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Architectural Competitions

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IN MEMORY – MINNEORD

In memory of our friend, the lecturer, scientist and president

Lena Villner

Lena passed away on Saturday 19 September 2009 after a short illness. Lena was a university lecturer of architectural history at the KTH School of Architecture and took an active interest in several areas, including teaching, research, administration and public activities. In 1997, Lena defended her dissertation about Tempelman, which was as interesting as it was liberating in its ease of reading. In 2005, her academic career brought her to the position of director of graduate studies. In 2008, she became a reader in architectural history. We will remember Lena in particular for her strong commitment to the journal on Nordic architectural research, *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*, and for her hard work for the association. Lena was a knowledgeable and highly respected member of the supervisory board, and in the period 2002-2004, she served as president of the association *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*. Lena will be sadly missed by us all.

Vännen, läraren, forskaren och presidenten

Lena Villner

*Lena lämnade oss lördagen den 19 september 2009 efter en kortare tids sjukdom. Lena var universitetslärare i arkitekturhistoria vid KTHs Arkitekturskola och aktiv inom flera områden: utbildning, forskning, administration och utåtriktad verksamhet. 1997 disputerade Lena på en intressant och befriande läst avhandling om Tempelman. Hennes akademiska karriär fortsätt 2005 med uppdrag som studierektor för forskarutbildningen. 2008 blev hon docent i arkitekturhistoria. Vi minns särskilt Lenas starka engagemang för tidskriften *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning* och hennes arbete i föreningen. Lena var en kunnig och respekterad medlem av styrelsen och under perioden 2002-2004 var hon president i föreningen *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*. Det är med stor sorg och saknad som vi minns Lena.*

Experimenting with The Experimental Tradition, 1989-2009

On Competitions and Architecture Research

Hélène Lipstadt

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Helene Lipstadt
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Abstract:

I propose that competition researchers enjoy an affirmative relationship with competitions which, if unrecognized and unavowed, prevents their understanding the logic of practice of the essentially illogical event of competing and impedes constructing the competition as a truly scientific object, resulting in serious deleterious consequences for competition research as an emerging discipline. The notion of affirmation is taken from formal logic and indicates an acceptance of a relationship of terms as they are stated. A review of my 1989 theorization of the competition as an "experimental tradition" and of analyses by a scholar/critic and several competition researchers supports the conclusion that the belief in competition as a disinterested act subordinates scholarship to the preconstructions or representations of both ordinary knowledge and scholarly knowledge. Conceiving competitions as disinterested displays the intellectualism which constructs ordinary practice on the model of scho-

lary thinking and reiterates architects' own inherent intellectualism. I argue that exorcising preconstructions is the precondition for the construction of a scientific object and propose that Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the field of cultural production and "thinking" the competition "in terms of field" enables a break with the affirmative relation. Conceiving the field as a space of objective relations requires relational thinking. If thought relationally, as a field, the competition ceases to be seen by the scholar "as-it-is" and since that "as it is," includes the relationship of terms as stated of the architect's and scholar's belief in the disinterestedness of the competition, affirmation ends.

Keywords:

Epistemology. Intellectualism. Bourdieu. Sociology of the field. Affirmative Relationship

The Challenge of the Competition as a Scientific Object

In 2005, the internationally acclaimed British critic and academic Deyan Sudjic provocatively proposed that the “architecture world’s” most cherished beliefs about competitions were in need of “interrogat[ing].” The main obstacle to that interrogation were the beliefs themselves.

Competitions are regarded within the architectural world almost as motherhood and apple pie issues, concepts that nobody could reasonably question, presented as good deeds in an unkind world. They are understood as an expression of a disinterested commitment to quality... The received wisdom [is] that competitions are uncomplicatedly good things.¹

The burden of his argument is best weighed when it is read in reverse. First, there exists a “received wisdom” about competitions. Second, according to that received wisdom, they are “uncomplicatedly good things” that are believed to be “expressions of a disinterested commitment to quality.” Third, and as a result, the “competition concept” is like “motherhood and apple pie,” an issue that is never “reasonably questioned.”

Although there is no evidence that Sudjic’s remarks were aimed at competition researchers, it is useful for those of us gathered here to act as if they were. Quite inadvertently, he has challenged us to consider the scientificity of our questioning of the competition “concept,” in other words, to ponder if we have constructed that “concept” (which we will henceforth refer to as the competition) as a scientific object.

There can be no better time or place than here and now to give serious consideration to constituting the competition in architecture (in which I encompass urban design, and, with some need for future discussion, certain kinds of urban planning) as a scientific object. Our meeting may well be the first international scientific conference devoted to scientific research about competitions. Such a ‘first’ designates us as an emerging discipline, one that is not only forging its instruments and defining its legitimate problems, but also striving to establish its position among other fields of research. The epistemological questions of the nature of our object and the scientificity of our methods of research are matters in which we

all have a stake. I want to argue that Sudjic’s general proposition that beliefs about the competition render it resistant to “reasonable questioning” and his own effort to overcome that difficulty sound an alarm about our methods of constituting our object of research that cannot be ignored.

If Sudjic’s characterization of the competition as a disinterested act sounds familiar, it is because it echoes not only statements by architects of the past—Louis I. Kahn’s aphoristic description of the competition as “an offering to architecture”² comes to mind—but also those of today. Disinterestedness is the stated motivation for competing in at least one European country, France. Jean-Louis Violeau has shown that disinterestedness is the primary rationale that French architects under the age of 35 gave for entering publicly and privately sponsored promotional competitions.³ In a study of 20 French architects who orient their efforts toward the public competitions required by French regulations, Véronique Biau found that established practitioners with a middling record of success recognized the impossibility of their invoking disinterest as a motivation for their competing, whereas the *most* successful and the *least* successful competitors were at ease in making that claim.⁴

Representations, and Failed Methods of “Interrogating” the Competition

By confronting Sudjic’s account of current “received wisdom” with Violeau and Biau’s scientific findings, we can recognize Sudjic’s account of the former as a *representation*. For sociologists and cultural historians representations are presuppositions and assumptions which are shared by a social group. They are inscribed in the workings and makeup of daily life and in the social institutions and social organization grounded in these beliefs. Representations allow social groups to come into being, to consolidate that being, and to form group identities. They function as principles of vision and division or ordering principles, providing criteria of similarity and difference that establish the boundaries of a group and the identity of its members in relation to other groups, and allow that group to order the world. Because they are self-evident, they are not taught; and because they have been learned without being taught, they provide the cognitive structures which are used to construct the world and make sense of it. Being self-evident, in normal conditions they are beyond

questioning, for to question them is to question the world the group has constructed. If Sudjic meant his audience to learn from his example, then surely he wanted it to consider his manner of interrogating the competition concept as a model for reasonable questioning. It consisted of a review of a number of celebrated and infamous twentieth century competitions (the Pompidou Center, the Opéra de la Bastille, and the Reichstag, among others) and the contemporary competition systems of Barcelona and Frankfurt; an analysis of their specific successes and failures; and a general assessment of the value of all competitions derived from that analysis. Sudjic's approach in his "interrogat[ion]" of the competition combines a method that is frequently employed in surveys of historical competitions with one that has been employed for what its authors characterize as "systematic" research about contemporary competitions. In the manner of the historians, he limits his inquiry to famously successful or notoriously unsuccessful competitions or competition systems, and in the manner of the "systematic researchers" he seeks results that are "prescriptive," i.e. that produce usable assessments of competitions' "organization and effectiveness."⁵

Arguably, neither of these methods can lead to the degree of reasonable questioning of the competition that can be deemed scientific. In the instance of the historians' method, there is the problem of drawing general conclusions about all competitions from the examples of competitions that are familiar precisely because of their great or abysmal results. Working from examples chosen for their fame issues an open invitation to the reader to insert personal knowledge garnered not from the scientific (here, historical) literature but from information 'that everybody knows'. The "prescriptive method" does the same for another conventional view that Sudjic also describes, without, however, giving it the prominence of the first. Rather, he allows architects to make the case that competitions are 'abnormal', first, because they constitute a departure from the norms of practice and second, because they are more likely to occasion violations of those norms of good practices or, more simply, to fail.⁶

Sudjic's solution has exacerbated his problem, for his method of interrogation has only made clearer how "received wisdom," or representations, impede reasonable questioning. He has exacerbated *our* problem because he has



shown that two standard modes of inquiry into the competition can be considered to have failed to reasonably question the competition concept. These may not be our particular methods, but they have made a claim to scientificity that we have validated by citing works in which they are used. As a result, these methods' subordination to commonplaces, to what everyone knows, is of general concern.

As the person who is raising the alarm about the nature of our object and the scientificity of our methods of research, it would seem only fair that I be the first to offer up my object and method for critical review. Conveniently, the conveners of this Symposium specifically requested that I take a backward look at my own work at the time of its inception in 1989, in

*Figure 1
Nordic Symposium Conference
Participants at the City Library
(Gunnar Asplund, competition,
1905; construction, 1923),
October 2008. Courtesy, Angelos
Psilopoulos, TEI Athens/ Interior
Architecture & Design
Department, photographer.*

the book entitled *The Experimental Tradition*, and specifically in the title essay of the same name. If I speak of that work in conditions as serious as these—with the metaphoric alarm bells ringing and the scientificity on our shared research object and our emerging status seemingly in jeopardy—it might appear that I assume that my work’s relative age makes it the progenitor of all that came after. To the contrary, I take this opportunity to question the adequacy of that first theorization not out of any pretension to primacy or extensive influence, but because of my recognition of the ordinariness of my situation. My earliest work, specifically, the essay “The Experimental Tradition,” demonstrates that one does not need to naively believe that the competition is an “uncomplicatedly good thing” to fail to fully and completely reasonably question it.

Experiments in Competition Research, 1989: “The Experimental Tradition”

“The Experimental Tradition” introduced *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (1989),⁷ the catalogue of a retrospective exhibition of American competitions from an era of a so-called ‘competition revival’ (1960-1985). I began the exhibition research in the belief that the (relatively) great quantity of design activity of this ‘competition revival’ was likely to have been the occasion for the generation of a proportionate number of designs of exceptional quality, with quality determined by the degree of innovation. I believed that projects that had proven too inventive to be premi-

ated and published remained to be discovered in archives [Fig. 2].

In the course of research, I came to realize that I had accepted two beliefs that had harnessed competition history to that of stylistic, formal or technical progress and the activities of genial creators for centuries.⁸ These were the “breakthrough” and the “obstacle.” In a breakthrough competition, a “new style, a new solution, or a new talent” is revealed, while in an “obstacle competition,” that style, talent or solution is revealed and revealed as exceptionally, even radically, innovative by being passed over. My goal then became the writing of a history capable of disempowering beliefs about competitions so that the competition could be studied as a practice characteristic of the architectural profession. To do so, I had to break with traditional architectural history’s “affirmation of a historical association of competitions with great style-forming moments of innovation” and to forswear the “unquestioning faith in [their] benefits” that that affirmation presupposes and enables. The notion of an “experimental tradition” took the place of the model of the breakthrough/obstacle. The competition was redefined to emphasize its unsurprising regularity, without denying its inherently conflictual, ‘winner take all’ nature, its demonstrable historical record of the aforementioned problems, unfavorable odds, etc. It was a “battleground of opposing ambitions and ... solutions, ... a public tournament, ... a struggle for one’s personal best” and, for the “happy few,” an occasion to “triumph.” Over many centuries these “ephemeral events” that were “always changing” in their composition but not in their structure, had been “endlessly repeated” for the same purpose, to arrival at “permanent results.”⁹ As a “process,” they recurred without being required by law: they were a “tradition.” As the “process” predictably produced unpredictable outcomes, the tradition was itself an “experiment.”

In my presentation of the competition, every party participates in the experiment. There is a collusive agreement among all the participants to accept the competition’s “basic premise,” that “the rewards to be accrued from the design of a possibly exceptional building make both the costs and uncertainties worthwhile.” In modern times, that possibly exceptional building is often a public one that communicates the symbolic intentions of its sponsor. This characteristic association of the expectation

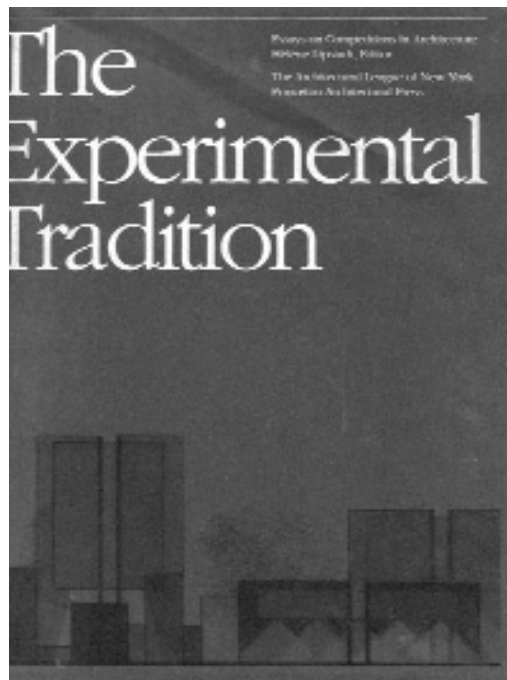


Figure 2
The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competition in Architecture, 1989. The Architectural League of New York, Michael Beiruit, Vignelli Associates (New York), designer.

that competitions generate exceptional designs that are also exceptionally representational or meaningful is a product of the early Italian Renaissance. There then emerged both a type of owner or sponsor capable of articulating their desire for a building whose qualities were not reducible to their programmatic or physical characteristics and a recognizable class of builders with the skill needed to depict buildings in technical drawings in which these qualities could be discerned.¹⁰

In the early Italian Renaissance, competitions which had previously been bidding processes were remodeled to conform to the agon of anti-quity, which had been a competition for aesthetic superiority. The competition which had initially been conceived as a means of selecting the best work for less, and then, in the early Renaissance in Tuscany, for asserting the claim to superiority of one commune over another and to lasting fame of the commune and of the group of contributing patrons (merchants, associations, guilds) became a "public spectacle of artistic discernment."¹¹ In competitions for architecture, the agreement that commissions are awarded on the basis of a judgment of superior quality was premised on the recognition of architectural drawings as works that could be so judged, which was itself premised on the recognition of the activity of projection, or *disegno*, as a conceptual and intellectual activity. The intellectual ability of projecting separately from and in anticipation of construction differentiated architects from members of the building trades and architecture from the manual arts. When architectural quality could be judged on the same grounds and in the same way as artistic quality, it could acquire some of the "sacral value" of art, or what would later become Immanuel Kant's notion of the functionless function of art.¹²

The legacy of those competitions is a living one. It was thanks to the Renaissance competition that architecture initially acquired a "patent of nobility as an autonomous art," the necessity of a client as the condition of possibility for realizing that art notwithstanding.¹³ At all times since then, competitions create opportunities for architects to design projects that closely resemble commissioned ones (at least in their earliest stages) with a freedom from external limits on creation that is almost identical to that usually granted to the artist. A project "conceived in the autonomy of the relation of designer to program" is thus an autonomous creation which, in contradistinction to the "fan-

tasy drawing" of a building projected for an imaginary client on a site of one's own choosing, has the same legitimacy as one that arises from normal "give-and-take of exchange with the client."¹⁴ Architects' acquisition of an autonomy somewhat like that enjoyed by artists in the Renaissance and, in the nineteenth century, a limited acknowledgment of their professional specificity does not however, change the fact that now, as then, they need a client to actually have their work realized, making them unlike most artistic producers.

Competition design also reveals the architecture profession's dominated status. The unfavorable odds faced by competitors makes entering a competition a course of action that would be deemed irrational by members of the other liberal professions. Competitions therefore remain symptomatic of architects' failure to establish the production of design as a specialized knowledge whose value to society is on the par with that of law and medicine and thus deserving of a state-sanctioned monopoly.¹⁵

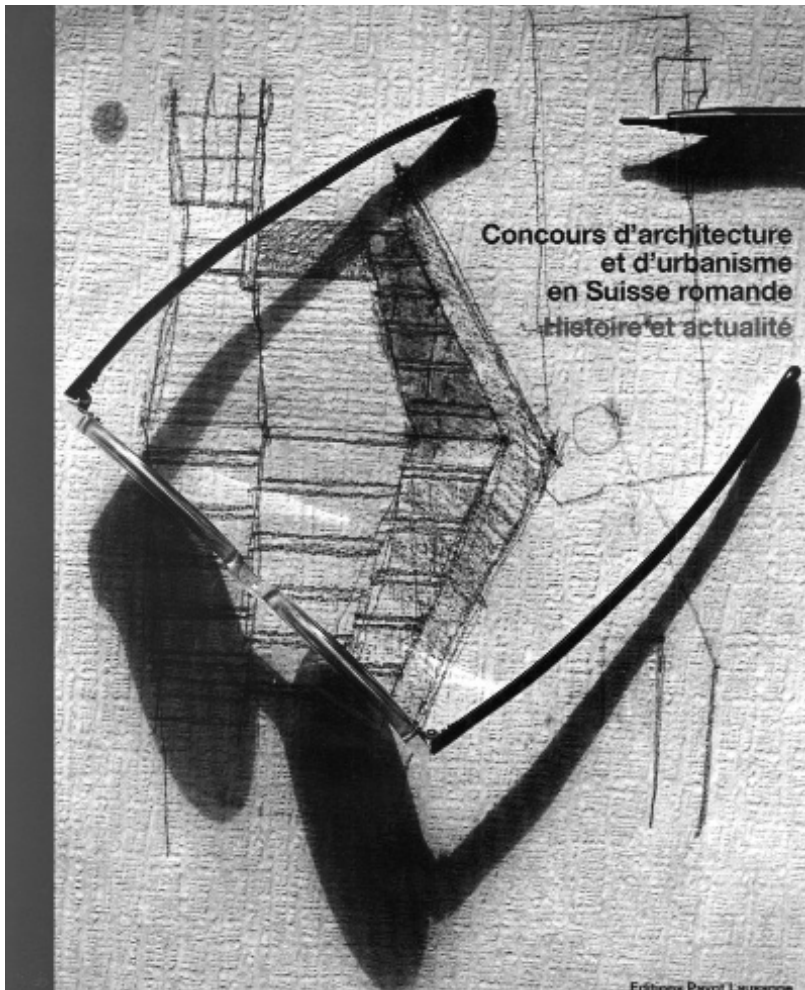
Since the competition encapsulates the autonomy/domination relationship characteristic of architecture, I characterized it as an antinomic pair, and as ethnographers have shown, antinomic pairs function as sense-making devices, the competition could itself be seen as a representation used by architects to construct a world in which the seemingly disadvantageous activity of competing makes perfect sense. A comparison of competitions and carnivals illustrated this proposition. The annual Lenten carnival of medieval and early modern Europe was a moment of symbolic inversion, or what anthropologists call a 'world upside down'. Carnival was an occasion when exception to the rule is the rule and excess is the norm. In both, rituals, games and performances allow roles and relations, especially hierarchical ones, to be inverted.

I concluded that the contemporary competition that was "lived as carnival" created an "opportunity of making architecture for its own sake." Its loan of professional legitimacy to a design which, in the end, may turn out to be no more than occasion for one's own edification, "affirm[ed] the individual and the creator" and made possible a "space for architecture-as-art" in the "city of practice." Competition design done in the spirit of carnival drew on the sources of "hope, aspiration and pleasure" of the design process itself.¹⁶

Experiments in Competition Research, 2008

I now realize that in the light of my preceding arguments, the conclusion that the competition affirms an individual as a creator might seem like an inexplicable theoretical *volteface*. The invoking of the creator could be seen as reopening the door that the notion of an experimental tradition had barred to the reign of genius and authorship by making the process itself an agent of creation, and thus something of an author itself. It was also hard to square a single creator with my theorization of the competition as an unintended collusion between the interests but not necessarily the intents of all the participants. Moreover, as I had provided no explanation of how the interested actions of competing were suppressed when a competition was experienced as carnival, it could be reasonably assumed that architects intentionally chose to work in an entirely disinterested way. It was as if competing empowered them to a perfect understanding of their condition which, in turn, made disinterestedness the most rational course of behavior.

Figure 3
Concours d'architecture et d'urbanisme en Suisse romande: histoire et actualité, 1995. Editions Payot., Werner Jeker, les Ateliers du Nord (Lausanne), designer.



In the concluding paragraph, the competition had become Kahn's "offering to architecture." With this acceptance of competition "as-it-is," I unwittingly allowed a part of my research object to be constructed for me by the very world of architecture that I had taken for my object. This conception of the competition was a preconstruction of ordinary knowledge, and, as such, was fabricated from representations. I had created a relationship to the competition that I will call affirmative.

The notion of affirmation does not mean that the acclamation or celebration produced a favorable bias. I use it here as it is employed in formal logic, where it indicates an acceptance of a relationship of terms as they are stated. In our case, this would be taking as given the relationship of architects and competitions as they represent it to themselves and hope to represent it to others. At the risk of controversy, I propose that the affirmative relationship is a condition that many competition researchers share, and further, that as long as it goes unrecognized and unavowed, it prevents our constructing the competition as a truly scientific object. Arguments that appear to a researcher to make good scientific sense often have an equivalent in ordinary sense, where they are commonplaces. The argument that the multiplication of solutions instigated by competitions not only benefits the competition's sponsor but society, that, in short, it is disinterested, is one such commonplace.

Consider, by way of illustration, the similarity of three examples of the argument for disinterestedness made over the course of a century to the positions taken by scholars today. (It is worth noting that while the arguments were made by architects in different countries with very different competition traditions at very different times in architecture culture, each one of them made the same case that competitions ultimately exist because they are for the 'greater good'.")

In 1899, at the time when the American Beaux-Arts was at its apogee, the competition expert, William Robert Ware, called competitions an "almost unmixed good" for the "community at large," for, by "employing all the talent available," they "improve the world in which the community has to live."¹⁷ During the interwar years in the United States, in 1939, the very year that it became crystal clear that American modernism had superseded the Beaux-Arts,

the historian and critic Talbot Hamlin observed that “competitions lead inevitably to experimentation in design, and the effect of experimentation will be seen not only in the building finally erected, but even more in the education they give to juries, to architects, to clients and to the public.”¹⁸ In 1993, at a time when, thanks in part to ‘critical regionalism’, modernism had itself ceded to postmodernism, the *commissaire général* of an exhibition devoted to the history of competitions in the canton of the Suisse Romande, Bernard Meuwley, described competitions as “the occasion for entirely reformulating a question. By bringing new elements to the table [they have] allowed the collectivity to accumulate ... a cultural patrimony composed of projects and of realizations of an absolutely exceptional dimension.... At their best they allow us to respond ... to create ‘works that correspond in the best way to the most important needs of man’”.¹⁹

Compare these, then, with the positions of contemporary competition researchers on the effect of the same multiplication of designs, as they appeared to a Canadian team of scholars made up of Georges Adamczyk, Jean-Pierre Chupin, Denis Bilodeau, and Anne Cormier. They write that “scholars and historians” are “increasingly recognizing the competition formula as a promising method for research and experimentation,” as the “process is known to produce bold and innovative solutions.” Competitions are said to engender innovation in four ways: when aesthetic and technical solutions are produced; when competitions “play a key participatory role in the definition of social values, in the context of a public sphere of debate”; when they grant “young firms ... access to a public venue for their work”; and when they serve as a “source of critical and reflexive practices in architecture.” For Adamczyk and colleagues, the competition’s value lies in the “intellectual heritage” of the “‘potential’ architecture” it creates. In a complementary paper, Chupin, Bilodeau and Adamczyk explain that potentiality. Competition “procedures contribute as a whole to the building of a public space of exploration and debate” of social values and thereby magnify occasions for practices that allow “social inquiry and cultural mediation at the very core of projects of architecture.” For them, the value of competitions lies in a conscious reflection rich in the potential for the amelioration of architecture and society, a reflection it stimulates in the form of the project.²⁰

There is a striking family resemblance between these scholars’ most important and fundamental claims about the competition and the commonplaces of ordinary knowledge of the world of architecture. Arguably, affirmation leads researchers to think as architects do. Like architects, scholars can ignore the unreasonable costs, history of deleterious outcomes, unfavorable odds and irrationality, or understand them as being far outweighed by the competition’s potential benefits. They can espouse a kind of wishful thinking in the form of a means/end rational whereby the interests that motivated the organization of particular contests, systems of contests, and the designs produced for them by independent, and differentially motivated designers are canceled out by the ultimate good these interests produce. By embracing disinterestedness, they can look beyond the competing part of the competition and the objective relations of the participants, both inside and outside the particular contest. Finally, and most importantly, they can postpone grappling with the fundamental question of why architects tolerate competitions when other professions do not and what it says about the lack of the autonomy of either other artists or members of the traditional professions. Either the question is not posed, or, if it is, it is rationalized as cost attendant on the privilege of being an art that is also a profession. How can all this occur and go unnoticed by the scholars themselves? Easily. Scholars already belong to and operate in a world founded on disinterestedness. The pact that defines scholarship as an agreement about the subjects about which one can disagree is grounded in their common interest in disinterestedness. Disinterestedness enables scholars to see the competition project as a disinterested act of research and the competition as primarily educative. They can champion the cause of the competition process without sacrificing their own disinterested stance as scholars. We have returned to our starting point of the inability of those who see the competition as disinterested to “reasonably question” the competition. The affirmative relationship creates a complicity that puts reasonable questioning out of reach and endanger the scientificity of the object. If by definition what is affirmed is not questioned, and in the Western research tradition of the scientific method what is not questioned is not scientific, then the scientificity of competition research is in desperate need of our joint reflection. My concerns about our object began when,

around 2000, I began use Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of the field of cultural production as an analytical tool for the study of competitions. My reconsideration of the competition at that time was in part prompted by Bourdieu himself, who had recently challenged an audience of researchers in planning and architecture to analyse architecture with the "schema that he used to describe literature." At the same time, he had warned those researchers that because "architecture" was "in some respects a very intellectual or intellectualist art," they were inherently unable to understand the practice of artists and writers.

Bourdieu had then distinguished between the art work of the "aesthetic tradition," or "*opus operatum*," the finished work, from the manner of working of artists, their "*modus operandi*." He called the latter a "practical mastery," or, in Bourdieu's special language, a *habitus*. The *habitus*, the idea of a mastery that is practical and practiced without theory, he continued, cannot be understood by scholars. As scholars, they are menaced by a "scholastic bias," or the "tendency [that is] very common among scholars, to put a scholastic mind, a scholar's mind into everyone's head, to treat an artist ... as a rational agent, [as] *homo calculans*, calculating man." They have incorporated a "*scholastic unconscious*" that prevents them from understanding practice." Only by making a "radical break" from their own scholarly *habitus* can they come to understand that practice is not governed by conscious calculation, but rather has its own *untheorized* (italics mine) "logic of practice," which Bourdieu often describes as a "practical sense" or a "sense of the game. The notion of *habitus requires but also enables* (italics mine) that "radical break."²² The scholastic bias causes the scholar to project the "scholastic unconscious" (which is found not only in scholars' minds but also in their scholarly categories of description and evaluation) onto the human agents who are the object of social research.²³ When scholars "place the models that scientists must construct to account for practices into the consciousness of agents," they commit the most serious epistemological error imaginable in the social sciences.²⁴ Exorcising the scholastic viewpoint or intellectualism at the root of this error is a precondition for beginning the work of constructing a scientific object. It requires a radical break, or a rupture which makes a radical break.²⁵ A practical mastery of the notion of the *habitus* is one way to make the break that allows social analy-

sis to go forward in a non-intellectualist and scientific manner.²⁶

The affirmative relationship is an example of the intellectualist architectural research Bourdieu had in mind in his 2000 address. We already know that the affirmative relationship obstructs the scientificity that we seek for our object and our discipline by putting scientific knowledge at the mercy of *ordinary knowledge*. Now it appears that the affirmative relationship puts it at the mercy of ourselves, as scholars, and our *scholarly knowledge*. When the architect's rationale that competition projects are a "disinterested commitment to quality" is accepted by scholars and then returned to architects in the form of a characterization of the competition itself as a force for the greater good, then scholars have put the scholar's mind in the architect's head, seeing the latter acting just as scholars themselves do in their daily life.

Having recognized the affirmative relationship as intellectualist and as the obstacle to our construction of that scientific object, can we avail ourselves of the solution Bourdieu proposed to his audience, namely that architecture researchers use the notion of *habitus* to effectuate and maintain a rupture with their understanding of all action as calculated? On the one hand, it would seem as if the *habitus* is made for use by competition researchers. Competing is an activity that in itself calls for being understood as something other than rational action. Use of the *habitus* would free us from believing that the actions of all the other participants are as rational and calculating as they are claimed to be, and help us understand their investment (psychological and social) in the costly and risky enterprise of sponsoring competitions. On the other hand, the *habitus* alone is insufficient for our particular use; for to understand the practical sense, the "sense of the game," of all the participants, we need to describe the game itself of the competition.

Our problem is resolved by using Bourdieu's *analytical* concept of a field of cultural production. "Thinking" the competition "in terms of field" can, I want to argue, secure the construction of the competition as a scientific object.

Bourdieu analyzes society by seeing it as a space constituted by fields, relatively autonomous universe of social relations, with its own

distinctive stakes, capitals, interests, and logic. A field can be compared to a battlefield, for everything is always at play and also up for grabs, including the stakes and logic that define the identity of the field and that are used to establish the boundaries that distinguish it from others. Because these matters of perpetual dispute are also contests for power and domination, fields are also spaces of struggle and fields of force. Conveniently for the study of the game-like competition, Bourdieu argues that the field and all its components are best understood and deployed if they are conceived as a board game.

The players (these can be individuals and/or institutions) enter into the game voluntarily, committing themselves without question to it (*illusio*). The *illusio* is thus at once a relationship to the game that is demanded as the price of admission to the game and a necessity for those who stay to play it. Players possess chips valid only in a specific game (*specific capitals*) and trump cards that are valid in every game (*fundamental capitals*). The player's stock of cards and chips establishes her place in the game (*position in the field*). The stock works together with the experience of the game underway and other games played by the player that have conditioned her and that have provided her with the schema (representations) through which she perceives the world (*habitus*). When playing, the players can avail themselves of the field's *space of possibles*, or everything that one must already know to play the game—such as past winning and failed strategies. The *space of possibles* makes it possible for those whose habitus is especially well attuned to the game to invent new strategies, subvert old ones, and change the rules and shape all future playing of the game itself.²⁷

The logic specific to a field establishes the limit of a field as the point where the *effects of the field* cease to operate, that is to say, where agents no longer benefit or suffer from those effects. The *field effect* is discernible when it "is no longer possible to understand a work (and the value, i.e., the belief, that it is granted) without knowing the history of the field of production of the work."²⁸

In a *field of cultural production*, symbolic goods circulate on their own *market*, an *up-side-down world* in which an *anti-economic* logic prevails, and where cultural capital is far more valuable than economic capital. In contrast to the eco-

nomie field, where 'business is business', the field of cultural production is "so ordered that those who enter into it have an interest in disinterest,"²⁹ to a commitment to acting in accordance with the field's definition of its highest purpose, despite the sacrifices entailed.

All fields of cultural production possess a greater degree of autonomy than other fields. The artistic and literary fields possess one unequalled by any other. Autonomy makes it possible for artists, authors, etc. to enjoy "liberties and daring gestures ... which would be unreasonable or quite simply unthinkable" in any other field." Their "degree of autonomy" is an "effect" of its field, for without it, works, relations between individuals, ideologies, genres, and the history of the field's evolution as an autonomous one cannot be understood.³⁰

The *illusio* required for entry into *these* fields is a belief in its stakes and in these stakes as sacred. It permits certain agents to be consecrated, and to have their products accepted as "*sacred* objects."³¹ The field, to adapt a famous phrase of Bourdieu's, "creates the 'creator'" and the belief that there can be creators and creations.

Being spaces of social relations, fields have boundaries that must be mapped to establish that the space they define has the requisite autonomy to make a field a field. But mapping a space made of social relations often requires the use of existing social units which, because they are themselves not sets of relations, are pre-constructions. To avoid succumbing to pre-constructions even as one extracts data from them, Bourdieu advises the use of a "*square-table of the pertinent properties of [the] set of agents and institutions*" of the social entity under consideration. The table isolates the traits that set it apart from all other entities. It is filled in with the properties peculiar to the object one is constructing, which involves comparing it and differentiating it from other entities. Constructing the table constructs the object, for the properties with which one is left are an objectivation of the relations and not the properties that constitute the object.³²

Thinking of architecture in terms of field and specifically in terms of the literary or artistic field would seem impossible. Architecture ordinarily circulates in the world of economic profitability, where the principles of the neighboring *economic* and *power fields* are embraced. The

presence of these heteronomous principles is a leading indicator of the absence of the autonomy that make a field a field. They make it difficult for architects to disavow the economism of 'business is business'. Above all, the dependency on the client for realization means that whatever architects may say or write, the autonomy they claim is not that of artists and writers.

The above-mentioned obstacles can be overcome by applying the square table and the field effect to architecture. The application reveals the role of the competition in making architecture a field. The use of the square table establishes that the competition is a "pertinent property" and "analytically relevant trait" that makes architecture a field, *tout court*, while that of the field effect establishes it as a field of cultural production. In the first instance, architects are alone among the state-regulated 'professions' in sometimes submitting their work for competitive judgment in order to secure a commission. In the second, there is a logic and an *illusio* that would make little sense in any other field, except that of the literary and artistic field. Finally, the competition temporarily endows architecture with the autonomy of those fields. 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.

In competitions, the sponsor or owner relinquishes its role in the process that ordinarily produces realized architecture when his or her power is translated in the brief or program as a set of conditions over which competing architects enjoy conceptual control. Rules, anonymity, and, above all, the jury of independent judges endow it with an autonomy from the economic field not present in the commissioning process. The competition, like a field of cultural production, is ordered so that those who enter it have that characteristic interest in disinterest. Economic and other interests, while not entirely disowned—people are in it for the money, everyone is playing to win—are verbally denied by everyone's conceiving the ultimate objective to be a disinterested commitment to architecture.

There are other similarities. The competition depends on an *illusio* identical to the one required for entry into a field of cultural production at the moment of entry. By bracketing or obscuring the truth of dependency and encouraging an interest in disinterest, the competition recreates the moment when architecture was initially embraced for the happiness it afforded. The competition also creates the creator. The competition project is, in a sense, designed not only for but by the field. It is conceived in anticipation of the judgment of jurors and of the imagined solutions and strategies of other competitors, who thus co-make the project artistically and formally. The jury, the program, the likelihood of publication and exhibition, the history of competitions, the beliefs in the 'breakthrough' and 'obstacles,' and the particular competitors instinctive grasp for what the space of possibles contains—all these are also authors of the projects. The competition makes a public performance of the designer selection process that usually goes unseen by the public; and the very structure of the process, with its multiple actors and experts, shows that it is the field that is literally creating the creator.

These are the immediate benefits to be gained from "thinking" the competition "in terms of field." The competition thought as field brings responses to fundamental questions about competitions. The *space of possibles* provides an explanation for why, on occasion, breakthroughs happens, while protecting us from falling victim to the conventional idea of the competition winner as a romantic genius who possesses the innate gift for the impossible and unconventional. The question of why architects not only tolerate competitions but actually clamor for more of them is answered by the notion of *illusio* and the many opportunities *autonomy* offers. The fact that it has been plausible for architects and for us to believe in the competition as a "disinterested commitment to quality" and a force for the good is understood as a *field effect* of the competition constituted as a field of cultural production.

Yet, until we have confronted the intellectualist affirmative relationship, these benefits will not achieve the disciplinary goal of constructing a scientific object. Thinking the competition in term of field brings that benefit, because, like the habitus, *the field is an instrument of rupture*. "To think in terms of field ... demands a conversion of the whole ordinary vision of the soci-

al world which fastens only on visible things” such as the “individual,” the “group,” and “relations understood as interactions,... [as] actually activated connections.”³³ Thinking in terms of field initiates a radical break because conceiving the field as a space of objective relations requires relational thinking; indeed, because the field *is* relational thinking.³⁴

Relational thinking goes hand in hand with confronting preconstuctions. Using the *square table of pertinent properties* to construct the object as a field obliges one to thinking relationally while preventing any reversions to the preconstuctions of the standard available data on which the table is based. The relational thinking required initiates a break with [the] “common sense” of official representations and ordinary knowledge that is the “first and foremost” condition for constructing an object. It facilitates the next step, which is the rupture with scholarly preconstuctions.³⁵ Ultimately (and conversion does not come overnight), relational thinking rescues the scholar from an intuitive understanding of reality “as-it-is”³⁶ and from taking that reality as his or her scientific object.

If thought relationally, the competition ceases to be seen by the scholar “as-it-is” and since that “as it is” includes the relationship of terms as stated of the architect’s disinterested relationship to the competition, affirmation ends.

When both ordinary and scholarly preconstuctions are seen for what they are, as representations, they no longer form the object.

The hold of the world of architecture on the object of research starts to loosen, our taken-for-granted mode of understanding is no longer taken for granted, and the difficult work of science has begun.

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What I saw in 1989 as a local matter of historiographical methodology today appears as a question of epistemology. What concerned me and a small group of colleagues working as authors of a collective work is now a matter of concern for scholars who are sufficient in number to begin to constitute a discipline. This broadening can continue. A discipline that has been formed through the “reasonable questioning” of the competition that I envision can arguably serve more than itself. Members of a discipline who have undertaken scrutiny that I propose will enter the larger game of architectural research with a notion of what the stakes are that can change the game itself into a greater, more scientific, endeavor.

AUTHOR



Helene Lipstadt
Professor
Founding Director and Secretary, DOCOMOMO US
lipstadt@gmail.com

NOTES

- ¹ Sudjic 2006, 55.
- ² Lipstadt 1989c, 10.
- ³ Violeau 2002, 64–95.
- ⁴ Biau 1998, 42–52.
- ⁵ Nicolas 2007, 12–13; Alexander and Witzling 1990, 100.
- ⁶ Sudjic 2006, 58–59.
- ⁷ Lipstadt 1989b.
- ⁸ Bergdoll 1989, 23; Lipstadt 1989c, 15.
- ⁹ Lipstadt 1989c, 9.
- ¹⁰ Lipstadt 1989c, 13.
- ¹¹ Bergdoll 1989c, 24.
- ¹² Lipstadt 1989c, 14.
- ¹³ Lipstadt 1989c, 15.
- ¹⁴ Lipstadt 1989c, 15 and, more extensively, Lipstadt 1989a, 109, 111, 131, n. 4.
- ¹⁵ Lipstadt 1989c, 16.
- ¹⁶ Lipstadt 1989c, 16–17.
- ¹⁷ Ware 1899, 109.
- ¹⁸ Lipstadt 1989d, 79.
- ¹⁹ Meuwley 1995, 5.
- ²⁰ Adamczyk, Chupin, et al 2004, 2, 1; Chupin, et al. 2002, 6, 5.
- ²¹ Lipstadt 2003.
- ²² Bourdieu 2002, 32–33.
- ²³ Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 70, 121, 142, 182.
- ²⁴ Bourdieu quoted by Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 70, n. 10.
- ²⁵ Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 121–122.
- ²⁶ Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 121–122.
- ²⁷ Bourdieu 1996, 235.
- ²⁸ Bourdieu 1993, 75.
- ²⁹ Bourdieu 1993, 113, 140; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98.
- ³⁰ Bourdieu 1993, 163–164, 182.
- ³¹ Bourdieu 1996, 226, 222, 230, 229.
- ³² Bourdieu 1992, 230.
- ³³ Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96, n. 48.
- ³⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96.
- ³⁵ Bourdieu 1992, 230–235.
- ³⁶ Bourdieu 1992, 246.

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