security Advisor to Nixon. There is an interview with him a few months after he went to Washington, and the interviewer asked him, "after Harvard, how do you find the politics in Washington?" – and his answer was, "it is a piece of cake". [laughs] Being a chair at Harvard, it is really time consuming and it may be really frustrating, and you have to be really patient.

S.R.: I imagine you are talking also from your very own experience.

F.V.: Oh, yes. Jerzy was also chair at a difficult time. Sert left I think at the end of the academic year in 1969, in June and 1969 was a difficult year, the equivalent of French 1968. It was a difficult time to deal with the administration and the students: and he did it very well.

S.R.: Pedagogically speaking, was it possible to see changes in the school when Sołtan was the chair?

F.V.: No, and that is because the chair at Harvard does not have much leeway to... say, reform the curriculum. You can introduce a new course if you can find funding for it, but you do not have too much leeway. The one thing you can do is to choose the people you invite as visiting critics to give lectures – there is always funding for inviting people from outside of the university, but it is about it... And then there is the matter of managing the internal politics of the department – and he was very good at it. I suspect that the experience he had with the communist regime at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw must have served him. He was a very good politician.

S.R.: Do you remember any significant visiting critics invited by him?

F.V.: No, it was not a period, in which there was much change in that matter. When you change deans, there is always a change of the atmosphere at the school. Sert was dean from 1953 until 1969, and he has made major reforms, including the Urban Design programme and inviting lots of Europeans as visiting critics and even as faculty members. Jerzy came in fact for the first time as a visiting critic. And Sert did a lot of that, he had a very good relationship with the president at that time, Nathan Pusey,[3] and he was able to get funds from him for the visitors. Then, the dean appointed in 1980 was a very energetic person – and he is the one who gave enormous backing to start the international work that we did at the school.

S.R.: So it clearly did not depend only on Sołtan as the Chairman of the School...

F.V.: No, no... As I was saying before, chairmen do not have that much leeway.

S.R.: What about his work after he retired from Harvard?

F.V.: He continued a very active life, and he did a bulk of his American architecture work afterwards if I remember well. When he was still at the faculty, he was trying to set up a small architecture practice with Al Szabo. They were working in a very nice small office in Harvard Square, but they never really were able to generate much work. In the US, the European architecture competition is very rare. One of the last competitions in Boston was the Boston City Hall... it is a modernist building, a brutalist building done by two young architects, who not only got the contract, but also received an appointment at Harvard as a reward.

S.R.: Do you think there is still some influence of Sołtan's teaching among other professors? Because when one thinks about Harvard, it naturally seems that professors have very strong personalities and background, thus they would not be easy to influence...

F.V.: Yes, that is correct... But I think the reason I am shaking my head is the thrust of design education in key American universities, as it changed in the last decade – it is much more about technology and green buildings, and artificial intelligence. The old preoccupation and discourse with design issues, it is still there occasionally – but it is no longer the core. I think one of the reasons is that the architecture students do not know how to hold a pencil anymore. It is computer designed. That changes not only the quality of the presentation, but also the whole conceptualisation of how you solve a design problem. Now, I only go there very rarely, only if I am invited to the juries and things like that, conferences. I find myself rather an alien right now. However, it is very interesting, I am not against that, but I think that Jerzy would have felt very uncomfortable. He was rougher than I was. When I was using computers, he was looking at me. For Jerzy, everything from design to conceptualising text, imagining a solution to a complex problem – it was pencil and paper. I was one-step ahead of that, but I am very far behind the new generation. And I think for what I have seen – you can tell contemporary buildings which were designed using computer systems. They are very different from the buildings that were being drawn.

S.R.: You said that Jerzy Sołtan would have felt very uncomfortable about the direction the present day university has taken with the design with the computers... But there was a moment when he was actually interested in the possibilities of computers and technology and design – I have found his speech from 1978 from the University of Virginia where he was talking about his early interest in the possibilities of computers.[4] Do you recall any discussions with him on that?

F.V.: I do not remember. He was such a good draughtsman to lay his ideas directly on the paper... Of course, the first graphic with the computers was quite rudimentary. When students started trying to use them, he was not that happy with the results. I think that for him the sketch was a way of exploring, like an intellectual challenge. It was not a representation – it was an exploration.

S.R.: He actually mentioned the PhD by Christopher Alexander.[5]

F.V.: Oh, I see – but that was different. Chris was talking about the analytical use of computers, not the graphic ones. He was a classmate in my doctoral program. He was quite an intellectual star, he was very talented and at the time he was really into computer computation as a way of structuring the world. What he was trying to do was to show how using computer technology and analysing may influence the decision taking and how it was important in design. So I remember Christopher's presentation, it was not about graphics, it was about reasoning. That Jerzy would have been very interested in.

S.R.: Were there any architects or buildings that Sołtan did not approve of?

3 Nathan Pusey (1907-2001) was Harvard President 1953-1971.
4 Lecture at the University of Virginia on December 8th, 1978 and article 'Where do we go from here...?', 1978, see: MASP-JS.
5 First PhD awared in architecture at the Havard GSD in 1963. The thesis was published as Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

F.V.: I think he would not have liked the building by Gehry at MIT,[6] the one that looks as if it got through an earthquake. I do not think he would have approved of that at all...

S.R.: Were there architects and styles that he was particularly interested in?

F.V.: I cannot tell, but a sure way to answer this question is to look at the visiting critics invited by Jerzy when he was a chair. That is where the prerogative of being the chair lies – invite lecturers and visiting critics. That would be very interesting, to know whom he invited.

S.R.: Sołtan was not only an architect, not only a teacher, but also an artist. He was drawing, painting and sculpting. What do you think was his connection between architecture and visual arts?

F.V.: I think this is something that was actually very private. He used to sketch during boring faculty meetings. We often sat next to each other, and there were those totally uninteresting boring discussions as there can be during faculty meetings, and he would start to doodle. They were very nice, often very erotic drawings. For him, there were drawings everywhere... For him, it was very important. As I have understood, he started to draw when he was a prisoner of war – he told me that he spent a lot of time drawing, as he had nothing to do. It was a way of keeping his sanity. He always liked to draw very much – and he was very good. What was interesting was the way that some of his drawings were almost fakes of Picasso or Le Corbusier, whereas others were inspired by them, but his own.

S.R.: In fact, Sołtan was recalling Le Corbusier's daily routine, he referred to his daily morning painting and drawing...[7]

F.V.: That is how Le Corbusier earned his living during the war: he had no buildings. He was selling paintings in fact...

S.R.: And Sołtan was recalling that there was a very close connection between Le Corbusier's painting and his designing – do you think there was also a similar relationship between Sołtan's designing and his painting?

F.V.: Yes, they were very much alike in that way. I remember also his belief in the strength of drawings. The only time I saw him mad, it was on a jury of a studio I was running on urban design, which I think had something to do with rehabilitation of historical buildings and how you could insert new into old. There was one Lebanese student who was incredibly talented in the way he drew. For some reason Jerzy hated the way the student drew and he started berating him, he said, "you think you draw like an angel, but you draw like a devil". [laughs] What I was coming to – he was able to represent in his mind very quickly, what the drawing would actually look like when it would be built.

S.R.: How was he managing designing and teaching at the same time?

F.V.: We all did. It was a usual thing to do. If you are teaching in a professional program, I cannot imagine that you have no practice of the profession. Then the question is on how you divide your time. I had my office at the time. In fact I think that we used my office and drawing tables for the Berlin competition. It was in Harvard Square, so just ten minutes from the Design School.

S.R.: Do you think there was a close relationship between Sołtan's theory, design and teaching?

F.V.: Oh, absolutely. I mean, he taught what he thought design should be and he tried – within the limits of practicality – to build what he believed in. Something that you cannot always do – based on the circumstances that do not allow you to do what you would like to.

S.R.: Have you seen some of his buildings, apart from the school in Salem?

F.V.: I know the Warsaw railway station and the stadium.

S.R.: Did he take you there to show you the buildings?

F.V.: Yes, that was when we were there together. I wanted to see them, and he wanted to see them again, so we took a cab and went there. [looking at the present-day photographs of 'Warszawianka' sporting centre] Good heavens, is that how it looks right now?

6 The Ray and Maria Stata Center in Camdridge designed by Frank Gehry was opened in 2004.
7 Jerzy Sołtan, 'Współpraca z Le Corbusierem', 1982, see: MASP-JS.

S.R.: Yes, they are photographs from last November...

F.V.: Given that Warsaw was growing, that is a prime site. I could understand demolishing and re-developing, but letting it go like that is unbelievable... And I remember the railway station was very good... Do you have its pictures?

S.R.: Yes, actually much better preserved...

F.V.: [looking at the present-day pictures of the Warsaw Midtown railway station] That is still very much like it...

S.R.: They have only added some shops...

F.V.: That is what is always done right now. That has not changed, that is good. And I remember a very handsome staircase to go down to the station from the entrance to the street level.

S.R.: When he was talking about the Polish designs, was it mostly then the railway station and the sporting centre?

F.V.: He did not talk much about it. When we were in Warsaw, I asked him to see those buildings. I have a feeling that once he had left with his wife and two children, and they started a new life here, he tried to put the past behind him – although it was a very productive and interesting past. It was also a very difficult one politically. As I remember well, he had some troubles with the government...

S.R.: What would you say was his attitude towards heritage?

F.V.: I was very positive. He was very conscious of the heritage: he took on a fascinating tour of the old city in Warsaw and he told me that he had been a part of the team that did the reconstruction after the war. Then they had done the same thing in Gdańsk – rebuilding the old city – but it was funny because Jerzy said that Gdańsk was much more advanced than Warsaw, "we reconstructed it exactly as it was, which is much too dense, and in Gdańsk they had built only a half of it bringing light and air". [laughs] It is a façade in Gdańsk, like a stage set.

S.R.: And do you think it is possible to consider Sołtan's work – in various disciplines – as heritage?

F.V.: When you look at Jerzy's work, he was in many ways a pioneer. That is where Le Corbusier, Sert, or Gropius come too. Let us not forget the Bauhaus either... I think their impact has been very significant – but in terms of how much built environment they actually did, it is minuscule. Many derivatives – people try to do like them, not necessarily very well. When you compare to the historically traditional styles, Georgian architecture for instance – it is marvellous. How many acres of Georgian architecture do you have – as opposed to Bauhaus architecture? I think that any kind of recognition of what they were trying to do, would be very good. I think Jerzy would have probably appreciated, but he was also a very modest man.

Bartholomew Voorsanger

May 13th, 2019

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's design studio (1961-1962). FAIA architect working in New York City and in Napa, California.

S.R.: How do you remember Jerzy Sołtan's teaching at Harvard?

B.V.: Before I comment on Jerzy, I need to give a little background to Harvard GSD at the time. I came to GSD in 1961 after graduating with honours from Princeton and after the military as a Lieutenant in the Artillery. I received advanced standing to GSD, so I arrived directly at the second year of a three-and-a-half-year program. At the beginning the second year, I had my first introduction to the program by prof. Neil Mitchell who proceeded to tell our entering second year studio that, "ultimately as architects one third would fail, one third would drop out and only one third would survive the profession and the GSD". The talk then became more and more destructive and negative of our capacities and future. Finally fed up, I raised my hand and said, "what do you really want from us?" – having been in the military and not being intimidated. He thought for a moment and said, "what we are really interested in, it is that one genius who comes through every ten years". I re-raised my hand and said, "you will save my father a lot of money, please tell me how do you recognize this person?" – and there was a tense silence and he realised the stupidity of the comment that one obviously cannot identify such a person among students. Brilliance emerges, but it is so difficult to telegraph at a young age. The school was is real tension between those professors coming from Europe after the war or from the concentration camps reality of a brutal existence versus the American professors graduated from Yale, or likewise, who lived a charmed, similarly unchallenged environment. At our 'review' of our/my first project, an elementary school in a nearby suburb, I remember presenting a 'ramp' scheme through four levels of the school rendered with a vivid 'blue' sky. The chairman of the department, prof. Bognar, an American, stared at the drawings and stated "this is one of the most disgusting presentations and projects I have witnessed in all my teaching at Harvard". We were all stunned then prof. Serge Chermayeff (truly frightening personality) stood up and went over to the project, thought for a long moment and said, "this is a brilliant project". Dead silence and then Bognar and Chermayeff spent the next fifteen minutes fighting. I realised later it did not matter what I had presented: if Bognar had liked it, Chermayeff would have disliked it, etc. It was perpetual fighting.

S.R.: How was Jerzy Sołtan fitting into this picture?

B.V.: Now coming to Jerzy... Our interaction through the two years was polite and not very interesting. However, I was then married to a brilliant woman, Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, who died quite young at fifty-one and she was a curator at the Metropolitan Museum. During her postgraduate training at City University in New York, in her last year she decided to write a paper on Ronchamp. So Catherine, who read French and German, decided to read all of Corb's library that has just been published – I believe fifty-one books. Her paper was revelatory, and knowing how much Jerzy loved Le Corbusier, I sent it up to him for his reaction. He, in his normal emotional reaction, called two days later in a state of great excitement and said, "she has figured it out – just brilliant! I must come down immediately and meet her". At the time, we had a country house on the Connecticut coast, in Stonington, so Jerzy literally came down the next day on the train. He fell in love with Catherine and said she must publish – it was so important... We contacted the AA in London, on Jerzy's recommendation, and they agreed to publish without reading it, but Catherine was always reluctant and eventually it never happened. I still have the original. The above is not offering anything substantial concerning Jerzy, but do remember his elegance – verbal, intellectual, social (he was really courtly) – and his emotional explosion of excitement concerning Ronchamp and Catherine's paper. Also I must mention that Jerzy never became this emotional about any of my projects. For me, the formative education was the brilliance of Princeton, not Harvard GSD.

Makoto Shin Watanabe

December 28th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student at Jerzy Sołtan's design studio (1978-1979). He was a member of Arata Isozaki's practice (1981-1995) and since 1996, he is professor at the School of Architecture at the Hosei University in Tokyo.

S.R.: Shall we start with the first time when you met Jerzy Sołtan? Do you remember it when you met him for the first time?

M.S.W.: I do not remember it precisely, because it is a long time ago. It was however in September 1978, and I was in the M. Arch. II programme at Harvard, a one-year programme, starting in September and ending in May.

S.R.: As a part of this program, you have attended in the first semester a design studio by Jerzy Sołtan, where you were to design a "place of spiritual retreat". Do you remember anything from it?

M.S.W.: I remember it very well because the theme of the studio was quite unusual, at least at that time. Now, you know, our studios are more flexible, but they used to be centred on a building type, and a "spiritual retreat" is not a building type. In addition, Jerzy took the location in the fields in Lincoln, Massachusetts, so we all went to the site to see it, and as it was not very far from Gropius' house, we were all able to meet with Mrs Gropius who was still alive. You know, being in Cambridge, and coming to such a legendary site and very famous house, even if it is small scale – it was still Gropius'...

S.R.: What about the teaching in the studio? The studio was co-taught by Jerzy Sołtan and Gerald McCue, do you remember how they were teaching?

M.S.W.: Gerald McCue was a co-teacher, but he was at that time the dean of the school. He let Jerzy take the lead, and Gerald was somehow supporting the studio. In Japan, today it is more common, but it used to be unusual that a studio would be taught by two instructors, usually it is taught by one only. At the beginning, Jerzy spoke more because we had to discuss more about the direction of the studio, and after we started making designs, Gerald McCue started to give us critiques, saying how thick a wall should be or what materials we should use. When the two of them sat next to my drawing table and started asking questions, Jerzy was always more philosophical and spiritual, whereas Gerald was more practical. That is how they took the load. We discussed with my colleagues, and all of us said the same thing: Gerald was more practical and Jerzy was more philosophical, and spiritual retreat of course is a spiritual theme.

S.R.: Do you remember your design?

M.S.W.: Oh, yes. I designed a Japanese project, like the Ise Shrine, a traditional Japanese shrine in Ise. Its characteristic is that it is surrounded by three wooden walls, and my spiritual retreat design had a continuous wooden wall: it was like a wall solution. People would come and walk around those walls, which were the main element of the design. In Ise for example, the shrine itself is not that important, but the place is. Given that, Gerald McCue was not very happy, but Jerzy was OK. I think that Gerald wanted me to design something more like a building. However, I remember that Jerzy invited Richard Meier to come to the final review, and Richard had just visited Japan so he understood what I meant. In the studio, one of my classmates was by the way a staff member at Richard Meier's office and after GSD he came back there and became a partner. His project was a Richard Meier-style design, a very nice one actually. It was a building, a design probably closer to what Gerald McCue really wanted.

S.R.: When we talked before this conversation, you mentioned that Jerzy Sołtan was a really good educator. Why was that according to you? What was so specific in his teaching?

M.S.W.: It was not actually teaching itself, but bringing legendary figures, like Peter Smithson, to the studio. Jerzy would say, "today we have a guest", and this guest would be Peter Smithson. Peter would not give you of course a very detailed critique, but if you could sit down with Peter Smithson and talk for about an hour, that was a fantastic experience. Aldo van Eyck, he also came... It was like the old Team 10. Then, I have

already mentioned Richard Meier coming at the very end. However, Jerzy was not imposing anything on us by bringing all those people. I mean, a discussion between Peter and Jerzy, us assisting such a discussion, it was a very good educational experience.

S.R.: What do you mean he was not imposing? Were you able to approach the design as you would like to?

M.S.W.: Jerzy was not forcing us in any means. Corbusian design or detail, he was not enforcing these at all. He was very quiet in that sense.

S.R.: What about postmodernism? Was he also accepting postmodern designs?

M.S.W.: I think at that time, postmodernism was not that strong, and I do not think that many students used postmodern vocabulary. For example, Michael Palladino's design was following Richard Meier, so it was really modern. My friend Yvonne Szeto who went then to work for I. M. Pei also designed a modern building. Instead, contextualism was really strong at Harvard... and contextualism was this kind of as a basic approach to everyone.

S.R.: Do you mean it was generally present at Harvard?

M.S.W.: Yes, I think it was like a general approach. We went to see other studios for the final reviews when we had time, and that was a general approach. These were late 1970s, and early 1980s, before postmodernism took initiative and became very strong... In a sense, contextualism can be seen as a proto-postmodernism. I translated a book by Colin Rowe, who was a contextualist, but he became a postmodernist... not that he wanted to, but because of what he was doing.

S.R.: Was there a difference between Sołtan's studio and the one from the second semester you attended, tutored by Moshe Safdie?

M.S.W.: Moshe was a successful architect, so he came to the studio once in a while. Jerzy came to the studio almost every time. You know, in Japan studio are once a week, but at the GSD it was three times a week. Nowadays in Japan, especially with the graduate students, we meet them twice per week. Three times a week for the entire afternoon, it is a lot of time, and quite a heavy obligation! [laughs] In fact, at that time, Gerald was unable to come to the studio once in a while, because he was the dean, but I think that Jerzy came to the studio almost all the times. That is why we felt kind of sympathy, due to the way he was teaching. Also, he would sit next to you, would make some sketches, and then he did not force his ideas. Maybe in my case especially, as he might have been in difficulty with a Japanese student who was using a scheme of a Shinto shrine in his design of a spiritual retreat... But anyhow, he was a very nice teacher.

S.R.: Do you remember any specific discussion or lectures he gave as a part of the studio?

M.S.W.: I do not remember him giving us any lectures, but the class was small and he came three times a week, so many times he would come and we would talk about many things. The idea of green energy and participation, that kind of topics, we discussed. But again, Jerzy was not trying to force us into that direction. He rather suggested it as a different approach: as a possibility.

S.R.: Were you familiar with Sołtan's design and artistic work back when studying under him?

M.S.W.: Not quite. We – students – knew that he was a respected architect of Team 10 who used to work for Le Corbusier. However, the first time I started to understand what he was doing as a designer, it was after I received this book. [shows *Jerzy Sołtan* ed. by Jola Gola] I was very surprised that he was very close to Le Corbusier, not just in his ideas, but also in his drawings and designs. He was not the person to show the students what he was designing. He never did it.

S.R.: Coming to an end, let us move to your own teaching experience. When we exchanged before, you mentioned before that you appreciate Sołtan's teaching because you teach yourself... Why is that? Do use this experience in your teaching?

M.S.W.: That is very difficult. Even though he was a very strong and influential instructor, it lasted for only three months: it is not a long time, compared to other experiences. After I came back to Japan, I started to work for Arata Isozaki and I worked there over ten years. However, Sołtan's very humanistic or humanitarian approach to architecture along with flexibility given to the students, it was very important... Sołtan worked for Le Corbusier, but at that time Le Corbusier was changing into more organic architecture: it was not just machine-type functionalist architecture, but something designed by and for a human being.

Anne Wattenberg

April 24th, 2020

Harvard alumnus, student in Jerzy Sołtan's design studio (1978-1979). AIA architect working in Colorado.

S.R.: Let me start with asking when it was the first time you have met Jerzy Sołtan...

A.W.: First, I have to preface my comments by saying that I am thinking about things that happened forty years ago... I believe I took Sołtan's studio as my fourth semester in spring 1979, and at the time, it was a seven-semester program. Before getting to that, let me explain about my situation in architecture school, which was a little unusual... It was Master of Architecture 1 Class, and I believe there were about forty-five students in it, but the year I entered, the GSD tried an experiment and there were about six of seven of us who did not have undergraduate degrees in architecture. We all came from other fine arts disciplines, and for example, I had been a modern dancer. Someone else in my class had been a potter, there were also a couple of visual arts people however, the rest of the class had undergraduate degrees in architecture. This was just a new experiment that they were trying in order to diversify the class, and whereas for some it worked out really well, for me it was a disaster, because I could not draw. Imagine that I was in this very high-level class, with some of the other students with wonderful undergraduate degrees in architecture, and I had never drawn anything before. In this situation, I had a disastrous beginning to my education: in fact, I failed one of my studios and I was put on the notice that if I was to fail another one, I was to be thrown out of the program...

S.R.: But it did not end badly, it seems...

A.W.: Exactly! When I got to Sołtan's studio, I was almost on the last legs of my potential career. I still have some of the drawings of the first project we had to design: it was a pavilion. I remember this very well, although I cannot remember what the programme actually was. I had an idea that you would enter this pavilion, you would go down a long ramp, then you would turn, and you would realise the breeze cooling the whole pavilion came from a large metal contraption that was suspended from the top of the roof: it heated up in the sun and caused the hot air to rise. I drew a terrible little plan but explained by idea to professor Sołtan who put a piece of charcoal in my hand, and he started to draw out the project. I kept this drawing all these forty years, because this situation completely changed everything. Up until that point, I just had no idea what an 'architectural idea' was, and how it evolved. Meanwhile, he said, "this is a great idea, and this is how it evolves, and this is how the roof would be sloped to make the wind go up and make the eye go up to catch the huge contraption that you have done, and this is how the ramp would look". So I went from being a completely failed student to actually graduating his studio with Honors. My recollection is that studios were graded with: Pass, Probation, Fail, and at the professor's option there was also Honors. I believe in Sołtan's studio there was only one Honors given each year. As you can imagine, it was a completely life-changing experience.

S.R.: Are these drawings of the pavilion made by Sołtan then?

A.W.: It depends... this one was my terrible plan. [referring to a plan scheme drawn with markers] That was my actual beginning, and I believe that is what I showed to him. You can just tell it is a terrible drawing! [laughs] I showed it to him, and then he said, "well, that's a fine idea, and this is the way it would be shaped". Other ones are actually drawn by both of us. Part of it was my drawing, and part of it is his drawing... It is in charcoal on a piece of tracing paper, you can see the rough shape of the roof that is coming through, you can see the entrance idea... and the very idea that you enter an object through another object, it is like in the Carpenter Center. One other thing to say about this project, the final presentation was also one of the first drawings that I had ever done that looked well, I actually drew nicely: everything about it was life-changing.

S.R.: What about other designs?

A.W.: It was a school project. Again, I am not entirely sure what the programme was, but it was an elementary school. My idea for it was that there was a garden in front of it, and the little kids had their classrooms on the ground level and they actually took care of the garden. Then, as you went up the ramp which wrapped around the garden, there were older children's classrooms and it all stacked up. The design principle – and I am sure you have heard from other people – was based on a Corbusian idea. You separated each of the elements, the

circulation, the program, the entrance, and the enclosure, then you solved them independently and rationally, and then you overlaid them on top of each other. Then you would allow this thing called "the hand of God": one little shake, and then – that was it. When I look at this design, I realise that was the first time I was in control enough of the project to be able actually to think it through that way, in a rational way. Of course, at the time, there was an entire school of thought about transparency and overlaying, we were working on tracing paper, and there was that whole idea of designing by literally overlaying the drawings. I think that probably I had seen the Ford Foundation and that I had looked at the work in *Five Architects*,[1] so I think you can see the derivation of all of these. Especially in this second design, there were many of the core ideas, for example, I think there must be a drawing of a screen, which was made with the Fibonacci series, and some horizontal fins as in the Carpenter Center. We all went over to Carpenter Center many times and I love that building. I am sure that I stole many pieces from that building in this project... An interesting part of my recollection of this project was the final review, the way the reviews took place this year, and I believe it was professor Sołtan's idea: you had to present the same project more than once, because you could get different points of view. I presented it the first time, to the first group of critics, and they liked it very much, but then we moved to the second group, and there was one person who actually failed me in a studio, and spent the whole time saying what a horrible project it was. Professor Sołtan walked in at the end of this and said, "yes, but it is a wonderful project, isn't it?", and it was an amazing experience, such a kind thing to have done. It was some kind of personal redemption, so even forty years later, it still means a great deal to me.

S.R.: You mentioned the Carpenter Center. Was it Sołtan's idea to bring you there?

A.W.: Yes, we went with him actually to see it, as it is just half a block away from the school. He took us over and he explained many of its design principles, and then probably we all would just go – or I would just go – there repeatedly to look at and to try to understand what it was about...

S.R.: When you were designing the schools, did Sołtan show you his designs of schools from around Massachusetts?

A.W.: It is so interesting, because I do not remember him showing us any of him work, which does not mean that it did not happen, I just do not remember it. Maybe its programme was the same as in one of the schools he was designing... but I have just no recollection of that.

S.R.: Apart from the designs, you also produced a paper for Sołtan's module 'Grassroots of the Contemporary Architecture'.[2] Do you remember anything about it?

A.W.: Yes, and I read the paper again when you sent it to me, but I do not remember it. Some of the ideas actually really make sense to me, but I do not recall doing any research for it.

S.R.: You told how the experience of the studio with Sołtan was different for you, in comparison to the previous studios. Was there something different in Sołtan's teaching? Why do you think there was such a difference?

A.W.: It is actually a question I have been thinking about a great deal and reflecting on. His personality was very magnetic and he was completely personally passionate about his beliefs in architecture. At the same time, he was very personal in his teaching attitude. He sat down with me and he had complete confidence that the idea I had was actually a good idea. He just helped me to sort out how you made it into an architectural idea. I think I had not had any major studio leaders up until this point, those that I did have in retrospect, might have had a preconceived idea about what architecture was and they taught according to that point of view. But since I had no architectural background, for me their point of view was incomprehensible ... and then with professor Sołtan, there was somebody who just took a pure idea and said, "OK, so this is how it becomes architecture", and that was for me a huge thing. To prove that, let me tell you about another part of my architectural background. You are wondering perhaps how it was possible that I got into Harvard without any architectural background...

Actually, I started off at a very small college that had a very major dance program, but I left before I got my degree and I went to Europe. When I came back and I thought of going to an architecture school, they did not have any architecture program, but there was an organisation called the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) directed by Peter Eisenman.[3] The institute collaborated with several little schools that did not have an architecture program, and it gave an internship program. At that time, as postmodernism and anti-modernism were really developing, Eisenman's idea was to invite all of these European architects, like Aldo Rossi, Rafael Moneo, and to bring them to New York to be part of this institute and part of the way he was able to compensate them was to give them a stipend for teaching in the internship program. In my case, this was a ridiculous use of very talented architects because I had never held a pencil and I had Rafael Moneo as the first person who ever taught me architecture. He was very nice and very kind, it was a wonderful beginning, but the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies had a wild cast of characters. Peter Eisenman himself was very bombastic, and he had very high-level philosophy. The other person who was all the time there was Philip Johnson, and Philip Johnson was a very, I think, a deliberately controversial person. Anyway, as you can imagine, if you do not know anything about architecture, it was a completely silly place to be. However, I think I knew enough at that time to understand that the IAUS' philosophy was really, really not for me. I had a very negative attitude towards it, because many people there – and I still believe this – had very controversial ideas, with no particularly great building forms behind them. There were just intellectual ideas, and even now Peter Eisenman's work, I do not find particularly interesting. Maybe he had some great ideas, but the buildings... they did not really appeal to me, but this is of course a philosophical issue.

S.R.: So all of it was before Harvard...

A.W.: Exactly. Professor Sołtan was the very first person who spoke to me about architectural ideas in a way that really made sense. Having heard all of these other things before, and then after the performance of the earlier studios... finally I could say, "this is really what it is".

S.R.: I would like to dwell on that quality of teaching. Many people who were taught by Sołtan and to whom I talked to, had very positive recollections of it. Apart from the way he was working on your own ideas, the passage between the ideas and architecture, was there something else about the course, which made it stand out?

A.W.: It is just hard to say, because he was just himself such an inspirational figure... As I mentioned, I think I had only junior professors before his studio. You knew that he was truly an artist... and his story about getting in touch with Le Corbusier when he was in the prisoner of war camp, and working for him, was a powerful example of commitment. At the same time, he was very interested, very kind, and very clear.

S.R.: You said he was an artist. How was it visible in his teaching or his attitude?

A.W.: As I recall, it was in encouragement, but also in the manner, he spoke on a very wide level about different things and about places he had been to. He spoke on a level much wider than a simple architectural studio project.

S.R.: You mentioned going to the Carpenter Center, you mentioned the Fibonacci series – it all points to Le Corbusier and Jerzy Sołtan's contact with him. How much was Le Corbusier present in Sołtan's teaching?

A.W.: I will just go back to this idea of looking at each part of the system dispassionately and solving them: that is why I sent you the sketches and the side panels from *Five Architects* by Richard Meier.[4] Those little diagrams were exactly what it was about, and this is my recollection of Le Corbusier's approach and of professor Sołtan's description of it. Richard Meier's work of that period totally encapsulated that.

S.R.: You mentioned that in the school design you applied this method. Was Sołtan expecting you to work in the same way of layers of different aspects of a design?

A.W.: Yes, exactly, that is what he would have expected you to do: to look at them as independent pieces. As I look at it now, I just think it is so interesting: I think that the invention of the curtain wall had so much to do with such an ability to follow this approach in the early twentieth century. Without a curtain wall, you had to combine enclosure and structure, but then, the curtain wall opened these possibilities... Once you had the curtain wall, you were able to manipulate the enclosure in a fluid fashion, all those curves and things, which would be much more difficult to realise if you were doing a load-bearing building. I just cannot help but think about it, about how much it was part of this particular historical place and time. You could just see the evolution

1 Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, and Meier, *Five Architects*.
2 Wattenberg wrote a paper for Jerzy Sołtan's module 'Grassroots of the Contemporary Architecture' entitled 'Ornament in the Early Work of Le Corbusier' in May 1979, see: HGSD-JS, AD017.
3 Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies was founded in 1967 and through the 1970s it started collaboration with several liberal arts colleges. Peter Eisenman was the first director of the institute until 1983. Amongst teachers, there were Aldo Rossi, Rafael Moneo, Robert Stern, Bernard Tschumi, Michael Graves, Richard Meier, Kenneth Frampton, Manfredo Tafuri, and Anthony Vidler.
4 Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk and Meier, pp. 111, 123.

from the 1930s and so forth to where we were in the 1970s...

S.R.: Apart from the manner you were taught to design, these different layers and different problems, were also the use of the Modulor, harmonic diagrams, and regulating lines part of the design method you followed? Was it something present in your studio?

A.W. The regulating lines, it is definitely something that rings a bell to me, and I guess I would not be surprised if there were golden ratios in our designs. The Fibonacci series for sure... We were of course totally impressed with the fact that professor Sołtan was 'Mr American Modulor', that was huge. I just thought it was so great, not to mention slightly goofy. My recollection is that we were told that Corbusier was very impressed by Sołtan's height and decided when Sołtan was sent to the United States that in keeping with the scale of the country, his measurement should be the basis for the American Modulor. The application of that part was not clear, maybe it was too old-fashioned. We knew about it, but it was not part of the design. However, regulating lines, I remember them.

S.R.: Apart from Le Corbusier, do you remember any other groups that Sołtan could have been referring to during his teaching?

A.W.: I do not, only Richard Meier, but only because of these schemes, but I just do not remember any discussions on any other architect. Professor Sołtan tried to get me a job with Richard Meier, which did not work, but then I went on to work for Edward Larrabee Barnes,[5] I have found that he is not well known among younger architects, but he was an amazing, brilliant, and committed designer. He worked following modernism in a rational, but also very romantic and personal manner. I know also that Sołtan admired his work, his manner of work had something in common with that of Kallmann and McKinnell's work, it was quite personal, with no follow-up to it. It was not part of the historical architectural trajectory, because it was personal to him.

S.R.: Let me concentrate on the connection between Sołtan and Meier. You mentioned that you could see a connection between them through the sketches of this 'layering'. Can it be instead a reference to Le Corbusier, as both Meier and Sołtan?

A.W.: I do not know. I remember those little diagrams, and I always assumed that those came through Sołtan. By the way, Richard Meier was teaching at the school when I was there... I think he was teaching a second year studio. So I know they were teaching at the same time, and even if you look at the letters he sent to me, you can see that professor Sołtan refers to Richard Meier. At the same, I assumed that those sketches came through Sołtan, but they could have come directly from Le Corbusier. Maybe you will find out.

S.R.: Were there any things, any mottos in the studio, some things that Sołtan kept on repeating to the students?

A.W.: The one that I remember is, "if you want to be a good designer, you have to work for a good designer, and if you can't work for a good designer, you should work at a gas station".

S.R.: This one I have never heard!

A.W.: Really? I thought you would have heard that from everybody. I am sure that I heard that saying more than once and I totally agree with him. There is another thing and I am not sure whether it was from him... At Harvard at that time, one of the important ideas was the parti. It meant that once you arrived at the design strategy that you came to during the process of overlay of different elements, you were left with a *parti*. Once you had it, you just kept going, and that *parti* led you throughout the design. It led you to the details and then back to the overall design because it was one linear exploration: you kept on going back and forth. Once you started it however, you could not change the idea. I am not sure whether the *parti* was a strategy specific to professor Sołtan or whether that was a general modernist idea of that time.

S.R.: May you please explain better what this *parti* was?

A.W.: The *parti* was sort of a core idea, it is like a little sketch.

S.R.: Like the first concept sketch?

A.W.: Exactly. That was very much present at Harvard, but I am not sure whether it was Sołtan's idea, or whether that was a departmental approach, the important idea was that you should have a *parti* and once you had it, you had to continue to pursue it, and not to say, "oh, I changed my mind to something else". You just kept going with it, and it came from this initial exploration of layering. You did not start with it: it was the result of the initial, dispassionate examination. Then, throughout the project's development, the *parti* was the guiding concept.

S.R.: What do you remember about his position in the school?

A.W.: As you know, Sert was no longer the dean, and the dean, was not an artistic force. The Science Center had been built and it was an example of Gropius-style modernism if you ask me[6] – that was on one side of the campus. Meanwhile, the professors in my era who were most sought after were Kallmann and McKinnell. I was thinking about it, and they were for me very much about postmodernism in a very personal manner, like in the Boston City Hall, which is an interpretation of La Tourette. Even they would say that... and when you look at it, you know it is true, but in a very weirdly postmodern way, because they took historical things and they would make them very personal. Their design approach was not something that anybody else could do, unlike Robert Stern who followed a similar postmodern strategy that everybody could copy. They were brilliant, and they were artists: they would make designs so personal and so individual that nobody else could do them. However for me, it was very much about postmodernism and the re-interpretation of different styles, and in the particular case of the Boston City Hall, it was a re-interpretation of Le Corbusier, which is pretty crazy when you think of their later work. That part of the school was really beginning to rise up and you could tell there was a tension between the Sert side, and the Kallmann and McKinnell side. My last studio was actually with professor Kallmann, so I had a chance to see it... he is an artist and he was brilliant, but that being said, he totally was not for me. The project I produced for him meant nothing to me... I just say this because I think that he was very, very brilliant but his method of design did not speak to me at all, even though you knew that you were in the presence of a great artist. It just totally did not speak to me. Actually, the best designer in my class went to work for Kallmann and McKinnell, because that was the prize that everyone in my class wanted: that was the direction people wanted to go in. The direction from professor Sołtan, I do not know anybody in my class besides myself who was so deeply influenced by him.

S.R.: Do you mean that Kallmann's language was different from yours?

A.W.: Yes, exactly. He really was very powerful and for some people, it was very exciting. There were also younger postmodernists, there was someone from Venturi's office teaching there... they were fine, and they were probably very good architects, but they were not nearly of the calibre of professor Sołtan or Gerhard Kallmann, who I think were both head-and-shoulders above everyone all of the other studio professors.

S.R.: Actually, I wanted to ask you about the influence of postmodernism in the school and especially about Sołtan's attitude towards it. Do you remember anything about it?

A.W.: I do not recall a discussion, whether negative or positive, at all.

S.R.: Coming forward to your years after Harvard... You were in contact with him through the letters. Did you have any opportunity to meet him afterwards?

A.W.: I think I may have gone back to Cambridge once. I worked in New York, and I remember perhaps meeting him maybe once in Cambridge after that.

S.R.: I wanted to ask about your retrospective reflection. If you think about the experience of being taught by Sołtan, how would you relate this experience to your later work? Was it the relationship between his teaching and your later work as architect?

A.W.: There are three ideas. First is only to work for a great designer, which I did although it took a year to convince Edward Barnes to hire me. Second is that you look at each design element instead of trying to look at the entire problem. You look at each piece individually and then poetically you put them together – that has always stayed with me, and that has totally resonated with me when I look at a design problem. Finally, it is very much a plan-based approach. When I started to work in the profession, we all drew by hand, and our design work was largely in plan even though we all thought in three dimensions. That is how buildings came to be. When you look at Richard Meier's diagrams in *Five Architects*, these are plan diagrams. Then, we went into CAD, which I think was great, and it was still very much of a plan approach. The major part of my early

5 Edward Larrabee Barnes (1915-2004) was an American architect located since 1949 in New York and Harvard professor, with his work spanning over five decades of the twentieth century. In 2007, he was awarded the A.I.A. Gold Medal.

6 The Science Center in Cambridge designed by Sert was opened in 1973.

professional life, I worked for Edward Barnes for about fifteen years, and as a modernist, he still followed a plan-based approach to problems. I feel that the current generation of architects use completely different tools, specifically Sketchup and Revit and they often tend to start with a three-dimensional vision or solution with the plan being vestigial. I think it is hard to apply the Sołtan/Corbusian design concept to a form that starts out being completely integrated.

For most of my career I have worked for offices on large cultural projects, I do a lot of technical work, and a lot of detailing. You may think it is not related to the method, but it is completely related, because the same applies to how you design a detail, and to how you analyse and solve each of the pieces completely separately and then overlay them. For me, it is simply a design problem of a different scale in general. I was never a conceptual designer in any of these projects I worked on, but I see the detailing very much as a confirmation of the design parti. It is really the part where you understand the relationship between the larger part and the smaller part and also the place in which you confirm that the project can be realized, that is built, beautifully.

S.R.: You were talking before about what you brought from Sołtan's teaching. Do you think there may be any legacy in his approach and in his ideas that may be still applicable to design work today?

A.W.: I have to say that I believe a generational change happened: up until a certain time, the plan was really how most of us understood things. In addition, most of the projects I have worked on were built, so I was very aware during the design about how you build things also, the plan was the way contractors worked with designs. Then, Revit came in, and everybody's thought process changed. Instead of starting from a two-dimensional and diagrammatic idea, which goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, suddenly everybody is working on things from a three-dimensional idea backwards. I had to stop working in offices, because I could not understand what everybody else was doing, and the way that problems were being solved made no sense to me at all... it still does not make any sense to me. This is an amazing philosophical split... Even today I go into buildings which have been created through such an approach, I cannot understand them: why an angle is where it is and not somewhere else... In architecture now, I think that the plan is not a primacy anymore and it is a little bit difficult to understand how the Sołtan design strategy would be applicable. On the other hand, if you look at it as a philosophy, it is good for almost anything. It does not have to be a building, it may be anything that you are designing and that you are looking at, it is always a good idea to approach any problem through the analysis of its component pieces in a dispassionate way, layer them on top of each other and see what happens.

architectural practice - United States

Edward Lyons

April 2nd, 2019 in Sharon and Brockton, MA

Practicing architect and co-worker of Jerzy Sołtan, manager of Haldeman and Goransson, where Sołtan was chief designer. They collaborated on designs from the practice, including school buildings around Massachusetts, and other designs in Boston. AIA architect working in Sharon, Massachusetts.

S.R.: How did you meet Jerzy Sołtan for the first time? Was it when you were working together?

E.L.: Yes, it was then. We[1] had an office that opened up in Boston in 1969 and we had a couple of Polish architects who were working there, but we were looking for a chief designer. They had a familiarity with Jerzy, and so they put us together. We had a meeting and we decided he would take over the practice as chief designer. I was managing the office at the time – we had about sixty-nine people there. Jerzy was interested in being able to build some designs as opposed to being a theoretician, so he agreed to join us. We, on the other hand, had a number of projects that were coming along that required a level of expertise he could certainly offer. But he came on the condition that he will be able to bring some of his people from the Graduate School of Design, including Alan Baer and Bill Whitney.

S.R.: Were you already working in the office when he came?

E.L.: Oh, yes.

S.R.: What was your role as the manager of the office?

E.L.: Well, we had sixty-nine people, with the design department, the construction department, the structural department, the specifications section... My role was to oversee the personnel.

S.R.: Were you designing too?

E.L.: Yes, it is interesting, because the office did not start that large. I was functioning primarily as a designer, but then the owner of the company said to me, "you can either design, in which case we will have somebody manage, or you can manage in which case you will oversee the design and participate as much or as little as you want". So I chose to take the managerial role.

S.R.: What was his role in the practice as the chief designer?

E.L.: For example in the school designs, where we had to deal with the school committees, and building committees and mayor and whatever, that was the area he was the least interested in and least experienced in. We had a number of people who were very strong in terms of the construction end of things, so the idea was that he would build a team where he would provide the ideas and we had other people who would execute them.

S.R.: Was he the person who was building the team?

E.L.: No, basically I was.

S.R.: You told that he was brought to the practice thanks to the contacts with some other Polish architects...

E.L.: It was just a reference: just people who knew him.

S.R.: Were they former students of Sołtan's?

E.L.: No, they were not. I think there was a Polish community and they knew there were architects practicing in the States in the area. They were actually of entirely different philosophies. The project I had done with the Polish architects who introduced us to Jerzy were entirely different from what we did with him. They were of different schools of architecture. Or, as he would have put it, "they were of no school". [laughs]

S.R.: What was the difference between them?

1 Haldeman and Goransson Architects and Engineers from Boston.

E.L.: They were working on different projects. The whole philosophy of architecture was different. Jerzy was Le Corbusier all the way... These people were not. They were divided into teams and worked on different projects in different areas.

S.R.: Actually, he never spoke well of the education that he had received in Poland before the war...

E.L.: We never had that kind of discussion really. He basically did not discuss it. He discussed his relationship with Corbu much more.

S.R.: That would be because it had marked him much more...

E.L.: Yes. Actually, whatever discussions we had with Jerzy that were about Poland, they were war-related, as opposed to school-related.

S.R.: How was he connecting his teacher's duties with the practice? How often was he working at the office?

E.L.: Almost daily. We opened up an office in Harvard Square right above the Coop, so that he would not have to commute to Boston, so I would go there, with Bill and Alan,[2] and we had a studio right there, so whenever he could break away, he was able to come over. We just fit ourselves in when he was available.

S.R.: Oh, so it was easier for him even if he was teaching at the time...

E.L.: Yes, that is exactly how it was. "I have an hour, meet me", and then he would go back. And if he was not working daily, he would leave an assignment that we would have to do when he would come back.

S.R.: How was he working with the others?

E.L.: Those were primarily his hands. I mean, they understood him because they worked and knew him from school. I would say the closest relationships were those two. My job was to be able to coordinate what they were doing with people who had to do the construction drawings and the people who had to go out on the field once it was being built. I would be one to go to the school committee meetings with Bill Whitney, whereas Jerzy would not.

S.R.: Sołtan would not?

E.L.: Generally not. He had to go in some cases, because people wanted to meet him, but it was not what he wanted to do.

S.R.: How was the teamwork? In Warsaw he created a group of architects and artists that was very prolific in designs and creative work... Was he receptive to others' ideas?

E.L.: Oh, very much so, because if we had a contract, for example the Salem High School, that had to be built with a particular budget. I had to be the one to say, "I love it, but they are not going to love it and we cannot afford to do it". And he was receptive to that. But if it was something really important, he would press it, and I would press on his behalf. If it were something that was impractical from a construction standpoint, he would understand that as well.

S.R.: Were there some recurring ideas or elements in the designs that you recall being important for him?

E.L.: Oh, yes, absolutely. First, it was a module, the Modulor. It was critical to everything. But there were individual design elements, like *brise-soleil* that were repeated in a number of buildings. And the use of materials, the use of colours and the use of graphics – that was consistent. He reminded us frequently to design from the general to the particular and from the particular to the general. The detail of the leaning rail for example, received a great deal of attention.

S.R.: Were you often using Modulor?

E.L.: Philosophically, yes.

S.R.: Do you remember some of the examples of that colour or material use that was important for him?

E.L.: Not specifically, there are graphic examples, and if you look at the work, you will see a number of similarities. Actually, we were doing a great number of schools and ours was one of the most important school

2 William Whitney and Alan Baer were architects at Haldeman and Goransson. They have collaborated with Sołtan on the architectural designs developed by the practice.

designing practices at the time in the area. You will see similarities in terms of the elements used in those buildings, whether it was Newton, Lynn, Brockton, New Bedford or Salem...[3]

S.R.: Speaking about his own designs, were there some of them that he was particularly affectionate of?

E.L.: Definitely Salem High School, and the two New Bedford schools.

S.R.: Why was that?

E.L.: Because they came closest to executing to what he had in his mind during the construction phase and afterwards. And they were remarkably different from anything else that was built in the area at the time. Salem is also certainly my favourite example of what we did.

S.R.: Do you remember him recalling some designs of his own before his coming to the United States?

E.L.: No, I do not. In fact, one of the primary successes was that we were building a lot more in that period than he had built before.

S.R.: Do you remember him naming other architects and their designs? Of course, there was Le Corbusier, but someone apart from him?

E.L.: Of course, Le Corbusier. In general, he did, but I could not name specifically, but he would point out the difference between what we were doing, and between what somebody else was doing. But it was pretty much the religion. I mean, we would have discussed Frank Lloyd Wright, and he did not have high regard for him. I, as a young architect, would look at Corbu and be impressed, and I would look at Wright and be impressed... But I was corrected.

S.R.: What was wrong with Frank Lloyd Wright?

E.L.: I do not think we got into the specifics, into what was wrong... He did not follow the same rules as Corbu.

S.R.: Was there something specific about Le Corbusier that Sołtan was recalling?

E.L.: I think it was the discipline... The discipline of the rules, the way things were handled.

S.R.: Do you remember some ideas that were at the beginning of the design, some initial inspirations?

E.L.: That is an interesting question... We also had a programming department, there was a gentleman, his name was Peter Mayer, who was a German architect, and he would write a very specific programme about the use of the buildings. And there were some very innovative features in the terms of how a classroom should be. The schools we are going to see in Brockton were radically different in terms of open plan classrooms from anything that had been done before. And that was based on these programs, so we did not start without an ample program. In fact, Jerzy used to say, "to design requires talent, but to program requires genius". And he reminded us of that constantly. He would not go to do a classroom without a better understanding of how the teacher and the students react in that classroom and how they relate to one another. There were atriums and common gathering spaces that had never been done in this area before. And that was based on the programming aspect. So we spent a lot of time with clients developing that first programme before we even put a pencil on paper – actually not a pencil, but a piece of charcoal. He only used a tissue with charcoal.

S.R.: Was he involved in the preparation of those programs?

E.L.: Not so much. That was pretty much the programming department in our office. Them and this individual, who were preparing the programs. It was quite substantial.

S.R.: Actually, last week when I was to the Salem High School, I was also talking to the building manager, and he mentioned that one of the important assets of the school is how wide the corridors are...[4]

E.L.: Yes, and that was very carefully thought out and it was to be a place for gatherings, the ability of people to use that space to associate with one another, as opposed just to walk from classroom to classroom.

3 Series of educational designs by Haldeman and Goransson around Massachusetts where Sołtan was the leading architect: Salem High School in Salem (1970), Oak Street School in Brockton (1975), Plain Street School in Brockton (1976), Carney Academy in New Bedford (1976), Hayden McFadden School in New Bedford (1975), and Breed Middle School in Lynn (1977); extensions to Newton Davis School in Newton (1975), Underwood School in Newton (1975), and Lincoln-Eliot School (1975).

4 Visit to the Salem High School on March 27th, 2019.

S.R.: How was the work proceeding? Was it a brainstorming in the studio; or rather was he thinking of something by himself and then coming to the practice with his mind already settled?

E.L.: Oh, both. He would come up with an idea and a little sketch and say, "do this", but we would discuss it together. But I think you put your finger into something very important here. It would be a mistake to look at his architecture and say, "oh, this is one of Sołtan's designs because the windows are similar". Yes, that was true, but that was based on where the sun was and on the orientation of the building. But that was only a part of the design. Deciding that the corridor should be wider so that people could function in the space and opening up the classrooms to one another, or doing a lecture hall with windows in it because you were not always in a darkened room. Those elements and the way the building functioned, and the central cores in the circulation, everything was much a part of his theory, as the architectural visual elements that you will see when you look at it. It would be a mistake not to put a proper emphasis on those elements as well.

S.R.: Do you remember some particular manners of design – some work with sketches, some with models, some for instance with sections... Was there something that was important for him?

E.L.: Well, he would always do sketches on tissue with charcoal; he would not pick up a pencil or a marker. He always wanted yellow too. You could not give him a piece of white paper. And he always wanted models. We always produced models.

S.R.: Just out of curiosity, is it possible that the charcoal drawing was something he inherited from Le Corbusier?

E.L.: I think so. It was strange to us. Those of us who went to school in the United States, we never had in our hands a piece of charcoal.

S.R.: You were working together over a long span of time – it was not only in the practice, you also did a competition in the late eighties...

E.L.: Oh, that was the Holocaust memorial competition.

S.R.: Exactly... Did you see something changes in his method of work, in his design over that time?

E.L.: No, I do not think there was a change of his method of work. Actually, we were working with another individual, Ed Vitagliano. He has since passed away; he was a very nice person... There was no obvious Corbu influence in what we did. We did not win the competition, but it was an extremely emotional experience. We spent a lot of time on that... Also, my family is Jewish, lost people in the Holocaust, whereas he told us about fighting the Germans on a horse. I get emotional even now while discussing the process... Going through that process with him was totally different from anything we had done before and the project was gut-wrenching. The design was intentionally unattractive. It was meant to elicit a strong visceral reaction from people. You could see that it brought back everything he went through during the war. It was totally different from anything I had experienced with him before.

S.R.: What was the main idea?

E.L.: It was very low, shallow, with a skull in the middle. [looking at the plan of the monument] That is it, actually a schematic version of it. There was a skull in crystal – death – and it was basically a copper recessed saucer. There were symbols around in the terms of how many people died and where they came from, but the skull was ultimately the death...

S.R.: Why did you decide to come back together to do this competition? How was your relationship with him throughout the years?

E.L.: Well, we maintained contact with each other. I mean, we became good friends, and it was a very wonderful relationship. There are three people in the world who are the most important influencers in my life – and he was number one. He was my mentor in architecture. And you know, the fact that I got to spend so much time with him was a treasure to me. I also felt he was grateful to have a relationship with me because I was able to help him to build things, and that was very important as well.

S.R.: In fact, in Poland he had a series of deceptions due to buildings not being built for various reasons. There was for instance a design for a church... did he talk about that?[5]

5 Interview with Joanna Sołtan.

E.L.: I remember him discussing it... I remember though another very interesting design we did, a little gem of a building we did in the theatre district in Boston. It never got built, but it was a little glass crystal structure. In the meantime, the practice's name changed, but there were the same people working on that... It was totally different from anything we had done. If you saw it, you would never guess that it came from him. But it was brilliant. Just this year I saw somebody finally starting to build on this site, it sat empty for many years... Jerzy was very proud of that building though. It was extremely complicated, very complicated – and actually, that looks like a chapel. [pointing at the sketch of the elevation of the World Class Restaurant] I recently designed a project just with those domes and my client asked me, "where do they come from?"... It must have been a flashback.

S.R.: Was it a common practice to produce models, like the one of the restaurant?

E.L.: Yes.

S.R.: Coming back to the schools, what were the issues he was attentive to while designing the schools? What was important for him?

E.L.: Well, surely it was starting with the program. Then, the classical elements that were there all the time, in terms of orientation, movement of people and how they function in between. That – in conjunction with the physical elements of the practice of architecture – that was common through all of them...

S.R.: I have seen that there were six locations of the school in Salem...[6]

E.L.: Oh, we did several locations and actually, we built it in a quarry, which caused difficulties in terms of excavating stone and all that. It was all rock. I do not remember much about the other alternatives.

S.R.: Do you remember why there were the alternatives?

E.L.: Oh, it was not up to us to decide it, it was the city.

S.R.: Was there a reason that the school was somehow recessed in between the rocks, instead of building on a basement of them?

E.L.: We had a number of ball fields we had to locate on the site in addition to the building itself. And he was just as involved in the site plan and working on the shape of the parking lots, as he was in the building itself... he worked on where the ball fields were going. He also used graphics on the wall: he did that commonly in lots of the schools. Did you look at Newton? There were some small additions to schools in Newton and there are some very interesting graphics there.

S.R.: I was looking at the typical design. If I am not mistaken, it was the first example of those graphics.

E.L.: [looking at the typical wall design] Yes, those graphics were something really important to him. He spent a lot of time studying that.

S.R.: Why was it important?

E.L.: Well, it was a blank wall. Kids were supposed to play ball against those walls. But it was not an easy sell to the school committees... First, while talking about buildings such as those in Newton, up to this day there is a question of whether you do a brand new building as an addition to an old building, or whether you try to do something to coordinate one with the other. His position was, "we are doing a new building, it is independent, we are going to do the best we can and we will attach it and if they do not look like they belong together, that is not an issue". That freed him up from putting colonial windows in a contemporary building. However, that discussion goes on from then to now, and it always will. For instance, one of the buildings in Newton was very industrial and it had some clerestories on the roof that were very industrial looking to get light into the space below. It does not look as if the building was attached to an old two-storey Georgian school building.

S.R.: I remember also that one of the recurring elements were the staircases... in Salem and the again in New Bedford.

E.L.: Oh, the staircases... I still do my staircases like that. I am doing a house right now with the same staircases. Because he taught us that you can have some freedom with staircases. People spend a lot of time going up and down, so one may make something about it... The curved landings and the projecting roofs with the light coming down from the top were recurring. A staircase to him was a building... It was very carefully thought out. For him, it was an element one was really free to design – he acted that way.

S.R.: It is similar to some ideas of Louis Kahn...

E.L.: That reminds me, he spoke quite highly about Louis Kahn, he liked him a lot better than he linked Frank Lloyd Wright.

S.R.: Have you seen the recent renovation of the Salem High School?

E.L.: No, I have not. [looking at the photographs of the Salem High School after renovation] They have changed the bricks, I wonder why... I mean, it is not offensive, but it was all red. I simply do not understand why they changed the bricks. There were no issues with them as far as I know. However, the biggest question would have been energy because at that time we did not have insulated glass. In fact, the building was electric, and I would assume the biggest thing to change would have been the HVAC systems.

S.R.: According to what I was told in the school, the brick was deteriorating fast, it was detaching itself from the wall. They have also changed some interior finishing because they contained some asbestos apparently.[7]

E.L.: Not that I recall, but there were materials that had asbestos in them that... we did not know they had asbestos in them. If you wanted a tiled floor at that time, it was very likely it could have had asbestos, but we did not know it. It was not known of course at time that it was noxious, so we used asbestos to save lives – it kept buildings from burning down. And the problems were in fact with the manufacturer of the product as opposed to the use of it... [looking at a photograph of the main East elevation of the Salem High School with the rocks] Oh, that is a great picture, with the rocks...

S.R.: I think it is very interesting, the idea of how the building is being surrounded by the rocks...

E.L.: That is very much his thinking, actually.

S.R.: I think it helps the building to appear more human-scale... When you approach on foot and you follow the path, the first time you see the school, you see it from a hill – you see it from above, it seems in that way less... dominant. Was it something that was part of the reasoning on the design?

E.L.: Oh, it was very carefully thought out by him. It is very much what he was thinking. I had received a degree in landscape architecture before I went to architectural school, and I was constantly fascinated by how much he knew about that than me. [laughs]

S.R.: Continuing on the rocks, was it deliberate that the side corridors were ending with a view on the rocks?

E.L.: Oh, absolutely. And the thought that went into the windows divisions composition was the same thought that got into this. [pointing at the typical wall design graphics drawing and at a photograph of the window at the end of the side corridor in the Salem High School] Everything like that was important.

S.R.: That is for instance how the renovated corridors look like...

E.L.: [looking at a photograph of a renovated main corridor of the Salem High School] Well, they have changed floors and ceilings... but it is not that different.

S.R.: Was there already a code of colours for different sections of the school when you were designing it?

E.L.: Oh, yes, absolutely.

S.R.: Actually, when I was preparing myself for the visit to the school, I was skimming through websites with comments on the schools. Even if the majority of them are rather about the pedagogy or about the quality of food in the cafeteria, there were quite a lot of them – negative – about the school that was falling apart around them. The building was in a dire need of renovation.[8]

E.L.: They do not do maintenance on buildings... They would find the money to build it, but the city council would vote for a new school, it would not vote to fix the old school. It is not really sustainable.

S.R.: What about this lighting? [pointing at a corridor lighting from the Salem High School] Was it

6 Slides with various positions of the school around Salem, see: HGSD-JS, series CB, 4A-1.

7 Visit to the Salem High School on March 27th, 2019.

8 Niche, *Salem High School Reviews* (2019), <https://www.niche.com/k12/salem-high-school-salem-ma/#reviews> [accessed May 22nd, 2019].

Sołtan's idea? It reminds me of an interior designed in Poland, the railway station in Warsaw.

E.L.: All custom, I have a piece of that lighting down in my office actually. Those fixtures did not exist, they were custom-made for the job, but it was a job big enough that they were willing to do it. And absolutely, it was his idea. The horizontal element was tying the whole building together, whether it was the windows, the lights, the materials...

S.R.: However, there was a major change in the courtyard – there is now a boiler in there, they needed a space to place it somewhere...

E.L.: Oh my God, that was because the building was electric... We spent many hours on that courtyard... [laughs] That is terrible, even though I understand the reason.

S.R.: Let us move towards that wall graphics design that we mentioned before and the arts in those designs. I have found that you have collaborated with a Polish painter, Fangor, on the design for the Breed School in Lynn.[9]

E.L.: Oh, yes – he was a good friend of his. I remember his name: I remember that he was involved and that Jerzy wanted to bring him in as a consultant. In Lynn we also had a landscape budget and I wanted to plant a big beech tree in front of the school, but then I was never sure whether it would remain... [looking at the photographs of the exterior or the Breed School in Lynn] But the building, obviously it was not being greatly taken care of – the concrete is quite filthy...

S.R.: About the exterior areas at the back, was it thought as the extension of the classroom outside?

E.L.: Yes, that was the idea. However, it seems as if the windows have all been replaced. It was one strip window, and now it looks solid. It is certainly not what we did. The idea was that when you are in the classroom, you would have natural light coming through the strip windows and a view window, but not a huge distraction. The entire strip was glass. I am glad I did not go there with you... [laughs]

S.R.: Were there some changes in the Oak Street School in Brockton too?

E.L.: [looking at the present-day elevation of the Oak Street School in Brockton] Well, sadly this is how it looked the last time I saw it. In fact, for the top part, we used robust metal panels that were normally used for the subway... but even though, the lack of the school maintenance was too much for them. And the windows under the metal panels, they do not look transparent. The success of those two schools – this one and the one in Plain Street – was that they were built with an industrial building system: open plan, open webs and cost per square foot remarkably less expensive than what they had in other school buildings. It was a real achievement in terms of finance.

S.R.: Is it most of all bad maintenance? Did they change anything according to you?

E.L.: It looks as if they closed the strip windows again – underneath the panel, the horizontal strip, we always did those in glass. Both here – and it looks like in Lynn too – they have replaced it with something solid, which leaves no natural light inside the rooms...!

S.R.: The Plain Street School seems better maintained...

E.L.: [looking at the present-day elevation of the Plain Street School in Brockton] Yes, this one seems to be in a much better condition... But they still made the opaque panels instead of the strip windows, it could be for energy saving or something... but there is no light in the rooms... At least, it is not vandalised. [pointing towards the barracks addition to the school] That is a sense of an addition though... Those are just simple modules. How can one do things like that...?

S.R.: And what was the pergola for? Was it detached from the rest?

E.L.: It was just a place for the kids to wait for the school bus to come. It was never connected. However, they have changed wood: that would not have been exposed.

S.R.: Let us talk now for a while about the Mellon Bank. I have found some correspondence between Sołtan and the bank director about the choice of the artwork in the bank. Apparently, Jerzy Sołtan did not like what they had chosen and he even proposed them to give free consultancy to choose better paintings.[10] **Do you remember that event?**

E.L.: Yes... [laughs] Yes, it is absolutely true. It was because of the location of the artwork, it was not just about hanging a picture on the wall. It was an integral part of the design. Let me give you a little background... This was the first Mellon Bank office in Boston area. They took a space in 1 Post Office Square under construction. We literally took the job while the construction was going on. It was twenty-first floor, if I remember correctly. They have since expanded and have entire buildings in Boston, but these were their first offices. I was introduced to them by a friend of mine who gave me a referral. While I was working with Jerzy, he added a number of things, and that was including putting mirrors in the ceiling, which was pretty unconventional for an old American bank client, like Mellon. [laughs] There were round mirrors – and he did that because there was a limited height under the ceiling, and he wanted to expand it visually. Thus, the windows along the sides had mirrors above them, and it looked like a two-storey glass instead of a one-storey glass. The other thing was that the column covers were custom-made in bronze, and the walls were panels of wood – I think mahogany. And there were specific recesses in the walls in individual offices made to have artwork. It was to be an integral part of the design of those walls. That is why it was critical to him what kind of artwork was going in. Everything was very different looking from anything we have seen before. We knew it was very hard to sell to the client. Moreover, we made the whole presentation: the client representative was supposed to come to Boston, but he could not make it, so I had to go to New York. In the meantime, the contract for the entire interior fit-up for Mellon bank was waiting to hear what the response was going to be, because there was a tight timetable. And it was my job to go by myself to meet with this guy and to sell him the mirrors in the ceiling and custom-made column covers, and recesses for artwork... I was very nervous about it, because I figured he was just going to throw me out of his office. When I showed him everything, there was no response... not a smile, not a wink. So when I was all done, he just asked, "have you completed your presentation?", and I said, "yes, I have. Is there anything else? What would you like me to do from here?", and he said, "well, build it of course". It was a million dollar interior back when a million dollar interior meant a lot of money... In fact, everybody in the office was waiting impatiently, because everybody else was doing painted walls and hung ceilings, no mirrors and certainly no places for artwork more than a hook on the wall... And they built it exactly the way we designed it, and it came out spectacular, but when Jerzy came to see it, all he could see was this artwork in these recesses that he did not like... It was a very memorable experience, because you do not often get a client who gives you that much freedom and that much exposure with the budget, and I had to present something that was avant-garde for such a client, so it was very memorable.

S.R.: It was great though that it was as you designed it...

E.L.: Oh yes, it ended up spectacular, and very unusual for the client too.

S.R.: Did they change the artworks afterwards?

E.L.: No. I was trying to avoid angering Mellon Bank too. It is kind of a big client. [laughs] And also the work material – we had to find people able to produce an interior like this...

S.R.: Were they hard to find?

E.L.: Not if you are Mellon Bank. [laughs]

S.R.: What happened afterwards with your collaboration?

E.L.: We had intentions of breaking into three companies – there was the original Haldeman and Goransson, which became Sweco, because we were working with a Swedish company. There was Archimetrics, which was going to be more of an engineering oriented division. Then, we were going to establish a "Sołtan" for projects like this restaurant, but we never went that far. We had some pretty interesting brochure proposals for the Sołtan as a company, but it never went ahead. Of course you realise, the practice of architecture and the economy, they go like this. [makes a sign of a sinusoid] We were one of the biggest school architects and then there was no more funding for schools, they stopped building schools... You have to move to something else.

S.R.: Was it then because of the general economics that the Sołtan branch of the company was not created?

E.L.: Yes. [pointing at a series of portraits of Sołtan] Those were actually taken when we were making the brochure for the new company.

9 *Jerzy Sołtan*, ed. by Jola Gola, p. 274.

10 Sołtan to George Farrell (Mellon Bank) from November 1st, 1982, see: MASP-JS.

S.R.: What about your own work – do you follow some design pattern you have seen while working with Sołtan?

E.L.: There was one project where I went solar. It was based on what he had taught me, and it was already past the point where he was involved on a daily basis. Unfortunately, in my practice since that time I had no clients that allowed me really to express myself the way I would like to. Then, I do not fancy positioning myself at any way near the level of his design capability: my role was to execute the designs, as opposed to create them. That building though was a housing project in Fall River.[11] We won an award on it, and I remember his quote was, "proper elements, properly executed". I was very complemented by that. I show it to him, nervously, it was to see whether I have learned anything, and he was very complimentary. Then much of what I was doing was modular houses – that was a big part of my career after I left and started my own practice. Obviously, there are elements still in my head that I use on a regular basis, but I have not had that kind of projects that leave you so much liberty. It is disappointing to be this far in one's career and have the people still decide what style the building they are looking for. And if I look backwards in time at what happened with the whole school of architecture in the so-called postmodern era, that would never have happened when he was teaching. At some point, it was coming out of the schools, and it was published in architectural magazines...

S.R.: And he was really despising postmodern...

E.L.: Oh, absolutely – so was I, but it did not matter, nobody listened... [laughs] And it still exists. If you look at the new town hall here in Sharon, it is a good example of what we should not be doing particularly in public structures. It is 2019 and we are building something that was bad a hundred years ago. In contrast, I designed this house thirty-seven years ago, when I was working with Sołtan. When I went to build the house, the real estate people said, "we hope that you are never going to sell that, because nobody will know what it is". We put it on a tour of new homes, and people could not figure out how to get in, because it was not a central colonial entrance. The floorplan does not match anything... It was a rarity then and it still is.

11 Bishop Eid Apartments for the Fall River Housing Authority. Published by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy Resources in 1983.

Carl Rosenberg and Larry Philbrick

April 3rd, 2019 in Cambridge, MA

Architects and sound specialists, members of Acentech – an acoustics, AV/IT, and vibration consulting company in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They were contacted by Sołtan to collaborate on the design of the Project Diomede in the Bering Sea in 1989.

S.R.: Do you recall how you started your collaboration?

C.R.: Just to give you some background, I took a course at MIT in architectural acoustics under Robert Newman, who was a teacher in architectural acoustics at MIT and at Harvard. He was an outstanding teacher and a very well established acoustician. That was my first introduction to the subject: it was enticing, intriguing and I did well on that course. He and two other partners started the consulting firm Bolt Beranek and Newman. They provided consulting for architects, and their first project was the United Nations building. I was fortunate enough, after my graduation and after obtaining the stamp of an architect, to get a job at Bolt Beranek and Newman. Actually, at that time, Bob Newman taught a course in architectural acoustics at Harvard GSD, at MIT and he travelled to other places, he was also asked to give a course at Princeton University. In 1978 the fellow who had been teaching at Princeton before Bob, had a stroke, so I started teaching and filling in for that. It was only once a week for six weeks, it was only a little course. In 1983, Bob Newman suffered a fatal stroke, and at that point, he was teaching his standard repertoire of courses at Harvard and at MIT. In order to fulfil the course, which he had started, they had asked Richard Bolt and myself to fill in. Then, from 1983 on, I took architectural acoustics at MIT and I filled in an *ad hoc* basis teaching at Harvard. However, it was an introduction to the GSD as a visiting lecturer only: it was not a full course. Certainly it was not a teaching load a normal professor has, it was not a studio load, but it meant that people who run studios could look at the rest of the faculty as 'resources to draw on'... and I think that was the sort of connection that Sołtan made. He reached out to me saying, "I am doing this project, I am a teacher at Harvard, and I would like to talk about acoustics". And for me, it was wonderful to meet a designer, and not just another hack architect. In fact, some of the highlights of my career were to work with some wonderful architects. I did some consulting projects with Philip Johnson or with José Sert. Those were great opportunities to meet wonderful people, and to see how they would approach design projects.

L.P.: Actually, I was at the GSD from 1972 to 1975, I believe, and I have taken a studio under him. However, I cannot tell you much about it: I do not remember much of it.

S.R.: So he contacted you, not the other way round...

C.R.: Yes, I would not have reached him, because I had not known him before. I think it was because of this project in the Bering Sea. I did not work with him on the schools, though a lot of our work in the firm was consulting architects for the schools: I can look at many schools built at that time and say that Bolt Beranek and Newman were working on that...

L.P.: Yes, I think he would contact you. Back then, I did not have much of a name beyond the internal structure of the firm.

S.R.: What was the nature of your contacts on this design, were working side by side of just meeting from time to time?

C.R.: Those were just meetings from time to time: I did not work in the office with him. We talked about it once or twice.

L.P.: Yes, I remember that we met with him after he called and he brought that up. I remember that we had one or two meetings. There would have been one or two sessions in the office, nothing more.

S.R.: Do you remember those meetings?

C.R.: I met with him, and he described the project, if I remember it well – it was an island in the middle of the Bering Sea, halfway between Alaska and Russia, right where the line of the international border would have

been. And this was a peace monument.

S.R.: What was your contribution to the competition?

C.R.: Actually, what you have here, it is not a big part of the submission, there was more. This is just the part that he wanted to present. [looking at the text on the plate n. 8 for the competition] As I look at it, I may have developed this kind of wording... This is a statement of what the acoustics goal was. However, we never took it to the next phase to actually do it. We did not test it out. All we did was to say, "you could do this, this is a fantastic idea". And I still think it is a great idea to make a space that will be visited by people and that would generate some sounds. However, we never knew what the sound would be like – at least I do not remember that we did that. We just developed that idea that there were going to be ways of generating what people would call tones.

L.P.: That is right – when wind would blow through it, it would create sound... When the wind would go through it, whether it would activate all of them or not – it would change the tone.

S.R.: What was the acoustic concept then?

C.R.: The thing that was exciting for me as I recall, it was a study in a form of how Sołtan wanted to commemorate the different cultures and different countries. We talked also about this being an interactive or active site, where the actual structure would generate sound due to the movement of air. There was the question of the wind coming through the structure, and of how to design this to create different sounds. We talked about this and I said, "sure, we can do that. It is not trivial because the wind changes and the direction changes, but this would guide it in and one could imagine creating some kind of sounds, perhaps not music like this[1] would suggest". I think that this is as far as we got. The idea was that you could do that.

L.P.: Yes, it looks like it is playing a melody... That would be tricky...

C.R.: We must have given the idea of sound resonators. There was a lot of mathematics and geometry to it too.

L.P.: [looking at the text on the plate n. 6 for the competition] I think that is what those circles are in the drawing – the resonators. Actually if it were today, we could give him some further ideas, like some moveable elements by the wind, other resonators, they would develop something similar to a melody.

S.R.: Do you remember those elements?

C.R.: I would say that the whole shape of this was a geometric concept driven by his interest in geometry. Then, there was the question of how one can use this and shape in order to make soundbridge was also his basic idea, but I would like to think that we developed that together. We have surely helped him on the principles: there was the issue of resonating chambers, which is not unlike a soda bottle for instance. You could design the cavities – different sizes of them – or the air bottles such that when the air would flow through them, the wind would produce different sounds, you would get then some musical tones. But the actual geometry was obviously of his doing.

S.R.: Do you remember the other competition, the project for an ex-missile site. It was called Project Atlas.

C.R.: I do not remember that, but we may have talked about that. The Bering Sea project is much more familiar to me, and it comes back...

S.R.: Do you recall something particular in your collaboration with Sołtan?

C.R.: I do not remember any particular details, apart from the fact they were very pleasant. I do not have any negative memories of working with Jerzy. I think that if we had had the possibility, it would have been a collaborative design.

S.R.: Do you mean that he was receptive to your insight? Some architects contact sector-specific consultants when the design is almost ready...

C.R.: No, I do not think it would have been like that. In a similar way, we get many architects who design a whole building and then say, "OK, now I have to add acoustics". They come in and then it is terrible, because every design includes acoustics, whether you are conscious or not... In that case, it was quite different, because he wanted to know how those forms would respond to light and sound. And he spent quite a lot of time on the light too. I think he wanted to add those aspects: that is why we were working together.

S.R.: I would say perhaps that he was not compelled to contact you – it seems that it was completely up to him to come up with the decision to contact you.

C.R.: That is very true. My first thought was, "why do you even contact us, it is a monument". So yes, he was definitely receptive and very interested in what we had to tell. And you can tell this was an interesting project because Larry and I, we both do remember it over thirty years. Perhaps not too much in depth, but it surely made an impression on us. There are plenty of designs where we just need to add the acoustics – and we do not remember those.

1 Referring to the plate n. 9 for the competition with melody symbols in the drawing.

relatives
- United States

Joanna Sołtan

March 28th, 2019 in Watertown, Massachusetts

Jerzy Sołtan's daughter, artist and former Curator at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She holds the Jerzy Sołtan family archive.

S.R.: Your father was working with Le Corbusier, and he was in contact with him for the rest of his life. Do you recall something about their relationship?

J.S.: There is so much to recall. After all, it was one of the most important relationships of my father's life. Perhaps the most intense and telling memory for me was witnessing the moment when my father learned about Le Corbusier's death and how devastating it was for him. During his last few years, my father was working on a book, which is currently being translated into Polish and prepared for publication by Centrum Architektury. Its working title is *He and I. About Architecture and Le Corbusier*.[1] It covers many aspects of that relationship, and is a testament to the impact that Corbu had on my father.

S.R.: During the Parisian period, your father was not only working for Le Corbusier, but also he was teaching at Beaux-Arts under Lods. Do you remember him recalling this experience?

J.S.: I do not remember him talking much about the Beaux-Arts except that he was incomparably more excited – stimulated – by the milieu surrounding Le Corbusier. And my father also worked for Pierre Jeanneret.

S.R.: Another connection from that time was the work for Claude Laurens... was he keeping contact with him and with his father, Henri?

J.S.: My father remained close with Claude Laurens. It was a friendship, which continued till Claude Laurens' death. I do not know if he was close to Claude's father (Henri) or to Claude's godfather (George Braque), both of whom he had great respect for.

S.R.: Later on, your father was a member of Team 10. Do you remember contacts with the others? Do you recall some of them in particular?

J.S.: Members of Team 10 were part of my father's professional life and, in most cases, I do not know who he was close to. The few with whom I know him to have been closest to and who were personal friends are Shadrach Woods, Aldo van Eyck, and Georges Candilis. Also, of course Oskar Hansen.

S.R.: What about the Smithsons?

J.S.: I do not know how close the Smithsons and my father were. As a child, I heard their names mentioned but that does not give you the information you are seeking. Other Team 10 members whose names I heard frequently were Jaap Bakema and Alexis Josić. When we lived in Poland, communication with the West was difficult. My father's contacts with these people took place mostly when he was out of the country or by, very censored, mail.

S.R.: But he was close to the Aujames, and they were away too...

J.S.: My father's and my parents' close friendship with Edith and Roger Aujame was very clear to me even during my childhood in Poland. The Aujames came to visit us in Warsaw. They were like the second parents to me when I lived in Paris. They visited my parents many times after my parents moved to the United States. I heard often how my parents served as matchmakers through whom Edith met Roger when they lived in Paris.

S.R.: Do you remember any other names of architects your father was close to?

J.S.: I hesitate to give names because there were so many, and I just do not know whom he was closest to. Definitely some of his colleagues at Harvard, of course: Walter Gropius, José Luis Sert, Willo von Moltke, Serge Chermayeff, François Vigier, Eduard Sekler, Albert Szabo of course, Alex Tzonis, Joseph Zalewski... and a number of others. His collaborators in Poland. Ihnatowicz, of course. Colleagues from the atelier Le Corbusier (Hanning, Xenakis, Wogenscky). But also so many internationally. Perhaps of interest is that my father spoke six languages and lectured in five, and thus travelled to and connected with fellow architects all over the world.

S.R.: Were there some local, American architects he was interested in?

J.S.: There are surely many that I just do not know about. I know that he admired Louis Khan (because he told me so right after we ran into him in the street and my father introduced us). He was also 'interested' and 'intrigued' by, and he would follow architects whose work he did not particularly like. Such was the case with Frank Gehry.

S.R.: Do you know something about the connections with architectural historians? For instance, I remember reading in his lectures that your father was quite critical towards Hitchcock's involvement in the development of the International Style.[2]

J.S.: Yes. He was very critical of Hitchcock and his writing. He was interested in Curtis. But other than that, I do not know about those connections.

S.R.: And with Frampton perhaps?

J.S.: Yes. They knew each other. He was interested in his writing. I do not know more.

S.R.: Let us talk more broadly, not only about architecture and about architects... Your father was working sure as an architect, but also as an artist – was there a difference between those two, was there a clear division between the two?

J.S.: To fully 'nail' my father's thinking on this topic would require a very long, in depth answer. As a horrendous abbreviation, I would say that in some aspects he was very aware of the sharp distinction between art making and architecture (the freedom, independence and often solitary aspect of art making contrasted with the collaborative aspects, importance of context and designated function of architecture). On the other hand, he believed in a fluidity, porous borders between different forms of creativity (he believed that his art making nourished his architecture and vice versa). Making art was quite important to him. He created many original drawings and copied works by many artists while prisoner of war during WW2 from 1939 to 1945. At the suggestion of Le Corbusier, he made an effort to study with Fernand Léger while in Paris, and continued making sculptures, drawings and printmaking later in life (both in Poland and the US).

S.R.: What about Fangor? They were collaborating both in Poland, for instance on Brussels EXPO Pavilion or the Warsaw railway station, but then also here in the US on some of the school designs ...

J.S.: My father's relationship with Fangor was both that of a creative collaboration and a close friendship.

S.R.: At the Fine Arts Academy I have found even a recommendation from Sołtan for Fangor's exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.[3]

J.S.: Yes. My father had great respect for Fangor and great appreciation for his art (way before Fangor became the international star he is today). In general, it seems to me that my father was fortunate or gifted in building strong teams and collaborated with talented 'creatives' working in a variety of media. Jerzy Nowosielski is another example of a talented painter he collaborated with,[4] Stanisław Skrowaczewski – example of collaboration with a composer, etc.[5]

S.R.: Apart from the fact that he was himself working on art and that he knew other artists, was he also interested in collecting art?

J.S.: No. My father was not a collector. Ownership did not interest him. You probably know that my father lost or had to leave behind pretty much everything he owned several times in his life. By the time I was old enough to observe him, creation, ideas, and experience seemed to be his driving forces. Ownership was not. Most of the art he had were gifts from fellow artists and family portraits.

1 Gauchat refers to the book he was helping transcribing for Sołtan, see: interview with Urs Gauchat.

2 Called "matchbox architecture", notes for a lecture at the École d'Architecture at the Université de Montréal from November 15th, 1990, see: MASP-JS.

3 Sołtan to John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation from December 5th, 1968 with candidature of Fangor, see: MASP-JS.

4 Collaboration on the designs for churches in Nowa Huta (1957) and in Sochaczew (1958).

5 Collaboration on the design for the Brussels 1958 EXPO Pavilion (1956).

S.R.: Do you recall some visits of the fellow members of the Harvard Faculty?

J.S.: I should clarify that for much of my father's Harvard period I did not live with my parents and thus have no extensive knowledge about this. When I lived with my parents or visited, among guests were Eduard Sekler, J. L. Sert, Albert Szabo, Moshe Safdie, Vigier, Woods, von Moltke (and I am sure to be forgetting many).

S.R.: Was your father commenting on the difference between teaching in America and teaching in Poland?

J.S.: I do not remember much about his specific comments – however, the main difference was the overall political and cultural atmosphere and amount of freedom he was given to pass on to his students what he most deeply believed in. When my father was teaching in Poland, it was during the 1950s and 1960s. Poland was pretty much under Soviet occupation then. Borders mostly shut. What was given for granted was the superior value of Social Realism. Modernism was disapproved of. Anything happening in the West was to be viewed as decadent and forbidden. In order to pass on to his students his strongest beliefs, my father had to resort to all kinds of intellectual gymnastics.

S.R.: Was it difficult to go from the Polish system into the American one?

J.S.: As far as I know, it was not difficult. Keep in mind that the transition was very gradual. My father had begun his relationship with Harvard as a Visiting Lecturer and his involvement increased slowly, over years. While in Poland, it was possibly his design and architectural work that took more of his creative energy while teaching brought in some frustrations. The balance changed in the U.S. where teaching seems to have dominated (hence, also, the Topaz Medallion for Architectural Education awarded to him by AIA/ACSA).

S.R.: Thus the Workshops in Poland. They were very important, weren't they?

J.S.: Yes. Much energy and creativity went into it. My father was very passionate about what they were doing.

S.R.: Was he in contact with the people from the Workshops when he was here?

J.S.: I do not know if and with whom – except for Wojciech Fangor, who also moved to the United States and they continued to spend a lot of time together.

S.R.: Concerning the students on the other hand, were there some that you know that remained close?

J.S.: Probably quite a number although that is not something that I would particularly know about - in part because many of his students eventually became his colleagues. The few names that clearly come to my mind are Pierre Jampen, his student at Harvard, who eventually joined the faculty at the Université Laval in Québec, Nader Ardalan, and Paul Krueger. From my father's Polish period as educator – Andrzej Pinno, his student at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, later professor at University of Texas – Arlington.

S.R.: What about Michael Graves? He was a student too...

J.S.: Yes, he did study with my father and even wrote something about my father, but I cannot recall any close contacts or visits at home. They were not as close as Jampen, who invited my father to lecture at the Université Laval and was probably involved in lobbying for my father's receipt of an honorary doctorate from Laval.

S.R.: Do you remember some designs of your father's that he was attached to?

J.S.: One that I remember clearly was the unbuilt design of a church in Sochaczew. My father was both proud of this project and very frustrated about why the project was rejected and what the church elected to build instead. A totally different memory was how my father enjoyed showing people a private home he and Albert Szabo designed in Laconia, New Hampshire for the Narva family. The Narvas enjoyed their home very much, liked to show it to people, and the location is lovely – all of which of course might have added to my father's delight. The stadium in Warsaw was probably also among projects that were very important to him. When I was a child, he took me to the site many times and continued to photograph it.

S.R.: What about the Warsaw Midtown railway station for instance?

J.S.: I do not remember conversations about it. Surely my memory flaws.

S.R.: What about the schools?

J.S.: Yes. Thank you. I do remember my father taking visitors to show them the schools and I do remember that he took many photographs of the schools in different light, different seasons etc.

S.R.: And the last design – what about the design of a church for the Pope?

J.S.: My father worked on it alone and at the time of his death, it was not quite finished. It was to be a very small, intimate and simple meditation space. This project makes me think of the never built church in Sochaczew and how my father, a deeply religious person, continued hoping that he could make this kind of a spiritual contribution to architecture.

S.R.: Was there an established routine of work on his designs? I imagine that with the teaching at Harvard – and especially with the chairmanship, it was enormously time consuming...

J.S.: My father was a workaholic. I am sure that the balance of his activities would change depending on his role and demands of each assignment, but I do not remember him ever needing to take a lazy break. He was passionate about his work. When I was a child, living with my parents in Poland, I remember that my father would teach and attend to various administrative matters during the day and, at night, shift to creative projects either alone or with others, his collaborators. During our family summer vacations in the country, he would occasionally join us for a couple of days, and go back to Warsaw to continue working until the next brief visit.