THE LUXURY OF SILENCE, CEMETERIES AS PLACES OF 'APOSIOPESIS' IN THE CITY

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Keywords: place, urbanism, cemetery, aposiopesis

Abstract

'Aposiopesis' derives from the greek word 'αποσιώπησις' meaning becoming silent or maintaining silence. It is when a statement or address is broken off, left unfinished, only to be completed in the imagination. Bearing in mind that 'place' has been defined as 'the concrete manifestation of man's dwelling', it becomes a paradox that cemeteries are probably the only 'places' manifesting very little about their 'dwellers'. Therefore, they appear as remote urban spaces in aposiopesis of their content and habitation. Someone would be more precise describing contemporary cemeteries as 'uninhabited', but yet not 'empty', urban places. Viewed as places of expression of our 'being-in-the-world', they transcend every aspect of functionality. Therefore the current discussion on the formation of contemporary 'gravescapes' as urban territories arise multiple quests about their content and identity in the city.

The research will be based on emerging theories and contemporary examples of cemetery design. The central argument concentrates on the present relation between the city and cemetery formation through social, cultural and aesthetical aspects.

1. Introduction:

Landscape as a criticism for the city

I would like to start this paper with a direct reference to contemporary theories on the blurring between urban design and landscape urbanism. According to Charles Waldheim landscape discipline has enjoyed an

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unprecedented intellectual and cultural renewal. For various reasons, impossible to explore within this paper research, landscape has improbably emerged as the most relevant disciplinary locus for arguments historically housed in the eras of architecture, urban design, or planning (Waldheim 2006). Among other authors, Charles Waldheim urges landscape urbanism as implied critique of architecture and urban design's stiffness in offering coherent translations of contemporary urban conditions.

There can be numerous references to statements regarding this newfound relevance of landscape as a model for urbanism. Some believe that the efficiency of producing urban effects enables landscape medium for use in complex territories. On the other hand, rapidly transforming conditions of contemporary urban culture testifies the origins of landscape urbanism.

Within this research, the new potential in landscape initiates an interdisciplinary approach to the qualities of cemeteries revealing interesting perspectives about their relation with urban and suburban context. What is the position of contemporary burial sites in the temporal mutability and extensivity of the urban territories? Are they simply open spaces in rapidly transforming urban sprawls or do they qualify as reflections of the city's entity and limits?

2. Burial sites and the urban territory

The answer to the previous question might seem obvious. Recent theories on architectural and urban design treat city's space as a complex and multi-functional territory. But in the case of cemetery design, issues on functionality and coherence can be doubted. Due to their content the relation between the city and its burial sites has been ambivalent.

Historically, burial sites have been located beyond articulated urban space. During the forming of European cities, the burial ground's potential for spreading disease exiled cemeteries outside city walls. Very few exemptions can be quoted to such conviction. For the sake of scientific accuracy, someone can mention the Towers of Silence and the early Christian catacombs. The first formed multi-level open spaces, where dead could be exposed instead of burying, within the urban matrix of Persian cities. Very few of them are now reserved as monuments. Catacombs form a system of burial places underneath the city level, where Christians would spend most of their religious lives (Gazis-Sax, 1995).

The field dedicated to those who do not live among us spreads beyond inhabited urban territory. Cemeteries tend to be located at areas that seem to act as urban boundaries. There are plenty of references proving designated burial grounds outside European city fortifications, at various times and scales. In traces of Roman London, fortified with strong walls, the early city as visualized in various maps was surrounded by

the river on the south and burial sites on the north, east and west. It seems that inhabited urban space is almost surrounded and defined by a unified zone of burial sites (diagram 1). (Rasmussen, 1991)

In the case of the ancient city of Athens, one of the gates is dedicated to the memory of the dead. Therefore someone could enter the city via the way (*odos*) of the tombs, through the sacred gate. Cemeteries in ancient Greece might be located out of the city but were bound to the urban rituals and city life (diagrams 2a, 2b). (Sennet, 1994)

Cemeteries located at the city's edge have appeared as 'uninhabited' but yet not 'empty' urban spaces. Open land adjacent to the city walls have proved ideal for burial. Someone can tell about the city's entity and limits from early cemetery planning. During urban expansion, burial places tended to follow city's growth and relocate according to urban needs and geographical features. Due to health hazards, burial sites in major European cities had to be relocated in early 19th century, in order to create a new network of open spaces in the dense urban tissue. Nowadays it is possible that someone can trace the extents of the urban matrix at the time by their place and formation.

In Paris, four new public cemeteries were designed almost at the same time. Montmartre cemetery in the north, Père Lachaise in the east, Montparnasse in the south and Passy in the heart of the city, replaced the numerous burial places and crowded churchyards in the city. Père Lachaise, completed in 1804, turned to be very influential at its time. The cemetery becomes popular in the sense of a 48 hectares open urban space, bringing the inhabitants of crowded Paris closer to nature. Within the Victorian cultural context, the perception of death changes dramatically and European burial sites offer a well-articulated open urban space.

Similarly, in London the government allows the design of seven new cemeteries at the periphery of London in 1832 (Rasmussen, 1991). Kensal Green (1832), West Norwood (1837), Highgate (1839), Abney Park (1840), Nunhead (1840), Brompton (1840) and Tower Hamlets (1841) form a new network of green remote burial sites.

Among popular contemporary burial grounds someone could mention Furstenwald cemetery, designed by landscape architects Kineast & Vogt in 1996 for the city of Chur. The cemetery is located on a natural plateau overlooking the city and its surroundings (diagrams 3a, 3b). It appears as an exalted terrain acting as an intermediate zone between the city and forest (Kienast 2002).

3. Cemeteries as places of 'aposiopesis'

3.1. The luxury of uninhabited urban space

Burial places, irrelevant of their location, scale, typology or religious rituals, inevitably become places of particular scientific interest. As open spaces reserved for the dead to rest, landscapes of cemeteries withhold their content to prevail stillness and calmness. If space is defined as the boundless, three-dimensional extent in which events occur and objects have relative position and direction, then cemeteries almost represent non-spaces. They have strong boundaries, cutting them off their urban or suburban context, they do not qualify as three dimensional artificial environments and very few events occur within their limits. In this sense, the notion of homelessness that is spontaneously related with burial sites and gravescapes arise multiple issues on whether they can be considered as components of the city.

3.2. The luxury of non-functional space

Death cannot be considered trivially in any aspect. Therefore, cemeteries cannot be encountered as other urban components. Within this paper cemeteries are considered as public places. They appear not as the actual location where death takes place but as the public terrain where someone can address to and come to terms with private loss and bereavement. As fields dedicated to those that passed, they form urban places almost without functional requirements. Due to their reduced activity they become a reflection of articulated urban space. If cemeteries provenly comprise as non-functional places, the question emerging is whether they belong to the shadow of the city or they transcend every notion of urbanity, becoming ideal or visualizations of utopian places.

'Aposiopesis' derives from the greek word 'αποσιώπησις' meaning becoming silent or maintaining silence. It is when a statement or address is broken off, left unfinished, only to be completed in the imagination. Cemeteries become places of aposiopesis in or at the edge of the city. Bearing in mind that 'place' has been defined as 'the concrete manifestation of man's dwelling' (Norberg-Schulz 1980); it becomes a paradox that cemeteries are probably the only 'places' manifesting very little about their 'dwellers'. They appear as remote urban spaces in aposiopesis of their content and habitation.

It has been written that landscape, natural urban or suburban, can be considered as an eloquent language of human being and activity in the world (Spirn 1998). Among various aspects of such conviction, many authors have commented on the meaning of landscape and urban space, confronting artificial environment as

a metaphor. If inhabited space can be viewed as a metaphor of being, it is possible that burial places can be viewed as metaphors of non-being. Burial places perform the 'material shelter' of death. If landscape is the 'house of being', cemetery truly is the 'house of non-being'. Viewed as places of expression of our 'being-in-the-world', they transcend every possible notion of rationality, becoming an ambivalent case in urban design.

Historically, the relation between burial grounds and cemeteries underwent multiple transitions. European cities, via rapid integral transformations and unprecedented extensivety, relocated burial sites. Through the typological evolution from 'tender graveyards' to 'remote necropolises' and 'crisp forest burial grounds', cemeteries appear as mirrors of rapidly transforming urban conditions. Whether they are considered as spaces or non-spaces, functional or non-functional, inhabited or uninhabited, components or not; burial places are integral parts of urban formations. Due to their relation to articulated urban space they can be divided in two types. The first can be identified as the *exiled* cemetery and the second as the *exalted* cemetery. Paul Valery, in his poem 'The graveyard the sea' (original title: 'Le cimetiere marin, translated by J. F. Nims), is describing a cemetery isolated from the city, in profound dialogue with nature:

'This quiet roof, bestirred with pigeon plumes,

Seen through the pine is pulsing, through the tombs.

Here Noon the just composes, all a blaze,

The sea, the sea, the recommencing yet!

O recompense, in long abstraction set,

Over the gods' own calm to gaze and gaze.'

The image of a remote cemetery beyond cityscape is very familiar. There has been little opposition to the fact that the place of the dead needs to be withdrawn from the place of the living. Therefore the cemetery transforms into an exiled place irrelevant of scale or typology. The proximity of the burial site and the natural environment activates different associations between manmade and godmade.

4. Urban space beyond the city

Paradoxical conclusion: a new urbanism with no urban references. If urban means related to city, then contemporary cemeteries constitute with no doubt urban places. But due to their particular identity, they are in most cases spaces wittingly cut off their urban context.

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List of illustrations

Diagram 1. Early London formation and its burial grounds surrounding the city walls

(Source: diagram by author, based on maps of 2nd century London maps)

Diagram 2a. Kerameikos cemetery location in relation to the ancient Athens' city walls

(Source: diagram by author, based on maps of 400 BC approx.Athens maps)

Diagram 2b. The way of the tombs and the sacred way as entrance to ancient city of Athens

(Source: diagram by author, based on maps of 400 BC approx.Athens maps)

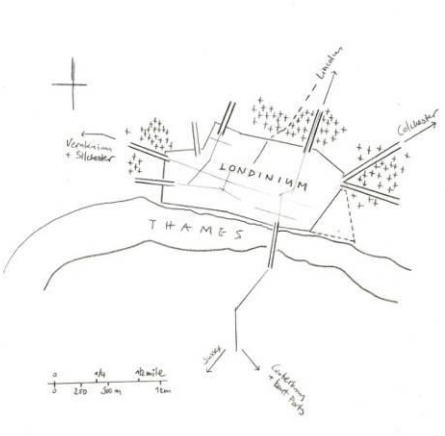
Diagram 3a. Location of Furstenwald cemetery in relation to the urban territory of Chur

(Source: diagram by author, based on aerial photos)

Diagram 3b. Location of Furstenwald cemetery in relation to the forest area

(Source: diagram by author, based on aerial photos)

Illustrations



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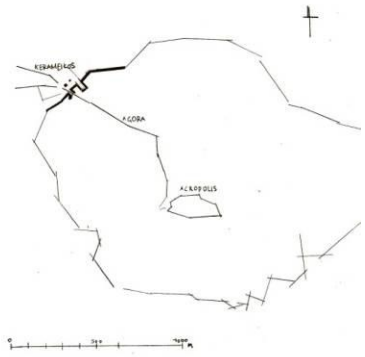

Diagram 2a. Kerameikos cemetery location in relation to the ancient Athens' city walls

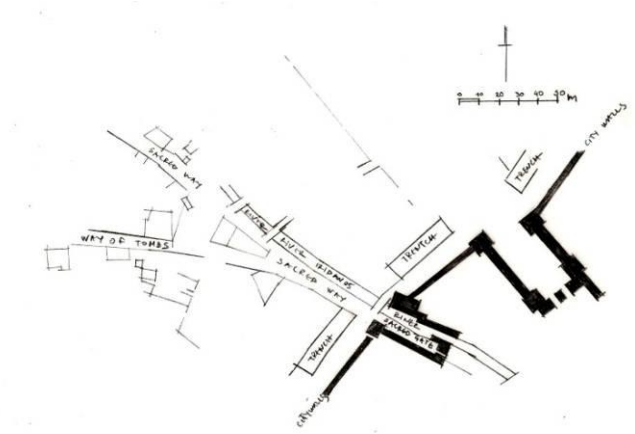

Diagram 2b. The way of the tombs and the sacred way as entrance to ancient city of Athens

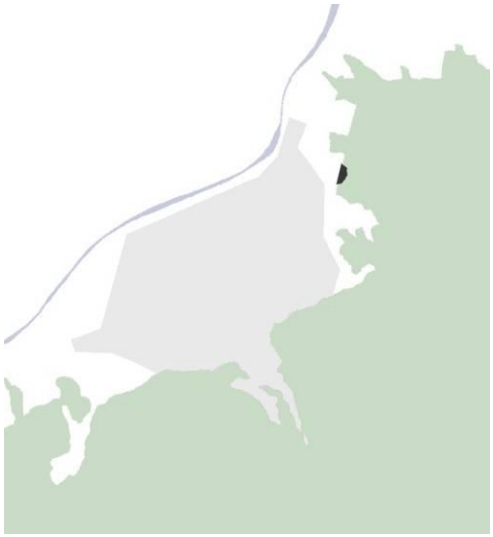

Diagram 3a. Location of Furstenwald cemetery in relation to the urban territory of Chur

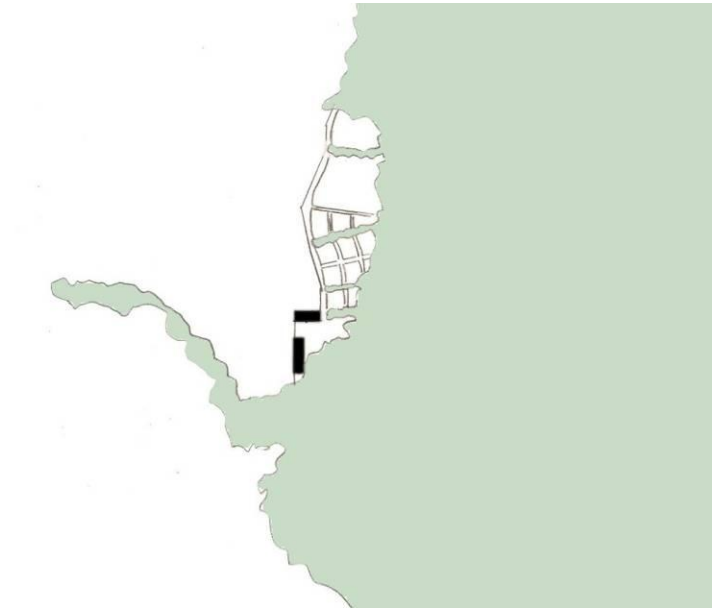

Diagram 3b. Location of Furstenwald cemetery in relation to the forest area