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CONDITIONS

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THE FUTURE OF COMPETITIONS

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RETURN WEEK 19



**THE FUTURE OF
COMPETITIONS
-TELL THEM
WHAT THEY
NEED**

THE JURY



GARY BATES

Gary Bates founded Space Group Oslo with Gro Bonesmo in 1999. Gary Bates began collaboration with Rem Koolhaas (OMA) in 1992 on such projects as the Educatorium (NL), Jussieu Library in Paris, Cardiff Bay Opera House, Samsung Headquarters in Seoul, and the Media Valley masterplan in Incheon Korea. From 1995-1998 Bates was Principal in charge of the Asian department. Gary has been a guest professor at the University of Texas in Austin, the University of Kentucky, and the Berlage Institute in the Netherlands.

BORIS BRORMAN JENSEN

is educated as an architect from Aarhus School of Architecture, Denmark with graduate studies at State University of New York in Buffalo and a doctoral degree in civil engineering from Aalborg University, Denmark. He has been a visiting academic at The University of Sydney, and guest teacher/lecturer at Chulalongkorn University Bangkok, KTH Stockholm, AHO Oslo and Harvard GSD. He is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Urbanism and Landscape at Aarhus School of Architecture. Boris Brorman Jensen has exhibited and published several research projects on globalisation, urban development and architectural theory. He is former partner of TRANSFORM - a Danish architectural firm dedicated to architecture and urbanism. Earlier projects include the awarded City Wall Xian project exhibited at the 10th Biennale di Venezia and the price winning Performing Arts Center in Kristianssand, Norway.

MARKUS MIESSEN

(*1978) is an architect, writer, and consultant. In various collaborations, he published books such as *The Nightmare of Participation* (Sternberg/Merve, 2010), *Institution Building – Artists, Curators, Architects, and the Struggle for Space* (Sternberg, 2009), *East Coast Europe* (Sternberg, 2008), *The Violence of Participation* (Sternberg, 2007), *With/Without – Spatial Products, Practices and Politics in the Middle East* (Bidoun, 2007), and *Did Someone Say Participate?* (MIT, 2006).

His work has been exhibited and published widely, including at the Lyon, Venice, and Shenzhen Biennials. Miessen has taught at institutions such as the Architectural Association, Berlage Institute, Columbia and MIT. He has consulted the Slovenian Government, the European Kunsthalle, the Serpentine Gallery and the think tank WIRE. Miessen is the founder of the Winter School Middle East, a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, and a Professor for Architecture at the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe.
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THE COMPETITION

We wanted to explore the potential of the competition. The question we asked ourselves was if the competition can generate new, relevant and critical ideas within architecture? We organized an idea competition about the architectural competition. The winners and interesting contributions are presented in the following pages.

The jury for the competition was Markus Miessen (GE), Gary Bates (USA/NO) and Boris Brorman Jensen (DK). The jury meetings was held in Oslo @ the Gallery 0047 on the 23rd and 24th of November. 48 'competition of competition' entries were evaluated.

COMPETITION ANNOUNCEMENT, JUNE 2010

Historically the architectural competition has been a testing ground for new ideas. It was understood as a space in which research and development, as well as the creation of critical architectural proposals, were possible. Today, competition architecture has increasingly become a service provision for the jury and a fulfillment of the technical requirements of the brief – in other words, simply what is needed to win the competition.

Needs are generating ideas whereas ideas should be generating needs. The outcome is often predictable and conventional, stripping competitions of their significance as a critical tool.

STIMULUS

- *What needs to be changed, and how, in order to make competitions once again a tool for generating new ideas?*
- *What can be changed to improve the interaction between commissioner, client and end-user in the competition process?*
- *How do the mechanisms of competitions affect the built environment?*
- *What is the potential of architecture competitions?*

THIS TIME YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS AND YOU GIVE THE ANSWERS

This competition attempts to instigate change by challenging the established in a critical but constructive manner. Join us by contributing the questions not yet asked! There are no fixed requirements regarding submitted material. Entries could be in the form of a text, manifesto, collage, illustration, SMS, image, fax, diagram, installation, paper architecture, runners up, brief, historical material, etc.

The essential idea is to explore the potential of the architectural competition – it is up to you how to communicate it. Please address the principle question of how to return to a condition where competitions generate ideas rather than simply deliver solutions. The format and material should be in relation to the concept of your submission.

We challenge experienced architects to take part and share their perspective on the matter.

COMPETITION
SUPPORTED BY:



JURY VERDICT AND COMMENTS

“On May 25, 1961 while addressing a special joint session of Congress, the US President John F. Kennedy, in an attempt to best the Soviet accomplishment of launching the first human into space only forty-three days prior, confidently claimed that the United States would land an American on the Moon before the end of the decade.”

MARK FOSTER GAGE

What is exciting about his moment in time is that US didn't have a plan, or funding, or even an idea – their only motivation was competition. As in the American Dream: the entire modus operandi is to compete.

The submitted material is quite diverse representing a range of very different formats including short text messages, e-mails, digital movies, sound bites, diagrammatical representations, boards with written statements, letters of recommendations, actual design proposals, boards with written dialogs, explicit images with hidden messages, cartoons and hand drawings.

In general most of the entries are extremely critical without offering new ideas. At the same time, it is clear that many entries come from young architects, frustrated with their position, desperate to get IN to so-called established circles.

What is interesting about this experience/experiment is that, rather than find new ideas about competitions, new directions or new issues that are concerning competitions, this process rather helps us reframe some of the ideas we already have about competitions and translate that critique back into the 'real' models that architects are working with.

As jury members the competition confronted us with our own professional relationships to competitions.

“Not only does it matter which principles we chose, but also which forces, which people will apply them.”

MERLEAU PONTY

The forces that apply are too often too weak.

Unfortunately no 'final solutions' to the struggle for better conditions for architectural competitions are found - but mounted side by side on the gallery wall the different suggestions represented a framework for possible ways to rethink and reform architectural competitions. At least seven categories or trajectories of future investigations can be identified:

1. CRITICISM OF THE INSTITUTION

A number of proposals suggested a continued critical dialog with the institution of architectural competitions. Many of these entries see competitions as a 'bargain market' for Schematic Design services where clients are managing risk through the exploitation of architects.

New directions are proposed where everyone can participate. New models parallel to the current types. System narratives – how competitions formulate questions, not only answers and how these questions can re-inject back into the process. Suggestions how this process can be imbedded into the decision making process.

A number of distinct projects are focusing on the production of questions as an alternative to the knee jerking procedure of providing 'good' solutions, attempts to overturn the standard linear Q+A process.

2. ALTERNATIVE MODELS

Instead of writing competitions, some proposals suggested to make briefs, or make projects and write briefs afterwards. Claiming that the foundation of competitions should be new ideas, not any given standards. A feedback strategy of thematic and abstract inspiration like *A Micro Competition*.

There are concerns about the shifting role of architecture and a fear of becoming powerless. And the opposite theory: we could use our intelligence to design everything – the Nikefication of design. Everything can somehow be a competition.

Some of the entries attempt to reorganize the relationships between projects, investor/financier, and architecture – into a new framework.

The aesthetic of the *comic* is used in several of the projects, Sci-fi architecture – an engaging tool for communication – simultaneously critical and light.

One proposal challenges architects to generate competitions where we are the only competitors – finding space for proposals.



3. OPEN SOURCE – USER PARTICIPATION

A relatively large number of entries proposed a more interactive, dialog based ‘democratic’ and participatory model for future competitions. A clear message is: “We shouldn’t compete but rather throw all our ideas into a basket and remix all ideas into a super project” - *bottom up* planning of competitions.

“Competitions should be a constant generator of the problematic and not making solutions”

“We could as a society prosper from more open and uncomplicated competition briefs”

4. A LIBRARY OF IDEAS

A handful of submissions is projecting different concepts for a world archive of ‘dead’ projects and ideas that was too radical, too futuristic or simply too furious to win any competition ever. A necropolis of architectural potentials and wasted imaginations!

A warehouse for architectural recycling (WAR) and bunkers for protecting intelligence, fields of attack, methods of communication. Re-appropriation of lost ideas – reevaluate competitions to give more exposure, a repository for ideas that we would never see or have access to.

At the same time one could question that we live in an era of information overload, what would a repository really add?

5. KEEP IT AS IT IS

A few individual entries recommend embracing any future competition – believing that creativity cannot die. Some optimistic folks out there send the message: Keep it as it is!

6. FREE LUNCH

Using the competition to promote oneself – exploiting the magazine for free advertisement and postcard asking Conditions to send money now.

7. COMMENTARY – PROPOSALS

A group of strange or ‘out of category’ entries is submitted. Like colorful building proposal and hand drawings of enormous steel structures erecting into a burning sky, sound bites and smart phone snapshots with hidden messages and Swastika like traces “... to visualize the common Austrian conservative political consciousness through infra red led’s only visible by mobile phone cameras”.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The jury decided to nominate one first and one second prize:

A first prize of 2.000 € goes to *Q&A - An experienced architect shares her perspective on architectural competitions of today and a possible tomorrow in a session of questions and answers.*

The project *Q+A* takes the format of a fictitious interview. This work is powerful as a succinct criticism of the status quo of architectural competitions, from its unsustainable linear logics (action, reaction, result) to the ‘limited professional territory’ in which architects operate.

A compelling analogy is made by *Q+A* to the incredulous moment in American history – the design of the voyager golden disk – a tool, which would be able to describe in very few words the nature of our existence on the planet earth. Competition processes predicate this type of communication oversimplification.

A second prize of 500 € goes to anonymous letter:
To whom it may concern

Two entries were recommended for honourable mentioning: *CoCrOACH* and *WarPanel*.

The jury will also like to mention: *So you want to launch an architectural competition...why?*, *Picture_urban_hack_to_visualize_the_common_austrian_conservative_political_consciousness_through_infra_red_led's_only_visable_by_mobile_phone_cameras.jpg* and *Architectural Competitions and 'Nation-Building' – Can 'architecture' build a nation?* for interesting contributions.

CONCLUSION

Jury – there is a risk in ‘missing’ things because you were looking for something, and there is a risk that the things you’re looking for actually becomes its own incessant critique.

Idea of competitions, the beauty of competitions: 50% of the entries received are saying, “let’s not compete; let’s get rid of the institution of competition”. THE competition is the way that ‘we’ can return to a territory for building intelligence. Without that building of intelligence we would devolve as architects.

One of the greatest potentials of a competition of this type is the collective intelligence gained through the entire body of work generated. Unfortunately, the audience for work in such a context as this is generally small and hence the influence is marginal.

With **CONDITIONS** taking the lead, the potential expands exponentially, instigating a much-needed discourse.

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