

Talca Interrupted

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In the wake of disaster, the steps toward mending a disrupted society are intricate. They call for nuance, scrutiny and tact. They represent a task of scope, which outmatches the ability and resources of any single entity. Many integrated bodies must combine their individual skills, agendas and visions for the mending to occur.

As architects, we have an opportunity to do the needlework, to gather the various threads. By intervening at key moments to catalyze the forces pre-existing within a community, we can push and pull on the strands in hopes of productively weaving them together. This realization and the process by which we've arrived at it were the most gratifying facet of COM(M)A, the studio which we led in 2011.

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, which devastated central Chile, we began our efforts to channel academic intellect and creativity towards a scenario worth global attention, yet grounded in local specificity.

COM(M)A became the place, for the future architects in the multidisciplinary group, to identify their roles. They learned how to acknowledge the magnitude of their strengths and yet reflect on the limitations of their reach. The studio looked at the reconstruction scenario of post-disaster Talca - a small historical agricultural town located 300km south of Santiago. The final outcome was simultaneously large and small with a series of long term plans for the development of the neighborhood as a whole and the immediate renovation of an existing neighborhood center.

Each student explored on his/her own, turned over many stones, discovered his/her inherent strengths and the purpose of his/her engagement, and learned that our group efforts should be about empowering others to work for themselves.

As we began our on-site work, the participation of the community grew. 4 design build projects came to fruition: a quincho (local traditional pergola), a playground, a paved area for communal gatherings and a mural diary for public posting, 6 others were workshops and art projects that engaged the community. We built furniture, created artifacts, made films and sculpture. We taught English and learned how to bake empanadas. We constructed together; some objects were tangible and some less so. We built trust and reciprocal admiration and, somewhere along the way, we became a conduit for the people in the neighborhood to once again begin to talk to each other, to organize, to motivate.

We lead our students through an experience, which has empowered them. Having spent so much time together in the months leading up to our trip to Talca - between charrettes, heated discussions, critiques and lectures - every student in the group had reached an amazing understanding of his/ her own skills and limits while acknowledging everyone else's. As a result, the "making phase" became a fluid piece of choreography, where every unexpected event (the depth of a foundation block, numerous power outages, the daily arrival of a flock of children after school, the visit of a city official, a cold downpour), was welcome and embraced with marvelous grace.

COM(M)A STUDIO

COM(M)A: A PAUSE, A TRANSITION, A MOMENTARY BREAK IN SPEECH BETWEEN TWO FRAGMENTS OF INTERRELATED AND CO-DEPENDENT THOUGHT. UNLIKE A PERIOD, A COMMA IS NOT A BREAK, NOR IS IT A SEPARATION. IT DOES NOT REPRESENT AN END NOR DOES IT A BEGINNING. IT THOUGHTFULLY MEDIATES THE TRANSITION BETWEEN COMPONENTS OF COMPLIMENTARY LOGIC. WHAT PRECEDES THE COMMA IS AS FUNDAMENTAL TO ONE'S UNDERSTANDING AS THAT WHICH FOLLOWS IT AND VICE VERSA. DURING SPELLS OF TRAGEDY, ALL THAT HAS COME BEFORE A CATASTROPHIC EVENT IS CRUCIAL TO THE CONTINUITY OF A CULTURE. FOOD, DANCE, MUSIC, ART, RECREATION & LAUGHTER BECOME THE LEGACY OF THE 'BEFORE'. SIMILARLY, THE CULTURAL ACTIONS AND STRIDES TAKEN BY A COMMUNITY IN THE WAKE OF TRAGEDY ARE CRUCIAL TO ITS STABILITY. THEY DETERMINE THE SUCCESS OF THE 'AFTER'.

WHAT COMES BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER ARE EQUALLY PARAMOUNT. PLACING CRITICAL PRESSURE ON THE MOMENT OF TRANSITION BETWEEN THE TWO PHASES OF CULTURAL COHERENCE, THE 'COMMA' BECOMES THE CULTURAL BRIDGE AND TAKES ON AN IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY IN LINKING OLD STRATEGIES TO NEW FORMULAS & TEMPLATES FOR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE. IT DOES NOT SEPARATE PAST FROM FUTURE BUT SIMPLY REPRESENTS AN ACTIVATED STATE OF THE PRESENT.

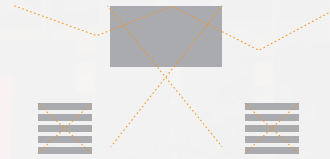
TALCA interrupted



01 FENCE



02 PLAYGROUND



03 QUINCHO



04 STREET ART



05 ART THERAPY



06 MEMORY LAMP



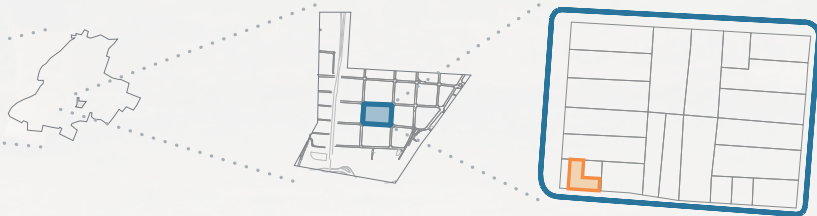
07 DRAWINGS



08 FURNITURE REPAIR



09 PAVEMENT



CHILE

In February 2010, Chile experienced an 8.8 magnitude earthquake, which occurred off the coast of the Maule region. The earthquake hit millions of citizens around the country, leaving many communities in need of reconstruction.



TALCA

Talca, a town in the Maule region of Chile, was one of several areas most affected by the earthquake. Due to the application of cement over traditional adobe construction, many buildings in the center of town were either severely damaged or collapsed completely.



PASO MOYA

Paso Moya neighborhood is located South-East of the historical center. Like those of other urban communities, Paso Moya residents are slowly organizing themselves to rebuild their houses and infrastructures.



COMMUNITY CENTER

The Paso Moya community center, located at the corner of 12 Oriente and 10 Sur, served for town hall meetings but was currently underutilized as the neighborhood still tried to reorganize itself. Our studio helped the community with the repair and the implementation of neighborhood workshops.