



Patrimonialization, Material Dispossession, and New Strategies for the Valorization of Sites of Memory: Villa San Luis de Las Condes and the Popular Seaside Resort Rocas de Santo Domingo (Chile, 1970–Present)

Patrimonialización, despojo material y nuevas estrategias de puesta en valor de los sitios de memoria Villa San Luis De las Condes y balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo (Chile, 1970-actualidad)

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Abstract

This article examines the heritagization processes of two sites of memory protected as Monumentos Históricos: the ruins of the former Villa San Luis de Las Condes and the former Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo, both used for political repression and/or resistance against the Chilean civic–military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and historiographical analysis, it reflects on the insufficiency of the National Monuments Law for the effective safeguarding and preservation of protected sites, and on the role that associations of victims of human rights violations have played in resisting their progressive intervention and destruction. Through this approach, the article analyzes these spaces as disintegrated monuments and reflects on the emergence of new technologies in the valorization of sites that are increasingly threatened by ongoing material dispossession.

Keywords: monument, heritage, material turn, former Villa San Luis de Las Condes, and the former Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda los procesos de patrimonialización de dos sitios de memoria protegidos como Monumentos Históricos, las ruinas de la ex Villa San Luis de Las Condes y del ex balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo, ambos lugares utilizados para la represión política y/o la resistencia contra la dictadura cívico- militar chilena de Augusto Pinochet. Con base en un trabajo de campo etnográfico y un análisis historiográfico se reflexiona sobre la insuficiencia de la Ley de Monumentos Nacionales para el efectivo resguardo y preservación de los sitios protegidos y el rol que agrupaciones de víctimas de violaciones a los derechos humanos han tenido a fin de evitar su progresiva intervención y destrucción. A través de esta aproximación se analizan los espacios como monumentos desintegrados, y se reflexiona sobre la emergencia de nuevas tecnologías en la puesta en valor de espacios acechados por el progresivo despojo material.

Palabras clave: monumento, patrimonio, giro material, ex Villa San Luis de las Condes, ex balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo.

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Introduction

The ruins of Villa San Luis de Las Condes—hereafter Villa San Luis—and of Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo—hereafter balneario popular—are two Chilean sites of memory located, respectively, in the cities of Santiago and Santo Domingo. Both are granted heritage protection as Historic Monuments under Law 17.288 on National Monuments. At present, these spaces are undergoing processes of heritage reactivation through different management and valorization initiatives promoted and driven by the state, associations of relatives and victims of human rights violations, and other interested groups. Yet both are also testimonies to a long history of dispossession and disintegration: they have gone from being key reference points for the socialist project of the government of Salvador Allende Cossens (1970–1973) to serving as sites of horrific abuses against human dignity during the civil-military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte (1973–1990). Over the past three decades (1990–present), as a result of human and natural forces, the inevitable passage of time, and the absence of robust public policies, both sites have succumbed to neglect and structural decay, becoming material vestiges of what they once were.

Within this context, organizations defending the historical memory of Villa San Luis and the balneario popular—the Comité de Defensa Villa San Luis, Fundación Villa San Luis, and Fundación de Desalojados de Villa San Luis in the first case, and Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio in the second—have promoted formal heritage protection for the ruins of both spaces as a way of preventing their complete material disintegration. This action is not an isolated occurrence but forms part of a strategy widely used by human rights organizations (Bustamante 2016), which have seen in legal protection and in the legal effects associated with declaring a site of memory a Historic Monument a tool to prevent its alteration, sale, or destruction¹, and to foster management processes ranging from recovery and conservation to the implementation of memorialization and musealization projects². In this sense, the practice of granting heritage protection to sites of memory

1 The declaration as a Historic Monument of the Hornos de Lonquén memory site (located 14 km from the city of Talagante, in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago), in 1996, constitutes a milestone in this sense, since, thanks to the organized action of the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales (CMN) set its legal protection, preventing its disappearance and transformation into a sanitary landfill (Bustamante 2016).

2 Between 1996 and 2023, the CMN has ruled in favor of declaring 50 memory sites throughout the country as Historic Monuments. The management of heritage protected memory sites is not the responsibility of the CMN, but of their owners or administrators, which has shown the existence of great differences between them, and the dependence on programs and competitive funds for their financing.

associated with human rights does not stem from a comprehensive public policy designed by the Chilean state, but rather from a set of reactive—rather than preventive—measures that have adjusted the existing heritage framework—centered on the material safeguarding of objects and buildings on the basis of architectural and urban values—to contingent political needs generated by the pressure exerted by civil society for the material conservation and preservation of sites of memory on the basis of their historical and social significance.

However, the legal protection offered by the National Monuments Law has not proven sufficiently robust to ensure the effective preservation of all declared sites of memory, and several of them have faced processes of material dispossession and disintegration. Although an institutional framework linked to the promotion and safeguarding of human rights has been consolidated³, and units addressing these matters have been created within the state's heritage apparatus⁴, no systematic and comprehensive public policy for the patrimonialization of sites of memory has been developed (Seguel 2018), nor has a regulatory framework been established to formally govern their administration. As a result, the legal tools employed have not necessarily translated into successful management and valorization of the protected assets, nor into effective responses to human and natural threats to their physical integrity, or the systematic development of institutional actions of safeguarding, intervention, and conservation. At the same time, weak protection mechanisms have opened space for organized, often self-managed, action by human rights groups, whose timely management initiatives have been crucial in preserving certain sites in the face of progressive deterioration or the disappearance of parts of their infrastructure.

The declarations of the remains of Villa San Luis and the balneario popular as Historic Monuments are no exception in this regard. In the case of Villa San Luis—originally named Compañero Ministro Carlos Cortés—after being evicted, sold, demolished, and transformed into a luxury high-rise district, only the ruins of one of its original buildings—block 14—are currently protected, and a memorial and museum project that seeks to valorize the site's historical memory is being developed on that basis. In the case of the balneario popular, after passing into

3 In 1992, the National Corporation for Reparation and Reconciliation was created; in 1997, the Human Rights Program of the Ministry of the Interior was created; and, in 2016, the Undersecretariat for Human Rights was established under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

4 The Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage has the Sites of Memory Program of the National Cultural Heritage Service and the Memory and Human Rights Unit of the Technical Secretariat of the CMN.

Army hands, being converted into a clandestine detention and torture center during the dictatorship, being almost entirely destroyed, and suffering the effects of the climatic conditions of the central coast, it is now fenced off and marked with signage indicating its heritage protection, and only recently has its administration been returned to the state. Both cases illustrate the politically strategic use of declaring sites of memory as Historic Monuments—as a reaction to the disintegration of their material fabric; the weakness of the National Monuments Law as a tool for effective and comprehensive heritage protection and management; and the vulnerability of the material integrity of sites of memory—precisely as physical testimony to the violations of human dignity perpetrated there—despite their legal protection.

In the face of this adverse scenario, we have observed the emergence of artistic projects that, through the use of novel technological resources, seek to preserve the historical memory of Villa San Luis and the balneario popular. The audiovisual work *Ar Rocas* by the artist Pepe Rovano and the sound play *Cómo se recuerda un crimen* (?) by the playwrights Camila Milenka and Cecilia Yáñez operate as strategies of heritage activation and memorialization that aim to counteract the neglect and destruction of these sites. In this context, this article examines the alternative forms of heritage activation offered by the use of new technologies in artistic and audiovisual projects in the cases of Villa San Luis and the balneario popular. Given the high social value of material vestiges as reference points for transmitting the historical narratives associated with these sites (Campos 2017; Pinochet y Tobar 2019; Sánchez 2017; Bustamante et al. 2021), we ask what role these new strategies for preserving historical memory play in a context of insufficient legal protection and progressive material dispossession, extending beyond the material and object-based dimension of their safeguarding as Historic Monuments.

To this end, drawing on a historiographical and anthropological study that combines the analysis of documentary sources—minutes, official letters, decrees, and resolutions of the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales (CMN), as well as digital press—with interviews conducted with key actors in the patrimonialization processes of both sites of memory, and with observation and recording carried out through fieldwork, this research is organized around the following objectives: (i) to characterize the patrimonialization processes of Villa San Luis and the balneario popular promoted by human rights organizations and the state in a context of historical erasure and the absence of a comprehensive public policy for the heritage safeguarding of sites of memory; (ii) to examine how processes of material

dispossession in these sites have contributed to their structural disintegration and to a revalorization that goes beyond their object-based and tangible components, through musealization and memorialization projects managed by the state and by members of civil society; and (iii) to describe new strategies of heritage activation developed through artistic projects that incorporate new technologies, emphasizing their origins, meanings, and motivations, and the ways in which they engage with these sites of memory as disintegrated monuments. On this basis, we interrogate the written and oral sources mentioned above to determine how the development of the audiovisual and theatrical initiatives discussed here manifests a material turn in heritage, one in which heritage valuation, management, and transmission transcend tangible attributes and durability over time, working instead from absence—through the material vestiges of the past and the voids created by human and natural action.

Historic Monuments, Sites of Memory, and the Material Turn

This study is grounded in the notions of *Monumento Histórico* (Historic Monument), *sitio de memoria* (site of memory), material dispossession, disintegrated monument, and the material turn. Over their trajectories, the ruins of Villa San Luis and the *balneario popular* have become material assets which, due to their historical and social values (Beltrán 1977), have been protected by the state for their conservation (Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales 2019) through their designation as *Monumentos Históricos*⁵. This designation formally recognizes them as truthful and authentic testimonies of past events (Riegl 1987). It is the outcome of a process of patrimonialization—formal selection, protection, and conservation (Prats 1997)—through which these sites become part of the country’s official heritage discourse (Smith 2006) and acquire a central place in the shaping of identity and collective memory (Bhabha 1990).

Historically, this category has been used to safeguard architectural and artistic materialities linked to “the national” (García Canclini 1989). In doing so, it has supported the consolidation of hegemonic power (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979) and the exclusion of alternative identities. Over the last few decades, however, several dynamics have challenged this framework: critiques of state heritage discourse,

5 The vestiges of Villa San Luis de Las Condes were declared by Supreme Decree No. 135 of 2017 of the Ministry of Education and partially disaffected by Supreme Decree No. 18 of 2021 of the Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage. The ruins of the Rocas de Santo Domingo popular spa were legally protected by Supreme Decree No. 337 of 2015 of the Ministry of Education.

the mobilization of human rights organizations, and the emergence of counter-heritage narratives and new monumentalities (Márquez 2019). As a result, the meaning of the category has been forced to shift so as to include new forms of heritage, among them sites, archives, and documentary collections related to memory and human rights (Seguel 2019).

This questioning of a monolithic vision of heritage contributed to Unesco's expansion of the conceptual framework of cultural heritage in the second half of the twentieth century. The traditional view gave way to a conception that also recognized domains such as people's development, cultural diversity, and environmental conservation. In 1982, the World Conference on Cultural Policies of Unesco's Development Commission stated that cultural heritage was not composed only of historic monuments, but constituted a dynamic and living totality of human creation (Cabeza 2009). In this context, what was considered worthy of patrimonialization and conservation broadened, opening the way for Indigenous, industrial, and memory sites to be formally recognized as heritage.

In Chile, sites of memory have been declared *Monumentos Históricos* as spaces that represent both human rights violations and political resistance to the dictatorship. The category is related to the notion of *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 2009): spaces or territories that serve as tangible testimony to traumatic episodes of the past, where the collective memory associated with them crystallizes and finds refuge. Through these sites, the meanings conferred by different social actors are preserved symbolically and functionally (Jelin y Lagland 2003).

Protecting such sites as Historic Monuments implies incorporating new monumentalities—often the focus of political dissensus (Kisic 2016)—into the state's heritage inventory. In semantic terms, it expands and resignifies the original sense of the category. This shift in heritage policy acknowledges collective memories (Halbwachs 2004), subterranean memories (Pollak 2006), and subaltern, counter-hegemonic, and popular memories (De La Cadena 1990). These memories question officially sanctioned truths and foreground pasts and historical identities that differ from those promoted by official discourse (Bustamante 2016).

From this perspective, these sites are “uncomfortable” heritages (Prats 2005) or counter-monuments (Young 1992). They are material records of political violence and state terror (Alegría y Uribe 2014) that have been formally protected in an effort to respond to social demands for truth, justice, and memory (Seguel 2019).

The values at stake are not tied to a traditional historical narrative, but to the negative consequences of human rights violations.

Both sites examined here have undergone material dispossession: processes through which legal ownership or administration has been usurped or denied and the properties have been used for purposes different from those originally conceived. The complexity of these processes lies not only in the physical damage inflicted—on the residents evicted from Villa San Luis, the original users of Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo, and the people detained and tortured in the latter—but also in the rupture of people’s affective and symbolic relationships with these places (Arias y Caicedo 2017). These ruptures occur in contexts marked by social inequality and precarity (Butler y Athanasiou 2018). In this sense, their symbolic significance is not limited to what has been built. It also involves ways of inhabiting the world that are implicit in the existence of the asset and in its ongoing material transformation (Paterman 2014), which includes both conservation and disintegration. The cases discussed in this article are symptomatic of a material turn in heritage (Burkey 2019). This turn abandons the traditional perspective that enshrines authenticity and integrity as the central principles of conservation, and instead works with disintegrated monuments: sites that have been progressively and deliberately destroyed in contexts where official protection has yielded to neoliberal regimes and private interests.

This work proceeds from their traces—*escombros* charged with meaning, bearers of temporalities and historical pasts (Da Silva 2016; Gordillo 2018)—and also from their absences: the voids, incompleteness, and spectral pasts that inhabit destroyed materialities (Kleinberg 2021).

Heritage Battles for the Preservation of Memory: Between Patrimonialization and Material Dispossession

Villa San Luis de las Condes

Villa San Luis de Las Condes was a social housing complex located in the comuna of Las Condes, in the eastern sector of Santiago. It was inaugurated in 1971 by the *Unidad Popular* government to provide housing solutions for families from *campamentos* and *poblaciones* (Chiara y Pulgar 2008) and, in doing so, to help overcome socioeconomically based urban segregation (Lawner 2007). Between 1976 and 1980, the dictatorship evicted its residents and relocated them to the urban periphery of Santiago, handing their homes over to the Army. From the 1990s onward, the Army

progressively and fraudulently sold the property to construction and real estate companies that completely transformed the area by demolishing the original buildings and constructing modern high-rise towers (Allende y Olave 2018). The last remnants of the *villa*—the ruined blocks 14 and 15 of lot 18-A1, located on a 4,329 m² parcel at the corner of Urano Street and Avenida Presidente Riesco—were declared a *Monumento Histórico* in 2017 (Ministerio de Educación 2017). However, as a result of pressure from the company that owns the site, Constructora e Inmobiliaria Presidente Riesco S.A., and of official and unofficial negotiations with organized former residents, the protection polygon was reduced to 1,000 m²—leaving only block 14 legally protected (Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio 2021)—under the commitment to recover the site through the creation of a museum and memorial (Secretaría Técnica del Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales 2020).

The patrimonialization of the site was preceded by a long history of dispossession and material destruction. In 1975, the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism informed the San Luis Neighborhood Council that the apartments had to be vacated because they had been transferred to the Army's *Comando de Bienestar*. On this basis, between 1976 and 1980, residents were subjected to a violent, systematic, and unjustified eviction process: they were forced to abandon their homes and relocated to other areas of the Santiago periphery (Lawner y Díaz 2017), in one of the cruelest and most silenced episodes of repression under the dictatorship. Yet the transfer lacked a solid legal basis. In 1989 the properties were reassigned to the Ministry of National Assets, which in 1991 officially transferred ownership to the Army (Ministerio de Educación 2017). Once the transfer was regularized, the buildings became part of the Army's *Patrimonio de Afectación Fiscal*, managed by its Administrative Support Command. In 1996 this unit initiated a fraudulent sale of much of the housing complex to the real estate firm Parque San Luis S.A. for 98 million US dollars (Romero y Santibáñez 2022).

In the decades that followed, despite the initial resistance of former residents, the legal action brought in the courts, and the temporary suspension of construction works (Allende y Olave 2018), the company paid 590 million Chilean pesos in compensation (Lawner 2007). This enabled it to proceed with the demolition of the *villa*'s blocks and the construction of Nueva Las Condes, a new high-standard office and residential complex (Chiara y Pulgar 2008). Between 2008 and 2013, after multiple rounds of negotiation, pressure, and threats (Lawner y Díaz 2017), the last remaining residents sold their apartments to Inmobiliaria Lote 18 for sums exceeding 100 million Chilean pesos (Allende y Olave 2018).

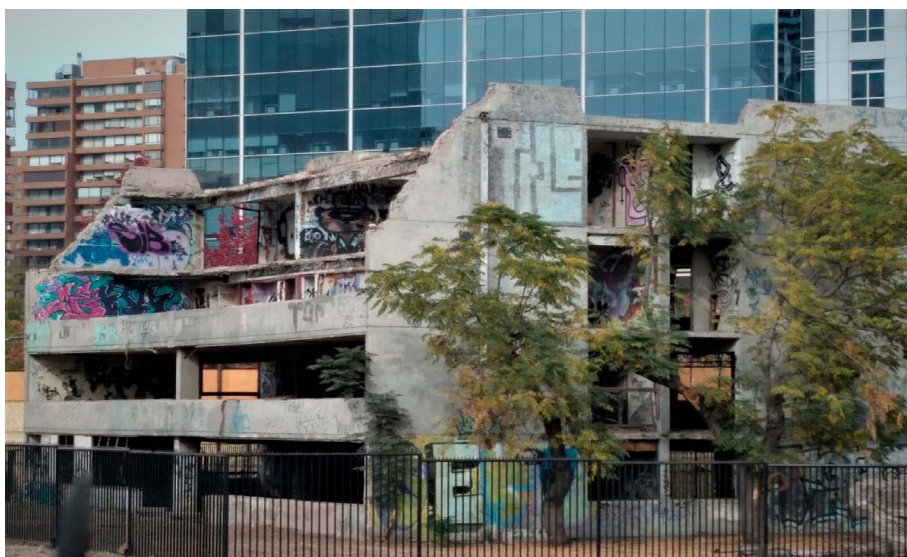
Faced with the imminent destruction and transformation of the last standing blocks—numbers 14, 15, 16, and 17—organized former residents, together with prominent professionals involved in preserving the *villa*'s historical memory, such as architect Miguel Lawner (former director of the Corporación de Mejoramiento Urbano, Cormu, the key agency in its construction), petitioned for official protection of the area. Their aim was to preserve the final material testimonies of the original project and of its history of dispossession and destruction. The request was partially approved by the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales (CMN), and blocks 14 and 15 were declared *Monumento Histórico* in recognition of their historical memory and their significance for the history of architecture and urbanism (Ministerio de Educación 2017).

This step, however, triggered immediate opposition from Constructora e Inmobiliaria Presidente Riesco S.A., which sought unsuccessfully to overturn the designation by filing a *recurso de protección* and arguing that the buildings were in poor condition and impossible to preserve. The court's ruling was unfavorable to the company, but after a series of negotiations with Fundación Villa San Luis—successor to the Comité de Defensa—the company managed to secure (1) approval of an intervention proposal and the signing of a framework agreement with the Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio to carry out a controlled demolition of block 14 and build a museum on its foundations (Secretaría Técnica del Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales 2020), and (2) a reduction of the protection polygon to 1,000 m², partially declassifying the *Monumento Histórico* (Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio 2020).

The partial declassification and demolition of block 15, along with the transformation of block 14, brought to a close a long cycle of efforts to recover, protect, and valorize the last vestiges of the *villa* as a site of memory. Its ruins are material and symbolic evidence of dictatorial repression. Their near-total disappearance not only exposes the absence of a comprehensive conservation policy for sites of memory, but also reveals the primacy of private investment over a heritage protection regime that lacks adequate tools for effective action. The state—through the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales and other bodies responsible for safeguarding historical memory—appears as a mediating, almost passive actor in the face of contentious situations, showing clear signs of weakness in the effective protection of human rights heritage.

In this context, the memory of human rights violations has tended to yield to the relentless advances of economic neoliberalism. Ultimately, the heritage

battle between those who defend the material conservation of these sites' historical memory and those who advocate urban transformation has been framed as an antagonistic logic in which the preservation of these places—precisely in their ruined state—is perceived as an obstacle to urban modernization and progress. Material dispossession thus encompasses not only the moral harm inflicted by the forced eviction of the *villa*'s legitimate residents, but also the physical and symbolic destruction of the site. In this destruction, both the tangible and representational dimensions of its remnants, as well as the absence of what has been erased, acquire particular significance when it comes to protecting and activating the site as heritage.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1. Last standing building of the former Villa San Luis de Las Condes, surrounded by a fence that demarcates the 1000 m² currently protected

Former Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo⁶

Ruins of pillars that once supported long, narrow buildings; shrubs, undergrowth, and garbage scattered across the plot; a ceramic slab shattered by storm surges, its structure sinking into the sand in front of the sea. This is the current state of the site of memory *Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo*. Although it was designated a Historic Monument by Supreme Decree No. 337

6 Former Detention and Torture Center at Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo

(Ministerio de Educación, 2015), its patrimonial trajectory has been marked by destruction and material dispossession. Despite the efforts of the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio to keep the grounds clean and to foreground the memories associated with the site, natural and human threats, combined with institutional neglect, have produced an increasingly visible deterioration that risks erasing the last material traces of this monument.

Inaugurated in 1971, the *balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo*—originally called Villa de Turismo Carlos Cortés—was one of sixteen *balnearios populares* administered by the Central Única de Trabajadores (CUT). It was developed under Measure No. 29, “Turismo Popular y Educación Física,” of Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular government. Under the banner of the right to rest for working-class sectors, a complex of six cabins was built on the shore of Marbella beach in the commune of Santo Domingo, together with bathrooms, storage areas, and a communal dining hall and kitchen (El Ciudadano, 2016). The complex was used for only two summer seasons. After the 1973 *golpe cívico-militar*, it was converted into a clandestine detention and torture center operated by the DINA, the main repressive apparatus in the early years of the dictatorship, and used as a training camp for its personnel. Working in coordination with Campamento de Prisioneros No. 2 and the torture center installed in the officers’ casino of the Regimiento Tejas Verdes, the *balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo* served as a training site for personnel from different branches of the Armed Forces and Public Order and Security forces, who were instructed as repressive agents. According to the testimony of Ana Becerra, president of the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio and survivor of the site, once the DINA deployed across Chile, the place remained under its control and was used simultaneously as a holiday resort for the families of intelligence agents and as a clandestine detention center (Ana Becerra, 2022). After the dissolution of the DINA in 1977, ownership of the property passed to the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) and, in 1990, to the Ejército de Chile. Although the Comisión Valech (2003) identified it as a detention center, there is no official record of the number of prisoners who were held there.

In this context, on 11 September 2013 the journalist Javier Rebolledo launched his book *El Despertar de los Cuervos*, which examines the Tejas Verdes prison camp and “la Escuela de la DINA” installed in the *balneario popular Rocas de Santo Domingo*. This publication brought public visibility to the site for the first time and, as Isabel Soiza—founding member of the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio—notes, marked a key turning point that would shape subsequent events (2021).

On 29 November 2013, acting on orders from the Municipalidad de Santo Domingo and justifying its actions with reference to an alleged rat infestation, the local authorities carried out the near-total demolition of the installations of the *balneario popular* (El Mostrador, 2013). In response to this destruction, representatives of the foundation, together with architect Miguel Lawner and Javier Rebolledo, petitioned the Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales (CMN) to have the site declared a Historic Monument. At its session of 12 November 2014, the CMN approved the request, and the site of memory *Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo* was designated a Historic Monument under Supreme Decree No. 337 on 14 August 2015 (Ministerio de Educación, 2015). Since the declaration, the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio has promoted and sustained a variety of initiatives and activities to enhance the site's value and to slow the encroachment of vegetation that threatens to completely cover the remaining vestiges.

Today, the *Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo* suffers from serious conservation and management problems, produced by human and natural factors, an ineffective legal framework, and a property and administrative regime ill-suited to its preservation. Located directly on the coastal edge and beside a wetland, the remains of the cabin complex, together with the protected polygon and main access routes, have been severely affected by the rising sea and expanding vegetation. These processes have dragged away and buried much of the surviving foundations. The absence of a conservation and protection plan has rendered the legal safeguards established in the monument declaration largely inoperative. The site lacks a proper perimeter enclosure that would demarcate the protected area, and there is no clear signage identifying it, except for one sign located by the parking area of the adjacent beach. This situation has facilitated the use of the site by tourists and casual visitors for purposes incompatible with its status as a place of memory, including parties, camping, and use as an open-air toilet. All of this has been made worse by an ownership and management regime that hinders its patrimonial enhancement. Under army ownership, access has been restricted and attempts to intervene in order to properly interpret and conserve the site have been systematically obstructed⁷.

7 In 2022, the Undersecretariat of National Assets formed and convened a technical working group, together with the San Antonio Memory Foundation; the Regional Ministerial Secretariats of National Assets, Cultures, Arts and Heritage, and Justice and Human Rights; the provincial presidential delegation of San Antonio; the regional government of Valparaíso, among other authorities, in order to manage the enhancement of the space as a memory site. The purpose of the above is to transfer the ownership and administration of the Comando de Bienestar del Ejército de Chile to another institution that will work on the recovery and management of the property, in line with the request of the Fundación para la Memoria San Antonio, after its declaration as a Historic Monument.

The combined actions of visitors, natural forces, and national and local authorities have had a markedly detrimental impact on the site's preservation. As of today, it is in a lamentable state of conservation, as Isabel explains:

Well, now I say that even nature has taken it out on the site. Just imagine the dining hall—what used to be the dining hall was intact, that is, the entire slab was there, and now there is very little left because the tide has eaten it away. That practically no longer exists, and the site is obviously now covered by undergrowth that covers almost everything. (Isabel Soiza, 2021)

As with the ruins of the former Villa San Luis de Las Condes, the material vestiges of the *Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo* expose the limits of state policy and the efforts to silence historical memory. In both cases, these places function as tangible testimonies of major public policies of Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government and, at the same time, of the human rights violations perpetrated under the dictatorship. In each context, they have become the focus of patrimonial struggles in which the actors involved have not been able to confront each other on equal terms. The specific history of this site also calls into question the primacy of material integrity in heritage thinking. In this case, destruction did not lead to disappearance and oblivion. Instead, it triggered patrimonial processes that overflow the walls of the former cabins and emerge in spite of material dispossession:

(...) Even though they tried to erase it, even though they knocked the cabins down, the symbolic dimension of the place is still there. Maybe with the cabins standing it would be as if time had not passed here, as if nothing had happened here. But when you see the foundations, when you see that unprotected place, you can also see the attempt to erase what happened. So, for me, organizing activities there, having people come to that site, takes on another meaning. (Isabel Soiza, 2021)

In this sense, as Isabel suggests and in contrast to a strictly conservationist paradigm, the destruction of the *Centro de Detención y Tortura en Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo* and the work of the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio reveal the dynamic character of the space. Its symbolic value and the social memories attached to it persist and exceed the fragile physical remains on which they are anchored.

Toward Revaluing the Disintegrated Monument: Material Turn and New Strategies of Heritage-Making

The former Villa San Luis de Las Condes in the project “Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)”

To glimpse the last vestiges of Villa San Luis de Las Condes, one has to walk around the high black walls erected around the construction site. In the present, little reference is made to these ruins, which five decades ago formed part of one of the most important housing and social integration projects in Chilean history. Today, the place is a large walled plot where, in one small corner, the abandoned and crumbling building survives amid heavy machinery, dust, and the noise generated by the works commissioned to raise future commercial towers. Built in the heart of one of Santiago’s wealthiest municipalities and far removed from any sign of habitation, this disintegrated monument would be almost impossible to recognize were it not for testimonies and for audiovisual and artistic projects created with the aim of subverting the profound institutional and social silence that surrounds these ruins. Among the projects produced over the last decade, *Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)* stands out: a sensorial work–research–installation directed by Camila Milenka and Cecilia Yáñez. It consists of a set of audio tracks that structure a route through what the authors call a “site-specific” work—conceived for a particular place and sustained through both analogue and technological materials (Camila Milenka 2022).

The work begins in a green sector of Parque Araucano, located on the sidewalk opposite the site. While the audience waits for the performance to begin, members of the creative team hand out the fanzine *Expediente Villa San Luis*, the main material support of the piece, which contains, among other texts, the following description of the project:

“[The work] seeks to reflect on ways of inhabiting the city and on the right to housing and to memory, based on what happened in Villa San Luis de Las Condes Ex Ministro Carlos Cortés. The villa was a pioneering project created by the Government of the Unidad Popular to promote social mobility and decent housing. With the military coup, its inhabitants were evicted, and, subsequently in democracy, the land was sold to real-estate developers. Today its ruins are an interstice in the middle of the city: awaiting the construction, on its foundations, of a space that prevents forgetting.” (Milenka and Yáñez 2021)

As the audience gathers, mobile phones begin to vibrate with each voice message sent via WhatsApp. There are seven audio tracks, corresponding to seven stations along the route, which must be activated upon reaching each stop: (1) The park, (2) The companies, (3) The military, (4) Lot 18, (5) The home, (6) The last block, and (7) The monument. The fanzine includes maps, diagrams, and activities that invite reflection on the history and memory of the former Villa San Luis, now almost entirely disappeared. The tracks compose a sonic universe that offers guiding questions and actions for each station, creating an individual, reflective, sensorial experience led by different voices that weave the narrative in dialogue with the printed booklet.

Testimonies, stories, questions, and sounds invite visitors to consider the socio-economic environment in which the disintegrated monument now sits, the voracious growth of the city, and the unequal value of land, through questions such as “Do you know how much the land where you live is worth?” They also invite listeners to imagine the original project of social integration and the everyday lives of its residents. Midway through the piece, at the fourth station, the voice redirects the gaze toward the interior of the lot concealed behind the high wall. Through a small, accidental opening, one can glimpse the remains of Lot 18, while the voice indicates: “If you raise your eyes, can you see what is inside the lot? Do you see the ruin? Do you see the ruin? No? You can spy through the holes in the chipboard” (Fieldnotes 2021).

Many of the words in the audio evoke “the story of those who were never asked, (...) that untold story, what was never said, the unofficial history” (Melissa Thomas 2022): the memory of a disintegrated monument, defined by the artists as a dying body in the midst of the city, a housing crime that destroys the principle of the right to housing and to the city (Camila Milenka 2022). The specificity of this work-installation lies in its use of analogue didactic elements—sound, images, and physical materials—designed “to let you connect with the problem of the villa and get closer to the villa without actually entering the villa” (Camila Milenka 2022). At the same time, the work must be experienced, visited, and traversed in that unique and irreplaceable testimonial space.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2. Fanzine “Expediente Villa San Luis” handed out in the play *Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)*. In the background, spectators during the play. 2022

Through testimonies, fragments of interviews, instructions, reflective questions, and sounds distributed across the seven tracks activated along the perimeter of the monument and its surroundings, *Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)* returns to the past of the former Villa San Luis. With a cellphone in hand and supported by analogue materials and technologies, the work interrogates dispossession and the conditions that made the project’s material and social disintegration possible. The sonic universe activated in this site-specific intervention asserts sensorial experience as a way of accessing the villa in the absence of the monument, and it complicates the temporalities and materialities that emerge from its physical destruction and from the prohibition on entering imposed by the perimeter fence.

The former Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo in the work Memorial AR Rocas

To reach the former Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo, one must walk along a long avenue until coming to a makeshift gate and fence, worn and broken by the passage of time. If it were not for the wooden-framed sign reading “Monumento Histórico ex Balneario Popular Cabañas Rocas de Santo Domingo” – installed by the Fundación por la Memoria San Antonio – nothing would indicate that

this place once housed a popular holiday camp (Fieldnotes 2022). In this landscape of lush vegetation, sea, and coastal wind, the only remaining fragments of the demolished buildings appear scattered across the ground: aligned *pollos* (foundations) and concrete stairways, numerous cracked ceramic tiles from the cabin floors, and a few remaining tiles from the dining hall.

We would know almost nothing of the history of the cabins, now invisible to the naked eye, were it not for the testimony that Ana Becerra, president of the foundation, regularly gives on site, and for the project by audiovisual artist and documentary filmmaker Pepe Rovano, titled *Memorial AR Rocas*. This thesis-work is composed of two experiences that seek to digitally reconstruct the disintegrated monument, “using interactive audiovisual pieces, 3D architectural modeling (to design houses that no longer exist), and proposing audio routes with Virtual Reality⁸ and Augmented Reality⁹.” In this way, the project aims to convey the past and digitally rebuild the now-ruined and vanished facilities, through “an installation that reproduces the *pollos*, the piles of Rocas de Santo Domingo, and from there I reconstruct, using 3D techniques and augmented reality, the cabins of Rocas de Santo Domingo” (Pepe Rovano 2022).



Source: Own elaboration.

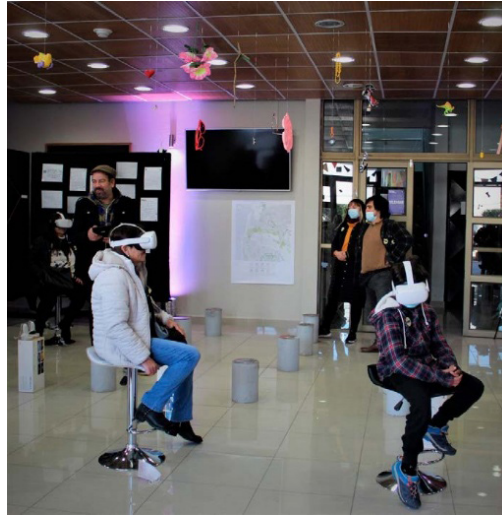
Figure 3. Remains of the ceramic floor of the old collective dining room of the former Rocas de Santo Domingo popular spa. Heritage Day, 2022

8 Interactive medium composed of simulations performed by technological means, which detects the position and actions of the participant and replaces or augments the response to one or more senses, giving the sensation of being mentally immersed or in the simulation a virtual world (...) (Sherman and Craig 2003).

9 An interactive medium that maintains the real world seen by the user (it does not replace it), complementing it with virtual information superimposed on the real one. It is a technology that allows the combination of digital information and physical information in real time, by means of different technological supports (Cabero and Puentes 2020). In [https:// memorialrocas.cl/](https://memorialrocas.cl/)

The first component of the project consists of an installation of structures that reproduce the *pollos* corresponding to the former cabin foundations in a cultural venue. By using tablets, visitors can virtually and interactively view the architecture of the former cabins and dining hall, and access “various digital pieces with survivors’ testimonies, micro-documentaries, sound pieces, archival materials, photographs, and documents that seek to recover and artistically represent the memories of a place in dispute and in ruins.” Thus, when the device’s camera is pointed at each foundation post, a 3D model of the original cabin design appears, accompanied by information in different audiovisual formats that complement the experience. In this digital restoration of the monument, the *pollos* constitute the starting point of the immersive experience, since they are “the only material reference for some of the elements that could be recovered” (Pepe Rovano 2022). They condense the history of the different layers of memory at the *balneario*: they evoke successive acts of destruction and systematic forgetting, now expressed as erasures and voids. Their disappearance means that the *pollos*, as the only intact elements, become the indexical points for reconstructing this non-place—as the artist describes it—a digital restoration that allows access to a razed site that no longer exists and to which, moreover, because it is private property, “you cannot enter, even if it exists” (Pepe Rovano 2022).

In its second modality, the immersive experience takes place through virtual reality. Presented in various cultural centers, the work invites participants to put on virtual reality headsets and, from their seats, to experience full immersion in the site of memory. Once the headset is on, viewers see fragments of floating images and sounds: the sea, seabirds, and the wind blend with views of the site’s ruins, the dense vegetation, and, in the background, the ocean. Although the user is not physically present at the site, the sense of reality created by the simulated environment makes it feel real at times (Fieldnotes 2022). The immersive experience generated by the headset produces a fleeting sensation of transportation and of *being there*, carrying visitors into the site of memory within a temporality that seems frozen.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 4. Installation of the work Memorial AR Rocas at the Centro Cultural de San Antonio, V region of Valparaíso, Heritage Day 2022

The Material Turn and New Strategies for Valuing Memory

The virtual and technological strategies used to reconstruct, musealize, and (re) activate as heritage the remnants of the former Villa San Luis de Las Condes and the former Balneario Popular Rocas de Santo Domingo have been crucial for accessing, through their materialities, the memories associated with repression and political resistance that unfolded in these spaces. In this sense, the analysis of the sound and digital projects developed at each site of memory, as processes of historical reconstruction and memorialization, allows us to reflect along two main lines: first, on the meaning and effectiveness of materialities in processes of remembrance and heritage-making; and second, on the relationship between dematerialization, the redefinition of heritage, and the opening of a material turn.

The productivity and effectiveness of material traces are evident in the multiple efforts deployed at both sites, whether to preserve them or to represent them through technological and digital projects. Ruins, remnants, and traces are material residues of the past that are central to practices of memory, processes of remembrance, and strategies of memorialization. They acquire an even more significant role in contexts marked by destruction and material disappearance. The symbolic power of these carriers of memory became clear during the research, as the projects described all took specific materialities as their point of departure: in

the case of Villa San Luis, a ruined building and another block half-destroyed; in the case of the former *balneario*, the foundations that once supported the cabins.

These surviving material elements, which stand in for an absent whole, constituted the starting point of projects that sought to translate the remnants into creative representations. The two buildings of Villa San Luis and the foundations of the former Balneario Popular thus become indispensable to the development of strategies of memorialization and heritage activation. They link the vanished totality, the remembered past, and the people engaging with the site. The marks and sediments that persist amid the overgrown lot in Santo Domingo operate as strategic reference points, binding together the nostalgia for a unique social and popular project, its later use as a site of detention, torture, disappearance, and military training, and the memory of the successive episodes of abandonment, neglect, and oblivion that have unfolded over the last thirty years.

Similarly, the half-destroyed blocks and scattered rubble in the small protected plot at Villa San Luis connect with the testimony of past generations who lived there, leaving behind the memory of a housing and social integration project. In the work *Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)*, this disintegrated monument—what survives of a totality now buried beneath corporate high-rises—is the point where the different histories of Villa San Luis intersect. At the same time, these structures-turned-ruins make visible disputes, exclusions, abandonment, and erasure. The material destruction has been countered through digital and technological reconstruction of the physical remains and their associated testimonies, with the aim of enabling new ways of transmitting the memories embedded in these now-disintegrated materialities.

The second line of analysis concerns the effects produced by material destruction and by the imminent dispossession and void that threaten these forms of heritage. Historical and ethnographic research showed that the material attributes for which the former Villa San Luis and the former Balneario Popular were legally protected only a few years ago have continued to be destroyed by human and/or natural forces. This contradicts the discursive premises of the heritage institutions whose stated purpose is preservation, and reveals that the principles that have guided heritage management in Chile for nearly a century have been ignored. The progressive deterioration and disappearance of a significant part of the attributes cited in the original protection decrees underscore the tensions between heritage values, political (dis)interest, and real-estate profits that surround heritage today. These disputes result in processes of dematerialization that point to one of the cen-

tral problems of the present: destruction, disappearance, and disintegration now constitute key dynamics of the contemporary heritage landscape. Only in some cases—such as the former Villa San Luis—have these processes been partially slowed by the self-organized actions of communities committed to preservation.

This leads us to ask: can we think of heritage today without the existence of intact, integral materialities? How much does authenticity and integrity weigh in the social valuation of heritage? From the evidence and experiences discussed here, the question arises as to the extent to which the disintegration of the material attributes of heritage undermines the paradigm of a culture of conservation as it has been conceived to date. We approach the abandonment, collapse, and disintegration of the monuments studied under the notion of dematerialization. By this we mean the reduction, loss, or partial or total disappearance of structures, traces, and material testimonies as a result of actions such as neglect, dispossession, or deliberate destruction. The survival of only two ruined blocks where Villa San Luis once stood—together with the drastic reduction of the protection polygon—and the presence of the cabin foundations scattered among ceramic fragments of the former dining hall in Santo Domingo are concrete examples of spaces traversed by conflictive relationships, actions, decisions, and omissions that embody dissent and controversy, culminating in material dispossession. These processes of dematerialization invite us to recognize and rethink a new reality in the heritage field, which we describe as a material turn: a move away from the hegemony of the object's materiality in the valuation of heritage.

From this perspective, the material loss and “de-objectification” of heritage do not necessarily entail the loss of its historical and mnemonic value. On the contrary, they can strengthen a more dynamic and changing conception of heritage. In the face of the destruction, fracturing, and/or disappearance of many heritage assets, we must explore new ways of valuing, conceptualizing, and managing them that can coexist with the permanent uncertainty surrounding their future, as demonstrated by *Memorial AR Rocas and Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)*. Following Peter Burkey's (2019) proposal, we reflect on the need to explore new interpretations and modes of interaction with these cultural artefacts. This involves the historical, testimonial, and architectural reconstruction of monuments that, though now disintegrated, can be recovered and reactivated through innovative methods and contemporary perspectives. Such approaches open possibilities for valuing and reconstructing the architecture and histories of spaces that have progressively lost the tangible attributes that once justified their recognition and protection.

The projects *Cómo se recuerda un crimen (?)* and *Memorial AR Rocas* speak directly to this possibility of reactivation. Using sound recordings, archival material, and the few surviving vestiges preserved at each site, they challenge the dematerialization, fracturing, and disintegration of the monuments. In the encounter between material erasure and artistic initiatives that reconstruct their histories and architectures through technological strategies—in the recognition of reduced protection polygons and abandoned spaces—questions arise about the displacement of material integrity as the central technical principle guiding heritage valuation and management. These projects suggest that the mnemonic function, in the face of material scarcity and the inevitable abandonment and disappearance of sites, can find other paths that do not depend solely on architectural and structural integrity as the unique and irreplaceable starting point for heritage valorization.

If, traditionally, heritage discourse has focused on safeguarding the preservation of those elements deemed significant for society, the tendency toward dematerialization has shaken the conservationist notion underpinning heritage management, which for decades has sought above all to preserve heritage as intact as possible for future generations. From this we infer that the current heritage moment invites us—indeed compels us—to loosen the hegemony of the culture of conservation, since the integrity and authenticity of heritage are now, and will continue to be, inevitably threatened. At the same time, it calls for reaffirming the importance of creative projects as vehicles for transmitting memories and sustaining processes of memorialization and heritage activation.

Final Considerations

This article has shown that, although both sites of memory have been formally recognized and legally protected by the State as National Monuments in the category of Historic Monument, the legal instruments of the heritage apparatus have not been sufficiently robust to secure heritage processes that guarantee their material preservation. Instead, they have resulted in abandonment, ruination, and oblivion. Taken together, these cases reveal how the absence of a comprehensive, long-term heritage policy for the protection and safeguarding of sites of memory—combined with human actions, sometimes spontaneous and sometimes premeditated, and the inevitable impacts of natural forces—has led to the abandonment and material dispossession of these places.

The cases discussed here illustrate a complex and far-reaching situation: the inadequacy of heritage legislation and institutions in guaranteeing the material

safeguarding of sites, even when they enjoy official State protection, and the crucial importance of organized social action in confronting their material fracturing and disintegration. These sites stand as tangible testimonies and vestiges of the human rights violations perpetrated by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The strategies of grassroots organizations, as we have seen, have gone beyond simply seeking the designation of these places as National Monuments. They also encompass a wide range of artistic and technological initiatives aimed at transmitting and evoking the memory of these disintegrated monuments, virtually reconstructing their histories and materialities through digital and technological projects.

On this basis, the article invites a complex and critical reflection on the guiding principle of material integrity in State-protected cultural heritage, which, despite recent innovations in the field, continues to shape heritage priorities. The experiences of *Cómo se recuerda un crimen* (?) and *Memorial AR Rocas* embody new and innovative strategies for valorization that, starting from material void, disintegration, and fracture—sites that are abandoned, fenced off, and/or whose vestiges have disappeared over time—seek to address and repair the absence of the tangible. These heritage practices can be read through the lens of the material turn in heritage.

This notion, together with the musealization initiatives examined here, calls into question the monumentalist perspective that currently prevails in the legal protection of sites of memory in Chile. Grounded primarily in material referents as vehicles of cultural significance, this perspective privileges the conservation of the physical, testimonial fabric of these spaces as the only way to access and engage with their histories. From the protection and management experiences reviewed, it becomes possible to consider new avenues for valorizing sites whose materialities are inaccessible, are in progressive decline, or have been definitively destroyed.

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