Some Reflections on the Problematic Location of the Entity "Clients" in the Ontological Structure of Electronic Ressources on Competitions

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEMATIC LOCATION OF THE ENTITY "CLIENTS" IN THE ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF ELECTRONIC RESSOURCES ON COMPETITIONS

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1 – What is a « client » in a theoretical model of the competition phenomena?

Of an epistemological nature, and considering the need for ontological definitions in parallel to ongoing case studies on competitions in the world, this paper addresses the paradoxical definitions of "client" and "clients" in a general theoretical framework for research on competitions. A simple comparison of two types of electronic resources on competitions, mainly typical websites and online databases, supports a questioning of common representations and potential controversies about the gap between clients and designers in the process. Competitions are often said to establish a distance between clients and designers. We formulate the hypothesis that this preconceived representation comes in part from the communicational and media potential of competitions rather than the design / judgement process itself and that it comes from a misunderstanding of what a competition represents. In our digital age, the impact of competitions websites on the dissemination of some clichés about competition cannot be underestimated.

This paper reflects on a decade of personal experience in the building and use of competition projects library, here presented as Electronic Library of Competitions (ELC), as an invitation to recognize that even the ontological structure of a relational database such as the *Canadian Competitions Catalogue* (www.ccc.umontreal.ca) remains an imperfect theoretical reconstruction of this complex temporal phenomenon called "design competition".

How can we define the notion of client in a theoretical model of the competition process? While it is clear that a competition is a temporal phenomenon involving a great variety of actors, it is more difficult to define, a priori, what a client represents in this process. One might argue that there are various clients all along the process. To the question "who is the client?" a possible answer may be: "the one who launches and ends the competition?" This answer is unsatisfying since a professional organiser can perform these actions without being the client, even more so if we admit that this service, as a professional act, precisely is addressed to a client, either private or institutional. The head librarian may be considered the client of a competition for a new public library when she is in fact only one of the representatives of the public mandate giver, depending on the various levels of hierarchy.

In this intertwining of responsibilities, typical of public spaces and places, the "client" either tends to be seen at one extreme or the other of the chain of decisions. However, can a administrative director or even a minister of culture or of education be considered the client of a school or a library, when everybody, in fact, in a democracy, is eligible to the title of client of a public space or building?

A sociological answer will not be more satisfying by replacing the client with the user. Client and user are not synonymous entities furthermore they tend to belong to opposite sides

of the project in architectural terms. Although designers must work with some representation of the user, and while there obviously are users of buildings, there is no user of a "project" per se. In other words, if we stay within the logical structure of a competition, the user is implicit during the process and becomes explicit only when the building is realised. On the contrary, and logically speaking, everybody should be considered a client in a competition process for a public building, including designers themselves. Like the notion of "user", the notion of "client" is not easy to circumscribe at an epistemological level.

But there is an entity, typical of the competition process, which is entitled to behave as a potential client and that is the jury. One should also consider by definition that in a competition, the jury theoretically is the representative of the public. As such, the jury is the temporary client to which designers submit their projects, in this kind of qualitative process. In other words the jury is the closest representation of an "ideal model of the clients" formulated by a specific competition framework. To make this even clearer, and to use an extreme case, it is not rare to see private organisers asking to be the sole members of a jury for a private building and to see public organisers' dream of the same kind of restrictive jury composition. The weight of French president François Mitterand in the questionable judging of some famous competitions in Paris in the 1980's is well known in that respect, as shown by François Chaslin (1985).

In general, jury are composed to be representatives of public interest and some competition rules consider that neither the elected politicians nor the administrative representative should be a jury member, as they can be tempted to emphasize political or institutional interests above general public needs.

In fact the history of competitions is a testimony of the difficult equilibrium requested to compose a fair, knowledgeable and "representative" jury and I would even add that the history of competitions is a slow and ongoing movement toward the democratic recognition of public interest: the same way that the history of the Internet mirrors the tensions between transparent communication and manipulative propaganda.

In the following two sections we evaluate both explicit and implicit representations of clients first in a general survey of competitions websites and second in a more scientific database like our own *Canadian Competitions Catalogue*. This comparison is not meant to act as a methodological apparatus but mainly as a reflective device.

2 – Where are the « clients » in the pages of various websites on competitions?

Coming from 45 countries, more than 150 websites on competitions have already been compiled in a special on-line resource regularly updated by the *Research Chair on Competition* (C.R.C) and the *Laboratoire d'étude de l'architecture potentielle* (L.E.A.P) labs at Université de Montréal (http://www.leap.umontreal.ca/index.php?id=85&lang=en).

When examined closely, it appears that dozens of competition websites give access to inconsistent levels of data and information. Although they display considerable amounts of images, these websites are rarely grounded on a coherent definition of the competition. Even a reliable resource like "competitions.org", directed by Stanley Collyer, will often display announcements or results by considering the organisers of a competition as clients but also as "sponsors". If we take for example a case related to the "Ullswater Yacht Club Design Competition", it is said that the *Royal Institute of British Architect* (RIBA) was the mandated sponsor and the notion of client appears only in a sentence like: "The report should also include an elemental cost statement to demonstrate how the scheme can be delivered within the client's identified budget". Although this distinction is accurate, it is clearer that this kind

of general website on competitions puts the emphasis on the competition process alone, when it is not on the winning scheme only.

For another semi private semi public competition like, "The spaces between: An urban ideas competition", the client is named as follows: AIA Utah YAF/ Salt Lake City Downtown Alliance in which the American Institute of Architects, Utah section is one of the clients. But it is also explained in the summary of the competition brief – as such a text coming from the organisers themselves - that "Two winning projects and fifteen finalists will be eligible for the People's Choice award". In this complex case, there is a mix of collective judgement through a regular jury and public vote, which demonstrates how ambiguous the notion of client appears when we browse competition websites.

We can distinguish three types of websites and attempt to categorise them through their main purpose: 1-billboard announcements, 2- promotional displays, 3- Journals. It is difficult to qualify the first and biggest category, what we call the "billboard announcements" type of websites, but the well-known "Death By Architecture" website perhaps best illustrates this category. This kind of calendar resource of registration deadlines is very useful and surprisingly enough, they do not come from public international organisations like the UIA expected to gather information, but from personal initiatives (Mario Cipresso in that specific case, launched his own website as early as 1995!). On such online resources, relying on their power of dissemination throughout the architectural community, you will not find competitions listed by clients' names but rather by categories, deadlines, juries and all basic information needed to decide whether you want to register or not. Although "awards" are distinct processes and should not be considered as competition per se, you will find them often mixed with competitions announcements.

The second category is perhaps the most intriguing since it appears to play mostly on the communicational potential of competitions sometimes coming from clients but more often from designers. On the one end, clients' websites like *Design Montreal* or *Montreal Ville Unesco de Design (*http://mtlunescodesign.com) in Canada, display a series of competitions in order to promote their own politics on design strategies for the enhancement and promotion of public projects. On the other end, designers' websites like http://EuropaConcorsi.com are based on what architects upload of their own projects, sometimes even when they were runner up and not laureate. As it presents itself: "it is a user-generated content architecture website" which means that participants are encouraged to publish their own projects on the platform. When entering a key word in the research engine, it appears that the emphasis is placed on projects rather than on competitions and it often displays a strong disparity between search results for competitions, with only one project documented, and search results for projects, without basic information on the original competition. If you type "Canada" for example, you will get 53 projects, 1 announcement and 8 competitions (when our own database lists more than 300 competitions organised since 1945). It is true however, that in the case of Europaconcorsi.com, and when the information is published by the editors, you will find the clients' names, but along with project managers and general contractors, and in the category: "Buildings", confirming, if necessary, that this kind of website is about architects' self promotion (about their projects or their buildings) - rather than about objective documentation of competitions.

"Journals", the third type, may be the smallest in number of items, but remains the soundest in terms of the amount of information displayed for each documented competition. Journals like the already mentioned *Competitions* in the USA or *Wettbewerbe Aktuell* in Germany have a long history of objective displays of both announcements and results. A

journal like *Wettbewerbe Aktuell* distinguishes between the clients of a competition and the clients of a project but does not differentiate between private and public clients. Needless to say, they started as printed journals and are now offering digital versions. One can suspect that the editorial rigor imposed by the old technologies of printed press is not what still assures a kind of discipline governing the content in these cases.

Without operating a complete and systematic survey of online resources, we can easily guess that any potential client wishing to understand what a competition is about, or how clients are being respected in the process through these websites might find it discouraging rather than enlightening. This situation is problematic while potential clients may use such websites when trying to figure whether they should follow what appears the riskier path of a competition process. But since in most of these resources, as in mundane discussion about competitions, the emphasis is put on the winner and rarely on debating or even explaining why this project won and how it influenced the clients understanding of his or her own needs and expectations, the risk of a distorted representation of competition is increased.

The study of competitions through these websites may have a sociological pertinence as such, but research on competitions cannot expect to rely on the basic requirements of rigorous documentation as do true relational documentary databases. It seems that most competition websites propagate inappropriate myths about the competition process, first of which is that competitions are for designers and not for clients and users. It should not come as a surprise that competitions are less regarded as research objects than as fluctuating and problematic phenomena and in some cases as "generators of controversies". But even this last issue appears to be a myth. Indeed, as shown by Bruno Latour and more particularly by Albena Yaneva in the design disciplines, design projects are, by definition, designed and built at the core of a complex network of controversies. It is not so much that design projects suffer from controversies as they are actually made of these paradoxical tensions as clearly shown by Yaneva in *Mapping Controversies in Architecture* (Ashgate, 2012). Framed by Actor-Network-Theory, her approach allows theorizing what she calls the "architectural" rather than "architecture" that usually concentrates on buildings rather than processes. In that respect, the principles of a competition database as we would like to evaluate now, would fall into the field of architectural processes, regardless of issues of scale. It is the variety and heterogeneity of actors, which is at stake in such a representation of competitions, understood both as a procedural and as a temporal phenomenon.

3 – Where are the « clients » in the ontological structure of a database of competitions?

Databases of all kinds are all too often considered as mere archival devices – as digital shelves - and when they offer a public interface on the Internet, they sometimes appear as websites. Two main differences should be underlined here. First, you can design a website page after page with no specific logical structure of the main subject, and second, you can sometimes "search" in a website but the results will rarely be comparable and structured. For example, you can design a website on "Bread", even to sell a variety of breads, without understanding how bread is made. You can even design a website on bread using the same structure that was used for a website on cheese. To follow this example, you may do some research in this page-by-page website, but you will not be able to compare the various types of bread. Any reliable comparison needs an ontological structure and the theoretical mapping of an entity / relation diagram of the subject. This is precisely why a database of competition

projects can be considered a research tool and as such contribute to the theoretical modelling of this complex phenomenon often generically called « competition ».

Our research program at both *Laboratoire d'étude de l'architecture potentielle* (L.E.A.P) since 2002 and *The Research Chair on Competitions* (C.R.C) since 2012, revolves on the gradual and regular updating of documentary databases on competition projects (*Canadian Competitions Catalogue, EUROPAN Competitions Database).* With the collaboration of librarians and IT specialists, we have achieved a systematic, annotated archive of competition projects in digital form, including preparatory documents, official documents, sketches (draft versions of the project), presentation prints, photos of physical models or digital models, presentation texts, jury reports and media and trade press reports. A genuine digital archive – a true project library – is being developed, through research work and monthly updates. Since 2006, a substantial amount of these documents are freely accessible from a public interface (http://www.ccc.umontreal.ca), with an original search engine. In 2012, the public entity *Innovation Canada (Fondation Canadienne pour l'Innovation)* has selected the CCC as a most valuable digital resource for the preservation of potential architectural, urban design and landscape architectural projects and has granted a special financial support to considerably improve the ontological and relational structure of the system.

The first database we designed focuses on Canadian competitions and the second on a certain type of competition best known under the name *Europan*, still considered the largest competition-organising body in Europe. The *Canadian Competitions Catalogue* (C.C.C.) aims, in the long run, to document all competitions organised in Canada since World War II. Compared to the European context, this challenge seems eventually achievable. Unlike Switzerland, which organises approximately 200 competitions a year, or Germany which organises more than 600 per year, and unlike France, where more than a thousand competitions are organised every year, this Canadian catalogue would cover less than 350 competitions identified between 1943 and 2013. In the fall of 2013, we have only achieved one-third of the task set before us, having archived approximately 115 competitions. This represents, however, several thousand projects since, for some competitions, more than a hundred teams were involved. Across Canada, there are major geographic and cultural disparities and of the 10 Canadian provinces and territories, Quebec has organised the most competitions. From this perspective, the archive already gives us an insight into contemporary Canadian history. It should also be noted that, in the majority of cases, the competitions were organised by private organisers (sometimes with a percentage of public funding), despite the fact that in Quebec, the Ministry of Culture tried to drive this process in the 1990s. North American governments have been torn between the principles of free market economics and the unpredictability of competition juries, and the very principle of competition itself. The CCC can also serve as a measuring tool to evaluate these tensions.

What about the European situation? The issue of digital data is raised to an altogether different scale, if we consider that the Europan-France phenomenon involves several thousand projects and that if the Europan-Europe Catalogue, for which we have designed a prototype, provided a comprehensive record, gathered more than 15,000 projects would become accessible! For example, the ninth session of Europan Europe gathered more than 22 participating countries and offered 73 sites to competitors. For the French session alone, 6 sites were proposed to competitors, for which approximately 200 teams designed development proposals.

In summary, the *Canadian Catalogue* offers a relatively limited corpus, covering a very large territory, with no apparent coordination: a collection that is constantly but randomly

growing, making comparative research very difficult. The *Europan Catalogue* likewise covers a very large territory, with a rapidly growing corpus, but there is a certain level of control and coordination from the Europan management team. Theoretically, this should ensure ideal conditions for operation, observation and comparison, both for archivists and for researchers. Nevertheless, each competition session highlights the urban and territorial issues affecting a given period. The Europan phenomenon is a bit like a snapshot of the generation of architects and the urban issues in play.

Fig. 1: Diagram showing the sub entity client ("maître_d'oeuvre") in relation to the super entity individual ("individus") in the ontological hierarchical structure of the Canadian Competition Catalogue (www.ccc.umontreal.ca).

For researchers, designing and compiling a documentary database, even more so a relational database is an invitation, a challenge even, to start theorising about the phenomena through the defining of the contours of certain disciplinary concepts. This is, of course, the main advantage of relational database system – enabling an architectural event, such as a

competition, to be reconstituted or at least modelled to a certain extent. The bottom line is that the projects in themselves are in some ways less important in such a digital archiving system than the complex fabric of relationships that can be represented and, even more importantly, that researchers can uncover using the documentation tool. When an IT technician asks simple questions such as, "What is an architectural competition?" or "What is a design project?" "Is a project a set of procedures, a set of documents, or both?" The researcher needs to clarify some epistemological assumptions. We need to take the risk of defining the relationships between research objects, if only to subsequently think more clearly about the weaknesses of the modelling endeavour.

Like in any scientific model of a phenomenon, there are ontological gaps and practical choices, which makes the classificatory paradoxes of these apparently coherent ensembles closest to some difficulties encountered throughout the history of library science or even biology as described by French philosopher Michel Foucault in his seminal *The Order of Things (An Archeology of Human Sciences*, (1966 – (1970)).

In order to design the CCC, we have developed an ontological structure, which distinguishes between concepts (country, teams of designers, offices, technical committee and individuals, etc) and qualifiers or descriptive terms (categories, types of documents, stages, etc) (Fig. 1). Behind the concept "individuals" you will find at list 6 entities: project manager, project superintendent, professional advisor, jury member, author, etc) but the entity "client" as such, and for all the reasons developed in the introduction of this paper, does not exist in the ontological structure of our database! The notion of "Project owner", although it is a poor translation of the French "maître-d'oeuvre", would nevertheless be the closest to what a client may be in our representation of competitions (Fig. 2).
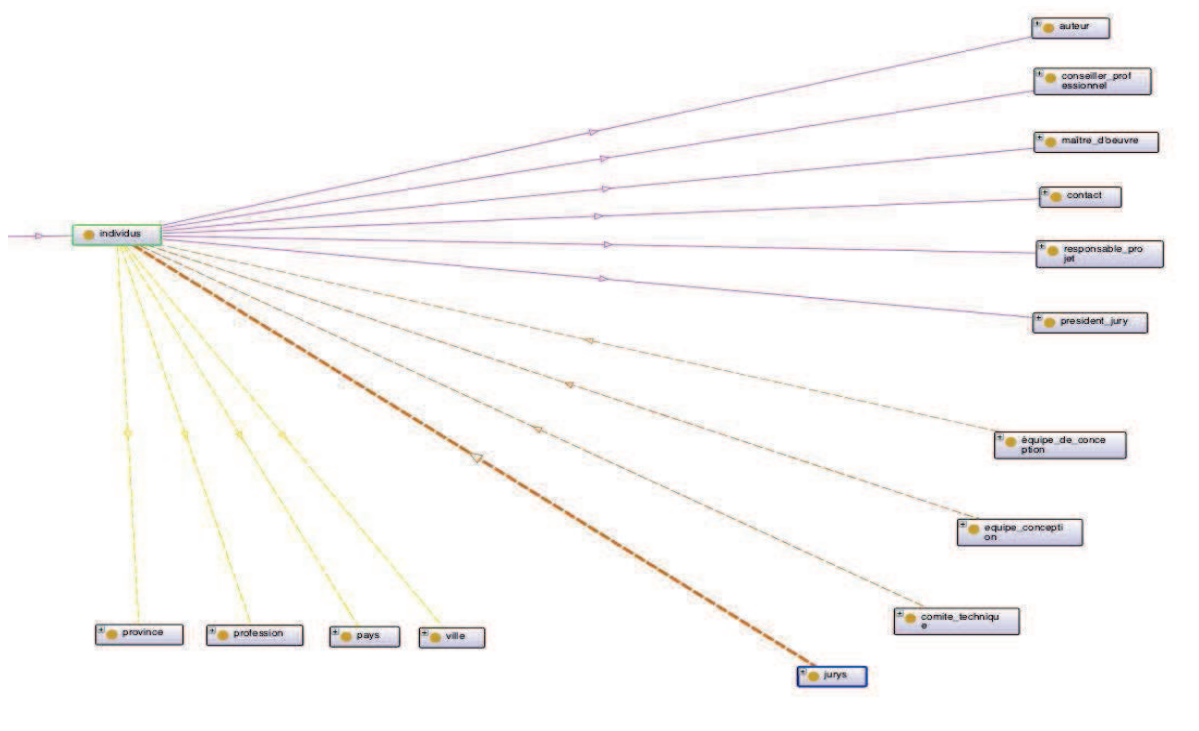

Fig. 2: Diagram showing an extract of entity / relations diagram displaying the entity "individual" and the various qualifiers related to it in the logical structure of the Canadian Competition Catalogue.

4 – Database of competition projects as scattered archives but potential libraries

However, we can already be sure that these databases will never be complete, for the simple reason that the records are at best scattered and at worst mostly destroyed. Our databases and their respective search engines and web interfaces are designed to enable comparison within a single site, across different sites and according to topics suggested by the organisers etc. It goes without saying that the scale of this work represented a real challenge to our organisational capacities and to our ability to convince architect offices to contribute to the undertaking.

In the case of Europan, the plethora of prints and presentation books led to the destruction of the archives by the organising countries themselves. On the other hand, for the Canadian competitions, which were more conventional in nature, it is sometimes easier to find drawings from the 1960s than digital files from the late 1990s.

If we go beyond these technical issues, genuine theoretical questions can also be formulated. To do this, it is important to distinguish between two types of digital archives. Firstly, archives that aim chiefly to store and preserve, and most of such archives feature two layers, the first of which is composed of a set of digital documents and a second layer comprising an elementary contextualisation of such data. We say elementary, because when comparing what these archives offer and what we are aiming to offer, we cannot help but notice a major difference in the area of data contextualisation - our aim being to genuinely 'model an architectural competition'. In our case, the ordering operations went from formulating research questions to identifying the corpus then compiling documentation and finally analysing the data. In some ways, the fact that our databases are now being used as historical records is simply one of the many paradoxes that we live with on a daily basis in research.

Although databases can appear as depositories, they do not have the mandate to preserve documents, only ideas and representations. Indeed a competition database is closer to the notion of a "library of projects", than it is to a digital archive and we propose to call these digital resources ELC: for *Electronic Libraries of Competitions*. This naming is a way to underline the idea that each competition is like a book (or research object) of which each stage and even each project is like a chapter or section (and research cases or experiences). The library may not contain every published or printed book, but each book is a coherent entity in itself. If a library is to be also considered as an archive, it is an archive of ideas, more than an archive of objects.

5 – Are Electronic Libraries of Competitions (ELC) threatening communicational devices?

Some books are dangerous; some libraries have a restricted access and the history of libraries show how powerful they have been in the emerging of modern civilisations and democracies. How far then can we keep the analogy between competitions and books? Would *Electronic Libraries of Competitions* be threatening communicational devices due to their transparency and projected light on the comparative phenomenon? A corollary of such questions would be the issue of innovation: Do competitions stimulate innovation or encourage repetition? This complex issue has important implications in the clients' representation of what a competition actually does.

Contrary to our expectations, some rather surprising reactions have ensued the public launching of these databases. When we presented the model of our system to the various organisers in other European countries in the summer of 2006 at a large Europan-Europe

forum in Dordrecht, the Netherlands, some managers were surprised that our system gave as much credence to the losers as to the winners. Even though we clearly announced the results and stated the competition winners and other shortlisted and mentioned projects, some organisers were worried that all the projects were being shown, instead of eliminating projects that the juries had not selected. A similar attitude can be noted within professional architecture offices that lose too many competitions and end up rejecting some of their own projects. It seems as if a project only has any value in the field if a jury confers such value. Architectural history, which is made up of project-to-project transfers and influence, would seem to categorically contradict this incorrect assumption.

These "non-wining" projects nonetheless have an architectural value that goes beyond their selection by a competition jury and the history of architectural competitions is marked by unsuccessful competition projects, which influence the practices, and the discipline as a whole, sometimes in a more profound way than the project actually built. Two well-known modern paradigms of this phenomenon are for example Le Corbusier's *Palais des Nations* project in 1927 or Rem Koolhaas' *Parc de la Villette* project in 1982. But in our view, all projects designed in a competition setting represent an architectural heritage, indeed poorly known, and as such they constitute a formidable reservoir of neglected 'potential architecture'.

This theoretical interpretation does not mean that clients who choose the competition process to build their projects easily recognise that they participate in a collective endeavour and the production of architectural knowledge. At best they see competitions as a way to communicate with the public at large and it is more and more frequent nowadays to encounter situations in which a client's representative under the name of "communication adviser" will control the competition process. These new actors do not consider competitions as scholars would do – as reservoir of potential architectures, ideas and solution – but, on the contrary, often threaten their clients about the dangerous transparent power of a process supposed to open the gate to controversies and counter-effects within the press and the public. As a result, it becomes sometimes impossible to display a newly judged competition in a documentary website since it would open the way to a criticism of the jury's judgement. This paradigm shift in the way clients deal with competitions becomes a new problem, which makes the systematic documentation of competitions and its display on the web a rather risky path. As explained by Emmanuel Caille, chief editor of French journal *D'A (D'Architectures),* in a special issue on competitions in April 2013, competitions are now being seen as instrumental in the communication strategies of cities and big institutions (not to speak about companies and private institutions). Documenting a competition sometimes becomes impossible when communication offices on both sides of clients and designers are willing to control the display of information following a competition. At a time when information is being transmitted in almost real time, it is precisely the transparent, fair and democratic characters of the competition phenomena, which are at stake.

The paradoxical nature of the process however, is such that its spectacular and media potential threatens the competition phenomenon and the experimental nature, quite often turns into a polemical dead end. Without digging into the sociological aspect of this displacement, we can underline here, that in general, only the winning projects are disseminated and the public exhibitions at the end of the selection process do not do enough to ensure lasting visibility for the different projects. True comparisons – for example by potential clients - are therefore difficult, if not impossible, and the other projects – the losing

projects - are doomed to be forgotten in the depths of professional architectural offices. This paradox only serves to enhance the dispersion of documents and ideas, and further devalues architecture in 'project' form. Whether they are run for cultural, heritage or domestic programmes, competitions, by their very nature, offer the basis of an empirical situation well suited to comparing projects. Each competition, by definition, is based on the confrontation between interpretations of a request formulated as a brief. Each competition is in some way a type of analogous experimental process understood, as early as 1989, by Helen Lipstadt in her seminal work on what she called the "Experimental Tradition", even though we should now be more careful to distinguish between experimentation in projects (as designers do) and experimentation nature of the empirical competition process itself.

6 – Architectural Knowledge and the Preservation of Projects: A *Borgesian* paradox?

To what extent do these *Electronic Libraries of Projects* change our research methods? The consequences for research are diverse and fruitful. As shown above, the comparative nature of each competition is better respected when not only the winner but also all competitors are presented objectively along with original expectations, judgement criteria, jury report and media reception.

A particular disciplinary issue that can be addressed with the help of *ELC* concerns the understanding of the design process. From an architects' perspective asking what aspects of a project architects and clients want to show or keep can help reveal how they summarize the process through a selection of documents. This issue is crucial and reinforces the distinction between archives and libraries. While an archive should be exhaustive, ideally speaking, a library is always a choice and a construct. In general terms, to what extent does an architectural project have to be documented in order to do it justice? Does the whole design process need to be reconstituted? As researchers in the field of design thinking and design processes, we feel that this idea is illusory and pointless, the chief concern being to ensure that the relationship between the project and the competition is well preserved. The validity of this 'slimmed down' approach is supported by the fact that the architects themselves identify some sketches as emblematic of a project, despite our observation that with the advent of digital design tools since the middle of the 1990s, the relationship with drafts has radically changed.

Although in some ways *ELC* enable contemporary architectural productions to be made available, let us not forget that their primary purpose is to enable research into contemporary architecture. One of the most helpful features of relational documentary databases is their ability to integrate analysis levels at every scale, and that these analyses are in themselves a layer of interpretation for the data stored within the archive. One example of the new capacity this provides is in distinguishing those winning projects that genuinely bear witness to their historical era from shortlisted projects that sometimes reveal ideas whose full meaning only becomes clear with historical hindsight. In Brest in 1997 (Europan France, session 5), the jury selected a project inspired by fractals and a certain 1980s deconstructivism, but did not seriously consider a project which now highlights a widespread fascination for its 'hybrid networks', and which has therefore since acquired a new value. By juxtaposing projects and comparing them, with hindsight, one can see, as in the 2003 Nanterre competition (Europan France, session 7), that the issue of tower blocks was starting to raise its head again in the Paris scene and that Rem Koolhaas' ideas were a major influence

on most competitors. From this point of view, these collections of projects become historical tools that, in some cases, can assist in political decision-making.

If Electronic Libraries of Projects contribute to the production of knowledge, through their use by designers and researchers alike, can we consider that in the new 'knowledge markets', ELC become efficient knowledge dissemination devices? In the strict sense of the term, a documentary database is no more an archive than pressed flowers or butterfly collections represent archives of living nature. However, these relational and most of all contextual documentary databases form a method for archiving these competitions as events. Documenting a competition is of course about documenting projects and gathering information by which the competition conditions and parameters can be understood. Architects seem to accept more and more the need to preserve a presence of their projects within the global scene or event of the competition. Finally, one unforeseen consequence of our work has been to realise that our databases are now starting to be considered as collective archives in which architects in some way entrust their ideas and proposals to us, to keep their memory. On both sides, there is a form of generosity. Archiving the event has become a way of 're-presenting' it, particularly if we consider that many architects enter competitions to renew their ideas and develop their practice through this confrontation with other architects. It becomes clear that if a project is not merely a collection of drafts, neither is a competition merely a collection of projects. It is a complex encounter between a client's brief, designers' proposals in the form of projects, expert knowledge of all kinds, and jury members' value systems and deliberations – all of which are somehow redefined during each competition process. Competitions are closer to what we would call after Schön (1987), reflective practices or more precisely, as we would like to coin it, reflective collective situations.

As reservoirs of collective intelligence, competitions and more particularly Electronic Libraries of Projects, can be seen as collective reflective devices. As shown by theoretician of artificial intelligence Pierre Lévy (1994), collective intelligence supports the process of democratization, which, for what regards competitions, should be seen as a coherent quality. The ontological search for the "client" takes on a different scale when we consider these ELC at the level of world heritage preservation. But contrary to the world heritage list of the UNESCO, which has become an issue of political and economic interplay between governments and touristic markets, ELC are still protected by the paradox of classification. This paradox, briefly expressed by the expression "classification as disorder", brings archivists, librarian, researchers and architectural designers together around the notion of ordering. Michel Foucault has highlighted the role of order in the development of modern science and has shown that mankind only became a knowledge-bearer after the Renaissance epoch, once a vast range of correspondences and relationships had been exhausted. From this perspective, 'knowing' would seem to be a question of creating relationships and classifying.

A conclusive story can illustrate how ordering should be seen as a way of building knowledge, be it at a figurative or literal level. Foucault was much amused by "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" that is cited in a novella by Jorge Luis Borges, and Foucault used this image in the preface to his monumental work *The Order of Things* (1966). In this typically Borgesian encyclopaedia*, "animals are divided into: a) belonging to the Emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame… f) fabulous… i) frenzied j) innumerable… n) that from a long way off look like flies"*. Although archivists would probably find this monstrous classification method amusing, the same seems to apply to designers, and this may be why their imagination is wired in such a strange way. To come back to our subject, this may be why designers' archives are organised so strangely too and this is why architects' libraries are so important in

the end as if architectural knowledge was to be found in between archives and libraries. This is even more intriguing since Borges was clearly referring to the ordering of books in a library and there was one Belgian librarian to whom Borges was alluding to, a famous one indeed: Paul Otlet. Let us continue Borges' quotation up to the passage that implicitly refers to Otlet: *"The Bibliographical Institute of Brussels also resorts to chaos: it has parcelled the universe into 1000 subdivisions: Number 262 corresponds to the Pope; ... Number 263, to the Lord's Day; Number 268, to Sunday Schools... It also tolerates heterogeneous subdivisions, for example, Number 179: "Cruelty to animals. Protection of animals. Moral Implications of duelling and suicide. Various vices and defects. Various virtues and qualities..."*

Paul Otlet was the symbol of a new way of ordering knowledge following the positivistic trend in Science at the beginning of the XXth century (Levie, 2006). Surprisingly, Foucault did not pick up on this important, even crucial reference, since Borgesian criticism focuses first on decimal classification, on its potentially absurd yet potentially brilliant juxtapositions! It is well known that decimal classification was invented by Melvil Dewey (1876), and that it was perfected, but also adapted to a more complex level by Henri La Fontaine and Paul Otlet. Along with Henri Lafontaine and later Le Corbusier, Otlet dreamt up the *Mundaneum*, an ambitious project to say the least, which aimed to document the whole world's knowledge in one single location. Needless to say, the Mundaneum never got to be built, but the classification made its way as a virtual architecture of knowledge.

Having said this, however, who has not, in the well-ordered shelves of a public library, found himself selecting a book just next to, two shelves further on, than the one that he actually came in to look for? Finally, this Chinese encyclopaedia whose incomprehensible classification of the real and imaginary so amused Foucault, had a name in Borges' novel, although this fabulous name was also, and even more strangely, omitted by Foucault. Borges' encyclopaedia was entitled *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge.* Is this not the very definition of our digital libraries of projects? It seems to me that this type of "Emporium of Architectural Knowledge" ought to start being compiled over the next few years as Electronic Libraries of Projects come into contact one with another, across cultures and oceans.

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