

Young & Ayata

Bauhaus Museum

Text by the editors of Project.

Speculation on building is the fundamental act of architecture, in both conceptual and practical terms. Within the discipline, drawings of buildings can be considered equal to buildings themselves as realized expressions of architectural ideas, an unbuilt project of no lesser status than a built one. Given these disciplinary conditions, the competition model has been essential to the modern development of architecture.¹ It has provided a series of controlled experiments at crucial moments in the history of the discipline since the nineteenth century, in which a fixed program has allowed varying, even antithetical positions to be directly compared through proposals for buildings.² In the comparison, it is often those projects that do not win, or are not subsequently built, that continue to permeate disciplinary discourse long after they have been passed over by competition juries and clients in favor of more politically or practically tenable schemes (or the competition itself has proven to be a sham). Competitions serve as crucibles for the development of radical ideas and practices, which mature when forced into contact with the material and cultural contexts within which built projects are produced, and that architects must inevitably define themselves in relation to. With a particular blend of freedom and constraint engendered by open speculation on a defined building project, architects test their capacity to produce diagrams of the organization of matter and space in relation to a specific program and context. These speculations are captured, at times, in as little as a single image, which may simultaneously engage a disciplinary audience, a jury and client and a broader public constituency, carrying the potential to sustain both a theoretical position and a built project.

A disciplinary history of the competition model would extend back through projects such as Adolf Loos' proposal for the Chicago Tribune Tower (1922) or Le Corbusier's entry in the competition for the Palace of the Soviets (1928) to the designs for civic monuments and infrastructure produced by French and American Beaux-Arts architects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As it pertains to the present, this history reached its apotheosis in the late 1980s and early 1990s, most notably in the work and practice of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, whose formative string of competition misses—Parc La Villette (1982), Zeebrugge Sea Terminal (1988), Très Grande Bibliothèque (1989), Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (1989), Agadir Convention Center (1990), Jussieu Libraries (1992) and others collected in *S, M, L, XL*—represent perhaps the most influential single body of architectural diagrams that have been produced in the recent history of the field. A series of competitions through the following decade, including the Alexandria Library (1989), Cardiff Bay Opera House (1994), Yokohama Port

1. The emergence of and relationship between the juried competition model in practice and its analog in studio education from the Beaux-Arts period onwards deserves consideration as well.
2. The competition model discussed here is specifically the long-standing model of open or invited competitions for building-scale projects that might plausibly be realized, as opposed to competitions organized around "ideas," large urban areas or, recently, temporary structures.



Young & Ayata, *Vessel Collective*, Bauhaus Museum, Dessau, Germany, 2015. Perspective.

Terminal (1994), Museo del Prado Extension (1995), Kansai Kan National Diet Library (1996), BMW Event and Delivery Center (2001), Mercedes-Benz Museum (2001), Eyebeam Museum (2001) and World Trade Center (2003), offered opportunities for the late baby boom and early Generation X practices of AKS RUNO (Birham Shirdel and Andrew Zago), Neil Denari, Reiser & Umemoto, Stan Allen, Greg Lynn, Preston Scott Cohen, UN Studio, Foreign Office Architects and others to begin to assert themselves against the to that point dominant projects of postmodernism, initiating a generational shift within the discipline.

Today, a younger group continues to use competitions as a vehicle for the development of their practices, even as the open competition model—in essence, the exchange of labor and ideas for a slim chance at a paying commission, if there is a really a building at the end of the competition at all—is increasingly put in question.³ The seminal project in Tom Wiscombe's body of work to date is his runner-up proposal for the Kinmen Passenger Service Terminal (2014), a proposal in which the architect clearly made a play at winning outright, sublimating pervasive formal tendencies towards the program in a manner that produced his most cogent and potent diagram of a building. Pita & Bloom's proposal for the Taichung Cultural Center (2013) represents the convincing translation of ideas primarily developed to that point through installation projects towards speculation on building-scale problems of mass, section and tectonic articulation. Taking a different tack, Mark Foster Gage's out-of-competition proposal for the Helsinki Guggenheim (2014), an open competition that from the start seemed an absurdity, with over 1700 entries,⁴ leveraged the increasing publicity associated with high-profile competitions in the digitally mediated age of ArchDaily and Instagram

3. See, for instance, Mark Foster Gage's critique of the culture of contemporary competitions, and of the value assigned to architectural labor more broadly, in "Rot Munching Architects," *Perspecta* 47 (2014).

4. For more on this competition, see our conversation with finalists Fake Industries Architectural Agonism in this issue.



Young & Ayata, *Vessel Collective*, Bauhaus Museum, Dessau, Germany, 2015. Aerial view.

to broach new disciplinary conversations and announce a new turn in his work. The work produced by young architects for these competitions and others—including the Kaohsiung Pop Music Center (2010), Kaohsiung Port Terminal (2010), Busan Opera House (2011), Helsinki Library (2012), and House of Hungarian Music (2014)—now populates the websites and substantiates the ambitions of emerging practices, much in the way that the work produced for competitions from the mid-nineties through the early aughts filled the early monographs and accompanied the theoretical writings of the preceding generation.

Among this younger generation (or perhaps somewhere between it and the next), Young & Ayata, the New York-based practice of Michael Young and Kutun Ayata, have used competitions as opportunities to advance their work towards the complexity of building. The firm's recent entry in the competition for the new Bauhaus Museum in Dessau (2015), *Vessel Collective*, a perhaps surprising co-winner (more on that to follow), builds on the firm's earlier Helsinki Guggenheim proposal. Both projects are aggregations of rotund forms, which taper above and below to truncated stalks that, by turn, lift the bulk of their masses off the ground and bring indirect light into their interiors. Where the plan of the Guggenheim project is axial and symmetrical, following the Beaux-Arts plan logic that has re-emerged in certain strands of contemporary formalism, with individual parts subsumed into a compositional whole, the Bauhaus project is a rougher-edged grid of cells, with multiple axes of local symmetry and no clear center or bounding figure. In this way, the Bauhaus proposal suggests a play on the extensive, pinwheeling Ls in the plan of Walter Gropius' original Bauhaus building, and of the broader aesthetic tendency emerging from Cubism and De Stijl to disperse elements into fields rather than consolidate them into figures. We could read, to extend the biomorphic analogies, two distinct, even competing, notions of architecture, one

in which the parts, like limbs or organs, are organized into coherent, centered, bilaterally symmetrical wholes, analogous to the human body, an idea that can be related to long histories of Western liturgical and institutional architecture (the pairing of Luigi Moretti's cast models of Baroque churches and Young & Ayata's Guggenheim plan on the firm's website is instructive), and the other a system of individuated cells, joining and splitting, in a primordial and open-ended state, closer in spirit perhaps to postwar interests in the "organic" development of networks and urban structures.

One can situate Young & Ayata's Bauhaus project within varied such histories of disciplinary exploration from Le Corbusier's five points and Modernist attitudes towards the ground, to Metabolism, Team X and the notion of collective form, to the algorithmic transformations of geometries running from Peter Eisenman's Carnegie Mellon project through Lynn's Embryological House to the present, to the loosely aggregated forms explored by MOS, to the biomorphic characters produced by Young & Ayata's contemporaries in the Possible Mediums and Treatise projects. And it is no surprise to find in the announcement of winners a reference from the jury to the way in which the project extends Bauhaus traditions of integrated cultural and technical practice. The discipline and the public constituency are both knowingly addressed through the project, the competition revealing the perpetually Janus-faced character of the practicing architect, who must always speak out of both sides of their mouths if they are to build radical ideas. Brought to an ever so slightly more urbane and understated appearance in relation to the earlier Guggenheim project, the curved surfaces of the cells at least partially ruled, the elevation a horizontal expanse of opalescent bulbs floating among trees, Young & Ayata's Bauhaus Museum rests at that point on the spectrum between speculation and pragmatism where the most potent architecture is found, proposing a synthetic attitude towards site, structure, material, circulation, distribution of function and formal expression that reflects the mutual entanglement of disciplinary interests and the plausible projection of, if not realization of, built work.

It is perhaps cynical to place Young & Ayata's Bauhaus project in the context of a history of mostly unbuilt competition entries, but, when seen next to its co-winner, a gridded steel and glass structure by Spanish firm Gonzalez Hinz Zabala, as well as the five other placed entries, it is difficult to imagine that it will be the project finally chosen for construction. Young & Ayata's project alone represents a deviation from a familiar contemporary language of somber European architecture rendered in plaster, brick, glass or steel and expressing rationalist-classicist grids or planar, monolithic, punctured masses. In the era of European austerity, the production of a project so visibly dissimilar from its context and any conservative sense of urban decorum would seem unlikely. But perhaps the divided jury that produced co-winners will finally find in favor of the young Turk and American. In any case, Young & Ayata's Bauhaus project has already entered into the discourse of architecture, where it resides in that archive of competition proposals whose continuing influence outstrips that of whichever project was finally built.