

Death in the City : The St. Lawrence Funeral Centre
by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In contemporary North America, death is contained within a network of cemeteries, crematoria and funeral homes. Death-space and its associative funeral rituals are both sacred and abject resulting in marginalization that adversely affects how the living understand their mortality.

Our perception of death influences our place in the world and funeral ritual facilitates our departure from it. In most cities, the funeral home houses this liminal ritual, while also providing the clinical handling and processing of the deceased body. Investigation of the funeral home and its role within the city addresses how architecture can influence cultural views on death. Through the funeral home there is an opportunity to balance the seemingly opposing narratives of the living and the deceased by bringing them together for the funeral.

In the City of Toronto, the density of its diverse neighbourhoods is not reflected by a proportionate number of local funeral homes. This thesis proposes a non-denominational space for funeral ritual and cremation within the dense St. Lawrence Neighbourhood. The placement of the Funeral Centre satisfies the practical requirements of this growing community, while the adjacency to the St. Lawrence Market juxtaposes the vibrancy of the ordinary and the solemnity of the sacred. This proposal extends into a network for the scattering of ashes throughout the city aiming to reconnect people to the realities of their existence.

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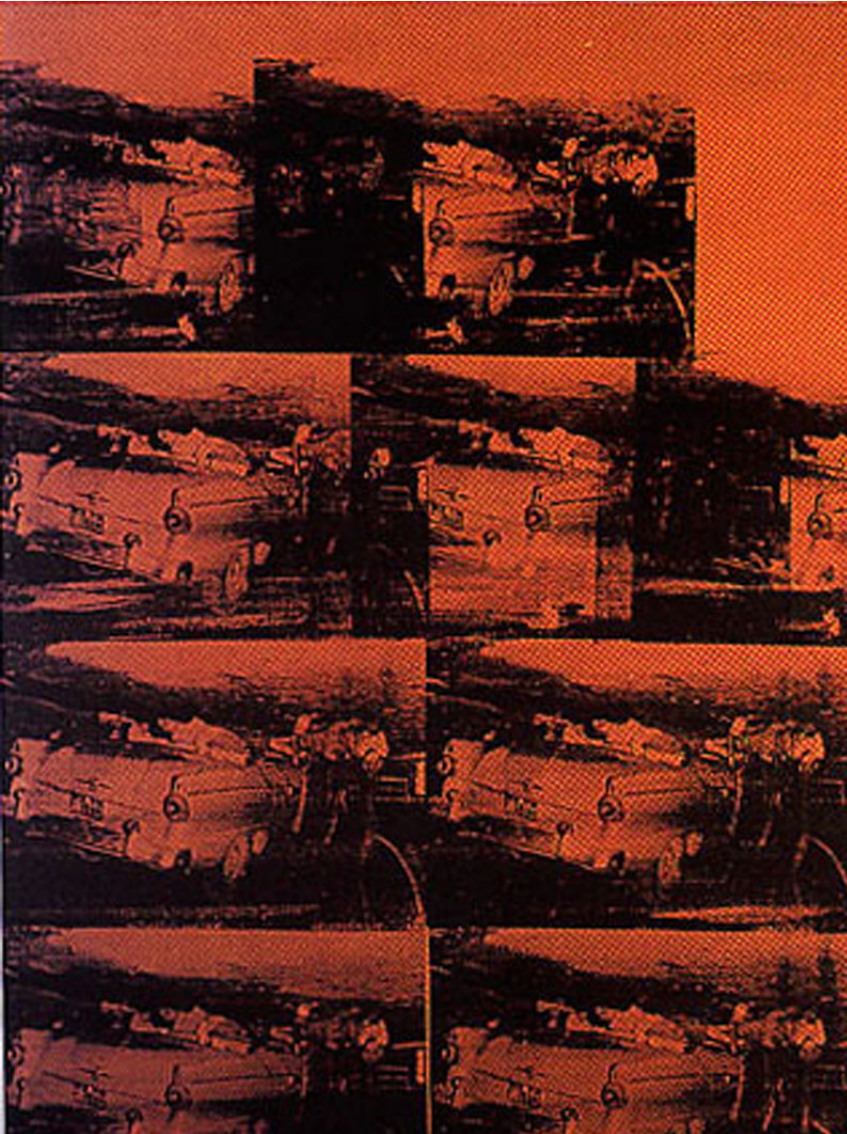
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Prologue
Interpreting Death



The Etymology of Death

The etymology of death is rooted in the verb (to) die, indicating death as an ‘act, process or condition’. Its basis as an action word situates death within a sequence of events that surround the transformation from someone being alive to something being dead. This sequence resonates both in reality and in spiritually defined afterlives. The enactment of these events is considered to be a ritual process or rite of passage.

The definitions and understanding of death as well as other central life experiences are typically locally defined. These local interpretations bear their own unique euphemisms or conjectures. This tactic has been historically employed due to both superstition from writing literally about death and the inability to convey the experience of death. Words like starve and swelter were used in place of *dying* until the mid twelfth century.¹ These collected interpretations of death contribute to highlight the subjective and universal grappling with its meaning.

This search for meaning in both death and life is a principle component to religion. The common fear of death is suggested to be the genesis of religion by Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of the discipline of sociology.² The increasingly secular North American population suffers from an absence of the support from a religious belief system.³ This presents a crisis in the interpretation and definition of death.

figure 0.01 The Triumph of Death (preceding page)

figure 0.02 Five Deaths Eleven Times in Orange



Further complication of the interpretation and definition of death and dying has come from the advances of Western Medicine. Prolonging life and distancing death means that dying is less frequently experienced. The growing knowledge of the body and its processes has made death a problem to be solved. The modern period has significantly exchanged the mysticism of euphemism and spirituality for rationalism.

The subjectivity of death is a part of its evocative nature. While interpretation and definition are not likely to become clearer, investing in the rituals surrounding death may bring society closer to accepting the realities of existence.

This thesis examines the evolution of the contemporary North American relationship to death, focusing specifically on the rituals defining the immediate events after death occurs.

figure 0.03 First Medical X-Ray

AGE OF SACRED DEATH

c. 1800
.....

AGE OF SECULAR DEATH

1918
.....

AGE OF AVOIDED DEATH

The Evolution of Death

The cultural relationships towards death and dying have evolved significantly in the past three hundred years. Sociologist Tony Walter defines these as the Traditional, Modern and Postmodern periods.⁴ These are abstract ideals representing dominant patterns rather than clear distinctions. In addition to Walter's evolutions there are the corresponding ages of Sacred, Secular, Avoided and Revived ages of death.⁵ In conjunction with the more temporal definitions, these terms better describe the changing perspectives of North America and the contemporary condition.

Traditional (Sacred & Secular)

In the past, death was a rite of passage shared by the family and Sacred community. Dying occurred in the home, observed and supported by friends and family enacting the rites and rituals of their religion. The funeral and its procession was a significant public event culminating at a central location of the church and cemetery. The event of death and resultant funerary customs were reminders of the fragility of life and the ability of the church not to provide meaning, but to affirm and embody the meaning that is found in the community and that already exists in everyday life.⁶

In the Victorian era, death shifted towards secular experience. The personalization of funerary custom expanded upon Sacred ritual. Wealth display, romantic narratives of grief and long, morose ceremonies began to celebrate individuality.⁷ The secular age of death-prominence was swiftly ended by the First World War.



figure 0.04 Death Souvenir

figure 0.05 The Evolution of Death (below)

c.1970

AGE OF DEATH REVIVAL

c.2000

AGE OF OBSCURED DEATH

Modern (Avoided)

Prevalence of science and medicine in the modern period shifted authority over death from religion to the state. The person became objectified within the institution as a problem to be solved, enabling the denial of natural process. Meaning is no longer provided by the community, which began to suppress the presence of death; instead meaning was provided by the individual within a medical framework.⁸ The absence of community and the avoidance of death resulted in an enlarged emotional problem in navigating grief and loss.

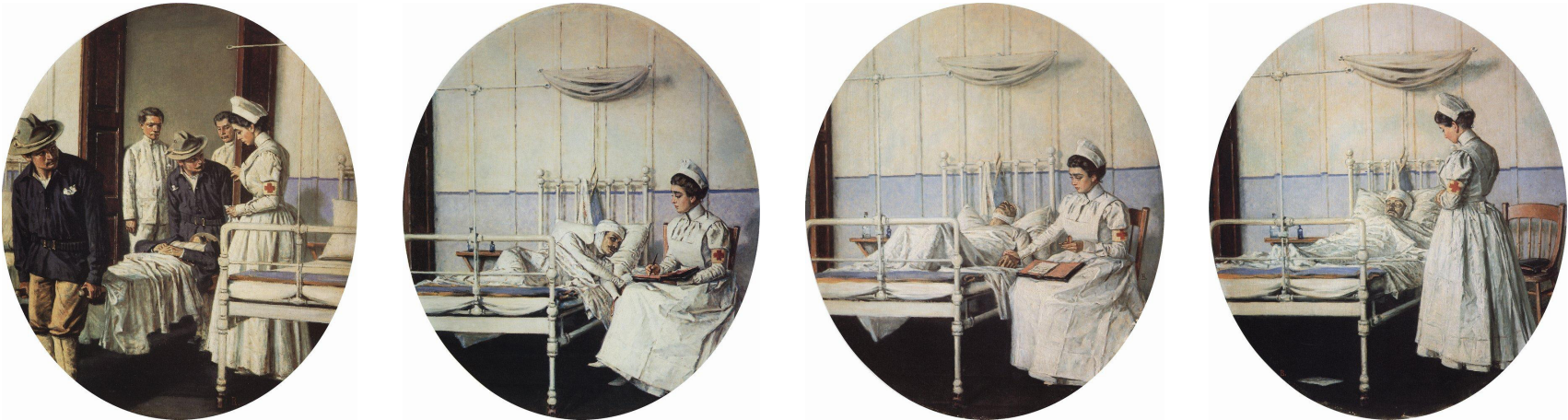


figure 0.06 "The Hospital", "The Letter Home (Letter to Mother)", "The Letter Interrupted", "The Letter Unfinished"

Postmodern (Revived)

The postmodern era attempted to combine elements of traditional community with the modern mastery over death, creating a highly individualized definition of death meaning. This includes the introduction of the hospice and humane euthanasia as well as the rise in the intimate discourse on emotions. In this example, religion is replaced by spirituality and the institution is augmented with humanist principles. Postmodern death combines the public and the private; the private feelings of the dying become the concerns of the professional.⁹

Contemporary (Obscured)

Despite the advances of the community and individual, the dying and the living continues to struggle with giving death meaning. Tony Walter states in *The Revival of Death*, “Revivalist funerals are usually strong on talk, and weak on ritual. The discourse is personal, but the disposal remains impersonal.”¹⁰

The contemporary condition highlights a decreasing clarity as to what roles the living has in rites and rituals of care, memorial and disposal of the deceased. As death is further obscured, its exploration becomes increasingly valuable.



figure 0.07 *The Long Goodbye - Hospice Care, Dying at Home*



figure 0.08 *Cemetery Restrictions*



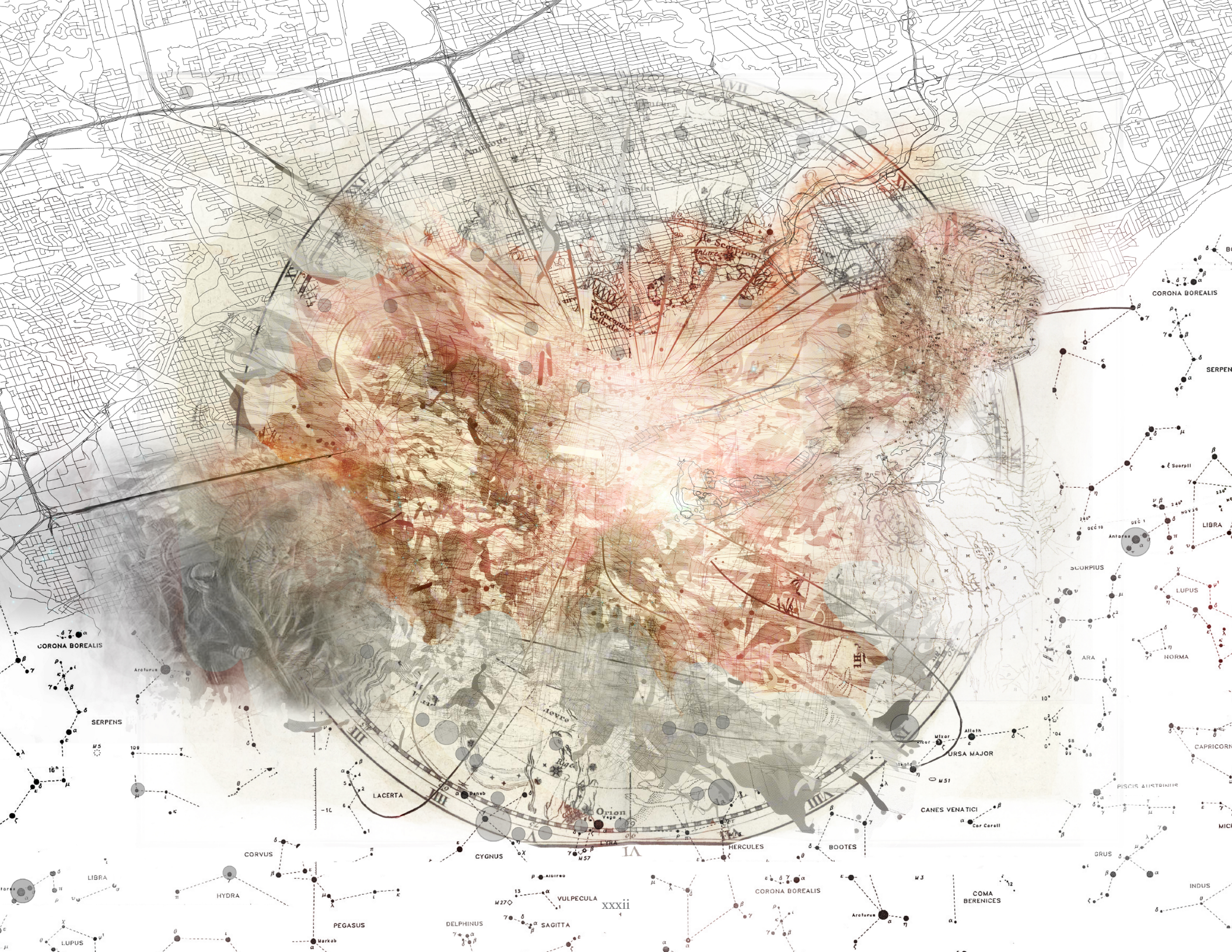
figure 0.09 By the Deathbed (Fever)



figure 0.10 By the Deathbed (Fever)

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Die,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed August, 2011, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=die>.
- 2 Leming, *Religion and the Mediation of Death Fear*, 119.
- 3 Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 187.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 185.
- 5 Stephenson, *Death, grief, and mourning: individual and social realities*.
- 6 Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 55.
- 7 Garces-Foley, *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, 286.
- 8 Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 39.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 175.



Introduction

Intersections of Life and Death

“Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type”¹

Friedrich Nietzsche

Death is humanity’s existential dilemma; to be conscious of our ultimate end is both what makes us a unique species and also what profoundly troubles us. Navigating the relationships between the living and deceased has qualified cultural epochs and has been traditionally manifested in the enactment of death rituals.

In contemporary North America the cultural response to death is to confine it within institutions, obscure it within funeral homes and all together marginalize its presence to the living. It resides, metaphorically, below the surface of urban experience within the networks of its marginalization. The networks of the living and the networks of the dead are commonly disconnected from one another. The networks of the living are those spaces of regular experience within the city, whereas the networks of the deceased are the funeral homes, crematoria, hospitals, cemeteries and places of memorial. They exist in an overlay within the city; their experience estranged as a result of their disconnection.

In the past and as recent as one-hundred-and-fifty years ago, the living and the dead were inextricably linked, largely due to the domestic care for the deceased or dying and due to the central role that funerary ritual had in society. At this time the presence of death was firmly rooted in our sense of identity.

Today, traditional funerary ritual has been diluted, forgotten and

figure 0.11 Dying in the City (preceding page)

figure 0.12 Death and Life



distanced from daily life, and this evolution has affected the human ability to resolve death and dying. It is as Robert Pogue Harrison suggests, “that humanity is not a species (*Homo sapiens* is a species); it is a way of being mortal and relating to the dead.”² This interaction between the living and the dead is at the core of culture and humanity.

The built manifestation of these interactions has been the genesis of architecture and urbanism. The burial of the dead, creation of the tomb and ultimately the accretion of graves precedes the construction of shelter or the forming of cities. As Lewis Mumford states in *The City in History*, “the city of the dead antedates the city of the living ... [it] is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city”³. Though the contemporary city varies significantly from its earliest iteration, it is still understood within the framework of its ancestors; the dead are omnipresent in memory, and in their physical or figural impact on the city. Where and how the living interacts with and resolves our relationships with the deceased and their passing is vital to the city. This is especially true in present day in the face of evolving funerary ritual.

This thesis examines the potential for architecture to contribute to the spaces where life and death intersect, enabling them to enrich human experience. The funeral home is recognized as the place most associated with death in contemporary society, followed or perhaps near-equalled by places of burial, entombment or in the specific case of ashes, dispersal. Both the places of funerary ritual and subsequent memorial are the focus of this thesis.

This thesis intentionally avoids making religion its focus. There is significant connectivity between mortality, faith, and sacred spaces, but issues of multi-faith are outside of the scope of work. This thesis does not attempt to create a space for all religions but focuses instead on the secular population. In many ways, society is already providing for religious sacred space whereas those without religious frameworks lack similarly articulated spaces.

This thesis recognizes the subjectivity of death and dying and the body of work attempts to maintain a comfortable balance between utopic and realistic ideals.

The identification of the funeral home as the primary place within the city where death and life intersect makes architecture the focal point of this thesis. It is the role of funerary architecture to celebrate life and what it means to be human by providing a sacred space by which to physically and emotionally reconcile the deceased. At present, its spaces of ritual invoke a sense of uncanny; both familiar and strange in the urban fabric. The disconnection to funerary ritual and the obscured presence of death in the city negatively affect society. These are realities of life and as such should be integral to experience. Erich Fromm states as much in *Fear of Freedom*:

“Instead of allowing the awareness of death and suffering to become one of the strongest incentives for life, the basis for human solidarity, and an experience without which joy and enthusiasm lack intensity and depth, the individual is forced to repress it.”⁴

Exploring the experience of funerary ritual in Toronto may be seen as a gateway into how North America as a whole approaches mortality. In addition to enriching the individual experience of the rite of passage of death, the space of the funeral home can contribute to an urban dialogue of mortality. The Funeral Home has a greater potential to be a part of the public and cultural domain. Though it is not a proper civic space, it has a similar function in that it must bring culturally diverse or geographically disparate groups together to share in a communal event.

The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood satisfies the desire to place death in a central location of significance for the city. The neighbourhood is rapidly increasing in its density, and as the historic civic core, it is entangled in the collective memory of the city. Specifically, the St. Lawrence Market is a vital element of daily city life. Designing a funeral home immediately south of the market combines elements of the extraordinary with the ordinary.

In addition to the funeral home building type, providing cremation within the facility acknowledges the increasing desire for Torontonians to be cremated. Traditionally separate from the funeral home, and considered primarily service-based, the combination of the two building types presents an opportunity to explore the architectural potential of their summation.

The scattering of ashes following a funeral are a vital part of the rite of passage. Ashes are intended to be dispersed, but their sacred nature creates a desire to keep them close. Their scattering within the city resonates within individual and collective memories and invokes a dialogue of community and place. This results in the intertwining of the deceased and the city in selected sites of memorial. In these sites the thesis celebrates that which makes us human; relating to our dead.

This thesis explores the historic, present and envisioned relationships between the city, its inhabitants and the dead. The design reflects a thorough consideration of what influences these relationships and how they may be both respected and challenged. The following is a brief outline of the chapters of this thesis:

The first chapter, *Death and Culture*, analyzes the history of the relationships between the deceased and the living. This is an examination of both city and individual scales which uncovers the physical and psychological relationships between society and death.

The second chapter, *The Emergence of the Funeral Home*, explores the formation of the funeral home building type and recognizes it as the primary place in the city to enact rituals of death. The funeral home is entangled in cultural notions of permanence, the evolution of sacred and domestic space. This chapter evaluates the architecture of the contemporary funeral home, uncovering what it symbolizes for death and culture.

The third chapter, *The Architecture of Ritual*, draws upon precedents that have the capacity to enrich the architecture of funerary space. These works explore how ritualistic space is articulated and experienced. They include crematoria, chapels, a bath-house, cemeteries and a mausoleum that are situated in Asia, Europe and North America. The geographic variety reflects the relative inattention that North America gives to spaces of death. The goal of this exploration of projects is to envision how the funeral home building type may evolve from its present iteration.

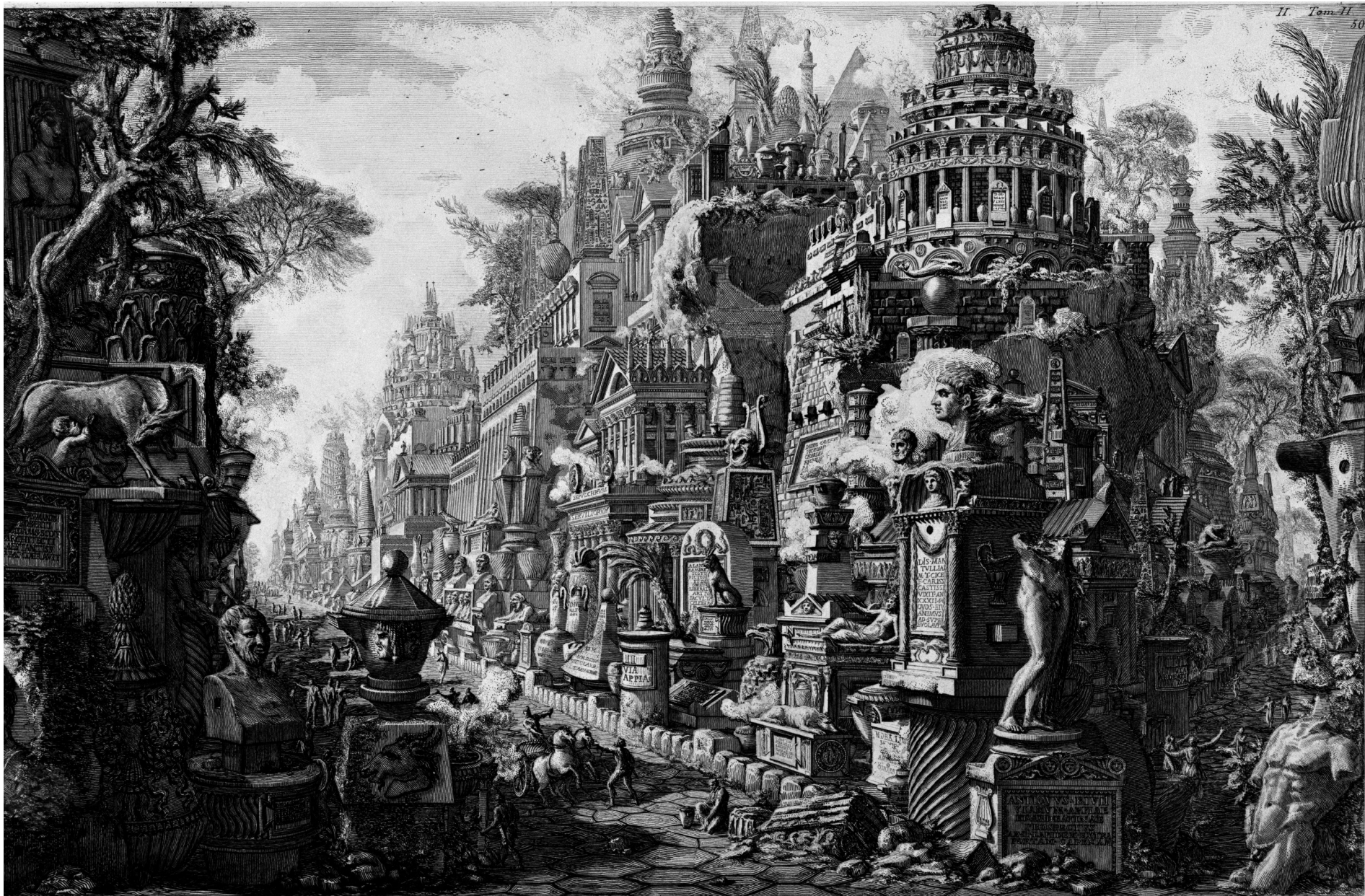
The final chapter, *The St. Lawrence Funeral Centre*, proposes the design of a funeral home and crematorium drawn from the architectural elements explored in the previous chapter. It recognizes the Toronto St. Lawrence Market and surrounding neighbourhood as an opportunity to integrate the networks of the living and the dead.

As an extension of the funeral home and crematorium evolution, the thesis imagines the city as a place to receive the dead. It explores how human remains may be scattered and integrated with both the proposed funeral home and the current network of funeral homes.

- 1 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 110.
- 2 Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, xi.
- 3 Mumford, *The City in History*, 7.
- 4 Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 212.



Chapter One
Death and Culture



The Urban History of the Dead

The urban history of the dead reveals the foundations of the contemporary relationship with mortality. Historically, the place of the dead has oscillated between unity with and separation from the city. Contemporary society neither unifies nor separates itself from death. Instead, the literal and metaphoric presence of death and the deceased is marginalized by the deathcare and healthcare industries.

Etruria & the Roman Empire

The Etruscans perceived the deceased as requiring much the same necessities as did the living. Funerary art depicts exuberance and festivity in the 6th and 5th Centuries, and pessimism and suffering in the 4th Century¹ reflecting Etruria's political and economic upheaval at that time.

Owing much to the Etruscans, the Romans believed that the soul survived after death. It had the potential to haunt the existence of the living. In addition, the body presented a problem of pollution to society. Accordingly, the deceased were entombed at the city edge, occupying both periphery and approach, as in the example of Via Appia in Rome. The dead were the threshold between city and wilderness; any person leaving or entering Rome had to encounter the city's deceased. In this case the dead both represent the city itself and create a threshold between city and wilderness.

The Roman necropolis, situated outside of the city of the living became a city for the dead. Tombs were reflective of the life of the individual and family. Italo Calvino's fictional *Invisible Cities* touches upon this urban relationship:

“The properties of the double city are well known. The more the Laudomia of the living becomes crowded and expanded, the more the expanse of tombs increases beyond the walls...On fine afternoons the living population pays a visit to the dead and they decipher their own names on their stone slabs: like the city of the living, this other city communicates a history of toil, anger, illusions, emotions; only here all has become necessary, divorced from chance, categorized, set in order. And to feel sure of itself, the living Laudomia has to seek in the Laudomia of the dead the explanation of itself...”²

Italo Calvino's passage and the Roman precedent reinforced the mirror-like enclosure condition of placing the dead outside of the city. This established the separation of the corpse and informed the Middle Ages' relationship between the deceased and the living which reflected their cultural philosophy; enclosure and the “creation of ideal interior spaces, not the experience of the natural world outside.”³

figure 1.01 View Over Town at Sunset, a Cemetery in the Foreground (preceding page)

figure 1.02 Via Appia

Western Europe: The Middle Ages and the Parish Cemetery

As the Roman Empire declined and Christian practices gained prominence, gradually the deceased were brought within the city walls. This was the result of a desire for the dead to rest in hallowed ground. The first cemetery Churches were erected on sites of martyrdom. As more churches were built where they were needed, the dead were buried underneath or beside them. The eminent in Christian society were buried in the churches as a privilege, and, as the custom became widespread, everyone desired this treatment. The close proximity of the Saints created sacred grounds, which bestowed virtue and sanctity on all inhabitants.⁴

Though this practice ultimately resulted in sanitary concerns, it created a culture of regularized, daily connection between the living and the dead. The practice of burying the dead inside parish churches and in their adjacent or nearby burial grounds continued for a thousand years until the cemetery reform of the 18th century.⁵

Paris' first burial ground, Cimetière des Innocents (Cemetery of the Holy Innocents) is a clear example of the unity a city may have with death. Functioning also as a marketplace, it was a delicate ecosystem of the activities of the living and the occupancy of the deceased from the 12th to the 18th Centuries.

The marketplace cemetery naturally combined the necessities of existence and the human condition. It acknowledged the inescapable presence of death and allowed it to exist, however tenuously, in the forefront of daily activity; allowing regular visitation, reflection and awareness.

This unified sense of death and dying was further amplified by the usage of *Memento Mori*. As the body decomposed in the natural subterranean process of biodegrading, the skeletal remains were exhumed and fashioned to adorn the surrounding walls of the cemetery, creating charnel houses that served as distinct reminders of human mortality, or *Memento Mori*.



figure 1.03 Totentanz Lobeck (Memento Mori)

figure 1.04 Cimetière des Innocents, 1750 (opposite)



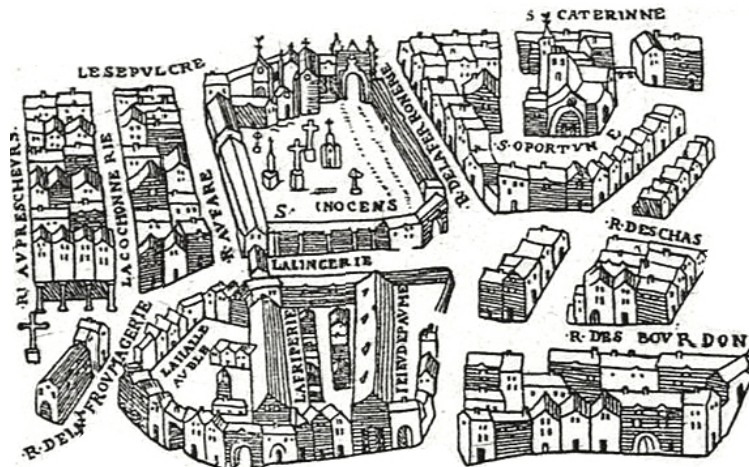


figure 1.05 Cimetière des Innocents, 1552

Memento Mori were used primarily in the late 14th and early 15th Centuries to remind of the fragility of life and in order to encourage the population to explore and appreciate Christian eschatology.⁶ The most famous of these symbols is the *Danse Macabre* or Dance of Death. A series of frescoes painted in 1424⁷ at the Cimetières des Innocents, The Dance of Death subsequently inspired countless reinterpretations in Europe and elsewhere abroad. These frescoes incorporated people of all ages and all classes into a representative image of society and its ultimate mortal resolution.

The Innocents Cemetery contributed to a dialogue of human mortality. The connections between life and death resonated in the market-cemetery's multitude of uses, serving merchants and their shops, livestock, picnicking families and when night fell, lovers' encounters. The cemetery both celebrated and condemned its patrons to perceive one another as inextricably linked.

Michel Ragon describes the nature of the Parish Cemetery:

From the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century, it seems that the least macabre place was the cemetery. Cemeteries were always full of bustling, animated crowds, where people seemed concerned with everything except death. The cemetery was a public place, open to all corners, a center of communal life...Markets, fairs, and pilgrimages were held there...In [European] towns the market halls were usually next to the cemeteries ...The ground floors of the ossuaries were almost always used as shops, even as ballrooms. ⁸



figure 1.06 Cimetière des Innocents, 1550



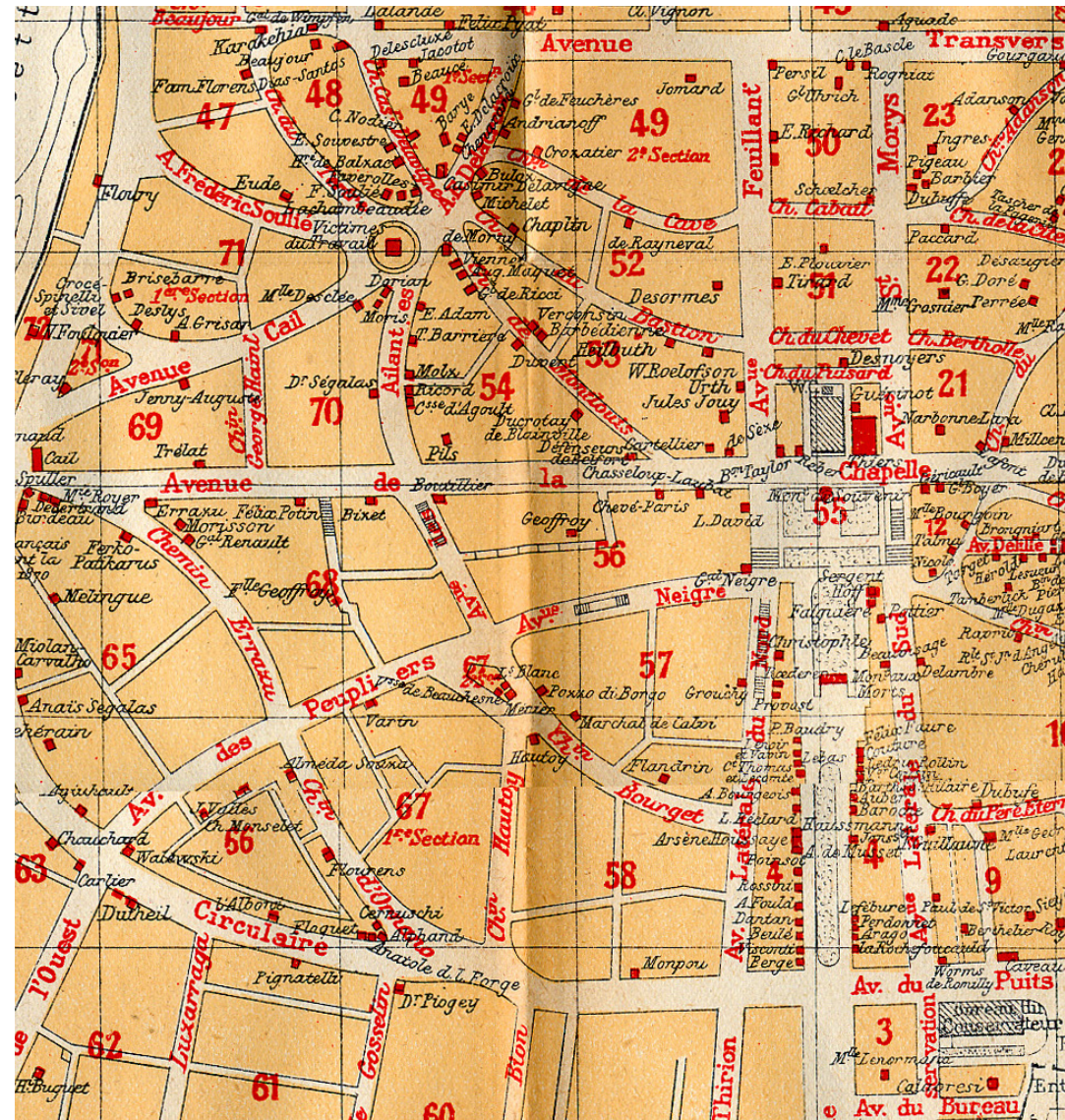
figure 1.07 Marche des Innocents, 1850

The demise of the Cimetière des Innocents came from two major causes, and was brought to its end by the Parisian Cemetery Reform of the 18th Century. The first was an abundance of burials that could not be properly handled due to space. Subsequently the cemetery became victim to sanitary concerns, culminating in a violent overflow of half-disposed corpses into the basements of surrounding tenements. The second cause was of a moral objection, as the rising concern of sanitation made the grounds less traversed, resulting in a terrain of unscrupulous behaviour.

In 1786, the bodies were exhumed and interred, as in the past, outside the city limits. The first cemetery of the reform movement was Père Lachaise. In its very deliberate landscape design Père Lachaise brought reform and order to the chaos of the Cimetière des Innocents. This cemetery restored the Roman precedent of exclusion of the dead and ultimately influenced North American cemetery design⁹.



figure 108 Père Lachaise Cemetery Tomb Sculpture



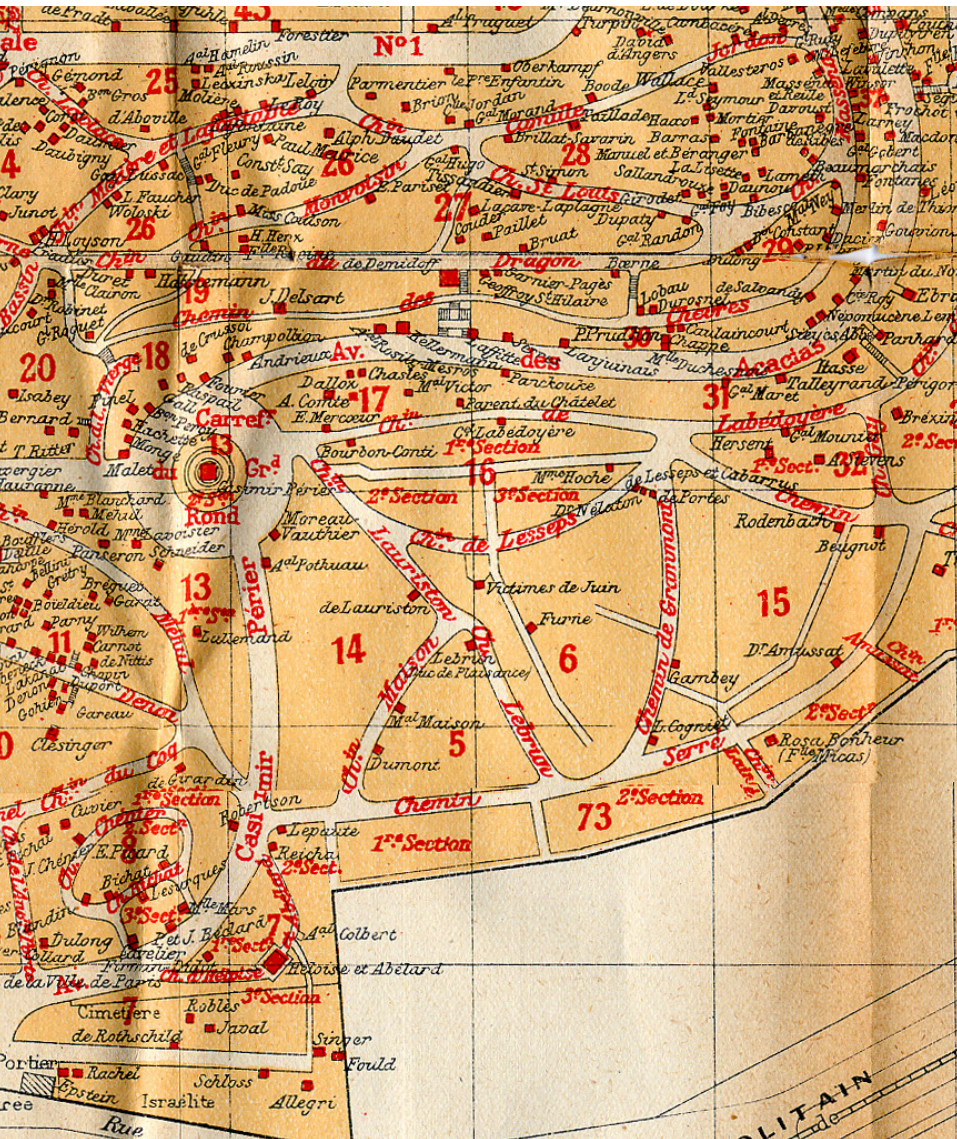


figure 1.09 Père Lachaise Map of Tombs

North America: The Rural, Lawn & Contemporary Cemeteries

The cemetery reform movement that created the picturesque garden cemetery in Europe was the prototype for the creation of new ‘rural’ cemeteries in North America.¹⁰ Previously, the Parish Cemetery type dominated America and Canada as the church and cemetery were central to town foundations. In the early eighteenth centuries, cemeteries were becoming municipally owned and operated; the dead were a matter of state rather than church.

The rural cemetery removed the burial of the dead from the centrality of the town to the periphery of the country. Michel Foucault wrote about this shift in his seminal work, “Of Other Spaces”, stating:

“The cemeteries then came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place.”¹¹

This was a return to the practices of exile of the Roman Empire. In addition, the celebration of individualism became a goal of the cemetery and monuments within the cemetery became personalized statements of identity articulated through statues, irregularly shaped grave stones, and all manner of styled mausolea.

The rural cemetery was an elaborate and expansive landscape set within nature. These ideal spaces were designed for the living to foster contemplation, leisure and repose amongst the deceased.¹² While creating this idealized landscape for pilgrimage, the dead were ‘banished from the city as having no physical and only a limited spiritual place among the living.’¹³

North America’s first rural cemetery was Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery. Founded in 1831, Mount Auburn was directly influenced by Paris’ Père Lachaise Cemetery.¹⁴ This new cemetery type grew in popularity along the eastern states and eventually spread to the rest of North America.



figure 1.10 View of Père Lachaise Cemetery from the Entrance, 1815

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century the highly personalized rural cemetery was subdued with the growing desire to avoid death. Monuments were exchanged for expansive uninterrupted lawns of remembrance with inset grave markers. The lawn cemetery or memorial park offered a simpler, more ordered iteration of the cemetery outside of the city. Still intended as a destination of solace, the lawn cemetery standardized cemetery practices.

The lawn cemetery reflected North American society and the proliferation of the Modern Age of Death. Reminders of death were no longer romanticized as they were in the Victorian era, but instead avoided.



figure 1.11 Cemetery of Mount Auburn

The first cemetery designed in the lawn park style was realized in 1913 as Forest Lawn in Glendale, California. Maclean and Williams described the changes in the cemetery during this period:

“In their contemporary form, “perpetual care” memorial parks are shaped on a model of efficient maintenance and practicality, a transformation...[that is critically labeled as the] “McDonaldization of society”. Contemporary funerary practices feature the efficiency of “one-stop shopping.” All funerary arrangements and services, including garden plots, caskets, markers, and even flowers, can be purchased on site and more or less on demand...With the emergence of lawn-park cemeteries and memorial gardens, shifting attitudes about the meaning of death clearly reflect...an increasing social separation from death and...the “dying of death.” Fast convenient services in a commodified and commercialized environment are part of a larger trend in separating Americans from the realities of death. Similarly, it was during this age of avoided death that cremation became more prevalent in North America because of the efficiency it offered in quickly disposing of the dead and removing death from prolonged sentimentality (Sloane 1991).”¹⁵

PRIVATE PROPERTY
**AUTHORIZED
PARKING
ONLY**
UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES
WILL BE TAGGED AND OR
TOWED AWAY AT
OWNER'S EXPENSE



As cities expanded, many peripheral cemeteries became more central components of urban fabric, creating the landscape that contemporary North American culture is accustomed to. Typically this resulted in close proximity to residential neighbourhoods. In order to not repeat the unfavourable activities and conditions of the parish cemetery, stringent conditions restricting use and high standards of sanitation defined the contemporary cemetery. It exists within the city, but retains the aesthetic qualities of the rural or lawn style cemeteries and the rationality and order of the reform movement.

The relationship between a city and its deceased, has throughout history, been a prominent qualifier of culture. The contemporary North American city resonates with the evolutions of inclusion and separation of the deceased that have characterized the precedents of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages and time of Cemetery Reform. The city cemetery, consumed by urban sprawl and obscured by societal avoidance, is evidence of our relationship to death.¹⁶



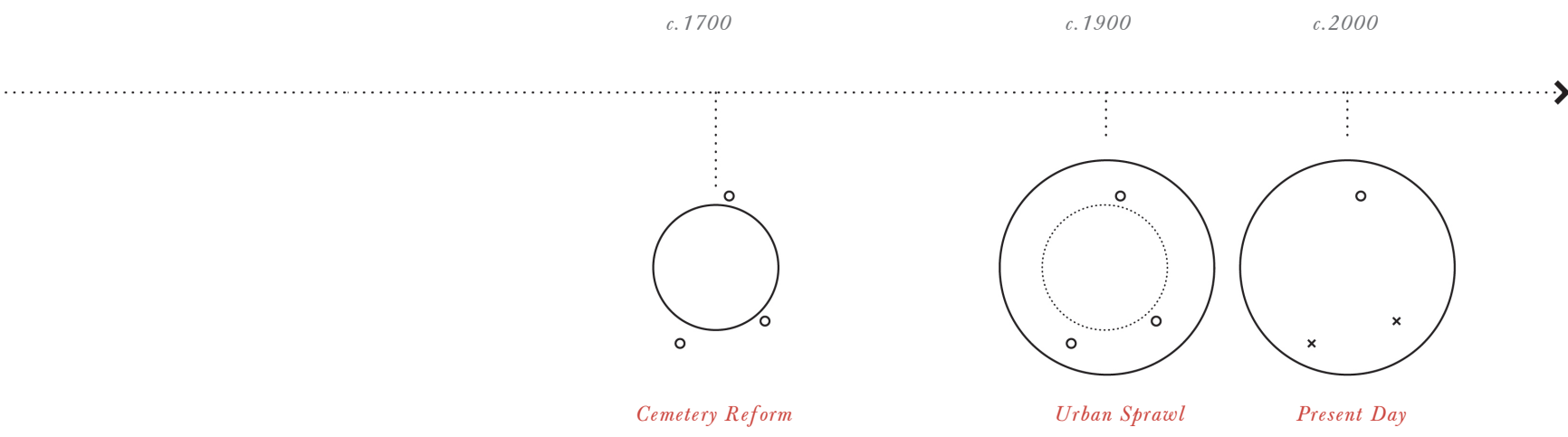


figure 1.13 Urban History of the Dead - Burial versus Settlement

“Would it not be better to give death a place in reality and in our thoughts which is its due, and to give a little more prominence to the unconscious attitude toward death which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed?...If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death.”

*Sigmund Freud*¹⁷

“[The] fear of death must be present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation. But fear of death cannot be present constantly in one’s mental functioning, else the organism could not function.”

*Ernest Becker*¹⁸

“Only in the infinitesimal space of the individual conscious subject does death take on an irreversible meaning. Even here, death is not an event, but a myth experienced as anticipation. The subject needs a myth of its end, as of its origin, to form its identity...This death, everywhere in life, must be conjured up and localized in a precise point of time and a precise place: the body.”

*Jean Baudrillard*¹⁹

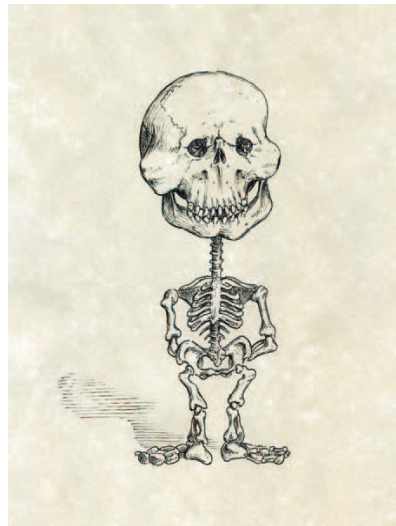
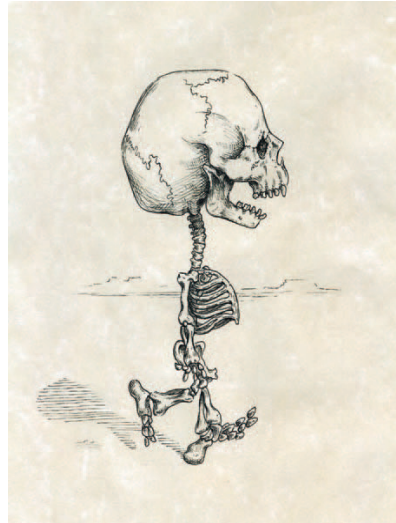
“The dead body has been theorized as many things: an unwelcome reminder of decay (Featherstone, 1991), a site of information and contested interests (Prior, 1989), a failure of the body project (Shilling, 2003), a symbol of pollution (Douglas, 1966), a disruption of order (Douglas, 1966; Kristeva, 1982), a symbol of self (Synnott, 1992), the termination of self (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 2003) and a presence that manifest an absence (Hallam and Hockey, 2001). More abstractly, Howarth (2001a: 120) identifies the dead body as signifying ‘the loss of self and the loss of individuality – the material reality of death. As such, the dead body, once a symbol of natural order, now has a destabilizing effect on social order.’ Arguably because dead bodies are understood as polluting (Hallam et al., 1999) and a symbol of disorder, dysfunction and danger, mourners in ‘contemporary western societies’ typically elect to award custody of the corpse to professionals.”

*Jenny Hockey*²⁰

The Body and The Corpse

The observance of the dead body is a challenging experience, both physically and emotionally. Confronting death brings our identity and our fear of non-existence into immediate focus. Beyond concerns of hygiene, this is largely why death is marginalized. There is superficial comfort in the avoidance of death and the professional care of the dead and dying. However, death is a reality of life, and its persistent disconnection from the living further estranges the capacity to be in and of the world. Specifically, it affects the quality of funerary ritual and the caring for the dying.

The estrangement between the living and dead may be explored through the concepts of self and other, the trilogy of symbolic, real and imaginary, and the uncanny and the abject. Examining these concepts in terms of the body and the corpse clarifies their influences on the construction of spaces to live and die in.



Self and Other

Self (*noun*)

one's particular nature or personality; the qualities that make one individual or unique

a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action²¹

Other (*noun*)

that which is distinct from, different from, or opposite to something or oneself.²²

Death is a loss of self brought into focus by the presence of the corpse. The corpse is the body's other. The sense of self is the result of the accumulation of identity over the course of a lifetime. Identity distinguishes one person from another and from their world, while simultaneously placing them within it. The threat of lost identity or the loss of self by death influences our behaviour, encouraging self-preservation

figure 114 Character Study (Charlie Brown & Lucy)

Identity and the Symbolic, Real, and Imaginary

“The Symbolic, Real and Imaginary serve to situate subjectivity within a system of perception and a dialogue with the external world.”²³

Amanda Loos

Connecting the abstract notion of self with the physical reality of the body recalls Jacques Lacan’s three theories of *the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic*. These theories explain the connections between the realization of one’s figural and literal selves, one’s place in the world and the fear of eventually rupturing these accumulated meanings. The enactment of funeral ritual is intended to reconcile this rupture.

Imaginary

The imaginary is the idealized other that gives meaning to the subject. This is best understood through Lacan’s description of the mirror stage.²⁴ He posits that when an infant first recognizes their reflection in a mirror it is as a whole, while their body (which they yet have full control over) seems fragmented. This idealized whole is linked to the formation of the ego and is considered by Lacan to be the imaginary. The creation of the imaginary is derivative of the exclusion of its other. The price of life is the ever-present notion of death; death is life’s imaginary.²⁵

Real

The real occurs before the development of identity and after the loss of identity; it is birth and death. It is that which cannot be reduced; it is outside of symbolic order, it is its negative.²⁶ It resolves and challenges the accumulation of the individual, reducing them to fear-instilling fragmentary equivalence. Yet, the subject needs a myth of its end and its origin. It must be conjured up in a precise place and time; the body.²⁷ The real is the ineliminable residue of all articulation, like death it may be approached but never grasped. It is the umbilical cord of the symbolic,²⁸ which both resolves and puts it to its end.²⁹

Symbolic

The symbolic is an act of exchange or a social ordering of the subject. It is beyond the imaginary³⁰; it is the process by which the undifferentiated becomes an individual in *societal* terms. It puts an end to the opposition between real and imaginary.³¹ The symbolic is a means of extending elements of the self into collective society. It helps acknowledge continuities with nature, history and the cosmos.³²

The Imaginary, Real and Symbolic theories put death in terms of an absence of identity, highlighting the value of an individual’s place in the world and the associative fear of losing this value through death. The anxiety or fear over returning to the real and abandoning the symbolic is a large component of what drives society to attach significance to memorialization and funerary rituals in order to address the crisis of non-existence.

The Uncanny & the Abject

The theories of the Uncanny and the Abject advance the anxieties of death highlighted in the Imaginary, Real and Symbolic, adding a spatial component. The corpse generates unease and discomfort for the living though it resonates as distinctly familiar. The corpse has been described as both uncanny and abject.

In its origins in Germanic language and the theories of Ernst Jentsch, the uncanny, or *unheimlich* is defined as un-homely. The home implies familiarity, and so the uncanny implies an uncomfortable familiarity. The corpse, very recently a living body becomes uncanny at the moment of death. In addition, spaces may be described as uncanny, especially funerary spaces. The notion of haunting is born out of the uncanny.³³

The uncanny is often confused with the abject. Both bear elements of familiarity, however, the abject represents a necessary exclusion. Abjection further amplifies the discussion of subject and object. Julia Kristeva considers the abject as a third definition that exists before subject-hood and after object-hood. The abject is closely linked to, but independent of the definition of the real or the uncanny.

Kristeva describes the corpse as that which “*show(s) me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.”³⁴ The corpse threatens the boundaries of the spectator’s “clean and proper” body.³⁵ This represents a threat to the establishment of the individual. The corpse’s position within society is defined by establishing it as a biological and signified threat and in addition to acting as a reminder of the fragility of life, the dead body is unhygienic and requires distance from the healthy body.

The sensation of the corpse being both uncanny and abject highlights its simultaneous acceptance and rejection by the living. This influences the formation of the networks of the living and the dead which exist in the city.

Fear and the Capsular Society

As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, the living and the deceased may be considered to exist in opposing networks. The philosopher Martin Heidegger argued that the basic anxiety of man is anxiety *about* being-in-the-world, as well as anxiety *of* being-in-the-world. That is, both fear of death and fear of life, of experience and individuation.³⁶ This results in the infrequent interaction with the networks of the deceased as a mechanism for self-preservation by the networks of the living.³⁷

The process of individuation, *of knowing one's distinct self*, ensures the protection from the other and limits the interaction with the real. This act of self preservation figures into what Lieven De Caeter refers to as *The Capsular Civilization*.³⁸ The Capsular Civilization enables livability in an unlivable environment; one that is constantly threatening the extinguishment of the life of the individual. Simply described, it is the emotional and physical shoring of oneself against experience.

The scale of the capsular society ranges from the immediacy of the body to the expanse of the city. With each progression there is less likelihood that life and death will intersect. The city unifies against the country, the neighbourhood against the city, the building against the neighbourhood, the room against the building and the person against the room.

In the tendency to create capsular networks, society ignores the acts of exchange that qualify life. This is understood through the comparison of the idealized classical and grotesque bodies.

Born in antiquity, the classical body was isolated, finished and complete. The unfinished nature of the body was hidden, divided from the outside world with its inner processes of absorbing and ejecting not revealed.³⁹ The classical body provided a “significant image through which dominant values, identities and sensibilities were projected...indicating from the sixteenth century onwards as characteristic of civility.”⁴⁰

The grotesque body is communicative between bodies, or between body and the outside world. It is the body in the act of becoming, interwoven with the specific events of life and death.⁴¹ The grotesque body is universal, as Bhaktin states, “the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding one...it stresses events common in the entire cosmos.”⁴²

The denied interactions between life and death are a denial of the realities of existence. The Capsular Civilization resists experience, unable to consider death in the presence of life. The abstract ideals of self and other set within the framework of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic define the societal desire to be of the world. The Uncanny and the Abject influence the formation of networks of the living and the deceased, while the disconnection between these networks results in the inarticulation of funerary space and its associative rituals.



figure 1.15 The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of the Living

ENDNOTES

- 1 Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, 13.
 2 Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 140.
 3 Scully, *Architecture : The Natural and the Man-made*, 14.
 4 Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 69.
 5 Etdin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, ix.
 6 Ibid., 3.
 7 Eichenberg, *Dance of Death*, 16.
 8 Ragon, *The Space of Death*, 144.
 9 Etdin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, 258.
 10 Ibid., 359.
 11 Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*.
 12 Gaimster and Majewski, *The International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, 148.
 13 Etdin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, 368.
 14 Gaimster and Majewski, *The International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, 145.
 15 Maclean and Williams, *The History of the American Cemetery and Some Reflections on the Meaning of Death*, 6.
 16 Etdin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, 368.
 17 Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, 299 - 300.
 18 Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 16.
 19 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 159.
 20 Hockey, *The Matter of Death*, 2.
 21 "Self," *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*
 22 "Other," *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*
 23 "Symbolic, Real, Imaginary," Loos, Amanda. *University of Chicago; Media Theory Website*, accessed 2011, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm>
 24 Lacan, *Ecrits : A Selection*, 1.
 26 Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 141.
 27 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 159.
 28 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 280.
 29 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 133.
 30 Miller, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 141.
 31 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 133.
 32 Johnston, *Confronting Death : Psychoreligious Responses*, 46.
 33 Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny : Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, 11.
 34 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection*, 4.
 35 Ibid., 102.
 36 Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 53.
 37 Cauter, *The Capsular Civilization : On the City in the Age of Fear*, 33.
 38 Cauter, *The Capsular Civilization : On the City in the Age of Fear*
 39 Bhaktin, *Rabelais and His World*.
 40 Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 40.
 41 Bhaktin, *Rabelais and His World*, 316, 317.
 42 Bhaktin, *Rabelais and His World*, 318.



Chapter Two

The Emergence of the Funeral Home



The Spaces of Ritual: Emergence of the Contemporary Condition

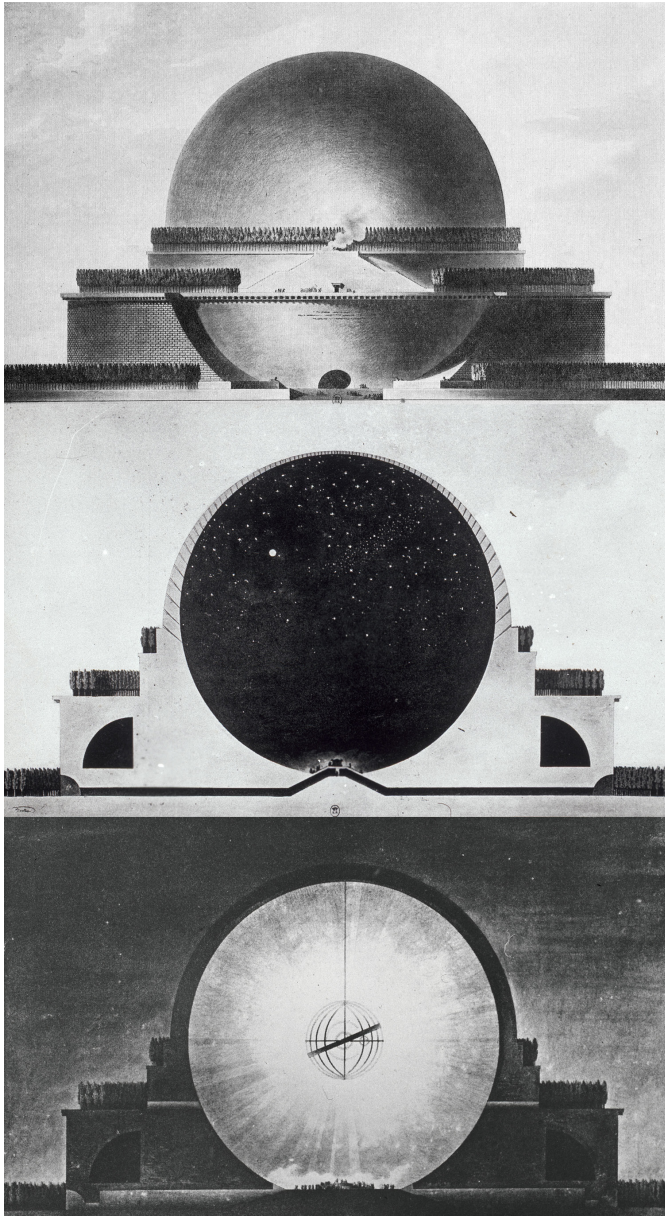
The places of connection between the networks of the living and the deceased may be titled *death-space*. Death-space locates the psychological or physical rituals to do with the deceased within the city. Funerary architecture, hospitals, hospices and cemeteries are examples of death-space.

Examining the nature of these places, with specific attention on funerary architecture, reinforces their value in the city with regards to both communicating the reality of death and providing a sacred place to experience a rite of passage. Death-space presently struggles for meaning in a culture that marginalizes the presence of death and dying. Funerary architecture in the best cases inquires and questions the loss of meaning in death-space, while in its worst cases accepts its present banality.¹

The previous section explored the psychological effects that the deceased have on the individual, whereas this chapter focuses on broader cultural reactions and their spatial manifestations. These include assertions of permanence, the evolution of the sacred and the marginalization of death resulting from the shift of domestic to professional care of the dead. These elements have directly influenced the architecture of the funeral home.

figure 2.01 Funeral in the Snow by the Old Tower (Previous Spread)

figure 2.02 Preparation for the Funeral, AKA, The Autopsy



Permanence

In Western culture, the fear of death manifests in the desire for permanence. This is recognized both in the creation of funerary architecture such as monuments as well as the desire for the body-identity to remain intact. Generally, culture requires death-space to have a timeless quality, though it is unreal to imagine this as a possibility.²

Permanence, in spaces of ritual is articulated through the use of enduring materials. This has been exemplified by the Parisian, 19th century architect Étienne-Louis Boullée. In his unrealized design of The Cenotaph for Newton he imagined monolithic stone so heavy and dark that it appeared to be sunken in the earth. He created architecture of shadows, with incisions in the stone that cast dark lines from the diurnal cycle.³ This use of material is both a reinterpretation of the monoliths of the past as well as a newly formed standard that has been repeated in funerary architecture since. It is typical of funerary architecture to challenge both space and time with grandeur and durability respectively.⁴ Seldom are ephemeral materials utilized within death-space as the preferred material has been stone. This is expressed from the grandest megalith to the simplest grave-marker.

figure 2.03 Cénotaphe a Newton

The disposal of the dead reinforces the role of permanence in maintaining the body-identity. The adoption of cremation in the Modern Age of Death threatened the posthumous continuity of the body-identity; this conflicted with prevalent Christian burial rites⁵ but provided a hygienic and space-conserving solution to the corpse.⁶ During this time the crematorium became an icon for the modern age, however, in North America the spaces of this newly embraced method of disposal did not develop due to Western society's unwillingness to engage the abrupt rupture that reduction to ashes entailed.⁷ The crematorium conflicts with notions of permanence, challenging body-identity and the place-making that occurs with traditional direct burial.

Place-making has traditionally been identified with permanence and the creation of monuments. The first architecture has been said to be the monument, in the form of the mound, the tumulus, or tomb. They allow a continuation of body-identity. Historian Lewis Mumford has explored the roles of permanence and place-making, stating, "The City of the Dead preceded the city itself precisely because of the importance attached to permanence"⁸. Permanence is a means of anchoring the space of the living to a particular location, making it sacred and placing it within the world.^{9 10}

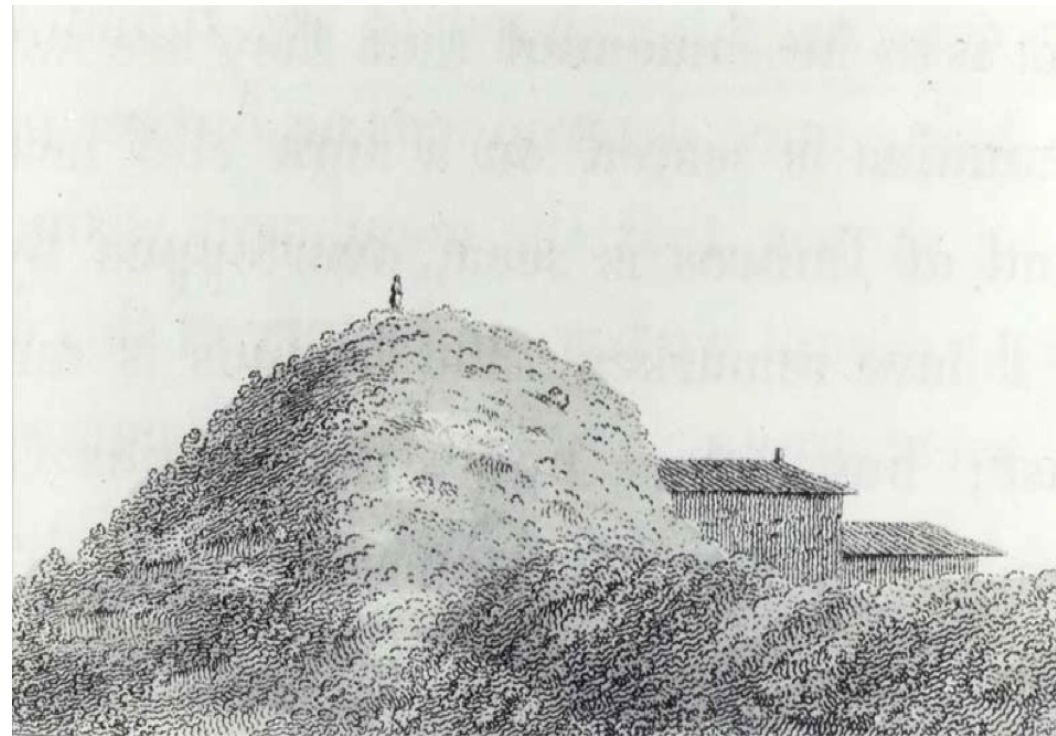


figure 2.04 Achilles' Tomb



Evolution of the Sacred

“When the sacred community gathered in the sacred space for a funeral, it was in order to re-enact a commonly held sacred story, an underlying conviction about the nature of life and death. Funerals...were religious dramas played out in the public theater of worship.”¹¹

Kathleen Garces-Foley

Death is a sacred rite of passage requiring the communion between people to enact rituals in space. Presently, death-space does not fulfill the inherent requirements of a special place to memorialize the deceased. Death-space is functional, but profoundly inarticulate, resulting in part from the evolution from the traditional religious Sacred and the moral and hygienic sacred. With the increase in secular beliefs, death-space functions primarily as a private place to enact ritual without its own inherent qualities to make it special.



figure 2.06 Bethany Mennonite Church, Lost River, Saskatchewan (top)

figure 2.05 Funeral of Mr. Cobden, West Lavington Churchyard (bottom)

The Traditional Sacred (and the Profane)

Contemporary death-space relies upon the intentions set forth by the traditional Sacred. The Sacred and its companion, the Profane are ideal religious concepts that were applied to both humanity and its spatial constructs in the Age of Sacred Death. Mircea Eliade described them as “two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of history.”¹²

The nature of the Sacred is to elevate and differentiate from the homogenous and relative Profane¹³. This spatial dimension is realized in the community church or temple which creates a place to order the cosmos and centre humanity within that relationship. Roger Caillois illustrated in *Man and the Sacred* the importance of differentiation, having stated:

“The profane alters [the sacred’s] essence, causes it to lose its unique quality...That is why we are careful to remove from a sacred place all that pertains to the profane world. ... The two categories cannot be brought together without thereby losing their unique characteristics.”¹⁴

Eliade’s definition of the sacred is inextricably linked to the profane. In fact he considers the sacred and profane as synonymous with the religious and the nonreligious human respectively. Eliade described the sensation of being in the presence of divine power in *The Sacred and Profane*:

“It is like nothing human or cosmic; confronted with it, man senses his profound nothingness, feels that he is only a creature, or, in the words in which Abraham addressed the Lord, is “but dust and ashes” (Genesis, 18, 27).”¹⁵

Despite the religious nature of the Sacred, its tendency to differentiate meaningful rituals in space resonates universally. Secular communities similarly require a place to celebrate the rituals of death. This definition of the *sacred* is closer to contemporary interpretations of the *numinous* which is that ineffable quality that conjures sensations of awe outside of oneself.¹⁶ In cases of both traditional Sacred and contemporary sacred death requires a specific place to enact ritual. Death-space must be conscious of how the presence of the corpse may challenge ideas of sacredness, both in sanctity and in sanitation.

Pure and Impure

“To ‘enlightened’ opinion, the dead were not only dangerous to the living; they also defiled the church. The reformers wanted to separate the two sides of existence not only according to the polarity of the healthy and unhealthy but also along the axis of the pure and the impure... The hygienic argument was accompanied by a new religious outlook, which saw death as sullyng the purity of the church”¹⁷

Richard Etlin

The threatening nature of the corpse and its clear reference to death made it a morbid presence; its expression of the human limit was a threat to spiritual continuity. The desire to keep the corpse separate from the living further estranged societal perception of mortality. Phillippe Aries states, “Decomposition is the sign of man’s failure”¹⁸. Sacred spaces were meant as places of relief from the aberrations of the body. Michel Ragon illustrates the threat of the corpse:

If the soul, having escaped from the body, had a life of its own, which could be kept going by religious observance, what could be done, on the other hand, with that now empty, cumbersome body, which, once the soul has departed, soon begins to decompose and stink?¹⁹

The unhygienic corpse has throughout history caused the exclusion of the dead from the living. The Modern Age of Death sought to cleanse the corpse and render it innocuous. This gesture penetrated the construction of death-space as rendering the corpse innocuous made it a clinical object, estranging it from sacred distinction. Zygmunt Bauman describes this shift:

“Through applying to the dead the same technique of separation as they do to the carriers of infectious disease or contagious malpractices, they cast the dead in the category of threats that lose their potency if kept at a distance.”²⁰

The shift in considering the corpse as a problem of sanitation coincided with the growing secularization of North America in the Age of Avoided Death. The cleansing of the corpse, through embalming, washing, or cremation created functional divisions of death-space. The professional had a large role in performing these rituals and accordingly this role became estranged from the bereaved. Combined with the absence of the Sacred, death-space shifted towards focusing on functionality and privacy in funeral experience.



Privacy & the Contemporary Sacred

*“As a social event, death has died...Private experience must become part of public discourse”²¹.
Tony Walter*

The contemporary rite of passage of death is a sacred event, in that it is profound and intimate and commands reverence. Describing it as private however, reflects the growing clinical nature of death and the absence of strong community-recognized rites and rituals. Without the common definitions of Sacred and the vessel of religion to rationalize death, grief and loss become about private, individualized experience²². As a result, the ‘sacred’ of death-space has evolved, no longer exclusively occurring in the church or temple. This dilution is represented in the inarticulate atmosphere of death-space. Eliade concludes that the private experiences of the individual cannot without critical mass hope to have profound value.

But modern man’s “private mythologies” – his dreams, reveries, fantasies, and so on – never rise to the ontological status of myths, precisely because they are not experienced by the whole man and therefore do not transform a particular situation into a situation that is paradigmatic.²³

Death-space must in some manner embed value in the experience of its places. As a means of articulation, contemporary death-space conveys itself as some evolution of the traditional Sacred, however, the secularization of society has meant that this is no longer an appropriate representation. The spaces of ritual remain unfulfilled and as the spatial component of experiencing a rite of passage, must be enriched in order to challenge the marginalized relationships between the living and the deceased.²⁴²⁵²⁶²⁷

figure 2.07 The Embalming Room



The Marginalization of Death and Dying

At the beginning of this chapter, death-space was defined as a connection between the networks of the deceased and the living that locates the psychological or physical rituals to do with the deceased within the city. Absent from the examination thus far is the role of the domestic realm. Traditionally, death and dying occurred at home, and funerary ritual occurred in both the home and in religious spaces. The combination of the shared Sacred community and the domestic family linked death and dying to intimate and social spaces and the formation of identity. The modern institutionalization and professionalization of death and dying has removed them from the domestic realm and disconnected them from the living.

Death and the Formation of Identity

...facing the dead means facing our own death and coming to terms with the fragile condition of identity.²⁸

Elizabeth Klaver

The experience of death and dying is a vital part of how families and communities interact. It is a part of human identity. The home is intimately tied to the identity of the individual and family. Where the term house plainly describes the physical elements that are inherent to shelter, a home implies a greater set of qualifiers that expands into the psychology of space. This psychology of space involves emotional, historical or familial connections to a place.²⁹

figure 2.08 Dressing the Dead Girl, Dressing the Bride

Rowles and Chaudhury state,

“Home provides the physical and social context of life experience, burrows itself into the material reality of memories, and provides an axial core for our imagination...It is now widely accepted that home provides a sense of identity, a locus of security, and a point of centering and orientation in relation to a chaotic world beyond the threshold.”³⁰

The home is a constructive place of individual identity, fundamental to human existence. It is as Bachelard states, “our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word”³¹. It is traditionally the place where dying and ultimately death occurred. This is also true for birth and other rites of passage in life. Most of these rites of passage now occur outside of the home. The result is the formation of identity without awareness of grief and loss; the individual is less capable of navigating death.

When the dying process and ultimately death occurred at home it involved the community. The sick or elderly were cared for by family within the residence before retiring to the familiarity of their bed and passing away. The deceased were laid out in the front room, or parlour, of the house to be mourned by the community. These experiences were contributors to making the house a home. The modern era challenged the definition of home by removing the meaningful rites of passage from the family house. These rites of passage now occur in the funeral homes, retirement homes, hospitals and hospices.

In the middle of the 19th century the hospital took over care of the sick and dying from the home.³² This shift in place is generally attributed to the expansion of technology and the mobilization of the family unit.³³ Jean Baudrillard writes of the hospital, “we no longer die at home, we die in hospital – for many good ‘material’ reasons, but especially because the sick or dying or man, as *biological* body, no longer has any place but within a *technical* milieu.”³⁴ This institutionalization allows the denial of death and the denial of natural process.³⁵ The deathcare industry continues this practice after death has occurred.

The Emergence of the Funeral Home

The funeral home is the public face to the death industry which was born over one-hundred-and-fifty years ago in the Age of Secular Death. In many instances it must perform the roles assumed from domestic and Sacred space.

In the mid-19th century at the end of the American Civil War there was a great public desire for the bodies of deceased soldiers to return to their home states. In order for their preservation along the journey via rail they were embalmed. Embalming was by no means a new process, being practiced by the Egyptians in antiquity, but it was not common practice. This event galvanized public views on embalming and launched the funeral trade or commodification of the corpse. It began the process of removing the care and treatment of the corpse from the deceased's family to trained professionals who possessed the necessary technology.

In addition to the proliferation of professionalism, the increasingly urban, mobile family unit and the popular embrace of consumer culture enforced the need for the funeral home. The industry developed to provide a communal space capable of accommodating large groups when families are spread out nationally or internationally. With the rise in prominence of the individual and the independence from a family unit, personalized and secular beliefs necessitated a place that was not distinctly affiliated with the traditional Sacred but provided a space for self-expression of the rite of passage of death.



figure 2.12 Display Room



figure 2.11 Reception Area



figure 2.10 Reception Area



figure 2.09 Chapel



The funeral home is a space where the bereaved reconcile the event of death and the loss of life of the deceased. Death-space is an unfamiliar realm and for this reason it retains, as outlined by Kyrö Selket, the familiar title *home* as a symbolic representation of its ritual origins within the family house:

“Eventually undertakers rejected the term ‘parlour’, transforming the parlour into a funeral ‘home’. In using the term ‘home’, funeral directors drew on the qualities and virtues believed to be present in the family home. Incorporating these into the funeral space meant that the funeral service could offer the public a sanitized, safe and somewhat neutral space in which to engage with the dead.”³⁶

The symbolic resonance of home within contemporary death-space attempts to reconcile the removal of death and dying from the family house by making the space seem familiar and comfortable. However, the spectral nature of presenting space in this manner evokes a sense of the uncanny. Its familiarity and estrangement makes it uncomfortable. Separating and diversifying funerary space in this way has had an adverse effect on the ability of the individual and community to form a sense of identity that includes an awareness of death. Within the funeral home is an opportunity to strengthen the individual and community relationships with mortality that have been outlined in the previous section of this chapter. This next section of the chapter examines the architecture of the funeral home as the contemporary place of funerary ritual.

figure 2.13 Calver Belangee Bruce Funeral Home, Mansfield, Illinois, U.S.A.



figure 2.14 Giffen-Mack Funeral Home



figure 2.15 Heritage Funeral Centre



figure 2.16 Highland Funeral Home



figure 2.17 Jerrett Funeral Home - Kennedy



figure 2.18 Jerrett Funeral Home - St. Clair



figure 2.19 Lynett Funeral Home



figure 2.20 McDougall & Brown Funeral Home



figure 2.21 McDougall & Brown Funeral Home

The Funeral Home

“...the production of atmosphere through architecture often leads to a false sense of pathos and drama, resulting simply in kitsch - partly because on the one hand architects tend to underestimate the subjective-psychic component of atmosphere, and on the other overestimate its objective-physical component.”³⁷

Rudolf Stegers

“Within the hidden space of the embalmer’s room the most abject of human fear exists, the decomposing corpse. This liminal zone and the decaying bodies that occupy it are, for many outside the funeral industry, and uncomfortable, unspeakable and mystifying space. It is here that the material and nonmaterial worlds are socially and historically constructed, simultaneously engaged, regulated and disciplined. Notions of the sacred and profane are negotiated and contained.”³⁸

Ben Campkin

The funeral home is a modern building type, assuming roles of both traditional domestic and sacred spaces. It situates increasingly secular, private, individualized death rituals within the city. The funeral home both reflects and perpetuates the contemporary marginalized relationship with death. The examination of the architecture of the funeral home and its organization of spaces presents an understanding of how death is obscured. Latent in the contemporary funeral home is the opportunity to enrich the current urban experience of mortality.



figure 2.22 Bernardo Funeral Home



figure 2.23 Bernardo Funeral Home



figure 2.24 Cardinal Funeral Home



figure 2.25 Cardinal Funeral Home



figure 2.26 Delmoro Funeral Home



figure 2.27 York Cemetery Chapel



figure 2.28 G.H. Hogle Funeral Homes



figure 2.29 G.H. Hogle Funeral Homes



figure 2.30 M.S. Bedford Funeral Home



figure 2.31 Murray Newbigging Funeral



figure 2.32 Newediuk Funeral Home



figure 2.33 Newediuk Funeral Home



figure 2.34 Ogden Funeral Home



figure 2.35 Wing On Chapel Funeral Home



figure 2.36 Paul O'Connor Funeral Home



figure 2.37 Pine Hills Cemetery Chapel



figure 2.38 Ridley Funeral Home



figure 2.39 Rosar Morrison Funeral Chapel



figure 2.40 Ryan & Odette Funeral Home



figure 2.41 Scott Funeral Home



figure 2.42 Sherrin Funeral Home



figure 2.43 The Simple Alternative



figure 2.44 Toronto Funeral Home



figure 2.45 Trull Funeral Home



figure 2.46 Trull Funeral Home



figure 2.47 Turner & Porter Funeral Homes



figure 2.48 Turner & Porter Funeral Homes



figure 2.49 Ward Funeral Home

Architecture of the Funeral Home

The identity of the contemporary funeral home is constructed from the vestiges of the domestic and the sacred³⁹ and struggles for independent architectural articulation. This is reflective of the cultural relationships with death that marginalize its presence.⁴⁰⁴¹

In the city, the locating of funeral homes further enforces its private, inward focus and dependency on borrowed meaning. They are found next to highways, service roads, restaurants, parks, cemeteries, flower shops, businesses and residences. They may exist anywhere, establishing banality that makes them seem *placeless*.⁴²

*If places are indeed a fundamental aspect of man's existence in the world, if they are sources of security and identity for individuals and for groups of people, then it is important that the means of experiencing, creating, and maintaining significant places are not lost.*⁴³

Edward Relph

In the architecture of the funeral home the borrowed identity is present in both ornament and form. The sacred identity influences the isolation of ritual from the city. This is reinforced by minimal fenestration. Where windows occur, they are treated to be translucent or opaque, achieved through stained glass, tinting or textile window covering. Both the interior and exterior of the building often has a domestic appearance. The exterior is typically masonry-clad with Victorian or Neo-Classical ornamentation, simultaneously enforcing the private and domestic nature of the space. The interior spaces of the funeral home are reflective of functionality and funerary ritual.



figure 2.50 Aftercare Cremation & Burial



figure 2.51 Balmoral Funeral Home



figure 2.52 Bates & Dodds Funeral Home



figure 2.53 Benisasia Funeral Home

The Articulation of Ritual Space

“Historically speaking, for many societies disposal has also meant a relocation of the dead – placing them somewhere else in the identity network of the living and giving them a new place within their own restructured identity network. This is where the theoretical idea of rites of passage becomes important.”⁴⁴

Kathleen Garces-Foley

Funeral ritual involves the reconciliation of loss and the redefining of the identity of the bereaved without the deceased. In addition, it involves the practical requirement of caring for the deceased. Funeral rituals and the articulation of the associative spaces may be understood in terms of the theory of Liminality. Arnold van Gennep defines liminality as three stages of a rite of passage; the preliminal, liminal and postliminal⁴⁵. These stages are connected by thresholds that separate and bridge liminal rituals of cleansing or purification. Eliade describes the role of the threshold in *The Sacred and the Profane*.

The threshold concentrates not only the boundary between outside and inside but also the possibility of passage from one zone to another (from the profane to the sacred).⁴⁶

In a sacred space such as the church or temple, the sacred is protected from the profane of the outside world by the threshold. In the funeral home the opposite occurs, as death is enclosed and obscured from the city. Elizabeth Klaver says as much while paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman in *Images of the Corpse*:

“Funerals differ in their ritual, but they are always acts of exclusion...They expel the dead from the company of the normal, innocuous, these to be associated with.”⁴⁷

The majority of the interior hierarchy of the funeral home is dedicated to reconciliation of the deceased body.⁴⁸ Perceived as a threat to the living the abject corpse is contained within the funeral home. Within the city capsular places exhibit an uneasy duality between what they contain and what they exclude. Michel Foucault describes this space as the *Heterotopia*, where “the abject and the ordinary are brought into uneasy conjunction.”⁴⁹ These include cemeteries, prisons, rest and retirement homes, hospitals and generally all space that must be entered by submitting to rites and purifications. The funeral home connects the *abject* corpse with the *ordinary* living. This begins with the preliminal stage of ritual.

figure 2.54 Arriving for a tree burial by canoe, in British Columbia, a traditional Indian ceremony



Preliminal Stage

The *preliminal* stage separates the living and dead. This is the moment of gathering at the funeral home, and the crossing of the threshold into the ritual space. Both deceased and living enter through separate areas. The former is inconspicuous where the latter is prominent. These thresholds narrate the procession of the funeral.

The bereaved enters the funeral home through a main, public entrance into a foyer or waiting area. Here, they are separated from the street, but not yet in the room of the funeral service. There may be several different services occurring simultaneously and the funeral staff would usher mourners to the appropriate place of ritual.

The deceased enters the funeral home through a service entrance en route from the hospital or home. These clinical spaces separate and prepare the corpse before contact with the living. Preparation, depending on individual wishes, typically involves cleansing, embalming and dressing. The corpse may also be cremated in this space. Access to this space is restricted to service personnel except in the case where a family member must observe cremation. Even this spiritual observation is viewed from within an ancillary room to the space where cremation actually occurs.

Liminal Stage

The *liminal* stage places the bereaved in contact with the deceased, enabling the reconciliation of grief and loss. This typically takes place in a chapel or similar place of ritual in the form of a service or visitation. The place of ritual is typically artificially lit, bereft of the interplay of natural light that often characterizes Sacred space⁵⁰ or domestic space.

In contemporary practice liminal rituals within the funeral home have become highly personalized, combining elements of spirituality with familial customs or secular interests. Preparation of the corpse may range from wrapping in a shroud without altering the constitution of the body to full embalming depending on individual decisions. The deceased is either then displayed or stored before being cremated or buried.

Post-Liminal Stage

The *postliminal* stage reintroduces the bereaved to the city and the deceased to their place of scattering, interment or entombment. The relationship between the deceased and the bereaved is reformed and intertwined between memory and the place of rest. Upon exiting the funeral home, the grounds or surrounding property does not often have places for gathering. If there is adjacent space then it is likely prioritized as parking. It is common for the bereaved to convene at a secondary location for a reception. This second location may be chosen for proximity, significance, or comfort.

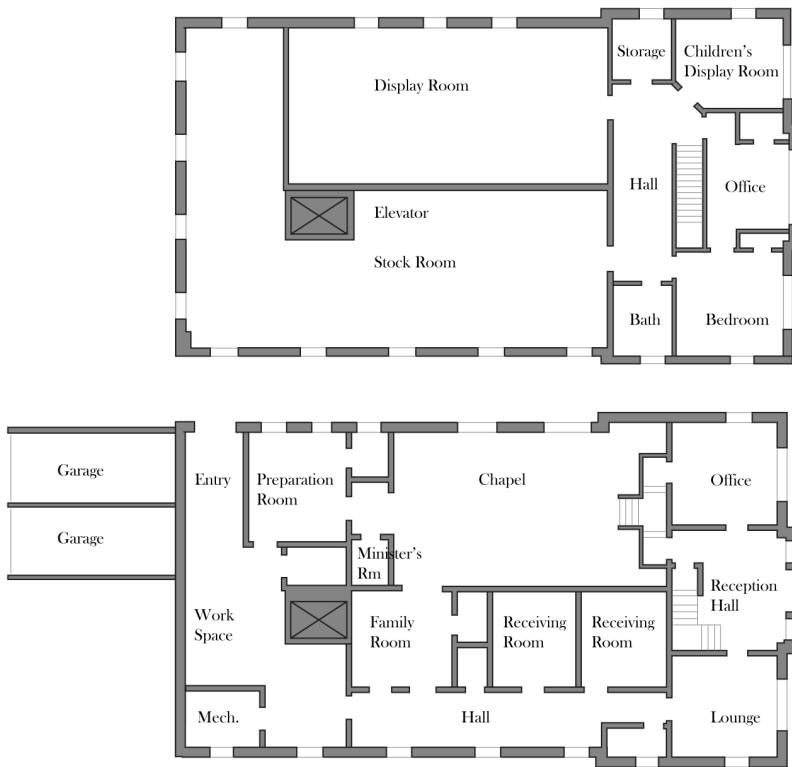


figure 2.55 Typical Funeral Home Floor Plan

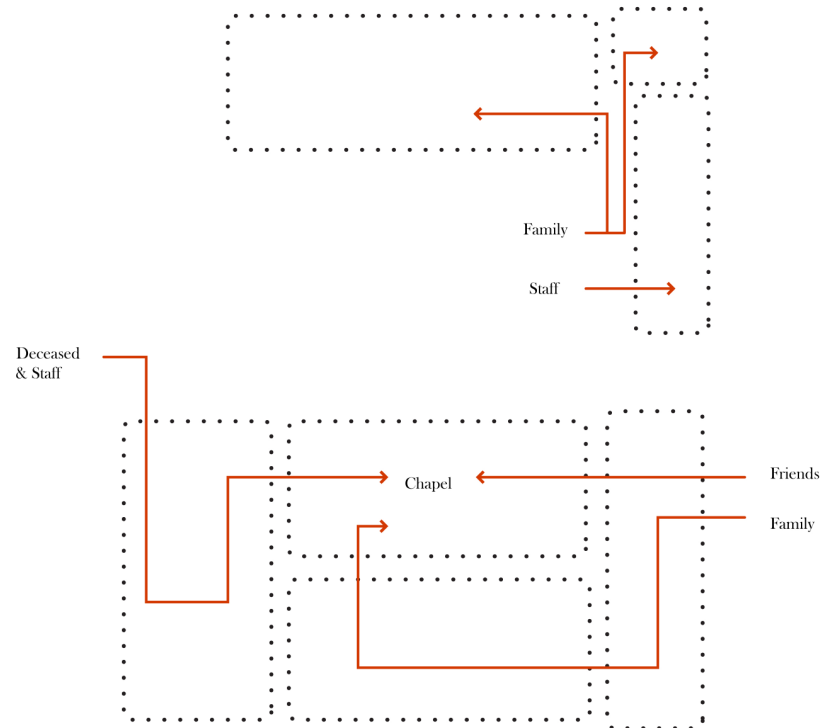


figure 2.56 Spatial Hierarchy - Friends, Family, Staff & Deceased

The funeral home is the primary site of post-death rituals, observing either Sacred or secular beliefs. The rapid proliferation of the death industry through the professionalism of the funeral director and commodification of the corpse has resulted in a building type that relies on the strength of the temporary inhabitation of people rather than being instilled with an atmosphere befitting its purpose. It bears the traces of its architectural forebears through aspects of home and religious space, though it is neither domestic nor sacred. In this way it appears as an uncanny vestige, both familiar and uncomfortable. The necessity of the funeral home presents an opportunity to invest in the spaces of death in order to enrich existence.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Heathcote, *Monument Builders : Modern Architecture and Death*, 62.
 2 Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 18.
 3 Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, 116.
 4 Heathcote, *Monument Builders : Modern Architecture and Death*, 49.
 5 Ibid., 16.
 6 Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 300.
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 8 Mumford, *The city in history : Its origins, its transformations, and its prospects*.
 9 Heathcote, *Monument Builders : Modern Architecture and Death*, 6.
 10 Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, 6.
 11 Garces-Foley, *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, 214.
 12 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion*, 14.
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 14 Caillouis, *Man and the Sacred*, 21.
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 16 Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*, 13.
 17 Etlin, *The Architecture of Death: The Transformation of the Cemetery in 18th Century Paris*, 17.
 18 Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 42.
 19 Ragon, *The Space of Death*, 5.
 20 Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, 24.
 21 Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 24.
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 23 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion*, 211.
 24 Klaver, *Images of the Corpse*, 218.
 25 Garces-Foley, *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, 229-230.
 26 Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 13, 37.
 27 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 159.
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 29 Perdue, “An Architectural Inquiry into the Significance of Home,” 24.
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 33 DeSpelder and Strickland, *The Last Dance*.
 34 Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 183.
 35 Nuland, *How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter*.
 36 Selket, “Bring Home the Dead: Purity and Filth in Contemporary Funeral Homes,” 52.
 37 Stegers, *Sacred Buildings : A Design Manual*, 33.
 38 Selket, “Bring Home the Dead: Purity and Filth in Contemporary Funeral Homes,” 57.
 39 Laderman, *Rest in Peace*, 26.
 40 Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 5.
 41 Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 366.
 42 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 3.
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 44 Garces-Foley, *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, 230.
 45 Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 21.
 46 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane : The Nature of Religion*, 181.
 47 Klaver, *Images of the Corpse*, 211.
 48 Laderman, *Rest in Peace*, xviii.
 49 Hallam, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 84.
 50 Stegers, *Sacred Buildings : A Design Manual*, 61.

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Chapter Three
The Architecture of Ritual

The Architecture of Ritual

In order to imagine how the funeral home building type may be enriched, this thesis examines the architecture of ritual. This type of building facilitates a dialogue about the shared communion between the participants of a ritual with one another and within their setting. In order to reflect the secular nature of what may traditionally be considered a Sacred space examples extend beyond both North America and the realm of funerary architecture. This analysis is instructive in order to create contemporary funeral death-space.

figure 3.01 Vitruvius, First Building of Shelters and Huts (previous page)

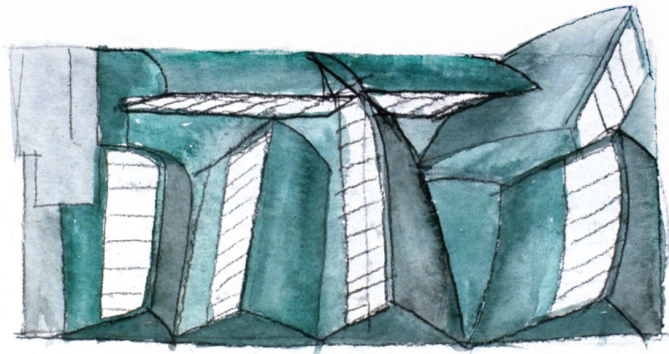


figure 3.02 Roof Plan

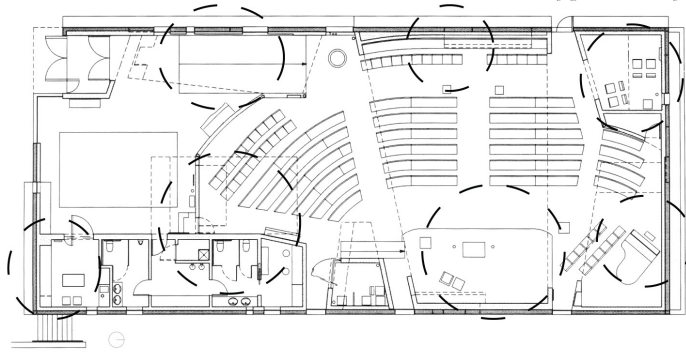


figure 3.03 Floor Plan

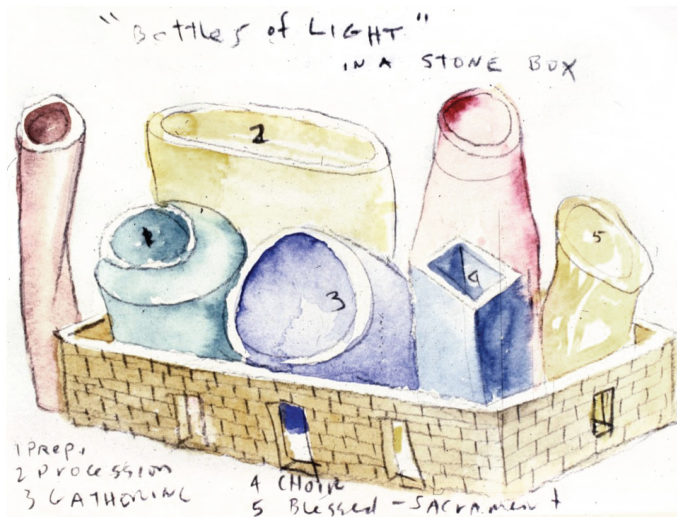


figure 3.04 Concept Illustration - "Bottles of Light" in a Stone Box

Steven Holl (1994-1997)
University of Seattle Campus,
Seattle, Washington

St. Ignatius Chapel

The St. Ignatius Chapel is located on the campus of Seattle University. The Jesuit and Catholic chapel's celebration of light to inform the ritual narrative and project outwards to the city is its most profound success.

Diffuse, natural light pours into the chapel through a series of scoops that extend upwards and connect the congregation to a distinct sense of verticality. Sheri Olson commented on the usage of light in *Architectural Record*, stating, "What makes the interior so arresting and enigmatic are the halos of softly pigmented light sliced through by shocking patches of otherworldly color."¹ The bright stone material surfaces deliver warmth and light from the upper reaches of the roof, along the walls and to the clean, polished floors. Holl's own description references the project as a collection of "different bottles of light in a stone box"². The light articulates the usage of the spaces, focusing the occupants on the ritual that they are enacting and reinforcing the Jesuit philosophy of a varied approach to the problems of life.

The reading of the building from the street conveys the spatial hierarchy and multitude of interior experiences. It keeps the actual ritual intimate, yet engages in a dialogue with its site and surrounding neighbourhood through the projection of light into the community through select window openings. In addition to the treatment of the interior spaces, light inscribes the ritual in space and guides the procession both literally and metaphorically.

Farkasret Mortuary Chapel

*Imre Makovecz (1975)
Budapest, Hungary*

The Farkasret Mortuary Chapel is a sculptural insertion into an array of dated chapels in Hungary. There are five chapels, the central of which was layered with the design of Makovecz. The chapel celebrates the figural and literal bodies; it is a communion of the deceased and the bereaved in funeral ceremony.

The chapel is designed to evoke the anamorphic symbolism of the ribcage, scaled upwards towards the monstrous. At the center of the wooden ribs, where the heart would be, is the catafalque to lay the deceased upon. Edwin Heathcote describes this significance of celebrating the body in *Monument Builders*:

“Just as the human body can be seen as a physical container for the essence - the soul - so Makovecz’s chapel is intended as the final ritual receptacle for the corpse; it becomes a place of transition between mourning and burial, between this world and the next.”³

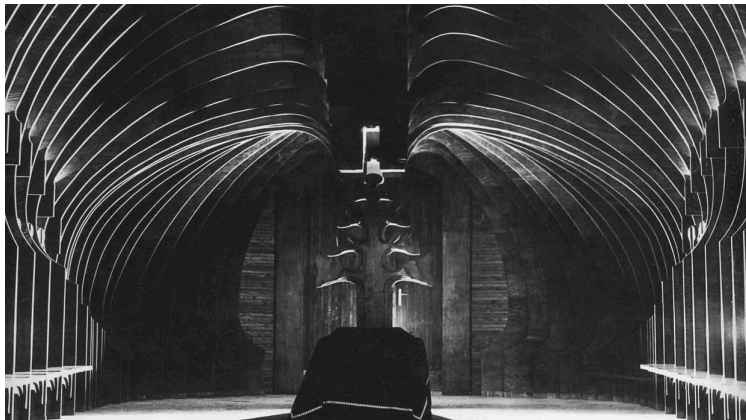


figure 3.05 Interior of Chapel with Sculpture of the Tree of Life

The arrangement of the wooden ribs maps the progression of the mourner through space, inscribing the enactment of ritual at the scale of the body. This creates a distinct relationship between the built-form and the occupants.

The sculpture of the chapel also has a tendency to impress a cavernous and imposing character. Instead of immediately alleviating grief the chapel heightens it to a pitch before relieving it. The softness of the wood used for the ribcage and the extensive, bright garden at the entrance to the chapel somewhat relieves the tension and imposition of the space.

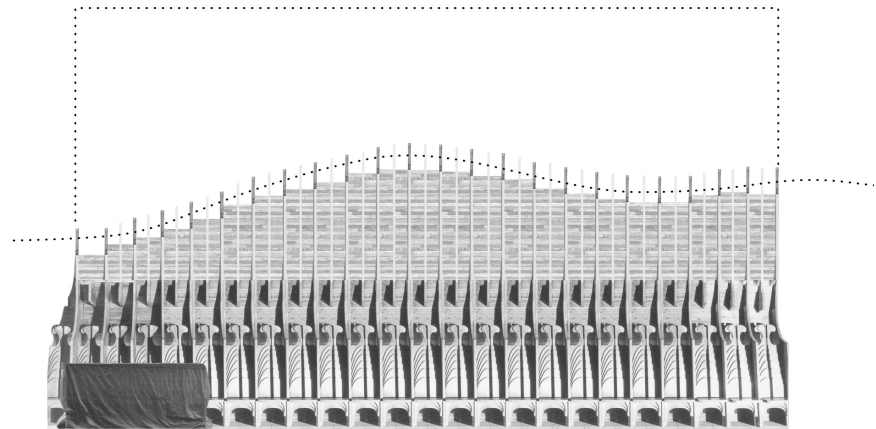


figure 3.06 Inscription of Ritual Use

Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

The Bruder Klaus Field Chapel's remote position in a farmer's field in Germany honours its hermit patron-saint. A tear-shaped, open-air oculus is stretched above the burned out remnants of 112 pyramidal formwork trees which embed the rammed-concrete walls with their effigy. Nearer to the poured lead floor pinholes through the charred walls allow diffuse light nearer to the plane of human occupancy. The chapel scripts a contemplative connection of the body to nature.

Peter Zumthor (2007)
Mechernich, Germany



figure 3.07 120 Tree Trunks - Pre Fire

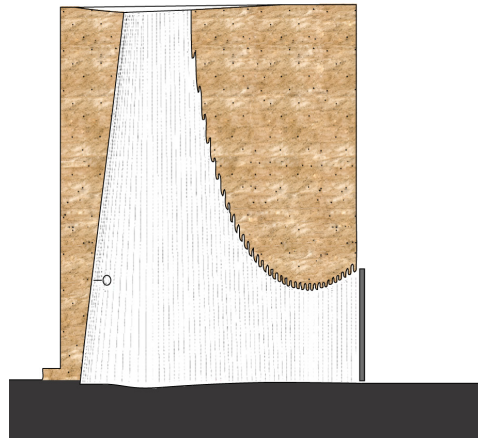


figure 3.08 Burned-out Interior - Post Fire



figure 3.09 Rammed Concrete Exterior



figure 3.10 Burned-out Interior - Oculus

From the exterior there is no indication of the unique character of the interior. Upon entry the scalloped, charred walls reveal the creation process of the chapel and place the occupant in an eternal forest that breaks away at the open-air roof. As a result, all elements of nature are present and render the space very differently depending on weather conditions. The atmosphere of the chapel encourages the simultaneous contemplation of the natural and spiritual orientation within the world. The essence of the space and its linkage to nature may be read through the lens of Luis Fernandez-Galiano. In his book *Fire and Memory*, he states, “The irruption of energy in the universe of architecture smashes its crystalline images, shakes its mute silhouette, and gives it a definitive place in the field of processes and life.”⁴

The reductive quality to the chapel and Zumthor’s work in general, places the individual evocatively within a dialogue of ritual and space. In the construction of the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel he achieves this rawness by contemplating a most primitive condition; whether to use wood for the construction of shelter or for warmth by combustion⁵. Zumthor engages the purest considerations of shelter and warmth within a dialogue of faith and nature.

The isolation of the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel distances it from being directly applicable within the urban scope of this thesis, but its clarity of articulation is a valuable precedent.

Kengo Kuma (2006)
Ginzan Onsen, Obanazawa, Yamagata, Japan

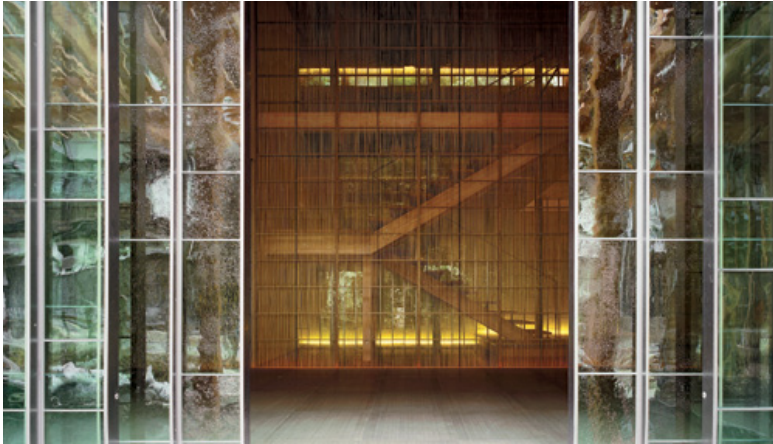


figure 3.11 View at the Entrance

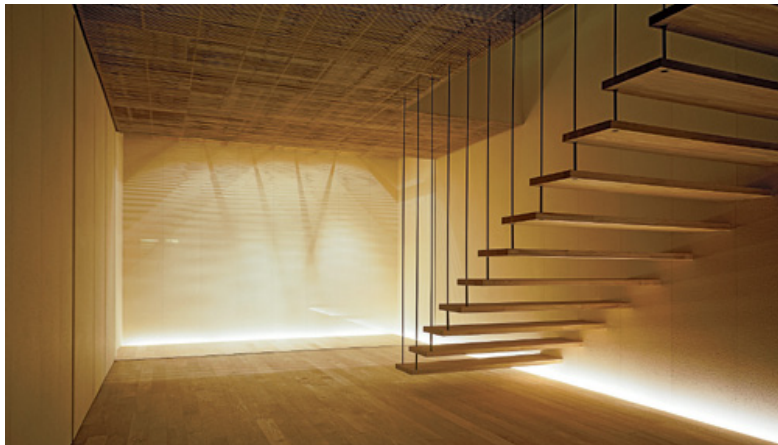


figure 3.12 Interior

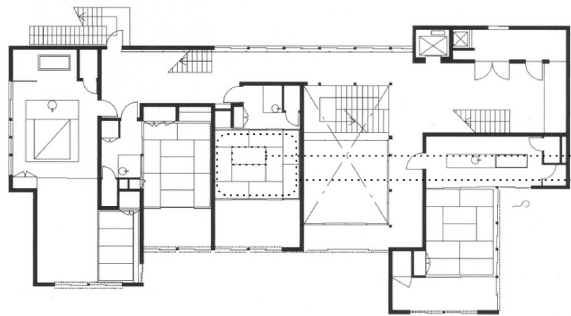
Ginzan Onsen Fujiya

Ginzan Onsen Fujiya is a bath house built upon the traditional rituals of Japanese culture. The careful employ of light to create atmosphere and thresholds to facilitate between city and ritual are the successes of this project.

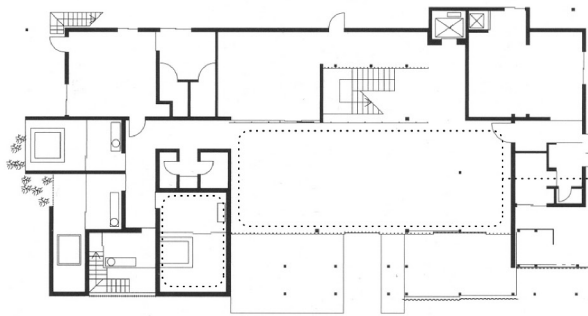
The architect, Kengo Kuma has commented on the spatial and atmospheric experiences in the bath complex, stating, “The idea was to connect the street with the lobby inside...So we established a new sense of transparency.”⁶

The distinction of space in the bath house was executed through the careful filtering of light by tightly woven bamboo screens. All sources of light are diffused or reflected and removed from discernable origins, creating glowing planar relationships which reinforce the sensation of enclosure. These translucent wooden screens create a beautiful and serene environment that provides sanctuary from the street and town.

Kuma’s approach to the street blurred the threshold between city and ritual by creating a large public space within the building which is unusual for traditional Japanese practice. Spaces radiate from this larger central main-floor atrium to become increasingly small and intimate on the second floor. These smaller spaces are represented by the implementation of modular tatami mats scaled to the human body. This narrative of scale creates a focused private interior and a welcoming public exterior.



*tatami mat
room/bath*



atrium



street

figure 3.13 Privacy Hierarchy



figure 3.15 Guest Room Interior

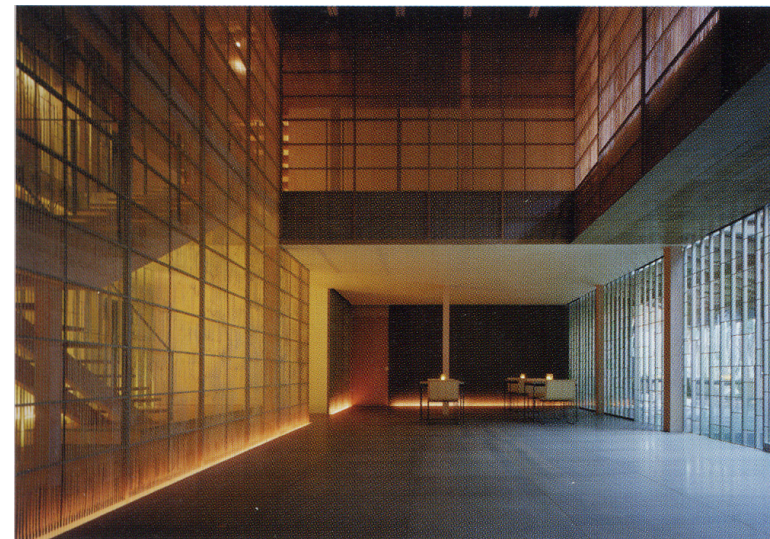


figure 3.14 Entrance Hall

Maki & Associates (1997)
Nakatsu Oita, Japan



figure 3.16 Chapel



figure 3.17 Exterior

Kaze-no-Oka

The Kaze-no-Oka crematorium is located on the outskirts of Nakatsu, in Japan. The complex is essentially three volumes, each differing in form, function and representation. There is a funeral hall, crematorium and waiting area. Maki masterfully combines the prosaic machinery of cremation with the solemn rituals of death. This is achieved through the creation of an evocative processional narrative, and careful consideration of light and materiality. In addition, the site relationship is sensitively crafted, given its role as a crematorium.

The articulation of interstitial spaces within the crematorium links the main programmatic elements with moments of repose and

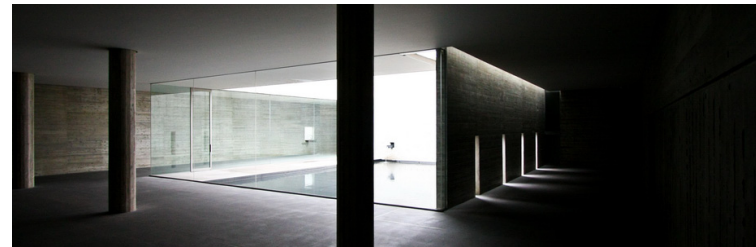


figure 3.19 Hall of Cremation Space

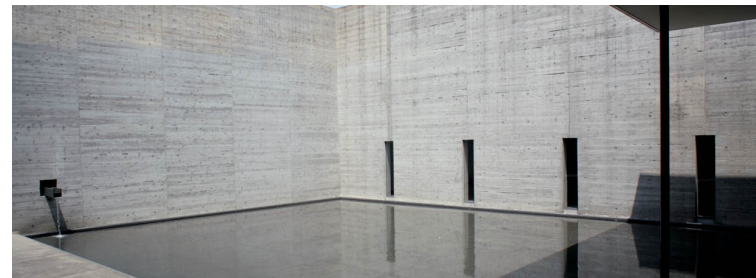


figure 3.18 Interior Reflecting Pool

reflection throughout the ritual procession. Rudolf Stegers states in the *Sacred Buildings: Design Manual*, “These are not designed with efficient functional operation in mind, but as a physical and mental passage from stage to stage”⁷. As the mourners progress through the building there is a tendency for the volumes to sink into the ground, to grow more enclosed and for the sources of light to become increasingly diffuse. There are no conventional windows on the monolithic volume. This exchanges the framing of views for functional and atmospheric openings primarily providing light. This evocatively focuses the mourners on the ritual before engaging the surrounding postliminal landscape of interment.

The building does not impose upon its site due to both the careful treatment of the grounds and the sunken, elongated and minimalist profile. The building is finished monotonously with brick, COR-TEN weathering steel and concrete. These materials convey the increasing solidity of the spaces in conjunction with the interior narrative. This tasteful balance of communication and site presence has encouraged the local community to use the surrounding cemetery for leisure activities as well as burial or memorial.

The Kaze-no-Oka Crematorium suffers from an over-extension of its minimalist treatment towards the stark or cold. The interior spaces although beautiful, lack the humanizing presence that the attention to the ritual procession suggests. Spaces are at times claustrophobic and the senses are intentionally dulled to create the focus that the architect associates with mourning. The atmosphere of this building is unfortunately common for contemporary death-space.

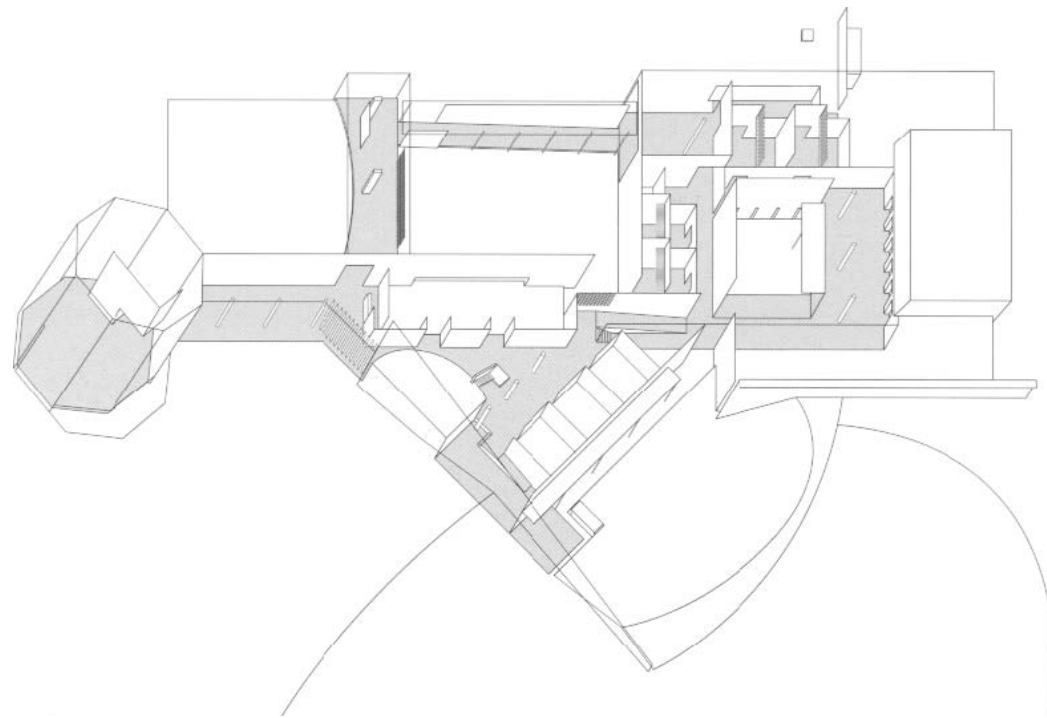


figure 3.20 Axonometric of Ritual Procession

Baird Sampson Neuert (2000)
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

St. Clair Mausoleum

The St. Clair Mausoleum is a singular precedent of well-articulated North American funerary space. Located in Toronto along St. Clair Avenue its clearest successes are its integration and conveyance of the procession of ritual space while maintaining intimacy.

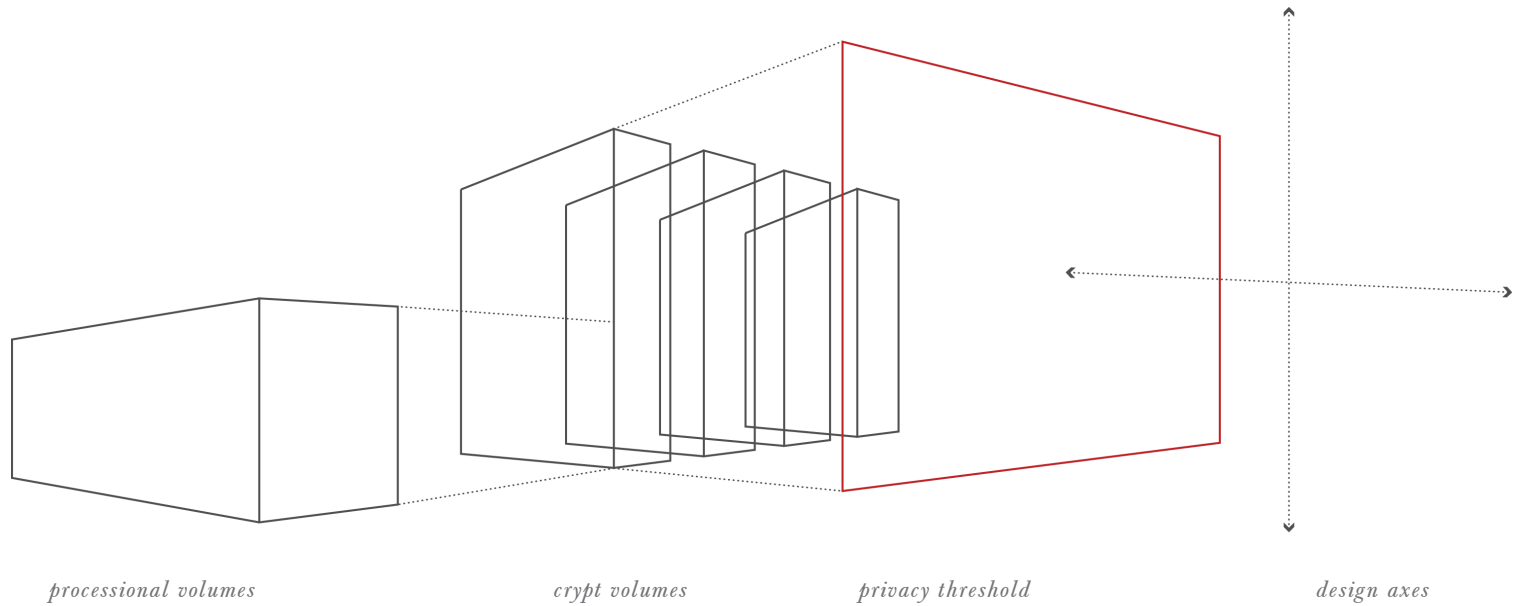


figure 3.21 Exploded Axonometric Drawing

From both the street and within Prospect Cemetery the Mausoleum showcases the circulation of its mourners while shielding the intimate moments of ritual. This is enforced primarily by the distinctive volumetric design. These volumes allude to a metaphoric relationship between a horizontal terra firma axis for circulation of the living and a vertical axis mundi for the entombment of the deceased within vaults. The glass-clad, negative space between volumes allows both views and significant light to pour into the space. At night the light projects outwards as a beacon to the city, similarly to the St. Ignatius Chapel.

The material cladding of the main volumes repeats traditional linkages between permanence and mortality by implementing stone throughout the building. The punctuation of the heaviness of the stone with the transparency of glass strikes a balance between the traditional and contemporary.

Though there is significant attention given to promoting the presence of the mausoleum and celebrating its usage by mourners, it remains a wholly private space, requiring access cards preceded by the entombment of a family member. This simple act of exclusivity lessens the otherwise broad connective gestures made by the architects.



figure 3.23 Night Exterior



figure 3.22 Day Exterior

Carlos Scarpa (1969-1978)
San Vito d'Altivole, Italy

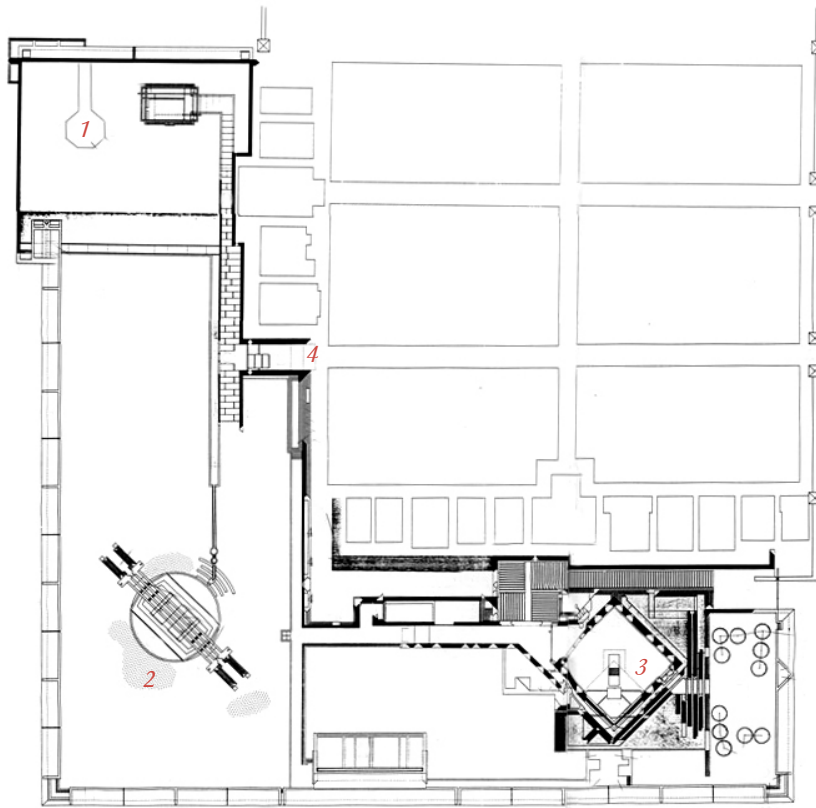


figure 3.24 Site Plan

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Island Pavilion | 3 | Funeral Chapel |
| 2 | Arcosolium | 4 | Entrance |

Brion Tomb/Brion-Vega Cemetery

The iconic Brion-Vega Cemetery is a project designed by the architect Carlo Scarpa for the Brion family. It is situated just outside San Vito d'Altivole, Italy. This work was carefully scripted by Scarpa and though many of his design intents could be celebrated, this study highlights his use of threshold and narrative.

The entry to the Cemetery is framed by two interlocking circles; the mandorla or *vesica piscis*. The iconography of this symbol identifies Scarpa's preoccupation with duality and the architect himself called it the 'eyes to the garden'⁸. Whether moon/sun, female/male or Eros/Thanatos⁹ this symbol and its attributes introduces the sense of balance (or imbalance) that pervades the design of the Brion-Vega Cemetery. Otto Brendel wrote, in *Origin and Meaning of the Mandorla* that, "the mandorla has always signified a separation between quotidian human experience and an 'other' realm." It is the navigation between these realms that is of interest.

In the approach to this symbol the mourner is forced to make a conscious decision between left and right. The northern or left-most circle is approached by stairs whose scale is appropriate for the human gate, while the southern, right-most circle is preceded by a set that cannot be comfortably ascended. To the left begins a narrative of the body, and to the right, a narrative of the spirit. These narratives include the Arcosolium (Brion Tomb), Family Tomb, Funeral Chapel and Island Pavilion. Only the Island Pavilion was conceived for the living as a place of contemplation.

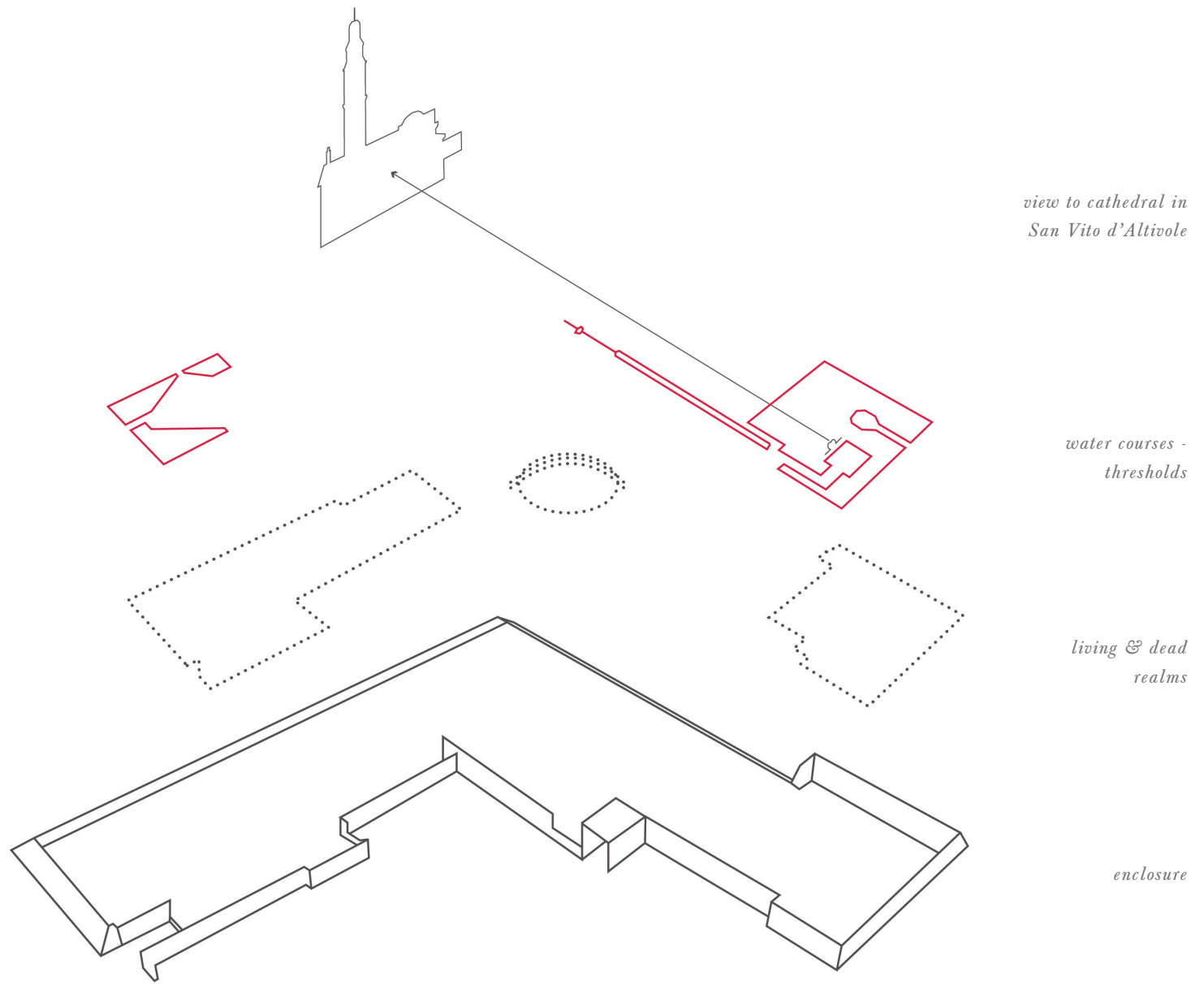


figure 3.25 Exploded Axonometric Drawing



figure 3.26 Vesica Piscis



figure 3.27 Viewfinder

Scarpa utilized both water and his 5.5cm square modular either independently or in conjunction with one another to blend, separate or comment on the thresholds within the cemetery narratives.

Water restricts traversal at the intersecting circles, forms the Island Pavilion, submerges the sarcophagi, bounds the funeral chapel and leads between these elements. The entire cemetery has been considered to evoke the Venetian condition of enclosure by water; in this case symbolized by the expanse of surrounding cornfields. Inside the Island Pavilion this enclosure and the relationship to the landscape is exaggerated as the mourner stands, surrounded by water, and views through two smaller interlocking circles the town's distant cathedral separated by '*un mare*' (*the great plane of water*)¹⁰. Scarpa utilized water as a threshold, recognizing its joint claims on both the sky and ground and its symbolism as mediator.

Mediation of thresholds is also achieved in the built form. The square modular formed concrete erodes between solid and void. This method evokes the traditional Ziggurat form; a series of stepped platforms that delineate between the corporeal ground terrain and the sacred super terrain. This technique is used throughout the cemetery and can be found between ground and building, and building and sky. Between ground and building the ziggurat is often covered by water as in the case of the sarcophagi or funeral chapel. In the oculus of the funeral chapel each stepped square ring casts a darker shadow between the sky and the interior walls.

The Brion-Vega Cemetery is an exemplary project identifying, amongst many things, the limiting or traversable threshold and its role in a place for the journey of both the living and the deceased.



figure 3.28 Exterior Enclosure

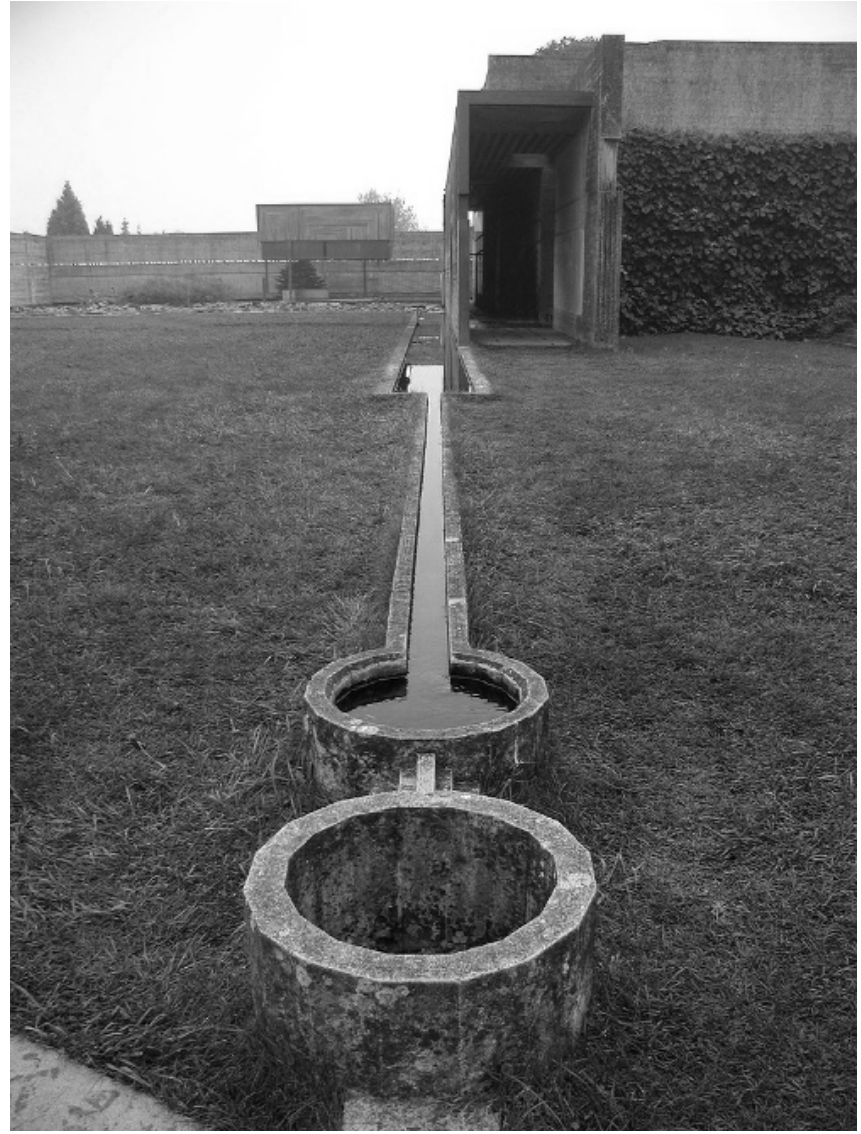


figure 3.29 Water Course

Enric Miralles & Carme Pinós (1985-1994)
Igualada, Spain

Igualada Cemetery (Enric Miralles, Carmen Pinós)

The design of the Igualada Cemetery focuses primarily on acknowledging the passage of time; this is explored in the encouragement of natural overgrowth and the implementing of weathering materials.

The success of Igualada Cemetery arises from its sensitivity. Executing time-centric design is especially difficult without conjuring immediate ominous reference to decay and death. Ephemeral design components are a common gesture within funerary architecture or when addressing mortality. Weathering materials, such as COR-TEN steel, untreated wood or staining masonry have been successfully utilized in other projects such as the Meer-Bloemhof Crematorium, the previously discussed Kaze-no-Oka Crematorium or in the sculptural interventions of Richard Serra.

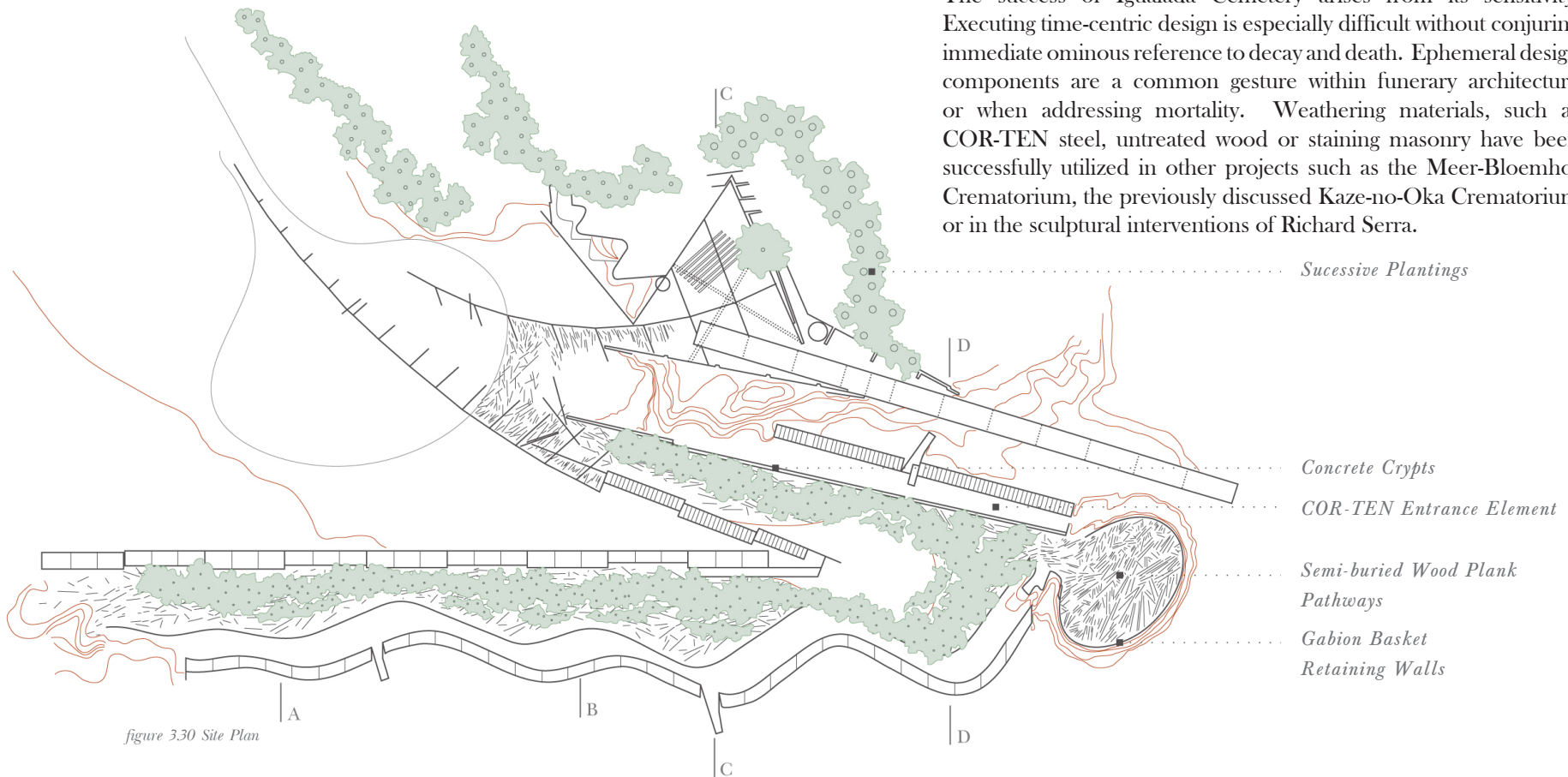


figure 3.30 Site Plan



figure 3.31 Guestbook



figure 3.32 Steel Sculpture at Entrance

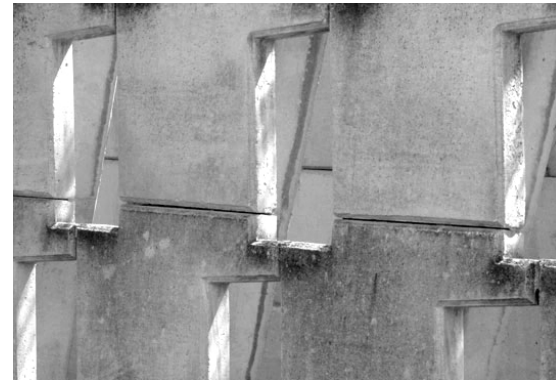


figure 3.33 Concrete Wall Surface

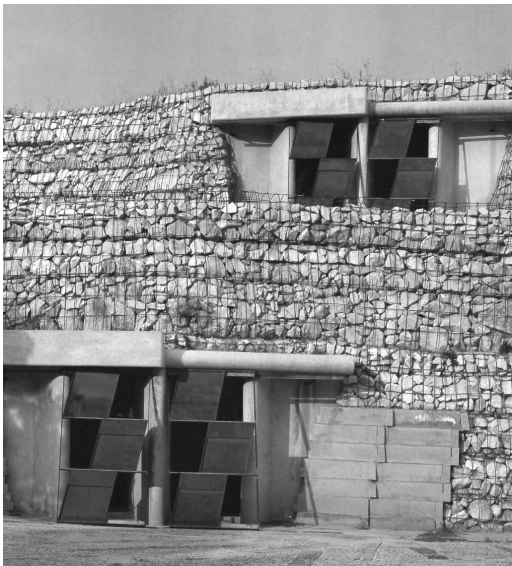


figure 3.34 Gabion Basket Retaining Wall



figure 3.35 Ground with Inset Timber



figure 3.36 Vertical Tombs



figure 3.39 Unplanned Vegetation



figure 3.40 Tree Walkway & Tombs



figure 3.38 View into Cemetery

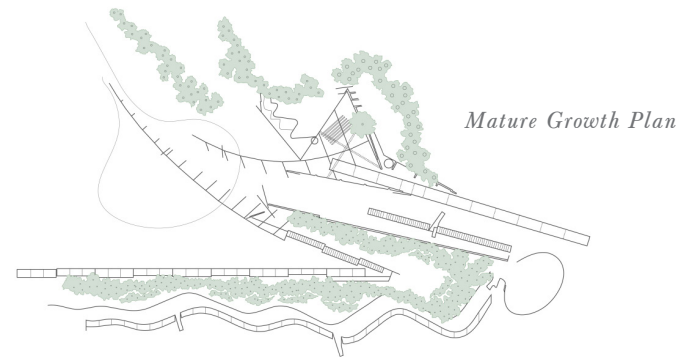
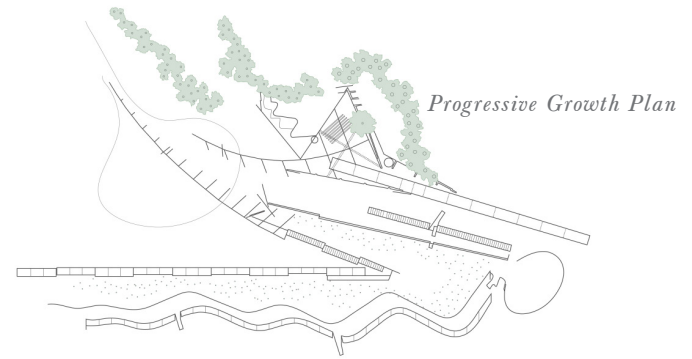
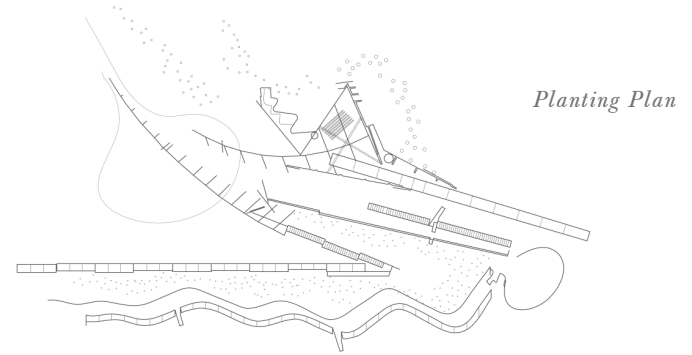


figure 3.37 Landscape Progression

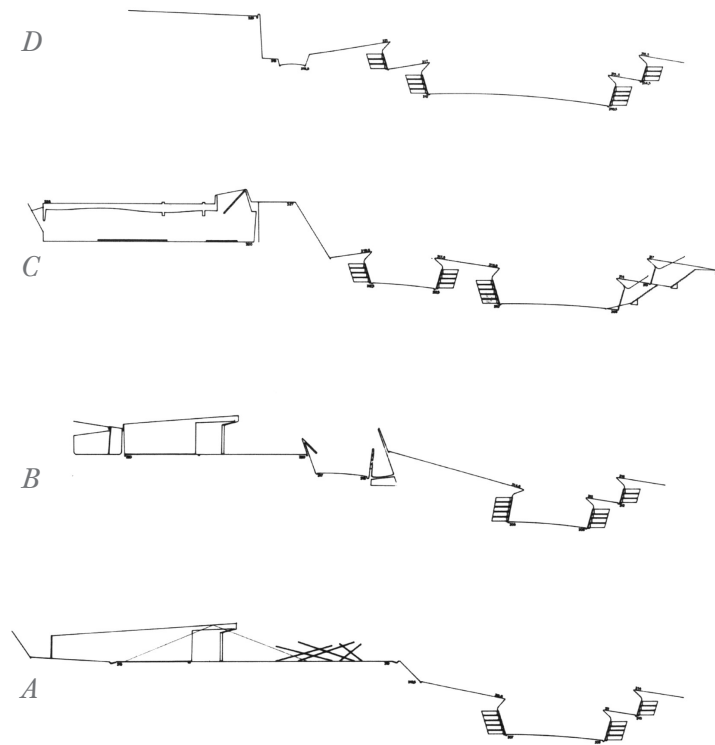


figure 3.41 Site Sections

Anatxu Zabalbeascoa comments on the sensitivity of the cemetery in the *Architecture in Detail* series:

“With time and weather inevitably intervening in the work, covering and eroding it, allowing it to become part of the natural landscape, the Igualada Cemetery will eventually be perceived less as a burial ground, and will come to be seen more as a field, an area in which all the natural cycles of life and, alongside it, death, take place.”

The site of Igualada Cemetery has been carved in a manner as to allow natural growth to eventually overtake and essentially bury the cemetery to view. Gabion baskets that allow the changing grade and carving of the earth are constructed with untreated metal that rusts and stains the pre-cast concrete below it. Layers of soil are exposed beyond the gabion baskets to suggest the accumulative presence of nature as well as to emphasize the depth of burial. The walkways are punctuated by inset timber beams that age in pleasant disharmony to the primary concrete walking surface.

Miralles and Pinos pace themselves in articulating these temporal moments, allowing the argument to expand and develop instead of imposing the gestures outright. The trees and landscaping of the site are meant to remain essentially unfinished, growing and eventually visually obscuring the presence of the cemetery while alluding to life prevailing over death.

For all of the intention of integrating weathering and successive iterations, the issue of maintenance is an oft-overlooked component of carefully allowing for designs like Igualada’s to age with eloquence. It is not clear within Igualada Cemetery whose ownership will steward the site’s progression. As time is the centerpiece of the design it will also be the measure of its success.

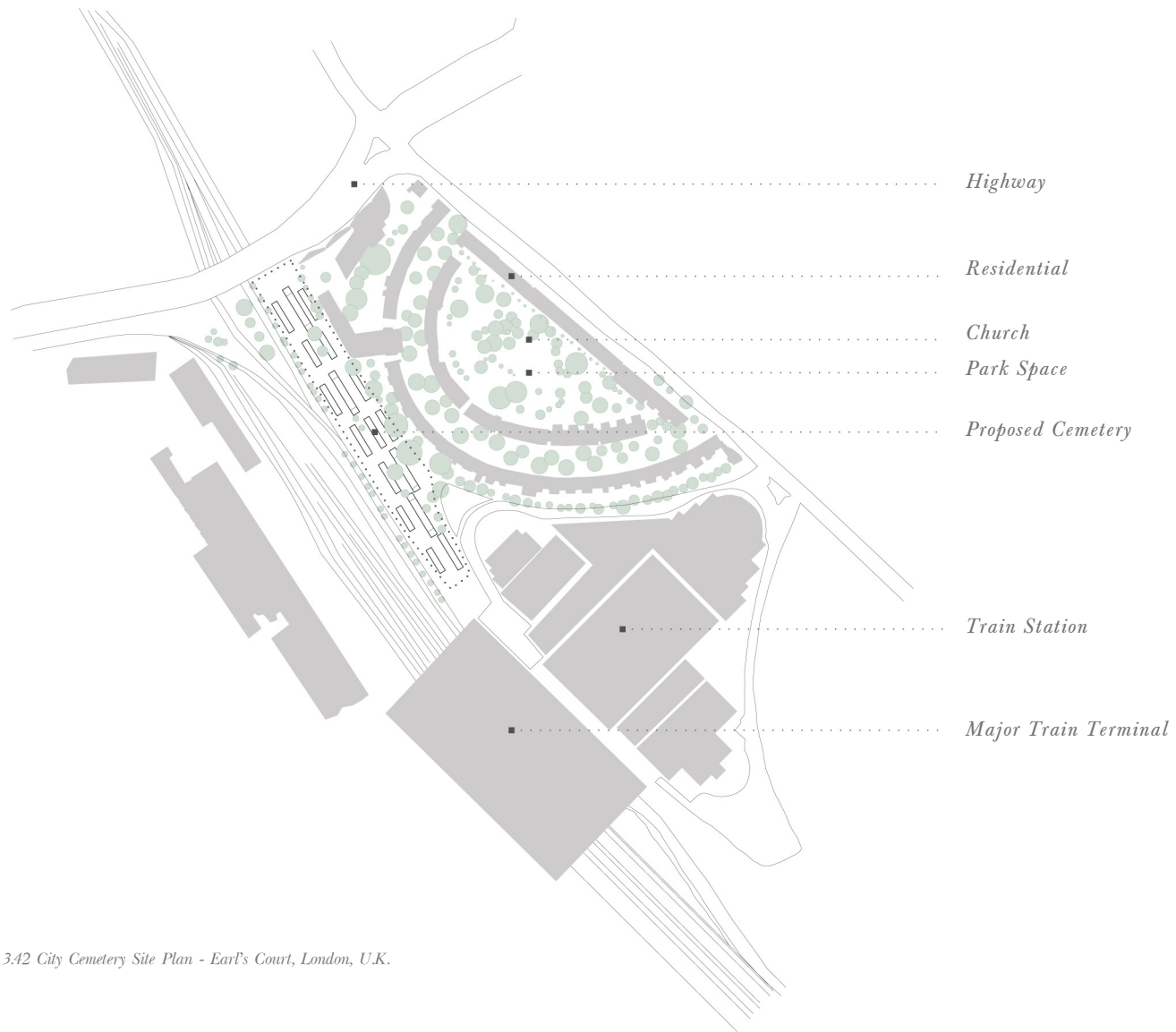


figure 3.42 City Cemetery Site Plan - Earl's Court, London, U.K.

City Cemetery

mae Architects (2002)
Earl's Court, London, U.K.

The City Cemetery, located in the Earl's Court district of London makes a strong case for the reintegration of cemeteries in a highly urban context. Many of the precedents examined are in natural settings, removed from the city. The City Cemetery imagines that interment could occur *within* city limits without the predication of a pre-sprawl cemetery site existing. The project, which is not yet realized, strives to create localized burial in neighbourhoods in a direct attempt at strengthening the relationship between the living and the dead while developing community identity.

At ground level it maintains a lawn or garden setting, while tombs stacked three-high are buried below grade. The project assumes that burial tenure would be shortened comparatively to the indefinite period of interment in suburban cemeteries. This acknowledges the present infrequent usage of the cemetery, challenging it to be a more dynamic space and encouraging an expansion of the definition of a memorial space.

Borrowing from the iterative and successive Igualada Cemetery, the City Cemetery is envisioned as a place which marks the passage of time. This is achieved by planting and growing a series of flora that emphasize the natural and park character of the site. Adhering to traditional ceremony and ritual the parks are punctuated with coffin-sized openings which receive the body into the ground in a mimesis of typical ritual. This combination of the traditional with the contemporary is a strong component of the design.

The City Cemetery is prototypical and imagines itself occupying marginal or interstitial landscapes throughout the city including rail-yards or abandoned tracts of land. The occupation of these peripheral spaces seems to resist the ambitious integrity of direct-city integration of the cemetery type.



figure 3.43 Below Grade Tombs

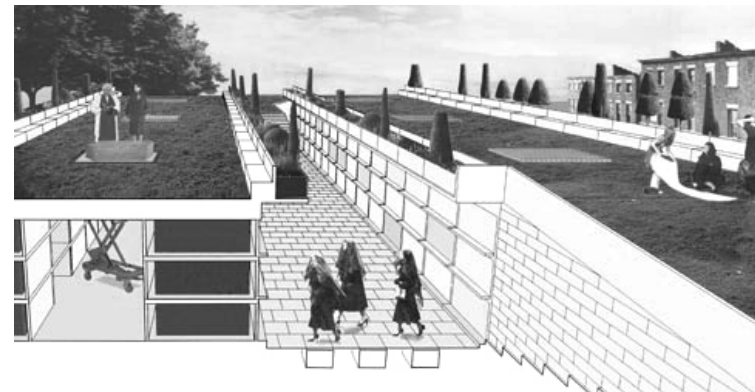


figure 3.44 Sectional Perspective

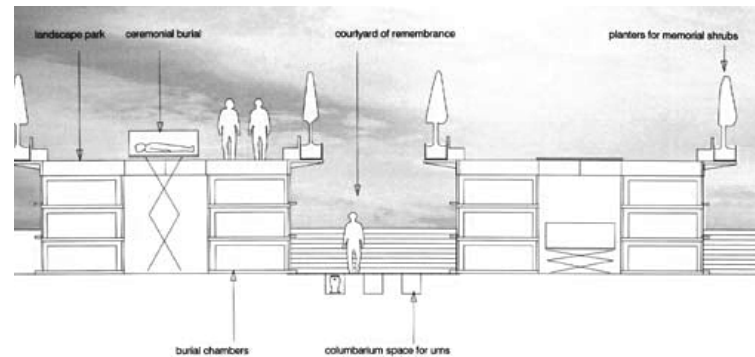


figure 3.45 Section

The Architecture of Death-Space

A funeral, as Robert Pogue Harrison states, represents the obligation of the living to allow the dead to die in them; to deliberately and ceremoniously remember and dispose of the deceased¹¹. This is reliant upon the sacred communion of the living in the presence of the deceased. The precedent works of the architecture of ritual influence the construction of death-space, supporting the case for an intimate place for the funeral that maintains a dialogue with its surroundings.

The Enactment of Ritual - The Convergence of the Deceased and Living

The funeral ritual recalls the three stages of the preliminal, the liminal and the postliminal. They are defined as the separation from the city, the ceremony or ceremonies of memorial and disposal and the eventual reintegration with the city. These experiences are mediated by the establishment of thresholds and a hierarchy is developed to sequence when and how these spaces are traversed. The blurring or enforcement of threshold has been shown in works by Scarpa and Kuma to be a viable tool in creating balance between spaces. The funeral ritual may extend into the city, or the city may be invited within the building. The seriousness of these interactions requires that boundaries be respected, while the desire for an urban dialogue challenges the conventions of these spaces.

The Contemporary Sacred – The Creation of Intimacy

The funeral space considers the creation of intimacy and how it may be balanced and articulated through variations in scale, enclosure, materiality and light.

The perception of scale within a space contributes to its intimacy. Observed in the examples from Zumthor, Kuma and Scarpa, smaller individual spaces allow solitary for reflection which often connects to the external presence of the theological or natural. Holl and Maki created projects for larger occupancies which are made intimate when filled by the participants of ritual. The sacred canopy of the collective experience may mediate a larger space, making it feel comfortable. It is common in many of the precedent works to oscillate between intimate and non-intimate scales in order to create a drama of their differences.

The enclosure of ritual space is often determined by the predominant desire to either isolate the ritual or connect it to its environment. The latter occurs more commonly within the natural landscape, while the former occurs most in an urban setting. The level of transparency of enclosure is dictated by these conditions of isolation and reciprocity.

Materiality is most engaging when it relates to the human experience, either in scale or tactility. Juhani Pallasmaa states in *The Eyes of the Skin*, “We feel pleasure and protection when the body discovers its resonance in space.”¹² Wood, a rudimentary and domestic material, consistently appears throughout the precedent works, its patina and warmth deepening the intimate and comfortable qualities of space.

In conjunction with scale, transparency and materiality, light enhances the experience of ritual space. It regularly alludes to an external presence, as in God or nature, and focuses the subject inward upon themselves or their shared experience.

“In working with light, what is really important...is to create an experience of wordless thought, to make the quality and sensation of light itself something really quite tactile. It has a quality seemingly intangible, yet it is physically felt.”¹³

James Turrell

Tadao Ando commented on the importance of a balance between light and dark, stating, “In order to appreciate light and the figure it illuminates, we need darkness.”¹⁴

Diffuse light, without discernable origins, is immerse whereas direct light heightens the sense of drama from its creation of shadow. The former may be seen in Kuma’s meditative innermost bath chambers at Ginza Fujiya, whereas at the Kaze-no-Oka crematorium Maki directs narratives with hard lines of light.

The combinations resulting from scale, enclosure, materiality and light, as derived from the precedent works, form a palette that constructs the contemporary sacred which may be experienced directly by the ritual participants and indirectly by the city.

The Communication of Mortality - Death-Space and the City

“Architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and time.”¹⁵

Juhani Pallasmaa

The architecture of death-space has the opportunity for a dialogue with site. The works of mae Architects and Baird Sampson Neuert embrace and engage their urban surroundings; Miralles & Pinos imagined that their Igualada Cemetery landscape would overgrow; Scarpa saw the Brion Cemetery as a symbolic island surrounded by ‘water’; Maki sunk Kaze-no-Oka into the ground encouraging a dialogue with the countryside; and Holl projected coloured light onto the University of Seattle Campus. Every example listed symbolically or literally extends itself beyond its spatial and temporal constraints. In the latter, the universality of time is a method of communicating mortality to the non-participants of the funeral ritual; the observing city.

The passage of time is a universal experience of both the Sacred and quotidian. Specifically, the quotidian identifies cyclical and natural processes. As such, it presents for the non-denominational funeral space an opportunity to convey the ephemerality of the human condition through weathering materials or seasonal landscapes.

Death-space may utilize these design approaches to articulate a space that is both intimate and urban, successfully balancing the elements that create a meaningful place for the contemporary funeral.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Olsen, “What is Sacred Space?”.
- 2 Holl, Steven. *Urbanisms: Working with Doubt*, 93.
- 3 Heathcote, *Monument Builders : Modern Architecture and Death*, 155.
- 4 Fernández-Galiano, *Fire and Memory : On Architecture and Energy*, 4.
- 5 Fernández-Galiano, *Fire and Memory : On Architecture and Energy*, 7.
- 6 Pearson, *Architectural Record*.
- 7 Stegers, Rudolf. *Sacred Buildings : A Design Manual*, 233.
- 8 Dodds, “Desiring Landscapes / Landscapes of Desire”.
- 9 Frampton, Kenneth. “Carlo Scarpa and the Adoration of the Joint”.
- 10 Pietropoli, “L ’invitation au voyage,”
- 11 Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 143, 147.
- 12 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses*, 67.
- 13 Adcock, *James Turrell : The Art of Light and Space*.
- 14 Baek, *Nothingness : Tadao Ando’s Christian Sacred Space*, 199.
- 15 Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses*, 71.

Chapter Four

The St. Lawrence Funeral Centre



1865

Charles Bolton brings embalming from Civil War America

1883

Undertaker's Association of Ontario founded

1884

Bates & Dodds (Queen Street West & Strachan) is Toronto's first funeral home (not including Undertaker's establishments) Embalming and the Wake were still carried out at individual homes; the funeral home provided space for casket selection, arrangements and service area for apartment dwellers or larger groups

1913

First motorized hearse in Canada - changing the procession forever

1922

Ontario Funeral Service Foundation is inaugurated (ex-UAO)

Death in the City of Toronto

“[Death is] simply part of living. Like [its] counterparts among the joyful occasions in our lifetime - the birth of a child or grandchild, a celebration of marriage, an enduring friendship - [it is] part of what it means to share in the human experience. And the emotions [it] creates in us are part of living, as well.”¹

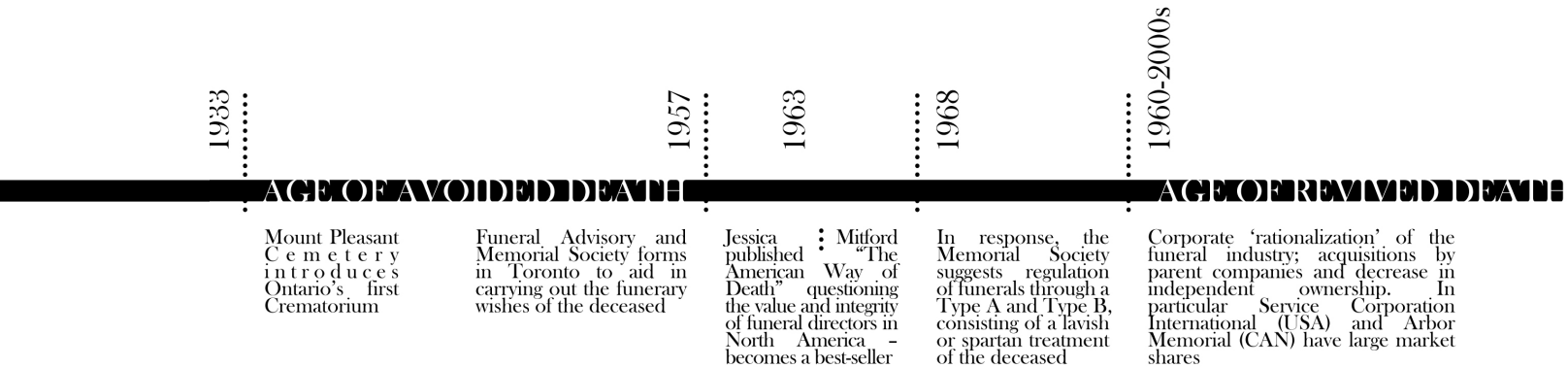
Funeral Service Association of Canada

The City of Toronto has forty funeral homes. They vary in their appearance and community presence but they unanimously strive to present an intimate setting for the rituals of death. The locations of the funeral homes are spread out evenly throughout the city with concentrations in traditional residential areas. This further enforces their domestic identity and provides close contact for the post-death proceedings.

Few of these facilities offer in-house cremation. Considered to be a service rather than a ceremony, cremation is most commonly handled off-site at Toronto cemeteries. This enables further specialization by the industry and a concentration of the services in the location of dispersal, entombment or interment.

figure 4.01 Abridged History of the Funerary Industry in Toronto

figure 4.02 Funeral Procession (opposite)

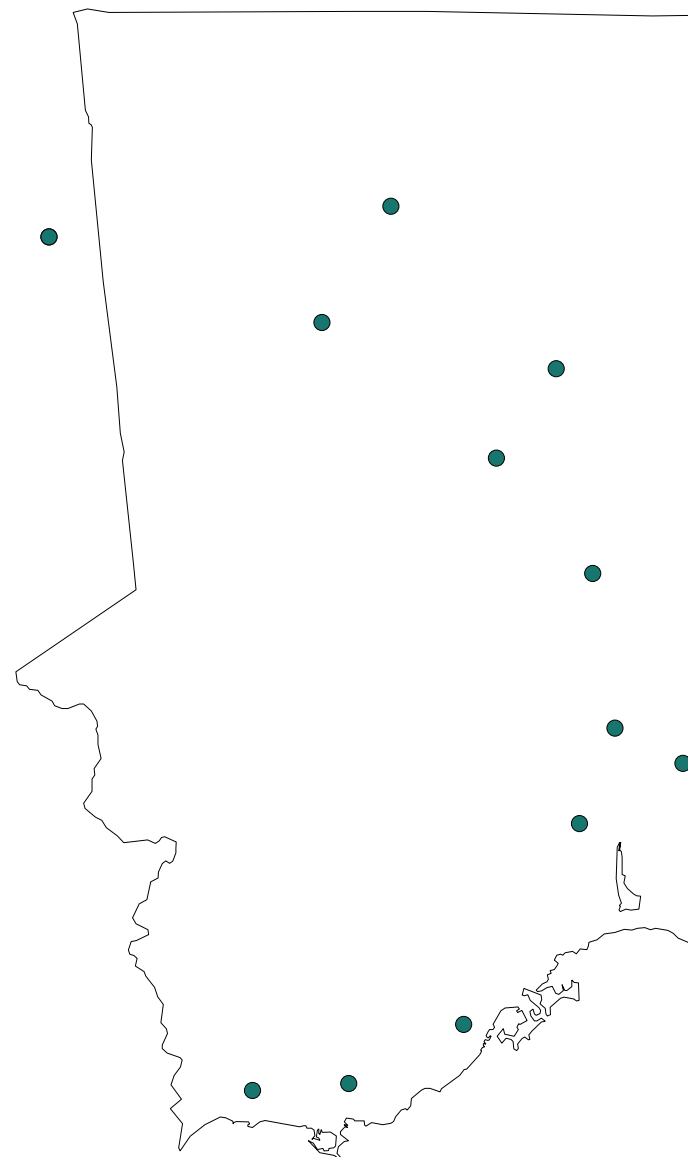


Nearly half of the funeral homes in Toronto are owned by two separate companies. These companies are Service Corporation International (USA) and Arbor Memorial Services (Canada). The remaining half is comprised of independents, and in many of the cases they are family businesses that have been handed down for a hundred or more years. The industry is very unique in this manner, affirming its domestic image. In Toronto, and in many Ontario cities and towns, the funeral director has had a strong presence in the community since the establishment of their businesses.

“Better to know me and not need me, than to need me and not know me.”

*Exert from interview with Gordon Boyd
Turner & Porter Funeral Directors, Yorke Chapel*

The directors or councilors are the strength of the funeral industry. Their compassion and professionalism are the keys to the longevity of a funeral home. This is especially true as many independent owners struggle with a decrease in profits due to corporate ownership and public disenchantment with traditional funerary customs. To combat the decrease in profitability of the funeral home, enterprising funeral homes in America have begun to expand beyond their traditional usage of space and incorporate weddings and other special events. This is occurring in funeral homes that are already organized and decorated in the fashion of a banquet hall; marble surfaces, ornate columns and classic styles. This trend within the funeral industry has yet to come to Toronto. Toronto is still dominated by more traditional use of funerary space and funeral homes continue to be the preferred method of memorializing, processing and disposing of the body.²



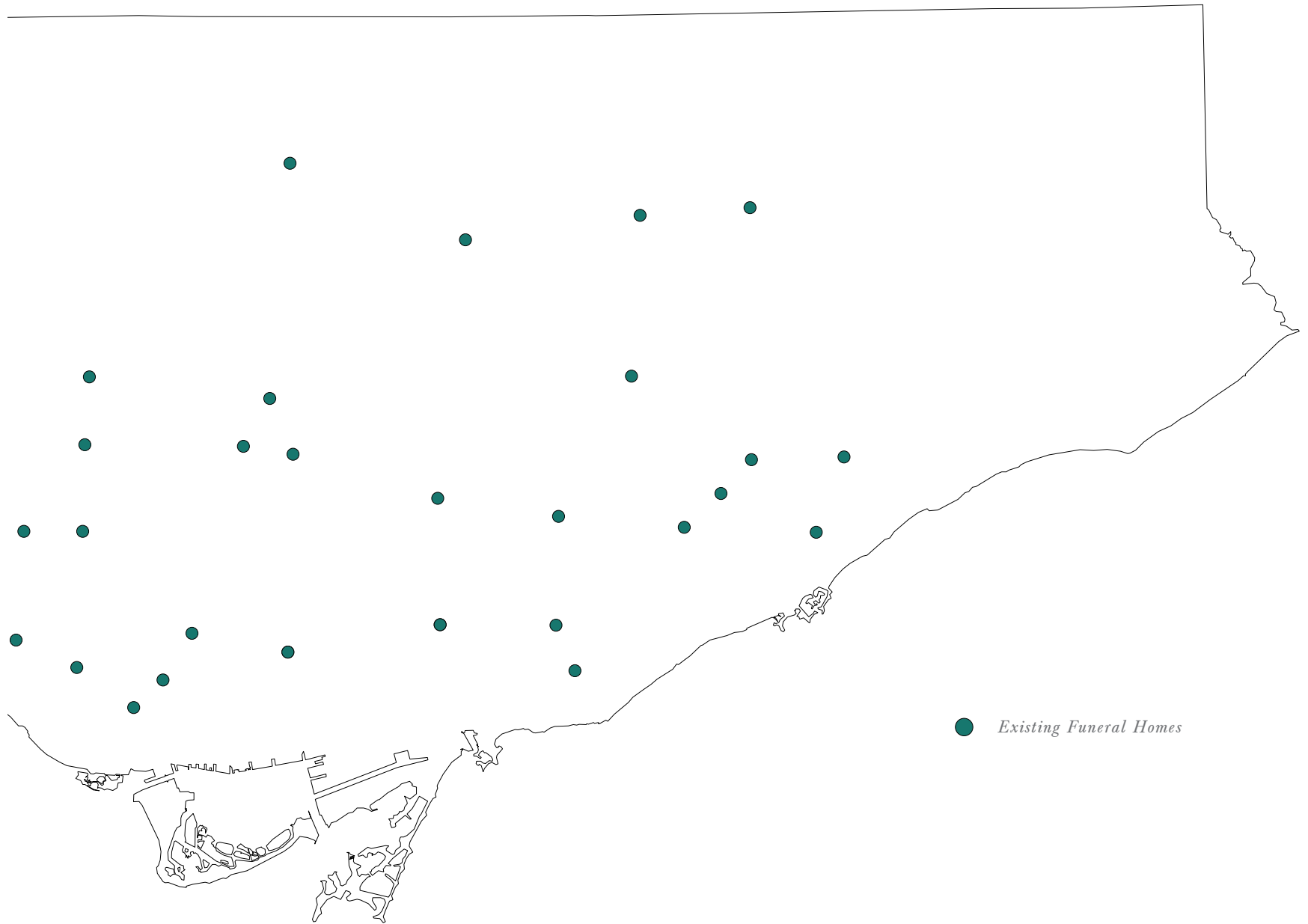


figure 4.03 Toronto Funeral Homes

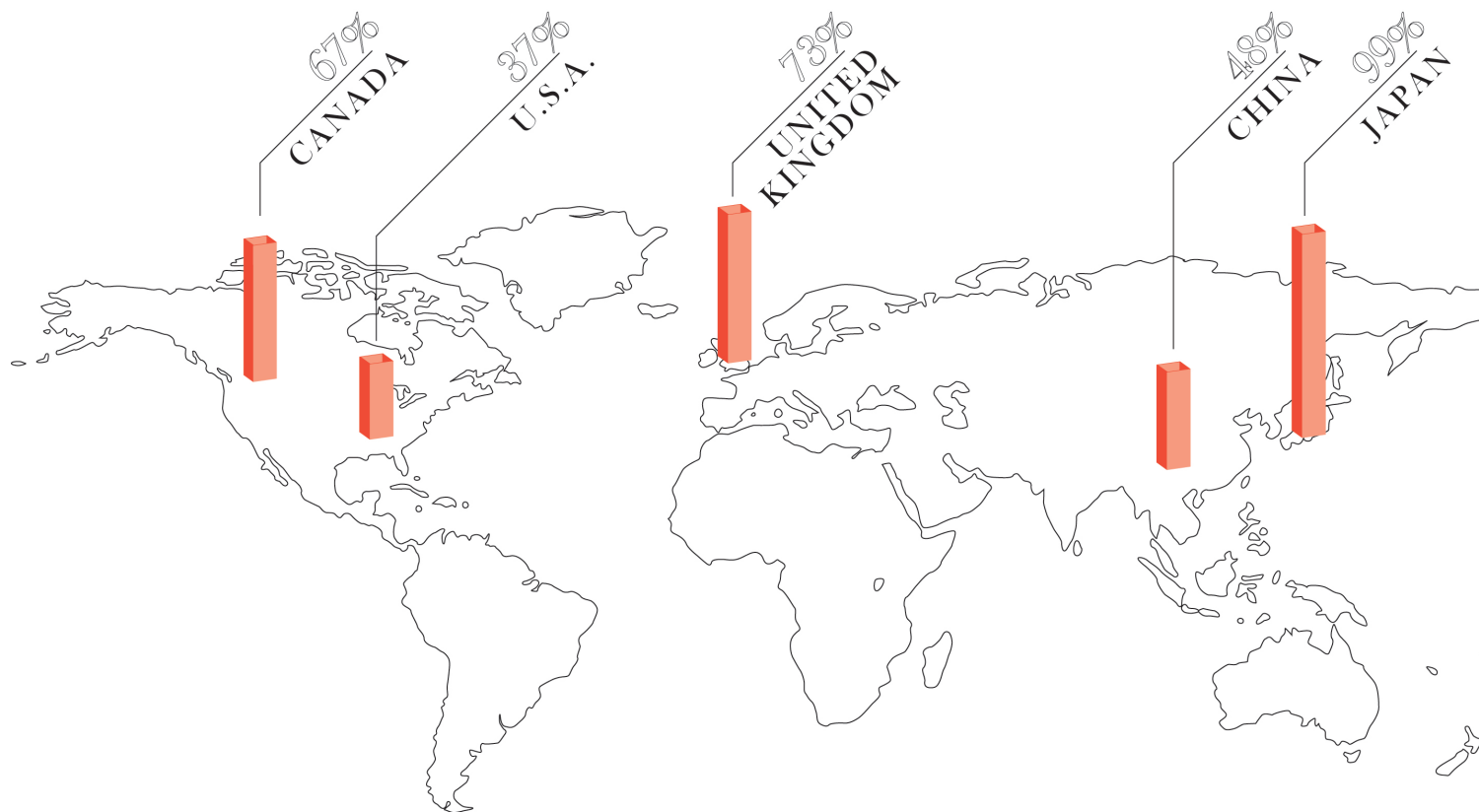


figure 4.04 Global Cremation Rates

Disposal of the Body

In Canada, the deceased may be interred, entombed or dispersed. In the case of the former two options, the body may remain whole or be reduced to ash. Cremation enables the ashes to be scattered or dispersed after cremation occurs, allowing greater personalization of funeral ritual. There are a number of regulations and limitations on whole-body burial, whereas ashes are regulated only by the consent of property ownership allowing dispersal.³

Nationwide, in 2009, cremation was preferred over direct-burial at 67.4%⁴. Province-wide the statistics vary significantly. For example, in British Columbia, cremation accounts for 80%⁵ of processing, whereas in Toronto it is the lower rate of 57.2%⁶. Together with the rest of the provinces and territories, the country typically cremates their dead. Canada is between the United States lower nation-wide rate of 36.86% in 2009⁷ and the United Kingdom's higher rate of 73.3%⁸.

In recent years, traditional cremation has been supplemented by the expanding practice of bio-cremation. This process is being marketed by a number of names, including Resomation, water resolution, natural cremation and by its technical description, alkaline hydrolysis. In any case, the result is the same as in traditional cremation; ash and bone fragments. The principle difference comes from the use of water in the place of flames. Both practices rely on intense heat to reduce the body to ashes, but in the case of bio-cremation, direct emissions are eliminated and only a sterile liquid is produced that can integrate with traditional waste-water treatment.

This method of processing the deceased is gaining popularity in the United Kingdom and America and preliminary facilities are being introduced to Canada in 2011⁹. It is engineered to integrate into traditional cremation facilities, making the transition simpler and more cost-efficient. The bio-cremation process has a carbon footprint that is four times smaller with a price that is identical to traditional cremation.¹⁰ This thesis acknowledges the increasing desire for Canadians to employ cremation in conjunction with the burgeoning practice of bio-cremation and imagines how these elements can be integrated into the space of the funeral home and the rituals of death.



figure 4.05 Nathan Phillips Square - Memorial for Jack Layton

Rituals of Death and Dying

Toronto is a culturally diverse city and Statistics Canada states that in the next half-century the number of deaths per year will double.¹¹ The city must provide for all denominations and face the challenges of creating places to mark or ritualize the passing of life.

The religion-centric funeral home is already a provision of the city. Statistically, Christians make up the largest religious group at 74.5% of the Ontario population. Beyond this are the smaller denominations of other popular religions. The City of Toronto additionally recognizes the religious beliefs of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, while amassing the remaining groups together as one statistic.¹² Each of these belief systems has specific traditions for death's rite of passage and many funeral homes cater to these requirements, if necessary. In some cases, however, their rituals are not able to be realized in the city.¹³

Second to Christianity the next largest group, at 16.3% and growing, is the non-religious. This highlights the requirement for a non-denominational place for funeral ritual. The secular funeral home must respect the elements of the domestic and the sacred from which it derives and acknowledge the value in community and shared experience that is continuous through all ritual. As a secular place it belongs both to the extraordinary of the funeral ritual and also to the ordinary of the city enabling the shared interactions of the bereaved with one another and with the deceased.

Though differing in their specific requirements, both faith and non-faith funerals are based upon the communal event. The shared experience of eating is a ritual that can be appropriated by all religious and non-religious denominations. The preparation and consumption of food is an expression of culture; it is a type of communion. Korb Scott and MFK Fisher state in *The Gastronomical Me*, “There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine is drunk. The eater lives in the world with others.”¹⁴ This philosophy carves out the basis for the importance of food within death-space.

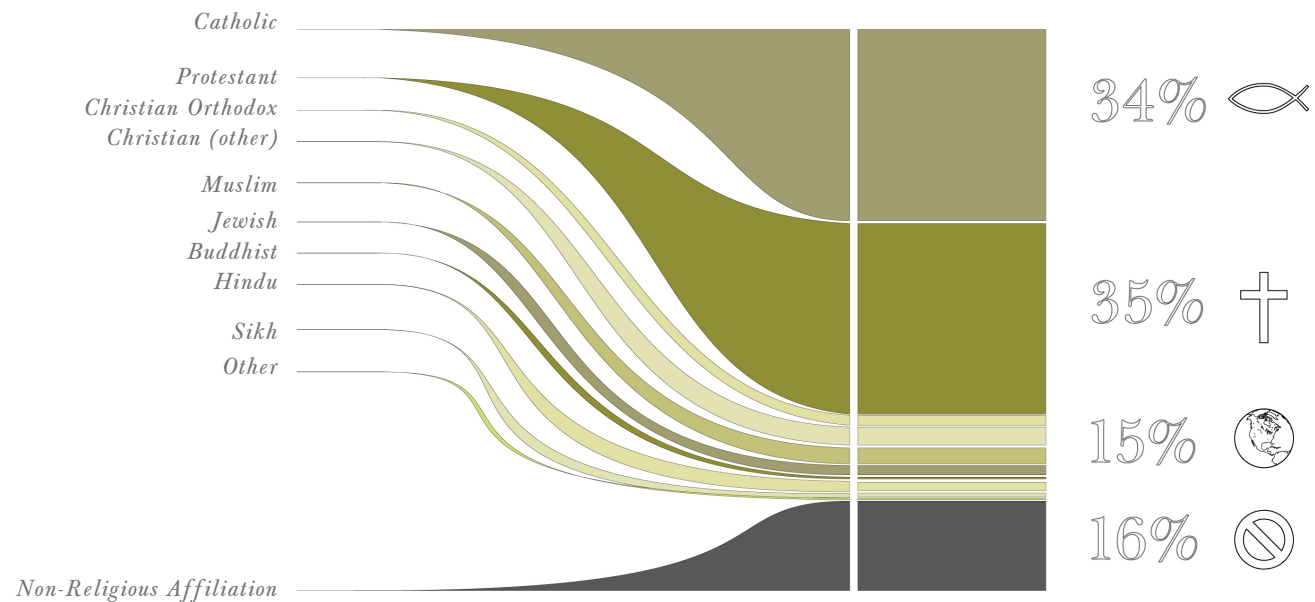


figure 4.06 Population by Religion

The Funeral Centre

The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood

In disharmony with densification, the City of Toronto is not providing new places for funeral ritual. The average Toronto funeral home is not situated according to density which forces people to make arrangements outside of their community. There is a need for funerary space within the densely populated and varied areas of Toronto, allowing individuals and families to both live and grieve within their respective communities. The vibrant St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood is a viable location to situate a new, urban funeral centre.



figure 4.07 St. Lawrence Neighbourhood (XL)

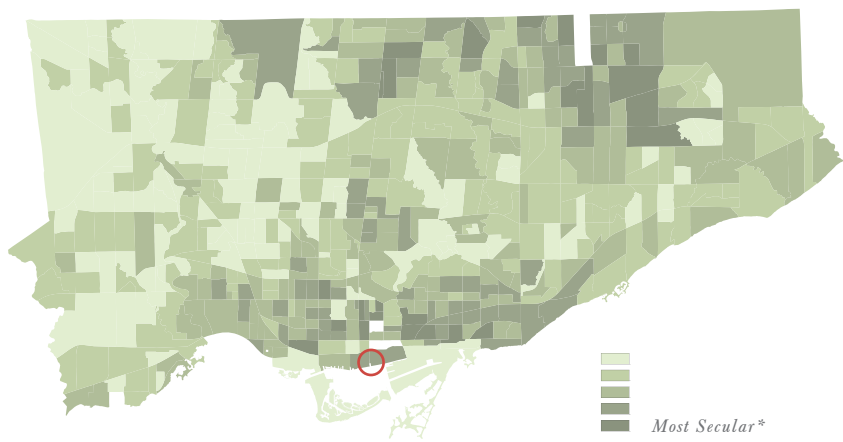


figure 4.08 Non-Religious Affiliation

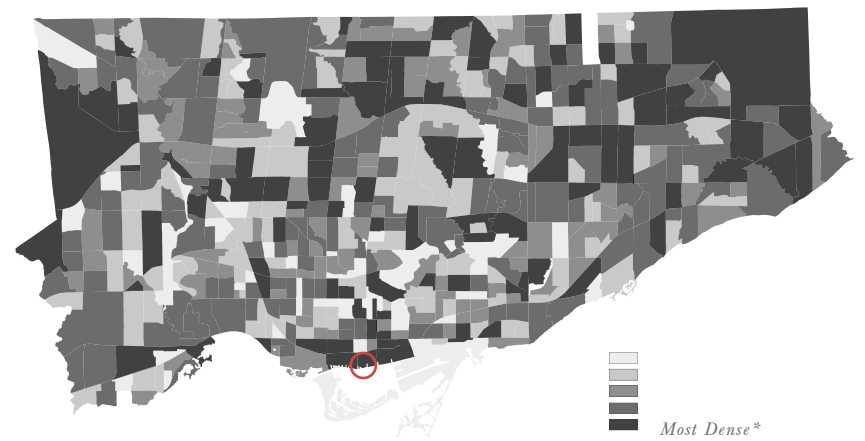


figure 4.09 Population Density

**Information is based on census demographics and type of urban fabric (detached versus tower) must be considered*

The St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood is a mixed-income, ethnically diverse residential and commercial neighbourhood adjoining the Central Business District. Five-hundred meters from the present waterfront, it is bounded by the Gardiner Expressway to the south, Parliament Street to the east, Queen Street to the north and Yonge Street to the west. The largely secular Market Neighbourhood is perhaps most notably the location of the St. Lawrence Market Complex. It is also the location of the considerable public green-space, David Crombie Park.

David Crombie Park has a significant east-west presence in the neighbourhood. It reaches from Parliament Street to Lower Jarvis running parallel to and south of the Esplanade. Its length is lined with Co-operative Housing Complexes with shared courtyards, and its eastern and western ends terminate at the Distillery District and St. Lawrence Market parking lot respectively. Neighbourhood activity oscillates between highly active and inactive as indicated by peak rush-hour traffic at the Gardiner Expressway and market patron activity in and around the North and South St. Lawrence Market buildings.

The spaces within the park are both spontaneous and programmed. There are numerous built elements for recreation, while open-spaces allow for personalized use. The northern edge of the park is a continuous promenade that mediates between its occupied spaces and the Esplanade.

St. Lawrence Hall

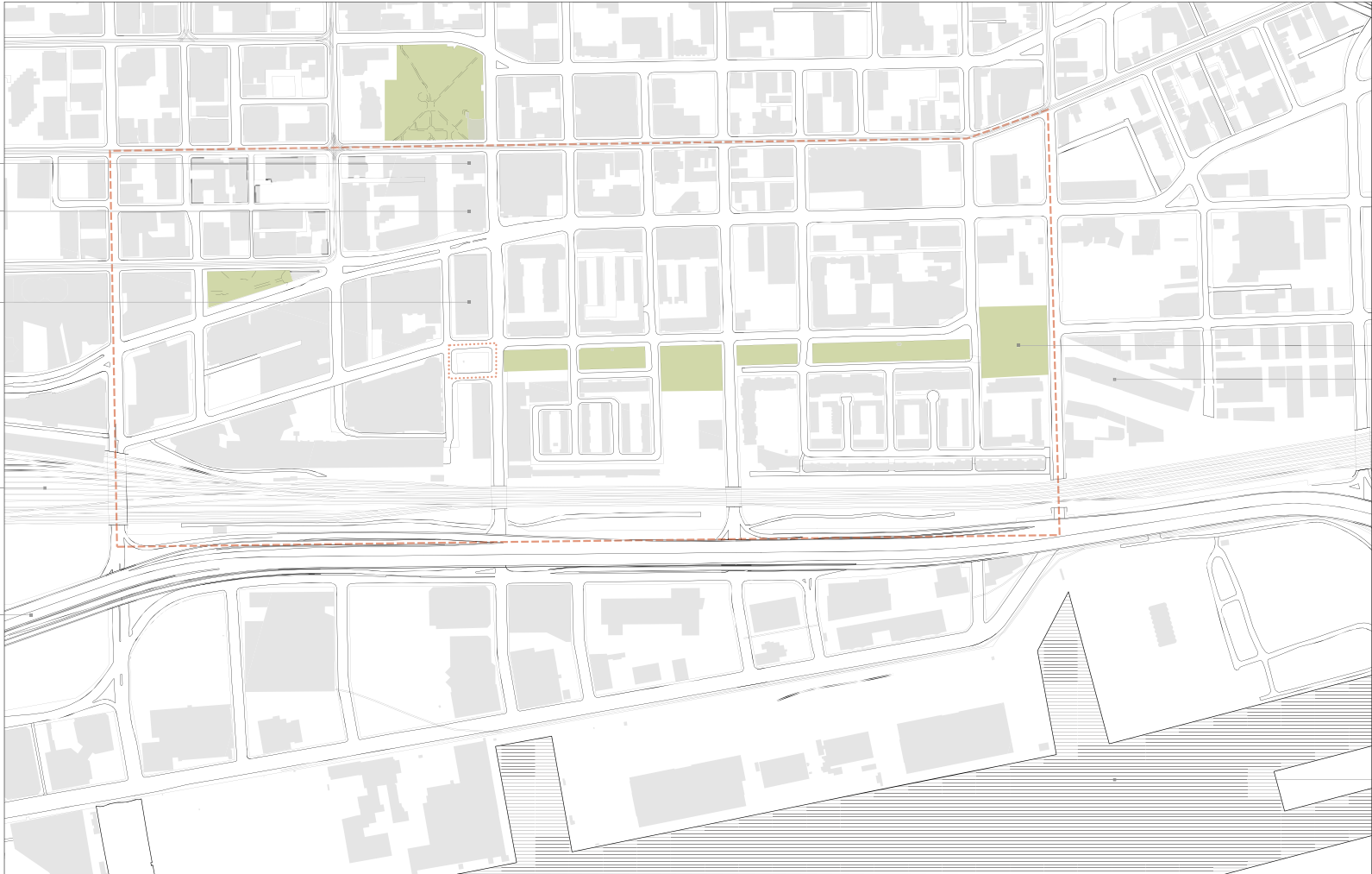
*St. Lawrence Market
North Building*

*St. Lawrence Market
South Building*

Railway Lines

Gardiner Expressway

figure 4.10 Site Plan - St. Lawrence Funeral Centre & Surrounds (L)



*David Crombie
Park*

*Distillery
District*

*Lake
Ontario*



St. Lawrence Funeral Centre
St. Lawrence Neighbourhood - - - - -

The proposed site of the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre is at the western terminus of David Crombie Park and southern terminus of the St. Lawrence Market complex upon an existing parking lot. This is the most dynamic and populated area of the neighbourhood. It is along an axis of major routes of travel for the procession of mourners to connect to other parts of the city, including but not limited to Mount Pleasant Cemetery to the north.

Siting the funeral centre adjacent to the multi-cultural St. Lawrence Market establishes death within the range of human activity. As MFK Fisher has stated, “We celebrate almost every one of our main events, like birth and death and marriage and all that with food.”¹⁵ The exchange between the ordinary and the sacred provides a platform to engage a dialogue of mortality within the city and strike a balance between the realities of existence. This pairing of program recalls the market-cemetery precedent of Paris’ Cimetière des Innocents and creates a place that provides for both life and death.



figure 4.11 St. Lawrence Market & St. Lawrence Market Parking Lot



figure 4.12 Woodsworth Housing Co-operative



figure 4.13 David Crombie Park - Community Garden



figure 4.14 David Crombie Park - Playground



figure 4.15 St. Lawrence Market Parking Lot



figure 4.16 David Crombie Park - Downtown Alternative School Playground



figure 4.17 Distillery District



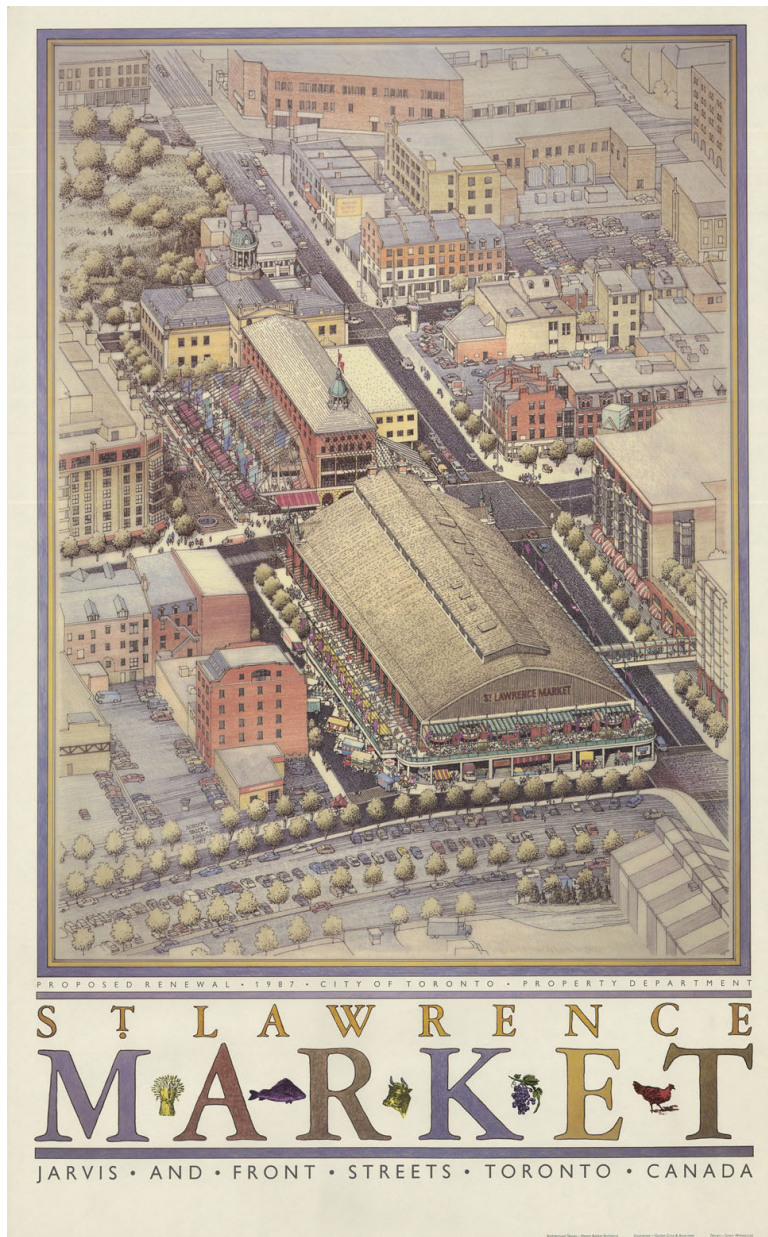
figure 4.18 David Crombie Park - Bandshell



figure 4.19 David Crombie Park - Basketball Court



figure 4.20 Soccer Field



The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood and the Market Complex have had significant roles in the history of the City of Toronto. Though Toronto owes its foundations to Fort York at Garrison Creek, the modern city began in the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood.

The South Market building initially looked directly onto the Toronto waterfront. This was the first point of contact for both goods and people traveling by water. It was, in 1834, the location of the first City Hall where the City of Toronto was incorporated. In the thirty years prior it had been known as the market-complex, providing a patchwork of spaces for both civic and commercial use. In the early 1850s the process of infilling the harbour began. In 1899 the City Hall moved to its second location on Bay Street and the market became a primarily commercial enterprise. The successive years of 1909, 1913, and 1931¹⁶ yielded the present day disconnect between the market and water's edge, burying and neglecting this historic site.

figure 4.21 St Lawrence Market Proposed Renewal, 1987

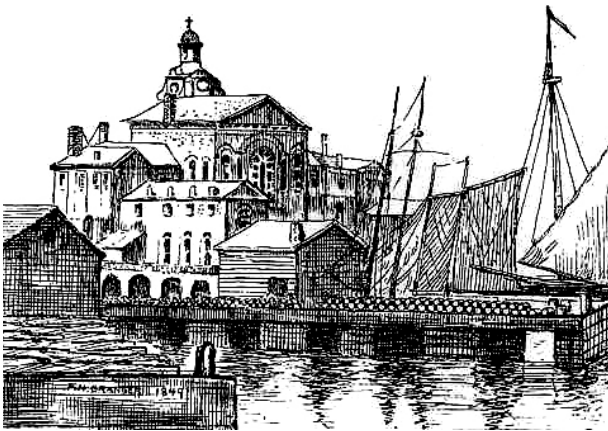


figure 4.22 St. Lawrence Market 1849



figure 4.25 St. Lawrence Market 1868

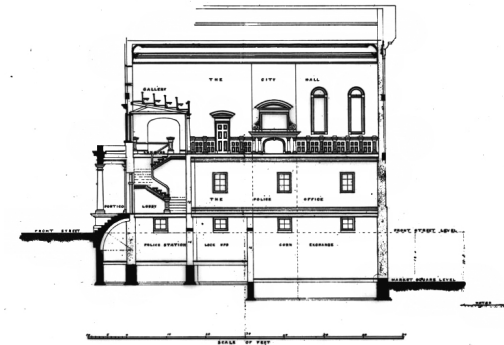


figure 4.24 St. Lawrence Market 1849

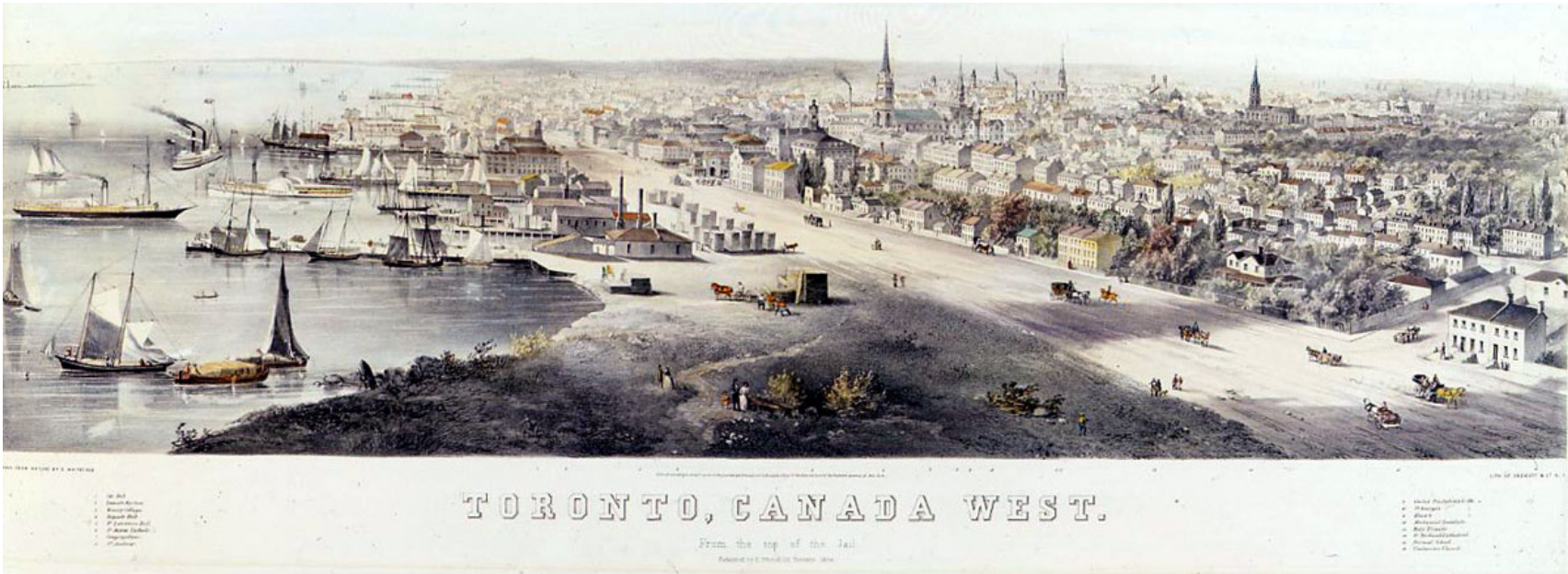
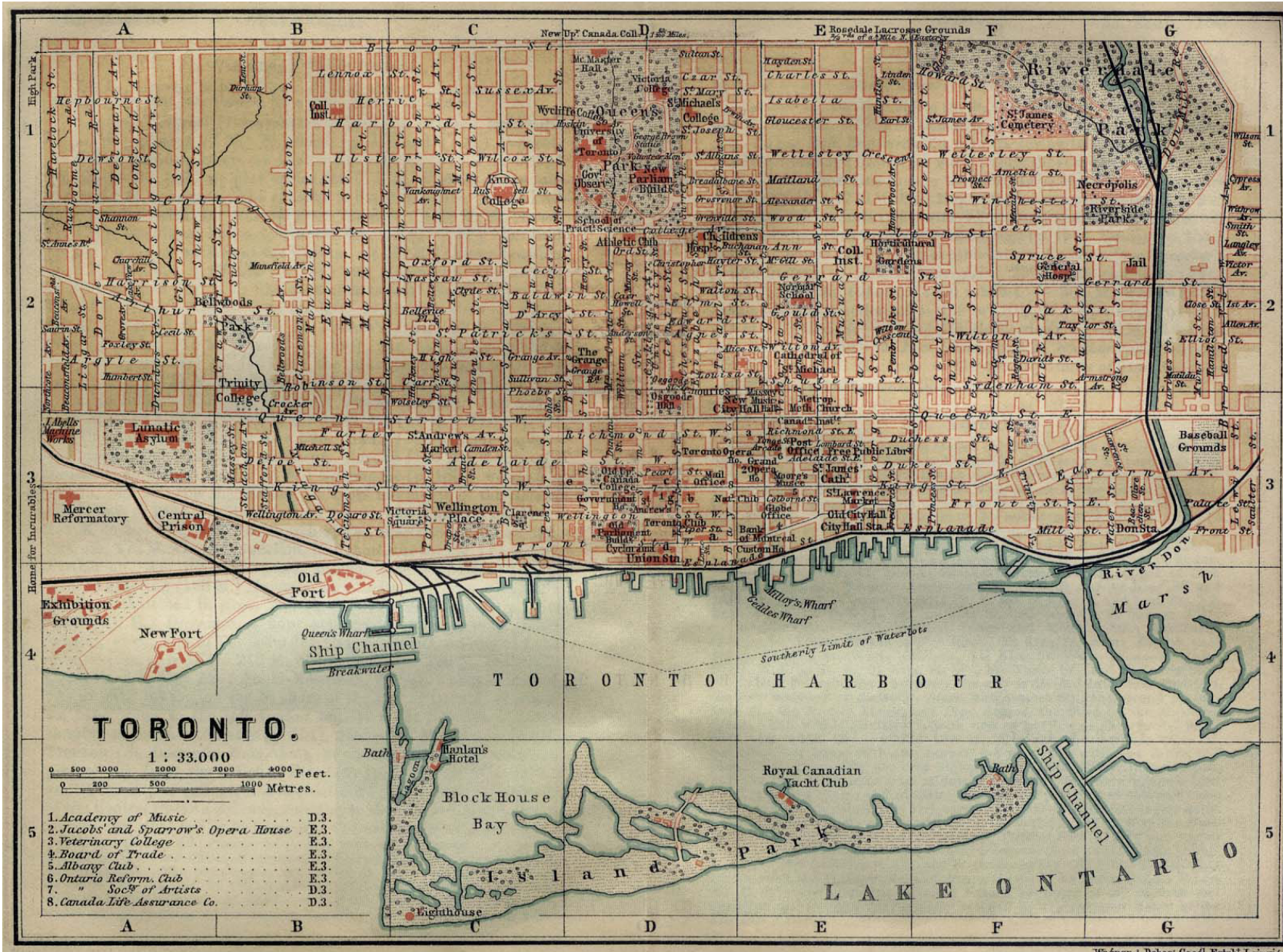


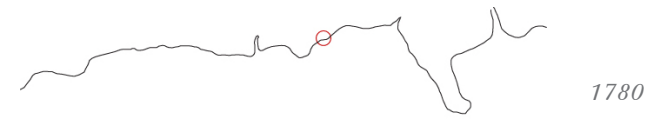
figure 4.23 Toronto, Canada West, 1854



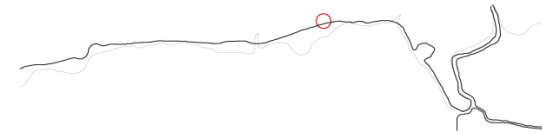
Wagner & Debes' Geogr. Establ. Leipzig.

“The liminal edge between land and water is a site of existential tensions, particularly those pertaining to life, memory, oblivion and death.”¹⁷

The City of Toronto, since the burial of its shoreline and many of its rivers, has developed its sense of place in conjunction with its lost waters. A composite of writers, architects, urban designers and other invested groups have recognized formally and informally the value in rediscovering how water moved through the city while imagining how it might again return. The empiric value of water is universal; it is life-giving. In this design proposal, it also has a role in taking life away. Water has, in many myths, been a mediator between life and death. It is often represented as a threshold; a transaction between two worlds. This thesis recognizes the historic role and buried presence of water on this site and imagines what role it might have in funeral ritual. Water-based cremation enables a sense of submitting the deceased to literal and mythological water. The site offers an opportunity for the deceased to be entwined with the past, present and future of the city.



1780



1850



1890



1920



2011

figure 4.26 Toronto, 1894 (opposite)

figure 4.27 Evolution of the Waterfront at St. Lawrence Market

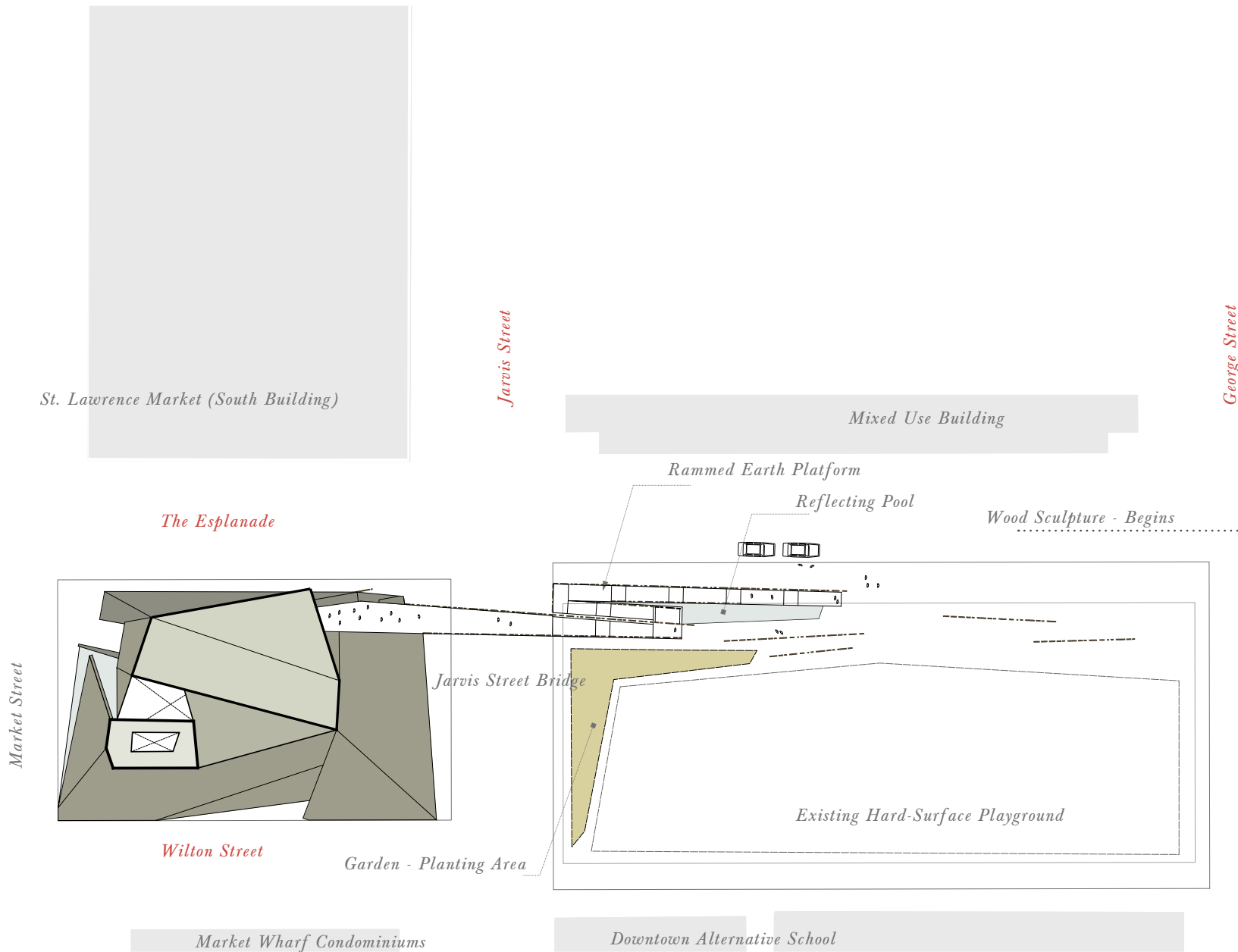


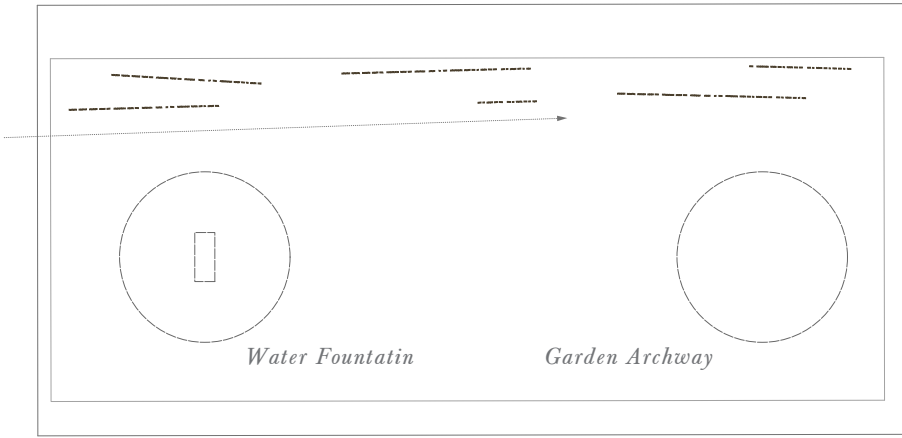
figure 4.28 Site Plan - St. Lawrence Funeral Centre (M)



The Funeral Centre acts as a departure point for the procession, encouraging travel eastwards along a sculptural insertion that extends through David Crombie Park, tracing the historic shoreline. The park is imagined as an extension to the design proposal as a place to scatter the ashes of the deceased.

Co-operative Housing Complexes

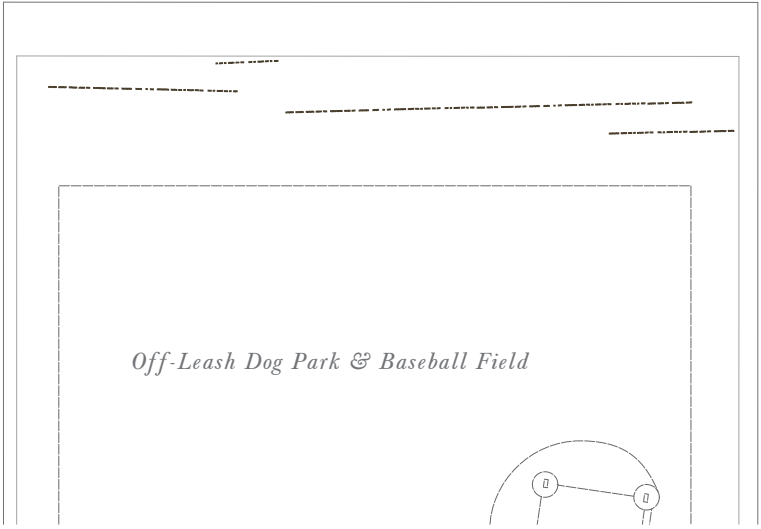
Sculpture - Continues Eastwards



Co-operative Housing Complexes

The Esplanade

Frederick Street



Lower Sherbourne



Car Dealership

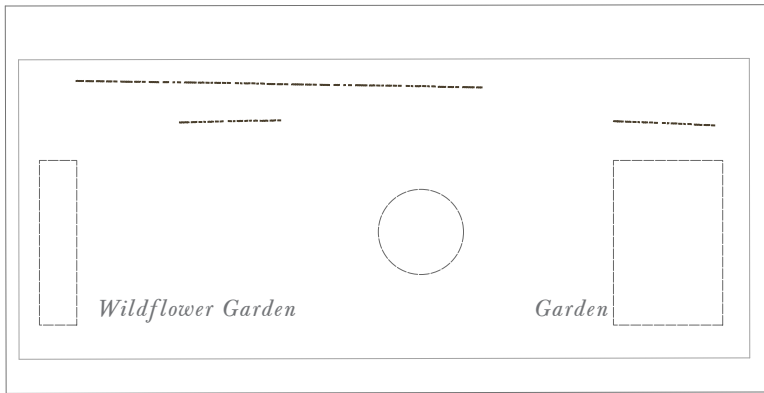
The Esplanade

Princess Street

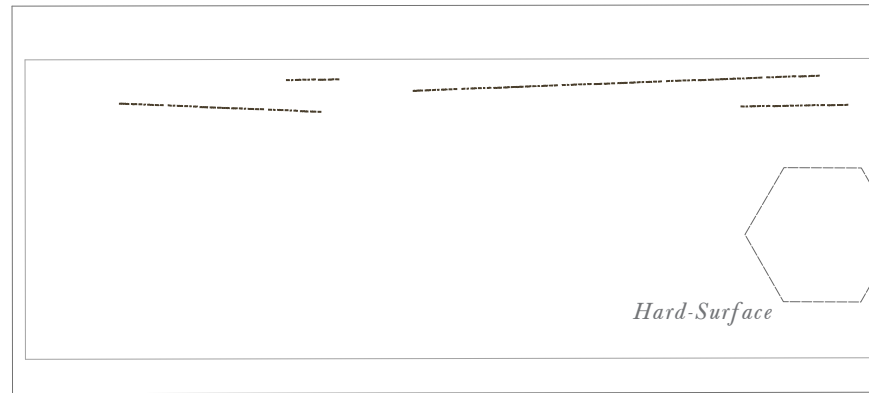


*Market Lane
Jr. & Sr. Public School*

*St. Stephen's
Community House*



Co-operative Housing Complexes



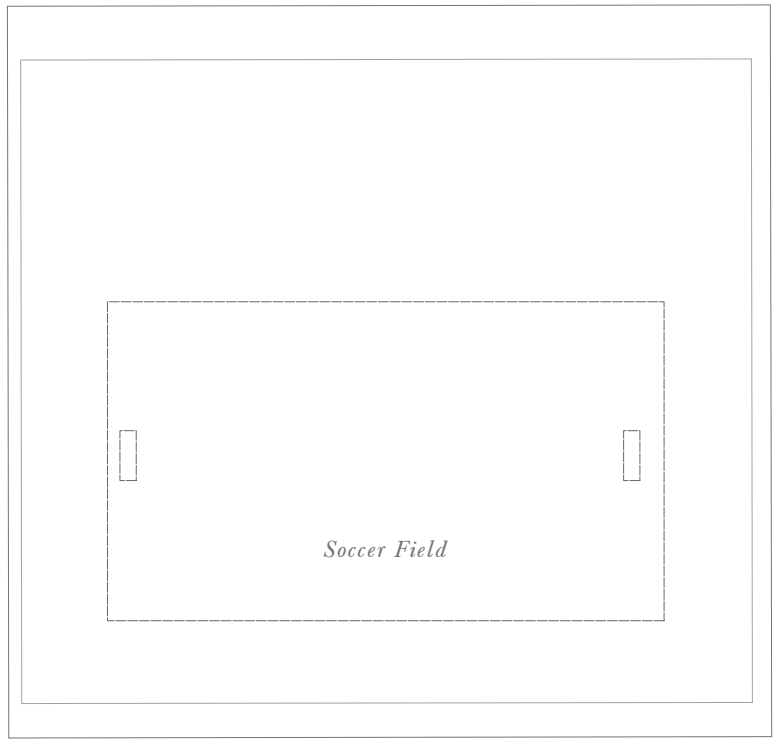
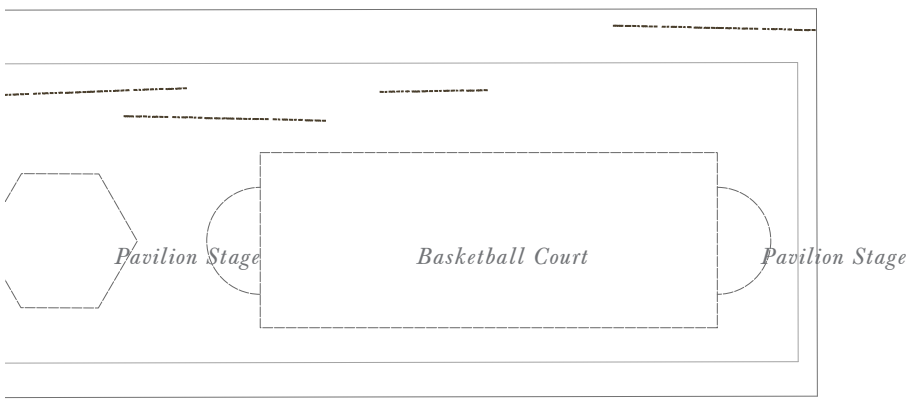
Co-operative Housing Complexes

Mixed Use Building

Berkeley Street

The Esplanade

Sculpture - Finishes



Co-operative Housing Complexes



“The tension between public space and private space cannot be reconciled by urban design or policy, until the citizen configures these contradictory desires, and makes an art of their apparent paradox.”¹⁸

“...it is the human drama alone that will restore our cities; more importantly, it is the unwillingness to conceal that drama that will emerge as the mark of our greatness.”¹⁹

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

The Building

The design of the funeral centre balances between the narratives of the city, the mourners and the deceased; the experience of funerary ritual simultaneously acknowledges the urban condition and the sacred intimacy of memorial.



the traditional burial mound

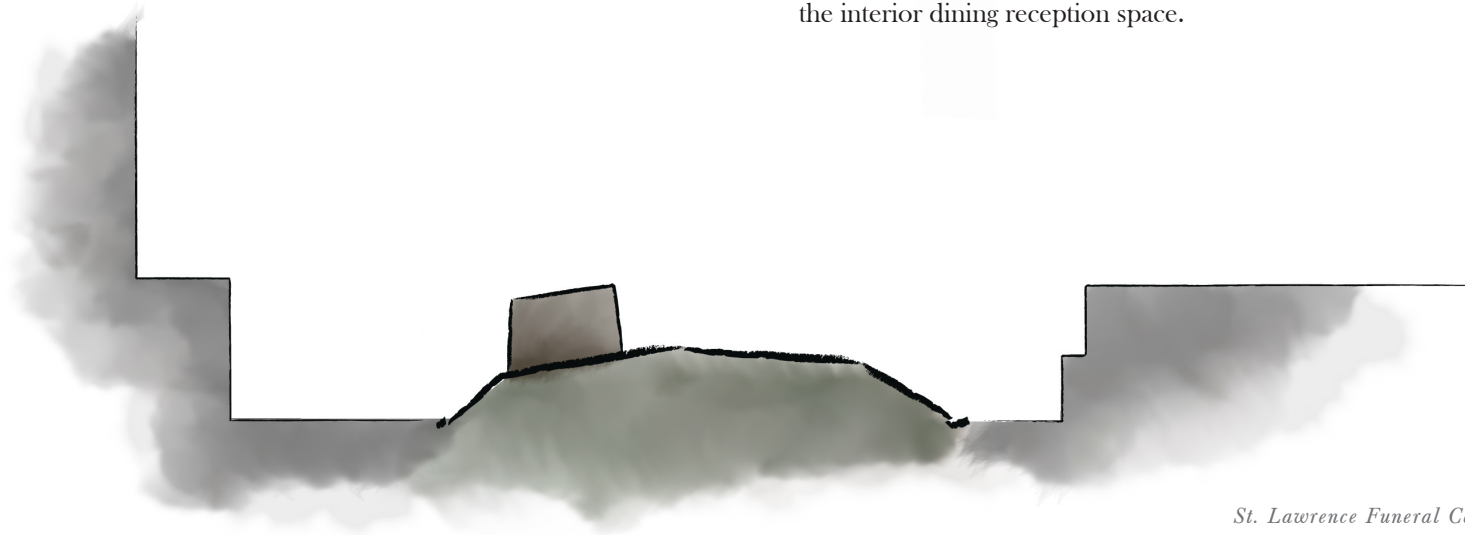


funeral spire punctures burial mound

figure 4.29 Design Concept - The Building as Landscape Mound

The Building as Landscape Mound

The first architecture has been said to have been in the form of the mound, a monument of raised earth displaced by the body underneath. The location of the deceased have always contributed to the sense of place for the living and the siting of the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre fully embraces the contemporary urban experience. The Funeral Centre enables the occupation of the mound by carving out its interior and blurring the edges between city and ritual. The perennial flora of the mound and the weathered cedar spire are communicative design elements encouraging a dialogue with the surrounding neighbourhood while the funeral ceremony is sunken below ground and perceived externally as a void in the centre of the landscape.



St. Lawrence Funeral Centre in city context

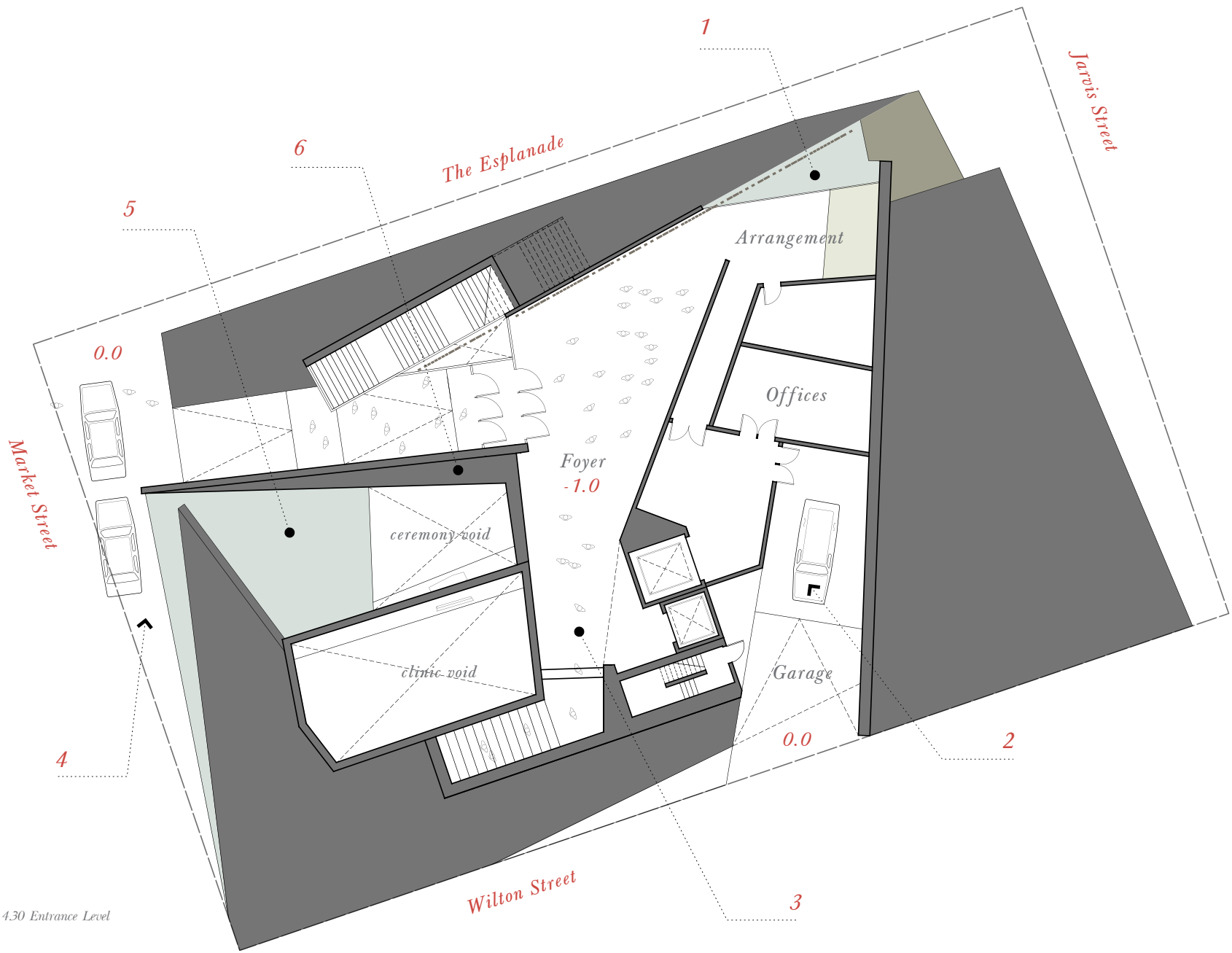


figure 4.30 Entrance Level

sunken foyer and arrangement spaces are screened by cedar lath wall; arrangement area is bounded by a reflecting pool and the sloped landscape breaches the interior framing a single view to the Esplanade, Jarvis Street and bridge over-head

1

hearse & deceased enter clinical spaces

2

all flooring, unless stated otherwise is unpolished concrete

3

entrance & drop-off area

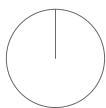
4

southern edge of reflecting pool falls to ceremony below along the face of the wooden spire

5

half-wall wraps ceremony void obscuring views of the deceased from entry and foyer

6



-1.0m Below Grade
Entrance Level

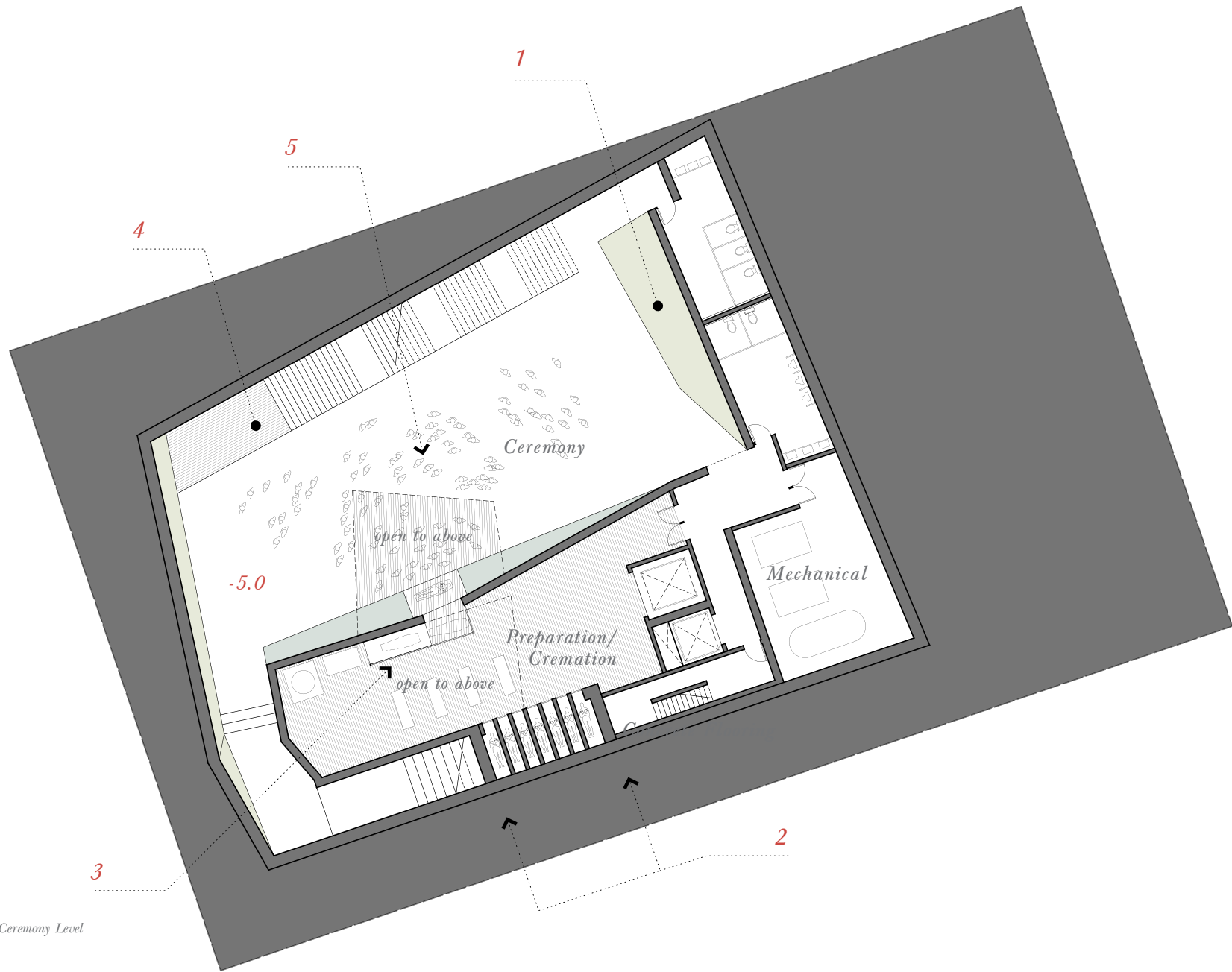


figure 4.31 Ceremony Level

the interior landscape walls of the ceremony space slope inwards

1

thermal surface deceased body storage

2

the preparation and cremation space houses all clinical proceedings including washing and/or embalming of the deceased, storing and cremation; the technician brings the deceased from the staging area above in the service elevator and uses one of four preparation tables illuminated from the 'clinic' oculus above

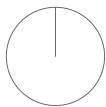
3

wood flooring as noted; base of ascending stairs, familial ceremony space and cremation space

4

ceremony space accommodates approximately two-hundred mourners; immediate family stands on a wooden platform below the 'ceremony' oculus and in front of the coffin, while extended family and friends surround; water collects from above in front of the spire and below the wooden floor; this water will be used for the cremation process as the deceased is passed into the spire

5



-5.0m Below Grade
Ceremony Level

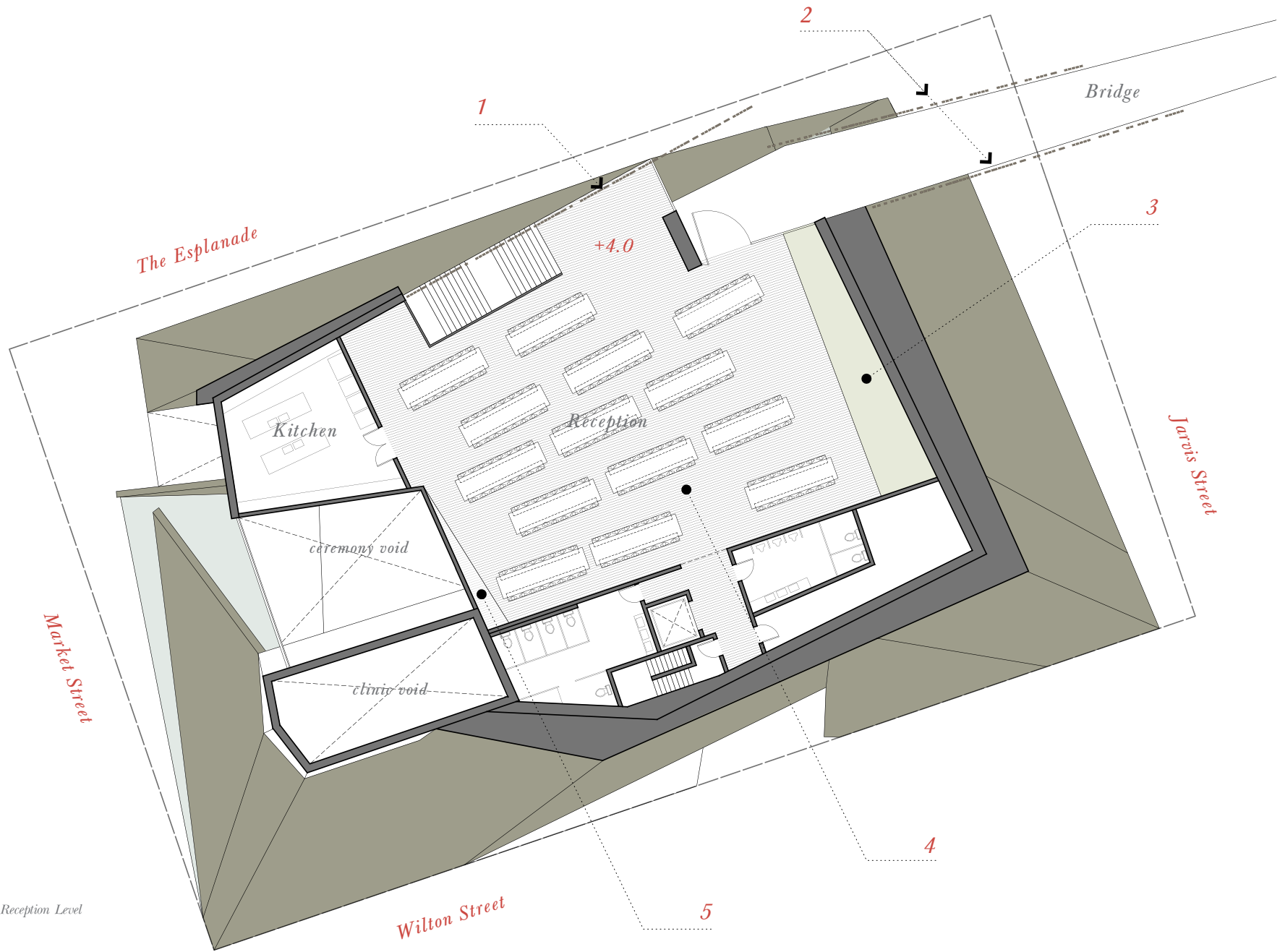


figure 4.32 Reception Level

cedar lath wall ascends from foyer and screens direct views from adjacent St. Lawrence Market Mezzanine; wall frames first unobstructed view to exterior revealing bridge & entire corridor of David Crombie Park

1

cedar lath wall bounds edges of bridge extending over Jarvis Street

2

the interior landscape walls of the reception space incline towards the opposing exterior wall - their meeting place creates clerestory fenestration

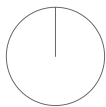
3

reception space accommodates two-hundred mourners for a seated dinner following the ceremony

4

vertical surface of spire flares to create continuity with horizontal floor surface; both are clad in wood; a single view is permissible to the ceremony space below the half-wall

5



+4.0m Above Grade
Reception Level

The City

Lower Jarvis Street & The Esplanade

It is nearly autumn, the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre is exchanging its lush greens of the summer. The goldenrod has bloomed and again resembles grass more than flower. The milkweed has gone to seed and the tiny volunteer floss can be found in the park carried by the wind.

The eastern edge of the mound is a variegated brown, compressed in places where people have had a market lunch perched upon its slope. The hanging greens on the north and south sides have lost their leaves and they are collecting in the pools of water on the north-east and south-west corners of the mound.

The bridge is casting longer shadows along the intersection of Jarvis and the Esplanade; the silvering cedar is catching the dwindling light of the shortening days. There is a funeral today and access to the rammed earth platform is barred. Walking through the intersection beneath the bridge, the sunlight is briefly interrupted by the passage of mourners overhead.

The view eastward is framed by the accreting wood sculpture; a cedar lath for every memorial. The procession of mourners has descended and is making their way along the park.





figure 4.33 The Mound

The Mourners

Entry

The mourners arrive at the north-western edge of the site, greeting one another in the outdoor gathering space. A cedar-wood spire projects from the landscaped mound and at its base the earth is pulled away to expose a broad oculus. The city level appears to sink into the entrance; a reflecting pool of water descends alongside and enters the building.

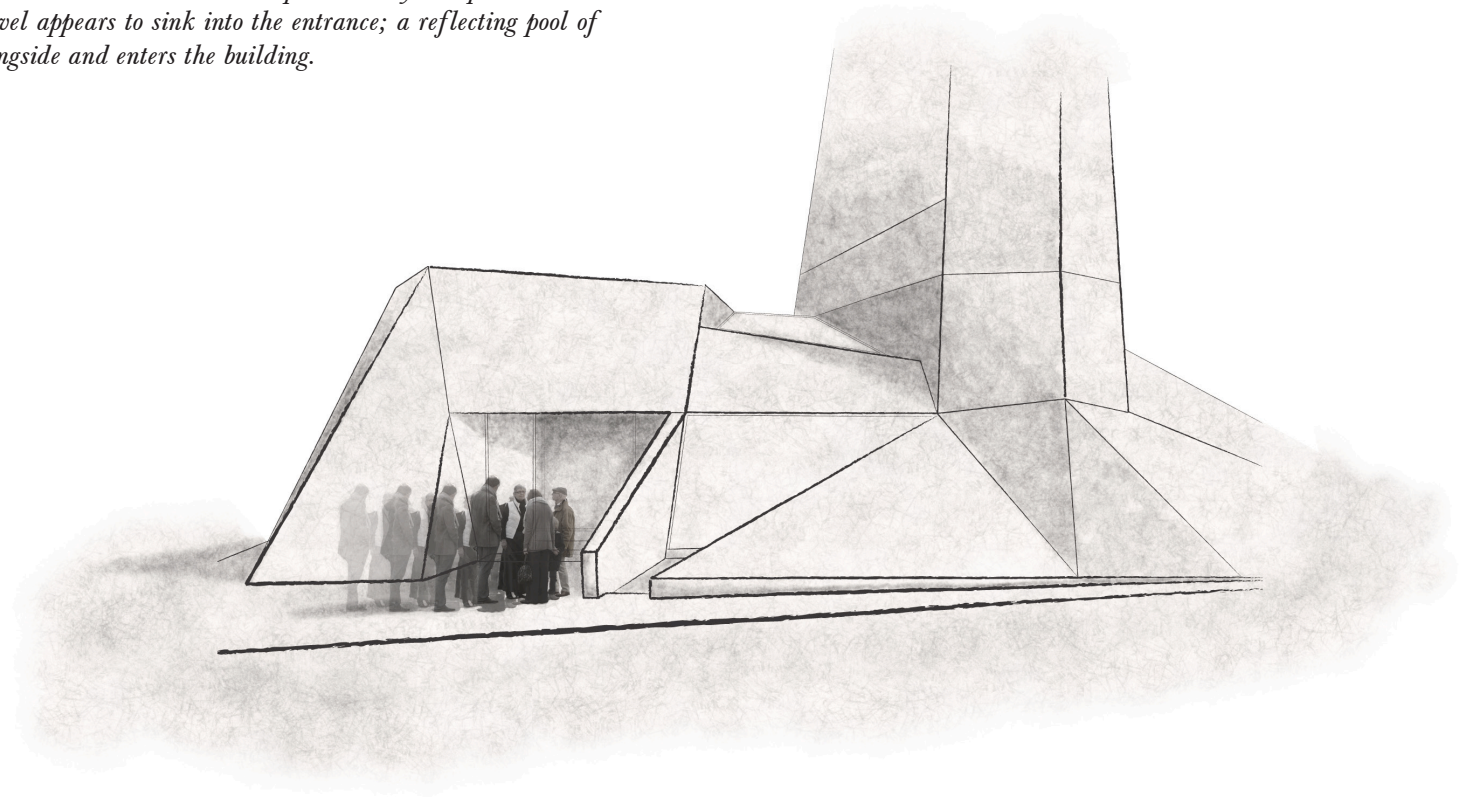


figure 4.34 Entry

The Deceased - The Funeral Director

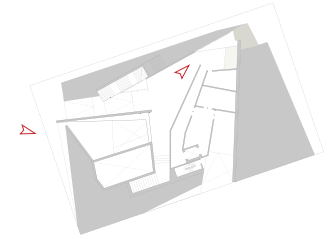


figure 4.36 Entry Level

Arrangement

A funeral is taking place today and the deceased must be collected from the hospital morgue. The funeral director is finalizing the preparations for a pre-arranged funeral. They have explained that the bereaved will be given a cedar lath with a simple 'in memoriam' burned into its grain. The lath will be appended to a wooden sculpture that over time will retrace buried rivers and the Lake Ontario's edge throughout the city, starting here, with Toronto's shoreline.

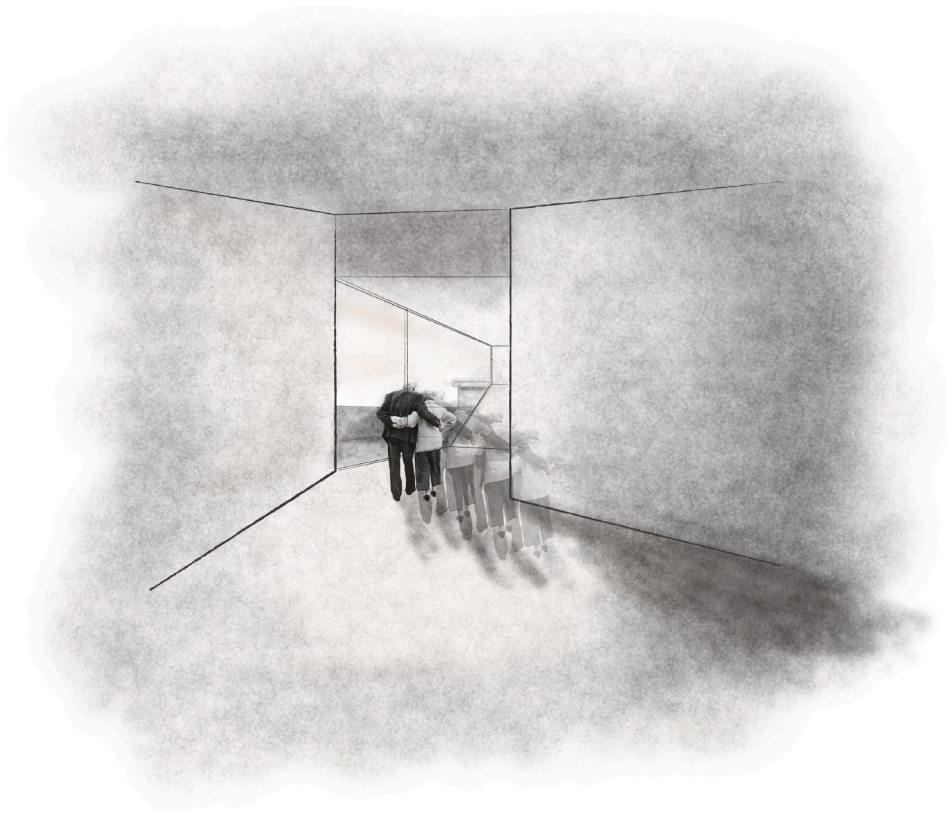


figure 4.35 Arrangement

The Mourners

Foyer

The noise from the nearby Gardiner Expressway, rail-lines, rush-hour city traffic and market exaggerates the sensation of silence upon entry. Inside the mound, the bereaved gather in an open space finished in unpolished concrete floors and plain white plaster. The oculus adjacent to the spire brings light in from above.

An inaccessible set of wooden stairs rises to the immediate north-east from the floor below. Direct views to the staircase are screened by a cedar lath wall that runs parallel to the northern edge of the room. To the south, the similar warm natural wood of the spire is visible, contrasting the concrete and plaster.

A set of stairs descends, wrapping the spire as it reaches below-ground. Half-walls frame the void open to the ceremony space below. Falling water can be seen while the space itself remains concealed.

The Deceased - The Funeral Director

Entry

Returning from the hospital, the hearse pulls onto Wilton Street, diagonally aligning to back into the side entrance of the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre. On the southern side of the mound a recess opens along the face large enough to allow the vehicle's entry. Hanging Virginia Creeper obscure the top of the concrete ceiling above the descending hearse.

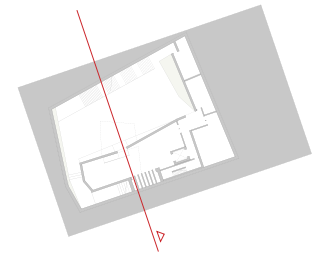


figure 4.38 Ceremony Level

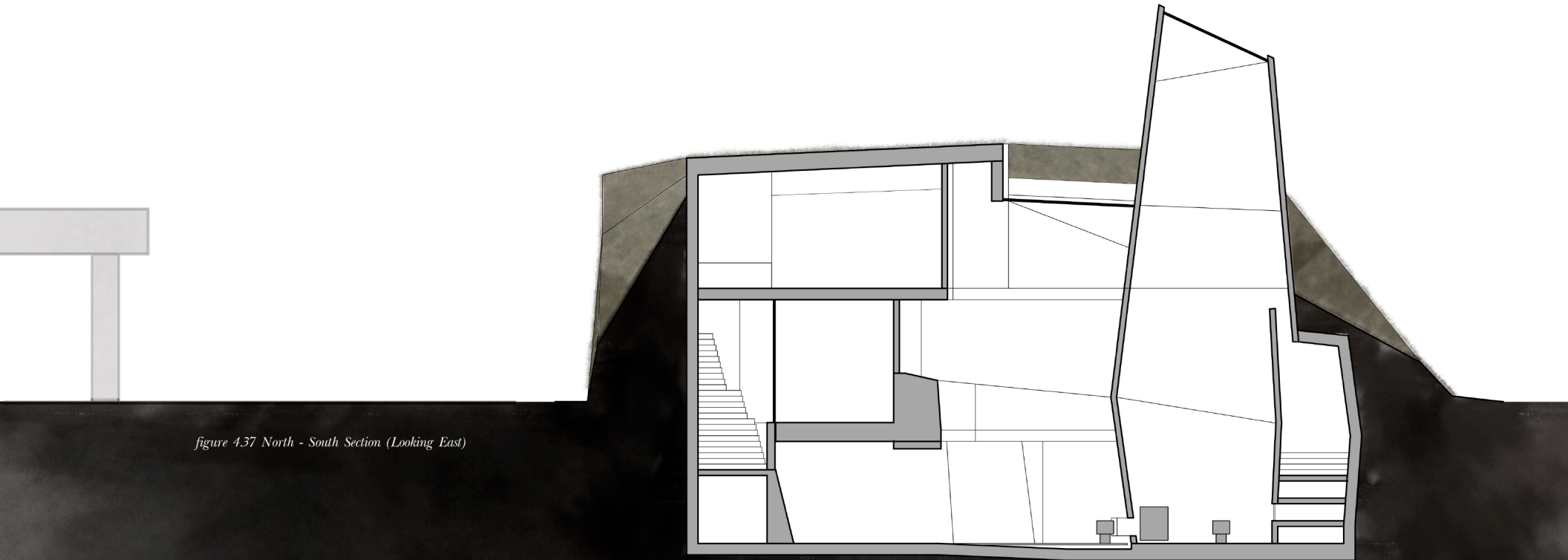


figure 4.37 North - South Section (Looking East)

The Mourners

Descent

The procession of mourners descends together, following the southern stairs down about the wooden spire further below ground. The ceiling inclines towards the face of the spire and stops before meeting it, allowing a curtain of light to illuminate the natural materials and guide the procession.

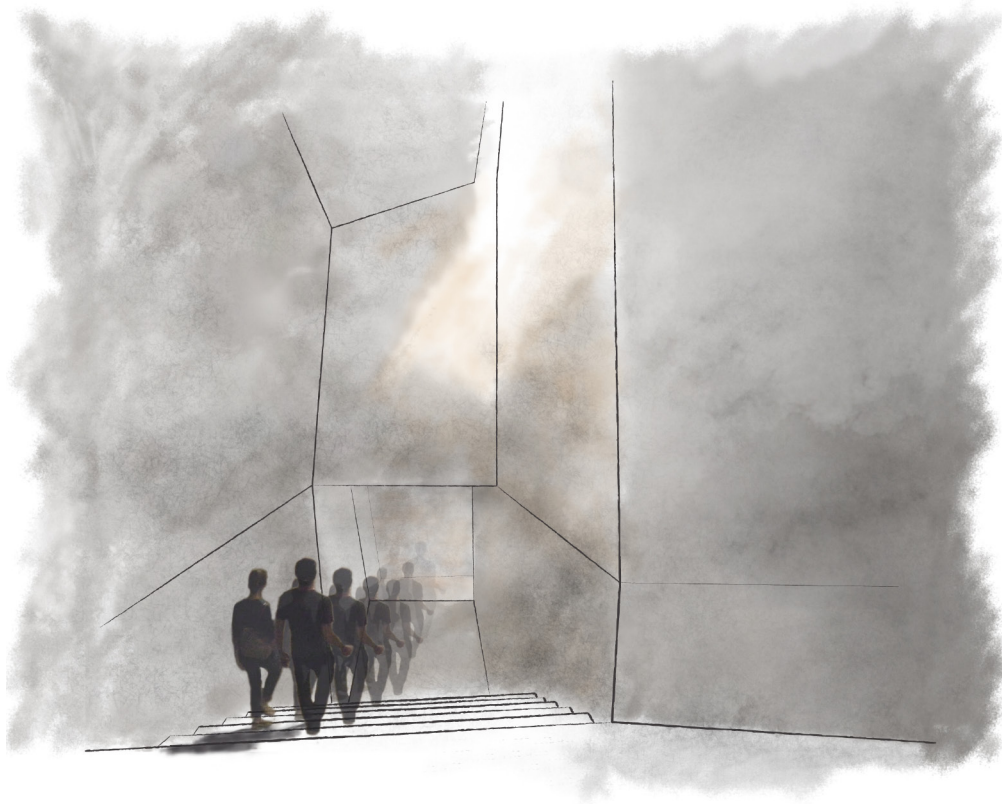


figure 4.39 Descent

The Deceased - The Funeral Director

Descent

The funeral director exits the hearse and opens the rear door while the wheels of the retort extend like an accordion to the ground. The deceased body is wheeled into the Funeral Centre. The elevator is called and the deceased and funeral director descend within the wooden spire.

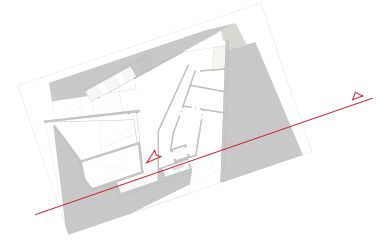


figure 4.41 Entry Level

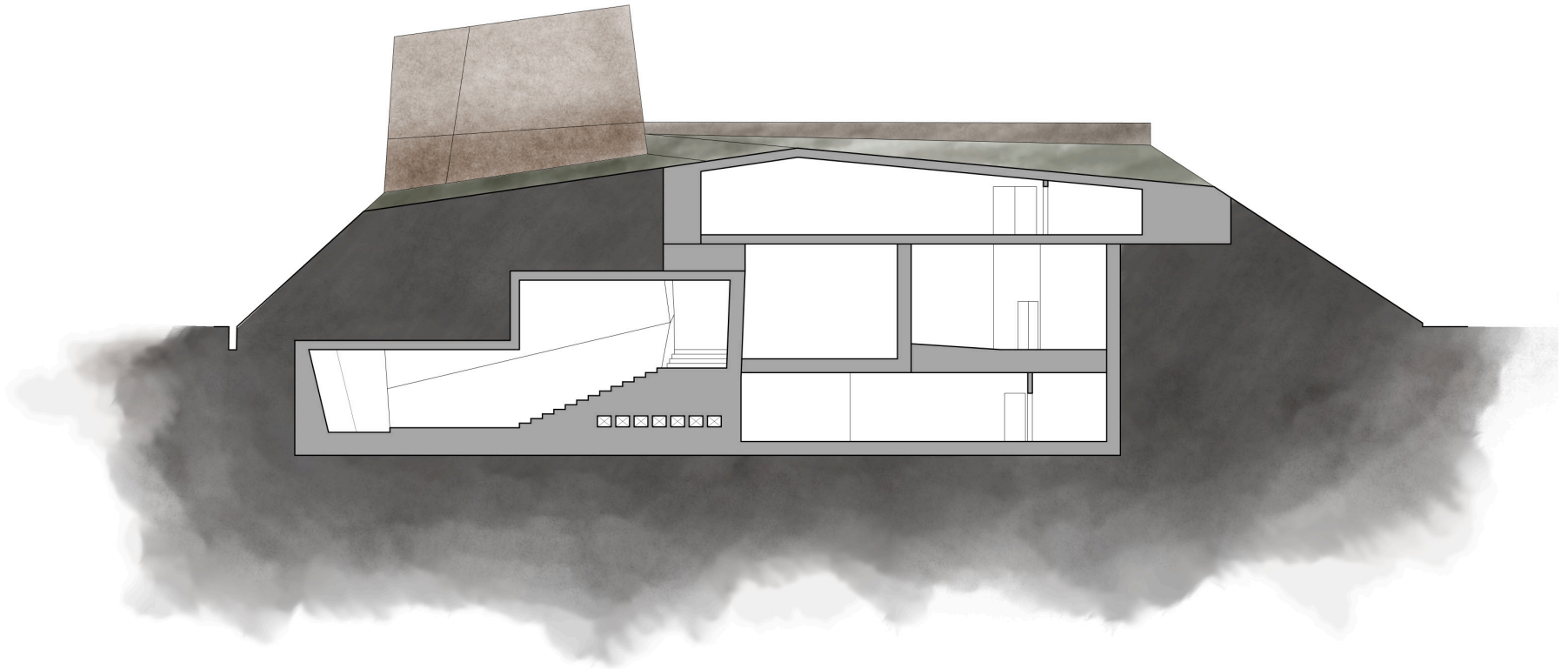


figure 4.40 East - West Section (Looking North)

The Deceased - The Funeral Director

Clinic Oculus

The elevator doors open four meters below ground into the preparation and cremation space within the wooden spire. Looking upwards, the oculus brings natural light onto the tops of the machines and the concrete dressing tables. The deceased is wheeled over to the built-in mortuary cabinets and as the family has requested no embalming, the deceased will stay here until the ceremony is ready to begin.

The deceased is brought out in front of the wooden spire. Below the catafalque, water has accumulated that will be necessary for the cremation process. The funeral procession can be heard above, resonating throughout the building as they descend the stairs.

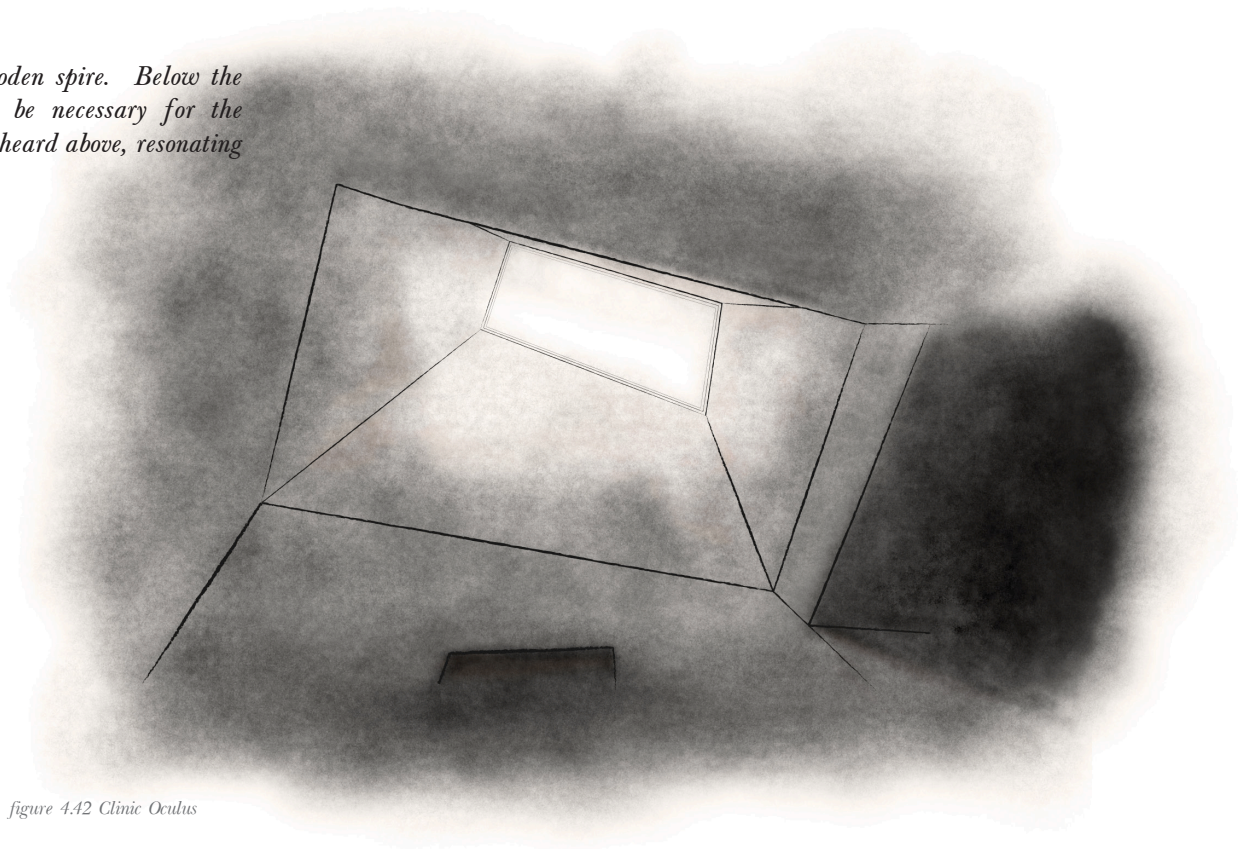


figure 4.42 Clinic Oculus

The Mourners

Ceremony Oculus

The stairs open onto the ceremony space. Diffuse northern light enters from the oculus above and illuminates the immediate area at the base of the spire where the family gathers to stand on a wooden platform in front of the casket and catafalque. The upper levels of the funeral centre step back with each ascended floor, creating an inverted pyramidal void with the sky at the upper limit. Water flows down the face of the spire from the main level above and fills a recessed part of the floor between the spire and the ceremonial area. Here, the service will be held and the deceased will be submitted to the water cremation area through a single opening in the spire.

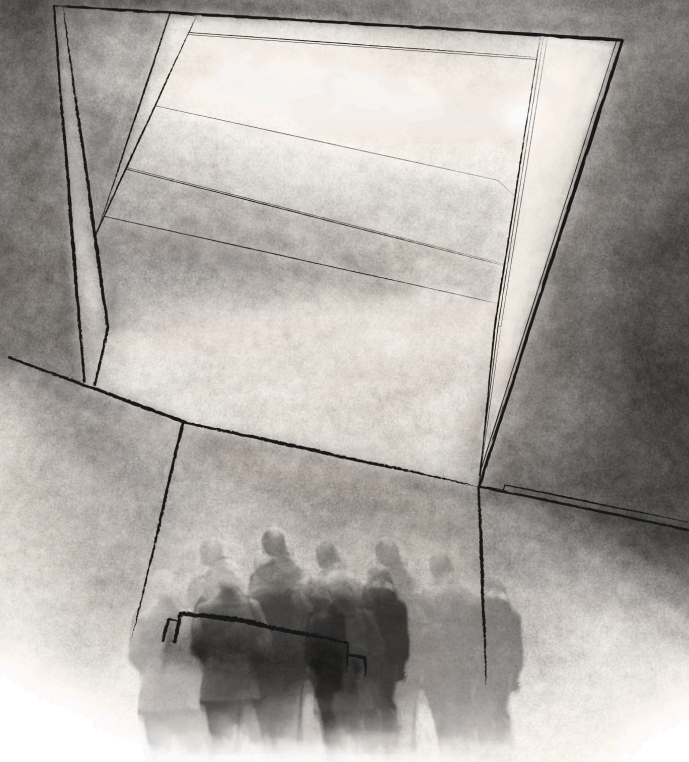
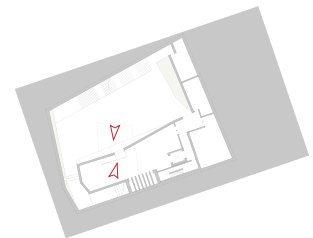


figure 4.43 Ceremony Oculus

figure 4.44 Reception Level (right)



The Mourners & The Deceased

Ceremony

The non-immediate family and friends gather in a concentric semi-circle extending further away from the casket and out of the illuminated area. The walls surrounding this group of mourners angle upwards, covered in shade-grown flora spilling down upon the concrete.

The ceremony begins.

...

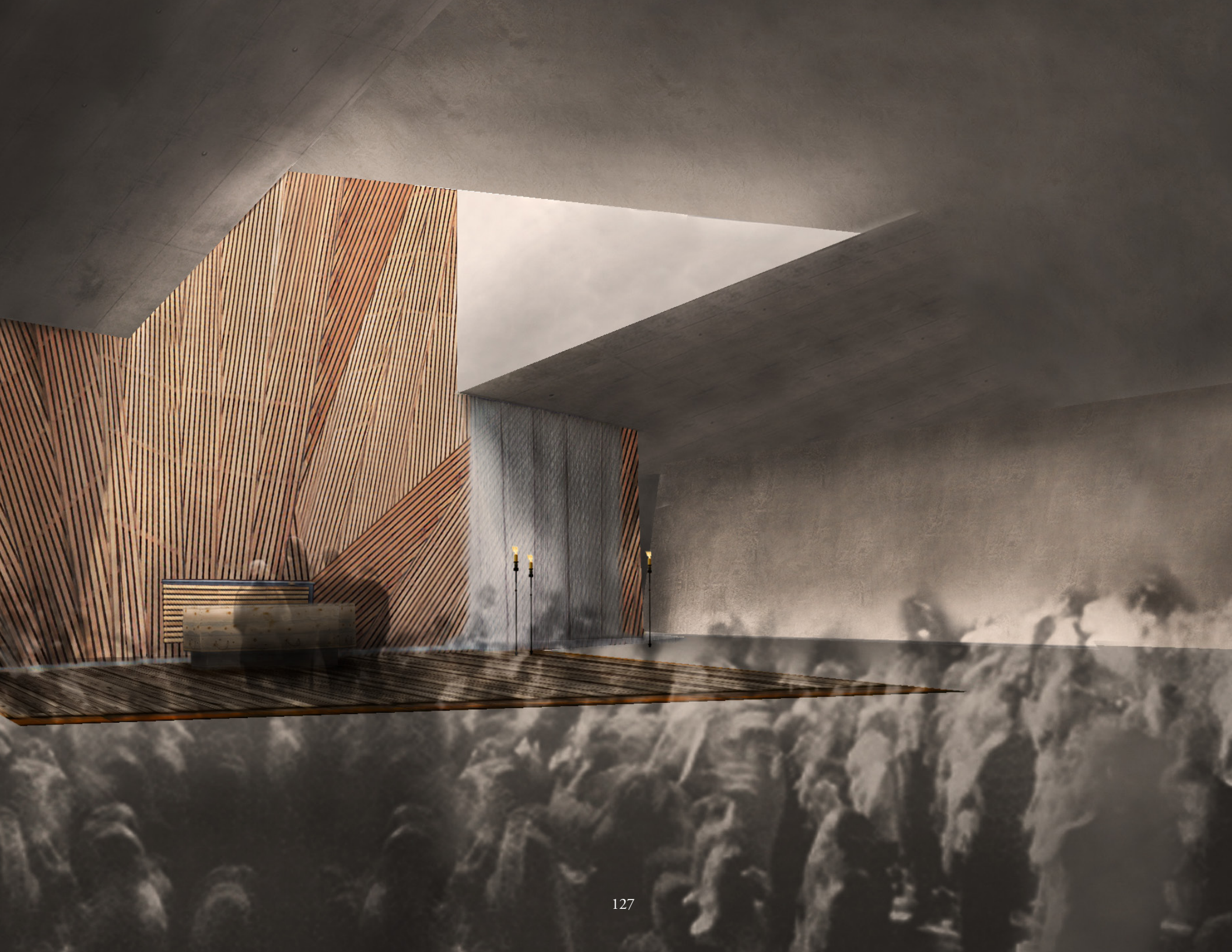
The family stands on the wooden floor with the casket and memorializes the life of the deceased. The only sounds heard are voices from the ceremony; the city is silenced. The changing of cloud cover above dims and brightens the space, allowing the candles to temporarily become the more prominent source of light.

Throughout the ceremony, the funeral director absents themselves, observing from a distance. At the family's signal they assist the lifting of the deceased through the wooden opening and into the cremation area. Water flows into the wooden spire while the cremation silently begins.

...

The ceremony concludes.

figure 4.45 Ceremony Space (Below-Ground)



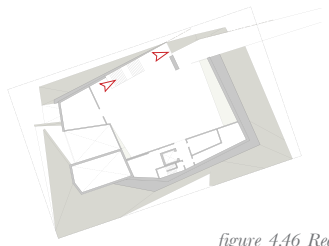


figure 4.46 Reception Level

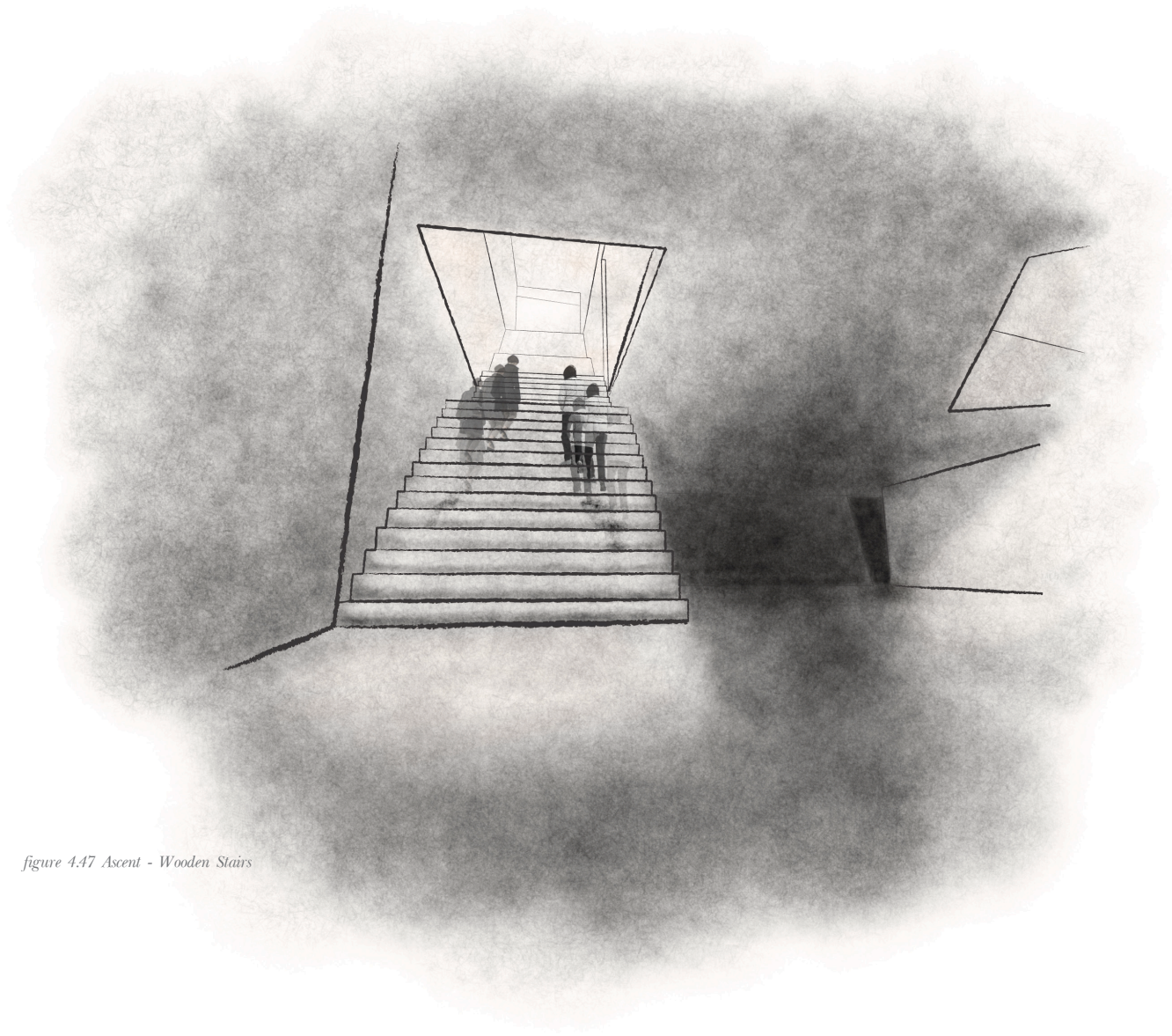


figure 4.47 Ascent - Wooden Stairs

The Mourners & The Remains of the Deceased

Ascent & the City

The funeral director encourages the mourners to continue to the second stair to the north. Out of view of the mourners, within the clinical space the three-hour cremation begins.²⁰ The interior is still lit by the evening sun as the director waits to complete the process.

The mourners gaze upwards to the second set of stairs that cuts directly through the funeral centre. Soft light barely reaches down to the landings from the opening in the roof. The wooden lath sculpture begins half-way through the ascent, screening direct visibility to the foyer or the street.

Atop the stairs mourners are gathering to look out from a broad window. The tops of the trees in David Crombie Park and the wooden sculpture extending over Jarvis Street frame the first proper view of Toronto.

While some people linger at this window, others move forward into the reception space, talking or finding places to sit.

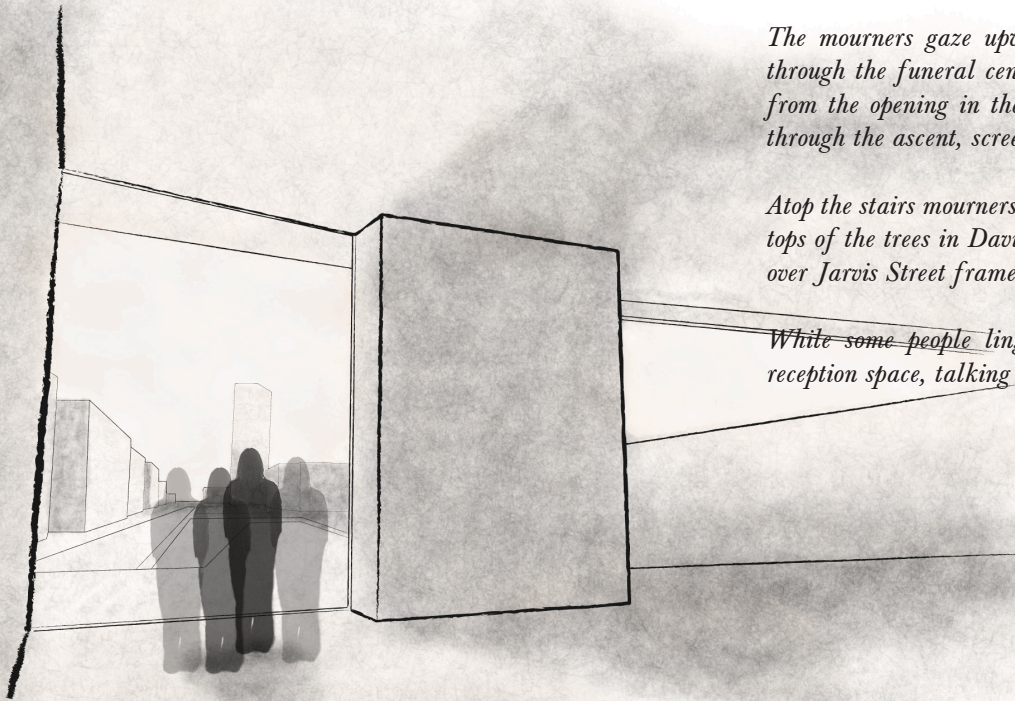


figure 4.48 View of City - David Crombie Park

The Mourners & The Remains of the Deceased

Reception

The mourners commune in the reception space while food preparation finishes in the adjoining kitchen. Long tables are arrayed and fan eastwards. People begin to sit down at tables in naturally forming configurations; remaining seats are eventually taken up by those mourners wishing to connect with old friends or by those with nowhere else to sit.

The reception space is brightly lit from clerestory openings where the interior inclined walls and exterior mound meet, blurring the boundaries between the ritual space and the city. The wood screen along the northern wall allows translucent reciprocal views between the market mezzanine and reception eating space.

The wooden floor is consistent and continuous with the surface of the spire, which is visible in the south-west corner of the reception space. It punctures the roof and extends towards the sky. Natural light falls into the void below.

Food and drink are served.

The mourners toast to the deceased; the assembly of people begins to eat and throughout the meal exchange individual, more personal stories with their tables.

The main food dishes have been consumed or are being picked at while drinks continue to be poured and stories become increasingly candid. Mourners are fluidly exchanging and visiting between tables. Some break away and wander to the half-walls that enclose the void. There is a single location that allows for an individual to peer back into the void at the recessed ceremony floor which has filled again with water. Others return to the large windows to look out towards the city.

Within the wooden spire the funeral director removes the remains from the chamber and reduces them into an ash, fine enough to be scattered. Carrying the ashes, the director proceeds to the reception space by the same ascent as the mourners in order to present the urn to the family.

The reception concludes with the funeral director presenting the ashes of the deceased to the family.

...

The mourners depart from the reception space towards the Jarvis Street bridge.

figure 4.49 Reception Space (Above Ground)



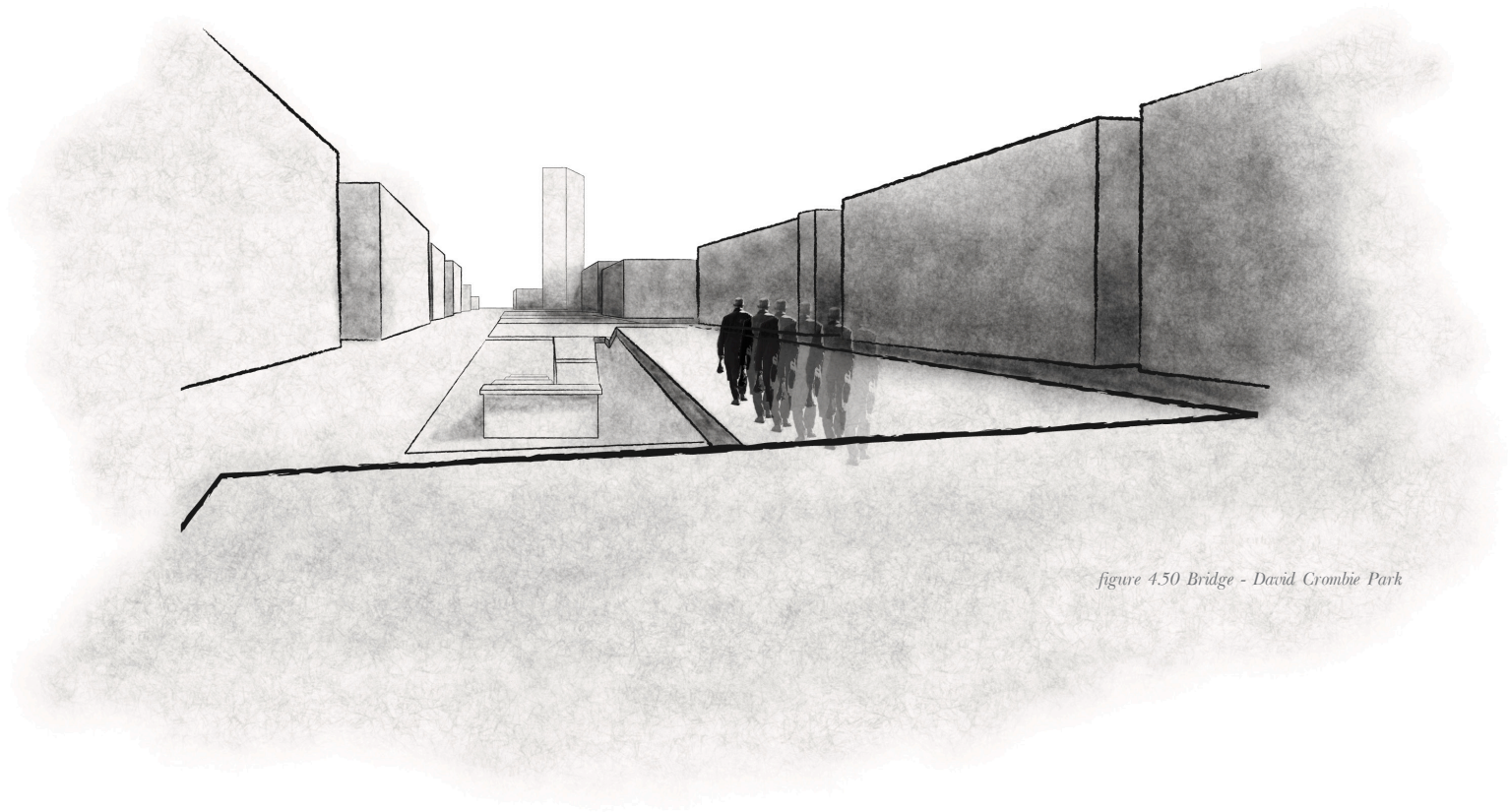
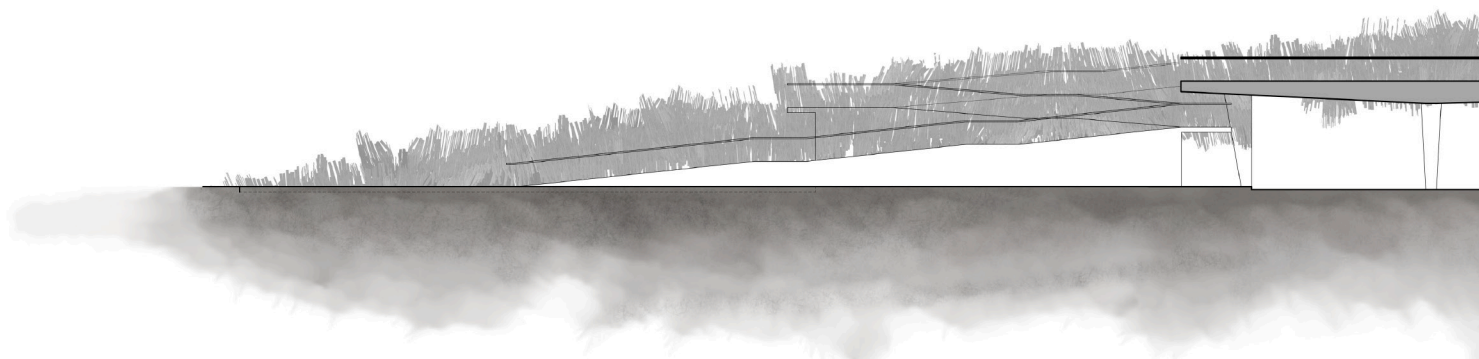


figure 4.50 Bridge - David Crombie Park



The Mourners & The Remains of the Deceased

The Bridge

The procession, with the ashes, exits the mound. Tall grasses bend with the wind while people and vehicles may once again be heard at the city level below. The wooden sculpture that began in the foyer interior extends from the building and offers shelter. Standing in front of it the bereaved family opens the urn and casts a handful of ashes back towards the sloping face of the raised earth. The ash disappears against a screen of variegated flora.

A bridge extends over Jarvis Street. The wood sculpture bounds the edges of the bridge, directing gaze eastward towards the park or upwards to the sky.

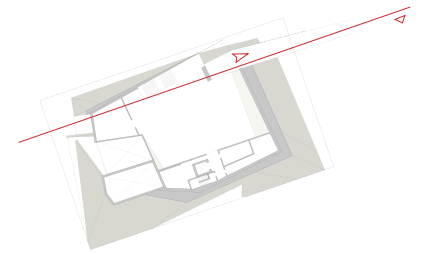


figure 4.52 Reception Level

On the David Crombie Park side of Jarvis Street the bridge rests upon a rammed earth platform, creating a last moment of pause before descending back to the city level. The mourner can see the wooden sculpture accreting as previous funerals have scattered ashes along the park edge.

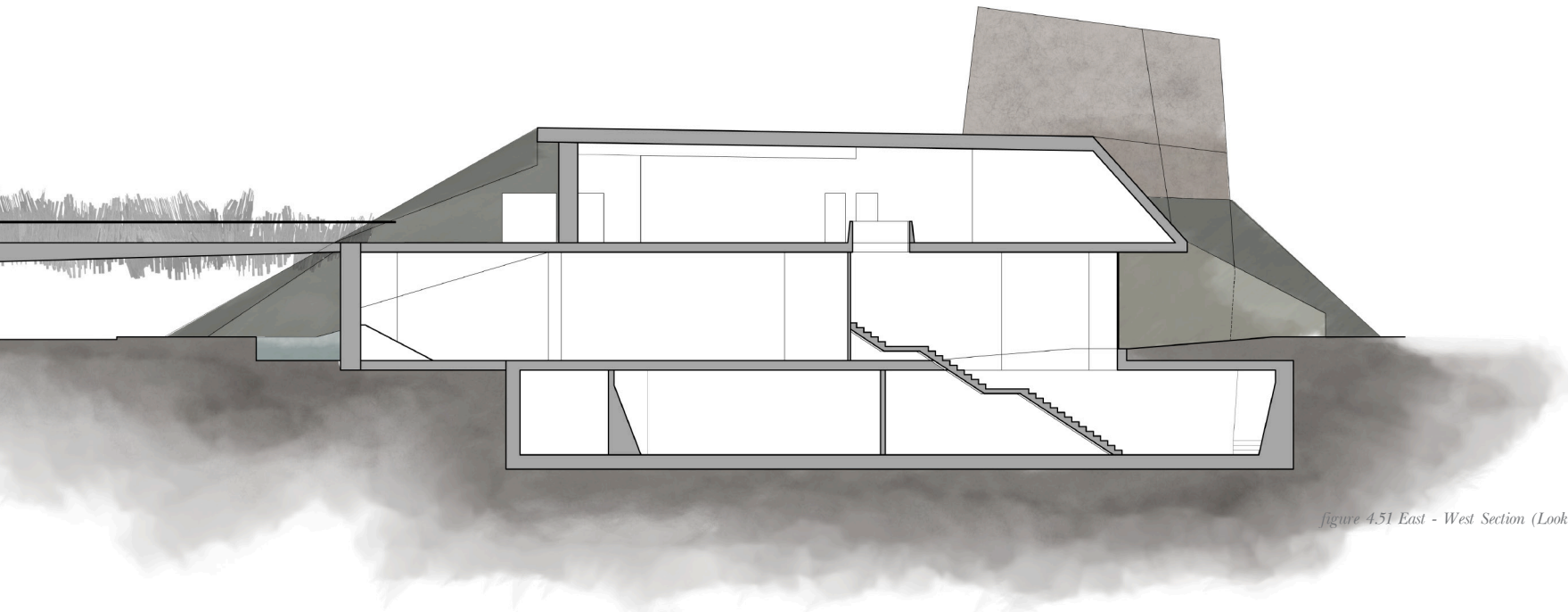


figure 4.51 East - West Section (Looking South)



The City

The procession continues to the city. The urn of ashes is opened and the remains are scattered against the backdrop of the cedar lath sculpture. The name of the deceased has been set into the cedar piece bestowed upon the family to append.

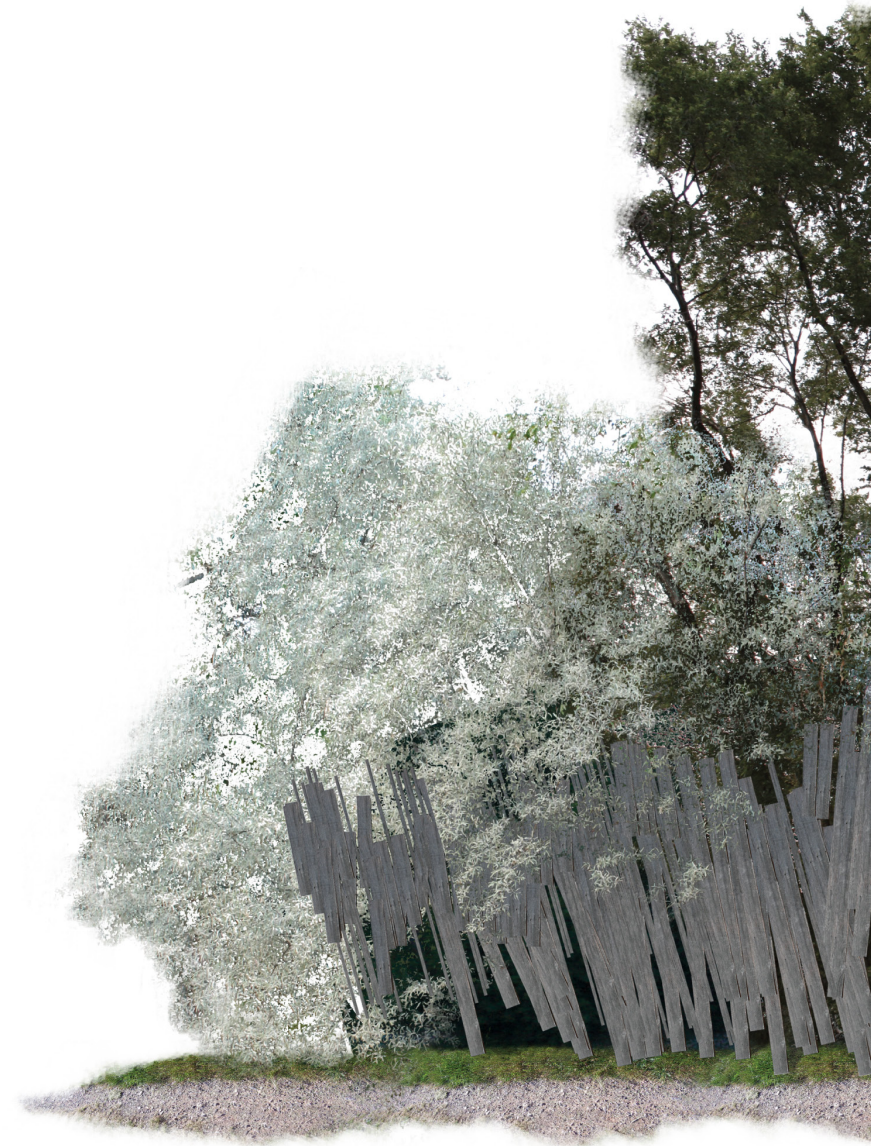
The procession disperses, leaving the family alone in the park. In the distance the wood spire can be seen above the tall grasses of the mound.

figure 4.53 View West - St. Lawrence Funeral Centre

*"I came like water and like wind I go."*²¹

*Omar Khayyám (Edward Fitzgerald) –
The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*

figure 4.54 Memorial Sculpture





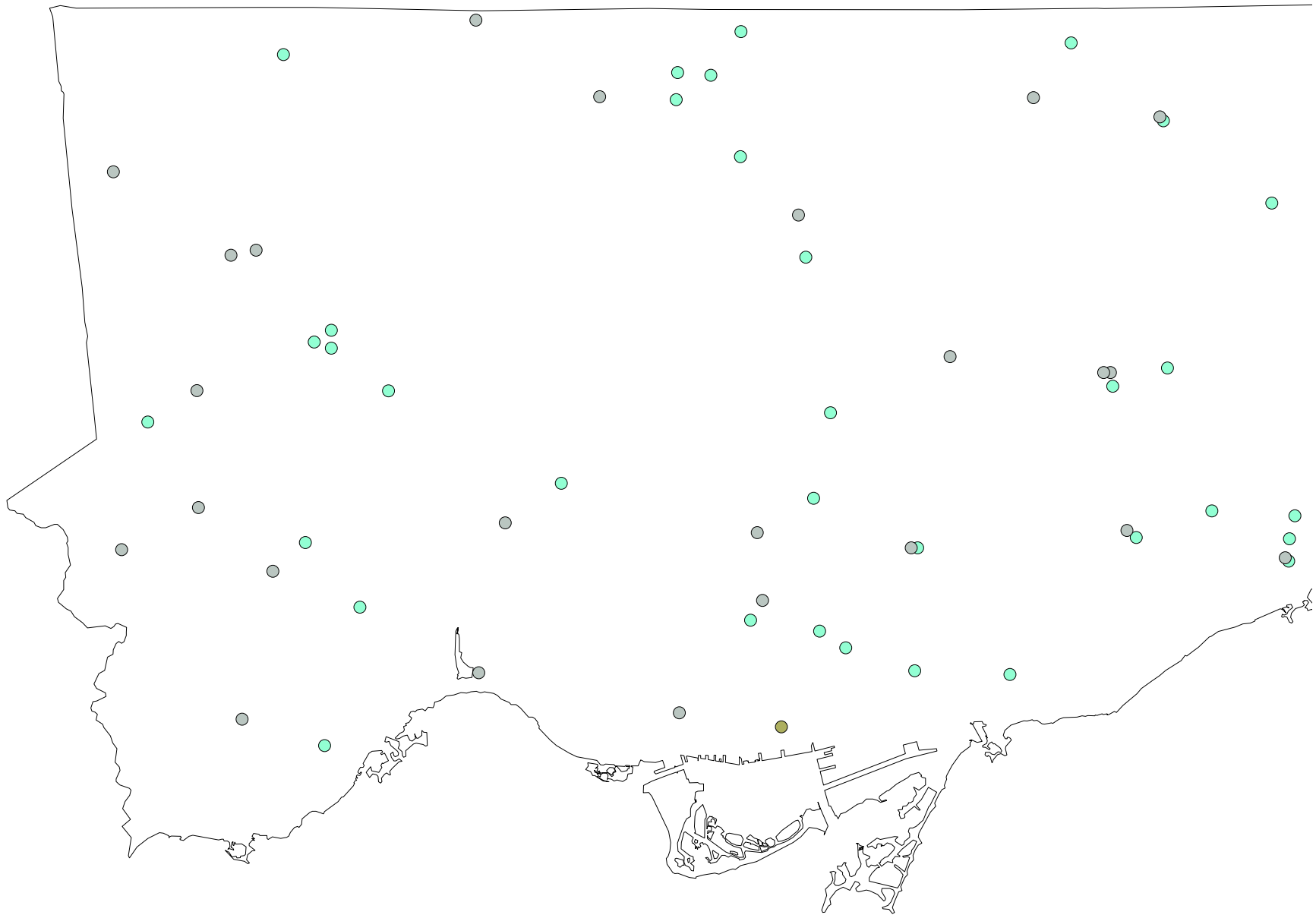
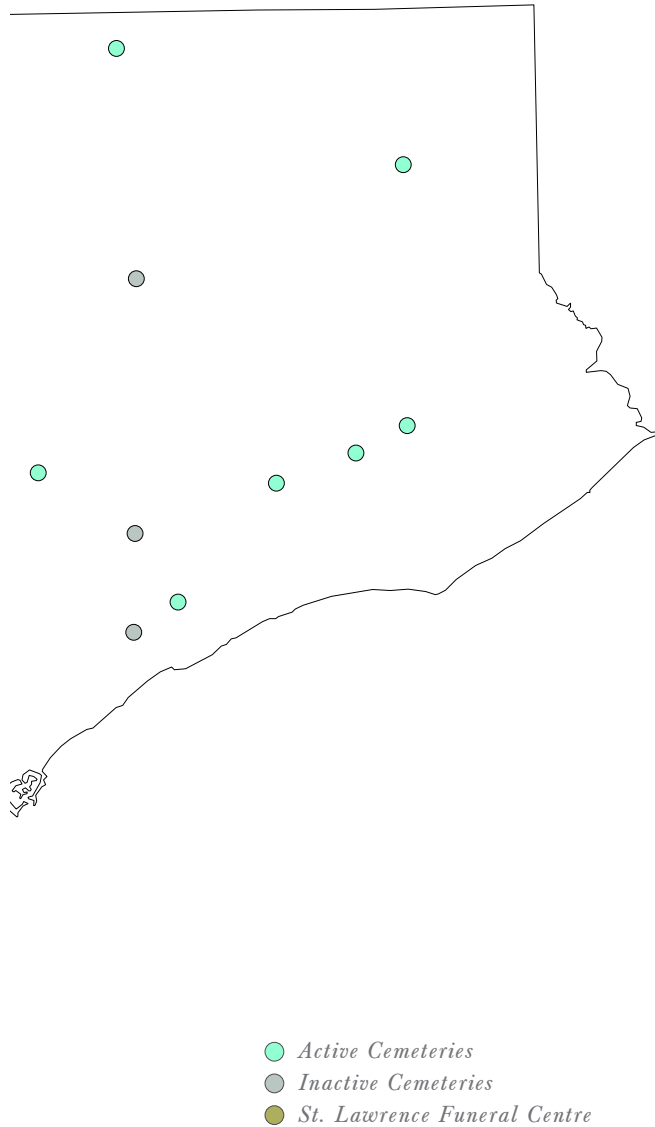


figure 4.55 Toronto Cemeteries



The Ashes

The scope of this thesis primarily focuses on the creation of ashes within the funeral centre and the immediate dispersal in the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood. However, the urban nature of this thesis also must imagine how the networks of the living and the dead could overlap with the scattering of ashes across the city.

The ashes of human remains are both sacred and profane. The reduction of the familiar body into dust, a material of waste, creates a paradox; ashes are intended to be cast-off, but their sacred nature creates a desire to keep them close. The dispersal of ashes follows the liminal ritual of the funeral. It is in that post-liminal stage that the identities of the bereaved are reformed without the physical presence of the deceased. The deceased is now a memory for each individual, but the ashes still require a place of rest. As they are scattered their location of dispersal embeds them within the city.

The initial intention of the cemetery to place the deceased in a permanent place continues to be desirable. However, for the reasons outlined previously, the contemporary cemetery network struggles to establish meaningful relationships for the living with the dead. In the City of Toronto there are approximately one-hundred and thirty-five cemeteries or burial grounds. The most prominent are Mount Pleasant Cemetery, York Cemetery and Prospect Cemetery, all of which are owned by the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries. They have hours of operation that ensure a level of security persists within their grounds. They are very often private, solitary and inwardly focused. Though ashes may be interred, entombed or scattered within a cemetery, they are also freely dispersed anywhere in the city.²² This act of dispersal locates the deceased in closer proximity to the network of the living, and in addition, embeds them in the collective memory of the city. Embedding the memory of an individual to a city or neighbourhood invokes a dialogue of mortality, community and the mythology of place.

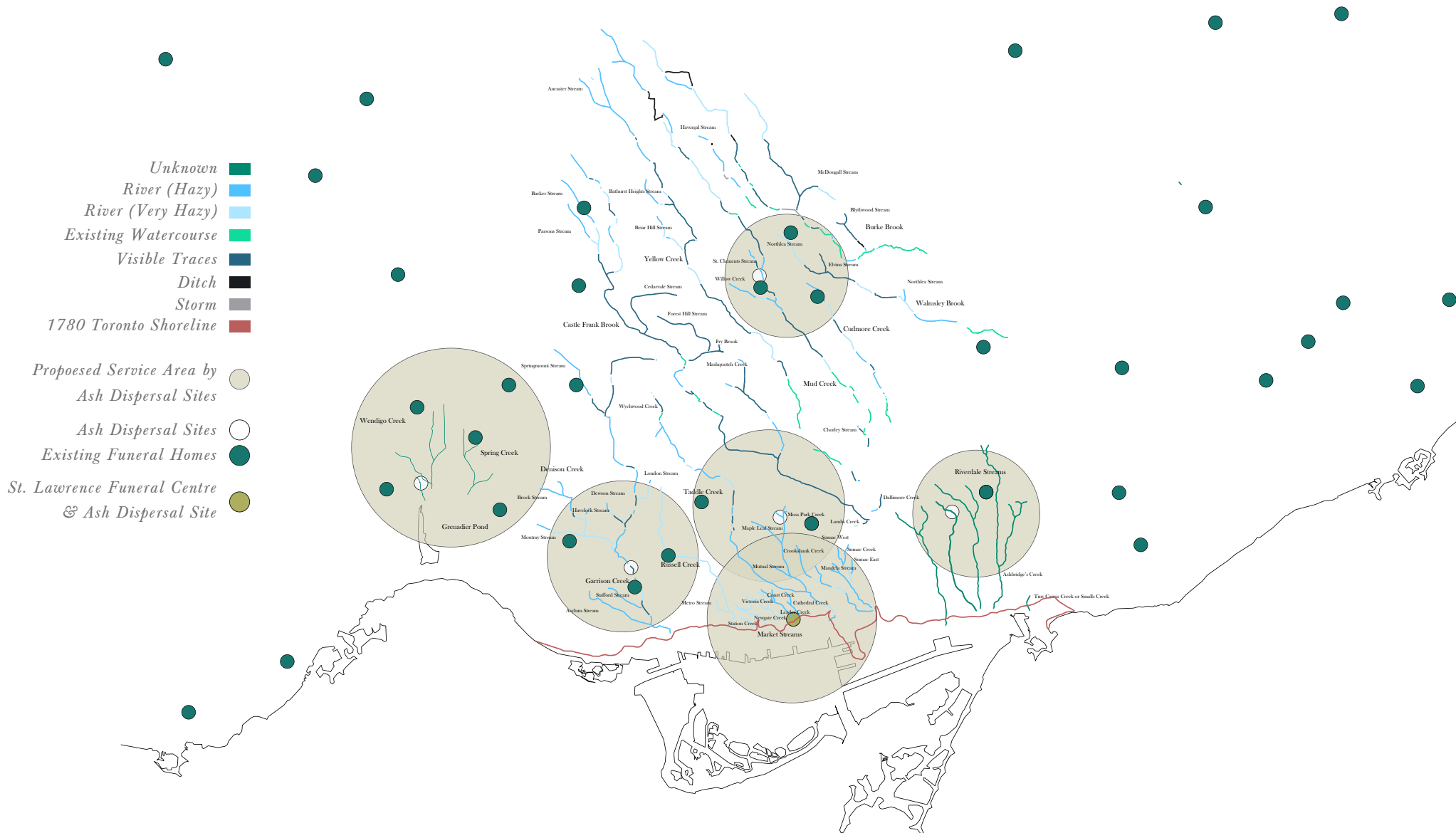


figure 4.56 Toronto's Lost Rivers & Ash Dispersal Sites

Sites of ash dispersal may integrate into Toronto's network of funeral homes and crematoria providing alternate locations of rest that are community based. They may be stewarded by either a municipal memorial society or the already community-active, compassionate group of local funeral directors. In this way of overlapping the proposed with the existing, this thesis respects the networks that currently exist in the city, complimenting them in order to enrich them. The common daily experiences that are exposed to mortality as a result of this scheme simultaneously engage their profane character with the sacred nature of the ritual of ash dispersal. The consideration of place rests along a delicate threshold where both of these phenomena must be allowed to co-exist.

The mythology of place combines these elements of mortality and community and enacts a common sacred between the city and its society. The St. Lawrence Funeral Centre proposed that the scattering of ashes throughout David Crombie Park could retrace the lost shoreline, connect the deceased to the collective subconscious of the city and create a visible and interactive place of memorial. This strategy could, in addition, be used throughout the city in numerous places that evoke a similar sense of connectivity between the deceased, the bereaved and the city.

*"We do not sufficiently celebrate water and the land
through which it flows. To celebrate watersheds
means to celebrate life."²³*

Underneath the ground plane of urban Toronto there exists twenty buried streams or rivers, and their six associative watersheds. Their disconnection from their natural ecosystems has become the focus of several different groups, most recently with Waterfront Toronto and their revitalization of natural storm water management on the east bay front. River mythology has been the focus of the Lost Rivers group, urban exploration, and the Coach House Books series. This developing mythology is accessed by these groups by walking and tracing the surface routes of these rivers as well as illegally exploring the subterranean storm water and sewer systems that buried and enclosed these natural water courses in the late eighteen hundreds. Joseph Campbell explains this type of mythology in the Power of Myth, stating,

"There is the mythology that relates you to your nature and to the natural world, of which you're a part. And there is the mythology that is strictly sociological, linking you to a particular society."²⁴

Currently, in the City of Toronto and similarly in other North American cities there is a tendency to languish in the nostalgia or memorial of these or other similar 'lost' city elements. The nostalgic appropriation of Toronto's rivers is rejected by architects, James Brown and Kim Storey, outlining that, in the form of bronzed placards and memory walks, nostalgia does nothing to reconnect citizens to their natural watersheds²⁵. Their proposals focus on the literal unearthing of buried rivers, returning the city's parks and ravines to their native form of water management. This ambitious thinking is encouraging but has yet to yield realized projects.

Between nostalgia and physical unearthing, this thesis proposes that the buried rivers of Toronto be engaged in a dialogue of mortality, community and mythology. Combining the richness of Toronto's buried river mythology with the literal dispersal of ashes is an opportunity to create meaningful spaces of memorial within the city that are accessible and work to de-marginalize the presence of death. This extends the philosophy of the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre into the whole of the city.

In parks where rivers once ran, dispersal areas centre about cedar lath installations that echo the original course of the water. These rivers or streams could be selected based upon their surrounding population demographics of age, density and non-religious affiliation as well as proximity to the existing funeral homes, hospitals and cemeteries. One such river is the Riverdale Stream which ran through where the present day East View Park is situated.

East View Park

*“There is no city that does not dream
From its foundations. The lost lake
Crumbling in the hands of brickmakers,
The floor of the ravine where light lies broken
With the memory of rivers.”²⁶*

Anne Michaels

East View Park is located as the name suggests in the East of Toronto. It is bounded by a wooded pathway on its western edge, the closed Beth Tzedek Memorial Park Cemetery on the eastern edge, a Public school on its northern edge and a community centre on its southern edge. Beyond this is neighbourhood-residential city fabric. The large park is populated by a baseball diamond, splash pond and play area.

The western edge is significantly raised, representing the original course of Riverdale Stream as it fell into the basin of East View Park. Its serpentine form traveled through the length of the park and down into Ashbridge’s Bay before being buried in the first decade of the 1900s.²⁷



figure 4.57 Aerial View - East View Park

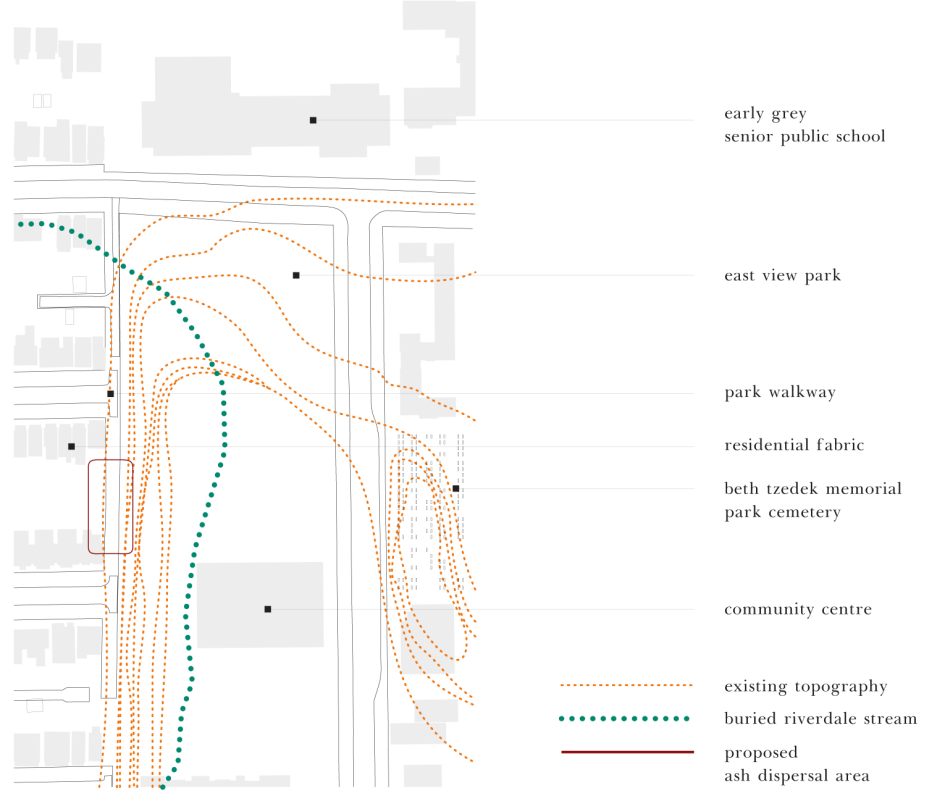


figure 4.58 Site Plan - East View Park



figure 4.59 East View Park Sculpture

The western path edge of East View Park looks through a small but dense naturalized slope onto the leisure program of the site. The path is a collector for the urban fabric, leading to Earl Grey Public School at the northern edge. The daily patterns of pedestrian traffic along the western path indicate its importance as a public space. The naturalized slope, in opposition, is impassable except for a select number of footpaths. The sculptural cedar installation is located along this path, undulating in and out of the edge condition of open path and enclosed green-space. The course of the Riverdale Stream is formed from its accumulation of cedar wood pieces near to its original and now buried riverbed.

In this installation, the public is able to experience a memorial space along their daily ritual, unencumbered by barriers or the sometimes unsafe grounds of the cemetery. The installation may be visited at any time of day or year. It may be passed by, or paused at, enjoyed by the bereaved or the park user. The ashes of the deceased are in this manner established amidst the collective of the city while still maintained in the individual memory of the bereaved in a place of visitation. Through ashes we are embedded into the natural processes of the city; the river becomes more definite as the deceased becomes more infinite.

Extending to the rest of the city, the dispersal of ashes in designated park spaces overlay the funerary networks upon the networks of daily life at a broader scale, connecting to existing funeral homes and their respective neighbourhoods. The deceased is given a place in the collective memory of the city in conjunction with the individual memories of the bereaved.

The East View Park, David Crombie Park or other potential ash-dispersal sites navigate the visibility of funerary ritual, negotiate the slippage between sacred and profane and propose a meaningful relationship between life and death. In ashes, we observe the elevation of a material that despite its sacred content is still considered dust. It is, as Steven Connor states, “both a terminal and a mediate matter, inert, but sometimes, for that very reason, omnivalent.”²⁸

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Accepting a Loss,” *Funeral Service Association of Canada*, Last Accessed on May 17, 2012. <http://www.fsac.ca/-14490.html>
- The sentiments of the people involved in the Funeral Industry are, at least upon public inquest, in line with the views of this thesis. The practitioners are not under investigation, though their role within the problematic funeral industry is certainly not insignificant. The interest is principally architectural; elevating its execution to the level of care expressed in these and other similar thoughts.
- 2 Bagnell, *Then and Now: Funeral Service in Canada*. Based upon data from 2006, there were 84,524 deaths in Ontario. Of these, 81,412 were handled by Ontario Funeral Directors.
- 3 “Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002.” This sizeable document outlines the approved practices, regulations, limitations, general conduct and duties of the funeral industry and its participants. In addition, municipalities may have differing approaches to scattering ashes. After cremation, ashes are rendered sterile.
- 4 “2010 Selected Funeral Service Information and Statistics,” *National Funeral Directors Association Website*.
- 5 “Part 4: The Four Ways to Dispose of Your Body,” *Funeral Planning and Memorial Association of Manitoba Website*.
- 6 “Spring 2011 Ontario Board of Funeral Services Newsletter,” *Ontario Board of Funeral Services Website*.
- 7 “2010 Selected Funeral Service Information and Statistics,” *National Funeral Directors Association Website*.
- 8 “National Cremation Statistics 1960-2009,” *The Cremation Society of Great Britain Website*.
- 9 Butler, “Resomator Offers a Greener Way to Go”.
- 10 Butler, “Resomator Offers a Greener Way to Go”.
- 11 Blackwell, “A Resurgence for Business of Death”.
- 12 “Population By Religion,” *Statistics Canada Website*.
- 13 Gombu, “Toronto Hindu Leaders Lobbying For Sacred Place To Scatter Ashes, Make Offerings”.
- 14 Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me*, 52.
- 15 Fisher, *Conversations with M.F.K. Fisher*, 105.
- 16 Fram, “A Tale of Two Waterfronts,” 255.
- 17 Harris, *Imagining Toronto*, 62.
- 18 Di Cicco, *Municipal Mind : Manifestos for the Creative City*, 41.
- 19 Di Cicco, *Municipal Mind : Manifestos for the Creative City*, 77.
- 20 The Funeral Centre uses the water-based technology of Alkaline Hydrolysis in place of traditional cremation. Alkaline Hydrolysis uses a similar amount and size of equipment as traditional cremation but it has fewer ventilation requirements. In traditional cremation, the off-gas is both pungent and voluminous. In Alkaline Hydrolysis much of the odour is eliminated by the nature of the process, but some ventilation is still desirable.
- Although classified as ‘cremation’, Alkaline Hydrolysis uses heated water in place of flames. The body requires approximately 500 litres of water within the retort to be reduced to ash and bone fragments.

- 21 Khayyām, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyām*.
- 22 The Ontario Ministry of Consumer Services states that, any individuals or families who wish to scatter the cremated human remains of their loved ones on Crown land and Crown land covered by water in Ontario can do so. Individuals and families are permitted to scatter on unoccupied Crown land, and those Crown lands covered by water. There is no need to obtain government consent to scatter on or in such areas, which include provincial parks and conservation reserves, and the Great Lakes. Individuals wishing to scatter on private land, or private land covered by water, should obtain the owner's consent. "Scattering Cremated Ashes in Ontario," *Ministry of Consumer Services Website*.
- 23 Sousa, "The Water Commons: Moving from Watershed Management to Watershed Consciousness in Toronto," 119.
- 24 Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 28.
- 25 Wickens, "What Bubbles Beneath our Streets." *Globe and Mail*.
- 26 Michaels, "There is No City That Does Not Dream," *Skin Divers*, 16.
- 27 This is ascertained from looking at maps from 1901 to 1913 - the latter showing no streams in the area, while the form still indicates the Riverdale Streams.
- 28 Connor, "Pulverulance," *Cabinet*.

Chapter Five

Conclusion



“[this work] hovers between the realms of the real and the imaginary, between the finite and the infinite, between the knowable and the impenetrable...ash reveals where fire has burned and has transmuted one elemental condition into another: flesh into ash, living into dead. The cosmology of Library of Dust views the universe as an immense athanor, or alchemical oven, where spirit and matter are in a continual process of creation and destruction.”¹

David Maisel

figure 5.01 1834

A canister of human remains reacting, over time, from exposure to flooding underneath the water table. This and many like it were found in a crypt within an abandoned asylum, photographed by David Maisel and compiled to create The Library of Dust. The ashes were the remains of inmates whose families did not claim them upon their death. Every canister started out the same, hermetic and unmarked.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis the relationship between life and death in the city has been the central focus. The first section reviewed the history of this relationship on both the city and individual scales, indicating cultural responses to death and the dead. The second section acknowledged the role of architecture in North American funeral rituals, and identified the contemporary funeral home as an opportunity to explore the balance between the needs of the city, the bereaved and the deceased body. The third section explored relevant projects that enabled a set of principles to guide the design of the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre in the fourth section. The parallel or converging narratives of the city, the procession of mourners and the deceased body explored how funerary architecture and ritual may be re-imagined.

The greatest challenges of the work arose from the difficulty in reconnecting the seemingly opposing forces of the living or the dead. Within this thesis death is recognized as both private and public. The claims of the city and the claims of the funeral centre are identified, respectively, as the ordinary and extraordinary. Their paradoxical combination within the design commits to providing a place to grieve that is distinctly urban and appropriately intimate.

The St. Lawrence Neighbourhood was chosen as the site as it represents the current direction of growth for the City of Toronto. It is a vibrant, dense community that is without any places of memorial. The tendency for places of ritual are to favour a sublime landscape. This would have opposed the desire of this author to fully recognize the need for urban funerals.

The highly subjective nature of funeral rituals made designing a space to accommodate them seem regularly futile. The City of Toronto regulates that a professional must care for the dead, and subsequently, the funeral home building type persists. Issues of multi-faith are bypassed and the non-denominational requirement of an intimate place to grieve and prepare and resolve the deceased body takes precedence over spiritual design guidelines. The role of the architect is to elevate the empirical nature inherent in the funeral home to a space of beauty befitting its sacred purpose.

Defining the sacred complicated the scope of this thesis. The Sacred is rooted in a religious definition; however, as societies become increasingly secular, the upper-case Sacred becomes less universally relevant. The lexicon of the non-spiritual seeks to define the precious spaces that contain their rites of passage. Accordingly, the lower-case sacred is born to delineate these spaces from the city. As the Sacred has been referred to as an internal human experience, the built world or any considerations of defining sacrality may also be irrelevant.

According to an observation attributed to Egon Eiermann, once in a lifetime every architect longs to design a chair as well as a church.¹ Arguably true, this statement resonates personally upon completing a thesis that is about neither but borrows from both.

While creating the image of the reception space the desire to have control over the design of furniture arose. Not considering this or resigning to common, plastic furniture would have unraveled the profundity of the design work. It was a helpless realization of the veracity of Eiermann's observation.

At the same time, this thesis humbly acknowledges the hubris that could accompany the design of a sacred space. Measuring the success of death-space should come from recognizing the work as a test of possibilities instead of imagining that *the* solution has been found to resolve how the city navigates death.

This thesis contributes to the experience of funeral ritual within the city with the intent of creating a more fulfilling experience of life. This author is unapologetically utopic, but maintains a healthy awareness of the unrelenting desire to cast death aside. Throughout the course of the work, the dark nature of reading primarily about death and dying and its associative affects has called into question both the resolve and beliefs of this author. The conversations, both formal and casual, enriched my appreciation of mortality and the capacity of this thesis to probe the topic. Every person reacts differently to death; these conversations have directly influenced the way in which I view my work and the personal journey of completing it. On the other side, I feel as though I have grown immensely towards becoming a more sensitive architect.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Maisel, *The Library of Dust*.
- 2 Stegers, *Sacred Buildings : A Design Manual*, 27.

Appendices

Appendix A

Preparing & Cremating the Dead

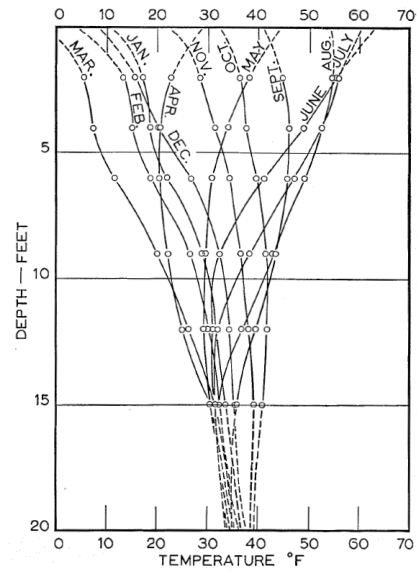


figure 6.01 Toronto Ground Temperature vs. Soil Depth

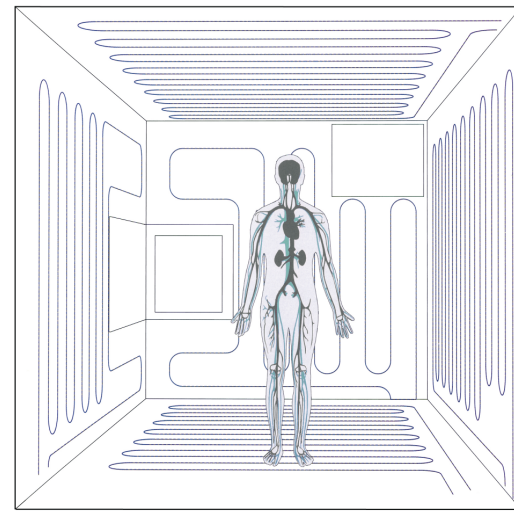


figure 6.02 Thermally Active Surfaces

Preparing & Cremating the Dead

The preparation and cremation of the deceased is the technical element of the funeral centre that is carried out by the funeral director or technician. The depth below-grade allows the deceased to be placed in a location that is cooled by the thermal conduction from the ground temperature rather than by a traditional re Fridgeration unit. In this manner, the architecture of the funeral centre further explores the relationship between the deceased and death-space. The process of water-based cremation, or “alkaline hydrolysis” is the sole mechanical process in the St. Lawrence Funeral Centre.

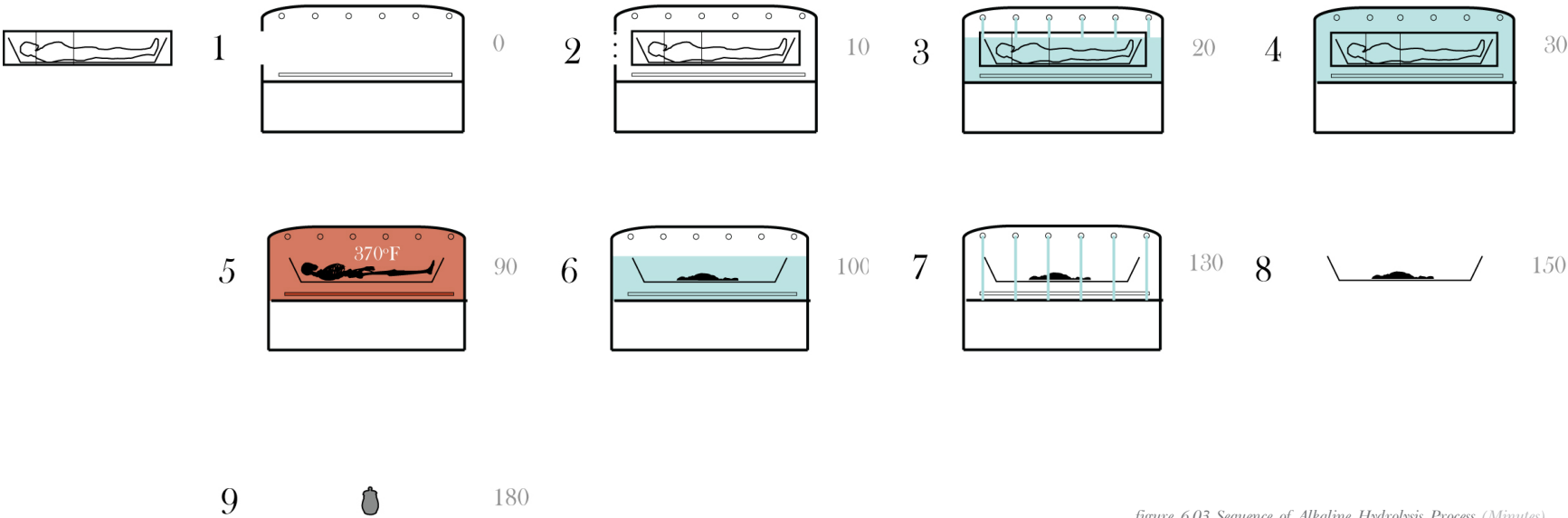


figure 6.03 Sequence of Alkaline Hydrolysis Process (Minutes)

Appendix B

Ashes

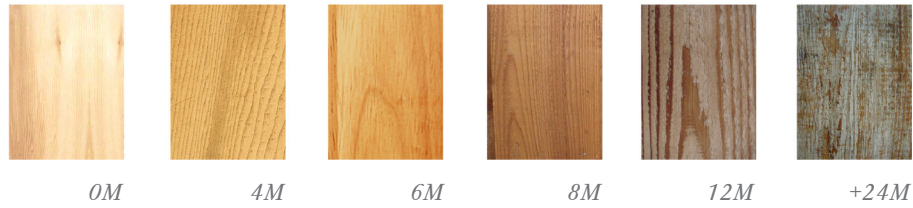


figure 6.04 Cedar Weathering - Approximate Chronology of Natural Patina



figure 6.05 Cedar Lath - 'In Memoriam'

Sculptural Intervention

The cedar-lath sculpture retraces the historic course of buried rivers, growing with each additional wood-burned 'in memoriam'. As the ashes of the deceased become more infinite, the river becomes more definite.

Direction of Growth

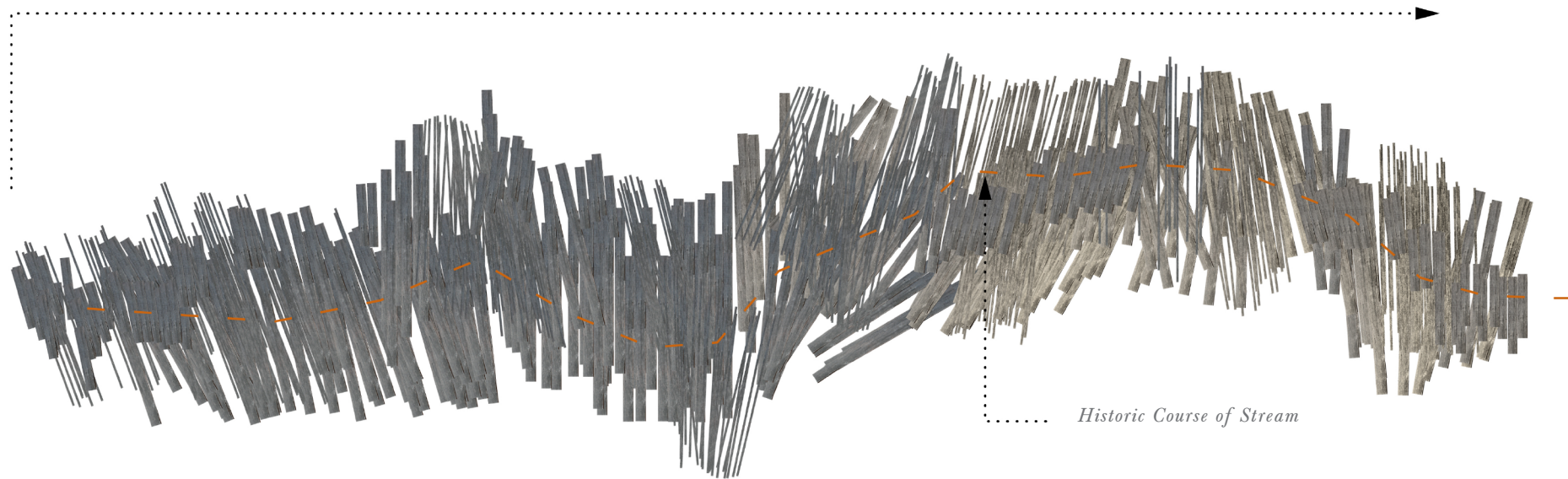


figure 6.06 Wood Sculpture Elevation

Appendix B

Ashes

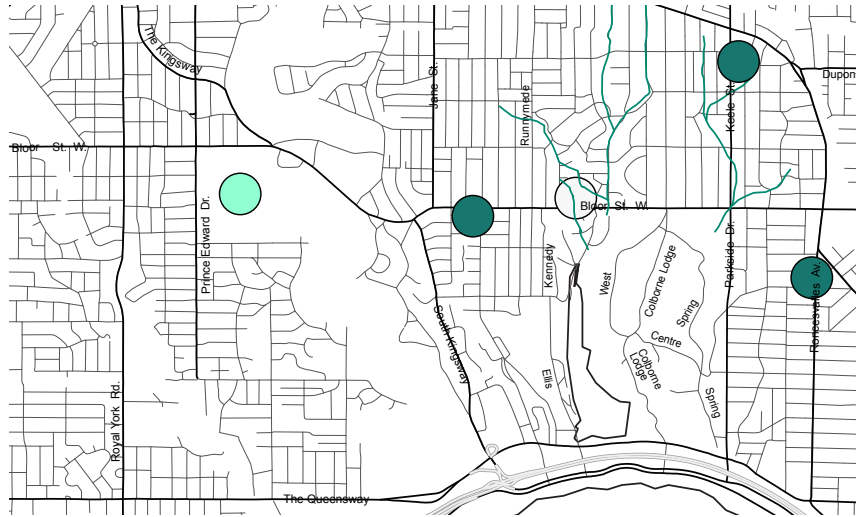


figure 6.07 Ash Dispersal Site - Kennedy Park - Margdon Parkette

- Proposed Site of Ash Sculpture ○
- Existing Funeral Home ●
- Existing Cemetery ○

Ash Dispersal Sites

Kennedy Park – Margdon Parkette

Kennedy Park - Margdon Parkette is in the west end of the city. It marks the buried route of Wendigo Creek. Wendigo Creek fed into the top of High Park's Grenadier Pond, but was buried in 1915, after a century of diversions and alterations to its course. It reappears on the surface within High Park.

The original course of the stream bisects Kennedy Park - Margdon Parkette. The park itself is an understated swath set in a residential area. It is both the smallest and least populated of the sites proposed. Though High Park library backs onto it, the only feature is a playground and an unbroken line of trees on its south face.

Trinity Bellwoods Park

Trinity Bellwoods Park is located west of centre in the downtown. Its most notable constructs are a community centre and group home, though it was the initial site of Trinity College which gave the park its name. The park is primarily surrounded by residential fabric except on the commercial Queen Street address where Toronto's first formal funeral home, Bates & Dodds Funeral Home, is located. It is diagonally split by Garrison Creek which was buried in the late 1800s.¹ Except for perhaps Taddle Creek, Garrison Creek is the most documented and engaged buried water-course in Toronto. Along its path to Lake Ontario it passes through Fort York, where it gets its name. It is memorialized in a series of placards and its metaphoric presence is very strong within the city. Brown and Storey Architects have focused considerable attention on the history of the area, proposing a storm-water management system that would unearth the creek and return its original natural function. This is the result of studies done in the late twentieth-century that highlight the inability for the current underground sewers to handle the increase in flow from modern development.

The traces of Garrison Creek are noticeable along its stretches throughout the city fabric. Bridges along Crawford Street and Harbord Street have been infilled where the ravine once ran, leaving their guardrails as indicators of their historic purpose. In addition, the topographic undulations of Trinity Bellwoods and Christie Pits are the bold physical remainders of its previous course, repurposed for leisure activities such as baseball diamonds or leash-free parks.

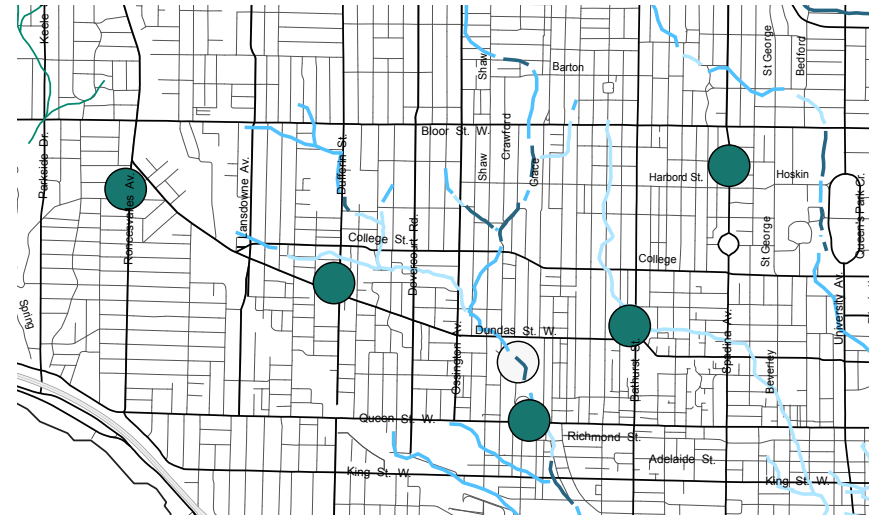


figure 6.08 Ash Dispersal Site - Trinity Bellwoods Park

- *Proposed Site of Ash Sculpture*
- *Existing Funeral Home*
- *Existing Cemetery*

Appendix B

Ashes

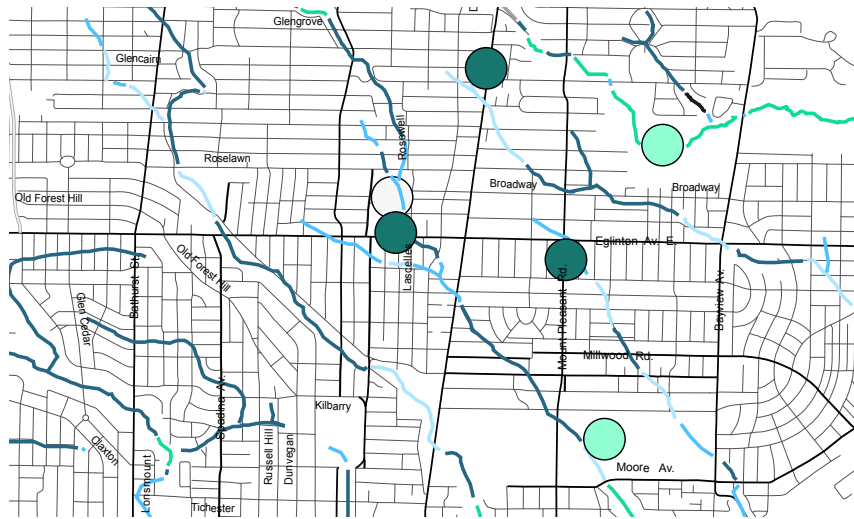


figure 6.09 Ash Dispersal Site - Eglinton Park

- Proposed Site of Ash Sculpture ○
- Existing Funeral Home ●
- Existing Cemetery ●

Eglinton Park

Eglinton Park is located in the North of Toronto. It is an active park, with a recreation centre and associative leisure program. It is primarily bounded by residential fabric, except on its south face onto Eglinton. Here, commercial fabric is punctuated by the Morley Bedford funeral home.

Mud Creek historically flowed from the top north-west corner diagonally through to the east. Joined along the way by many smaller tributaries, it eventually reached to the Don River at the site of the Don Valley Brickworks.

Eglinton Park was in 1885 the site of the Pears Family Brickworks, it was purchased by the city for parkland in 1926.² During this time the natural water course was covered and adjoined into Toronto's sewer system. At present, the ground seeps water during storm conditions, an indication of the Creek attempting to re-naturalize itself. The western edge of Eglinton Park is currently under restoration to its native habitat.³

There are a number of memorials presently located within the park in the form of decorative quarry-stone accompanied by small placards. These are independent markers for individuals that enjoyed frequenting the park. Across the

Cawthra Square

Cawthra Square is located in the East Downtown of Toronto. It is surrounded by mixed-use development. Moss Park Creek flowed through the west section of the square, and was buried prior to 1860. Moss Park Creek is a tributary of Taddle Creek. The rest of Taddle Creek was buried at different times, the last portion buried in 1886.⁴

There are few indicators of the presence of Moss Park Creek, unlike the distinctive contours that signify Garrison or Mud Creek. The development of the area has made the traces of Moss Park Creek especially difficult to imagine. The area is very dense with medium-rise and some high-rise buildings.

Cawthra Park is currently the site of an AIDS memorial, with the names of over 2500 people engraved into the surface that have passed away in Ontario from HIV/AIDS. On this site, there is an annual candle-light vigil that centers on the memorial and is organized by the 519 Church Street Community.⁵

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Garrison Creek,” *Lost Rivers Website*
- 2 “Eglinton Park Reach,” *Lost Rivers Website*
- 3 The Eglinton Park Project - This project is ongoing with combined efforts from North Toronto Green Community, Greenest City, the Evergreen Foundation, the City of Toronto’s Parks and Recreation and many volunteers.
<http://www.lostrivers.ca/points/egltuparkpjts.htm>
- 4 “Taddle Creek,” *Lost Rivers Website*
- 5 The Annual AIDS/HIV Candle-light Vigil occurs on June 23.

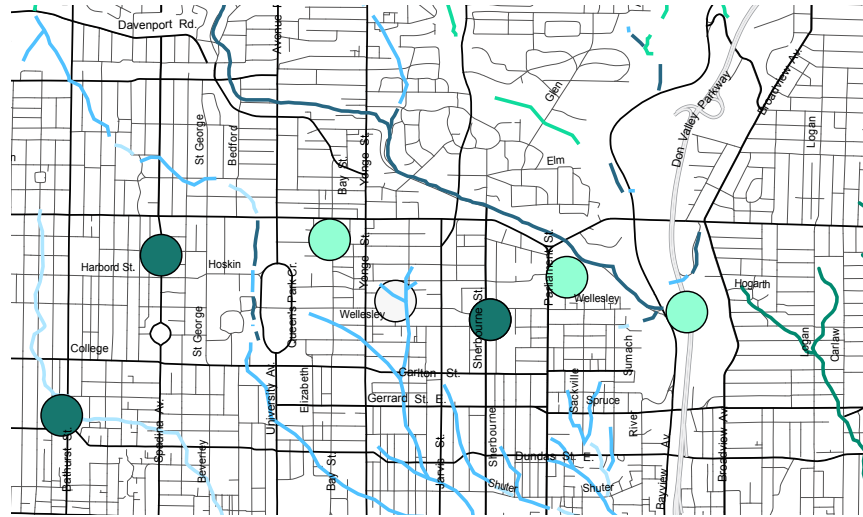


figure 6.10 Ash Dispersal Site - Cawthra Square

- Proposed Site of Ash Sculpture
- Existing Funeral Home
- Existing Cemetery

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