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► To cite this version:

Véronique Biau. Professional Positioning among French Architects. Professions, Identity and Order in Comparative Perspective, 1998. halshs-01714729

HAL Id: halshs-01714729

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01714729>

Submitted on 21 Feb 2018

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**PROFESSIONS,
IDENTITY, AND
ORDER IN
COMPARATIVE
PERSPECTIVE**

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Professional Positioning Among French Architects

Véronique Biau

Introduction

Institutions and individual agents within the dynamics of the field of architecture.

In the various studies concerning the professional group of architects in France developed to this day, two viewpoints have been emphasized : the analysis of the structures specific to architectural activity considered as a whole, on the one hand, and on the other hand, an analysis on a much more individual scale of professional positions and the representations related to these.

The first group of studies has been largely dedicated to the historical origin and the actual functioning of architecture, as through its organizations for education and regulation of the economic and symbolic competitions : among these, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts until the mid-twentieth century, the Architectural Academy and the successive Ministries in charge of architecture during the past decades.

The second group has attempted to reach a definition, through typologies or monographies of specific sub-groups of architects, of the main divisions between professional positions. The key elements in this analysis are the relation of the practitioner to his clients, and the differentiation of the various missions he is taking in charge, as well as the type and amount of work commissioned. The divisions therefore appear in terms of a greater or smaller opportunity to obtain the various types of commissions (and it will be further shown how heterogenous commissions may be), in terms of symbolic recognition (varying with the practitioner's proximity to the definition of the most legitimate architecture), or finally in terms of a specific architectural culture.

It appears sensible to place our study at the crossroad of these two approaches, and to consider how the process of positioning is carried out by architects, that is, their distribution and traveling between the different positions, as the analysis of the second group defines them. This will lead us to examine how mutations within the global structures tend to orient the

individual strategies of architects. This issue adds an individual dimension to the structural approach of architecture as field of research, and a dynamic dimension to the relatively static approach which typologies present.

Within this considerably broad problematic of research, our objective will limit itself to give an insight on the individual strategies which architects develop to improve their access to commissions as well as the symbolic recognition of their peers, the latter being highly responsible for the awarding of contracts. This issue has been made particularly acute in France today because of the current evolutions. And the strategies evoked here have appeared to become, over the last few years, increasingly conscious, rational and obvious. Indeed, the conjunction of a rise in the number of practitioners and a reduction of the total financial amount of contracts, have strained the professional market, forcing the architects to adopt more aggressive attitudes. Also, the global trend leading to give media coverage to social events, and concerning our area of study, the increase of the " emblematic " part in the commissioning of public buildings in particular, have encouraged the rise of a star system which architects reach for all but not by mere chance. Finally, new organizations for the management and promotion of architecture, created by the state for the most and strongly linked to the circle of architectural critics, have valorized, specially concerning the practice of competitions, a profile of designer and a type of production which have been set as reference. Therefore, each practitioner has been summoned to take a strong line over this reference thus renewing the traditional duality between the artist-architect and the craftsman-architect (or the businessman-architect).

We will focus on the latter issue, presenting the specific behaviors developed by architects working in their private practice and the conditions of competition progressively set during the 80's for the awarding of the main public commissions.

1. Until 1968, Academic Institutions and Oligopolies.

For several centuries and until 1968, the French academic system of architecture had adjusted, in a relatively stable way, the organization of education and profession, the conditions of professional consecration and the awarding of public commissions. This system rested on the trilogy of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts on the one hand, the Architecture section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and the Prix de Rome by which were set the standards of the " good " architecture on the other hand, and finally of the elite corps of the Architectes des Bâtiments Civils et Palais Nationaux (BCPN).

Actually, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where existed a numerus clausus, was largely in the hands of " big architects ", heads of large firms and award

winner of the Prix de Rome. This institution was the place of very obvious mechanisms of reproduction, through which filiation ties virtually of familial nature were developed between master and student. This was seen in the candidacies to the Prix de Rome for the most brilliant students (Martinon, 1982) as well as in the progressive access of the young architect to the hierarchically managed firm of the "boss" for the others.

The Prix de Rome, created in 1760, managed and judged by the Académie members, was awarded each year to three architects under 30 years old. It guaranteed them, at the return of their stay at the Villa Médicis in Rome, a recognition through both their enrollment in the corps of the Architectes des Bâtiments Civils et Palais Nationaux, and a definite prestige to the eyes of the private clients of architecture, mainly traditional bourgeoisie and industrial bourgeoisie.

As for the corps of the BCPN architects, organization of about a hundred members, created with the first Prix de Rome to take responsibility for the construction, planning and preservation of the state real estate properties, it has held a virtual monopoly over the public commissioning until the end of the 19th century. Only at the time of Reconstruction (after WW2), with the rapid growth of the state commissioning and its phrasing in terms that were more and more different from the monumental conceptions of the BCPN architects, did they lose some of their privileges to the somewhat small group of architects approved by the main constructing Ministers (Moulin R. et al., 1970).

The very long life of this academical system over a period of time otherwise largely affected by the evolution of techniques, urban planning doctrines and aesthetic choices can be explained in several ways. Obviously the small size of the professional circle which this system has maintained, contributed to ensure both a certain homogeneity of the professional representations and a relative economic balance between the global amount of commissions and the number of architects able to do the work. Also, a certain aesthetic consensus had been made possible between the architects represented by their academicians, and the public, among which particularly the sleeping partners of architecture, who having been trained merely in the basics of art and architecture, would rather spontaneously opt for established values.

At the end of the 60's and early 70's, a radical change sees the rejection of these secular institutions, totally displaced concerning the technological, sociological, economical and organizational issues in debate over the subjects of architecture and construction. The school of architecture liberates itself from the care of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1968, the Prix de Rome

disappears in 1970¹. The corps of BCPN architects is thereafter led to extinction. The Architecture section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts within the Institut de France (5 members) is doubled since 1953 by an Académie d'Architecture, more dynamic in spite of its purely voluntary status, which counts more than 200 members. The institutional landscape of architecture then undergoes a fundamental transformation during which the public and para-public organizations will invest themselves in new missions. These missions will not limit any more to commissioning, nor to the regulation and control of the profession, but will place themselves on the exact issue of the very definition of architectural " quality " and the promotion of those persons susceptible to bring this quality to reality, in reference to public buildings.

2. End of the 60's : New Public and Para-Public Organizations for the Promotion of Architectural "Quality"

In 1971, the Prime Minister creates the " Plan Construction ", organization to which important credits are allotted, and supposed to support the politic of aid to housing by a reflexion on the technical and social innovation in the building industry. The context is that of a criticism of hard industrialization, but the " Plan Construction " is consistent in the will to modernize, if through other forms, the sector of building industry and public works.

Among the various actions taken by this organization is the creation of the Programme d'Architecture Nouvelle (PAN), program for a new architecture, in 1972; it has later become the European in 1989. This is a competition held each year on a specific theme and, at least for European, on selected sites in various european countries. The jury selects a varying number of projects for which the Ministry of Construction and Development commits itself to help the realization with specific credit lines allotted to the client. Whereas only 41% of all award winning projects of the PAN have actually been realized over the 20 years of existence of this competition in its national form, the number of competitors is constantly rising, going from about 50 in the years 1972-1974, to around 120-150 from 1975 to 1989 and, as the competition progressively opens to various countries in Europe, to several hundreds and even more than one thousand. The impact of the

¹ It would be more correct to say that it is replaced, without its reputation, by the Grand Prix d'Architecture of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, created in 1975. The conditions of the competition which nominates three winners each year, after three tests, are directly modelled on the conditions of the Prix de Rome. The types of subjects given to the competitors (in 1977, an olympic town; in 1983, the Parliament in a democracy of 5 million residents ; in 1994, a French Embassy in the Middle-East) are also in the academic tradition.

competition and of the discussion that goes along over architects, the younger ones in particular, but also over part of the public commissioning is far from negligible.

Also aimed as a priority at young architects, the Architecture and Urban Planning Authority of the Ministry of Construction and Development has developed an initiative to promote young architects, via the Albums de la Jeune Architecture (AJA), albums of young architecture. The great difficulty that young practitioners face in trying to obtain commissions has been strongly felt by the ministerial institutions in charge of the supervision of the profession. Thus these Albums were created in 1980 and are meant to spread, among the main public and private clients, the work of architects having still little or no building experience, but who have been noticed in public competitions. The idea is to select about ten projects from the hundred or so addressed each year by competitors, and to edit 3000 copies of a brochure presenting the projects of the award winner (or winning team), in order to publicize it largely among the potential clients.

The Programme d'Architecture Nouvelle and the Albums de la Jeune Architecture both give their award winners a recognition of their work by the public institutions, possibly an easier access to clients, but only rarely the opportunity of a commission. In this, they are close to the various prizes and decorations awarded by the architectural critic, the professional organizations, the administrations or even some building companies and property developers. These competitions, generally taking place in the career of architects very early after graduation, endorse the status of a sort of post-graduate quality label given by the state. They are therefore by nature very different from the public architecture competitions, which consist in awarding architects missions of design and construction of the main public buildings.

In 1977, an Interministerial Mission for Quality of Public Buildings (MIQCP) is founded in charge of suggesting measures to increase the number of architects answering public commissions and check the architectural, social and technical quality of public buildings as well as their economical viability. In fact, public commissioning represents an important part of the building industry in France: 23% in 1989. But as French architects are poorly represented in several private sectors (and particularly the house industry), public commissioning is a major economical stake for architects: it made for 44.8% of their total annual revenue in 1983 and has constantly declined to reach 28.8% in 1990, to rise again to 37.1% in 1992². Coming mainly from

2 Data from the Conseil National de l'Ordre des Architectes (national professional organization of architects), Bulletin de conjoncture de l'Observatoire de l'Economie de l'Architecture n°2, juillet 1994.

public companies and from the state (for roughly one half and a third respectively), public commissioning also comes largely from local authorities since the decentralization laws of 1982 and 1985. These authorities have massively invested the field during the period where the mayors of major cities obtained a genuine role of economic and spatial managers of the city, thus giving way to several prestigious architectural politics (Biau, 1992).

The attribution of public commissions and the transparency in the choice of the designer have been subject to many reflexions from the administrative and professional organizations, thus leading to the law of 12 July 1985 on public commissioning and its relations to private clients. The law creates mandatory procedures to respect by the public sleeping partner concerning the choice of the architect. The conditions of this choice depend on the amount of fees generated by the contract : for projects leading to a contract of over 900 000F of fees (which corresponds to a building of approximately 40 appartments, or a small public facility), it is mandatory for the client to organize a competition. Thus, the procedure of competition has grown particularly in France going from 800 public architecture competitions held in 1988 to 1200 in 1992. As a comparison, we may note that while France organized 900 competitions in 1991, Germany and Spain did twice less, the U.K., Portugal or Denmark each held only 10 to 20 and many other countries like Italy or Sweden did not use the procedure at all (Brésard et Fradin, 1991). We will further discuss the direct and indirect repercussions of this new condition of attribution of commissions on the professional practice of architects.

We will consider, to end this picture of recent evolutions observable within the organizations dedicated to the promotion and critic of architecture, the opening on a national or regional scale of places for exhibition and documentation on architecture (Centre de Création Industrielle at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Institut Français d'Architecture, or Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris, Arc-en-Rêve in Bordeaux, etc.).

3. Progressive Establishment of a Channel of Excellence

In order to measure how these evolutions of the global structures for valuation and promotion of architectural " quality " affected the practitioners in their representation of the profession, and moreover, in their day-to-day business, we have led a qualitative enquiry made by semi-directive interviews on a sampling of about 20 french architects working in their own private practice (Biau, 1994). Although it is a small group, the sampling has made sure to take into account the main differences found in the particular professional group: young and less young, small and large practices, known and less known architects, oriented mainly towards public commissions or

towards private contracts, with offices in the Paris area or in the rest of the country.

The results of this study, presented to the enquired as a questioning on how they made their work known around themselves (with a voluntary frequency on our part of the type of interlocutors we were evoking), allow several observations which can be analysed in terms of individual positioning in reference to the following duality " do business, obtain contracts " (economic strategy)/ " make works of art, be recognized as a gifted architect (symbolic strategy). A certain number of publications have highlighted, in the artistic fields in particular, the existence of such a bipolarity (Moulin, 1992). In its actual functioning in France, architecture is by many ways susceptible of being understood with this model. We will here develop more specifically the strategies of positioning, on a symbolic level, for architects.

This study shows that in the representations as well as in the effective practices of architects, a model of canonical success is developing. This model places in its center the competition procedure, which leads to the great public commissions, and which, by this action is completely integrated to symbolic but also economic strategies.

In the upstream of the competition, a string of conditions is spread : thus, in order to be allowed to compete, one must be part of a preliminary selection made on a file of references. Which means that, depending on the subject of the competition or on a more standardized way, the architects make a presentation book of their firm and its realizations, or at least, the ones they want to promote to the organizers of the competition. The competition jury (with the client of the projected building as president , and as an obligation by law, made for one third of professionals,) therefore routinely examines 50 to 60 candidacy files and will retain only 4 or 5. These 4 or 5 will be invited to compete and will be paid to do so.

Considering the hard competition as well as the speed with which these files are necessarily examined, the architects used to the procedure try to maximize their chances. They have noted that it is important to first, present a clear, concise file in a moderately luxurious, original and attractive presentation. Also, they remark that it can be determining to personally know at least one member of the jury, and to be sure of that person's support in order to be identified among the many candidates. If this personal support lacks, it may be replaced by different forms of labels : a success at one of the label-competitions described hereabove (PAN, AJA) plays a considerable role to build a credibility to young architects who do not have many, or none, built realizations under their signature. In the same way, to have been reviewed in professional journals or exposed in exhibitions is a situation able to influence the jury : the interviewed architects explain that the architectural

critic, and therefore the recognition of a practitioner by his peers, is more uncompromising than a client's judgement and can thus force itself upon him. However, the general opinion in the studied sample is that clients don't read architecture journals and do not see exhibitions either : some of the studied architects insert the offprints or the lists of publications in the press book they present with their application.

The competition itself is a concentrate of symbolic strategies, insofar as it supposes at the phase of the first draft, or preliminary design, to produce an image (a " concept " as is more and more often said, borrowing the term to the advertisement vocabulary) which is strong, clear and defendable enough to gain the attention and ultimately the approval of the jury (Epron, 1983), and to be able to nuance the initial idea during the phase of detailed conception that comes after. The survey shows various cases for which the architects have asked some contribution, in the design, graphic representation or oral presentation, to experts exterior to architecture : advertisement people, historians, philosophers, plastic arts specialists, scenographers, etc. Their competences are required partly to improve the communications technique, but also to enrich the cultural dimension of the demonstration that goes with the project.

In the downstream of the competition, for the award winners, the symbolic profits are various and cumulative. First, it is clear that the architectural realizations dedicated to public clients receive a much larger interest in the professional journals than constructions made for private clients. The analysis of the four main French architectural journals (*Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *Techniques et Architecture*, *Architecture Modernité Continuité*, *Architecture d'Intérieure-Créé*), over the period 1969-1994, shows this. Except for the last title cited, more focused on commercial and office buildings and hotels in which 61% of the buildings presented are due to public commissions, the other journals publish approximately 80% of realizations made with public funds (79,84 and 85% respectively).

It is by the way worth noting that, moreover, the French editors of architecture, economically frail and careful to keep their readership by presenting first rate works, open their columns to a rather small number of designers and review their works in very different ways. Indeed, the 5654 articles presenting an architectural realization correspond to merely 1515 architects, with a ratio of number of articles per architect going from 1 article for 770 of them, to 104 articles for Jean Nouvel, five of his colleagues having each obtained more than 50.

The confirmation effect for names already out of anonymity isn't specific to publications; it also takes place in the competition process where, as the

built references and notoriety of practitioners rise, so do their chances, and at the same pace, of being selected for a later competition. Thus, a survey realized by the MIQCP, whose mission we have seen was to increase the group of architects with access to public commissions, shows the importance of this multiple selection : in the 261 competitions that the MIQCP supervised between 1985 and 1990, that is 646 design teams selected to compete, 109 teams (60%) were selected three times and more, 6 teams were selected between 10 and 14 times (Benilan, 1991).

On this crossed emulation of access to public commissions through publications and access to publications through realization of public commissions, come various other forms of recognition by the professional field: decorations and prizes of course, but also access to certain positions or duties such as professor, counsellor for the ministry in charge of architecture, member of a journal's publishing committee, etc.

4. The Strategy of the Competition Oriented Architect

According to our survey, it seems that this channel, articulating the different phases which have been created progressively during the last few years in the sphere of competition, is starting to become perceptible by architects, mostly the younger ones and particularly the parisians. This does not mean in any way that all (nor even the majority) the architects try to follow this canonical path, strongly managed by state organizations. The sample, which also counted some " businessmen-architects " and some " craftsmen-architects ", to use the wording of R. Moulin et al. (1973), and who would share a logic of the product rather than an affirmation of the work of art, allowed us to notice strategies of avoidance of this path. It may concern architects building for private property developers and who, for long periods of time in their career, have obtained commissions from a same (or small number) of client(s). In all cases however, appeared the wish to accede to public commissioning, either to broaden an orderbook which is weakened because of the crisis in the real estate business, or to get the long awaited opportunity to build an object susceptible to bring the peers' attention on oneself.

Renouncing attitudes are nonetheless the most common, in particular in the group of architects over 40 or 45 years old, who still haven't entered this world of competitions : without any references of programs similar to those of the buildings in competition (having not achieved any educational or health buildings for competitions concerning these subjects, for example), having generally no publication to join to their application, with a name that is no emblematic " signature " to the client, they are frequently left out of the pre-selections. Some of them manage consequently to reverse their system of

values, criticizing at the same time the unfairness and cheatings of competitions, the glazed paper architecture thus resulting... and the architecture journals who, instead of informing the practitioner of technical and judicial news useful to him, play the "star system" game.

We will develop here the establishment of conscious strategies of adaptation to the conditions of selection of this channel, as they can be observable in "competition architects". These architects represent rather precisely the type of "producer for producer" (Allégret et al., 1989) which is characterized by the attention he gives to the look that peers give to him, and also by his interest in the avant-garde and its lovers in all fields.

The "competition architects" (expression in which we count all architects who orient their efforts towards the access to public commissions, whether they are successful or not) are those whom we see develop important efforts of information and communication, and in certain cases completely rationalized, or even professionalized. A study of the library at their workplace shows the dominant presence of journals, monographies of contemporary architects, but also books on the current scene of plastic arts or even works on industries such as naval construction and aeronautics, to which architecture borrows today a certain number of techniques and formal references. In the same way, architects acknowledge regularly attending exhibitions (specially on opening nights!) and conferences. All of these practices participate in introducing them to "what is in fashion", both in a descriptive sense-the current productions-, and in a prescriptive one -what is good to do-.

For these architects, all the phases identified as crucial in the competition channel, upstream and downstream of these (knowing there is a high risk, even for a famous architect, to see oneself being progressively excluded of the competition system, due to the competition with younger names for example), are subject to more and more explicit attitudes.

The first stage, situated during scholarship, consists in choosing the professors and/or the schools best fitted into the system. Here we come across phenomena which have been analyzed at the time of the Prix de Rome and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and which give students of famous and award winning professors the best chances to later be famous and award winners themselves. The reproduction takes place along two paths: first, the teaching given at school by the architect familiar with the process of competitions encourages among students a certain form of learning of design, graphic representation and verbal argument; second, the professor himself frequently entering competitions for public architecture may happen to need temporary help (taking the form of "charrettes", namely handcarts, as the professional

jargon names them), thus asking his brightest students, and offering them at the same time a pre-professional experience in this specific exercise.

The second stage, which may blend with the first one, passes through a settling in Paris for the student architect or the newly licensed architect. Paris, and the Ile-de-France region count 37% of the french architects listed at the " *Ordre* ", the professional association of architects, but most important, the area groups the essentials of the architecture " *microcosm* ", the administrations, professional organizations, journals and institutions of the architectural critic, places of exhibitions and discussions.

A third stage could be that of the candidacy to what has been named " *label-competitions* " (*Programmes d'Architecture Nouvelle, Albums de la Jeune Architecture*) ; the access to these isn't subject to a pre-selection and may even be open only to architects who haven't had the opportunity to build yet. Young architects, and among them an important part of Parisians, enter these competitions, often making teams, and spend a considerable budget and amount of time on this task.

Concurrently to all this progression, the competition architect pays great attention to the professional press opinion that the architects whose works are presented in the journals and exhibitions are gifted architects, and the approval concerning the type of recognition at work naturally incites him to attempt to figure himself in this selection. In a more pragmatic way, it is also due to the fact, as we evoked hereabove, that publications are, at least for the public sector of architectural activity, positive elements in the *résumé*. The experienced competition architect knows the profit he can make out of these. It is shown through a very specific set of daily activities, to which the architect devotes time, a budget and organization efforts. There is, on the one hand, the regular presence at professional events such as the private views of exhibitions, conferences and fairs, visits of recent buildings or study trips organized for instance within para-professional associations, and the mobilization of personal networks in order to contact the main architectural critics. There is also the more or less systematic mailing of press records to the reading committees of the main professional journals on the occasion of a success at a competition, or the end of a work. This mailing is followed, in the firms best organized to put this strategy to work, by telephone calls to check for the actual publication, add further iconographic elements, or give precisions on the choices of design of the work. The survey has shown very remarkable methods of organization, considering the reputation of carelessness attached to french architects as for the management part of their activity. Thus, the architects wishing to be very much represented in competitions and publications organize minutely the keeping of records and the promotion of their works ; the drawings produced for the design and

construction of buildings, which cannot be published as they are, are carefully drawn again with the objective of selection of information, clarification of the formal choice and plastic quality of the graphic document. Texts to go with and present the projects are written and edited according to some standardized file formats ; photographs of the building (preferably taken before the handing to the users, and its " parasitizing " by these!) are made, if possible, by a professional photographer of architecture, and duplicates of all of these documents are produced, filed, possibly updated, in order to be immediately usable in case of a competition opening, or of a request from journalists. It is possible to see, in the firms with a large volume of commissions, these tasks done by a press attaché or a specialist in graphic and communication design. In the smaller firms, it is common to find a trainee student in charge of this work.

In the rare and relatively frail cases, where the process of reciprocal feeding of the public commissioning by reputation remains, the architect may get the feeling of crossing the threshold which gives him an " aura " and puts him more often in the situation of being in demand than being the one who appeals to clients. This is the time in an architect's path, where his reputation can grow, out of the professional sphere, towards the general public (reviews in the general press, television programs, ...). It is also during this period that he has the easiest opportunities to obtain teaching positions, consulting functions to major public and private clients, to be advising consultant for professional journals'editing committee, to be an expert on reflexion committees, on juries of competitions and prizes, etc.

These positions, these functions, when multiplied, draw in the person in charge of them, many questions on the redefinition of the person's professional role, and on the priorities it implies. Some will prefer to save their image of designer and a genuine control over the projects and buildings that are being carried on in their firm with their signature. Others will chose to use their new reputation to " help " architecture as a whole : this point is raised by the architects frequently expressing themselves in the media. They explain that they act in such a way in order to increase the architectural culture of their fellow citizens, which is the best guaranty for an overall quality of the built production. It is also to " avoid letting mistakes be made " that they participate in the juries of public architecture competitions, sometimes in uncomfortable positions.

As for us, we will remember that the outcome of this ascending path within the symbolic sphere of the field of architecture, reintroduces the individuals which stem from it to the influential positions at the main phases of this path. There is a lack of information elements on the effective role played by these elite architects on the organizations of symbolic power in

which they participate. It is therefore impossible today to analyze the share of reproduction and that of transformation which this circularity induces. But we are tempted to compare this process to the process of oligopoly as it has been described for the former periods...

Conclusion

This study, as specific as it may be, gives us a few harbingers of deep changes currently taking place in the symbolic stratification of the field of French architecture. As we have seen, these evolutions are situated at the crossroads of structural changes, on the one hand, related to the establishment of state or para-state organizations, in charge of the architectural "quality" and who in fact renew the processes of production of elites, and on the other hand, of new or more explicit individual strategies developed by practitioners to conquer the positions identified by them as the most enviable in the field.

We have focused here on the model of symbolic success, setting in the foreground the recognition by peers, and more generally, by clients, the spheres of construction and possibly the general public. However, there is also, not completely independent from the previous, a model of economic success which is valued through the turnover and the amount of commissions negotiated.

Still pending is the question of the relative legitimacy, in architects' eyes, of the economic success versus the symbolic success. Now, as has been noted in various artistic productions, there is apparently in architecture a certain antagonism between these two "markets": many architects, with a considerable production, are unknown of the specialists of the current scene and critic of architecture. On the other hand, well known architects with frequent reviews in the professional journals and exhibitions, maybe even award winners of prestigious prizes, may happen to experience critical economic situations. We are thinking of Pierre Bourdieu's expression of "reversed economic worlds" (1992, p.210), that he affects to the fields of cultural production when analyzing the relations created between economic capital and symbolic capital: "the 'economic' capital cannot ensure the specific profits offered by the field- and at the same time the economic profits which they will often bring ultimately- unless it changes into symbolic capital. The only legitimate accumulation (...) consists in making oneself a name, a known and recognizable name, which creates a consecration capital implying the power to consecrate objects (it is called the stamp or signature effect) or people (through publication, exhibition, etc.), thus giving value and securing profits to this operation."

We can see through the case developed here, how this "interest in selflessness" can express itself in practices as organized as those used in

marketing, and by certain points comparable to these. It is interesting to note that, in justifying their action, practitioners call for largely contradictory types of rationalities (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991), whose articulation with the professional ethics of architecture as a private practice is rather subtle: reference to the artist's spontaneity and independence, but also valorization of an expertise in communication and self-promotion, for all that these are dedicated to architectural "quality".

Translated from French by Emmanuelle Guedj, architecte d.p.l.g.

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Abstract

For French architects, the two last decades have been a time of harder competition to get contracts. In the same time, a very codified system for the attribution of public commissions, which represent a very significant part (economically but symbolically too) of architects' professional activity has been settled. So, a lot of practitioners have progressively been involved in always more explicit and organized ways of presenting themselves to the public. The paper will point out the strategies of accumulation of references, distinctions and publications which are needed to get into the french system of public architectural competitions. It will try, by this approach, to contribute to analyse the dynamical dimension of the french architectural production 'field'.

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