

This general point is certainly relevant to the form-generation process in particular, as the architect Vittorio Magnano Lampugnani points out:

*The public client is almost without exception an abstract entity, a vacuous and vague sort of bureaucratic figment. And the private client, who at least puts in an appearance – usually – in flesh and blood, is not capable of expressing precise, concrete and unequivocal demands.*¹³

The sociologist Robert Gutman also supports the view that many patrons cannot specify what they want with any certainty:

*I have spoken with architects for several of the universities involved in major building projects here [Britain] and in America, and they are agreed that the task of developing university briefs was difficult but also fascinating and exciting. It was difficult because no one involved in the clients' organization – not the vice-chancellor or president, not the building committee, the department heads and professors – no one was able to articulate for them in any easy fashion their objectives except in the most vague terms.*¹⁴

Admittedly this was written back in the 1970s, but more recent opinion confirms the same view. Bernard Tschumi – who, as an eminent practising architect, should be in a position to know from first-hand experience – tells us that 'in our contemporary society, programs are inherently unstable.'¹⁵ As he sees it, 'Few can decide what a school or a library should be or how electronic it should be, and perhaps fewer can agree on what a park in the twenty first century should consist of.'¹⁶ This inherent vagueness gives any expert actor a degree of autonomy, which can be enhanced by drawing on the power of inner resources such as initiative, determination or moral commitment, rather than merely relying on access to external sources of economic or political power. When we start focusing on such potentials, however, we have moved outside the limits of the market problematic. We now find ourselves in a place which resembles a battlefield rather than the friendly bustle of a marketplace. How far can this 'battlefield' problematic offer us further insights into how form-production works? In particular, how far can it help us understand the scope for using the relative autonomy of particular actors to outwit the big battalions?

A particularly adroit example of how to play a weak hand with consummate skill is given by the

architect Zaha Hadid, designing a housing project for the IBA organisation in Berlin. Here, Hadid has been asked to design a three-storey building, but she does not want to do so:

*I always made faces and frowned, so they said mine could be five storeys. So I asked was that an average? I spoke no German, which is a good thing sometimes. I don't speak Japanese or German, so I can always pretend that I don't understand what they are saying. They always say we didn't understand what you asked us so the contract is wrong, and so on. So I played the same game. I asked was it an average of five storeys? And they said yes. After many trials and errors we had two buildings . . . one is eight storeys high and one is three, averaging out five and a half. So I had half a story [sic] to bargain for. Again that was crazy, but I said you did tell me in writing it was an average of five and that was that, as far as I was concerned.*¹⁷

In this situation, Hadid has very little obvious power in the 'master and servant' sense, yet she has achieved more or less what she wanted, through an adroitly handled process of negotiation. If, as relatively powerless people, we want to maximise the impact we can make on urban form, there is much we can learn from this. Let us analyse the situation in more detail, to see if we can get a clearer understanding of how she did it.

First, she has what Shoukry Roweis¹⁸ calls 'knowledge power': she knows things the others do not, and the others need that knowledge. She has something they want, which gives her an initial bargaining position. Second, the strength of this position is enhanced by the fact that Zaha Hadid has a considerable international reputation in the world of avant-garde architecture. This endows her with what the French social anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital';¹⁹ which, no doubt, is amongst the reasons why she was hired in the first place. The logic of their own commissioning decision implies that the people who hired her *must* respect what she says and does. Third, the division of labour in the modern form-production process is organised in such a way that it is usually only 'designers', such as architects, who make proposals for physical designs, except in the most general terms. As an architect, this gives Zaha Hadid a crucial element of initiative, so far as physical form is proposed. It is her proposal, once made, which sets the agenda for the subsequent process of negotiation about form. Taken together,