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

Jean-Pierre Chupin

International competitions as generators of cross-cultural metaphors

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

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

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

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

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

Between formal, structural and conceptual analogies

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

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

abuse scientific analogies to explain rather than to understand. [17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

In his seminal *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, Peter Collins forged four categories of modern analogies: biological, mechanical, linguistic and gastronomic.[28] In previous studies, however, I have explored in depth how analogies do not fall exclusively and simply into sealed
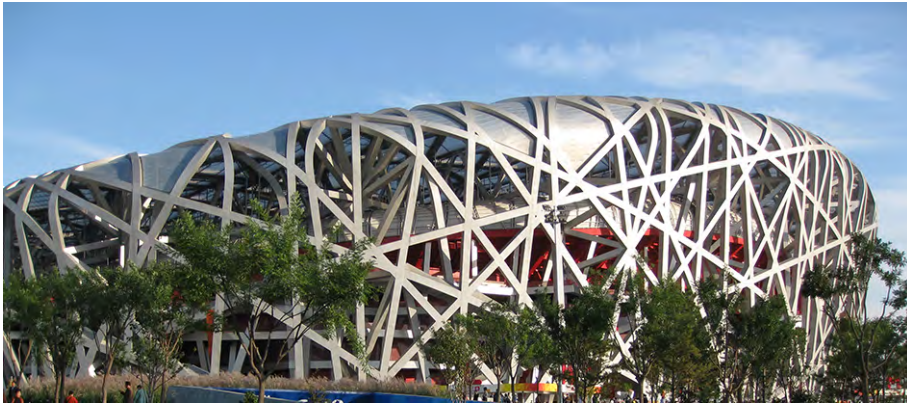
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

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

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

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

A third category of conceptual analogies – with theoretical principles – can be combined with formal and structural analogies. However, conceptual analogies occupy a special place in the theory of architecture. Within the limited scope of this article, we can only mention how a 1987 competition entry by Peter Eisenman illustrates this more abstract form of analogical reasoning. The architect's transposition of the colour code used by biologists to characterise genetic sequences, resulted, according to him, in 'a project that is neither simply architectural nor simply biological, but one which is suspended between the two.' Discussing the origin of his project for the Bio-Centrum Laboratory at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Eisenman forged a clear analogical biology and declared, 'What we discovered was that there is a similarity between the processes of fractal geometry and the geometry of DNA processes. This similarity was used to propose an analogy between architectural processes and biological processes.'[32]

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

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

Redefining international competitions

Thinking about international competitions as an ensemble of contact zones means that not all international competitions behave the same way or define a singular type of contact zone. The current fluctuation of centres of power makes the contemporary role of international competitions radically different from the role they played in the neo-colonial, largely Western-centric world order that
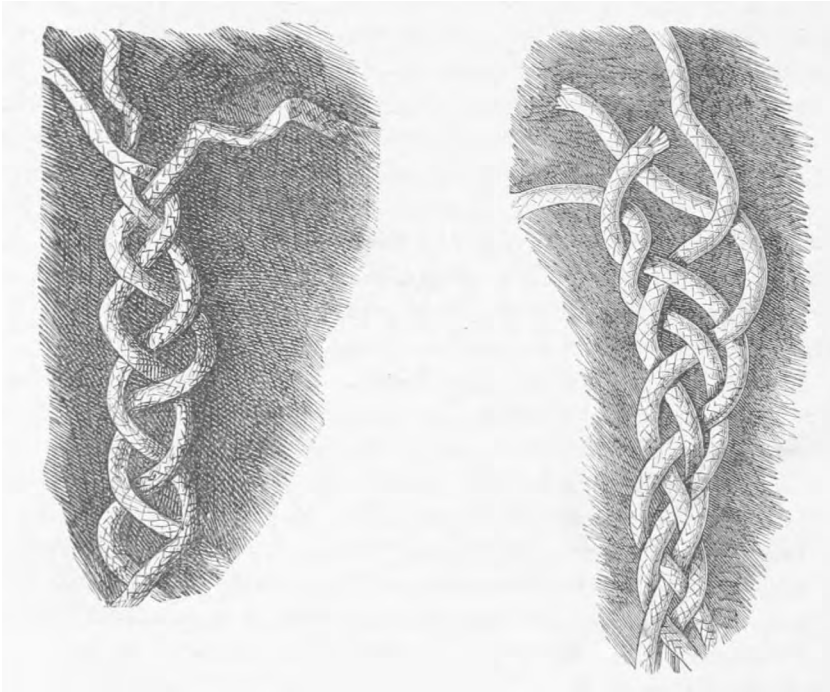
Fig. 3

Fig. 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

understanding of what an international competition can or should do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A) International competitions as world-class contests

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

Germany	Netherlands	United Kingdom	Canada	Sweden	Brazil

14 / 81

44 / 38

36 / 22

29 / 16

16 / 1

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 667

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 94

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 82

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 58

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 45

Total number of competitions held between 2007 and 2010: 17
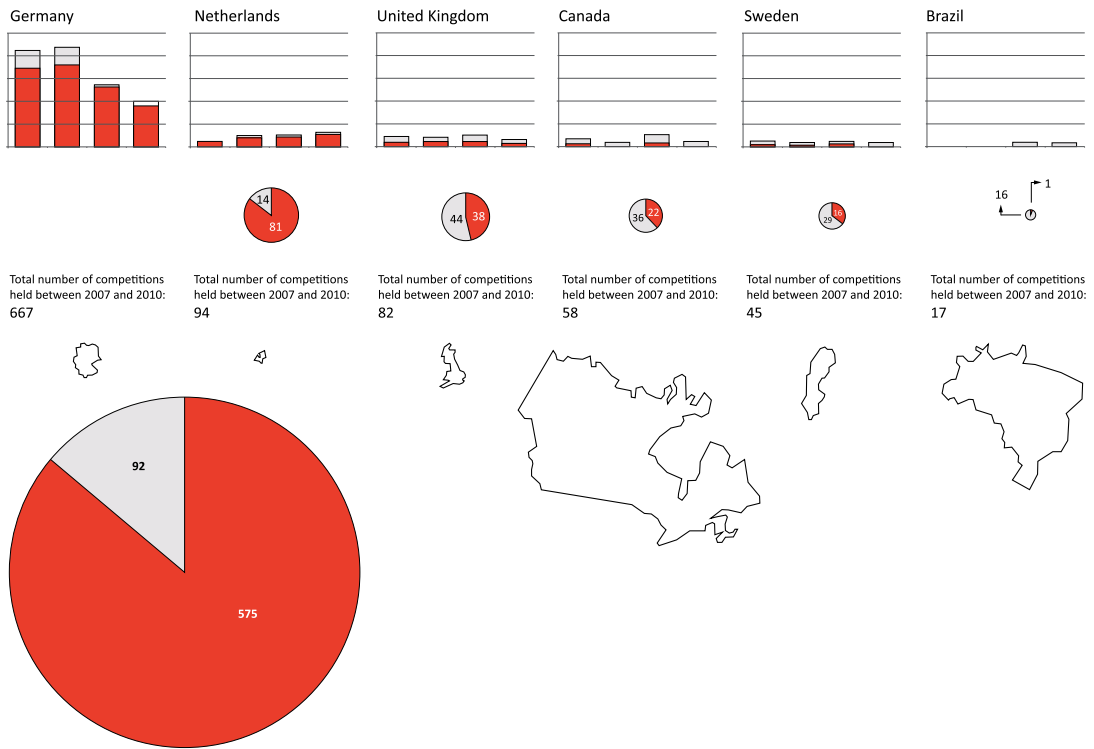
92

575

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

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

B) International competitions as transfer between local and global models

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

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

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

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

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

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

Number of
competitions

100

90

80

70

60

50

40

30

20

10

0

Provinces and
territories

Yukon
Northwest Territories
Nunavut
British Columbia
Alberta
Saskatchewan
Manitoba
Ontario
Québec
New Brunswick
Prince Edward Island
Nova Scotia
Newfoundland and Labrador

■ International competitions
□ Competitions restricted to national architects, including provincial and regional restrictions
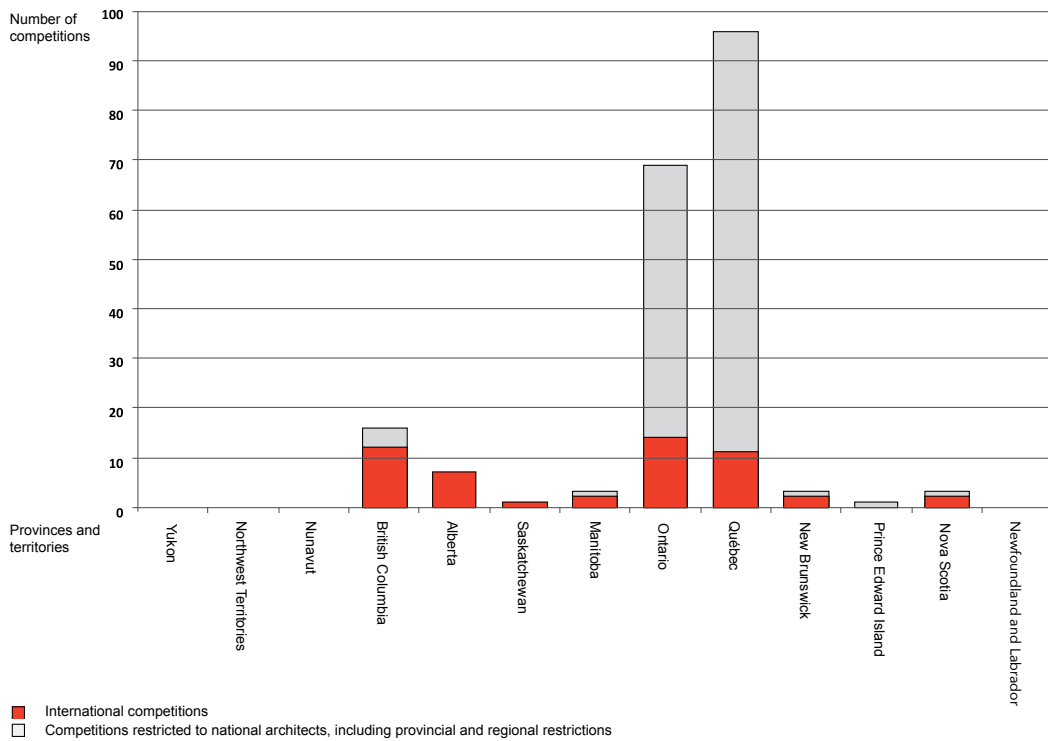
Fig. 6: Ratio of international competitions from 1988 to 2010 by Canadian provinces and territories. Source: Canadian
Competitions Catalogue: ccc.uMontréal.ca.

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

C) International competitions as global issues in local contexts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D) International competitions as intercultural openings to the world

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

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

Type of international competition	Representative key expressions	Political intention or type of 'contact zone'
A) International competition as world-class contests	• 'world-leading communities,' • 'world-leading design teams' • 'world-class destination'	Darwinian fight for the first place Internationality as utopia
B) International competition as transfers between local and global models	• 'a model for local and global design excellence' • 'an architectural statement of international excellence' • 'to put [our city, region, or nation] at the forefront of global cities, etc.'	Tension between local and global scales (branding) Internationality as heterotopia
C) International competition as global issues (cultural, environmental, etc.) in local contexts	• 'greenest city in the world' • 'applicable in many other locations'	Yearning to become a world-reference Internationality as potential dystopia
D) International competition as intercultural openings to the world	• 'inviting the world' • 'opening ourselves to a world of ideas' • 'learning about best practices from other parts of the world'	Yearning to exist on the global-market map Internationality as ontological premise

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

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

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

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

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

Metaphorical bridges in the contact zones of international competitions

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. This is represented by Hélène Lipstadt's reflection on her own seminal collective work on competitions in the US. Hélène Lipstadt, 'Experimenting with the Experimental Tradition, 1989–2009: On Competitions and Architecture Research', in *The Architectural Competition (Research Inquiries and Experience)*, ed. Magnus Rönn, Reza Kazemian and Jonas E. Andersson (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2010), 37–76.

2. Two contrasting views on the relationship between competitions and experimentation are presented in Hélène Lipstadt and Barry Bergdoll, *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989) and Bechara Helal, 'Competitions as Laboratories: On the So-Called "Experimental" Nature of Architecture Competitions', in *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge (An International Inquiry)*, ed. Jean-Pierre Chupin, Carmela Cucuzzella and Bechara Helal (Montréal: Potential Architecture Books, 2015), 232–53.

3. I have developed this understanding of the comparative nature of competitions in Chupin, Cucuzzella, and Helal, *Architecture Competitions*. For a thorough definition of qualitative comparisons see Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

4. Historian Peter Collins was a fierce proponent of the argumentative redefinition of judgement in competitions, while Elisabeth Trostrup's 'rhetorical' reading may appear less deeply theorised: Peter Collins, *Architectural Judgement* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971); Elisabeth Tostrup, *Architecture and Rhetoric: Text and Design in Architectural Competitions, Oslo, 1939–1996* (Oslo: Oslo School of Architecture, 1996).

5. The theory of speech acts has been proposed by J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

6. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

7. Douglas R. Hofstadter, 'Epilogue: Analogy at the Core of Cognition', in *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science*, ed. Gentner Dedre, Keith J. Holyoak and Boicho N. Kokinon (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 499–539.

8. Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', *Profession* 1 (1991): 33–40. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interprétations* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

9. A comprehensive and collective survey was published in French in the 1980s and unfortunately never translated: André Lichnerowicz, François Perroux, and Gilbert Gadoffre, eds., *Analogie et connaissance,* in 2 volumes (Paris: Maloine, 1981).

10. His first book comprises a famous ensemble of four chapters on so-called modernist analogies: Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture, 1750–1950* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998 [1965]).

11. Alexander Tzonis, 'Huts, Ships and Bottleracks: Design by Analogy for Architects and/or Machines', in *Research in Design Thinking*, ed. Nigel Cross, Kees Dorst and Norbert Roozenburg, (Delft: Delft University Press, 1992), 139–64.

12. Donald Schön, 'Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem Setting in Social Policy', in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. A. Orthony, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

13. Richard Coyne, Adrian Snodgrass and David Martin, 'Metaphors in the Design Studio', *Journal of Architectural Education* 48, no. 2 (1994): 113–25; Niraj Verma, 'Metaphor and Analogy as Elements of a Theory of Similarity for Planning', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 13, no. 1 (October 1993): 13–25.

14. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Les métaphores dans la vie quotidienne,* trans. Michel de Fornel and Jean-Jacques Lecercle (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

15. Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander, eds., *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire of Thinking* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

16. Jacques Bouveresse, *Prodiges et vertiges de l'analogie: de l'abus des belles-lettres dans la pensée* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 1999).

17. The authors of the affair give their own account: Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Impostures intellectuelles* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1997).

18. Although analogical thinking is a long-standing theme is philosophy, it has rarely been studied in depth in architecture. See for example: Maurice Dorolle, *Le raisonnement par analogie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949). Tzonis's short study on design by analogy remains a fertile counterpoint to Collins's critical approach: Tzonis, 'Huts, Ships and Bottleracks'. Following these pioneering works, including the celebrated chapters by Collins in his 1965 *Changing Ideals*, I have been pursuing long-term studies on analogical reasoning in architecture. Some of these studies on biological analogies, Aldo Rossi's theory of the *Città analoga* and the role of analogies in design models were published in Jean-Pierre Chupin, *Analogie et théorie en architecture: de la vie, de la ville et de la conception, même* (Gollion: Infolio, 2013).

19. Two works enable us to grasp the problem from the point of view of ancient and contemporary sciences. Peter L. Galison and Emily Thompson, eds., *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999); Alessandra Ponte and Antoine Picon, eds., *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).

20. Michel Serres, *Le Tiers-Instruit* (Paris: François Bourin Editeur, 1991).

21. Philibert Secretan, *L'analogie,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984). Arild Utaker, 'Analogies, Métaphores et Concepts', in *Enquête Sur Le Concept De Modèle*, ed. Pascal Nouvel (Paris: PUF, 2002), 203–21.

22. Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogies in Architecture and the Applied Arts,* (London: Routledge, 2008).

23. Contrary to Steadman's well documented categorisation, it is unfortunate that a series of illustrated booklets oversimplify the role of biological analogies.

See for example: Alejandro Bahamón, Alex Campello and Patricia Pérez, *Inspired by Nature: Plants: The Building/Body Connection*, trans. Parramón Ediciones (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Alejandro Bahamón and Patricia Pérez, *Inspired by Nature: Animals: The Building/Biology Connection*, trans. Parramón Ediciones (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

24. The full statement reads: 'From vernacular constructions to the works of eminent architects, natural forms have always been subject to reinterpretations and applied to the realm of architecture'. Bahamón, Campello and Pérez *Inspired by Nature: Plants*, 4.

25. The firm notes the analogy in specifying that the project 'takes its name from the building's five intersecting volumes, … reminiscent of crystals.' https://libeskind.com, accessed 15 May 2019.

26. Ai Weiwei's testimony can be found in *Ai Weiwei, Art/Architecture*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2011).

27. This is best exemplified by the famous exhibition of Herzog and de Meuron's design models at the Canadian Center for Architecture. See Philip Ursprung, ed., *Herzog and de Meuron: Natural History* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2002).

28. Collins, *Changing Ideals*.

29. Chupin, *Analogie et théorie.*

30. Luis Fernández-Galiano, *Fire and Memory: On Architecture and Energy,* trans. Gina Cariño (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 162.

31. Joseph Rykwert, 'Organic and Mechanical', in *Rethinking Technology*, ed. William W. Braham and Jonathan A. Hale (New York: Routledge, 2007), 337–49.

32. This project by Peter Eisenman is presented in 'Bio-Centrum, Frankfurt-am-Main', in *Deconstruction, Omnibus Volume,* ed. Andreas Papadakis, Catherine Cooke and Andrew Benjamin (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 159.

33. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words.*

34. Aymone Nicholas, *L'apogée des concours d'architecture: L'action de L'UIA De 1948–1975* (Paris: Picard, 2007).

35. Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

36. Mitchell and Picon are two declared opponents of Frampton's redefinition of tectonics: William J. Mitchell, *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995); Antoine Picon, *Ornament: The Politics of Architecture and Subjectivity* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2013). See also Antoine Picon, *Digital Culture in Architecture: An Introduction for the Design Professions,* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010).

37. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

38. https://wettbewerbe-aktuell.de, https://competitions.org, https://ccc.uMontréal.ca and https://concursosdeprojeto.org.

39. https://ccc.uMontréal.ca.

40. This territorial approach of competitions in Quebec has been studied in Denis Bilodeau, ed., *Architectural Competitions and Territorial Imagination: Cultural Projects in Quebec, 1991–2005* (Montréal: Uqam/LEAP, 2006).

41. Calgary National Music Centre Competition, 'Cantos Takes Next Step to Create National Music Centre,' Cantos Music Foundation, 9 March 2009.

42. Jarvis Slip Public Space Competition, 'Competition Brief: Goals of the design competition', 2008.

43. Point Pleasant Park Competition, 'Introductory remarks: Program, Opportunities, Culture Heritage & Tourism', 2005.

44. Edmonton Airport Land Competition, 2010.

45. TownShift Competition, official press release, 'Surrey Contest Issues Global Invitation for Town Centre Design Idea', 2 November 2009.

46. 100 Mile House Competition, eligibility description, 2012.

47. Canadian Museum for Human Rights Competition, brief, 2003.

48. The extract in French reads as follows: 'Par ce concours d'envergure internationale, la Grande bibliothèque du Québec souhaite réaliser un triple objectif: établir un haut niveau d'excellence et d'efficacité pour

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

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

Biography

Jean-Pierre Chupin is a professor at Université de Montréal School of Architecture, where he holds the Canada Research Chair in Architecture, Competitions and Mediations of Excellence (www.crc.uMontréal.ca). Chief editor of the *Canadian Competitions Catalogue* (www.ccc.uMontréal.ca), he is currently developing the *Atlas of Research on Excellence in Architecture* along with Prof. Terrance Galvin and scholars from all Canadian schools of architecture (https://architecture-excellence.org). Among his last books: *Competing for Excellence in Architecture* (2017) and *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge (an International Inquiry),* edited with Carmela Cucuzzella and Bechara Helal (2015).