

Searching for Slowness

A FUTURE-PACED ETHOS



CONTENTS

I - PREFACE

BOOKLET 01

revisiting slow

II - ACTIVITY

BOOKLET 01

evaluating slow

III - TENETS

synthesizing slowness

BOOKLET 01-02

07 *Empathy*

BOOKLET 02-03

15 *Locality*

BOOKLET 03-04

21 *Empowerment*

BOOKLET 04-05

27 *Ownership*

BOOKLET 05

35 *Flexibility*

BOOKLET 06

41 *Interdisciplinary*

IV - REFLECTION

BOOKLET 06

46 *re-write slowness*

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Critical Precedents in Practice
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- I -

PREFACE

Let us re-visit our definition of Slow Architecture:

Slow Architecture is an alternative practice, production, and occupation of architecture, which is attuned to environment and cultural context, with all aspects of the design deeply considered and deliberately working to achieve quality and longevity.

By proposing a new, slow manifesto, we must acknowledge aspects of our process; the conversations you have just read are recalled exchanges – *What was lost in translation?*

The tenets were synthesized thematically from these conversations – *What survey biases are present due to the research “participants”?*

What biases are present because of our own preconceptions and values?

During our process of synthesizing *Searching for Slowness*, our understanding of Slow Architecture has evolved as we conversed, reflected, and categorized our research.

The tenets outlined in the following “reading” of *Searching for Slowness* are just one of many possible distillations of what it means to practice, produce, and occupy Slow Architecture.

- II -

ACTIVITY

Now that you’ve read a series of conversations with architects whose practice or project expresses an ethos of slowness, we invite you to digest and synthesize the themes of the text.

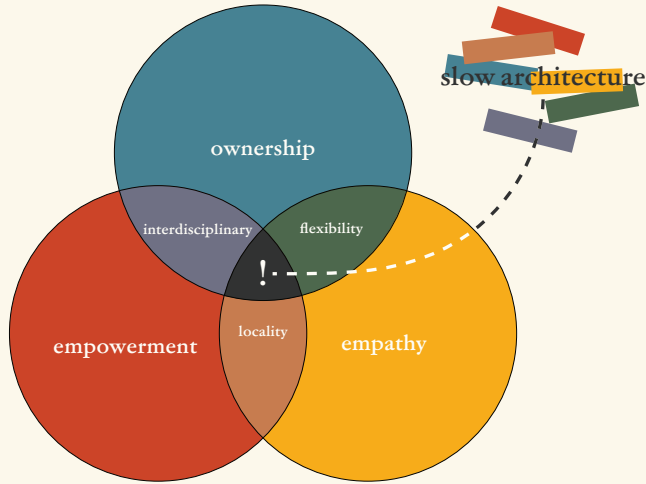
As you unravel the conversations, explore emergent themes and categorize salient moments into key principles of Slow Architecture – we think a successful principle addresses issues of sustainability and equity.

Disassemble the *conversations* “reading” of *Searching for Slowness*, folding each page

in the opposite direction and fixing it by stitch into its thematic partner, *tenets*.

The *tenets* are our synthesis of the conversations. They represent a transformation in our understanding of slowness. Adjust the tenets as you see fit, creating categories that are of interest to you!

You now have participated in *Searching for Slowness*. This booklet serves as your reference guide to understand your relationship to slowness, as well as your contribution to creating a common understanding of what it means to slow down.



Slow Architecture is: an ethos transmitted through empowered people who have ownership in the projects they work on, who above all build relationships and designs which are rooted in their locality, flexible enough to accommodate multivalent perspectives and futures, and are inspired by their environmental context, communicating that intent empathetically through a haptic medium that is thoughtful, rigorously detailed, and informed by the specialized, yet highly interdisciplinary contributors.

EMPATHY

EMPATHY

Empathy wears many hats. Empathy can be created through haptics, allowing for a physiological transference of knowledge and experience through space or representation of space. Empathy embodies slowing down to the pace of another, sympathizing with diverse experiences, and understanding everyday, often concealed, realities.



EMPATHY [em-pa-ty] noun
The imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it.

we hire people who demonstrate a shared spirit of slowness, intentionality, and quality.

relationships

Do you really want to use a material produced by slave labor? Do you really want to use a material that causes cancer for you, loved ones, and people that produce it?

relationships

using the main materials of water, air, and light.

relationships

relationships

the limits of the hand crafted wooden model are often seen as sensible boundaries

relationship

Designing haptically is innate in everyone. Rather than reproducing an architectural version of haptic qualities, our design focuses on experiencing the same source of haptic qualities.

encourage legibility of the
gesture of the human hand,
believing it adds a great value
to the architecture.

relationships

relationships

document and create
atmosphere.

Physical making is a key
component of the office's
architectural production –
Rahul uses the model as a tool
to evaluate the design.

down to the details worked out
in shop drawings.

Slowness is largely a cultural
attitude, and in places with less
of a history of architectural
production, there is a hope
that we can introduce this slow
mindset

an attitude.

The power of what an
architect can do is to make
a gesture, to make space.
And whether a large or small
project, if the gesture and the
haptic qualities are expressed,
then scale is transcended.

One thing that we always work towards communicating is tactility; haptic qualities. Tactility must be communicated for a design to come into fruition, but this can't be communicated via drawings.

emphasize a work life balance for all of our staff

Creating haptic information

relationship

relationships

expressing gesture

we can create architecture just as we can gesture affection. If you design anything that you are personally invested in, then you are sharing this affection.

an environment that fosters

Haptics can only be transferred via haptic medium

You cannot practice the same way there as you can in North America

our belief in the value of
the details – the details on
paper and materialized in
construction

Clients don't understand
architectural drawings,
but they do understand
architecture when they're in
the space, once the floors,
walls, and columns are up.

relationship

hand

LOCALITY

LOCALITY

Slow architecture demands nuance, regionalism and honoring of diversity. Locality encompasses Slow Architecture's need to be site specific, engaged with community, and sensitive to the divergent realities of our global era.



LOCALITY [lə-cal-i-ty] noun

¹The fact or condition of having a location in space or time. ²A particular place, situation, or location

We use whichever materials
are appropriate for that
locality

engage with communities
sooner

international

reality

differently than in North
America

attuned to critical dimensions

material costs

from construction details to
local code to file-management
in the office.

There is a synergistic
relationship – and so much
to learn from these regional
differences. When working
abroad, you have to smell the
ground, figure out who is there
and what they're doing – we
work to design *with* the locals,
not for the locals.

keeping revenue in the region,
this provides local jobs and
allows us to learn from locals

design within any conditions.

I believe that you have a latent sense of locality. The design is already within you, whether you know it or not, and waiting to discover that design is as important as action.

moments to study something difficult to capture in drawing or digitally

We are interested in using slow, raw and whole materials — materials that are not composite or industrially produced, but rather materials that come from the earth.

Local materials are considered in every project — especially in arid and hot climates in the country. The architects are in discussion with the local masons, for example, to talk about the type of construction and techniques they are most familiar with and what is most appropriate for the local site. Often during the geological survey, usable stone is discovered in the soil and the design incorporates this as much as possible so that fewer materials are imported and less waste is generated during excavation.

There is no sense that we are an outside group coming in to teach Rwandans about good design.

Working on a more permanent time-scale

...

are local, not global.

...

honoring the local values and architectural traditions.

...

On each project, local contractors are used, and this also helps to ground the project in the local construction techniques.

...

appropriate for the space.

...

EMPOWERMENT

EMPOWERMENT

Employees, clients, craftspeople, and the public are empowered by Slow Architecture. Empowerment breeds responsibility and care, enabling the production of good, clean, and fair architecture.



EMPOWERMENT [em-pow-er-ment] noun

¹ The act or action of empowering someone or something. ² The granting of the power, right, or authority.

our staff gain a deep understanding of the entire design-construction process.

employees with no higher or design education, but greatly contribute to the office

We must remember that architecture is inherently political and always has been.

There is very little respect for working with your hands

help shape healthy and sustainable supply chains

Our goal is to keep team members on projects for the entire duration.

next decision is more readily to go in the favor of the designer and slowness

The goal is to build back that base of strong craft in the US, and for us to find a network of reliable Artisans to work with.

money flows in smaller circles and shorter radii from the project site – and we use this to benefit the region and our design.

with the entire staff of the firm.

young staff are given a lot of responsibility.

We often show models and model photographs to our contractors, and they immediately understand the design intent in ways that they wouldn't from a drawing set. Our goal is to make the thinnest set of construction documents possible.

Our associates are project managers and construction managers

Its less convincing people, and more institutionalizing these values. This can happen on the academic level – “brainwashing” these concepts of good, clean, and fair into students, exposing them to concepts like embodied carbon, passive design, and the value of sustainable specifications

You can only improve upon something measured; a baseline for cities must be established, and local zoning laws must demand improvement.

staff gain a better understanding

Most people in the office meet
with a potential candidate,
and everyone has a voice.

Responsibility drives passion
and energizes the staff to work
hard and thoughtfully on their
design.

OWNERSHIP

OWNERSHIP

Slow Architecture takes ownership over all decisions made, from design to materials to construction. Ownership asks architects to think holistically about architecture, from pre-construction embodied energy to demolition.



OWNERSHIP [own-er-ship] noun

¹ The state, relation, or fact of being an owner. ² A group or organization of owners.

Specifying clean materials is an ethical issue – creating slow spaces is the largest scale of conscious consumerism.

vision

involved in a significant capacity in every project

with complete control

We learn so much by having control over this process, and we are able to take ownership and accountability for every decision along the way.

trust

reputation

build confidence

As much weight is given to a candidate as a persona and cultural fit as is given to the portfolio, allowing for slowness despite the firm growing

High quality, fairly produced materials simply cost more, and there is no real way around that.

We've created the S.L.O.W. acronym of our values, which is plastered all throughout the office, in our mission statement, and talked about constantly with staff and clients.

...
refuse to let anyone work for even an hour more than we are paying them to.

...
We definitely hire for ethos - everyone on the team has to be on board with the core values.

...
We have no problem shedding light on these issues for clients

in a design build, you have complete control over the final product

...
build confidence

...
highly intentional and discussed in depth

...
designers to be exposed to the whole process.

...
reputation

...
trustworthy

a consistency in ethos of the firm

fully embedded in the design process

the firm structure emphasizes responsibility

Creating architecture is probably about 20% design, 80% execution, and you need to be on site, getting dirty, in order to achieve slowness.

Each designer has handful of projects at a time

Specifications determine how labor is organized, how materials are sourced, and how large the embodied carbon of a project is — this is our greatest source of power as an industry.

If the architect is not intimately involved in the construction, your final product will not only have no principles of slowness, but will also not look anything close to what the architect envisioned.

Creating architecture is probably about 20% design, 80% execution, and you need to be on site, getting dirty, in order to achieve slowness.

in order to have the greatest chance of creating or recognizing this alignment of conditions, you must be involved in all parts of the design that allows for this anticipation.

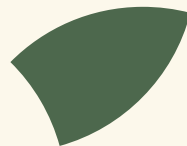
architects specifications are where as a designer you have the most agency

trust

FLEXIBILITY

FLEXIBILITY

There are no hard rules to slowness; flexibility is an appropriateness and willingness to pivot. Flexibility represents a balance between rootedness and docility, in process, design, and occupation.



FLEXIBILITY [flex-i-bil-i-ty] noun

¹ Capable of being flexed. ² Characterized by a ready capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements.

Slowness requires not just infinite time, but the *right* amount of time to push up against. The process of design to execution must be backed by the ethos of slowness and balanced by a sense of appropriateness – there are no hard rules to slowness.

...

Flexibility of a space is client and project specific, however the sense of rootedness is an essential quality

...

Good design is creating a gap in the conditions, creating a tolerance, and operating within that wiggle-room of conditions.

the manifestation of slowness has had to evolve with this change in size from a dozen employees to around forty today.

...

art of effective slowness is understanding the energy being applied to the design process

...

As a non-for-profit, we are positioned uniquely in the architecture industry – not only to attract people with the same values, but also to apply for funding as a non-for-profit. This allows us to do more upfront R+D and engage with communities sooner in the scope of a project.

Creating good architecture is a bit about being at the right place at the right time – it is an alignment of conditions, and an awareness of this alignment to create a gap in reality and create an opportunity.

...

busy at all times: while the designer pushes forward the design, the draftsman can work on another project.

...

Rootedness is inherent in the projects, and this cannot always be sacrificed for flexibility, otherwise all projects would be warehouses with adjustable partitions on a grid.

the structure of the teams and the exact design process shifts to accommodate the project,

...

This is when flexibility comes into play for us – an excellent structure is critical to good design and future changes to the space. Our design team thinks a great amount about the structure, columns, slabs, and walls. These elements, when planned carefully, can grant flexibility to the client when they are able to experience the architecture for the first time.

...

What is at interest in the gap is the pursuit of possibility, not the execution of a project.

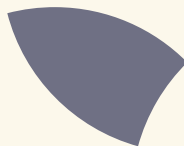
evolved over time

This delegation frees the designer up to spend time as possible on the design, while the drafts-people ground the project in reality and the model builders document and create atmosphere.

INTERDISCIPLINARY

INTERDISCIPLINARY

Breaking out of the insular and elitist discipline of architecture, interdisciplinarity is required of Slow Architecture. From engaging with crafts-people, to understanding the construction and engineering trades, Slow Architecture bolsters and draws from diverse bodies of knowledge.



INTERDISCIPLINARY [in-ter-dis-ci-plin-ary] adjective

¹ Involving two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines. ² Relating to more than one branch of knowledge.

there should be no specialists –
there is no differentiation from
those who design and those
who execute. Designers must
be involved in construction

ignite change through law, at
the local zoning and code level

Having engineers looped into
the design team from the
beginning allows us to work
seamlessly, design with passive
systems in mind, and reduce
redundancies throughout the
process.

architecture and construction
process

responsible development.

the draftsman to execute
to technical specificity, and
the model-maker to bring
physical models to high levels
of resolution.

industry experience

structure, not just the finishes

We became interested
in quality materials,
craftsmanship

a drafts person, a model-
maker, and a principal.

...

construction side

...

Developers

...

specialty

...

Craftsmanship

...

To not think of construction
as part of the design process is
a major flaw of the field today.

Our design process is
branched: there are designers,
drafts people, and model
makers - each with different
rolls in bringing a project to
fruition.

...

Generally we try to have
designers follow through the
entire design process and
life of the project - some
designers are more specialized
in the front end, and others
the back end

...

construction

...

- IV - REFLECTION

Now having participated in *Searching for Slowness*, we invite you to reflect on our tenets

*Are there principles that extend beyond the six which we outlined?
Are there actionable themes of slowness which we have not addressed?*

This is your opportunity to contribute to our common understanding of Slowness, insert your own agenda, understand your biases and explore your values. On the following page, create your own tenet and add text from the conversations which fit your category's theme.

add your tenet here!

add a definition of your tenet applies to slowness here!

what shape is your tenet in the Venn diagram?

add the official definition of your tenet here!

WORD (pronunciation) part of speech
insert definition here
insert alternate definition here

Two horizontal lines for a tenet, followed by ten horizontal lines for a definition.