

bubble. Their appearance, as well as that of most of the buildings reproduced by Haacke, bears resemblance last-minute derivations of the immuebles-villa devised by Le Corbusier after World War I. They are units facing a large interior courtyard, usually consisting of a pool, a basketball court, and a play area for children. Their design, therefore, squarely rejects the idea of social exchange between different units: all contact tends to be limited to the neighborhood corresponding to each resident upon purchasing the apartment. The residents of these condominiums crave the city that exists beyond the limits of these bubbles of bricks and concrete due to the suspicion of a threat, fueled by the sense, justified or not as it may be, of personal danger and paranoia.¹²

This sort of attitude explains why the residents of most of these family cells spend their free time in that other bubble—of leisure—which is the shopping center or mall.¹³ The astronomical rise in the number of these buildings in the past decades—from the 71 built in Spain in 1988, the figure jumped to 541 in 2008 (Fig. 7)—represents a final loop that literally copies the spatial structure of the dwelling units: the common courtyard becomes the avenue and the fountain, while the private space is converted into consumption space.¹⁴

Other interesting implications exist in this residential phenomenon. As I pointed out earlier, it is mainly geared toward young families with children, thereby marginalizing the groups not included in that traditional family model. As if they were the latest evocation of the changes in U.S. society during the Cold War, these groups need to occupy other domestic spaces in tune with their generic needs, principally second-hand homes in city centers.¹⁵

The gridded morphology of the hallow structures captured by Haacke takes on a disturbing minimal appearance, as if the famous grid structures of Sol LeWitt had morphed into gigantic monuments devoid of any meaning (Fig. 8). Thus, it seems like an even more resounding homage to Minimal Art than the street bearing its name in the south extension of Vallecas. And the photo and video documentation of its presence similarly evokes the expeditions of Robert Smithson through a variety of landscapes in the suburbs of the United States, such as the Passaic River (1967), in which he offered those who would join in on the trek the chance to appreciate an experience of the sublime by coming into contact with places and abandoned architectural and engineering structures in which the past, present, and future are (con)fused. For instance:

Nearby, on the river bank, was an artificial crater that contained a pale limpid pond of water, and from the side of the crater protruded six large pipes that gushed the water of the pond into the river. This constituted a monumental fountain that suggested six horizontal smokestacks that seemed to be flooding the river with liquid smoke. The great pipe was

in some enigmatic way connected with the infernal fountain. It was as though the pipe was secretly sodomizing some hidden technological orifice and causing a monstrous sexual organ (the fountain) to have an orgasm.¹⁶

There is yet another element that links these excursions by Smithson to Haacke's artistic project on the south extension that is on display at the Reina Sofía Museum. It remains strikingly odd that, at the end of the 1920s, a group of artists linked to the Spanish avant-garde would found what was to later be known as the "Vallecas School," which also lends its name to one of the streets in the urban extension. Initially made up of the painter Benjamín Palencia and the sculptor Alberto Sánchez, these and other members of the group devoted themselves to endless walks, using Atocha station—located across from what is now the Reina Sofía Museum—as their starting point and the Vallecas town center as their final destination.

The group's intention was to seek out inspiration in nature, materialized in the vast moorland of La Mancha. What in other artists would have given way to more or less realist landscapes, in the hands of the artists of the Vallecas School was transformed into an inert, ancestral space. Their compositions were populated by fossilized monumental characters, which were evoked by the paintings of Yves Tanguy, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí; likewise, they were captured from a point of view that heighten the contrast between the moorland and the sky, just as in the photographs of enormous concrete structures conceived by Haacke. That same group, in the full-on chaos of the Spanish Civil War, came to view the conflict from a telluric and ancestral perspective, expanding the limits of time in a way similar to Picasso in his mural *Guernica*.¹⁷

Although the German artist's proposal strays directly away from the literary narrativity of Smithson and indirectly from the surreal connotations of the Vallecas School, all three artistic projects share the same chilling vision of a post-historic time, expanded and frozen in equal parts. A time that, in the case of Haacke, elapses in a world governed ad infinitum by economic activity, just as Francis Fukuyama regrettably cried out to the four winds in "The End of History".¹⁸ A world "without art or philosophy", that is, a silenced world.

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YARAUVI: A UNIVERSAL ISLAND

Javier Boned Purkiss

Miró-Rivera Architects (MRA) with their studio in Austin, Texas since 1997, is one of the most prominent firms of young architects in the United States.

The firm's work is full of sensitivity toward the new requests that society demands from architecture: functionality, simplicity, sustainability, and all without ever foregoing an updated concept of beauty. The projects of Juan Miró and Miguel Rivera are full of the architectural craft, that old word that appears to have been forgotten among the ins and outs of the "spectacular" architecture that has predominated, and continues to predominate, many of the projects of contemporary architects. This work has already been valued by a specialized criticism, which has demonstrated this recognition with several awards, in spite of its still emergent trajectory.

The work of Miró-Rivera Architects sparks us to regain the excitement for the commitment to honesty and rigor of well-executed architecture. With its particularized concept of place along with its refined, imaginative, and innovative poetics in the use of materials, all of the firm's works contribute to the requirements of transcendence characteristic of good architecture, the result of a deeply reflective, sophisticated, elegant, and above all, socially responsible lyrical attitude to the service of humankind.

YARAUVI.

Miró-Rivera has not only shown the fruit of this responsibility and the product of a strong critical sense with the culture of globalization that dominates our world through the material result of its architecture, but rather with theoretical proposals for dreamed-of future architectures acting from that other side that is necessary for architecture, theory, unconstructed, projected, drawn architecture, but that always serves as a means for opening paths, for proposing possibilities, for providing an outlet for the most personal dreams and ideas. Actually, this area of creation, anticipative and purposeful, will always have to do with "that to come," and history, especially since the Enlightenment, has never ceased to emphasize these values that theoretical thinking contributes to architecture. (Fig. 1)

In this case, Miró-Rivera proposes, based on the poetics of the "unconstructed," a new conception of public space, reaffirmed by an idea of de-contextualization, which makes it tremendously novel. Cemeteries, historically linked to urban space, have gradually formed over time into numerous typologies, distinct types of campuses where different social classes have settled. In this sense, the concept of "analogous city" or "city of the dead" has continued to maintain its symbolic and metaphysical level with regard to the urban settlement referred to, while at the same time it has been developing a peculiar landscape concept in relation to it.

The project imagined by Miró-Rivera involves the use of the landscape as a "de-context," in an encounter of great semantic force between architecture and surroundings, but devoid of urban content, lo-

cated in an imaginary place, accessible by a canal built across the Israeli-Jordanian border, which connects the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. In the latter, at its center, a structure of global reconciliation is proposed as a universal cemetery, a place for eternal rest without any attention toward religious or cultural differences—a positive Utopia, stemming from architecture, to reflect on the imperious necessity to update the concept of tolerance. Yarauvi is not only a necropolis project in the Dead Sea; it is a proposal that embraces universality, all of that which has to do with the humanity's ancestral culture. Yarauvi is the symbol of the future shared by all humankind. It portrays the synthesis and expression of the transcendental in one single gesture. This universality, apart from the strict assumption of the event of death, would fundamentally derive from the capacity to choose, from the possibility of lying eternally surrounded by the shared presence of beings from all cultures and religions. It is the open door to a starting point for global communication, the last temple where the convergence of all that is different could be experienced. Sharing death in such a way would similarly lead to sharing life as well.

Miró-Rivera Architects willingly distances itself from everyday architecture, from the office tied to a determined time and place, to devote itself to an abstract architecture in the landscape that speaks every language, houses every system, and transcends every technology. Their labor as architects strives to make us reflect on that which is most sacred, human death and life, and their truth as an event of universal reconciliation—the possibility, from the poetry of architecture, of forever ending all the differences that muddle human coexistence. Yarauvi proposes universally sharing eternal rest, lying for all eternity alongside one's fellow being, in the floating silence of the waters of that no-man's land of the waters of the Dead Sea. (Fig. 2)

MEANINGS.

We live in a time in which we ought to seek out the foundation and not the cause of every act, every portrayal, every phenomenon, in order to understand its inner reason, even though this goes against the functional or instrumental reasoning to which we are accustomed. Its reason for being is not merely an objective that must be reached. A creation has self-meaning if it is able to capture the form, the inner reason of a given whole. It only has value if it can express and synthesize, in the strongest sense of those terms, an archetype in which both every individual and humanity as a whole are able to identify with. Cultures will then spread because they will be supported by this archetype as a solid foundation, even unconsciously, and this attachment will allow them to expand, and their inner reason can only favor this openness. There is a close relationship between a centripetal attitude and a centrifugal attitude. Sure of its inner reason, a culture can

spread once it has learned how to metabolize its borrowed elements.

Yarauvi embodies that archetype. It is organic because it overcomes modernity and because that which is organic, as opposed to that which is not, finds itself within its own form; its dynamism, which is destined to grow and develop, is born within, and although it may seem paradoxical, the organic form is a concealed appearance. Overcoming the modern will always take place through accumulation and agglomeration. Overcoming modernity as a disparate yet united union of the most diverse elements. As in the baroque, the temporal nature of objects appears. This new statute "no longer relates objects with a special mold, with a form-matter relationship, but rather with a temporal modulation that entails both a placement in continuous variation of matter as well as a constant development of form."¹

A) WATER AND SYMBOLS

Miró-Rivera Architects moves along the universal paths of the symbolic. By "symbolic" what is meant is a sign through which the incommensurable relationship between the signifier and that which is sought to be expressed by it. Just as the philosopher Eugenio Trías reminds us, "the referent of the symbol is incommensurable and from it only a remainder endures, whose relation to the referent is indirect. The symbol never denotes, it only connotes; it never designates, but rather it alludes. It emphasizes through the sensitive form indirect, free connections or associations, through which a certain referent, of an enigmatic nature, is alluded to."²

Yarauvi defends architecture as art, thereby allowing it to move beyond the functionalism that defines it, opening it to the symbolic. "In every architectural construction of an artistic nature there is a symbolic resonance. It leads in only a suggested, allusive, or connotative manner to a universe of unconscious and archaic symbolism."³

Yarauvi is architecture, inasmuch as it selects from the rest-movement synthesis the spatial (or resting) component and feeds off of other more earthly, more static images and archetypes, where movement and time form a pool and remain suspended: the grotto and the cavern, but also the tree, the forest. The marine journey to reach Yarauvi also makes us think about its possible "musical" character.⁴ (Fig. 3)

Because "dying is parting" and one only parts well when the trickle of water, the current of a long river, is followed. All rivers are going to feed the River of the dead (the Sea of the dead). Only this death is fabulous; only this parting is an adventure. If the deceased, for the unconscious, is a person gone missing, only the navigator of death is a being who can be indefinitely dreamt of. It would seem its memory always has a future, because with those

who have died at sea another illusion is conveyed, a special reverie. The farewell on the seashore is at once the most heartrending and most literary of farewells. Its poetry makes use of an age-old backdrop of dream and heroism. According to Gaston Bachelard, "when a reverie, when a dream comes to be absorbed like that by a substance, the whole being receives a strange permanence. The dream falls asleep, stabilizes. It tends to engage in the slow and monotonous life of an element, and having found its element, merges all its images into it, it materializes. It "cosmifies." For certain dreamers, water is "the cosmos" of death. [...] Long before the living confessed to the waters, would not the coffin be cast into the sea or the torrent? The coffin, in that mythological hypothesis, would not be the final voyage. It would be the first voyage. For some profound dreamers it will be the first true voyage."⁵

The decision to die in Yarauvi allows for its growth. This is its mystery and its symbolic capacity, that of shaping a universal space. The artistic acts first and foremost as a mode of production that seeks to make manifest that which it takes away from every revelation. "On the hinge between what can be revealed and what should remain concealed gleams the very limit where art finds its essential reason. Only one mode of display is offered to give logical form (logos, think-say) to that substratum that falls in on itself and to what is here called the hermetic frame: symbolic display. The transcendental horizon of all art is the symbol."⁶

B) THE ISLE OF THE DEAD

But in addition to this water-derived symbolism, we must highlight Yarauvi's island nature. Images such as "The Isle of the Dead" come to mind, that series of paintings by Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin, made around 1880. The image is presented to us as a dusk casting off a reddish glare on a small islet. It is made up of imposing crags which seem to be laying siege to a gloomy copse of cypress trees. The tops of the rocks display whitish marble slabs that evoke a tomb, an entryway into the subterranean world of the dead, from where no one returns. Over the calm waters of the sea, a rowboat approaches, steered by a figure wrapped in a dark reddish cloak. In front of this unsettling figure is another person clad in white, turned facing the islet and strange for the viewer, and alongside this second figure is a sarcophagus shroud in an off-white fabric. The viewer can almost physically feel the solemn silence of the imminent nighttime occurrence. (Fig. 4)

The Isle of the Dead portrays this concept to perfection: it is an unreal, mysterious, nocturnal, and inhospitable place, definitely, a place that at once houses the eternal desires and passions of the human being and constitutes the final station of the being's life journey. In the painting, Böcklin lends this place an incomparable expression that makes

it iconic, a work that has been referenced, modified, and caricaturized to the present day by countless artists.

The profound fascination that this painting generates owes itself to, on one hand, the absence of spatial consecration from that taking place in the image, and on the other, to the formal and conceptual ambivalence of the same. It depicts a spiritual perception, a desire, a mirage. It is a world of shadows bathed in the subdued light of uncertainty. Everything is at once a diaphanous yet foggy time, clear yet twilight, real yet unreal. Nothing here is what it seems.

Twenty-eight years later, the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff composed the symphonic poem "The Isle of the Dead" op. 29, in the city of Dresden. The music starts off softly, with a rocking movement that suggests the murmur of the waves while Charon, the ferryman who in classic mythology carried the souls to Hades, rows through the river Styx. Throughout this work, Rachmaninoff uses a figure, a meter that mimics the movement of the water and Charon's oar. At the beginning of the work, the main theme is repeated in a prolonged crescendo; in the middle section, the orchestra explores different variations of the theme, until reaching a moment of silence upon which, the motif of the music of the Dies irae is introduced as a reference to death. Meanwhile, the back-and-forth rolling of the music also suggests the sound of breathing, indicating in such a way, that way in which life and death intertwine.

In Yarauvi, the Western, dusky, melancholic romanticism of Böcklin y Rachmaninoff, its cultural sunset, has become a positive uncertainty, in a purposeful wager on that yet to come, where the dramatic has become daybreak. Yarauvi's mysteriousness is asking us to live in a time when the differences between peoples, cultures, and religions must be overcome, until assuming the universal twinning of through the act of death. (Fig. 5)

In order to do this, Miró-Rivera Architects have invented an object in the landscape, a white abstract place, a concave structure able to grow ad infinitum, which is reached thanks to Charon who no longer charges us for the services of his voyage. An empty circle where one can be free from all forms of domination and prejudice. Because...how can humans free themselves from their own work? How can at the moment of supreme clairvoyance in the face of death, detach oneself from every imposed language and culture? The answer is Yarauvi is in that existential and freeing void, in the conversation of the convex in the concave, in the assumed and shared silence of a container where all cultures have been made sacred as a result of precisely this very conversation, this spiritual emptying. And the paradox is completed with the parabolic growth of this void, of this concave island, as a greater number of humans are able to let go of their own limita-

tion. The scale of the object as a measurement of a collective spiritual emancipation.

C) FROM THE LABYRINTH TO THE FINAL DWELLING PLACE

Access to the final dwelling place, entails, in Yarauvi, a final reflection. A classic one-way labyrinth must be traversed. This "City of Troy" labyrinth will force us to travel over the entire circle upon entering it, to reach the center by way of a sole way, path, or trail, without providing any possibility of taking alternative routes. There are no forks; we cannot lose our way once inside. The Daedalic instinct takes hold of us as we encounter the final test, the last hurdle, before going out into the light of the emptiness. Daedalus, the first architect, imposes a final rite, a final passage with no return. Once in the forest of pillars that gradually leads us to the center, the decision has already been made. Time will gradually come to a halt from the time the coffin ascends the sacred staircase upon disembarkment, until ultimately being placed in the great grave. "Daedalus" was also the name given by science to a lunar crater located in the middle of the dark side of the Moon. (Fig. 6)

"Dwelling places of the dead" include Hades, in classical mythology, where souls are judged, and the Hebrew She'ol, which is the common grave of all humankind, a place where both the righteous and the wicked alike end up. Although many theories have been proposed to explain the origin of the Hebrew word "sche'ól," it seems to be derived from the Hebrew verb "scha-ál," which means "to request, to ask for." Different interpretations have agreed upon She'ol as a common ground or region of the dead. It derives its name from the insatiability of the grave, as if it were always asking for or claiming more. This, apparently, gives the idea that She'ol is a place (not a condition) that claims everyone without distinction, since it takes in the dead of all humanity (Genesis 37:35). She'ol seems to have been located somewhere underground, and the condition of the dead was foreign to both pain as well as pleasure. Also, She'ol was neither associated with reward for the righteous nor punishment for the wicked. Everyone, good and bad, tyrants and saints, kings and orphans, Israelites and gentiles, all slept together unconscious of one another. While Greek teachings on the immortality of the human soul found their way into Jewish religious thinking in subsequent centuries, the biblical record shows that She'ol refers to the common grave of all humanity as a place of unconsciousness. The word "she'ol" appears frequently in the books of Psalms and Job to refer to a place where all the dead will end up. It is portrayed as a dark place, where, strictly speaking, no activity exists. No moral distinction is made there. In a certain way, speaking of "the grave" in a generic manner is a near equivalent, with the exception that She'ol is a common grave where all the dead are to be found.

THINKING UNIVERSALLY

The all-encompassing "everything" once again becomes essential. Understanding of the parts is given to us by the whole. It is a sort of synchrony that, through mixing and association, again enlightens a description, a phenomenon, a composition. Individualism has its price, and the construction of the person, as in Goethe's "elective affinities" may only be performed to the extent that the many pieces that compose it are able to be joined in oneness. "Just as social life is based on the participation of everyone in everyone and everything, it is important to establish a way of thinking that is congruent with a vaster whole and which engages in that way of thinking. In order for such, it is necessary for the order of knowledge not to be clouded by the concept, which strictly speaking is intangible, but rather by the allusion, the notion, the notation, the symbol that extends beyond the confines of the word, and favors becoming aware of the similarity."⁷ (Fig. 6)

Yarauvi represents a thought, a reflection on universality through a growing form. Let us make a distinction between form and formula. The formula has above all certain answers that are already ready. Alternatively, the form is content to explain problems and provide "conditions of possibility" for giving an answer to those problems, case by case, and not abstractly. The form is full of doubts and becomes an undeniable force within the knowledge process. In the interplay of forms there is in effect this dual perspective of fiction and truth, a reciprocal interplay of eternal forces. They are left open to potentialities that may or may not come to pass. It is the form as essence. Universal thinking does not contain only the form, but rather all the forces and possibilities of the performance, display, and evolution of things. Yarauvi is so well thought-out that the day it ceases to grow will be the sad indicator that humans have ceased to understand one another.

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RESEÑAS / BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW:

PRODUCTORA. MEXICO CITY, MEXICO:
EDITORIAL ARQUINE, 2012.

By: Yara Maite

Productora is the name of a studio created by a group of young architects, Argentine Abel Perles, Belgian Wonne Ickx, and Mexicans Carlos Bedoya and Víctor Jaime, who have recently published their first catalog of architectural projects and interventions. The name of the

firm, likewise, both an adjective and feminine noun in Spanish, like those used by old factories or corporation, is antonomastically also the title of the catalog. A number, the number one, also appears on the cover, and upon having added up the dimensions of the volume, it encourages what we perceive, at a first glance, as the beginning of a series to come that Productora clearly aspires toward. Directly, the number indicates the diagram of the structural layout for the first project appearing in the publication. This portrayal on the cover is a gesture that accounts for the aim of the publication (to introduce and reveal a work), but it also demonstrates the impatience of this collective to transgress (in this case in a figurative and superficial manner) an image, the sharpness of the black cover that encloses the traditional notebook where students and professionals of the trade compile ideas.

Hence, as a continuation of the book cover, with no further introduction, the main content of the catalog appears, or rather the first of four parts, which includes the most photogenic proverbial images of the project as constructed or under construction, or the plan or rendering that best captures, according to the architects, the "essence" of the project. At first, the proposed approach is textual. Readers find themselves faced with images they must read or decipher, in which case, that "essence" has a multifaceted character, because that which is prominently portrayed is at times the artisanal or technological quality of the work, the programmatic suitability or singularity, the tension or distension with the landscape, or the vestigial yet regulatory and categorical presence of a grid.

That last image, which already appeared on the cover, is one of the recurring themes in a cross-reading of the catalog, to the point of cross-referencing proposals as far back as J.N.L. Durand, the French architect, who, were he to still be living, would regard Productora with mistrust. Durand was simplified production, conceived two-dimensionally, with a restricted point of view that was "prêt-à-porter," obedient to the material, efficient, and industrialized. Productora is introduced to us mostly as industrial dysfunction, not unlike a short-circuit, or the unexpected omission on a long production line. In both cases, the failure is foreseen or there is a realization of the limits of the square grid or the orthogonal structure: according to Durand, it is most recommendable to adhere to the grid, which is conceived of as a prophylaxis of absent or boundless creativity. At Productora, however, the exploration of these bounds or margins is the creative space, it is the additional resource. To a certain extent, Productora makes "mistakes" as seen in terms of the grid-so-