

Camilo Yáñez

Estadio nacional, 11.09.09 Santiago, Chile

Kathleen Bühler

Camilo Yáñez's installation comprises a projection screen suspended in the middle of the room, with an video loop projected on each side. The two videos are exactly the same length, namely, nine minutes and fifty-six seconds, and each shows an infinite loop of a single sweep through the National Stadium in Santiago de Chile. On one screen the camera pans to the right up into the stands from a position on the field—looking outward—while on the other side the camera pans to the left, sweeping from the edge of the field to the other side of the stadium—thus directing our attention inward. The shots move at walking speed and viewed one after another they convey an impression of two movements circling one another, exercising an irresistible visual pull. The visual material is backed musically by Carlos Cabezas's contemporary interpretation of "Luchín" (1972), one of the most famous folk songs of Víctor Jara.¹ The lyrics tell the story of the poor boy Luchín, "fragile as a paper kite" with his little hands frozen blue, who plays atop the roofs of the impoverished Barrio de Barrancas on the outskirts of Santiago with a ball made of rags, a cat, and a dog, while a horse watches

¹ Víctor Lidio Jara Martínez, born September 28, 1932, in Lonquén near Santiago de Chile, was a singer, musician, and theater director, and a leading figure in the South American "Nueva canción" (new song) movement. As a committed communist and head of the cultural section of the Chilean Communist Party, Jara joined with other singers to give concerts supporting Salvador Allende and his left-wing Unidad Popular coalition government. He was detained by the military on September 12, 1973, and found murdered three days later with forty-four bullet wounds. The original lyrics of his song are: "Fragil como un volantín / en los techos de barrancas / jugaba el niño Luchín / con sus manitos moradas / con la pelota de trapo / con el gato y con el perro / el caballo lo miraba. / En el agua de sus ojos / se bañaba el verde claro / gateaba a su corta edad / con el potito embarrado / con la pelota de trapo / con el gato y con el perro / el caballo lo miraba. El caballo era otro juego / en aquel pequeño espacio / y al animal parecía / le gustaba ese trabajo / con la pelota de trapo / con el gato y con el perro / y con Luchito mojado. Si hay niños como Luchín / que comen tierra y gusanos / abramos todas las jaulas / pa' que vuelen como pájaros / con la pelota de trapo / con el gato y con el perro / y también con el caballo."

benevolently. The song ends by saying that as long as there are children like Luchín, who have to eat earth and worms, all the cages must be opened to let them fly away like birds. Víctor Jara's moving homage to the impoverished, formerly rural population supplies the bittersweet melody to this special audiovisual memorial recalling the significance of the National Stadium in Chilean history. Yáñez shows the stadium with the seats torn out and stands partly demolished for an overhaul explicitly scheduled to be finished six months later in March 2010, so that the venue's reopening could be part of Chile's two hundredth anniversary celebrations.

The "national monument" was built in 1937–38 as a sport and recreation center using plans by Austrian urban planner Karl Heinrich Brunner.² It originally held 48,000 spectators and was mocked as a "white elephant" because people doubted it would ever be filled.³ As well as soccer games, religious ceremonies were also held in the National Stadium, including the youth mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II on April 2, 1987, where he spoke of it as "the site of athletic competitions, but also of pain and suffering in bygone days."⁴ The Pontiff was unquestionably alluding to the human rights violations committed during the violent overthrow of the government in September 1973, when the military junta used the National Stadium as a prison. Yáñez overtly references that episode in the stadium's history by emphasizing in the title—and the concept—that the film was shot on September 11 at 6 p.m., exactly thirty-six years to the day after the coup began with the bombing of the presidential palace, La Moneda, by the Chilean air force. In an uncanny way the jumbled heaps of blue plastic seats seem to symbolize the dead and injured the bloody takeover left behind.⁵ The red construction cranes stand like lonely guards at the edge of the field, their arms lowered, as the stadium is now empty and there is nothing left to watch over. Similarly, the green signs with the white lettering ("Salida") form fingers pointing silently to the dark passages within the

² Karl Heinrich Brunner (1887–1960) studied architecture at the technical university in Vienna, where he later taught urban planning and housing. In 1929 he took up an urban planning post in Santiago de Chile.

³ The "Colossus of Ñuñoa" served as a venue for sporting events, concerts, official celebrations, and other cultural activities.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, "Pope, Moved by Tales of Squalor, Tells Bishops to Back Election in Chile," *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1987, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-04-03/news/mn-2454_1/3 (accessed December 12, 2010).

⁵ Constantin Costa-Gavras recreates the events in the National Stadium especially impressively in the film *Missing* (1982), which tells the story of an American journalist who disappeared during the coup and was murdered.

stadium where so many innocent souls disappeared for ever (ill. p. ##). Seen like that, the two camera shots are circling a site of trauma in Chilean collective consciousness. Traumatic first of all because more than three thousand people lost their lives here in the weeks following the coup, as officially verified by truth commissions. But traumatic also because the memory of those victims continues to divide Chilean society, as demonstrated most recently in 2003 on the thirtieth anniversary of the coup when the pro-Allende and pro-Pinochet camps lined up again, while most of the population stayed aloof of old conflicts and largely ignored the anniversary.⁶

The National Stadium is an emblem of Chile's recent history, and reflects the artist's ambivalent stance toward the legacy of the dictatorship. It stands for experienced suffering, but also for seeds of hope as the scene of political demonstrations and democratic elections.⁷ Just as the collective memory of these events brings together contradictory feelings, the two camera shots interlock and interact to create incongruent overview of this "building site of Chilean history."

⁶ Carsten Volkery, "30 Jahre Militärputsch in Chile: Allendes Auferstehung unter Polizeischutz," *Spiegel*, September 8, 2003. Online version: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,264728,00.html> (accessed October 20, 2010).

⁷ As well as Augusto Pinochet and Pope John Paul II, Fidel Castro and Salvador Allende also spoke there.