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Carved cherubs frolicking in a sunny stream: The National Stadium

Don Roberto Sanchez, first a worker, then a detainee, then a reinstated worker in the National Stadium of Chile, comes from Temuco. Born in about 1951, he recalls a strangely ambiguous relationship with his brutal stepmother. Once she floored him with a crack on the head with her shoe, then revived him in tears. Small, tough and nuggety, at 17 Roberto told her that he was off to seek his fortune, like so many young men for centuries before him, in Santiago. His stepmother cried and gave him a packet of money to look after himself. It was many years before Roberto saw her again, this time under circumstances even more unhappy.¹

At about the same time as Roberto Sanchez changed his status from stadium cleaner to stadium detainee, another young man – we don't know his name because he will soon become a detained-disappeared – is frog-marched from the Victor Jara Stadium into a van that, crammed with 20 other prisoners, will take him to another stadium, a much larger holding centre. It is the 60,000-seat National Stadium of Chile. In the next two months more than 20,000 detainees will be processed here, some to be sent on to other torture and extermination centres, some to be released, some jailed in state prisons, some to die here. But the stay of this young man will not be long.

1 Roberto Sanchez, interview, 12 May 2014.



Roberto Sanchez.

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.

On the 11th night of captivity, after a week of torture and beating, he curls up as usual into a foetal position in the changing room of the main stadium beneath the bleachers. It is known as the Coliseum, and the changing room as *camarín* no. 3. In the darkest hour of the night the lights snap on. Four guards enter, the officer shouts his name. The young man stands and tries not to trample any of the 40 other prisoners, now wide awake and apprehensive, jammed up on the cement or crouched on the wooden benches. Another torture session, as he supposes. Handcuffed, blindfolded, he is pushed up the wide staircase, upstairs towards the broadcasting studios and presidential viewing box where he has already been three times tortured. But on the first floor, instead of turning right, he is ordered left. Up another flight of stairs, then another to a metal ladder. The sounds of military boots echo oddly off the hard surfaces as he tries to reason where he is. A jangle of keys. A metal door opens. Pushed towards the sound he feels the chilly September night air on his face. *God, we're going outside. This must be the roof.* Sensing a new tension in the guards, he feels a rifle butt pressed deeper in his back. 'Keep going you filthy motherfucker.' Pushed forward, slow step by slower step. The open reverberations of the deserted amphitheatre, the distant hum of the

sleeping city. *Ay mi madre, they're going to push me off.* Six more steps. The very last sounds this detained-disappeared hears in this life are 'Fucking communist'.²

The National Stadium of Chile, based on the Olimpiastadion of Berlin, is not just an Olympic-standard soccer field but a huge sports complex, holding the now 80,000-seat arena itself; swimming pool and change rooms; tennis, basketball and archery courts; velodrome and weights room; and a dozen training fields. It holds huge emotional significance as the first site to which the world's press was drawn immediately after the coup. It was the first, as well as the largest, of the major interrogation, torture and extermination sites in Chile. In cruelty, violence, intimidation and terror, as well as disorganisation, its enormities were quite the equal of anything that happened anywhere under state terrorism in South America. It was the first Chilean centre to practise on a large scale the systematic electrical torture developed in Algeria and Brazil for which some Chilean officers had received advanced training.³ In March 1990 the National Stadium was the site where Patricio Aylwin, the first democratically elected President of Chile in 18 years, presided over a national exorcism of the recent past before a crowd of 80,000 people. A white horse galloped across the arena, a gigantic Chilean flag was unfurled, and the widow of a detained-disappeared danced Chile's national dance, *La Cueca*. Symbolically, she danced it alone – *la cueca sola*.⁴

Equally, since 1937, hundreds of thousands of Santiagans have held the stadium in quite different, and affectionate, memory. The home of Chile's national soccer team, it hosted the World Cup in 1957. Chileans have come over many decades to play or to watch their favourite sport. It is the nation's preferred concert venue. Rod Stewart, Cindy Lauper and Bon Jovi had each performed between the period known as the return of democracy and Aylwin's ceremony; since then the Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Elton John and Madonna are among dozens

2 Don Victor Peña identified the site where a body was found smashed on the wooden seating of the arena.

3 'The secret history of Brazilian torturers who brought terror to the detainees of this country in the National Stadium', 24 April 2014.

4 12 March 1990. Heraldo Muñoz, *The Dictator's Shadow: Life Under Augusto Pinochet*, Basic Books, Philadelphia, 2008, pp. 217–18.

of international stars to perform, often at the moments when the consultations as to the stadium's future were at their most critical.⁵ In 1990 its status as memory site both for death and for entertainment made its future more contested and more uncertain. Some wanted it declared a historical monument, others that it move on. Why, asked the critics, should sport never again be played at the stadium simply because the state had used it for its own purposes, for just four-hundredths of its working life?

Between 11 September and 7 November 1973 a constant stream of at least 20,000 detainees were entering and leaving the stadium, transferred from the Stadium of Chile, from the factory precincts around the city, the universities, former Allende government offices, and the working-class government settlements called *poblaciones*.⁶ In this time an unknown number of detainees, perhaps 500, were released. Execution estimates within its walls – again there are no certain figures – vary from 35 to 500. Most of the captives were transported to other centres – the state prisons, to 1367 José Domingo Cañas, Londres 38, Villa Grimaldi, or to the far north of Chile, to the mining town of Chacabuco.⁷

The most critical geography of the stadium as detention and torture centre is, first, the arena, known as the Coliseum. Trucks and vans carrying the prisoners enter through the least frequented entrance in the street known as Pedro de Valdivia. They arrive dressed as students, or ready for the factory, the office or in suits. Some tumble from the transport bloodied or with broken ribs, past a pile of bodies bound for Patio 29 estimated, on the first day after the coup, to be as high as a man.⁸ Sometimes the detainees have to run the gauntlet of beatings and blows as they scramble, handcuffed or hands on necks, 40 metres towards the Coliseum main entrance by the ticket office. On this first night some find themselves sleeping on top of each other in the ablutions, others in the *escotillas*, the covered entrance

5 'Estadio Nacional Julio Martínez Prádanos: Concerts', Wikipedia.

6 *Poblaciones*, which we will investigate more fully in Chapter 6, were poor and often politically radical working-class settlements sponsored by government since the mid-1960s.

7 On 12 October 1973, in an effort to display the even-handedness of the regime, 327 detainees out of a group of 3,500 were released; Steve Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973–1988*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006, p. 59.

8 The estimate of the height of the body pile was given by an Army officer, in Carmen Luz Parot, *Estadio Nacional*, DVD, 2002.

ways into the arena, or in the corridors under the banks of seats, or in the changing rooms. Here they will remain crammed together in terror. On the fifth day, the restraining wire fence separating the seating from the main arena completed, they will be allowed out by day. From 16 September, 5,000 male detainees daily emerge to sit or stand on the wooden tiers of seats, unwitting subjects of photographs that will be reproduced round the world for decades. Every 15 metres stand armed guards – in front, behind, on every side of each enclosure. Some are conscripts just out of school, simply told to report for military service. One smuggles some fruit to a few detainees. *Don't reveal where you got it or I'm fucked.* Towards one end of the grassy central arena is erected a disc with a huge black centre. The chilling rattle of a machine gun splits the air. Three executed detainees fall to the grass. A hooded figure, known as the *encapuchado*, moves slowly on the outer lane of the athletic track beside the perimeter fence with his escort of four soldiers, peering closely at the detainees. Next he enters the seating area, up and down the aisles, between the benches. To hide one's head invites a closer scrutiny. The hooded one stops to point to a detainee. The guards seize him or take his name.⁹ Esteban Carvajal recalls:

The fear was a living thing. That day I didn't sleep. Nobody slept thinking that the *encapuchado* came. We consoled ourselves thinking that this could be a simple method of intimidation, but we were convinced that the *compañeros* chosen by the mysterious man would not return to see us. Everyone asked the same question. Who was the *encapuchado*? He seemed to know half the world.¹⁰

Early morning is perhaps the worst time, when names roll out from the PA across the arena and into the bleachers. When so ordered to attend, each individual must come instantly to the black disc. Each may then be taken to one of the administration offices upstairs to check registration. Each will be issued with a compulsory identifier, yellow, black or red. Red means marked for imminent execution. The interrogation is fast and brutal.

9 Evidence Esteban Carvajal 'Patricio' in Villegas, *El Estadio*, pp. 28, 38–39.

10 Esteban Carvajal, in Villegas, *El Estadio*, p. 30. One of the *encapuchados* was revealed to be the Socialist militant Juan Muñoz Alarcón, whose murdered body was found in Santiago in 1977; 'Estadio Nacional, Santiago', *Memoria Viva*.

Why are you here?
I don't know.
Tell us the names of three communists and you can go free. Be quick.
I don't know any.
Where have the Marxists hidden their arms?
I know nothing about them.

Each answer is followed by a blow. Or the torturers will run a metal instrument over his genitals, grind his toes into the floor with their boots or burn the tops of his fingers with cigarettes.¹¹

Within a week the procedure shifts to interrogation in the chambers set up in the changing rooms of the velodrome, the cycling track, pride of the stadium, which stands 200 metres away at the southern end of the precinct. Here too stand the most feared buildings of all, two spiral-shaped concrete structures, the closed weightlifting arenas known as the *caracoles* (literally, 'snails').

On the summons to the black disc the prisoner's mates wish him well, knowing that if he returns at all, he will be very probably supported between two *compañeros*. It is unlikely that he will be able to walk. The detainee, his head covered with a blanket, is escorted outside the arena, turned left towards the velodrome. If this is his first time, the prisoner will stumble into the interrogation where the officer will tick him off the list of the day, the suspects who must be interrogated and in all probability tortured. Each of the 30 interrogators working in shifts generally knows no more than the officer as to the nature of the alleged offence. Most begin with 'Why are you here?' Frequently the detainee will not know either – perhaps he was seen flicking through a leftist tract in a bookshop before a zealous guard, himself no better informed, but warned that he had better arrest someone, orders him outside. Replying in a manner deemed to be unsatisfactory, the male detainee is ordered for torture in the south *caracol* adjacent to the velodrome. The queue lengthens with the day so he must stand, waiting at attention, under threat of instant death, for his turn at the *parrilla*. Still blindfolded, he absorbs the thunderous military music from the loudspeakers, or a burst of machine gun fire of a real or faked execution from the direction of the entrance way into the velodrome.

11 Of the many accounts of interrogation, see, for instance, Adolfo Cozzi, *Estadio Nacional*, Editorial Sudamericana Chilena, Santiago, 2000, p. 70 passim; and Samuel Riquelme, in Villegas, *El Estadio*, pp. 79–82.

From inside the *caracol*, the screams of the tortured rise higher and higher until it seems his eardrums must burst. Sometimes he waits all day, and marched back again on the next. Those detainees who can bring themselves to revisit the *caracol* today recall a diabolical mix of hideous pain and mundanity. Seven times is the journalist Alberto Gamboa brought to the weights room: when he returns for the first time in 29 years with the filmmaker Carmen Luz Parot, he finds himself sweating, his throat fills with mucus, he can hardly breathe – exactly as if he is being tortured again. One session he recalls was shorter than the others: he hears the torturer tell his assistant, ‘Let’s make this a quick one, we have to finish early. I have to meet my wife at 5.20 to take her to that movie, the Godfather.’¹²

Barely alive, the detainee will be dragged back into the changing room of the main stadium, bones or teeth smashed, maybe deafened, half naked, electrode marks all over his body, the scrotum monstrously enlarged. All night he cries in agony on the freezing cement, to receive what comfort he may from his petrified comrades – who may now well suspect that he has been ‘turned’ informer.

Women detainees do not enter the Coliseum but jam into the men’s changing room of the swimming pool. Some, it is said, are executed in its underground section, or against the outside wall, but most are tortured, or killed, on the *parrilla* in the northern *caracol* not far from that of the men.¹³ Less is known about what unspeakable tortures they endure, for little is spoken about this north *caracol*, and their message to the world, when the survivors come to describe their experiences two decades later, is a different one.¹⁴ Roberto Muñoz, standing outside the southern *caracol*, waiting to be thrown on the *parrilla*, could clearly hear their terrible screams from 50 metres away.

12 Luz Parot, *Estadio Nacional*.

13 Drawn from a number of sources, including Luz Parot, *Estadio Nacional*; Bill Vann, ‘Chilean court re-enacts stadium execution of American journalist [Charles Horman]’, World Socialist Web Site, 17 May 2002; and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2001, chronicle.com, Section International, p. A36; see also Cecilia Valdes, ‘Torture charge pits professor v professor’, *New York Times*, 8 September 2001.

14 See Chapter 7: ‘Villa Grimaldi’.

By 2000, successive governments of the centre-left Concertación government, and the district mayor who held administrative control over the structure, remained undecided whether to demolish the ageing stadium structure altogether and sell the land for housing, build another in another location, or restore it. The outer cement walls of the main arena were peeling and dirty, the sports fields overgrown. Even seven years after the transition to democracy nothing was memorialised, until on the 28th anniversary of the coup, 2001, a somewhat unspecific plaque to the ordeal of the detainees appeared overnight, obscurely attached to the outer wall near the main entrance. It read:

Between the 11th of September and the 7th of November 1973, the National Stadium of Chile was used as a concentration camp, and place of torture and death. More than 12,000 political prisoners were detained here without charge or process.

In memory of all those who suffered within its walls and those who hoped, in the darkness, to see the light of justice and liberty.

Then followed a beautiful, though obscure, invocation of the dead by the poet Stella Díaz Varín, who had paid for the plaque herself:

I demand from my dead
That in their own day
I will find them, I will transplant them
I will undress them
I will bring them up to the light
Close to the ground
Where their song
Will be nestling, waiting for them¹⁵
(Tr. Paula González Dolan)

Heroic words; but the plaque, the same colour as its surrounding wall, was easy to bypass, and mysteriously fixed so high that no one could read it without the aid of a stepladder.

15 Les obligo a mis muertos
En su día
Los descubro, los transplanto,
Los desnudo
Los llevo a la superficie
A flor de tierra
Donde esta esperándolos
El nido de la acústica.

A more significant event towards serious remembrance came two years later, in 2003 in the stadium's Declaration as a Historic Monument. Seven years 'special protection' accompanied the declaration, not least as a gesture towards the country's 200th anniversary of release from Spanish control.

The tour, 2009

Don Victor Peña is a senior official in the management of the stadium. He has carried out several impromptu tours before, mainly for investigators.¹⁶

He begins at the *escotilla* no. 8, the entrance way that leads into the arena itself. It is not surprising, given the stadium's doubtful future, that the area is cold, dirty and messy, and holds some modern graffiti. Hundreds of detainees were crammed into it on their first and subsequent nights. Although the walls have been whitewashed to conceal such traces, Don Victor's torch illuminates faint inscriptions carved by detainees with whatever was handy. One reads:

RJJ
12 IX 73¹⁷

Don Victor believes that up to a dozen such inscriptions may be recoverable. He leads into the main arena. Over there was the black disc at which prisoners had to gather when their name was called. The corpse of the detainee thrown off the roof landed just where he stands. Into the darkness again to enter a changing room known as *camarín* no. 3. This too is dirty, the windows so covered in dust to be darkly opaque. The basins and toilets, he explains, have not been touched since the detainees last used them. Covered in grime, dried calcium rivulets under the taps, they look a little like the bathroom porcelain recovered from the *Titanic*. The tattered remains of a temporary photographic exhibition are pinned to a frame in a corner. Don Victor unfolds some to reveal the exiguous detainees' sleeping space. The ceiling, which must have leaked at some point,

16 Don Víctor Peña, video interview and stadium tour, 2009, 2010.

17 For commentary, see Valentin Rozas, 'Tres maneras de explicar la presencia de graderías antiguas' [Three ways of explaining the presence of the old seating], *Bifurcaciones revista de estudios culturales urbanos*.

has been repainted but looks ugly and stained. This will be the only one of these changing rooms, he explains, to be preserved. Outside he points to a subsidence beside the outer wall of the Coliseum.

We used to think it might be a mass grave, but it turned out not to be. Not one of the guards who used to guard the prisoners has ever talked publicly. Nobody knows what happened to the bodies of those killed at the stadium. We just don't know anything here, neither what happened nor what's going to happen.

The next point in this informal tour is the men's changing room at the swimming pool. Here some hundreds of women were held, but never, unlike the men, allowed outside except to be interrogated and tortured. The building looks in much better condition; no wonder, it began to be used as a changing room again in the 1990s.

At the pool Don Victor introduces Don Roberto Sanchez, foreman of the swimming pool precinct. He is short, dark and broad, wears a T-shirt inscribed 'Chileswimming', holds a tape-measure and looks busy.¹⁸ On invitation to tell his involvement in the stadium on camera, however, he readily agrees to stop work. 'Nobody has ever asked me about this before.' Don Victor, the guide, has himself never heard more than that Roberto Sanchez had been a detainee here during the dictatorship. Before the coup, since 1970, he worked as a cleaner. Days after the coup, in mid-September 1973, walking with a mate near Santiago's main watercourse, the Mapocho River, he noticed three bodies floating in the current. While engaged in pulling them out they were overtaken by a dawn patrol, whose commander, in the dangerously fragile post-coup atmosphere, wrongly assuming that a pile of military clothing nearby must be connected to the two men, arrested them. Don Roberto found himself a despised detainee in the stadium in which he was an employee the day before. He spent his nights in the dreaded *galeria*, the cold and dark spaces under the wooden spectator benches enclosing the main arena. Several months incarceration brought violent beatings. Yes, he agrees, this was the inferno that journalists speak of, not least because, unlike a regular prison, no rules applied. No protections, no records, no charges, no accountability. The security forces were police, judge and jury. Some of the soldiers were kind, but most were not. The lowest ranks were

18 Don Roberto Sanchez, interviews, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013.

generally the worst – but sadists are sadists at any level. Three times – he thinks – he was taken to the *caracol*, the weight-training room, to be tortured on the *parrilla*. Blindfolded throughout, he never saw his torturers, and was too nervous to remember their voices. ‘One tries to forget these things’; but he can neither forgive nor forget. ‘I know who some of the torturers are, yes. If I have to engage them in conversation, I would but will never be their friend.’ Don Roberto will die with his memories, he says, but the pool and the stadium won’t, they’ll still be here. ‘But you returned here to work?’ ‘Yes, because it is the people who are guilty, not the place.’ He practically lives at the stadium, he says, six days a week, 7 am to 9 pm, 38 years in the job.

Don Victor continues the walking expedition, past the arena entrance, 200 metres towards what the prisoners knew as the Via Crucis, the way of the Cross, leading from the stadium to the torture chambers at the extreme end of the precinct. Here, on the left, is the velodrome where the major interrogations took place. In the passageway leading to the cycling track, Don Victor warns: ‘Don’t be deceived by these marks in the walls. People will tell you that all are bullet holes. Some are, most are not.’

From interrogation each detainee was led 30 metres to wait his turn in the weight-training room, the *caracol*. It is a windowless circular concrete shell, tiled floor, cement walls and ceiling. Inside it is empty, echoing, black, stained. A bird’s nest balances precariously above the entrance.

The Declaration as National Monument with its seven years ‘special protection’ included the appointing of a team of experts to plan a process of further memorialisation. Their brief included the preservation and eventual restoration of the washroom *camarín* no. 3 and the entrance walkway *escotilla* no. 8, including the detainees’ inscriptions. Crowds entering for football or a concert would be routed away from them. The draft protocol controversially excluded conserving the north and south *caracoles* of torture and other significant sites, but the swimming pool changing room would be barred from further use. Elsewhere, and little by little, the stadium’s facilities were planned to come to life: first the sports fields, the running track, the pool. The women’s torture chamber, the northern *caracol*, having been quietly leased to

the University of Chile's sports facilitators, was surreptitiously set aside. No protocol determined the destiny of the 200-metre walkway, the avenue of death, the Via Crucis, that detainees had taken from the Coliseum towards the velodrome. The men's torture chamber site, the south *caracol*, would, by inference, remain unused, stained, filthy and neglected.¹⁹

The team of heritage consultants awarded the contract prepared its first meeting. Mindful of the recent recommendation of the Valech Report on Torture to create on-site symbolic monuments to the dead, the committee began considering demands for the conservation of the nation's prime Historic Monument of the misdeeds of the military regime.²⁰ At its head was Wally Kunstmann, President of the Metropolitan Region of Political Prisoners, leading a team that included historians, lawyers and architects.²¹ She informed President Bachelet's heritage advisor that the team was drawing up plans for an 'Open Museum Site for Memory and Homage', and 'Educational Museum for Human Rights'.

Released only seven years later, Kunstmann's blueprint, acknowledging the twin tasks of memory and homage, was no exercise in fence-sitting. Her project aims were to preserve the integrity of the stadium as a Site of Memory, to commemorate the victims and survivors, to encourage the recognition of other memory sites, to make accusations against the perpetrators and to promote respect for human rights through compulsory education. She distinguished between the separate sites of detention, torture, shooting and disappearance, and envisaged, finally, the creation of a Journey of Memory that would take in every significant part of the detainees' journey from bloody arrival to torture or death. Her intention was to consciously relate human rights abuses

19 Information about the women's torture centre is elusive, for it has ceased to be part of the stadium's official remembrance; Don Roberto Sanchez, interview.

20 'Report of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture' ('Valech Report'), 29 November 2004, p. 1059, recommended commemorative monuments listing victims from both sides, and public parks for commemoration and places for 'recreation and for bolstering a life-affirming culture'.

21 The authors of the Heritage Report, entitled *Open Museum. Site of Memory and Homage*, were Wally Kunstmann, President of the Metropolitan Region of Political Prisoners; Alejandra Lopez, historian; Sebastián Insunza, lawyer; Carlos Duran, Aleksandra Buzhynska, Marcel Coloma, and Claudio Guerra, architects. This section is based on the document, *Proyecto Estadio Nacional. Memorial Nacional. Comité Estadio Nacional 2002–2007*, photocopy document in possession of the authors. See also Katherine Hite, 'Chile's National Stadium: As monument, as memorial', *ReVista*, Spring 2004, 58–61.

in the stadium to state transgressions worldwide. She embraced the principle that 'A people without memory was a people without identity'.²²

In practice, this meant that visitors entering through the principal gate on Avenida Grecia would immediately turn left towards the women's detention site, the former changing room, near the pool. They would enter at ground level, and perhaps descend to the execution wall below ground. A plaque outside would explain its significance. They would then follow a marked path to the Coliseum to inspect passageway no. 8 with its permanent display of the best-known photographs of the detainees and a map of the precinct. The scratchings on the wall would be conserved, protected and where possible deciphered. Changing room (*camarín*) no. 3 downstairs would feature a depiction of a struggling fish beneath the caption 'Caught in the Net'. A detour would follow towards the detainees' entrance from Pedro de Valdivia Street. A 6-metre metal tree was to spring from a reinforced concrete symbolic depiction of the Coliseum walls. In the 50 metres between the detainees' entrance and the arena itself, the consultants planned to set thousands of ceramic tiles into the roadway leading to the Coliseum, each inscribed, 'I was here' followed by a name of a survivor and the date of arrival.

From this point the visitor would follow the 'Via Crucis', now known as the Pathway of Memory, towards the velodrome. The walking track would become a memorial avenue. Handsome trees set on each side would intersperse with sculptures relating to human rights and testimonies of survivors. Inside the south *caracol*, the torture chamber of the men, the consultants proposed a three-dimensional digital display, though of what was not specified. Of the tunnel leading to the velodrome, Kunstmann proposed silhouettes of detainees in shatterproof glass, arms raised, in the sections of concrete wall where the bullet marks are most obvious.

Stage Two of the project, the consultants designed as a Museum of Memory in a People's Plaza, four times the size and double the height of the weight-training room. It was to be sited alongside.

22 Kunstmann plan, 2008.

Not surprisingly, both the details of the 2010 Kunstmann plan, and the question of whether there should be memorialisation of any kind, were the subject of much unfriendly conservative comment. The manager of the national archery team complained that his competitors could no longer use the swimming pool changing room. They had nowhere to put their belongings, which were stolen when they left them outside. He denied that anyone had visited the changing rooms to say 'I want to remember where I was a prisoner'. The markings in the exterior wall, rumoured to be bullet holes of firing squads, he maintained could have been caused by faked executions to frighten the prisoners, and who could say if they were bullet holes at all? He suggested a memorial plaque, after which the team could go on using the facilities. That was refused, but so was Kunstmann's team refused permission to move the weekly candle-lit vigils outside the stadium onto the wooden bench-seating inside. A savage attack by the group called the 'Tenth of September Movement', dedicated to 'Those who brought peace' (i.e. the Pinochetistas), in 2012 denounced Kunstmann's group for 'trying to turn Marxists into martyrs'. They responded to her words

Every enclosure, with its gardens, trees, its coliseum, absolutely every place in the National Stadium was used for torture.

with the sarcastic

The prisoners had to be hung up on trees to be tortured?²³

It now transpired that the obscure and (unless one stood on a ladder) unreadable plaque on the stadium perimeter wall had been fixed in 2001 without government permission. According to the radical journal *The Clinic*, Carmen Luz Parot, producer of the film *Estadio Nacional* in 2001, had written to the CEO of ChileSports, to suggest fixing two memorial plaques. One would be on the south *caracol*, and the other outside the main entrance. Receiving no reply, two members of the Association for the Politically Executed decided to do it anyway. Very few guessed that the plaque, following its mysterious nocturnal appearance, was unapproved, nor that the reason for it being placed so high was to avoid vandalism. Amidst the wrangling as to what kind of

23 'Marxistas tratan de imponer historia falseada de Chile' [Marxists try to impose false history on Chile], *Movimiento 10 de Septiembre*, 12 April 2012. Permission to hold the candlelight vigils was granted in 2010.

memorial the stadium should contain, the mayor of Ñuñoa, threatened to demolish the whole stadium, citing its age and decrepitude, 'The declaration of National Monuments is so subjective that the title is given to any sites where torture supposedly took place ...'

Don Roberto Sanchez – not that anyone asked his opinion – was bitterly opposed. 'I have been working here for 38 years, and was only tortured for two months. How could I not wish it well? It is the people that are guilty, not the place.'

The expected dissent, though, was no more bitter than what was had been going on amongst the memorialisers. Feuding, perhaps inevitable given the bitter memories and the government's tardy and cautious brief, was not long in coming. According to US observer Zachary McKiernan, hostilities between the memorialisers began immediately. Shortly after the first meeting in April 2003, the team fractured, unleashing, from what archival records and interviews indicate, a long war of suspicion and divisions between human rights activists, professionals, survivors, and the government planner.²⁴ Two architects expelled from the committee went on to develop their own proposal. Known as the 'Rodriguez' because of their close family connection to a detained-disappeared, they formed their own team of experts to produce a parallel model of remembrance. Kunstmann referred to them as 'robbers' who looked down on the rest of the group. An ugly quarrel followed a suggestion to invite the popular artist Sting to perform at the stadium whereby spectators would wear Pinochet masks. The 'Rodriguez' team objected, and also to the proposal to include the whole 60-hectare precinct in an Open Museum.²⁵ Into the midst ChileSports jumped in to propose a different redevelopment altogether, a sports precinct of parks and lakes, but with no protection of the special sites like *escotilla* no. 8. Kunstmann announced that in a dream she had seen the south *caracol* and the swimming pool changing room destroyed, which, since not much had been actually conserved since the declaration, were still in some danger of destruction. She alleged that the Rodriguez team had disappeared with the plans for both sites. The government's heritage adviser asked that all the plans, including

24 Zachary McKiernan, 'National Stadium, national memory: A personal letter', Public History Commons.

25 For another version of the dispute, see Veronica Torres, 'Los Escritos de los presos políticos del Estadio Nacional: El pergamino, la lápida y la canción de Bebo' [The writings of the political prisoners at the National Stadium], *The Clinic* online, 10 November 2010.

that of ChileSports, be put on show. Tensions culminated in a tense meeting with Bachelet's human rights adviser in 2008 that resulted, according to McKiernan, in 'piecemeal and spotty historical work', such as the preservation but lack of protection of the inscriptions in passageway no. 8.

The Rodriguez alternative, in contrast to Kunstmann's walkway, was a series of eight 'memory tunnels' situated at eight 'stations' placed at the sites that everyone agreed were the most critical.²⁶ The government adviser ordered a meeting between the two factions, which ended in a former detainee exclaiming, 'I was in the changing rooms – you have nothing to do with any Project'. Exhausted, the Rodriguez faction withdrew. In 2010 Kunstmann's plan was finally approved. The battle of wills was over. Which was more important, asked the executive secretary of the Monuments Advisory, the person who did the monument, or the monument itself? Such jealousies and envy threatened that nothing would be done.²⁷

The government had at last approved the memorial in principle, but when would work begin? Apparently, not very soon. The release of the Kunstmann plan opened a period that the critic and journalist Veronica Torres called not 'Open Memory' but 'Spineless Memory'.²⁸ ChileSports, whose approval of any memorial project remained necessary, remained more interested in getting the stadium ready for the South American Games scheduled for 2014, and seems to have been ready to use the dissent among the memorialists as an excuse to further its own program.²⁹ Nobody in government seemed ready to take charge of any part of the project, preferring, in Kunstmann's opinion, stalling tactics like a program to list every tree in the whole precinct.³⁰ At length the silhouette figures in the velodrome and south *caracol* were agreed upon, but without resolution if or how the inscriptions in *escotilla* no. 8 were to be conserved. Torres wondered if Chileans really deserved a national memorial, for neither government nor people

26 'Proyecto de memoria y educación en el Estadio Nacional de Chile: "Museo Abierto, Sitio de Memoria y Homenaje"', Archives Audiovisuelles de la Recherche.

27 Veronica Torres, 'Los escritos de los presos políticos del Estadio Nacional: El pergamino, la lápida y la canción de Bebo' [The writings of the political prisoners at the National Stadium], *The Clinic* online, 10 November 2010.

28 Kunstmann to Read, 7 July 2014.

29 Hernán Rivera Mejía, 'Estadio Nacional de Chile: Un museo abierto', Archivo.

30 Kunstmann to Read, 7 July 2014.

showed the required sensitivity. All the same, she concluded, successive Concertación governments in the early years after the transition to democracy had seen the horrors close up, and Pinochet remained head of the Army. Torres might have added to the mix the Chileans who opposed outright any form of memorial; those who acknowledged the terrible deeds of the stadium that had occurred only within a space of two months at a site that also represented secular history, sport, enjoyment, concerts, drama and national pride for more than for three quarters of a century; and those who demanded the entire precinct be destroyed or never used again.³¹ Torres, and all Chileans, may well have asked if such cross-cutting emotions, desires and agendas could ever be accommodated within a single memorial, if at all. In 2010 the Chilean state was facing almost as many difficulties as it had seven years before if it wished to use the stadium as the principal memorial to the victims of the Pinochet regime.³² Indeed, it was not until the four-year term of the centre-right government of President Sebastián Piñera in 2008 that work finally began on the 'Greek Memorial' near the main entrance, the part-restoration of the Pathway of Memory to the velodrome, the 'protective shield' round the women's prison, and a 'homage' to the workers of the industrial zones near the entrance gate from Pedro de Valdivia. But that entrance was not planned to include an information plaque.³³

In truth the differences between the Rodríguez plan, with its tunnels and stress on education, and Kunstmann's vision of a rather more emotional Via Crucis, might be considered minor. More was at stake,

31 Quotation and article, Torres, 'Los escritos de los presos políticos del Estadio Nacional: El pergamino, la lápida y la canción de Bebo': 'Rescatar la memoria en democracia ha sido complejo. Pero no menos de cómo ha sido en Alemania, o en otros lados. Villa Grimaldi fue el primer sitio de conciencia recuperado en América Latina y Bachelet la primera Presidenta en hacer una visita de Estado a ese lugar.

En un bar de Providencia, tomando unas cervezas, Carolina Aguilera, 36 años, socióloga que trabaja en la Corporación Villa Grimaldi, me explica cómo ha entendido – a pesar de las críticas que comparte – el actuar de la Concertación.

Me puedo poner en la cabeza de ellos y entender el miedo que tenían. El '99 fue el Boinazo, a Pinochet lo tomaron preso en Londres. Y después de la dictadura la gente empezó a portarse bien. Racionalmente, se puede decir que se debería haber hecho más. Pero en concreto los que gobernaban vieron el horror de cerca y Pinochet seguía siendo el comandante en jefe del Ejército. Esa cuestión no hay que olvidarla nunca.' (*The Clinic*, 28 October 2010).

32 The authors have heard this view expressed on several occasions; see also Katherine Hite, 'Chile's National Stadium', *ReVista*, Spring 2004, 58.

33 In fact it does. The Pedro de Valdivia entrance memorial was completed according to the Kunstmann plan in 2015.

though, than egos and jealousy. At the heart of the tensions were the central questions of public memorialising: who, in the end, could claim first privilege in determining the form of the memorial – the survivor, the relative, the human rights advocate, or, as the principal financier, the state itself? And to what extent should a memorial to terrible deeds be intended primarily to evoke the emotions of pain, sympathy, horror, rage, or instruct in the historical circumstances and civil morality, or prevent a repetition, or to encourage national reconciliation, or even to apportion blame?

Yet for all the criticism that those who had been detained in the stadium should have the right to decide on its representation, Kunstmann's team had got it right in emphasising a visitor's walking tour that was more emotional than instructional. The movement of visitors must always be a central decision for the museum curator. Effective exhibitions answering both curatorial design and visitor preferences must follow a logic that may be temporal, factual, emotional or cumulative, to ensure that the visitor will stay to be informed or moved; he or she should not wander off to another part of the display distracted by an interesting photograph or exhibit. In the Kunstmann plan the visitor would follow a quasi-chronological logic beginning at the women's prison, proceeding past a major informative signage at the 'Greece Memorial', detour to the sculpture at the prisoners' entrance at Pedro de Valdivia, confront the emotive, dust-ridden chambers of the changing rooms and *escotilla* no. 8. Lastly, the visitor would proceed up the prisoners' Via Crucis to the velodrome and torture centre of the highest emotional level. The museum sited here would carry the information the 'Rodriguez' group planned to impart on its version of the visitor walkway. The view from the top floor would dominate and belittle the *caracol* beneath.

4. CARVED CHERUBS FROLICKING IN A SUNNY STREAM



The principal memorial, main entrance, National Stadium of Chile.

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.



The smaller structure at the left is the swimming pool changing room, National Stadium of Chile, occupied by the women detainees. The larger, more modern structure attached to it is the display area opened in 2014.

Source: Photograph by Peter Read, editing Con Boekel.

Roberto Sanchez, released finally from prison in 1976, returned to Temuco, his birthplace, and to his foster mother, to find a large photograph of Pinochet in the family home and a cousin in the police force. He found himself treated ‘worse than dirt, as if I was a communist traitor’, served another brief jail term, and returned to Santiago. Here for a time he lived rough, drinking heavily. By 1990, though, he was a casual worker at the stadium, and in 2000 he became permanent.

Don Roberto Sanchez is still happy to talk to visitors whom he trusts, recount his life, show them the space under the seats where he spent the first night of detention. In all his years as foreman he has only visited the *caracol* once, when it was used as a storeroom during the dictatorship, and that was to clean it. He found himself sweating, his arms covered in goosebumps, his breathing laboured. It was an

experience he is unwilling to repeat. Hearing the national song 'Libre', which was sung by detainees to those who were being released to return to their families, will always reduce him to tears.³⁴

His central concern is for the stadium precinct itself. In the unique viewpoint of the insider/outsider, Roberto is determined that it should not be damaged, harmed or punished for actions taken by others within its walls. Memorialisation should be minimal. He is angry that the washbasins and changing rooms are still in their original condition rather than being reconstructed and re-used. He refused to put his name forward to the Valech Report as one of those tortured in the stadium: 'too many just jumped in for the money, who hadn't been tortured at all'. He is uneasy at the endpoint of the visitor's journey to the *caracol*, and its planned People's Plaza.

What form, then, should the memorialisation take for him? Just a little monolith, just a plaque perhaps, a little fountain and a quotation. 'But it should not be for us victims, there are not many of us left, and we'll take our memories to the grave.' Make it symbolic, and certainly not ideological. He doesn't want future generations to remember the pain, or carry the struggle into the future, only to know what happened. The punishment for the perpetrators should come not from the courts but from God. He doesn't like the monument and list of names outside José Domingo Cañas 1367 – much too cold and impersonal. Even the climax at the end of the Pathway of Memory, he thinks, should in no sense be grand or monumental nor display long lists of survivors' testimonies. So just a little memorial, then, a pretty little fountain with little angels, that's all. Others had it worse than me. Keep the stadium. Use the stadium. It was bad here only for two months in 71 years. Just a pretty fountain by the south *caracol*, just a little plaque, no names, no accusations, just water flowing gently over the stones, and carved cherubs frolicking in the sunny stream.

34 Roberto Sanchez, interview, 21 June 2015.

This text is taken from *Narrow But Endlessly Deep: The struggle for memorialisation in Chile since the transition to democracy*, by Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.