

Memorials and Trauma: Pinjarra, 1834

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Memorial spaces so often appear to sit quietly in the landscape, as Huyssen (1995: 258) notes, the usual critique is that they appear to bury memory and to ossify the past. Many memorials, however, are spaces of almost overwhelming semiotic contradiction. They often seem to be frozen places of outdated memories about events that seem to have no impact on us but, if dissent is voiced, the historic and contemporary importance of the events is often revived. Memorials usually declare the past in a way that seems beyond interpretation by making a transcendent statement which appears to escape moulding by politics and time. Analysis reveals, however, that they are grounded in narratives - at minimum there are two narratives: a narrative of the original events and a narrative of the time in which they were memorialised. Memorials suppress their narrative aspects by insisting through sacred and solemn connotations that the events they recall are beyond debate and that they represent truths. Memorials are, therefore, places of intense semiotic conflict even if it is not apparent day by day. In this conflict reside latent performative qualities as viewers are positioned as audience and players.

The paradoxical character of memorials is the first place to start when thinking about their role in performative aspects of trauma. This paper emerges from my thinking about attempts to deal justly with sites of historic conflict between coloniser and colonised in Australia. Tunbridge and Ashworth argued as long ago as 1996 that a process was needed to deal with contested heritage. Heritage work, therefore, ought to move on from simply identifying points of conflict, to finding ways of responding to memory problems. De Jong and Rowlands (2008: 133) have high ideals for heritage saying that it can be a “technology of healing”, similarly, Meskell and Scheermeyer (2008: 156) argue that it can be a therapy. These ideals are far removed from most heritage achievements which simply record or preserve a memory in a place. This paper argues that memorials are always sites of narrative and performance, even if sometimes muted and that now is the time for that latent quality to be identified and pushed to the foreground of memorial work. Moral obligations to Reconciliation in Australia demand that the performative aspect of memorials be developed with great sophistication and in full awareness of the textual elements which compose them. This paper analyses the textual components of types of memorials which mark contested heritage. It does so with the belief that heritage work needs to practice problem solving and that the performative aspects of heritage offer scope for interactive healing.

Attempts to memorialise the October 1834 events at Pinjarra, a small town about an hour's drive south of Perth in the Shire of Murray, offer an opportunity for Australia to begin to deal justly with some aspects of the past which are disputed fiercely. Along the banks of the Murray River, only five years after British settlement of the Swan River Colony, an event occurred which resulted in the deaths of 15 to 80 Binjareb people and one British participant. For the British, it was the place at which south-western

Indigenous resistance to colonisation was overcome (Contos and Kearing, 1998; Richards, 1993: 8) in what has been referred to most often as a “battle”, a word which many insist today is the correct description. For the descendants of the 1834 Binjareb people and their supporters, the event could not be further from a battle. It is a place known through oral history as an infamous “massacre” site in which, in the historically-debated absence of the young Binjareb warriors (Statham, 2003), mostly women, children and the old died in a disgraceful ambush which all but destroyed their society and has carried intergenerational trauma (Contos and Kearing, 1998; Contos, 2002).

A memorial has been erected, but it bears no words. The local council, Shire of Murray, supports development of the site to tell the story, but an impasse has been reached about what to call that event. The Council insists through a formal resolution that the word “battle” is accurate while Indigenous people and their supporters insist on “massacre”. Desire to mark the 175th anniversary in 2009 puts pressure on both sides to begin to deal with the naming of this event. This paper is used to think through the blockage in Pinjarra by exploring the enormous emotional, political and textual challenges that are encountered when attempts are made to memorialise events which are so bitterly contested. The first half of the paper consists of an extended analysis of two other conflictual events and attempts to memorialise them. It then looks at the potential of the Pinjarra case to develop performative qualities which would enable a contested site to remain rich in meaning, bear the legacy of the interpretation conflicts and contribute to Reconciliation.

Challenging memorials

Early memorials to colonial conflict were statements by the coloniser about Indigenous “treachery” or European “bravery” in the face of Indigenous “aggression”. These memorials are dotted about the Australian landscape, but it was not until very late last century that responses emerged that insisted on counter-narratives.

The *Explorers’ Monument* on the Esplanade in Fremantle illustrates a provocative response. The memorial’s 1913 words:

This monument was erected by CJ Brockman as a fellow bush wanderer’s tribute to the memories of Painter, Harding and Goldwyer. Earliest explorers after Grey and Gregory of this “terra incognita”. Attacked at night by the treacherous natives they were murdered at Boola Boola near La Grange Bay on the 13th November 1864. Also as an appreciative token of remembrance of Maitland Brown one of the pioneer pastoralists and a premier politician of this state. Intrepid leader of the government search and punitive party. His remains together with the sad relics of the ill fated three recovered with great risk and danger from lone wilds repose under a public monument in the East Perth Cemetery. “Lest We Forget”

In 1994 an opposing text was juxtaposed to the original. The new text is a counter-narrative.

This plaque was erected by people who found the monument before you offensive. The monument describes the events at La Grange from one perspective only, the view point of the white 'settlers'. No mention is made of the right of Aboriginal people to defend their land or of the history of provocation which led to the explorers' deaths. The 'punitive party' mentioned here ended in the deaths of somewhere around twenty Aboriginal people. The whites were well-armed and equipped. Lest We Forget Mapa Jarriya Nyalaku

The memorial has become a powerful place for several reasons. First, because it alerts us to the fact that the original words on the memorial construct a narrative, although they purport not to do so, as they seem simply to record facts. Secondly, the 1913 words link implicitly the actions of the punitive expedition to the bigger story of the development of pastoralism and good government in WA. This story claws back the story of European-Australian progress and harmony from the story of violence. This story of progress underlies most memorials and offers narrative closure to otherwise unresolvable events. The implicit narrative of harmony and progress, belief in the ultimate good of the society, is one of the key factors which produces an often numb look at memorials because it is a static and repetitious story. The increasing difficulty, however, of stating the repeated narrative closure in a period of historic revisionism opens up textual possibilities for alternatives. Thirdly, the memorial itself is now both a narrative and a counter-narrative against itself. Fourthly, the continuing controversy over the two narratives and frequent theft of the 1994 counter-narrative plaque mean that this place is a place of high drama as visitors can see the two sides play out a conflicting drama of interpretation.

It is certainly a raw place in which conflicting views of the La Grange events co-exist in continuing historical and political tension. The site thus offers a dramatic performance because a singular vision of the past is demonstrated as impossible; the viewer sees performed the conflicting narratives. The memorial has the effect of encouraging performance from its viewers - or vandalism - as the newer plaque is often stolen; on one occasion the head of Maitland Brown disappeared from the top of the monument. It is not, therefore an ossified memorial, or a place where nothing happens. This is a vivid and active place in which the conflicting versions of history are played out in the middle of the town's most popular park.

It is evident that this kind of lived-out drama at a memorial site is not liked by everyone, maybe because it is aesthetically untidy to attach a counter-narrative after the construction of a memorial. More likely, however, is the discomfort aroused by a memorial of conflict in the heart of the City of Fremantle - a city, after all, with a highly developed sense of identity and social pride. There are signs, therefore, that there is now some re-thinking of monuments of conflicting histories so that they will include oppositionality from inception.¹ The desire to represent oppositionality in the same

¹ Tunbridge and Ashworth (XXXX: 219) describe a similar approach in the "inclusivist" approach of settler societies with the example of Canada: "the incorporation of all perspectives into a patchwork quilt called Canadian heritage" This desire to construct an inclusive society is achieved through subordination of diversity.

memorial results is what I call a “twinned memorial”.² An example of this thinking is found in an interpretation plan for Bootenal Spring on the Greenough River 400 kilometres north of Perth and 18 kilometres south of Geraldton.

Bootenal Spring was the site at which a violent incident occurred in July 1854. The local Indigenous people, called Naaguja, have an oral history version of the event which includes the slaying of many Indigenous people. The written European version, however, refers to driving out Aborigines, but not to their killing. (Latitude Creative Services, 2007: 5-6)

The Plan suggests that a memorial which states both opposing histories would be advantageous to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today.

The contradictory accounts of events at Bootenal Spring site provide a valuable opportunity to acknowledge and provide meaningful interpretation in a unique and significant landscape setting, of the conflicting histories and fatal consequences for Indigenous and settler communities on the mid-west Western Australia frontier. (Latitude Creative Services, 2007: 6)

The plan recommends that:

The Bootenal Spring site should be supported with thought provoking interpretation to acknowledge the violent climate and conflicting versions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous history of the Greenough district. (Latitude Creative Services, 2007: 7)

This highly sympathetic response to the tragic events of colonial expansion is evidence of growing resistance to the triumphant, imperialist history of the settlement of Australia, but it offers only “thought provoking interpretation to acknowledge” the various versions of events. Although the plan emphasises the importance of engaging local Indigenous people to play a key role in developing tourism and the creation of a monument at Bootenal Spring, it does not move beyond saying that there are two conflicting histories. The plan thus proposes implicitly to harness and control the drama by making conflicting statements central to its conception. This has the effect of attempting to deny the performative quality of the possible drama because it *contains* the conflict. If the aim of the finished monument is to state the two histories, it thus poses conceptual and political problems. Certainly, visitors would be alerted to the atrocity - and probably shocked - this clearly would be a good outcome. But, by containing the two accounts of the events neatly in the one space, it is unlikely that the memorial would push visitors to think of the legacy of the events today.

A model of the western democratic nation with its idealised balanced system of government and opposition, suggests that transferring this model to a memorial might be a productive idea for dealing with historic conflicts that continue to be lived out in various ways in contemporary society. Setting out to construct a memorial with the intention of embedding oppositionality in the construction right from the start, by stating the two histories, could seem like a rational and just way to treat memorials to contested

² I differentiate this type of opposition-bearing memorial from the twinned memorial style proposed for Oxford and the Nazi death camp, Belzec. For this memorial, a piece of English ground will be marked out in the dimensions of the camp, 300 metres square, for one week in January 2010. (www.twinned.org/parks/index.htm)

anguish. Memorials, however, are not rational spaces because in many cases they are about trauma and any attempt to make them conform to the neat framework offered by the institutionalisation of two opposed statements is an unrealistic attempt to narrate trauma. Controlled statements of traumatic memories are most unlikely to produce a result which expresses adequately the trauma of the experience especially if there are opposing sides because such statements imply a radical equality of interpretation of the past. Two centuries of European control of history has clearly not delivered a just society to Indigenous people. To re-tell the history of dispossession and violence now, by elevating the fact of the historic moral achievement of acknowledging conflicting histories, is to avoid implicitly making moral judgements about the continuing lived effects of these atrocities.

I argue this despite noting that the Interpretation Plan says that it draws on historiographical concepts encouraged by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the pursuit of

a shared sense of history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To share history involves changing the way Australian history is constructed and represented. It involves non-Indigenous Australians identifying with aspects of Indigenous Australians' cultures and histories. It also involves Indigenous Australians sharing their knowledge of history in this country. (Latitude Creative Services, paraphrasing Clark (1994), 2007: 9)

I argue that such is the strength of the underlying narrative of progress and order at memorials, that it insists on asserting itself endlessly even in a political climate which is favourable to Reconciliation. It is conceptually difficult to adhere to the spirit of Reconciliation while maintaining the very old narrative about social progress which underpinned so much colonial expansion and dispossession of Indigenous people. It is evident that the desire to juxtapose contrary statements is a genuine act of good faith with the aim to state opposed positions and to move towards resolution and a more peaceful future. The implicit insistence on the radical equality of statements, experience and outcome, however, can appear as an unintended act of imperialism; it cannot express the trauma and certainly does not resolve it. Why?

Textual elements of memorials that try to represent opposing sides

A key reason for the failure of balanced, opposed statements to express trauma is the textual difficulty of having someone adopt the speaking position of the one who chooses the statements for the memorial. If a "super voice", a form of omniscient narrator, speaks the opposing narratives, it follows that both the Aboriginal and the European stories risk being subordinated to another superior and hegemonic story from which the twinning emanates. Conservative Europeans in Australia have always held the position of protagonist in their massively dominant versions of colonisation and, therefore, are at only slight risk of being objectified as they have been the ones controlling the extension of the protagonist and antagonist positions to others. For Indigenous Australians, however, twinned memorials could result in a double denial of their status as protagonists. They were denied, first, in the preceding two centuries of

history telling and then are denied again through the twining process which subordinates their history to a larger history of European progress - an inevitable trajectory of memorials noted above and discussed further below.

It is more than ten years ago that Jacobs (1997: 203) described the impact of revisionist historiographies as celebrating “those moments when Aborigines broke out of the subordinate positioning conferred upon them by the colonial order and entered onto the historical stage as protagonists”. The reconstructions of the histories of resistance (see for example Macintyre and Clark (2003) and Reynolds (1981; 1998)) have, step-by-step, written new histories and rewritten or challenged existing versions. It is now accepted by many historians that an Aboriginal version of colonial clashes ought morally to be documented. Thus the history of Australia is being transformed both in terms of content and construction as the narrating of those stories is ideally heard through Aboriginal voices.

The problem of twinning lies in the effect it has of incorporating the opposed narratives into a single seemingly coherent and harmonious text even if this is not the intention. This occurs unwittingly through the aesthetics of the site which do not permit a secondary voice to disrupt the memorial, hence there is rarely any intention to allow in the physical construction for other and future stories to be written. By comparison, the *Explorers' Monument* has an additional plaque which disrupts the aesthetics and the story of the original. Incorporation occurs also because of the detached voice of the expert, that is, the constructing voice of the memorial, which produces a new, unarticulated narrative. This narrative emerges from the two opposed narratives and it says “the new, superior narrative is that our society can embrace opposed historical narratives, the new narrative is about social cohesion”. This implied hegemonic narrative is spoken by a disconnected and disembodied omniscient narrator. The twinned memorial, therefore, risks losing the raw pain activated by the rubbing up against each other of the two narratives because it unwittingly erases them with another story. To do this, it assumes a visitor who feels safe in the exercise of social justice of his or her European-based society.

The appearance of the super narrative is a problem also because it jumps over the necessity of an apology. Daye (2004) argues from South African apartheid history that the moment of apology is an essential step in a forgiveness and healing plan and that forgiveness starts with memory and moral judgement (Daye, 2004: 20). It is not possible to replace trauma with a hegemonic story because such a story does not resolve trauma, to the contrary, it functions to mask it. Daye argues that the first step is for injustice to be named; “the second essential act is an apology or confession in which the guilty party admits to the wrong done and acknowledges its moral indebtedness to the party it has harmed. Very often at this stage the guilty party offers excuses or explanations along with the admission of guilt”. (Daye, 2004: 7-8)

Plans for twinned memorials could be understood as a partial attempt at apology and are certainly effective for alerting visitors to the existence of hidden histories and in this they should be applauded. The revelation of the twin narratives, so often about violent events of celebrated nation building, could be a moment of productive shock for the visitor. The soothing, hegemonic narrative, however, would undermine the memorial's positive aspects with the calming statement that the current society is good, especially so for the act you see before you, that is, for acknowledging this acrimonious past event. Further, the super narrative in a twinned narrative memorial could end up

stating implicitly that the new society was not connected to the violent, former society and proof of the disconnection resides in the very fact of the memorial's existence which is a sign of the contemporary moral courage needed to state the shameful past.

Nora's (1989) analysis of the arrival of formal history being the moment when real, lived, organic memory fades is important in understanding the impact of the super narrative. The super narrative not only replaces other narratives, but it also directs us how to read the past: as a series of events which are finally resolved and dissolved into an agreed-upon story. When that super voice narrates the bigger story it removes subjects from their stories as they are no longer the ones who are permitted to speak. This is a serious textual problem as it removes participants and descendants of participants from their own story and works against the story having any power today.

The fact that the emergence of the super narrative is virtually naturalised in heritage activity is illustrated vividly by the speech made in 2008 by Heritage Minister, Peter Garrett on the occasion of the inclusion of Myall Creek on the National Heritage List. Mr Garrett attended a memorial service to mark the 170th anniversary of the murder of approximately 30 Aboriginal people by local stockmen. The atrocity is distinguished in Australian history because "It was the first and last time the Colonial Administration intervened to ensure the laws of the colony were applied equally to Aboriginal people and settlers involved in frontier killings" (Garrett, 2008). The execution of the murderers was greeted with anger by the coloniser community and such justice was not meted out again.

Garrett's remarks move from setting out historic details of the conflict and early responses to it to broader, super narrative statements about the success of contemporary society.

The conflict of 170 years ago has given way to a new understanding of Aboriginal people's attachment to the land. Recognition of this attachment and the sometimes brutal ways in which Aboriginal people were dispossessed are important in the journey of Reconciliation. The Myall Creek Memorial was established in 2000. The fact that the descendants of some of the people massacred on that horrific day in 1838 and the descendants of those charged with the crime come together in their own peaceful and personal reconciliation gives me great hope for our country and makes me very proud to be an Australian. (Garrett, 2008)

There is no doubt that national heritage recognition of the horror of the events at Myall Creek is a goodwill landmark in colonial and heritage history. The ease, however, with which the Minister moved from the conflict to the super narrative of the achievements of Australian society demonstrates the philosophic and textual ease with which the retelling of the tragic event was so swiftly subsumed into the dominant narrative of national progress. Naturalising of the super narrative has the effect of nullifying the continuing effects of violent colonial relationships and contributes to disregard for Aboriginal versions of the past. A memorial that contains oppositionality thus can virtually erase troubled dissonant histories by replacing them. By contrast, a memorial containing a counter-narrative added after the memorial was constructed, does not produce a super, erasing narrative and is more likely to represent bitter dissent. The counter-narrative memorial achieves this by permitting the telling of a counter-narrative in defiance of the first narrative and without resolution. The two narratives are not muted by the appearance of a dominant voice which calms their histories and produces a restabilised historical position. The 1986 *Monument Against Fascism* by Jochen and Esther Gerz is a good example of productive clashing of stories. It was constructed in

Hamburg, Germany with the intention of gradually being lowered into the ground and finally disappearing. On a pillar cast in soft lead, visitors were invited to perform by writing, and many did so, even supporters of fascism with new messages of hate added to those of heartfelt sadness. A memorial was produced, therefore, which over time came to bear the drama of its own opposition. Young says:

its aim is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desanctification; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet. (Young, 1993: 30)

In this monument, performance was activated in such a confronting way that it could almost have been considered dangerous and a risk to public safety. Conflicting stories were permitted to be told even though the intention of the memorial, as understood from its title, was to speak against fascism. In allowing more stories than that single narrative to be spoken - but crucially refusing to control them - the monument became exceptionally strong. It did this by laying bare violently clashing stories, refusing to resolve them and asking visitors to perform.

This kind of memory work is active and fluid, refusing to fix meaning and even risking exposure to the pain caused necessarily by colliding in the same space with an opposition. The brutal juxtapositioning of such terrible feelings and memories is one of the most powerful ways of encouraging visitors to engage with some aspects of history. By contrast, a memorial which denies its opposition or attempts to subordinate it to a hegemonic story of social success loses this extraordinary opportunity to allow the monument actually to perform some of the reality of the original violent encounters. The rarity of counter-monuments highlights the continuance of the overwhelming desire to produce neat thematic histories which subordinate discontinuous and abrupt events to linear and controlled versions of the past. Foucault argues for the necessity of practicing genealogy rather than this kind of controlling history; genealogy allows for “the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality” (Foucault, 1977: 139) so that the twists and turns of discontinuous stories are retold through multiple, inconsistent versions. The duty of genealogy “is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present... to follow the complex course of events in their proper dispersion is to identify the accidents. (Foucault, 1977: 146)

As the particular events associated with most Australian memorials are subordinated to bigger stories, it is politically and emotionally confronting to have iconic stories challenged. In the case of Pinjarra, one of the most difficult aspects is the fact that the expedition against the Binjareb was led by no less a person than the governor himself, Governor James Stirling, a person who elsewhere is associated with many apparently honourable actions in founding the Swan River Colony. If Foucault's genealogy is practised, then Stirling's participation in the killing of Binjareb children needs to be told as part of the wider history of the state.

Related to genealogy is the concept of trauma time and linear time developed by Edkins (2003). It is derived from an analysis of the way that memory is used in politics and offers insights into why the two types of memorials discussed above are textually so different. Linear time is the time with which we are most familiar in the west and complements the process of most narratives with their sequential structure. Edkins argues

that it is used by the nation state, it is the “time of the standard political processes... with the continuance of the nation state... we know almost in advance that such events have a place in the narrative”. (Edkins, 2003: xiv) By contrast, trauma time concerns disruption.

It doesn't fit the story that we already have, but demands that we invent a new account... until this new story is produced we quite literally do not know what has happened: we cannot say what it was, it doesn't fit the script - we only know that 'something happened' (Edkins 2003, xiv).

This paper argues that a twinned memorial which re-tells opposing narratives works in linear time because the disruption caused by the oppositionality of the stories is smoothed over by the super narrative of the state. A memorial bearing a counter-narrative, such as the *Explorers' Monument*, however, works in trauma time as the disruption is never resolved and the impossibility of its resolution is one of the main messages of the memorial.

Trauma time is very difficult to live in and heritage responses to the 1834 events at Pinjarra illustrate the great tension that is generated by living in this time with its lack of a big, comforting narrative.

Productive trauma in Pinjarra

The exact location of the events at Pinjarra is not fixed, but accounts state that it took place along the edge of the Murray River. Despite the absence of a verified site, the general vicinity is tense with conflicting views of the events and the generalised site has shown great resistance to a heritage resolution, a situation which exasperates Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. In the non-resolution, however, there is a rich and productive dramatic tension which has been instigated by neither party, but results in a site of strange power. The history of the events which occurred only five years after the commencement of settlement of the Swan River Colony can be grasped by being guided by Foucault's (1977) insistence on genealogy as a more truthful approach to past events than a history which tries to produce a coherent thematic whole.

The events have a range of interpretations. Richards (1993: 8) quotes a frightening eyewitness account of the slaughter; George Winjan said: “They rush camp: they shoot-em man, shoot-em gins, shoot-em picaninnies and they shoot-em dogs too”. Given the savagery described in this quote, Richards summation is particularly callous and even dismissive of the event. “The upshot of the affair was the spirit of the tribe was broken and settlement could, and did, proceed at a fairly rapid pace soon afterwards... Although several “depredations” occurred and soldiers were at times despatched... the trouble decreased” (Richards, 1993: 8). In contrast, Mulvaney (1989: 170) says that an Aboriginal oral tradition which was recorded in 1973 suggested that the deaths could be as high as 750 thus illustrating the trauma felt by Indigenous people. Contos and Kearing (1998) are outraged by the incident and the European history telling that followed. It took until the 1970s and the rise of Aboriginal social justice activism for the site to be memorialised in any way by which time the use of the word “battle” to describe the events was entrenched. First accounts, however, describe the events differently and include “rencontre”, “salutary example” “skirmish”, encounter”, “affray”, “affair” and

“chastisement” (Contos and Kearing, 1998: 64). Despite such an array of choices the word “battle” seems to have become the usual title from quite early after the events (Contos and Kearing, 1998: 64). Noteworthy is Fletcher’s (1984: 1) observation that the event was not an isolated incident as there had been many encounters in the previous five years and yet this is the one chosen for remembrance and history telling.

Contos and Kearing (1998) record attempts to memorialise the site. From 1975 to 1978 a plaque commemorating the event was attached to a tree by the river, but it disappeared inexplicably. In the 1980s the Murray Districts Aboriginal Association (MDAA) worked towards establishing a memorial in Pinjarra with support from Bicentennial funding, but the Murray Shire would not accept proposals for a memorial. The MDAA then campaigned for ten years for acceptance of the idea of erection of a memorial. In 1991 the first “Back to Pinjarra Day” was held to mark the anniversary of the 1834 events and has been held several times since. In 1992 the area was entered on to the Register of the National Estate with both names recorded: “Pinjarra Battle Memorial Area” and “Pinjarra Massacre Site” (Contos, 2002: 126). On 28 October 2001 a memorial was dedicated by WA Governor, John Sanderson. It consists of a large boulder of adult head height erected on the edge of thick brush by the river’s edge. It is surrounded by a circular paved area in which are inset four mosaic medallions depicting black and white figures in the landscape, but it has no plaque to explain to the visitor what this place means because no agreement could be reached on the description, “battle” or “massacre”.

In many ways, this event could be compared to Myall Creek where a representative of the government was accepted by Indigenous people as an appropriate person to unveil a memorial to a great tragedy. Similarly, the place is listed as a place of national importance. The absence of an explanatory sign, however, makes the site mysterious and incomplete. In its present unkempt state, the visitor comes across it while walking in a narrow clearing between the river and McLarty Road. Its apparent silence raises questions - what is this place about? Why does it have no sign?

The answer lies in the fact that this is a place of double trauma. First it is obvious trauma for the Indigenous people who have insisted on the correctness of their oral history against almost two centuries of insistence on a European version. Secondly, it is a site of trauma for parts of the European population which are caught in the awful situation of having to contemplate the revision of their history and all of the values associated with it, especially fairness and justice. Humphrey (2002) and Daye (2004) argue that nightmarish details of the past must be confronted by the whole society as part of a healing strategy. “The rationale is to prevent the past returning by producing a stored public memory of atrocity and terror” (Humphrey, 2002: 105). Daye (2004) goes further arguing that for political forgiveness to occur on a nation wide level it is necessary to revise

The very myths and narratives that tell a people who they are and who their friends and enemies are... for movement towards political forgiveness to occur, charismatic actors and creative thinkers will have to bend these symbol systems away from enmity and toward affinity. (Daye, 2004: 11)

So very far are some parts of the Pinjarra population from confronting the past that in December 1998 the Shire of Murray took the extraordinary step of voting on a motion which was carried eight to two stating that the Council does not recognise the word

“massacre” and that the area must be known as “Battle of Pinjarra Memorial Area”. Despite protests, the Council has not rescinded the resolution and continues to assert its view of history. In 2007 the Council placed a plaque on the memorial. It disappeared but not before the Heritage Council of Western Australia had objected to the wording saying that it was not consistent with the statement of significance for the site (*Mandurah Coastal Times*, 22 August 2007). the Acting CEO, Peter Black told me on 8 October 2008 that the Shire wants to recognise the area.

It is part of the history here and should be properly recognised. The only issue has been the same one right from the beginning: local Indigenous community interests call it “massacre”, and Council, by resolution, says that it is a “battle”, this is the only issue. Most Councillors have been on Council for a considerable time - the issue has come up many times, it has always been the difference between “massacre” and “battle”.... The issue is just sitting at the moment waiting for someone to pick it up and run with it.

Why is the Council intransigent? First, the standard answer is that the word “battle” suggests dignity which Contos and Kearing (1998: 64) reject. They restate accepted definitions to show that the two words describe different things. “The New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary gives the following definitions of the terms: battle: *n.* combat, especially between large organised forces... massacre: *n.* the indiscriminate killing, especially of unresisting persons... (65). There was no battle they argue, but an ambush which resulted in a massacre of people who were not expecting to fight and whose warriors were away at the time. The Council’s insistence on the word “battle”, therefore, seems to be a desperate moral assertion that the event was fair by combat standards and has nothing immoral or disgraceful associated with it. Statham (2003) refutes much of the argument of Contos and Kearing (1998) arguing that Stirling acted in a moral way by the standards of the day. She says that he tried to have Indigenous matters dealt with by civilian rather than military institutions; that he tried to lessen the impact of invasion on the Nyongars; that he had not planned a “major onslaught” (190) and that Binjareb warriors were certainly present rather than mostly women and children (191). Secondly, battles for Europeans, especially in the nineteenth century, are often associated with nation building and national defence and are often constructed as glorious events. Hence, battles such as Trafalgar and Waterloo, not so distant in 1834, are part of the myth of English heroism. From the late nineteenth century, Australia was engaged in intermittent international combat and, certainly from the time of Gallipoli in 1915, battles were used to construct Australian national identity. Consequently, the word “battle” is clung to fiercely, even in 2008. It would be socially, culturally, historically and emotionally dangerous to lose the word because so much identity is built around it, but as Daye (2004) argued it is imperative that the myth that created that identity is exposed and challenged.

For Contos and Kearing (1998) the site has enormous power.

That the Pinjarra Massacre occurred is indisputable... it therefore stands as testimony to the treatment of Aboriginal people by the European invaders. It also stands as proof of the powerful resistance that was mounted by Aboriginal people against the invasion. So successful was the resistance of the Binjareb Nyongars that the head of the Swan River Colony saw the only “solution” being to “wipe them out”. (Contos and Kearing, 1998: 63)

The current situation is one which perpetuates the 1834 trauma, becoming ever more complicated. In an interview on 17 October 2008, Karrie-Anne Kearing, the daughter of Theo Kearing who co-authored with Natalie Contos (1998), reflected on the frustrations of memorialising the site from the Aboriginal perspective, an impasse made all the more frustrating and ironic given that much of the information about the events are drawn from European accounts.

A plaque was put up, but it lasted about a month, it said “here a battle happened” - just crap, it did not mention women and children... We tell them what we know from European diaries which say 21 deaths. They should put it down and get over it, it is listed as a massacre, it is their people who wrote it down. They are not going to suffer today, we are not going to take their homes, we just want respect and acknowledgement. They’ve got memorials in other people’s countries like the Kokoda Track, in places they invaded. They invaded this mob’s country.

It is noteworthy that Karrie-Anne Kearing says that Europeans should “get over it” thus implying that she recognises that it is traumatic for Europeans to have to admit to an atrocity.

In an interview on 6 October 2008, Lisa Gardiner, manager of Community Services in the Shire showed her frustration with both the Council and the split Indigenous community:

I use the word “massacre” but I get chastised by Council, I must take the Council stance. The difficulty is that there is a disconnected Indigenous community, two distinct factions, it is awkward and uncomfortable, we give offence if we talk to one before the other, we can’t please anyone, it is bogged down.

She sees possibilities for the town if the interpretation of the site could be agreed upon:

It would make a wonderful entry statement, many interpretative possibilities... no matter what we do it gets trashed, we don’t know who does it, now we simply mow... it is a poison chalice.

The “poison chalice” concept reflects the current trauma. Trauma as an open-ended crisis is dealt with extensively in trauma literature - the trauma cannot be expressed nor resolved. The metaphor of the wound that cannot heal is used by Kaplan (2005: 135) in her analysis of Tracey Moffat’s *Night Cries*. Kaplan identifies the potential of this expression of trauma in her discussion of on-going mourning - mourning with no resolution. The most productive use of the Pinjarra site, therefore, at this moment of Australia’s post-colonial history might be in its power as a place of no healing. If the site is conceptualised as a festering wound it can be seen to be in a state of on-going injury which elicits attempts by Indigenous people and their supporters to heal, again and again. It is thus a place of continuous intergenerational trauma. The site has emerged as an incomplete memorial place with strong performative qualities continuously provoking action. Ironically, it is an unkempt looking place where some people with little local knowledge set up camp, while for others, it is a sacred place which lacks proper signage.

Two forces are clear: Europeans who cling to the word “battle” are trying to control the meaning of the site. For Aboriginal people, however, the place is implicitly a performance zone. I cannot say whether this is their long term vision for the site, but it is

how it functions at the moment. Its performative aspects include the drama of the Indigenous refusal of a plaque which bore the word “battle”; their refusal ensured the issue of interpretation continues to be debated. The 17 year history of “Back to Pinjarra Day” is one of the activities around the site with a strong tradition of gathering to mark the day. On 28 October 2008 local Indigenous people arranged a basketball game for under 18 year olds from Perth and the Pinjarra area. Following the game, the wider group gathered at the rock memorial for a barbeque and to listen to speeches. Information boards were erected to give background details to visitors. The Vietnam Wall site in Washington DC is alive with visitors who leave personal mementoes to mark the loss of men in the war, so too the Pinjarra memorial is a site of activity and the performance of everyday life as commemoration.

Plans for the 175th anniversary in 2009 are not proceeding smoothly. Although the Council staff says that they want to assist, Karrie-Anne Kearing feels rebuffed.

I wanted to hold a concert, but was told that the music would be too loud for the old people’s home near by and the environment manager says that trees could fall on people; I am looking for another place. I might run a film festival through Fairbridge, but I really want it at the site... I feel that I am getting nowhere with the Council, old farmies (farmers) run it they think that we are going to take their land. (Karrie-Anne Kearing, interview 17 October 2008)

The idea of the co-existence of everyday performance and memory emerges strongly from Kearing’s plans. They are in the spirit of the 1990s plans for the memorial which were explicit in the intention not to be divisive but to be a positive force for the wider community.

MDAA intend to involve the local community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in developing the memorial area dedicated to the people who died in the Massacre. A series of community workshops will invite input from different sectors of the community, including schools... it is intended that this will facilitate a sense of pride and ownership amongst the local community. (Contos and Kearing, 1998: 114)

Indigenous actions are clearly aimed at keeping the site vibrant and in performance, but those who resist are ironically contributing also to its performative aspects. The sign at the entrance to the town reads: “Pinjarra Historic Town 1834”, it seems most ironic if the arriving visitor knows about the violence of the same year because the idea of the sign connotes the opposite - a town of harmony, clearly an assertion of the super narrative. Historic markers along a different town section of the river record other events which have not achieved the fame of the 1834 massacre but are given precedence in the landscape. For the visitor who is informed about the long running dispute and the history of the violence the town seems to handle its history in an unintentionally ironic manner which has the effect of highlighting the unresolved trauma of 1834.

Conclusion

The Pinjarra site is a place of drama / trauma. Memory of the past is used as the centre for other events which could function quite well without a link to the past, but act powerfully to connect the everyday to the past thus keeping memory alive. The basketball match to commemorate the 2008 anniversary and the desire to stage a concert for the 175th anniversary in 2009 are examples of taking ordinary events and endowing them with special commemorative meaning by linking them to past events. Sadly, at Pinjarra these events are occurring because of the lack of resolution about the massacre; unwittingly and ironically they have the effect of enhancing the site and calling our attention to past and present injustices in a strong way.

Stirring memorials such as the Vietnam Wall inspire interaction, they do not sit idly in the landscape but have become the focus for activity and vigorous memory (Edkins, 2003). Likewise, Pinjarra is a site of active memory which offers learning possibilities as some of us try to develop performative aspects of memorials seeing in the idea of the everydayness of performance around memorials, a textual possibility offered by the reality of many existing memorials. It is a powerful and productive place if we understand it as a memorial in transition and do not ask it to produce a permanent Australian answer to how to build memorials to traumatic events. It is better to understand it, therefore, as a place in process that could be extended to be the focus for debates, lectures, film screenings, theatre and also celebratory events such as barbecues.

The everyday activities that the local Indigenous people use to keep the place alive should be encouraged to continue after the memorial wording is resolved. Further, the history of the memorial debate should be inscribed in any new wording so that almost two centuries of conflict over its meaning would be recorded.

I propose a role for memorials that departs from the old ideal of a place of silent respect to one that exists to activate debate. It is possible that the extraordinary apparent permanence of memorials works against them being more performative. If they were more transitory, or transitional for some fixed time, such as the *Monument Against Fascism* discussed above, then more daring intellectual interaction might take place around them. The *Explorer's Monument* activates performance, but in such a way that bitterness lingers. It is unfortunate that the Pinjarra memorial does so also because it is such a traumatic place; it is not the intention of this paper to suggest that the activation of on-going trauma is a good outcome of a memorial. The aim of a good memorial ought to be to resolve trauma, but if the meaning of a place is finally resolved there is no reason why it should not continue to be the focus for deliberately planned memory events.

Public programmes that activate debates related to historic sites would push memorials into very active roles. It should be insisted that events considered significant enough to be placed in memorial form in the landscape should be made to do some on-going intellectual work. If memorials could be reconceptualised as places of foregrounded memory work then we would all become aware of our parts in social and historic dramas; we would all be protagonists, listening to and telling stories.

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