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# RITUAL SPACES

## RITUALS

There exists within man a need for ritual. Ritual is a patterned symbolic response to a disorienting experience. Rituals are attempts to relate to the experience, find meaning within it, and get in touch with the mythical aspect of our existence.[1] Rituals enable us to reflect upon our spiritual potentialities.[2] Rituals are performed and rhetorical. They are a way in which man deals with paradox and conflict in life. Through ritual we "organize our understanding and dramatize our fundamental conceptions".[3] Ritual provides us with a sense of reality, a reflection of ourselves and a restructuring of meaning. Rituals deal

with the experience of time. There is a passage from ordinary time to sacred time in performed rituals and rites of passages. Sacred time is reversible so that primordial mythical time may be made present. In this way rituals may transcend temporal time and time can be made continuous.[4]

Rites of passage are rituals that mark the passage of the individual through life cycles.[5] Barbara Myerhoff identifies how nature marks the life course only upon birth, sexual maturation and death. T.S. Eliott refers to "the brass tacks" as being "birth, copulation, death".[6] These inevitable occurrences are marked by rites of passage. Rites of passage deliberately destroy continuity of life by marking these events as disruptions and fractures. These events provide moments of great anxiety and occasions for the individual to be most receptive to understanding.

Myerhoff has also considered three paradoxes that are a part of rituals and rites of passage. First we must resolve conflicting notions of man as a creature of nature or man as a social and cultural being. The paradox of continuity versus disruption and change is also a part of rituals. Man must consider temporality and immortality. The third paradox identified is the resolution of individuality and uniqueness of expression with the sense of connection and involvement with others.[7]

Death provides the event for a great rite of passage. Death cannot be confronted or avoided. One of Sartre's characters has said that death will "creep up behind us". Death is the absence of life. Without life we cannot know or experience. Therefore it is not possible to know death or experience death. We must, however, accept that death will happen in order that we may fully experience life. Margaret Mead has stated that she knows "of no people for whom the fact of death is not critical and who have no ritual by which to deal with it."[8]

The practice of funerary rituals finds its origins in fear. The elaborate events and celebrations were a way to appease the dead. Modern ritual has evolved to be concerned with grief and the mourners. Most contemporary funerary services involve four phases: 1) the rites at the time of death or the initial adjustment, 2) the funerary rite, 3) the rite of committal and separation and 4) memorialization in ritual over time. The funerary rite provides the confrontation with the body, therefore,"...we understand something about our own death in contemplating and enacting rituals involving a corpse".[9] We are confronted with the body at the wake and at final commendation. The rite of passage of death must allow us to know that death has occurred, that the body is no longer living and to say farewell to the body.

Death provides a significant disruption of the continuity of life. Man must come to accept the finitude of his life, the limits of the human condition, and make decisions based upon these constraints. Is it possible to believe in immortality and truly be in the temporal? Can you believe in the sacrament of the ordinary and believe in the afterlife? We must revel in the journey not the end. Many funerary rites reinforce this idea and provide comfort to the grieving mourners not by false hope of an afterlife but by presenting the beauty in man being highly integrated with continuous existence. The death of an individual being marks the existence of this continuity as well as the evolving nature of life. This involvement in being, in existence, can be celebrated upon death. We can leave the ritual with an understanding and appreciation of the boundlessness of life.

Death rituals can be both singular and temporal. This paper explores two types of burial sites: landscapes and temporary urban conditions. The private burial landscape of the Brion Tomb and the larger public landscape of Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm will be presented. Burial traditions on the Venice island of San Michele are temporary and typically only involve a ten year stay on the island before being moved to a permanent home on the mainland. Burials in Cuba are also temporary and bodies are reburied after just two years when remains are transferred to a smaller container due to the limited space on the island. These interruptions require a specific land-

scape and architecture to support the various rituals and ceremonies.

## LANDSCAPES

### *Brion Tomb, San Vito d'Altivole, Italy*

Carlo Scarpa began his career in 1930, detached from architecture circles, and followed his personal inclinations in his work and in his teaching. He felt that "the architect's profession is for the mature"[10] and that an architect needs humility and an understanding of life. This removal from architectural theoretical inquiries led him instead to the world of the writer, the artist, the craftsman, the master builder and the glass blower. This self-reliance on a personal understanding might have led to his careful and contemplative working method.

Scarpa designed a landscape of interconnection for a family memorial, a place that deals with "the ephemerality of life".[11] The Brion Tomb, in San Vito d'altivole, Treviso, Italy, provides a series of subtle transitions from the zone of life, as understood in the contemplation chapel in the lily pond, to the zone of death, symbolized by the tombs of Onorina and Giuseppe Brion. The memorial is an L shaped garden that wraps two sides of the existing village cemetery.

The garden, designed for and commissioned by the Brion family, contains both public and private functions. An Italian cemetery is truly a place of community. An Italian widow will visit the grave of her husband several times a week, maintaining the gravesite and maintaining contact with the past members of her family. The cemetery is not a place of mourning; it provides for social engagement while supporting the act of remembrance, the connection to the traditions and understandings of the culture.

Scarpa's garden illustrates the narrative of the funerary ritual. There exists a dual narrative that corresponds to the two main circulation paths and defined rituals. One path leads from the public entry from the village cemetery, through the propylaeum, to the prato or public lawn, and then to private visitation with relatives. Inside the propylaeum the visitor is facing east and oriented to the cardinal directions. To the left are the tombs, the body, and the public lawn reached by a set of generous stairs. To the right, a series of narrow and steep steps allows access to the zone of the spirit and the private space of the meditation pavilion, which is the last portion of the second path. This second narrative is the narrative of the funerary ritual itself, which starts at the funerary gate, leads to the public mortuary chapel, to the tombs and ends at meditation chapel. Both narrative paths follow the sequence of separation, transition, and incorporation of the body which define rituals.12 In each case the transitional space is the circulation space, the space of the body in motion. The narrative structure, based on the funerary ritual, is tied to the body and completes the architecture. The primacy of the body is revealed.

The arcosolium, an arched form that protects the sarcophagi of Onorina and Giuseppe Brion, sits at the corner of the plot. The circle in which the tombs are placed is cut into the earth, creating a tension in the ground plane and increasing the protection offered to the tombs. South of the tombs an elevated garden and lawn leads to the pool and the meditation pavilion. To the west, on a lower ground plane, are the family tombs and the mortuary chapel. Organized movement through the project helps the visitor understand the composition. This "syncopated movement"[12] links the simple building forms into a complex landscape that is felt by the body. This movement sequence is carefully articulated but is not a closed system. Space and circulation weave freely through out the composition allowing the visitor to chose and switch their individual paths.

The garden is also an allegorical and metaphorical experience as described through its use of material, space and water. Material is used as both symbol and space. Concrete is at times solid and dense or can be thin and light, as in a canopy. It can be read as either positive or negative space in the zigzag forms. Water also provides symbols and

linkages throughout the composition. The transformation of matter as the water leads from the meditation chapel, in a series of chambers from wet to dry, to the tomb is seen as an allegory of the dematerialization of the bodies in the tombs.[13] There is a balance of matter and space; nothing is treated as separate. The project describes the sensual reunion in death.[14]

Although much has already been written regarding the human figures in the drawings of Carlo Scarpa, most extensively by Frascari and Anderson, it is hard to ignore the drawings of the pavilion filled with bodies. This private and contemplative space, a space of the spirit, is still inhabited and defined by the body. An understanding of the body is apparent. In order to view the garden you must sit or, if standing, align yourself, as indicated by the drawn figures, with a slit in the fascia. The inclusion of the figures in Scarpa's drawings illustrates how the body motivates design decisions. "The figures in the drawings of Carlo Scarpa...show that the elements of architecture can respond actively to human gestures, that spaces shape themselves to affect sensations in particular ways, and that the human body is a direct agent of architectural composition".[15] Not only are figures in drawings helpful in understanding scale and how a building might feel, but they also help the designer develop how a body moves through the space. Frampton agrees with the importance of "the imaginative, dynamic and involuntary projection of self into the architectural object, without which architectural experience would be purely intellectual or associative".[16] Frascari has said that the body's habits regulate Scarpa's planning. This is evidenced by drawings of the pavilion and by the design that is clearly shaped by the body standing, seeing, and sitting. From this privileged place on the platform of the pavilion, connections are made beyond the walls of the cemetery to the landscape beyond.

### *Skogskyrkogarden, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, Sweden*

The Woodland Cemetery was designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz after winning the design competition in 1915, competing against 52 other entries. The two architects were both young and each had individual practices though they collaborated on this competition entry and its development, though buildings within the complex were designed individually.

When a new cemetery was needed Stockholm's City Engineer, A. E. Pahlman, looked to Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris as a model for an urban public cemetery; a new type of large public burial ground located outside of city walls for hygienic purposes. When site difficulties emerged on the large plot of land south of the city the Cemetery Authority Director, K. G. Hellstrom, determined that hosting an international design competition for the project would help connect cemetery reform, a new movement to promote cremation as both hygienic, efficient, and culturally accepted, with modern design aesthetics.

Asplund and Lewerentz started with the idea of landscape and the primitive Nordic connection to nature. They even named their entry "Tallum" referring to the pine trees and to the small log cabin at Villa Tallom designed by Lars Israel Wahlman in 1906, reinforcing this primitive connection to nature. As Caroline Constant writes, the architects "relied primarily on enhancing attributes of the landscape – ridge and valley, earth and sky, forest and clearing, meadow and marsh – to evoke associations of death and rebirth".[17] The circulation routes through the landscape to each chapel have been carefully organized. The processional routes to the chapels were designed to set the tone of mourners and then reconnect them to nature and the circle of life. "The cemetery may, in fact, be regarded as a garden."[18]

The entrance begins at the circular entry court and leads, past a stone wall on a path to the main chapel. While on this path, the Way of the Cross, views of the building beyond are hidden un-

til one rises along with the landscape. The visitor ascends the stone path, passing by a large stone cross with the Woodland Crematorium on the left. This series of buildings contains three chapels: Chapels of Faith, Hope and Holy Cross. These were completed in 1940 by Asplund, the same year he died, and his urn is housed near the Chapel of Faith. The Chapel of Holy Cross is the largest chapel of these and each contain a centrally placed catafalque for the coffin to be placed.

The route continues through dense trees to the Woodland Chapel also designed by Asplund and built in 1920, the first structure in the project. Coming from the dense forest one is led underneath a low portico with Tuscan columns supporting the sheltering shingled roof to the brightly illuminated interior. Even the building is "subordinate already – to the woods" as stated by Gunnar Asplund when describing his Woodland Chapel. "The building was compressed until it modestly subordinated itself, insinuated itself into the woods, surrounded by spruce and pine trees towering to double its own height."[19]

Chapel of Resurrection, was added between 1923 and 1925 when the Woodland Chapel proved too small. It was designed by Sigurd Lewerentz with its portico set at an angle to the chapel. You enter the chapel from the north but exit to the west. While the chapel maintains the traditional east/west axis of Christian churches the portico faces north and south. Leaving the chapel you head west, along the Way of the Seven Wells, a long path, with older graves set among the trees on either side, that cuts through the forest and leads to the Grove of Remembrance, a paved square bordered by elm trees. A series of Service Houses and storage areas designed by Asplund complete the buildings in the complex. The quiet solemn architecture reflects a modern understanding of classic and antique forms that is always second to the power of the land forms and trees.

As beautiful and moving as these two landscapes are I believe ii is also important for the rite of passage of death to be able to occur within the community. It has been suggested that the removal of the dead out of the churchyard, and then further out of the city limits into suburban cemeteries, as these landscape examples demonstrate, has expelled the acceptance and familiarity of death from our lives. We are confronted with balancing the need for the performance of funerary rites to be located within the community, within the dense urban fabric, and the inherent limits of that land. Some cities, with real spatial limitations, have allowed that daily interaction and visual recollections of the certainty of death in a temporary way, providing nearness for a limited time period.

## TEMPORARY CEMETERIES

### *Isola di San Michele, Venice, Italy*

The island of San Michele became a cemetery in 1836 when special funerary gondolas carried bodies to the island. While there are areas of the island that include permanent residents such as Igor Stravinsky and Ezra Pound, there is a large center field for more temporary arrangements. Space is limited on the island, although an enlargement is under way, and burials are squeezed in tightly. Dead Venetians are only guaranteed a few years of rest on San Michele, long enough for widowers to visit their husbands. After a period of around ten years, remains are exhumed and stored in an ossuary and a new set of temporary residents are placed in efficient trenches.

### *Colon Cemetery, Havana, Cuba*

Colon Cemetery was established in 1876 and covers 140 acres. One noticeable characteristic are the funeral wreaths which are made out of wadded up, tightly twisted raffia studded with flowers, green leaves, and a ribbon of remembrance and adorn new graves. The cemetery has more than 800,000 graves and 1 million interments and space is very limited. After three years the deteriorated remains are removed from the tombs and placed in a much smaller box. Typically families will have a second ceremony at this second interment.

# Notes

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[7] Myerhoff, Barbara. "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox" in *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982): 109-35.

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[10] *Carlo Scarpa: Drawings for the Brion Family Cemetery*. New Haven: Yale School of Architecture, 1984.

[10] Ibid.

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[16] Frampton, Kenneth. *Studies in Tectonic Culture*. Cambridge: Graham Foundation, MIT Press, 1995.

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