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Post-modern crematorium Haarlem: a place to remember

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Abstract: One consequence of the introduction of cremation as a way of disposal was the creation of a new landscape of mourning and remembrance. A shift in commemorative culture within the last decades makes the modern crematoria inadequate for post-modern death rituals. In this paper we use post-modern crematorium Haarlem to analyze its sense of place, as it stands out with an innovative ideology, lay-out and architecture. An in-depth interview with the architect revealed that as bereaved people attach meaning to a farewell ceremony that is strongly remembered, the key feature behind his design is about recalling the crematorium and the ritual procession. The light-footed, transparent chapel is intended not to dominate the place, while it incorporates the surroundings within its design. Physical influences are important during the ceremony and the ritual procession, as along with time and distance, environmental transitions will provide comfort and will help to recall the whole event. Interviews with the staff of crematorium Haarlem shows that they changed some ideas in order to meet what they considered as the needs of the bereaved. If this is true, does this mean that the general public is not yet ready for Zeinstra's crematorium?

Keywords: crematorium, Haarlem, sense of place, architecture, the Netherlands

Abbreviated title: Post-modern crematorium Haarlem

Biographical note

Mirjam Klaassens works at the Department of Cultural Geography, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her PhD research concentrates on places of death and/or remembrance and analyses the cultural meanings that are attached to it. Peter Groote is an assistant professor and supervisor of the research project.

Introduction

In the Netherlands, the practice of cremation as bodily disposal is possible since 1914, when the first Dutch crematorium was built in Velsen, located 30 kilometres west of Amsterdam.¹ Traditionally, the mainstream disposal practice in the Netherlands has been burial, since in Christian belief the bodily integrity for resurrection for eternal life was part of the doctrine.² When the first crematorium was opened, forty years after the formation of the Dutch Royal Cremation Society, cremation was still an illegal act. However, it was allowed by the government because of some incomplete sections in the

¹ Cappers, W. *Vuurproef voor een grondrecht. Koninklijke Vereniging voor facultatieve Crematie 1874-1999*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1999.

² Horrox, R., Purgatory, prayer and plague: 1150-13.80. In P. Jupp & C. Gittings (Eds.), *Death in England: an illustrated history* (pp.90-119). Manchester: University Press, 1999.

Burial law of 1869.³ Only 40 years later, in 1955, cremation became legal, when the Law on the Disposal of the Dead was accepted. After this, the cremation rate stayed relatively low, namely four percent in 1960 and 14 percent in 1970. The rate increased to 35 percent in 1980, to 44 percent in 1990. In 2002 cremation began to take over from burial as the dominant form of funeral in the Netherlands and increased to 56 percent in 2008.⁴

One consequence of the introduction of cremation was the creation of a new landscape of mourning and remembrance. For this new practice, there was no architectural precedent; therefore a new building type had to be designed. A lack of shared expectations of what is required by a crematorium made them essentially ambiguous buildings.⁵ From this time on, architects were discussing and searching for an appropriate building. Although in the 1980s a boost started in the construction of funerary architecture, there is almost nothing published about the design and functioning of Dutch crematoria in the academic world. Just as Grainger stated, crematoria “have become the invisible buildings of the 20th century. No one wants to talk about the architecture of death”.⁶ However, within the public discourse more attention is paid to Dutch crematoria. They appeared to be efficient facilities that lack atmosphere and style, rather than places where emotions can be felt or grief can be expressed.⁷ Crematoria were described as bland and modest buildings, with stuffy and dark interiors.⁸ From the outside it is hard to distinguish crematoria from other building types, while from the inside hardly anything refers to their purpose.⁹ According to architecture historian Herma Hekkema crematoria were ‘hidden’ at peripheral industrial located sites that were left out in spatial planning.¹⁰ Such modernist crematoria can be considered as ‘non-places’, places that are rendered meaningless, as the same style of building appears everywhere.¹¹ This is not surprising, as Ley stated that the modernist trend is a blueprint for placelessness, for anonymous, impersonal spaces.¹²

The last decennia of the 20th century and the first of the 21st century, showed a boost in the construction of funerary architecture. This had to do with the renewed attention for death, which started in the 1980s, in the wake of a quest for new personal

³ Cappers 1999

⁴ Landelijk Vereniging van Crematoria, *Crematiepercentage 2008 stijgt naar 55,8*. Retrieved September 15, 2009, from, <http://www.lvc-online.nl/actueel-details/crematiepercentage-2008-stijgt-naar-55-8>.

⁵ Grainger, H.J. *Death redesigned. British Crematoria: history, architecture and landscape*. Reading: Spire Books Ltd, 2005.

⁶ BBC, *‘Exceptional’ crematorium praised*. Retrieved September 15, 2009, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/wales/5053602.stm.

⁷ E.g. Enklaar, J. *Onder de groene zoden. De persoonlijke uitvaart*. Alpha: Zuthpen, 1995; Sax, M., Visser, K., & Boer, M. *Zand erover. De uitvaart in eigen hand*. Amsterdam: An Dekker, 1989; Hulsman, R.N. & Hulsman, M. *Bouwen of de grens (deel zuid). Gids voor de funeraire architectuur in Nederland*. Rotterdam: Ger Guijs, 2008.

⁸ Hekkema, H. ‘De oesters zijn gegeten, de witte wijn is gedronken’. In H. Hekkema, W. Cuyvers, & H. Heethuis (Ed.), *Uitvaartcultuur als Ontwerpopgave. Situering en architectuur van funeraire functies in een veranderende samenleving. Een ideeënprijsvraag voor studenten* (pp.59-75). Zwolle: Esselink Stichting, 2002; Hulsman & Hulsman 2008.

⁹ Enklaar 1995

¹⁰ Duijnhoven, D. (2002). Tegen de achteloosheid. *De uitvaart*, 5(May).

¹¹ Augé, M. *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995.

¹² Ley, D., Modernism, post-modernism and the struggle for place. In J.A. Agnew & J.S. Duncan (Eds.), *The power of place. Bringing together geographical and sociological imaginations*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

funeral rituals.¹³ Today there are 67 crematoria in the Netherlands and there are serious plans to build another 11.¹⁴ Cappers believed that after the previous soulless designs, new initiatives in the 1990s could be the onset to devoted funerary architecture.¹⁵ Moreover, Hulsman & Hulsman observed a turn in funerary architecture resulting in sand coloured or dark red bricks walls, white or colourful plasterwork, or copper coloured sheets.¹⁶ The last decades, different initiatives within the crematorium architecture were taken, for example in Leiden (1991), Gouda (1998), Haarlem (2002), Leusden (2003) and Zoetermeer (2006). In this paper we use a Haarlem crematorium to analyze its sense of place, as along with an innovative ideology, its lay-out and architecture stands out (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Crematorium Haarlem¹⁷

The building has won two architectural prizes: the Timber price in 2003 and the Dino-Cup in 2002.¹⁸ We are interested in the sense of place that the architect intended to produce and the way he tried to do this. We start to describe the social context in order to understand the criticism that modern crematoria received within a society that is characterized by a shift in commemorative culture.

Social context of crematoria

According to Hellman, crematoria are buildings that lent themselves well to modernism, which celebrates technology, scientific efficiency and non-sentimental functionalism.¹⁹ Crematoria were a new 20th century building type and offered a modern way to deal with the disposal of the dead “as cremation is an efficient, mechanized disposal system for the soulless remains of the secular dead”.²⁰ In the second part of the 20th century, a decline of rituals was noticeable in a society that was constructed around death-avoidance.²¹ Death was denied, rituals disappeared and funerals became standardized. Most people seemed to disappear quietly and unnoticeable from our midst.²² However it were the modernistic features of crematoria which later received widespread criticism. This was

¹³ Hulsman & Hulsman 2008

¹⁴ The authors’ created a database consisting of information on the Dutch crematoria concerning their year of opening, architect, including pictures and in some cases maps.

¹⁵ Cappers, W., Van Zielloos tot beziend. Funeraire architectuur in historisch perspectief. In H. Hekkema, W. Cuyvers & H. Heethuis (Eds.), *Uitvaartcultuur als Ontwerpogave. Situering en architectuur van funeraire functies in een veranderende samenleving. Een ideeënrijsvraag voor studenten* (pp.29-56). Zwolle: Esselink Stichting, 2002.

¹⁶ Hulsman & Hulsman 2008

¹⁷ Crematorium Haarlem. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.crematoriumhaarlem.nl>.

¹⁸ The Timber price (Houtarchitectuurprijs) is provided by the Timber Information Centre to pay attention to renewed or original applications of wood (www.centrum-hout.nl). The DINO-Cup (Dutch Dino-bokaal) is awarded every two year by architecture websites ArchiNed and ArchitectenWerk to a realized project of a Dutch architect who is older than 61 years old. Retrieved September 2 2009 from <http://www.archined.nl/oem/reportages/dino/dino.html>.

¹⁹ Hellman, L. (1982, July 14). Ashes to ashes: Crownhill Crematorium, Milton Keynes. *Architects’ Journal*, p.48.

²⁰ Grainger 2005

²¹ Wouters, C., 2002. The quest for new rituals in dying and mourning: Changes in the we-I balance. *Body & Society*, 8(1), pp.1-28.

²² Enklaar 1995

based on the one hand on their impersonal atmosphere, and on the other hand on the sense of being processed. This resulted from efficient routing through the building, which was a dominant feature of crematorium design to speed up the flow of congregations. Because of the 'one door in and one door out' routing, mourners had to exit the building through a different door in order to make way for the next group of mourners. Therefore crematoria are compared with conveyor belts as they make mourners feel as being 'processed' in a rather mechanical way.²³ The idea of processing also applies to the coffin, which in some crematoria automatically moves down to the basement where the furnace is located.

During the modernistic area meaning in the built environment was defined in utilitarian terms, resulting in functional and uniform aesthetic expressing a machine-based mass society.²⁴ However, in the last decades the purpose of crematoria was believed to go beyond that. Crematoria had to provide a physical context which would allow emotional fulfilment as well.²⁵ In 1986 the Dutch Cremation Society²⁶ published a report concerning the architecture for newly planned crematoria, as the changing position of death within the society made it necessary to introduce innovations to its architecture.²⁷ It seems that modernity's strategies to insulate and conceal death socially and spatially from everyday life had gradually been giving way to a re-appearance of death as a ritualized and almost openly 'performed' life event. There was ample room for personal, expressive, and flexible death rituals which are assumed to give new meanings to a fundamental human transformation. Post-modernity is then seen as a refusal of the exclusion of death from modern society. This resulted in a quest for new rituals²⁸ since traditional religious rituals have increasingly fallen out of favour.²⁹

In 2008 several Dutch scholars contributed to a book about creativity in death rituals in the Netherlands.³⁰ In the introductory chapter Venbrux et al. stated that death is a topic that is much alive in the Netherlands.³¹ In May 2009 a special issue of *Mortality* paid attention to the new ritualisations of death in the Netherlands. In the last two decades, mortuary rituals became more personalised and informal.³² The farewell ceremonies tend to embody and celebrate the life lived. Along with individualisation, personal rituals were preferred that reflected the lifestyle of the deceased and the

²³ Davies, D.J. *British crematoria in public profile*. Maidstone: The Cremation Society of Great Britain, 1995.

²⁴ Ley 1989

²⁵ Grainger 2005

²⁶ Crematoriumvereniging Nederland (CVN); Own translation..

²⁷ Van Asbeck, E., Van Aalderen, D., Faasse, M. & Hupkes, R. (Eds.). *Vormgeving crematoria*. Amsterdam: Tessel Offset, 1986.

²⁸ Wouters 2002

²⁹ Bernts, T., Dekker, G. & De Hart, J. *God in Nederland, 1996-2006*. Kampen: Ten Have, 2007.

³⁰ Venbrux, E., Heessels, M., & Bolt S. (Eds.). *Rituele creativiteit. Actuele veranderingen in de uitvaart- en rouwcultuur in Nederland*. Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008a.

³¹ Venbrux, E., Heessels, M. & Bolt S. Rituele creativiteit rondom de dood. In E. Venbrux, M. Heessels & S. Bolt (Eds.), *Rituele creativiteit. Actuele veranderingen in de uitvaart- en rouwcultuur in Nederland* (pp. 9-15). Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008b.

³² Laderman, G. *Rest in peace: A cultural history of death and the funeral home in twentieth-century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

bereaved.³³ Already in 1967, Bond suggested that architects have a great responsibility to provide the context in which subtle human experiences are expected to take place.³⁴

Architecture is a medium for the communication between a series of spatial arrangements and the inner condition of a human being.³⁵ This process of communication is also called architectural language, and “must speak to the soul, offering an uplifting and memorable architectural experience symbolic of the intense personal and psychological experience of the transition from life to death”.³⁶ According to Ley, “the post-modern project is the re-enchantment of the built environment”.³⁷ This can be done by the creation of place, which can be defined as space imbued with meaning, which involves investment in the physical alteration of the setting, but more importantly needs symbolic investment. While in the early days of modernism, there was a struggle to empty out and purify space, in postmodern times a comparable struggle occurred to fill space with meaningful references.³⁸

Research method

We use crematorium Haarlem, which was opened in 2002, as a case study, since this postmodern crematorium breaks with the regular design and ideology of modernist crematoria. This place of death and remembrance is owned by different parties: two undertaking businesses and the municipality Haarlem. It is designed by an expert in contrast to for example gravesides and roadside memorials where the directly involved lay people are responsible for the design. By designing crematoria, architects are potentially influential actors in the funerary architecture. Architect Herman Zeinstra played a leading role in the design of crematorium Haarlem. For this reason an in-depth interview was conducted with him. The interview was semi-structured, which involves a predefined range of questions but is flexible enough to focus on new topics or expand relevant issues.³⁹ The coherence, depth and denseness of information of the in-depth interview were high.⁴⁰ The interview lasted for about two hours. Additionally, sources of information such as early sketches and ideas, information booklets, unpublished articles and pictures were provided by the architect.

Complementary perspectives were provided through interviews with staff members of crematorium Haarlem. The manager provided information during a tour through the crematorium. Some weeks later semi-structured interviews were conducted with the manager and two other staff members. Bereaved people that used the

³³ Sax et al. 1989

³⁴ Bond, P.B., Exploration of future possibilities. In: *Annual Cremation Society Conference. Report of Proceedings* (p.25-33), 1967.

³⁵ Bond, P.B., Architecture for mourning. In G. Cope (Ed.), *Dying, dying and disposal* (pp.85-98). London, 1970.

³⁶ Grainger 2005

³⁷ Cited in Clark, J. 2008. ‘Your spot’. In F. Vanclay, M. Higgins & A. Blackshaw (Eds.), *Making sense of place. Exploring concepts and expressions of place through different senses of places*. Canberra: National Museum of Australian Press, p.169.

³⁸ Ley 1989, p.44

³⁹ Payne, S. Interview in Qualitative research. In J. Wiley & Sons Ltd., *Handbook of the Psychology of Interviewing*, 1999.

⁴⁰ E.g. Valentine, G. Tell me about...: using interviews as a research methodology. In R. Flowerdew & D. Martin (Eds.), *Methods in human geography. A guide for students doing a research project* (pp.110-127). Harlow: Pearson Education , 2005.

crematorium were not interviewed. The interviews with the staff and the literature in the public discourse provided information for an initial exploration of how the crematorium is perceived by the public. However, as the characteristics of a place may affect how people feel⁴¹, we start with examining the place.

Results

Crematorium Haarlem: a Spartan building

The architecture of the crematorium as well as the lay-out is unique in the Dutch funerary tradition (see figure 2).⁴²

Figure 2. The courtyard of crematorium Haarlem⁴³

Architect Herman Zeinstra describes the crematorium, made from austere and raw materials, as a Spartan building. The simple materials contribute to the simplicity of the design and make it neutral, without symbolism.⁴⁴ His idea was to make a comprehensive building without too much fuss. However, in the beginning the Spartan style was also physically experienced as there was on purpose no heater in the chapel. The architect wanted people to experience the outside world.⁴⁵ The family room was designed in the same minimalistic style as the rest of the crematorium, which is in contrast with many Dutch crematoria. For example, undertaking business Yarden is restyling the interior of all its 22 crematoria by applying warm colours and comfortable furniture. Walter suggested this is “to smother the interior of the building with pseudo-comfort in the vain hope that the bereaved somehow won’t feel the pain”.⁴⁶ One staff member of Haarlem argues that the restyling is a way for standardised modern crematoria to distinguish themselves, something that crematorium Haarlem does not need.

However, people complained that the family room in Haarlem looked like a hospital because of the white walls without decorations.⁴⁷ The staff consequently changed the room by applying paintings, curtains, atmospheric lighting and plants, as they perceived the room to be unsuitable for bereaved families. A staff member thought that people were not ready for it yet: “it is ahead of its time”. This is also underlined by a visitor at the open day of crematorium Haarlem who stated: “I think this building is too futuristic. I know it is modern, but also older people come here. I miss plants and paintings”. This response illustrates the staff experiences with elderly visitors, who often miss decorations and a cosy building.

The layout of the crematorium is configured as an arcaded courtyard with an open roofed passage which connects all the parts of the building into a single ritual circular route. The chapel, placed within the courtyard, is made up of glass panels in between tall wooden rafters. This design is influenced by the king pin roof structure of an old barn.

⁴¹ Vanclay 2008

⁴² Sprenger, T., *Open dag voor het publiek op 30 juni a.s. Crematorium Haarlem opent zijn deuren: een uniek gebouw wordt in gebruik genomen*. Retrieved February 13, 2009, from <http://www.uitvaart.nl>.

⁴³ Crematorium Haarlem. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from <http://www.crematoriumhaarlem.nl/aula.php>.

⁴⁴ De Groot 2002

⁴⁵ Personal communication with Peter van Wees at March 6, 2009.

⁴⁶ Walter, T. (1990). Setting the style. *Resurgam*, 33(4), p.126.

⁴⁷ Van Wees 2009

Architect Zeinstra aimed to create an optimistic place⁴⁸, by using soft wood constructions and light coloured bricks.⁴⁹ For that reason, Debets describes the building as light-footed, transparent and cheerful.⁵⁰ The crematorium breaks radically with the usual austerity of crematoria.⁵¹ Keuning stated that although death is sombre, the thought of this airy building "... offers comfort in wood and stone" to a sad person.⁵² A visitor to the open day responded: "I like the structure very much. It is open, contains lots of light and wood. Light and airy, I think that is important. In crematoria it is often so depressing. This one is open: you can breath."⁵³ This idea is shared by a group of younger, highly educated people. When for example an older woman of 70 years old visited the crematorium with her children who were in their 40s and 50s, often the mother did not like the place, whereas the children were very enthusiastically. One of the staff members explains that baby boomers have a different outlook on things and therefore appreciate the unusual crematorium more. Another visitor adds: "It is like a taste of what is in store for us in heaven".⁵⁴ Overall, the interviews and some reactions at the open day show that "people like it or they don't"⁵⁵. The building is experience by some as liberating and uplifting, while others experience it as cold, lacking of a warm ambiance. However, one staff member stated that nowadays they hardly experience negative responses. Arguably, it takes some time for the public to get used to this uncommon crematorium. Especially when they have attained or conducted a farewell ceremony in the crematorium and experienced this in a positive way, this will help to create a positive sense of place.

All the significant places of the crematorium have enclosed walls of 2,30 meters high, to create a place for purposes other than those of daily practical use. It assures security from the outside world so that mourners are not confronted with the activities at the neighbouring sports field nor the cemetery.⁵⁶ However, the columbarium is a wall with units of laminated wood that offers a view on a hedge of rhododendrons and the cemetery. In the crematory, the light comes from above and enlightens the incineration space. It does not contain windows, as the bereaved are there for a short time only and the focus has to be on the committal. Although the crematorium conveys an enclosed impression, the building has an airy ambiance, because several units of the building open out on enclosed patios and the glass panels covering the high walls provide a view at the surrounding trees.

Nature plays an important role within the design of crematorium Haarlem. Zeinstra asked advice of an arboricultural expert to maintain the trees at the building site and included a hedge of rhododendrons in his design. The idea that the physical environment influences human well-being is very much supported by designers of

⁴⁸ De Lange, H. (2004, October 12). Een naakt crematorium zonder draaideuren en gordijnen. *Trouw*, p.21.

⁴⁹ See Debets, C. (2002). Geen open eind meer. *BouwWereld*, June 17; De Groot, H. (2002). Tijd voor emoties. *Het Houtblad*, September p.4-9; Koster, E. (2002). Lichtvoetig, maar verstill. *Het Financiële Dagblad*, Augustus 10.

⁵⁰ Debets 2000; also Koster 2002

⁵¹ Koster 2002

⁵² Keuning, D. (2002). Troost in hout en steen: crematorium Haarlem. *Detail in architectuur* 4, pp.24-27.

⁵³ Kempers, H. (2002, May 25). Crematorium Haarlem – geen open dag, bezoekers toch welkom. *Haarlems Dagblad*.

⁵⁴ Kempers 2002

⁵⁵ Van Wees 2009; Personal communication wit Jan van den Oever at March 6, 2009.

⁵⁶ E.g. De Groot 2002; Keuning 2002; Koster 2002; Architectenweb. *Crematorium Haarlem*. Retrieved February 13, 2009, from <http://www.architectenweb.nl/p335>.

hospitals and hospices.⁵⁷ They believe that aspects of the environment can influence health outcomes.⁵⁸ In Haarlem the glass panels covering the high walls provide a view above, on the crowns of surrounding trees. Occasionally, herons can be spotted as they nest in these trees. The chapel provides a view at the courtyard as well, which consists of different kind of grasses planted in lanes. A staff member explains: “During the summer, the big wooden doors located behind the casket are opened and it happens often that we have butterflies inside the chapel. That is wonderful”. The reason to include nature into the design is also a way to provide a focal point for people to look at. According to one of the staff members people do in fact often look up.

In sum, crematorium Haarlem is an optimistic place because it is a light building constructed out soft wooden constructions with much glass and light coloured stones. Architect Zeinstra’s intentions with the design were that the building should be fixed in one’s mind and should not be forgotten. The unusual crematorium with its unique architecture and lay-out helps to accomplish this, but more importantly it is the incorporation of the physical environment within the design. In contrast with modern crematoria, Haarlem cannot be described as a non-place, thanks to its exceptional architecture. According to the manager of crematorium Haarlem: “Cremation has started as an ideology. People who strived for it were innovators and freethinkers. This building with its unusual architecture and ideology suits this kind of people. It is a new step of innovation”. Besides the physical alteration, it is important that places require symbolic investment.⁵⁹ In the next part, we describe how Zeinstra aimed to accomplish this in Haarlem.

Ritual procession

The lack of ritual and meaning in crematoria arise from the absence of a standard liturgy for cremation. It is difficult to change this modern method of burning the dead efficiently into a more personal and emotional practice, when there is no framework of belief and any depth of shared spiritual meaning.⁶⁰ Bond, in citing Gorer’s research, argued that mourners who were subjected to a more ritualistic form of mourning would be able to adapt themselves more readily to life afterwards”⁶¹. Architect Zeinstra wanted to stimulate an appropriate ritual that would provide comfort to mourners. Traditionally, funeral rites were about the deceased in order to provide a safe journey to another world and for the salvation of the soul. Although nowadays the ceremony still focuses on the deceased and the life lived, the rituals are conducted also to support the mourners. The practice of rituals can help people to express their emotions, to face reality and to make sense of death. Rites also have a functional purpose. In a situation where everybody is shocked and shattered, the rites and customs provide rules on how to behave. Each person knows what to do. At the same time, they have a therapeutic value as they shape a definite confirmation of the reality of death.⁶² Crematorium Haarlem shows new ways to

⁵⁷ Worpole, K. *Modern hospice design; the architecture of palliative care*. London: Routledge, 2009.

⁵⁸ Hamilton, K. Evidence based design and the art of healing. In C. Wagenaar (Ed.), *The architecture of hospitals*. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2006.

⁵⁹ Vanclay 2008

⁶⁰ Grainger 2005

⁶¹ Bond 1967

⁶² Enklaar 1995; also Sax et al. 1989

make the farewell ceremony more meaningful, for example by creating a ritual procession and to provide finality to the cremation ritual.

Firstly, architect Zeinstra believes that a cremation ceremony, unlike a burial, lacks in providing mourners something to hold on or any sense of consoles. A traditional burial takes place in clearly defined stages, whereby the visitor moves from the home to the church, to the grave and finally to the condolence room. The routes between the different stages seem to be remembered by the bereaved in particular.⁶³ Zeinstra's design is based on burial rituals. In Haarlem, the premise of the design is formed by ritual and procession. The different events that constitute the procession take places within different buildings arranged around an inner courtyard. It is designed to allow walking between these events as part of the mourning ceremony, described by Debets as routes of comfort⁶⁴. The act of passage provides time and distance to comfort the people. It helps to recall the farewell ceremony. This is also accomplished by the physical circumstances. "By passing out of the chapel into the open air there is an environmental change which can provide a certain relief".⁶⁵ In Haarlem this is enhanced by the presence of trees together with the convert garden, which again emphasizes the transitions within the processions. British leading crematorium architect Sir Maxwell Fry believed "that the act of passage through the grounds was also symbolic movement and that the landscape itself could lend much to the spiritual and psychological significance of the procession".⁶⁶

This stands in contrast with most existing Dutch crematoria in which farewell ceremonies proceed within one building as smoothly as possible. In order to avoid tensions, the cremation itself takes place behind closed doors. According to Zeinstra, a ceremony that is intended to protect the bereaved from external influences, does not offer much comfort or something to hold on. The memory of a burial or a cremation is determined by physical circumstances. The building together with the events is indelibly printed in the memory of the mourners and helps to recall the ceremony.

Secondly, architect Zeinstra thinks that the open ended nature of a cremation service causes a lack of ritual in traditional crematoria. Therefore it is not an effective ritual to say a real goodbye. While the lowering of the coffin in the grave finalises a burial, at the end of a cremation service the coffin stays behind or disappears. Although the purpose of a crematorium is to reduce a corpse to ashes, the act of cremation is seldom witnessed and takes place behind the scenes. The act of cremation is implicitly rather than explicitly acknowledged; even the smoke and the smell of burning are avoided as far as it is technically possible.⁶⁷ This way, the entry of the coffin into the cremator is physically and emotionally detached from the mourners, who remain passive observers rather than active participants within this final act.⁶⁸ This can lead to a certain emotional disconnection and lack of finality in the cremation service. To witness the cremation, is the most certain way of facing finality.⁶⁹

A climax to the mourning ritual is provided because the cremator of crematorium Haarlem is designed for the mourners to accompany the coffin into the cremator. This

⁶³ Zeinstra, H. & Stuhlmacher, M. *Crematorium Haarlem. Ontwerp juni 2007*, 2007.

⁶⁴ Debets 2002

⁶⁵ Bond 1967

⁶⁶ Grainger 2005

⁶⁷ Davies 1996

⁶⁸ Davies, D.J. *Death, ritual and belief*. London: Continuum, 2002.

⁶⁹ Grainger 2005

can provide a feeling of relief.⁷⁰ An important aspect of bereavement is to be actively involved with the farewell ceremony, which may help to realise what happened and forms the first steps in the process of bereavement. The modernist way of bereaved as passive observers, and death as hidden, makes it difficult for the bereaved to come to terms with reality.⁷¹ Nowadays, there is an increase in the number of people who want to accompany the body of their loved one to the cremator. As this place is often experienced as a frightening place, people can say goodbye in the building containing the cremator, without watching the incineration. In Haarlem the last farewell often takes place outside, in front of the door to the crematory.

The staff of crematorium Haarlem has extended the ritual procession; they have added a flower plateau. They place the flowers together with the name of deceased person outside the building on the route that the bereaved will walk when they leave the building. It is a personal tribute to the deceased person and often people come back the next day to take pictures of the flowers. This idea was picked up during a trip to English crematoria..

Functional routing

Architect Zeinstra abominated the idea of the singular route through the building that became the planning imperative in crematoria design. He believes that people get disoriented if staff moves their coats from the entry of the building, where they left them, to the exit of the crematorium. Through the design of a comprehensive crematorium he aspired to end this ‘puppetry’, to make the bereaved more aware of the building and the events taking place. In order to prevent the bereaved from getting disorientated, he pleaded to use the same entry as exit in the building. A hallstand was designed at the entrance, so people would have to walk back to the place where they left their jackets.

However, the staff explained that the initial idea of Zeinstra was never adopted. A linear route is implemented in Haarlem: entering the building at the front and leaving it at the back. The fixed hallstand designed at the entrance was placed in the condolence room, to prevent visitors to walk back. This routing is implemented, to run the small crematorium more efficient. The original plan could be applied in the crematorium, but would result in a limited number of services a day, which is not feasible for a commercial company.⁷² The staff also did not want to have people wandering around when they are busy preparing the next ceremony. “Some times it happens that people walk back, and then we just tell them that the exit is the other way”. Another colleague explained that the routing provides a sense of calmness as people know where they will go next. This fits with the way crematorium Haarlem promotes itself as a small quiet crematorium where a lot of time is reserved for the bereaved.⁷³ Despite of the implementation of this functional routing, the staff experiences difficulties working efficiently with a transparent chapel. They do not want the bereaved who leave the casket behind in the chapel, to see how they remove the flowers and the ribbons and move the casket to the cremator. Because of this, they have to wait for the whole group of bereaved to enter the condolence room, before they can do their work in the main hall. In some cases, they

⁷⁰ De Groot 2002

⁷¹ Sax, Visser & Boer 1989

⁷² Van Wees 2009

⁷³ Van Wees 2009; Van den Oever 2009

have to forbid people from smoking in the convert garden and to ask them to proceed to the condolence room. Groups of mourners are kept strictly separated, so they have the idea that they are the only users in the building.⁷⁴ Zeinstra wondered why it is such a bad thing to see other groups of people, as that also happens with funeral processions to the cemetery and at the cemetery itself.

Conclusion and discussion

The sense of place that architect Herman Zeinstra wanted to create in crematorium Haarlem is thought to help the mourners to remember the farewell ceremony. This is a key feature behind crematorium Haarlem. Zeinstra believed that mourners, irrespective of their cultural or religious background, attach meaning to a ceremony when they are able to remember the place and the performed rituals. The simplicity of the Spartan crematorium creates a light-footed, transparent building that intends not to dominate the ceremony and to distract people from their surroundings. According to Koster, the chapel gives the impression of being provisional, because of its fragile timber construction and high walls of glass, as if it was set up on the occasion of only one ceremony.⁷⁵ This underlines the unique character of every ceremony. Through the glass panels of the chapel and the glass covering of the high walls, the building collaborates with the landscape.

The crematorium consists of a spatial arrangement of different parts around an inner courtyard, in order to provide security from the outside world and to create a ritual procession. The ritual procession includes time, distance and environmental transitions, and as such will provide a certain relief and will help the bereaved to recall the whole event. To create finality to the ritual is another way to provide meaning to the farewell ceremony. It also offers an opportunity for the bereaved to be involved with the practices and to create a personal ceremony, which suits the needs of many postmodern mourners. The physical experiences during the different stages of the ritual procession are important for people to remember the stages and to deal with their grief. In the modernist era, the efficient functioning of crematoria would create distance between the mourners and their deceased loved ones as the former are not involved in the ceremony. Death was hidden and a lack of ritual would result in a denial of reality. The ritual procession in Haarlem, however, provides ritual and time to face reality which is seen as a first step in the process of bereavement.

When we analyze the design of crematorium Haarlem critically, we see indeed that more attention is paid to rituals than in the often criticized modernist crematoria, in order to create a meaningful farewell. However, the staff of Haarlem crematorium indicated that the crematorium is more appreciated because of its light and uplifting ambiance than because of the idea of a ritual procession. Staff also experiences that after a service the majority of bereaved families prefer to leave the casket behind in the chapel, instead of accompanying the deceased to the cremator. Arguably, this has to do with the fact that new rituals can not be created on the fly. It may take time for people to attach meaning to 'new' rituals in order for them to practice these at a cremation. Another point for discussion is the ritual route, consisting of a sequence of events in different spaces

⁷⁴ Van den Oever 2009; Personal communication with Herman Zeinstra at February 25, 2009.

⁷⁵ Koster 2002

with clearly defined routes connecting them. Is this route not as compulsory as the functional routing, that Zeinstra abominated?

In his design, the architect wanted to create an 'easy to understand' building in which the mourners realized what happened and which would invite them to participate in the different rituals. This differs considerably from the functional routing in modernist buildings. Especially, the abandonment of the 'one door in, one door out' principle, helped to accomplish this. However, against Zeinstra's intentions, staff resurrected a linear routing in crematorium Haarlem. The idea is that a fixed routing can also provide something to hold on, instead of creating anxiety when people are wandering around in an unknown building without knowing where to go and consequently what to do.

In sum we can say that some of the ideas of Zeinstra are controversial and break with 'traditional' ideas concerning crematorium design. Because not all of his ideas are realized it is difficult to say if his design works the way he intended them to. The staff changed some of his ideas in order to meet what they considered as the needs of the bereaved. If this is true, does this mean that the general public is not yet ready for Zeinstra's crematorium?