LIVING WITH THE DEAD

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to reimagine the space for the anonymous dead in New York City by proposing a new scenario for burial on Manhattan, which reconnects the alienated community and program to the heart of the city and other civic activities. The construction of the architecture proceeds as the substances transformed from human bodies accumulate. The processes of the transformation are embraced to perform new rituals for the anonymous New Yorkers. Meanwhile the architecture decays and deteriorates as its self-weight grows. Such cyclical processes continue to happen on the site.

Urbanistically, the thesis argues that the status quo of anonymous burial is spatially circumscribed and finite, geographically dispelled and demographically unequal, and there’s a conflict between the scarce space for the living and the dead, as part of the “ever-accumulating past” of the city. Thus attempts to generate a new urban dynamic should be made. Moreover, using death space as one incidence, the thesis intends to criticize Manhattan’s habit of expelling and outsourcing unwanted infrastructural elements at the expense of sacrificing other landscapes instead of absorbing and resolving the issues.

Architecturally, it challenges the typology of a cemetery as a picturesque park that has been embraced to cover up the deceased since 18th century despite the continuous urbanization, and explores alternative configuration, materiality, spatial quality and events associated with the burial process.

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THE STORY OF HART ISLAND
NYC's Potter's Field

- Main roads as on Ecological Survey 1989
- Secondary roads as on Ecological Survey 1989
- 20th century buildings built by New York City for institutional use.
- Silos
- Compound: vehicle and machinery store
Hart Island, a piece of uninhabitable landscape off the coast of the Bronx overgrown with the ruins from the 19th century, is a place for burying anonymous people in New York City. If a person dies in New York with no family members to be found or sufficient amount of money in the bank account, he or she would end up in a trench here.
A lunatic asylum for women was established

Harbord Island was purchased by the City as the City's public cemetery

The Island was used as a quarantine facility for yellow fever epidemic
Solomon Riley, a millionaire, proposed a seaside resort but was stymied by the city.

Prisoners were transferred, leaving the facility as a detention center for the city jail system.

A branch workhouse was built and served as a reformatory.
The Phoenix House drug and alcohol rehabilitation center was opened.

The military evacuated Hart Island and returned the land to the city the following year.

During the Cold War, Hart Island became home to a Nike Project missile base.

The working prisoners erected a 30-foot tall monument for the unclaimed dead buried on Hart Island.

The island was returned to the Department of Correction; the jail was reactivated.

During World War II, the Navy used the prison facilities as a disciplinary barracks.
The prisoners were transferred back to Rikers Island, leaving Hart Island unoccupied. Department of Correction once again began housing a small prisoner population on Hart Island.
DEATH IN THE CITY
Moving of Potter's Field
Through the urban development process, the churchyards in Manhattan no longer have enough capacity of housing the dead New Yorkers. Programmatically, burial grounds started to be considered unhygienic and needed to be removed from close contact. Typologically, the notion of a cemetery as a picturesque park has been embraced to cover up the deceased. This model of space of death itself and its relation to the city has remained unchanged since 18th century despite the continuous urbanization process.

The Conventional Cemetery Model
This secluded island is a supportive element in the daily operation system of the city, and it reveals our contemporary consensus of anonymous burials and resonates the images and landscapes we today associate with death and memory, which is **spatially circumscribed and finite, geographically dispelled and demographically unequal.**
144 Deaths Per Day

1 ft X 1 ft X 1 ft

13 ft X 13 ft X 13 ft soil in 12 months
52,000 Deaths Per Year

3/8 ft X 3/8 ft X 3/8 ft
ash

13 ft X 13 ft X 13 ft concrete Per Year
The conflict between the scarce space for the living and the dead, a part of the “ever-accumulating past” of the city that starts to fill up the plots in existing cemeteries, also poses questions for the future scenarios. How do we arrange space for the dead to prevent the burial crisis in the early 19th in Manhattan from happening again? Is it possible to inject a lifecycle of growing and decaying into death architecture so that it renews itself to address the dynamic?
In this case, I propose to transform the form of a human body into inorganic matter and encapsulate it into architecture creating a highly engineered subnature taking inspiration from central park.
Vigil (wake)  
(prayer service and eulogies)

Funeral Mass  
(liturgy, homily)

Body Preparation  
(Keriah  
(tearing an item))

Funeral

Christianity  
59%

Judaism  
14%

Muslim  
2%

Body Preparation  
(Washing and Shrouding)

Funeral  
(Mosque)

Interment

Christianity

Judaism

Muslim
Funeral Events by Religion

In New York City, where there's a mix of people with various social and religious states, what's the materialized existence of the dead that introduces greater elements of equality, democracy and fraternity into the resting place while respecting the nuances of individuality and creating experiences for mourning the loved ones? The activates taking place in central park performed by all new york citizens like the Marathon and tourists around the world, provide the opportunity for them to participate in the rituals of the New York anonymous dead or building their anti-memorial.
Birth of the New Death Space
The Process and The Substance

The transformation of substance happens within the architecture. The organic soil produced from *Promession* becomes the formwork. After it's used, the soil becomes part of the growing Great Hill of Central Park and reveals its existence through time.
Whereas after *Cremation*, human bodies become ash. When it's mixed with cement, it's transformed into concrete, which is the material and formalize the architecture itself. The hearth of cremation and the liquid nitrogen cloud make the funeral visible events for visitors of Central Park to take part in.
Hart Island

Excavation to Bedrock

From the Island of Anonymous Dead to the Park of All Living
The Great Hill

Building Up the Architecture

Manipulating the topography of Central Park and situating the architecture
As more people are transported to the site, the generation of the architecture begins and the volume grows layer by layer.
B2(promession) Floor Plan

Trucks carrying the deceased people arrive at the site via the existing paths in Central Park. Then the coffins arrive at a temporary refrigeration space for storage. The Promession process consists of three cells for freezing, shaking and separate the matter that goes through.
First (cremation) Floor Plan

The cremation space and chimney are carved into the poche of the concrete plate. The atrium in the middle of the plan reflects the light emit by the fire. Visitors sit across the atrium in a low-height cave. The view is open to the rest of Central Park. The circulation includes a ramp system for transporting materials and an elevator.
The Cemetery, The Park, and The Island #1
View Towards Central Park
The Central Atrium
The Entrance
Nitrogen Cloud from Promession
The Cemetery, The Park, and The Island #2
THE UNCANNY CONCRETE PLATES
Early experiment with water

Making of the sand-scape
Plaster Casting

Surface Texture
First Plaster Model Test
Close-ups of Model Detail
Test #2 Formwork (Up), Model (Down)
APPENDIX A: THE FINAL REVIEW
APPENDIX B: A Visit to Hart Island
Bibliography


