

(3) On these terms, and as an example, it should be said that, unlike the postmodernists, Le Corbusier and Borchers never wrote essays: they were totally convinced – each one in his own way – that through their writings they expressed something immensely superior to the contingent fact of their respective individual existences, whether it was the universal-mathematical *soma* of the *Modulor* or “*Lo Plástico*” (“The plastic”). On the contrary, and at a distance from a subsidiary representational role to some transcendental idea, the fiction character and not the “representation” of not-classical architecture is precisely what takes Eisenman to privilege the signifiers over the signified, in sum, the means over the ends. This is, certainly, the key for a whole new notion of projectuality, one that tends to recognize its authentic domicile only and mainly in the problems of design.

(4) As it is well known, the traditional Marxist definition of the concept of ideology can be reduced to the formula “they do not know it, but they do it”. As Sloterdijk states, in a world where we are increasingly more aware of the inevitable mediated character of reality, the possibility of being submitted by the lack of awareness is quite restricted. For a praxis in which the subjects would no longer be oriented by any illusion, Sloterdijk reserves the concept of “cynical consciousness” that, in our terms, would be the position of the ironist. Paraphrasing the old Marxist definition mentioned above, which adjusts itself more fully to our post-ideological era, it can be resumed in the axiom “they know what they do and they do it” (Sloterdijk, 2007). Nevertheless, there is a third alternative that modifies the previous motto, replacing the ideological condition of its own cynical attitude. In fact, it is the one that Zizek proposes and that questions the seeming lucidity of the ironist, precisely, for ideological: “What they do not know is that their social reality, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishist inversion (...) they know very well how things are, but even so, they do as if they did not” (Zizek, 2009, p. 61).

(5) In this sense, the State funds work not for the rhetoric of the architects but for the efficiency that the project might provide for the fulfillment of its interests although the symbolic weight of the authorial prestige might be, in this case, very attractive to increase national pride.

(6) The university’s public character lies on the unconditional nature of the discursive space that characterizes it. In fact, without this quality it cannot enjoy such status. It seems nowadays extremely simple and imprudent to identify public with State, above all taking into consideration the role that the State begins to play in the promotion of what is private under the neoliberal order. Likewise, in order to maintain its modern sense it is not enough to demand from the national government more resources for the university; it is also necessary, and urgent, to deprivatize its discursive space and promote its autonomy. Cf. Derrida, 2010.

Architecture, playing and vanishing

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“How do you know life? We think that as we see it through space, going around the city. It is not known inside the classroom.”

Alberto Cruz, Improvisación, 1959

ABSTRACT

In this essay I will focus on an exceptional group of architects and poets who have explored vanishing as a form of action, by means of grandiloquent geo-poetic expeditions through more or less vast American territories, for over sixty years. I will try to imagine the formulation of an aesthetics of invisibility in which active vanishing⁽¹⁾ operates like an emancipatory practice as a ludic proposal that challenges real sociopolitical and economic hierarchies and promotes new horizons for collective living. Even though when referring to the Escuela de Valparaíso, it might be more appropriate to think in terms not of aesthetics, but of poetics – in the sense of poiesis – whose radicality is in its concept of an architecture of living together, based on opening, risking

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and daring to expose one another, sometimes even to the extreme of vanishing.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE POETRY OF ACTION

In the middle of the last century, there was a rumor going around in reduced circles: there was a small group of poets, who were architects, for whom architecture consisted in the very experience of going around the city. One of the most visible members of this group of architect-poets of action was Alberto Cruz, then a young professor who became known at the beginning of the 1950s when he irritated a considerable number of parents of his architecture students at the Universidad Católica de Santiago, to whom he had communicated this idea that architecture was not learned in a classroom but knowing the city intimately. Alarmed, when they heard that a professor was encouraging their children to wander about the city and experience urban life, they demanded that the rector dismissed him. At that time, wandering about the city was done only by people who were poor and had a bad reputation, “people who are people”, a group to which architecture students then were supposed to belong, should visit (and not wander about) only the places delimited for that purpose. In spite of the scandal, in 1952 the polemical professor was invited to join the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso to relaunch the School of

Architecture. Cruz's reply was "either all of us or nothing", meaning the collective with which he had been doing architecture and poetry excursions in Santiago, a condition that was accepted by the university. That same year he moved to Valparaíso together with the small group of poet-architects⁽²⁾. Thus, the group left behind the urban design of Santiago based on the Spanish checkerboard, a perfect graticule where getting lost required a big effort, to begin a new collective life in the port of Valparaíso, with a dramatically different urban grid to that of the capital city⁽³⁾.

The new institute of architecture founded by the group conceived the port as a territory for ludic and (self) teaching experimentation. There, away from the "sources" of modernism in fashion, the city became a laboratory for their poetic actions that conceived architecture as the only way to live (and learn). In 1959, Alberto Cruz confirmed the position of the institute that architecture must necessarily be learnt collectively, leaving the classrooms and "going about the city, submitting oneself to its intimate life" (Cruz, 2010). Likewise, he said how this became an educational principle and described how the first year workshop students received a small photograph of a façade together with a simple instruction: find the house. Thus, they assumed that in order to trigger this encounter with the intimacy of the city, they needed to immerse themselves into it. The professors also exposed themselves to the port, they constantly went out taking long walks and doing poetic actions in public spaces – bridges, squares, beaches and woods –; actions that they would later call "phalènes". A phalène is a particular

kind of poetic action that, with a certain similarity to surrealist wandering, expands the field of poetic writing into the space, but differs from wandering as it is a concrete intervention here and now (and not in the oniric or unconscious world, in that sense, it is an "anti-dream"). The phalène, rather than liberating poetry from the field of literature, tries to unfold the action that gives place to the poetic game (so it is also an "anti-theatre")⁽⁴⁾. Knowing whether a poetic action manages to become a phalène implies that it might be able to stimulate participation, involving passers-by who have been interrupted by the action. The phalène has no script and it is open to the indeterminate result of the collective. The phalène bursts into space to transform it by means of the ludic game of poetry in action and is, therefore, an architectural action: it transforms the way of being, the way of inhabiting a particular time-space. For the Valparaíso group, it constitutes a way of intervening, participating in and transforming public life; for the group, all public life consists in "actions that are undone as they are being done" (Iommi, n.d.).

It was from the experience of their poetic actions that the group developed its constructive and projective "en ronda" ("in a round") methodology. They faced an architectural commitment as they faced the city, the job (and the site itself) is conceived as an exploration laboratory. Ideally, they built in stages, projecting a corner of the site only, to then grow about the site in an organic way in a process in which everybody participated, taking decisions by means of a trial and error system in situ: the project was defined during the work process, which naturally complicated the jobs to a certain extent⁽⁵⁾.

In the phalène what matters is experience, inhabiting the action, that is why there is no interest in documentation or recording (there are, though, photographs of the event, such as snapshots from a family album or field notes like log books), but rather experiences that mark the collective group and, therefore, they become the working methodology. These marks are susceptible of being revived and constitute a practical and poetic experience that is activated at the moment of carrying out a joint project. The project, the process and the experimentation are the work. It is as if, for the Escuela de Valparaíso, every project was a journey.

VOYAGE

In 1965, a group of architects, poets, philosophers and sculptors, self-proclaimed "Delegación Universitaria" (University Delegation) – in representation of the Escuela de Valparaíso – embarked in a new expedition, now about the live cartography of the South American continent⁽⁶⁾. In a "geo-poetic" journey that they called "Travesía" ("Voyage") they go to Tierra del Fuego, then to cross the Pampas, bound for the city that the group had declared poetic capital of America: Santa Cruz de la Sierra, on the frontier of the Amazon basin. The Voyage, in 1965, intends to refound America poetically through the experience of their expedition itself, in order to find, in that way, its own language, that will appear and reveal a new word: Amereida, an Eneida for America. The group stood out in every place they visited, above all because of the extravagant appearance of Godofredo Iommi (a half bald man, well nourished, that on poetically demanding

occasions took off his trousers, wearing, from the waist down, unmistakable and tight-fitting red stockings, a form of attire he used to call his “poet suit”).

Along the route, the group left signals linked to the performance of various poetic acts, more or less ephemeral, but always full of spontaneity and improvisation. The first “document” of the Voyage (and of the Escuela as such) is Amereida, a collective poem published in 1967, in whose last page – almost blank – a solitary phrase states in a sort of poetic-educational axiom, that “The way is not the way” (Various authors, 1967). On return, having officially founded the school with that “geo-poetic expedition around the American continent”, which appeared in the local newspapers, the Escuela de Valparaíso entered its most public stage and its way of doing politics coincided with what was happening in the regional context. In 1967, after a few arguments with local authorities, on the anniversary of the beginning of the movement of university reform in Córdoba (1918), the school made their “Manifesto of the 15th of June 1967” known to the public. The manifesto opens with the following words: “A wave of cowardice covers our America. Cowardice that hides us either in the frustration or in the inferiority complex or in the desperation of violence” (E[AD], PUCV, 1968). A complaint about which the group itself seemed to respond themselves with the authority granted by the experience of the Voyage: “(...) our America existed, exists and bursts in, inviting us relentlessly to have courage. Courage to open ourselves to its reality, courage


to accept its history and measures, courage to conform to the risk and adventure of being what we can be” (E[AD], PUCV, 1968). They finish their manifesto declaring:

“(…) the Direction of our center of studies is headless and we propose its restructure, so that, for example, housing, society, history and urban planning in Latin America can be seen with our own eyes; the desert and the deserts like the forests, the floras and the faunas and the large American rivers, the Patagonias and their mountains, may be visible in the contemplation or free study and may be in the near future (...) live subject matter of our universities, so that, and in no other way, the university can accomplish its objective in the society of its men” (E[AD], PUCV, 1968)⁽⁷⁾.

In 1969, the school again makes the headlines because of its strong opposition to a road project of the Ministry of Public Works, an elevated way that would run along the coastal border and would connect Valparaíso with the Argentinian city of Mendoza, considered the star project of the current government. The school reacted with an initiative or a counter-project in which students and professors participated, based on which they built a huge scale model of the city. Their proposal, unlike the Ministry’s project, wanted to recognize and respect the condition of Valparaíso as seashore (something that acquires more relevance if we take into consideration the fact that geographically, the whole of Chile is nothing but a long seashore)⁽⁸⁾. The school held an exhibition of the project with the exuberant model as a protagonist which threatened with

coming alive, overflowing the exhibition hall, climbing up the roof and literally escaping through the windows (an imaginary city self-proclaimed as a possible utopia and as such, threatening to grow and replace the real city). The President of the Republic at the time, Mr. Eduardo Frei Montalva, was invited to the inauguration. As a result of the project of the Escuela de Valparaíso, one of the largest demonstrations of the time took place at the port, in which a big crowd walked in mournful silence through the coastal streets whose life would be outraged by the project of the mega-highway. After the silent march that appeared on the front page of the newspaper as “Architecture protest” (Anonymous, 1969), the President could not but go to Valparaíso and attend the protest-inauguration of the sculpture-model. Like the majority of projects “professionally” identifiable as architectural projects of the school, the proposal for the alternative to the elevated way was not built.

Along its history, the school was regarded with perspicacity from various fronts, due to its strange attire, its interruptions to city life, and, above all, its stubborn persistence in the architectural relevance of poetry, since it was considered that taking seriously “absurd phrases of adolescent poets who wrote on boats when drunk” was not compatible with the profession⁽⁹⁾. However, what upset their detractors most was the obstinacy to call all of that – Travesías, phalènes and poetic acts – architecture, in spite of the evident fact that they hardly built anything (and when they did, according to the neighbours, the buildings inevitably looked crooked and unstable)⁽¹⁰⁾. That huge

invisible architecture body resulted, even in the convulsed 1960s and 1970s, an incomprehensible heterodoxy. The Escuela de Valparaíso had (and still has) the courage to expose itself constantly to the risk and experimental chaos of the collective. The policy of its architecture consists in its ludic mood, open to improvisation, maintaining that strong – somewhat delirious – belief with irreverence, and some stubbornness, that the world must and can be changed. 

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NOTES

(1) “Active vanishings” is a concept proposed by Peggy Phelan, which she defines as “the deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility” (Phelan, 1997, page 19).

(2) Godofredo Iommi, Francisco Méndez, Miguel Eyquem, Fabio Cruz, José Vial y Jaime Bellalta. A few years later, the Argentine sculptor Claudio Girola joined the group.

(3) That city may be recognized in the short documentary “A Valparaíso” (1962) done by Joris Ivens, with a script by Chris Marker, together with his students, when both of them travelled to teach at Universidad de Chile.

(4) For the phalène, see: Iommi, 1963.

(5) The first works built by the group were almost exclusively for members of their extended families, one of the first ones was Casa Cruz, 1958-1960.

(6) Participants in the journey were: Jonathan Boulting, Alberto Cruz, Fabio Cruz, Michel Deguy, François Fédiér, Claudio Girola, Godofredo Iommi, Jorge Pérez Román, Edison Simmons and Henri Tronquoy.

(7) The manifesto, which appeared published the following day in the main newspaper of the port, concludes announcing the beginning of the taking of the school “by common agreement” by professors and students, thus starting the process of university reform that soon would take place at national level.

(8) The solutions proposed by the school to the problems of connectivity included the building of an exclusive way for pedestrians and bicycles, besides an exclusive way for automobiles that wanted to drive along the coast. Thus, the people with or without a car could observe peacefully – for example – a sunset on the sea. There would also be another highway, away from the coast, that would take transport lorries and “functional” cars, whose purpose was just getting from one place to another.

(9) This phrase is attributed to Sergio Larrain García-Moreno, the former Dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago. It referred to the fact that the architects of Valparaíso liked Rimbaud’s poetry. I owe this anecdote – which probably took place at the beginning of the 1960s at a meeting at the National Museum of Fine Arts – to the poet and open citizen Carlos Covarrubias.

(10) It is well known that some neighbours of the now nonexistent Casa Cruz (1958-1961), located in the then upper borough of Santiago, Las Condes, complained to the Municipality about the appearance of the building. Apparently some even wanted it to be demolished.

De/Re-Construct

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ABSTRACT:

In the context of 55th Venice Art Biennale, Jasmina Cibic transformed the interior of the Slovenian pavilion in a series of “wallpapered” ambiances in which she exhibited still lifes from the Parliament’s art collection and two videos. She used architecture as program of her work by carefully selecting ideologically charged architectures as settings for her videos, by drawing the content of videos on architectural research and by using the architecture of the pavilion as an orientation device that guides the viewer and allows him/her to construct new perspectives on art and architecture. The article attempts to situate Cibic’s work through questioning the meaning of the setting in the context of today’s eroding ideological boundaries and shows how using architecture as program of a space installation may elucidate the context of art.

THE PAVILION

Production of art and architecture put on display at Venice Biennale remains to a large extent organized according to the categories of nation states. The gallery