

PRISONERS OF RITOQUE

THE OPEN CITY AND THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

In the early 1970s there were two spaces of exception in Ritoque: a school of architecture and a concentration camp. While there was no contact between them, their occupants formed communities and used similar repertoires (games, events and performances) to create real and imaginary spaces. School professors formed a utopian enclave that freed them from regulatory structures but limited its political action. Camp prisoners instead turned their forced isolation into active political resistance.

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A set of train tracks runs along the Ritoque beach.¹ My argument follows these tracks, connecting two sites that settled in Ritoque in the early 1970s: the Open City, an architecture school, and the Ritoque concentration camp, established by the Pinochet regime to house political prisoners (FIG. 1).

Founded in 1971 on the south edge of the beach, the Open City is an architecture school that has defined its pedagogy as a combination of poetry and architecture. As part of their studio exercises, students participate in collective events that recall surrealist practices, such as the exquisite corpse and automatic writing. These exercises are starting points for the design and construction of buildings, sculptures, and installations on the Open City campus. This process reflects the school's philosophy: that architecture should be a collaborative, ephemeral, and utopian event that exists outside the boundaries of conventional professional practice (Pérez de Arce et al., 2003).

Three years after the Open City was founded, the dictatorial regime of Augusto Pinochet set up a concentration camp for political prisoners three miles north of the school (Lawner, 2003).² The

¹ The tracks run parallel to the Pacific Ocean. They serviced a train from the Empresa Nacional de Minería, which transported copper from the foundry to the port.

² This camp was one of several; an estimated 100,000 people went through these camps. Miguel Lawner –Director of the Urban Improvement Corporation (CORMU, for Corporación de Mejoramiento Urbano) in Allende's government– was also a prisoner in Ritoque and other camps. His drawings are the only record left of these events. They were smuggled out of the camps and outside Chile with great difficulty. Initially known as concentration camps, at a later stage the name of these sites was changed to detention centers. I have chosen to keep the name used when they were operational.

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camp prisoners, who included professional actors and playwrights imprisoned for the political content of their theater plays, initiated a series of games and theatrical performances at the camp.

The confrontational nature of their performances which included defiant interactions with their audience –the guards– stands as a foil to the Open City's architectural performances.

In this article, I place the founding and development of the school in the context of the pedagogical and political environment of late 1960s and early 1970s Chile. I compare the school's pedagogical methods and the prisoners' performances, describing their origins in French Surrealist theater and Brazilian Marxist pedagogy. In the camp, these influences were mobilized with specific political intent, but in the school, which expressly detached itself from politics, similar activities had much different motivations. I argue that the school's detachment implied a removal, a voluntary imprisonment, which should be understood in the context of the political turmoil of 1970s Chile, which saw the short-lived presidency of socialist Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and the subsequent military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990).

Previous research on the school has emphasized its pedagogical innovation, through the use of games, poetry, and design-build, but has avoided any discussion of the political upheaval that marked its founding.³ South American scholarship has come from within the school –eager to showcase its methods– or from outside

the country, where the school is seen as an alternative utopia in support of the development of an American architecture, with America understood as the American continent (Gutiérrez,



FIG 1 Localización del centro de detención de Ritoque (información proporcionada por Miguel Lawner, ex prisionero) y de la Ciudad Abierta de la PUCV. / Location of the Ritoque concentration camp (provided by Miguel Lawner, former prisoner) and the Open City school. Región de Valparaíso, Chile.
Fuente / Source: Google Earth™

3 For scholarship and documentation about the Open City, see the books: Lagnado, 2010; Pérez de Arce, et al., 2003; Alfieri, 2000; Pendleton-Jullian, 1996; Crispiani, 2011. Published articles include: Pérez de Arce, 2005; Pérez Oyarzun, 1993; Amadei, 2008; Valuable interviews with the main actors of the school have been compiled in Torrent et al. 2002; and Vallespir, 2005. The school's website, <<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/1992/ritoque-ciudad-abierta/>>, includes digital transcripts of several lectures. Graphic documentation is available at Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong <<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/mundo/archivo/>>.

“There are two stories to be told about Ritoque in the 1970s: one of voluntary isolation, the other of enforced imprisonment. The Open City still operates..., The concentration camp has disappeared...”

1998:39,304).⁴ The presence of the prison camp in the immediate vicinity of the school has never been acknowledged in past scholarship on the school. By presenting these two sites as parallel enclaves in the context of the Chilean dictatorship, I describe how each group negotiated the political potential of utopian isolation.

There are two stories to be told about Ritoque in the 1970s: one of voluntary isolation, the other of enforced imprisonment. The Open City still operates, promoting itself as an alternative to conventional architectural education. The concentration camp has disappeared, demolished after the 1988 referendum that ended Pinochet’s regime. Despite their physical and cultural proximities, these sites are distanced by their politics. While the school’s faculty chose to remove itself from the conventions of university, professional practice and the larger political environment, the camp prisoners were brought together and compelled to act in reaction to a repressive government.

STARTING POINTS: THE SCHOOL

First modern ideas were introduced to Chilean architecture schools in 1933, thanks to a student movement originated in the School of Architecture of the University of Chile.⁵ Although this first attempt made little changes, it was the beginning of further initiatives that eventually led to a stronger, prolonged movement that was later endorsed by the University Council through the reform of 1946. On this basis, new curriculums renewed the teaching of architecture in the country, with the important contribution of the Hungarian architect Tibor Weiner, who had studied at the Bauhaus.⁶ These ideas spread to the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) in Santiago, particularly under the leadership of Sergio Larraín, dean elected in 1952.⁷

4 Argentinian historian Gutiérrez concludes his introduction to the book by proposing that the Open City provided a means to rescue an American utopia in open opposition to the First World. This political charge is later confirmed in his description of the work emphasizing its lack of funding and use of cheap materials.

5 Personal communication with Miguel Lawner, February 13, 2013.

6 For further information regarding these events and Tibor Weiner, see: Talesnik, 2015. Talesnik is currently writing his PhD dissertation on this topic at Columbia University.

7 For further details about modern pedagogy at the PUC see: Fernando Pérez Oyarzun, “Theory and Practice of Domestic Space between 1950 and 2000” (Pérez Oyarzun, et al., 2010:1-43), and “Los Frutos de la Modernidad,” in: Eliash; Moreno, 1989:154-191.

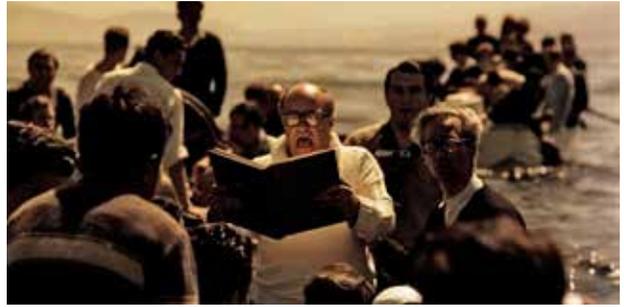


FIG 2 Godofredo Iommi (izquierda, leyendo) y Alberto Cruz (derecha) en una de sus primeras *Phalène*. / Godofredo Iommi (left, reading) and Alberto Cruz (right), in an early *Phalène*. Horcones, Región de Valparaíso, Chile, 1964. Fuente / Source: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

That same year, PUC professor Alberto Cruz (1917-2013) was invited to teach at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV). The offer to Cruz was prompted by a change of leadership at the PUCV, originally a private foundation and taken over by the Jesuits in 1952.⁸ Cruz accepted the position only after the school agreed to hire a multidisciplinary group he led from the PUC, with the addition of Argentinian poet Godofredo Iommi (1917-2001), who quickly became the ideological leader of the group (FIG. 2). Once in Valparaíso, Cruz, Iommi, and their colleagues created the Institute of Architecture (1952-1969), a separate institution that allowed them some independence from the university. It was partially inspired by Institute of Architecture and Urbanism in Tucumán, Argentina (1946-1952), itself related to the Ulm School through Tomás Maldonado (Iommi visited the school while in Europe).⁹ But the Valparaíso group distanced itself from these schools by including philosophers and poets among its members, and organizing itself around a collective model, typically assigning one member as the design lead for the group and inviting students to participate in projects as needed. As part of their agreement with the PUCV, the group received full-time posts, although with reduced salaries. Their pact to pool their salaries and occasionally share living conditions allowed them to avoid working in professional offices outside the school.

Their practice was developed parallel to academia, in a similar mode to the ateliers at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris: that is, the work produced at the Institute was part of a learning process that involved students and teachers outside the school. This collective mode was in sharp contrast to the School of Architecture at PUC in Santiago, where teachers maintained a professional career separate from their part-time teaching posts. From the start, the members of the Valparaíso group sought to distance themselves from conventional professional practice,

⁸ Cruz was offered the post by the new rector of the PUCV, Father Jorge González Förster, the representative of the Jesuits, who had taken over administration of the university in 1952. See Fernando Pérez Oyarzun, "The Life of Architecture: The Valparaíso School and the Studio of Juan Borchers," in Lagnado, 2010. The group hired with Cruz included architects Miguel Eyquem, Fabio Cruz, Arturo Baeza, José Vial, painter Francisco Méndez, and poet Godofredo Iommi. Soon afterwards they were joined by Argentinean sculptor Claudio Girola. (Reyes, 2010).

⁹ For more on the Institute of Architecture and Urbanism at Tucumán, see Maragliano, 2003.



FIG 3 Acto inaugural de la Ciudad Abierta. / *Open City Inaugural Act*. Ritoque, Región de Valparaíso, Chile, 1971. Fuente / Source: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

which they saw as an obstacle to the development of a more significant discourse. This position further isolated them from Chilean academia. Mario Pérez de Arce, former professor and dean at the PUC in Santiago and colleague of Larraín and Cruz, describes his impression of the Institute of Architecture group:

I would see them every now and then, but the truth is I always felt the Valparaíso School as a very closed thing, hermetic. It's like they had a language of their own. (Torrent et al., 2002:126).

As part of their methodology, the group promoted –in accordance with the new religious status of the institution– an understanding of Catholicism in terms of service and poverty rather than hierarchy and obligatory charity. These religious influences should be understood in the context of the Catholic left in postwar South America, which developed within the Church as an alternative to more conservative Catholic groups.¹⁰ The Open City faculty was outspokenly Catholic, but its politics were more difficult to define. Their particular practice of Catholicism reinforced ideas about communal living, equality, and a culture of poverty that translated into their architectural production as an appreciation for rustic or reused materials, and programs related to collective spiritual experience such as the design and reconstruction of several churches damaged by the 1960 earthquake in the south of Chile.

In the early 1960s, several members of the group travelled to Europe and met with a group of French poets and philosophers, prompted by conversations with German

¹⁰ Following the shifts of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Both Cruz and Iommi were part of *Acción Católica*, a Catholic association. See the Jaime Márquez Rojas interview for some discussion of the role of the church in the first reform in the School of Architecture at PUC, and León Rodríguez Valdés on the origins of *Acción Católica* and Catholic progressive movements tied to France, both in Torrent et al., 2002.



FIG 4 *Hip, hip... ufa!*, Teatro Aleph, 1972. (De izquierda a derecha / From left to right: Juan McLeod, Marieta Castro, Alfredo Cifuentes, Óscar Castro, Manena Parra, Cecilia Benítez, Ricardo Vallejo). Fuente / Source: Teatro Aleph

philosopher Ernesto Grassi who had lectured at the PUCV.¹¹ Iommi organized 'poetic acts' in a number of French cities during the trip; the 'acts' recalled Iommi's earlier work, which sought to liberate poetry from writing. A key shift in Iommi's thought happens at this moment, as he began to look back at America as a continent of possibilities, instead of relying upon European sources for inspiration.¹² This outlook inspired *Amereida*, a 1965 trip through South America marked by improvised 'poetic acts' and later turned into a book-long poem that would become an important reference for the group.

By that time, a series of reforms altered the organization of the largest Chilean universities. Larger political, academic and agrarian reforms, enacted by the government of Eduardo Frei (in office 1964-1970), prompted the university changes. Students demanding universal access to education and participation in university decisions led the university movement.¹³ At the PUCV, a more moderate movement was led by the academics of the School of Architecture –including Cruz and his group– along with the Institute of Social Sciences. The reform discussions at PUCV focused on administrative assignments, control over budget allocations, and increased autonomy from the Catholic Church.¹⁴ Compared to similar processes across Chile, the

11 Ernesto Grassi was a German philosopher of Italian origin and a Heidegger disciple, who lived in Chile in 1952-53. He lectured at PUCV, where he met the group and encouraged them, especially Iommi, to travel to Europe (Crispiani, 2011:244).

12 Before leaving for Europe, Iommi had described the trip as going back to the origins (and by "originals" Iommi meant the European avant-garde). Upon his return, Miguel Eyquem describes how Iommi spoke of discovering a European perspective on the American continents, which led to the first *Amereida* trip and poem in 1964 (Torrent et al., 2002:64,70).

13 For more on the Chilean university reform see Rosenblitt, 2010.

14 The university was funded by the state and the rector was elected by the Catholic Church. The reform group argued for the rector to be elected by the faculty. The reforms were later dismissed by the Great Chancellor of the University and Bishop of Valparaíso, Emilio Tagle Covarrubias. See Rosenblitt, 2010. Tagle Covarrubias was Alberto Cruz Covarrubias's cousin. See Torrent et al., 2002:115.



FIG 5 Torneo / Tournament Edros versus Oides, Ciudad Abierta / Open city, junio de 1979. Fuente / Source: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

PUCV reform had a stronger academic focus and more support from conservative factions. During this process, Iommi argued against the social privileges and divisions created by university degrees, and proposed transforming the university into a collective society that integrated life, work, and study (Iommi, 1969). These ideas were dismissed by both the university and the reform movement, compelling the group to look for alternative venues to implement their vision. Taking advantage of recent land reforms, they purchased 275 hectares in the southern stretch of the beach of Ritoque, and founded the Open City in 1971 (FIG. 3).¹⁵

Since then, the Open City has functioned as a laboratory of arts and architecture that collaborates with –and is partially funded by– the PUCV. Its legal framework, Amereida, is a non-profit cooperative that owns the site collectively, with the exception of some smaller private properties within the complex.¹⁶ The school's buildings are built communally, in a slow, additive process that makes it difficult to attribute specific authorship. A project director coordinates the work, and different designers collaborate on smaller projects that contribute to the gradual construction of the campus; an ongoing project, described on the school's website as the permanent co-participation in the construction of the Open City.¹⁷

STARTING POINTS: THE CAMP

The modernist avant-garde in Chile developed within institutional and literary groups that accommodated a

¹⁵ The land was previously part of a large estate. The purchase was made possible by agrarian reform established by Frei, although it took place during Allende's government (Alfieri, 2000:14).

¹⁶ Although the overall lot is collectively owned by the cooperative, it is in itself private property.

¹⁷ Description of the Open City campus, <http://www.amereida.cl/ciudad-abierta/campus/>. 20 february 2012. This text has been modified.



FIG 6 Proyecto de título R. Varela / *Student Graduation Project, R. Varela. Ciudad Abierta / Open city, 1973.* Fuente / *Source:* Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

growing middle class increasingly interested in scholarly pursuits. The journal *Mandrágora* was founded in 1938 at the Instituto Pedagógico in the Universidad de Chile by the first self-declared Surrealist group in the country. It dealt primarily with poetry, and included some discussions of art and philosophy.¹⁸ Many artists fleeing the Spanish Civil war arrived in the country in the late 1930s, bringing with them an influx of Surrealist theater practices that had a profound influence on university theaters.¹⁹ This link between avant-garde theater and the university was maintained as modern theater became an established institution in the country.

The 1967 university reforms that prompted the eventual foundation of the Open City also resulted in a reorganization of university theaters into larger interdisciplinary academic structures, in association with music, dance, and art departments. Led by students, these reforms emphasized the role of theater as an instrument for social change through experiments in collective creation. The Aleph Theater, led by playwright Óscar Castro (b. 1948), participated in these efforts despite its affiliation with the PUC, a conservative, upper-middle-class university.

The Aleph Theater's politics were firmly on the left, but their tactics were based on a wide spectrum of practices. In 1972, Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal taught "physical training," performance exercises based on the body, to the Aleph group. Boal's theater supported an emphasis on political consciousness and audience participation, but according to Castro the group's contact with Boal did not go beyond these classes.²⁰ Art critic Justo Pastor Mellado recalls the group as a leftist vaudeville, fond of paody and

¹⁸ *Mandrágora* was founded by Braulio Arenas, Teófilo Cid, and Enrique Gómez Correa (Baciu, 1979).

¹⁹ These groups shared a desire to expand the audience from the traditional elite to the masses in working-class districts and rural areas, linking modern methods and leftist politics. (Boyle, 1992) (Boyle, 2001).

²⁰ Personal communication with Óscar Castro via Isella Ugarte, Aleph Theater, Paris, March 22, 2012.



FIG 7 Palacio del Alba y el Ocaso / *Palace of Dawn and Dusk*. Ciudad Abierta / *Open city*, 1982. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

surrealism.²¹ For example, their play *Hip, hip... ufa!* (1972) included a scene called “*el tren de los vivos*” (an untranslatable pun which refers to both the train of the living and the train of the smart guys), in which the audience was invited to “join the train” (FIG. 4). Thus linked, actors and audience left the theater and went out into the street, where the play ended, in order to demonstrate that “life was in the street.”²² In contrast to these productions, other groups staged lighter plays that tried to diffuse, rather than confront, the tense political atmosphere in Chile. This dichotomy between social commitment and escapism reflected the increasing polarization of the country into a political left eager for popular participation and a right anxious to maintain the status quo.

At the end of 1970, a year prior to the founding of the Open City, socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile and initiated an accelerated program of industrial nationalization and land reform. As part of his social agenda, eighteen small vacation resorts were built in the beaches of Chile, aimed at low-income families.²³ One of these resorts, comprised of five wooden barracks with communal facilities, grouped around a clearing for group activities and sports, was built in Ritoque, three miles north of the Open City. The resorts and the broader reforms of the Allende government had a short lifespan.

All this changed the morning of September 11, 1973. With the Coup d'état led by General Augusto Pinochet, Allende's

21 Mellado recalls that the group came from “La Sexta Experiencia”, a “neo-dada” group. Personal communication with Justo Pastor Mellado, February 9, 2013, and February 11, 2016.

22 Personal communication with Óscar Castro via Isella Ugarte, Aleph Theater, Paris, March 22, 2012. Current Socialist president Michelle Bachelet was part of the Aleph group when she was 15 years old. In her analysis of Chilean theater, Boyle describes the Aleph group as having “a distinctive style and a strong following,” “almost deliberately naïve, with an emphasis on social and political comment.” See Boyle, 1992:47. For more on Chilean theater, see Pradenas, 2006.

23 The Ministry of Housing built 17 resorts, with communal facilities and a total capacity of 500 people. The resorts were used in 6 rotations of 15 days, for a total of 300,000 tourists per season, and designed for low-income groups, especially young people and children. They were owned by the Central Unica de Trabajadores (CUT). Several of these sites were converted into concentration camps (Lawner, 2003:75).



FIG 8 Hospedería de la entrada / *Hostel of the Entry*. Ciudad Abierta / *Open city*, 1982. Fuente / *Source*: Archivo Histórico José Vial Armstrong, Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso. [<http://www.ead.pucv.cl/extension/archivo/>]

socialist project was transformed into a totalitarian, military regime. Echoing this transformation of the country, Allende's vacation resorts were turned into concentration camps for political prisoners.

Shortly after the coup, several universities went through a counter-reform process: university theaters were closed or had their staff replaced. Such was the case for Oscar Castro and the Aleph Theater at the PUC.²⁴ The Aleph's university offices were closed and several members were arrested for staging plays against the regime. Castro was arrested, tortured, and eventually confined to the concentration camps.²⁵ Between 1974 and 1975, the camps received prisoners from the undeclared torture centers and incarcerated them until they obtained political asylum outside Chile. In contrast to the torture centers, the camps were not secret: the International Red Cross paid visits, and family meetings and donations were permitted.²⁶ However, the camps maintained a routine of torture and punishment that bypassed international control. The strategies developed by camp prisoners to resist such punishments would echo the pedagogical methods of the Open City.

PEDAGOGICAL POSITIONS: THE SCHOOL

The Open City has always operated as part of the PUCV, typically offering an elective or required studio for the students of the PUCV School of Architecture. Students enrolled in an Open City studio travel in or outside Chile as a group, or participate in courses on site, and then complete a building exercise. The trips, or *travesías*, are related to a larger discourse of continental integration that characterized the Open City pedagogy from the start. The *travesías* require leaving the Open City in order to 'establish' it elsewhere through 'poetic acts.' Whether at Ritoque or in the *travesías*, these ritual events combining poetry and architecture are the cornerstone of the school's pedagogy, reflecting the two main actors involved in the development of the school, poet Iommi and architect Cruz.

The poetic act or *phalène* is a performance that Iommi integrated into the architecture pedagogy at Valparaíso in 1952 and developed further during his stay in France between 1958 and 1963.²⁷ For Iommi, the poetic act was a collaborative and participative event, yet at the same time it distinguished between a creator or artist and an audience. It involved multiple disciplines but did not attempt to transgress their boundaries. Accordingly, the emphasis on collaboration and

24 A complete account of Castro's experience can be found in his interview with Dorfman. See Dorfman, 1979.

25 Castro and his sister Marieta were also charged with housing a member of the MIR, the Revolutionary Left Movement, which was banned after the coup. Their mother and Marieta Castro's husband, Juan McLeod, were captured when they visited Marieta (FIG. 3). They were taken to the Grimaldi camp and are among the many prisoners that disappeared without record (Dorfman, 1979:119-121). Marieta also staged theatrical productions in the women's camps, although those productions were immediately suppressed by guards

26 The Open City also had national recognition in 1975, when founder Alberto Cruz received the National Architecture Prize from the Chilean Association of Architects.

27 Fabio Cruz Prieto, part of the original 1952 group at Valparaíso and teacher at the PUCV, interviewed in Torrent et al., 2002. This interview and a description of the poetic act and Iommi's experiences in Europe can be found in Crispiani, 2011.

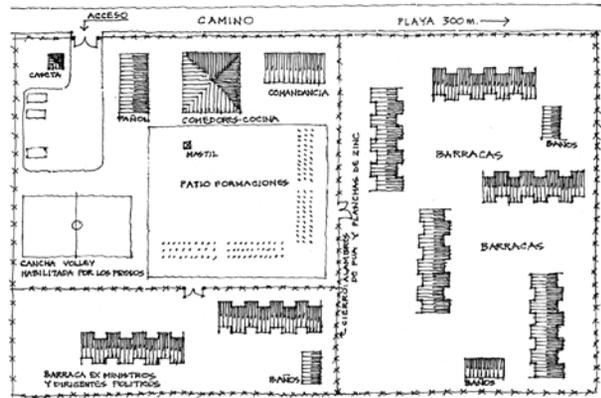


FIG 9 Planta del centro de detención de Ritoque. Croquis de Miguel Lawner, 2005. / *Ritoque Concentration Camp, approximate site plan drawn by Miguel Lawner (2005).* Fuente / Source: Archivo privado de Miguel Lawner

participation in the Open City has always been conducted in the context of a teacher-student relationship, although this relationship is less rigidly hierarchical than it was prior to the 1967 student reforms.

Iommi's "poetic act" was influenced by the Romantic poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin and Arthur Rimbaud, understood through the phenomenological lens of Martin Heidegger.²⁸ In his examination of Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger meditates on the innocent, harmless nature of poetry versus the dangers of language. Iommi's lectures echo these thoughts and connect them to Rimbaud's ideas about the need to detach word and action. Iommi carries this idea of poetry as detached from action into an apolitical strategy at large:

...we [the school founders] disengaged ourselves, radically, from everything that could be called action ... no type of action, categorically, none: it doesn't move anything. This is a hard, strong division, dangerous for the individual life of the self. Innocuous, for the political life, without any political transcendence, but, yes, hard, for the individual life of each person... And we don't intend to change the world. One would think this is an evasion, but it's the opposite, why? Because we're the only ones that are going to change the world, because we believe in the word that changes and not in action that does not change anything (Iommi, 1983).

This elevation of word over action was reflected in the roles of Iommi as poet and Cruz as architect. It was Iommi who spoke for the school; his many lectures were recorded and transcribed to represent the school's philosophy and teaching. As the architect, Cruz built after the poet had spoken, just as the poetic acts start with readings and are followed by actions that turn into building. These actions include games and rituals planned in advance but using chance and intuition to determine decisions such as site and building orientation (FIG.5). Design, construction, and sometimes destruction follow the rituals; architecture becomes

²⁸ See particularly Heidegger, 1949; Heidegger, 1971. "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" was published in Spanish as early as 1944. See: Heidegger, 1944; and Heidegger, 1958.

an improvised process (FIG.6). During his stay in France, Iommi's colleagues had criticized his fondness for improvisation and automatic writing.²⁹ At the Open City, these tactics were recovered and encouraged. The whole site is understood as a continually evolving project, an enormous exquisite corpse at multiple scales in which the work pauses for a few hours or years and then is resumed by a new collective of designer-builders.

The life of a project is unpredictable, most notably in the Palace of Dawn and Dusk, a construction that was halted before its planned completion when the group agreed it was done (FIG.7). This informal, sporadic approach was meant to resist the closed processes and individual authorship of normative architecture and the professionalization of the discipline. The buildings favored rudimentary materials and haphazard geometries that are occasionally compared to slum settlements or deconstructivist geometries (FIG.8). However, the school's phenomenologist discourse, derived from Iommi's Heideggerian ideas, is devoid of explicit formalist impulses, and emphasizes site instead. The changing sand dunes, the harsh vegetation, and the constant wind are typical starting points for design. All constructions turn away from the sea, reflecting an enduring desire to benefit from its presence, while resisting its commoditization. The location of larger structural elements such as prefabricated columns are determined only after they reach the site, and roof membranes are designed empirically after the structure has been erected. Many buildings take the form of closed, introspective enclosures, sometimes excavated into the dunes. Sculptures usually stand out vertically against the horizontal landscape. Buildings and sculptures appear disconnected from each other within the site; like a landscape of objects washed over by the sea, they are located based on intuition, improvisation, and topography, in contrast to the orthogonal composition of classic and modern planning.

A desire to realize change through discourse, a deliberate suppression of political engagement, and the firm belief in the inefficacy of action: these positions take on new meaning when reframed within the political context of 1970s South America. It was an era in which the predominant architectural discourse, influenced by the Marxist writings of the Venice School, shared a distrust of utopia and an interest in social concerns (Waisman, 1972). The complete absence of this influence from the discourse of the Open City distanced the school from architecture culture in the rest of the continent. It is a convenient absence: Manfredo Tafuri, with his extreme distrust of utopia as a confinement in the irrelevance of a boudoir, would have been skeptical of the idiosyncratic experimentation at the Open City (Tafuri, 1984). In failing to engage with this discourse, Cruz and Iommi's group—already isolated by the censorship and restrictions of the Pinochet regime—was further distanced from South American architectural academia. Like many of its buildings, seen from the outside, the Open City seemed introspective and solitary.

29 By Carmelo Arden Quin, Uruguayan poet and artist and member of the *Madí* movement who lived in Paris. See Crispiani, 2011.



FIG 10 Perros sin uniforme. Croquis de Miguel Lawner. / "Dogs Without Uniform," drawing by Miguel Lawner. Ritoque, febrero de 1975. Fuente / Source: Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos, Fondo Miguel Lawner.

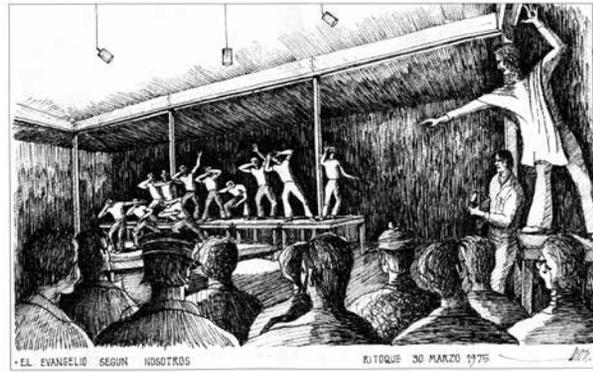


FIG 11 El Evangelio según nosotros. Croquis de Miguel Lawner. / "The Gospel According to Us" drawing by Miguel Lawner. Ritoque, 30 de marzo de 1975. Fuente / Source: Museo de la Memoria y de los Derechos Humanos, Fondo Miguel Lawner.

PEDAGOGICAL POSITIONS: THE CAMP

In contrast, political and social concerns were central to prisoners at the Chilean concentration camps. The camps were used by the regime to hold former opposition leaders, and included a broad range of occupations and education levels. While at Ritoque, the inmates produced a series of lectures and festivals, and ran a small school. Each inmate taught their field of specialization: nuclear physicists taught advanced mathematics, farmers explained land cultivation, mechanics showed how to dismantle a car engine. These study sessions established a common ground that brought different income levels and social classes together.

Once established in the camp, former university theater playwright Castro started staging plays with increasing collaboration from fellow prisoners, including a few theater professionals and amateurs.³⁰ They soon became weekly events. Castro would write plays, performing them in front of the camp authorities for approval, and then change emphasis and intonation in the actual performance. Engineers and mechanics helped with special effects, using an economy of means and material improvisation similar to the work of the Open City. Fellow prisoners often performed roles close to their own lives. Office clerks would portray office clerks, and rural workers would play rural workers. Victims of torture would reenact their experiences, only to be rescued by comic book heroes.

These parallels between fiction and reality reached a climax in a permanent performance called "The Town of Ritoque,"³¹ started as a joke after the prisoners gave street names to the passageways along the five barracks of the concentration camp (FIG. 9). The play transformed the camp into an imaginary free town protected from the rest of Chile by barbed wire, meant to keep all the prisoners of the dictatorship (that is, all the Chileans outside the camp) from escaping into the freedom found in Ritoque. This urban fantasy grew to include a City Hall, a Fire Department, a Music Band, a Priest, and a Post Office. Prisoners decided who should

30 The first presentations staged in Tres Alamos were done as part of the "Cultural Fridays," a weekly event allowed and attended by the camp guards and higher officers.

31 The concentration camp of Ritoque was ready on 20 July 1974 (Lawner, 2003:75).

play each role, a hierarchy distinct from their official internal organization, managed by a Council of Elders. Castro became the Mayor. He was responsible for giving an 'official' welcome to new prisoners, once they were registered and the Council of Elders assigned them to a barracks. The fictional mayor of Ritoque, in a performance that would transform the central area of the camp into the town plaza, then received the new members of the town's 'team':

The theme for the greeting was sports. We welcomed these new athletes, who had arrived to become part of our championship team, which had always been such a success. We wished the return train would be more reliable, because the arrival train that brought people was very good, but the return train always failed, which is why the comrades have stuck around and we should not blame bad luck, but transportation.³²

Castro alludes to the train which went by the site every day, but never stopped at the camp: the prisoners were brought over by truck.

The mayor also took on less playful tasks. Periodically, the guards would group prisoners in the main field, strip them and search their bodies and scarce personal property (FIG. 10). After these humiliating experiences, when the camp settled back into a semblance of routine, Castro would assume his character and break diplomatic relations with the guards, chastising them for their lack of proper documentation, in an ironic reference to the procedures of the secret police.³³ These audacious performances were part of a larger shift in the prisoners' attitudes, from despair to increasing disobedience, prompted, paradoxically, by their increasingly desolate prospects.³⁴

Encouraged by the success of "The Town of Ritoque," prisoners without a theatrical background started performing their own plays (FIG. 11). They used acronyms and anagrams to invent code words and make allusions to their political situation, and created narratives that paralleled, but did not directly describe, their experience of arrest and torture. Prisoners also confronted their guards, interfering with the schedule of torture sessions, and they maintained records of their presence and resistance. When his theatrical activities became too provocative, Castro was transferred to other camps, in what he jokingly referred to as his "artistic tour." He used his transfer from camp to camp to disseminate his plays and their rebellious message. The prisoners' defiance complicated the regime's international image. After

32 Óscar Castro, interviewed in Dorfman, 1979:130.

33 In this performance Castro would mimic the excessive documentation regulations of the DINA, the National Intelligence Directorate, or Chilean Secret Police during the government of Pinochet.

34 "Había un período de despersonalización que venía del paso por la tortura, y en el cual estás reducido a una mierda. Entonces, de pronto llegas y descubres que hay un espacio en el cual ya no te van a meter preso . . . ellos están cagados: ¡tú ya estás preso!" Personal account from Renato Arias, in Pradenas, 2006:450.

two years of operation, the camps were closed and the prisoners were deported from Chile.

POWER, POLITICS, AND PERFORMANCE

During the early 1970s, there were, in practice, three sites at Ritoque: the school, the concentration camp, and the fictitious “town of Ritoque.” These sites form a field in which the dynamics of power were negotiated through two related ideas: a pedagogy of equals, and the erasure of the distance between performer and audience. I will examine these ideas through the lens of the Marxist pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Antonin Artaud’s Surrealist theories of the theater, and Michel Foucault’s late writings on discipline and power.

Marxist pedagogue Paulo Freire lived in Chile from 1964 to 1969, exiled by the Brazilian military dictatorship.³⁵ For Freire, education had the potential to become “the practice of freedom”: the means to achieve a critical consciousness of the world.³⁶ This education was best achieved through dialogue, and peers were the most effective teachers. Freire viewed education as a political and collective act that critiqued oppressive practices and hierarchies, including those of the educational system itself. His ideas would be incorporated into the work of another influential Brazilian exiled in Chile, playwright Augusto Boal. Freire also had ties to the South American Catholic left, specifically with the Liberation Theology movement, and as such his pedagogy can be understood as a politically radical variant of the collaborative ethos the Open City tried to implement.

In their efforts to support university reform, the Open City faculty –led by Iommi– intended to destabilize all instances of power: not only from the outside, but from within the school. We can see these tactics at play in the emphasis on collaboration between students and teachers, which was intended to erase distinctions between work, study, and life, dismantling notions of authorship and disciplinary hierarchies. This paradigm is very close to Freire’s pedagogy, where knowledge is discovered through a collective experience where the teacher is only a guide. Similarly in the Open City studios, teachers acted as guides and collaborators with students. However, in the Open City these tactics supported a deliberately apolitical architectural pedagogy, opposed to Freire’s ambitions to create a critical consciousness. Rather, Iommi advocated for an a-critical consciousness: a liberty of thought that was nurtured from within a community and deliberately disengaged from external political forces. Furthermore, despite seeking to destabilize ideas of authority within the school, Iommi and Cruz were, without question, leaders, not guides.

35 Freire lived in Chile from 1964 to 1969, during the presidency of Eduardo Frei, and worked for the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement and the Food and Agriculture Organization at UNESCO. His first book, *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*, was published in Brazil in 1967 and in Chile in 1969.

36 Freire defines *conscientização* as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take actions against the oppressive elements of reality.” Thus “The pedagogy of the oppressed (...) is the pedagogy of men engaged in the fight for their own liberation.” (Freire, 1970:39).



FIG 12 Restos del centro de detención de Ritoque. / *Remains of Ritoque concentration camp.* 13 de octubre de 2012. Fuente / *Source:* Ana María León.

A pedagogy with a stronger resemblance to Freire's ideas developed within the camp. In an interview from 1979, during his political exile in France, Castro described his realization that workers with no formal education could explain political, economic, and social problems to him.³⁷ This society of equals, and its various forms of literacy were also at play in Castro's theatrical performances, and demonstrate an obvious debt to Augusto Boal's writing. Boal describes what he calls—in an acknowledged reference to Freire—the poetics of the oppressed:

The poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change; in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (Boal, 1974:17).

Note the stark contrast between Boal's call for action and Iommi's prescription against it. For Boal, action produces participation and a liberated spectator, a complete dismantling of the hierarchy between the actor and audience derived from Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" (Artaud, 1958). Similar tactics can be found in Castro's plays: the anagrams and metaphors that asked the audience to actively interpret the action, and the appropriation of "non-performers" (the prisoners and guards) into the "Town of Ritoque." In contrast, the Open City's poetic acts encouraged participation but sidestepped its political meaning. Jacques Rancière has recently reinforced the relationship between Artaud's call to draw the audience into the space of the play and pedagogy through the paradigm of the "ignorant schoolmaster" (Rancière, 2007). According to Rancière, just as

³⁷ Óscar Castro currently divides his time between Chile and France. (Estrada, 2009).

the ignorant schoolmaster can only teach by giving students freedom to explore, emancipated spectatorship creates a collective of individuals who learn through exploration.

Unlike the camp performances, the school's interest in redefining power relationships was ancillary to the implicit purpose of realizing a model of architectural education and practice that transcended a troubled and corrupt social and political order. This desire for autonomy – distinct from the discourse of autonomy that arose in Europe and North America in the 1970s and 1980s – defined architectural education as necessarily separate from the world as given. The distinction between education as an autonomous or political process, or, as Foucault would characterize it, a practice of freedom and a process of liberation, defines and animates the differences between the camp performances and the school's teachings.

Acknowledging the inevitability of the presence of power, in his late writings Foucault theorized on the care of the self and the need for guidance. He described external forms of discipline based on power (the rule of law and techniques of government) and internal disciplines or technologies of the self (practices of the self and practices of freedom).³⁸ Foucault defined these internal disciplines as “an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being.” He distanced them from what he called processes of liberation, which respond to mechanisms of repression. According to Foucault, these political processes only achieve an illusory liberation from external power, by making it the culprit for all internal repression. Thus Foucault dismisses processes that react to external repression, emphasizing instead practices based on the ideological liberation of the self, independent of external conditions. We can contrast this concept with Freire's “practices of freedom,” in which critical consciousness is a necessary step in order to perceive and understand repressive conditions. For Freire achieving this freedom (or consciousness) makes political action inevitable.

Following this taxonomy, Castro's work would be defined as a process of liberation, that is, a reaction to a repressive mechanism: the discipline of the concentration camp. Iommi's ideology could be understood as a practice of freedom, a process of internal transformation, deliberately detached from external conditions. Suspended in utopian isolation, the school gained the freedom to act at the cost of its own relevance. Although the school was founded before Pinochet's regime, its voluntary disengagement from the political realm allowed it to function with relative independence. Within the enclosure of the school, students had a certain liberty that was denied to many Chileans. While the school voluntarily embraced its own isolation from the political context, the camp performers used their tactics to create a space of resistance from inside the Pinochet regime. The school chose to disengage, while the camp chose to resist.

It's worth to recall that there are some similarities between the Open City pedagogy and contemporaneous experimental communities such as Utopie in France, and Arcosanti,

³⁸ See Foucault, 1997:299. Transcript from an interview conducted on January 20, 1984.

“Castro’s work would be defined as a process of liberation, that is, a reaction to a repressive mechanism. Iommi’s ideology could be understood as a practice of freedom, a process of internal transformation detached from external conditions.”

Drop City, and Ant Farm in the United States.³⁹ These countercultural communities sought to produce alternative societies and engaged architecture as part of their practices, not unlike the Open City, and the participants in the school were aware of some of these experiments. Certainly, the beach of Ritoque and its surroundings were known as a site for hippie communities, a phenomenon common in certain isolated areas in South America and other locations in the southern hemisphere. Likewise, other groups in Chile formed experimental communities, including the more structured but similarly collective community housing experiments involving self-construction coordinated by Chilean architect Fernando Castillo in the 1960s and early 1970s (Eliash, 1990). Thus the Open City was established in the context of similar practices in Chile and around the world, but its status as a school of architecture makes it unique among these examples.

ABANDONED TRACKS

For prisoners in the camp, the train that traversed the beach twice a day was a reminder of the outside world; the distant whistle was often mentioned in the prisoners’ memories of the camp.⁴⁰ In contrast, it is telling that despite their emphasis on site, the various descriptions of the school overlook the train and its tracks. If the prisoners were attentive to the train’s whistle as a daily ritual, the school’s deafness reminds us of their insistence on isolation.

The train no longer travels along the beach, although the tracks remain, covered by sand. The Open City still operates, in a slightly different mode, its aging founders giving way to a new generation of teachers. From the start, funding problems limited the frequency of built work. Current faculty is expected to raise funds for Open City projects through grant applications, while students cover the expenses of school travel. Increasing costs have compelled school administrators to make Open City studios elective rather than required courses, although most students at PUCV are involved with at least one Open City project during their studies.⁴¹ The school keeps a detailed record of its past; Iommi’s speeches have been carefully transcribed and archived online, images

39 For further information about these experimental communities, see Scott, 2007.

40 The train would travel through the Open City and could be heard by the Ritoque camp prisoners twice a day. Castro remembers the schedule in his interview with Dorfman, 1979:129.

41 Rafael Moya Castro, personal communication, February 6, 2011.

of the Open City have been uploaded to a Flickr site, and its buildings and sculptures have been located on a Google Map.⁴² This careful documentation demonstrates not only an eagerness to safeguard the past, but also a willingness to share it with the world: a carefully curated public version of an introverted pedagogy. However, this openness is limited to the words and images the school uses to describe itself, and critical analysis of the school remains scarce. The school's detachment from politics contributed to its survival, and its introspection has become self-promotion; it is the school's brand.

The performances in the Ritoque concentration camp turned the image of a town into a form of active resistance, producing a spatial politics. The "Town of Ritoque" satirized the camp, and relied upon an understanding of utopian communities that played upon the idealization inherent to utopian thinking. The camp is gone; it was demolished in 1989 after Pinochet lost the plebiscite, ending the dictatorship. Only concrete foundations remain, partially covered by grass (FIG. 12).⁴³ While the school seems obsessed with preserving its memories, the events that took place just three miles north have been buried in the sand, and the "Town of Ritoque" survives only in the memory of the prisoners. For the school's students, the camp is only a distant rumor. Yet the activism that characterizes the camp remains: Castro continues to do theater in both Chile and France, often connected to his experiences of imprisonment and exile. Lawner, whose drawings illustrate this article, is still active in Chile.

In the end, Ritoque offers two versions of utopia and its critical potential. According to Manfredo Tafuri, in his canonical essay "*L'Architecture dans le Boudoir*" (Tafuri, 1974), architecture focused on the internal processes of the discipline, such as formalist experimentation, confines the discipline to irrelevance, an enclosed space he likened to a boudoir. In its utopian isolation and its participatory tactics, the Open City resembles many of the experiments of the United States and European neo-avant-garde Tafuri was addressing. However, the resemblance ends here. Political repression in Chile created two types of imprisonment at Ritoque, one voluntary and one enforced. For the architects of the Open City, the only avenue for action existed outside the larger political context. The body of work the school produced under the dictatorship stands as the strongest argument for their project. It demonstrates that the disciplinary boundaries of architecture can create a certain freedom, a space to act. But that freedom is also constrained; at the Open City, it required a voluntary imprisonment. **ARQ**

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⁴² See the school archive, <http://www.ead.pucv.cl/amereida/>, its flickr website, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/archivo-escuela/>, and the sites on Google maps, 2012, <http://bit.ly/nrx1Xq>.

⁴³ Although we don't know who took the camp down, it is interesting to note that it was demolished before Pinochet left office.

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