Interrupted Stadium: Broken Promises of Modernity in the National Stadium of Chile

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The end of 20th-century military dictatorships in Latin America triggered an obligation to commemorate the fallen and to warn the survivors of the threat of moral corruption that looms over modern societies. Unfinished and partial projects of national modernization faced the need to teach audiences about their past mistakes. “Interrupted Stadium” deals with this issue by asking how these new pedagogical demands are incorporated into the rationalized space of the Modernist project. The National Stadium in Santiago de Chile constitutes an ideal example of this problem, because it is a piece of public infrastructure that contains the premises of modernity of a state that intended to renovate society. It is not only a building but a whole site devoted to educating the “new man” in terms of physical, moral, and civil health.

Throughout its existence, the National Stadium worked as a shelter for citizens, a sports ground, a cultural space, and a stage for Chilean politics. However, in 1973 the educational function of the Stadium lost its civilian constitution and became a site of imprisonment, torture, and death. Although this cycle lasted only 58 days, it was an interruption that initiated a long period of decadence for the main building and the whole site. Thirty years later, in 2003, the site was declared a historical monument by the Council of National Monuments. Six years later, in 2009, the Stadium began remodeling to meet the spatial standards imposed by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), a process that involved the “construction” of a memorial inside of it. In this context, the National Stadium became an exemplary case of the superposition of two almost antagonistic uses: sport as spectacle, and the memorializing of the military dictatorship’s victims.

In more than seven decades of existence, the National Stadium has been subject to hundreds of architectural and urban plans that range from ambitious master plans to redesign the whole 158-acre site to interventions as specifically focused as solving the structural bonding between a beam and a chair. Journalists, athletes, academics, poets, musicians, neighbors, former prisoners, and politicians have written about it for as long as it has existed. Visually, the stadium has inspired artists, photographers, graphic designers, and performers, leading to a vast array of works produced about the sports complex. “Interrupted Stadium” delves into this legacy, using material traces, finished buildings, architectural drawings, historic magazines, photographs and urban projects to analyze the relationship between the Modernist ideal behind the National Stadium’s project and its subsequent ruptures.
Despite the abundant material around the National Stadium, no cultural history about the building had been written; “Interrupted Stadium” is a step into that direction. At the beginning of this research, one very important milestone was missing from the debates around the sports complex: the original plan for the National Stadium. The discovery of the original set of architectural drawings for the stadium and the Olympic sports complex—conserved, but spread out in two different archives—played a central role in this research. There are several differences between these drawings and the building, suggesting that intermediate construction plans and plans as-built might exist for the National Stadium, although they have not yet been found. This paper combines both original drawings and actual buildings, as well as the gap between them, to construct its evidence.

Modernity Reaches the Masses

The construction of the National Stadium can be situated in a period defined by the “coupling” between a Modernist style imported from the European Modernist movement and a deep industrial modernization process underway in Chile. It can be stated, then, that the National Stadium is a modern work—a reflection of the coupling period between the Modernist movement and the country’s modernization—due to its appearance and its content. While its appearance is almost the product of chance, the result of the travels of some modern pioneers, its content—which includes its structural system and the incorporation of modern sports programs—is derived from a society undergoing a modernization process.

Figure 1: The western facade of the National Stadium, photographed in 1943. As part of a book that commemorated the four hundredth anniversary of Santiago, the photo portrays the building as a symbol for the modern capital. Source: VV.AA. (1943) Cuatro siglos de la historia de Santiago. Zig Zag: Santiago. Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl.

While the first modern works of architecture were presented as extravagant constructions for the elites, executed by European-influenced architects, the Chilean State was undergoing profound changes that would lead it to combine its modernization process with the Modernist movement through its
public buildings. In the late 1920s, faith in progress dominated Chile, a feeling that saw industrialization as instrumental to achieving the country’s modernization. The state became more active in the economy, fostering productive infrastructure and restricting imports. This led to an increase in public spending based on the growth of external debt. This model faced a deep crisis after the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929; according to the League of Nations, Chile was one of the worst-hit countries in the subsequent Great Depression.

The drive for modernization that had been truncated by the 1929 economic crisis was resumed by the second administration of President Arturo Alessandri Palma (1932-1938), who consolidated the effort by empowering the state as an instrument of social balance and progress. In 1933, Chile resumed its role as exporter of minerals and agricultural products, working to meet the demands of a world economy on the mend. Chile also resumed the repayment of its external debt via an economy led by construction, which, alongside industry and mining, managed to reduce unemployment. Eduardo Cavieres speaks about the 1930s: “It is the modernization of the mass culture, the modernization of reform, and the modernization of nationalism. With its limitations and ambiguities. A small-scale modernization, but also a human-scale modernization.”

Alessandri’s government set in motion a number of public works, including the National Stadium; all of them were Modernist, aimed at civic education, and monumental in scale. The transformation of modern architecture—from specific elite intervention to mass demand—was fostered by the state, in the context of an ambitious public construction plan intended to stimulate the economy and lay the foundations of a public institutional order independent of the political vices of the oligarchy. The institutional changes that the country was experiencing in the 1930s opened up new professional avenues for architects, which allowed them to take on the social role demanded by the ideals they admired in the Modernist movement. Emboldened by the growth of this activity, in the early 1930s—and even before—many architects began joining public organizations, while others collaborated with the state by participating in public competitions. The state-Modernism entente was not peculiar to Chile; on the contrary, Adrián Gorelik argues that the communion between the state and the Modernist movement was a constitutive element in most Latin American countries in the mid-1930s.

For architects Humberto Eliash and Manuel Moreno, avant-garde architecture penetrated the country through private practice, “because the change had less inertia to fight against;” however, before incorporating modern architecture as the dominant state practice, the state experimented—as private architects did—with the techniques of modern construction. As a result, in the mid-1930s state intervention helped to consolidate modern architecture, which reached the masses and became an urban protagonist.

It is worth asking why, in the 1930s, the state embraced the aesthetic, constructive, and functional canons of the Modernist movement. There are at least two types of explanation, one functional-symbolic and another political-cultural. On the one hand, the bulletin of the Architecture Office of the Ministry of Public Works described the functional and symbolic reasons quite precisely:
“the functional and symbolic reasons quite precisely: al. On the one hand, the bulletin’s institutional order, austere, conceptually transcendent, materially lasting, spatially functional, flexible…respectful of the cultural traditions of our society and of the landscape where it is located. It accepts no trends, superfluous decorations, or extravagant elements that entail physical or conceptual risks.”

On the other hand, the political-cultural explanation for the state’s adoption of the modern style was based on the political premise of establishing an institutional order, away from the tendentious image that the oligarchy had acquired. The new state had to be constitutional and modern, but at the same time, in the context of the country was based on the poli austere. In addition, it was a time of increasing middle class participation in consumption, production, culture, and politics, which led to the emergence of a political force that would later govern the country. The middle class was sympathetic to modern architecture, because it was a way for them to distance themselves from the land-owning aristocracy. President Alessandri knew well that the country’s political future was in the hands of the middle classes, and so probably did not hesitate to cater to their aesthetic tastes with his program of public constructions. As the modern pioneers proclaimed, public architecture sought to consolidate a new national identity through new techniques, spaces, and aesthetics. This is the background of the National Stadium lic conststate-owned, mass-oriented, and middle-class.

Four Breakdowns of Modernity

“Interrupted Stadium” defines four turning points in the reality of the modern utopia proclaimed by the creators of the National Stadium. The first point concerns the incompleteness of the original work. Just as the project of
modernizing the country would be left incomplete, its main stadium would never be finished. Second, we will note how the expansion of the stadium in the 1960s not only distanced itself from the task of completing the original, but also reduced the clarity, quality, and harmony of the original project. Finally, the use of the National Stadium as a concentration camp in 1973, along with the memorial of Escotilla 8 (Hatch 8) executed in parallel with the remodeling commissioned by the Ministry of Public Works in 2010—in third and fourth place—will complete the dissipation of the stadium’s Modernist ideals.

I. New but Unfinished:

“The National Stadium has greatness. And we are not referring to its large size, but to the majesty that springs from its whole form, to the suggestiveness that surrounds its vast stands, to the ambitious lines that open to host immense crowds. The athletes that enter it will feel the weight of its dominion and the emotion of its strength. As figures grow when they stand out against the evening sky, athletes in the Stadium will feel examined under a magnifying glass, as if standing on a pedestal. The spacious construction multiplies the importance of the sporting spectacle. It ennobles, heightens, provides peak sensations.”

Published on the day of the inauguration of the National Stadium, December 3, 1938, the above-cited article characterized the new National Stadium as an echo of the Roman circus and as an heir of the Greek gymnasium. The newly inaugurated work consisted of an Olympic Stadium—because it could host multiple disciplines such as soccer, athletics, and cycling—and three entrances: north, west, and east porticoes. Between the porticoes and the building, there was a garden with plaques and classical sculptures of athletes and of the ideal human being. Like the porticoes that architectural historian Andrés Téllez describes as a characteristic of modern residential neighborhoods, those of the National Stadium are located on the edges of the site, while the building is set back in the center of the northern part of the site (see figure 3). The simple and modern lines of the porticoes mark the Stadium’s Modernism and function as a facade and a sign of what awaits inside.

![Figure 3: Porticoes on the main entrance to the National Stadium, from Avenue Grecia. Source: Magazine Urbanismo y Arquitectura 10, 1940. Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl.](attachment://figure3.jpg)
The outer body of the Stadium is an enormous elliptical volume three stories high, supporting the slab of the spectators’ stands. This element is completely functionalist, made of exposed, reinforced concrete on both inside and outside, with a symmetrical radial structure in both axes, north-south and east-west. When the Stadium was inaugurated in 1938, the facade was still incomplete; what would later be white stucco was then exposed reinforced concrete. The stands are designed as two rings separated by a great corridor around the perimeter, connecting the whole Stadium and establishing a continuous relationship between the second floor, reserved for spectator services, and the spectacle on the pitch. Connecting the first ring to the second were zig-zag staircases, one of the Stadium’s trademarks (figure 4). Although the composition of the stands as superimposed rings separated by a corridor was not a typological invention of the National Stadium—it had already been used in Berlin's Olympic Stadium in 1936—the zig-zag staircases appear to be original.14 The spatial decompression provided by the perimeter corridor, together with the lightness of staircases that function as structural elements, surprise a contemporary eye; the space is not only functional, but also innovative, and that innovation constitutes an integral part of the modern content of the work.

![Figure 4: Zig-zag staircases and corridor, 1937. Source: National Museum of History, Chile](image)

The final building has four more elements which distance themselves from the functionalism already described: the decorative accents at the top of the building in the north, south, east, and west. Each introduces, with varying success, ornamental and classical elements; only the marquee building manages to fuse coherently with the stadium. The ornamental elements of the work, which make reference to classical antiquity, are the friezes of the western facade and the statues, which—shaped like Mapuche15 chiefs and Hellenic figures—populate the gardens around the building (figure 5).16 The conjunction of these two sources of influence is not resolved; rather than engaging in a dialogue, they are superimposed on a building dominated by its exposed reinforced concrete structure. The effect is of an ascetic functionalism merely ornamented with classical references in certain specific points.

So far, we have analyzed the National Stadium mostly on the basis of its external facade, but a look inside completely changes the situation. What President Alessandri inaugurated on December 3rd, 1938, was little more than the building’s structural work. There was no finishing, much of the necessary electrical and sanitary work had not been done, and the whole third floor was unfinished. The closed rooms on top of the building, which originally included
planes of glass, had not been completed; even the Presidential Stand, where the authorities sat, was only structurally finished.

Figure 5: The cover of the Magazine En Viaje depicts the newly renovated gardens of the National Stadium, redesigned for the World Cup of 1962. In the foreground we can observe a reproduction of the statue of Caupolicán—a Mapuche military leader—by the Chilean sculptor Nicanor Plaza. In the background, flags of some of the sixteen countries participating in the soccer championship, including Chile, the Soviet Union, Switzerland, Yugoslavia and Germany, crown the Stadium. Source: En Viaje (special edition, 343), May 1962. Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl.

The plaque that identifies the National Stadium as a work carried out by Alessandri's government states:

“NATIONAL STADIUM: built during the administration of his excellency Mr. Arturo Alessandri Palma. Work began on February 25th, 1937, the Minister of Public Education being Mr. Francisco Garcés Gana and the Minister of Finance being Mr. Gustavo Ross Santa María. Inaugurated on December 3rd, 1938, the Minister of Public Education being Mr. Guillermo Correa Fuenzalida and the Minister of Finance being Mr. Francisco Garcés Gana.”

However, the inscription had to be updated by Alessandri’s successor, and so the following was added: “Work continued during the administration of his excellency Mr. Pedro Aguirre Cerda with his Ministers Messrs. Juan Antonio Iribarren and Rudecindo Ortega M.”

The imminent end of his government led Arturo Alessandri to inaugurate an incomplete work, which forced his successor to finish it without a special budget assigned. Some of the unfinished work was completed during Aguirre Cerda's government—mostly sanitary and electrical fittings and partition walls to make it suitable for public use. But the third floor, along with the partition walls of the Scoreboard Tower, the western side, and the northern entrance were never completed. Not even the expansion carried out for the 1962 World Cup, or the remodeling started under Michelle Bachelet's government, took into account the more than 107,000 square feet left unfinished and underused within the country’s main sports arena (figure 6).
II. More Spectators, Less Architecture

Chile hosted the 1962 FIFA World Cup thanks to the work of Carlos Dittborn, administrator of the Chilean Soccer Association, who presented the project to FIFA. Additionally, the political instability of Argentina, Chile’s rival in the election, helped Chile’s bid to host the tournament. Sports journalist Daniel Matamala notes that without the rise of political violence, which in the late 1950s weakened Argentina’s international image, Chile would not have hosted the World Cup. Chile was no match for Argentina: the only stadium of a size adequate for the World Cup was the National Stadium, while the rest were just promises made by Dittborn. Chile’s insufficient sports infrastructure was compounded by a president—Jorge Alessandri—who, unlike his father, was ascetic and uninterested in sports. In addition, the apparent legitimacy of investing state funds in the World Cup was undermined by the reconstruction efforts required after the Concepción-Valdivia earthquake in May 1960. According to Matamala, the reason for the mediocrity of the Chilean World Cup was the 1960 earthquake: “Because on May 22nd, 1960, in just a couple of minutes, Chile’s great Football World Cup collapsed. It never rose again.” The original plan for the Chilean World Cup was approved—three years late—in 1959, and it included five venues in addition to the National Stadium. After the earthquake, the only reason why Jorge Alessandri’s government did not withdraw funding for the National Stadium was that work had already started in 1959, and, in his opinion, leaving the construction unfinished would have been more wasteful than completing it.

The organization of the World Cup, conducted against the clock, under economic hardship, and in an environment not conducive to its success, had direct consequences on the project executed in the National Stadium. Of the 24 proposals to extend the Stadium presented to the Ministry of Public Works, the most austere one was chosen—but even it was still impossible to implement. It was intended to increase the Stadium’s capacity from 52,000 to 120,000 spectators by replacing the velodrome with a new grandstand and adding a new ring of seats on top of the building. The chosen proposal, designed by members of the Architecture Office of the Ministry of Public Works, had only 365 days to
complete the task. Lack of time was one reason for the failure of the project; it only managed to add 11,000 seats, not the required 68,000. The four lighting towers, which should have been ready for the opening match, were not set up, so the old lighting system had to be used. Also, the Olympic Village, where foreign delegations were to stay, was not ready. The history of 1938 repeated itself, and once more the National Stadium project was left unfinished.

The 1962 project eliminated the velodrome, which had traversed the perimeter of the central pitch and occupied the lower edge of the stands, thus truncating the original conception of the building as a multidisciplinary Olympic stadium. This initiated the progressive “soccerization” of the National Stadium, which is still happening. Not only was a discipline eliminated from the stadium and moved to an autonomous building, it was replaced with deficient stands that lacked a full view of the soccer pitch (figure 7).

Figure 7: Sticker album of World Cup Chile '62 candies. Text at bottom reads, “Sports and cultural competition for the Chilean youth. Collect the idols of world soccer.” Source: Private collection of Rodrigo Millán Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl.

The second operation conducted by the 1962 expansion was the occupation of the corridor around the perimeter of the stands. This continuous space for spectator movement, marked by a series of expressive zig-zag staircases, was filled with seats in a structure superimposed on the original staircases. As a result, the relationship of the second floor with the galleries was reduced to a series of doors, which, due to their relative distance, cannot generate continuity between the interior and the exterior, as the 1938 building had been able to.

While these two operations—the elimination of the velodrome and the corridor along the perimeter—were concentrated on the existing volume of the National Stadium, the third and last attempt to increase its capacity involved an increase in height. A new reinforced-concrete structure, which supported 12 new rows of seats—accounting for most of the building’s increase in capacity—was added above the top level of the stadium. According to the original architectural drawings, it is a structure that rests atop the Stadium’s structure, located over its top cornice. The anchoring between the two structures was executed hurriedly and with no attention to the details of the joints, resulting in a rough and poorly
accomplished contact between the extension cornice and the top structure of the National Stadium.

These three operations—the elimination of the velodrome, the occupation of the perimeter corridor, and the increase in height—took away from the original project its volumetric purity, its spatial amplitude, and its proportion. In addition, the most characteristic and innovative element of the National Stadium—the perimeter corridor—was covered, and so the typological creation of the Stadium was buried under the new stands. In spite of the extreme new density of seats, the lack of space did not manifest itself in the interior areas of the Stadium, which remained intact and unfinished, as they had been since 1938.

On May 30th, 1962, the day the Jules Rimet Cup was inaugurated, President Jorge Alessandri gave a brief and humble speech, in which he said:

“It is possible that our country may not provide all the comfort and advancements that others may offer. There may remain some deficiencies that we may have been unable to overcome, despite our efforts. But what I can assure you, and you can be certain of this, is that in this far-flung corner of the world there is sincere thankfulness for having chosen us to host this championship (...)”

Against the clock and lacking funds, the expansion of the National Stadium for the FIFA World Cup not only failed to increase the number of seats to 120,000, but the 11,000 places that were added had poor visibility, were overcrowded, and damaged the original building. The attributes that made the National Stadium an accomplished example of Chilean Modernism were obstructed in order to deficiently increase its capacity. Although I have pointed out that even the 1938 version of the National Stadium was an unfinished promise of modernity, the 1962 expansion initiated its physical deterioration.
III. Concentration Camp

The next blow to the truncated modernity of the National Stadium was landed by the Government Junta, when it used the site as its main center for imprisonment, torture, and death during the first months of the military dictatorship. For 58 days, the full 158 acres of the National Stadium site stopped being a sports ground and hosted the victims and the perpetrators of a dictatorship that was to remain in power for 17 years.

The National Stadium was a component of the first stage of the dictatorship—its rise to power—in which a number of spaces were employed—the National Stadium, the former Government’s seat (La Moneda Palace), and the UNCTAD III Building—to transmit a single message: in order to exterminate the Marxist cancer, the government was willing to violate all the constitutional rights of Chilean citizens. As a result, 10,000 people—Chileans and foreigners—were detained in the National Stadium with no charges, trials, or clarity regarding the detention procedure.20

The “monument to national sport” was profaned and reduced to a makeshift prison (figure 9). Its potential dungeons, the panopticon-like Press Gallery in the marquee, and the control of the flow of people that the spatial design of the National Stadium facilitated, appear to be the main functional arguments—though they were never declared as such—that led the military to use it as a prisoner camp. But the Stadium’s visibility, its role within the city, and the identification of the site as a place for recreation, fun, and spectacle, were the symbolic reasons to transform the National Stadium into a prison camp. As a visual example of military authority, the transgression of the National Stadium was repeated through speeches and images throughout the country and abroad. Functionalism and symbolism combined to form the largest prison camp operated by the military regime. After its transformation into a prison camp, the National Stadium was opened to local and foreign press and photographers on more than one occasion. Photographers like Marcelo Montecino (Chile) and Koen Wessing (Holland) registered those visits and published their material abroad.21 Additionally, Costa Gavras’s film Missing (1982) was based on the disappearance of American journalist Charles Horman, who was imprisoned at the National Stadium.22 These images, among many others, crossed the Chilean dictatorship’s borders and transformed the National Stadium into an international symbol of Pinochet’s regime.

Figure 9: Political prisoners being held in the stands of the National Stadium during the military occupation of the sports complex. The National Stadium was transformed into a concentration camp during the first day of the military coup, and remained militarized until November 9th of 1973. In the foreground we can see a young conscript on guard. Source: Photograph by Marcelo Montecino. Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl
During its first months, the military dictatorship was not concerned with hiding human rights violations; on the contrary, the intention was to exhibit what was happening inside the stadium in order to intimidate the rest of the country. The same logic lay behind the disproportionate bombing of La Moneda Palace (the seat of government) and the president’s residence, the book burnings, and the painting of walls with partisan slogans. While the expansion for the 1962 Soccer World Cup violated the spatial modernism of the National Stadium, its use as a concentration camp divested it from the values of social modernity that permeated its original design. The cult of the body and the defense of the race, the creation of a type of politics that embraced the working and the middle classes, along with a social policy based on the granting of citizen rights in matters of health, housing, education, and recreation, came to a sudden end with the use of the National Stadium as a place for imprisonment, torture, and death.

After 58 days, the National Stadium regained its intended use, with the famous match between Chile and the Soviet Union on November 21st, 1973, part of the qualifiers for the following year’s World Cup. With the Soviets having refused to travel to Chile due to the anti-Socialist regime imposed by Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean team, alone on the pitch, scored a cinematic, almost fictional goal to win 1-0. In spite of the intense use that the dictatorship would make of the stadium, its deterioration had set in—a phase of progressive physical obsolescence that reached its climax in the mid 1990s. The heavy propagandistic use of the National Stadium by the dictatorship, along with its conversion to a concentration camp, corrupted the promise of liberating modernity that the work had represented for most Chileans.

IV. The Past Takes Revenge

The return to democracy in Chile was celebrated on the central field of the National Stadium, with a huge inauguration event led by president-elect Patricio Aylwin in 1990. Although a large flag was used to cover the whole pitch, this exorcism failed to halt the Stadium’s trend of deterioration. At that time, the sports ground was fragmented through franchises, rentals, and leases, all of which affected its unitary composition.

As previously mentioned, the whole site of the National Stadium was declared a Historical Monument in 2003, a decree that provides special safeguards for the Stadium’s building. This decision functioned as a detonator for a series of projects and opinions—both public and private—that were discussed throughout the country in national newspapers and magazines. The contradiction between making the building a piece of Chilean heritage and its deep physical decay eventually led, in 2009, to the presentation of a state project to remodel the stadium. The project, launched by Michelle Bachelet’s government, included the substitution of individual red seats for the old stands, the construction of a moat to eliminate the fences, the renewal of toilets and dressing rooms, a new coat of paint for the facade, and a modern drainage system for the pitch. However, 915 square feet were left untouched. In this fenced area, the old stands were kept as a memorial to those imprisoned and killed by the military dictatorship, and, in the hatch that connects these stands with the outside, a photo exhibit was put in place which displays the National Stadium’s past as a concentration camp (figures 10 and 11). The intervention
was not limited to conservation; it also introduced weathered wood and similar materials to produce a false historical effect.

Figure 10: Hatch 8 Memorial, seen from the opposite stands during the reopening of the National Stadium in 2010. Source: Photograph by Valentina Rozas Krause.

Figure 11: Part of the exhibition “Walking for memory” (Caminando por la memoria), organized by the Metropolitan Association of Former Political Prisoners, in commemoration of the victims of the military dictatorship. The exhibit was installed in the Hatch 8 sector, one of the entrances to the lower section of the north gallery of the National Stadium, in remembrance of the fortieth anniversary of the military coup. Source: Photograph by Juliana Carvalho. Archive: www.archivoestadionacional.cl.

This memorial presents the National Stadium’s past in a material and concrete way, which brings the Modernist ideals that had created it to an end. A memorial placed in the midst of a work devoted to the modern cult of the body, reason, and spectacle is—in the view of Modernist precursors—a contradiction. Although for modern dialectics the cult of the past is substantial, the staunch Modernists who propagated the modern style as a law were part of a cult of the future that allowed for no reminiscences of the past.

At this point, the road to the de-modernization of the National Stadium reached a point of no return. The original modernity of the project was truncated by its incompleteness; then its modernity was lessened—at the spatial level—by the expansion for the World Cup and—at the symbolic level—through its transformation into a concentration camp. However, the creation of a memorial—or monument—to the victims of the dictatorship within it sets the past in opposition to contemporaneity and symbolic representation in opposition to functionalism.

In the early modernity of the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche issued a warning about the danger of the monumental contemplation of the past. In addition, he noted the incompatibility of modernity with the monument, because while the former is constantly mutating, the monument remains static, unable to change. Nietzsche coined the term “monumental history” to refer to the kind of history based on the search for reference points of honor and bravery in the past. In this view, monuments are the constructed form of that monumental
history which is opposed to the critical method for surveying the past that the author proposes: “But the fiercest battle is fought over the demand of greatness to be eternal. All the other living beings exclaim, ‘No!’ ‘Out with the monuments’ is their slogan.”

Maurice Halbwachs, author of the concept of “collective memory,” points out, contra Nietzsche, that the original aim of the monument is to safeguard, watch over, and disseminate a certain memory; but because there are as many memories as there are human groups, monuments are immersed in a constant process of re-appropriation and re-signification. For art historian Aloïs Riegl, the monument is understood as “a work constructed by human hands and created with the specific aim of keeping individual feats or destinies (or a set of them) always alive and present in the consciousness of forthcoming generations.”

According to Riegl’s categorization of monuments in three groups, Hatch 8 Memorial is an “intentional monument,” a work produced by the will of its creators in order to recall a given moment of history.

A few years later, during the first decade of the twentieth century, one of the most radical theoreticians of architectural modernism, Adolf Loos, expanded Nietzsche’s warning about the past, pointing out that, in order to attain modernity, human beings must live in the present, without nostalgia about the past. The modern human being is not anchored to the past, because his duty is to constantly seek to overcome the present. Modernity values the modern just because it is new, and so the past is regarded as an oppressive burden from which the culture must break free in order to fully comprehend the real spirit of its own time. It is important to stress that, despite their contempt for the eternization of the past, the precursors of the modern movement did build monuments, although only, as Rosalind Krauss points out, monuments that made reference to themselves. For Krauss, these modern monuments are unable to engage in a dialogue with any events outside themselves.

Although it may seem contradictory, Adolf Loos had noted in 1910, “Only a very small part of architecture belongs to the domain of art: funerary and commemorative monuments.” The importance that Loos grants to the monument as the only resource independent from its usefulness, and, therefore, from the course of history, connects it with the idea of the permanence of architecture advanced by Sigfried Giedion:

“[M]onuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideas, for their aims, and for their actions; they are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future...Monumental architecture will be something more than a strictly functional endeavor; it will have recovered its lyrical value.”

Christian Norberg-Schultz states that one of the first Modernist theoreticians to demand a “new monumentality” was Giedion, in the 1940s. Staunch functionalism had shown its defects, giving rise to the need to refer to the past and to the transcendental. With the creation of a monument inside it, in this case a memorial to the victims of the dictatorship, the National Stadium lost
The National Stadium is part of two fundamental dimensions of Chilean modernity. On the one hand, it was designed following the premises of local Modernism, and, on the other, the project was in tune with the social function of the endeavor to modernize Chile. The educational function of the building responds to a special idea of regeneration, which sought to defend “the Chilean race” from its baser instincts through a rationalization project based on the promotion of sports. Focused on a healthy and vigorous youth, the stadium was intended to instill new cultural values in the whole of the population rather than on a part of it. True to its project, the building was surrounded by monuments that evoked an edifying corporeality and by gardens and bodies of water (figure 12).

The National Stadium was a State precursor of the modernization that never fully established itself in Chile. The result of a sum of travels to Europe, the work is a stain of modernism within a country on the road to modernization. Additionally, the original National Stadium is a lesson in the vicissitudes of early Modernism in 1930s Chile. Although its overall conception is functionalist and modern, some neo-traditional elements emerge which reference classical antiquity. As we can see, Chilean Modernism did not need to wait for the “new monumentality” described by Giedion in order to acquire transcendence; instead, it was forced to engage in a dialog with past references from the start.

In the 1980s, Chilean architect Cristián Fernández Cox coined the concept of “appropriated modernity” as the attitude of Latin American architects towards the events of modern architecture. Appropriated modernity is that which is adapted to Latin American reality—“appropriated” both in the sense of being made its own by the continent in opposition to international influences and in the sense of being of Latin American origin. Temporally, the National Stadium belongs to the decades of early imitation of the European modern movement, and so its eclecticism can be regarded as a defect in this disciplinary context. However, it can also be argued that the adaptation of the pure European functionalism to Chilean reality by including references to transcendental
classical ideals is a first nod to the “appropriated modernity” discussed by Fernández Cox in the late 1980s.

Whether its modernity was imitated or appropriated, the National Stadium was led on a path of progressive de-modernization. The original work remained forever unfinished and the expansion for the World Cup condensed the Stadium’s stands, obstructing the spatial achievements of the original. Spatial de-modernization was followed by symbolic de-modernization, which turned the temple of modern sport into a temple of horror in the memories of most Chileans.

Later, the monumentalization of horror made its way into the entrails of Modernism, through the Hatch 8 memorial. The most basic function of the National Stadium—as a venue for spectacles—was distorted by a monument that restricts attendees’ use of the building. The absence of the past which generated the first signs of rejection to the tabula rasa imposed by the early modern movement also reached a crisis point in the National Stadium, with a significant coincidence: the emergence of horror. Although the events which occurred in Chile and in Europe—the military dictatorship and the Second World War—are incomparable, we must bear in mind that the National Stadium is the inheritor of the modern horrors of the Second World War, of the USSR, and of its own history of human rights violations during Pinochet’s dictatorship. This situation makes it impossible to maintain the self-referential Modernist purity of the National Stadium, and prompts the incorporation of symbolic references to account for lessons from the past.

NOTES

1 In parallel to this research, and together with Rodrigo Millán and Camilo Yáñez, we initiated the collaborative project “Archivo Abierto-Estadio Nacional,” which is a digital archive of images and visual material that covers the more than seven decades of history of the National Stadium (Rodrigo Millán, Valentina Rozas Krause, and Camilo Yáñez, “Archivo Abierto Estadio Nacional,” Digital Visual Archive, Archivo Abierto Estadio Nacional, accessed September 3, 2015, http://www.archivoestadionacional.cl).

2 The original master plan for the National Stadium can be accessed here: http://www.archivestadionacional.cl/archivo/plan-maestro-del-estadio-1937.

3 VV.AA., Cuatro siglos de la historia de Santiago (Santiago, Chile Zig-Zag, 1943).


5 Humberto Eliash, Arquitectura y modernidad en Chile / 1925-1965 : una realidad múltiple, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Serie arte / arquitectura (Santiago, Chile Universidad Católica de Chile, 1989).


7 In parallel with the Chilean state’s building boom in the second half of the 1930s, Brazil witnessed a deep alliance between the state and the modern avant-garde, intended to represent the ideals of modernity, unity, and territorial conquest necessary to deal with the new industrialization processes and the emergence of an integrated economic system.
8 Eliash, *Arquitectura y modernidad en Chile* / 1925-1965, 120.

9 Ibid., 130–132.


13 Asociación de Arquitectos de Chile, “Revista Urbanismo Y Arquitectura,” 1940.


15 The Mapuche are a culture indigenous to South America


18 Ibid., 119.

19 Jorge Alessandri Rodríguez, “Discurso Del Presidente de La República En La Inauguración Del Mundial de Fútbol [Speech by the President on the Inauguration of the Football World Cup] Santiago de Chile” (Documento del Departamento de Prensa, Oficina de Informaciones y Radiodifusión, Presidencia de la República., May 30, 1962), no page number.

20 Named after the first conference it hosted: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Building III


27 Ibid., 13.


35 Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me; the Diary of a Development*.

36 “Revista Crack,” Editorial Zig-Zag II, no. 61 (December 9, 1938).

37 Giedion, *Architecture, You and Me; the Diary of a Development*.
