

The competition as a thinking tool

A revalidation of the investigative and experimental nature of architectural competitions

El concurso como herramienta de pensamiento: Una revalidación del carácter investigativo y experimental de las competiciones arquitectónicas

A competição como ferramenta de pensamento: Uma revalidação do caráter investigativo e experimental das competições de arquitetura

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Abstract

The article aims, in the first instance and gathering a witness of sufficient previous support, to identify the architectural competition as a tool that is born spontaneously, evolves gradually and, as such, is admitted to be imperfect and in the process of improvement. From there, the relevance of the invisible within the creative act is valued and the terms of research and project experimentation and architectural competition are mutually and effectively related. Consequently, it is identified as a prodigal space that encourages innovative conceptual inquiries and as an instrument that allows, with greater freedom and naturalness, to test new projected conceptions with a constant and necessary vision of posteriority. The final characterization of the architectural competition concludes by demonstrating -through the study of some paradigmatic and precise specimens and through their proven close relationship with the ideas of avant-garde and utopia-, the importance that the notion of the future acquires in the discipline.

Keywords: competition, architecture, tool, project research, utopia, vanguards.

Resumen

El artículo pretende, en primera instancia y recogiendo un testigo de suficiente respaldo previo, identificar al concurso de arquitectura como una herramienta que nace espontáneamente, evoluciona gradualmente y, como tal, se admite imperfecta y en proceso de mejoría. A partir de allí, se valora la relevancia de lo invisible dentro del acto creativo y se relacionan mutua y efectivamente los términos de investigación y experimentación proyectual y concurso arquitectónico. Consecuentemente, se lo identifica como un pródigo espacio incentivador de indagaciones conceptuales innovadoras y como como instrumento que permite, con mayor libertad y naturalidad, testear unas nuevas concepciones proyectadas con una visión constante y necesaria de posterioridad. En la caracterización final del concurso de arquitectura se concluye demostrando —a través del estudio de unos paradigmáticos y precisos especímenes y mediante sus probadas estrechas relaciones con las ideas de vanguardia y utopía —, la notabilidad que la noción de lo venidero adquiere en la disciplina.

Palabras clave: concurso, arquitectura, herramienta, investigación proyectual, utopía, vanguardia.

Resumo

O artigo pretende, em primeira instância e reunindo um testemunho de apoio prévio suficiente, identificar a competição arquitetônica como uma ferramenta que nasce espontaneamente, evolui gradualmente e, como tal, é admitida imperfeita e está em processo de melhoria. A partir daí, a relevância do invisível dentro do ato criativo é valorizada e os termos de pesquisa e experimentação projetual e competição arquitetônica são mútua e efetivamente relacionados. Conseqüentemente, é identificado como um espaço pródigo que incentiva investigações conceituais inovadoras e como um instrumento que permite, com maior liberdade e naturalidade, testar novas concepções projetadas com uma visão constante e necessária da posterioridade. Na caracterização final do concurso de arquitetura, concluímos demonstrando - através do estudo de alguns exemplares paradigmáticos e precisos e através de suas relações comprovadamente próximas com as idéias de vanguarda e utopia -, a importância que a noção de futuro adquire na disciplina.

Palavras-chave: concorrência, arquitetura, ferramenta, pesquisa de projetos, utopia, vanguarda.



Tools of thought. Introduction

When one senses that the question to be studied has to do with the topic of architectural competitions, the conception of the competition as a tool is a conceptual crutch that not only becomes pertinent to reflect upon, but also acts as a trigger for new ways of looking at the subject. Juhani Pallasmaa, in *La mano que piensa*¹, delicately resolves the intimate and ancestral relationship between the hand and the tool. By way of introduction, setting up some equivalences about it allows us to relate these two concepts comparatively with those of architecture and competition. The architect identifies in the tool an idea that is born by and for the hand of man. He recognizes an intimate union between it and the one for which it was born, between the millenary evolution of the same and the road traveled together with the human being. "Tools evolve gradually through a process of small improvements, through use and rejection. The best tools are the result of a timeless anonymous evolution"². The coalition, so essential, recognized between tool and hand becomes a pertinent analogy to talk about the relationship forged by competition and architecture since their beginnings. More than anything else by the fact of conceiving the competition as an essential tool and architecture as the hand that made and makes use of that instrument.

"The tools possess a special and unquestionable beauty, caused by absolute causalities instead of being the materialization of an aesthetic idea. Even the most primitive stone tools express their use in the grasp of the hand and convey the unquestionable pleasure of their perfect functionality and functioning"³. We emphasize these words in order to recognize that, from the base, and as a tool, the architectural competition still needs to survive

a few more years to be able to boast of being a tool free of deficiencies and imperfections. The subjective nature of the architectural discipline accentuates this last definition. On the other hand, every tool is born, in history, with a well-defined purpose. Although perhaps chance has played an important role in the most atavistic times, they end up having appropriately specific objectives. The architectural competition, as such, is permeable to this statement. "In drawing and painting, the pencil and brush become inseparable extensions of the hand and mind. A painter paints through an unconscious intentionality of the mind, rather than with the brush as a physical object. Despite these magical integrations, tools are not innocent: they expand our faculties and guide our actions and thoughts in specific ways. To maintain that, to draw a project with charcoal, pencil, rótring and mouse are equivalent and interchangeable is to completely misunderstand the essence of the union of hand, tool and mind"⁴. New and better ways of thinking result from the alliance between hand, tool and mind. In reference to these last sentences, we can understand the contest, simply, as a tool for thinking. And not only to think, but to do it in a very specific way. Spontaneous, frank and unprejudiced. In relation to these last sentences, the ultimate purpose of this reasoning is to reaffirm the validity of the explorative character, as primordial as it is necessary, of the architectural competition. In this sense, it becomes pertinent to confirm architectural competitions as an irreplaceable methodical bastion when it comes to proclaiming the conception of this type of ideas. From there, it is the presumption of this reflection to deepen, conceptually and sustainably, the characterizations that, from its understanding as a genuine space of exploration, the tool in question reaches as an honest investigative and experimental fact. (Figure 1)

¹ PALLASMAA, Juhani: *La mano que piensa*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili. 2012.

² *Ibíd.*

³ *Ibíd.*

⁴ *Ibíd.*



Figure 1. The hands of a great sculptor: Henry Moore in his studio in the late 1970s. Photograph. Author: Ralph Morse. Ca. 1970. Credits: PALLASMAA, Juhani: *La mano que piensa*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili. 2012.

Undeniably, there are many professionals who use the architectural competition with the mere intention of competing and winning a project decisively. However, there are also, and no less, those who understand the competition as one more step in a career of project exploration that takes place over a much longer period of time and parallel to the competition itself. It is there where the greatest theoretical and intellectual gains are observed within a myriad of design processes outside the competition itself, which inevitably end up being reflected in subsequent projects. Research and project experimentation are, without a doubt, some of the objectives sought when participating in competitions of this type. Testing the validity and solidity of this last manifesto is also the object and objective of the following paragraphs.

The conquest of the invisible. On the architectural competition and design research

First of all, we formulate and admit, based on the ideas developed in the previous lines, the following postulate: any creative act forces us to reflect on the value of the invisible. Project research, as the elder sister of the architectural project, is inevitably a creative act. Reflecting on the value of the invisible becomes very timely. "In the film *Blow Up*⁵, by Michelangelo Antonioni, a photographer (...) goes to take pictures in the quiet atmosphere of an English-style park, peaceful and little traveled. While taking pictures of a couple in the distance (...) he finds that his camera has captured a mysterious murder. In the enlargement of the photos he discovers that, hidden in the dense foliage of a hedge, the silhouette of a man appears and a hand pointing a gun protrudes. In the next sequence he sees that a corpse appears. His images are strong evidence.

⁵ ANTONIONI, Michelangelo: *Blow up*, En castellano: *Deseo de una mañana de verano*. 1975.

However, he has not seen anything, the murder took place in a fold of vision"⁶. It is not only necessary to see, but, on the contrary, we need to know how to see. Precisely these details that, at first glance, seem to be missing. That try to pass themselves off as invisible. Álvaro Siza describes it poetically: "Of course, what you have to do is open your eyes and see. Not just look (...) open the windows of your eyes to see and discover what is inside"⁷. Knowing how to see refers to looking at the same things with different eyes. Research is often very similar. Discovering new references about old matters is always easier if we have trained our eyes. In architecture, this last postulate is doubly valid. Not only because of the investigative character that every project presents in its beginnings, but also because of the strength that the visual acquires in the discipline (Figure 2).

When we relate the invisible with the design process and research, it becomes impossible not to quote Carlos Martí Arís. In *La cimbra y el arco*⁸, he describes the relationship between these two by comparing them with the concepts of theory and practice. "Like the falsework, theory, in my opinion, must be nothing more than an auxiliary construction that, once the arch has been allowed to form, withdraws (and becomes invisible) and disappears discreetly so that it can be seen in all its splendor"⁹. Although it seems that in the comparison the theory takes a little relevant role, the analysis of the postulate shows us the opposite. No arch could be built without a formwork, no practice is valid if there is no theory to support it and there is no project that consumes really good architecture if it did not involve a previous project research.

⁶ LOOTZ, Eva: *Lo visible es un metal inestable*. Madrid: Ardora. 2007.

⁷ SIZA, Álvaro: *Álvaro Siza. Textos*. Madrid: Abada. 2014.

⁸ MARTÍ ARIS, Carlos: *La cimbra y el arco*. Barcelona: Fundación Caja de arquitectos. 2005.

⁹ *Ibíd.*



Figure 2. Still from the film *Blow up* by Michelangelo Antonioni. 1975. Credits: © Arthur Evans: "David Hemmings in *Blow-Up*". 1966.

The nobility of resources

Formal investigations carried out in almost any field have certain moments that are usually quite well defined. The one where the approach of a hypothesis and objectives is generated, the one where the fieldwork, collection or archive work becomes effective, the one where we form, as a corollary, some conclusions and the last ones where we intend to disseminate some results. When talking about architecture, these spaces are never completely clear. Although there are some environments in which it is possible to generate some almost parallel relationships with scientific research, there is no definition of the field in which architectural inquiry and innovation are presented in conjunction with design research. One of the undisputed but unrecognized fields where this type of activity takes place is that of architectural skills. Proposing a vindication of the architectural competition as an instrument that encourages design research is one of the aims, not only of this section, but of the reflection in its entirety.

For Jorn Utzon: “The architect’s creative work is of such a complicated nature that an enormous number of drawings and models are necessary to obtain satisfactory results. Most of this work can seem pointless. Instead of complaining about this wastefulness, it should be compared to the wasteful abundance of nature. Le Corbusier put it in these consoling terms: the architect’s work is never wasted; the work done in each work contains something useful for the next”¹⁰.

¹⁰ UTZON, Jorn: *La importancia de los arquitectos*. AAVV. Catálogo de la exposición Jorn Utzon. 1995.



Figure 3. The tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Oil on panel. 1563. Credits: Dominio público. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The architect’s work is never lost. Each piece of it is gradually stored in the collection that he himself builds up over time. Architectural competitions are occasions in which the freedom to act and the attempt to take risks increase considerably. Everything leads the architect to generate ideas that he does not normally conceive. The competition is the tool that most identifies research with a professionalized production of architecture. For the sake of innovation and conscious evolutionary transformation of architecture, if they did not exist, we would have to invent them.

Experience and experiment. On the architectural competition and design experimentation

Secondly, having highlighted the intense investigative personality of the subject, it becomes appropriate, following the same reasoning, to highlight the frank relationship that also exists between competition and experimentation. Architectural projects labeled as utopian have proliferated at various moments in history. Normally, due to the crises and frenetic changes to which we are subjected as a society. These have led to the flourishing of interventions that are practically impossible. This movement, which was understood as an anxiety for a radically innovative future, sought to move away from social and cultural uncertainty through transformative propositions. However, to speak of utopian architecture is rather contradictory, since architecture, despite being born as a projection, owes almost all its presence to its materialization. On the other hand, utopia indicates, from its etymology, the literal identification with that which is nowhere. It is in this paradox that the richness of the question lies and constitutes the impossible paradigm that configures utopian architecture. In architecture, there have been many who have left aside the art of building to recreate completely imaginary architectural spaces. The

Tower of Babel painted by Pieter Brueghel could be one of the first specimens that palpably united architecture and utopia. (Figure 3). The avant-gardes certainly have this intrinsic utopian character. Japanese metabolism and Archigram's city proposals always come to mind when we lump these two terms together. However, recognizing utopia as one of the main values of the architectural competition forces us to specify the matter a little more. In order to emphasize the experimental nature of many of the proposals submitted, the competition is understood as an ideal space used by the discipline to test new architectural conceptions and ways of approaching a project. As that condensing scenario of new and disruptive ideas that, on occasions, have marked times and epochs. The Argentine architect Horacio Torrent explains it this way: "One of the moments where cultured architecture is present is the competition. Whoever calls a competition is because he requires a solution that is not present in the known repertoire. Whoever enters a competition has the pretension of achieving a novel, original project that can provide an advance in ideas"¹¹. However, although we can affirm that the relationship between utopia and competition is becoming clear, we cannot be sure that good architecture and new architecture are always synonymous. (Figure 4)

Understanding the faithful relationship between utopia and competition, conceiving the latter as an absolute space for design research now seems obvious. Research and exploration are understood, then, as ideas that are born, in architecture, by and to enrich the design process. We can affirm, in the same way, that utopian thinking becomes essential when facing any inquiry related to the architectural project. To this end, referring to utopian thinking as that which precedes the creation of new

¹¹ TORRENT, Horacio: "Evidencias. Arquitectura culta: anotaciones en los márgenes. Sobre construcciones en Santiago". ARQ. 2002.

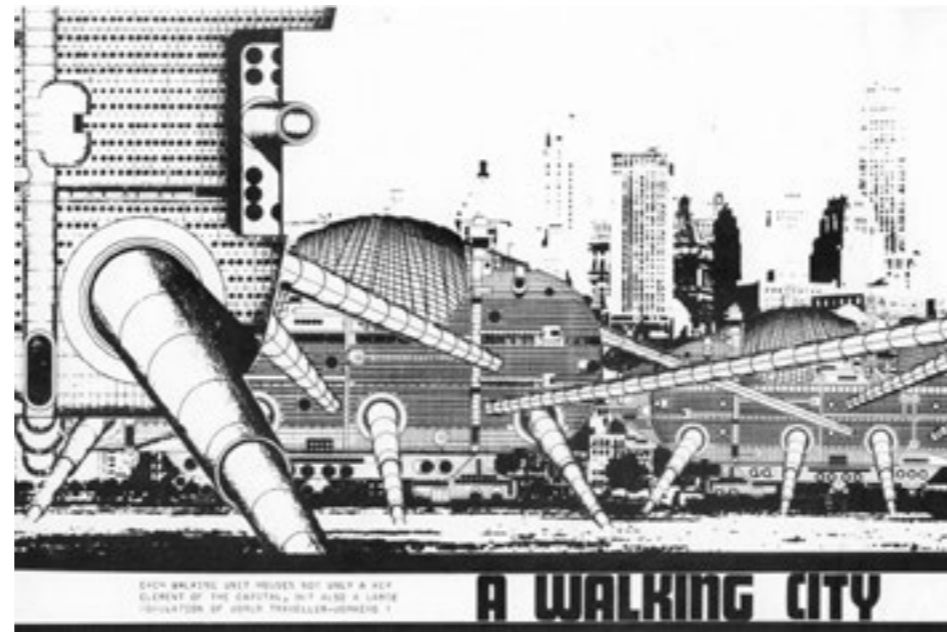


Figure 4. Walking city. Archigram. Photomontage. Ca. 1964. Credits: "Archigram, la arquitectura como rebelión nómada". Revista bifrontal. 2016.

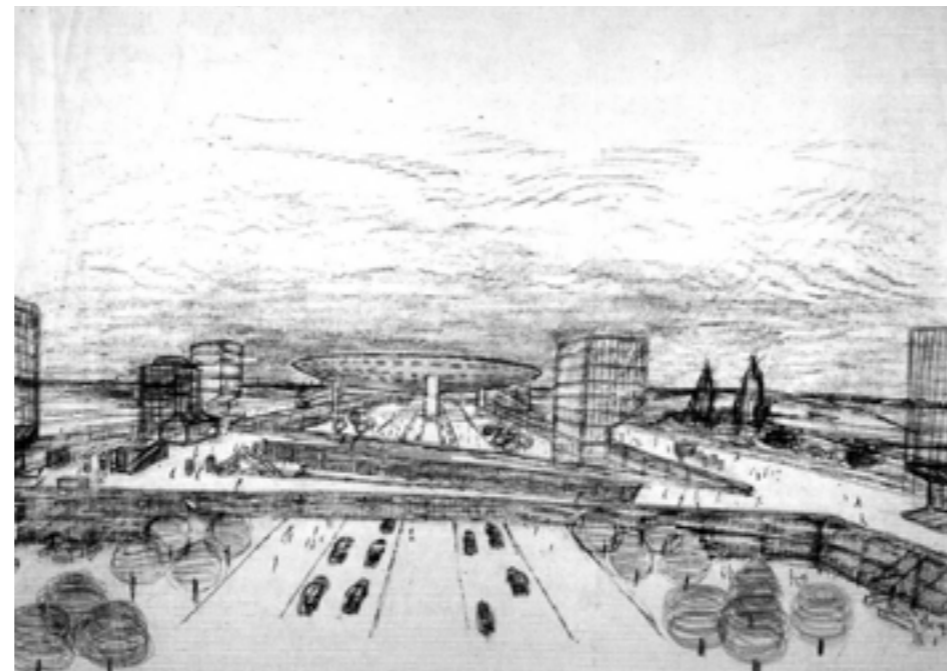


Figure 5. Proposal for Berlin by Alison and Peter Smithson. Aerial perspective. 1957. Credits: ORTEGA, Estel: "Berlín Hauptstadt. Alison y Peter Smithson con Peter Sigmond". DPA. N. 27. 2012.

knowledge becomes indispensable. There are countless cases in which this postulate can be corroborated over the years by trying to confer on utopia the character, not of impossible or incoherent, but of advanced or visionary. The duos of Alison and Peter Smithson and Ábalos and Herreros, in 1957 and 1988 respectively, are generators of two projects that exemplify this idea. These two pairs are part of two urban scale competitions and reflect, in their thinking, two positions that, admittedly utopian, are understood as a reflection of an advancement of ideas and not of an unrealistic proposal. In a competition held in Berlin¹², where the intentions were to achieve the union of sectors occupied by Soviet and Allied forces, the Smithsons explored concepts that were quite advanced for their time. They recognize, in their proposal, elements such as mobility and infrastructures, physical and social factors derived from the new forms of life emerging in the Europe of those years. Without neglecting the need for identity links, the main strategy was based on the superimposition of a new geometry that respected the pre-existences, but at the same time gave freedom to the movements and changes needed by the modern city. (Figure 5). In the same vein, the housing proposal of the Madrid studio sought to propose solutions for the area of Barcelona's Diagonal Avenue¹³ as it passes through Poble Nou, and is innovative in more ways than one. In this competition, where Frampton, Siza, Gregotti, Vacchini, Busquets, Bru, and Mateo, as jurors, endowed the event with notable prestige, the couple works with visionary concepts on urban and architectural scales. The former duo gives us a preview, on a macro scale, of what were to be their most common tools in the following years. The modern urban form, the high-rise building and the mixture of uses. Looking inside the towers, the utopian character becomes even more evident. Based on different

¹² Véase: ORTEGA, Estel: "Berlín Hauptstadt. Alison y Peter Smithson con Peter Sigmond". DPA. N. 27. 2012.

¹³ Véase: AGUADO ROCA, María: *Barcelona en el punto de mira (tesis doctoral)*. Barcelona. UPC. 2015.

formal and technological strategies, such as the limitation of the housing form to enclosures and installations, they introduce a set of techniques that allow free and full mobility of services and furniture. (Figure 6). In both cases, more or less well known, new and original architectural conceptions emerge. The competition is the platform that allows and encourages it. Utopia does not only appear in our discipline through architectural competitions; however, the latter should be recognized as a platform that continually increases the collection. Inevitably, each project becomes part of design research that not only reflects new ideas, but also turns them into a motive for study and reflection. Experimentation, which in architecture finds its peak in competitions, becomes experience when we apprehend each of the arguments that have shaped them since their generation.

Thinking ahead. On the project as a necessary reflection on the future.

In 1927, the famous director Fritz Lang proposed a chaotic urban reality for 2026 in the German expressionist classic *Metropolis*¹⁴. The famous dystopia set in a futuristic city, where the inhabitants are divided into two radically differentiated social classes, is quite different from what we can observe today, almost a hundred years later, in our cities. Or perhaps not so much. The architecture is inserted in a majestic way in the film, recreating the division between the subway world of the workers and the upper part of the city, where a monumental style that takes references from the Art Deco of the New York skyscrapers stands out. The Chicago school, Taut's experiences and Ferris's drawings¹⁵ are also clearly artistic expressions that shine in the film. In

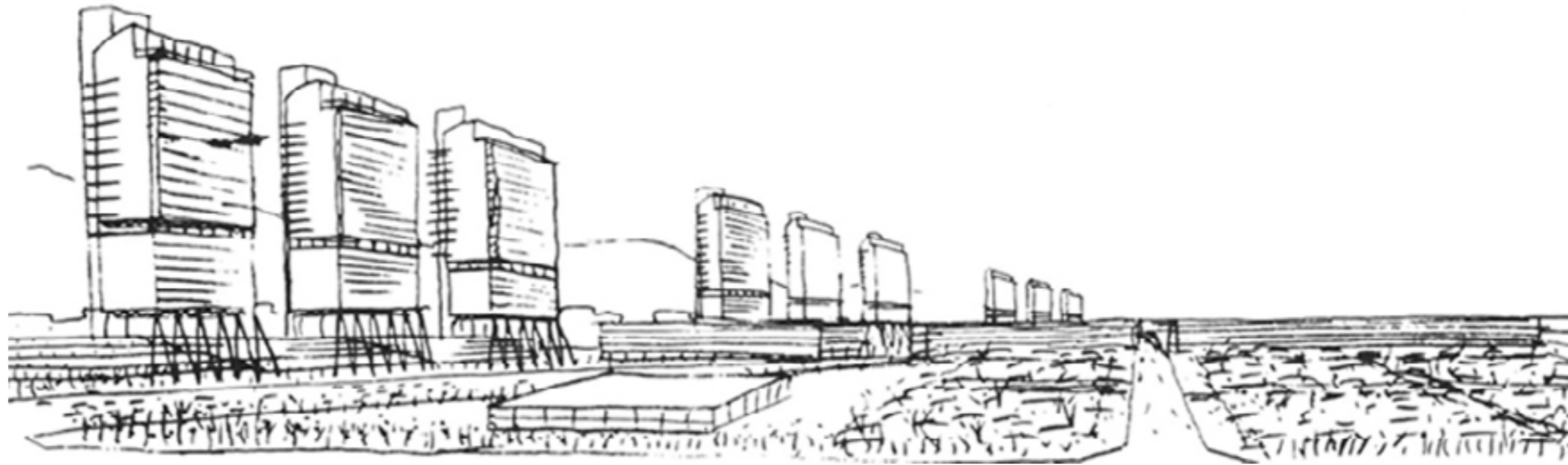
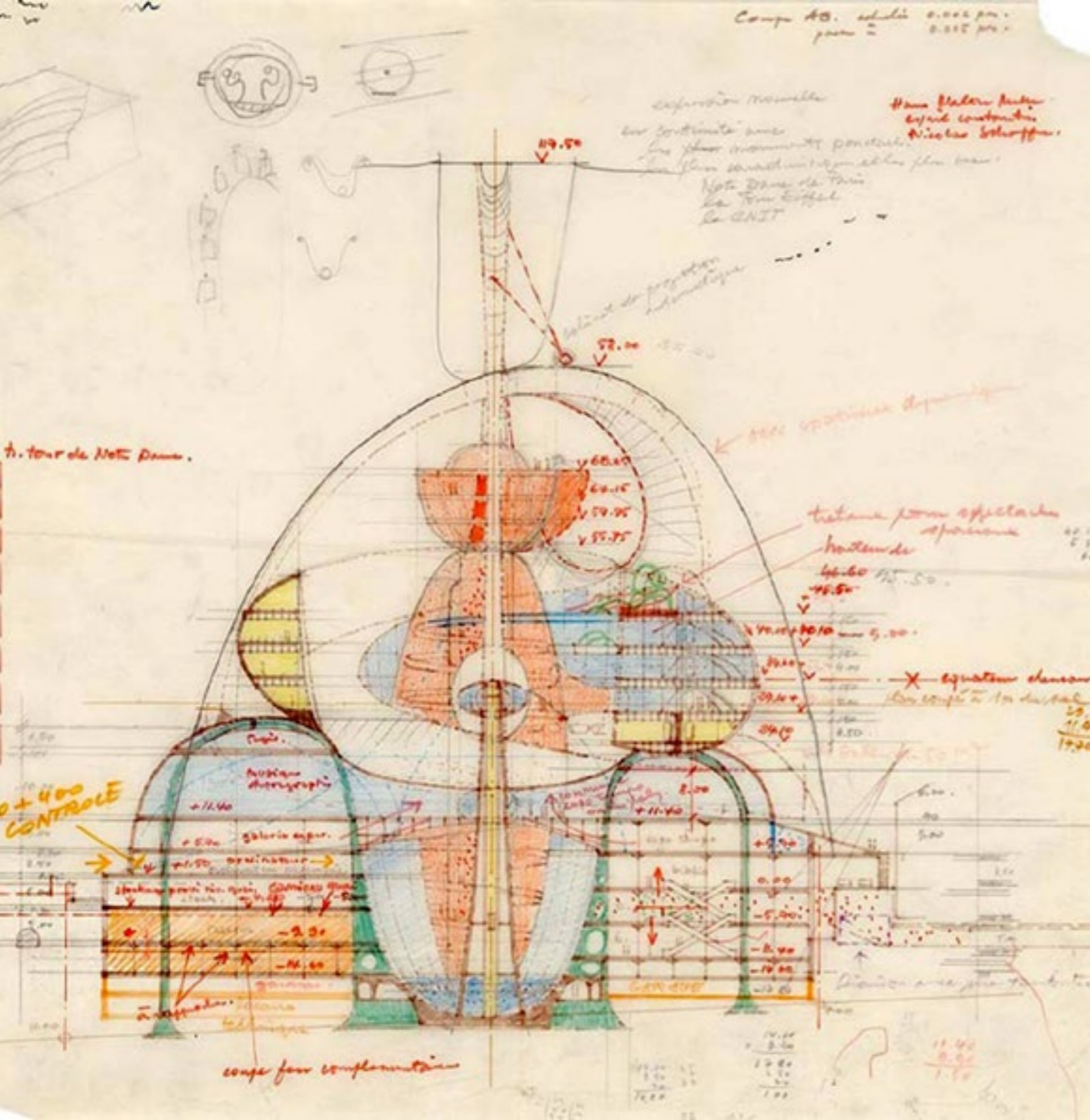


Figura 6. Proposal for Barcelona by Ábalos y Herreros. Aerial perspective. 1988. Credits: GELABERT ABREU, Dayra; GONZÁLEZ COURET, Dania: "Vivienda progresiva y flexible. Aprendiendo del repertorio". *Arquitectura y Urbanismo*. 2013.

¹⁴ LANG, Fritz: *Metropolis*. 1927.

¹⁵ FERRIS, Hugh: *Delineador y arquitecto estadounidense*. 1889 – 1962.



the same vein, it is common knowledge that architecture has played a fundamental role in the history of cinema since its beginnings. Because of their correspondence as visual arts, the relationship between both disciplines has always been fruitful. *Metropolis* is certainly a timely film when it comes to reflecting on the way in which we conceive the future. It shows us, as a paradigm, a hypothesis that today we can confirm, discard or evaluate a little more objectively. Every time the discipline tries to answer what the architecture of the future will be like, each answer that emerges is just that, a hypothesis. And it can only be evaluated with the passage of time.

When Louis Kahn was asked what architecture will be like in fifty years and what we could predict about it, the master replied: "It is impossible to anticipate". Allow me to quote a fragment of a conversation with the architect to delve into the subject.

"This reminds me of a story (...) the General Electric Company asked me to help them design an aircraft, and the FBI had to accredit me in order to do it. (...) I met with a group of scientists at a long table. It was a very colorful group, pipe-smoking, gray-haired and mustachioed. (...) One of them put an illustration on the table, and said: Mr. Kahn, we want to show you what aircraft will look like in fifty years. It was an excellent drawing, a nice drawing, of people floating in space and beautiful complicated-looking contraptions floating in space. You feel humiliated. You feel that the other guy knows something that you are completely unaware of, that smart guy who shows you something and says: this will be what an airship will look like in fifty years. I immediately said: it won't be like this. And they pulled their chairs closer to the table saying, how do you know? I said it was easy: if you know what something will look like in fifty years, you can do it now.

But you don't know, because what a thing will look like fifty years from now will be what it will look like"¹⁶.

It is not very easy to deny any of Louis Kahn's assertions. Although countless architects try, day after day, to conceive imaginary projects that can be identified with formal innovations or concepts of the future, it is not an easy task. However, in their role as a stage for testing and experimenting with new architectural conceptions, competitions only provoke and stimulate professionals to reflect on the subject. In this sense, all ideas considered common or current at present were, at one time, totally new. Just as designing is thinking ahead, no matter how difficult it is to imagine what the future will be like, it is an indispensable condition to speculate about it every time we act creatively.

For their ability to uproot almost all previous knowledge and assumptions, but mostly for the degree of formal innovation of the proposals, almost extreme, there are some cases in the history of architecture that deserve to be highlighted. Chanéac and Claude and Pascal Häusermann and the Foreign Office Architects, are presented to two competitions in which they expose, in their own way, ways of understanding architecture cataloged instantly, as futuristic. This caricatured or jocular nickname is often useful to identify an architecture whose first premise is to investigate forms that seem to be identified neither with their time nor with the space to which they belong. On July 15, 1971, eight of the nine members of a jury chaired by Jean Prouvé, which also included Philip Johnson and Oscar Niemeyer, selected one of the 681 projects as

¹⁶ LERUP, Bell; LERUP, Michael; LERUP, Lars: *Louis I. Kahn: conversaciones con estudiantes*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2002.

Figure 7. Proposal for the cultural center of the plateau Beaubourg de Chanéac and Claude and Pascal Häusermann. Section. 1971. Credits: "Centre Beauborg" © Hidden architecture. Extraído de: <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/centre-beaubourg-competition-for/>

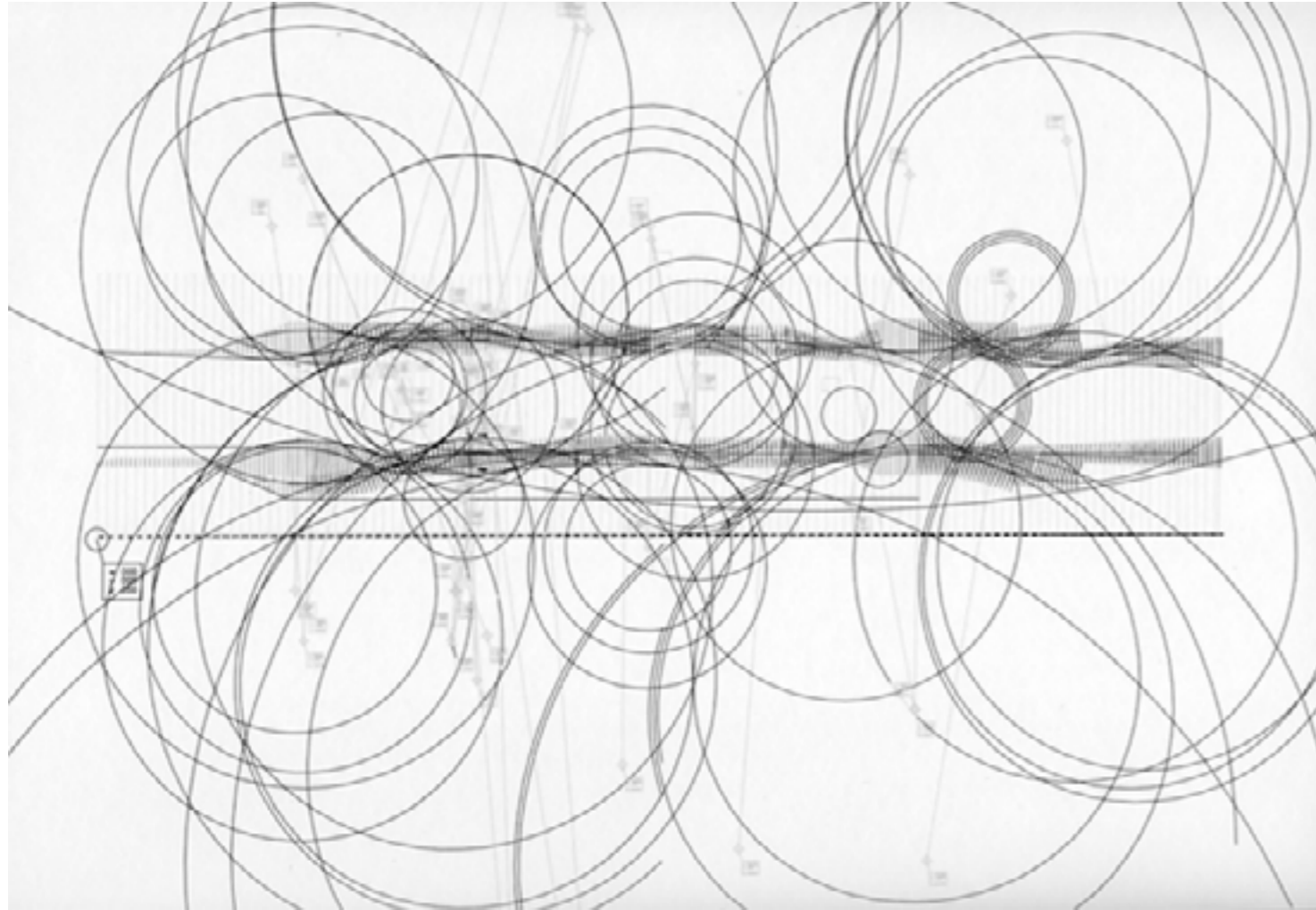


Figure 8. Proposal for FOA's Yokohama International Passenger Terminal. Vector grid. 1995. Credits: IM, Jonghoon; HAN, Jia: "Typological desing strategy of FOA's architecture". Journal of Asian architecture and building engineering.2018.

the winner of the competition for the Cultural Center of the Beaubourg plateau in Paris¹⁷. The one that would later be known as Georges Pompidou. The authors of the project were Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. For this same competition Chanéac and Claude and Pascal Häusermann presented themselves together. Pioneers in the renewal of architectural forms and creators of truly disruptive manifestos and pavilions, they show all their ideas in their proposals. They chose to invade the entire site and programmatically arrange the building around a large central void and structural arches that support and stiffen the entire volumetric ensemble. Like some of their other proposals, the form of the project is characterized by its amorphousness and the apparent randomness in its organization. They generate an abstract and certainly complex image to generate and understand. (Figure 7). On the other hand, 660 participants from all over the world entered the competition for the Yokohama International Passenger Terminal¹⁸ in 1995. The former couple formed by Farshid Moussavi and Alejandro Zaera, under the name of Foreign Office Architects, established themselves worldwide through the design of this project and the winning of the first prize. The initial concept of the project was summarized in the generation of an arrangement based on a circulation model, as a development of the idea of hybridization between a shed -a more or less indeterminate container- and the ground. The work, made possible only by the enormous advances in computer-aided design, has a unique structural system made of folded steel sheets and concrete beams, which supports the whole. The abundance of non-orthogonal walls, floors

¹⁷ Véase: "Centre Beaubourg". *Hidden architecture*. Consulta: Agosto de 2020. Recuperado de: <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/centre-beaubourg-competition-for/>

¹⁸ Véase: GARCÍA, Mayka: "Edificios con escala de paisaje. Agadir de Oma y Yokohama de Foa" *Architecture, City and Environment*. 2014. Consulta: Agosto de 2020. <https://doi.org/10.5821/ace.9.26.3562>

and roofs creates a controlled sense of vertigo that is similarly accentuated in every off-center fixture and detail. The sum of all these notions configures, and this time brought to reality, another attempt to inquire about those architectural forms that would reflect future times. (Figure 8). To borrow a few more words from Louis Kahn: "When a man begins to project something for the future, it can become a rather comical piece of history, because it can only be something that can be done now"¹⁹. Contradicting somehow, this time, the appreciation of the master, and reaffirming that to project is to think ahead, we could say that every creative act always tries, from architecture, to anticipate what will become of our societies.

Without being characterized as the traveling vehicle of Herbert George Wells' novel²⁰ or as the DeLorean mounted from the direction of Robert Zemeckis in *Back to the Future*²¹, architectural competitions, however, in their unflinching role as faithful and passive autopsy reflections of past times and in their confirmed role as an incentive platform for a way of thinking identified with the years yet to come, can well be defined as their own peculiar time machines. Now, in this reality that frames the anterior and the posterior as faithful components of the whole, the last option is undoubtedly the one that relates frankly and directly the ideas of research and project exploration with architectural competitions. That of the front, that of the subsequent, that of the near, that of the future.

¹⁹ Ídem 16.

²⁰ WELLS, Herbert George: *La máquina del tiempo*. Reino Unido: Heinemann. 1895.

Competitions in times of war. Conclusions

Returning to the ideas of Álvaro Siza in his reflections on ways of looking, architectural competitions definitely shape a new way of seeing and understanding facts. They are understood, as the last sentence of this train of thought, as a lens of future projection that, confirming the assumptions raised in the first paragraphs, arises from its close link with the creative process of design and its obligatory need to think ahead. Research and experimentation are recognized in this need, and being an essential part of the essential characterization of the architectural competition, they reaffirm its sense of contact and connection with the future. The idea of the avant-garde works perfectly to make these ideas explicit and to provide, at least stammeringly, some new unknowns that allow, in addition to the ratification of the concepts developed so far, the stimulation and construction a posteriori of an authentic and contemporary thought. A thought that, through the collection and casting of collective notions that include authors and readers, avidly generates a critique in continuum. Although few register it, the term has a strictly warlike birth. Also known as outposts, they were those troops of a guard whose mission was to penetrate enemy territory to occupy strategic positions on the battlefield, to explore the terrain to avoid surprises and ambushes and, in many cases, to sacrifice themselves to achieve a larger objective. This is the conceptualization taken up by the avant-garde artistic movements of the early twentieth century in order to identify themselves as being ahead of their time. However, as Carlos Martí Arís well narrates in *Silencios elocuentes*²², there are some references that are usually left aside, but which are those that best describe these tendencies. First of all, he emphasizes that the purpose of any good vanguard troop is to disappear in order to make way for larger troops and, in relation to this, the ability of these movements to fade away in order to establish a new tradition. Having reflected on the utopian and futuristic edges of the contests and understanding the necessary look ahead that each encounter with a new project implies,

it becomes quite simple to understand which facts bring together the terms avant-garde and contest. As a tool that allows with greater freedom and spontaneity to test new conceptions, as a platform that projects with a constant and necessary vision of posteriority and as an instrument that, after completing its mission, disappears and gives way to the project and the work of architecture. However, in relation to the understanding of every competition as an avant-garde movement, how long will we allow this avant-garde movement to withdraw and disappear completely without a trace, to the detriment of the required continuity of all the experimentation and research that takes place in every competition? In a more anecdotal order, but no less pertinent, it should also be noted that one of the main sections of the vanguard corps, in which the magistrates, officers and trumpeters traveled to carry messages, had no lesser objectives: to ask for the surrender of cities and castles. Perhaps, in a new supposition, might some proposals decided in architectural competitions also be a kind and anticipated call for the surrender or a request for the expiration of some ways of thinking? Undoubtedly, it becomes necessary to recognize these competitions as spaces where each participant is given the free possibility to criticize and express his or her most integral thoughts through architecture.

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Figures

Figure 1. The hands of a great sculptor: Henry Moore in his studio in the late 1970s. Photograph. Author: Ralph Morse. Ca. 1970. Credits: PALLASMAA, Juhani: *La mano que piensa*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili. 2012.

Figure 2. Still from the film *Blow up* by Michelangelo Antonioni. 1975. Credits: © Arthur Evans: “David Hemmings in *Blow-Up*”. 1966.

Figure 3. The tower of Babel by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Oil on panel. 1563. Credits: Dominio público. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Figure 4. Walking city. Archigram. Photomontage. Ca. 1964. Credits: “Archigram, la arquitectura como rebelión nómada”. *Revista bifrontal*. 2016.

Figure 5. Proposal for Berlin by Alisson and Peter Smithson. Aerial perspective. 1957. Credits: ORTEGA, Estel: “Berlín Hauptstadt. Alison y Peter Smithson con Peter Sigmond”. DPA. N. 27. 2012.

Figura 6. Proposal for Barcelona by Ábalos y Herreros. Aerial perspective. 1988. Credits: GELABERT ABREU, Dayra; GONZÁLEZ COURET, Dania: “Vivienda progresiva y flexible. Aprendiendo del repertorio”. *Arquitectura y Urbanismo*. 2013.

Figure 7. Proposal for the cultural center of the plateau Beaubourg de Chanéac and Claude and Pascal Häusermann. Section. 1971. Credits: “Centre Beauborg” © Hidden architecture. Extraído de: <https://hiddenarchitecture.net/centre-beaubourg-competition-for/>.

Figure 8. Proposal for FOA's Yokohama International Passenger Terminal. Vector grid. 1995. Credits: IM, Jonghoon; HAN, Jiae: “Typological desing strategy of FOA's architecture”. *Journal of Asian architecture and building engineering*. 2018.