Memento Mori:
Siting the Sacred in the Urban Realm

by

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Abstract
Many cemeteries in North America have been removed from city centers. This isolation deprives urban centers and their inhabitants of a vital civic space dedicated to acts and rituals associated with death. Presently, places for remembrance in North America are not recognized as cultural resources for the communities they serve. Little attention has been given to their design or purpose, apart from their function as efficient disposal grounds for remains of the dead. This paper describes the way cemeteries in North America have evolved and how contemporary preferences for cremation over burial warrants a rethinking of cemetery location and design. The goal of this project is to design a multifunctional, sacred space for remembrance within downtown Vancouver.
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Chapter I  Project Overview and Context

1.1 Introduction

Sites of Remembrance have long been a central feature in the urban landscape setting, as a means of commemorating the dead and reflecting cultural values of the present and past. According to Edwin Heathcote, "The house of the dead reveals as much, and usually more about society, than does the house of the living" (Heathcote 1999). This calls into question the fact that graveyards in North America have been relegated to the physical and consequently spiritual fringes of cities and society. Clearly, history has helped to determine the form and placement of today's cemeteries, yet the underlying reasons for their organization and limited function, must be re-examined. I argue that it is time for cemeteries to return to the heart of North American cities as integral, essential public realm.

Statement of Intent

Death is part of life, yet cemeteries or places for the dead are often outside or not integrated into the urban fabric. This project will propose a multifunctional sacred space for remembrance within Vancouver's downtown core.

Project Goal

To integrate the practice of remembrance into everyday life in downtown Vancouver

Objectives

1. Understand the feasibility of creating urban sanctuaries and siting sacred acts and events within the urban context.

2. Explore the possibilities of multifunctional cemeteries.

3. Allow the relevant populations burial preferences and rituals associated with death to inform the design.

4. Create a public space that can host diverse cultural celebrations of death and remembrance.
1.2 Historical and Present Contexts

Civic value of Cemeteries in Ancient Cities

The cemetery is a monument to human mortality. In its historic form, it functioned as both monument and as a fundamental pillar of civic life. It was the foundation or seed of the first human settlements.

Historic evidence shows that Paleolithic man's first fixed meeting places were created for venerating the dead (Mumford 1970). "In these ancient Paleolithic sanctuaries, as in the first grave mounds and tombs, we have, if anywhere, the first hints of civic life". "Here, in the ceremonial center, was an association dedicated to a life more abundant: not merely an increase of food, but an increase of social enjoyment through the fuller use of symbolized fantasy and art, with a shared vision of a better life, more meaningful as well as esthetically enchanting" (Mumford 14). In ancient times, cemeteries offered opportunities for the living to celebrate life and improve upon it through higher standards of living and an enhanced cultural life. However, this is not to say that cemeteries could nor should be the soul source of civic life as they were in the third century. Instead, we can draw on the history of locating cemeteries within city boundaries, so that people are able to share a vital space where they can collectively identify with each other and their mortality.

Figure 1 Ancient Tomb and Twentieth Century Urban Cemetery

ANCIENT TOMB
Tomb of Āit Yacoub Ouarzazate, Morocco. (Cowles 1999)

TWENTIETH CENTURY URBAN CEMETERY
Trinity Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY. (Vergara 1989)
Necropolis of Western Civilization

Necropolis—means literally, city of the dead. The word itself embodies the term *polis*, which implies both the city and the civic culture, which that city embodies, simultaneously (Warpole p.86 2003). A classic historic example of a necropolis is the Etruscan tombs. Here, the profusion of tombs built in the sixth and seventh century, literally created a city of the dead, complete with and street network and neighborhoods of houses for the dead.

Extensive underground internment first began because early Christians could not afford to buy or own land for burial, so they went below ground. The catacombs (tunnels) that were dug deep into the earth were thought to be connected to the saints. It was believed that, at death people became closest to the saints and prophets whom they worshipped.

This cemetery was in Rome was in existence when Saint Agnes' remains were buried here. The oldest part of the north side, dates back to the second century.

Figure 2 Catacombs
The idea (or ideal) of the modern necropolis emerged in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. The most notable example being Pere Lachaise in Paris. This cemetery was the first of many to bring together a regard for landscape theory, with a range of burial and ritual preferences, related to the “refinement of city living” (Warpole p84 2003).

Pere Lachaise Cemetery is structured complete with a road network and houses for the dead that parallel those of the urban grid. According to Warpole, “Often, it is difficult to distinguish between the hard and fast typological boundaries between the necropolis, garden cemetery and American rural cemetery” (Warpole p88 2003).

Figure 3 Pere Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

19th century Isolation of the Urban Cemetery

The rich functions of these historic relics are the antithesis of today’s North American urban cemeteries, many of which sit perched on freshly mowed greens virtually void of people, characterized by the fact that they are often unvisited, unloved and unattended (Jackson 1989). The fears and values associated with death during the twentieth century have had the largest influence on the spatial configuration of cemeteries in North America. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, many of the first cemeteries built by immigrants in North America (modeled after those in Europe) were built around churches. Together, the church and its cemetery functioned as the original heart of the urban center.

In the 1850’s, when diseases ravaged Europe and North America alike, a new trend of tearing cemeteries out of the heart of the cities emerged. The dead bodies were thought to be ‘contaminated’, so they were moved out of churchyards and city centers and relocated in rural and municipal cemeteries on the outskirts of cities (Prothero 2001). Today, the form of cemeteries and the manner in which the dead are commemorated still reflect these same superstitions, fears and taboos that were associated with death in the 1850’s. Edwin Heathcoate emphasizes the continued distancing from death that perpetuates today’s society. According to him, “Today’s gestures made towards isolating death from urban life (in the form of: mourning, epitaphs, burials and monuments) have nothing to do with rational
ideas and everything to do with taboos that reach back into this pre-history” (Heathcoate 1999).

**Rural Cemeteries**

In effect, religion, sanitation and a plight for space to accommodate the living and the dead gave rise to the 'rural cemetery movement,' which relocated cemeteries well beyond urban centers. In the 1850's, Protestantism was the dominant religion, and it advocated the belief that the living should be kept separate from the dead (Heathcoate 1999). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, cholera, yellow fever, typhoid, diphtheria and other infectious diseases plagued the nation. The prevalence of sickness instilled in the public a fear of dead bodies and instigated a desperate cry for sanitation. As populations grew, and church graveyards became overcrowded, people were convinced that cemeteries were a threat to public health. As a result, the sanitary movement came to life and spread fear of 'miasma,' a term given to airborne contamination emitted from dead bodies that was thought to be fatal (Prothero 2001). Protestants took the approach of literally quarantining the dead in the same way they were doing with the sick; they banished urban graveyards from the cities to the suburban areas and modeled the new cemeteries after the classic English garden. This way, the fear of grotesque dead bodies was replaced with a romantic vision of the dead (Prothero 2001).

**Figure 4** Old World Cemetery and Rural Cemetery of the 1900's

**OLD WORLD CEMETERY**
Capuchin Cemetery, Church of Santa Maria de la Concezione, Rome. The profusion of human bones decorating this popular eighteenth century cellar chapel reveals a vastly different strain of sentiment from the desire of modern cemeteries to hide all signs of bodily decay. (Vergara 1989)

**RURAL CEMETERY**
The rural cemetery became a destination for rejuvenation and social recreation. Families came to picnic on the plots that would become their eventual resting grounds. In a veritable parade of urban society, horse-drawn carriages followed the beckoning roadways as they meandered over and around hillsides, lakes, and lawns studiously planted to mimic natural settings.
In the early part of the 1800's, these rural garden cemeteries sprung up throughout the United States, becoming prominent public parks. They further secularized the living from the dead, because only the wealthy could afford to drive out of the city to access them. Despite this, their popularity continued to grow until cities swelled so much that rural cemeteries were swallowed up by the cities they had fled (Prothero 1999).

In Sweden, a counter movement was taking place in the first part of the twentieth century. In 1915, Swedish architects Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz won a competition for Woodlands Cemetery, where they rejected the traditional European and Islamic prototypes i.e. (city's of the dead and paradise gardens) as well as secularized forms based on the English garden. Instead, they used more “primitive Nordic affinities with nature in order to situate their design within regional cultural traditions” (Constant p108 1994). In essence the design reflected a cultural and bio-regional response to cemetery design.

**Figure 5** Woodlands Cemetery Stockholm, Sweden

Woodlands Cemetery outside Stockholm occupies a former woodlot. The original intention was to preserve the natural character of the forest floor while using a variety of memorial markers in the forest floor. To accommodate memorials and the custom of leaving flowers at the grave sites, they decided to clear the forest floor and plant it with grass. They considered this a sacred act as, “a modification that distinguishes this wooded landscape as a human construct and thus a symbolic act” (Constant p106 1994).
Cremation and Spatial Efficiency

Due to a growing concern for the significant land area being consumed by rural cemeteries and municipal burial grounds, cremation was accepted in the 1860's as a more hygienic and space efficient method of dealing with dead bodies. Despite its rich pre-Christian heritage that went back to the Bronze Age, cremation was not accepted in the West until this time. The shift in attitude towards cremation came by way of the philosophy of utilitarianism in Britain, which was soon adopted in North America. Utilitarianism perceived burial and entombment as a wasteful technique, which occupied excessive amounts of valuable land and resources (Prothero 2001).

Thus, cremation was originally popularized by a combination of: 1. the spread of utilitarianism 2. an ongoing quest for sanitary solutions for disposing of the dead, 3. the secularization of religion making it an acceptable and 4. an increased awareness in land conservation (Prothero 2001). These factors popularized cremation and gave rise to a variety of new landscapes for remembrance. Since cremation as an alternative to burial originated as a rational, efficient way of dealing with remains of the dead, the forms it generated were quite modest. They responded to the spatial inefficiencies of the grand rural cemeteries by occupying spaces like: 1. unassuming parcels of land that Heathcoate describes as wistful parks" (Heathcoate 24) 2. Gardens beside suburban churches or 3. adjuncts to existing cemeteries (Kenneth 1989). They were characterized by their highly efficient use of space in the form of columbaria that were designed to accommodate large numbers of peoples and by their minimal maintenance requirements.

This period marked the beginning of a growing concern for land conservation. The trend has continued to grow exponentially as more and more people choose cremation over burial. A 1999 survey across America shows that for the primary reason of land conservation, one third of North Americans chose cremation over burial (Jackson 1989). The preference towards cremation is far more dramatic in certain states and provinces. According to the Vital Statistics of Canada, the highest cremation rate is BC, with a seventy-six percent preference (See Appendix A). With current conventions averaging 1 foot/person for urns (vaults containing ashes), cremation proves to be extremely space efficient, consuming about $1/50^{th}$ of the space consumed by underground burial (See Appendix B).
1.3 Rethinking the Urban Cemetery; Its Form and Functions

The historic pattern emerging in North America, of separating the living from the dead has had a significant effect on our perceptions of the cemetery and its role and function as viable public space in society. Edwin Heathcoate goes so far as to parallel the contemporary disposal of the dead to that of garbage disposal (Heathcoate 6, 1999). The out of site--out of mind approach where corpses are buried far away from the city, or located on ring-roads or by-passes only accessible by car continues today. This incessant cycle of disposal and removal, does not allow us to “Confront death as a defining part of life” (Heathcoate 7, 1999).

A rich future for the City of Vancouver demands a rethinking and diversification of the range of possibilities that public space could offer its inhabitants and tourists alike. When planning the future one must remember that, “Landscapes of the dead are always, simultaneously, landscapes of the living. It is this coterminousness of life and death that that gives the burial site its salience and emotional power” (Warpole p21 2003). Integrating death into the life of the public realm is imperative and will contribute to the richness and depth of Vancouver's urban fabric.

Creating a viable place to commemorate the dead within Vancouver's downtown core is an imperative part of the individual lives and civic life of the city. Vancouver's public realm continues to be internationally acclaimed for Stanley Park, the Sea Wall and its other great touristic and recreational opportunities. However, Mountain View Cemetery is the city's only public place for internment. Apart from attracting nearby residents, Mountain View lacks a sacred quality that attracts a range of people throughout the city and tourists alike to visit more frequently. The city thirsts for a place to mourn, reflect, grieve, and celebrate the past, both collectively and individually. The creation of such a public space could potentially function as the city’s urn containing personal and collective memories of its inhabitants.
1.4 Precedent Case Study

The work of Jose Pinos and Enric Miralles at La Igualada cemetery confronts many of the critical components of creating sacred space for internment. Additionally the site has similar dynamics and challenges to the Beatty Street Escarpment. Perhaps most intriguing and inspiring at La Igualada Cemetery, is its ability to evoke the intimate and sublime experiences through landscape and architecture. It is located just outside Barcelona on an elbow of land that juts out into a dry river valley. The cemetery has a dynamic integration with the surrounding landscape. It not only responds to the local surroundings, but draws on primal forces. Enigmatic forms that serve as containers for the dead rise from the ground plane seemingly uninhibited by the earthly force of gravity (Zabalbeascoa 1996). Miralles and Pinos have transformed formalist notions involving repetition, modularity and composition to enhance the sculptural aspects of their work and the existing land form.

The architects have developed tension and ambiguity between the earthly and the ethereal. The monumental pre-cast and site-cast concrete forms are battered, in places, portraying an appearance of unyielding strength ensuring structural integrity throughout the incised processional route. Conversely, at other locations the forms are reversed and expand towards the sky in defiance of gravitational forces; they appear to possess the quality of weightlessness. Along the processional, the architecture dissolves into landscape as the threshold between earth and building becomes blurred. Exterior stairs, for example, constructed within the concrete retaining walls appear to transcend through the ground plane allowing passage between levels of the cemetery (Zabalbeascoa 1996).

There are also many references made to the passage of time—to the dialogue between the notions of the temporary and the permanent. Miralles discusses how, over time, the cemetery will by transformed by the growth of vegetation upon the stone and concrete retaining walls. He also uses wood inlaid into the concrete of the ground plane. Over time, the wood rate of decomposition will supercede the concrete, catalyzing different types of growth (transforming the growth-rates and the experiential procession over time).
CHAPTER II  The Site

2.1 Site Criteria

Central and Prominent Position in Downtown Vancouver that is Multi-Layered
The site must have a central and prominent position within downtown Vancouver. With the intention of recalling the past, a multitude of historic layers is also critical.

Direct access to Water
Water is an important aspect of memory, so close proximity to water is another important criteria. As a reflective and life giving substance, it is integral to the rituals associated with birth and death. Therefore, water should be either contained within the site and or directly adjacent to the site.

Accessibility
The site must be accessible by all. Adjacent public transit should be immediately accessible so that the site can be easily accessed by all quadrants of the city.

Genius Loci
The site should have a dynamic presence and be integral to the urban fabric.

2.2 Physical Context

Location
The site is located in British Columbia, on the Eastside of Downtown Vancouver (See Appendix C, Urban Context). It occupies the space above and below the Beatty Street Escarpment. As part of the original False Creek shoreline, the escarpment is a defining element of the downtown peninsula and an important urban landmark. As one of the last unaltered geographic features in the downtown area, it is an important historic landmark that demands a vital public function.

The site is flanked by False Creek to the southeast, and various prominent public institutions; each integral to its position within the larger urban fabric. The False Creek waterfront is one of Vancouver's most prominent and well-used public spaces. The creek
dissipates just near the site, so the site becomes an important extension of the waterfront walk that leads to Chinatown. Georgia Street (one of downtown Vancouver's pivotal streets) that begins at English Bay terminates here. Other important adjacencies include Stadium Skytrain Station (on the corner of Dunsmuir St. and Beatty St.), General Motors Place Stadium, BC Place, Queen Elizabeth Theatre. All of these adjacencies make the site a prominent and memorable public space within downtown Vancouver's urban fabric (See Appendix D, Adjacencies).

**Site Dynamics**
The site's adjacency to False Creek makes it not unlike many urban waterfronts that are largely empty industrial fragments of land severed from downtown by a system of elevated highways. Its edge condition is in-between the pressure of urban production and consumption, ethnic contrast, social marginalization, and False Creek. Thus, the site provides an opportunity to gather energy from all sides: the urban flow, which is intensified at the river edge (freeway, railroads, ships, bridges, industry) and the dynamism of water, wind and gravity. These forces are amplified here, establishing a dialogue of rhythmical cycles of construction and deconstruction, erosion and deposition—all part of the cycles of life and death.

**Topography and Views**
The site has a memorably dramatic grade change of 12-13 meters from the top of the escarpment to the bottom (See Figure 6-8). In addition to the view from Beatty Street and the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts, a pedestrian catwalk surrounds BC and GM Place and provides excellent views of the site from above. From the escarpment, the topography seems to dwarf the scale of people below. The dramatic vista makes it ideal for a cemetery/space for reflection. As Christopher Alexander wrote, “The instinct to climb up to some high place, from which you can look down and survey your world, seems to be a fundamental human instinct” (Alexander 1976).
Figure 7  View looking South East towards General Motors Place

Figure 8  View looking North towards Dunsmuir Viaduct

Figure 9  View looking West towards escarpment

Views
Below the escarpment, the site has a strong sense of containment. Its edges are formed by the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts, BC Place and GM Place. The large circle of the surrounding infrastructure creates a sense of enclosure and inhibits the view of False Creek; the orientation is thus inward and upward towards the sky. (See Appendix E-1, Energy)

**Site Access and Circulation**

The dramatic grade change makes site access a challenge. Presently the four corners of the site form the prominent pedestrian access points (See Appendix E-2, Pedestrian Access). All four corners originate from well used locations including: Stadium Skytrain Station, GM Place, BC Place and South East False Creek. Additionally, all roads surrounding the site are one way access routes (See Appendix E-3, Auto Circulation)

2.3 Historic Layers

The site is thick with various layers that represent different stories and time in the history of the site. The various layers provide the beginning of a rich urban chronology. Predominant layers include: the Escarpment that once was a shelf formed by False Creek, the Canadian Pacific Railway Tunnel, the Drill Hall, and Viaduct Park.

**False Creek**

The rapid change that took place in the adjacent False Creek is arresting. It's difficult to find another example of a site which has moved, in the space of forty years, from an almost pristine forested coastal inlet, rich with wildlife, to an industrial mess, almost devoid of nature and posing a risk to human health; then, within twenty years, after a period of stagnation and indecision, filling the Creek with earth from the Grandview Cut started in 1906, swung it around as a sought-after residential, commercial and recreation area (Wynne and Oke 1989).

False Creek is indeed false. It's an eroded trough (perhaps a former arm of the Fraser River) invaded by the sea. In 1880, apart from the small Indian village of Snauc, it was a quiet inlet with tidal flats and sand bars, fed by several creeks and ringed by expansive forest and marshy shores. The inlet extended 5.5 kilometers inland to the present position of Clark Drive. At low tide, the eastern half was mostly exposed tidal flats, but at high tide it was connected to Burrard Inlet.
The beginning of selective logging really began in 1872, when the Main St. Bridge was constructed. However, the largest impact on the land came in 1885-6, when the CPR clear-cut 480 acres on the north shore of the creek, clearing the entire area that is now downtown, including the Beatty Street escarpment. The arrival of the CPR line in 1887 and the leasing out of the land along the north shore produced a surge of industrial construction in the following decade. After 1900, industrial operations really boomed in the form of sawmills, planing mills, sash and door manufacturers, shingle mills, lime kilns, brickyards, cement works, building suppliers, breweries, tanning works, ironworks, foundries, metal works, machine shops, a cooperage,

By 1920, industry had dramatically transformed the size, shape and character of the basin. The need for deep-water access, led to more dredging from the Granville Cut. The dredged material was then dumped back onto the surrounding marshland in order to extend the land holdings. This material in addition to the dumping of industrial waste dramatically altered the edge of the False Creek basin. The following figure shows, the geometric forms created in the landscape, verses the forms prevalent when it was a natural flood plain.

**Figure 10** False Creek Shoreline 1913
Lighter area of the Creek no longer exists.

**Figure 11** False Creek Landholdings 1970
Industry has dramatically altered the shoreline.

**CPR Tunnel**
The Canadian Pacific Railway tunnel, Vancouver's oldest, was opened in 1932 to transport materials from False Creek and eliminate Downtown traffic snarls. It was built by the Northern Construction Company and J.W. Stewart at a cost of $1.6 million. The tunnel is six to 24 meters below the surface and is 1,396 meters in length. It follows an elongated S-
curve; starting with the west portal on Burrard Inlet (now the waterfront terminal for SkyTrain), it curves left up Thurlow, and switches back south under Dunsmuir, follows Dunsmuir to Cambie, then curves again almost due south, ending at the east portal near the Georgia Viaduct (now Sky Train's stadium station) (See Figure 5, Tunnel Map).

Today, the inside of the tunnel is void of activity, apart from the section of track near Stadium Station that is occupied by the Skytrain. The art deco entry into the tunnel has a strong presence on the site. However, the tunnel beyond is made impassible by a cinder block wall. On a sunny day, passerby's congregate near the entry, bearing looks of curiosity. The tunnel opening, like all opening into the earth, sparks intrigue and curiosity of what lies within and beyond. It references the catacombs of the past, or other inner worlds. The notion of a tunnel or digging into the bowels of the earth evokes questions of other worlds and what lies beyond.

Figure 12  CPR Tunnel entry

Figure 13  Dunsmuir Tunnel Route 1936
**Drill Hall**

The Beatty Street Drill Hall, built from 1899 to 1901 as the headquarters of the B.C. Regiment, Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles, is Vancouver's oldest surviving drill hall. The structure, with its massive brick walls, crenellated turrets and original interiors, is an A-listed heritage building. The building retains its historic military reserve function. According to the historic society, maintaining the original function is crucial not only to its historic significance but ultimately to its survival -- otherwise it is at risk for abandonment, decay, demolition, or at best conversion (Historic Conservation Society 2002). The building's main hall is still used for a range of military functions and large gatherings.

**Viaduct Park**

The original Georgia Viaduct was completed in 1915. Viaduct Park was created to commemorate the original structure after it was demolished in 1970. The Park occupies the right-of-way for the old Viaduct's western approach, directly above the original abutment. The original Viaduct had concrete railings with a classical 'grille' motif surmounted by lamps on concrete lamp-posts. Some of these historic materials were saved and reused to frame the commemorative plaza. However, today the park receives little use. In winter the park is characterized by its dark surfaces and general heaviness created by the hard and soft materials. In summer, on various occasions (including sports events) a variety of people congregate at the overlook and on the benches. However, most of the time the park is populated by the odd homeless person, and a derelict quality permeates the space.
2.4 Site Challenges/Constraints

Heavy Infrastructure
Infrastructure has an overwhelming presence on the site. The lower part of the site is bound by infrastructure on all sides; Dunsmuir and Georgia viaducts to the north and south and B.C. Place and G.M. Place to the East and Southeast, respectively. In addition, the site experience is heavily influenced by the extensive shade and shadow the infrastructure casts throughout much of the day.

![Figure 14. Presence of heavy Infrastructure on Site](image)

Accessibility and Movement
The dramatic grade change and viaduct infrastructure makes site access a challenge. Presently, there is no passage on site that allows for access between the upper and lower levels of the site.

Vandalism and Changing the Identity of a Marginalized Space in the City
The site is presently a fairly derelict space in the city. Likewise, changing peoples perception about the space and allowing the public to take ownership is necessary in reducing and eliminating the threat of vandalism.

Maintaining a Strong Sense of Relationship to the Escarpment
The escarpment has the potential of being divisive in the way that it separates the upper level from the lower level. Part of the challenge will be to use the escarpment in ways that incorporate the upper and lower levels of the site, so that there is a dialogue between the two.
CHAPTER III Program

3.1 In the Context of the City

Presently, Vancouver's public realm contains a variety of recreational opportunities. In the design of public open space throughout the city, recreational activities have been given priority. There is a desperate need to rethink the range of possibilities and functions that public space in Vancouver may provide.

Like all North America cities, Vancouver thirsts for more memorable places, rituals and events that allow people to identify with the city and its inhabitants. The site's central and prominent location makes it an ideal urban node. Taking advantage of it's position and drawing on important adjacencies will allow the space to become host to a range of daily rituals and annual events.

Capitalizing on Adjacencies

The adjacent public transit station and other cultural landmarks (including Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver Public Library, China Town, and False Creek) make it an important part of a larger network of nodes within the city center (See Appendix F). Their close proximity creates a range of options for developing a notable urban walk, a memorial tour through Vancouver, and a range of annual events and festivals related to urban memory. The idea of diversifying public space through a range of forms and functions here will ultimately contribute to the richness and sense of place with which people identify.

Developing an Urban Walk

Many cities have notable urban walks. Vancouver's most revered is the Stanley Park Sea Wall. However, there are few notable urban walks within the city center. As a public space dedicated to remembrance, the site will become an important node linked to a string of other prominent urban landmarks that become part of a great urban walk connected to China town, the Seawall and Georgia Street (See Figure 13).

Annual Processions

The site's position in its larger urban context allows it to be integrated into larger annual processions. Presently, the Remembrance Day March, the single largest March in Vancouver, begins at nearby Victory Square. The site is adjacent to the start of the march.
that travels to memorials throughout the city. Likewise, the cemetery would become an
integral addition to this annual March and others throughout the city.

**Annual Festivals**

The multifunctional urban cemetery does not want to veil or disguise death. Instead, *memento mori*, is a place where death is reflected upon and celebrated in a multitude of ways. Currently, the Parade of Lost Souls and the Lantern Festival are some of Vancouver's more memorable participatory celebrations of death and light (See Figures 15 and 16). They demonstrate the power of celebration that involves community participation.

In addition to existing annual festivities, the site would be host to a range of new festivities surrounding death and remembrance. Presently, Ching Ming Festival—a celebration of Death that's rooted in Chinese culture is practiced in Mountain View Cemetery and other cemeteries throughout BC. This is a day when people bring offerings of food to the graveyard. The site design incorporates a variety of public and more private altars, where people can leave offerings for the Ching Ming Festival, Day of the Dead and the many other cultural celebrations for commemorating the dead.

The Central public Stage/Altar is situated to accommodate annual classical concerts, dance performance, theatre and other forms of artistic expression that allow people to collectively grieve or celebrate life and death. There is great historic precedent of ancient cemeteries that were placed beside the theatre. The adjacent Queen Elizabeth Theatre provides an opportunity for theatrical performances to spill out into the cemetery. Bringing theatre here will bring a different life to the house of the dead and ignite the imagination about life after death.
Vancouver Festivals involving community in the celebration of death and light.
3.2 Outdoor Spaces

As a site that accommodates a variety of programs (ranging from the grieving individual, to the public, to a small group, to an individual on lunch-break) the site requires a high degree of spatial differentiation.

Figure 17 Spatial and Circulation Diagram

Community Gathering/ Central Oak Gathering
Indicated by the semi-circle of oaks surrounding a large grassy plane at the center of the site. This area is oriented around the central alter/stage, which hangs from the center of the escarpment. The 80x100 meter gathering space accommodates one to two thousand people and is utilized for: large memorials, celebrations, community events, concerts, theatrical and dance performances, annual classical concerts, celebration of the seasons, a lily of the valley celebration of spring, etc.
Experiential Qualities
In times of grieving, a void or large, empty open space provides important emotional relief. The Central Oak Gathering is a large grass plane that’s enclosed by the softness and stability of large oak trees. On a quiet day at Memento Mori, one may find refuge reading a book on the grass or meeting a group of friends for a picnic. Whereas, on a celebration day, preceding the memorial for a notable Vancouver citizen, hundreds of people pour out of the tunnel entry with lit candles. A path of illumination wraps around the semi-circle of oaks. Candles are blown out as people enter the grass plane. Here they congregate on blankets and listen to speeches by various members of the community followed by a memorable classical concert.

Smaller Group/Collective Mourning Areas
Small group gathering areas for 5-40 people are indicated by Oak Trees throughout the site. Historically, oaks trees have served as important gathering trees. Likewise, the four large single Oaks on site indicate places where smaller groups can host a memorial service, picnic, celebration of a death or life, etc.

Experiential Qualities
Here, under the shade of the large single oak, small group gatherings ranging from picnics to memorial services take place. Beside the oak tree, seated planters that form the base of the strata (columbarium) orient themselves for communal sharing and reflection (See Appendix- Columbarium).

More Private Mourning
The more private or personal areas of contemplation are situated on the elevated tiers within the beech grove.

Experiential Qualities
Here, amidst the beech grove, the strata divide the space, creating a sense of privacy for the grieving individual. The beech trees provide a magical environment for reflection. Their long silver trunks rise up like elephant legs, inviting the wandering eye to climb up to the chartreuse green canopy above. The dappled light produced by the canopy provides the individual with feelings of ascension and a sense of life that lies above and beyond. The grove is a perfect retreat to sit and have lunch, meet a friend for a chat, read a book or just
sit and contemplate in a peaceful pocket where the sites and sounds of the city seem to disappear.

**Ceremonial Areas**

Multiple areas are required that are accessible from various site entrances. Different spaces conform to different ceremonies and the size varies greatly. Ceremonial space is defined by vegetative material and hard surfaces. Rituals might include: candle lighting, services to celebrate collective and individual memories. (i.e. grandparents, parents who have lost children, cancer, First nations, inhabitants of the downtown eastside, light, fire, etc.)

**Experiential Qualities**

On any given day, people emerge from the tunnel opening or elevator and light a candle to illuminate the memory of a loved one who has passed away. The illuminated wall serves to remind us that there is life or spirit that lives on after death.

**Promontory**

Provides views of the site and a heightened awareness of scale. The promontory becomes an important public meeting and gathering place. The edge requires secure railings for safety.

**Paths**

Connect Main Facility to Upper Entry and various meditation and ritual spaces throughout the site. Minimum 1.5 meter width. All wheelchair accessible paths minimum 2 meters.

**Emergency Access**

A gate on the east side of the site allows vehicle access for fire trucks, maintenance vehicles and ambulances to gathering areas within the site.

**Alters and Offering Spaces**

Altars exist in the form of the central stage alter and smaller winged crypts throughout the site. On various days the stage altar is open to the public and is devoted to range of events and festivals of recognition related to memory. On given days people may leave offerings in the form of flowers, notes, stones, photographs, etc.
Columbarium
Due to the shortage of cemeteries within the city of Vancouver, this proposal is designed to contain 15% of city of Vancouver's burials for the next 200 years. The figures are based on an average of total deaths within the city from vital statistics from 1986-1998 (See Appendix B). However, it can be assumed that preference for cremation will continue to grow at 2%/yr. for the next 20 years. Based on current trends, the site is designed to contain 20% of Vancouverites ashes for the next 200 years, which averages about 105,400.

3.3 Building Program
The building program is designed to accommodate a variety of programs associated with the rituals and administrative necessities surrounding death and memorial. The various programs associated with the building include a grand entry court, covered waiting area, central reception, family rooms that orient themselves towards a more private outdoor gathering area, administrative facilities and the main reception hall. The main hall has large glass doors that open up onto an adjacent outdoor area. This creates more space to accommodate larger services and events when the weather permits.
(See Appendix G for area and numbers to be accommodated within the building program)
Chapter IV  Site Design

4.1 Concept; Palimpsest

The layout and site structure is concerned with the notion of the passage of time. The site is multi-layered; the different layers reference the inner and outer worlds. The site provides spaces for intimate, introspective experiences of mourning juxtaposed with the sublime; both inherent in life and death. The site does not dissolve or attempt to bury the past. Instead it is similar to a palimpsest; becoming a living narrative of past, present and future.

A palimpsest is a manuscript on which an earlier text has been effaced and the vellum or parchment reused for another. It was a common practice, particularly in medieval ecclesiastical circles, to rub out an earlier piece of writing by means of washing or scraping the manuscript, in order to prepare it for a new text. The motive for making palimpsests seems to have been largely economic—reusing parchment was cheaper than preparing new skin. Another motive may have been directed by the desire of Church officials to "convert" pagan Greek script by overlaying it with the word of God. Modern historians, usually more interested in older writings, have employed infra-red and digital enhancement techniques to recover the erased text, often with remarkable results. Similarly, the site is treated as an evolving canvas of memories, where the past lives and layers lay beneath the present. New layers continue to be stacked above.

4.2 Site Organization (See Figure 19, Plan)

The site is designed so that as one moves through, open spaces are constantly confronted with closure, as the living are with the dead. Once one has descended into the site from above, no view can be seen, beyond the sky and the confines of the site. The site is made internal in the same way that the act of grieving is internal. The site area below the escarpment is organized into various tiers. The lowest plane is the central void. This is the grass gathering plane used for large urban gatherings or reprieve. Three Beech Tiers to the East form the lower, middle and upper passages of the site. These are primarily dedicated to mourning, resting and more personal, reflective space. There are spaces for smaller group gatherings indicated by Oak trees situated at the terminus of these tiers. Places for various rituals are located in distinct locations throughout.
4.3 Circulation

Vehicle Access/ Automobile Processions and Parking

The circulation on site is organized so that daily automobile processions and parking are located off of Pacific Blvd., below the Dunsmuir Viaduct. The road placement, beneath the Dunsmuir Viaduct creates a unique internal, underground experience while making efficient use of space on the site. The internal experience of grieving begins upon entry through the gates, (See Appendix I, Internal Entry).

The placement of daily parking is concentrated on the east side of the site in order to make the most efficient use of space. This way, the site does not become consumed by parking, like many North American cemeteries. Here, the entry road/parking experience is quite concentrated and compact.

In the event of larger processions, people can also park and enter from above. Beatty Street will be closed from Georgia to Dunsmuir Street, allowing vehicles to park on both sides of Beatty Street, and than enter the site through the Tunnel Processional.

Pedestrians

When entering the site from above, pedestrians access the lower site by elevator or via Tunnel Processional through the internal staircase. The pedestrian experience from both above and below is memorable. From below, pedestrians enter the site through a rather large rectangular opening/ passageway through the main facility.

The paths within the site connect building programs with landscape programs. Path surface and size signifies the use. i.e. Primary circulation from the candle wall to the building is blue brick, Quieter mourning routes are marked by compressed granite pathways and paths along sacred spaces associated with rituals or sacred acts are marked with the iron oxide treated concrete which also forms the skin of the building and the columbarium (See Figure 19, Materials).

4.4 Textures and Materials
The continually changing features of the hard and soft materials on site enhance the idea of transition. (rusting of steel, weathering of concrete, plant material that changes throughout the seasons, etc.). All of these respond to and reveal the passing of time (See Figure 20).
Building Precedent; Museum Jorge Oteiza
Architect: Francisco Javier Saenz de Oiza

Building Skin and Sacred Surfaces—concrete dyed with metallic oxides that give it a tanned color close to cor-ten steel.

Grande Entry Parking and Crosswalk Surface—Blue brick

Paths and Sacred Surfaces—textured concrete dyed with metallic oxides and crushed granite aggregate.

Edging and Details—black slate, bronze and steel

Figure 20 Materials
4.5 Design Interventions

Edges (See Appendix I, Site Sections)
Below the escarpment, the site has a strong inward and upward orientation created by the thick edges of infrastructure formed by the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts, BC Place and GM Place. This large surrounding infrastructure creates a sense of boundary, enclosure, and inhibits the view of False Creek.

The design response further thickens this sense of enclosure by binding the edges of the site with a 3-6 meter high planted earth berm. Its fairly dramatic slope forms an earthen outer edge, while the inside is made of a sacred columbarium wall containing urns for ashes. The thickness and visual barrier from inside and outside, further exaggerates the sense of inward reflection and the need for enclosure inherent in mourning.

There is strong historic precedent for walled cemeteries. Traditionally, many cemeteries in Western culture have been walled landscapes; partly for anthropological reasons to do with creating boundaries between polluted and unpolluted space, or between secular and religious space, as well as for practical reasons (Warpole 2003). In this design, the earth berm-columbarium wall is used to further define and delineate sacred space.
**Addressing the Escarpment** (See Appendix I, *Escarpmont*)

Since this section of the Beatty St. escarpment remains the only part within downtown that has not been built, I have chosen to maintain its un-cultivated character. The escarpment will be managed so that all woody plants and shrubs will be removed and a mixed wild flower seed will be cast every 2 years. Several of the alders below the Drill Hall will be left to natural succession.

The more wild or overgrown nature of the escarpment dramatically ends where the escarpment meets the lower level. Here, a thin (30cm x 60cm) steel basin runs like a line along the bottom of the escarpment edge. This edge delineates the rougher vegetation and character of the escarpment with a clean edge of mowed lawn. There is an ongoing dialectic between the rough and refined. This also symbolizes the former edge of False Creek.

The stage and main building create a dialogue between the spaces above and below the escarpment. Both buildings help connect the upper and lower levels of the site and enhance one's sense of scale. The stage/public alter is visible from the promontory above and from the lower site. It adds another layer of ritual to the escarpment and invites people to gather around the landform. The main facility's physical connection to the escarpment heightens one's sense of scale, making the human seem small in comparison to the landform.

**Entrances as Sacred Openings**

The site has three primary openings or entrances. The two entrances from the top of the escarpment include the stairway access through the tunnel that begins from the center of the upper plaza and an elevator that descends down the Western side of the escarpment. The lower entrance has parking access and thus is used for daily ceremonial access when a hearse or automobile procession is required. All three entrances to the site are small openings that allow people to pass through layers and engage in a dialogue between the inner and outer worlds.

**Lower Entry** (See Appendix I, *Lower Entry*).

From below, the site is entered via Pacific Blvd. A one-way auto entry is marked by a retractable gate and blue-black bricks at the crosswalk adjacent to GM Place. The building entrance is visible from the Road. The experience of entering underneath the infrastructure
evokes a heaviness, but light trickles in from the foliage of the trees and living wall; reminding the passerby that there is life and light beyond. Yet another layer is added to the viaduct pillars themselves. Names of those persons remembered on site wrap and wind their way up the viaduct pillars. Like palimpsest, the names cover the existing infrastructure with another layer and memory. The names invite people to look up the pillars towards the sky, accentuating the dialectics of above and below that are often associated with life and death.

When entering the inner site proper, pedestrian access is achieved by passing through a large opening through the base of the tower, which is the caretaker’s residence. This dimly lit entryway maintains a site line to the central stage/altar.

**Internal Staircase and Tunnel Processional** (See Appendix I, *Internal Staircase*)
An overhanging concrete slab marks the upper entrance to the internal staircase. This relatively small opening into the underground space is evocative of a subterranean experience. Once within the staircase, long and thin (4 meter x 20cm) glass slats form skylights above each landing. The shafts of light cast from above reference the outer world while inner layers of the earth and eventually the tunnel walls are revealed as one descends down. The slice through the tunnel leaves the concrete raw and exposed, revealing yet another layer from the past.

**Candle Wall** (See Appendix I, *Candle Wall*)
When descending through the *Tunnel Processional*, in addition to the natural light produced by the opening of the tunnel, a candle wall monolith stands here. This way, when one emerges from the tunnel they are greeted by a wall of light. The light at the end of the tunnel serves as a greater metaphor for the spirit, or life that lives on after death. Both eastern and western traditions have used light in rituals surrounding life and death, thus light remains an integral part of life, and this processional experience.

**Columbarium** (See Appendix I, *Columbarium*)
Palimpsests subvert the concept of the author as the sole originary source of her work, and thus defer the "meaning" of a work down an endless chain of signification. Similarly, the columbarium or storage of ashes throughout the site, does not monumentalize the individual, but their compact size and joinery
connection is symbolic of the interconnection between the living and the dead.

The columbarium, which I refer to as strata-- are stackable. They are organized in the same way that layers of the earth are stratified in Geology. Just as the oldest particles are found at the lowest elevations in archaeological digs, the oldest urns are found at the lowest topographical points on the site and placed first in the stackable rows. Thus, the site is organized into three tiers at successive elevations. As the burial niche walls descend down the tiers from the East side of the site, they get lower, as if they have been 'buried' by the cemetery and growth.

Figure 22
Stacked strata descend downwards, as if buried by the site.

The base layer of the strata functions as a planter with seating. Like the other sacred surfaces or skins, it is made of concrete stained with iron oxides. Families or individuals can opt to contribute to a planter, where the ashes are deposited into the planter box itself and recognized by a nameplate, or they can purchase an individual urn (box for containing ashes). Similarly, the surface above the graves becomes active garden/green space (See Appendix I, Internment Experience). Each urn is physically joined or connected to those above and below it. This connection is symbolic of the interconnection between the living and the dead. The act of connecting the urns is a physical act that becomes part of the ritual and is symbolic of the living being physically connected to the dead and vice versa.
CHAPTER V Concluding Remarks

Bringing Death to Life Again

As the cultural obsession with youth, vigor and the eternal quest to stay young becomes ever present, death continues to have less of a place in society (Zabelbeascoa 1996). Likewise, eliminating places to recognize and celebrate death as part of everyday life continues to contribute to our culture further losing touch with mortality. “More than remembrance, the cemetery derives power from the intuitive belief that the dead persist, that they have not vanished altogether from our world, that they communicate with the living, that something of their life force resides where the body is buried or, where the ashes are deposited. Once this belief weakens, the cemetery loses its significance, becoming an unsettling and unwanted reminder of mortality” (Jackson 1989). Yet in these times of ambiguity and uneasiness about the meaning of death and afterlife, the bereaved still need spaces where they can reflect upon their loss and feel comfortable nurturing the memory of their loved ones.

The contemporary isolation of the cemetery reflects a diminishing sense of mortality as an organizing principle of civic life and urban centers in North America. Youthfulness is celebrated everywhere and the old, once venerated by memorable entrances and monuments rarely find an echo in our modern minds. With an altered value system, burial places have become nuisances as opposed to central institutions in the life of a community. In recognizing reasons for their loss as well as their necessity it’s evident that segregating cemeteries from everyday life only perpetuates our fears. Thus, this design brings these spaces together again. With time and weather inevitably intervening in the work, covering and eroding it, allowing it to become part of the natural landscape, the cemetery will be seen as less a burial ground and will come to be seen as more of a forest and field, in which all the natural cycles of life and, alongside it, death, take place.
Bibliography


There has been an average of 4,180 deaths per year in the City of Vancouver over the past 11 years.

The demand for cremations has increased from 58 percent in 1986 to over 60 percent in 1998.

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*Based on local health area boundaries and includes a small number of remains classified as "others"

Source: British Columbia Vital Statistics

City of Vancouver

Mountain View Cemetery Financial Report

Appendix A Vital Statistics from 1986-1998 demonstrate a rising preference for cremation
Appendix B  Cremation/Burial Spatial Comparison.
Demonstrates the space utilized by 100 graves verses 100 standard 1ft.x1ft. urns for ashes.
Appendix C  Urban Context Map
Appendix D Urban Adjacencies Map

Appendix E Energy, Access and Auto Flow
Figure E-1
Site Energy Flow

Figure E-2
Pedestrian Access

Figure E-3
Auto Circulation
One way streets flank all sides of the site
Appendix E  Energy, Access and Auto Flow

Appendix F  Proposed Urban Walks that extend from site.
3.2 Building Program

Main Facility

**Administrative Building** 27 x 8m
Includes: Offices for Cemetery Manager and Cemetery Forman, Staff Kitchen, Meeting Room

**Family Rooms** 8 x 12m

**Reception Hall** two stories at 25 x 10m
For services following funerals (should accommodate 6-100 people)
Overflow covered Space with built in speakers.
Public Restrooms

**Caretaker Residence** 240 m

**Maintenance Building** 20 x 10m

**Works/Soils Yard** 50 x 30m

Parking
Guest and Employee/Staff to accommodate 3-4 full time staff.

Appendix G Building Program Requirements
Memento Mori
Sting the Sacred in the Urban Realm

Section A-A: North-South Site Section, View Looking West

Section B-B: West-East Site Section, View Looking South
memento mori
siting the sacred in the urban realm

addressing the escarpment
Leila Zeppelin  August 2004

section elevation C-C'
stage/alter 1:50

section elevation D-D'
Escarpment interface with lower level of site, view looking north towards main building 1:100

section elevation E-E'
Promontory edge and railing 1:50
memento mori
siting the sacred in the urban realm

perspective of candle wall and tunnel entry

section elevation E-E' of candle wall and elevator access
memento mori
siting the sacred in the urban realm

colunbarium as strata
leila zeppelin  august 2004

plan of strata that functions as seating planter
1:20

section of strata as planter

section of strata stacked

axon of interconnecting urns
1:10

axon of group gathering and individual reflection space. group gathering spaces defined by oaks and more private mearning defined by beech trees.

stacked strata with winged altars
1:20

precedent at quadrate, barlowe
memento mori
siting the sacred in the urban realm

internment Experience

section 1-1' of columbarium burial garden passages
1:50

perspective 1 of burial garden and internment passage