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El Helicoide and La Torre de David as Phantom Pavilions: Rethinking Spectacles of Progress in Venezuela

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This article explores El Helicoide and La Torre de David as remnants of the recurrent boom-and-bust cycles and spectacles of progress associated with Venezuela's 'magical state' (Coronil). Their redefinition as 'phantom pavilions' – constructions designed to symbolise development but haunted by crisis and precariousness – serves as a conceptual tool against the amnesia and hysteria these sites provoke. First, I use it to track the buildings' grandiose designs, subsequent curtailment and modified uses through political and economic history. Second, the concept informs the analysis of recent artworks that summon monumentality and ruination to envisage alternate forms of public engagement with truncated sites.

Keywords: architecture, art, monument, ruin, spectacle, Venezuela.

> Outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them. (W.G. Sebald, Austerlitz)
> *Han pasado siglos y todavía me parece vivir en un campamento* (Centuries have passed and I still feel like I'm living in a campsite). (José Ignacio Cabrujas, 'El Estado del disimulo' (1987))

Spatial arrangements that herald national development are more than bricks and mortar or concrete and steel. As they shape space into specific forms, they build 'a framework for a worldview and a carcass for futurist dreams' in tune with the prevailing political and economic ideologies of their times (Boym, 2010: 64). Yet for these prospects to hold sway, monumental constructions must be more than paper architecture; they must be completed and used according to plan. This raises the question of what happens when this is not the case. What can lapsed buildings tell us about the way progress is conjured through built space? And how can we think through the presence of truncated constructions on the urban landscape without reducing them to dystopian sites or aestheticised ruins? This article addresses these issues by examining a pair of constructions in Caracas whose grand designs were conceived as signs of unstoppable development, but whose curtailment saw them yield to precarious uses and collective amnesia.

The first is El Helicoide Shopping Centre and Exhibition of Industries (1955), a spiral-shaped modernist mall conceived and designed by Jorge Romero Gutiérrez, Pedro

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Neuberger and Dirk Bornhorst during the oil-rich military dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, whose construction stuttered after the post-1958 transition to democracy. Under state control since 1976, it underwent numerous failed transformations and even became a refuge for landslide victims. In 1985, Venezuela's intelligence police took over the site and since 2010 it has been both a jail and a police-training academy. The second building is the Confinanzas Financial Centre (1989), better known by the moniker La Torre de David, which was designed by Enrique Gómez y Asociados for the banker David Brillembourg as an icon of Venezuela's finance sector. The construction of the 45-storey tower and adjacent buildings halted after just four years amid the fall-out from the violent disturbances of the 1989 *Caracazo*, 1992 coup attempt, and ensuing financial crisis and after languishing for years under state control, in 2007 squatters set up homes in its concrete carcass, only to be extricated by the government four years later, leaving the building's future hanging in the balance.

Despite – or perhaps because – of their dramatic stories, El Helicoide and La Torre de David inspire impassioned reactions. But instead of probing the sites' complexities or considering their passages from blueprint to truncated monument, discussions about them tend to remain ensnared in reductive framings. Showcased in celebratory publications (Bornhorst, 2007) and high profile exhibitions like the Museum of Modern Art's recent *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980*, El Helicoide has largely been cleansed of its problematic afterlife and merely consecrated as modernist heritage. For its part, even as the media frenzy around La Torre de David's occupation drew the building out of obscurity, as it was filtered through the polarised lenses of contemporary debates about Venezuela it was either cast as cipher of generalised ruin (Wilson, 2012; Anderson, 2013) or proof of governmental capacity for national renewal (TeleSUR, 2014). Amid such settings, these problematic sites risk becoming blind spots in the nation's cultural, historical and political consciousness. Even as such buildings remain in public view, their roles as testaments to modern history are 'masked and distorted by layers of amnesia and hysteria', as Alejandro Velasco recently pointed out (Velasco, 2015: xiii).

The complexity of El Helicoide and La Torre de David's rise and fall calls for a critical framework in which political, economic and social history dovetails with aesthetic and cultural criticism. In this regard, my aim in this article is to develop a method that builds on analyses of architectural design, recognises the buildings as testaments to political and economic upheavals, but also as 'structures of feeling' whose aesthetic remediation offers routes to rethink national development, urban transformation, and crisis (Williams, 1977: 132–133). Specifically, this approach entails approaching El Helicoide and La Torre de David as remnants of the 'dazzling spectacles of national progress' and boom-and-bust cycles that Fernando Coronil uncovered at the heart of Venezuela's 'magical state' and experience of modernity (1997: 1–5). More broadly, by engaging the buildings as curtailed and precarious structures, I draw on related inquiries into ruination and monumentality that have emerged alongside the current boom of 'ruin lust' (Dillon, 2014), which risks aestheticising abandoned or unfinished buildings as melancholic wreckage and thus muting their complex 'afterlives' (Draper, 2012).

As scholars (Hell and Schönle, 2010) currently engaged in this field contend, the challenge is to approach problematic sites in such a way that they shed light on shared histories and enduring challenges. Excavating their unfinished forms and ruptured materiality thus offers a means to uncover the political, economic and social conflicts embedded in them (Gordillo, 2014). Incidentally, similar proposals transpire in recent debates that call for a re-envisaging of about monumentality to account for, rather than overshadow,

political and social complexities. Engaging Deleuze's criticisms of conventional links between monumentality and commemoration, and the former's monolithic and intransigent postures, Jacques Rancière (2010) proposes aesthetic mediation as a means to refigure monumentality and thus attest to conflictive realities.

To this end, the discussion below establishes a framework to liken El Helicoide and La Torre de David to 'pavilions', that is, symbolic encapsulations of national progress. Next, I leverage this conceptual tool in two interconnected directions. First, I use it to retrace the stories of the buildings' conception and curtailment through the boom-and-bust cycles of Venezuela's modern history. Second, I analyse how recent artworks develop productive engagements with these buildings' histories to refigure their vocations as pavilions and monumental contours to make room for the unpredictability of a future in a constant 'process of becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991a: 177).

The Pavilion as Spectacle of Progress

The longstanding bonds between architecture, nationhood and spectacle offer a means to bring El Helicoide and La Torre de David onto common ground. On a global level, and especially amid the quest to consolidate Latin America's emergent nation-states in post-independence, a number of spatial typologies have served as 'galleries of progress' to demarcate national identity, herald future development, and to lure local and foreign capital (Andermann and González Stephan, 2006). Since the late nineteenth century, pavilions, museums, conventional monuments, and constructions of monumental proportions, have all served as more than architectural forms. They are discursive and exhibitionary spaces that marshal certain ideas of nationhood and forms of social and political order (Bennett, 1995).

It is on the first of these typologies that I will draw to elucidate the two buildings under discussion here. Since its inception, the pavilion has been tasked with encapsulating ideal models of nationhood through its combination of architectural design, technologies of display, and formative itineraries (Bennett, 1995). When deployed in a prospective mode to project future development, it conjures optimistic horizons as preordained realities, forecasting guaranteed progress in line with specific economic models, usually through modes of capitalist and industrial production. As Timothy Mitchell has shown, to gain purchase for this idea, the pavilion summons a 'reality effect', whereby forward-looking aesthetics and optimistic itinerary are presented as seamless continuations of the real world, rather than aspirational conjectures (1989: 236).

As across Latin America, this edifying way of depicting national development swiftly gained traction in Venezuela. After 1889, successive governments commissioned pavilions to construct a 'self-portrait' to buttress the nation-state, cohere its imagined community, and legitimise models of development (Marin, 2006: 268; González Stephan, 2008). Later, Venezuelan pavilions became imbricated with the dreams of instantaneous development that the oil economy engendered as they played out the shift from traditional agricultural economy to modern oil nation. At the 1937 Paris World Fair, Venezuelan architects Luis Malaussena and Carlos Raúl Villanueva designed a neo-colonial pavilion that celebrated Venezuela's Hispanic heritage and agricultural production. Just two years later, though, at New York's World of Tomorrow Fair, this traditional 'self-portrait' was replaced by a glass-walled pavilion designed by American firm Skidmore and Owings. As it left behind pastoral and colonial heritage, the forward-looking design reinvented the nation as a key contender in global oil markets. Even though the pavilion's modish

International Style bore no relation to Venezuela's architectural vernaculars at the time, the commissioners enthused about its 'absolute identification [of a] burgeoning country that has already taken its path to modernisation and left its past behind' (Calvo Albizu, 2007: 331). Evidently, what mattered was not that the building resembled the existing landscape, but that it heralded a nation on the up.

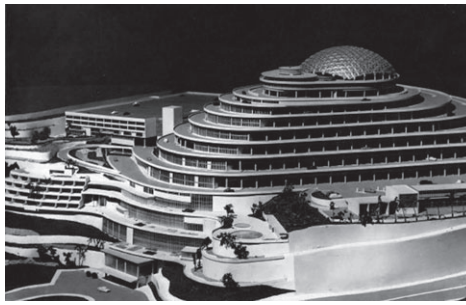
Literally speaking, the grand scales of El Helicoide and La Torre de David's design outsize the pavilion's typically smaller size. The buildings were conceived as markers of Venezuela's development and economic growth at home, not abroad. Even so, the analogy I propose here is not beholden to a literal notion of the pavilion, but draws on it as a paradigm of the way spectacles of progress are staged by architectural means. The way the pavilion attempts the affective capture of its public, not because its aspirational conjectures are the truth, but because 'such a notion of the real, such a system of truth, continues to convince us' (Mitchell, 1989: 236), dovetails with the function of El Helicoide and La Torre de David's forward-looking architecture as a buttress for the spectacles of progress that Coronil associates with Venezuela's modern history. It is this parallel that informs the redefinition of the two buildings as 'pavilions' and which the next section will address as it traces their conception and design through the upheavals that reduced both to phantasmal forms: sites haunted by promises of development that did not materialise as planned.

Retracing Histories of Boom and Bust

It is no coincidence that Romero, Neuberger and Bornhorst dreamt up the idea of building El Helicoide at precisely the same time that *Time* magazine described Venezuela as the 'dreamboat' of South America: an economy buoyed up by rising oil revenues and foreign investment. Intoxicated by this boom time climate, in 1955 the three architects began designing a building that served multiple ends. It was a speculative enterprise for the firm; another foothold for Venezuela on the global map of architectural modernism; and confirmation of national development all at the same time (Figure 1). El Helicoide's construction site was located at the Roca Tarpeya, an undeveloped outcrop located close to downtown Caracas, reached by the Avenida Fuerzas Armadas and connected to the new arteries that headed east. The rock was bulldozed into shape and clad with dual helix reinforced concrete ramps that echoed Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (1943). Along with the ramps, the design featured four street-level elevators that were to provide vehicular and pedestrian access to more than 300 stores, offices, a hotel, multi-room movie theatre, television studios, car showrooms, and a gas station. At the summit, a 2300 m^2 trade fair of oil, petrochemical, gas, iron, aluminium, and agriculture industries would be set up under a Buckminster Fuller dome to present Venezuela as an industrialised powerhouse of global proportions (Villota Peña, 2014: 420).

The building's audacious design and incorporation of automobile culture even earned it a place at the Museum of Modern Art's 1961 exhibition *Road*s, while its colossal scale and its modernist style tapped directly into debates about modern monumentality that occupied critics and architects in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, even though it was not a state commission, El Helicoide adds weight to Gregor Paulsson's assertion in the *Architectural Review*'s seminal symposium 'In Search of a New Monumentality' that '[g]enuine monumentality can only arise from dictatorship' (Paulsson *et al*., 1948: 123). Sixty years on, many still attribute the building to dictator Coronel Marcos Pérez

Figure 1. Photograph of Model of El Helicoide



Source: Dirk Bornhorst Archive/Proyecto Helicoide. Anonymous (undated)

Figure 2. Portrait of David Brillembourg with a Model of La Torre de David

Source: Ricard2 (c. 1989)

Jiménez (1952–1958) since its daring style chimed with the military mandate to deliver instant modernity by channelling the nation's rising wealth into high-speed construction.

For all the impetus put behind modernist architecture during the period in which El Helicoide emerged, the period was one of significant upheavals. Military rule had intercepted the tentative process of liberalisation and democratisation that followed the protracted dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908–1935), under whose watch oil extraction began. The late 1930s and 1940s marked a shift to centralised urban planning and investment in public works, which cemented the equation between built space and progress (Martín Frechilla, 1994), yet for some military officers the speed of development was not fast enough. In 1948, after a military junta toppled national novelist Rómulo Gallegos, the first president voted to office through universal suffrage, a poorly masked dictatorship was installed that lasted ten years. Although the leaders promised free elections in 1952, a fraudulent count of votes installed defence minister and coup-leader Marcos Pérez Jiménez in power.

As Castillo (1990) shows, the initially 'soft' dictatorship (*dictablanda*) was built on the promise of a New National Ideal: the developmentalist ideology that advocated the transformation of the physical environment to expunge the 'backward' trappings of rural life, trigger rapid development, and propel Venezuela to modernity. A combination of curbed civic rights and soaring state revenues caused by the post-war demand for petroleum, the closure of the Suez Canal, and the Iranian crisis of 1954, secured the dictator's seat in power (Karl, 1987: 71). The state increased regulation of oil, minerals, and private enterprise, and controlled strategic sectors of growth, like steel and electricity. Armed with an open chequebook, the regime equated nation building to the rapid construction of mass housing and infrastructure – a correlation that official propaganda entrenched by equating large-scale modernist architecture to extant modernity.

In its conception as an exponent of modern monumentality in Caracas' changing urban landscape and an exhibition centre to showcase the nation's industrial might, El Helicoide synthesised the political mandate for modernisation delivered at a spectacular speed and on a colossal scale. The speculative mode of investment behind the architects' method of selling space off plan to fund round-the-clock construction tapped into the ranking Venezuela reached between 1950 and 1957 as the country with the second highest amount of foreign exchange in the world (Karl, 1987: 71). Moreover,

as a cutting-edge shopping mall, the building was perfectly in tune with the ideology of capitalist growth and lifestyle trends inflected by oil culture in the 1940s and through the 1950s, which advocated social clubs, modern hotels, and an expanding marketplace chock full of novel goods, imported mainly from the United States, as markers of modernity (Vicente, 2003; Tinker Salas, 2009: 181–189). Briefly put, El Helicoide was the ultimate national 'pavilion' of its time: spectacular proof that Venezuela could live up to the reports that dubbed it *The New El Dorado* (Ward, 1957).

But when the political and economic tides changed, El Dorado did not materialise as planned. The spectacle of progress built on military rule and escalating public spending turned out to be unsustainable, as did El Helicoide's round-the-clock construction. As Karl (1987) points out, since the dictatorship had risen to power by stunting processes of democratisation cultivated between 1946 and 1948 that were leaving behind military authoritarianism, the emergence of a new crisis was just a matter of time. By 1957, the dictatorship's extravagant construction projects had deepened the incipient economic and fiscal crisis. However, instead of placating Venezuela's increasingly disgruntled industrialists, the regime isolated them further by shutting them out of strategic sectors. The upshot was that conservative economic elites sided with outlawed parties like Acción Democrática, joined in calls for regime change voiced increasingly by the Church, restless military officers and members of society eager to play a more active part on the political stage.

On 23 January 1958, Pérez Jiménez fled and the dictatorship came to an end. El Helicoide's architects attempted to ride out the storm over the next ten months as the political landscape was prepared for elections, leading to the Pact of Punto Fijo signed by the three main parties. In it they pledged to secure national stability and democratic rule by initiating a political truce and respecting the results of the upcoming election, but just as democracy was gaining a foothold, construction on El Helicoide stuttered. The climate of uncertainty over these transitional months had made the architects' risky sell-to-build strategy unfeasible. Despite assistance from commercial banks and the provisional post-dictatorship government, funds began to dry up, building slowed, and investors sued the architects (Bornhorst, 2007: 17–18). By 1961, the firm went bankrupt amid the climate of austerity advocated by newly elected president Rómulo Betancourt and the unfinished project ground to a definitive halt. The 12,000 blueprints that projected unstoppable industrial and capitalist expansion came tumbling down to earth, turning the spectacular pavilion of progress into a phantom haunted by dictatorial hubris and economic crisis.

Over the ensuing years, as Acción Democrática (AD) and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) took turns in power, stop-start construction stumbled along, but the unfinished spiral was overshadowed by a new megaproject: the 59-storey twin tower residential, cultural and commercial complex of Parque Central (1970), designed by Daniel Fernández-Shaw and for a long time the tallest buildings in Latin America. The complex befitted the renewed spectacle of progress associated with Carlos Andrés Pérez' first term as president from 1974 to 1979. Bolstered by quadrupling revenues produced by the 1973 oil crisis, Pérez heralded a 'Great Venezuela', reviving 'the illusion that instantaneous modernisation lay at hand […] that oil money could launch the country into the future' (Coronil, 1997: 237). As the economy soared, so too did buildings, and the Parque Central 'pavilion' shaped up the nation to its moniker *Venezuela saudita* – a kingdom in South America like its oil-rich counterpart in the Middle East. The state increased financing and management of extractive industries, nationalising oil and steel, encouraging import substitution, and funding the world's

third-largest hydroelectric dam. Meanwhile, the private sector benefited from high yield investments in real estate, commerce and construction (Coronil, 1997: 246, 286). Flush with wealth, the state purchased El Helicoide in 1976, proposing numerous projects, from a cultural centre to an environment ministry and cemetery (Olalquiaga, 2014).

However, as Luis Herrera Campins took over from Pérez in 1979, the still empty building did not rise from the ashes, but slid further into obscurity. As heavy rains left hundreds destitute and the state turned the building into a temporary refuge, storm clouds also gathered in the economy. Boom turned again to bust as consumption outran production, foreign debt rose, oil plunged, and the bolivar's Black Friday on 18 February 1983 brought an unprecedented devaluation against the dollar (Coronil and Skursi, 1991: 293). As this new crisis played out, the precarious community squatting in El Helicoide grew to some 12,000 people, who were only evacuated six years later when a local government realised the gravity of conditions in the site. After the police-led clearance in which residents were paid to demolish homes and erase traces of their dwelling, the project leaders celebrated that it had effectively 'domesticated' the building and laid out detailed plans to create a Museum of Anthropology there (Gobernación del Distrito Federal, 1982: 7).

The museum's construction did not last long, however, but stopped a year later. It was then that the intelligence police stepped into the void and moved into El Helicoide. Still, even amid the economic downturn in which debt repayment overtook state-funded development, Pérez's spectacular promise of the 'Great Venezuela' lingered on. Although El Helicoide was pushed from the spotlight, construction on the Parque Central towers continued during the mid-1980s and private banks invested in building new skyscrapers. It was amid the recent memories of economic boom and the enduring faith in renewed growth that the investor David Brillembourg commissioned plans for La Torre de David and launched his banking group's slogan *Confinanzas: renace la confianza* (Confinanzas: confidence is reborn). Venezuela would rise again, onwards and upwards with the skyscraper's 45 storeys.

La Torre de David also sketched out the contours of an imagined nation, both developed and prosperous (Figure 2). Much as El Helicoide's architects had invested in the endurance of spectacular growth, Brillembourg wagered on a return to economic boom, projecting the continued growth in the banking sector and demand for luxury office space. Albeit in a different architectural vernacular, this new 'pavilion' of prospective development was also designed to monumental proportions. As well as housing the Confinanzas financial group, the 45-storey main tower and four additional buildings would feature 30,000 m^2 of office space, a luxury hotel, 81 apartment suites, a twelve-storey car park, swimming pool, and helipad (Urban-Think Tank, 2013: 70–73). Engaging the architectural idiom of corporate luxury and global finance, the main tower was to be decked out with a 30-m high glass atrium and covered by a glass curtain manufactured by the same firm that had clad the ill-fated World Trade Centre (Urban-Think Tank, 2013: 87). Its location near the Miraflores presidential palace, Capitolio building, government ministries, and Central Bank, would situate La Torre de David at the centre of political and economic power.

Despite the dogged optimism associated with its design, when construction started in the late 1980s the economic crisis deepened. Venezuelans' election of Carlos Andrés Pérez's to a second term in 1989 suggested that the population was still invested in his promise of the Great Venezuela, but hopes of its renewal were soon shattered. In an attempt to restore confidence among foreign creditors, the *Gran Viraje* (Grand

Turnaround) Pérez promised ended up replacing state-protected business with an austerity package that engendered panic among Venezuelans (Coronil and Skursi, 1991; López Maya, 2003). As the state withdrew subsidies on basic goods, ended price controls, and freed up interest rates, violent protests and looting broke out in the *Caracazo* of 27 February 1989, shattering the rebirth of confidence in which Brillembourg had invested. In 1993, Pérez was impeached for embezzlement, the finance sector buckled a year later, and the Confinanzas group went down with it, turning La Torre de David into another a phantom pavilion of unrealised promises.

Over the following years, the abandoned building stood by as another sea change occurred in Venezuelan politics. The cumulative impacts of Black Friday, the *Caracazo*, and a further austerity package introduced in 1996, all exposed fractures in the two-party system and the model of democratic representation, state-led development, and social and economic well-being that had marshalled Venezuela from dictatorship to democracy after the Pact of Punto Fijo was sealed (Cicciarello-Maher, 2013). Although, as David Smilde argues (Smilde, 2011: 3–6), the model had brought manifest gains in health, literacy and prosperity, its gradual weakening created room for the alternate promises of national renewal that Hugo Chávez offered voters. After leading an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1992, Chávez's election to office in 1998 brought pledges of the dawn of a new Venezuela. Out of the rubble of the conflictive 1990s he promised to draw up a reformed constitution that would deliver greater social justice, equity, popular participation, and economic reform (López Maya, 2005: 40–60).

Despite initial consensus, support waned amid growing radicalisation, and the national strike and coup of 2002 divided the nation into polarised groups of *chavistas* and *oposición*, whose animosities continued over later struggles for recall referendums and constitutional reforms to extend presidential terms and re-election (Cannon, 2004: 293–298). It was in the midst of this tempestuous political climate, a particularly bad bout of torrential rains, and the continual pressures of a longstanding housing deficit, that in 2007 a few hundred people took shelter in La Torre de David. Over the next few years, the population grew to nearly 4500 people, who improvised sewerage, electricity, and water systems, and replaced the glass curtain with red brick walls, living amid precarious conditions against all odds.

Suddenly, La Torre de David returned to the forefront of public debates. The state turned a blind eye to the squat until 2012 but amid media attention and confronted with one of its occupants on live television (Sarabia, 2012), Chávez ordered an inquiry into living conditions, which led to its evacuation in July 2014. Under National Guard supervision, residents boxed up belongings and boarded buses to new government housing outside Caracas. As evacuation advanced, government websites celebrated internal demolition work (Oficina Presidencial de Planes y Proyectos (OPPE), 2014a, 2014b) and President Nicolás Maduro declared La Torre de David a ruin of the pre-Chávez era (Telesur, 2014). At the same time, the spotlight was shifted onto the horizon of a reborn socialist nation whose dawn Chávez predicted in 1999. On television Maduro handed ex-residents keys to a 'new socialist city' produced by *Constructores del Socialismo* – Builders of Socialism (Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela, 2013).

When the global media frenzy and government speculation about La Torre de David's transformation (Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, 2015a, 2015b) waned, the building slipped back into obscurity. Just a few kilometres away across the Caracas valley, El Helicoide remained embroiled in contradictions. Although a training academy had been installed there in 2010 to enact 'comprehensive police reform' (Humphrey and Valverde,

2014: 162), the site continued to serve as an improvised prison for high profile detainees implicated in political conflicts and violent crimes (Fernández, 2015).

Spectres Past, Challenges Present: Phantom Pavilions in Contemporary Art

This historical overview shows that as 'phantom pavilions' both El Helicoide and La Torre de David are as much haunted by the past as they are embroiled in present conflicts. Given their propensity to slip in and out of public debates, it bears asking by what other means these problematic sites might become topics of more productive, critical discussions. Through research-led websites, exhibitions and public events, Proyecto Helicoide (2013), founded by cultural historian Celeste Olalquiaga, and La Torre de David, developed by artists Ángela Bonadies and Juan José Olavarría, have contributed to encouraging public engagement in the buildings they study. The artworks drawn from these projects for analysis here are significant because by summoning their roles as 'phantom pavilion', they manage to work through their complex histories, at the same time as they engage the calls for revised notions of monumentality and critical representations of ruination highlighted at the start of this article.

The installation *Melancolía de Roca Tarpeya. Homenaje a la traición* (Melancholy of Tarpeian Rock. Homage to Treason), by artists Rodrigo Figueroa, Marjiatta Gottopo, Federico Ovalles-Ar, and Gerardo Rojas, was created in 2014 for the exhibition *Helicoides posibles: visiones fantásticas* held at the Centro Cultural Chacao in Caracas and curated by Proyecto Helicoide to bring the building back into public discussions (Figure 3). In one half of the exhibition, an illustrated timeline charted the history of El Helicoide, while the other displayed works by artists invited to reconceive the building in fantastical forms. In *Melancolía*, the artists used El Helicoide's truncated promises of development as a departure point to design a speculative monument, which was displayed as a scale model in the gallery alongside materials from their research process. As Figure 5 shows, the monument was framed as a 'cenotaph' of El Helicoide's monumental prospect and promise of development. The artists appropriated as the structural framework for this hypothetical construction the solid form that appears in Albrecht Dürer's iconic engraving *Melancholia I* from 1514 (Figure 4). Set amid a scene depicting abandoned tools and a frustrated creator, this solid form, also known as the 'magic square', connotes architectural failure and truncated endeavour.

Redeployed in half a century later in *Melancolía*, it stands as a double of El Helicoide: a melancholic commemoration of the Tarpeian Rock from which the building was carved out. Although the use of Dürer's solid as an allegorical tomb for El Helicoide's modern utopia mobilised a conventional monumental idiom to commemorate the past, *Melancolía* did not indulge in the 'restorative nostalgia' that reconstructs a 'lost home' as a locus of 'truth and tradition' (Boym, 2001: 41). On the contrary, the installation literally emptied out the causal connection between monumentality and progress. As Figure 6 shows, Dürer's monumental 'magical square' was not rendered anew as a spectacular or monolithic volume; it was first pared down to its skeletal framework and placed in dialogue with El Helicoide and the informal urban fabric amid which it is embedded.

By stripping the 'magical square' down to its bare bones, the artists countered both the spectacular valences of the pavilion's promise to depict and encapsulate the nation,

Figure 3. Installation View of *Melancolía de Roca Tarpeya. Homenaje a la traición*

Source: Rodrigo Figueroa, Marjiatta Gottopo, Federico Ovalles-Ar, and Gerardo Rojas (2014)

and the solidity with which monumental structures purport to embody nationhood in edifying and durable forms. In turn, the artists applied this action of voiding spectacular display and solid mass to the new monument they conjured up. As can be seen in Figure 5, the 'cenotaph' is a rudimentary framework supported by scaffolds, whose spiral walkways revive a spectre of El Helicoide's optimistic itinerary. However, while the design envisaged users ascending the apparently solid monument using its walkways, they would not reach a triumphant summit but a descent into its cavernous interior. In this 'tomb', the phantom of El Helicoide's dream of instant modernity was replaced by a piece of concrete rubble. To be sure, this 'monument' was a solid mass, but one entirely out of time with the linear trajectory of progress: its reinforced concrete was supposed to connote construction, not destruction.

While these aspects focused on the unstable foundations on which El Helicoide was originally built, the hypothetical monument presented in the installation also established a dialogue with the conflicts and crisis of the present. The artists proposed that it be erected on the recently levelled site of a jail called La Planta, built in 1964 only a few hundred metres from El Helicoide. Over the preceding years, La Planta had become a landmark of the deterioration, deadly riots and overcrowding that characterise Venezuela's penitentiary system (Morais, 2009) and the rising crime rates (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012; Zubillaga, 2013) that interfere with optimistic narratives of national rebirth associated with Chávez's rise to power. Using similar methods of media coverage to those deployed during the evacuation of La Torre de David two years later, in 2012 the government ordered the prison's demolition and brought in bulldozers to reduce it to rubble on live television. As the prison was destroyed, ministers clad in hard-hats announced the Bolivarian Revolution's plans to replace this site of 'horror' with a 10,000 m^2 communal park where life would prosper (Venezolana de Televisión, 2012). In spite of the upbeat messages that framed the clearance of space as a triumph of life over horror, its erasure simply moved the architecture of incarceration from view to put another large-scale, and as yet unfinished, construction in its place.

By summoning the jail's demolition and positing an alternate occupation of its vacant site with a funereal 'cenotaph' instead of a life affirming park, *Melancolía* confronted

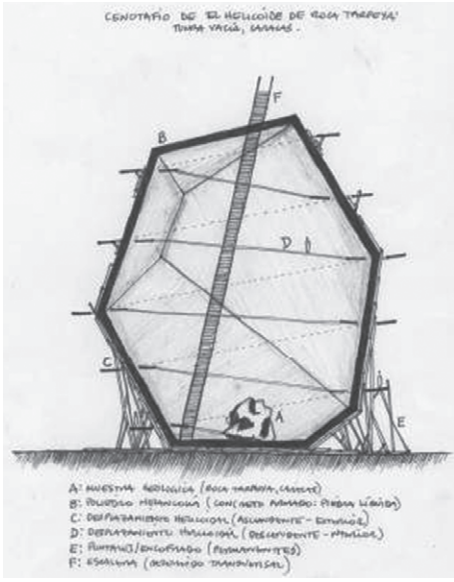
Figure 4. Albrecht Dürer (1514) *Melancholía I*

Source: British Museum, Creative Commons

the logic of erasure and reinscription that was synonymous with modernist planning and that endures today. By merging La Planta and El Helicoide's respective trajectories from jail to park, and utopian mall to police headquarters, the new public space would be host to past spectres. In so doing, it posited a way to look at conflictive landmarks in dialogue, rather than in isolation. Against the amnesia on which the new park was proposed, in the hypothetical site conjured by *Melancolía* architectures of development and incarceration would overlap in the sediments and rubble left by spectacles of progress, their construction and ruination. In sum, the installation experimented with an alternate mode of monumentality, that promised neither spectacular display nor intransigent postures. Instead, as *Melancolía* revived El Helicoide as rubble on the site of the demolished jail, it looked forward, positing a site in the urban landscape where problematic the gathering of their 'afterlives' could allow 'a mode of experiencing the echoes of a past that is lost to history but that has the potential to be heard and made legible' (Draper, 2012: 5).

The phantom pavilion as a site of productive encounters rather than collective amnesia is also the core of Bonadies' and Olavarría's project into La Torre de David. Their works, exhibited in Venezuela and internationally, from Germany to Mexico and Dubai, raised awareness about the building before it became a media sensation that drew accusations of misery porn (Hancox, 2014), an urban laboratory showcased at the 2012 Biennale di Venezia (Kallipoliti, 2013; Urban-Think Tank, 2013), a topic of academic comment (Gordillo, 2014), or a ruin of the pre-Chávez era worthy only of demolition, as President Nicolás initially suggested. Bonadies and Olavarría's works engage La Torre de

Figure 5. Design for *Melancolía's* Cenotaph of El Helicoide



Source: Figueroa *et al*. (2014)

Figure 6. Photograph from *Melancolía* Showing Model Opposite El Helicoide

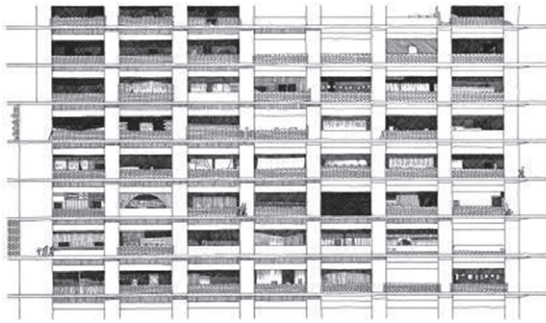
Source: Figueroa *et al*. (2014)

David as a specific site shot through with structural and social challenges, and a departure point that afforded them a long view of urban design that engaged enduring links between architectural form and promises of national development.

In a series of meticulous pen drawings of sections of the building's façade, the artists appropriate the trope of the architectural blueprint only to problematise it by inverting its prospective temporality. As Figure 7 shows, rather than use the grid form of rational planning to propose an ideal space, *Estudio fachada este* (Study of Eastern Façade) uses it as a means of recording in detail the improvised dwellings implanted in the failed tower. Beyond the immediate depiction of La Torre de David, the façade's irregular lattice brings to mind the simple grid map of Caracas sketched out in 1567 to entrench the structure of colonial power, as well as the Monumental Plan drafted by Maurice Rotival in 1939, whose expansion of the colonial grid is credited with originating urban modernisation but whose grand designs also entailed problematic sites – like the insalubrious El Silencio area – being reduced to rubble in the name of progress (Fraser, 2000: 103–110). This potential to summon a *longue durée* of urban transformations from a fragment of the building displaces the limiting focus on its decaying monumental contours as a stimulus for ruin lust and polarised judgments. Instead, the work calls forth an imaginary of intermittent promises of spatial – and national – order from Venezuelan history, to make connections between the persistent quests devised to induce development through spatial arrangements.

While this strategy illuminates urban history, Bonadies and Olavarría's works do not eschew the contingencies and particularities of the building's occupation. Indeed, their frequent use of installation assembles an archival scene, composed of documents

Figure 7. *Estudio fachada este*



Source: Bonadies and Olavarría (2010)

Figure 8. Installation View of *La prueba*

Source: Bonadies and Olavarría (2010)

charting the building's origins, photographs of its recent occupation, and objects they present – fictitiously – as vestiges of the real site, which give the materiality of the precarious structure a tangible presence. This strategy is significant precisely because it avoids reducing the building to a merely symbolic phenomenon or dystopian postcard. Instead, it brings into focus its occupation as a real human problem and in so doing pushes back against the blind eye the state initially turned to the building's perilous conditions, and, more broadly, the tendency to aestheticise ruinous sites as picturesque scenes cast through romantic or apocalyptic lenses.

It is in this context that Bonadies and Olavarría's installation *La prueba* (The Test) garners particular significance. As Figure 8 shows, *La prueba* is a simple installation comprising a real-size tent of tarnished fabric. The work restages the conditions in which La Torre de David's first occupants settled there and the latter method implemented to put aspiring residents to the test referenced in its title; only if they could live amicably in a tent for a set period would newcomers be given a space to build their own apartments.

Alongside this compelling factual dimension of the work, which fabricates the tent to signal a real, material problem, the installation educes another illumination. As it privileged a provisional shelter over the building's monumental and now iconic contours, *La prueba* directly engages the spectres of precariousness this article has unearthed as the scaffolds for spectacle and monumentality. In so doing, it exposed other valences in the concept of the term 'pavilion', bringing to mind its etymological roots in *papillio* – the Latin word for butterfly and tent, both of which epitomise flux and provisionality. This semantic bridge elucidates the contradictory space staged in *La prueba*: monumental contours that have become a makeshift tent – stained fabric marked by a vulnerable community, in place of a glass curtain providing grand views for bankers.

Through this reading, the installation can be conceived as a renewed staging: one that puts the spotlight on the engrained indeterminacies that lurk amid the monumental buildings whose rise and fall mirrors the boom-and-bust of modern Venezuela. Much like *Melancolía*, this artwork also refigures monumentality to counter its intransigent forms by foregrounding a site that speaks to the way unstable experiential and material horizons transpire gradually. While Deleuze and Guattari (1991b) imagined an alternate monument emerging from piles of rocks left by walkers as testimony to their common passage on a shared path, here it is the tarnished fabric of the tent in *La prueba* that conjures residual traces left by fictional inhabitants. By giving presence to provisional

living conditions, the work strips the monument of its commemorative function and monolithic form, reconfiguring it instead as 'a sensible element torn from the sensible': a fissure in the grand aspirational 'pavilion', now rendered a makeshift tent (Rancière, 2010: 173).

Conclusions

Much as Sebald wrote that monumental contours and grandiose constructions 'cast shadows of their destruction before them', the curtailment of El Helicoide and La Torre de David elucidates the shaky scaffolding that propped up the spectacles of progress that shaped Venezuela in the mid-twentieth century and that continue to inform the present. Instead of diverting the gaze from these lapsed buildings or fixating on them only during momentary media frenzy, the concept of 'phantom pavilions' brings their shadows and spectres back into focus. Revisited in historical context and remediated through aesthetic practice, truncated sites and their problematic afterlives take on a more productive presence: they stand as testaments to the discontinuities between hubristic imaginaries of progress and enduring social, economic and political challenges.

The aesthetic of provisionality that transpires in *La prueba* and *Melancolía* suggests that attempts to secure development by uprooting the nation and remaking it in monumental forms are recurrent features of Venezuela's modern history. Indeed, this idea evokes the oft-cited comments of José Ignacio Cabrujas (1987) in the wake of economic crisis and not long before the upheavals of the *Caracazo*. As he pondered the prevailing model of progress and statecraft, he conjured Venezuela as a provisional camp transformed into a grand hotel, administered by a state permanently incapable of securing its guests' comfort and welfare. In this image of an indeterminate nation caught between provisional sites and aspirational buildings, boom-and-bust cycles and periodic occupations and clearances emerge as coetaneous features of spectacles of progress, whether seen as a New National Ideal or a Great Venezuela.

While bulldozers and demolition continue to serve promises of instant transformation, sites like El Helicoide and La Torre de David stand as challenges to amnesia and are apt starting points for critical debates about much more than architectural design. When looked at carefully, without hysteria, these buildings' curtailment and modified functions alert us to the enduring dangers of boom-and-bust cycles that set the oil nation lurching between definitive forms and makeshift contingencies. Reconfigured through artworks that invite public engagement, El Helicoide and La Torre de David begin to plot a history of the spectacles of progress that informed their rise, and the socio-economic challenges that brought about their demise. When they find ways into public discussions these critical dimensions create opportunities to rethink architectural remnants and also to conceive alternate monumental forms that allow shadows and spectres to gather to remind us that they are as much a thing of the past, as persistent features of the present.

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