

JUAN LUIS TRILLO DE LEYVA\*

## FORBIDDEN GAMES: ARCHITECTURAL COMPETITIONS

---

### ZAKAZANE GRY: ARCHITEKTONICZNE KONKURSY

#### Abstract

Common characteristics to any type of game: entertainment, risk, rules, action, confrontation, strategy, creativity, passion... The exercise of architecture is also a game. However, a form of extreme game for the professional architect is participation in contests. In these contests, projects should resemble a screenplay, an initial energy capable of generating a process.

*Keywords: game, competition, creativity, magic, project*

#### Streszczenie

Powszechna charakterystyka wszystkich rodzajów gier to: rozrywka, ryzyko, zasady, działanie, konfrontacja, strategia, kreatywność, pasja... Praktyka architektoniczna również jest grą. Jednakowoż formą ekstremalnej gry dla profesjonalnego architekta jest udział w konkursach. Projekt konkursowy powinien przypominać scenariusz, stanowiący iskrę zapalną, zdolną pobudzać proces.

*Słowa kluczowe: gra, konkurs, twórczość, magia, projekt*

---

\* Prof. Juan Luis Trillo de Leyva, Escuela Tecnica Superior de Arquitectura de Sevilla.

## 1. The reasons to play

The game concept is so diverse and extensive that is preferable, before entering semantic or philosophical definitions, to establish some features common to any type of game.

– The game is an entertainment that increases the tension of living, an activity that makes our attention and our perceptions extreme. When a young famous “torero” (bullfighter) was asked by a journalist about the reason that motivated him to risk his life in front of a bull, he replied: “Because to live is not enough.” That is a reason to play.

- From the bullfighter’s response, it follows that risk and adventure are also features of the game.
- The rules. This is the most educational aspect of the game, the acceptance of conventional limits that will set up a “field” or context where the game will be developed. Breaking these rules puts us “out of the game”.
- Take action, start and reiterate a process that is always different. It is called the Shannon number, the name of the mathematician who made the calculation, to the almost infinite number of possible different headings of chess. The Shannon number is equivalent to the number of atoms that compose the universe.
- Through the game we compare ourselves and confront other players, as happens in the sports field. The game is an index to evaluate our global potential, of our abilities. The game is at the same time learning, confrontation and evidence or personal assessment.
- The game is linked to a strategy, when it reaches a particular capacity or ability, it is necessary to establish our own rules or rules of conduct that will increase our chance of winning.
- The game is training to exercise creativity.
- Emotion and passion are strongly linked to the activity of the player, are even the main causes of the usual addition of many people to the game.
- The board in chess, the ball in basketball, the javelin in athletics, the book for the reader..., are objects that together with the rules of each game are essential for the action; for in the game we find the toy as a tool that assists in the development of the features already set out.

It is obvious that the game is not linked only to our childhood, and if we are smart enough we will become adults who continue to play. This is the reason that leads us to be architects and to exercise architecture with creativity, passion, confrontation, rules, strategies, and risk.

## 2. The exercise of architecture

The exercise of architecture has cunning, its development continued on the appearance of the spaces and objects make it assimilable to conjuring and magic. The weight of matter, the confinement of light, perspective and visual mechanisms, the use of platforms, are a part of the mechanisms involved in the architectural project, that “played” by the architects seduce or alter the perception of viewers, which is an essential part of the architecture game.

As Carlos Marti said: “The law of gravity the weight into one of the main attributes of any constructive operation. The weightlessness becomes a constant aspiration aesthetics of the architecture”[1, p.134]. We find in contemporary architecture many examples of these games that assume as strategy the weightlessness of the buildings, perhaps one of the most

spectacular is the building “Veles e Vents” in the Port of Valencia, by David Chipperfield, built between the years 2005 and 2006. The weightlessness and the dematerialization are part of the architectural game of the twenty-first century.

A high plateau, a platform, allows the Mayan culture, on the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, to create an alternative space decontaminated of your environment:

*“On these high platforms – many of which have a length of one hundred metres – they built their temples. From there they had access to the sky, the clouds, the breeze and to the great plains open in that, suddenly, he had become the previous jungle tedium. Thanks to this architectural artifice the landscape totally changed and gave you a visual experience of a greatness only comparable to the greatness of their gods.”* Jørn Utzon [2].

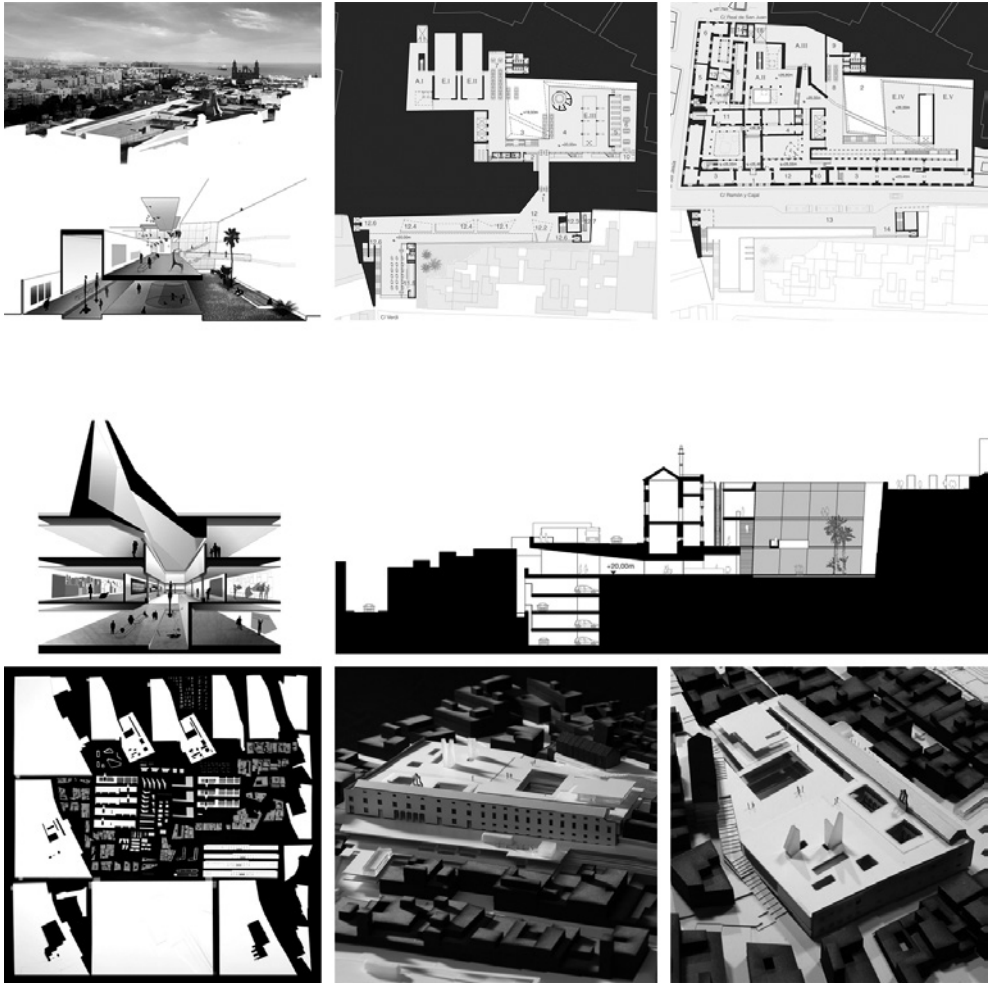
As the squares suspended in the middle of the Mexican jungle, the access platform to the Neue Gallery in Berlin by Mies van der Rohe is abstracted from the traffic of cars and pedestrians that surround it and puts visitors at the height of the treetops. Well-known was this architectural ruse to Jørn Utzon when he submitted to the contest in Sydney and dug into a platform the auditoriums and on it, converted on the deck of a boat, traced sails swollen by the wind of Sydney.

The geometry and the forced perspective, had allowed at all times “play” with the appearance, it is known that the renaissance magic of Bramante, creating a false perspective in the interior of the church of Santa Maria Presso San Satiro in Milan; as also occurs in the Scala Regia of the Vatican, built by Antonio da Sangallo and restored by Bernini.

The Modern Movement tried to debug the image of its buildings in the abstraction of a drawing, not only hiding the volumes and the constructive logic, but, even, forcing the logic of building material. The avant-garde facade of the civilian Government of Tarragona by A. de la Sota, the result of a contest in the year 1956, is a good example of this. He chose as an argument the construction of an impossible facade, full and empty, that belong to a dimensional drawing, difficult to construct in three dimensions without the use of the magic of the architecture. More recently, the architecture of Javier Garcia Solera provides us with the elemental of a sketch; solid lines, refined shapes in the which we do not recognize the material thickness, as happens in the Geshem building in Elche, built between the years 1999 and 2002, where the architect, based on its constructive knowledge, converts it from a drawing to architectural reality.

### 3. The competitions

However, a form of extreme game for the architecture professional is participation in competitions. A species of massive confrontation with the same program and place. A professional activity that is as much a game as a sport. I do not refer here to excessive professional energy spent in each architectural competition, especially in a period of restrictions and economic crisis, but the difficulty to obtain a fair judgment, especially in the existence of an increasing number of incompetent political representatives as jury members, with scarce presence of architects. Errors and anachronistic choices occur, almost always marked by the conservatism of the jurors. A contest is a game, a tournament, with players and rules, with winners and losers. Confrontation between “realists”, usually the victors, and creative or utopian, the losers. Competition is also an investigation, an implementation of the comparative, theoretical and practical dimensions of the profession. In our recent history, we find many examples of contests where the winning proposals have been forgotten, while projects rejected are a regular part of architectural criticism and continuous reference of the avant-garde.



III.1. Competition Museum MuBA\_G.C., in March 2015. Authors: Angela Ruiz Martínez, Juan Luis Trillo de Leyva, Antonio Martínez García, Gilberto González González, Sergio Sánchez Jiménez, José Antonio Alba Dorado, Rocío Narbona Flores, Paula Sabina Cabrera Fry, Yudit Barreto Martín, Tamara Narbona Flores, José Manuel López Cabrera, María del Rocío Acosta Martínez, Meritxell Álvarez Roja

The Universal Exhibition of London of 1851 convened a competition for which there were 245 proposals that were disqualified as unviable. After this result and the imminence of the event, the organization convened local construction companies in a minimum time to build a simple building that would host the exhibition. Joseph Paxton had to associate himself with the winning company and build the Crystal Palace in nine months. In 1854, the building was disassembled and moved, being destroyed by a fire in 1936 after successive functional changes.

Another unsuccessful competition has left us one of the most beautiful pieces of modernist architecture: the glass skyscrapers of Mies van der Rohe. In 1921, a contest was convened in Berlin for the realization of a tower next to the Friedrichstrasse station, 145 proposals were presented and that by Mies was disqualified before the result. It was a triangular solar located between the train station and an arm of the river Spree, with an area of 4,800 m<sup>2</sup>, occupied during the competition by an amusement park. Of the proposal made by Mies van der Rohe three mounts and a charcoal drawing are left (MOMA), facts after the judgment of the contest. The winners were conservative, conventional and historicist projects. In 1929, Mies made a new version of the skyscraper of glass with curvilinear forms, which materialized in a model, which is still a reference in international criticism.

Most widely known has been the tender for the construction of the headquarters of the Chicago Tribune, in 1922 and whose bases had as goal the construction of the most beautiful skyscraper in the world. There were 262 proposals from 32 countries, including European architects. Among the participants were: Eliel Saarinen, Walter Gropius, Adolf Meyes, Bruno and Max Taut, Hugo Häring... the neo-gothic project of American architects Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells won the contest, was built in 1925, and has been forgotten. The contest went down in the history of modern architecture with a losing project: that of Adolf Loos, a column Dorica that its author claimed, after learning the judgment of the jury, would be built.

The same result obtained in the Contest for the League of Nations of Geneva of 1927, where 377 projects were presented and no winner was declared, proceeding later to the building of a neo-classical facade between 1929 and 1937. Among the multiple presented proposals was one by Le Corbusier that served as precedent to the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow.

A test of the polemic raised by this contest can be found in the magazine *Cahiers d'Arts*<sup>1</sup>.

The contest for the League of Nations in Geneva and the demolition of the church of San Salvador in Moscow were the precedents for the Le Corbusier's project for the Palace of Soviets (1931). An ambitious functional program that provided for room for 15,000 spectators and a complicated state administrative development (USSR) took place to this contest. The preliminary phase consisted of an internal consultation to Soviet architects, who accepted an international invitation, in which Le Corbusier, was among others such as Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, August Perret, Hans Poelzig ... The winning project was an immense tower crowned by Lenin's sculpture, with a height of 415m. In 1961 the government withdrew from the construction of the Palace of the Soviets, constructing in its place the swimming pool Moskva, until in the nineties the destroyed cathedral was reconstructed. In the opinion of Joseph Quetglas, this contest was significant in the configuration of the later architecture of the USSR: to be won by classical pastiche, he supposed the end of the identification between modern architecture and the Soviet Union[3].

The contest for the Opera House in Sydney (1959-73) had a lucky decision in favour of the project by Jørn Utzon, thanks to the intervention as a member of the jury of Eero Saarinen and the assistance of several architects, the Utzon drawings required a qualified jury. 233 proposals of 722 entries were submitted. The competition program drawn up by the British musical director Eugene Groossens: 3 halls for symphonic music (3000 to 3500 spectators);

---

<sup>1</sup> The magazine *Cahiers d'Art*, devoted some of his articles to disseminate the discomfort that the profession had on the outcome of this competition: 1927, numbers 4 -5.7-8, 9 and 10; 1928, nr 2.

opera (2,800) and theatre (1,200). A total area of 60,000m<sup>2</sup>, comparable only to the Lincoln Center in New York in the 1950s. The political spin produced in Australia in 1966 forced the resignation of Utzon before concluding the work.

In competitions, projects should resemble a screenplay, an initial energy capable of generating a process.

With these precedents it is possible that we come to think that it is better to lose a contest in second place than to win it, is that's why and it is my desire always to present in this event the last architecture realized in my study, therefore we illustrate this article with images of the project for the MuBA Museum of Gran Canaria, presented to the contest organised in 2015 and which, according to the judgment of the jury, occupied second place<sup>2</sup>.

*“The Hospital San Martín, outside the walls of the foundational district of Vegueta, is perched on the Guinguada ravine as a junction of the Risco de San Juan in its North slope. Against its monumental presence in the profile of the ravine, San Martín has a setting of narrow streets, low height, without capacity to assimilate the Museum activity. On the other hand, the ravine and its relevance make it proper as via access to the MuBA GC, to obtain this objective is activated the empty plot between Ramón y Cajal and Juan de Quesada, zoned as “free space”.*

The patrimonial subject of discussion is the adequacy of the dimensional spaces rehabilitated: the width and height of the hospital naves are not suitable to the expositive contemporary space; at least, not in its entirety. Museums are places of transit and stasis, public spaces of creation and exposure. A kind of theatre scene that, using large dimensions and equipment, enable diverse representations. Therefore we need new rooms of the twenty-first century, with heights of 5 metres and high technology, along with the pre-existing walls, loaded with history, also by suffering. The section of the ravine allows us empty interiors of 15 and 10 metres in height, with itineraries ranging from the shiver of history, which is retained in the old Hospital, to the visit to virtual or imaginary places, a reissue of the “magic box” of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century.

*A museum is a public space and part of the city: the sleep of reason and a haven for creativity. A location for feasting and tribal recognition, where fellow citizens become aware of their belonging to a place. A plastic substance that blends local and universal essences. To frame this activity has been our goal in this project”<sup>3</sup>.*

## References

- [1] MartíAris C., *Weight and lightness. Notes on the force of gravity*, [in:] *Loose ends*, Madrid 2012.
- [2] Utzon J., *Platforms and plateaus*, [in:] “Zodiac”, Milan 1962.
- [3] Quetglas J., *Illicit Associations – the Palace of the Soviets of Le Corbusier*, [in:] “WAM” 08, link: <http://www.arranz.net/web.arch-mag.com/8/homeless/08s.html>.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the link “<http://mubagrancanaria.coac-lpa.com/000AALT0/>” can be seen all of the documents submitted to the contest, and in “<http://www.coac-lpa.com/?cat=8>” the winning project and all the proposals submitted.

<sup>3</sup> From the original memory presented to contest, March 2015.