

Mario Navarro

Radio ideal

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“We all know how painful the time of the Pinochet dictatorship was for those of us who lived in Chile, for those who were forced to leave the country, and for those who could no longer bear to stay. For many years the legacy of the coup meant that Europe maintained relations with Chileans rather than with the Chilean state, always regarding the country from the perspective of humanitarian aid, solidarity, and human rights. Anything that art was able to contribute to the discourse also fell into this frame of reference. But when political change came, and above all when the collapse of the free market in 1990 dashed hopes raised by the shift from dictatorship to democracy, art, too, had to reorient. This was a time when artists, mainly from my generation, now autonomous and government-subsidized, went out into the world to put their works into circulation.”¹

This extract vividly describes the situation of the generation of artists to which Mario Navarro himself belongs. The mood of a society coming to terms with its past after the end of dictatorship, finding its feet in a new democratic model while the shadow of the past still weighs heavily, leaves its mark on many works of art. It also characterizes the curatorial and art education work of Mario Navarro, who took up his post as curator of contemporary art at the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) at the beginning of 2010. Thus the overarching theme of his exhibition *Transformer*² in 2005 was the transition to democracy in Chile and how this transformation was expressed in the

¹ Translated from Mario Navarro, “Die Erfindung von Chile und anderer Länder,” in *Blickwechsel: Lateinamerika in der zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Wiener Institut für Entwicklungsfragen und Zusammenarbeit and Kulturen in Bewegung (Bielefeld, 2007), pp. 74–75.

exhibited works: “Each artist, with his work and transformations, evidenced points of view that appeal to the observation of the *Democratic Transition* as an example of a work in progress, a symbolic space depending on its instability as an historic and unfinished period.”³ The idea of creating a symbolic space intervening in the unstable and unfinished process of democratic transition (and showing its analogies to the creative process) also characterizes *Radio ideal*. Mario Navarro first realized this installation in 2003, when he was invited by the artist/gallerist couple Ana María Saavedra and Luis Alarcón to create a work for the Galería Metropolitana in the traditional working-class district of La Victoria in Santiago de Chile. During his preparations Navarro noticed how the original sense of community had faded as all kinds of interest groups emerged in the formerly left-leaning working class quarter. His intervention consisted of a bright red trailer housing a communal radio studio from which these diverse groups could broadcast their ideas to the quarter (an existing radio station provided airtime). Navarro gave the different groups space, making them and their concerns more tangible and at the same time raising the question of the role of art in public space. Furthermore, the “guerilla tactic” of his mobile studio referred to the widespread practice of clandestine broadcasting during the dictatorship.⁴ Whereas the red sculpture’s first two public outings in Santiago de Chile—its inauguration in 2003 and its return for *Dislocación 2010*—commemorated a historical reality and promoted a new sense of community, the third foray of *Radio ideal* at Kunstmuseum Bern will reflect upon the exhibition itself. Navarro takes the fourteen works exhibited in *Dislocación* as his starting point, interviewing the artists and allowing them to reflect on possible variations or ideas that were ultimately set aside.⁵

² Other exhibitions on related themes curated by Mario Navarro are the *Daniel Lopez Show*, White Box and Roebling Hall Gallery, New York, and the *7th Mercosul Biennial* in 2009 in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

³ Mario Navarro, “Introduction,” in *Transformer*, ed. Mario Navarro, exh. cat. Centro Cultural Matucana 100 (Santiago de Chile, 2005), p. 115. “But the stunning and extraordinarily real hope was swiftly transformed in a utopia which paradoxically declined into a feeling of frustration even more visible than the one that existed during the dictatorship. The everyday closeness with collaborators and members of the Pinochet government and the impunity with which they kept on enjoying judicial and economic benefits created a structural fault in the Chilean conscience which brought out the grayest, most melancholic and downhearted face of people.” Navarro 2007 (see note 1), pp. 123–24.

⁴ “The realization of this work is also a response to the necessity of bringing to the light the secret systems and processes of communication used by different political groups during the military dictatorship in Chile, which Mario Navarro remembers from his childhood and adolescence at home, at school, and in the street.” Translated from Ana María Saavedra and Luis Alarcón, eds., *Galería Metropolitana 1998–2004* (Santiago de Chile, 2004), p. 70.

⁵ The contributions were broadcast online on the website www.marionavarro.cl.

In both the earlier versions and the latest incarnation of *Radio ideal*, Navarro alludes to the French media theorist Régis Debray and his distinction between transmission and communication.⁶ Modern communication systems transport information over long distances without changing it and ensure the simultaneity of sending and receiving. Examples of this would be telephone and internet, where information flows non-hierarchically back and forth between sender and receiver. A transmission on the other hand occurs over a longer period and can alter the information during the process. There is no immediate reciprocity of sender and receiver, for the receiver can convey nothing back. Instead there is a temporally displaced connection to something spatially absent, as is the case with radio transmissions. The latter is characteristic of Mario Navarro's radio station—and of the radio stations remembered from his youth. *Radio ideal* also provides the artists with an extra platform for conveying their ideas, where their self-critical reflection on the creative process appears as a democratic achievement of the kind that has become possible and desirable again since the transition.

⁶ Régis Debray, *Transmitting Culture* (New York, 2000).