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Islands of the Abject: Absence, trauma and memory in the cemetery island.

Abstract

Cemetery islands—lands of death—are simultaneously real places as well as symbols of the ways in which death has been marginalized in the modern city. Since the nineteenth century, cemeteries on islands have tended to be quietly invisible places, reserved for the bodies of those who, in life, occupied the margins of human society: the deviants, the forgotten, the diseased and the insane.

Places such as *Hart Island*, the vast potter's field of New York City and *Poveglia*, the island where Venice's plague victims were sent to die, remain resolutely out of sight and mind, hidden behind the shiny façade of the urban metropolis. Yet today such islands are also sites of transformation brought about by a growing interest in death-tourism, calls for public access to sites of heritage, and the continued real estate development of 'authentic' urban spaces. Even while some cemetery islands lie abandoned and ruined, other islands of death and marginalization have emerged to take their place as locales for the contemporary 'Other'.

It is these simultaneously transgressive and transformative qualities of cemetery islands that provide the main question for this paper: How might the dark histories of trauma and violence found within cemetery islands, be critically addressed within future representations of these islands? One cemetery island - Hart Island, located in New York City, is considered here as a generative landscape that has contributed to a discussion about continued practices of spatial exclusion and their potential transformation through alternative, experimental modes of art and design. This discussion is framed through Kristeva's theories of the abject and Foucault's notion of heterotopian space.

Keywords

islands, cemeteries, burial grounds, convicts, Hart Island, abject, heterotopia, trauma, violence, institutions, social marginalization, Isle of the Dead, spatial exclusion, exile, island detention, landscape architecture, Melinda Hunt

Author Biography

Emma Sheppard-Simms is a landscape architect, PhD researcher and filmmaker based in Tasmania, Australia. Over ten years of research and professional practice, she has developed research interests in exploring the landscape dynamics of marginal urban spaces such as cemeteries, post industrial sites and agricultural landscapes. Her current research explores the significance of island burial grounds as landscapes of memory and cultural trauma.

This paper presents a discussion of the cemetery island, which can be defined as a small island where the majority of land is taken up by human burial, or where a burial place is of particular symbolic or historical importance. In this sense, the cemetery island can be seen as a distinct land use that has two dominant and interrelated qualities—its “islandness” and its character as a place of death. However, in the context of this research the cemetery island is not just a place; it may also be seen as a symbol of the ways in which death and disorderly bodies have been exiled from normative spaces, particularly as part of the practices and traditions of modernity.

Unlike the modern cemetery, which is a highly controlled, regulated and maintained land use, cemetery islands have tended to be quietly invisible places, reserved for the bodies of those who, in life, occupied the margins of human society: the deviants, the forgotten, the diseased and the insane. Places such as Hart Island, the vast potter’s field of New York City, or Poveglia the island where Venice’s plague victims were sent to die, remain resolutely out of sight and mind, hidden behind the shiny façade of the contemporary urban metropolis.

Jacky Bowring (2011, 252) has referred to such islands as “liminal zones, at the edge of our consciousness;” memory-filled and melancholy places that provide a dark counterpoint to the relentlessly new world of capitalism and consumption. Their crumbling landscapes and troubling histories impart cemetery islands with a powerful presence; a haunting quality that is increasingly sought after by those in search of dark tourism¹ or authentic experiences to tick off their bucket lists. Today many cemetery islands are seen as valuable opportunities for redevelopment, their derelict landscapes on the way to becoming the newest creative, recreation or tourism precinct. One example of this is Sydney’s Cockatoo Island, at one time a prison, a reformatory, orphanage and naval base but now the celebrated, location of Sydney’s art Biennale. The islands of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay and Robben Island in South Africa also provide examples of a shifting landscape, where the traces of historical violence have been transformed into a voyeuristic attraction for tourists. In this sense, many cemetery islands might be seen as a bastion of urban decay, on the brink of being absorbed by the advancing amoeba that is urban gentrification.

Conceivably, the focus might rest a while on the transgressive qualities of cemetery islands, specifically their murky layers of history and their unsettling presence in our cities, combined with their fascinating allure as edgy, dark places. For

¹ Also known as “black tourism” or “grief tourism,” “dark tourism” was defined by Lennon and Foley (2000) as tourism that involves travelling to sites characterized in some way by death and tragedy.

while they might appear to be empty, abandoned and ruined, their existence has a continued relevance to contemporary practices of marginalization and death on islands. Indeed, the practice of exiling the Other on islands can still be found today in places such as the Greek island of Kos or Lampudesa in southern Italy where drowned asylum seekers wash up on the shore (Pugliesi 2009), what Mirzoeff (2002, 20) has referred to as the “Empire of Camps” including Australia’s continued detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru, and on Indonesia’s so-called “execution island” Nusa Kambangan (Riga 2015, online). It is the simultaneously transgressive and transformative qualities of cemetery islands, combined with their continued use, that has prompted the main question for this paper: “How might the dark histories of trauma and violence found within cemetery islands, be critically addressed within future representations of these islands?”

The discussion in this paper has been organised into two main sections. The first describes the characteristics of the cemetery island as a landscape typology that emerged in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and was later adopted in (post)colonial settings such as America, Australia and Canada. The second section provides a case study of one particular cemetery island, Hart Island in New York City, tracing its evolution from a sequestered, socially-invisible landscape during the nineteenth and twentieth century, to an important landscape of memory in the contemporary era. Throughout this paper, Julia Kristeva’s (1982) theory of the abject and Michel Foucault’s (1986 [1967]) work on heterotopias provide a discursive framework that locates Hart Island within an evolving ideological context.

Cemetery islands

A common type of research concerning cemeteries on islands consists of historical, environmental or archaeological studies in relation to individual islands’ broader functions.² While such historical studies have certainly been important in extending knowledge about particular cemetery landscapes, this disproportionate focus on history has had a tendency to emphasise the static and passive qualities of cemetery islands rather than representing them as complex, socially constructed and potentially active landscapes. Cemetery islands, as sites of trauma, absence and violence, present particular difficulties for landscape architecture; a profession that occupies the territories in-between social responsibility, environmental management and

² See for example the scope of historical work in relation to Isle of the Dead in Tasmania as found in the following articles (Lord and Bowler 2004; Peacock 1985; Pridmore and Solomon 2005; Thorn and Piper 1996; Wright 1995)

commercial development. For while their institutional histories and architectural ruins make cemetery islands potentially fascinating tourism or recreation sites, the disquieting traces of those who have been exiled from normative culture remain; a condemnation of the very foundations of capitalism itself.

In response to this paradox, and as a counterpoint to simplistic or nostalgic historical approaches, here the cemetery island is firstly considered as a complex and constantly negotiated site of collective memory. This viewpoint finds resonance with recent work in island studies that has sought to problematize the representation of islands as neatly encompassed, discrete physical entities by pointing out the various ways that they are both reflective and constitutive of the cultural imagination (Baldacchino 2006; Hay 2006; Williams 2012).

The notion of the cemetery island as a collective phenomenon – a landscape typology – accords with research that has explored the patterns of western spatial marginalization (Bashford and Strange 2003). As such, this paper aims to move beyond an examination of the historical origins of cemetery islands as isolated entities, towards a fleshing out of their operation, proliferation and evolution in relation to similar landscapes of exclusion. Within this collective context, the cemetery island may be seen as a distinct land use that is both connected to, but differentiated from the so-called “Garden Cemetery” landscapes that first emerged during the eighteenth century and have since become common within (mainland) European and American culture. The following section traces the emergence of the Garden Cemetery typology and the establishment of the cemetery island as a specialised type of potter’s field.

The emergence of the Garden Cemetery

Architectural historian Richard Etlin (1977, 15) writes of the frenzy of urban reform that transformed Paris during the eighteenth century, whereby land uses that “harbored disease and decay” were relocated from the centre to the outskirts of the city as part of the aims of a morally progressive society. These reforms established fundamental changes in the physical layout of the city, including the closure of many churchyard burial grounds, which were replaced by large, park-like cemeteries such as Père-Lachaise (est.1804). As the urban reform movement spread to England and its colonies, public figures including Dr George Alfred Walker campaigned for changes in cemetery management and design. Disgusted by the intramural graveyards that surrounded his surgery, Dr Walker published “Gatherings from

Grave Yards” (1839)³, which linked his observations on the spread of disease amongst the poor, to the unhygienic modes of bodily disposal found in overcrowded urban burial grounds (Johnson 2008). His discussions of the contaminating ‘miasmas’ emanating from graveyards had a significant influence on the public perception that burial grounds should be located on the outskirts of settlements at a distance from the living (Jackson 2014).

Landscape planners, such as J.C. Loudon (1783-1843), also played an important role in the development of design alternatives to churchyard burial grounds. Long before the influence of Frederick Law Olmstead and the rise of the urban planning profession, Loudon was designing green belts, parks and community spaces to improve the health of the city. His ideas for Victorian cemeteries culminated in 1843 with the publication of his influential text, *On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries* (Loudon 1981 [1843]). For Loudon, aesthetics, scientific design and urban planning became a vital means of ameliorating the moral problems associated with overcrowded burial grounds (Curl 1979). These ideas were soon reflected in the establishment of new cemeteries in London such as Highgate (1839) and Brompton (1840), which were characterised by efficient roads and pathways, beautified landscapes, regular placement of grave sites and permanent funerary architecture.

In America, the establishment of Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1831 was a watershed for the rural cemetery movement and a highly influential landscape on the development of later urban parks and gardens (Bachmann 2014). Aaron Sachs (2010) has argued that Mount Auburn and other rural cemeteries, in their picturesque landscape settings that required constant maintenance represented a social desire to engage with the conditions of human mortality. As he writes (2010, 209): “(Mount Auburn) was a grounded, earthly Eden, where each proprietor was expected to shape and maintain his family's plot. You couldn't invest in this piece of land and think of nature merely as scenery; establishing your place in the environment took steady labor.” Similar cemeteries were later established in colonial settings such as Rookwood Cemetery in Sydney (1868), Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland (1886) and Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto (1873). The highly manicured landscapes of such cemeteries represented a transference of control over death, from the sacred sites of the church to the secular landscapes of the state. While initially they were highly popular and visited places, however the conditions of

³ The full title of this work is as follows: “*Gatherings from grave yards: particularly those of London: with a concise history of the modes of interment among different nations, from the earliest periods. And a detail of dangerous and fatal results produced by the unwise and revolting custom of inhuming the dead in the midst of the living.*”

perpetuity meant that many of them were to fall into eventual neglect as mourners stopped paying their respects.

Perpetuity and the beautification of death

From the late eighteenth century onwards, the social and material expression of death was evolving as practices of mourning, grave architecture and funerary rituals became increasingly elaborate and set apart from everyday urban experiences (Morley 1971). This shift was supported by the growing industries of death, or businesses that offered an elaborate range of funerary goods and services to the middle and upper classes (Mytum 2006). The construction of spacious cemeteries in combination with a readily available supply of headstones meant that burial “in perpetuity,” essentially the promise of a permanent gravesite, was now possible, at least for those who could afford it (Rugg 2000). This represented a significant change from the previous practices of churchyard burials, where graves were commonly recycled to provide space for new bodies.⁴

According to Peter Johnson (2008), J.C. Loudon’s cemetery designs addressed the social revulsion associated with decay and death by incorporating order, control and surveillance into the burial landscape, expressed in devices such as the cemetery grid, separation/partitioning of graves, symmetry and the social ordering of graves. Building upon the work of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1979), Johnson observes that these spatial techniques are similar to those employed in other nineteenth century institutional settings, such as prisons, asylums, schools and hospitals. In such places, the architecture of the institution compels a social ordering that works upon – but is also resisted by – the body as it moves through space. From this perspective, the nineteenth century cemetery was an institutional landscape that reflected a new spatial order based upon the medical and scientific control of disease, decay and death. The consideration given to architectural and material expressions within the cemetery also reflected a new secular preoccupation with the notion of individuality and the permanence of memory (Tarlow 2000). Nevertheless, there was a flipside to the rational, beautified and consumable cemetery landscape; the potter’s field, which was becoming a focus of social disgust and revulsion.

⁴ Grave recycling is still practiced in many countries throughout Europe including Italy, Switzerland and Germany, and has more recently been proposed as a solution to burial space scarcity in countries such as Australia and England (Sheppard-Simms and Simon 2015).

The English pauper's grave

While pauper's burial grounds had long been a traditional part of English community life,⁵ during the nineteenth century pauper's burial became feared and loathed by rich and poor alike (Laqueur 1983; Strange 2003). In contrast to the elaborate funerary customs of the Victorian era, the pauper's funeral was conducted with the most basic of materials and at the least cost to frugal administrators (Strange 2003). In the majority of cases paupers were provided a cheap coffin and were buried in a common grave pit with few funerary rites or attendees. For instance, Anne Enright (2015, 12) writes of the priest at Grangegorman asylum,⁶ who "got so lonely burying the abandoned mad that he requested company – just one other living person, to say the word 'Amen'."

The threat of body snatching, or the theft of cadavers for medical dissection, also came to be associated with pauper's graves (Richardson 1987).⁷ By the nineteenth century the pauper's grave and funeral had become conflated with notions of low social status, moral degradation and a lack of social dignity in death (Laqueur 1983). While provision was sometimes made for the pauper's burial in municipal cemeteries (Sloane 1991), many paupers were buried in proximity to various social institutions where they lived, including poorhouses, asylums, prisons and orphanages. Some of these burial grounds were unmarked and are still being located today, such as the mass grave in the grounds of the Bon Secours orphanage in Tuam, Ireland where the skeletons of 796 children were uncovered in 2014 (Garrett 2015). Collectively, these institutional graveyards might be thought of as an extreme type of potter's field where absence of memory has become the defining feature. While they derive from the same traditions of the nineteenth century Garden Cemetery, cemetery islands differ in several ways relating to their traumatic histories as institutional graveyards and their geographical isolation on islands. The remnants of this trauma, as found in archives, oral histories and the bodies of those who were buried there, still pervades many cemetery islands today.

⁵ For example the Irish tradition of *Cillini* or burial grounds reserved for strangers and social outcasts, including unbaptized children, women who died in childbirth, suicides, executed criminals and the insane (Enright 2015).

⁶ An Irish asylum also known as St Brendan's at Grangegorman, which was established in 1815 and used for the incarceration and treatment of the mentally ill.

⁷ It is also important to note that experiences were varied across different regions and often involved a complex set of attitudes towards the pauper burial, including the belief that it was an inalienable right of the poor Hurren and King (2005).

Exile to the (institutional) island

From the late eighteenth century in Europe and its colonies, islands have been commonly used as locations for state institutions. See for example the work of (Pearn and Carter 1995), (Edmond 2003), (Nethery 2012) and (Roscoe 2015) for a cross section of this type of research. Examples of such places include quarantine and leper islands such as Grosse Île (Canada), Kamau Taurua and Quail Island (New Zealand), Hospital Island, Angel Island and Rainsford Island (USA) and Torrens, Channel and Peel Islands (Australia). Asylums, poorhouses and homes for inebriates were also established on many islands including Peat Island and North Stradbroke Island (Australia), Blackwell's Island (USA), San Servolo (Venice, Italy) and Robben Island (South Africa). Indigenous people were exiled to islands by colonial powers; including Flinders Island, Palm Island and Rottneest Island (Australia), Deer Island (USA) and the forced relocation of Inuit people to Ellesmere Island and Cornwallis Island (Canada). These examples are but a few of the many institutional islands scattered around the world, which collectively form a type of "carceral archipelago" and destination for bodies that represent the modern Other. At this point the work of Michel Foucault becomes relevant through his discussion of the power mechanics of institutions, particularly prisons.

Island landscapes were often chosen as ideal locations for prisons for their perceived qualities of separation, isolation and the potential to enact total control over those who were incarcerated there (Pearn 1995). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, prison islands were established by imperial powers throughout Australia, the Atlantic, the Western Indian Ocean and Europe (Anderson 2006). Here the criminal body and its corrupting influences were purged from society in one of the largest mass exiles in human history. Notorious prison islands include Devil's Island (French Guiana) the setting for Henri Charrière's 1969 book *Papillon*, Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years and Alcatraz, the prison island of San Francisco Bay.

As Michel Foucault has discussed in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), the spatial design of the nineteenth century penal institution engendered new operations of state power, internalised within the body of the subject via the effects of isolation, surveillance and discipline. One example of this new architecture of control was the Panoptican-like "Separate Prison," built in 1850 at the Tasmanian penal settlement of Port Arthur. The Separate Prison was based on a series of symmetrical cells located around a central surveillance hall. As Rachel Hurst (2010, 79) has said of its design, "...from the unbreachable smoothness of encircling wall to the unambiguous axes of circulation and the chilling, lofty volume at its heart, it's as near to a

Cyclopean space as one might care to get.” Within this structure, convicts were incarcerated in their individual cells in perpetual solitary confinement, engaged in repetitive menial labour for much of the day and subject to strictly observed rules and routines. Allowed out only for short periods of exercise or church, they were made to wear a heavy wool hood that prevented all forms of communication with other prisoners. While this system of total control over the bodies and minds of the prisoners was initially seen as a revolutionary means of moral reform, a more common outcome was mental breakdown and neurosis as documented by social commentators of the time (Frow 2000).

The construction of the Separate Prison in Tasmania during the 1840s reflected a general shift away from flogging and other public punishments towards the use of systematic, psychological and bureaucratic techniques of control (Hughes 1996). Within this new order, memory (understood as a compulsively relived and internalised experience) rather than spectacle, became the primary technique of reform (Frow 2000). At the same time, the absence of collective memory of the convict body became a means of controlling the rest of the populace; an absence that was symbolically represented within the design and management of the penal burial ground as well as the post-mortem treatment of the convict corpse.

At Port Arthur the burial ground was located on The Isle of the Dead, a small island located a short boat trip away, but still visible from the main penal settlement. Convicts who died at Port Arthur were routinely removed to the hospital for dissection and examination, then placed in bare pine coffins “in a state of perfect nudity” and then transported by boat to The Isle of the Dead where they were buried in unmarked, shallow graves with a rudimentary religious ceremony (Ross 1995, 35). Sometimes convict graves were marked with small, wooden crosses, even though memorial markers were officially prohibited for convicts. Free settlers were also buried on Isle of the Dead, however they were buried separately on the northern side of the island, whilst the convicts were buried together with paupers, lunatics and invalids on the lower southern side (Ross 1995).

The violence found in the official treatment of the convict corpse, namely bodily dissection, nudity, transportation to a remote island, the use of shallow graves and absence of memorial markers - can be seen as a type of what Pérez (2012) has called the “politicization of the dead.” Here, the corpse becomes a highly symbolic object, a spectacle and an instrument of power for those in control. As he states (2012, 15):

The complete destruction of human remains symbolizes the undisputed success of the victors and serves as a transition from war to victory. The disarticulation and mutilation of bodies symbolizes

the political dismemberment of the vanquished, emphasizes their total subjugation and reinforces the power and dominant ideology of the victors.

Here the convict corpse might be seen as representing the deviant working class body; its physical annihilation symbolic of the triumph of state power over the bodies of the people. In this context, the violent treatment of the convict body is not just seen as an abhorrence, but as a social and political act that has shaped ideology and history.

The burial of the convicts on the island represented several layers of exile, starting with their transportation from Britain to Tasmania, the secondary punishment of being relocated to Port Arthur and finally their burial on the Isle of the Dead, in a final severing of cultural and historical ties with their homelands. This systematic process of removing the subject from his or her community, cultural traditions and homeland brought about a type of “social death,” understood as the removal of one’s social agency via the symbolic and physical stages of exile. As has been discussed within other contexts of social death including slavery (Patterson 1982) apartheid (Mason 2003) and genocide (Card 2003), social death involves the systematic, bureaucratic process of alienation inflicted upon a group. This stands apart from perspectives that represent social violence as a type of historical anomaly or as the actions of deranged or evil individuals. Within this systematic and politicized view of violence, the island landscape can be seen as playing an important role as both a spectacle and symbolic locale for the annihilation of the non-conforming, abject body.

Islands of the abject

While many of island institutions were closed and later abandoned during the twentieth century, traces of their histories remain in the archives, architectural ruins and landscapes of the islands, as well as in urban myths and stories about such places. These traces exist as a powerful testament to the systematic and violent attempts to erase certain types of disorderly bodies within the western historical tradition. Building upon the work of Sigmund Freud and Mary Douglas, Kristeva (1982, 3) proposes that the construction of the human subject involves a casting away of the elements which society has deemed filthy and disgusting – the abject. She states;

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live,

until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body
falls beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver.

According to Kristeva, the belief that people must be protected from such defiling elements (and indeed the failure of this objective) is characteristic of modern western subjectivity. As she writes (1982, 4), the human corpse is "...the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life," a representation of the threat of bodily dissolution and chaos. Essentially, the corpse reminds us of the inevitability of death, so it is safely handled by the vast institutional networks of the city, from the hospital, to the morgue, the funeral home and finally the orderly cemetery landscape, where, contained within its coffin, it is placed in the reassuring permanence of the grave. Conversely, the pauper's grave, with its absence of memorial and individual markings, and its symbolism of social failure becomes deeply disturbing. The cemetery island, from this perspective, is a landscape where abjectivity is intensified; as it contains the corpses of those disorderly bodies whose very existence poses a challenge to normative western fantasies of control, rationality, participation and progress.

However, as Kristeva points out, as much as we try to purge the abject from our collective experience, it remains a repressed part of ourselves. As such, it returns to haunt us within the realm of the unconscious and symbolic. This can be seen, for example, in the ways that various 19th century institutions have become places of notoriety and fascination in film, literature and other forms of popular mythology.⁸ This is also true of cemetery islands, which frequently emerge in film as dark settings for hauntings and horror stories where past peoples come back to wreak their revenge upon the present.⁹

An important point here is that while cemetery islands have been constructed as places of exile, seemingly severed from the operations of everyday life, in fact their marginal status is directly related to the construction of the modern subject. In this sense cemetery islands could also be described as one of Anne McClintock's (1995, 72) "threshold zones," places that are at once central to and marginalised from the operations of industrial imperialism. In this sense the representation of exile islands as isolated places or as closed cultural systems, is misleading. Instead, the cemetery island might be seen a landscape that derived from, but at the same time is transgressive in relation to, the mainland. Its very existence reminds us of what has

⁸ See for example Pheasant-Kelly's Pheasant-Kelly (2012) paper on abjectivity in the spaces of the institutional film *Shutter Island*.

⁹ Examples of these types of films are commonly found in B-Grade horror films such as Val Lewton's *Isle of the Dead* (1945), Ugo Liberatore's *Damned in Venice* (1978) and George A. Romero's *Survival of the Dead* (2009).

been exiled; the bodily, the dirty and the vulnerable, the terrifying, disgusting, shameful, and instinctual parts of ourselves that we may repress but which cannot be erased. In the same vein, the cemetery island contains the possibilities for a renewed engagement with the complex dimensions of human experience; the ‘ghosts’ that return to haunt us.

Haunted islands and traumascapes

In her seminal work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon (1997, xvi) refers to the “ghostly” manifestations or “seething presences” of things, people and events that have disappeared from official versions of history and knowledge. As she writes, “[t]hese specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view.” In the case of the cemetery island, this “trouble” refers to the violent exclusion of non-conforming bodies from normative space and the subsequent erasure of their social memory. Trouble also relates to trauma as a moment of repeated discursive disruption. As Avery Gordon and other trauma scholars including Dominick LaCapra (1999), Cathy Caruth (1995) and Roger Luckhurst (2008) have noted, trauma violently disrupts the seamless illusion of normative meaning, but through its compulsive reappearance trauma also provides the possibility for a rethinking, and interweaving complex structures of trauma with new types of meaning.

As previously discussed in relation to Port Arthur, many prisons, quarantine stations, asylums and other institutions located on islands were physically and psychologically violent places. Physical violence was a means to ensure compliance, to prevent escape and to serve as a deterring spectacle. Psychological and social violence was inflicted through the architectural and landscape design of the institutions. Cultural violence was also manifested through absences within the cemetery island, found in the lack of grave markers in a society where individual memory was assuming great cultural importance. The concentrated effects of violence and trauma within the island landscape renders it a type of “traumascap,” described by Maria Tumarkin (2005) as a haunted place that contains affective power through its location as a site of acute loss, suffering and death. Tumarkin’s analysis of traumascapes across the world, from Tasmania’s Port Arthur, to the location of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, to sites of war atrocities such as Sarajevo, opens up important questions about the transformative power of places in negotiating cultural meanings around violence, absence and trauma. Building upon the work of Avery Gordon, Tumarkin asserts places of trauma are ‘real’, that is, their

landscapes contain meaning that we instinctively recognise and which affect us in ways that transcend mere myth. She writes,

Traumascapes, of course, were haunting and haunted places. Yet they were not poetic or metaphysical terrains but, rather, concrete, material sites, where visible and invisible, past and present, physical and metaphysical came to coexist and share a common space. And the astonishing thing was that most of us knew about these places. (Tumarkin 2005, 233)

To this end, the trauma found in the cemetery island could be considered on three different levels. First, and as previously discussed, there is the particular trauma that surrounds systemised and violent processes of incarceration. This trauma was inflicted upon the bodies and the corpses of the people who inhabited the institutional spaces of the island. Second, relating to the concept of social death, there is a trauma associated with the lives of the people buried there, found within their individual histories of illness, dispossession, dislocation, criminality, poverty (etc.) and their systematic exclusion from the wider social body. Third, and in accordance with Kristeva's work, the cemetery island represents a type of collective cultural trauma that relates to the repression of our own abject and vulnerable selves, as symbolised by the bodies which remain buried on the islands.

Returning to the premise of this paper – that the cemetery island has an important potential to contribute to current discourses about spatial marginalization in the contemporary era, the question thus becomes: How can we address the historical traces of trauma, absence and violence as found on the islands, whilst maintaining a critical perspective on the islands' broader ideological significance? It is proposed that one answer to this question lies within critical modes of landscape representation that have explored affective alternatives to the cliché of the cemetery island as an isolated, static and passive artefact. Here trauma is not written over or mindlessly repeated, but is intertwined with the landscape to become a powerful mechanism of change.

Through the lens of such work, the second part of this paper explores the generative potential of the cemetery island as a Foucauldian heterotopian space. In the following paragraphs I provide an introduction to Foucault's idea of the heterotopia, employing this theory to reframe the cemetery island as a culturally active and productive landscape. I will then discuss the example of Hart Island, New York City, as one cemetery island that is currently undergoing a process of political transformation in part catalysed by affective forms of landscape representation including film and photography.

Island heterotopias

Originally a lecture given by Michel Foucault to a group of architects in 1967, *Of Other Spaces* discusses the idea of the heterotopia as a counter-site that engenders a type of ideological break from normative structures of meaning through its function as a representational space. In Foucault's words, the heterotopia is "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986 [1967], 3). In this quality of being set apart from all the other real sites, the heterotopia may help to reinforce and stabilise certain social conventions, or conversely, it may bring about their transformation (Saldana 2008). In turn, questions of spatiality are central to the operation of the heterotopia.

As Dumm (2000, 40) notes;

...the connections made through a heterotopia are not determined by the heterotopia itself but rather by the contents a heterotopia's placement brings into play. Its position is crucial to the experiences that people will have, the ways in which they will understand themselves and the importance (or lack of importance) of what they do.

For Foucault, the characteristics of the modern heterotopia are closely related to the broader changes in western perceptions of space between the Middle Ages and the modern era. Within this shift, the work of Galileo signified an important opening up in perception of space from the medieval "space of emplacement" (1986 [1967], p.22) characterised by the hierarchical and ordered organization of a localized spatial system, to a modern era of relational sites set within infinite space. Within this recent relational model, Foucault argues, the question of how to order space to create certain types of human relations has become central. Yet, as he explains, some spaces lie outside of such relational systems and mechanisms of control; the 'other spaces' comprised of both utopian and heterotopian spaces. Foucault identifies six principles of heterotopian space (pp.24-26);

1. They are found throughout the world in two manifestations, as "heterotopias of crisis," for example an initiation site, or "heterotopias of deviation," for example a prison.
2. They have a precise function in relation to any given society, which is dependent upon social contexts and may change over time to reflect changes in society, for example a cemetery.

3. They are characterised by the juxtaposition and overlay of multiple, potentially incompatible places symbolically in one place, for example a cinema.
4. They often involve a separation from normative conceptions of time (heterochrony), for example a museum or library.
5. Their access is determined by a threshold where specific rules and rituals are observed, for example a Swedish sauna or Muslim hamman.
6. They have a purpose that is intrinsically connected to normative space – either to expose the “real” world as illusory (for example a theatre), or to compensate for the chaotic nature of the world by creating a “perfect,” controlled space (for example in the Jesuit colonies of the Americas).

Foucault specifically describes the cemetery as a heterotopia, in this sense a type of spatial mirror that simultaneously reflects ideal, controlled and ordered visions of death, and the transgressive Other City where our dark fears of mortality are played out in the abject processes of decay, decomposition and disappearance of the human body. In this sense, heterotopian space is also uncanny space (Manning 2008). It is familiar as it reflects the ordering and the real spaces of society, however it is also unfamiliar because it presents potentially incompatible sites (and ideas) simultaneously, questioning the foundations of our subjectivity. The interdenominational cemetery provides one example of this operation. As a spatial organisation of different burial traditions concerning death, it reflects the familiar pluralistic society that we inhabit. However, when seen collectively, the aesthetic and ceremonial differences between each section of the cemetery present a fundamental contradiction of the idea of religious or ideological truth. In relation to that most disturbing of human conditions – death – plurality becomes problematic.

Yet, given that the cemetery island is a place where absence is the defining feature, its status as a heterotopian space is less clear. Many cemetery islands, through their historical association with state institutions, could be considered as ‘heterotopias of deviation’, or places for the incarceration of particular social groups that were classified as harmful. An operational example of this is Hart Island, New York City, where access is limited and visits are strictly controlled. Nevertheless, the status of most cemetery islands as abandoned, ruined sites may be more in alignment with Foucault’s idea of the crisis heterotopia; “privileged or sacred or forbidden places,” for example “the boarding school” or “the honeymoon trip” (1986 [1967], 24) that contain the subject-in-crisis but allow for the social reintegration once the subject has been transformed. The crisis heterotopia here takes on a quality of a relational, transitional space that has a power to influence the collective imagination.

In terms of physical characteristics, a difference between the cemetery island and other crisis heterotopias is its relative isolation and lack of accessibility, an inheritance from its time as a heterotopia of deviation. The fact that islands may only be reached with difficulty by boat or plane has encouraged their development as special destinations, demonstrated for example by Cockatoo Island's development into a creative urban precinct. Yet, as Bowring (2017, p.105) notes in relation to Cockatoo Island, this type of development has an associated problem; "The legacy of danger and discomfort, sadness and isolation, can become suppressed as part of moves to create pleasant places." Clearly, designing for visibility or accessibility alone does not provide the answer.

At this point I wish to propose that the heterotopian qualities found within creative works such as film, virtual memorials and speculative landscape design, may provide a means to connect cemetery islands to the mainland, whilst retaining the power of their traumatic histories. For Foucault, spaces of representation such as the cinema or the theatre are heterotopian, and intrinsically powerful, because they represent the real whilst simultaneously revealing the artifice of its construction. This brings to mind Baudelaire's famous words;

I would rather go to the theatre and feast my eyes on the scenery, in which I find my dearest dreams artistically expressed, and tragically concentrated! These things, because they are false, are infinitely closer to the truth; whereas the majority of our landscape painters are liars, precisely because they have neglected to lie. (Baudelaire 1981 [1859], 202)

As James Corner and other landscape theorists have proposed, this "neglect to lie" goes to the heart of a problem with much landscape representation, in which ideology powerfully remains hidden, contained within the physical appearance of the real (Corner 1999). This is as true of landscapes of absence, such as the cemetery island, as it is of formally designed landscapes. However it becomes particularly problematic in relation to sites of trauma and violence where the invisibility of ideology is one of the very means by which oppression has been, and continues to be, perpetuated. The idea of the creative heterotopia is useful in this context as it opens up new possibilities for understanding the cemetery island as a complex ideological space, but also a space of future possibility. The following discussion of Hart Island in New York City illustrates how critical modes of landscape representation offer up a complementary type of heterotopian space that has catalysed the political transformation of the cemetery island within the broader urban context.

Hart Island: A heterotopia of deviation

Hart Island is located East of the Bronx in New York City, part of a group of islands in Long Island Sound. Over time the island has been used for a variety of purposes including a civil war prison camp, quarantine station, hospital, a missile base and a reformatory. However, the dominant use of the island since 1868 has been as a potter's field, the burial place for the bodies of New York's unclaimed, unknown and poor (Santora 2003).

Hart Island's size (0.41km²) makes it 'the largest taxpayer-funded cemetery in the world' and over one million people have been buried in the cemetery since it was first established (Hunt 2016, online). A highly regulated place, the island is currently administered by the New York Department of Correction and inmates from the nearby prison on Riker's Island dig the graves and perform burials and exhumations on the island (Buelow 2010). This practice alone involves a type of enacted violence and trauma for the inmates, who are forced to contemplate their lives and potential future through the ordeal of digging their own symbolic grave.

Burial on Hart Island is a matter of efficiency and expediency. Currently, funeral ceremonies are not conducted on the island and public access is limited. In recent years public visitation rights have been increased to once per month on a designated ferry service (City of New York Department of Correction 2016) The bodies, in plain pine coffins, are laid in large trenches which will eventually contain 150 adults or 1000 babies. Trenches are left open until they are filled, with coffins exposed, for periods of time averaging 20 days. This practice leaves bodies vulnerable to the effects of vandalism, weather, erosion and decomposition (Hunt 2016, online). The completed mass grave is then marked by a single white posts and left for a sufficient time for decomposition to occur (approximately 25-50 years) after which the ground is dug up to make way for new interments. Significantly, those who die and remain unclaimed in New York City may be selected for use as medical cadavers (Bernstein 2016). Just as it was 150 years ago at Port Arthur, burial in the potter's field of New York City represents the final consequence of social deviancy. Nevertheless, the landscape of Hart Island is gradually changing, in part catalysed by the efforts of New York artist and activist Melinda Hunt.

The transformation of Hart Island

Over the past 25 years, Melinda Hunt's artistic practice has been based upon New York City's historic potter's fields, particularly Hart Island. In 2011 she co-founded a registered charity, The Hart Island Project, to assist family members in locating

relatives buried on the island as well as to provide public access to and information about the island as part of the process of mourning and memorialization (Hunt 2016). These efforts have resulted in an online, searchable database of burials and grave locations on the island (The Museum of the Traveling Cloud), the development of a formalised process for those who wish to visit the island and ongoing public debate about whether Hart Island should be transferred to the management of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (De Bode 2016).

Recurring themes in Hunt's artistic practice include the changing historical and social attitudes towards death in New York City, the importance of landscape in processes of mourning and the selective nature of collective memory. In 1991, she visited Hart Island in collaboration with Joel Sternfeld to produce a photographic series based on the island (Hunt and Sternfeld 1998), echoing the work of Jacob Riis who documented the same subject in his photography of the tenements of New York City during the 1880s (Riis and Museum of the City Of New York 1971). According to Hunt, they initially wished to explore Hart Island as "a hidden American landscape" that was characterised by a contradictory relationship between the beauty of the island and its violent history of burial and displacement (Hunt 1998, 20). Yet rather than depicting a passively historical or natural landscape, the resulting photographs revealed the ongoing and powerful connections between the island and the people who have been associated with it. From portraits of the Riker's Island inmates, to the grave of the first child to die of AIDS in New York City, to a woman visiting the grave of her stillborn infant for the first time in forty years, Hunt and Sternfeld's photographs are infused with a haunting melancholic power born of innumerable personal tragedies. Hunt further developed this idea of the island as a landscape of stories within her 2008 documentary: *Hart Island: An American Cemetery* (Hunt 2006).

Hart Island: A heterotopian cemetery

In a scene half way through *Hart Island: An American Cemetery*, the brother of a man who is buried on Hart Island contemplates a view of the island from a beach where his family would visit when he was a child. Commenting on the "strange and eerie and spooky" moment he finds himself in, he attempts to reconcile his happy childhood memory of a family picnic with the simultaneous knowledge of his brother's drug addiction, death from AIDS and burial on Hart Island. As the feeling of the moment takes hold, he searches for symbolism and solace in the landscape: tracks in the sand become "tracks to my past," while the shape of the beach becomes

an arm, embracing his dead brother on Hart Island. This same man later absent-mindedly scatters a handful of seeds in the overgrown meadows of the island, an action that becomes symbolic of Hunt's optimistic view for the future; that Hart Island will become a place that is integral to the life of the city.

Hunt's documentary film follows four families who are attempting to piece together the stories of their relatives who have been buried on Hart Island. It presents the island amidst the vast institutional networks of New York City, including the police departments, morgues, prisons, hospitals and other institutions that organise the lives and deaths of those who have slipped through the net of mainstream society. In alignment with the broader aims of The Hart Island Project to open up the island to greater public access (Hunt 2016), a prominent theme in the film is the devastation caused when a place of mourning and remembrance is denied to those who are left behind. For the people depicted in the film, being able to visit and dwell in the actual place of burial is a vital part of dealing with the traumatic circumstances surrounding their loved one's life and death. By highlighting this absence, Hunt contributes to a dialogue about the ways that the institutional landscape contributes to the perpetuation of social trauma. Yet, as the film progresses it also offers an alternative view of landscape as potentially redemptive and transformative, a theme that is conveyed in a type of symbolic journey taken by each group of relatives to the burial site of their loved one on Hart Island.

In its heterotopian space, the film juxtaposes many different stories, revealing the diversity of the people who are buried on the island and reconfiguring its representation as a space for the socially dead by revealing the enduring connections to the living. The idea of complexity and connectivity is represented within the film by a series of compositing effects, including interviews and footage that is intercut and overlaid by photographs, archival records, newspapers and letters, music, poetry and artworks. In one sense this collage-like effect mirrors the disorienting, rupturing effects of trauma (Caruth 1995) opening up an alternative landscape where neatly contained narratives no longer hold sway. This cinematic collage also unearths and reinserts that which has been repressed, the stories of the individuals who were buried on the island, and their enduring memories in the world of the living. What emerges is a juxtaposition between the highly controlled and rational institutional representation of Hart Island and an emotional landscape of fear, love, sorrow and mourning which is essentially human. The conflation of these human stories with the stark wastelands of the island itself, populates the island with an emotional infrastructure that becomes an essential part of its transformation. Trauma here is

not confined to the individual, although it remains deeply personal, but instead becomes the ethical concern of the city, the landscape and society as a whole.

For Hunt, the heterotopian qualities of the island, combined with its future public access becomes an important means to reconcile the violence and trauma of the past within the present. Complicating what we think we already know about marginalised people, *Hart Island: An American Cemetery* seeks to create a network of interlaced stories, located amongst different times, places and people, but all grounded within the temporal landscape of the island.

Conclusion

Within this paper, the cemetery island has been discussed as a distinct landscape typology that remains closely related to the spatial arrangement of the rational city. In contrast to the mainstream Garden Cemetery where individual memory was celebrated, the cemetery island became a counter-site that actively brought about the erasure of an individual's social memory. As a group of landscapes scattered throughout the world, they remain diverse and complex in character, however they have certain common characteristics that relate to their institutional histories, including their isolation, lack of public access, their institutional ruins and burial grounds typified by mass or common graves, minimal grave markers and a general absence of formal landscape design. In this sense the cemetery island became the modern incarnation of the potter's field, a spectacle of horror for the growing middle class.

Through the work of Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva the cemetery island may be understood as a product of a newly secularized society, where the body took on increasing importance as a site of disciplinary power. In part, the subject was defined spatially according to a set of relational sites that lay at increasing distance from an imaginary centre. Here, the cemetery island can be seen as one of the most marginal sites within this newly defined system – a place of both bodily disorder and death, a “carceral archipelago” for the modern abject. In turn, the maintenance of this system of exclusion involved systematic and bureaucratic forms of violence and the so-called “politicization of the dead,” the traces of which still remain today in the cemetery island landscape. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that landscape has often played a complicit role in the perpetuation of structural violence, albeit transported to contemporary island settings.

While the traumatic histories of cemetery islands have been rendered invisible through structural forms of violence, they have also tended to resurface in the realm of stories and myths, and expressions of cultural “trouble” that continue to be

expressed within the contemporary psyche. In this sense, the cemetery island is as much a real place, as it is a site of the collective cultural imagination. The transgressive, violent histories of the cemetery island have most recently emerged in relation to contemporary pressures for the redevelopment of abandoned cemetery islands. This current condition of transformation raises important ethical considerations about the future development of cemetery islands, but also presents opportunities for a re-examination of contemporary practices of marginalization. Within this paper, it is proposed that a reframing of the cemetery island as a Foucauldian heterotopian space may open up active and critical perspectives for the future development of such landscapes. For while the cemetery island is arguably already a heterotopian space, accessibility and interconnections between the mainstream and the isolated island landscape still need to be brought about through critical modes of landscape representation and design. Potentially, one way in which this might be explored is through the creative heterotopia which can function as a type of affective virtual landscape which complements the physical landscape of the island.

The example of Hart Island has been discussed as a particular site of transformation within a major metropolis. Hart Island has gradually evolved from a heterotopia of deviation at the turn of the nineteenth century, to an increasingly visible locus of contemporary discourses around death, the urban marginalised and the transformative role of landscape in New York City. The artistic and political activism of Melinda Hunt has been central in increasing the visibility of this island through her interdisciplinary practice involving public artworks and installations, documentary filmmaking, multimedia practice and her recent founding of The Hart Island Project. As many scholars have shown, the representation of trauma is fraught with difficulties relating to its paradoxical unknowability, the way that it disrupts meaning and defies language. However, artworks, including those found in multimedia art and documentary film may offer alternative ways of expressing trauma that draws upon its affective and temporal qualities. In this vein, the work of Melinda Hunt involves more than just depictions or testimonies of trauma. By engaging in a political type of creative practice that is participatory and ethical, affective and temporal, Hunt continues to challenge issues of the visibility of death and marginalised communities in the contemporary city.

While the heterotopian function of each cemetery island is necessarily different, collectively they are spaces that remain intrinsically connected to the mainland, and each other, rather than separated or isolated sites. In this view, cemetery islands are productive counter-sites, places imbued with histories of violence and trauma, but

also reflective of complex, human questions about the way we imagine our bodies and the bodies of others in space. As such, design approaches that aim to redevelop or tokenistically represent the landscapes of the cemetery island lose an important opportunity to retain the symbolic and transformative power of such spaces. Conversely, creative approaches that challenge the representation of the cemetery island, may forge new understandings of these important sites of cultural memory. The notion of the heterotopian cemetery island as a space that allows for transition and negotiation of new meaning in relation to the norm is particularly relevant within the context of a rapidly transforming, and anxious, society where questions around death and marginalization have become central concerns for the postmodern subject.

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