Cemeteries are commemorative landscapes filled with monuments and memories. Graves, and the monuments placed thereon, are sites of individual memories and collective memories, private memories and public memories. In the nineteenth century, the idealised cemetery landscape itself became indicative of the strength or loyalty of memory: remembered - a neat and ordered grave - or forgotten - an overgrown and neglected grave. Close examination of the history and evolution of cemetery landscapes reveals that cemeteries were not always the respected and sacred places of popular memory. Cemeteries were (and still are) places of contested, even contradictory, values and meanings. Dichotomies such as remembered / forgotten become weaker and blurred when you compare the social values used to define the ideal cemetery with the prosaic reality of many cemetery landscapes. It appears our ancestors had a more ambivalent attitude towards cemetery commemoration than is conventionally portrayed. This history of cemeteries calls for a re-evaluation of our understanding of cemeteries and how they are conserved and interpreted.

Cemeteries are inscribed with layers of meanings. They perform both private and public functions of disposal, consolation, and education. The cemetery ideal was a creation of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie to regulate and control bodies – both living and dead. It evolved from the principles of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, thus being prescribed with both functional utilitarianism on the one hand, and aesthetic and moralistic qualities on the other. It was seen as the answer to the sanitary problems of the overcrowded churchyards and scruples over the treatment and integrity of the corpse.

The cemetery landscape was central to the cemetery ideal's vision, where Nature and religion combined to produce a sublime environment. Through its location, landscape and monuments, the cemetery was to be a sanctuary of spirituality, decency and decorum. The cemetery was seen as an important civic institution that improved the taste and morals of the public. In an era obsessed with death and cemeteries, "God's acre" was quickly embraced as the phrase that encapsulated all the moralistic and religious qualities of the cemetery. The use of the term "God's acre" from the mid-nineteenth century through to the 1930s illustrates the prominence of the cemetery ideal in the public imagination. Cemeteries were visited, written about and discussed as cultural places that resonated with religious, social and historical meanings for the community.

In Australia government officials and public figures were aware of the cemetery ideal and examples of this movement in Europe, Britain and America. The cemeteries and burial grounds that developed in colonial Australia also embraced these values. The colonists rapidly adopted the practical aspects of cemetery location and layout. But they were also conscious of the more philosophical aspects of the cemetery ideal, and were eager to implement appropriate and tasteful landscapings in cemeteries and burial grounds.

Neatness in the cemetery landscape was associated with decency and good taste. John Claudius Loudon, an influential architect and landscape designer who published several pieces on cemetery reform, emphasised that landscape was the key to influencing behaviour. "It must be obvious that the first step to rendering the churchyard [or cemetery] a source of amelioration or instruction is, to render it attractive." In stating the obvious, Loudon underlined the widespread acceptance of the idea current in the nineteenth century of the moralistic influence of landscaped Nature. The ordering of the landscape, controlling Nature and rendering it beautiful and tasteful, was applied not simply to cemeteries but to landscaped gardens and public parks. Ordered nature was seen as a metaphor for genteel civilised society. The landscape was designed to shape the behaviour of visitors in appropriate ways and to inculcate an understanding of moral and social values.

Graves and funerary monuments were an integral part of the commemorative landscapes. The cemetery ideal created a space where personal grief and remembrance could be channelled into a physical site. The grave and the cemetery landscape encouraged mourning, remembrance, consolation and faith. The grave marker became the focus for private mourning, allowing the perpetuation of the memory of the deceased and a connection between the living and the dead. Contemporary cemetery guides in Britain rejoiced in the comfort provided by the cemetery landscape. The centrality of the grave to private mourning and memory is aptly summarised in the brief epitaph: "Though lost to sight, to memory dear." At the same time, any marked grave situated within a public cemetery self-consciously contributed to the social construction of the deceased. Through the epigraphic tradition and symbolic language of sepulchral design, people shaped and placed in the public domain a statement of the deceased's identity: who they were, where they were from, what they did, what they were like. The erection of a memorial is one way in which the community participated in history-making at a very basic level. By perpetuating the private memory of the deceased in a public monument, the community was contributing to the accumulation of a public or social memory. In the newly settled colonies, the cemetery became an important cultural institution in which the religious, moral and social order could be established and a person's identity could be defined.

Gravestones because of their permanent qualities were also a lasting public declaration of love, affection, admiration and virtue, creating a public identity for the deceased through the monument. Neatly tended graves were a public sign of
memory and affection, as an 1885 illustration demonstrates. Overgrown, neglected graves were reminiscent of the conditions of churchyards in the late eighteenth century - something that the nineteenth-century cemetery ideal shunned. The grave was defined in the nineteenth century as a sacred spot that should not be disturbed. The inviolability of the grave was seen as an expression of 'respect for the dead', a supposedly universal human trait. The association between the sanctity of the grave, respect for the dead, and civilisation was central to the construction of the cemetery ideal in the public imagination.

The condition of the cemetery landscape thus became an expression of the state of religion, morals and civilisation. The Churches viewed the cemetery landscape as a physical manifestation of their religious beliefs and Church leaders reminded clergymen of the importance of maintaining the cemetery landscape. In Sydney in 1861 Archbishop Polding reminded Roman Catholic priests of their duty once again. The condition of many cemeteries in the Archdiocese is a disgrace to the name of Christian and Catholic; I lay anew upon the priests the charge of a reformation in this respect. We believe in the resurrection of the body, we believe that it is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and the place where we lay it to rest must give evidence of this belief. ... [Cemeteries must have] a substantial fence, and some ordinary neatness and good taste in the laying out of the grounds, so that they may express somewhat of the cheerfulness of Christian hope whilst they soothe the grief of the mourner.

The Church of England agreed. Their manual for the management of cemeteries - appropriately titled God's Acre - emphasised the careful attention which cemeteries required. The Bishop of Goulburn reminded his flock that 'God's acre' should be the best-kept plot of ground in the whole neighbourhood, neat and tidy and beautiful as a 'garden of the Lord'. ... The cemetery is the resting-place not only of our own friends but of the household of God; its decency and dignity are the concern of the whole family; and its condition speaks ill or well for the practical Christianity of the parish.

Order and decency were absent in overgrown, neglected cemeteries. It was therefore extremely disconcerting for the Churches and public leaders that many cemeteries in New South Wales, and indeed around Australia, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were overgrown and neglected. They were forgotten.

While some cemetery trustees maintained their cemeteries in good order, others did not appear to prioritise it. The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney complained that the organisation of general cemeteries into denominational areas with separate trustees meant that there was no standard of neatness and orderliness in the cemetery landscape.

In [some] instances one body of trustees does its work well, and keeps its part of the cemetery in decent order, while another allows the neighbouring plot of ground, with its fences, to go to rack and ruin; so that it has been sometimes even necessary to separate the two portions by an inner fence. The condition of cemeteries usually came to public attention when the hallowed ground of the cemetery was violated - when pigs were disturbing the graves, tombs were being desecrated, or the sanctity of the body was being violated. In New South Wales accusations of 'indecent' burials or neglected cemeteries occurred with alarming regularity throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth; approximately every ten years. Neglected cemeteries could equally be found in metropolitan and country towns. Mr Hay MLA reported to Parliament in 1870, The burial grounds in and about Sydney - [and] those in the interior of this colony - were not well cared for, were not pleasing to the eye. So far as could be said in such a matter, this colony was all behind Victoria. He had observed this in travelling through the interior. Graves were swept by winds and washed by rains, and coffins exposed to view, but no one seemed to care ... to his sorrow he very seldom found burial-places in this colony such as they ought to be. But the situation was not confined to the colony of New South Wales. Despite Mr Hay's concerns that New South Wales was lagging behind its colonial rival, Victoria, the neglected state of cemeteries was replicated in colonial cemeteries across the continent, as several historians have shown. In contrast to the public image of 'God's acre' (a manicured cemetery meticulously maintained) continual complaints and reports suggest that cemeteries in Australia did not live up to the cemetery ideal.
Whenever the poor condition of a public cemetery was brought to the attention of the public through the newspapers, criticism was couched in the rhetoric of sanctity, decency, and respect for the dead. Neglected cemeteries were condemned as 'scandalous', 'indecent' and as having a 'bad effect upon the public mind' which 'contributes greatly to injure the moral and religious character of the people'. They were, in short, 'a disgrace to any civilised community'.

But despite the rhetoric, neglected cemeteries did not reflect declining morals or the collapse of civilisation. The history of neglected cemetery landscapes in Australia suggests that while memories for the dead were cherished, these memories were transient and not as everlasting as the memorials. The shifting nature of private memory and public memory towards cemetery commemoration is most clearly seen in cemeteries which have been shifted or removed from the public domain. I will use two well-known examples from Sydney to illustrate my point: the Old Sydney Burial Ground and the Devonshire Street Cemetery.

The George Street Burial Ground (later known as the Old Sydney Burial Ground) was the principal burial ground for the colony from 1793 to 1820. An 1811 map illustrates how it was literally on the mapped outskirts of Sydney Town. Sydney Municipal Council was incorporated in 1842, and aldermen immediately began looking for an appropriate site for a Town Hall. The old burial ground, closed and neglected, caught their eye. It was adjacent to the markets on George Street, amongst the expanding commercial businesses, and close to the wharves at Darling Harbour.

There was public opposition when it was first proposed in 1845 to resume the Old Sydney Burial Ground to make way for a city Town Hall. Prominent Sydney citizen and merchant John Tooth, Esq. vehemently argued against the disturbance of graves as a 'monstrous sacrilege' which was 'calculated to destroy one of the finest feelings of our nature'. Reverend William Cowper agreed with Tooth, stating 'I fear if we have not a certain degree of respect for the dead we shall lose sight of that respect which we ought to have for the living'.

An alternative site was offered by the colonial government to the aldermen, down at Phillip and Bent Streets near the site of the first government house. The council took the land, but did not build a town hall. They still wanted the site of the burial ground. The fate of the burial site was considered again by colonial government in 1860s, in conjunction with choosing the site of a new cemetery for Sydney. The Mayor of Sydney, Charles Moore, lobbied the government for the old cemetery site. A parliamentary select committee inquiry was set up to investigate the matter. This time, no one objected to the proposal of a town hall being built on a portion of the old burial ground. The burial ground had become 'a resort for bad characters at night and for goats and horses during the day'. Council merely wanted to 'put a handsome building on this ground which is now lying waste and neglected'.

The Devonshire Street Cemetery was also removed for the greater public good for the construction of Central Railway Station. The Devonshire Street Cemetery was established near the Brickfields on the outskirts of Sydney in 1820 to replace the Old Sydney Burial Ground. By 1845, the Devonshire Street cemeteries were becoming crowded. While the colonial government procrastinated in granting a new cemetery for Sydney, Devonshire Street continued to receive burials in what little land remained. The graves became shallower as chaplains and sextons tried to squeeze in as many corpses as they could. By 1866 the situation had become intolerable. The Devonshire Street cemeteries were no longer on the outskirts of Sydney but were surrounded by the bustle of the city. The poorly drained, overcrowded site was deemed a public health threat. So on the eve of the opening of the new Necropolis, an act was passed to close the cemetery to burials, except for vault holders. Once closed, the cemeteries fell further into disrepair, and were reclaimed by scrub, becoming, as one newspaper described it, a 'wilderness of tombs'.
The government and private companies soon began dreaming about what they could do with this valuable piece of real estate. As early as 1878 the government was considering it for railway purposes. The extension of the railway from the Fredlaun terminus into the city was a contentious proposal in the late nineteenth century. In 1890 it was proposed extending the railway to the northern end of Hyde Park. But such was the public outcry about taking away the people’s park that the Devonshire Street site became the favoured location for the railway extension. Mr D. Davis, the Honorable Member for The Shoalhaven, approved of the Devonshire Street site because ‘it will do away with one of the worst eyesores in the city - that is the old burying-ground’. It was fine to remove a cemetery, but not the ‘people’s park’.

In December 1900, the government finally resumed the cemetery lands for the building of Central Railway terminus. The proposed resumption of the cemetery lands received very little attention in either parliament or the newspapers. It appears that it was generally accepted that the cemetery resumption was a necessary step for the building of the new railway station. No parliamentarians argued that the graves shouldn’t be disturbed. They simply wished to ensure that public sentiment was met. The government was instructed to ensure that ‘ample provision [was] made for the removal of remains in a decent way’. This was seen as an appropriate gesture as compensation and respect.

So far, I have only been able to uncover two public objections to the resumption of Devonshire Street Cemetery. Neither was based on religious or sentimental grounds. One elderly lady protested that her right to burial in her family vault had been taken away. She had a vested interest in the cemetery. The other objection was more interesting. It arose from the newly formed Royal Australian Historical Society, whose stated objective was ‘to secure an imperishable record and memento of old Sydney’. The Society sent a deputation to the Lord Mayor of Sydney in February 1901 asking that the Council lobby the government ‘to have the inscriptions on the tombstones in the Devonshire-street Cemetery photographed before being removed, as many of the early pioneers of the State are buried there’. The Mayor agreed to raise the issue with the government. But nothing came of the proposal, and it was left to two members of the RAHS, Mr & Mrs Foster to photograph and transcribe parts of the cemetery before it disappeared entirely.

These two case studies illustrate how the memories attached to the cemetery landscape shift and evolve over time. It is not accurate to say that in the nineteenth century cemeteries were always well kept, revered landscapes. Certainly the ideal cemetery was a neatly ordered, tasteful landscape. But the historical record does not always support this popular interpretation of cemetery culture. Ideas and realities do not always match up.

My research into the history of cemeteries in New South Wales shows that there has always been a tension between ‘Remembered’ and ‘Forgotten’ in the cemetery landscape. The cycle between ‘Remembered’ and ‘Forgotten’ is partly dependent upon the type of memories attached to the cemetery landscape and the strength of those memories. When cemeteries are ‘active’, they are sites of ‘living memories’ - both public and private memories. The monuments within the cemetery are visited and cared for. The graves are ‘remembered’. As time elapses, cemeteries fill up. The physical landscape changes. It becomes more crowded. The trees mature, and the grave plantings start to cover and smother the graves. Some areas of the cemetery become more visited than others. Relatives who tended the graves die or move away. As the private memories attached to the graves fade, so does the public inclination to care for the cemetery.

The cemetery then enters into a phase of neglect. It is ‘forgotten’. This however generally passes and a new generation becomes interested in the cemetery. Sometimes these people are responsible authorities; sometimes they are interested locals, sometimes they are descendants. Generally over a period of cycles, the emphasis shifts from private to public. People become interested in the cemetery not as a site of individual memories and individual graves, but as a site of dormant memories, historic memories, collective memories. The cemetery becomes a site with connections to the past. It is ‘remembered’ but in a different way. The historicisation of the cemetery, its identification as heritage, containing a shared history, suggests that a shift in the landscape is occurring from private memory to public memory.

The chequered history of many cemetery landscapes requires cemetery managers and heritage practitioners to reconsider how a cemetery’s heritage values should be interpreted. In some cases it may be inappropriate to return a cemetery to a neatly mown site. For a start one may destroy important native and exotic plantings. But more importantly, it may be a false or misleading interpretation of what the cemetery landscape was like. The conservation strategy of controlled overgrowth, where grass is allowed to grow long over most of the site and only key pathways are kept mown, may provide a more accurate picture of how a cemetery landscape has appeared and has been maintained over a cemetery’s history. Today and in the future, a ‘heritage’ cemetery with long grass may not always mean ‘Forgotten’.

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Ebbs and flows: when to conserve the scars of pain? When to let them heal?

Joan Domicelj

Once upon a time, in Germany, there was a mediæval marketplace. This is its story. It is set in Hildesheim, a Saxon town much enhanced by the artistic and cultural works of its eleventh-century Bishop, Bernwald. In 1997, music filled the Romanesque Church of St Michael for the opening of an international symposium on the World's Cultural Heritage. In addition to St Michael's Church, Hildesheim's jewels include the Cathedral of St Mary, the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, a revered ancient rose-tree and a mediæval marketplace. In the dying days of World War II, 300 RAF bombers attacked Hildesheim. Both churches were severely damaged and only one side of the marketplace remained. Over ensuing years, the churches were repaired, the rose-tree bloomed again and the City cleared the rubble from the marketplace, replacing missing sides with modern shops and generous car parking in the centre. The community put the pain of war behind them, cleaned up the mess and started life afresh.

This is Stage 1 of the ebb and flow: Erasure.

What is interesting is the sequel, over 30 years later, when it seems that some ache of memory returned. In 1985, the two resuscitated churches of Hildesheim were successfully inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, as cultural properties of 'outstanding universal value'. Also in the 1980s, a bank in the remnant mediæval portion of the square sought consent to modernise and extend its building. There was a public outcry. Under a City grant, the project was converted to sympathetic restoration in Gothic form. The result was so popular that the citizens demanded the historic reconstruction of the entire market square. Now, as in Warsaw, a twelfth-century re-created mediæval urban space is in place for all to see. And the market-place lived happily after.

This is Stage 2 of the ebb and flow: Recall.

What happened to Hildesheim's Marketplace is not unique. In the immediacy of here and now, following profound trauma, survivors cry out for Stage 1 — to relieve the pain, to disengage the mind from reminders, to re-invigorate body and spirit, to see the sky again. Clean up, build as new and, above all, re-define and re-activate life. A shocking concomitant to this most understandable and health-giving stage is the risk that washing away the evidence may, through communal amnesia, serve the perpetrators' interest.

With the distance of time and deeper reflection, those same survivors reach out to Stage 2 — seeking to re-engage the public memory. And with urgency. To defend and display in perpetuity, if only that were possible, the evidence — either of what was lost (the exquisite pre-bomb square) or of what was suffered (its shattered remains).

So, Stage 2 itself comes in two forms:
- the first attempts to annul loss through restoration
- the second acknowledges the quiet but tangible evidence of the horror itself — the remnants of Hiroshima’s Genbuka dome or the slave holding-rooms on Senegal’s île de Goree.

In Stage 2, the community faces the grim task of looking deep into the eye of cyclical history and conserving what it sees — often ambivalent, continually recurring, ebbing and flowing themes.

Now, let us consider places drawn into institutionalised cruelty.

In the aftermath, what are the differing roles of the survivor, conservationist and poet?

It is on the whole easier to study places objectively, when their historic significance derives from events long ago. Perversely therefore, I introduce you to Chile's military coup on the relatively recent 11 September 1973 — just one face of the troubled, subjective twentieth century — and to buildings with stories to tell about General Pinochet's first decade. I confess this is personal. I never kept diaries — or only once, for 27 days in 1973, when my world in Chile stood on its head. For everyone's sake, it was written in code, I doubt that I have the key now — so haphazard was it with anger and grief.

But, before we cross the Pacific Ocean, to witness human abuse at another time in another place, let us recall current events on Australia’s beloved soil and sea. The relentless failure to respect, or reconcile with, Aboriginal peoples or to deal with Native Title; the demonising of people seeking rescue here; their detention, incomunicado, behind razor wire; their abandonment to death at sea. And the new visibility of the military... Is this a significant stage in our history? If so, how do we, the professionals, deal with the evidence? The Stage 1 whitewash? The Stage 2 black armband? Or will we turn a corner to share the colour of hope?

So, to Chile, 1973 — please forgive the poet Pablo Neruda, 1904-73, if he interrupts me occasionally.

Chile is a slim North-South country of extraordinary beauty, wedged between the freezing Southern Pacific and the lofty ranges of the Andes. Santiago was founded by Spain in 1541; Independence came in 1818. Despite occasional wars with neighbours and suppression of indigenous peoples, its history was relatively benign for its region. In the 1970s, its population was 11 million, highly urbanised — with 4 million in the greater Santiago, 80% mestizo, 20% European, half a million Mapuche Indians. Chile is Spanish-speaking, highly literate, Catholic and with a solid middle class.

Much to everyone's surprise, in this place, in 1970, Dr Salvador Allende became the world's first elected Marxist president. His coalition Popular Unity government stood for socialist reforms within the democratic framework of the Chilean constitution. It was greeted with exuberant excitement, in art, song and deafening talk, relatively untempered by the bitter opposition of the formerly privileged.

Neruda: de las alturas tembles donde yace el cobre... surgió un movimiento liberador de magnitud grandiosa!

From the terrible heights, where the copper lies buried, arose a liberation movement of grandiose proportions!

Three years later, on that jinxed date of 11 September, this
government was ousted by a violent military coup, during which Salvador Allende and others died.

On 14 September 1973, Neruda wrote: ‘Mi pueblo ha sido el mas traicionado de este tiempo. My people have been the most betrayed in these times’. Nine days later, he died of a broken heart.

Sandbags and police dogs appeared on street corners and helicopters overhead. Thousands were detained and a secret police force, the DINA, was set up. Trade unions and Congress were dissolved. Foreigners, students, indigenous land-holders, sociologists, journalists, singers were arrested and interrogated. Books, music, even the traditional Andean flute, were banned. Military deans were appointed to the universities. A decade of Chicago-school economics, repression and assassinations followed, interspersed by bursts of celebration from the Right and protest from the Left.

In the first curfewed weeks of the military regime, over 20 covert interrogation centres were established within Santiago alone (many of the 1000 missing persons were last seen in one of these centres). Provincial detention centres were almost as harsh and remote as our own Wooporea — eminent politicians and Mapuche leaders froze on islands in the Magellan Straits; trade union leaders and miners baked in the northern Chacabuco desert.

What part did buildings play over this period? And murals? the voices of singers? poets?

I bring you six built messages from Chile — from the ‘great clean-up’ to the bombed Moneda and its replacement. I bring you a sports stadium and I bring you memory museums.

Buildings talk

The first message: Erasure

During the Allende government, popular art flourished and spilled onto public walls, splashing colour along the canalised River Mapocho, up the sides of schools. In their first days of power, the Junta, deeply offended by this visible expression of the Cancer of Communism, sent out squads of high school students in smocks to whitewash away every trace. This exercise was named the ‘Gran Limpieza’, the Great Clean Up. I have tended to admire the resilience of graffiti cultures ever since witnessing that Gran Limpieza en la ciudad de Santiago.

The second message: Restoration

The Palacio De La Moneda is an imposing neo-classic building, designed in 1788 as the nation's mint, but which later become the country's seat of government. Modifications in the 1850s allowed a century of Presidents to live there, and further extensions admitted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the morning of 11 September 1973 when, after due warning, President Allende refused to surrender, five Hawker Hunters bombed the Moneda from the air and armoured tanks attacked it from the ground. The manner of Allende's death is disputed. His last recorded words call on the people — rural women, young students, workers, intellectuals — to hold high their faith in Chile and its destiny. No evidence of damage to the Moneda or its public square has been conserved. The building's meticulous repair and restoration by conservation specialists took seven years, after which it could, once again, become the seat of government. Surprisingly, a statue of Allende now stands in the square.

The third message: Naming

In 1972, under the Popular Unity government, just down the road from the Moneda building, a modern steel-framed conference hall was custom-built for the visit of the UN's Commission for Trade and Development; it was consequently known as the UNCTAD Building. After the conference, it became a cultural centre and was re-named Gabriela Mistral, in honour of a woman much loved in Chile for her Nobel prize-winning poetry. The previous government house having been severely bomb-damaged and requiring, as already mentioned, some years of repair, the military regime took over this brand new building as its seat of government from 1973 to 1981. Inevitably, it was re-named, this time after Diego Portales, the man who, in 1833, introduced a centralised, authoritarian constitution for Chile, and whose bust still adorns the building’s entrance.

Neruda: Aquellos que quieren apartar la poesía de la política, quieren amordazarnos, quieren apagar el canto, el canto eterno. Those who want to separate poetry from politics, seek to muffle us all and to silence our song, our eternal song.

The fourth message: Silence

In two stadiums in Santiago, the Estadio de Chile and the Estadio Nacional, over 7000 prisoners were held incommunicado, over the first weeks of the military regime. Most were later transferred to secret locations. Prisoners stayed, day and night, on the stands; the change-rooms were used for interrogation and torture. Hundreds detained at the State Technical University were transferred to the stadiums on the first day. Several were executed, amongst them the singer/guitarist Victor Jara. Before his death, he sang for his fellow detainees in the stadium, including a Neruda poem that may resonate for us here, in Australia, and now.

Jara/Neruda: Yo no quiero la patria dividida — cabemos todos en la tierra mia. I don't want my country divided; there's room for us all on this land.

The stadiums continue to house sporting events. As far as I know, no reference is made to their strange role in September 1973 — other than the haunting memory of song.

The fifth message: Rebirth

This is the story of the current Peace Park at Villa Grimaldi, Penalolen, in what is now a suburb of Santiago. Early in the nineteenth century, Penalolen was a rural holding, whose owner was most influential in establishing Chilean independence and republicanism. The homestead, Villa Grimaldi, became a convivial meeting-place for intellectuals, writers and musicians. The tradition of elegant literary soirees and long discussions of liberal politics continued under new owners into the 1940s. This pattern was abruptly curtailed in 1973, when house and grounds were acquired by General Pinochet for interrogation purposes.

The military renamed it the ‘cuartel Terranova’. Its red adobe walls were surrounded by barbed wire and purpose-built structures were added. From 1974, some 5000 prisoners passed through the new iron gate. Over 140 disappeared and all, or almost all, were tortured. One survivor, a British doctor, Sheila Cassidy, had earlier rambled with me over the Andean foothills, accompanied by her small dogs and my small daughters. Villa Grimaldi became the most important of over 20
secret precincts of detention and torture for the DINA. I choose not to describe what went on 24 hours a day at the base of the Torre, or in the dark closets of the ‘Casas Chile’, or on the metal frame of ‘La Família’. The unimaginable filth of nightmares.

In 1990, a neighbour alerted the Press of bulldozing at the ‘cuartel Terranova’. Investigations revealed that in 1987 General Wenzl had corruptly sold the public property to his own family trust as a development site. The Auditor’s Office and democratic parliamentarians intervened; the black gate was thrown open to the Commission of Human Rights and former internees; and the Villa Grimaldi Park for Peace was created. Now, on the site of each former building there is a mosaic-patterned floor – the only portion visible for the blindfolded; a Wall of Names commemorates those who died or disappeared; the garden flourishes. Last year, poets from around the world gathered here to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Pablo Neruda’s receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971.

The sixth and final message: the Phoenix

This message concerns the house museums of Pablo Neruda. In September 1973, the military grudgingly permitted Pablo Neruda’s funeral, so soon after the coup, to occur during curfew. It was of course only a family affair. During the ceremony (and curfew), his houses and their contents in both Santiago and Valparaíso were savagely looted and vandalised. The establishment in 1986 of the Pablo Neruda Foundation was arduous. It was created to fulfil Neruda’s wish for ‘el cultivo y propagación de las artes y las letras’, the cultivation and dissemination of the arts and literature. The military government had no sympathy for Neruda’s work. Nonetheless, his houses – la Chascona in Santiago; la Sebastiana in Valparaíso and la Casa de Isla Negra – have now all been repaired and restored, as have his collections of art, books and archival material. All three houses are museums, with over 280,000 visitors per year. The Foundation offers poetry workshops, prizes, cultural events and access to research materials.

Neruda: Pueblo mio, ¿Verdad que en primavera suena mi nombre en tus oídos y tu me reconoces como si fuera un río que pasa por tu puerta? My people – is it true that, in spring, my name rings in your ears and that you sense my presence as a river flowing past your door?

How difficult it is to say, from these jumbled stories of pain, indifference and hope, whether Allende’s final angry optimism or Neruda’s despair at the coup’s inception was the more appropriate. Chile still walks a political tightrope. We have seen the Erasure, Restoration, Re-naming, Silence and Rebirth of six historically significant places, each related to activities surrounding the Chilean coup. The three wise monkeys saw no evil, heard no evil, spoke no evil – but there is a shadowy fourth who, sees and hears it all and, out of it all, somehow creates new life. Ephemeral messages appear in this naming and renaming of places, in the painting and erasing of murals and graffiti, in the erection of statues, in the creation of chants and songs. All are political acts, shorthand versions of the art of conservation.

Postscript

...and really the whole point of my paper...

In 1999, that blessedly gifted author, Arundhati Roy, wrote in ‘The End of Imagination’ of her horror at India’s decision to test nuclear weapons. ‘My world has died. And I write to mourn its passing. Admittedly it was a flawed world ... but it didn’t deserve to die.’ That same despair has engulfed me, since Australian voters (having thrown out reconciliation and the republic) were persuaded to abandon the story of the Good Samaritan in order to savage the Alien.

Australia’s generous heart, together with our collective soul, did not deserve to die.

At this alarming stage of history, must Woomera, Port Headland, Curtin and outposts like Nauru be seen through the Black Armband of Recall, to resonate like Port Arthur? Or will we adopt the Whitewash of Erasure (la Gran Limpieza), whereby it is only the victims who can remember?

Maybe, just maybe, it can be neither. Even recalcitrant Labour may join doctors, lawyers, teachers and rural communities in demanding a genuine change.

Maybe, just maybe, our work could one day be seen to be, neither black nor white, but blue and gold: a program of well-conserved forget-me-nots set in the gold of A Bran Nue Day? What do the professionals say? I still can’t hear them.

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