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Architectural Research Quarterly / Volume 16 / Issue 04 / December 2012, pp 325 - 337

DOI: 10.1017/S1359135513000213, Published online: 09 July 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1359135513000213

How to cite this article:

Mary Ann Steane, David Jolly Monge and Marcelo Araya Aravena (2012). The origins of city: Paseo. *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 16, pp 325-337 doi:10.1017/S1359135513000213

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From the lessons of Paseo – an Anglo-Chilean installation in Cambridge, UK – the recent prominence of collaboration in the architectural curriculum is illustrated and examined.

The origins of city: Paseo

Mary Ann Steane, David Jolly Monge and Marcelo Araya Aravena

It was neither with music or an acoustic, but with a sense of origin that we wanted to build the work. A work that seeks, is still in the seeking, in search of establishing a road.¹

In colonising capitalist topography, urban transformation ranges between massive infrastructure, architectural intervention and slum amelioration. Carried out in accordance with professional codes, it proceeds from the general to the particular, organised as contract phases, i.e. from site to planning to construction details. When researching the city, architectural studios typically present two complementary forms of site interpretation: data, statistics, graphs, diagrams, maps, on the one hand, and more 'poetic' sketches, photos, videos, installations, *dérives*, on the other. Obviously – reflecting the split between the sciences and humanities – how the two styles of thought relate to each other is usually left to the architectural or urban response and leads to a situation in which designers struggle to engage with the question of civic life, the purpose of city. The design practice adopted by the School of Architecture and Design at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV) starts instead from the particular. Critically, context is not assumed but is discovered through the making of architecture. Emphasising the architectonic act rather than the architectonic artefact, their work at the Open City – an ongoing project – signals a shift in the ambitions and priorities of architectural education. This argument

concerns architectural practice as collaboration, not only as an example of the types of practice which reach beyond production of form-and-space, but as a vehicle for proper insights into the nature of city.

Paseo – an installation/event that took place in Cambridge, UK, in September 2010² – was an example of such shared endeavour staged by university teaching colleagues from England and Chile. A bringing together of English curtains and Chilean tables, it stimulates the following discussion concerning the preconditions for, and implications of, architectural collaboration. Paying close attention to how design *takes place*, this argument is informed by the alternative perspectives on the role of improvisation in creativity provided by Umberto Eco's 1962 essay, *The Poetics of the Open Work*,³ and recent arguments by social anthropologists Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold.

A Cambridge paseo

In Spanish towns and cities the *paseo* is the evening event in which citizens acknowledge their solidarity by strolling round their neighbourhood, meeting and greeting their friends and relations. A *paseo* is literally a 'parade' or 'walk' and *dar un paseo* translates as 'to take a stroll'.⁴ In the Cambridge Paseo the curtains that depict a procession of townspeople, with their typical relations, stories and myths, establish the horizon for a possible city evoked by the models of Open City architecture carried by the tables. Constructed from multiple layers of fabric, the



1a



1b

- 1 a Composite image of Paseo in the small hall of the Cambridge Guildhall, looking south
b Location of small hall in Cambridge city centre. The Guildhall lies to the south of the Market Square

curtains occupy the walls making a corner, while the tables occupy the centre of a public room whose availability for hire makes it part of the civic common ground of Cambridge [1-4, 22].

The (vertical) curtains and (horizontal) tables are minimum constituents of a room which stages the event. However, the customary relation between horizon and dramatic life has been inverted; the life-size people are the horizon and the urban setting comprises the furniture of the tables/models. Moreover, what is customarily movement – a *paseo* is



a parade of life marked by finitude in history – is still. And what is customarily still – the urban context – is here movable. The relationship between Cambridge and the Open City is treated as a dialogue/ collaboration of not only cities, but continents, in which the dilemmas and opportunities of place-making and place-finding are at issue. Furthermore, a less evident inversion, this time from customary design practice, is also in play. Instead of deriving the architecture from poetics and data, the collaboration creates a situation of improvisation, in which the contexts for the work are not given but revealed through making. The lessons concerning understanding of city enabled by these references and inversions prompt the following discussion of ‘openness’ and its enactment in design.

Open work: collaborative improvisation as ‘work in progress’

Eco distinguishes between the concept within aesthetic theory that every text is more or less open in having any number of interpretations depending on the reader’s background and experience, and his more specific concept of the open work. According to Eco, an open work – in music, art or literature – is one which admits ambiguity (plurivocality) by deliberately supporting or requiring a multiplicity of readings and, while having historic antecedents, is a characteristically modern phenomenon.

Importantly, in his related discussion of ‘work in movement’, a sub-category of open work, he shows that the demands of ambiguity characterise the forms in which they are embodied, as they illuminate what ‘openness’ means for different disciplines. Thus while open work may serve to illustrate the transient nature of any model or standard,⁵ it is the fact that such openness represents an invitation to collaborate, the active engagement of the performance/audience, that deserves emphasis here. Citing musical compositions



from the 1950s by Berio, Stockhausen, Pousseur and Boulez, whose tangible 'openness' leaves them literally 'unfinished', he discusses how such works compose a kit of parts from which the performer must choose. In such work, as in jazz, the performer is not just free to interpret but is asked to impose his or her own judgement in shaping the outcome, as when deciding the order or length of the notes. Essentially, he argues that planned inexhaustibility – a multiplication of the formal possibilities through which the elements may be distributed – leaves work of this kind forever 'in progress'. Moreover, in revealing its field of possibilities, improvisation becomes a necessary corollary of openness. Similarly, in underlining the techniques used by Brecht to encourage his audience to decide the message of his dramatic work (ambiguous endings, a dispassionate framing of the points of tension through epic recitation), Brecht's plays are said to share the openness of debate. Mallarmé's poetry, on the other hand, offers Eco the opportunity to reflect on the conscious desire of the author not to force a single interpretation, but to elicit from the reader a more nuanced response to the subtler implications of the text. Here it is artfully indeterminate typography, the carefully composed interplay of words and blank page, which aims 'to make the text pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities'.⁶ Finally, Eco does not feel the need to explain his reference to Calder's mobiles as 'work in movement', but in fact the deployment of allusive fragment and collage by other visual artists is stronger evidence for the involvement of Modernism with open work.⁷

Social anthropology seeks to illuminate collective forms of human experience and highlights the significance of improvisation for all social life, as well as for many traditional art-forms, in the process. By outlining the supra-personal interactions involved in adjusting to a world in formation, social life – like

creative play generally – is revealed to be 'not something the person does but rather what the person undergoes'.⁸ The collaborative improvisation it requires manifests creativity 'through the dynamic potential of an entire field of relationships to bring forth the persons situated within it'.⁹ Establishing rapport, acting and reacting in mutually responsive ways, requires agreement between participants,¹⁰ and supports the idea that creativity is an ongoing event rather than a completed product. This is important, because it gives critical focus to the limitations – typical of Modernism – in equating creativity with distinctive change and the individuals who set it in motion. Seen from the anthropological perspective, creativity is not the production of novelty by individual genius, but something ongoing – work-in-progress – and collective.¹¹ It is worth adding that while Modernism typically lambasts the inertia of tradition, dismissing the type of improvisation it generates as the mere reworking of convention, i.e. the work of scribes rather than artists, this picture no longer holds when creativity is treated as a social and cultural process. Rather, communities and traditions must be forged together to remain relevant, and the possibility of co-narrating art work in the contested construction of its site, allows a telling – and recognisable – synthesis to emerge. Indeed, arguably, it is collaborative improvisation of this kind which itself fosters resonant innovation in the renewal of tradition.¹²

Collaborative improvisation: enacting poetry at the Open City

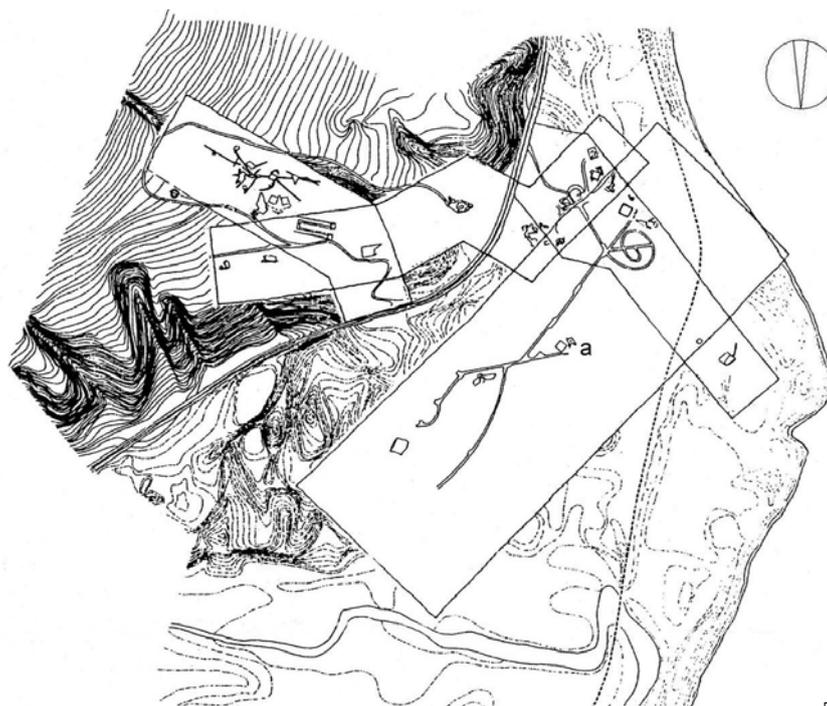
The primary inspiration for the Cambridge collaboration was the Open City (*La Ciudad Abierta*), a project whose philosophical foundations were laid by a group of young designers led by the architect Alberto Cruz and the poet Godofredo Iommi in the post-war period [5]. Their arrival at the Valparaíso

2 View across floating surface of the tables, looking east

3 Collaboration in action. Debates during the hanging/installation of Paseo

4 The tables rearranged in a line down the centre of the hall

5 Map of the 'Open City'. The area between the coastal highway and the sea is constantly exposed to the roar of the Pacific breakers. On the plateau above, a road winds between individual dwellings, leading towards the leafy gully where the cemetery, church and amphitheatre are located. The public meeting room known as the Sala de Música (a) stands among the dunes at the western edge of the settlement



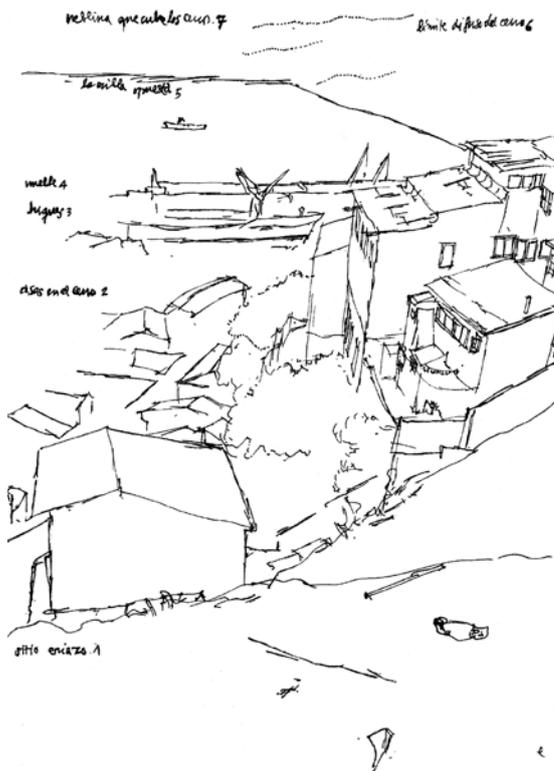
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6 Typical street view in Valparaíso, a city largely built on the steep hillsides overlooking the port. PUCV design students are encouraged to develop strong observational sketching skills by analysing how its citizens inhabit this challenging topography

7 David Jolly, *Profundidad*, a 'Valparaíso School' sketch of a local coastal scene, 2010

8 Open air lesson at the Open City beside the Torres del Agua

9 Although most work at the Open City has been constructed by groups of teachers, students also get the opportunity to build together, here engaging in debate near the Hospedería Rosa de los Vientos

School in 1951 instigated an alternative approach to the teaching of design whose emphasis on observational drawing and learning through making sought to relate poetry to architecture [6-9]. A series of live collaborative projects elsewhere in Chile preceded the foundation of the Open City in 1971. This settlement, which lies twelve miles to the north of the metropolitan area of Valparaíso/Viña del Mar at Punta de Piedra, constitutes both an open-air workshop and a city-in-the-making. Its deliberate divorce from the market forces to which professional practice must respond has encouraged design issues to be rethought and new building practices to emerge. This co-operative praxis is informed by the words of *Amereida*, a narrative of foundation whose layout and lack of punctuation echoes that of

Surrealists and the Situationists, provides the initial catalyst for each project [13–15]. Requiring participants to enact a collective journey to a site, a poetry of place, ‘originary words’, foster insights on, and thus a carefully judged response to, its specific conditions.¹⁵ Significantly, Iommi’s term for this poetic genre, *poesía del ha lugar*, is both a play on a key phrase – ‘rien [...] n’aura eu lieu [...] que le lieu’, ‘nothing [...] will have taken place [...] but the place’ from Mallarmé’s ‘Un coup de dés ...’ and a play on the Spanish juridical usage of *hay lugar*, ‘to be admissible’. Poetry that ‘takes place’ is poetry that is valid, as when a judge in a court of law says an objection to an argument is, or is not, admissible, does or does not have its place.

Beyond a dual emphasis on site and issues of human occupation, the builders of the Open City have also examined how identity and locatedness are

constructed in a wider sense. ‘*Travesías*’, student study trips within South America which constitute further exercises in collaborative construction, reflect this emphasis on the potentially life-changing lessons of exploration that the letters of earlier travellers across the continent like Darwin reveal [13, 16].¹⁶ Epitomised by the thesis set out in *Amereida*, that for those in the southern hemisphere ‘south is our north’, this effort to recover orientation in a cultural milieu marked at its origin by immigration has been as important to the Valparaíso School as the advocacy of a local culture, its materials and practical arts, against globalised technological processes. The work produced on these journeys is typically ephemeral as it must constitute a gift rather than an imposition, and as at the Open City, its stimulus is a matter of participants ‘making the land speak to them’.¹⁷



13a

13 Valparaíso poetic acts
 a Dressed in tights, Godofredo Iommi staged *phalènes* in European cities in the 1960s. Here he performs in central London
 b The first *travesía* took place in 1965. Beginning at Cape Horn, the *Amereida travesía* aimed to explore the extent of South America en route to its poetic

centre at Santa Cruz de la Sierra in Bolivia, but was cut short by Che Guevara’s revolutionary activities.
 c Poetic Act, Open City, October 2006. These festive events are annual student design competitions which typically involve the construction of equipment for a game or race



13b



13c



14



15

14 'The act of reception for the first year students at the Valparaíso School in the middle of the great dune in the Open City. The poet calls them by name one by one and delivers to each an object-present extracted from beneath the sand. This object contains breakfast. It is the act of receiving, where each person, an equal among many, is initiated in an occupation. The action and words are a version of those used when receiving guests. At this

moment each person sets off with a discourse and action that will distinguish them from their peers. This event is a time granted on the sands, a time and expanse hollowed out to receive the elemental plenitude of word and action we recognize as openness.' David Jolly, *Acto recepción*, sketch and its accompanying *observación*, April 2010

15 Poetry reading in the Sala de Música at the Open City. An enigmatic response to the local acoustic

and visual conditions, this building was constructed in 1971. As the community's major public reception room, it offers a stage not only for musical performance but a range of other communal events

16 *Travesía to Cuiaba (1994)*. This journey to the watershed between the Amazon and Panama Rivers led to the construction of a place in which to take in, and potentially to draw, the extensive view

Poetry and the white page

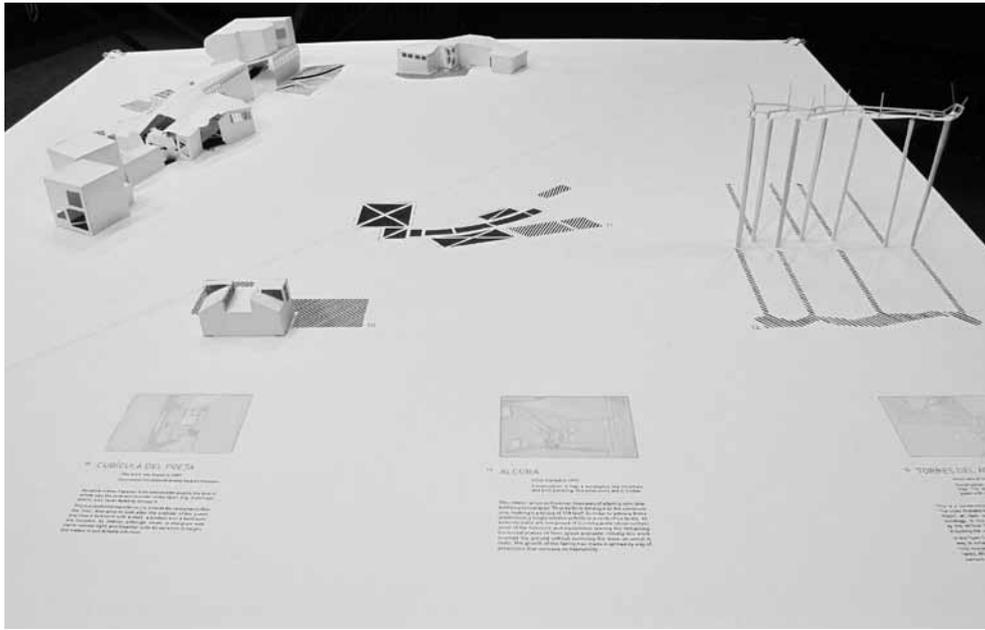
However hopeful design may be, it is presently also fraught with categories like 'space' which tend to flatten the concrete conditions of political and social life. There is a tendency, as cities become ever larger 'global' or 'world' entities, to see them in terms of infrastructure and statistical trends, as if ever greater abstraction could keep the city within the protocols of technological management. Here the focus on the poetic moment preserves, as far as is possible under such conditions, the content or meaning of city – as the centre of speculation. The whiteness of the tables derives from the whiteness of Mallarmé's work, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.¹⁸ Here whiteness establishes a gulf in which both the end (a shipwreck) and the possible renewal of poetry occurs, and which is one of the earliest manifestations of Modernist 'space'.¹⁹ As Mallarmé realised, this white page harbours danger and even death, as well as possibilities for creativity and renewal. Thus, when such a page becomes the maps of colonial powers in *Amerieida*, whole continents are placed under the spell of planning, and its tension between death and renewal, while Mallarmé's gulf becomes the oceans in which these continents sit [8].

For the poetic tradition which lies behind the Valparaíso School, the very earth of South America is made sterile by colonial inhabitation, and is therefore appropriately marked by the death harboured by Mallarmé's gulf.²⁰ Under these conditions, even a *paseo* reflects the practices of the powers of colonial exploitation, and the type of city imposed by the colonial powers is also sterile. All human movement is thus cast into a domain of wandering, hoping – a navigation that always sees behind the quest for knowledge of travellers like Darwin the precondition for eventual exploitation and instrumentalisation. We are in the ever-deferred eschatology of Enlightenment 'progress'.

'Mapping' has become another motif of contemporary design practice, and the poetic procedures by which this is often accomplished (indebted to the Situationist *dérive*) generally strive to overcome the generalisation, the organisation-for-the-purposes-of-betterment, the instrumental control, customarily associated with mapping. It is best to realise that Mallarmé's identification of the proximity of death and renewal is always present in the settings we make for ourselves and, particularly, in our modes of understanding. A poetics that shuts itself off from the past four centuries of instrumental development is as incomplete as the over-reliance on technology and system. Similarly, it would seem that no authority lies in autochthony, we are always transitory guests with respect to earth. Since Biblical times, people were more often known by their cities of origin – e.g. 'Abraham of Ur' – than by regions or certainly nations. What is most important about the poetics of the Valparaíso School is not the aspects that are critical of Europe, but the realisation that one can interpret 'origin' ontologically, with respect to concrete historical conditions, without becoming enthralled to a nostalgic past or future.



16



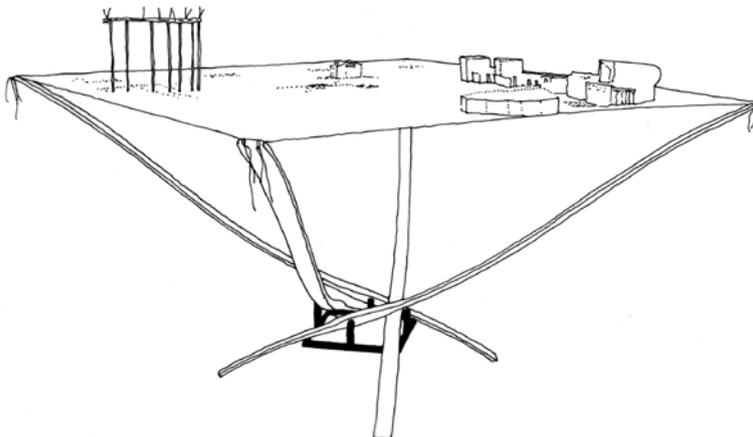
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- 17 The incised and folded Paseo table surface
- 18 Prototype Paseo tables on the terrace at the PUCV School of Architecture and Design, Recreo, Viña del Mar



18

- 19 The surface of each table is held in tension by four laminated legs made from *coihue*, a wood whose hardness and durability make it particularly suitable for furniture. A discreet metal cage onto which the legs are slotted gives them the required geometry. The table's original corner detail had to be modified on site owing to the relatively high humidity of Cambridge compared with Valparaíso. In this final version the corners of the paper surface are reinforced and tied to the legs with twine in order that the surface remains in tension. All the models, including this one of the Sala de Música, were designed by PUCV students in collaboration with Marcelo Araya. The tables are currently at the Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño at PUCV



19a



19b

The Paseo tabletops are made from this white sheet, and in creating fold-up or fold-down models of buildings from its surface, they imply that a stanza is analogous to a work of architecture [17–19].

Correlatively the nominally two-dimensional curtains lie between black and white, their strong colours establishing light, figures; while the quasi-cubist figuration tunes the figures back to architecture. The unlikely thinness of ‘ground’ created by the white sheet ensures that questions of sitedness, and of concreteness and abstraction, observe the more stable ‘invitation’ or ‘hospitality’ as the meaning of ‘common ground’. This point is supported by a reference to a table-painting experiment in a 1954 text by Alberto Cruz, which celebrates the messy companionship of everyday life that the whiteness of a table makes visible:

*Some time ago I was hurriedly fixing a house for a friend and we painted the table top in multi-coloured rectangles [...]. Some time later, with a sheet of plywood and some sawhorses I put together a table in the dining room of my house and I sent it to a garage to have it painted white so that afterwards I could paint the surfaces with colours, but when it arrived it created in the house a spatiality so alive, it seemed to me a real crime to touch it. And in the white shines the plates, the wine, the stews. And the elbows and hands in conversation. A kind of life has been created by this white. So that it is no longer just a colour, but rather a quality of space.*²¹

Significantly, a white page (or screen) is also where sketches become buildings, as, literally, do those of the PUCV tables in Paseo. Indeed, as Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks demonstrate, speculation from drawings to diagrams to writing take place in a matrix where the possible and actual are joined intimately to a designer or artist, or indeed to a planner of any kind.

Poetry and making

In response to the contemporary conditions, PUCV has sought to avoid the standard architectural strategy of assuming a site is a rawness improved through the agency of design, engineering, technology. Instead they have developed techniques of collaborative improvisation that seek to make design vulnerable to the conditions, of which the natural conditions are fundamental. In other words, the generalisations produced by reliance on the established protocols/techniques of the white page are eschewed for direct intervention in urban or rural sites. In this regard, it should be said that the motif of the gift at PUCV represents the effort to instil an obligation to the conditions on the part of poet-designers, and makes what is made an expression of gratitude. What is ‘given’ is light-on-the-ground, transient, open to refusal.

Thus the table-surfaces in the exhibition are not for dining, but provide a common ground for discussion, made out of shadow and depth. As Hannah Arendt notes in this regard, and Open City architecture acknowledges:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common,

*as a table is located between those who sit round it; the world like every in-between, relates and separates people at the same time.*²²

The curtains on the other hand simply catch the light-dark of the windows of the room, and its figures, potential inhabitants of the ‘open’ city, are to its surface what the buildings of the tables are to theirs.

The *travesía* can be seen as a metaphor for the kind of exploratory wandering that this style of making involves – a species of improvised pilgrimage without specific objective of either place or what to do/make. Indeed it can usefully be framed as getting lost as a way of re-finding orientation at a deeper level. It is thus not a getting lost by achieving a *tabula rasa*, an erasure of the extant conditions, rather the aim is to open oneself to the fundamental conditions too often taken for granted.

Poetry and journey

As rehearsed already, the idea of European ‘voyages of discovery’ to which *Ameréida* alludes remains problematic in the southern hemisphere. Moreover, one of the most powerful English images of the lonely detachment of scientific inquiry – that of Newton playing on the shore with the ‘great ocean of truth’²³ undiscovered before him – does not make sense at the Open City. In Valparaíso the sea is considered *desconocido* – unknown and unknowable – and design an act which requires not only immersion in a site but ‘a return to not knowing’ (*volver a no saber*), where commitment to debate among a group is part of the ‘adventure’.

Such ambiguities surrounding ‘discovery’ in science and the arts, manifested by the close coincidence in Cambridge of the 2009 Darwin Festival and 2010 Paseo, are at issue in the installation: whereas the former event celebrated the collections of specimens and drawings held by the University of Cambridge that were Darwin’s own objective on his journey through South America; the latter marked the route of his voyage in order to highlight the fact that Valparaíso was a critical turning point on it [20]. Darwin’s 1859 theory of evolution, *On the Origin of Species*, and his youthful record of his experiences gathering his data, *Voyage of the Beagle*, from twenty years earlier, are two very different texts.

Scientific discovery seeks to establish ‘facts’ from hypotheses. Since Galileo, it has been a resolutely materialist, quantitative, positivistic endeavour, with which Modernist architecture has carried on an uncertain dialogue, typically via aesthetics. Artistic discovery seeks to find orienting insights, is rooted in the humanities, and can put its trust in ‘play’, in open works, improvisation, collaboration. In this dialogue, explicit in architectural debates since Romanticism, the styles of orientation that anthropology has exposed – generally filed under ‘myth’ – exhibit an analogical density/profundity that is able to accommodate the more sophisticated discourses of the sciences and technology, but the reverse is not the case.

These ambiguities are suggested by the uncertain



20a

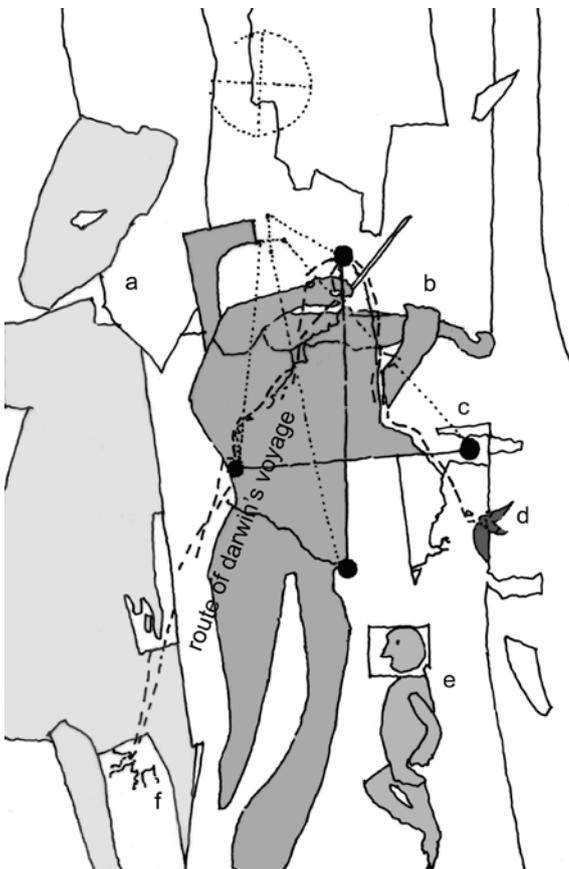
20 In this *paseo*, three street musicians entertain the crowd. Standing before the end wall of the room, and therefore prominent on entry, the central musician, a violinist, is veiled by, and constructed from, a diagram showing the land-masses to the north-east and south-west of the Atlantic, where south is at the top. Overlaid with the constellation of the Southern Cross, a diagram from *Amerieida*, this map has been annotated in red thread with the route of Darwin's voyage from Devonport, England to Valparaíso, Chile

a carnival *paseo* figure
 b violinist
 c diagram of Southern Cross laid over outline of South America
 d dying Galapagos finch
 e dancing marionette
 f outline of south-western coast of Britain and north-western coast of France

21 Each curtain is approximately 1800 mm wide and 2500 mm high. Constructed of layers of recycled cotton, silk and wool fabric, they have been hand-sewn to create a parade of figures 22 m long modelled on the half-bird/half-human figures of Max Ernst's 1934 *Une Semaine de Bonté*. A response to ideas in play at the Valparaíso School, the relations between *paseo* (a customary procession, laden with communal relations, both friendly and predatory) and *travesía* (a collective pilgrimage of discovery of architectural identity in relation to place), cover a spectrum between the uncertain milling about typical of a *paseo*, and the more formal movements and spaces of urban ceremony or ritual. Negotiating the boundary between being lost and being

found, references are made to the demands and duties of navigation and exploration that constitute 'whereness', so that Darwin's journey around South America is framed as a *travesía*. Between *paseo* and ceremony, the *travesía* proposes that art (poetry) is the necessary complement to practical science (technology). When conducted as a collaborative poetic act, it provides a vehicle for the architect or scientist explorer, like Mallarmé's ship-captain-poet, to discover through getting lost/dying. This is the order in which seven of the twelve curtains were sequenced in the Cambridge *Paseo*. (Currently the curtains remain in the ownership of their designer/maker, Mary Ann Steane)

22 *Paseo* opening, 26 September 2010



20b

'place' of Valparaíso in Darwin's letters home. On the one hand, Darwin's enthusiastic description of the welcome he receives at Valparaíso and of the favourable turn in the weather evince the struggle of collecting samples in rugged territory and navigating dangerous coasts that his journey of exploration had become.²⁴ Yet his comparison of the port with London and Paris in order to explain the sudden leap in 'civilisation' it signified, points to the divisive cultural hegemony of Europe in the south.²⁵ In its dramatisation of the relationship between the themes of dwelling (tables) and journey (curtains), *Paseo* points to the reciprocity between place-making and place-finding in securing the orientation/understanding which a claim to 'openness' connotes. Thus *Paseo*'s inverted map of South America, on which Darwin's *travesía* is drawn/sewn, testifies to the goal of locatedness in 'making' place, while concurrently referencing the potential for misunderstanding and conflict, yet also renewal, of 'finding' place [20].

Paseo's 'openness'

The curtains create a fragile lining to a solid room which is ephemeral in two different ways. On the one hand, these stitched panels, 'women's work', reference temporary encampments through their location in a staid twentieth-century 'political' setting with pretensions to historic grandeur. The fact that the order and geometry of these panels is deliberately not fixed also makes them 'open work' in Eco's terms. Not only their seriality,



21



22

but the details of their design – particularly the position of heads and hands – lends a curator a degree of choice in their arrangement. As the *paseo* performs the city anew every day, the curtains offer myriad alternative narratives. In this regard, exploration of their possible sequencing, led to the creation of a deck of cards, known as a *myriorama*, *panoramacopia* or ‘endless landscape’. Akin to the card games made for children in early-mid-nineteenth-century Europe, this is a further hidden yet necessary aspect of the ‘play’ that Paseo involved [21].

Likewise, the arrangement of the tables is open to change. The paper surface of each one is held taut by legs whose geometry is akin to an open hand. Together they allow the dictatorial grid of a map to decompose into separate territories. They were in fact moved during the installation in response to the room’s changing density of occupation; initially grouped at the centre, they were subsequently placed in a line parallel to the long wall and the street beyond [1, 4].

One way of seeing Paseo’s combination of curtains and tables is as a species of ‘completion’ – or ‘translation’ – of the Open City. The Open City rightly accords primacy to the natural conditions, or landscape. Yet it does not sustain enough inhabitants for a real *paseo*, and so the Cambridge event is a sort of mythical inhabitation – the spirits of a traditional Spanish city have been invoked, invited or have come to visit. A *paseo* presumes a living city, with its history, customs, rivalries. The fleeting character of this embodiment – curtains through which glow an autumn sun and paper tables which characterise the common ground – emphasises the ideal or spiritual character of ‘open’. In a room where visitors are placed within the inverted conditions outlined at the start, ‘city’

as a topic begins to float, as both a tradition and a future possibility, at a time when capitalism devours the natural conditions and collective urban life is reduced to statistics. An aspect of our current condition is that a good city is typically most palpable as a possibility, something found elsewhere, in other times, in novels, but also in the collective poetic moment (*la phalène*). For Aristotle, the purpose of a city was profound political understanding. It is the inverted conditions of Paseo which make it propitious for the development of such awareness.

These conditions are analogous to those of urban design, in which possible urban configurations are imagined with respect to possible inhabitants in a state of suspension and hopefulness. The characteristic settings for such speculations are architectural schools and design ateliers where, however, an objective result is expected. Paseo instead transforms an actual room in the Cambridge Guildhall, whose demure vault and grandeur of scale testifies to the last period when such edifices aspired to represent the significance of ‘town’. A regular setting for both ceremony and commerce, rather than a gallery, this municipal venue is a typical element of the new town halls fostered by the 1835 Act of Parliament which reformed local government in England and Wales. It is therefore not neutral, and alludes not to concepts of aesthetics or art history, but given its place in the town’s civic life, to the ‘origin’ or purpose of city.

Collaborative improvisation in design education

After a period of residence in the Open City, one begins to realise that for Valparaíso students an understanding of architecture is profoundly qualified by a design process which prioritises generosity as it questions what it means to build.

The willingness to accept that architecture is an ongoing dialogue rather than a finished product, underlines the idea that architecture can be an act which invites exchange between participants, rather than one imposed on occupants by distant experts. Seen in this way architects are primarily instigators and interpreters of dialogue. They enable. What the Open City poetics underlines is the potential significance of how such collaborations are staged. Thus one innovation of Paseo is to treat the design process, less as the production of something 'seen', than as an unpredictable path of action – i.e. something 'spoken' – with the potential to change the degree to which people feel they have a stake in making settings hospitable for guests yet unborn. Dependent on keeping channels of communication open, its recasting of design as a vital poetry of improvisation underlines how communities are created and empowered through architecture.

A second equally significant achievement of Paseo concerns understanding of 'city'. Curtains normally occupy walls, and tables, floors. However, the improvised collaboration that resulted in these curtains and these tables leaves the visitor a navigator, pilgrim, wanderer in a milieu whose interpretative direction leads ultimately to questions of 'common ground'. The stark emptiness of the room, vaguely civic in its articulation, and an extension of the central Market Square, makes clear how its own ground or floor has been put in play. There is nothing preventing the visitor from simply regarding the installation as another *exhibit-of* (in this case, of curtains and tables). However, the more s/he becomes involved with the themes put

in play by the vertical and horizontal surfaces, the more s/he becomes involved in the conflicts and ambiguities which attend the things we take for granted, and the more the conclusion is reached that it is precisely improvised collaboration – like two instruments in tune but playing different songs – that exposes the nature of commonality as rooted in the differences.

The techno-aesthetic protocols that have evolved for making our huge capitalist cities – enshrined in a strange transaction between a vague 'originality' and the laws of science and the building-codes – are being challenged by procedures that explicitly or implicitly share attributes with PUCV. This is true particularly in work done in urban slums, where collaboration extends to the constituents, and where making parts of one's town as a shared enterprise and shared context have obvious political and social implications, even if so urgent and remedial in most cases as to make the fundamental poetics of PUCV less a concern than preserving settings for traditional religions and customs.²⁶ Inspired by this sort of work, the phenomenon of the pop-up has become familiar in European cities, where the hand-made, sub-legal theatres, cafés, gardens, colonise neglected corners without covering them over in bourgeois decency and safety. In this spectrum between emergency remediation and contemplative speculation, the curtains and tables in the Cambridge Guildhall occupy the latter end; but the spectrum itself exposes the origins of city, and the vulnerable aspirations of what otherwise is taken for granted as the vast infrastructure for consumerist well-being.

Notes

1. Alberto Cruz, personal interview, 2006.
2. Paseo was installed in the small hall at the Cambridge Guildhall from 26 September to 28 September 2010. The Paseo tables were exhibited at London Metropolitan School of Architecture between 30 September and 15 October 2010.
3. Presenting a collection of Eco's pre-semiotic writings on modern literature and art, *Opera aperta* was first published in 1962 by Bompiani, Milan.
4. For an analysis of *paseo* performance in the Latin American context see Miles Richardson, 'Being-in-the-Market versus Being-in-the-Plaza: Material Culture and the Construction of Social Reality in Spanish America', *The American Ethnologist*, 9.2 (1982), 421–36.
5. Guy De Mallac, 'The Poetics of the Open Form: (Umberto Eco's Notion of *Opera Aperta*)', *Books Abroad*, 45.1 (1971), 31–36 (p. 35).
6. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 8–9.
7. See Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 318–52.
8. Tim Ingold, *Evolution and Social Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 247.
9. Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold, 'Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction' in *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, ed. by E. Hallam and T. Ingold (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 1–24 (p. 7).
10. See Karin Barber, 'Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick', in *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, pp. 25–41; Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (New York: Putnam, 1990); Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival', in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. by Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 3–53.
11. See Hallam and Ingold, pp. 10–11.
12. See Berber, pp. 33–35.
13. Mallarmé's poem was first published in *Cosmopolis*, May 1897. *Ameréida* was the fruit of the writings produced during the school's first *travesía*, illustrated in Fig. 13, that were subsequently transcribed by Iommi and published in 1967. Virgil's *Aeneid* is of course the birth-narrative of Europe as a realm of cities with a city (Rome) at its heart.
14. See Fernando Pérez Oyarzún and Rodrigo Pérez de Arce, *Valparaíso School/Open City Group* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2003); Ann Pendleton-Jullian, *The Road that Is Not a Road and the Open City, Ritoque, Chile* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996); Mary Ann Steane, 'Enlightening Conversations', in *The Architecture of Light* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 105–129; M. Casanueva Carrasco, 'The Errant's Lodge: Reconstruction, Research and Teaching', *arq*, 2.2 (1996), 40–49; Nicholas Ray, 'Valparaíso School'

- Open City Group by F. Pérez Oyarzún and R. Pérez de Arce', book review, *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 7.3+4 (2003), 373-74.
15. David Jolly Monge, trans. by Mary Ann Steane, 'Ephemeral Architecture', unpublished paper, September 2010.
 16. Quotes from Darwin's letters were included in the Paseo exhibition catalogue, alongside images of the plant and animal specimens he sent back to Cambridge and the landscapes around Valparaíso he described in his journal.
 17. Jolly Monge, 'Ephemeral Architecture'.
 18. See note 13. Concerning the question of the death of poetry, the end of Mallarmé's poem offers potential redemption in its vision of the constellation, hence one significance of the Southern Cross to *Amereida*.
 19. See Peter Carl, 'On Depth, Particular and Universal, Fragment and Field', in *Fragments: Architecture and the Unfinished: Essays Presented to Robin Middleton*, ed. by Barry Bergdoll and Werner Oechslin (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), pp. 23-42.
 20. For PUCV, this conflict is manifest as a drama of authenticity regarding residence in and attunement to 'America' north and south, thus *Amereida's* reversed map, which precipitates a more general anxiety regarding exploitation of the land – which, to date, has mostly been a matter of European colonisation. Authentically 'Chile' was a matter for discovery, yet at the same time, there is built into this colonisation a guilt, already manifest in the sixteenth-century epic poem by Alonso de Ercilla, *La Araucana*. An earlier inversion of Virgil's *Aeneid*, this work concerns the Spanish conquest of Chile.
 21. Alberto Cruz, 'Proyecto para una capilla en el fundo Pajaritos', *Anales de la UCV*, no. 1 (1954), 219-234, available at <<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/1954/proyecto-pajaritos/>> [accessed 25 September 2012].
 22. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 52.
 23. Sir Isaac Newton. First reported in Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters, of Books and Men* (1820), vol. 1 of 1966 edition, sect. 1259, p. 462. Purported to have been addressed by Newton in the final year of his life (1727) to Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsey. Quoted in David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (1855), vol. 2, p. 407.
 24. Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. by Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 205-217. (First published by Henry Colburn, 1839.)
 25. Letter from Charles Darwin to his sister, E. C. Darwin, discussing his recent arrival in Valparaíso, 29 July 1834. Correspondence Database, <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-248>> [accessed 18 July 2012].
 26. See Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency, Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011); Maurice Mitchell, *Learning from Delhi: Dispersed Initiatives in Changing Urban Landscapes* ed. by Shamoon Patwari, Bo Tang (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); and Adriana Massidda, 'The Plan de Emergencia, 1956: The Argentine Debate about Housing Shortage, Then and Now', *Scroope*, 21 (2012), 42-51.

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arq gratefully acknowledges:

Archivo Histórico José Vial
Armstrong, e[ad], PUCV, Chile, 5,
10-12, 13a-b, 15, 16, 18
Artopoulos, 2, 3, 17
Baker, 8, 22
Jolly, 7, 14
Steane, 1, 4, 6, 9, 13c, 19-21

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the generous support for Paseo from the University of Cambridge Department of Latin American Studies Chile Projects Fund and the Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, PUCV, Chile.

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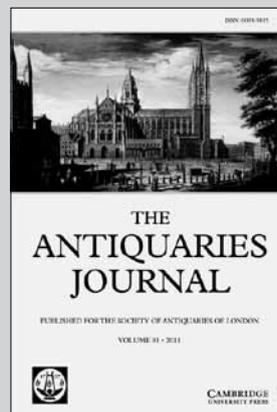
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