

**The Architecture Competition as Contact Zone  
Towards a Historiography of Cross-Cultural Exchanges**

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**THE ARCHITECTURE COMPETITION AS CONTACT ZONE:  
TOWARDS A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGES**

SPRING / SUMMER 2020

Introduction

**Architecture as Exchange:****Framing the Architecture Competition as Contact Zone**

Jorge Mejía Hernández and Cathelijne Nuijsink, editors

*Histoire Croisée: A Relational Process-Based Approach*

Bénédicte Zimmermann

**Portuguese Architecture in Transit(ion):****The 1967 International Competition for Amsterdam Town Hall**

Bruno Gil, Susana Lobo, José Ribau Esteves

**Competition Juries as Intercultural Spaces:****Between Evaluation, Experience, and Judgement**

Carmela Cucuzzella

**This is Not a Nest:****Transcultural Metaphors and the Paradoxical Politics of International Competitions**

Jean-Pierre Chupin

**The Architecture Competition: A Beauty Contest or a Learning Opportunity?****The French Case in the Light of European Experiences**

Véronique Biau, Bendicht Weber, Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger

Review Articles by Torsten Lange, Federico Ortiz, Hamish Lonergan

Interview with Sarah Williams Goldhagen

# Contents

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Introduction

- I    **Architecture as Exchange:  
Framing the Architecture Competition as Contact Zone**  
Jorge Mejía Hernández and Cathelijne Nuijsink
  
- 7    ***Histoire Croisée*: A Relational Process-Based Approach**  
Bénédicte Zimmermann
  
- 15    **Portuguese Architecture in Transit(ion):  
The 1967 International Competition for Amsterdam Town Hall**  
Bruno Gil, Susana Lobo, José Ribau Esteves
  
- 39    **Competition Juries as Intercultural Spaces:  
Between Evaluation, Experience, and Judgement**  
Carmela Cucuzzella
  
- 63    **This is Not a Nest: Transcultural Metaphors and the Paradoxical  
Politics of International Competitions**  
Jean-Pierre Chupin
  
- 83    **The Architecture Competition: A Beauty Contest or a Learning  
Opportunity? The French Case in the Light of European Experiences**  
Véronique Biau, Bendicht Weber, Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger

Review Articles

- 99    The Hannes Meyer Seminars at the Bauhaus Dessau (1980–86)  
as a Contact Zone for Finnish and East German Architects  
Torsten Lange

- 111   Architecture Competitions as Pedagogical Tools:  
Bridging the Unit and the Office  
Federico Ortiz

- 125   Pools, Carparks and Ball-Pits:  
Or Why the Notre Dame Restoration Competition is a Meme  
Hamish Loneragan

Interview

- 137   Trading Zones and the Stickiness of Ideas  
Sarah Williams Goldhagen



## Introduction

# Architecture as Exchange: Framing the Architecture Competition as Contact Zone

Jorge Mejía Hernández and Cathelijne Nuijsink, editors

The extraordinary speed with which ideas cross the globe today has prompted architecture historians to consider new modes of writing history. In the face of unprecedented cultural intricacy and rapid change, existing histories of architecture suddenly appear as both limited and limiting devices; unable to grasp the complex processes of global travel, collaboration and exchange that have decisively influenced the way in which we conceive of the built environment. A mere widening of the geographical scope to include previously uncovered regions and cities in our histories, or the recognition of actors other than the single architect-author in our accounts of the production of buildings seem insufficient corrections to the way we write about the past and present of architecture. To understand the growth and development of architecture knowledge as a result of quickly evolving global processes, new histories must account for cross-cultural negotiations and translations of shared architectural questions.

This diagnosis is not new. Current modes of transnational historiography has been the subject of scholarly research since the 1980s. Inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and by the emergence of subaltern studies a few years later, scholars like Swati Chattopadhyay and Mark Crinson, for example, have criticised architectural histories' strong Euro-American bias by directing their focus towards architectures of the southern hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> Another strain of contemporary architectural historiography, used among others by Dell Upton, has

challenged the myth of the single authored building by recognising the host of actors and voices (and the many exchanges between them) that are indispensable for the production of architecture.<sup>2</sup> Yet another novel mode of history writing, linked to global travel, collaboration and exchange, questions passive conceptual metaphors such as 'import /export', as well as the often unidirectional notion of 'influence', and instead registers the complexities and ambiguities of cross-cultural interrelations using concepts like 'translation', 'exchange' and 'reciprocal comparison'.<sup>3</sup>

To contribute to this ongoing quest for more dynamic, inclusive and global histories of architecture, this issue of *Footprint* explores architecture as a series of cross-cultural exchanges, transactions, or 'contact zones'.<sup>4</sup> Appropriating the term from the work of comparative literature scholar Mary Louise Pratt, who defined contact zones as 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of power', we are fascinated by moments and places in which intense transcultural and transdisciplinary exchanges of architecture knowledge take place.<sup>5</sup> Pratt's contact zones are 'intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy',<sup>6</sup> and reveal 'exhilarating moments of wonder, revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom'.<sup>7</sup>

But how to capture these exhilarating moments? Where can we spot them, amid the vastness of architecture and its production over the years? From a number of conspicuous instances of trans-cultural and trans-disciplinary exchange among architects, such as international exhibitions, biennales, summer meetings, development aid programs, and competitions, we have chosen to focus on the latter – the competition – as exemplary of architecture performing as a contact zone.

At the outset, we recognise that the production of knowledge fostered by architecture competitions is not a univocal, unidirectional process, but rather emerges as an open arena for debate between different architecture cultures. The simplest imaginable competition involves a sponsor, a competition brief, at least two competing architectural teams, an evaluator, two or more entries produced as responses to the brief, and some kind of reward. Interactions between these agents range from the technical to the aesthetic, and from language to politics. More commonly though, these numbers are much larger, and include public and private funding agencies, interest groups, several levels of legislation, media attention, a mixed bag of jurors, evaluation criteria, a polytechnical throng of professionals, the projects that result from their work, and of course, prizes.

The convergence of different cultures in architecture competitions is not limited to local identities either. It also includes professional, generational, technological, and political cultures, among many others. Against this proliferation of cultures, present in every competition, focus on a single transcultural discussion (for example, a younger generation superseding an older one; architects from a particular country succeeding beyond colleagues from another) seems futile. Instead, the techniques, theories, and principles required to research and represent a history of architecture competitions point to *exchange* as a much more

enlightening object of study – something discovered three decades ago by scholars like Pratt in their examination of texts and power dynamics.

In line with this realisation, Bénédicte Zimmermann's opening article, *Histoire Croisée*, can be read as an elegant development of Pratt's contact zone, with a cross-border approach directed against territorial categories of exchange. After presenting a succinct explanation of two well-known modes of exchange studies – comparison and transfer historiographies – Zimmerman proposes to complement both lines of inquiry with the third modality of crossed history which, she argues, can syncretise histories' long-term structures and short-term actions at the empirical, epistemological and methodological levels of research. The articles that follow Zimmerman's illuminating text explore a diversity of architecture competitions as contact zones, and reveal the many ways in which the actors and stakeholders involved in those competitions collectively produce and develop architecture knowledge beyond the limits of academia.

Bruno Gil, Susana Lobo, and José Ribau Esteves, for instance, present an in-depth study of a contact zone that encompasses several well-known dichotomies, as it lingers between modernist and postmodernist architectures, mainstream European (central) and Portuguese (peripheral) artistic canons, international abstraction versus localism, and architects' choices for open or closed configurative strategies, among others. True: their comparison of the seven proposals presented by Portuguese architects to the 1967 Amsterdam Town Hall competition does cling to national categories in order to reveal a number of cross-influences that underlie an alleged paradigm shift in Portuguese architecture. However, it also suggests that the seven Portuguese entries can be seen as concrete responses to inter-national professional debates, and even further as points within a broader constellation of local and global political

tensions, supra-national technical debates, and the trans-national academic experiences of individual architects.

A very different type of contact zone is developed by Carmela Cucuzzella in her article 'Competition Juries as Intercultural Spaces'. The cultures involved in this analysis of recent Canadian competitions are not bound to national cultures, as in the above-mentioned case of Portuguese architects in the Netherlands. Instead, her research elaborates on the different value systems utilised by the artistic, technical and managerial cultures that converge in many juries nowadays, as well as their effects in the briefs, evaluations and final outcomes of those competitions.<sup>8</sup> According to Cucuzzella, the contrasting ways in which objective facts, subjective experiences, and normative expectations are weighed and communicated by these different professional cultures, erodes the illusion of a homogeneous architecture community, and brings to the fore the often noxious role of the authoritarian expert who hampers balance and productive deliberation among jurors.

Concurrently, Jean-Pierre Chupin's article 'This is Not a Nest' studies the architecture competition as a contact zone between political forces that operate simultaneously at the local and global levels. The competition process is not depicted here as the stage where national architecture cultures collide, but rather as a positioning device amid globalisation. Revealing an interesting contradiction, the article shows how the very precise language used by competition promoters to situate their built-environmental ambitions in a global context, is strongly related to the deliberately nebulous transcultural metaphors used by participants to make their projects appear neutral, non-partisan and politically correct.

Like Cucuzzella's article, the contribution by Véronique Biau, Bendicht Weber, and Jodelle

Zetlaoui-Léger also focuses on the inner workings of the competition process, this time turning towards the normative and procedural basis on which exchange is carried out. Implicit in this evidence-based study of French and European competitions is a critique of architecture as an artistic discipline carried out by unaccountable experts. Innovation – the authors claim – should not be limited to the former, nor reliability to the latter. Instead, a case is made for *legislation* as a contact zone in itself, which would be able to promote broad and diverse participation in all stages of a competition process, and could therefore (if well designed) lead to architectures that are simultaneously innovative, reliable, but also more meaningful and appropriate.

Iterating on the contact zone as a place where national cultures meet, Torsten Lange's review of the Hannes Meyer Seminars at the Bauhaus Dessau towards the end of the Cold War uncovers professional transactions that have remained rather hidden in the folds of mainstream histories of architecture. The review article studies a contact zone where different architecture cultures meet, but more importantly, situates it at the margins of global power. By doing so, Lange exposes the effects of geopolitical contingency in our profession and on the shape of our cities, and reveals the manifold consequences of casual contact between Finnish and East German architects in construction processes and techniques, urban planning policies and the configuration of housing models in both countries.

In turn, Pratt's critique of the academy (and 'the sort of thinking' that gets done in it) is challenged by Federico Ortiz, whose review article offers a reconstruction of the multiple connections that were established between the budding Office for Metropolitan Architecture and the Architectural Association's Unit 9 diploma studio in the 1970s. The wealth of themes and project strategies discussed, the number and the diversity of actors involved,

and the way academic institutions were utilised to explore architecture and architectural practice as sources of knowledge, support the idea that even within an apparently limited context, competitions foster unexpected exchanges between different professional cultures.

Contact zones have also been characterised as spaces of critique, parody, imaginary dialogue, and absolute heterogeneity of meaning.<sup>9</sup> Hamish Lonergan's review article offers a sharp analysis of memes as expressions of these traits in the dizzying realm of social media. The torrent of proposals to rebuild Paris's most iconic cathedral, he notes, sprung from a virtual competition, snow-balled across established and emerging practices, and revealed the extraordinary weight of architecture communication in our time. Lonergan's use of the contact zone as an instrument to analyse the proliferation of projects sparked by media attention raises provocative questions regarding originality, authorship and reproduction, labour, the legitimacy of architecture institutions, and the role of the individual architect in our time.

Closing the issue we have talked to the architectural historian and critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen, whose seminal description of architecture as a discourse is evidently in tune with Pratt's contact zone and Zimmermann's *histoire croisée*.<sup>10</sup> Goldhagen's reflections on current historiography, postmodern architecture, and architecture competitions bring to light a host of new concerns for architects and historians alike; ranging from the role and nature of architectural education and the irrelevance of style, to the possibility of histories of architecture that should transcend narrow divisions and categories by focusing on key elements of the architectural discipline, such as technique.

Together, these contributions reveal the utility of studying architecture and competitions as contact zones. Framed as inter- and trans-cultural

exchanges between different professional value systems and their normative apparatuses, competitions are certainly much more than discussions among a homogeneous community of designers. They are arenas for public debate, spaces where different world visions are transacted, instances of cognitive growth via competition and collaboration.

It must be noted that the fuller and certainly richer demarcation of architecture and its history which we have captured in this study of competitions as contact zones has brought forth a communicative challenge. Exchanges, interrelations and interactions do not seem to fit, much less be expressible with conventional methods of architectural representation. Consequently, descriptive texts, perspective renderings and crisp photos of buildings – standard illustrations in most journals of architecture – have been mostly replaced by charts, tables, and index cards in these pages, indicating that new modes of writing history inevitably demand new instruments and methods for architectural expression. Aware that every discovery brings forth a new challenge, this realisation leaves us confident that we have assembled a valuable contribution to the growth and development of our knowledge of architectural historiography, by convoking the following, notable attempts to examine architecture and competitions through the methodological frame of the contact zone.

## Notes

1. Swati Chattopadhyay, 'Depicting Calcutta', PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997. Swati Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2005). Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003).
2. A thought-provoking publication that put the spotlight on the clients of architectural houses is Alice Friedman's *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York:

Abrams, 1998). Dell Upton pioneered the approach of addressing the people involved in the design process and ignoring the canonical architects of modernism. Dell Upton, *America's architectural roots: Ethnic groups that built America* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press: 1986).

3. In her PhD dissertation, Esra Akcan used the literary metaphor of 'translation' as a way to understand the global circulation of culture. 'Modernity in Translation', PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2005. She further developed the argument of the liberating and colonial effects of translation in *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, & the Modern House* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). For studies that addresses the complexities of cross-cultural exchange, see for example Tom Avermaete et al., *Oase 95: Crossing Boundaries: Transcultural Practices in Architecture and Urbanism* (Rotterdam: Nai010 uitgevers, 2015). Jean-Louis Cohen and Christa Weil, *Scenes of the World to Come: European Architecture and the American Challenge 1893–1960* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995). The method of 'reciprocal comparison' elucidates how developments in 'peripheries' are no longer compared to Europe but to other previously colonised regions. See for example Alex Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, c. 1840–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
4. Together with Tom Avermaete, Cathelijne Nuijsink is currently defining the larger theoretical and methodological framework of 'contact zones', and its meaning for the field of architecture. See Tom Avermaete, and Cathelijne Nuijsink. 'An Architecture Culture of "Contact Zones": Prospects for Changing the Historiography of Architectural Modernism'. Paper Presentation at the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) Annual International Conference 2020, Seattle, United States. The paper will appear in extended form as a book chapter in the edited volume Vikramaditya Prakash, Maristella Casciato, and Daniel E. Coslett, eds. *Global Modernism and the Postcolonial: New Perspectives on Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2022). With similar ambitions, but using elements

from scientific methodology for the appraisal of architecture, Jorge Mejía Hernández has advanced a new mode of cross-cultural history writing in 'Transactions; or Architecture as a System of Research Programs', PhD Dissertation, TU Delft, 2018

5. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* (1991), 33–40; 34.
6. Ibid., 37
7. Ibid., 39
8. Also suggested in the interview with Sarah Williams Goldhagen in this issue, focus on the effects of managerial and technological cultures in architecture suggests an interesting paradigm shift in architectural historiography.
9. Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', 37.
10. Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 64, no. 2 (2005): 144–67.

## Biography

Jorge Mejía Hernández graduated as an architect in Colombia and received a PhD from TU Delft, where he teaches design studios and research with the section Methods and Matter. He is co-director of the Delft/Rotterdam-based research group Architecture, Culture and Modernity and acts as science communications manager for the EU-funded COST action Writing Urban Places: New Narratives of the European City.

Cathelijne Nuijsink graduated in architecture from both TU Delft and the University of Tokyo before obtaining a PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilisations from the University of Pennsylvania. Currently, she is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich, where she is exploring the potentials of architectural contact zones as a theoretical and methodological framework to rewrite the history of architectural modernism using as a case study the Shinkenchiku Residential Design Competition (1965–present).



## *Histoire Croisée: A Relational Process-Based Approach*

Bénédicte Zimmermann

Globalisation makes understanding worldmaking processes crucial. During the Cold War the social sciences mainly addressed this issue through comparative studies that mirrored the logic of the world-historical confrontation. In this respect 1989 fostered not only a political turn but an epistemological one. Beyond comparison, the new political situation fuelled the development of approaches dedicated to the study of relations and interdependencies between different parts of the world.

Like entangled, shared or connected histories,<sup>1</sup> *Histoire croisée* takes a cross-border perspective.<sup>2</sup> These approaches have in common that they shift the analysis from comparative methods centred on territorial entities, or any other predefined units, to the relationships that flow through and the interactions that constitute them, as well as moving away from approaches solely focused on state relationships. Dedicated to the study of intersecting processes in various settings, *Histoire croisée* is driven by an empirical, methodological and epistemological shift that involves redefining the object of research.

### **A double shift: from comparison and transfer studies to *Histoire croisée***

Comparison consists of contrasting different though preferably equivalent entities and showing differences and similarities so as to highlight a common question or problem. The scale of comparison is decisive; it consists in choosing a focal point that, for

the sake of symmetry, should be identical for each of the entities under study. Whether the comparison takes place at a sub-national or supra-national level, whether it favours a micro or macro scale, it usually takes as its starting point those traditional academic categories and facts that are historically and nationally formatted and thus lead to a methodological nationalism that deciphers and writes the story of the Other in light of the researcher's own national tradition.<sup>3</sup> From this aporia is born the space for *Histoire croisée*, which allows for the study, among others, of the processes involved in the constitution of categories and objects of comparison as well as the transformations that result from their relationship.

*Histoire croisée* is born from the blind spots inherent in comparative methods. One blind spot of particular concern is the interaction between the objects of comparison. When societies are in contact with each other, even through loose ties such as those created by virtual networks, then objects and practices are not only interrelated but modify each other as an effect of that relationship. This is often the case in science and innovation, where disciplines and paradigms develop and change through the process of mutual exchange; it is also true for cultural activities such as literature, music and the fine arts as well as in practical areas such as advertising, marketing, technology, trade and even social policy. It is further true for worldwide architecture competitions. Yet comparative studies

are ill-equipped to grasp these contact areas, the mutual interaction that may develop from them and the transformations that may result.

Transfer studies were among the first in Europe to highlight these aporia of comparison and try to overcome them.<sup>4</sup> Yet they limit their scope to particular forms of circulation. With their focus on transactions between two poles, transfers imply a fixed frame of reference that includes a point of departure and a point of arrival. In the case of transnational exchanges these points are generally located within national societies and cultures that are in contact with each other. Consequently the initial situation and that resulting from the transfer are apprehended through stable national frames of reference assumed to be well known, for instance 'German' or 'French' historiography. Although the original purpose of transfer studies was to discredit the myth of the homogeneity of national units by showing their permeability, the analytic categories actually bring back into play the very national references that were to be questioned. Hence rather than vitiating the national grounding, most of them paradoxically strengthen it. Lastly, most transfer studies miss the issue of reciprocity and reversibility. They generally analyse simple linear processes from one culture to another with the understanding that what counts are phenomena of introduction, transmission and reception. But the situation is often more complex, bringing into play the interaction between various points that may engender new dynamics.

Inspired by the shift in perspective initiated by transfer studies, *Histoire croisée* engages in a second shift from transfers to interpenetration and intercrossing. In so doing it makes no claim to replacing either transfers or comparison but rather takes up lines of inquiry and processes that are inaccessible to those approaches and thus makes its focus a study of circulation and interaction processes and their outcomes.

### **Intercrossings: another way of constructing the research object**

In the literal sense, to cross means 'to place or fold crosswise one over the other.'<sup>5</sup> This creates a point of intersection where events may occur that affect the involved elements to varying degrees depending on their resistance, permeability, malleability and environment. Accordingly, research entities and objects are not considered merely in relation to each other, but also through one another in terms of relationships, interactions and what those interactions produce. The understanding that something occurs in the intercrossing process is one of the basic assumptions of *Histoire croisée*. It pays particular attention to the analysis of resistances, inertia, shifts in trajectory, form and content, and of new combinations that may develop through intercrossing. The aim is to grasp the complexity of a composite, plural world in motion and thereby develop tools for addressing the fundamental question of change – for change is a weak point, if not a blind spot, in most comparative approaches and to some extent in transfer studies.<sup>6</sup>

The relational, interactive and processual character of *Histoire croisée* invites one to distinguish different and complementary dimensions of intercrossings that might be found in one and the same study at the empirical, epistemological and methodological level.<sup>7</sup> The first of these dimensions anchors the intercrossing in the empirical soil and thus makes it the very object of the research. This allows new research questions to be formulated – questions that both comparative and transfer studies have difficulty grasping – such as how the local and global coproduce each other, or how in international architectural competitions new standards may arise from the encounter between the contest details, competitors' individual take on them, and the selection committee.

But intercrossings do not only relate to the interaction between objects, they also involve interactions



between the researcher and her object. This is the second dimension. At the epistemological level, *Histoire croisée* addresses both the researcher's perspective on the object and the issue of reflexivity. The epistemological dimension heeds that particularly sensitive point of the interaction between the characteristics of the object, the chosen approach and the researcher. This is a crucial point because whatever the intercrossings are, even in their empirical dimension, it is insufficient to merely note and record them, for they are not already given but require an observer to highlight them and construct their space of understanding.

As for the third dimension, the methodological one, studying intercrossings involves approaches such as multi-level analysis and the combination of different time-space scales. As a general rule, empirical objects are related to several scales simultaneously and are not amenable to a single lens. Thus from a spatial point of view, scales refer to the multiple scenes, arenas, settings and situations where the interactions that shape the object under study take place.<sup>8</sup> From a temporal point of view, they refer back to the different temporalities involved in the process under study, which extend from the history of existing frameworks, institutions and representations to the temporalities of situated action.

From such a perspective the scales of time and space cannot be reduced to external explanatory factors; instead they become an intrinsic dimension of the object and an integral part of the analysis. In other words, scales are not only a cognitive and methodological option chosen by the researcher but inhere in the actors under study and thus become a true matter of inquiry.<sup>9</sup> This means breaking with the logic of pre-existing, ready-made scales such as those often associated with national entities, cultural areas or major dates in political chronology. These scales are used as natural analytic frameworks defined independently of their object of inquiry.

Thus results a plea in favour of an empirical inquiry that can take into account the intercrossings and interactions between different scales. This means following the objects and protagonists involved in the process under study on the various scales where they evolve, perform or struggle, and more broadly inquiring into the scales themselves. In so doing, *Histoire croisée* argues in favour of going beyond dichotomist reasoning, that is, in terms of micro versus macro, and instead emphasising their inextricable interconnections and how they constitute each other, this being achieved by giving an interactive account of time and space that makes a fulcrum of people's agency.

Paying attention to agency does not mean shrinking the analysis back down to short-term and micro dimensions to the detriment of long-term and macro features; rather it calls for combining the long-term character of structures with the short-term character of what is happening in a given situation. The aim is to grasp the dynamic interplay between the structuring activity of people and the structuring power of existing frameworks that may constrain or sustain individual agency, and in turn be changed by people's activity.<sup>10</sup> From such a perspective the activity of individuals appears both as structured and structuring, in a relationship of reciprocal interdependence between structures and action. Thus most of our institutions and action frameworks stem from a dual grounding, both within a long-term history of structures that has an impact on their logic and functioning, and in specific situations of action that play a decisive role in bringing them about or transforming them.

*Histoire croisée* seeks to understand how these two dimensions interact by developing in-depth empirical case studies. Beyond the singular logic of situations, it refers to the notion of configuration so as to emphasise the collective and temporal structuring of the processes under study.<sup>11</sup> Doing so, *Histoire croisée* seeks to open up promising

avenues for studying global topics by highlighting the interplay between transactions of different kinds that involve several scales at a time in a given contact zone. This may clearly apply to the architectural competitions investigated in this issue of *Footprint*.

### **The challenges of holding together the long-term structures and the short-term action**

Holding together the long-term structures and short-term action is a foundational problem of the social sciences. It confronts the researcher with those basic dichotomies with which the social sciences struggle, structure versus action being just one of these, which works along with and often overlaps with others such as macro/micro, diachrony/synchrony, global/local, general/singular.

Max Weber made a significant contribution to this debate by laying the epistemological grounds of a sociology of action, while providing an overarching comparative analysis of worldwide historical processes of rationalisation.<sup>12</sup> However, a closer look reveals a partition between these two major components of his work. The empirical material used for his comparative historical sociology depicts representations, institutions, established practices and categories, but seldom seizes situations of action in progress. Weber's reasons for this are apparent from his research subjects and agenda.

In *History and Economy* he provides multiple examples from other times and societies to illustrate his thesis of a worldwide and multiform process of rationalisation, the aim being to demonstrate the superiority of Western rationalisation processes and thus modernity. The variation in spatial and historical scales in his work therefore serves a specific aim. The analysis proceeds not from a detailed description of the different cases in relation to each other or from an analysis of the contact zones, but from their organisation into a series whose components can

be contrasted, hierarchically arranged into examples and counter-examples, and synthesised in the form of ideal types.

The notion of ideal type developed by Weber at a methodological level and the notion of subjective meaning at an analytical level are his means of bridging agency and structure.<sup>13</sup> These two levers certainly suit his empirical research agenda. However, as soon as a more complex use of spatial scales is undertaken, and the scales themselves become objects of inquiry, as *Histoire croisée* demands, then ideal types and subjective meaning prove insufficient, since they give no access to the fine mechanisms through which scales overlap and interact, take shape and may change. Consistent with Weber's concern for historicising contemporary issues, *Histoire croisée* departs from its approach in the way it combines historicity with situated-agency analysis. This short excursus into Weber's sociology teaches us that not every way of bridging agency and structure is relevant to every research goal. Because *Histoire croisée* is interested in the outcome of intercrossings, it requires appropriate ways of empirically integrating agency and structures. It is a matter of coherence between one's research questions and the methodological design of inquiry intended to handle them.

A brief recap of the dominant features of structure-focused and action-focused approaches, as derived from Weber's work, helps to better grasp the challenges of their integration. By columns, Table 1 characterises each approach in terms of lens, duration, frame of reference, object and method. The first two columns disjoin the time scales of the past from that of the present action. They also address specific objects of inquiry – concepts, representations, institutions, established practices and categories for structure-focused approaches versus agency and what people actually do in given situations for action-focused approaches. These differences go hand in hand with contrasted

	Structure-focused	Action-focused	Structure/action focused
<b>Lens</b>	Macro	Micro	Multi-scale
<b>Duration</b>	Long-term and middle-term	Short-term	Time spans specific to the research object
<b>Frame of reference</b>	Context	Situation	Configuration
<b>Object</b>	Concepts, representations, institutions, established practices and categories	Agency, what people actually do	Concepts, representations, institutions, established practices and categories, agency in action
<b>Method</b>	Exemplification, ideal type, illustrative cases, statistical series	Observing situated action and interactions	Following people, objects and their interactions on different time and space scales

Table 1: Three approaches and their key features

methods of inquiry – with a focus on exemplification, ideal type, illustrative cases and statistical series in the first case, and on the observation of situated action and interactions in the second. It is the aim of *Histoire croisée* (last column) to overcome the gaps and blind spots created when implementing these columns separately in the research design. It is not simply a matter of having their respective dimensions enter into dialogue with each other but to provide a means of access to the way these dimensions interact in the very constitution of empirical reality. Therein lies the processual contribution of *Histoire croisée* – making intercrossings, their unfolding in time and space, and their consequences an object of social-science research.

## Conclusion

*Histoire croisée* means crossing borders of various kinds – territorial, linguistic, cultural... – and revisiting those analytic categories that bear the stamp of their spatial and temporal configurations. In doing so, *Histoire croisée* uses three main levers: empirical anchoring in concrete situations of action, multi-level and multi-sited analyses, and a self-reflexive take on the categories and the object at stake. By placing interrelationships, reciprocal influences, rejection or co-production phenomena at the heart of the analysis, it proposes a shift of perspective and another way of building the research object so as to create coherence between the research question, the object and the empirical method. This does not mean that comparative or transfer studies are in any way negated, but rather that *Histoire croisée* provides just another way of looking at and understanding the world.

## Notes

1. For a general discussion of these different approaches, see Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Alessandro Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).
2. For an extended discussion of *Histoire croisée*, see

Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50.

3. Andreas Wimmer and Nina G. Schiller, 'Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences', *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–34.
4. Transfer studies were initiated by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner in a seminal text in 1987: 'La construction d'une référence culturelle allemande en France, genèse et histoire', *Annales ESC* 42, no. 4 (1987): 969–92.
5. It is only by extension that the term takes on the meaning 'to meet in passing, especially from opposite directions' (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1983), 309.
6. Given that transfer studies are concerned with transformations, they do in fact deal with certain aspects of change. But in limiting oneself to transfers, one cannot account for radical change and instances where new things, categories, practices or institutions arise for the first time. In other words, our understanding of transfers does not depend on understanding changes, so a more broadly encompassing approach is required.
7. On processual analysis, see Andrew Abbott, *Processual Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).
8. In *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), her sociology of space, Martina Löw underscores this relational and labile dimension of spaces composed of objects and individuals that move beyond systems of geographical, institutional, political, economic and social coordinates which aim to stabilise spaces by establishing boundaries.
9. *Histoire croisée* departs on this point from a multi-focal perspective as depicted in Jacques Revel, ed., *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Éditions EHESS, 1996).
10. Karin Knorr-Cetina, 'The Micro-Sociological Challenge of Macro-Sociology: Toward a Reconstruction of Social Theory and Methodology', in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of*

*Micro- and Macrosociologies*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina and Aaron V. Cicourel, (London: Routledge, 1981).

- 11 The notion of configuration is drawn from Norbert Elias, *Was ist Soziologie?* (Weinheim: Juventa, 1971), 139–50, but whereas Elias developed a primarily hermeneutic approach to history – on the basis of readings of treatises on correct behavior, e.g. *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, *Histoire croisée* widens the scope to the study of ongoing action. This difference considerably modifies the research procedures involved in studying configurations.
12. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002 [1922]) and *Wirtschaftsgeschichte: Abriss der universalen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958).
13. Stephen Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative Historical Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

## Biography

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## Portuguese Architecture in Transit(ion): The 1967 International Competition for Amsterdam Town Hall

Bruno Gil, Susana Lobo, José Ribau Esteves

### Introduction: Portuguese architects

In Portugal, the 1960s defined a strategic period in the transition to democracy and, consequently, to the present. The outbreak of the colonial war, the growing rural exodus and emigration, as well as student upheaval, contrasted with the period of economic liberalisation and private investment that came from the gradual (although discreet) modernisation of the regime. In these years of disruption, Portuguese architecture found a particularly prolific field of action, both in the volume of commissions and in the diversification of themes and subject matter. For a new generation of architects this was the opportunity to join the international disciplinary debate.

The previous decade had seen the assertion of modern Portuguese architecture. First, as a result of the first National Congress of Architecture held in 1948, where the professional class came together to dispute the imposition of an official aesthetic in the public works of the Estado Novo regime (1933–1974) and demanded an update of state politics regarding the adoption of modern principles in architecture and urban planning.<sup>1</sup> *Arquitectura* magazine was to have an influential role at this time in disseminating the works and texts of the main authors of the modern movement, including the publication of the full version of the Athens Charter in Portuguese.<sup>2</sup> Also, in publishing the production of what Ana Tostões calls the ‘Green Years’ of Portuguese modern architecture, when

the modernist experience of the early 1930s was resumed and substantiated in its ethical and social dimensions. Concerned with projecting a certain image of progress in the new post-war world order, António de Oliveira Salazar’s government would concede to a degree of transformation in cultural and economic values.<sup>3</sup> The expression of this newfound modernity would be crystallised in two important foreign events: the Portuguese Architecture Exhibition of 1956 in London, promoted by the National Secretariat of Information, Popular Culture and Tourism (SNI),<sup>4</sup> and the Brussels World’s Fair of 1958, with Pedro Cid’s American-inspired, mostly via Brazil, Portuguese Pavilion.<sup>5</sup>

Following this initial moment of a more literal appropriation of the modern movement vocabulary, the Survey on Portuguese Regional Architecture, launched by the National Union of Architects in 1955, would shed a different light on the interpretation of the CIAM doctrine, introducing concerns over cultural identity and geographical context. This new awareness of the broader anthropological and sociological role of the architect in the organisation of the built environment derived from a closer contact of Portuguese professionals with their international colleagues, in particular through the attendance and active participation in the Union International des Architectes (UIA) and CIAM.<sup>6</sup> In these meetings, modern architecture was repeatedly questioned, in a growing affirmation of new experiences that surpassed its rigid and absolute model.

Again, *Arquitectura* magazine was central in this repositioning of the Portuguese approach.<sup>7</sup> In an article of 1959, Nuno Portas called upon 'The responsibility of a brand new generation of the modern movement in Portugal' in contributing to the move to 'structure and give a certain degree of synthesis and operational effectiveness' to the 'dispersed attempts of thought and action that have been tested in recent years'.<sup>8</sup> It was necessary to define a common methodology, one in which the concrete cultural, technical and social realities in hand were taken into consideration. This move into the field of human sciences placed Nuno Portas, and with him Portuguese architecture, in close alignment with the ideas supporting the international critical revision of the modern movement at the turn of the decade. This revision had led to the dissolution of the CIAM in 1959 and the institution of Team 10 in the same year, opening the path to the dichotomy between 'continuity' or 'fracture' that characterised the architectural discourse and production of the 1960s.

Within this context, the focus of this article is on a specific moment, 1967: a year after the publication of *The Architecture of the City*, by Aldo Rossi, and *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, by Robert Venturi, and a year before May '68. As the decade progressed, there was a clear need for the establishment of new senses of 'city' and 'building', taking into account the growing importance of public opinion and the different approaches that were being proposed in the field of architecture. The International Competition for Amsterdam Town Hall of 1967, with more than eight hundred entries from all around the world, highlighted the diversity of the decade and worked as a contact zone for the multiple visions of monumentality implicit in a building that represented local political and public power. From Portugal, the competition archives register the participation of seven teams of architects from a new generation, protagonists of the transition, not only of a country on its way

to democracy, but also in experimenting with new forms and concepts that revised the modern movement. On the other hand, considering the scale and the peripheral condition of Portugal, along with the record of a single architect participating in similar international competitions in the previous decade, the large turnout of Portuguese architects in Amsterdam was representative of a generation in transit across borders.<sup>9</sup> It was an unprecedented experience that reflected the unfavourable conditions that this young generation, eager to engage in the practice of the profession and gain recognition, faced in Portugal.

Due to the relevance of this competition in the European and international contexts, but also to the particular moment in Portugal in the 1960s, the Portuguese participation can be understood as a sign of internationalisation and vitality of the national architectural culture in a transitional climate. In this sense, it is important to show how this broadening of horizons was manifested, implicit in the very presence in Amsterdam, but above all in the diversity of themes approached by the Portuguese architects. The answer to this question stems from the recognition of a double meaning in the Amsterdam competition as a contact zone: the effective response to the site and programme and the subjective context in which the proposals were set, combined with a dispersed and complex process of events, individual routes and learning paths.

### **The Amsterdam Town Hall Competition: overall brief**

The question of the construction of a Town Hall in Amsterdam dates back to 1808, the year in which King Louis I claimed the Dam Square Palace as his residence. From this moment, the city administration was repeatedly forced to relocate to different places over the years. This transitory situation generated an increasing need to gather all services into a single facility, although it was not until 1936



that the intention to commission the design of a new building was assumed by the city council. After a first competition in 1937, won by architects Johannes Berghoef and Jo Vegter, representing a more traditional approach to monumentality in a 'medieval Venetian style design', the outbreak of WWII postponed the initiative.<sup>10</sup> Engaged in the effort to reconstruct Amsterdam after the war, only in 1954 did the council resume the process and set a new location in the Jewish quarter next to Waterlooplein, flanked by the Amstel River and close to the city centre. It was for this site that the same team was invited to develop a second project based on similar principles. The result, a traditional rectangular block organised around an inner courtyard that expressed its authority in its rigid form, was not welcomed, either by the public or by architecture professionals. One of the main opponents to the project was Aldo Van Eyck, who dubbed the design 'an unimaginable lump of backward fascism'.<sup>11</sup> In his article of 1961 in the magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer*, the young architect defended a more integrated approach to the concept of a city hall: 'a human place with a human task; one with everyday life and just as real and ordinary'.<sup>12</sup>

The level of criticism generated around this submission was representative of a new understanding of democracy and of the power relations within the urban built environment. In fact, the controversy around the construction of the new town hall came at a time when other issues arose in relation to the urban renewal of Amsterdam, such as the recent intervention for the construction of the subway line that involved the demolition of a strip of buildings in the very heart of the city. It was then proposed to occupy the empty lots with large-scale constructions, in contrast with the silhouette of the city, an idea that, according to Max Risselada, was also strongly contested and, thus, abandoned:

The city hall was a project for the whole city of Amsterdam, but the other one [the subway line] was,

in fact, also a project with great influence for the people living there. It became a bottom-up action. Van Eyck joined them. They managed to abolish the original idea and to make a more refined system because they still had to build the subway. Many of the architects who worked with Van Eyck were involved in that project. In fact, he became part of the young protest generation along with PROVO. He protested, himself, with this bottom-up movement.<sup>13</sup>

In this context of upheaval, a building for the town hall meant more than just a physical space for the representation of its citizens. The outcome had to be the expression of both urban and social ideals translated into the spatial and conceptual layout of a building. Under the harsh scrutiny of public opinion, in 1964 the city council dismissed Berghoef and Vegter and decided to promote an international competition of ideas. It was imperative to answer the need for a diversified representative space, capable of engaging with the city at an urban level, but also at social and cultural levels. This was the brief set by the alderman for public works, Joop den Uyl: 'A democratic city hall for a council by persuasion, a meeting place for citizens'.<sup>14</sup> The idea was in tune with recent examples of civic centres that combined administrative services with cultural and commercial facilities, like Alvar Aalto's project for Seinäjoki.<sup>15</sup> Another reference would be Aldo Van Eyck's design for the Deventer Town Hall Competition of 1966 (first prize, never built), where the advisory committee 'admired the way he "succeeded in taking the principle of the structure of the historic city a step further", so that "the new town hall would not conflict with the historic city, but rather complete it"', although the commission in itself implied the also controversial demolition of part of the historical area of Grote Kerkhof.<sup>16</sup>

Chief municipal architect Chris Nielsen was entrusted with the delicate task of supervising the preparations for the Amsterdam Town Hall Competition, consulting the different political parties

in order to draft the programme of requirements. The panel of judges was composed exclusively of architects specialised in building in historic town centres. According to Max Risselada, the chairman Huig Maaskant was 'an architect of the grand gesture' and had taken part in the previous competition along with Piet Zanstra, also on the panel.<sup>17</sup> Other judges were Johan Pedersen, Copenhagen city architect, the Belgian Frans van Gool, member of the Old Town Committee of the Amsterdam Board on Beautiful Buildings, the Swiss Jacques Schader and, from England, Sir Robert Matthew. The competition was organised in two phases. A first phase, aiming at the 'understanding of the architectural possibilities and aspects of urban planning' of the place, was open to all architects as long as they were 'accredited and registered as such'.<sup>18</sup> The second phase was limited and based on the results of the open competition. Five to eight proposals were to be selected, after which further detailing would be required and, hence, the exact definition of the programme and budget. Only then would a winner be announced.

The programme did not elaborate on what was understood by a 'meeting place for citizens'. In practical terms, this only required a large central hall with commercial services – a restaurant, a bar, a kiosk and a tourist office – as part of a series of different-sized reception and workrooms. The fact that the building site was located between two distinct urban scales – the small scale of the city centre and the large scale of the recent urban interventions – did not earn any mention in the programme requirements either, even though a potential conflict was emphasised by establishing a main entrance towards Mr. Visser Square, referring the future building to the scope of the great urban and traffic systems of the city, a 'vision that met with resistance from a powerful urban-renewal lobby, that appealed for small-scale development'.<sup>19</sup> The only architectural references included in the

competition's brief concerned incorporating a bell-tower, inside or outside the building's volume, and privileging the use of natural sunlight in the inner divisions. The brief also highlighted the importance of the 'proportions of the building to be acceptable in the general aspect of the city', a condition that implied an integration in the volumes and layout of the historic centre.<sup>20</sup>

By the closing date of the competition, 30 November 1967, a total of 803 submissions had been registered. The unexpectedly high number of participants can be explained by the growing internationalisation of Western culture at this time and the scarcity of similar initiatives, only matched by the Toronto City Hall International Competition of 1958 with over five hundred participants. It was within this unique opportunity presented by the Amsterdam competition to work on a project of such scale and particular context that seven teams of Portuguese architects could be found, six from Lisbon and one from Porto: from Lisbon, Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Bartolomeu Costa Cabral with Manuel Tainha, Francisco Conceição Silva with Tomás Taveira, Luís Fernandes Pinto, and Victor Consiglieri; from Porto, José Pulido Valente with sculptor José Rodrigues and painter Jorge Pinheiro. Although none of these proposals was selected for the final shortlist of the competition, won by Wilhelm Holzbauer, for the purpose of this article we will present a brief analysis of each of the Portuguese entries focusing on the urban and volumetric layout of the solutions, considering how they adapted to the structure of the city and organised the functional programme, and on the elected constructive systems, considering their impact on the formal expression of the proposed designs at a technological and material level.

### **Effective Responses: city versus object**

For the younger generation taking part in the competition, the Amsterdam centre raised a number

of questions concerning the monumental character of a building such as the Town Hall, representative not only of democracy but also of the population itself. Should the building continue the large-scale transformations that had disfigured the historic city centre of Amsterdam? Or should it reinterpret this process of modernisation through new concepts of citizen involvement, on a continuous and ideological scale with the city? In 1943, the debate around a new concept of monumentality, headed by Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, was already associated with the representative buildings of the city. Monuments, they maintained, 'are the expression of man's highest cultural needs',<sup>21</sup> but had become empty shells that did not represent 'the collective feeling of modern times'.<sup>22</sup> Monumentality, instead of a hermetic gesture or an argument based on empty rhetoric, had to be proposed in new terms. The discussion lasted through the post-war period and the impulse behind this 'new monumentality' remained. In the 1950s, it was represented by 'the mythopoetic structures of Louis Kahn and the new capitols built in India and Brazil, re-emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in the historicism of the Italian Tendenza and the grandiloquent facades of postmodernism'.<sup>23</sup>

A theory for monumentality was thus sought to contradict its formal emptiness. In *The Architecture of the City* (1966) Aldo Rossi refers to urban artefacts as individual and exceptional elements in the history of cities.<sup>24</sup> Evoking memory as an intuitive instrument, Rossi associates the passage of time with history and the idea of a monument is consequently revealed. When form is addressed as quintessential, the urban artefact catalyses the city and the notion of monumentality is ultimately re-founded. But whereas Rossi elects form with an illuminist reverberation, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (also 1966), Robert Venturi retrieves meaning from the mannerist ambiguity. Contemporary to these views, Dutch

structuralism and its main proponents (Aldo van Eyck, Herman Hertzberger, Piet Blom) rejected both meaning and form of the monument as a factor of urban development. What is at stake is, therefore, the negation of the monumental character itself: 'architects working from a structuralist perspective wanted to design buildings that were non-monumental, without style, without predefined form'.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, in the structuralist movement 'open structures are – as opposed to closed structures – open to interaction with the outside world', able to influence 'and also be influenced by their surroundings'.<sup>26</sup> Finding that cities 'design themselves from the inside out', Hertzberger says that buildings undergo the reverse process: 'buildings are conceived from the outside in'.<sup>27</sup> Mentioning Van Eyck's project for the new Deventer Town Hall (1966), where the design's premises are comprised of narrow streets and a dense urban fabric, Dirk van den Heuvel stresses that 'the public domain and public life literally penetrate the interior of the political institute while upsetting the conventions of urbanism and architecture'.<sup>28</sup> This strategy was also the key principle of Hertzberger's designs for the town halls of Valkenswaard (1966) and Amsterdam (1967), developed from a grid of inner streets. Although structuralism was built 'without style' and 'without predefined form', it ended up introducing a very clear and recognisable aesthetic. Nonetheless, the interest here is in retaining not the resulting form, but the relations it promotes with the urban space: the transposition of outer space into the building, in continuity with the urban fabric, and the abolition of spatial hierarchy.

In 1967, the deployments, scales and languages of the proposals submitted for the Amsterdam Town Hall Competition disclosed an advanced stage of the modern revision. The shortlist of twenty selected entries reflected this diversity.<sup>29</sup> However, it is possible to identify some affinities between

the different approaches. The highlight here is on a series of designs that seek a middle ground between the statement of form and the contextualisation in the overall plan of the city, exploring a strong relation with the river Amstel. This was a recurring theme, particularly revealing of the intentions of each architect. Rafael Moneo was the only one to draw the building according to the contour of the river. Arne Jacobsen also acknowledged the river, but drew on the volumetric abstraction of his design. Others, such as Wilhelm Holzbauer, placed the building in the centre of the square. In S. Kondo's design, a collage of elements at different scales and with different meanings was presented, as it was in the proposals by Adrian Meyer, Hans Ulrich Fuhrmann, Urs Burkard and Marc Funk, albeit with a more controlled formal coherence. Structuralists had a strong presence on this short-list, perhaps because they were in 'safe territory'. These proposals sought an intrinsic relation with the water. They crossed the river, always referring the *cell* to the *whole* and vice versa. Despite their experimentalism, there is a defined global coherence, particularly in the projects by Hans Davidson, Kees Rijnbouts and Moshé Zwarts and of Leo Heijdenrijk. Still in the experimental scope, Johannes Hendrik Van den Broek and Jaap Bakema's mega-structure is notable, designed from the interconnection of the road network with the built volumes. In opposition, Ewa and Jerzy Buszkiewicz presented a completely decontextualised volumetric statement. Others struck a balance between form and context without asserting themselves on either the experimental or contextual side: Groupe GIA, Macy Dubois and H. Fairfield, and Paul Niepoort, S. Jensen and Max Steiger. Either way, none of the solutions was absolutely valid for the whole problem. It is, thus, necessary to elect a few concepts that help clarify and mediate the analysis of distinct proposals, also as a means to situate the Portuguese participation.

In 1969, *Forum* magazine set out a clear position by standing unequivocally against Wilhelm

Holzbauer's winning solution. From the controversy around the result of the competition, two opposing views can be defined, based on two distinct projects: on one hand, the winning project, on the other, Herman Hertzberger's design. The first inherited the rigid character of modern architecture. The 'grand gesture', which its form suggested, presented itself as insensitive to the surroundings and by focusing on the interior central hall it turned its back to the city, despite the explicit requirement in the competition programme.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, according to the criterion that 'the outward appearance of the building must be acceptable in the overall aspect of the city', the judges' panel claimed of the winning submission that 'a shape of great sensitivity has come into being, which manifests itself favourably in its urban surroundings'.<sup>31</sup> *Forum* contradicted this statement, arguing that this principle 'concerns quite different qualities', such as 'recognising the importance of the ever changing structure' of the city and not just satisfying the need 'for a building as a definite and completed thing'.<sup>32</sup> Conversely, Hertzberger's design derived from an 'effort to find a principle of order attuned to the structure of the city', a structure to which it responded but from 'different elements as concerns meaning and size'. In this way, it became 'a city in a house, a house in a city,' where everyone was free to 'interpret it in its own way'.<sup>33</sup> In its structuralist expression, we can trace the volumetric and spatial composition, which was governed by a principle of democratisation of space, through the abolition of hierarchies.

The two proposals that we present as opposites refer to two meanings of 'monument' and 'building' that, due to the sensitivity of the place but also to the function it represents, are deeply linked to the very meaning of the city. Carlo Aymonino's reflection on this question is particularly incisive:

It must be asked whether the "finished form" (of a building or complex) will not, by virtue of the unity itself, cancel the relationship between the constructive

typology and the urban morphology ... and will not report the confrontation to more directly homogeneous terms, such as morphological, both architectural and urban. That is to say, how it becomes the point of contact between urban analysis and architectural composition.<sup>34</sup>

Following the same reflection, Holzbauer's solution can be placed within the framework of the finished form. It distanced the monument from the surrounding space. Hertzberger, in contrast, sought 'an approach to the architectural design and, in particular, its compositional aspects through the analysis of urban structures (in their profound transformations and ratifications)'.<sup>35</sup> The first reflects a monumental affirmative and disconnected gesture to the context, while the second portrays a new notion of monumentality, precisely because it contradicts it. From these (op)positions, we define two concepts: the object-building, reflected in Holzbauer, through arguments only regarding its own form; and the city-building, associated with Hertzberger, as a set of ideological arguments of democracy and continuity with the city. In this context, we propose situating the Portuguese entries between these two concepts creating a line, which serves as an instrument for their interpretation and their relative arrangement according to the design arguments they each sustain. We seek, thus, to oppose them by comparing the way in which they approach the city from a critical point of view: whether they embrace the structure of the city or react to it.

By placing the seven entries on this line, we adopt a criterion that allows us to characterise the Portuguese participation in the Amsterdam Competition in a critical perspective. [Fig. 1] A criterion that confronts, simultaneously and as a whole, the individual approaches to the competition brief, the personal references that inform the proposals and their own formal languages. As we will argue, while Conceição Silva and Tomás Taveira 'unequivocally detach' their building from

'the urban landscape of Amsterdam', Pedro Vieira de Almeida 'refuses the possibility of an object architecture'.<sup>36</sup> These two extremes define a line on which Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Victor Consiglieri and Luís Fernandes Pinto can be placed closer to Conceição Silva and Tomás Taveira's approach; they are more concerned with affirming the form of the building than with its relation to the city. Costa Cabral with Tainha and Pulido Valente are closer to the ideological approach of Pedro Vieira de Almeida, although they might be positioned in a possible centre because the relation they proposed with the city resulted namely from formal options.

### **Subjective Backgrounds: the Portuguese participants**

The following analysis relates the proposals submitted by the Portuguese teams to the references, paths and circumstances relevant to the creation of a network of relations. While aiming to provide evidence that refers to the broader scope of the 1960s architectonic culture, it also gives a way to question the processes that started to contradict a semi-peripheral condition, still marked by the dictatorship in Portugal. In fact, in 1965, *Arquitectura* magazine's editors decided to publish a section dedicated to international competitions, in a bid to recognise Portuguese architects within the international debate.<sup>37</sup> These participations were, however, quite sporadic, distinguishing the Amsterdam competition, with seven Portuguese entries, as a turning point and a desired international contact zone. Several questions arise: how did participating in the Amsterdam competition demonstrate the paths, conceptual and formal choices of each architect and position them in relation to Portuguese architecture and their other fellow national competitors? Did they adopt an autobiographical or more attached attitude to the city? Where can we read the conceptual and formal options that we recognise today in the personal paths of the participating architects?

Conceição Silva and Tomás Taveira's proposal was undeniably an exception in the continuous landscape of Amsterdam, while, however, seeking subtle relations of place and programme. [Fig. 2a, 2b] Positioned at the centre of Waterlooplein, the vertical stance of the five towers is contradicted by the horizontal bridges that connect the site to the opposite banks of the Amstel river. These connections provide direct access to the big central hall from which the programme develops in height – from the public spaces to the more private ones. It was Taveira's intention to create buildings that somehow 'constituted landmarks, provoking a reaction in people.'<sup>38</sup> With a glass 'skin' that covers the concrete structure, allowing for a visual connection with the city's skyline, we classify Conceição Silva's proposal as an object-building. In this sense, it is important to address Tomás Taveira's fundamental contribution to the range of references of the Conceição Silva atelier, particularly evident in this competition. 'In fact, my culture is Anglo-Saxon,' he says.<sup>39</sup> Considering Stirling as one of his 'heroes', he travelled to England where he visited the Engineering Building of the University of Leicester (1963), a work that constitutes a strong influence in the project for the *Fábrica de Elevadores* (elevator factory) which Taveira designed while still a student in 1966, with 'glass cascades inspired by Stirling and Gowan, alternating vertical planes and projections at 45°'.<sup>40</sup>

Victor Consiglieri also considered image as a goal, finding in materiality and volume the fundamental premises for his design. [Fig. 3a, 3b] Like Conceição Silva and Tomás Taveira, Consiglieri's formal approach, referring to the work of Le Corbusier, places him in the same scope of the object. 'The image that I have of architecture shows that we are always on the path to form', he said, justifying the proposal as a plastic exercise that proposed an analogy to a pyramid, 'an upward curve to counteract the public square'.<sup>41</sup> The sum of different abstract volumes highlighted the building

in the urban landscape of the city in a composition that, nevertheless, was aware of the public space and explored strong connections to its surroundings. In addition to the shape, the use of concrete emphasised the urban presence of the building, making it easily identifiable. This presence was achieved through the exploration of prefabricated construction, visible on the modular façade.

This expressive character is also particular to Luís Fernandes Pinto, whose work does not show a volumetrically affirmative attitude towards the urban fabric, but rather an unexpected and innovative formal exercise. [Fig. 4a, 4b] From the recognition of the architecture of the city and its scale, the architect proposed occupying the whole of the plot, outlining its perimeter, and assumed a horizontal character in the layout of the volumes, never exceeding the surrounding heights. Their overlapping configuration suggested a distinct image, in a complex but pragmatic composition, determined by the 'the individualisation of the volumes according to their respective function'.<sup>42</sup> The aesthetics of the building, as a result of the 'possibilities of reinforced concrete', reflected the full meaning of the materials as found, such as structure and finish, as well as the use of exposed brick in the base of the building. Its structure was a result of this experimental attitude, and in it we can recognise reminiscences of the brutalist experiences of Paul Rudolph, in the US, whom Fernandes Pinto visited in 1958, and of the Portuguese architect's later investigations into American architecture.<sup>43</sup>

The United States is also inseparable from Hestnes Ferreira's proposal. [Fig. 5a, 5b] We recall that after his passage through Helsinki and the design of the Albarraque House (1960–61), clearly influenced by Aalto, he left for America. Following his studies at Yale, he moved to Pennsylvania, where he worked in Louis Kahn's studio between 1962 and 1965. As he states, this collaboration allowed him 'to know the moral strength and

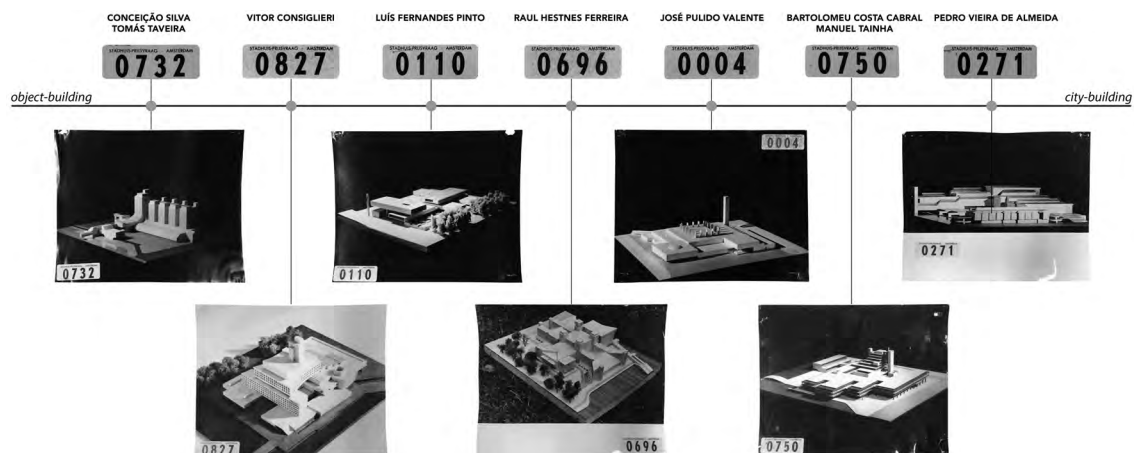


Fig. 1: Diagram with photos of the models of the Portuguese proposals positioned according to the line 'Object-Building / City-Building'. Diagram: authors.

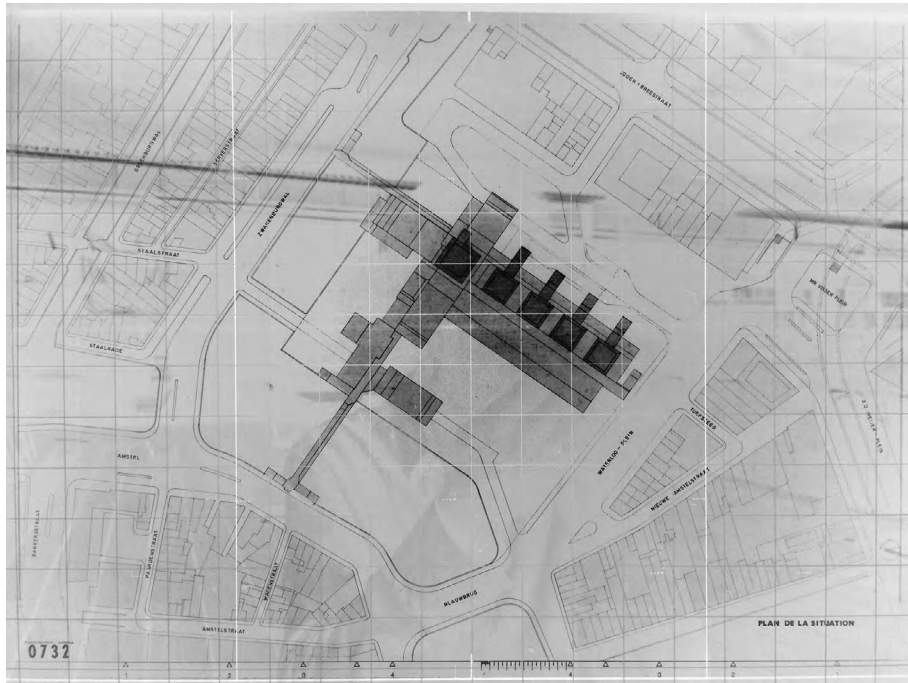


Fig. 2a

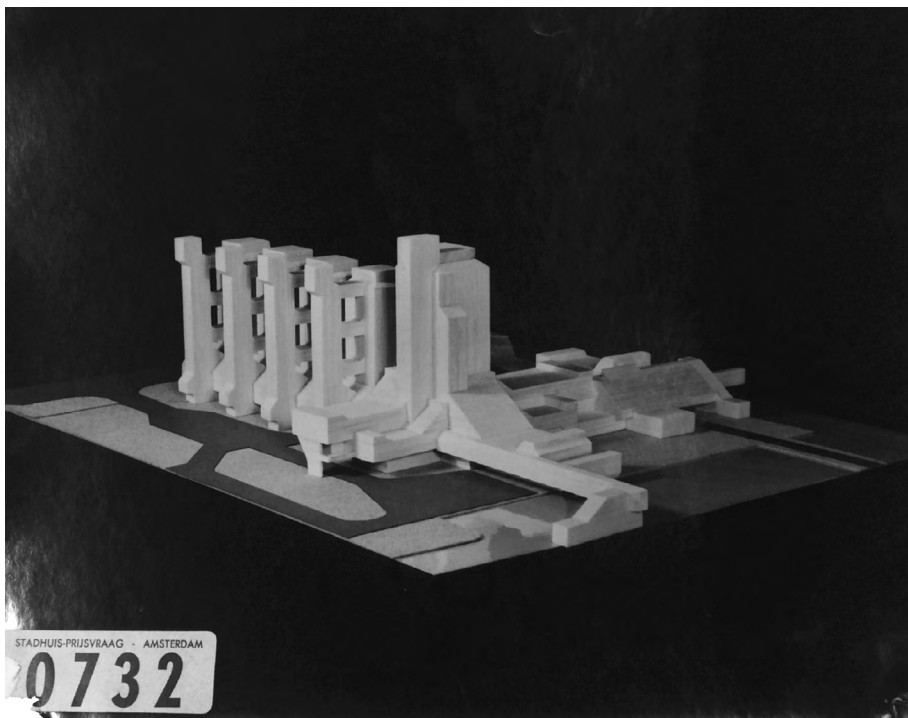


Fig. 2b

Figs. 2a, 2b. Site Plan and Model. Atelier Conceição Silva, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 732.



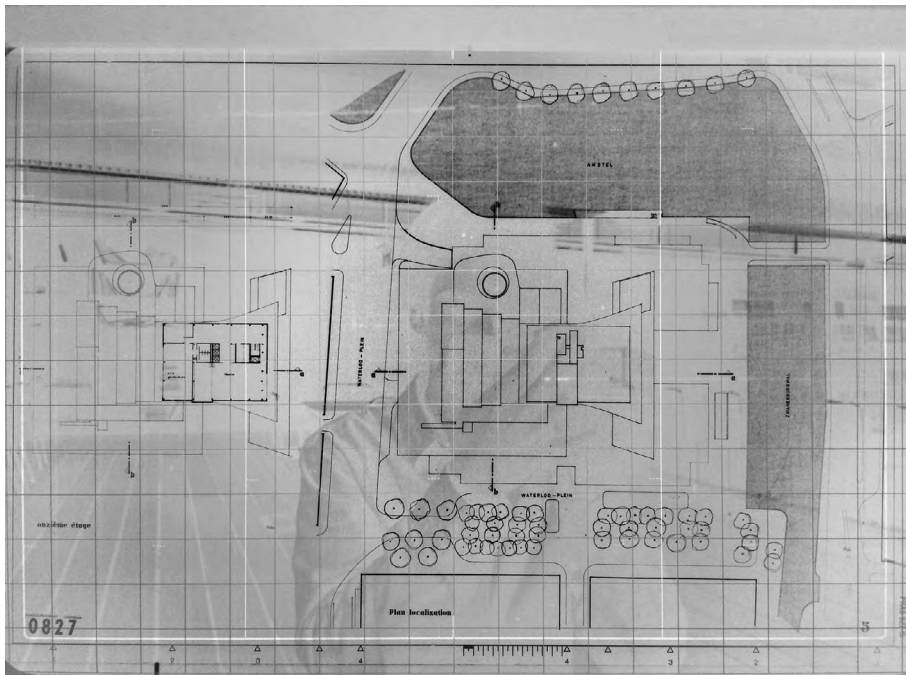


Fig. 3a

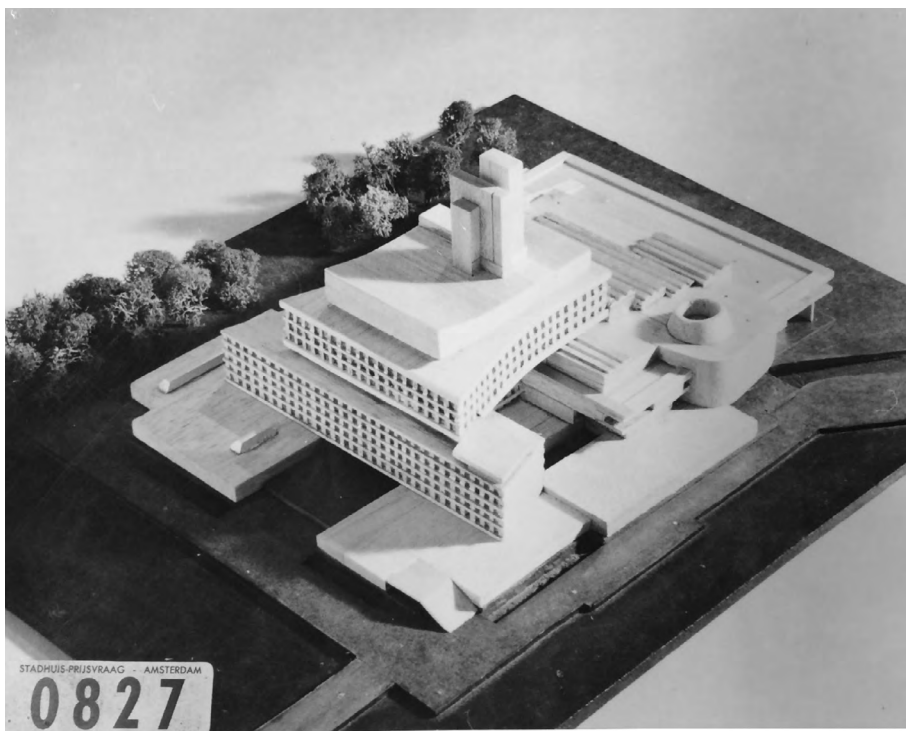


Fig. 3b

Figs. 3a, 3b. Site Plan and Model. Victor Consiglieri, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 827.

professional position of Kahn', and to be inevitably touched by his 'interest in exploiting knowledge of the great examples of the past'.<sup>44</sup> The analogy between Hestnes's proposal and Kahn's Dhaka Parliament (1964–82) is unavoidable, not only because the Portuguese architect took part in its design, but also because the assembly is considered the centre of the composition and represents the space for debate *par excellence*. Moreover, emphasis should be given to the unequivocal relation of the axial structure of both buildings and their spatial order, 'receiving light from the glazed surfaces'.<sup>45</sup> The materiality is also a reflection of Kahn's lesson, present in the use of brick, but also in the design of the archway that circumscribes the building. Although we consider it an object-building, essentially based on motives of form, we recognise in this proposal the philosophical plan that Hestnes rescued from Kahn. The building did not constitute itself as an image before the city, but it also did not adopt its structure. Rather, it suggested the notion of interior space as generator of the external appearance.

Still within the scope of the image, José Pulido Valente reached a more contextualised solution from a formal exercise that addressed the building as a statement, not through its volumetric display but by exploring the concept of town hall as a meeting place. [Fig. 6a, 6b] The architect himself acknowledges that he was designing a 'city-building', in continuity with the dominant height of the urban fabric and placing the central square at the heart of the composition, determining the pragmatic disposition of the different functional spaces.<sup>46</sup> Despite its modest volume, the building stood out from the urban surroundings as a plastic exercise, deeply rooted in the materiality and dynamics that the constructive elements imposed on the overall configuration. The 'crystal sculpture' to which Pulido Valente referred concerned the use of glass as a fundamental element of the language of the building.<sup>47</sup> The surface reflections and the multiple

viewpoints explored appear as playful premises that induce the idea of transparency, suggesting a sense of democracy. Pulido Valente explained his proposal, not in relation to any direct influence on his architecture, but rather as an 'emblem of his way of being': 'discreet', 'calm', 'not spectacular', 'working the spaces as they are and as they deserve'.<sup>48</sup> He related his proposal to an artistic object, not by the force of the architectural gesture, but by the intellectual arguments that made it a 'habitable sculpture'.<sup>49</sup>

A sense of continuity is equally recognisable in the proposal by Bartolomeu Costa Cabral and Manuel Tainha. [Fig. 7a, 7b] They occupied the whole area of Waterlooplein in a gesture that evoked the city's dense urban fabric, where the perimeter of the building adapted both to the layout of the canals and to the height of the surrounding constructions. The concept of the 'inner street' governed the spatial order of the internal plan, culminating in a large central atrium.<sup>50</sup> Despite the tower element, set on the horizontal platform, we place this proposal closer to the city-building approach because of the subtlety of its volumetric integration. We also highlight the intention of adopting a light and modular constructive system, distinct from the other Portuguese proposals, that Costa Cabral associated with his propensity for 'functional aspects' complementary to the 'plastic concern' of Tainha.<sup>51</sup> However, both referred to the 'practice of architecture' and the themes of Atelier Nuno Teotónio Pereira, where the two architects collaborated, as being fundamental in their approach to Amsterdam.<sup>52</sup>

The last of the Portuguese proposals, by Pedro Vieira de Almeida, introduced a different perspective. [Fig. 8a, 8b] More than any other, we consider it as a precursor of a new sense of building and city, towards the definition of a new monumentality. The 'rejection of an object architecture',<sup>53</sup> based on ideological arguments of democracy and of continuity with the city, resulted from the assessment that the importance of a town hall building was

not in its form, but in the 'acts that are achieved in it'.<sup>54</sup> This assumption translated into a volume that outlined the limits of the plot and respected the surrounding areas. The large open-air square that penetrated the building conveyed an unequivocal public sense, as it extended the street to the centre of Waterlooplein, facing the river and connecting the main volumes placed on its perimeter. In the interior, big glass corridors accessed the open space rooms, emphasising a strong feeling of transparency, both physical and ideological. This profound urban awareness, that transported the city into the interior of the building, was revisited (almost literally) in the Igreja do Sagrado Coração de Jesus (1962–76), a church design by Teotónio Pereira and Nuno Portas in which Pedro Vieira de Almeida collaborated. This comparison emphasised the importance attributed by this proposal to the public space, the streets, and squares, fundamental elements for the exercise of an effective citizenship. So, we place it according to the logic of city-building. And although we can attribute new values in the scope of monumentality to all of the proposals, in Pedro Vieira de Almeida we identify the most experimental approach in the intention to renew this concept. The answer to the Amsterdam brief was therefore fulfilled, probably in its true space and time needs.

Even if not selected for the final shortlist, these seven competition entries constitute an expressive sample of the various interpretations that informed the contemporary disciplinary debate around the city and its representative buildings. This is particularly revealing if we consider the Amsterdam competition as a contact zone, not only where different lines of thought were experimentally tested, but also where diverse geo-cultural approaches and references were actually in transit.

### Transitions of scale, typology and meaning

The new monumentality that we have analysed above as a factor of the transition is thus retrieved, both because architecture is proposed through new

forms and languages, and is revised in a renewed sense of citizenship and urbanity. This transition is more than mere evidence of a number of morphological factors observed in the proposals. It refers to a wider dimension, in which we can recognise a set of relations within Portuguese and international architecture. If the competition was a vital sign of the internationalisation of Portuguese architecture, it also foreshadowed something that is following its own path. In this sense, we discuss below some factors that we consider pertinent, in view of the interpretation of the Amsterdam Town Hall International Competition as a moment of transition.

As we have argued, by rejecting the object, Vieira de Almeida refreshed the relationship between public space and public institution – but he went further. He revisited the spatial concept of a town hall in a full sense of democracy and citizenship. He revised monumentality, rejecting it, and thus agreed with what Doxiadis describes as the way of the *transition*:

I find I have an obligation to follow only that road ahead of me that is not obstructed and cluttered up with monuments, the road whose largest shadows will be cast by simple, plain, human buildings.<sup>55</sup>

His proposal revealed an authentic political manifesto, whose formalisation was based on the encounter of the civic dimension with the urban scale, in a profound ideological sense. This contrast points to a more experimental and research dimension, inseparable from a critical and subversive stance within Portuguese architecture.

It is time for architectural solutions that are 'open to problems'. Especially those of urban relations, such as the collective use of the city and buildings, which 'bear witness, even to the level of perfection, of a path that is purely autobiographical or stylistic (even if this component is essential in an architectural work)'.<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting a common position



Fig. 4a

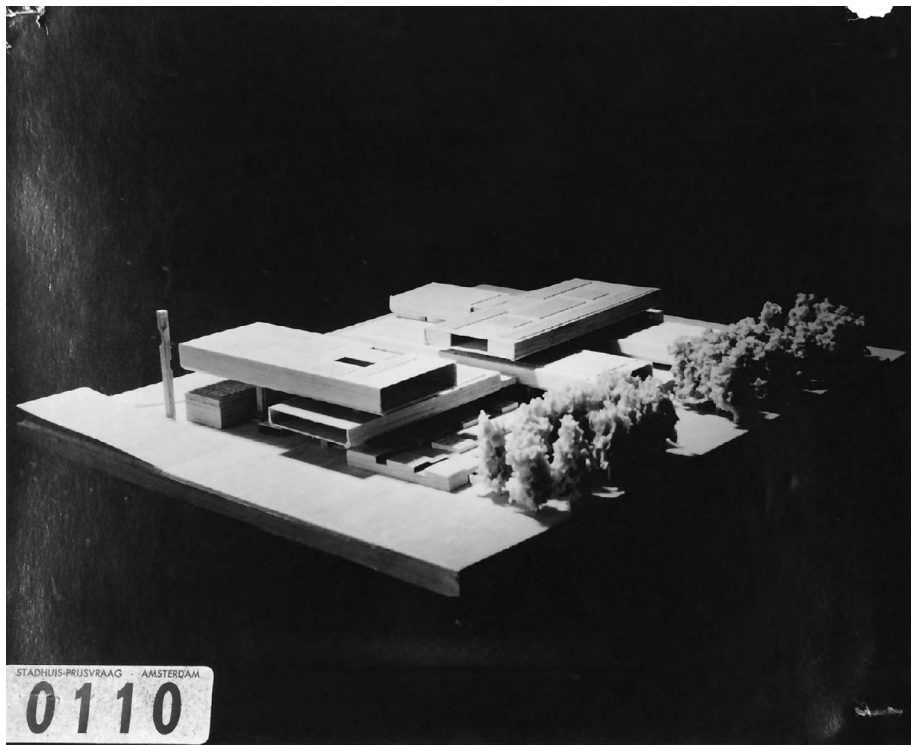


Fig. 4b

Figs. 4a, 4b. Site Plan and Model. Luís Fernandes Pinto, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 110.

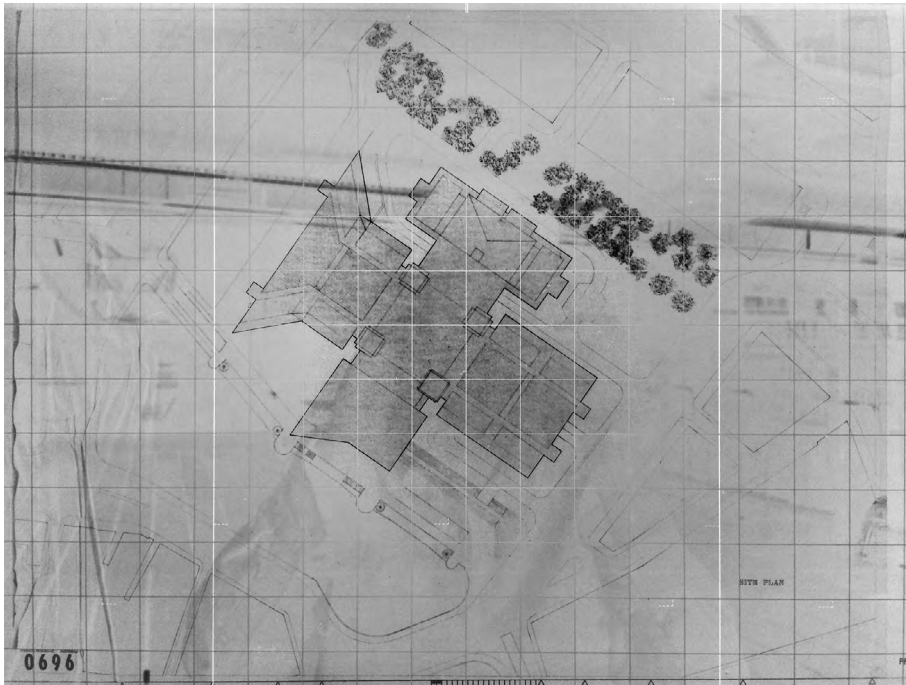


Fig. 5a



Fig. 5b

Figs. 5a, 5b. Site Plan and Model. Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Stadhuys-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 696.

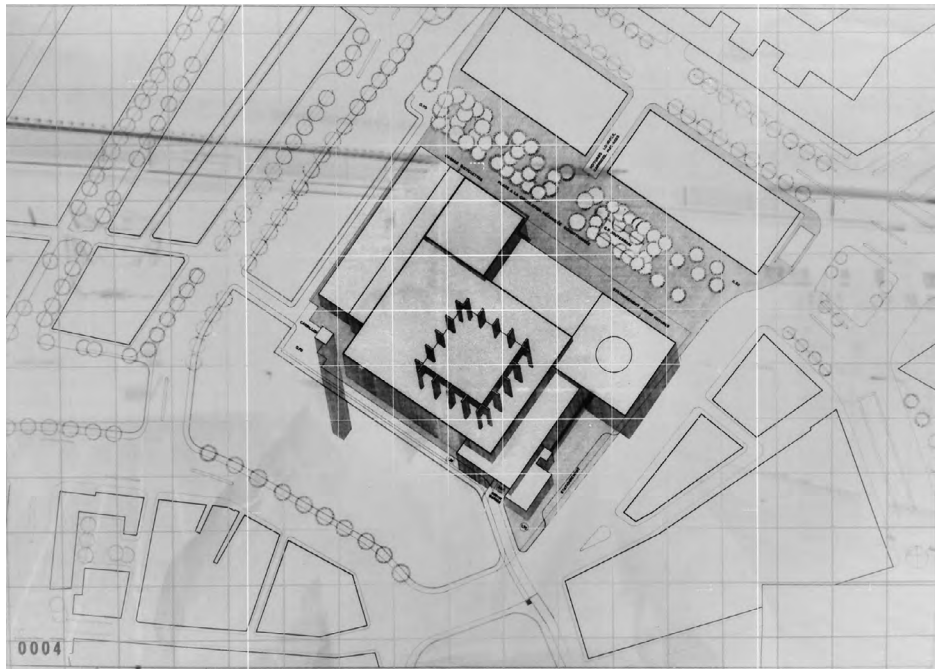


Fig. 6a

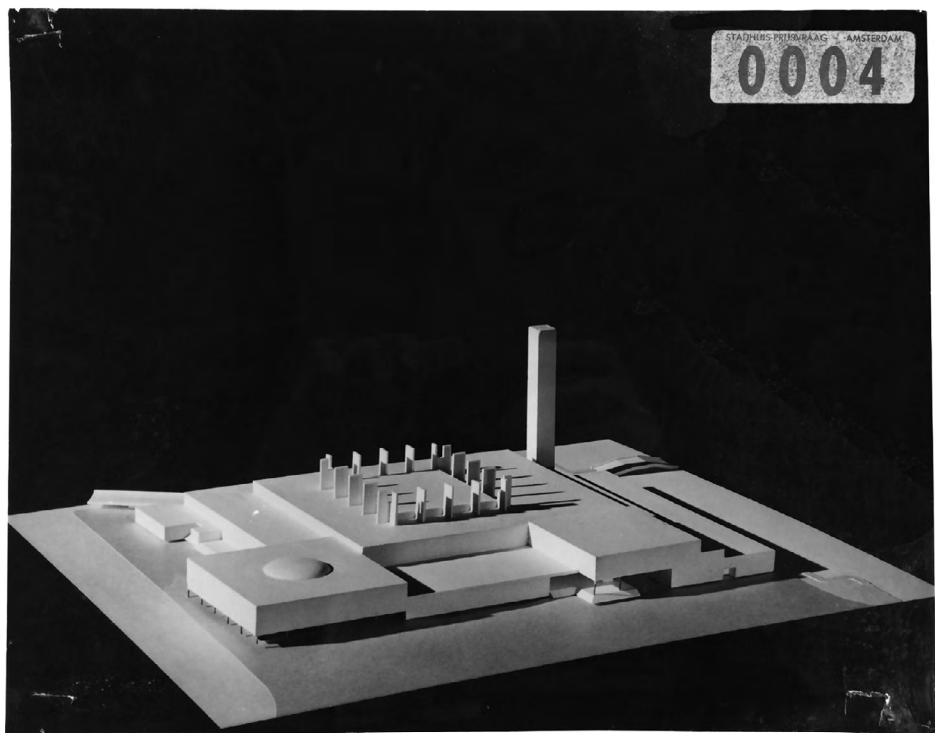


Fig. 6b

Figs. 6a, 6b. Site Plan and Model. José Pulido Valente, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 4.

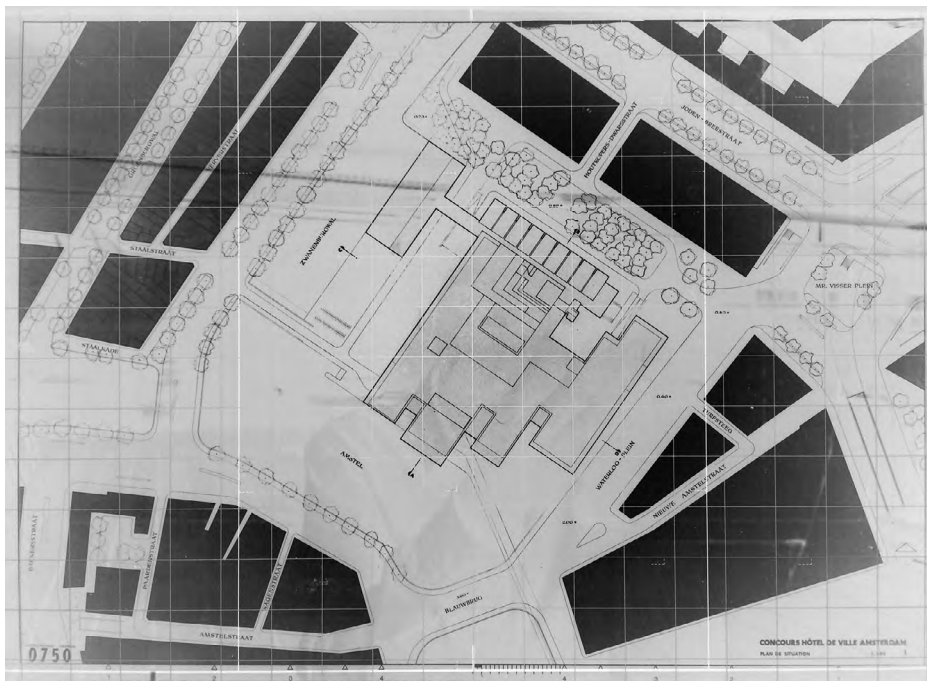


Fig. 7a

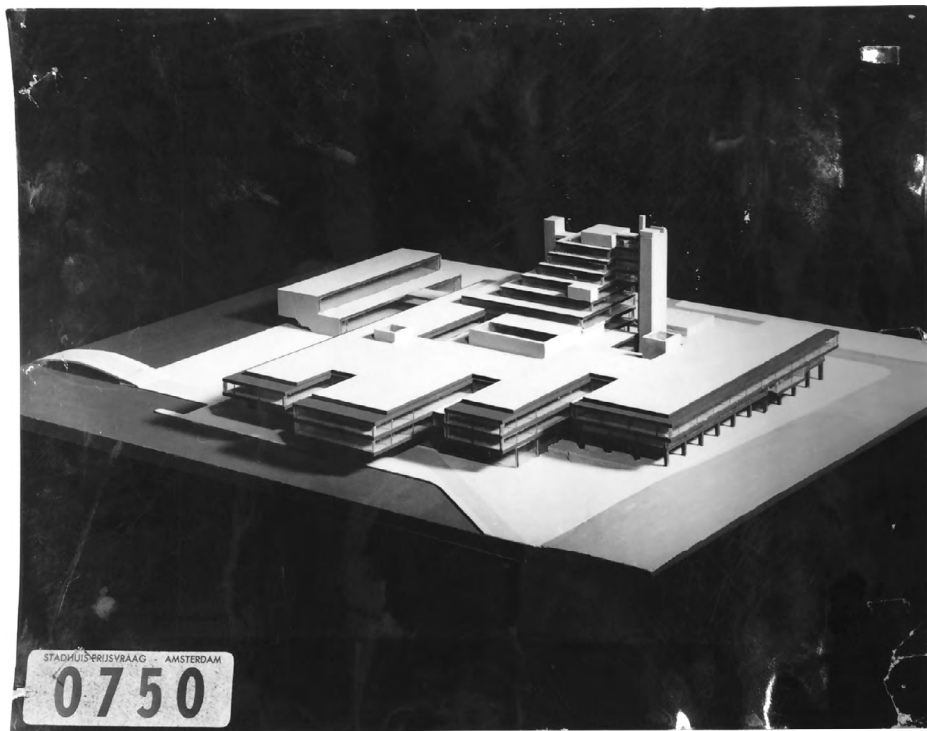


Fig. 7b

Figs. 7a, 7b. Site Plan and Model. Bartolomeu Costa Cabral and Manuel Tainha, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967.  
 Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 750.

with Aymonino, valuing, beyond specific languages, the proposals that 'best respond to a role of architecture in the city; in the present city, but which open, in the present, to one of the possible hypotheses of the future city'.<sup>57</sup> The transition to architectures that are open-ended is thus of interest here, inasmuch as they do not represent finished forms but propose a critical and especially intelligent reflection of relations with the city, in space and, also, in time.

Perhaps due to the fact that the impact of this competition is yet to be unravelled by Portuguese modern architecture historiography, but also because the temporal distance causes the revolt against a regime that narrowed the intellectual frontiers of Portuguese artists and intellectuals to fade, we find this question of internationalisation greatly smoothed in the accounts of the architects interviewed.<sup>58</sup> Addressing the evolution of this relationship with the exterior is decisive in rebutting the general feeling of 'periphery' that Portuguese architecture suffered throughout the twentieth century until the mid-1970s. Although we are dealing with the specific context of the competition, the set of experiences we have analysed represents a challenge to modern ideas. Rationality is consequently reinterpreted in multiple visions, in contradiction with its absolute character. Thus, the Portuguese proposals attest to the dissemination of approaches registered in the national practice of architecture of the 1960s. At this time, referring to Portuguese architecture as a whole is to affirm it as a plural set of experiences. It is not Portuguese in a single sense, but it is not from Amsterdam either. It is from the America of Kahn, the England of Stirling, or the Portugal of Teotónio Pereira.

The concentration of object-oriented approaches in the competition leads us to a separation of the object from its moral load and, thus, to the ambiguity that fosters a pulverisation of formalist tendencies and explorations. The competition, as stated by Pulido Valente, represents a 'presage of

postmodernism' that reveals not only the intention to transpose national borders, but also the fresh and intense will of a country that wants to be catapulted into the centre of the European discussion.<sup>59</sup> In fact, in 1971 architects continued in transit, this time to Paris, to the Beaubourg Competition won by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, giving rise to the Centre Pompidou (1971–77). From Portugal, it is worth mentioning the presence of three teams: Luís Fernandes Pinto, also a contestant in Amsterdam, Ruy Jervis d'Athouguia and Alberto Pessoa, whose authorship of the Gulbenkian Foundation's headquarters corroborates a previous experience in large cultural complexes, and José Paulo Coimbra Neves with António Costa Pecegueiro. Nevertheless, already in democracy, it was the SAAL Housing Process (1974–76) that concentrated the efforts of Portuguese architects, producing 170 projects for forty thousand families. Conversely, it was this local experience that, by answering and experimenting in small scale housing prototypes within a large-scale programme, helped the international export of a particular know-how. In 1976, within an issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* entirely dedicated to 'Portugal Year II', Bernard Huet concluded that 'from now on our future goes through the Portuguese experience'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, also the SAAL process became a contact zone between the Portuguese experience and international critique, emphasising a special mediation between architecture and the city. A mediation that we claim had already been suggested by the Portuguese teams in the Amsterdam competition of 1967.

Thenceforth, other entries existed in large and medium-sized competitions, where Portuguese proposals started to gain prominence amid international architects: the competition entries by Álvaro Siza in Berlin and Venice, Souto de Moura and Byrne in Belgium, the ARX duo in Berlin, Carrilho da Graça in France and Aires Mateus in Switzerland, among others, to this day. We see how pertinent it is to juxtapose these moments with the phenomenon





Fig. 8a

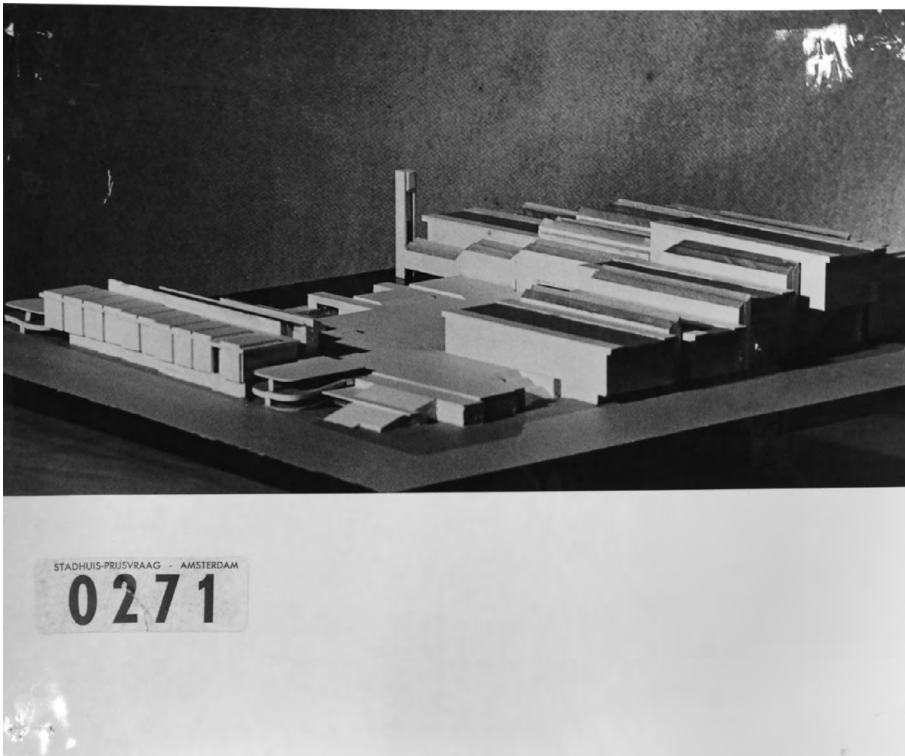


Fig. 8b

Figs. 8a, 8b. Site Plan and Model. Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam, 1967. Source: Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 271.

of globalisation and the even more evident internationalisation of Portuguese architecture: the post-25 April revolution, the accession to the European Community, the founding of new architecture schools, the exponential growth in the number of architects, younger generations working abroad, as well as the media and digital boom. All of these will be reasons for an unavoidable blending with an international context in growing contact.

## Notes

This work is part of (EU)ROPA – *Rise of Portuguese Architecture*, project 30492, financed by FEDER (*Fundo Europeu de Desenvolvimento Regional*) funds through the COMPETE 2020 Operational Programme for Competitiveness and Internationalisation (POCI), and by Portuguese funds through FCT (*Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*).

1. The first National Congress of Architecture, promoted by the National Union of Architects, was sponsored by the Estado Novo government as part of the '15 years of Public Works: 1932–1947' exhibition held in the facilities of *Instituto Superior Técnico* in Lisbon. The second National Congress of Engineering took place at the same time. The debate was organised and determined by two main groups of architects: Arts and Technical Cultural Initiatives (ICAT, 1946–57), based in Lisbon and mobilised by Francisco Keil do Amaral, Celestino de Castro and Hernâni Gandra, among others; and the Organisation of Modern Architects (ODAM, 1947–56) gathering some of the most representative architects teaching at the Porto School of Architecture and Portuguese delegates to the CIAM, including Viana de Lima, Arménio Losa, Agostinho Ricca, Mário Bonito, Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, Fernando Távora and José Carlos Loureiro. For a more comprehensive overview of ICAT and ODA, see Ana Tostões, *Os Verdes Anos na Arquitectura Portuguesa dos Anos 50* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1997).
2. The most relevant architectural publication of the time, directed by ICAT from 1946 to 1957 (nos. 1–58).
3. *Secretariado Nacional de Informação*.
4. Tostões, *Os Verdes Anos*.
5. The catalogue of the 1943 exhibition 'Brazil Builds' curated by Philip Goodwin for the Museum of Modern Art in New York is a major reference for this generation of Portuguese modern architects. See Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old 1652–1942* (New York: MoMA, 1943). For the relation between Portuguese and Brazilian architecture in the twentieth century, see Ana V. Milheiro, *A Construção do Brasil: Relações com a cultura arquitectónica portuguesa* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 2005).
6. Portuguese delegates, led by Viana de Lima and members of ODA, attended the CIAM VIII in Hoddesdon (1951), CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence (1953), CIAM X in Dubrovnik (1956), and CIAM XI in Otterlo (1959). For an overview of the CIAM meetings and history, see Eric Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on urbanism 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
7. From 1957 to 1974, *Arquitectura* magazine was taken over by a new generation of Portuguese architects actively committed to the critical revision of the modern movement in Portugal that included the collaboration of Nuno Portas, Carlos Duarte and Pedro Vieira de Almeida, among others.
8. Nuno Portas, 'A responsabilidade de uma novíssima geração no Movimento Moderno em Portugal', *Arquitectura*, 66 (November/December 1959): 13–14.
9. Porto architect João Andresen (1920–1967) who participated in the International Calvert House Competition for the Canadian Home of Tomorrow of 1954, sponsored by McGill University's School of Architecture and Calvert Distillers Ltd, with 661 submissions from 17 countries; and in the 'Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial International Competition' of 1959, launched two years before with the cooperation of the International Union of Architects (UIA), with 400 submissions from 36 countries.
10. Bob Geirnaerdt ed., 'Amsterdam Town Hall Competition' (2005). Available at <http://static.nai.nl>.
11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.
13. José Ribau Esteves, interview with Max Risselada, Delft, 2 March 2017. Interviews in full in José Esteves, 1967: *Arquitetura Portuguesa em Transição. Experiências no âmbito do Concurso Internacional para a Câmara de Amesterdão* (Master Thesis in Architecture, University of Coimbra, 2018).
14. Geirnaerd, 'Amsterdam Town Hall Competition'.
15. A complex of six buildings comprising civil guard headquarters (1924–25), a church (1957–60) and parish centre (1965–66), a town hall (1961–62), city library (1964–65), central government offices (1966–68) and city theatre (1986–1987) along with the civic square (1988). For more information, see <https://seinajoki.fi>.
16. Wim Denslagen, *Romantic Modernism: Nostalgia in the World of Conservation* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 152.
17. Esteves, Interview with Max Risselada.
18. Jan van Toorn, *Stadhuis – prijsvraag Amsterdam 1967/68* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Gemeenteraad, 1969).
19. Geirnaerd, 'Amsterdam Town Hall Competition'.
20. Van Toorn, *Stadhuis – prijsvraag Amsterdam*.
21. Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, 'Nine Points on Monumentality,' in *Architecture Culture 1943–1968: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Joan Ockman (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, 1993), 29.
22. Ibid.
23. Ockman, *Architecture Culture*, 28.
24. Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 29.
25. Tom Avermaete, 'The Agency of Structuralism, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel interviewed by Arjen Oosterman and Brendan Cormier,' in Salomon Frausto and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Open Structures: An Introductory Dossier on Dutch Structuralism*, a supplement to *Volume 35: Everything Under Control* (April 2013): 4.
26. Herman Hertzberger, 'Open Versus Closed Structures,' *Open Structures: An Introductory Dossier on Dutch Structuralism*, a supplement to *Volume 35* (April 2013): 17.
27. Ibid.
28. Dirk van den Heuvel, 'Contested Spaces of the Open Society: On Dutch Structuralism and Welfare State Planning,' *Open Structures: An Introductory Dossier on Dutch Structuralism*, a supplement to *Volume 35* (April 2013): 30.
29. The finalists included the best examples of the diversity of approaches registered in the competition. Megastructures: Van den Broek and Bakema, J. Boot, G. Ferrante, P. Lüthi [Netherlands] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 200, 1967); T. Durrough [Australia] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 454, 1967); M. Dubois and H. Fairfield [Canada] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 552, 1967); H. Gunlogsson, J. Nielsen [Denmark] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 582, 1967); J. Lunding [Sweden] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 702, 1967); Groupe GIA – J. Maisonneuve, E. and J. Karczewski and A. Kozielski [France] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 286, 1967). Structuralists: H. Davidson, K. Rijnboutt and M. Zwarts [Netherlands] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 53, 1967); M. Hagberg and H. Uhlen [Sweden] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 108, 1967); L. Heijdenrijk [Netherlands] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 154, 1967); B. Winkler, F. Hahmann [West Germany] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 245, 1967). Postmodern proposals: A. Jacobsen [Denmark] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 275, 1967); J. R. Moneo [Spain] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 325, 1967); S. Kondo [Japan] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 359, 1967); P. Niepoort, S. Jensen and M. Steiger [Denmark] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 700, 1967). Other approaches: E. Jelles, H. de Soeten, C. Alberts and W. Gerretsen [Netherlands] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 201, 1967); A. Meyer, H. Fuhrmann, U. Burkard and M. Funk [Switzerland] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 287, 1967); D. Gorman and R. Mixon [Canada] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 527, 1967); E. Grinberg and W. Fischer

- [France] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 573, 1967); J. and E. P. Buszkiewicz [Poland] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 739, 1967); W. Holzbauer [Austria] (Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 769, 1967).
30. Geirnaerdt, 'Amsterdam Town Hall Competition'.
  31. Van Toorn, *Stadhuis – prijsvraag Amsterdam*.
  32. Peter Karel Alexander Pennink, 'Een Stadhuis voor Amsterdammers | A city-hall for the people of Amsterdam,' *FORUM* (1969).
  33. Ibid.
  34. Carlo Aymonino, *O Significado das Cidades* (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1984 [1975]), 142, free translation by the authors.
  35. Ibid.
  36. Atelier Conceição Silva, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 732, 1967).
  37. It is worth mentioning a small note by the editors at the beginning of the section: 'Some Portuguese architects have been competing in recent international competitions. That is the case for the arrangement of two public squares in the United States, in Pittsburgh [Allegheny Public Square, Luiz Cunha and Carvalho Dias, 1963–64] and San Francisco [Civic Center Plaza, Carlos Duarte with the sculptor António Alfredo, 1964–65], and the touristic ensemble Euro-Kursaal in San Sebastian [António Aurélio, 1964–65]. In the following pages we present the works by the Portuguese teams (the few that we have heard from)'. 'Concursos Internacionais', *Arquitectura*, 88 (May–June 1965): 104–12, free translation by the authors.
  38. José Ribau Esteves, interview with Tomás Taveira, Lisbon, 19 April 2017.
  39. Ibid.
  40. Geoffrey Broadbent, *Tomás Taveira: Architectural Works and Designs* (London: Academy Editions, 1990), 11.
  41. José Ribau Esteves, interview with Victor Consiglieri, Lisbon, 3 May 2017.
  42. Luís Fernandes Pinto, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 110, 1967).
  43. Luís Fernandes Pinto, *Colecção GETECNO – Projectos e Obras – Arq. Luís Fernandes Pinto* (Lisbon: GETECNO, 2008).
  44. Raul Hestnes Ferreira, 'Entrevista', *Arquitectura* (June 1973): 3.
  45. Raul Hestnes Ferreira, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 696, 1967).
  46. José Ribau Esteves, interview with José Pulido Valente, Porto, 22 May 2017.
  47. Ibid.
  48. Ibid.
  49. José Pulido Valente, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 4, 1967).
  50. Bartolomeu Costa Cabral and Manuel Tainha, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 750, 1967).
  51. José Ribau Esteves, Interview with Bartolomeu Costa Cabral, Lisbon, April 2017.
  52. Ibid.
  53. Pedro Vieira de Almeida, *Design Brief Explanation, Stadhuis-Prijsvraag Amsterdam* (Rotterdam, Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut/ PRAS, 271, 1967).
  54. Ibid.
  55. Constantinos A Doxiadis, *Architecture in Transition* (Oxford University Press, 1963), 194.
  56. Aymonino, *O Significado das Cidades*, 155, translation: authors.
  57. Ibid.
  58. Either in its collective expression, or at the level of each individual professional path. The single known published reference to the Portuguese participation in the Amsterdam Town Hall Competition is made in the *Jornal Arquitectos* magazine article 'De dentro para fora na década de 50' (From the inside out in the 50s) by Michel Toussaint, of 2003, which refers exclusively to the participation of Conceição Silva (1922–1982) and Raul Hestnes Ferreira (1931–2018), based on information taken from the respective monographs of 1987 (SNBA/AAP) and 2003 (Edições ASA). Of the remaining Portuguese participants, only Manuel

Tainha (1922–2012) and Bartolomeu Costa Cabral (born 1929) also have individual publications on their work, in 2002 (Edições ASA) and 2016 (Circo de Ideias), although in none of them is there any mention of the Amsterdam international competition. There are no significant publications on Luís Fernandes Pinto (1930–2016), despite their relevant and comprehensive contributions to the criticism and teaching of architecture in Portugal, José Pulido Valente (1936), Pedro Vieira de Almeida (1933–2011) and Victor Consiglieri (1928–2019).

59. Esteves, interview with José Pulido Valente.
60. 'Notre avenir passe désormais par l'expérience portugaise'. Bernard Huet, 'Portugal An II', *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 185 (May/June 1976): 1, translation: authors.

## Biography

Bruno Gil is an architect, researcher at the Centre for Social Studies and guest Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture at the University of Coimbra. His doctoral thesis presents a cultural approach to architectural research, aiming at both site-specific peculiarities and knowledge transfer networks. His writing appears in *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, *Docomomo Journal*, *Writingplace Journal* and *Joelho*.

Susana Lobo is Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture at the University of Coimbra, researcher at CITUA-IST/UL and associate researcher at CES-UC. She has authored the book *Pousadas de Portugal* (Coimbra University Press, 2007) and the exhibition catalogue *Risco Interior* (Anozero/Edições Almedina, 2015). She was guest editor of *Docomomo Journal* 60: 'Architectures of the Sun' (2019) and has contributed to a number of architectural periodicals. Her research focuses on Portuguese Architecture, Urbanism and Design of the twentieth century, with expertise on tourism and leisure infrastructures.

José Ribau Esteves is an architect, graduated from the University of Coimbra in 2018. Academic work led him to the investigation of the Portuguese participation in Amsterdam's Town Hall Competition. His master thesis focuses on the competition entries and their meaning in a critical and historical perspective. He currently collaborates with Eduardo Souto de Moura in Porto, Portugal.

## Competition Juries as Intercultural Spaces: Between Evaluation, Experience, and Judgement

Carmela Cucuzzella

With the growing complexity of architecture projects comes the growing complexity of the jury deliberation process in competitions. Competition participants have historically been challenged on how best to represent their projects so that juries can understand their spatial composition, formal qualities, material and structural choices, scale, and even narrative. Typically, project presentations have focused on communicating the project's function and cultural strength.

With the increasing digitisation of the design process and the paralleled rise in environmental certification requirements in competitions – in Canada, specifically in the last decade – the competitors now produce large amounts of performance data during their design process. In order to remain competitive, design teams are expected to demonstrate the efficiency of their project regarding heating/cooling systems, water use/reuse strategies, structural efficiency, material thermal capacities, the ventilation system's ability to produce fresh air, and other technological inclusions. In turn, jurors are required to understand how the projects can minimise various environmental risks through a multiplicity of means, specifically in the form of quantitative information.<sup>1</sup> Environmental risk refers to the potential negative impact of the construction and use of the building on the environment. In Canada, this may manifest in a variety of forms. For example, the extreme summer and winter seasons in Canada require that architecture teams carefully design their projects

to be energy efficient – meaning that they seek to minimise environmental impacts related to energy. Environmental impacts (or risks) in this case can refer to the natural resource demands that result from energy production and consumption, as well as potential toxins in the air, soil, and water.

The increasing imperative for competitors to assess and communicate how environmental risks can be minimised requires that the juries in architectural competitions today are much more diverse than just a decade ago. The ability to read and comprehend such reports requires new forms of knowledge within the jury. With this, juries have the potential to become spaces of complex dialogue, which may include discussions of analysed objective facts, interpreted subjective experiences, and imagined normative expectations. The environmental concerns, in Canada especially, are both existential and political. In Canada competitions are often organised for public municipal projects (libraries, museums, cultural centres, sports centres and so on), so they are even more scrutinised as they are widely published.

If the architectural project is considered as a set of traces and indices of reflective practices embedded within the epistemology of Donald A. Schön's 'how professionals think in action', the project is quite different for socio-anthropologist Jean-Pierre Boutinet.<sup>2</sup> For Boutinet, the architecture project reveals theoretical problems with respect to

the complexity of anticipating the form of a place through 'design thinking'.<sup>3</sup> Competitions are understood as devices, exposing situations that allow the study of interdisciplinary and intercultural issues related to contemporary design projects.<sup>4</sup> Recent work in competitions studies shows that from the construction of the brief to the selection of the winning project, competitions are true communication platforms.<sup>5</sup> These communicative exchanges also emphasise the value systems of the various stakeholders with regard to overall design quality.<sup>6</sup>

Observations of jury deliberations reveal at least two things. First, how architecture project representations are interpreted, and second, how the social, disciplinary, cultural, and cognitive origins of the jurors influence the selection of the winning project through this process of qualitative debate and judgment. Given that juries often comprise actors with diverse backgrounds, they have the potential to be rich intercultural spaces of deliberation. However, the contemporary imperatives regarding the provability of environmental performances have had an impact on these typically rich deliberations. So, the question asked in this article is: how does the diversity of jurors influence the competition outcome? This is especially important in a contemporary context where environmental questions are at the forefront, where such concerns are most often dealt with through the quantitative assessment of environmental risks.

In this article I will first describe the basic theoretical canvas of this study in order to delineate the methodology for the analysis of the jury observations. This will constitute a mapping device, developed from Jean-Pierre Boutinet's compass for studying anticipative projects. I also draw on the work of Jurgen Habermas from the perspective of communicative action and John Dewey for defining the components of judgment. This mapping will be used to analyse the observations of jury competitions. Second, I present the mapping along with

general observations on how the winning projects were deliberated. This analysis and mapping outcome consider the structure of the jury and the lexicon of the debate for a series of architecture competitions that took place in Canada between 2008 and 2014. In the discussion and concluding section, the mapping results are considered through this theoretical framework and interpreted from a broader epistemological perspective, using the lens of contact zones as intercultural spaces. I reflect on how the imperatives for evaluating environmental risks in competitions have influenced the way in which the jury addresses uncertainty and unverifiability of data. Finally I will address how this has influenced how the built environment is judged in the competition context.

### **Mapping jury deliberations after Jean-Pierre Boutinet**

According to Jean-Pierre Boutinet, the architectural project implies a vision based on a future temporal and spatial perspective.<sup>7</sup> The project allows a shared knowledge to emerge as well as a transformation of the intentions to be manifest. According to Boutinet, in the realisation of an architectural project, anticipation, or anticipative action is characterised by the fact that one must decide which course of action to take when faced with decisions or dilemmas, in a place-based and spatial situation. The activity of design then not only seeks to understand and address the 'what is', but must also seeks to conceptualise the 'what can be', and equally important, the 'what should be' for any given situation in order to improve it – the idea of projection and anticipation are at the foundation. Indeed, for Boutinet, design is a project of intentions.<sup>8</sup>

However, anticipation comes in many forms, as Boutinet emphasises in his book *Anthropologie du projet*, first published in 1990. These forms are: adaptive, cognitive, imaginary and operational (refer to Table 1 or the details of this categorisation). According to Boutinet, the adaptive mode

Modes of anticipation		Forms of anticipation	Conceptions linked to anticipation
adaptive	empirical	foresight prevention	conjecture prediction
	scientific	forecast (or prevision)	conjecture/prediction
cognitive	hidden	divination	prediction / destiny
	religious	prophetic	prediction / destined
	scientific or philosophical	prospective / futurology	conjecture
imaginary	rational imaginary	utopia	in the future
	dreamlike imaginary	science-fiction	in the future
operational	rational	goal / objective / plan	to become
	deliberate intent	wish / promise	mixed
	fuzzy	project	to become

Table 1: The characteristic modes of anticipation, based on: *Boutinet, Anthropologie Du Projet*, 59. Translated by author.



is characterised by the ability to identify probable consequences based on adjustment to current behaviour. The cognitive mode is characterised by a preoccupation to pierce the mystery of the future by conjuring all that the future can bring. The imaginary mode is characterised by taking the opposite of what currently exists and elaborating on what does not exist, but it could exist in some distant future. And the operational mode is characterised by some personal future that the author of the anticipation seeks to bring about.<sup>9</sup> The architectural design, evaluation, judgment, and construction processes may comprise elements of all of these forms of anticipation.

Conditions of anticipation represent the basis of architectural projects as the stakes are long-term and, in many cases, far-reaching. In each of these forms of anticipation, it may be individuals or communities that are involved in the project. The project itself can be of a very technical, or very existential nature, with a spectrum of project varieties in-between. Boutinet's analysis grid is reflective of this complexity of projects. In his analysis graph, he has included both aspects of action and actors of the project, each consisting of a different axis on his radial graph. [Fig. 1] The action axis of Boutinet's graph refers to whether the underlying purpose of the project tends more closely towards a technological innovation or to the improvement of the human condition. The actor axis of the project refers to the societal axis – whether the project involves collective or individual involvement. This model is a good starting point and is indeed frequently adopted to analyse design and architectural projects. Here it will be adopted to map out the way in which a jury deliberates on the qualities of projects to arrive at a judgment for a winning project.

The action axis of Boutinet's compass is analogous to the relationship Schön identified in professional architectural practice: the tension between reflection-in-action and technical rationality.<sup>10</sup> Schön's

technical rationality is embedded within the much broader reflection-in-action. Indeed, Schön has asserted that architects develop their projects through a series of oscillations between these two modes of thinking.<sup>11</sup> Design thinking, as defined by Schön, remains after more than thirty years an excellent model from which to understand and describe how designers conceptualise, and jurors judge, design projects. Schön's technical rationality is similar to the technical pole (refer to the top pole of the vertical axis in Boutinet's compass, an action aiming for completion. Whereas Schön's reflection-in-action is similar to the existential pole (refer to the bottom pole of the vertical axis in) of Boutinet's compass, an action that can be interminable. Boutinet's compass succinctly captures this tension of authorities through the combination of the two axes (actors and actions), where the actions span from the technical to the anthropological, and the actors can work individually or in collaboration. Therefore, I will build from Boutinet's compass to propose a new grid for mapping the lexicon used in the jury deliberation and the structure of the jury (background and cohesiveness of the actors).<sup>12</sup>

This proposed analysis grid is presented in figure 2. It comprises two axes: one representing the lexicon of the debate (vertical axis), and a second representing the coherence of the jurors' arguments in the debate (horizontal axis). The categorisation in this proposed grid refers to the specific mode of deliberation adopted by the jurors. The resultant four quadrants and their dominant jury deliberative approaches can be understood in the following four ways. First, a technical expert drives the jury decision (quadrant A: driven by solo technical expert). This occurs when a dominant technical expert in the jury, often a world-renowned expert, delivers arguments that no other juror wants to attempt to contradict, and the decision is therefore driven by a single technical expert. A second category is when an architectural expert drives the jury decision (quadrant B: driven by solo architectural expert).

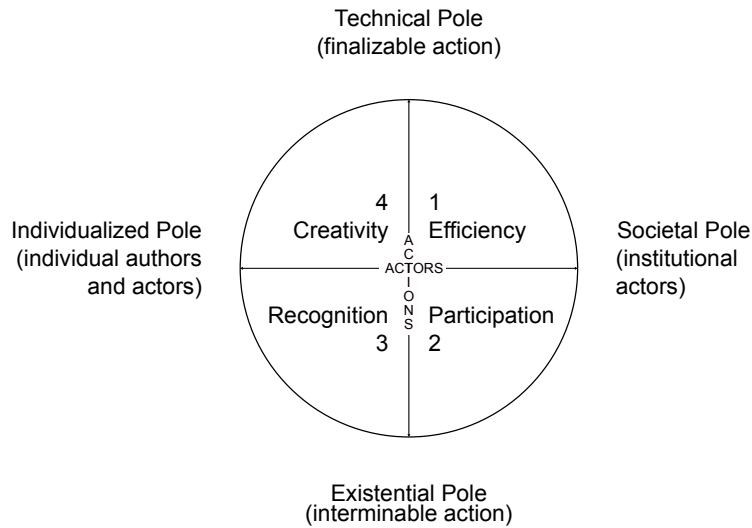


Fig. 1

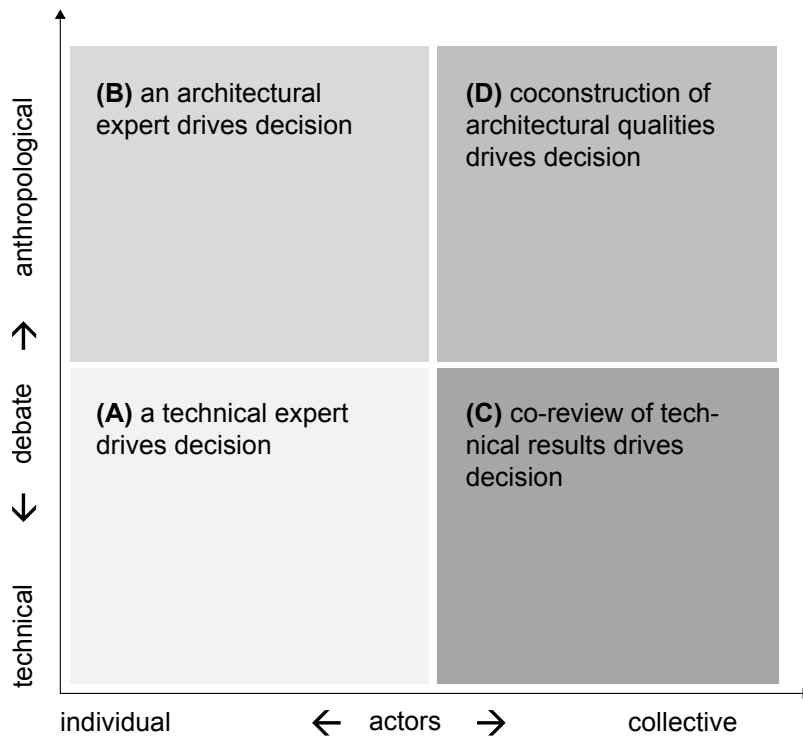


Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Jean-Pierre Boutinet, radial graph for mapping anticipative projects. Translated by author, from Boutinet, *Grammaires des conduites à Projet* (Paris: PUF, 2010), 149. Sector 1: Cross between technical pole and societal pole: efficiency. Sector 2: Cross between societal pole and existential pole: participation. Sector 3: Cross between existential pole and individual pole: recognition. Sector 4: Cross between individual pole and technical pole: creativity

Fig. 2: Compass for analysis of jury observations. Diagram: author.

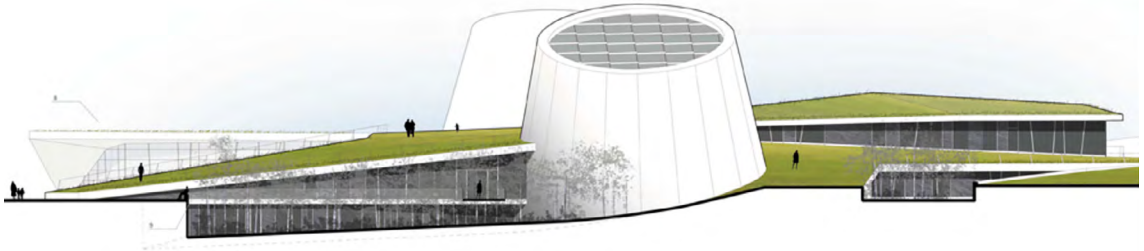


Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b

Fig. 3a: New Montréal Planetarium, image from competition panel. Source: Cardin Ramirez and Aedifica.

Fig. 3b: New Montréal Planetarium. Photo: author.



Fig. 4a



Fig. 4b

Fig. 4a: Saint-Laurent Library, image from competition panel. Source: Cardinal Hardy, Labonté Marcil, Éric Pelletier Architects.

Fig. 4b: Saint-Laurent Library. Photo: author.

This occurs when an architect, often a world-renowned architect, delivers arguments that are left uncontested by other jurors. This is often due to her/his authoritative voice in the profession, where her/his arguments deliver the winning project. A third category is when the jury collectively reviews the technical results for making the final decision (quadrant C: driven by collective technical experts). This is when the technical experts present arguments from the technical reports, which predominate all arguments and deliver the winning project. A fourth category is when the jury collectively constructs the architectural qualities of the winning project (quadrant D: driven collectively by all jurors). This is when the winning project is the result of a series of design debates about the details and overall qualities to a point where the jury redesigns the winning project.<sup>13</sup>

Drawing on empirical observations of competition juries in the Canadian context, I will now unpack the jury deliberation process as they construct a judgment to select the winning project.

### **Understanding communicative action: Habermas**

If we consider the jury deliberation process from the lens of Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, then three perspectives of argumentation – objective, normative and subjective – are necessary to constitute a strong argument.<sup>14</sup> We know from previous research that the best way to understand the project during a competition jury is to 'redesign' the project collectively, but this level of communicative exchange and construction of ideas, which represents an ideal contact zone of intercultural deliberation, is not always evident.<sup>15</sup>

Habermas defines the 'ideal speech situation' as an exchange where there is an absence of coercion and where influence over others is possible through the strongest argument and not the most powerful actor (based on wealth or political position).<sup>16</sup> So, an ideal speech situation is one that is fair and just.

If we consider this for the competition jury, it would translate into a jury situation where all members of the jury are free to express their views in order to arrive at a collective understanding and construction of the winning project. Habermas, an idealist, refers to this collective constructed view of any conversation aiming at some form of comprehension as a 'common situation definition'. He claims that this form of communicative action can be a practice of emancipatory moral consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

Habermas's theoretical approach, when it is manifested in its ideal form, can be played out in a competition jury. This would be a situation where the jury is capable of arriving at a common understanding of the design brief and competition submissions through communication and debate. Habermas asserts that 'participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions'.<sup>18</sup> Habermas defines communicative action as a form of spoken exchange where 'the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding'.<sup>19</sup> In this perspective, communicative action is a two-sided equitable dialogue among the members of the jury, rather than a one-sided coercive form of communication.

Any competition jury deliberation, in the process of constructing a judgment, would benefit from such a form of communication. However, ideal speech situations are the exception rather than the mainstay of communicative action, especially within competition juries that include criteria for environmental design.<sup>20</sup> This prevailing confrontational situation is a result of the divisive worldviews embedded in the jury, since environmental experts and designers are confronted with each other's differing objectives for architectural quality.



Habermas claims that the three main pillars of the ideal communicative speech acts are the combined arguments of objective facts, normative expectations, and subjective experiences. He claims that these are increasingly fragmented in our modern society because of how the variety of expertise is growing and dispersing the associated knowledge in modern culture.<sup>21</sup> The theory of communicative action, as developed by Habermas, is therefore adopted as the main theoretical framework for understanding the form of communication for the jury debates, together with the compass represented in figure 2.

### Structure of jury and lexicon of debate

John Dewey elaborates on the question of reflection and judgment in his seminal book *How We Think*<sup>22</sup>, where he considers that judgment comprises three main characteristics:<sup>23</sup> first, a controversy, or sphere of contention consisting of opposing claims. Second, a process for defining and elaborating claims and for sifting through facts. And third, a final decision, arriving at some closure. Judgment involves many elements before a final decision can be reached, including the collection and understanding of facts, as well as a series of conflicting perspectives that can be weighed. Without contradictory arguments a decision process is reduced to a logical outcome and does not involve judgment. In *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, Dewey further elaborates on both the conflict of authorities during a situation of collective judgment, and on the seat that they hold in attaining a clearer understanding of the world, whether their claims are true or not.<sup>24</sup> The state of reflection, according to Dewey, refers to a suspended state of thinking until a judgment is made.

If, based on Dewey, a judgment comprises a controversy, a process for defining and sifting through factual claims, and a final decision, then in a competition jury we can further identify several influencing factors for reaching a final decision.

This includes the many observers of the media-tised competition (the public, the client, the users of the new space), the many participants of the jury (competitors, jurors, external technical experts, competition organisers) and the agents (whether these are human or non-human, such as environmental certifications or the performance results of digital models) in jury deliberations.<sup>25</sup> The competition juror is then in a constant state of reflection with other jurors that are most often from different cultures, professions, and backgrounds. The premise here is that the competition jury process is ideally a contact zone of intercultural spaces. As the leader in the theory of contact zones Mary Louise Pratt states, these zones are 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power'.<sup>26</sup>

If we consider the architectural project as comprising many technological features, as well as a diverse set of anthropological conditions, experiences, and spaces, then the communicative acts in a competition jury cannot escape this spectrum of arguments. In other words, the arguments will likely include technical analyses of structures and resources that are relatively easy to verify with models and tools, but also the exploration of spatial, material, and experiential qualities that are more difficult to verify. The vocabulary adopted by the jurors, along with the inherent values embedded in the form of their arguments, are key indicators for unpacking the jury debate. From this perspective, the jury is an exemplar contact zone.

Ideally, competition juries are constructed with a diverse set of members, representing a variety of communities, so that the exchanges are rich with multiple points of view. It is during these fertile debates that the jury members more fully comprehend the details of the design proposals.<sup>27</sup> However, in a contemporary competition context, with the focus on demonstrating that environmental risks



Fig. 5a



Fig. 5b

Fig. 5a: Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre, image from competition panel. Source: Atelier Big City, Fichten Soiferman and associates, L'OEUF.

Fig. 5b: Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre. Photo: author.



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b

Fig. 6a: Saul Bellow Library Extension, image from competition panel. Source: Chevalier Morales Architects.

Fig. 6b. Saul Bellow Library Extension. Photo: author.



have been diverted, is the potential of juries as contact zones not diluted into one where the actors simply exchange a series of technical evaluations rather than deliberate on architectural qualities? A provocative question, which I will explore below.

We can now state that the structure of jury and lexicon of debate, among other factors, have a direct influence on the outcome of the competition decision. 'Structure' refers to the profession, disciplinary background, and level of expertise of jurors. The horizontal axis of the mapping grid in this study [Fig. 2] addresses the variety of actors in the jury and their ability to collectively (or not) come to a final decision. The 'lexicon of debate' refers to the categorisation of the inventory of words used to defend the competing proposals. This comprises the vertical axis of the mapping grid developed for this study. This double-vectored model is adopted as the basis for analysis and mapping.

### **Competitions as ideal intercultural spaces for collective judgment**

In Canada, competitions are most often organised for public projects: museums, libraries, cultural centres, education facilities, sports centres, and so on, as is evidenced in the *Canadian Competitions Catalogue* – an online database that archives Canadian competitions since 1945. These complex socially and culturally embedded projects require the involvement of multiple stakeholders, all of which contribute to this democratic method of design provisioning. Competitions can be both controversial and experimental moments in the design disciplines.<sup>28</sup> This is evidenced in the competition jury, where it comprises both a diversity of views, and a representative mix of disciplinary, professional, and cultural expertise and authorities.<sup>29</sup> The process culminates during the jury process, where a judgment is made in order to select the best of the various submitted projects.

In Canada, architects must make up at least half of the competition jury. This introduces the potential of a diversity of experts embedded in the jury. Given that this mix may influence the jury process, a series of further questions arises. Is the final decision individually driven or collectively constructed? What does the choice of lexicon say about the values highlighted in the projects? Do authoritative voices in the jury pre-empt the debate on excellence? Does the focus on technical data compromise the overall appraisal of architectural quality?

The Canadian competitions selected for this study were launched between 2008 and 2014. This time period is a significant sample since the environmental certification LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) was introduced in Canada only a few years earlier, in 2003. During this time period (2008–14), LEED was quickly becoming a nation-wide norm for ensuring that environmental design practices would be upheld in architectural projects submitted to competitions. It took only a few years after its introduction in the Canadian market for LEED to become a quasi-mandatory requirement in Canadian competitions. Indeed, its introduction in the competition format has influenced how designers present their projects, and how jurors evaluate and judge the submissions, as previous research on Canadian competitions has already shown.<sup>30</sup> The selection of competitions is drawn from the comprehensive *Canadian Competitions Catalogue*. Table 2 lists the competitions that took place in Quebec during this time. Those indicated in bold are those competitions that are analysed, mapped and presented in this article.

### **Mapping competition jury deliberations**

The five competitions selected for analysis are listed in Table 2. They are the New Montréal Planetarium, the Saint-Laurent Library, the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre, the Saul-Bellow Library Extension, and the Pierrefonds Library Extension.

Name of Competition	City	LEED Level	Year
<i>Espace pour la vie – Volet A: la Métamorphose de l’Insectarium</i> (Space for Life - Part A: The Metamorphosis of the Insectarium)	Montréal		2014
<i>Espace pour la vie – Volet B: le Biodôme renouvelé</i> (Space for life – Part B: the Renewed Biodôme)	Montréal		2014
<i>Espace pour la vie – Volet C: le Pavillon de verre au Jardin botanique</i> (Space for Life - Part C: the Glass Pavilion at the Botanical Garden)	Montréal		2014
<i>Concours pour l’agrandissement de la bibliothèque de Pierrefonds</i> (Competition for the Extension of the Pierrefonds Library)	Montréal	Gold	2013
<i>Agrandissement de la bibliothèque Saul-Bellow</i> (Saul-Bellow Library Expansion)	Montréal	Gold	2011
<i>Maison de la littérature de l’institut Canadien de Québec</i> (House of Literature of the Canadian Institute of Quebec)	Quebec		2011
<i>Complexe de soccer au CESM</i> (CESM Soccer Complex)	Montréal		2011
<i>Concours de design urbain Namur Jean-Talon Ouest</i> (Namur Jean-Talon Ouest Urban Design Competition)	Montréal		2011
<i>Complexe sportif Saint-Laurent</i> (Saint-Laurent Sports Complex)	Montréal		2010
<i>Centre Culturel Notre-Dame-de-Grâce</i> (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Cultural Centre)	Montréal	Gold	2010
<i>Nouvelle bibliothèque de Saint-Laurent</i> (New Saint-Laurent Library)	Montréal	Gold	2009
<i>Musée National des Beaux-arts du Québec</i> (National Museum of Fine Arts of Quebec)	Québec		2009
<i>Bibliothèque de Saint-Hubert</i> (Library of Saint-Hubert)	Saint-Hubert		2008
<i>Planétarium de Montréal</i> (Planetarium of Montréal)	Montréal	Platinum	2008

Table 2: Design competitions in Canada, 2008–2014. The competitions in bold are those studied in this article.

Translation of French competition names by author.

The winning project, along with details of the jury, of each of these competitions is listed in Table 3. Each of the winning competition projects had a LEED certification requirement, of which the level is included in this table. The jury composition was different for each competition, as highlighted in the table. The number of members varied between seven and eleven jurors. In all cases, an environmental expert or LEED-certified architect was included. Each had at least one representative of the project, or the community for which the project was intended. Some juries also included either an artist or journalist. All the competitions were intended for projects in the city of Montréal, and have since been built.

The data for this study was collected from the competition briefs, the winning project proposals, the jury reports, and observations in some of the jury deliberations. Discourse analysis was conducted on the briefs, the jury reports and the notes collected from observations. Image analysis was conducted from the winning project proposals. The quotes presented in the following analysis are selected from the competition jury reports, as these are public documents. The observations of the jury deliberations remain confidential. However, these observations allow us to draw further conclusions.

The first case, the New Montréal Planetarium competition (2008), was the only one among the five competitions studied that required a LEED Platinum level of certification, the highest and strictest level of LEED. [Fig. 3] The others all had a requirement of Gold. The jury of the New Montréal Planetarium included eleven jurors, of which six were architects – so a bare minimum of architects structured the jury (55 percent). One of these architects was a nationally prominent environmental expert. The jury also included three high-level representatives of the planetarium, one artist, and one scenographer. Despite the diversity of the jury, the following quote from the jury report, which is indicative of the overall

arguments presented for the winning project, points to the persuasiveness of the environmental expert, since the architectural qualities, in terms of form and materiality, were not considered of superior quality:

The architectural concept proposes quality sequences of experiences to visitors. ... The architectural concept integrates, in a clear way, the environmental strategies put forth, including passive strategies. ... More profound symbolic explorations of the cones, from both iconographical and material points of view is recommended.<sup>31</sup>

This winning project did not win because it offered an exceptional spatial or symbolic experience, but rather because ‘the architectural concept integrates, in a clear way, the environmental strategies put forth, including passive strategies’.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the jury felt that the material, formal, and symbolic qualities had to be revisited before construction. Given that one of the four panels submitted was a mandatory environmental strategy panel, the jury spent considerable time to understand its details, where information was often too technically generic, meaning there was no reference to the actual project and only reference to universally accepted technologies. The environmental expert was decisive in leading the discussion and driving the final decision, almost entirely on their own. However, the environmental arguments were presented in the form of abstract eco-models about universal eco-features in a generically factual manner. They were difficult to dispute since the lexicon adopted was exclusive to the expert’s knowledge. This is why New Montréal Planetarium is placed in the lower left-hand quadrant A: Driven by solo technical expert. [Fig. 8]

The second case is the Saint-Laurent Library competition (2009). [Fig. 4] There were seven jurors, of which five were architects (70 percent). Of these, one was a key contributor to the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC) initiative, whose



Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b

Fig 7a: Pierrefonds Library Extension, image from competition panel. Source: Chevalier Morales Architects and DMA architects.

Fig 7b: Pierrefonds Library Extension. Photo: author.

key aim was to introduce LEED to Canada in 2003. The other two jurors were a journalist and an urban planner. This jury was less diverse than that of the New Montréal Planetarium case; however, it was deadlocked when finalising the selection for the winning project. Some jurors preferred the runner-up project for its exceptional spatial, material, symbolic, and experiential qualities, while others preferred the eventual winning project for its massive presence and environmental strategies. Regarding the winning project, the jurors argued that 'The concept offers a contemporary distinctive signature and the bridge offers a new relation with the city and the wooded area ... The concept of sustainable development is innovative, clear, and pedagogical; the solar orientation is well exploited.'<sup>33</sup> It was the argument of the CaGBC expert that finally drove the decision to select the most easily provable environmental project, since the sustainable development strategy was considered innovative, clear, and pedagogical. However, the deliberation was more agonistic than that of the New Montréal Planetarium, which is why I place the Saint-Laurent Library slightly higher along both axes of the lower left-hand quadrant A, Driven by solo technical expert. [Fig. 8]

The third case is the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre competition (2010). [Fig.5] There were ten jurors, of which only five were architects – one was a local LEED expert. The percentage of architects in the jury was thus the minimum required for juries in Canadian competitions. The other members were three high-level representatives of the client, one representative of the Quebec Minister of Culture and Communication, and one urban planner. The president of the jury emphasised at the very beginning of the deliberation session that the number of LEED credits would not weigh heavily as a criterion for finding the best project. Rather, the aim was to focus on the specific architectural qualities, alternating between detail and big picture. The environmental strategies were discussed within

these parameters. In many instances, the arguments presented by one of the jurors, a nationally recognised architect, helped converge to the final decision. Even if this key juror directed the discussion, the debate about the projects was fertile, and helped the other jurors better understand each of the finalist projects. A statement in the jury report highlights the general lexicon of the argumentation: 'In their comprehension of the changes expected in the usage of such a cultural space, and through its expression of openness, this project reveals a strong potential of development for the community, respectful of the past, and resolutely pointed towards the future.'<sup>34</sup> This is why the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre is mapped on the top part of the vertical edge, between quadrant B: Driven by a solo architectural expert and quadrant D: Driven collectively by all jurors. [Fig. 8]

The fourth case is the Saul-Bellow Library Extension competition (2011), which had eight jurors. Of these, six were architects, one a prominent environmental expert. [Fig. 6] The other jury members were a citizen representative and a representative of the client. The percentage of architects in this jury (75 percent) was higher than the previous cases described. This competition was original in its format and requirements, since it was the first in the province of Quebec to require an Integrated Design Process (IDP) following the selection of the winner.<sup>35</sup> With this inclusion in the design process, the decision was made that many of the environmental details could be worked out during the forthcoming IDP process. This process would entail the development of the detailed design and the construction phases. The following quote summarises the overall argumentation adopted during deliberation: 'The potential of evolution of the concept is elevated since it is flexible, non-rigid, and therefore will facilitate the Integrated Design Process (IDP) to follow; it responds to criteria without formal dogmatism. The team has the potential to evolve this project.'<sup>36</sup> The jury debate was

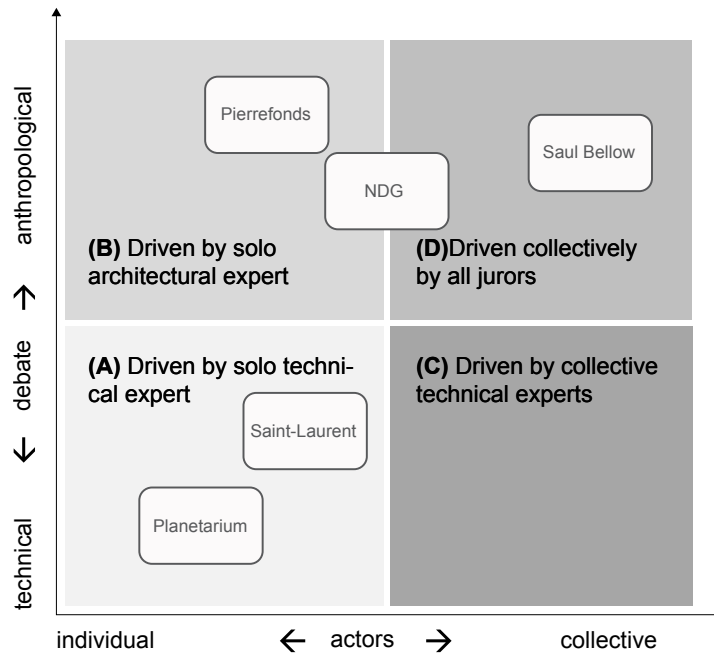


Fig. 8

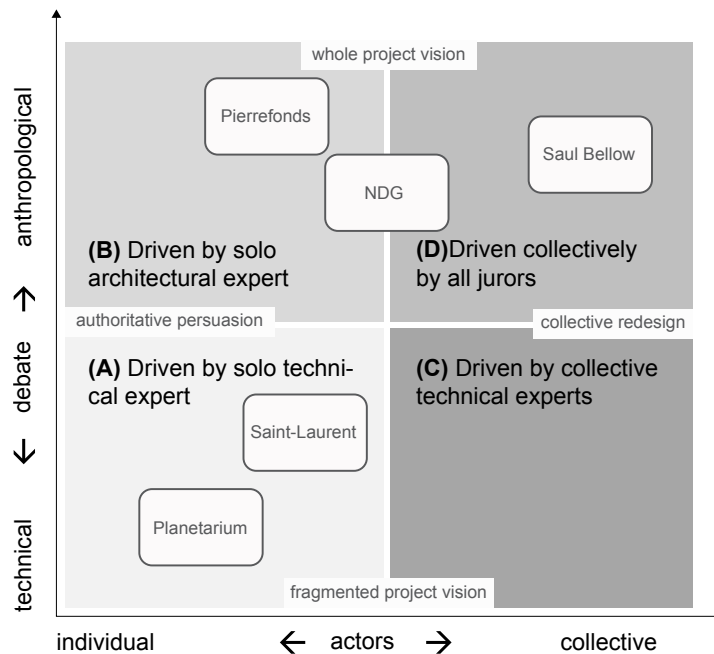


Fig. 9

Fig. 8: The discursive methods of the five competition juries. Diagram: author.

Fig. 9: Redefinition of the edges of the two axes of the mapping compass: the horizontal axis (actors' involvement) spans from authoritative persuasion to collective redesign; and the vertical axis (lexicon of debate) spans from a whole project vision to a fragmented project vision. Diagram: author.

focused on architectural qualities, such as space, materiality, experience, design potential, constructive qualities, and to some extent, the potential to attain the certification requirement, without strictly counting LEED credits. Since one of the competition requirements was to submit an animation of the space, there was an extensive exploration of spaces and flow. This jury deliberated in a non-confrontational, yet agonistic manner, leading all jurors to understand the projects in terms of their potential for the programme, site, and community expectations. This is why the Saul-Bellow Library Extension is mapped high in the quadrant D: Driven collectively by all jurors. [Fig. 8]

The fifth and final case is the Pierrefonds Library Extension competition (2013), which had seven jurors. [Fig. 7] Of these, five were architects (70 percent), one of which one a local LEED expert, and the president a celebrated architect. The involvement of this prominent architect was pivotal in the deliberation process, and in the way the debates took place. The remaining two jurors were representatives of the library. The structure of this jury was thus very similar to the one for the Saul-Bellow Library extension. The following quote from the jury report represents the overall tone of the debate:

This project presents a pavilion in the park and not a box in the city. It is open to its environment and takes advantage of the site. It has a marked presence on the street and respects the existing vegetation. ... The "all-white" is divine. The beauty of the white resides in the sum of a multitude of colours.<sup>37</sup>

During the debate, there was some discussion regarding the environmental strategies for attaining the required LEED Gold certification. However, these discussions did not drive the final decision, as they were considered inseparable from the overall design. The final decision was determined by the symbolic, experiential, formal, and specific contextual response to the site. This included the

sensitivity to and possible disturbance of trees. The discussion was broad, yet to some degree steered by the star architect, which is why the Pierrefonds Library Extension is mapped along the top edge of quadrant B: Driven by solo architectural expert. [Fig. 8] The debate was highly architectural and anthropological, where the final decision mostly converged through the arguments of the world-renowned architect.

### General observations

One of the overarching observations about these juries is that environmental imperatives influenced the lexicon as well as the structure of the jury. In all cases, the competition rules established environmental certification as a criterion. In two cases though, the Saul-Bellow Library Extension and the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre, the environmental certification was not considered a necessary precondition at the stage of the jury deliberation. Here, jurors accepted the situation that the LEED certification requirements would be dealt with during the forthcoming detailed design and building phases. Because of the stricter LEED requirements for the New Montréal Planetarium, the debate there tended towards discussions of energy efficiency, water conservation, material toxicity, lighting efficiency, site disturbances, and even maintenance costs.

In all of the competitions, technical experts were invited to present the structural and environmental results (even if they did not have voting power). In some cases, the use of abstract models and quantitative performance measurements were prevalent for explaining the project's merits. These technical expert presentations did not add to the qualitative debate since these facts were simply accepted by the jury. In the cases where an internationally known environmental expert was part of the jury, the arguments presented by this juror, confirmed the presented facts provided by the technical committee (external to the jury). In two of the five

<b>Competition title</b> <b>Year</b> <b>LEED level</b>	<b>Jury composition</b>
<b>Pierrefonds Library Extension</b> 2013 LEED Gold	7 jurors = <b>5 architects</b> of which 1 was a LEED expert <b>2 reps</b> of the library
<b>Saul Bellow Library Extension</b> 2011 LEED Gold	8 jurors = <b>6 architects</b> of which 1 is a nationwide renowned environmental expert <b>1 citizen representative</b> <b>1 director</b> of municipal services
<b>Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre</b> 2010 LEED Gold	10 jurors = <b>1 director</b> of library, <b>1 director</b> of sports and leisure <b>1 art director</b> , <b>1 coordinator</b> for Quebec Minister of Culture and Communication <b>5 architects</b> of which 1 is a LEED expert <b>1 urban planner/designer</b>
<b>Saint-Laurent Library</b> 2009 LEED Gold	7 jurors = <b>5 architects</b> , of which 1 is a LEED expert who contributed to the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC) initiative and another an architecture academic/professor <b>1 urban planner</b> <b>1 journalist/author</b>
<b>New Montréal Planetarium</b> 2008 LEED Platinum	11 jurors = <b>6 architects</b> , of which 1 is a LEED expert and Canada-wide sustainability expert <b>1 general director</b> of science complex <b>1 president of administration</b> of science complex <b>1 director</b> of Planetarium <b>1 scenographer</b> , <b>1 artist</b>

Table 3: Competition-winning projects selected for analysis and mapping.



cases, these arguments were strong enough that the environmental expert in the jury almost drove the final decision single-handedly. This was so for both the Saint-Laurent Library and the New Montréal Planetarium. In these two competitions, a qualitative debate was circumvented based on three major reasons: first, a powerful and persuasive argument by a technical expert forced an early convergence to a winner. Second, a discursive gap emerged among the jurors because the technical expert in the jury leaned heavily on abstract data rather than specific qualities of the project. And third, the importance of the environmental certification requirement strongly biased the jury decisions.

If we consider Habermas's dimensions of modern culture for the aforementioned competition jury discussions, we can say that in two, the cognitive-instrumental (objective) dominated.<sup>38</sup> Since the technical expert prevailed, the arguments remained fragmented, abstract and difficult for the other jurors to debate as they were stated in terms of 'pure' facts and impossible to challenge.

In one competition, it was an internationally celebrated architect who provided a series of arguments that would be difficult to challenge. In this case, the jury was swayed in the direction of the expert architectural counsel – similar behaviour as when the technical expert prevails in the jury and the qualitative debate is sidestepped. The following two reasons may explain this. On the one hand, the qualitative and descriptive arguments, highlighting aesthetic-experiential qualities of the project were convincing and seemingly unquestioned by the other jurors because of their high esteem for the prominent architect. On the other hand, the expert's explanation was in the form of a narrative, discussing the anthropological qualities of the space, while highlighting architecture qualities, creating a vision of lived space, that was persuasive to the other jurors.

This was the case for the Pierrefonds Library Extension and the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre, for the latter to a lesser extent. The debate of design quality was usurped, to some degree, by the expert counsel provided by the renowned architect in that specific jury. This is because their arguments, even if they contributed to an overall understanding of the project, quite distinctly drove the final decision. In the case of the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Centre the debate represented a true contact zone, with a combination of arguments by the expert architect and the fertile mix of arguments by all jurors.

If we consider this from a Habermasian perspective, when the architectural expert prevails, as in the Pierrefonds Library Extension competition, it appears that it is the dimensions of aesthetic-experiential (subjective) and moral-practical (normative) that dominate the argumentative content.<sup>39</sup> If we further consider judgment as elaborated by Dewey in each of the four cases cited above, these expert jurors may have succeeded in controlling the controversies of the judgments, through the careful elaboration of claims of quality and the meticulous selection of facts.<sup>40</sup>

In the Saul-Bellow Library Extension the debates were rather diverse. The arguments oscillated between the environmental expert advice, the other architects, the director of municipal services, and the citizen representative. From a Habermasian ideal speech act, the discussion was balanced between the objective facts, the normative expectations and the subjective spatial and formal considerations.

As a final observation, there were no competitions that fell in quadrant C: Driven by collective technical experts. This condition could occur only if the technical experts, along with the rest of the jury, would sift through just the objective facts to construct a final decision – a decision based on the summation of a series of fragmented facts. This approach

for selecting a winning project would fail to engage in a qualitative debate that would help understand the projects in any depth. Does this finding further corroborate the notion of a competition jury as a contact zone of intercultural spaces?

### **Discussion and conclusion: juries as contact zones of intercultural debate**

Taking into account the small sample of this study, we can identify three preliminary findings. At best, the jury deliberation comprises diverse exchanges, oscillating between the evaluation of technical reports and the negotiation of architectural qualities, in a balanced manner. Furthermore, ideal communicative speech exchanges are inconsistent across the juries studied since the structure of the jury influences the potential of this rich deliberative exchange. And finally, it does not seem possible to have a collective construction of the winning project through the summation of technical evaluations alone, as seen in figure 3.

This study provides a series of openings to new hypotheses. Given these preliminary findings, I have tentatively renamed the four inner poles, as shown in figure 4. When projects are mapped on the top centre pole, this indicates that the individuals in the jury adopted a whole project vision. Projects mapped on the bottom centre pole indicates that they adopted a fragmented project vision. Projects mapped on the centre left pole indicates that the jury project was driven by the authoritative persuasion of a key juror. The opposite end of the authoritative persuasion pole – the centre right pole – indicates that the jury was able to collectively redesign the project through debate. These renamed poles, as shown in figure 4, may help to consider new questions and hypotheses.

Let us now return to the aim of this article: to understand how the imperatives for evaluating environmental risks in competitions have influenced the way in which the jury addresses uncertainty and

unverifiability, and how this has led to an improved comprehension of how the built environment is judged in the competition context. The notion of juries as contact zones is critical as it sets the jury up as a space rich in deliberative potential. We have seen that the competition jury, with its diverse structure, varied value systems, professions, disciplines, and wide-ranging lexicon, is an ideal representation of a contact zone. However, this potential is not always easy to achieve in a competition jury. It may be weakened, depending on the structure of the jury and the way that the arguments are constructed and delivered.

This appears to be the case when the evaluation of technical reports overrides the qualitative reflection of the projects. Schön asserts that the complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, and value-conflict prevalent in architectural design and judgment situations do not fit the model of technical rationality alone, since in this perspective they are reduced to problem-solving exercises.<sup>41</sup> This problem-solving approach is the space in which many environmental evaluations reside, whereas reflection-in-action is a space of suspension, uncertainty, and imagination. From this Schönian perspective, I have sought to better understand how juries deal with the tension between these two overarching modes of thinking (that is, technical rationality and reflection-in-action) in the deliberation process. Both of these modes can themselves encapsulate a plethora of social and cultural differences.

What this seems to confirm is that the contrast between the rigidness of environmental performance measurements and the complexity of the multifaceted intentions of projects is a disciplinary problem. This becomes quite evident in competition juries and represents a point of fragility, since some jury members prefer to measure quality from an objective perspective, while others will argue that architecture projects can only be deliberated and debated in order to arrive at a collective judgment

of their quality. These different types of experts see the concerns related to architectural quality very differently.

I am not suggesting the exclusion of technical or environmental experts in a competition process, or the total exclusion of rigidly prescriptive green building rating systems, which, in their current use, may stifle debate and openness in the search for innovative solutions. Rather, there are three recommendations that can be offered here. First, I would advise that the technical experts should remain external to the jury process, since their project vision is limited at best, and fragmentary at worst, and could have a counter-productive impact on the way in which quality is established. Second, I would recommend that the expert evaluations are included in the jury deliberation, but that final judgment is suspended until claims from all jurors have been heard, in order to avoid oversimplifying a given project's qualities. Third, I would advise that environmental management tools such as green building rating systems are used as guidelines by competitors without having to be part of the judging process at all – in other words, credits would not be counted and compared by the jury.

As a final note, as there were no competitions mapped in quadrant C: co-review of technical results drives decision, I have formulated questions for future consideration. [Fig. 9] Given the imperatives of climate change today, should the debate of architectural quality in a jury rely mostly on technical expertise to assess the multitude of risks that culture and society are facing? If the answer is yes, then what is left of the complexity of the project in terms of spatial and experiential qualities? Is it even possible to collectively construct an understanding of the winning project through technical evaluations alone? And if the winning project was selected solely through technical evaluations, would the jury believe, or be comfortable with, their decision in seeking to select the best overall project?

In this light, the conflict of experts may be summed up as the contradiction between the fact that technical experts fail to engage with the complexity of design projects, yet, clients require technical expert advice to counterbalance the architect's tacit knowledge. Technical experts in this sense appear to be rather remote from the very idea of a competition as a space for qualitative debate and judgment. What seems to be essential in the competition format is that the competition jury is a contact zone of design judgment, somewhere between the many technical evaluations, user experiences, and the deliberation of overall architectural quality.

## Notes

1. Literature on environmental risk spans many disciplines, from philosophy to environmental studies, environmental sciences and environmental design. The following offer a glimpse of the breadth of the discourse. H. Scott Matthews, Lester Lave and Heather MacLean, 'Life Cycle Impact Assessment: A Challenge for Risk Analysts', *Risk Analysis* 22 (2002): 853–59. Philipp Weib and Jorg Bentlage, *Environmental Management Systems and Certification* (Uppsala: Baltic University Press, 2006). Kerry Whiteside, *Precautionary Politics: Principle and Practice in Confronting Environmental Risk* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006). Risk society is a condition of both scientists' ability to perform statistical analyses and the realization that humans are creating situations of risk faster than we can learn to understand them. A primary author is Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).
2. Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). He deconstructs the professional project of various fields (medicine, architecture, etc.). He suggests various conceptual processes that take place in order to reach decisions during these practices.
3. The project is comprehensively described and analysed in Jean-Pierre Boutinet, *Anthropologie du*

- projet* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005 [1990]).
4. Architecture competitions are particular formats of design procurement that best permit a transparent process. Competitions have been thoroughly studied and theorised by several teams of researchers, in Europe, in Canada, and in the United States of America, among them: Magnus Ronn, Reza. Kazemian and Jonas. E. Andersson, eds., *The Architectural Competition (Research Inquiries and Experience)* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2010); Stanley Collyer and M. Berk, *Competing Globally in Architecture Competitions* (Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2004); Jean-Pierre Chupin, Carmela Cucuzzella, and Bechara Helal, eds., *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge: An International Inquiry* (Montréal: Potential Architecture Books, 2015); Jonas E. Andersson, Gerd Bloxham Zettersten, and Magnus Rönn, eds., *Architectural Competitions as Institution and Process* (Stockholm: The Royal Institute of Technology, 2016).
  5. The design competition as a platform of communicative exchanges is introduced by Jan Michel Silberberger, Joris Ernest Van Wezemaal, Sofia Paisiou and Ignaz Strebel, 'Spaces of knowledge creation: Tracing 'knowing in action' in jury-based decision-making processes in Switzerland', *International Journal of Knowledge-Based Development* 1, no. 4 (2010): 287–302.
  6. The competition jury as a means for design procurement is representative of values needed for the judgment process as I argued in Cucuzzella, 'Judging in a World of Expertise: When the Sum of the Parts Is Less Than the Whole,' in *Architecture Competitions*, ed. Chupin, Cucuzzella, and Helal.
  7. Boutinet, *Anthropologie Du Projet*.
  8. Ibid.
  9. Ibid.
  10. Ibid.
  11. Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
  12. Jean-Pierre Boutinet, 'Les Multiples Facettes Du Projet,' *Sciences humaines* 39 (1993): 20–24.
  13. Jean-Pierre Chupin has elaborated extensively on how the ideal judgment process founded on debate essentially results in the jury redesigning the winning project in Jean-Pierre Chupin, 'Judgement by Design: Towards a model for studying and improving the competition process in architecture and urban design', *The Scandinavian Journal of Management: special topic forum on 'Architectural Competitions'*, 27, no. 1 (2011): 173–184.
  14. The speech situation, in an ideal context for the exchange of ideas, is thoroughly described in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
  15. The jury deliberation and judgment process can be seen as a way to collectively re-design the winning project is explained in Jean-Pierre Chupin, 'Quand Juger C'est "Concevoir Un Projet", *ARQ, La revue d'architecture* 154 (2011). Special edition on architecture competitions edited by Jean-Pierre Chupin.
  16. Ibid.
  17. Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
  18. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 286.
  19. Ibid., 285–286
  20. In Canada, once the LEED certification was introduced in 2003, there was a period when its adherence was usurping the debate, as demonstrated in Carmela Cucuzzella, 'When the Narrative of Environmental Certifications Replaces the Debate on Quality', in *Faire des histoires? du récit d'urbanisme à l'urbanisme fictionnel: faire la ville à l'heure de la société du spectacle*, ed. Architectes Fondation Brillard, (Geneve: Fondation Brillard Architectes, 2015), 43–47.
  21. Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Incomplete Project' in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985).
  22. John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1933).
  23. Ibid.

24. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (London: Allen & Unwin, [1930] 1990).
25. Kersten Reich, 'Observers, Participants, and Agents in Discourses: A Consideration of Pragmatist and Constructivist Theories of the Observer', in *John Dewey between Pragmatism and Constructivism*, ed. Larry A. Hickman, Stefan Neubert, and Kersten Reich (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).
26. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the contact zone', in *Professing in the contact zone*, ed. Janice M. Wolff (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002), 2.
27. Chupin, Cucuzzella, and Helal, *Architecture Competitions*.
28. Alben Yaneva, *Mapping Controversies in Architecture* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012); Hélène Lipstadt (ed.), *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989).
29. Elizabeth Tostrup, *Architecture and Rhetoric: Text and Design in Architectural Competitions Oslo 1939–1997* (London: Papadakis Publisher, 1999); Paul D. Spreiregen, *Design Competitions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Kristian Kreiner, 'Designing Architectural Competitions: Balancing Multiple Matters of Concern', *Conditions: Scandinavian Magazine on Architecture and Urbanism* no. 7 (2010): 12–17.
30. Carmela Cucuzzella, 'Is Sustainability Reorienting the Visual Expression of Architecture?', *Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review (RACAR)* 40, no. 2 (2015): 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1035398ar>.
31. City of Montréal, 'Rapport du jury: Étape 2 (Jury Report), Le Planétarium/Concours d'architecture' (Montréal, 2009).
32. Ibid.
33. City of Montréal, 'Rapport du jury, Étape 2 (Jury Report), Concours d'architecture: Bibliothèque Saint-Laurent', Centre D'exposition et Réserve Muséale, Arrondissement de Saint-Laurent' (Montréal, 2010).
34. City of Montréal, 'Rapport du jury (Jury Report), Concours D'architecture: Centre Culturel De Notre-Dame-De-Grâce'. (Montréal, 2010).
35. The Integrated Design Process (IDP) has been given much attention since the early 2000s. There are many reports and guidelines on the topic, such as: John Boecker et al., *The Integrative Design Guide to Green Building: Redefining the Practice of Sustainability* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009); Busby Perkins & Will, *Roadmap for the Integrated Design Process Part One: Summary Guide* (Vancouver: BC Green Building Roundtable, 2007); Nils Larsson, *The Integrated Design Process: International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment (iiSBE)* (2004). However, very little has been written yet on its effectiveness in completed designed and constricted projects.
36. City of Montréal, 'Rapport du jury, Étape 2 (Jury Report), Concours d'architecture - Agrandissement et réaménagement Bibliothèque Saul-Bellow- Lachine', (Montréal, 2011).
37. City of Montréal, 'Rapport su du jury (Jury Report), Concours d'architecture - Agrandissement et réaménagement Bibliothèque Pierrefonds-Roxboro', (Montréal, 2013).
38. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*.
39. Ibid.
40. Dewey, *How We Think*.
41. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

## Biography

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# This is Not a Nest: Transcultural Metaphors and the Paradoxical Politics of International Competitions

Jean-Pierre Chupin

## International competitions as generators of cross-cultural metaphors

Competitions can be studied in terms of project management processes or from a sociological vantage point as spaces of social practices. Some scholars, however, only consider the architectural qualities of projects designed through competitions without considering the process itself. Aside from monographic studies of winning schemes, the literature on competitions from the last two decades reveals two common scientific trends. The first is more axiological and evaluates the appropriateness of the competition process from a quasi-managerial perspective while the second, operating outside architectural theory, adopts a generally all-embracing sociological framework and presents a meta-disciplinary theory that demystifies designers' intentions and endorses competition studies as a new sociological field.<sup>1</sup> International competitions seem to have an even more divergent status in competition studies. Initially designated by Hélène Lipstadt as 'experimental' devices reflecting power games in the transformation of the built environment, these all too obvious spaces for innovation have recently been reappraised through a critical reading of experimentation.<sup>2</sup> Such opposite views may be said to hint at distinct forms of innovation, but it appears that they have not addressed the production of creative discourse – particularly performative metaphors – as a specific phenomenon. In between these poles, my theoretical

standpoint considers competitions not only as both process and product but, more importantly, as fertile epistemological filters for the theorisation of contemporary practices in architecture. Considered as epistemological prisms or filters, architecture competitions reveal contemporary trends or disciplinary issues through the production of discourse. A comparison of competitions within a historical period renders the already inherent comparative nature of the competition process even more fruitful. From a methodological standpoint, and particularly through both qualitative and quantitative comparisons, competition studies can produce new knowledge on architectural practices and discourses.<sup>3</sup>

The discursive dimensions of architecture competitions have already been analysed through argumentative or rhetorical lenses, but the recurring production of transcultural metaphors, particularly in international competitions remains to be addressed.<sup>4</sup> The proposed hypothesis of competitions as contact zones seems particularly appropriate at the international level generating enhanced intercultural zones in which competitors forge broad analogical figures in an attempt to bridge cultural differences. In this article, I propose to consider competitions, and particularly international competitions, as in-between spaces for the framing of active architectural tropes – here called 'performative metaphors' for their explicit intention to bridge cultural differences. After summarising

some paradigm shifts in the theory of analogical thinking, I present a cognitive interpretation of some well-known design metaphors (crystal, nest, biology, cloud, and so on). These almost mundane tropes, often transformed into nicknames, tend to persist in the collective remembrance of an event long after it has ended, even far beyond initial intents. These analogical discursive vehicles are probed for their exemplification of competitions' ability to behave as conflictual cross-cultural spaces of interaction or interpretation. In this sense, I refrain from considering analogies as indicators of designers' intentions. On the other hand, however, I acknowledge that some of these metaphors can be meant to induce performative action or speech acts.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in *Models and Metaphor*, a seminal critical theory on the role of metaphor, Max Black underlines that metaphors not only reveal or repeat semantic relationships, but often contribute to creating these relationships.<sup>6</sup> More recently, not only are metaphors now considered the main product of analogical thinking but, as theorised by Douglas Hofstadter, the very making of analogies is at the core of cognition.<sup>7</sup> In other words, some analogies can actually act as cradles and matrices for the production of knowledge. My hypothesis is that these generic metaphors are signs and indicators of deeper intercultural exchanges occurring in highly asymmetrical cultural situations: complex interactions that fall into the definition of what Mary Louise Pratt, from the standpoint of comparative literature and cultural studies, has named 'contact zones'.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this probing of competition's metaphors, we can identify a variety of political expectations among their organisers. These intentions point at a somewhat post-colonial redefinition of international competitions. My own statistical and analytical survey of forty North-American competitions converges on a more refined fourfold definition of what is expected today of international competitions. By extension, I conclude by proposing a

fourfold model distinguishing specific forms of contact zones.

### **Between formal, structural and conceptual analogies**

When exploring new forms, ideas, or principles, analogies appear as true matrices for inexhaustible sources of metaphors, be it for the elaboration of an operative vocabulary in the arts and sciences, for forging new concepts, discursive figures or visual images.<sup>9</sup> In architecture, as theorised by historian Peter Collins, analogies deserve a prominent place in a critical history of modern architectural thinking.<sup>10</sup> According to Collins's pioneering work, scholars in architecture have regularly approached metaphors and analogies as creative generative devices.<sup>11</sup> Even before formulating the much-celebrated theory of the 'reflective practitioner', Donald A. Schön wrote extensively on the role of 'generative metaphors' in social policies.<sup>12</sup> Metaphors have also been observed in the context of the design studio in both architecture and planning education.<sup>13</sup> In general, Lakoff and Johnson's theories of 'everyday life metaphors' are now considered common knowledge, with many implications for architecture.<sup>14</sup> Since the turn of the century, analogies have been acutely redefined within the realm of cognitive sciences 'as the fuel and fire of thinking'.<sup>15</sup>

Analogical thinking can play with risk and novelty, the unexpected and the amazing, with striking successes and as many notorious failures. In *Prodiges et vertiges de l'analogie*, Jacques Bouveresse situates 'the literary distortion of thinking' at the heart of some of the most spectacular scientific controversies of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> His example of the so-called Sokal affair, referring to a hoax manufactured by physicists Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont to denounce the 'metaphorical misuse of scientific concepts' by some philosophers, illustrates the excesses of literariness, when theorists in human sciences use and

abuse scientific analogies to explain rather than to understand.<sup>17</sup>

Acknowledging this acute warning, it is appropriate to wonder whether architectural research and theory is inclined to acknowledge its own debts to analogical reasoning. Instead of a technological definition (analogue versus digital), I follow a cognitive approach in the footsteps of some pioneering theories of analogical design studies like Alexander Tzonis.<sup>18</sup> However, how should we think about architects' tendency to borrow ideas and concepts? Should the behaviour be considered simple exchange or, more concerningly, a potential source of plagiarism? As proposed by Alessandra Ponte and Antoine Picon in a collective work on the sharing of scientific metaphors, the former notion may seem more nuanced. One might wonder, though, if exchange between architects is always reciprocal and if it is not more often a form of epistemological one-way.<sup>19</sup> Michel Serres has underlined that knowledge is often elaborated and transmitted through crossbreeding.<sup>20</sup> Philibert Secretan's studies have long pointed to a certain respect for differences inscribed at the heart of analogical matrices, which precisely criticises all reductions of analogy to resemblance or 'similes' only.<sup>21</sup> Most theoreticians of analogical thinking prevent us from looking for homogeneous analogies connected to a single theme (that is, biological analogy) and instead consider multiple registers corresponding to levels of reasoning. We can distinguish at least three types of uses in contemporary design practices indebted to a biological imaginary: morphological, structural and conceptual.<sup>22</sup>

A few common cases illustrate these levels of analogical thinking, most of them notably designed through an international competition process and bearing metaphorical nicknames. Formal analogies, the most obvious of these categories, describes the most literal products and gives rise to, at times,

banal interpretations. In modern architecture it often encompasses the realm of forms borrowed from nature. A large body of animal and vegetable references has sprung up since the beginning of the twenty-first century, as documented in the illustrated series edited by Alejandro Bahamón, Patricia Pérez and Alex Campello on analogies between contemporary architecture and the natural world.<sup>23</sup> In this work and without providing any real scientific or historical support for their claims, the authors assert that architecture has always reinterpreted natural forms.<sup>24</sup> Taking a seductive, visual approach to their argument, they play a game of recognising similarities and never disclose to the audience what they truly think of the retroactive inspirations they describe. The superficiality of this type of analogical correspondence is non-operational and non-productive. It is easy to see how such a comforting reading of architecture can be appealing, especially at a time when even the most theoretically vigilant of architects have realised the potential of 'naturalising analogies' to attract the interest of a wider public. Daniel Libeskind's submission to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) competition in Toronto (2001), for example, bearing a multitude of sharp edges and metallic faces, identifies itself with the form of a crystal and even opened in 2007 as the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal.<sup>25</sup> [Fig. 1] And although such a design seems especially fitting for a building housing a collection of geological specimens, Libeskind uses a similar analogy to explain his very different design for the Denver Art Museum's Frederic C. Hamilton building. Should we note, then, that the ROM also accommodates a palaeontology collection and that its overall form can be confused with that of silex, whose angles are perhaps even sharper than a crystal's? We should not. This would be of little interest. Libeskind's crystal analogy is not that of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace (1851) and is even less relatable to Louis Sullivan's nature-inspired system of formal composition. In the case of the ROM, the crystal serves to communicate – to



market, essentially – and not simply to exist as a product of its original design process.

To decipher structural analogies, we need to turn away from thinking about visible forms and consider transfers from specific structural systems to works of architecture. This does not preclude ambivalent interpretation between form and structure. For example, such are those double spiral staircases that seek to symbolise or pay tribute to the DNA structure: thereby disregarding the historical precedent of the celebrated double spiralled staircase at the Castle of Chambord in France, which obviously preceded the discovery of DNA by Watson, Crick (and Franklin) at the beginning of the 1950s. The case of the playful Nest or Bird's Nest, the nickname given to the large, international competition-designed Olympic stadium in Beijing (2008), belongs to this ambivalent category. The bird's nest analogy is halfway between the formal and the structural: formal in its symbolic naming and supposed appeal to a deeper Chinese reverence for the bird's nest, but also structural in its inventive constructive metallic structure. [Fig.2] Architects at Herzog and de Meuron graciously accepted the nest metaphor, despite its turning out to have had little importance in the initial design of the stadium. Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, however, who was associated with the project, gave an important clue in 2011, when he declared that 'the Chinese themselves nicknamed the stadium "Bird's Nest" in the very early stages of the project, thereby essentially assimilating it as their own, before it had even left the drawing board'.<sup>26</sup> The nest is an acceptable (albeit imposed) analogy because it does not contradict Herzog and de Meuron's avowed passion for 'natural history' emphasised in the title of a monograph on the firm published in 2002 by the Canadian Centre for Architecture.<sup>27</sup> If, for Chinese officials, the metaphor of the nest was able to draw public support for a building designed by Westerners, it is important to note here how the cultural exchange began with

an explanatory analogy that later became a design analogy imposed on the architects and then ended as an intercultural, and international, metaphor. The fact is that the three-dimensional knot structure of the stadium was much more coherent and in line with a tectonic intention following a constructive tradition extending back to Gottfried Semper (1803–1879). According to Semper's theory of origins, the arts of braiding and weaving were central in the invention of architectural structures through the ages. [Fig.3] Between the bird's nest and the knot, it is unclear why the metaphor of the knot would have been too complex a message to convey to the Chinese public.

Gigantic scale or, more precisely, changes to the scale of visibility are sometimes at the heart of structural analogies. This is apparent in another structure built for the Olympic Games in Beijing. The Aquatics Centre, or the Water Cube (2008), a work by the Australian architects PTW and engineers at Arup, neighbours Herzog and de Meuron's national stadium and is just as remarkable. [Fig.4] In this case, however, the building's colourful cladding is not indicative of an analogy concerning the overall form of water. Rather, it is a mathematical reinterpretation of the molecular structure of water that guided the architectural design of a swimming pool inside the Water Cube. This analogy also reflects on the membrane of the building itself, which is presented, in contrast to the stadium and its oversize steel structure, as an ecological paradigm through its constructive choices (alveoli of high-performance air cushions), including systems of rainwater collection and recycling.

In his seminal *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, Peter Collins forged four categories of modern analogies: biological, mechanical, linguistic and gastronomic.<sup>28</sup> In previous studies, however, I have explored in depth how analogies do not fall exclusively and simply into sealed



Fig. 1

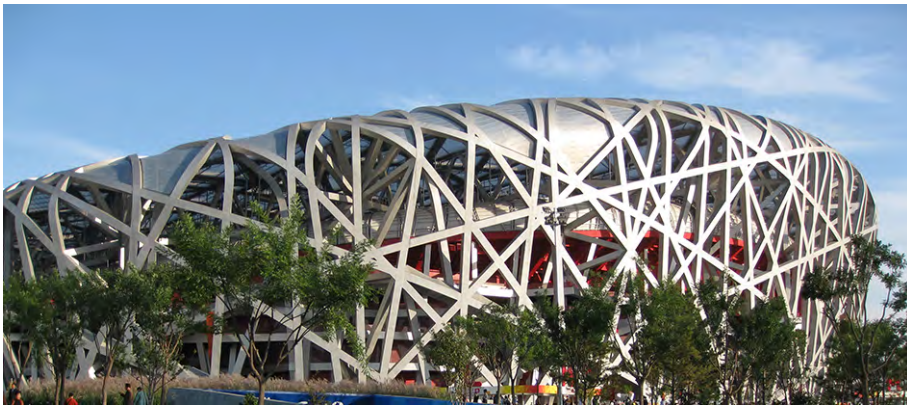


Fig. 2

Fig. 1: The Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. A project by Studio Daniel Libeskind, winner of the competition in 2001 for the expansion of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (completed in 2007). The firm's website specifies that the project 'takes its name from the building's five intersecting volumes, which are reminiscent of crystals.' [www.daniel-libeskind.com](http://www.daniel-libeskind.com). Photo: author.

Fig. 2: The Bird's Nest by Herzog and de Meuron, winner of the Beijing National Stadium international competition (completed in 2008). Photo: C. Cucuzzella.

boxes, be they biological, linguistic or mechanical (or even gastronomic).<sup>29</sup> Artificial tensions such as these, theorised between apparently organic and mechanical imaginations, have induced simplistic architectural categorisations. Recent work by Luis Fernández-Galiano and Joseph Rykwert has begun to deconstruct and offer a more nuanced interpretation of the historical importance of this opposition. In *Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy*, Fernández-Galiano shows that the parallelism and reciprocal relationships between worlds of reference are such that we should recognise the mechanical character of Frank Lloyd Wright just as much as the organic character of Le Corbusier.<sup>30</sup> Rykwert, too, in addressing the relationship between the organic and the mechanical, recalls, as did Peter Collins before him, that the authorship of the form/function problem is attributable Horatio Greenough and not to Sullivan, that is, not back to an architect but to a sculptor. This historical acknowledgement, Rykwert concludes, does not contradict the fact that the very notion of organicism, particularly in relation to the image of the body, has always been a recurrent theme of architectural theory.<sup>31</sup>

A third category of conceptual analogies – with theoretical principles – can be combined with formal and structural analogies. However, conceptual analogies occupy a special place in the theory of architecture. Within the limited scope of this article, we can only mention how a 1987 competition entry by Peter Eisenman illustrates this more abstract form of analogical reasoning. The architect's transposition of the colour code used by biologists to characterise genetic sequences, resulted, according to him, in 'a project that is neither simply architectural nor simply biological, but one which is suspended between the two.' Discussing the origin of his project for the Bio-Centrum Laboratory at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Eisenman forged a clear analogical biology and declared, 'What we discovered was that there is a similarity between the

processes of fractal geometry and the geometry of DNA processes. This similarity was used to propose an analogy between architectural processes and biological processes.'<sup>32</sup>

What indeed, could be more natural than a biological analogy for a biological laboratory? The 'in-between' of the analogical reciprocity is clearly set out here at the heart of the project, although the analogy requires a distinct and elaborate reading with the transposition of the biologists' code in mind.

So far, through a series of well-known examples of metaphoric names or references forged through international competitions, we have seen architects struggling with strong and catching metaphors that sometimes escape their initial intentions for projects. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that something is being 'acted' or done through the competition process. Following J. L. Austin's concept of speech acts, competitions can be interpreted as exhibitions of performative analogies.<sup>33</sup> It remains unclear at this stage, however what exactly is being performed. This phenomenon seems to be even stronger in the contact zone of international competitions. Indeed, it is mostly during international competitions that the space of cross-cultural exchanges reaches its ultimate form of complexity: asking of both organisers and competitors to build a new common language in order to overcome original identities and seek a new intermediate way of being.

### **Redefining international competitions**

Thinking about international competitions as an ensemble of contact zones means that not all international competitions behave the same way or define a singular type of contact zone. The current fluctuation of centres of power makes the contemporary role of international competitions radically different from the role they played in the neo-colonial, largely Western-centric world order that

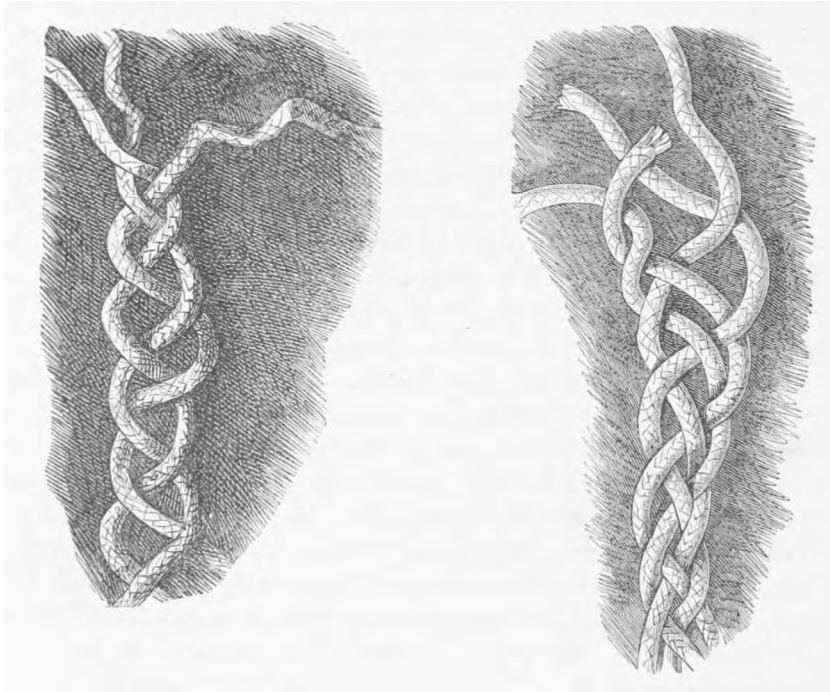


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 3: The knot as tectonic principle in Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder Praktische Ästhetik* (Munich: Friedr. Bruckmann's Verlag, 1861), 172.

Fig. 4: The Water Cube by PTW Architectes and ARUP, winner of the National Aquatics Center competition, Beijing (completed in 2008). Photo: C. Cucuzzella.

emerged following World War II. Often controlled by the *Union Internationale des Architectes* (UIA), international competitions of the 1950s and '60s were regularly presented as generous contributions to developing countries. A comprehensive study by Aymone Nicholas, published in 2007, has shown the specific role of the UIA in major competitions through the 1950s to the '70s, resulting in the construction of some of the most prominent buildings of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> From 1948 to 1975, a period considered the apex of the UIA's influence, it was common to request the organisation's approval before launching an international competition. Organisers sought this approval as a way to reassure competitors about the fairness of the competition process when organised abroad, but their behaviour was further coloured with a characteristically neo-colonial mistrust of developing countries and a somewhat paradoxical intention to influence the design of their most important political buildings. As noted by Nicholas, these international competitions were considered a means of continuing to export (mostly) European practices. Most competitions concerned major public institutions: supreme courts, urban plans, university campuses, parliamentary precincts, city halls, monuments, head offices of world organisations, national theatres or operas, major religious buildings, national museums, religious cultural centres, and so on.

How can we define an international competition in 2020? The same ambiguous generosity may still be present in organisers' intentions today, such as when they employ international competitions as political tools to demonstrate openness to the world. At the same time, however, one would be hard pressed to rationalise not opening a competition at the international level in the contemporary globalised economy. But can we simply oppose the national (non-global and possibly local) competitions in favour of the international (global and therefore non-local) competitions? Such a dualism seems all too simplistic.

On the other hand, the phenomenon should not be reduced to a simple exchange of starchitects. Indeed, an important figure to keep in mind when building a comparative scale on international competitions is the impressive number of an average of 250 competitors per international competition recorded in UIA's sixty years of accessible data. When compared to the four to twelve competitors of common restricted competitions, there is no need to further demonstrate the international competition's widespread capacity for attraction and exposure. It is a characteristic powerful enough to attract and convince major administrators and elected politicians of the need to opt for a world opening, either for political, economic or communication reasons. However, how can we grasp the variety present across managers' intentions to use an international competition to build and transform a situation in our post-colonial context?

In an extensive comparative survey of North American competitions, I have attempted to identify the organisers' intentions in order to better grasp the motives driving the organisation of competitions at the international level. Considering competitions as indicators of a genuine opening of mentalities – a standpoint that does not preclude that they can act as instruments of political control – I analysed a series of international competitions organised since the end of the eighties, mostly in North America but also in Russia and Asia. By combining comparative and discourse analysis of official representative's letters of intent and then comparing them with journalistic reports they inspired, I first distinguish explicit intentions related to competitions of both ideas and projects as well as cultural buildings and their relationship to national and provincial politics. In a second reviewing of available documentation, I distinguish between landscape architecture and urban design programmes in how they can specifically point to the role of touristic policies, for example, or, at times, to the definition of municipal marketing. I also identify a series of recent

competitions for sustainable housing that displayed a tension between traditional and environmental globalisation. I have therefore selected and documented a corpus of international competitions organised in North America between 1988 and 2012. This period is particularly enlightening, since it occurred alongside changes in international policies following the fall of the Berlin wall and the rise of China on the economical international scene. In terms of architectural theories and practices, this period is also associated with tensions between more traditional tectonic principles<sup>35</sup> and new digital cultures that have had a critical influence on architectural discourse.<sup>36</sup>

My hypothesis stated that international competitions can be analysed as in-between spaces for cultural encounter as contact zones or spaces of 'transculturation'. These are spaces where societies geographically and historically separated 'come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict'.<sup>37</sup> By extension, we can define international competitions as spaces in which there is a need to overcome apparently incompatible differences and come to an agreement on a winning project.

Focusing on about forty competitions, comparisons revealed a larger spectrum of intentions – consequently a larger spectrum of contact zones – than expected. While economic forces certainly have a major impact on levels of openness, a few explicit political and communicational intentions can be identified beyond the mere need for a building or urban area driving the establishment of design contests. These intentions are often displayed in official announcements or evidenced in briefs and programmes, and generally echoed in media coverage. As we will now employ a series of extracts to display, these contemporary intentions for rendering the architecture competition as an international contact zone point toward a fourfold

understanding of what an international competition can or should do.

Preliminary statistics were gathered on institutional or professional architecture websites as well as the four main online resources concerning competitions: *Wettbewerbe Aktuell*, a long-standing German journal and database, *Competitions*, an international journal based in the US, the newer *Canadian Competitions Catalogue* and the Brazilian website *Concursos de Projeto*.<sup>38</sup> Over a fairly short period, between 2007 and 2010, the comparison of ratios of international versus national competitions in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, Sweden and Brazil, reveals rather drastic differences. [Fig.5]

Germany and the Netherlands opened more than 80 percent of all competitions at an international level. But the overall number of more than 650 competitions in Germany is seven times higher than that of the Netherlands, since the latter country is fewer than five times the population of the former but with a higher GDP per capita. When we restrict the corpus to one country, some disparities become apparent. For example, data available on the *Canadian Competitions Catalogue*<sup>39</sup> reveals major discrepancies between national and international competitions. Western Canadian provinces like British Columbia and Alberta, both of which barely had any competitions between 1945 and 2010, have since launched competitions almost exclusively at the international level. In the meantime, eastern provinces like Ontario or Quebec, where more than 83 percent of all competitions have taken place since 1945, have regressed to organising at the national or even provincial level. Between 1988 and 2012, we find that 33 percent of international competitions were held in Canada. This becomes an intriguing figure when analysed inter-provincially, as the portion becomes split between 20 percent in Ontario and 11 percent in Quebec, a region home to almost 50 percent of all Canadian



competitions. [Fig. 3] The building of a regional landscape, as demonstrated by Canadian scholar Denis Bilodeau's comparative study on 'territorial imagination' in Quebec, is a phenomenon that does not seem to operate at an international level in the Canadian context.<sup>40</sup>

There is an obvious scientific limit to any interpretation of data collected by online resources, but this initial quantitative approach nonetheless points to socio-political distinctions that could benefit from further exploration through sociological or ethnographic methods. For this research on performative analogies, we chose to complement the statistical study by engaging in a traditional discourse analysis related to a series of thirty-eight international competitions organised in Canada since the mainstreaming of international competitions at the end of the 1980s. Since 1988, seven of the ten Canadian provinces launched competitions at the international level. The following list shows a significant discrepancy amongst provinces: fourteen international competitions in Ontario, ten in Quebec, eight in British Columbia, three in Alberta, two in Manitoba and only one in Nova Scotia and in Saskatchewan. The balance between competitions for ideas and competitions for projects is surprisingly even. The typological spread is also quite surprising when one considers that, in the general public's opinion, international competitions are often for the design of prominent symbolic cultural buildings and/or symbolic landmarks. On the contrary, in the selected Canadian corpus we find eleven competitions at the urban scale, eleven competitions for landscape design, six for cultural buildings, five for housing projects and five miscellaneous (schools, bridges, sport complexes). The analysis was then restricted to four of the most significant program scales (urbanism, landscape, cultural, and housing) and looked for elements of discourse in four categories of documents (Calls for competitors (C), Rules and Briefs (R), Official declarations (O), and Media

coverage (M)). It must be mentioned here that I was looking particularly for explicit fragments of political rhetoric and clear signs and indicators of an explicit political will (or intention) to open the architectural debate outside the cultural borders of a specific nation.

The following four sections present some of the most explicit quotations. Needless to say, the analysis gathered an extensive amount of data. The most common figures concern four poles of intentions in the same competition-related discourses, sometimes combined and sometimes conflicting. These intentions can be summarised as:

- A) International competitions as world-class contests
- B) International competitions as transfers between local and global models
- C) International competitions as global issues (cultural, environmental, and so on) in local contexts
- D) International competitions as intercultural openings to the world.

Since these four categories indicate the primary reasons an organiser would want to engage in an international competition, we summarise their associated political intentions – or types of contact zone – before looking more closely for specific productions of metaphorical language through analogical analysis. [Fig. 6]

#### **A) International competitions as world-class contests**

For the 2009 Calgary National Music Centre competition, the official announcement makes it clear that organisers are looking for a 'world-class destination for public programs, civic engagement, music education, creativity and learning that incorporates, expands and honours the existing historic King Edward Hotel'.<sup>41</sup> As seen in many other cases, an initial thread of key words contains expressions like: 'world-leading communities', 'world-leading

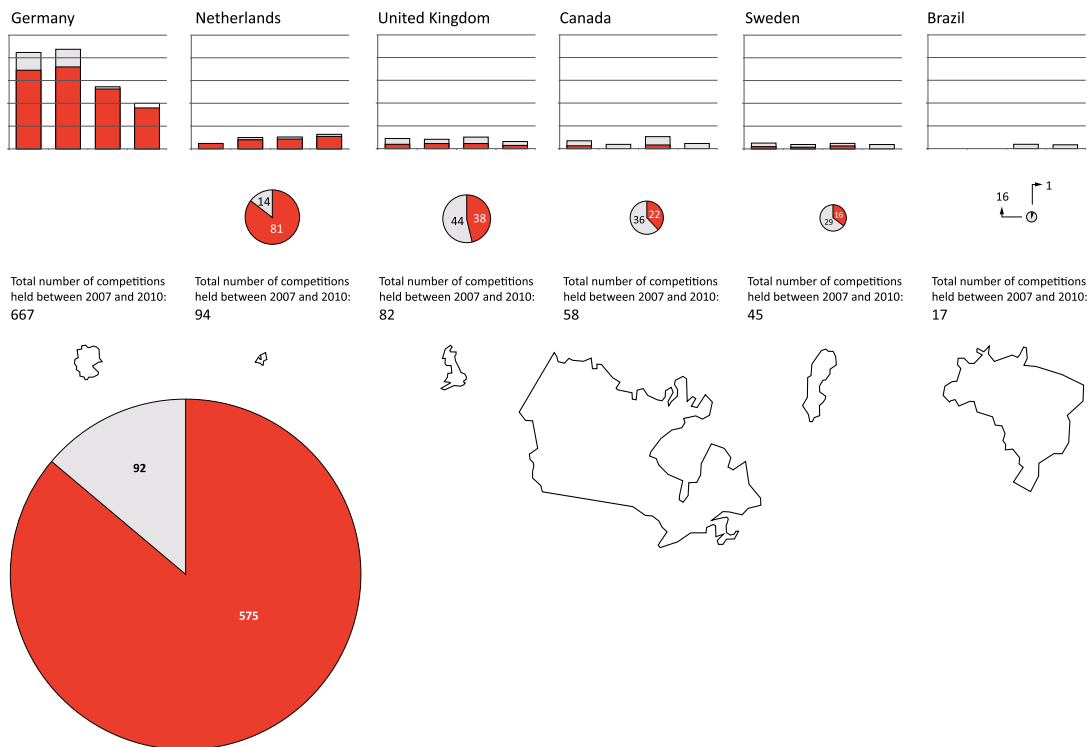


Fig. 5: International comparison (five countries) of the ratio of international to national competitions from 2007 and 2010. Sources: Federal Chamber of Architects (Germany), Steunpunt Ontwerpwedstrijden (The Netherlands), Royal Institute of British Architects, Canadian Competitions Catalogue, Swedish Association of Architects, *Concursos de Projeto* (Brazil).



design teams', or 'world-class destination'. All of these imply a real (or imaginary) world ranking. This view implies that organising an international competition is a way to compete at the 'world level,' as can be the case for sporting events, for example. The space of competition – the contact zone – is more a combat zone as it clearly evokes the primary level of fighting for first place. Few instances of multicultural intentions are perceptible, with an almost Darwinian understanding of excellence as 'natural selection' for survival dominating instead. In fact, in this category, be it for designing at the urban, cultural or housing scales, we find such strong intentions to situate projects in an international context that any value at the local or national levels is almost negated. In the case of the Royal Ontario Museum competition in Toronto (2001), for example, organisers looked for a 'great architect for the ROM's revival,' claiming that 'Toronto need[ed] a star turn' whose implied location was more likely outside Canada's borders than within them. Daniel Libeskind famously won this competition.

### **B) International competitions as transfer between local and global models**

In this category, we find cases related to either urban landscape or architectural scales. For example, the design of a new waterfront for Toronto was done through a series of landscape competitions in which the competition brief insisted on a tension between local and global scales:

*Waterfront Toronto's mission is to put Toronto at the forefront of global cities in the twenty-first century by transforming the waterfront into beautiful and sustainable communities, fostering economic growth in knowledge-based, creative industries, and ultimately redefining how Toronto, Ontario, and Canada are perceived by the world. ... Through the coordination of several international design competitions and the engagement of many of the world's best landscape architects and urban designers Waterfront Toronto has demonstrated its commitment to design excellence.*

*Jarvis Slip will be a key component in Toronto's network of world-renowned waterfront public spaces.*<sup>42</sup>

Occasionally, the text of the 'competitions rules' itself exemplifies the same local-global tension:

*An international design competition informed by local technical experts and public consultation was chosen as the way to find the best ideas for the park." The Canadian Tourism Commission states: "Canada's tourism industry will deliver world-class cultural and leisure experience-year-round while preserving and sharing Canada's clean, safe and natural environments."*<sup>43</sup>

In this second thread of key words we find expressions like: 'a model for local and global design excellence' or 'an architectural statement of international excellence,' or even 'to put [our city, our region, our nation] at the forefront of global cities'. If the first category of intentions (A) was mainly oriented toward a 'world level', in this second category (B), there is bipolarity. Managing entities expect that an international competition will put them 'on the map'. This is clearly the case for cultural buildings, for which a certain level of notoriety is supposed to help the image or the world recognition of the organising entity. This analogy is supposed to function at two levels: one locally, the other globally. In the restricted corpus of this study, most of international competitions are recorded around the turn of the century, when the debate around the unavoidable globalisation of economies and cultures was most heated. This has since shifted somewhat towards ideas of 'global models' and 'international examples', however, and some cities even insist on the existence of new networks of global cities. In this category, launching an international competition seems necessary to access the so-called network of world-renowned public spaces, which I propose to keep as a second definition of international competitions as contact zones. This is clearly the case when tourism issues are at stake: a global market

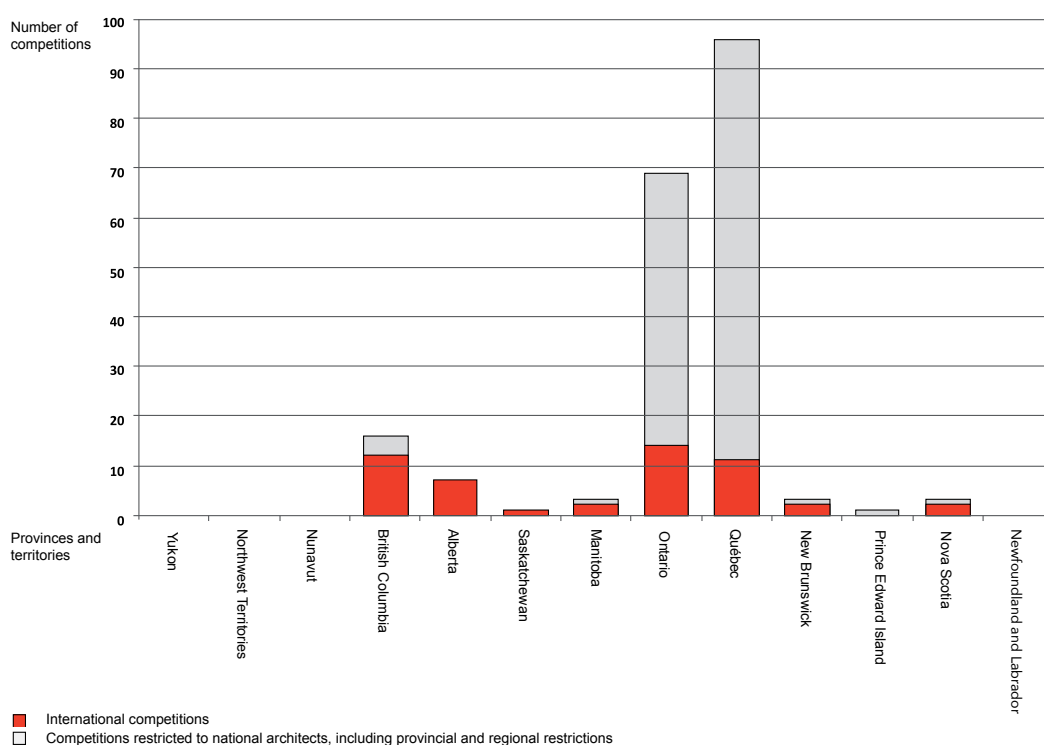


Fig. 6: Ratio of international competitions from 1988 to 2010 by Canadian provinces and territories. Source: Canadian Competitions Catalogue: [ccc.umontreal.ca](http://ccc.umontreal.ca).

activated by new communications technologies, in which branding is seen as a way for the local to be identified on a global international map. The now famous Bilbao effect is perhaps the ultimate paradigm of this kind of contact zone.

### **C) International competitions as global issues in local contexts**

Global issues, not be confused with global markets, have radically changed the definition of international competitions over the course of the last two decades. It is no surprise, then, that most of the cases falling under this third definition will have occurred at the urban level. For example, for the 2010 Edmonton Airport Land competition, the rules are as explicit as possible:

This community must be seen as a model for local and global design excellence. A very high threshold of sustainability has already been achieved by a limited number of sustainable developments in other parts of the world. Edmonton's vision is to expand on the successes of these leading-edge communities.<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes, the official launch of a competition reveals a political agenda on global issues or on local issues 'shared by other (parts of the world)':

The City of Surrey is "inviting the world" to help provide future vision and design ideas for its five emerging town centres. "The issues involved in managing the growth we're seeing in our five-town centres are shared by other suburbs shifting into complex cities around the globe," said Watts. "By opening ourselves to a world of new ideas, we'll be able to access and consider the widest possible range of options as we plan the future of our town centres."<sup>45</sup>

In other cases, such as this 2012, housing-focused competition in Vancouver, the competition rule implies an ambitious local dissemination of the best designs on 'our shared planet':

This is an open worldwide competition and we seek submissions from as far a geographic reach as possible...Vancouver as the epicentre of the 100 Mile radius it is hoped that the design principles promoted will be applicable to many locations on our shared planet.<sup>46</sup>

A series of competitions in western provinces, particularly British Columbia, relied almost entirely on reforming the image of cities through international competitions to compete for the title of 'greenest city in the world'. The gap between economic and environmental globalisation may not be as wide as it seems, given that cities' competitively enhanced images are also meant to stimulate tourism (before or after Olympic games for example). Arguably, the most surprising idea would be the possibility of an internationally generalised design principle meant to be 'applicable in many other locations'. There is an almost neo-colonial tone apparent in these declarations, hidden behind good intentions and assertions that environmental issues are an international concern. In this specific case of contact zone, an international competition would be defined as a tool for developing international relationships. Large metropolises seem to be aware of this challenge, given their tendency to compete against each other for worldwide recognition.

### **D) International competitions as intercultural openings to the world**

A fourth and final category of intentions defines the contact zone as an open intercultural zone, an extreme case being the private competition for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in 2003:

The issue of human rights is such a worldwide concern that the decision was made to conduct an international architectural competition to select an architect and design for this important project. ... The Museum will be a permanent statement to the world about our essential values and beliefs—and *our desire to work*

Type of international competition	Representative key expressions	Political intention or type of 'contact zone'
<b>A) International competition as world-class contests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'world-leading communities,'</li> <li>• 'world-leading design teams'</li> <li>• 'world-class destination'</li> </ul>	<p>Darwinian fight for the first place</p> <p>Internationality as utopia</p>
<b>B) International competition as transfers between local and global models</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'a model for local and global design excellence'</li> <li>• 'an architectural statement of international excellence'</li> <li>• 'to put [our city, region, or nation] at the forefront of global cities, etc.'</li> </ul>	<p>Tension between local and global scales (branding)</p> <p>Internationality as heterotopia</p>
<b>C) International competition as global issues (cultural, environmental, etc.) in local contexts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'greenest city in the world'</li> <li>• 'applicable in many other locations'</li> </ul>	<p>Yearning to become a world-reference</p> <p>Internationality as potential dystopia</p>
<b>D) International competition as intercultural openings to the world</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'inviting the world'</li> <li>• 'opening ourselves to a world of ideas'</li> <li>• 'learning about best practices from other parts of the world'</li> </ul>	<p>Yearning to exist on the global-market map</p> <p>Internationality as ontological premise</p>

Table 1: Types of international competitions: fourfold model with key expressions and main vectors of intentions indicating a specific type of contact zone.

*with people of every nation to promote the cause of human rights. ... The creative challenge will be to express these critically important issues and transform them into an architectural statement of international excellence and significance.*<sup>47</sup>

At a more traditional architectural scale, meanwhile, designs for new libraries are often presented as social openings, indoor public spaces, *troisième lieu*. This can be the case for a national library (Quebec being recognised as a nation by the federal government) as it was the case for the *Grande bibliothèque du Québec* in 2000. In the competition brief, the Grande Bibliothèque du Québec wishes to achieve a triple objective: to establish a high level of excellence and efficiency for its future installations, stimulate the creativity of architects from here and elsewhere, and contribute to the international influence of Quebec in architectural terms.<sup>48</sup>

In this fourth category, along with the more traditional understanding of international competitions as highly influenced by economic issues, we found examples of discourse grounded in a more benevolent call for international expertise and debate. Noticeable expressions included: 'inviting the world', 'opening ourselves to a world of ideas', 'learn[ing] about best practices from other parts of the world'. Instances of such generous openings being can be found in competitions organised by private owners, with the goal of 'introducing Canada to design and construction techniques from elsewhere' in a kind of knowledge transfer. It is important to note, though, that there remains a belief in an international sharing of knowledge for these cities, in which the best practices would contribute to the renewal and diffusion of a given municipal image. This 'opening to a world of ideas' does not welcome innovations at just the technical level, either; it is occasionally so broad as to accept ideas concerning the aforementioned realm of human rights. In the specific case of the Museum for Human Rights, the 'opening to the world' is presented as an obvious necessity

due to 'worldwide issues of tolerance and respect for human rights'. In a Unesco-like system of multicultural values, this kind of international competition would be one of the very few to exist as the expected result of multicultural policy.

### **Metaphorical bridges in the contact zones of international competitions**

This article addressed the recurrent production of metaphors in international competitions. The proposed hypothesis of competitions as contact has been held up against cases where it appears that competitors have chosen to employ specific figures of speech in an attempt to bridge cultural differences. Whether they be crystals, nests, clouds, or flames, some of these performative metaphors have an unclear status at the intersection of architects' intents and public expectations. A theoretical framework using analogical matrices to flesh out an analytical grid is able to identify various levels of formal, structural and conceptual analogies. A deeper systematic hermeneutical discourse analysis of forty North American international competitions points toward a fourfold series of expectations related to international – that is, cross-cultural – contact zones [Table 1]: A) International competitions as world-class contests (contact zone characterised by a 'Darwinian' fight for first place), B) as transfers between local and global models (contact zone characterised by a series of tensions between local and global scales), C) as global issues in local contexts (contact zone characterised by an aspiration for world-wide recognition), D) as intercultural openings to the world (contact zone characterised by as aspiration to exist on the global-market map).

Needless to say, these four categories should not be considered mutually exclusive and it would be erroneous to classify competitions in boxes. In fact, we found instances of intentions bleeding between categories. Some competitions were clearly meant to adopt a single position, while some

employed various, almost contradictory, definitions of internationality. This points to an understanding of what architects and designers can address, and possibly bridge, in the contact zone of international competitions and their particular blend of cultural differentiations. Adhering to the theory of speech acts as actions performed through words, I suggested that competition analogies appear less as indicators of designers' intentions than as products of the broader context surrounding competitions themselves, thereby categorising forms of contact zones in which metaphorical relationships are actively created at the risk of misunderstanding deeper cultural meanings.

Further study of competition metaphors it certainly needed. Such work would engage in deeper comparative analysis and employ both discourse analysis and ethnographic methods. That international competitions can employ performative metaphors to address globally – if not resolve locally – controversial issues is a broader hypothesis that will require further studies at the intersection of cultural anthropology and political studies, beyond the preliminary discourse analysis developed in this article. It could also be said of international competitions themselves that they are Trojan horses, as was the case for the main buildings of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, won by 'foreign team of architects', as Chinese political leaders put it. In these cases, an international opening through competition entails not so much an opening to the world as an opening of the world to one's own market and culture. To put it in Ai Weiwei's own critical words: 'The stadium is a very bold design for a nation that wants to prove itself part of the international family, to show we share the same values.'<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

1. This is represented by Hélène Lipstadt's reflection on her own seminal collective work on competitions in the US. Hélène Lipstadt, 'Experimenting with the Experimental Tradition, 1989–2009: On Competitions and Architecture Research', in *The Architectural Competition (Research Inquiries and Experience)*, ed. Magnus Rönn, Reza Kazemian and Jonas E. Andersson (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2010), 37–76.
2. Two contrasting views on the relationship between competitions and experimentation are presented in Hélène Lipstadt and Barry Bergdoll, *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989) and Bechara Helal, 'Competitions as Laboratories: On the So-Called "Experimental" Nature of Architecture Competitions', in *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge (An International Inquiry)*, ed. Jean-Pierre Chupin, Carmela Cucuzzella and Bechara Helal (Montréal: Potential Architecture Books, 2015), 232–53.
3. I have developed this understanding of the comparative nature of competitions in Chupin, Cucuzzella, and Helal, *Architecture Competitions*. For a thorough definition of qualitative comparisons see Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).
4. Historian Peter Collins was a fierce proponent of the argumentative redefinition of judgement in competitions, while Elisabeth Trostrup's 'rhetorical' reading may appear less deeply theorised: Peter Collins, *Architectural Judgement* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971); Elisabeth Trostrup, *Architecture and Rhetoric: Text and Design in Architectural Competitions, Oslo, 1939–1996* (Oslo: Oslo School of Architecture, 1996).
5. The theory of speech acts has been proposed by J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).
6. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

7. Douglas R. Hofstadter, 'Epilogue: Analogy at the Core of Cognition', in *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science*, ed. Gentner Dedre, Keith J. Holyoak and Boicho N. Kokinon (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 499–539.
8. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession 1* (1991): 33–40. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interprétations* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).
9. A comprehensive and collective survey was published in French in the 1980s and unfortunately never translated: André Lichnerowicz, François Perroux, and Gilbert Gadoffre, eds., *Analogie et connaissance*, in 2 volumes (Paris: Maloine, 1981).
10. His first book comprises a famous ensemble of four chapters on so-called modernist analogies: Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750–1950* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998 [1965]).
11. Alexander Tzonis, 'Huts, Ships and Bottleracks: Design by Analogy for Architects and/or Machines', in *Research in Design Thinking*, ed. Nigel Cross, Kees Dorst and Norbert Roozenburg, (Delft: Delft University Press, 1992), 139–64.
12. Donald Schön, 'Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem Setting in Social Policy', in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Orthony, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
13. Richard Coyne, Adrian Snodgrass and David Martin, 'Metaphors in the Design Studio', *Journal of Architectural Education* 48, no. 2 (1994): 113–25; Niraj Verma, 'Metaphor and Analogy as Elements of a Theory of Similarity for Planning', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 13, no. 1 (October 1993): 13–25.
14. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Les métaphores dans la vie quotidienne*, trans. Michel de Fornel and Jean-Jacques Lecercle (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).
15. Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander, eds., *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire of Thinking* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).
16. Jacques Bouveresse, *Prodiges et vertiges de l'analogie: de l'abus des belles-lettres dans la pensée* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1999).
17. The authors of the affair give their own account: Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Impostures intellectuelles* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1997).
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19. Two works enable us to grasp the problem from the point of view of ancient and contemporary sciences. Peter L. Galison and Emily Thompson, eds., *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999); Alessandra Ponte and Antoine Picon, eds., *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).
20. Michel Serres, *Le Tiers-Instruit* (Paris: François Bourin Editeur, 1991).
21. Philibert Secretan, *L'analogie*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984). Arild Utaker, 'Analogies, Métaphores et Concepts', in *Enquête Sur Le Concept De Modèle*, ed. Pascal Nouvel (Paris: PUF, 2002), 203–21.
22. Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogies in Architecture and the Applied Arts*, (London: Routledge, 2008).
23. Contrary to Steadman's well documented categorisation, it is unfortunate that a series of illustrated booklets oversimplify the role of biological analogies.

- See for example: Alejandro Bahamón, Alex Campello and Patricia Pérez, *Inspired by Nature: Plants: The Building/Body Connection*, trans. Parramón Ediciones (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Alejandro Bahamón and Patricia Pérez, *Inspired by Nature: Animals: The Building/Biology Connection*, trans. Parramón Ediciones (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).
24. The full statement reads: 'From vernacular constructions to the works of eminent architects, natural forms have always been subject to reinterpretations and applied to the realm of architecture'. Bahamón, Campello and Pérez *Inspired by Nature: Plants*, 4.
  25. The firm notes the analogy in specifying that the project 'takes its name from the building's five intersecting volumes, ... reminiscent of crystals.' <https://libeskind.com>, accessed 15 May 2019.
  26. Ai Weiwei's testimony can be found in *Ai Weiwei, Art/Architecture*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Bregenz: Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2011).
  27. This is best exemplified by the famous exhibition of Herzog and de Meuron's design models at the Canadian Center for Architecture. See Philip Ursprung, ed., *Herzog and de Meuron: Natural History* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2002).
  28. Collins, *Changing Ideals*.
  29. Chupin, *Analogie et théorie*.
  30. Luis Fernández-Galiano, *Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy*, trans. Gina Cariño (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 162.
  31. Joseph Rykwert, 'Organic and Mechanical', in *Rethinking Technology*, ed. William W. Braham and Jonathan A. Hale (New York: Routledge, 2007), 337–49.
  32. This project by Peter Eisenman is presented in 'Bio-Centrum, Frankfurt-am-Main', in *Deconstruction, Omnibus Volume*, ed. Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 159.
  33. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.
  34. Aymone Nicholas, *L'apogée des concours d'architecture: L'action de L'UIA De 1948–1975* (Paris: Picard, 2007).
  35. Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995).
  36. Mitchell and Picon are two declared opponents of Frampton's redefinition of tectonics: William J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995); Antoine Picon, *Ornament: The Politics of Architecture and Subjectivity* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2013). See also Antoine Picon, *Digital Culture in Architecture: An Introduction for the Design Professions*, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).
  37. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
  38. <https://wettbewerb-aktuell.de>, <https://competitions.org>, <https://ccc.uMontréal.ca> and <https://concursosdeprojeto.org>.
  39. <https://ccc.uMontréal.ca>.
  40. This territorial approach of competitions in Quebec has been studied in Denis Bilodeau, ed., *Architectural Competitions and Territorial Imagination: Cultural Projects in Quebec, 1991–2005* (Montréal: Uqam/LEAP, 2006).
  41. Calgary National Music Centre Competition, 'Cantos Takes Next Step to Create National Music Centre,' Cantos Music Foundation, 9 March 2009.
  42. Jarvis Slip Public Space Competition, 'Competition Brief: Goals of the design competition', 2008.
  43. Point Pleasant Park Competition, 'Introductory remarks: Program, Opportunities, Culture Heritage & Tourism', 2005.
  44. Edmonton Airport Land Competition, 2010.
  45. TownShift Competition, official press release, 'Surrey Contest Issues Global Invitation for Town Centre Design Idea', 2 November 2009.
  46. 100 Mile House Competition, eligibility description, 2012.
  47. Canadian Museum for Human Rights Competition, brief, 2003.
  48. The extract in French reads as follows: 'Par ce concours d'envergure internationale, la Grande bibliothèque du Québec souhaite réaliser un triple objectif: établir un haut niveau d'excellence et d'efficacité pour



ses futures installations; stimuler la créativité des architectes d'ici et d'ailleurs et contribuer au rayonnement international du Québec au plan architectural'. Grande Bibliothèque du Québec Competition, 21 January 2000.

49. Ai Weiwei's own words are as critical as they are political: 'No one in the state here would ever hire me for a project like this. Even if they tried, I would not do it', Ai Weiwei interviewed by Jonathan Watts, *The Guardian*, Thursday 9 August 2007.

## Biography

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## The Architecture Competition: A Beauty Contest or a Learning Opportunity? The French Case in the Light of European Experiences

Véronique Biau, Bendicht Weber and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger

The architecture competition is clearly a device with a strong capacity to mobilise various actors during the development of a project: the project contractor, local decision-makers, designers, users and the public. Based on surveys conducted in France<sup>1</sup> and in several other European countries<sup>2</sup>, this article aims to identify the conditions that stimulate interactions and foster the construction of shared points of view between actors from different cultures of the space and its transformation, and then to analyse the scope of these exchanges and the logic behind them.

It will target highlights of the competition process, starting from the interactions at its origin (the call for tenders) to its possible follow-up, the dissemination of results, the forms of capitalisation and monitoring to which it can give rise, via the heart of the system: the preparation of the brief and the organisation of the consultation, then the emblematic moment of the jury process.

The practice of architecture competitions in France is in many respects singular: mandatory in public commissions of a certain importance, providing for compensation for the services delivered by all candidates, thus favouring the restricted competition, leading to an overall contract (design and site supervision<sup>3</sup>) with the winner of the competition. It has known two 'moments': in the 1970s, it was implemented mainly by the State administration, in reaction to the criticisms and failures of public policies of patterns in architecture; then in the

1980s and 1990s, at the time of the decentralisation process that gave local authorities control over their architectural and urban policies, it was conducted mainly by elected officials in a context of territorial competitiveness heavily influenced by the effects of media coverage.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, the architecture competition in France is caught in a tension between two logics of production, between that linked to the neo-liberal shift<sup>5</sup> and that of the rise of participatory dynamics.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, it is clear that the construction sector is reacting to the need to control the risks and uncertainties of real estate transactions by integrating tasks and phases into turnkey processes (design-build contracts, PPPs, global energy performance contracts, and so on). While competitions are mandatory for the operations that fall within the scope of public procurement, the aim is mainly one of providing technical, economic and legal security for the awarding of a contract, with the stakes all the higher as the contract includes a set of tasks that were previously distributed among several service providers. On the other hand, and in vast contrast to these forms of rationalisation that put large operators and experts in a position to decide according to specialised and unshared criteria, processes are developing that anchor decisions about architectural projects in the legitimacy conferred on them by public debate. In these participatory mechanisms, which are based on the existence of, or the ability to acquire, knowledge about architecture and the city among non-specialist individuals, the competition is

designed in a completely different way. We will see that the competition is then envisaged on a larger scale and for a longer duration, starting very early on with shared reflections on the diagnosis of the situation, the challenges of the project, the questions raised by the diversity of stakeholders – with the experiences and skills specific to each – and continuing downstream with the capitalisation of located knowledge that can be re-mobilised in the wake of local urban reflection, and more generic knowledge that can be made available to various stakeholders and the public.<sup>7</sup>

The restricted competition is the subject of great enthusiasm in the French architecture community and with certain contracting authorities. Until the mid-2000s, in a context of decentralisation, it often involved builders and a new generation of local architects coming together around public infrastructure or social housing projects to support territorial attractiveness, especially in medium-sized cities.

The innovation claimed by the organisers and participants of the competitions and relayed by different media, both specialised and general, lies above all in the formal aspect of the achievements, which contrasts with the highly standardised conception of the 1950s to 1970s. The focus is on the moment the winner is chosen and on his or her personality. The French-style competition seems to crystallise around this high point, on the winning architect or even on the political relationship between the decision-maker and the architect. It contributes to maintaining the myth of a design that comes out of a 'black box'.<sup>8</sup> The result seems to depend above all on the talent of an architect who in France is still often considered an artist. The winner is chosen by a jury whose debates are rarely revealed for fear of appeal. The competition process is therefore surrounded by a veil of mystery that became even more opaque from 1998, with the European directive imposing anonymity. In this

French context, the competition cannot really be described as a forum for exchange. However, it may be the case in some circumstances.

To demonstrate this point, we have interviewed the protagonists of these consultations and collected documentation that is not spontaneously disseminated. We did not focus on the moment of choosing the winner, but tried to render and analyse the entire project process that gives birth to the competition.

The prospect of holding competitions that focus on when the winner is chosen changes the overall approach to a project and can devalue exchanges throughout the process. This critical finding implies adopting a broad approach to the concept of design that integrates programming, evaluation and delivery activities, and thus viewing it as a collective and social process.<sup>9</sup> It is thus assumed that the way in which these activities are understood and formalised is likely to promote or limit the nature of debates between various actors during a competition.

We base our arguments on a first hypothesis that the intensity and scope of the exchanges generated by the competition depend structurally on how such an event is imposed or perceived: either as a regulatory constraint or as an opportunity to stimulate reflection around a design problem.

To explore this first hypothesis, we develop a twofold methodological perspective that is still uncommon in research on architectural competitions [Box 2, 3], drawing on a large quantitative survey based on the construction and operation of a database covering ten years of competition notices in France, and supplemented with a qualitative study crossing the points of view of four types of professional actors particularly involved in this procedure. This analysis of the French context is then cross-referenced with the comparative approach at the European level, which shows that

#### Box 1: The French-style competition

Organisation of competitions is mandatory for public contracts

- above a threshold of €144 000 in design consultancy fees (for state contracts)
- above €221 000 for local authorities.

The design contest is restricted and compensated.

Exceptions: the reuse or rehabilitation of existing works, infrastructure works, contracts without design mission, works carried out for research, testing or experimentation, and social housing.

Steps of the procedure:

1. A competitive public tender notice is issued.
2. Consultant teams (MOE) submit their applications.
3. The jury composed of at least one third of design experts selects the candidates admitted to the competition (at least three competitors).
4. Applicants submit their projects anonymously.
5. A technical commission examines the projects to inform the work of the jury.
6. The jury examines and ranks the projects.
7. The contracting authority (MOA) designates the winner and awards the contract. Other competitors are compensated for at least 80 percent of the value of their service.

behind the generic term 'competition', there are very different regulatory provisions that may favour or make it more difficult to organise exchanges.

The results of these surveys thus highlight a diversity of procedures and practices that seem to be in tension between two approaches already mentioned before. The first is often observed in contexts where the competition is a chosen procedure, and is oriented towards exploring possibilities and generating ideas. The contracting authority (MOA) wishes to encourage the opening of a professional, or even public, debate in this perspective.<sup>10</sup> The second often goes hand in hand with a perception of the competition as a constraining procedure. Either the contracting authority would have preferred to do otherwise, or it applies the procedure with the main concern of ensuring fairness and transparency in the choice of project and service provider. The procedure is then carried out in order to secure the contract that will result from the competition. It tends to limit the time available and the topics for discussion.

We are interested in the importance and value given to design work apparent in these two approaches of architectural competitions; our analysis follows on from the reflections carried out in recent years by Jeremy Till.<sup>11</sup>

We then develop a second hypothesis concerning the fact of considering competitions as moments of exchange between actors from different professional cultures, and more broadly different cultures of space. This issue was particularly relevant in the way in which interactions between specialists and non-specialists in architecture were organised. We have therefore wished to pay particular attention to exchanges involving and driven by the contracting authority, *maîtrise d'ouvrage* (MOA), and not to those more specifically internal to the consultant team, *maîtrise d'œuvre* (MOE). After having three major challenges that run through the practice of

competitions, in connection with the problem set out in this introduction, we will focus on three key sequences of the procedure likely to offer opportunities for interaction, constructive exchanges and even the hybridisation of knowledge: the moment of the jury process when image effects can take precedence over substantive debates; the meetings organised between the sponsor and the teams before the submission of bids, where the possibility of progressiveness in the design work is at stake; and the dissemination and valorisation of the results, which can generate a broad cognitive process. The different ways of considering these sequences in the different countries provides an interesting insight into the potential of the competition in terms of interaction space.

### Uncertainty in the design process

The research we conducted on the practice of competitions in France between 2006 and 2015 enabled us to analyse the nature of expectations regarding this procedure, its organisation methods, as well as the way in which it was experienced by its main actors. It gave rise to several survey systems, through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, in which architects, consultants from technical design offices, contracting authorities and programmers were solicited. The research included detailed monographic studies to trace the genesis and course of action in a number of competitions. The results show that in the French-style competition, exchange is not considered an important objective: first of all, contracting authorities (MOA) find it interesting to be able to choose a fairly formalised design solution, compared to other forms of consultation where they must commit themselves on the basis of a memorandum of intent produced by teams, without being entirely sure that the one chosen will be able to respond properly to their request. The second advantage they spontaneously mention is that the competition provides a diversity of 'rich and interesting' solutions, which they did not necessarily suspect at the beginning.

Box 2: Three surveys by the authors on the practice of competitions and public procurement of architectural services in Europe.

1. A first survey carried out in 1998 on architectural competitions and public procurement in the European Union on behalf of the Directorate for Architecture and Heritage (Ministry of Culture and Communication) examined the practices that were being put in place, particularly at the legislative and professional levels, in eight countries (Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal); studies of regulatory texts, questionnaire to French embassies, interviews with clients, professionals, ministries, analysis of the professional press.<sup>37</sup>

2. A second survey, carried out between 2000 and 2002 in nine European countries, highlighted, in addition to the debates and questions specific to each country, common themes: the motivations of the contracting authority in the search for its partner(s) and in the choice of the procedure to be implemented; the repercussions of this choice on the conduct of the project and on the built structure, the criteria chosen for the choice of the contracting authority.<sup>38</sup>

3. In 2015, the issue of competition returned to the topical French political, administrative and professional debate, following two parallel reflections: that which accompanied the transposition of Directive 2014/24/EC on public procurement into national law and that which is part of the National Architecture 2015 Strategy. The Ministry of Culture and the Interministerial Mission for the Quality of Public Construction decided to finance two parallel studies: one on the practice of architectural competitions in Europe and the other on the practice of architectural competitions in France (see Box 3). The European survey analyses the use of competitions in relation to other forms of public design procurement, as well as the conduct at all stages of the procedure in four countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland). Interviews were conducted with professional organisations, young and experienced architectural and urban planning agencies, public clients (MOA) and a foundation for the promotion and dissemination of architecture (Architectuur Lokaal, Amsterdam). An overview of all European countries has been established based on the statistics of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) and the International Union of Architects (UIA). Databases of official journals were used, such as Tenders Electronic Daily TED-Europa (*Journal officiel des Communautés européennes*, JOCE) and *Système d'information pour les marchés publics* (SIMAP, information system for public procurement) for Switzerland. Academic literature, a rich documentation and finally national and international websites and digital platforms constituted for this third study very rich databases.<sup>39</sup>

These two positions, which can sometimes be shared by the same contracting authorities (MOA), reveal one of the essential aspects of the architectural design work with which the client must deal: uncertainty. This is linked to the specificity of each context (urban, political, social, and so on) and to the creative and inventive dimension of the exercise of architecture. But it can be amplified by the way consultant teams (MOE) are asked to contribute. On the one hand, contracting authorities can be reassured by the regulatory formalism of the competition (definition and timing of the studies to be carried out, publication of the criteria for evaluating the applications and then the proposals, identification of the members of the jury...) leading to a structured argument about the way the choice of a project has been done.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the absence of exchange during the elaboration of the architectural response and the difficulty in anticipating the jury's behaviour are worrying. Thus, as pioneering research on competitions since the 1970s has shown, the uncertainty they generate is often considered a significant risk.<sup>13</sup> Paradoxically, we note that the management of this risk by the contracting authority (MOA) gives rise to opposing attitudes. Either it results in a severe limitation of the possibilities of exchange, or it gives rise to many exchanges: before, during and after the competition. The objectives associated with the competition explain these contrasting practices.

### **The competition, an exploratory device?**

The ideas associated with the purpose of the competition are very different from country to country, and referred mainly to two different relationships with uncertainty. On the one hand, there are the virtues of a 'potential architecture' defended by Jean-Pierre Chupin, where the production of ideas stimulates a debate about a project and raises the competence of the stakeholders, whether or not the project is carried out.<sup>14</sup> And on the other hand, there is a definition of the competition as a legal procedure

with the aim of choosing a reliable and competent consultant team (MOE).

In France, the latter position clearly appears to be dominant. It must be noted that the concern to secure the ins and outs of the procedure frequently gives rise to restrictive clauses, aimed at limiting the universe of possibilities, and therefore the scope of debate. In our survey, 39 percent of contracting authorities (MOA) and 43 percent of architects spontaneously considered that it would be necessary to improve the conditions of exchange during the competitions. In the focus groups, most architects supported and clarified this idea; they advocated greater openness and dialogue during and around the consultation in order to promote the exploratory dimension of the competition while reassuring each of the parties. We were able to identify several moments in the project process that could compromise or, on the contrary, facilitate constructive exchanges during the design process and during the competition.

### **Prospects for fruitful exchange**

A first period of debate is sometimes initiated before the consultation is organised. When the operation is launched, the competition appears as a high point in the project trajectory. As such, some contracting authorities (MOA) use it to support a collective dynamic well upstream of the operation. The clear rules and publicity associated with the procedure, the prospect of organising a jury and disseminating the results of the competition to the press, encourage them to organise a collaborative approach involving local political actors, operators and even facility managers, residents and users. At this stage, the contracting authority is mainly seeking to generate enthusiasm for its operation, to facilitate negotiations on some fundamental aspects of the project (such as financing, location and urban integration, programme) and to avoid blockages.

### Box 3: Competition practice in France: a partnership research (2015–2017)

This research was done on behalf of the Interministerial Mission for the Quality of Public Construction and the Ministry of Culture. The steering committee included the Order of Architects, the State Real Estate Purchasing Department, the National Federation of Consultants in Architecture, Urbanism and Environment, the *Association Qualité des Constructions*, the Ministry of Housing and Cohesion of the Territories, and a technical committee with representatives of the various professional organisations of the contracting authority, the Assistance to Contracting Authority and design stakeholders, as well as the Social Housing Union and the National Agency for the Support of the Performance of Health and Medico-social Institutions. The survey was based on diverse devices and tools to answer the following questions:

- Which projects are submitted for competition? How has the number of projects evolved over the last ten years compared to other procedures?
- How do contracting authorities organise themselves to conduct a competition, from preliminary studies to the valorisation of the results?
- What is the place of civil society in the procedure?
- How is the competition procedure technically carried out by the contracting authority and design teams?
- How does the jury work, how does it communicate with candidate teams, how is the analysis of the projects conducted, what are the choices based on?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of competitions? What avenues for improvement should be considered?
- How can we envisage an observatory of the architectural competition activities in France, inspired by examples from other countries?

The research team collected and analysed ten years of public tenders (2006–15, more than 50 000 announcements). This team carried out surveys by questionnaire and got replies from 1 019 architects, 164 engineers or construction economists, 183 representatives of client organisations, and 124 independent client advisers for brief development. Three focus groups were organised with different professional profiles, to get a reflective interpretation of the registered and analysed answers to the questionnaires. Interviews with actors from two major construction sectors (housing and offices), and researchers working on the construction and development of competition observatories in Belgium and Canada, as well as three detailed case studies of competitions, completed the survey.



By taking this path, the contracting authority agrees to debate a variety of options, but this is not a common approach, either because they do not have the means to organise such exchanges or because they do not see any interest in it. Contracting authorities (MOA) fear that they will not be able to manage a variety of requests, that conflicts of interest will arise leading to delays and additional costs. The limited nature of the debates and actors involved before the choice of the consultant team (MOE) is reflected in the drafting of programme documents, either extremely vague and succinct, or dense and fairly prescriptive, reproducing recommendations from previous operations or regulatory orders.

Surveys suggest that the focus of many briefs on constructive solutions and standards – a phenomenon amplified by the required application of environmental labels – are seen as a sign of risk management, closing the possibilities to design work.<sup>15</sup> It creates situations where the competition is essentially imposed and not intended to find new solutions, or at least to take full measure of the context of the operation. It is part of a 'routine' around which the contracting authority would rather seek to generate as little discussion as possible that could delay the completion of the operation. The programme and projects follow a very prescriptive logic, especially in the internal organisation of the building and in the technical devices used. In France, the healthcare, housing and education sectors are especially affected by this type of practice.

### **What is the place for non-specialists in these spaces of exchange?**

Research on deliberative or participatory mechanisms has shown that the richness and scope of debate in preparing a decision are all the stronger as the profiles of the people who participate are varied by integrating non-specialists, and that to manage uncertainty, the organisation of 'hybrid forums' is a possible alternative to technocentric approaches.<sup>16</sup>

Could this be the case in architectural projects, particularly in competitions? The organisation of such mechanisms is still quite rare and is mainly limited to consultative mechanisms. For several years, the Netherlands and Switzerland have been considering organising public presentations prior to the holding of juries, with varying degrees of impact of the opinions gathered on the final decision.<sup>17</sup>

In France, the involvement of residents in urban projects has been increasing over the past ten years, but it is still quite limited during construction.<sup>18</sup> However, we note the importance given by some contracting authorities to the fact that the project brief is the result of consultation with facility managers, or even with users. The experts we interviewed in several countries also underline the importance of involving them at this stage.<sup>19</sup> If their input is only solicited at the time of the competition, and if, moreover, the criteria for assessing the projects are not very precise, their opinion focuses on the architectural gesture, or the façades.

A growing proportion of designers defend the principle of more concerted briefing processes with users, perceiving the potential of briefs which do not only address technical issues. When asked about the quality of these documents, half of the French architects believe that it has improved over the past ten years, but the same proportion reproach them for still being too dense, too detailed, accumulating technical details too early, or even prefiguring solutions. Whether the briefs are too heavy or too light, they are mainly criticised for the fact that the qualitative issues are stated in a generic way (in terms of functionality, quality of the atmosphere, and comfort). A majority of architects are waiting for synthetic instructions, prioritising clearly the objectives of the project, and making the future activities and uses of the building more explicit.

The literal application of standards maintains architecture as a discipline of experts. It stirs

tensions between the worlds of engineering and architecture, both in the fabrication and the criticism of projects. The composition of the competition authorities reflects this situation. The technical commissions that prepare the selection of juries are mainly composed of technicians or project management administrators, to which are added various external experts (brief developers, cost consultants, representatives of technical design offices, and so on). The commission issues an opinion that sometimes resembles a first ranking of candidates, when requested by the contracting authority, which can then create tensions during the jury process.

Until 2016, regulations required that at least a third of juries are designers. The other participants are generally elected officials, heads of local services or decentralised administrations. The presence of users, the staff who will work in the building, is limited to one or two people; in more than a third of competitions, these actors are not invited. Users or residents are involved in 15 percent of cases, according to the testimonies of project owners who organised at least one competition between 2006 and 2015. More than half of the architects surveyed would like there to be more facility managers in the juries (the second category cited after architects), 39 percent would also like there to be more users. Engineers share this point of view.

However, it is not enough for residents, future users or building managers to sit on a jury, to be able to express themselves and be heard. Monographs that we have produced during this research on the French context, and other works that have given rise to observations on participation in competitions show that the intensity of the collaborative process before a project is launched plays a fundamental role in enabling non-experts to be active and to be fully considered by the other members of the jury.<sup>20</sup> This experience is at the heart of a learning process that will also benefit the other members of the jury.

The work in which residents, facility managers and users are involved during the briefing process places them in a position to co-construct and appropriate the expectations of the project, within the framework of negotiations and social transaction processes, obliging both sides to compromise. They also gradually become more familiar with architecture vocabulary and graphic representation methods. They thus acquire the keys to reading and analysing architecture proposals that they use in the context of a technical commission or during the jury process to argue in front of professionals. This moment can then become a space for exchange where they are recognised for expertise that is not only linked to knowledge of use, but also to their experience of the debates that preceded the organisation of the competition. They thus come to express, in these forums for dialogue, symbolic issues or issues linked to the desired life project, on which decisions have been made well in advance, and of which they are the only members of the jury to be aware. During the jury process, the inhabitants are then less tempted to express themselves in their own name and more liable to speak as stakeholders in the exchanges that precede the competition.

The procedural legitimacy thus acquired seems stronger than that obtained by having only followed an accelerated course in architecture before sitting on a competition jury, which is now proposed by some localities in France<sup>21</sup> or the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> Learning to read architecture by having participated in the genesis of a project helps lay participants to speak with experts, without entering technical or aesthetic arguments, where the ordinary citizen might have difficulty being heard. This type of intervention can contribute to a debate during the jury process on what makes architectural quality, in its multiple components, not in the absolute but in a specific situation. This question of architectural quality, a recurring one in competition juries as well as in architectural criticism more broadly, must then be expressed and negotiated in a vocabulary

understood by all.<sup>23</sup> During the debates, the design teams expect the experts present in the jury (architects and client advisers) to help them understand the impact of certain architectural choices on the use of space, the management of the building or the eligibility for subsidies later on. In several of the cases studied, non-professionals in architecture stressed and appreciated the existence of such mediation, or regretted its absence.

While competitions are places where an ever-increasing tension is expressed between quantifiable expertise delivered by technical design offices, and other characteristics that are more qualitative, but with more implicit issues raised by architects based on their general knowledge of the design process, the opinion of non-professional actors can be vital in helping to reach a judgment based on contingencies linked to the history of the project. In two different cases, we found that it allowed a discussion to be re-launched by going beyond the initial clashes of experts.<sup>24</sup> The syncretic value of the questions of use and appropriation from which all the jury members express themselves, encourages a dynamic of enlarged exchanges that make it possible to give meaning to certain recommendations of the brief, to highlight specific criteria. They are all the more taken into consideration if they refer to situations of exchange during the preliminary consultation phases. They can help to remove purely technical expertise or personal opinions that may have arisen from the juries.<sup>25</sup> A form of knowledge hybridisation takes place, highlighting general as well as particular experiences of the project process.

### **Go beyond the focus on the image during the jury process**

The importance of having non-expert participation in the upstream phases of architectural projects does not only concern users and residents, but also decision-makers and elected officials, whose behaviour

during the jury process is often criticised in France. During our survey, contracting and building project managers repeatedly regretted the limited time these officials are willing to devote to these sessions, sometimes only two hours compared to the full days or even multiple sessions of debates that some of them had experienced in Switzerland or Germany. One architect said: 'We should force the juries to do real work. You don't choose a project of 10 million euros and more in four hours and yet... yes, you do.'<sup>26</sup> A state consulting architect said:

A large number of selection panels are sometimes held in two hours, whereas they would systematically deserve a day. Elected officials or contracting authorities often expect a technical commission to divide the panel into groups to speed up the analysis time.<sup>27</sup>

The very busy agenda of decision-makers cannot fully explain this situation. The regular members of the competition juries rather cite a problem of competence, a difficulty in positioning or even a certain unease that elected officials might have in expressing themselves about architecture. This results in several compensatory attitudes: shortening the jury's time, standing back from the expertise of technicians or architects, or focusing on the image and aesthetic issues, in the name of the social acceptability of the project or the attention it must generate.

Technicians and architects thus regret consultations transformed into 'beauty contests', with elected officials mainly focused on image issues. An architect explains:

Politicians, when they walk into the rooms, they look at the signs. 'Oh, that one has a nice face, that one I don't like', and that's it. He did not look at whether the building works well, is well placed in terms of mass. And now, to change his opinion, well, you have to hold on.<sup>28</sup>

Architectural agencies anticipate the potential strength of images during the jury.<sup>29</sup> Those that have the means, have teams dedicated to competitions, which leads to significant inequalities in this exercise, with 67 percent of French agencies having no staff or one employee only.<sup>30</sup> Architects also explain how they work by integrating this issue from the outset; they develop their proposal according to the perspective rendering that will best enhance their project during adjudication.

But not all contracting authorities focus on formal questions during the competition. Two very different attitudes can be identified among those who seek to stimulate debate around other aspects. Some expect a lot from new digital technologies, for example, to advance a project, and therefore require precise representations in that regards. Others, on the contrary, seek to simplify the media and the representation codes. In the first case, the competition becomes a heavy financial investment with detailed renderings that can limit the prospects for further development of the design. In the second case, simpler representations are required, (white model, omission of a detailed perspective), specifically so that the debate does not engage too quickly on purely aesthetic considerations. The mobility of professionals in different European countries, either as members of competition boards or as candidates, has enabled them to assess these practices, or sometimes apply them. Architects appreciate, for example, that in Germany, perspective is not necessarily required. It may even be prohibited, while hand sketches and volume models are preferred.<sup>31</sup> Not producing 'too realistic' images of exteriors would encourage all jury members to discuss subjects other than facades, and to depart from the unique and fixed point of view offered by a perspective.

### **Prepare to negotiate after the competition**

The involvement of the teams in the sequence of questions before the submission of the projects and

their ability to answer questions asked by the jury in the event of a tie between several candidates, are signs of an openness to dialogue to which the contracting authorities are very sensitive, with a view to subsequent stages. Fifty-two percent of them believe that the competition closes the possibility of the project's evolution after the jury. This point of view is explained either by the fear of provoking appeals from competitors if they start asking the winner for too many modifications, or by the sometimes rigid posture of the architect, who, buttressed by the fact of winning the competition, refuses to adjust his proposal. Anticipating such a situation can encourage the contracting authority to finalise the programme as much as possible and to integrate design solutions into it before the consultation.

Another way of managing the post-competition period by encouraging dialogue is to clearly specify during adjudication the reasons why the winner has been selected and the aspects on which he or she should improve his or her proposal. The scope of the dialogue that will be established after the competition also depends on the mutual listening skills of the different parties. Mediation work is often necessary between the architect and the contracting authority, but also with facility managers and users, who often discover the project at a time when the design is very advanced. To successfully carry out such exchanges, more than 71 percent of architects and nearly 88 percent of engineers in technical design offices find it useful to have assistance in project management programming beyond the competition. Thirty-nine percent of contracting authorities say they extend this type of assistance repeatedly.

Given the mandatory nature of the competitions in certain types of operations, they are sometimes feared, particularly by those who are unfamiliar with it, whether elected officials or users. The request for

mediation before, during and after the competition is thus quite important for people who are not used to this type of procedure.

### **Dissemination, valorisation, learning**

In France, according to a report of the National Assembly<sup>32</sup> and the National Strategy on Architecture,<sup>33</sup> the enhancement of documents produced during a competition could contribute to the sharing of an architecture culture with and within the population. With that in mind, the publication of the results of a competition could be seen as an integral part of the exercise of project responsibility, that of the contracting authority (MOA), particularly when it is based on public funding. This would make it possible to strengthen the commitment of the various stakeholders to quality and transparency throughout the competition process. Such an approach to promotion and publicity would increase the sense of responsibility felt by all involved in the jury's work. For the MOE teams that have contributed their proposals, this approach would become a way to take advantage of an expanded reflective space, and to improve their practice by assessing, through knowledge of competing proposals, the different ways of responding to a design problem. Implemented systematically and rigorously, this approach would also reduce the feeling of arbitrariness and even injustice often felt by non-awarded project teams about competition results.

Different methods could be used to implement such an approach: organising public exhibitions of projects; and making them visible on the project website, in newspapers, and in the specialised press. To be complete, this publication of competition results should include a presentation of the initial commission through the main programmatic challenges set out by the contracting authority in order to be able to assess the different response methods. The projects would then be presented in formats that would make them easily comparable,

and that would include elements of an evaluation grid, with a brief presentation of the project intentions argued by each of the designers. The jury process would then be a key moment that would make it possible, for example, to review the wording of the adjudication order. The jury would then assess how the problems were reformulated by the designers, and make the reasons for their choices more understandable.

Such methods, still expected by some of the actors questioned in France, already exist in various forms and more or less developed in several countries, and in the form of books and journals with criteria that facilitate comparison.<sup>34</sup> Architectural competitions contribute in this way to large reflexive discussions based on a variety of proposals that meet the same project objectives, and thus contribute to building a shared culture of investigation and architectural diversity. Accumulated over time, these publications constitute a database that can help contracting authorities to inform themselves, to form an opinion on the eventual profit of a competition, and then to formulate expectations for an upcoming competition. The challenges of articulating different levels of cognitive trajectories through the organisation of the competition thus appear.

There is nothing to prevent French contracting authorities from making jury reports public, as long as they are limited to opinions on the winning project. The dissemination of notices about other competitors would require an amendment to the current rules. Indeed, the promotion of competitions through public access to the results and work of the jury is not self-evident. But not doing so changes the meaning of the competition. In France, architecture is clearly perceived as a matter for experts in the context of a very broad lack of understanding of the contributions made by designers in terms of appreciating the project situation and exploring the possibilities. This is reflected in the fact that, during

competitions, the architectural work undertaken and presented is not publicly discussed as a contribution to improving the quality of the living environment. The added value of architectural quality remains little explained and publicly perceived, and feeds a representation of the architect's work as an extra reserved for those who can afford to pay for this type of service provider, an extra that would embellish a building but is not considered essential. On the other hand, among the many examples that could be cited, the Vorarlberg region seems to us to be particularly emblematic of the construction of a real learning culture in relation to architecture competitions.<sup>35</sup> The aim of the organisers was to value all the productions as a whole – both award-winning and all other proposals – in the form of a kind of repertoire of possibilities. In this case, the capitalisation, circulation and enhancement of the elements produced during the competitions are done in a way that situates them within a series of interlinked investigative projects (for children, for the lives of elders, for neighbourhood life, and so on).

The identification of project issues and problems that were relevant in various villages was supported in Vorarlberg by work to develop a shared vision for the future of the region. This reflection on a development strategy has led to a broad awareness of the polycentric functioning of the territory, and the importance of strengthening such micro-centres and their network. Architecture competitions clearly appear here as links in a broad cognitive process, which concerns on the one hand critical knowledge of the territory, and on the other hand the possibilities of acting to improve its habitability.

The rigidity of the briefs as well as the encouragement to produce images of objects that give an impression of an advanced degree of formalisation, are processes that aim to reassure the contracting authority during the competition event, by giving him

the feeling that the design work has been completed at this stage. They contribute to a vision of architecture as result and product, denying the nature of the design work and process that is consubstantial with it, and which, given the complexity of the issues to be addressed, requires a long time, and many exchanges and iterations.

The different methods of exercising the competition that we have identified show that there are alternatives to securing the project by reducing the universe of possibilities at the time of the consultation. For example: by integrating the competition into a partnership project process from the start of the operation; by considering a progressive approach to the preparation of studies; by providing the competition process, if necessary, with support engineering to carry the programming as a memory of the expectations of the project and an instrument for dialogue between the stakeholders, beyond the choice made by the contracting authority. From then on, the competition is no longer thought of as the only moment and outcome of a design process but can be considered 'as the beginning of a conversation around it'.<sup>36</sup> Such a perspective also avoids relying solely on the insight of a jury and the choice of an 'angel's solution'. Thus, trust can be built between the different actors of a project (decision-makers, technicians and citizens, designers and other service providers) promoting a recognition and a certain hybridisation of the knowledge mobilised throughout the development of the project.

## Notes

1. Elise Macaire and Jodelle Zetlaoui-Léger, eds., *Étude qualitative et quantitative sur les concours d'architecture en France, 2006–2015* (Paris: MIQCP/MC, 2017).
2. Véronique Biau and Merrill Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture en Europe (focus sur la Suisse, les Pays-Bas, la Pologne et l'Allemagne)* (Paris:

- MIQCP, 2017); Véronique Biau and Sylvie Weil, *The Attribution of Public Contracts to Project Consultants in Europe; Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom* (Paris: French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 2002).
3. In France, the project process is strongly structured around two concepts: the *maîtrise d'ouvrage* (MOA) which stands for the contracting authority and its prerogatives and responsibilities, and the *maîtrise d'œuvre* (MOE), representing all the service providers in architecture, engineering, landscape design, urban design, other design specialties and cost consultants enabling the formulation of a response to the brief. The 'MOP' Law of 12 July 1985 regulating the relationship of public contracting authorities with private service providers, and the Public Procurement Code, are the principal legal basis on which most public construction law and contract is based. MOA and MOE describe sets of tasks and not professions, and there is no satisfactory translation in English. We will mention them in brackets for the sake of clarity.
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  8. John C. Jones, *Design Methods: Seeds of Human Futures* (London: Wiley-Interscience, 1970).
  9. Henry Sanoff, *Integrating Programming, Evaluation and Participation in Design: A Theory Z Approach* (Brookfield, VT: Avebury, 1992); Alain Findeli, 'La recherche-projet en design et la question de la question de recherche: essai de clarification conceptuelle', *Sciences du Design*, no. 1 (2015): 45–57 ; Marianne Stang Valand, 'End User Participation as an Input to Shape the Brief in Architectural Competitions: A Threefold Translation Process', *Nordic Journal of Architectural Research* 21, no. 2/3 (2009): 108–122.
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  12. Jean-Louis Genard, 'Architecture et réflexivité', in *Vivre ensemble au XXIème siècle* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, ULB, 2007), 387–403.
  13. Paul D. Spreiregen, *Design competitions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).
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  22. Prince Claus Bridge in Dordrecht, Delft City Hall for example. See Cilly Jansen's interview in Biau and Sineus, *La pratique des concours d'architecture*, 94.
  23. Christophe Camus, 'Reconnaître et énoncer la qualité lors d'un concours d'architecture', *Cahiers Ramau* 5 (2009): 95–108.
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  25. Camille Crossman, 'Faut-il des critères précis pour bien juger?', *d'Architectures* no. 216 (March 2013).
  26. Macaire and Zetlaoui-Léger, *Étude qualitative et quantitative*, 42.
  27. *Ibid.*, 42.
  28. *Ibid.*, 51.
  29. Three-quarters of the architects interviewed for this research in France believe that the competition sometimes or regularly favours teams that produce spectacular renderings. The same proportion believe that the competition favours the search for a visually attractive solution at the expense of a deeper understanding of the project's challenges. These results are articulated in many (and sometimes very virulent) criticisms of the place of image in competitions, for example: 'priority to images', 'predominance of the image', 'seduction of the image', 'obsession with the image', 'image competition', choice of 'bodies linked to the image', 'stunning presentation', 'flashy studios [whose built projects have nothing to do with the image presented in competition]'.
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    32. Patrick Bloche, *Sur la création architecturale*, Report no. 2070 (Paris: National Assembly, 2014), proposition 7, p. 119.
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    35. Günther Prechter, *Architektur als soziale Praxis: Akteure zeitgenössischer Baukulturen: Das Beispiel Vorarlberg* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau



Verlag, 2013); Stefan Obkircher, *Raumentwicklung in Grenzregionen: Bedeutung und Wirkung von Planungsleitbildern und Governance-Prozessen* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017).

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37. 'Les concours de maîtrise d'œuvre dans l'Union Européenne; application de la Directive 92/50/CEE du 18 juin 1992 et respect de l'anonymat des candidats', French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 1998.
38. 'The Attribution of Public Contracts to Project Consultants in Europe; Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom', French Ministry of Culture-CRH, 2002. [www.miqcp.gouv.fr](http://www.miqcp.gouv.fr).
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## Biography

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## Review Article

# The Hannes Meyer Seminars at the Bauhaus Dessau (1980–1986) as a Contact Zone for Finnish and East German Architects

Torsten Lange

Late-socialist East Germany may not be the first place that springs to mind when thinking of either international architectural competitions or contact zones. This is hardly surprising. Politically and diplomatically isolated during the formative years of the Cold War, the country strove to build international relations after its recognition in 1973.<sup>1</sup> Prior to that, the 1956 architectural competition for the Fennpfuhl area in East Berlin – won by Ernst May from Hamburg – was the last to cut across the East-West divide, which was to become literally cemented four years later, in August 1961. But did that mean that there was no contact between East German architects and their colleagues abroad?

According to the East German architectural theorist Bruno Flierl, the relative sense of isolation was primarily a result of the tightly confined space of public discourse. Discussion of international projects, especially those by architects from the West, usually had to be kept to a minimum both in mainstream architectural media and professional debates.<sup>2</sup> That is not to say that architects had no access to these projects. Quite the opposite. Most research and university libraries as well as nationally-owned construction enterprises subscribed to a range of international professional journals and held copies of relevant books. But mostly, ideas were received second hand, in mediated form. Direct contact and exchange remained a rare occurrence, despite the trips to East Germany of such influential

figures as Aldo Rossi and Carlo Aymonino in 1961, Richard Neutra in 1967, or Konrad Wachsmann in 1978.

At the same time, East German architects' ability to travel freely was seriously hampered (in contrast to functionaries, sportsmen and artists), preventing them from visiting buildings as part of their education – a fact that Flierl links to the profession's increasing proletarianisation and the poor recognition of its cultural contribution. He remarks:

Between Moscow and Prague, Leningrad and Tbilisi, GDR urban planners and architects knew almost everything that was of any interest for them. Yet, with few exceptions, they saw neither Paris nor London, Sienna nor Barcelona, least of all New York or Chicago. They were not even in Munich or Hamburg.<sup>3</sup>

Flierl's list of places admittedly reproduces a centre-periphery logic that we should treat with caution today. Recent research has uncovered the extent to which architects from socialist countries were involved in construction projects in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, thus highlighting the significance of the 'Third World' as a space for transnational exchange in the second half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the fact remains that such instances of contact remained the exception rather than the norm.<sup>4</sup>

Prompted by this special issue's theme, the following article discusses a particular and little-known contact zone within the GDR itself: the Hannes Meyer Seminars held annually between 1980 and 1986 at the newly restored Bauhaus building in Dessau. Stressing mutual exchange and collaboration, these intensive week-long seminars had the character of a design charrette more than an architectural competition. Their goal was to adapt industrialised housing to urban contexts, by developing new residential and mixed-use building types for historic cities. Typically, about forty planners and architects worked in small teams, assisted by technical and economic consultants. Different local stakeholders such as representatives of the public administration or construction industry were also present. The resulting proposals, while identifying potentials, had to remain technically and economically feasible to ensure their implementation by local district construction offices. They sought to instil debate, especially among decision-makers.

Through the participation of Finnish architects in three successive years from 1982 to 1985, the design seminars developed into a site for the transfer of ideas.<sup>5</sup> As East German architecture – mass housing, in particular – underwent a crisis, Finland seemed not only to offer a more humane modernism along with the technology and expertise to develop variable building solutions, it also was perceived as not ideologically opposed to socialism. The Hannes Meyer Seminars paved the way for further design workshops that hosted mixed teams of architects and industrial designers from such countries as the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg and West Germany.<sup>6</sup> For their younger participants – most of them advanced architecture students at the College for Architecture and Civil Engineering (HAB, *Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen*) in Weimar – the seminars also became a place to test concepts that were later submitted to international competitions such as the UIA Young Architects'

Award, where East German entries received several prizes.<sup>7</sup> The Finnish architects, funded by their professional association as well as industry partners, likewise took their designs to the technical detailing stage (with the assistance of students), and presented them not only to international audiences at the Leipzig trade fair, but also in the national architectural press.<sup>8</sup>

### **Establishing common ground**

Scant information has survived about the origins, aims and composition of the first two design seminars in 1980 and 1981. While the inaugural workshop was organised by Joachim Stahr, professor of housing design at HAB Weimar, the second iteration was led by Joachim Bach, professor of town planning in the same department. In both cases the goal was to develop new housing solutions for the city of Dessau. The broader aim was thus to actively engage with the local context by proposing alternatives to construction projects overseen by the municipal planning and regional district construction offices. The 1980 seminar, for example, strongly criticised a new satellite district southwest of the historic centre – the largest in Dessau, comprising 2 400 residential units. Building on this critique, the following summer's design workshop argued for intensified land use in the historic city centre, thus continuing to challenge established principles of the socialist leadership's mass housing programme. While bureaucrats and construction officials alike recognised the high standard of the results of these two seminars, they nonetheless dismissed them as 'unfeasible'.<sup>9</sup>

This didn't change significantly when Bernd Grönwald, professor of architectural theory and director of the Architecture Department at HAB Weimar, became responsible for the coordination of the Hannes Meyer Seminars in 1982. An advocate not only of utilising the Bauhaus building following its restoration in 1976,<sup>10</sup> but also of updating the school's legacy in line with



Fig. 1: Cover page of the design portfolio 'Musterhäuser für Ergänzungsbauten Muldvorstadt/Dessau' (Model houses for infill building Muldvorstadt/Dessau), third Hannes Meyer Seminar, Bauhaus Dessau, May 1982. Source: Pertti Solla.

present-day material conditions and qualitative problems of design, Grönwald was appointed in 1981 to oversee the establishment of the Bauhaus Dessau as a centre for design with subdivisions for architecture and town planning, industrial and environmental design, fine arts, culture and media, as well as research and collection.<sup>11</sup> The centre's objectives were, among others, to improve the aesthetic quality of the city as a whole, to elevate East German construction to the international state of the art, including the use of CAD/CAM, and to increase designers' competitiveness by promoting experimentation and innovation.

Grönwald believed that fostering transnational dialogue was the best way to achieve these goals. For that reason, he invited the Finnish architects Pertti Solla, Jaako Laapotti and Eero Valjakka to participate in the third design seminar, which sought to develop new urban housing models based on industrialised building systems. All three had contributed to prestigious Finnish welfare state projects over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, and through this work were familiar with industrialised construction.<sup>12</sup> Working in Aarne Ervi's studio, Solla was among the architects who designed the commercial and cultural infrastructures in the Tapiola garden city. Valjakka, along with Simo Järvinen, was the architect of the award-winning Olari housing district (1969–73) in Espoo. Laapotti also specialised in housing, and held the Chair for Housing Design at the Technical University Helsinki for nearly two decades from 1975. Prior to that, he had been involved in the production of the Finnish Association of Architects' (SAFA, *Suomen Arkkitehtiliitto*) report on the lack of adequate housing, which had formed the basis for the parliament's so-called half-million programme of 1966.<sup>13</sup>

Their experience aside, what secured these architects' involvement in the Bauhaus Dessau exchanges until 1989 was an agreement for scientific and technological cooperation that Finland

and the GDR had signed in 1976.<sup>14</sup> This agreement established relationships between various chairs at the Technical Universities of Tampere and Helsinki and the HAB Weimar – among them Fred Staufenbiel's Chair of Urban Sociology, Bach's Chair of Town Planning, Stahr's Chair of Housing Design, and, not least, Grönwald's Chair of Architectural Theory. The partnership began with a symposium on 'way of life and living standards: housing and the living environment' held in Weimar in 1979.<sup>15</sup> This was accompanied by an exhibition featuring Finnish residential and interior design.<sup>16</sup>

The discovery of Finnish design resonated with the revision of modernism under way in East Germany, as it seemed to offer an alternative to the forbidding rationality and productivist logic of German functionalism. According to Grönwald, the problem of mass production that was so central to modernist discourse had largely been solved, but economic concerns continued to influence creative thinking, calling for a reorientation of architecture and design towards individual needs and greater quality.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the analyses of living standards by social scientists in Finland and the GDR equally highlighted parallels between the countries, especially with regard to the larger socio-economic challenges faced by developed industrial societies: urbanisation, the improvement of infrastructures and the quality of the residential environment.

Lastly, among architects and planners on both sides there appeared to be great openness, even affinity. Many Finnish practitioners identified as left-wing, and believed that 'all social issues are ultimately related to a political struggle for power', and that 'in the socialist countries the political power of the working class has provided planning and architecture with unforeseen prospects'.<sup>18</sup> While helpful as a basis for cooperation, Finland and East Germany also sought to strengthen their cultural and economic relations beyond mere affinities.

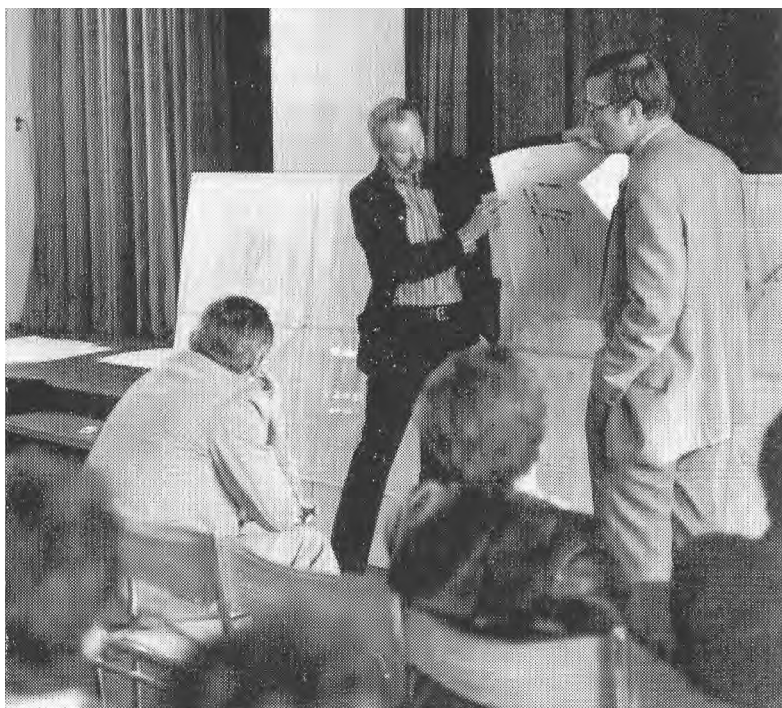


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 2: Kurt Lembcke, Pertti Solla, Eero Valjakka and Bernd Grönwald (from left) during the third Hannes Meyer Seminar, Bauhaus Dessau, May 1982. Source: Bernd Grönwald, 'Architekturfortschritt heute und für morgen', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der HAB Weimar* 29, no. 5/6 (1983).

Fig. 3: CAD/CAM suite at the Bauhaus Dessau, 1987. Source: BArch DH 1/36110



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 4: Cover of *Finnischer Wohnungsbau*, 1979.

Fig. 5: Page showing tableware from *Wohnumwelt Finnland*, 1979.



Fig. 6

# MUSTERHÄUSER II ERGÄNZUNGSBAUTEN IM MITTELALTERLICHEN ZENTRUM VON ERFURT

Als WZ-Arbeit zwischen Finnland und der DDR ausgearbeitete Vorschläge der finnischen Teilnehmer am 4. Hannes-Meyer-Seminar in Dessau zu Dessau, Juni 1984  
Ausgearbeitet mit technischen und material-ökonomischen Daten in Zusammenarbeit mit der Fa. Oy Partek Ab.

VORBEREITUNG UND PLANUNG der Musterhäuser im mittelalterlichen Zentrum von Erfurt  
Leitung des Gesamtprojekts: Pertti Solla, Architekt SAFA  
Planung der Musterhäuser: Jarmo Lappetti, Architekt SAFA, Professor für Wohnungsbau an der TH Helsinki  
Pertti Solla, Architekt SAFA  
Eero Valjakka, Architekt SAFA

An der Ausarbeitung der Vorschläge waren außerdem folgende Studenten der TH Helsinki beteiligt: Anta Björklund, Edda Davidsson, Firkko Eekola, Timo Järvenen, Theo Koller, Markku Lappalainen, Tuija Lind, Siniiska Mänttinen, Ulla Rönkä und Tiina Rasi sowie die Architekten Leo Mitronen und Rurik Vassantjerne.

VORBEREITUNG UND AUSARBEITUNG der technischen und materialökonomischen Daten und Ausführungspläne des Beispielsobjekts  
Leitung der Vorbereitungen und Ausarbeitung: Kai Laitio, technischer Leiter der Elmatic Engineering Division unter Mitwirkung von Projektleiter Martti Vuolteen, beide von der Fa. Oy Partek Ab.  
Ausarbeitung der technischen Daten: Rie Fallström, Ingenieurbüro Magnus Hainberg

SEILAGE: Zusammenfassung des SES-Systems erarbeitet aus der von Zentralverband der finnischen Betonindustrie herausgegebenen Schrift "SES - Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung eines offenen Bauelement-Systems" (1970). Detaillierte Veröffentlichungen gibt das Institut für Bauelemente, Helsinki heraus.

ÜBERRÜCKUNGEN: Gislebert Jönische, Helsinki

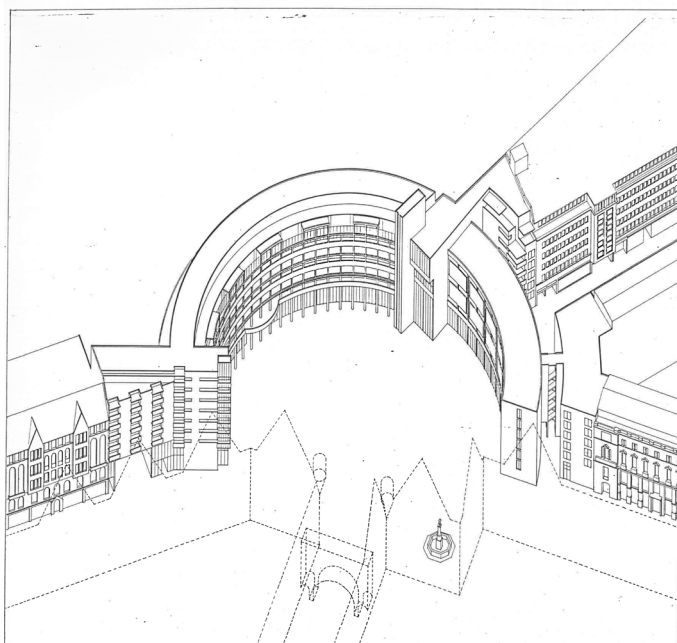


Fig. 7

# MUSTERHÄUSER III ERGÄNZUNGSBAUTEN IM HISTORISCHEN STADTKERN VON LEIPZIG FÜR

BURG-PLATZ UND PETERSSTRASSE

In Finnland bearbeitete Vorschläge der finnischen Teilnehmer für das 5. Hannes-Meyer-Seminar Mai/Juni 1985

Burg-Platz  
AKSONOMETRIE VON RATHAUSTURM AUS GEGEHEN

Fig. 6: Cover page of the design portfolio 'Musterhäuser II – Ergänzungsbauten im mittelalterlichen Zentrum von Erfurt' (Model houses II – buildings in the medieval centre of Erfurt), fourth Hannes Meyer Seminar, Bauhaus Dessau, June 1984. Source: Pertti Solla.

Fig. 7: Cover page of the design portfolio 'Musterhäuser III – Ergänzungsbauten im historischen Zentrum von Leipzig' (Model houses III – buildings in the historic centre of Leipzig), fifth Hannes Meyer Seminar, Bauhaus Dessau, May/June 1985. Source: Pertti Solla.



As early as 1955, Finland had become a regular participant in the above-mentioned Leipzig trade fairs. Contacts in architecture and construction can be traced back roughly to the same time, but remained isolated attempts until the end of the 1960s, when formal cooperation between the Finnish and East German architects' associations, SAFA and BdA/DDR (*Bund der Architekten in der DDR*), commenced.<sup>19</sup> That said, Finland remained neutral during the Cold War, not least because of its historic relationship with (Soviet) Russia. And contrary to other Western nations, it recognised neither the Federal Republic of Germany nor the GDR until 1973. Thus, any economic and cultural relationships that it maintained with both German states were kept below the level of formal diplomacy.<sup>20</sup>

### Exchanging (between) systems

Since the beginning of the 1970s, contacts between the Finnish and East German (as well as Eastern European) building industry steadily intensified. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the gradual removal of trade barriers in the wake of peaceful coexistence came at exactly the right time, when the construction market in the West was in the grip of an economic crisis. By 1978, Finland's exports to European Comecon states amounted to approximately 20 percent. A similar outward expansion characterised Finland's largest corporation in the construction sector and main industry partner in the Hannes Meyer Seminars: the building materials manufacturer Paraisten Kalkki Oy, renamed Partek Oy in the mid-1970s for marketing reasons. As construction in Finland began to slow, the company drastically increased its export activities to the Eastern Bloc (later also the Global South), leading to the growth of foreign sales to 40 percent of the company's overall share within just five years.

In 1974, Partek Oy signed its first export contract with the GDR. The company's main export products were cement, concrete prefabrication technology

and heavy machinery. Thus, it delivered two highly efficient, partially automated panel factories able to produce dozens of residential units each day for what was the largest building site of the socialist leadership's housing programme: Berlin-Marzahn. For the two partners this deal was not only a major investment; the plant added a whopping 620 million marks to the mounting costs of the East German policy shift towards consumer socialism. It also marked a diplomatic breakthrough of such magnitude that the Finnish president Urho Kekkonen attended the panel factory's opening ceremony shoulder to shoulder with East German bureaucrats and four thousand construction workers.<sup>21</sup>

From a technical perspective, the export of these factories was only possible because of the high compatibility between the Finnish and East German prefabricated concrete construction systems – BES (*Betonielementtistandardi*) and WBS 70 (*Wohnungsbauserie 70*). Both countries had seen a huge spread of industrialised building over the course of the 1960s. In Finland, the concrete prefabrication industry had successfully lobbied municipalities to designate land for large-scale projects to address the urgent need for housing. But the prevalence of different building systems reduced the speed and efficiency of construction. Between 1968 and 1970, the organisation of the Finnish concrete industry therefore took steps towards the production of a unified open construction system – the BES study. The BES system consisted of load bearing wall panels, based on a 3x3m square module, and hollow slab floors. Although a second construction kit called PLS, which combined prefabricated floor slabs with in-situ concrete pillars, was developed in parallel to maintain greater flexibility, the industry's high investment in the production of BES meant that it became the dominant system, employed in the majority of 1970s housing projects. Developments in the GDR in many ways mirrored those in Finland. At the end of the 1960s, in the context of a centrally managed economy, similar

efforts were made to develop a unified construction system for housing, thus rationalising production by narrowing the palette of previous, at times locally developed, panel systems. Here the result was the infamous WBS 70, which came to be employed in the vast majority of mass housing projects of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

However, the agreement between Finland and the GDR had barely been signed, as criticisms of prefabricated mass housing began to emerge in both countries. Yet, while in the former, under market conditions, the intersecting crises of late modernist mass housing and the economy became a cause of nervousness for developers, construction officials in the GDR pursued industrialised construction in vast satellite districts largely undeterred as the demand for housing remained grossly unmet.<sup>23</sup> To counter the increasingly negative image of prefabricated system housing, and to address users' requirements for greater flexibility and variation, the Finnish concrete industry tasked a team of architects with improving the BES system both in terms of its technical and thermal performance and its adaptability. The result was the *Asukas-BES* system (user-BES system), presented in a study that was published by Laapotti in 1979.<sup>24</sup>

The standardised BES-system remained the basis for all proposals by the Finnish architect-led team in the three Hannes Meyer Seminars of 1982 (Dessau), 1984 (Erfurt) and 1985 (Leipzig). In so doing, above all they wanted to test the system's limits and, at the same time, showcase its versatility across a great variety of contexts and different typologies – whether these consisted of small-scale infill housing into the heterogeneous fabric of single- to two-storey eighteenth-century craftsmen's and three-storey nineteenth-century workers' houses in Dessau's Muldvorstadt, or a scheme consisting of different types of three-storey townhouses, an infill type, a multi-storey residential and commercial building, and a hotel in the medieval centre of

Erfurt, or the mixed-use residential and commercial building, hotel, and exhibition building proposed for Leipzig's historic centre. Each of the three schemes and its constituent elements was developed in detail as model projects, and presented to an international audience and the East German public at the Leipzig trade fair in 1984.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

As previously mentioned, despite the organisers' ambitions to implement the projects of the Hannes Meyer Seminars, the Finnish-led team's designs remained paper proposals, as responsible administrators and construction officials dismissed them as unrealistic. Archive documents bespeak the scepticism among party leaders and bureaucrats toward the Finnish partners and their motivations. In the end, not a single project was ever executed. The reasons for this might be found in the very economic basis of the cooperation: the East German side struggled not only with escalating costs for Finnish equipment (which increased by about 70 percent – an annual inflation of 12 percent to 15 percent), but also with rising loan interest rates, meaning that the leadership had to keep renegotiating repayment terms with their foreign creditors.<sup>26</sup> This may be why Grönwald had to keep insisting that the Finnish partners had no vested interests in the exchange.<sup>27</sup>

Undoubtedly, at least for the Finnish industry partner, Partek Oy, this wasn't true. But for the East German organisers of the Hannes Meyer Seminars, immaterial rather than material aspects predominated. Their main interests were to improve architects' design skills as well as their technical competence, including the ability to use state of the art tools such as CAD/CAM. It would be a mistake, however, to depict this knowledge transfer as a one-way process. Finnish architects likewise learned from the East German approach of working with the historic urban fabric, and sought to apply this expertise to redevelopment plans for the former industrial harbour in Herttoniemi, Helsinki, in the

late 1980s.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of their modest outcomes, the Hannes Meyer Seminars require us to move beyond the figure of the Iron Curtain, and to think through the complex entanglements between late socialist and late capitalist worlds instead.

#### Notes:

- Both the GDR and the FRG joined the UN on 18 September 1973.
- From 1962 to 1964, Flierl was editor-in-chief of *Deutsche Architektur*, the GDR's only official architectural magazine. For an autobiographical assessment of his editorship in the context of the periodical's history see Bruno Flierl, 'Anspruchsvoll und waghalsig? Die Zeitschrift *Deutsche Architektur/Architektur der DDR* (1952–1990)', in: Simone Barck et al. eds., *Zwischen 'Mosaik' und 'Einheit': Zeitschriften in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1999), 252–7; Bruno Flierl, *Kritisch Denken für Architektur und Gesellschaft: Arbeitsbiographie und Werkdokumentation, 1948–2006* (Erkner: IRS, 2007), 23–27.
- Bruno Flierl, 'Stadtplaner und Architekten im Staatssozialismus der DDR (1993)', in: Flierl, *Gebaute DDR: Über Stadtplaner, Architekten und die Macht* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), 68.
- The Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 3 (2012) 'Cold War Transfer: architecture and planning from socialist countries in the "Third World"', guest edited by Łukasz Stanek; Łukasz Stanek, 'Socialist Networks and the Internationalisation of Building Culture after 1945', *ABE Journal* no. 6 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org>; Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- For reports of the seminars in the East German professional and academic press see: Hans Goetze, 'Das 6. Hannes-Meyer-Seminar am Bauhaus Dessau', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der HAB Weimar* 33, no. 4/5/6 (1987): 340; Bernd Grönwald, 'Entwürfe zur Stadterneuerung – 4. Hannes-Meyer-Seminar', *Form + Zweck* 17, no. 1 (1985): 35; Bernd Grönwald, 'Das 4. Hannes Meyer Seminar im 35. Jahr der DDR – Ein Beitrag zur Lösung neuer Aufgaben des Wohnungsbauprogrammes der DDR', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der HAB Weimar* 30, no. 4 (1984): 199–208; Bernd Grönwald, 'Architekturfortschritt heute und für morgen', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der HAB Weimar* 29, no. 5/6 (1983): 351–5; Bernd Grönwald, 'III: Hannes Meyer Seminar am Bauhaus Dessau', *Architektur der DDR* 32, no.8 (1982): 509.
- Following the Bauhaus Dessau's administrative restructuring in 1986, the design seminars were continued under the name Walter Gropius Seminar between 1987 and 1991. They were coordinated by new Bauhaus Dessau director Rolf Kuhn, urban sociologist Harald Engler and architect Dieter Bankert. Their focus, however, gradually shifted from urban housing to the surrounding territory. See chapters by Harald Kegler and Harald Bodenschatz in: Christoph Bernhardt, Thomas Flierl and Max Welch-Guerra eds., *Städtebau-Debatten in der DDR: Verborgene Reformdiskurse* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012). On the Bauhaus institutionalisation in East Germany see: Wolfgang Thöner, 'Bewahren und Aktualisieren: Bauhaus-Institutionalisierungen in Dessau von 1945 bis 1994', in: *Bauhaus global: gesammelte Beiträge der Konferenz bauhaus global vom 21. bis 26. September 2009* ed. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2009), 217–26; The results of the first Walter Gropius Seminars were documented in detail in: *Bauforschung – Baupraxis. Bauen in der Stadt*, no. 252 (1989). For a shorter summary, see: Jos Weber, 'I. Internationales Walter-Gropius-Seminar am Bauhaus Dessau', *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 8 (1988): 43–46.
- One example would be the diploma project by Ralf-Rüdiger Sommer and Fred Jasinski from 1983, based on the third Hannes Meyer Seminar in 1982, which won an UIA award. See: Grönwald, 'Das 4. Hannes Meyer Seminar', 199.
- Three design brochures were produced for the projects developed by the Finnish team during the third, fourth and fifth Hannes Meyer Seminars in Dessau, Erfurt and Leipzig. Private archive of Pertti Solla.

9. Grönwald, 'Das 4. Hannes-Meyer-Seminar', 199.
10. Grönwald observes how the East German Bauhaus reception had gradually shifted from arguing 'against the Bauhaus' in the 1950s towards arguing 'with the Bauhaus'. He continues that raising the quality of design – of commodities and buildings – on the basis of contemporary conditions of production as well as social needs would be the main task of an updated Bauhaus. Bernd Grönwald, 'Kulturpolitische Bedeutung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung der Pflege und Aneignung des Bauhauserbes in der DDR', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der HAB Weimar* 26, no. 4/5 (1979): 309–12.
11. Prior to its institutional alignment with the construction sector through the opening, in December 1986, of the Bauhaus Dessau – Zentrum für Gestaltung, the building had operated as the so-called Wissenschaftlich-Kulturelles Zentrum (WKZ) since 1976. For the first decade, both the *Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung* and HAB Weimar occasionally used the school as a professional training facility, hosting workshops in collaboration with organisations such as the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, ICSID (1979). However, plans to restore and reuse the Bauhaus building date back to the end of 1962, after a first attempt by mayor Fritz Hesse and former Bauhäusler Hubert Hoffmann to re-establish the school in 1946 had failed. See: Thöner, 'Bewahren und Aktualisieren', 217–26.
12. On the welfare state in Finland see: Pauli Kettunen, 'The Nordic Welfare State in Finland', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26, no. 3 (2001): 225–47.
13. Erkki Helamaa, 'Building Finland: Housing architecture 1940–1980', in *The Work of Architects: The Finnish Association of Architects 1892–1992*, ed. Pekka Korvenmaa, (Helsinki: The Finnish Building Centre, 1992), 147.
14. Because of his knowledge of German, Solla became responsible for coordinating those exchanges on behalf of the Finnish side from the late-1970s. In the mid-1950s he had worked as a builder in Cologne before studying architecture at TH Karlsruhe and becoming an assistant of Egon Eiermann until 1961.
15. About forty Finnish delegates from disciplines such as sociology, planning, landscape, architecture, and product design were part of the event organised by Ekkehard Bartsch from East Germany and Solla from Finland.
16. Briitta Koskiahio et al., eds., *Lebensweise und Lebensniveau: Wohnen und Wohnumwelt* (Tampere: Finn publishers, 1979); *79-Finnischer Wohnungsbau* (Helsinki: Institut für Bauinformation, 1979); *Wohnumwelt in Finnland* (Helsinki: Finnisches Architekturmuseum, 1979).
17. In my interview with him, Solla also stressed the importance of design as a 'door-opener' and key driving force behind the later architectural design exchanges. This is confirmed by the fact that the East German Office for Industrial Design had established a cooperation with the Finnish designers' association Ornamo in the mid-1970s, and that the latter was a partner organisation in the Weimar symposium in 1979.
18. Ilkka Holmila and Jukka Turtiainen, quoted in Jere Maula, 'Architects and urban development in the 1960s and 1970s', in Korvenmaa, *The Work of Architects*, 188.
19. The most immediate outcome of that cooperation was the exhibition 'Architektur in Finnland: eine Ausstellung veranstaltet von dem Museum für finnische Architektur und dem Bund Dt. Architekten der DDR, Deutsch-Nordische Gesellschaft der DDR' at the Internationales Ausstellungszentrum Berlin, 4–28 June 1970.
20. Seppo Hentilä, *Neutral zwischen den beiden deutschen Staaten: Finnland und Deutschland im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin: BWV Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006); Dörte Putensen, *Im Konfliktfeld zwischen Ost und West: Finnland, der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage 1947–1973* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2000).
21. Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 61–62.
22. Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte: industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR* (Berlin: Schiler, 2005), 96–106.
23. The ongoing decay of the largely nineteenth- and

twentieth-century urban housing stock in East German city centres did little to help this problem.

24. Jaako Laapotti, *Asukas-BES* (Helsinki: Suomen betoniteollisuuden keskusjärjestö, 1979); see also: Marja-Riita Norri, 'Prefabricated Madness: Housing Construction in the 1960s and 1970s', in *Concrete in Finnish Architecture*, ed. Juoni Kaipia, trans. Pirjo Kuuselo (Helsinki: Suomen Betoniteollisuuden Keskusjärjestö, Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1989), 57.
25. The Leipzig project is developed in less detail, however, because the Finnish team was unable to attend the seminar in Leipzig in May–June 1985.
26. B-ARCH, DH1-29131, 'Information zum Plattenwerk Vogelsdorf, 26. August 1977'.
27. Archiv der Moderne Weimar, 3. I/20/143, 'Wiss. Zusammenarbeit der HAB Weimar mit TH Tampere'.
28. *Herttoniemen Keskus Ja Satama-Alue, Osayleiskaavaluonnos* (Herttoniemi Center and Harbour Area, Local Master Plan Draft), City of Helsinki, City Planning Department, Master Plan Department (15.5.1987). Private archive of Pertti Solla.

## Biography

Torsten Lange is lecturer at the Institute gta, ETH Zurich and August-Wilhelm-Scheer Visiting Professor at TU Munich. He studied at the Bauhaus University Weimar, and the Bartlett School of Architecture, London. His dissertation focused on the theoretical underpinnings of late-socialist urbanism and the production of mass housing in the GDR. His publications include articles and chapters in edited volumes such as *Industries of Architecture* (Routledge, 2016) and *Produktionsbedingungen der Architektur* (Thelem, 2018). He was one of the coordinators of the research and publication project *East West Central: Re-Building Europe, 1950–1990* (Birkhäuser, 2017).

Review Article

# Architecture Competitions as Pedagogical Tools: Bridging the Unit and the Office

Federico Ortiz

The extreme whores of the practitioners and the most withdrawn of the pedagogues of the profession are frequently produced by the AA and this is its strength, because in order to achieve such production extremes a great deal in between – student, staff and member – has also to be produced.

(Price, 1975)<sup>1</sup>

With traditional top-down teach-and-test educational methods in crisis, financial pressures and overwork, architecture students have to deal with highly competitive environments. Architecture competitions are usually associated with the practice of architecture and they are indeed a seemingly good way to start practicing architecture, professionally. But within the realm of pedagogy, architecture competitions can prove excellent tools to encourage not competition but collaboration. Expanding and intertwining the practice of architecture across both the professional and pedagogical fields, architecture competitions as pedagogical apparatuses can destabilise roles, positions and ideas in order to produce new knowledge.

Architecture competitions in the context of education encourage the crossing of borders. They allow the academy to prematurely engage with professional structures and external forces, while maintaining a relative level of critical distance and autonomy. And they simultaneously give professional practice a much-needed discerning position that delays full involvement with productive structures. I call this a 'cooperative pedagogy',

emphasising not only the cooperation between the two traditionally separated ways of practicing architecture, but also the operational benefits this brings to both of them.

The 'Unit/Office' association, then, is here understood as a site for knowledge production that employs this notion of cooperative pedagogy. Many examples of an academic unit (or studio) and an architecture office coming together to produce knowledge can be traced throughout history. However, one school of architecture managed to transform its studio structure and to attract practising architects to work with students on architecture projects. Introduced by its chairman John Lloyd in the late 1960s, the 'Unit System' at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) allowed for a more horizontal and collaborative teacher-student relationship. According to tutor Fred Scott, 'an authoritarian teacher-student relationship was replaced by one of mutual discovery and reinforcement regardless of status, which also formed a basis for a remarkably even distribution of power throughout the school community.'<sup>2</sup>

To transform a unit into an office, and vice versa, a series of mechanisms have to be applied. We could identify five lines of action, that are non-hierarchical and different in nature, but unfold closely and overlap with each other. These are: *representation*, the architecture of drawing techniques; *narrative*, the textual part which, together with drawings, forms the architectural project; *media*,

engagement with multiple forms of content production, including exhibitions, publications and events; *history*, the operative use of history to inform practice; and finally, *competitions*.<sup>3</sup> In this essay I explore one such case of a Unit/Office and their use of professional architecture competitions as pedagogical tools.

### Unit/Office

London, early 1970s. The AA had recently restructured itself after a deep political and financial crisis. Alvin Boyarsky had been elected by the school community as its chairman and a new era was about to begin. Expanding and strengthening the school's unit system, Boyarsky was celebrated for curating a strong collection of unit tutors who – sometimes clashing, sometimes collaborating – were pushing themselves, each other and students to new frontiers in architecture pedagogy.<sup>4</sup> From Mark Fisher's inflatable architecture to John Turner's housing and community preoccupations, each Diploma Unit had its own themes and obsessions, led by tutors whose professional architectural production was already widely recognised outside academic circles, including Archigram's Peter Cook, Warren Chalk and Ron Herron (Unit 6); the so-called London Conceptualists such as Bernard Tschumi, Nigel Coates and Jenny Lowe (Unit 2 / Unit 10); and in Unit 9, Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas's emerging Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA).<sup>5</sup> [Fig. 1]

Elia Zenghelis studied at the AA between 1956 and 1961, becoming tutor of the Second Year in 1963, then radically transforming the First Year and later having his own unit in the Diploma School – the last two years of the five-year architecture education. Unit 9 had explored, for more than ten years, particular modes of understanding architecture and the city, and of practicing pedagogy. Zenghelis's genius was in collaborating with other units across the school, like with the previously mentioned London Conceptualists or with Leon

Krier's Unit 2;<sup>6</sup> proposing competitions to other units and even schools; but also in nurturing and encouraging students who would then become tutors in the unit, work with him in his professional practice, liaise with other units, and ultimately explore and evolve their own paths and architecture projects.<sup>7</sup> [Fig. 2]

By charting the development of the Unit through the AA *Prospectus* and *Projects Review* and the expansion of the Office across architectural magazines, we can trace how the pedagogical model was 'contaminated' by Zenghelis's professional practice, and vice versa.

Starting with what could be considered a pedagogical manifesto, in the 1974 'Statement of Aims for a Diploma School Unit' Zenghelis explains the projects the Unit developed to help the students foster their ideological positions on the city. First, there are 'Points and Lines', formed by areas of metropolitan interest that radiate or attract 'urban intensity'. Secondly, 'projects of Metropolitan interest', which refer to historical projects that will be studied to understand and, through them, develop a unique personal point of view and new architectural proposals. The final aim of these projects is to examine such 'real' existing areas of the city and to shift them into the 'possible' by proposing new injections of urban intensity. Finally, all Unit members would also work on 'actual competitions with sufficient symbolic potential'. The 'real' starts entering the realm of education as the professional practice of the tutor starts penetrating the pedagogical model. The last paragraph of this statement establishes the structure of the Unit and explains how it employs 'cooperative pedagogy'. The main component of this site of knowledge production is the work collaboratively produced by both students and tutors.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Unit was also called a 'collaborative workshop'.<sup>9</sup>

The Office for Metropolitan Architecture (New York-London-Berlin) – active since the early

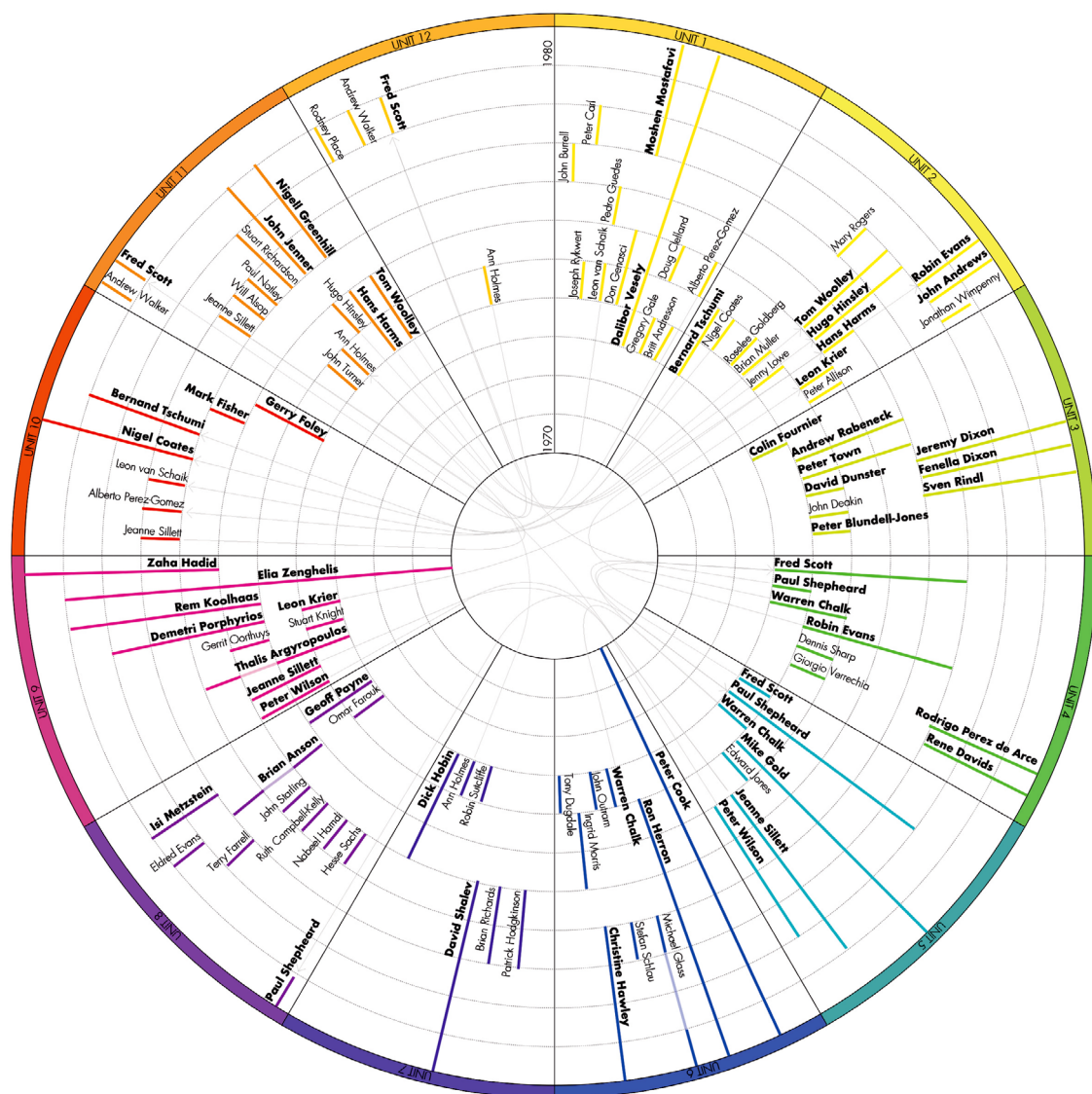


Fig. 1: Diagram 1: AA Diploma Units 1970 – 1980. Source: author.



seventies, was officially founded on January 1, 1975 to develop a mutant form of Urbanism – new types of architectural scenarios which would result in the rehabilitation of the Metropolitan lifestyle – which accepts the Megalopolitan condition with enthusiasm and which will restore mythical, symbolic, literary, oneiric, critical and popular functions to the architecture of large urban centres'.<sup>10</sup>

This extract from a 1976 issue of *Lotus International* magazine clearly states the aims for an architecture office that, founded by Elia Zenghelis, Madelon Vriesendorp, Rem Koolhaas and Zoe Zenghelis, started working on three categories of architecture projects: conceptual-metaphorical, idealised and realistic. The first two were conceptual architectural theorems identified in Manhattan, then put to work to produce highly idealised 'architectural forecasts' – two examples of this kind of project are The City of the Captive Globe and Hotel Sphinx. The last category belongs to the projects that incorporate the lessons of Manhattanism but were intended to be immediately realised.<sup>11</sup> Architectural competitions were used to test these types of projects, to release them from their otherwise purely theoretical nature.

In the span of ten years this Unit/Office complex was to use architectural competitions as a way to produce knowledge that would feed into both the professional practice of architects and the education of future professionals. The Unit/Office was operating in what the tutors called 'the spectrum from theoretical to real',<sup>12</sup> which meant that first research would be developed to be able to produce, through evident operative historical distortions, 'architectural theorems' that could be put into practice directly in real design projects.<sup>13</sup>

Contemporary professional architecture competitions were used to create a space where the asymmetrical hierarchies of students and tutors of diverse backgrounds and with different points of

view would productively meet and clash. This practice was not confined to Unit 9, other units were also employing architectural competitions as part of their pedagogical briefs, establishing a cross-cultural collaboration not only within units but also among architecture schools and, most importantly, between architecture practice and education. [Fig. 3]

### **'Actual competitions with sufficient symbolic potential'**

We will now follow the unfolding of four case studies in which competitions developed by the Office were used in the Unit as pedagogical exercises. These projects evidence the complex network of internal and external cross-cultural relationships that established a contact zone that went far beyond the limits of the architecture school and the city of London, connecting sites of knowledge production across the Atlantic and bridging the gap between the academy and professional practice.

### **Roosevelt Island Housing Competition**

In 1969, the City of New York transferred the urban and financial management of Welfare Island to the Urban Development Corporation (UCD), a real estate development entity funded by Nelson Rockefeller as an instrument of his housing and urban policy. In 1972 the island was renamed Roosevelt Island to house the F. D. Roosevelt Memorial, designed by Louis Kahn. A masterplan of the island, developed by Philip Johnson and John Burgee, divided it into Southtown and Northtown, joined by a Main Street. The housing competition was a call for proposals for the development of an area of Northtown, made by the UCD together with the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in 1974.

In London that same year, Unit 9 proposed this competition as part of one of its exercises, calling for 1 000 homes, to be done in collaboration with two other diploma units at the AA and the graduating year at Columbia University in New York. This



Fig. 2: Diagram 2: AA Diploma Unit 9, 1970 – 1980. Source: author.

competition is one of the most interesting cases in the first years of the Unit/Office, as it opens up a series of connections that unfurl a network of production.

Zenghelis was the main tutor both at the AA and at Columbia (1973–1975), and Koolhaas was using his colleague's units to test the production of the Office – not only competitions like this one but also media products like the first chapters of *Delirious New York*, which were presented to students as lectures. OMA, which in those years included Oswald Mathias Ungers as a main collaborator, developed two proposals for the competition: one by Ungers in collaboration with K. L. Dietzsch, Jeff Clark and Arthur Ovaska, and the other by the Zenghelis, Vriesendorp and Koolhaas in collaboration with the IAUS, specifically the interns Livio Dimitriu, German Martinez, and Richard Perlmutter – who would later join Unit 9. Within the IAUS itself, some of its members also took part in the competition, most notably Peter Eisenman, with Anthony Pergola and Gary Davis.

Together with Unit 9, AA Diploma Unit 5 – led by tutors Mike Gold, Edward Jones and Paul Shephard – and Unit 6 – led by tutors Ron Herron, Peter Cook and Ingrid Morris – also took part in the competition and proposed it to their students. Archigram submission was explicitly proposed as a group submission by staff and students together, including Ron Herron, Peter Cook, Ingrid Morris, Christine Hawley, Tom Heneghan, Penelope Richards, Gerry Whale, John Robins and Keith Priest.

Finally, there were four tied winners of the competition: Robert Stern and John Hagmann; Kyu Sung Woo; Sam Davis with the ELS Design Group; and Robert Amico and Robert Brandon. Like Zenghelis and Koolhaas, Stern was teaching at Columbia University, where they held common debates on the project.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the teams responded fairly similarly to the challenge of the competition: this comprised the extension of the Manhattan grid over Roosevelt Island and the exploration of low-rise high-density, including re-appropriated Manhattan typologies, from skyscrapers to brownstones. No one in the Office nor in the Unit won the competition, but it certainly established a productive mechanism that would be explored in the following years.

### Museum of Photography

In 1976, Emile Meijer, the director of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, proposed the realisation of a photography museum situated between its building and the Stedelijk Museum. The lot is in essence a continuation of the Van de Veldestraat that sits, with its typical lines of trees on both sides of the street, between the two buildings. In their proposal, OMA's attitude from the beginning was that of the 'as found' – a concept embraced by Alison and Peter Smithson, tutors of both Zenghelis and Koolhaas. However, the Smithsons' inspiration in and appreciation of the ordinary, of things as they are and as people use them, was quite different from OMA's acceptance of pre-existing conditions used only to develop original design strategies that would inform the project.

Probably one of OMA's first reflections on the notion of context in physical terms, their project, led by Koolhaas, proposed to bury the museum and to leave the street above intact. Underground, a series of identical exhibition rooms were only interrupted by areas that contain the necessary soil for the trees to remain living and a crossing street – to become a typical OMA tactic, bringing an episode of dramatic change and formal exuberance into a rational programmatic organisation. The interior evoked the outside world by using the existing street pavement as its floor and replacing the street above with glass bricks. This competition and its extreme preservationist attitude would become the main source of



Fig. 3: Diagram 3: AA Unit 9 Architecture Competitions. Source: author.

inspiration to the Unit for the 1976/1977 academic year.

The students in the Unit reproduced the same strategies. Most projects occupied the street in between the buildings, respecting the existing conditions as much as possible. In all the projects we find: the parallel lines of trees, a series of repetitive underground rooms along a rectangular building, and a secondary street disrupting the composition. However, placing the whole museum underground was a strategy that did not seem appropriate to all the students, some of whom instead explored different formal configurations, mostly various extrusions of the plot. The use of professional architecture competitions as pedagogical exercises allowed students to learn not only by working side by side with their tutors on the same project, but also empowered them to challenge the tutor's ideas.

### **Dutch Parliament Extension**

Originally a fortress, the Binnenhof is the house of the Dutch Parliament and Government. After centuries of additions and extensions, in 1978 the government held a competition to bring some clarity to the fragmented agglomeration and to extend its facilities. Two projects shared the first prize: one by the Dutch structuralist architect Leo Heijdenrijk and the other by OMA. However, neither of the projects were built and, after a series of new commissions, Pi de Bruijn was the architect who finally gave shape to the new building in the 80s.

The Office's project, usually described as three fragments, was most importantly an attempt to appropriate the fortress as a type and to open it up in a democratic gesture, not of transparent facades, but of an explosion of modern fragments injected in the middle of a context that should have otherwise been perfectly restored. The result is a complex composition of singular elements that conquer the old fortress, invade its empty crannies and create

public spaces framed by two large blocks and surrounding mini formalistic episodes, much like an *Architekton*, all connected by bridges and interpenetrating volumes.<sup>15</sup> This anti-rational, anti-contextual and anti-structural project appropriated the typology of the fortress, transforming it through the unapologetic injection of concentrated congested modern episodes.

For this competition, OMA consisting of the Zenghelis, Vriesendorp, Koolhaas and Ron Steiner, incorporated as a main partner a former Unit 9 student, Zaha Hadid, and two current Unit 9 students as collaborators, Elias Veneris and Richard Perlemutter. After this competition, Hadid started her own office, and would then continue the legacy of Unit 9 for almost another ten years after joining as a tutor in 1977 and then taking over from Zenghelis and Koolhaas in 1981. Veneris was part of OMA only for this competition, but later joined Zenghelis when he opened the OMA branch in Greece during the 80s. Perlemutter stayed working for OMA until the early 80s, collaborating on the Kochstrasse / Friedrichstrasse Housing project for IBA Berlin, among other ex Unit 9 students Stefano de Martino and Alex Wall. The latter, now professor at Harvard GSD, worked for OMA until 1989 and joined Hadid as tutor of Unit 9 in 1983. OMA founders Madelon Vriesendorp and Zoe Zenghelis also joined Hadid in the 80s, running the Colour Techniques Workshop.

With this project, OMA had identified three post-modern attitudes that they were consciously trying to avoid; three 'isms' dealing with historical town centres became the target and the source of work for the Unit/Office. 'Contextualism', especially Colin Rowe's methodology, was attacked for compressing in a single act of creation years of historical urban transformation and for fossilising both idealised pasts and present circumstances together with their future possibilities. Likewise, the tutors of Unit 9, would fight against the idea of eternal typologies and morphologies that the 'Rationalists', mainly Aldo

Rossi and the Krier brothers, found to be perfected urban organisations developed throughout centuries of history. In their eyes, both Contextualism and Rationalism were 'pre-empted tactics which abort history before it even happens'.<sup>16</sup> Finally, chiefly opposing Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, OMA did not agree with Structuralism's idea that breaking large programs into smaller formal units would re-establish a 'human scale'.

Unit students explored similar ideas: not restoring the original type and not respecting the formal physical context, but inserting regular prismatic elements that opened up the group of buildings to the metropolitan congestion. In particular, the work of Alan Forster and Stefano de Martino, consisted as well of longitudinal buildings and its interconnecting bridges. However, they moved in the opposite direction from their tutors: instead of interrupting the fortress with perpendicular slabs, they made a parallel intervention to it and then connected it with smaller elements. The drawing techniques are remarkably similar to those of the tutors, especially in de Martino's project, exploring an isometric floor plan that reconstructs three-dimensionally only the proposed buildings in an exploded axonometric, à la James Stirling, but with a stronger constructivist tone. Both de Martino and Forster, would become part of OMA's team for the next competition. Other student in this academic year was Ricardo Simonini who later joined OMA for the 1980 IBA projects in Berlin (Kochstrasse / Friedrichstrasse and Lützowstrasse Housing), competition projects that Hadid would incorporate in her 1984 Unit 9 briefs following the tradition of using competitions as pedagogical tools.

It is interesting to note that while the Unit was trying hard to 'get real', it was not by means of developing projects realisable in the immediate future that the aim was to be achieved. Rather, the mutual immersion of pedagogical and professional practices in each other's realms would allow the

Unit to become involved in the real practice of architecture. Architectural competitions were used as a didactic way of testing ideologies in the professional practice.

### **Residence of the Irish Prime Minister**

In the late 70s, there were plans to turn an old Georgian building in the middle of Phoenix Park in Dublin, into the new residence of the Irish Prime Minister. For this purpose, a competition was held to find a solution for a complex brief: the PM's residence and the State Guest House, which had to be separated but linked by both formal and informal connections, situated in the middle of a big urban park with many other historical buildings.

As we have seen, OMA was employing students from the AA, Columbia and the IAUS, as collaborators for their competitions. This 1979 competition proposal was done by the Zenghelis, Vriesendorp, Steiner and Koolhaas, with the collaboration of Unit 9 students Forster and de Martino. The latter, currently professor and former dean of the Faculty of Architecture University of Innsbruck, stayed working for OMA until 1983, joined Hadid as tutor in Unit 9 in the 80s, and later had his own unit until 1991. As previously mentioned, for this completion Hadid started her own office and submitted a proposal in collaboration with Camilla Ween and with Unit 9 students Jonathan Dunn and Kami Ahari. Tutors from other AA Diploma Units also took part in the competition, in fact the winning project was by Evans & Shalev Architects, led by David Shalev tutor at Unit 7 and Eldred Evans tutor of Unit 8. Other team in the competition, formed by Unit 5 tutor Edward Jones in collaboration with Russell Bevington, included Unit 7 student David Chipperfield and Unit 9 students Malcom Last and Margot Griffin.

OMA's project consisted of two independent houses: the Taoiseach's Residence and the State Guest House. The former was an intersection of

two curved prismatic volumes, one opening to long vistas over the landscape and the other spanning over the main road access. The latter was a rectangular cloister that contained a private garden surrounded by bedroom suites, in the form of separate pavilions interrupted only by public facilities. These two fragments were connected by a roundabout system, transforming the residence into a drive-in motel. Finally, to intensify the contextual relationship, the architects proposed to reconstruct original fencing stone walls and to recreate the organisation of the surrounding parkland in a series of bands of coloured flora. Given the circumstances of the contextualist debate, this could be OMA's most ironic critique or most serious postmodern project.

The Office's reaction to these divergent demands was to resolve it

by dividing the site along an east-west axis, a trajectory that goes from the curvilinear to the rectilinear, from the agitated to the serene, from the (relatively) exposed to the shielded. The two houses are an architectural extrapolation and interpretation of these themes: they echo and amplify the existing gradation of the land.<sup>17</sup>

However, the so-called natural landscape was not more than an urban park and the standing buildings hardly had any historical value – in fact, of almost one hundred entries, only four preserved these buildings. Therefore, the question of preservation – mostly what to preserve and how – was already part of the Office since its beginnings.

While the contrast between the curvilinear PM's Residence and the rectilinear State Guest House was the Office's main input, the projects developed by the Unit students had little to resemble the tutor's intentions. The students focused on the rectangular limits of the existing wall and the internal-external relationship between the perimeter and its content.

While their tutors proposed a very clear formal contradiction between two objects, the students did not even explore the possibility of rebuilding the perimeter in order to contain a private garden. Perhaps one of the most interesting projects is Forster's version, in which a series of rooms are placed next to each other in what might seem an endless grid. Considering that he was simultaneously part of OMA's team for this competition, his project demonstrates how students were able to develop their own ideology and use the competition as a tool to test ideas and find new answers. All other proposals, however, accepted and even emphasised the conflicting relationship between form and program: the programme was not large enough to fill in the formal weight of a Prime Minister's Residence. At this point students, confident with the methodology, would also start choosing themselves the competitions that they wanted to work on and develop projects individually.<sup>18</sup> Even if students were working in different projects the Unit continued to be a space for interchange and collaboration.

### **Exodus: back to the beginning**

In 1980 Koolhaas left London to establish himself back in the Netherlands and opened a second branch of the Office in Rotterdam. Later, Zenghelis also went back to his home country and opened a third branch of OMA in Athens, running it until 1987.<sup>19</sup> Between the three cities, the professional production of the Office started to take off. The partners, now ex-tutors of Unit 9, and their collaborators, mostly ex-students, started working on real architectural projects with the sole intention of building them. Across all cities, the Office was working on projects that challenged the postmodern ideas of context, form, language and programme, by extracting and developing models from the Unit/Office's catalogue of ideas.

Coinciding with the end of Zenghelis and Koolhaas teaching at Unit 9, the AA displayed in 1981, the work of OMA. In the exhibition catalogue, Koolhaas

introduced their work as a critique of the postmodern attitudes of contextualism and rationalism. Through the projects for the Dutch Parliament extension and the Koepel Panopticon renovation, he explained how these projects understood the fortress and the panopticon neither in a historical nor typological sense, pushing forward a new modern attitude. Their 'New Sobriety' favoured a modern ideological position based on functionalism – without a formal obsession – and programmatic imagination that would formulate content for a Culture of Congestion.<sup>20</sup> OMA was reflecting and using the already consolidated history of the modern movements, especially its 'misfits', for its own production, but it was simultaneously creating its own history. In the previous year OMA had occupied another exhibition space, this time at the Luce van Rooy Galerie in Amsterdam, where they showed nothing more than its already well-known 'Exodus'.

'Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture' was the entry for Casabella's competition 'The City as a Significant Environment' submitted by the Zenghelis, Vriesendorp and Koolhaas in 1972. Many pages have been written about this project, its drawings and its narrative, but there is usually a fact that is difficult to grasp. As previously mentioned, Zenghelis was a First Year tutor, but as the school was malfunctioning during the 69-71 crisis, he started receiving students from other years, leading the popular 'Greek Unit', that led in Boyarksy years, to Unit 9. In 1968, Koolhaas joined the AA as a student, Zenghelis's Unit a year later, and then left in 1972, only to return three years later as a tutor in Diploma Unit 9 with his former teacher.<sup>21</sup> Then, the co-creators of 'Exodus' founded in 1975 the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, based on their collaboration for the Casabella competition. In 1973, after the project was published in the magazine, Zenghelis, drawing on the competition and the project, introduced to Unit 9 students a brief for 'The Utopian City'. Peter Wilson's projects 'The Fire' and, joint Diploma project with Jeanne Sillett, 'Dorset:

Inhabiting a landscape', originate as a response to this brief and is a testimony of both the cultural and ideological landscape across units at the AA in the 70s and illustrates the productive forces unleashed when using competitions as pedagogical instruments.<sup>22</sup>

Was therefore 'Exodus or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture' part of the production of an architectural Office or a student's project for a pedagogical Unit? It was neither one nor the other, and yet it was both. This was the beginning, as we have seen, of years of a productive cooperation between education and professional practice: an apparatus that found its productive force in the exploration and exploitation of the Unit/Office as a productive site and in architecture competitions a tool for producing ideas that would transform the reality of cities.

Architecture competitions allow architects to create stories, not only answering questions posed by a brief but also reframing these questions and asking new ones, in order to identify new answers – or even new problems. Students should find in architecture education a space for cooperation, dialogue, and fundamental questioning. In architecture competitions lies the potentiality of imagining and expanding original productive educational models hand in hand with innovative roles for architects. Ultimately, these historical accounts shine a light on other forms of architecture practice and pedagogy, and encourage not only an experimental use of architecture competitions but also a hybrid relationship between professional practice and education at large. Instead of competitions being understood as spaces of rivalry, teachers-architects-students can find ways to cooperate and establish productive relationships that subvert the individualistic ideology of entrepreneurship, towards a practice that allows for exploring radical empathy and critical pedagogy in both the profession and schools, blurring the boundaries between the architecture office and the classroom space.



## Notes

1. Cedric Price, 'A Useful Irritant' in *A Continuing Experiment: Learning and Teaching at the Architectural Association*, ed. James Gowan (London: Architectural Press, 1975), 39.
2. Fred Scott, 'Myth, Misses, and Mr Architecture' in Gowan, *Continuing Experiment*, 169.
3. Here I refer to Tafuri's concept of *operative criticism*. Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (London: Granada, 1980), 141.
4. As with every new beginning and experiment, tutors and students were also testing the system, specially people like Nigel Coates and Jenny Lowe, who joined three different units as students, and Jeanne Sillett who, together with Peter Wilson, joined as a student both Elia Zenghelis's Unit 9 and Dalibor Vesely's Unit 1, and later joined as a tutor Unit 5, 9, 10, 11, and led her own 'special unit' *LOT 90*.
5. Nicknamed by Peter Cook as 'The London Conceptualists', this group led by architect Bernard Tschumi and RoseLee Goldberg, director of the Royal College of Art, explored ideas around a conceptual understanding of space and its relation with performance art, through performances, lectures, exhibitions and teaching – first in Unit 2, were Tschumi and Goldberg collaborated, and then in Unit 10. The 1975 exhibition 'A Space: A 1000 Words' displayed the work of artists and architects, including Tschumi's former students Will Alsop, Jenny Lowe, Nigel Coates, Peter Wilson and Jeanne Sillett (both also part of Unit 9), all later tutors in the unit; but also other AA unit tutors like Unit 4 / Unit 5's Paul Shephard and Unit 9's Elia Zenghelis, with Zoe Zenghelis. For more on the 'London Conceptualists' see Sandra Kaji-O'Grady, 'The London Conceptualists: Architecture and Performance in the 1970s', *Journal of Architectural Education* 61, no. 4 (2008): 43–51.
6. Leon Krier started teaching with Zenghelis in 1973 but then, suggested by Boyarsky, started his own unit. Unit 9 and Unit 2 maintained a good relationship for a couple of years and collaborated in a series of projects and lectures: 'Weekly lectures and seminars will be organised in conjunction with Elia Zenghelis. They will discuss the history of the European City and territory, the dialectic of building types and urban morphology, architectural language and the use of types and the radical critique of modern town planning.' 'Diploma Unit 2' in *AA Prospectus 1975–1976* (London: Architectural Association School of Architecture, 1975), 48. Flying straight from New York in 1975, Koolhaas joined Zenghelis as a tutor in Unit 9 shifting the focus on the traditional European city towards the exploration of the metropolitan culture of congestion and the reconsideration of radical modernities, such as the work of Russian architect Ivan Leonidov – which explains the incorporation of Gerrit Oorthuys as a tutor, with whom Koolhaas was working on a never published book on the work of Leonidov.
7. Gaps in mapping this history of the AA Units is due to the lack of records because of the institutional crisis between 1968 and 1971, when Boyarsky was elected chairman. 1973/1974 was the first academic year when the 'new' unit system was fully in place and the first time the new AA Prospectus and Projects Review were published, establishing a long-standing tradition of documenting the school's production.
8. 'I would very often work on the competitions and my own projects in the studio, so students would see me working. That was an important part of the teaching. This way, you showed the students that one was involved in the same kind of things that they were. We were going through the same struggles and it was visible, they could see me struggling on my drawing board – in those days there were no computers – through the whole process.' Elia Zenghelis in conversation with the author.
9. Elia Zenghelis, 'Diploma Unit 9' in *Prospectus* (London: Architectural Association, 1975), 8.
10. Pierluigi Nicolin, ed., *Lotus International*, No. 11. (Milan: Elemond Periodica, 1976), 34.
11. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: a Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 10.
12. Demetri Porphyrios, Elia Zenghelis and Rem

- Koolhaas, 'Diploma Unit 9' in *Prospectus*, (London: Architectural Association, 1977), 49.
13. Architectural Association School of Architecture, *AA Prospectus, 1976–1977* (London: Architectural Association School of Architecture), 49.
  14. 'We did the project as part of OMA, students developed their projects, and Robert Stern, who was teaching History and Theory at Columbia at the time, participated in the competition as well. We worked on the project while the competition was going on and at the end of the semester we had the final review. Rem and I presented our project, the students presented theirs, but also Bob presented his project. The students were very positive about our project, but they gave Bob a very bad review. The next day he won the first prize for the competition.' Elia Zenghelis in conversation with the author.
  15. Kazimir Malevich's *Architekton* was part of the Unit's pedagogical toolkit. Understood as form without content and mixed with the Surrealist's technique of *cadaver exquisit*e, it was used to produce fragments of personal architectural worlds that would then be reassembled under one single project.
  16. Haig Beck, ed., 'OMA: Office for Metropolitan Architecture. Urban Intervention: Dutch Parliament Extension, The Hague' in *International Architect* 1, no. 3 (1980): 47–60.
  17. Office for Metropolitan Architecture, 'Irish Prime Minister's Residence', <https://oma.eu>, accessed 30 June 2019.
  18. 'We were doing all sorts of projects. You were free to propose your own briefs and make your own projects. In the Fourth Year, for example, I was the only one doing a competition for the Acropolis Museum.' Elias Veneris in conversation with the author.
  19. Zenghelis continued OMA projects in Greece with Elia Veneris, former Unit 9 student, but left the Office in 1987 when he started a new practice with Eleni Gigantes, ex Unit 9 student under Zaha Hadid. Zenghelis continued teaching for many years at Princeton, the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf (1989–2002), the Berlage Institute (1993–2010), ETH Zurich (1998–2000), Accademia d'Architettura Mendrisio (2000–2007), and most recently at The Bartlett, the AA, and Yale.
  20. Rem Koolhaas, 'Our "New Sobriety"' in *OMA Projects 1978–1981* (London: Architectural Association School of Architecture, 1981), 9–10.
  21. AA Newsheet No. 13. Summer 1971/1972 (London: Architectural Association School of Architecture, 1972).
  22. Peter Wilson had simultaneously joined Tschumi's Unit 2 and after graduating from Unit 9, together with Jeanne Sillett joined as tutors until 1976 and were simultaneously affiliated to Unit 5. Sillett later joined Unit 10, Unit 11 and for only one year led a special Unit 13 and LOT 90. Wilson stopped teaching at the AA in 1988, to concentrate on his professional work with Bolles + Wilson, office established with also former Unit 9 student Julia Bolles. On Peter Wilson at the AA see Isabelle Doucet, 'Architecture Between Politics and Aesthetics: Peter Wilson's "Ambivalent Criticality"' at the Architectural Association in the 1970s', *Architectural Theory Review* 19, no. 1 (2014): 98–115.

## Biography

Federico Ortiz is an architect, researcher and writer. He studied History and Critical Thinking at the Architectural Association, where he received a distinction for his thesis entitled *The Unit and The Office: Cooperation in Practice*. Previously, Ortiz studied architecture and urbanism at the National University of La Plata and worked as an architect in Argentina and Switzerland. Ortiz has recently worked in curatorial and editorial projects at the Canadian Centre for Architecture. He is currently a Programme Manager at New London Architecture and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire.



## Review Article

# Pools, Carparks and Ball-Pits: Or Why the Notre Dame Restoration Competition is a Meme

Hamish Lonergan

## The Notre Dame (non) competition

It did not take long for images of the reconstruction of Notre Dame to become a meme online. Even between 15 April 2019, when fire consumed the roof and spire, and 17 April, when French prime minister Edouard Philippe announced a future competition for its reconstruction, images circulated on social media incorporating the restored cathedral into a slick mixed-use development by the august-sounding firm Pick Rogarth + Baumsnatch. [Fig. 1] Many responded with shock and disbelief at the arrogance of architects imposing their banal, commercial vision on a national monument, before realising the joke. Those taken in were quick to claim it was not so ridiculous after all, pointing to I. M. Pei's pyramids at the Louvre, and the commercialisation of many European cathedral squares.

Fewer fell for Oliver Wainwright's Twitter proposal on 17 April to replace Viollet-Le-Duc's spire with Heatherwick's Vessel. [Fig. 2] It followed Phillippe's widely-discussed call for solutions 'adapted to the technique and the challenges of our era',<sup>1</sup> and the frenzied pledges of support from billionaires like Bernard Arnault, who commissioned the Louis Vuitton Foundation by Gehry Partners.<sup>2</sup> In this context, after Wainwright's damning review of Hudson Yards in *The Guardian* – and an earlier twitter post comparing the Vessel to a giant shawarma – it read as a pointed warning against deliberately iconic architecture. These three days set the tone for discourse surrounding the promised

competition over the next month: the focus on shareable images; the public anger at architects capitalising on tragedy; confusion of the serious and satirical; connections across pop-culture; and the ever-present proximity of architectural competitions and power.

Many of the more serious proposals were strikingly similar: transparent recreations of what was lost in the fire. As early as 16 April, Studio Fuksas described their vision of 'a crystal pinnacle of Baccarat for the new Notre Dame' on *Huffpost*, before releasing glowing, blue renderings.<sup>3</sup> Soon after, emerging and established designers began posting proposals on Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms, where they were picked up by mainstream design news websites like *Dezeen*, *Archdaily* and *Designboom*. By 25 April, when *Dezeen* editorialised the 'best' of these proposals, Fuksas's images were joined by variations in stained-glass and green crystal; some, like architects Studio NAB and rendering firm Miysis Studio, filled this glass roof cavity with plants, turning it into a greenhouse.<sup>4</sup> Kiss the Architect's scheme – replacing the spire with an assemblage of columns, arches and spheres – photoshopped an existing folly proposal into place, conspicuous in a field dominated by professional and expensively-produced renderings. Where a popular *Dezeen* article might typically attract between ten and twenty responses in the comments section, the Notre Dame piece attracted over 140 comments

with an unusual degree of consensus, panning the proposals as shamefully insensitive to the building and its history, calling for an accurate reconstruction instead.

Soon after, Swedish firm Ulf Mejergren Architects (UMA) shared renderings replacing the roof and spire with a meditative pool. [Fig. 3] By the time *Dezeen* posted a follow-up article, 'Seven of the most outrageous proposals for Notre-Dame', the pool had been edited into a carpark – 'if North Americans are put in charge of the Notre Dame reconstruction' – and retweeted by a Belgian politician taking a swipe at his opponents' transport policy.<sup>5</sup> [Fig. 4] It set off a series of increasingly outlandish edits: another Twitter user turned it into a multi-story carpark, [Fig. 5] before it morphed into a children's ball-pit on architecture meme account Oh-Em-Ayy. [Fig. 6] Another contributor to the *Dezeen* comments photoshopped a mob of *gilets jaunes* protestors in place of the pool, while others questioned why *Dezeen* would engage with the scheme at all, accusing the designers of manufacturing outrage to stand out in an already crowded field. Designer Sebastian Errazuriz replaced the spire with a rocket, claiming it was an 'act of creative one-upmanship designed... to exhaust the audience's patience... for a new glass eco-roof.'<sup>6</sup> He congratulated himself when, on 29 May, the French senate determined that there would be no competition and the cathedral would be restored to its 'last known visual state.'<sup>7</sup> Even then, GoArchitects, an independent publisher turned competition convenor, announced a 'people's choice' design competition, open to any scheme 'no matter how outlandish'. The online edition of British newspaper *The Independent* featured an entry by Bay Huynh Architects, with another rooftop pool, this time connected to the Seine by elevated canals.<sup>8</sup> [Fig. 7]

### Competitions on the internet

In the month between Phillippe's announcement of a competition and the French Senate's bill to prevent

it, Notre Dame generated a remarkably high level of online interest, even compared to recent competitions like the Guggenheim Helsinki (2014). Without a competition brief, hundreds of proposals have been produced, posted across social media, architecture news platforms and the GoArchitects webpage. While the Guggenheim competition produced over 1 700 entries, the way they were aggregated on a single website meant that writers like Peggy Deamer and Pier Vittorio Aureli could confidently comment on the overall quality of the proposals without fear of excluding any key schemes.<sup>9</sup> In that case, only the six shortlisted entries were widely shared online, while those not submitted for official consideration – the schemes produced by Mark Foster Gage and Andrew Kovacs, for example, both combining ready-made physical and digital figures into new architectural forms – were widely published in established architecture journals like *Log* and *Architectural Design*.<sup>10</sup>

Notre Dame is the rare case of a discrete internet phenomenon – bookended by the fire and the Senate's announcement – but even in this limited timeframe the same type of cohesive analysis is almost impossible. Proposals have spread far more widely across the internet, creating the kind of infinite regression of referential connections which leads from a meditative pool to a ball pit. Throughout the process of writing this essay there seemed to be a steady stream of photoshopped variations, impossible to keep up with. All the while, the terrible odds associated with the never-realised Guggenheim competition – better to meet a client at a bar, wrote Derrick Leavitt – were compounded in a competition that no-one could win because it was never officially opened.<sup>11</sup> In the GoArchitects' competition, over two hundred entries competed for a grand prize of only €900.

### A memetic competition framework

This overwhelming and unrewarded online interest might be unusual for architectural competitions,



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Pick Rogarth + Baumsnatch's mixed use development. C:\temp\ (@bryceelder ), 'Restoration of Notre Dame', Twitter, 16 April 2019, 12:26 a.m., <https://twitter.com/bryceelder>.

Fig. 2: Viollet le Duc's spire replaced with Heatherwick's Vessel. Oliver Wainwright (@ollywainwright), 'France gave New York the Statue of Liberty', Twitter, 17 April 2019, 8:47 a.m., <https://twitter.com/ollywainwright>.

but it is not strange for memes. Over the last ten years, a mature body of scholarship has emerged to explain the increasingly important role that memes play in online discourse. Although discrete images of Notre Dame like Wainwright's Vessel mashup may have been extensively shared online, this does not make them memes. As meme scholar Ryan Milner writes, 'it's an easy shortcut to call a solitary image we scroll past on Twitter or Tumblr a meme, as if the term is synonymous with "a quirky little JPG from the internet."'12 Instead, it is useful to turn to Limor Shifman's broader definition, going beyond individual images:

(a) group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users.<sup>13</sup>

For outsiders, this complex web of self-aware connections can appear illegible, but remains easily comprehensible by overlapping groups of internet users who recognise the joke and its context: from the broadest group who understand the logic of memes generally to subgroups like architects who have the specialised knowledge to grasp disciplinary content.

In this way, UMA's pool may be the source, but the meme is the network of modified and reposted images across social media. Through this process, the pool and its variants illustrate many of the qualities which Milner sees at the heart of memes. Users took advantage of the inherently editable qualities of this high-quality rendering of the cathedral, already stripped of its spire and roof: it was easier to turn this image into a carpark because the hard work of editing out the background was already done.<sup>14</sup> In calling the original 'outrageous', *Dezeen* captured something that resonated with viewers in a way other images did not. UMA's proposal was refreshing, boldly rejecting the verticality of spire

and roof, absurdly juxtaposing pool and roovescape.<sup>15</sup> That this audience existed at all is arguably due to the coincidence of the Notre Dame competition with the rise of specialised architectural meme accounts like Sssscavvvv (6 850 followers) and Arc.humor (4 250 followers). When they encountered the ball pit, Oh.Em.Ayy's 8 950 followers could recognise both Ulf Mejergrén's pool and the poorly photoshopped aesthetic of other memes online. As other social media users modified the image, they invested in a content-creation process that rewarded them in likes, reposts and new followers, ultimately spilling over into mainstream notoriety on platforms like *Dezeen*.<sup>16</sup>

Meme theory helps make sense of the string of modifications to UMA's pool, but my contention here is that this serious scholarship of a seemingly-unserious topic can be used, in reverse, to begin to understand competitions on social media more broadly. As recently as 2017, Ignaz Strebél and Jan Silberberger's exhaustive overview of the historiography and theory of competitions noted that entries are routinely archived on official websites, without recognising the increasingly important role of social media and online architecture media.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Notre Dame seems less like an anomaly than a premonition of how competitions will occur online in the future: simultaneously under the auspices of competition bodies and the media. The reach of social and mainstream architecture media means that an architect can gain as much popular, professional recognition from a well-publicised image as with a short-listed competition entry. Here, I sketch out three initial ideas for how meme theory might inform an understanding of competitions online.

### Architectural subcultures

One typical rationale for entering competitions is the free publicity they offer architects. Indeed, the *Dezeen* comments section accused firms of exploiting this perverse incentive, creating insensitive schemes to generate media attention. On

closer examination, it seems a dubious strategy, given how unlikely anyone is to commission, or even follow, a firm whose work they find so unappealing. Conversely, Deamer wrote that even the most impressive Guggenheim Helsinki schemes were lost in the competition archive and the glut of images online.<sup>18</sup> It is certainly easy for something to anger the public or 'disappear' in the depths of the internet, but meme theory shows how subcultures latch onto resonant images even as they are forgotten and ridiculed by online culture at large. Schemes by more well-known firms like Fuksas slid into obscurity whereas UMA's pool resurfaced on social media via its edited proxies.

Understanding competition entries as a type of specifically targeted 'advertisement' helps explain why entrants risk public wrath and oblivion online. Rendering firm Miysis's rooftop greenhouse may have closely resembled other schemes, but they were not selling a building proposal. Instead, their images and fly-throughs broadcast high-quality rendering services to their peers and potential clients. Similarly, Kiss the Architect's arched confection relates to a recent social media interest in post-modernism, on pages like AdamNathanielFurman (30 100 followers) and Newagecocaine (51 200 followers). Indeed, there was a notable increase in the firm's Instagram following after appearing on *Dezeen*. Read in this way, these were not proposals designed for construction, rather they responded to specific concerns and interests of identifiable subgroups within the discipline.

Perhaps the most interesting case is UMA's pool itself. Followers of UMA's Instagram could place the pool in a lineage of projects rejecting European monumentality and embracing user participation, from a pavilion to be 'grown' from trees over the course of sixty years to a bridge formed of two slides. While fun, they are serious proposals, not jokes. Of the pool, UMA wrote:

Most proposals that we have seen puts way too much focus and effort on the spire... Instead we let the bell towers, the flying buttresses and the rose windows do the talking... Maybe the pool will be replaced in a hundred years or so, becoming another layer of great stories.<sup>19</sup>

They sought to create a novel, delightful public experience in the heart of the city, preserving what people already love about the building, eschewing the earnest form-making of other proposals. Why, then, was this light-hearted, thoughtful scheme lost on its audience?

Hélène Lipstadt writes that architects perceive competitions, at least in the early phases, as a rare opportunity to exert disciplinary autonomy. Competitions are said to replicate the freedom of artists and authors: creativity is rewarded, with cost pressures and the clients' whims offset by independent, knowledgeable jurors.<sup>20</sup> All participants in this sheltered system are accustomed to interpreting competitions as an exercise in autonomy, from entrants and jurors, to peers viewing entries in specialist architecture publications and exhibitions. This frees entrants to push against some of the external economic, aesthetic and technical considerations that constrain other projects. If this is true, then online competitions unleash these disciplinary forces on an unsuspecting public who encounter the full range of unfiltered entries, not just those shortlisted and approved for public consumption.<sup>21</sup> It was easy to misunderstand a meme like the ball pit when it leaked from its specific subculture to the mainstream, where viewers were unfamiliar with UMA's pool and architecture memes. In the same way, there is an inevitable confusion when competition entries are accessible on generalist design media websites and social media accounts; catering simultaneously to an architectural audience that knows what to expect from such competitions and a public that does not.





Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Fig. 3: Ulf Mejergren Architects Notre Dame Pool proposal. Courtesy of the architect.

Fig. 4: Ulf Mejergren Architects pool photoshopped into a carpark. Brndn (@brndan\_), 'If North Americas are put in charge', Twitter, 11 May 2019, 10:59 a.m., <https://twitter.com/brndan>





Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Fig. 5: Rob Cross' multi-story carpark. Rob Cross (@RobCross247), 'Sure while we're at it, let's go multi-level car parking!' Twitter, 12 May 2019, 8:29 a.m., <https://twitter.com/RobCross247>.

Fig. 6: The pool replaced with a ball-pit. Oh.Em.Ayy (@oh.em.ayy), 'We Won!' Instagram, 18 May 2019, <https://.instagram.com>.

### Copies and consensus

It is common for broad themes to emerge in competition entries. Susan Holden writes that the Centre Pompidou brief emphasised solutions combining ‘monumentality’ and ‘change’ in the context of Archigram and Cedric Price’s English avant-garde, producing a host of similar mega-structural proposals with moving parts.<sup>22</sup> Naomi Stead argues that the brief for Brisbane’s contemporary art gallery, GOMA, was explicitly written to solicit entries sensitive to the subtropical climate that were stylistically informed by the local timber-and-tin vernacular architecture.<sup>23</sup> Aureli claimed that the Helsinki competition entries were a group of projects without distinction, united only by the way the Guggenheim used their bland consistency to ‘construct consensus around a controversial building.’<sup>24</sup> Deamer thought the only unifying quality was a ‘confusion over what a supposed parametric zeitgeist may or may not imply.’<sup>25</sup> In these three cases, design consensus was constructed explicitly through competition briefs, and fostered implicitly by contemporaneous architecture culture. Yet in each case, it took scholars with detailed knowledge of the competition context and archive to draw out similarities that would not be immediately obvious to the public: similarities less to do with visual resemblances than common conceptual and theoretical strategies.

In contrast, both architectural and lay commentators immediately noticed the transparent roof and spire common to many of the Notre Dame Proposals. In part, this could be attributed to Phillippe’s calls for contemporary techniques, or President Macron’s boast that the replacement would be ‘more beautiful’ than before.<sup>26</sup> Yet this homogeneity was too complete, and glass hardly the only material for contemporary, beautiful architecture. The difference here was that, without the anonymity that has been a hallmark of serious competitions since the Italian Renaissance – supposed to ensure that entries are

judged on their merits alone, rather than the fame of the designer – proposals were conceived in a context saturated with images of other schemes.<sup>27</sup> The speed with which Notre Dame renderings were produced and disseminated online demonstrates how easy it now is to share early ideas before conditions of competition entry and anonymity are announced. Whether or not this secrecy always functions in picking an anonymous winner, it does ensure that entrants only see other proposals once the shortlist is revealed.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, the connection between some Notre Dame projects was explicit: Miyosis first posted their glass-roofed proposal in the *Dezeen* comments section, below several other near-identical proposals.

Accusations of copying remain controversial in architecture discourse, despite its presence throughout the discipline’s history. Copying continues to imply a lack of originality and authenticity, and potentially infringes copyright law.<sup>29</sup> Understanding this free flow of influence from scheme to scheme as a meme offers a way to remove some of this disciplinary baggage. All faced with the same problem at the same moment, transparent reconstructions might be considered a kind of collective solution; developed in tandem by different firms at the same time, each with different strengths and abilities. In the same way that memes develop through the network of connections built between modifications and reposts, each version of Notre Dame in glass or crystal offers a different perspective on the same proposal. Like memes, this process might have exhausted itself, or it might re-emerge as the dominant, obvious solution, should a competition eventuate.

### Memes offline

It is tempting to dismiss internet memes, and this essay with them, as a juvenile internet phenomenon, comically ill-suited to serious study. Milner and Shifman, however, have characterised such



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Fig. 7: Bay Huynh Architects' Flowing Fish proposal. Courtesy of the architect.



patently un-comical internet trends as Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street as memes; built on slogans and images online but effecting real change.<sup>30</sup> What was published online will ultimately influence any future Notre Dame competitions: we can only speculate whether this will prompt glass roofs, exhaust the appetite for 'outlandish' designs or foster an atmosphere of further experimentation. Indeed, proposals like UMA's pool and Fuksas's crystalline spire have already inspired entries in the real GoArchitect's ideas competition. On the other hand, the proliferation of unsolicited proposals has arguably stoked public fears of an insensitive architectural solution, contributing to the French Senate's decision to block an official competition.

Milner writes that at their best, memes become sites where multiple voices converge to exchange ideas on a relatively equal field. Popular culture provides a common language for diverse groups.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Notre Dame bypassed the traditional black box of anonymous entries and jury deliberations, opening the discussion to critics like Wainwright and the public, who both communicated with images. Through a network of interactions on social media, architecture media websites and online competitions like that of GoArchitect, it engaged architects, designers, politicians and enthusiasts in conversation over the future of a beloved icon. Despite this, specific disciplinary knowledge has continued to separate architects and non-architects, leading to the sort of disorientation that characterised the comments on *Dezeen*.

Tracing the ways that the Notre Dame controversy resembles a meme uncovers many of same institutional and disciplinary structures that have characterised competitions in the past. Even without becoming an official project, Notre Dame remained under the control of different branches of the French government, who announced the competition, cancelled it and established its terms and parameters. Mainstream design websites

acted as gatekeepers little different to traditional journals, deciding which schemes to publish from social media, while architects produced proposals and renderings without immediate financial gain.<sup>32</sup> Meme producers exploited an intimate knowledge of both architecture and internet culture, acting from within the discipline.

Notre Dame may have become a meme, but in many ways it still resembled a traditional competition. In simultaneously reinforcing existing power dynamics while opening new modes of engagement and experimentation, it exposes an institution in transition. How well this existing model adapts to the internet, or prompts the emergence of an entirely new model, will depend on how future competitions grapple with these issues of anonymity, public engagement, reward, gatekeepers and even memes. Ultimately Notre Dame might simply reveal online competitions as a future reality: neither nightmare nor utopia, but as much a part of architecture culture as competitions offline.

## Notes

1. Jon Henley, 'France announces contest to redesign Notre Dame spire', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2019, <https://theguardian.com>. Other journalists were quick to point out the political utility of Emmanuel Macron's calls for 'a more beautiful cathedral' to be built in just five years, in time for the Paris 2024 Olympics, projecting an image of a progressive, modern government, distracting public attention in the midst of the populist 'yellow vest' protests. Dorothy Wickenden, 'The Notre-Dame Fire Could Be a Turning Point for the Macron Presidency', *The New Yorker*, 18 April 2019, <https://newyorker.com>.
2. Since then, none of the promised funds have been released, prompting some commentators to accuse France's billionaires of cynically exploiting tax loopholes and of pledging support only to wield disproportionate influence on the reconstruction when it begins. Aditya Chakraborty, 'The lesson from the

- ruins of Notre Dame: don't rely on billionaires', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2019, <https://theguardian.com>.
3. Linda Varlese, 'Massimiliano Fuksas: "Immagino un pinnacolo di cristallo di Baccarat per la nuova Notre Dame"', *Huffpost*, 16 April 2019, <https://huffingtonpost.it>.
  4. Tom Ravenscroft, 'Seven alternative spires for Notre-Dame Cathedral', *Dezeen*, 25 April 2019, <https://dezeen.com>.
  5. Tom Ravenscroft, "Seven of the most outrageous proposals for Notre-Dame," *Dezeen*, 15 May, 2019, <https://dezeen.com>. BoredPanda, a non-architecture website aggregating memes and general internet culture, attributed the carpark design to Pascal Smet, minister of mobility and public infrastructure for Brussels, who had retweeted the image. Giedrė Vaičiulaitė, '9 Ridiculous Proposals for the Notre Dame Restoration', *BoredPanda*, <https://boredpanda.com>.
  6. Sebastian Errazuriz (@sebastianstudio), 'This little piece', Instagram, 17 May 2019, <https://instagram.com>.
  7. Tom Ravenscroft, "Notre-Dame must be restored to 'last known visual state' says French Senate," *Dezeen*, 29 May 2019, <https://dezeen.com>.
  8. Liam James, 'Notre Dame design competition seeks new roof for world famous Paris cathedral', *The Independent*, 21 June 2019, <https://independent.co.uk>.
  9. Peggy Deamer, 'The Guggenheim Helsinki Competition: What Is the Value Proposition?', *The Avery Review* 8 (2015): 1–5, <https://averyreview.com>; Pier Vittorio Aureli, 'Can Architecture Be Political?', lecture at the Architectural Association, London, 6 December 2014, <https://youtube.com>.
  10. Andrew Kovacs, 'Archive of Affinities Making Architecture from Architecture', *Architectural Design* 89, no. 4 (2019): 54–61; Mark Foster Gage, 'Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture', *Log* no. 33 (2015): 95–106.
  11. Deamer, 'Guggenheim Helsinki Competition'; Derreck Leavitt, 'Why Open Competitions Are Bad for Architects', *Modative Blog*, 18 May 2010, <http://modative.com>; Taller de Casqueria, 'Guggenheim Helsinki: Architectural Competition Data', 15 October 2014. Infographic video, 4:31. <https://vimeo.com>.
  12. Ryan M. Milner, *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media*, ed. ProQuest (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 3.
  13. The original definition comes from Richard Dawkins: 'a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation'. Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 41.
  14. As Milner notes, the ability to easily appropriate an image is a key indicator of the popularity of a meme, allowing users to easily use it for their own purposes, making it their own. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 29.
  15. Milner characterises this more broadly as an image's resonance. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 32. Shifman writes that 'a fundamental feature of many memetic photos is a striking incongruity between two or more elements in the frame'. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, 90.
  16. Milner sees this sort of 'shared resonance' and collectivism at the heart of meme culture. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 33.
  17. Ignaz Strebel and Jan Silberberger, 'Introduction: Unpacking Architectural Competitions – Project Design and the Building Process', in *Architecture Competition: Project Design and the Building Process*, ed. Ignaz Strebel and Jan Silberberger (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 1–27.
  18. Deamer, 'The Guggenheim Helsinki Competition', 4.
  19. UMA, 'Notre Dame', <https://u-m-a.se>, accessed 18 January 2020.
  20. 'The competition temporarily endows architecture with the autonomy of those fields [literature, the fine arts]. When architects compete, the dependency on the sponsor is suspended and the act of entering formal competitions gains them the kind of autonomy historically accorded to artists. A competition is thus the space in which architects can act as if, and believe themselves to be, full-fledged, relatively autonomous creators.' Hélène Lipstadt, 'Experimenting with the Experimental Tradition, 1989–2009: On Competitions and Architecture Research', *Nordic Journal of*

- Architectural Research* 21, no. 2/3 (2009): 15. See also Paul Gottschling, 'Where Design Competitions Matter: Architectural Artefacts and Discursive Events', *Journal of Material Culture* 23, no. 2 (2018): 151–68.
21. As Elisabeth Tostrup writes, even while architects believe themselves to be working in an autonomous system, juries increasingly consider the public reaction to a work in their deliberation. Elisabeth Tostrup, 'On Competition Rhetoric and Contemporary Trends', in *Competition Grid : Experimenting with and Within Architecture Competitions*, ed. Maria Theodorou and Antigoni Katsakou (London: RIBA Publications, 2018), 24. See also Hélène Lipstadt's preface in the same publication.
  22. Susan Holden, 'Megastructures and Monuments: The Dilemma of Finding a "Permanent Image of Change" in the Plateau Beaubourg Competition, 1970–71', *Fabrications* 21, no. 2 (2012): 83–112. See also 'The Pompidolium', *The Architectural Review (Archive: 1896–2005)* 161, no. 693 (1977): 270–72.
  23. Naomi Stead, 'The Brisbane Effect: GOMA and the Architectural Competition for a New Institutional Building', in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 32, ed. Paul Hogben and Judith O'Callaghan (Sydney: SAHANZ, 2015): 627–39.
  24. Aureli, 'Can Architecture Be Political?'
  25. Deamer, 'The Guggenheim Helsinki Competition', 4.
  26. Adam Nossiter, 'In Aftermath of Notre-Dame Fire, Macron Urges Unity in Fragmented Nation', *The New York Times*, 16 April 2019, <https://nytimes.com>.
  27. Hélène Lipstadt and Barry Bergdoll, *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989), 15.
  28. See, for example, Crossman's account of the Opera Bastille competition (1986) where jurors chose a scheme they thought produced by Richard Meier, 'but was in fact penned by an unknown Uruguayan practicing in Canada named Carlos Ott'. Camille Crossman, "'Jury boards as "risk managers": Analysing jury deliberations within architectural competitions against the background of risk management', in Strebel and Silberberger (eds.), *Architecture Competition*, 117.
  29. Neil Leach, 'The Culture of the Copy', *Architectural Design* 86, no. 5 (2016): 126–33. Urtzi Grau and Cristina Goberna, 'What Kinds of Copies?' *Log* no. 31 (2014): 139–42.
  30. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 219; Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, 129–38.
  31. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 111.
  32. As Milner notes, memes are often still dependant on cultural gatekeepers like *BuzzFeed* to achieve mainstream success. On another level, recommendation algorithms within social media platforms themselves also contribute to a meme's popularity. Milner, *The World Made Meme*, 199–201.

### Biography

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## Interview

## Trading Zones and the Stickiness of Ideas

Interview with Sarah Williams Goldhagen

**Footprint:** In the year 2000, you described a sense of anxiety shared by many architects in relation to postmodern heterogeneity. After almost twenty years, do you believe that anxiety still persists? Has it evolved, changed, or perhaps been replaced by something else?

**Sara Williams Goldhagen:** It has probably diminished because the economy is better now than it was then, and because the hopes for a Marxist revolution have been more or less permanently extinguished. Twenty years ago, we were still dealing with a generation of intellectuals who harboured immense ambivalence about the capitalism. To subsequent generations (the ones now practicing most wholeheartedly), thought leaders like Koolhaas and Eisenman basically said 'so, architects build for the people who make a lot of money. To make architecture, that's what you have to do. Get over it.'

Twenty years ago style was really a salient question for architects, charged with all sorts of ideological messages and saturated with meanings. As a designer, one had to be very careful about what kinds of things one was communicating, and there was a sense of a culturally determined but also transparent relationship between the viewers and users of a building and the people who shaped it, mediated by the design of the object itself. But that broke down with the arrival of globalisation, which multiplied meaning-contexts many times over, and with the expanded influence of post-structuralism, in

which the apprehension of meaning was complexified to the point of irrelevance. I don't see designers nowadays anxious about style, or even much about what messages they are communicating to their colleagues and peers through their design choices. The focus of discussion has completely shifted. Anxiety remains, for sure, but its focus is now far more concrete, and real, centring on globalisation, global warming and climate change, and on the consequent mandate to preserve and reinterpret local cultures.

**FP:** How would you see the role of the architectural historian in relation to this new reality? If the architectural historian, as you described it then, could clearly put their finger on these relations between styles, messages, power structures, how would you see historians performing in our much more ambiguous environment? What could be interesting foci for them?

**SWG:** There is a huge amount of work to be done in architectural history to uncover lineages of the body of thought I analyse in my most recent book, *Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives*. One superb example is Zeynep Çelik Alexander's *Kinaesthetic Knowing*. So many other questions remain! For example, how much impact did the American philosopher and psychologist William James have on nineteenth-century, early twentieth-century American architects? Or John Dewey? These would be fascinating questions to answer, and really important ones.



As we are in the process of revising our understanding of what role architecture plays in human experience and human social life, and we have become clearer about how people actually experience buildings and spaces in the phenomenological sense, there is an opportunity to revisit modernism, especially its heterogeneity. Take some of the beautiful buildings by Jan Duiker or Brinkman and Van der Vlugt. Why do they still have the aesthetic power that they do? Given what we now know, how do those landmarks look and what can we learn from them?

And conversely, what is it that twentieth-century progressive architects were doing wrong? One obvious way that some architects went wrong was by privileging mass production so highly that their work steamrolled over any consideration of human phenomenological experience. How, then, is contemporary technology being used in ways that support or fail to support human experience? I can think of a few examples, particularly in the early mania for parametric design... but that's a different subject.

**FP:** You are still talking about the heroes of the modernist canon, Jan Duiker or Brinkman and Van der Vlugt, Walter Gropius.... What about rewriting the history of architecture in another way; one that does not focus on star architects from the Euro-American continents? What do you make of the more recent 'global histories' of architecture, or the more cross-cultural attempts?

**SWG:** These huge correctives are absolutely necessary. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the barrier separating the West from the rest of the world seemed so impervious that so-called non-western cultures and traditions just didn't seem very relevant. That's completely changed. Equally important are the critical studies on vernacular architecture, and the relationship of vernacular or indigenous architecture to high architecture. Look

at the most recent Aga Khan award for Bengali architect Saif Ul Haq's school just outside Dhaka in Bangladesh. Made from bamboo and floating for half of the year, the school constructs a kind of vernacular that works perfectly with climate change yet formally and experientially, is really innovative. Such a smart project comes only from an architect who learns from every step he takes as he walks around the city. And so, the kind of inter-penetration of various traditions and levels of culture is a critical question that resonates with the experiential concerns on which I am currently working.

**FP:** On these grounds, do you see the possibility of making a huge corrective to the architecture history canon as the endeavour of a single author or team of authors?

**SWG:** Survey books of 'world history' or 'global history' are written because they are useful for teaching an undergraduate class in which professors need to assign reading. I'll answer this question in a roundabout way. Recently I spent a lot of time in Africa. Colonial monuments throughout. For example, in Namibia, which is one of the least dense countries in the world, population-wise – and really, who goes to Namibia? – there is this little town, Swakopmund. Because Namibia was a German colony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Swakopmund, sitting on the edge of the ocean in one of the world's biggest deserts, looks like a late nineteenth-century German village in the Black Forest. It's surreal. What makes *Blut und Boden* buildings in the suburbs of Heidelberg any more important than the buildings I saw in Swakopmund? Nothing.

Then if we recognise that Africa is not one place but fifty-four different countries with countless different kinds of geographies and topographies and tribal histories ... one couldn't even write a comprehensive history of African architecture, much less of global architecture. Even the notion

of a Latin-American architecture history is questionable, despite all the journals declaring otherwise that are written and published all over Latin America. One of the reasons I wrote the Coda to *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* as I did was to acknowledge modern architectural history's limitations. Two generations of scholars had concentrated their studies on a very restricted group of people and an extremely circumscribed set of issues. I am not even sure I see the value of trying to write a global history of architecture today. Whatever you came up with wouldn't give anybody a very good sense of how architecture develops, much less of the salient issues.

More interesting would be to take a thematic approach. A thematic meta-history means getting away from the conventional art historical narrative of, 'at the end of the 1920s there was a stock market crash in the United States, which reverberated around the world. And so, this is what happened architecturally in the 1930s. And in Eastern Europe, this is what was going on at the same period.' I say: 'Forget this! Think thematically instead.'

Technology would be an obvious theme because it's easily definable but also extends far beyond its material base to encompass architect's visions and ideals of social life. Histories of technology exist, of course, but I know of no work on recent technological revolutions that approach it at a global scale and theorise the potential interactions of various technological innovations with political life, social space and civic space. Another obvious topic is climate change. Although it seems well-tilled ground by now, I'm not sure that it is completely the case when we think about the ways in which different areas have dealt with their climates and their resources and their indigenous materials to solve problems of social life and inhabitation and living. That would be a cool book I myself would want to write.

**FP:** If we don't want to assign a single global historical survey to students, what could be a good thematic approach to set up a series of courses, a good way to restructure the traditional survey course?

**SWG:** My super quick response is that I don't think we want to teach surveys anymore. I am not sure how a survey benefits students. The conventional model of education was based on frontal learning, the professor imparting knowledge to the student. Effectively it derived from a classical model whereby students were expected to inculcate a well-defined, restricted body of knowledge, and doing so gained them entry into the cultural elite.

That is not what educators are trying to do anymore, certainly not at the undergraduate level. What we are trying to do now is to give students the background and conceptual tools to think critically and analytically about the salient human, social, political issues of the day. One way to introduce students to architectural history could be a year-long thematic course based on, for example, 'phenomenological experience', dedicating a week at a time to the study of 'the visual system', the auditory system, and so on, as well as formal tropes such as 'texture', 'pattern', 'complexity', 'fractals', 'biophilia,' and so on. Now you are getting me excited!

**FP:** It is very exciting, indeed! It seems great to have different points of view converging around each of these topics. We started off this issue of *Footprint* with something similar in mind, based on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone. Pratt defines contact zones as 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical ways.' For her, contact zones produce friction as well as 'moments of wonder and revelation and mutual understanding and new wisdom.' We are curious about moments when different architecture cultures have come together to discuss a common theme or shared

design problem, and we are also curious about what happens to that theme or design problem after it is interpreted by all these different cultures.

**SWG:** The concept of contact zones brings to mind American historian of science Peter Galison's concept of 'trading zones', places and spaces in cultures where ideas, like goods, are exchanged despite differences in language and culture. I was there when Western architects started to go to China and it was a really fascinating trading zone, or contact zone; there was a sense of wonder and astonishment similar to that which Pratt describes. It is interesting to think how discussions about intercultural questions have changed. The world twenty years ago was a really disaggregated place. Not as disaggregated as it was in the seventeenth century, but I can tell you that the watershed shift between twenty years ago and now is remarkable. And there's a lot of issues to be thought through regarding how people view different cultures, now that different cultures are so much more proximate than they were before.

**FP:** Beyond larger geopolitical or global economic transformations, this trading seems to be boosted at the purely disciplinary level by events where architects meet, such as exhibitions, biennials, congresses, competitions. What role would you assign to such events in the development of architecture?

**SWG:** Just as the CIAM meetings used to be in the twentieth century, these meetings and exhibitions and so on are the glue that holds the profession together. But there are so many of them now, taking place all over the world, that in sum I think that they are actually much less important than they used to be – no single group or groups has near-hegemonic control over the discourse, as used to be the case.

**FP:** You have been mostly writing history, but as you say, now you have evolved from being a

historian to a critic and theoretician. We wonder if from your new perspective you could still appraise historiography as a form of theory?

**SWG:** In a way, almost any good historical and historiographical work ends up being a form of theory, because you almost can't help but posit a vision of society (or culture, or whatever) and how it operates. I will give you an example. I worked with Robin Middleton, a historian of eighteenth and nineteenth-century French and English architecture. His *Neoclassical and 19th Century Architecture* is, in part, a historiography of modernism, but underlying that was a much larger and more complex theoretical view regarding the so-called great chain of ideas. It is a historiography based on a theory of how culture evolved over time and the stickiness of ideas through generations.

**FP:** Staying with historiography, what do you think about the history of architecture competitions; the way it has been written so far, and the way it should be written now?

**SWG:** I am on the board of the Van Alen Institute in New York, which sponsors a lot of ideas competitions, which are effective in shaping discussion about a certain social problem, like resiliency, or a given development, like Detroit's waterfront. Competitions can be really critical in laying the groundwork for thinking about a project, as well as in creating public demand for the right ideas.

**FP:** Certainly, institutions do play a key role in shaping architecture discussions. However, there seems to be a paradigm shift in relation to how we understand architecture and assign priority to buildings, especially when discussions are no longer centred and defined by a few institutions, but are built among a multiplicity of actors from all around the world who are contributing elements to feed discourse. Some modalities of the architecture competition, like the virtual competitions sparked

by the burning of Notre Dame, insinuate new instances where this paradigm shift is visible. In the face of such shifts, can you still see some common denominator or common ground in contemporary architecture?

**SWG:** Yes, absolutely there is a common ground, but it isn't stylistically based. If you take the paradigm of 'human experience' as how architecture and the built environment should be organised, around what we know about the way humans perceive, learn, develop cognitively, and so on, then you begin to discuss formal questions like scale, surface articulation, spatial organisation, and use natural light in more helpful terms. Take natural light – that's one that people are all over, right? We know natural light is good for people: it improves mood, improves health, supports circadian rhythms. But how is an architect going to use natural light in Angola, where the light is so bright and hot that all people are doing is basically trying to get away from it and into the shade?

I definitely think that there is going to be, and to a certain extent there already is, the kind of shift in orientation that you just mentioned. Yet it is not going to be as easily identifiable as when modernism was (temporarily) superseded by postmodernism, because it is going to be based on the interrelations that can be established between human experience and the body, which change dramatically depending upon who you are, and where you are in the world.

## Biography

Sarah Williams Goldhagen is a critic, theorist and historian of modern and contemporary architecture. She holds a PhD in the History of Art and Architecture from Columbia University; in addition to her *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (Yale, 2001) and *Anxious Modernisms* (MIT, 2001), she authored several seminal articles retheorizing modernism and excavating the roots of Alvar Aalto's work in experimental psychology. In 2017 she published the highly regarded *Welcome to Your World: How the Built Environment Shapes Our Lives* (HarperCollins). For many years, Goldhagen was the *New Republic's* architecture critic, and taught for a decade at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. A sought-after speaker nationally and internationally, she writes, lectures, and consults on how architecture and landscapes, cities and streetscapes, infrastructure and public art – the built environment – shape human experience.



*Footprint* is a peer-reviewed journal presenting academic research in the field of architecture theory. The journal encourages the study of architecture and the urban environment as a means of comprehending culture and society, and as a tool for relating them to shifting ideological doctrines and philosophical ideas. The journal promotes the creation and development – or revision – of conceptual frameworks and methods of inquiry. The journal is engaged in creating a body of critical and reflexive texts with a breadth and depth of thought which would enrich the architecture discipline and produce new knowledge, conceptual methodologies and original understandings.

*Footprint* is grateful to our peer reviewers, who generously offered their time and expertise. In this issue, the following papers were peer-reviewed: 'Histoire Croisée: A Relational Process-Based Approach'; 'Portuguese Architecture in Transit(ion): the 1967 International Competition for Amsterdam Town Hall'; 'Competition Juries as Intercultural Spaces: Between Evaluation, Experience, and Judgement'; 'This is Not a Nest: Transcultural Metaphors and the Paradoxical Politics of International Competitions'; 'The Architecture Competition: A Beauty Contest of a Learning Opportunity? The French case in the light of European experiences'.

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