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*Metropolis versus Necropolis.
Polarity in the relationship between the city and the cemetery in history.*

Final Report

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*'Since ancient times, the architecture of the grave has mirrored society's thoughts about the dwelling of the living.'*¹

¹ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaheer, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg. 2005) p. 6.

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The evolution of the city and the cemetery have always been running parallel in history, one couldn't exist without the other; their relationship has always been strongly intertwined, yet strongly polarised.

The aim of this report is to analyse key historical examples, relating to particular historical events, which in my opinion, may help to open - at least a partial view - on the evolution of the relationship between the city and the cemetery, affected by the shifting and changing balance of religious, political and socio-cultural components.

In ancient times, the human body was taken as a reference to design the city; first developing the metaphor of the city as a living organism - a metaphor which will be largely used through history, as will we see later. In the Greek and Roman cultures, the dead were not allowed to pollute the space of the living and the cemetery and the city were two separate entities. The advent of Christianity in Medieval times, saw the introduction of churchyards within the city walls, which also along with poor health conditions of the then cities, facilitated the spread of epidemic diseases such as cholera.

The Renaissance brought with it the desire to start afresh new cities and towns. The many projects of ideal cities left behind by architects such as Filarete or Scamozzi, were primarily concerned with the aesthetic and the security of the city rather than the real issues: health and hygiene and the spread epidemic diseases; issues that finally urbanists had to address with the expansion of the cities due to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Work forces during this particular historical moment moved from the countryside to city centres. The absence of any burial regulation and health issues urged the introduction of legislations which moved the cemeteries out of the city. In England, the Burial Act (which came to force in 1851) marked the introduction of suburban necropolises in the Victorian era, to resolve the issues of crowded inner city burial grounds, and guarantee city inhabitants a healthier life in the city centres. This also facilitated the condition for the development of a new strong architectural language specific to the cemetery in the Victorian era, which mostly came from cultures with strong past records of funerary traditions, like the Egyptians or the Romans.

The new suburban necropolis in Victorian England, was the starting point of a new type of cemetery, which was also perceived as a public civic space, like a park. From now on we will see that the city and the cemetery will be almost completely separated: the city - growing into the metropolis, a complex, sometimes chaotic large urban development, and the cemetery -

embracing more and more nature, promoting ethical and ecological issues attached to it.

Due to the expansion of the city, the Victorian necropolis once located in the suburbs of London, have recently become an integral part of the urban fabric. For example, 'Abney Park Cemetery is now encircled by a dense, multicultural, inner-city population that it serves in new ways. It is a quiet retreat for walking, a repository of funerary art, a genealogical archive, a memorial space and a natural reserve.'²

Legislations such as the Burial Act of 1851 in England, were also introduced throughout Europe producing a schism in the relationship of cemeteries and cities as well as diverse, new interpretations of suburban burial grounds, in capital cities such as: Paris, Berlin or Stockholm.

In recent years, the introduction of 'green burial grounds' in some London cemeteries such as Manor Park Cemetery and The City of London Cemetery constituted an interesting area of exploration of alternative ways of burying the dead. These designated areas are secular burial grounds which will be re-integrated with public woodland after a certain number of years. In this way the cemetery is in fact, completely departing from its usual architectural inspiration, embracing instead nature for the sake of the ecological cause. This doesn't seem to include a specific

² Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg. 2005) p. 208.

architecture language, but promotes instead a non-architectural message.

The city will be taking over land more and more as it expands; the cemetery instead, will help to give land back to nature.

Bringing this report together I have relied on publications which directly or indirectly contributed to construct the argument at the core of this body of work. Amongst others, *'Flesh and Stone'* by Richard Sennett, and Anthony Vidler's, *The Architecture Uncanny – Essays in the Modern Unhomely* especially for concerning the idea of the human body as a model for the city. *'Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West'* by Ken Worpole, has been crucial in identifying the Victorian necropolis as a civil and social space, as well as understanding the function and importance of the landscape in the context of the cemetery and the city. *'The Secret Cemetery'* by Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, Georgina Neophytou, and *'Necropolis – London and its dead'* by Catherine Arnold, informed my work on the history of burial grounds in London. For the contemporary issues of the city and the city planning I have been reading texts by Richard Rogers and Lewis Mumford, even stretching as far as Archigram's fantastical city projects, to visualise in general the future of the urban conglomerate.

For clarity, I have presented the material in chronological order, starting by extracting relevant points from the relationship between the city and cemetery in the Egyptian, Etruscan and Roman times, where the city and

the cemetery were clearly separated, up to the advent of Christianity and the introduction of the cemetery within the city walls. In the second chapter, I will be looking at some examples of ideal cities in the Renaissance times. In the third, the Victorian necropolis and city with the introduction in England of the Burial Act in 1851. I have dedicated the fourth chapter to an analysis of the condition of the relationship between the city and the cemetery in modern times; including comments from architects and lecturers, stating their opinions on the subject.

From the Pagan Necropolis to the Sheltered Cemetery.

Before taking any step into the historical analysis of the relationship between the city and the cemetery, I would like to pause the attention on the etymological meaning of these two words and express some considerations on them. “The source of the English word “city”...is the Latin *civitas*, which described a federation of tribes grouped under common political and religious institutions.”³ The word cemetery comes from the late Latin *cœmeterium* and Greek *koimeterion*, which meant room for sleeping, dormitory.⁴

In light of this etymological clarification, we can spot a juxtaposition emerging between the two meanings. The *civitas* appears to be primarily concerned with people sharing their political and religious institutions; the *cœmeterium* simply with space.

On the latter, I would like to introduce an extract by Leon Battista Alberti from his tractate *Ten Books on Architecture* describing an element which defines space as the possible original burial in antiquity: ‘...the *Gatæ*, in

³ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p.11.

⁴ As described in the T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 68 and in the *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005) p. 275.

the most remote Antiquity, used at first, in the Place where they interred a dead Body, to set up a Stone for a Mark, or perhaps (as *Plato* in his *Laws* more approves) a Tree, and afterwards they use to raise something of a Fence about to keep off the Beasts from routing it up, moving it out of its Place.⁵

The *gatæ* protecting a grave, as described by Alberti, evokes the archaic necessity of protection from the foreign, the unknown, as well as defining a property a belonging, by identifying it with a spatian boundary. The definition of a space by using the *gatæ* – the fence – has been used for cities - possibly since the introduction of the ‘original burial’ described by Alberti. These two physical spaces defined by the fence, the city and the cemetery, share a common denominator: the human body. We can affirm that city and cemetery are in fact spatial, and architectural responses to two different physiological status of the human body in the space. The city is the space designated to the living, and the cemetery the space designated to the dead.

Some early civilizations such as the Egyptians, more than adopting the fencing of individual graves, as described by Alberti, developed burial grounds which architecturally reproduced the dwelling of the living.⁶

‘Egyptians tombs were modeled on domestic prototypes.’⁷

⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*. (London: Alec Tiranti, 1999) p. 165.

⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*.

In central Italy, the Etruscans necropolises (see fig. 1) were developed in a similar way to the Egyptian ones, mirroring in their layout a village or small town as James Stevens Curl explains in his book *Death and Architecture*: ‘Tombs not covered with mounds often stood, alone or in groups, within walls, and give the appearance of planned villages. The cemetery of Caere (Cerveteri) has a principal street, and the plan of the necropolis is not unlike that of the Roman city of Ostia. Vulci has regular rows of tombs and has a recognizable plan and layout similar to towns for the living.’⁸



Fig. 1 - Etruscan Necropolis of Cerveteri. The Etruscan tombs of Cerveteri. 6th and 7th Century BC.

‘Etruscan tombs and cemeteries were always outside the towns and cities’⁹so that the spaces for the living were completely separated from those of the dead. Ken Worpole in his book, *‘Last Landscapes – The*

(London: Alec Tiranti, 1999) p. 164.

⁷ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 4.

⁸ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 37.

⁹ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 38.

Architecture of the Cemetery in the West describes his visit to the Etruscan Necropolis of Cerveteri. 'All of this development (the necropolis) is of a piece with the development of domestic architecture, rather than sepulchral architecture'¹⁰, says Worpole about this Etruscan necropolis.

The use of domestic architecture as such, might find an explanation if read in connection to religious beliefs of the Etruscan civilisation. In their journey to the afterlife, the dead were believed to be accompanied by their belongings, which were laid in the 'tomb-dwelling'. This was all done to keep the dead happy in the afterlife, and avoiding them to come back to the land of the living as ghosts.

In my opinion, the tomb-dwelling also helped to give a familiar visual representation to something so unfamiliar as the world of the dead.

By observing the plan of the Etruscan necropolis of Cerveteri, we can identify the similarity to the traditional village fabric, identifying the main road, and the tombs-dwelling forming almost little clusters of buildings. There is though, a distinctive and uncanny difference between the two typology of houses: the absence of windows in the tombs-dwellings. This brings to mind Wölfflin's theory on the association between buildings and the human body: the physiognomic of a building. 'Even though a house has little in common with a human form, we see the windows as organs that are similar to our eyes... We therefore attribute to them all the

¹⁰ Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 82.

expressive value that resides in the relation of the eye and its surrounding.¹¹The houses in the necropolis of Cerveteri do not have windows and therefore no expression, their eyes are shut like the dead.

The use of the familiar reproduction of the 'house' in the Etruscan funerary architecture does occur also on another scale. For those bodies that were cremated, the Etruscans created urns in the shape of dwellings or round huts.

The Etruscan example of mirroring the *civitas* and the *coemeterium*, is probably one of the strongest in history, sharing though some common ground with the early Roman culture, which clearly adopted some customs from the Etruscans and well as from the Greeks.

The neat separation between the spaces for the living and those for the dead, is also present in the Greek culture. The necropolis was located away from the space of the living for health reasons as this extract from '*Flesh and Stone*' by Richard Sennett clearly explains: 'The cemetery lay beyond the city's walls at the northwestern edge of Athens – outside the walls because the Greeks feared the bodies of the dead: pollution oozed from those who had died violently, and all the dead might walk at night.'¹²

The Romans had a similar belief, in fact the 'Roman law forbade burial *in urbe*. To preserve the sanctity of the living, cemeteries were located on

¹¹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Prelegomena to the Psychology of Style* in H.F. Mallgrave and E. Ikononou (ed.s), *Empathy, form and space – Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873 – 1893*, (Santa Monica: The Getty Center Publication Programs, 1994) pp. 176.

¹² Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone – The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) p. 144.

roads leading out of town. These laws derived from the need to keep the dead at a distance.’¹³ Due to their imperialist politic, the Roman exported this tradition to England and to other colonies of the then Roman Empire: ‘the remains of three major Roman cemeteries have been found on roads leading west, north and east out of London.’¹⁴

In Rome, the tombs and necropolis were scattered along the consular roads which led to the city. One of these consular roads, which still retain most architectural testimonies of Roman funerary architecture, is the Via Appia, where we find some tomb-dwellings (see fig. 2) as well as tombs reproducing small pagan temples, like the ones, mentioned by James Steven Curl in his book *Death and Architecture*.¹⁵



Fig. 2 - Tomb of the first century on the Via Latina, Rome.

¹³ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 8.

¹⁴ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaheer, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005) p. 10. (www.eng.h.gov.uk/ArchRev/rev94_5/eastcem.htm).

¹⁵ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*. (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 51.

Although the similarity in the construction and architectural features between the dwelling and the tomb-dwelling, in the Roman necropolis there was an absence of 'planning'. Unlike the Etruscan's, the Roman necropolis was simply developed along the consular roads, outside the city walls. We can say that in this particular time, the cemetery more than mirroring the city was extending it, by being located along the consular roads; so that we have the city as a pulsating living being as the core, and the necropolis representing the dead extremities of the city. This particular urban configuration, stimulated a vertical development in Rome at the time, more than a sprawling, out of the city walls.

With the advent of the *Republica*, (IV Century AD), the introduction of the cremation and by consequence of small burial spaces to store the urns we start to see the adoption of a funerary architectural structure called columbarium.¹⁶This phenomenon generated the creation of... walled enclosures associated with tombs, ...funerary gardens laid out and planted to provide fruit, flowers, and wine to honour the dead.¹⁷These walled cemeteries 'were laid out to formal plans'¹⁸which seems to imply the presence of a grid system, a system that the Roman have been employing to lay out their city and determined the plan of many cities up to our times: 'The grid and its axial partition had been employed by the Etruscans and had not only spiritual significance as the representation of

¹⁶ Giuseppe Lugli, *La Decorazione dei Colombari Romani*.
www.inroma.roma.it/arardec0/1921/21_III/Art1/III1T.html

¹⁷ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*.
(Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 42.

¹⁸ James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*.
(Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 42.

the order of the heavens, but also practical advantages...the Romans used the grid not only not only in their military camps but also in new colonies...a clear representation of the order imposed by the imperial power.¹⁹

Along with the introduction of the grid, early civilisations, used the human body as a reference to create their cities; not in its shape but for its vital organs, so that the city could be associated with a living organism. For the design of the cemetery by contrast, the reference was the city, a mirror image of the city, in fact, a reflection or opposite of the living organism.

To understand this comparison of the city with the human body, we must acknowledge that for the Romans, their cities had an umbilicus just like humans, which connected the city to the earth. "The planners...pinpointed the umbilicus of a city by studying the sky...The umbilicus had immense religious value. Below this point, the Romans thought the city was connected with the gods interred with in the earth."²⁰

With the advent of Christianity, the importance of the grave location of a corpse determined the place in the afterlife. 'Because of the Crucifixion, Christian theology put a strong emphasis on death. During the reign of

¹⁹ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) pp. 34/35.

²⁰ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone – The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) p. 106.
Rome's umbilicus is still marked on Via Sacra in the Roman Forum.

Roman emperor Constantine, Christians sought to be buried near the tombs of Christian martyrs.²¹

The closer bodies were buried by a martyr, the more chances to get a place to Heaven. We can say that unlike the Egyptians or the Etruscans civilisations where the dwelling of the dead had a strong importance, more than the location of the body (and the dwelling), Christianity shifted the emphasis on the location of the body. This major change, resulted in a shift into the polarised relationship between the city and the cemetery.

Italian historian Fabrizio Mancinelli, gives some explanations about the early Christian community in Rome: 'They generally lived in densely populated neighborhoods in the suburbs, especially near the sites which offered the possibility of a lively trade in supplies for the capital...or near industries like the transport services on the Appian way.'²²We need to remember this area was a major burial area in Rome at the time, this is probably one of the reasons why they excavated the catacombs there.

At first the Christian community in Rome, due to the strict Roman legislation were confined to burial grounds outside the city. Christians buried their dead in the same Roman necropolis along the Via Appia and other consular roads leading out of the city. Later on, with Christianity gaining proselytes and influence over 'the wealthy Roman families which were converting to Christianity...granted the Church the use of their

²¹ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone – The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) p. 35.

²² Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity* (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 5.

lands as burial grounds... With the passage of time, nearly all the cemeteries became property of the Church and were directly administered by it.²³

With the introduction of the catacombs, we witness the unique phenomenon of Christian necropolises. We see here that more than mirroring each other, the cemetery and the city were developing in layers (see fig. 3); the city over ground and the necropolis underground.

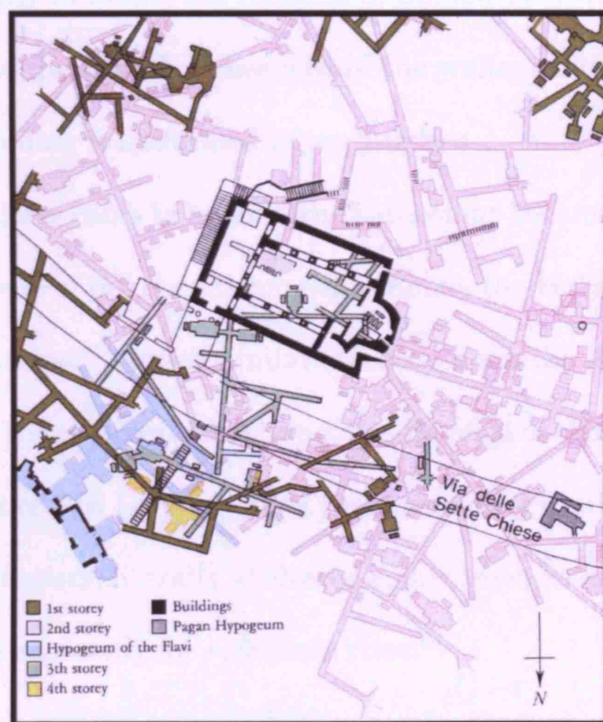


Fig. 3 - Plan of the catacombs of Domitilla. The different colours indicate the different catacomb levels.

As the power of the Church grew in Rome, its influence materialised in physical urban layout of the city. "The early beginning of ecclesiastic organization date back to the time of Pope Fabian (236-50 AD). He divided the city into seven districts and entrusted seven deacons with the

²³ Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity* (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 6.

supervision of the cultural, instructional and charitable activities that went on in the *tituli*²⁴ of each. Another of their tasks was funeral organization, for which the state did not provide at that time, and each district was allotted a burial zone outside the walls, with a certain number of cemeteries.²⁵ The catacombs were located on land (outside of Rome's wall) that converted Roman aristocrats donated to the Christian community to be used as burial grounds. Once the Church established itself permanently in Rome, the remains of the martyrs were moved from the catacombs to the new churches within the walls, which were usually Roman civic buildings transformed into churches.

'When burials there came to an end, the catacombs became sanctuaries. Immense numbers of pilgrims thronged to Rome, the Holy City, from every part of Europe.'²⁶ 'Other similar structures are the *Basilica Apostolorum* – Today's San Sebastiano, the Basilica of Santi Marcellino e Pietro, and that of San Lorenzo, all of them cemetery basilicas or *coemeteria subteglata*, literally sheltered cemeteries, destined for funeral ceremonies and especially for *refrigeria* rites.'²⁷

With the Church gaining more and more power, throughout Medieval times we also see that the relationship between the city and the cemetery

²⁴ *Tituli* were the houses of the benefactors of the early Christians in Rome. They were bearing the name of the owners and were used for the Christian community to gather and celebrate mass or perform Eucharistic baptism rituals. Later on the *tituli* were replaced by the churches. Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity*. (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 6.

²⁵ Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity*. (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 6.

²⁶ Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity*. (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 8.

²⁷ Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity*. (Florence: Scala, 1994) p. 50.

got more intertwined with the fabric of the city. The idea of the necropolis outside of the city walls, was almost completely abandoned in favour of churchyards within the city walls. As the cemeteries entered the city walls, the relationship between the city and the cemetery shifted. This also had a direct effect on the city fabric itself, distinctions between sacred and secular spaces started to take shape. The Church was in fact ‘...expanding the sacred city and pushed against the expanding secular city.’²⁸ ‘The secular buildings...grew jumbled together, the streets twisted and inefficient, while the churches were carefully sited, their construction precise, their design elaborately calculated.’²⁹

An example of this can be observed in the development of the city of

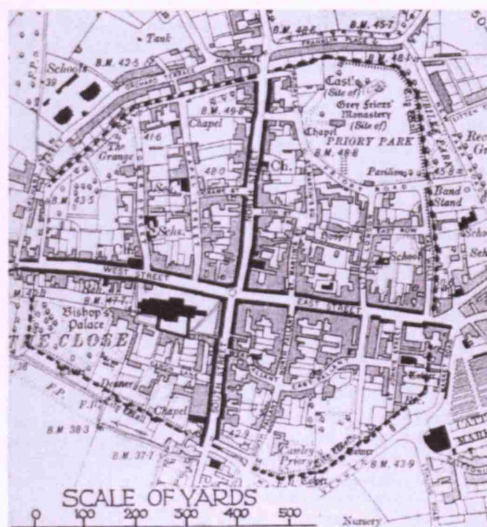


Fig. 4 - Map of Chichester: the modern street plan based on the typical east-west, north south cross of the Roman times.

Chichester (see fig. 4). This was a very typical Roman town until the

²⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 16.

²⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 12.

influence of the Church modified the urban fabric: 'The lesser streets have been substantially pushed out of their original grid by the territorial ambitions of the various religious institutions which squeezed within the walls in the Middle Ages.'³⁰ The relatively unorganised structures of towns and city, became the starting point during the Renaissance to develop utopian urban solutions of towns and cities. These though, were lacking of any interest into the relation between the city and the cemetery, as we will see more in detail in the following chapter.

³⁰ Colin and Rose Bell, *City Fathers. The Early History of Town Planning in Britain*. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972) p. 15.

The utopian ideal cities conceived by Filarete, Scamozzi (see fig. 5) or Leonardo in the Renaissance, were a departure from the Medieval town, and the past: 'Utopias are usually implanted upon virgin or razed soil...divorced from the past influences of time...being as close to perfection as possible, [and] ...not intended to undergo future development...'³¹

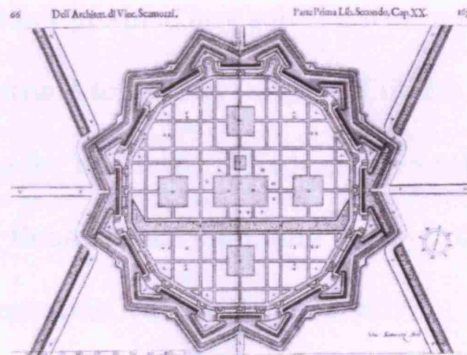


Fig. 5 – Scamozzi, Ideal city plan in Vincenzo Scamozzi: *L'Idée della architettura universale*, Venice 1615.

This we could say, is a very Modernist approach to organise the city in a rational way. 'Utopias are presented as alternatives to establish situations which are perceived as chaotic ...they are most usually urban (or

³¹ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 16.

suburban) and laid out upon geometrical lines, suggesting humankind's rational domination of the chaotic forces of nature.³²

Another reason for these restructuring of the cities was to do with the perception of man in relation to the rest of the universe. In this time, 'the cosmos was ...perceived as being rationally arranged, the physical representation of divine order...the ideal city sought to achieve the harmony of the cosmos.'³³

Most of the projects for the ideal city were planned as a contained space, enclosed by walls, like the churchyards in towns and cities, which could not expand out their confined boundaries, and were to use the burial space, over and over. The architects and planners, such as Filarete and Scamozzi, didn't take into consideration the possible future expansion of the city. They also didn't produce any solutions for a possible ideal cemetery as a counterpart to the city, almost if in the vision of the perfect city, there is no space for the dead. The ideal cities remained confined to the aspiration of the Renaissance man, and in most of the cases remained a pure visual representation, rather than a reality.

The visual impact had a stronger relevance, rather than the actual issues connected to a city structure. Boyer already identified this by analyzing the space in the Medieval town form the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. She says that the gates to the city represented a display to

³² Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 16.

³³ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 48.

impress the visitors entering the town: 'As the royalty or her or his emissary entered the gates of the town, she or he passed by a series of triumphal arches, fountains, bridges, and a number of tableaux vivants.'³⁴ Filarete with his projects for Sforzinda in the mid fifteenth-century³⁵ seemed more interested in satisfying his commissioner, rather than offer urban solutions. Alberti, attempted to give some directions, in his Ten Book of Architecture, about the construction of the funeral monuments, without really thinking about a proper location for the burial grounds to be located. Out of a list of idealists architects, Leonardo, appears to be the one concerned with the real issues connected to health and hygiene in the urban environment. '[He] was concerned with practical issues: the decontamination of the city the introduction of canals, sewerage and drinking water, the opening up of the squares and avenues and the repositioning of the walls to let the city breathe.'³⁶

In the meantime, the reality of the towns and cities, was far away from being ideal; part of the responsibility for this was the poor condition of burial grounds within the city walls. The absence of any regulations to do with burial grounds, the expansion of the city as well as plagues, brought the situation in the cities out of control. The visions of the ideal city didn't look at the possible solution for an ideal cemetery to juxtapose the city;

³⁴ M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory –Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment*. (London: MIT Press, 1995) p. 206.

³⁵ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 15.

³⁶ Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002) p. 54.

missing an opportunity to reassess the relationship between the city and the cemetery.

Even when looking at contemporary utopian urban solutions, architects and urbanists seem not interested in producing a concerted urban development which could involve both and appear to be still interested in confined urban developments, such as Buckminster Fuller's Triton City (see fig. 6), '... a floating neighborhood of no more than five thousand people, embodying all the positives amenities of any neighborhood, including parks strategically placed within the massive courtyard area of the structure, stores, and parking.'³⁷

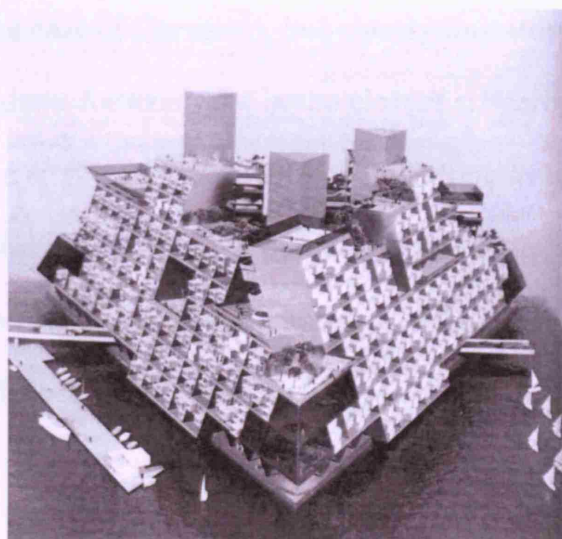


Fig. 6 - Triton City, a floating self-contained community model by Buckminster Fuller.

Fuller's idea of the city is not open to future development, as the city won't grow bigger to accommodate larger numbers of inhabitants. This concept although different is very close to the ideal cities of the Renaissance, such

³⁷ Lloyd Steven Sieden *Buckminster Fuller's Universe. An Appreciation* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990) p. 407.

as Filarete's Sforzinda. where the urban configuration could become a tool to control a specific community by the institution.

After this brief introduction to the Ideal Cities, in the following chapter will see how the advent of the Victorians brought finally some consistent changes into the relationship between cities and cemeteries, with the introductions of legislations that would regulate the burial grounds. This marked the schism between the city and the cemetery, assisting to the rebirth of the Necropolis first in Paris with Père Lachaise and subsequently in England and throughout Europe.

None of these necropolises though, will really be designed to be the mirror of a city like in the case of Cerveteri, but clearly imitates the city in its layout. Père Lachaise, for example, is the closest a Necropolis ever went on being laid out as a city: replicating the cobbled stone avenues of Paris.

With Père Lachaise we have one of the strongest example in history of mirroring between the city and the cemetery, stronger than the encounter earlier with the Etruscan necropolis.

Metropolis versus Necropolis.

In London ‘...during the first forty years of ... [the nineteenth] century ...population doubled, from 985,000 to nearly 2 million. Housing and sanitary facilities proved inadequate and death rates in overcrowded areas increased rapidly, creating growing numbers of dead to be buried. After centuries of interments, existing inner-city burial land was already inadequate.’³⁸ The death rate was high and ‘life expectancy (in London) in 1842 for a professional man was thirty. For a labourer, it was just seventeen.’³⁹In this critical situation, Edwin Chadwick with his ‘Conclusion from the Sanitary Report’ dated 1842⁴⁰, mainly concerned with the hygienic situation of London, helped to shape the Burial Act. ‘The Act to Amend the Laws Concerning the Burial of Dead in the Metropolis, commonly known as the Burial Act...was finally passed in 1851. After that, notices were issued for the termination of interments in vaults and graveyards all over London.’⁴¹

³⁸ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaheer, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg. 2005) p. 30.

³⁹ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 94.

⁴⁰ ‘...the annual loss of life from filth and bad ventilation is greater than the loss from death and wounds in any wars in which the country has been engaged in modern times’. This is an extract from ‘Conclusion from the Sanitary Report, 1842’ by Edwin Chadwick which worked to reform the statutory social services in UK. *Industrialisation and Culture 1830-1914*’ edited by Christopher Harvie, Graham Martin, Aaron Scharf (London: The Open University Press, 1970) p.138.

⁴¹ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*.

This brief introduction depicts the unhealthy situation in Victorian London, a situation which was ripe to changes. In this chapter, I will analyse how the introduction of the Burial Act in 1851, marked a dramatic shift in the relationship between the city and the cemetery, to overcome health and hygienic issues in Victorian London. The necessity to change the dynamic between the city and the cemetery, wasn't caused by religious belief, like the previous one with the advent of Christianity, but in the light of rational and practical decisions, regulated by law. As observed in the second chapter of this report, whenever a shift in the relationship between the city and the cemetery occurs, we observe repercussions in the balance within the city fabric itself.

In the Medieval town or city, when the cemeteries moved within the city walls, the pressure started to grow, between the sacred and the secular spaces of the city. The result of this was a juxtaposition between the unorganised secular spaces and the organised sacred spaces. During the Victorian times, and in the particular case of London, when the cemeteries moved out of the city, the city fabric underwent major transformations. At the same time, the necropolises were taking shape in the suburbs of London (and in those of other European capitals such as Paris), large operations of urban surgery were taking place. Like in the Medieval times, the authority of the Church pushed the boundaries of secular activities to spread the sacred spaces throughout the city. In the nineteenth-century,

Houssmann in Paris and the Victorians in London, managed to demolish to inner city residential areas, removing the life from the city by pushing out the residents to the suburbs, as well as their cemeteries; freeing up space for commercial use. In the case of Paris, 'Houssmann confronted a congested city a thousand years old whose twisted streets were a breeding ground for, in his mind, the unholy trinity of disease, crime, and revolution.'⁴²

These new urban solutions, were also strongly influenced by scientific discoveries such as: 'Harvey's'⁴³ findings about the circulation of blood and respiration which led to new ideas about public health, and in the eighteenth century Enlightened planners applied these ideas to the city.'⁴⁴

In London the reshaping of the secular city did affect the sacred spaces of city, more than thirty Wren's churches were demolished in the Victorian times '...in the course of killing off the residential City.'⁴⁵

Proposals for large out of town cemeteries, were not new to London.

Proposed plans were already drawn up by Christopher Wren after the

⁴² Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 62.

⁴³ William Harvey published in 1628, *De Modu Cordis* a tractate on his discoveries about the circulation of the blood. Discoveries which revolutionised the scientific understanding of the human body.

⁴⁴ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone – The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) p. 256.

⁴⁵ Colin and Rose Bell, *City Fathers. The Early History of Town Planning in Britain*. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972) p. 76.

Great Fire of London in 1666.⁴⁶ Wren's proposals though, were then refused by the Corporation of London.

The introduction of the Burial Act, also helped the development of the undertaking trade. Up to that time '...the midwives who ushered new life into the world also prepared dead bodies for the next one.'⁴⁷ 'The change in funerals, and the development of the undertaking trade, was a reflection of shifting attitudes towards death on the part of the emerging middle class...and burial need no longer to take place in a mere churchyard.'⁴⁸

Plans were also drawn to reuse neglected burial grounds in inner London; most of them got transformed into gardens and parks '...back in 1843, Sir Edwin Chadwick had recommended that the space previously occupied by burial grounds should be made available for public use, and his sentiments were echoed now by other reformers, who suggested that they reopen as parks. An early example of this change of use was Bunhill Fields, closed in 1832 and re-opened with considerable ceremony in October 1869 as a "public walk".'⁴⁹

A contemporary and supporting figure of Chadwick's view, was John Claudius 'Loudon (1783-1843)...a horticultural writer and designer who campaigned vigorously for burial reforms...[he] suggested that the cemeteries of the past would become the parks of the future and predicted

⁴⁶ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 68.

⁴⁷ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 74.

⁴⁸ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 81.

⁴⁹ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 174.

the development of cremation, forty years before it became legal in Britain.⁵⁰ Loudon's vision of the future of the London cemeteries, gave back to Londoners civic space that, could have been used as for leisure purposes.

'A piece of ground beyond Goswell Street, along the old lines of the City fortifications, where hundreds of victims from Clerkenwell and Aldersgate were buried, subsequently became a physic garden, one of the first examples of a London burial ground being turned into a park. Another piece of land at the end of Holloway Lane in Shoreditch, became a yard for keeping hogs.⁵¹ Large London cemeteries were also in competition with one another, such was the case of Kensal Green versus Highgate cemetery, to gain business, especially from the wealthier classes. The large necropolises were proper city infrastructures which resembled parks, they'...were described as "the lungs of the city", and their designs had similarities. For example Regent Park (see fig. 7) was the prototype for Kensal Green Cemetery (see fig. 8).⁵²

This parallel confirms that the mirroring between the metropolis and the necropolis - encountered in the first chapter of this report with the Etruscan civilisation - was during the Victorian times, seeing a comeback. The Etruscans, as we have seen, built their necropolis on the model of

⁵⁰ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 87.

⁵¹ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 64.

⁵² Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005) p. 35.

The Regent's Park



Fig. 7 – Plan of Regent Park.

their towns and villages; we can say, simply reproducing the urban layout to serve the necropolis. The Victorians, departed from reproducing in their necropolis, a layout that would have suggested a urban built environment configuration, used instead nature, in the form of a controlled landscape.

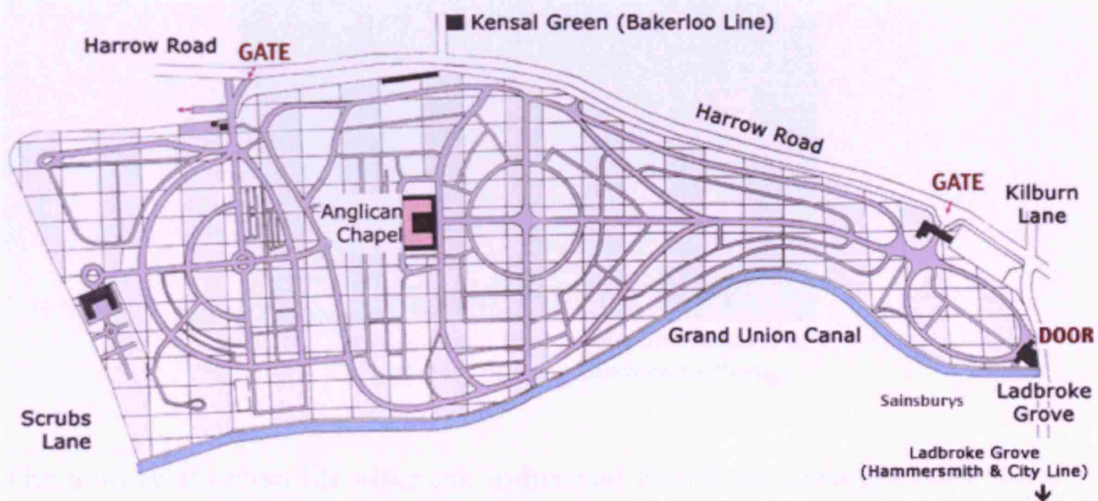


Fig. 8 – Kensal Green Cemetery, plan view.

The rest of Europe was undergoing similar changes in relation to burial grounds. In 1804 Napoleon introduced an act that stopped the dead being

buried in Paris with the creation of Père Lachaise cemetery. In Sweden, since ‘...1783, when Gustavus III prohibited the sale of burial sites within urban churchyards for hygienic reasons...responsibility for burial reverted to the state. Large municipal cemeteries were created as a result, situated outside the cities and laid out as parks to reflect their hygienic content.’⁵³ We can observe that the phenomenon of the Victorian necropolis is very unique in itself and clearly distinguished from other European cemeteries. For example, ‘Père Lachaise (see fig. 9) is laid out like Central Paris itself, all avenues and boulevards rotating like spokes off a wheel...’⁵⁴ The example of Père Lachaise, is not unique in Europe; cities in Italy for example, adopted the urban Roman grid system to layout their cemeteries.



Fig. 9 - Père Lascaise: View of a cobbled street in the cemetery of Père Lascaise in Paris.

The quality of urban life after the Industrial Revolution brought back the metaphor of the city as a human body, but this time an unhealthy body

James Donald reports in his book *Imagining the Modern City*: ‘At the

⁵³ Caroline Constant, *The Woodland Cemetery: Toward a Spiritual Landscape*. (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 1994) p. 14.

⁵⁴ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 84.

beginning of the nineteenth century, the problems of a rapidly growing industrial city like Manchester in the north west of England were conceived as a disease in one part of the body needing to be cured before the whole was effected, or as a faulty part making the machine inefficient.⁵⁵

This metaphor instigated theories and analysis around the human condition in the urban context, such as alienation and physiological disorders.

We could say that the eradication of the necropolis from the city played its part in the process of dehumanisation of the city environment. The separation of the city from the cemetery initiated by legislations coming to force throughout the nineteenth-century is still in act. The memories of the dead loved one are away, almost out of reach in the suburban necropolises. In the rationality of the city there is no space for such emotions.

Those that were in the nineteenth-century suburban necropolises are now fully integrated within the city fabric (see the case of London and Paris) due to the expansion of the cities. As we will see in the next chapter, the relation between the metropolis and the necropolis are becoming further and further apart: one embracing more and more architecture as its flag; the other embracing nature.

⁵⁵ James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*. (London: The Athlone Press, 1999) p. 27.

Return to the Garden of Eden?

It was in 1959 when Yves Klein - giving a lecture at the Sorbonne - talked of the 'return to Eden' and said that as human race '...we have gone through a long evolution in history and reached the height of perspective and the failure of the Renaissance through the psychological vision of life. Today this evolution comes to us as through dematerialization leading to immaterialization, and we are happily moving towards a genuine and dynamically cosmic well being.'⁵⁶ Does dematerialization then, mean the possible disappearance of our cities?

Richard Sennett too, talks about Eden in his book *Flesh and Stone*, although his interpretation of Eden is a more physical one. For Sennett, the city is an attempt to recreate the lost Garden of Eden.⁵⁷ Does this mean that the urban space is our Eden after all? On a similar note, Mumford's definition of the city seems to be close to nature too, when he says that: 'The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or a ant-heap.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Peter Noever and François Perrin (eds.), *Air Architecture – Yves Klein*. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004) p. 42.

⁵⁷ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone – The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) p. 27.

⁵⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996) p. 5.

Others theorists, seems to have a different vision of Eden, like the authors of *The Secret Cemetery*. Talking about the Victorian cemetery they affirm that ‘...through the creation of the cemetery in the form of a landscaped garden, a harmony with nature was sought in death – a return to the lost Garden of Eden.’⁵⁹

In light of these diverse interpretations of Eden, the ultimate question is now: if throughout history men has been seeking the return to lost Garden of Eden, will this then occur through the evolution of the city, by the creation of the landscaped cemetery, or ultimately by dematerialisation of architecture?

Do these different interpretations of the lost Garden of Eden overlap or meet somewhere? Can be the city and the cemetery be considered the same thing?

In this chapter, I will attempt to pursue some routes of interpretations of the modern city and the modern cemetery, how their relationship evolved since their former separation in the nineteenth-century and ultimately their destinies which in one case seem to merge into a necropolis-metropolis.

In the early years of the twentieth-century, the Modernist movement - like the architects in the Renaissance times - attempted to tidy up the chaotic

⁵⁹ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg. 2005) p. 6.

fabric of the city. Le Corbusier among others, had a dream to gradually transform the city into a park,⁶⁰ ‘ironically, what Le Corbusier’s dream helped to generate, were the dystopian housing estates that now ring historical Paris.’⁶¹

Le Corbusier’s vision of the city of high rise and high density buildings, which would eventually free up public space to be transformed into parks, didn’t take into considerations people needs; and ended treating people like un-lively objects. His high rise, chest of drawers like dwellings, also described as ‘machines for living in’, bringing to mind a parallel with the Roman *columbarium*.⁶² They offered – especially in the difficult conditions of post WWII countries - a quick housing solutions, but partly damaged the fabric of the communities inhabiting such structures. *In The City of Collective Memory*, Christine Boyer’s description of the attempts to re-establish order in the urban fabric evokes a scene from an operating theatre: ‘Everywhere the architect and city planner cut the fabric into discrete units and recomposed them into a structured and utopian whole: disorder was replaced by functional order, diversity by serial repetition, and surprise by uniform expectancy.’⁶³

⁶⁰ James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City*. (London: The Athlone Press, 1999) p. 57.

⁶¹ Alain de Botton, *The Architecture of Happiness*. (London: Penguin Books, 2006) p. 245.

⁶² A vault having niches for funeral urns, from Latin *columba* dove. *Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged*, (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005) p. 337.

⁶³ M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory – Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment*. (London: MIT Press, 1995) p. 46.

The fixation with order and sanitised spaces in the city, has inevitably and ultimately adopted the grid solution. “The modern grid is an organisation of repeating elements (see fig. 10) on which nothing changes. The modern urban grid is centerless and boundaryless, a form of pure repetition very much like the working of an industrial machine.”⁶⁴

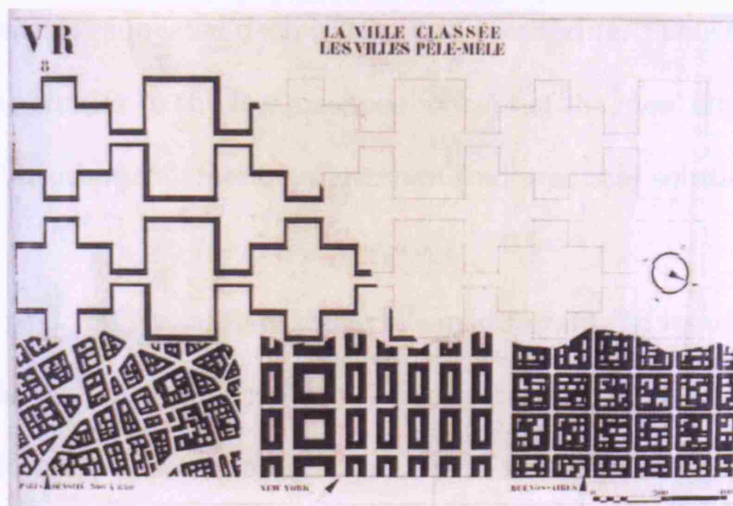


Fig. 10 - La Ville classée, les villes pêle-mêle. Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse: éléments d'une doctrine d'urbanisme pour l'équipement de la civilisation machiniste*, Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1935.

The ‘gridded space does more than create a blank canvas for development. It subdues those who must live in a space, but disorientates their ability to see and to evaluate relationships. In that sense, the planning of neutral space is an act of dominating and subduing others.’⁶⁵

We can find a parallel here between the approach the Modernist movement had in reordering the city, and the interventions in Victorian London or those in Paris by Haussmann.

⁶⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 214.

⁶⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 60.

For Christine Boyer, in the metropolis of the early twentieth-century, ‘the pictorial image of the City as a work of Art was replaced and in its stead stood the City as Panorama, the city of soaring skyscrapers an metropolitan extension; a spatial order when seen from a bird’s-eye perspective that requested deciphering and reordering.’⁶⁶This reordering of the city was similar to the Renaissance concept of the ideal cities: dealing with visual aesthetic elements, more than find practical solutions.

But in the past the meaning of the grid was different. ‘In its origins the grid established a spiritual center.’⁶⁷The Egyptian hierograph that historian Joseph Rykwert believes was one of the original signs for a town is [see fig. 11]

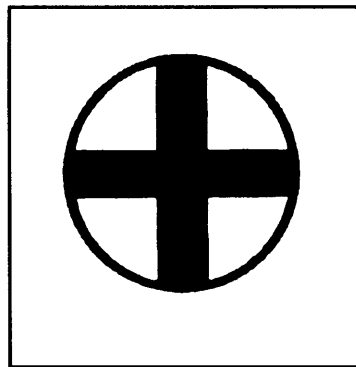


Fig. 11 - Egyptian hierograph believed to be the original sign for a town.

‘...this hierograph, a cross within a circle, suggested two of the simplest, most enduring urban images. The circle is a single unbroken closed line: it

⁶⁶ M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory –Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment*. (London: MIT Press, 1995) p. 41.

⁶⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 47.

suggests enclosure, a wall or a space like a town or a square; within this enclosure life unfolds. The cross in the simplest form of distinct compound lines: it is perhaps the most ancient object of environmental process, as opposed by the circle, which represent the boundary defining environmental size. Crossed lines represent an elemental way of making streets within the boundary, through making grids.⁶⁸

Where the Modernists wanted to organise and sanitise the city, the Situationists⁶⁹ encouraged the vitality of the city and its chaotic nature. They abhorred the Modernists idea of structuring the chaos. 'Situationists uncovered the social body of "the naked city" by becoming streetwise.'⁷⁰ In his *Mémories*, Guy Debord presents a project for 'realist urbanism' in which he calls for transforming tombs and buildings, align sewers with the planting of trees and so on.⁷¹ For the Situationists, in the city of the future, the Métro would have been converted into catacombs and museums will be abolished and the past eradicated, but not in a modernist way. The old order be replaced by anarchy.⁷²

Subverting and re-interpreting the urban space, needs of course, to be backed up by political views. One of the problems in the contemporary city

⁶⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities*. (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992) p. 46/47.

⁶⁹ The Situationist International (SI) was an artistic and political movement which worked actively between 1957 and 1972 to subvert the 'establishment' in the western world.

⁷⁰ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*. (London: MIT Press, 1999) p. 93.

⁷¹ Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*. (London: MIT Press, 1999) p. 108.

⁷² Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City*. (London: MIT Press, 1999) p. 109.

is the lack of political engagement of its inhabitants. Numbed by the consumer culture, and land developers, the urban social space in the city has been shrinking in favor of commercial developments. Another factor is playing an important part: the high mobility of the community. We belong to a series of temporary communities but not engage in any of them.

Spontaneity is mostly what the Situationists were seeking. In the contemporary sanitised city, the only spontaneous part of it is probably its periphery, where the city is reaching out to spread and taking over nature. The city in the past was contained within walls, had gates, but now those gates are the airports and stations, even internet points could be considered gates to a virtual city. Modern cities are not enclosed by walls anymore, they have been replaced by orbital roads like the M25 in the case of London. A boundary that more than protecting the city is marking the limits between itself and the countryside.

The destiny of the cemetery in the twentieth-century hasn't been much different from the one of the city. Apart some exceptions such as the Woodland cemetery in Stockholm by Asplund and Lewerentz (1915-40). With this project the architects '...rejected [the] traditional European or Islamic prototypes for the cemetery...as well as nineteenth-century secularised forms based on the English landscaped garden'.⁷³

⁷³ Caroline Constant *The Woodland Cemetery: Toward a Spiritual Landscape*. (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 1994) p. 1.

In most of Europe the grid - applied to urban planning – was also widely applied to the cemetery, delivering uniform and indistinctive spaces.

In the process of removing the cemetery from the city, in the nineteenth-century, the planners removed death as well as memories, almost completely from the modern metropolis. When city inhabitants go to a funeral function, they do so by moving outside the urban context - in the majority of the cases – living their emotional experience out of the metropolitan context.

The only experience of death and memory we are left with in the modern city are linked with terrorism threats and accidents (car, motorbike, etc.). The process of sanitising the metropolis life from death, as from any anti-social behaviour, creates also a sense of detachment from the 'authentic' emotions, which are in fact virtually lived instead in newspapers, books, TV programs, films. Princess Diana's state funeral, was one of the few occasions where people could experience the urban rational space as an emotional stage, where death and their emotions reached widely the nation and the world. Events such as a state funeral, do engage the public as well as absolve to political functions: reinforcing the position of the ruling class. A parallel can be drawn here between the funeral of Princess Diana in 1987 and Queen Elisabeth I in 1603. 'Elisabeth's funeral constituted a final show of strength: the heraldic funeral as a social

control. A big state funeral served to calm and reassure the public and reinforce the power of the monarchy.⁷⁴

Another case of death permeating the city fabric, was the terrorist attack in 2001, on the World Trade Centre in New York. This tragic event transformed the formal site of the Twin Towers into an instant yet permanent cemetery within the city fabric. The pictures of the exposed bare foundations of the twin towers could be associated to an opened *mundus* – believed to be by the Romans the umbilicus of the city – releasing the feared gods of the underworld, and with it our paranoia of possible terrorist attacks in the urban centres. Tragic events like this traumatically reconnect people with death as well as imposing it right at the heart of the urban context.

These considerations leave us with unanswered questions such as: will be city planners of the future ever consider the planning of the cemetery as an integral part of the process? I posed these questions architects and lecturers, to find out what their opinions and feelings were on the subject. Thomas Muirhead answered that ‘Urban planning regulations today actually forbid the construction of cemeteries inside cities, and it is also forbidden to build anything near an existing cemetery. This is part of the process of removing death from the general consciousness. This is very unhealthy, as death is always very close. In the writings of Mircea Eliade,

⁷⁴ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster 2006) p.42/43.

the closeness of death and life is a central theme; Eliade attaches great importance to establishing communication between the living and the dead. Urban planning (in the West) does everything in its power to hide this relationship. I believe it would be a great advance in civilisation if new cemeteries were built right in the heart of the city, with houses and flats directly overlooking them.⁷⁵

For architect Tore Dobberstein from German practice Complizer, '...the city and the cemetery will stay separated, more or less on the current level.

There are two forces in-between the dead and the living.

One force is dividing - making us look away, forget or fear everything That is connected to death. This force lets us associate the dead body with The spread of death, with illnesses, danger, and horror. This is a strong Force and it exists in all places and cultures. The second force is pulling us towards the ones we lost. It can be also very strong, but does not apply necessarily to people we were not familiar to. It wants us to honour, remember and visit the dead. It is not so much genetically rooted, but more based on our social culture. That hints that the first dividing force is stronger and dominates the second.⁷⁶

Architect and lecturer Adrian Friend, 'argue[s] that the rise in displaying flowers at traffic accident locations is a symptom of the separation

⁷⁵ See Appendix, p. 71.

⁷⁶ See Appendix, p. 67.

between city and cemetery and a sign that death is less private now than it has ever been. I think that the 21st Century is still unpacking and replaying much of what happened in the 20th Century. Cemeteries were and are a great way of placing individual memories within the construct of a shared memory. In a secular western society cemeteries maybe the only building type that does ultimately bring us all together!⁷⁷

The relationship between the modern city and the cemetery, has become strongly polarised and, as Adrian Friend identified, there are ‘symptoms’ of their separation in the urban environment. Their individual destinies too, appear to lead in opposite directions. The metropolis, if fact, has been expanding taking over nature; the cemetery, by contrast, has been giving back to nature thanks to the introduction, in the recent years, of alternatives burial grounds called ‘green burial grounds’. This secular way of burying the dead, takes to heart the ethical issue of pollution generated by cremation and the idea of man being part of a life cycle in which the human remains are put back into the life cycle of the earth. ‘Nature’s powers of rebirth and regeneration, as experienced in gardens and cemeteries, offer resources that confound and obscure an irreversible vision of the human life course and suggest, instead, a cyclical, repetitive and eternal view of existence that holds hope for immortality.’⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See Appendix, p. 70.

⁷⁸ Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaheer, Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery*. (Oxford, New York: Berg. 2005) p. 6.

'We respond to landscape intuitively on the basis of its ability to offer us both "prospects" – commanding vantage points - and "refuges" – places of concealment from which we may command the view without being viewable ourselves.'⁷⁹ But equally, 'From Homer to our own time, nature has been represented as both wild and pastoral, a site of exalting terror as well as of comforting serenity.'⁸⁰

Anonymity though, seems to be a common denominator between the city and the cemetery. The city protects people with anonymity in life, and the green burial ground protect the anonymity when people die, by removing any sign of individuality, except for a bio-degradable wooden tablet with name and date of death of the person buried there.

For Worpole, 'natural burial is not only anti-architectural, but also refutes the long tradition by which the places of the dead are also the subject of particular kinds of human disruption or rearrangement of the landscape. Advocate of natural burial seek to create cemeteries that meld into uncultivated landscape as quickly as possible, returning to a "state of nature" as if human presence on earth had never been.'⁸¹

This raises concerns on the future of funerary architecture and what physical traces are we leaving to posterity as human kind. Is there a risk

⁷⁹ Kate Soper, *What is Nature*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p. 223.

⁸⁰ Kate Soper, *What is Nature*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p. 222.

⁸¹ Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) p.191.

of forgetting the past? ‘...the strong desire to “be at one with nature” and to leave no sign of burial behind is an unexpected and late-modern phenomenon, at least within the Western culture, part of a new and unique kind of ecological consciousness, rather than a trace element of pre-historic of pagan belief system.’⁸²

Green burials also raise questions around the aesthetic of nature in the form of a landscape. For example, ‘from the mid-eighteenth century [Kant and Burke] theorizes the response to the natural environment in terms of the “beautiful” and the “sublime”, and cultivates the latter as a distinct aesthetic experience.’⁸³

The ethos of the green burial ground, doesn’t want to connect to the picturesque, or pastoral, neo-classical interpretation of the landscape, painting the harmony of man with nature; the aim is to give back to nature; it is a eco-political statement. The ecological concerns at the heart of the concept of the green burial ground is not something recently introduced, but has, its origins in Victorian times: ‘the cremationists also had another opponent in the form of Sir Francis Seymour FRCS (1818-1910), inventor of the Earth-to-Earth coffin. Haden had proposed the Earth-to Earth disposable coffin (cardboard or wicker), filled with aromatic herbs and grasses, which would break down quickly and allow the body to decompose faster, meaning the burial ground could be used

⁸² Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) p.191.

⁸³ Kate Soper, *What is Nature*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p. 222.

again'. Haden's invention appealed to the London Necropolis Company, since the gravelly soil of Brookwood was particularly suitable for disposable coffins, and the Patent Necropolis Earth-to-Earth Coffin went on display at trade fairs.⁸⁴

In the Victorian necropolis, nature in the form of a landscape was extremely controlled, a landscape with the social function of being designed for burial purposes. This is not just an aesthetic experience but is the result of the control that the architects and planners couldn't apply on the city. The Victorian necropolis is to me, the ultimate ideal city, it is the utopian space which never happened since the Renaissance, and urbanists longed for the length of the history of architecture.

The ideal city - as we have seen in the second chapter - was imagined almost as a static urban space more than a lively chaotic one; a space that would not expand and pulse with life. Its stillness, to me, applies more successfully to the necropolis. The architects in the Renaissance treated the idea of ideal city, without considering its main component: life. The absence of life transformed them automatically into dead-cities therefore, necropolises.

Peter Eisenman, in the introduction of Aldo Rossi's *Architecture and the City* states that 'for Aldo Rossi the European city has become the house of

⁸⁴ Catherine Arnold, *Necropolis – London and its dead*. (London: Simon & Schoster, 2006) p. 234.

the dead. Its history, its function, has ended; it has erased the specific memories of the houses of individual childhood to become the *locus* of collective memory.⁸⁵

But if the European city has become the house of the dead, does it mean the end of the city? On the architecture of the cemetery, a similar debate can be identified in the words of Ken Worpole in his book *Last Landscapes*. Worpole laments the individualistic and detached approach of architects. "Today, many architects seem silent on the matter of death; landscape designers only slightly less so. Spiritual matters don't come easily to professionals and practices that are increasingly computer-scored, technology driven, and which too often stand aloof from the quotidian forms of life and ritual."⁸⁶

In Worpole's words, it appears then that technology could be one of the causes for the lack of interest by architects to get involved into designing spaces for the dead. On a larger scale technology has been influencing our everyday life as Lefebvre commented on his *Introduction to Modernity*: "Technology began penetrating everyday life; there were problems. And now, what can you see? Everyday life like a massive weight, reduced to its

⁸⁵ From the introduction by Peter Eisenman to Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*. (London: MIT Press, 1992) p. 10.

⁸⁶ Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p.179.

essence, to its trivial functions, and at the same time almost disintegrated, nothing but fragmented gestures and repeated actions.⁸⁷

The city, originally metaphorically associated to a living organism, is now associated with a machine. With the loss of its human element, the city has lost its spontaneity, something the Situationist movement was trying to instill back in the metropolis. Looking back at the city in ancient Greece, the city had a rhythm connected to seasons and nature, closer to the rhythm of the human body: 'The way the city was structured coincided almost entirely with its own life. Passions and rhythms, cycles in time and space – all was harmony.'⁸⁸ where in the modern city, to say it with Lefebvre's words, the modern city is a place where '...everything is disjointed.'⁸⁹

Another theory about the modern city is the one by L.S. Mercier mentioned by Lewis Mumford in *The Culture of the Cities*: 'All the major activities of the metropolis are directly connected with paper...As early as the eighteenth century Mercier had observed this metropolitan form of the White Plague...Buildings rise recklessly, often in disregard of ultimate

⁸⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*. (London, New York: Verso, 1995) p. 125.

⁸⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*. (London, New York: Verso, 1995) p. 122.

⁸⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*. (London, New York: Verso, 1995) p. 123.

profits, in order to provide an excuse for paper capitalisations and paper rents.⁹⁰

Mercier sees this paper induced White Plague – bureaucracy – as one of the reasons for the existence of the metropolis. We could say then that as the Black Death used to cut down physically on the population of the city, in the Medieval times, in modernity, the White Death, cuts down psychologically the population in the modern metropolis; that the modern city is not a place of physical but psychological death, if we read the city under the metaphor of the city-machine. But when reading the city as an living organism we, realise that ‘city centres are melting pots that continuously merge together human experiences and creativity. And they should be centres of inter-cultural communication where people from different traditions can learn about, and from, each other.’⁹¹

Humankind through history has been searching for a home, for a dwelling; has been searching for urban order; through the immense task of readjusting to the planning mistakes of previous generations, in the light of new knowledge. Paul Finch in a recent editorial about the 2006 edition of the Venice Biennale of Architecture, said that ‘city planning is regarded

⁹⁰ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996) p. 257.

⁹¹ Herbert Girardet, *The Gaia Atlas of Cities*. (London: Gaia Books Ltd, 1992) p. 121.

as the opportunity to create desirable conditions, not the occasion for passing the smelling salts.⁹²

The desirable conditions that Finch mentions, though, shouldn't engage just with city planning; it should also engage with cemetery planning. Ken Worpole in his book, *The Last Landscapes* affirms that 'Landscapes of the dead are always, simultaneously, landscape of the living... Different societies, at different times, renegotiate the relationship between what anthropologists call "life space" and "burial space", depending on settlement patterns and the nature of livelihood.'⁹³

The renegotiation of 'life space' and 'burial space' mentioned by Worpole makes me reflect on the possibility that the city and the cemetery are somehow overlapping and leads me to question if the city and the cemetery could be considered the same thing. Through my research I did come across one example of the overlapping between the 'life space' and 'burial space', an uncanny reality which shows the extreme conditions as well as adaptation of human nature to situations.

The housing shortage in this Egyptian metropolis of Cairo, has pushed the city's poor to use the spaces available in its necropolises. Spaces for the dead in one historical period are now becoming spaces for the living in the

⁹² Paul Finch, View, *The Architectural Review*, n. 1315, September 2006, p. 19.

⁹³ Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) p. 21.

current era, giving to Cairo the unique status of a necropolis-metropolis, with an estimates between 30,000 to one million inhabitants (see fig. 12).

by Heba Fatteen Bizzari's and Trent Rockwood from www.goworldtravel.com and touregypt.net the tombs?

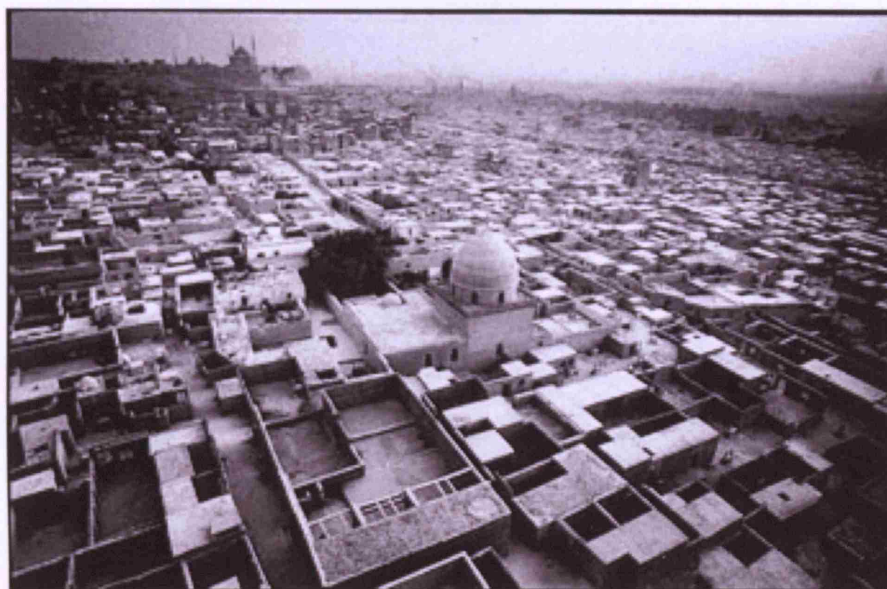


Fig. 12 – View over Cairo's necropolises.

‘Although some of the earlier residents have illegally spliced wires from nearby mosques and run electric wires to their tombs, most residents do not have the luxury of lights, TVs or telephones. And since people living in the tombs are technically illegal squatters by Egyptian law, there is also no sewer or trash service. Piles of garbage are on every street corner, while some alleys run with raw sewage.’⁹⁴ ‘These invaders have adapted the rooms to meet their needs. They have used the grave markers as desks, and shelves. They have hung strings between gravestones for their laundry to dry out.’⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Extract from the article: Cairo: Shopping in the City of the Dead by Trent Rockwood.
<http://www.goworldtravel.com>

⁹⁵ Extract from article: Cities of the Dead by Heba Fatteen Bizzari
<http://touregypt.net/featurestories/city.htm>

Looking at this incredible example of merging between space for the living and space for the dead, I question if this exception could become norm in the future. Shouldn't we learn from it to shape our cities of the future?

We began by looking into the relationship between the city and the cemetery in the Egyptian and Etruscan culture. We have seen how – although separated in two distinctive physical spaces – they mirrored each other, by adopting similar architectural and urban elements, such as the dwelling and the street. The Roman necropolises too, separated from the city of the living, but did not assume any urban configuration such as the Etruscan necropolis. The advent of Christianity brought with it a major shift in the relation between the city and the cemetery: people wanted to be buried close to the graves of martyrs, so to be closer to Heaven themselves. This phenomenon started with the Catacombs - the network of underground necropolises outside Rome's walls.

With the Church gaining power and the Roman empire reaching its decline, remains of the martyrs were moved into the city to create new churches and with it, new cemeteries in their vicinities. The Medieval town and city fabric as a consequence, started to be divided into secular and sacred spaces.

In the Renaissance, the utopia of the ideal city attempted to bring some order in the city fabric, and on the pressure between secular and urban spaces. The results were more concerned with the visual impact than the

actual issues of the city itself. At the same time, the presence of the cemetery within the city fabric contributed to the deterioration of hygienic and health issues in urban centres. These issues were finally resolved with the introduction, in the nineteenth-century, of legislations such as the Burial Act in 1851; which sentenced the separation of the city from the cemetery in London.

This Act brought the re-introduction of suburban necropolises to serve the city. The interpretation of these burial spaces in the case of London, mirrored the layout of urban parks, creating spaces for burial as well as leisure.

At the same time, the urban space readjusted to accommodate to commercial developments with major urban surgery to re-establish some order, by re-introducing the grid system.

In the modern era, this relationship has become more polarised: the city has been expanding and taking over nature more and more; the cemetery by contrast, with the recent introduction of the green burial ground, has been giving back to nature in the form of woodland burial grounds.

After an historical analysis of the polarised relationship between the city and the cemetery, there are still many questions that remain to be answered.

Among others, the ones that Archigram posed in one of their editorials back in 1965: 'Are cities still necessary? ...Do we need the agglomeration of five, ten or twenty million people in order to learn, be entertained, enjoy

good food or take part in high productivity?⁹⁶ With the current trend of urban regeneration programs in cities such as London or Manchester, it seems that we still need large urban agglomerations. 'Mega-cities will become, if not a commonplace, then more certainly more common across the globe and across this [twenty-first] century.'⁹⁷

There are also other, more ethical issues to be considered. The modern city has become, to use Paul Barker's term, a 'complex beast'⁹⁸ that strongly relies for its maintenance on energy sources, sometimes located even in other countries. This process in place is a one way system: the city in exchange for the resources, is not putting anything back into the environment, except for its waste. With this we can say that the city hasn't just departed from the cemetery but from the rest of its surrounding environment. A possible solution to this could be to learn from one another across cultural, religious and language barriers: 'more than ever, modern society needs to fashion a cultural synthesis drawing from the best of the great Western, Eastern and aboriginal traditions in seeking a more benign and nurturing relationship to nature.'⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Extract from *The Metropolis* – Editorial from *Archigram* 5 issued in the winter 1964/5. *Archigram*, Peter Cook and Warren Clark, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999) p. 25.

⁹⁷ Paul Finch, *View*, *The Architectural Review*, n. 1315, September 2006, p. 19.

⁹⁸ Paul Barker is a research fellow at the Young Foundation. The quote is extracted from his article *Mixed blessing*, appeared on *Society Guardian* section, part of the *Guardian* Wednesday 30th August 2006, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Michael E. Soulé and Gary Lease (eds.), *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. (Washington: Island Press, 1995) p. 118.

Thomas Muirhead, architect and lecturer, agrees with this cultural learning: 'In history, death in the city was very commonplace. London had the Plague of 1664-65 and outbreaks of cholera in the 1800s. Thousands of bodies were buried within the city. Today, the removal of death from the city is a Western phenomenon, no doubt related to the cycle of production and consumption (now mainly consumption) to which the Western city is dedicated since industrialisation. Nothing must interrupt the continuous manufacture of happiness. Death is, of course, omnipresent in Baghdad or Beirut. Temporary cemeteries, to stop rotting bodies from smelling, are common in such cities as they once were in Western cities.'¹⁰⁰

Muirhead's omnipresent awareness of death is also apparent in Cairo's 'City of the Dead'. The population there, by necessity, have erased any boundary between life and death; they have overcome their fear of the dead and their spaces.

For future urban developments I hope that planners will be able to reconcile the city and the cemetery. The destinies of the two - as we have seen in this report - have always been so intertwined that one can not consider the future of one, without affecting the future of the other.

Therefore, they should not be considered separately but together.

Muirhead echoes this sentiment: 'I believe it would be a great advance in

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix, p. 71.

civilisation if new cemeteries were built right in the heart of the city, with houses and flats directly overlooking them.’¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ See Appendix, p. 71.

Figure 1 - Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery, in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) p. 81.

Figure 2 - James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002) p. 51.

Figure 3 - Fabrizio Mancinelli, *The Catacombs of Rome and the Origins of Christianity* (Florence: Scala, 1994), p. 25.

Figure 4 - Colin and Rose Bell, *City Fathers. The Early History of Town Planning in Britain* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 15.

Figure 5 - Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 61.

Figure 6 - Lloyd Steven Sieden, *Buckminster Fuller's Universe. An Appreciation* (New York: Plenum Press, 1990), p. 406.

Figure 7 - Regent Park plan view: www.kultureflash.net/archive/99/

Figure 8 – Kensal Green Cemetery, plan view: neilbartlett.tripod.com/darkdestiny/id9.html

Figure 9 - Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes – The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 88.

Figure 10 - Ruth Eaton, *Ideal Cities. Utopianism and the (Un)Built Environment* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), p. 17.

Figure 11 - Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: the Design and Social Life of Cities* (London: W. W. Norton Verso, 1992), p. 3.

Figure 12 – View over Cairo's necropolises: http://www.egyptmyway.com/articles/picturescityofdead2_3.html

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During the course of my research I made contact and had conversations with architects and lectures about the subject of my report. Here below I report the complete written answers they kindly provided to support their thoughts and personal views.

Tore Dobberstein, architect.

Since the mid nineteenth-century, the city and the cemetery have been separated - for hygienic and health reasons. What are your thoughts on the separation between the city and the cemetery?

Well I thought about your questions a bit. I personally guess that the City and the cemetery will stay separated, more or less on the current level.

Why so? Well, I think there are two forces in-between the dead and the living.

One force is dividing - making us look away, forget or fear everything That is connected to death. This force lets us associate the dead body with The spread of death, with illnesses, danger, and horror. This is a strong Force and it exists in all places and cultures. It is probably a genetically program, embedded deeply in our unconscious soul. During the evolutionary progress our genes learned, that "putting the dead away" increases our chances of survival.

The second force is pulling us towards the ones we lost. It can be also Very strong, but does not apply necessarily to people we were not familiar to. It wants us to honour, remember and visit the dead. It is not so much genetically rooted, but more based on our social culture. It is universal across different cultures but varies among cultures. The strength, length and the circle of persons affected are different. (Fore example in hot countries like India, the culture to mourn is short and strong – the bodies are burnt quickly)

That hints that the first dividing force is stronger and dominates the second. All our handling with death people is organised in a way the

first force can be partly overcome or be dealt with...

Now you could argue, architecture, together with other arts (literature, music), religions, the law and social norms etc. is responsible to manage these two forces practically in our day to day life. Not only on the level of physically placing or burning the dead, but also on a level of philosophy, or symbols. One could even think, that the two very strong symbols, the pyramid and the cross are describing the struggle between those two forces.

As you know surely much better than me, cemeteries vary in concept, Shape and so on, depending on the time and local culture. Now architecture as well as other disciplines of cultural origin is in a process of global convergence. Also cultural customs are in a global convergence. We even have a convergence over time spans, eg. Fashions or customs that are linked to one particular time period pop up in increasing frequencies.

So if you ask me: "will we change the way we deal with our dead and the Way (shape or organise) our cemeteries?" I would agree. It won't be a fundamental change, but we might try out successful funeral formats from other places in the world or use new technologies etc.

But if you ask me: "will this change be so fundamental, that we e.g. Include graves into apartments, I would say no." not as long as we all more or less fear death.

It might be possible that we loose the first dividing fear. That means To change this genetically program - for example have most of us lost the Fear of heights - a fundamental human fear that early societies might have felt much stronger - but this takes time... Also we have a fascination for heights. And if you look at the shape of a city now, this fascination is clearly dominating the fear. Who knows though, whether we build higher, because we lost this fear of heights, or if is the other way round?

The history of the city and the cemetery have been so interconnected through history, but when we get to city planning, the cemetery is usually neglected. Do you think that will be beneficial for urban planner to consider the city and the cemetery almost if one entity?

I always try to be cautious with normative rules that say: one should do this or that. So I found (again) a few arguments to answer explicatively more than in a judging way:

First: - the city and the cemetery are the same anyways. Just look from Far far away for a long long time, and the difference between the city and The cemetery can be neglected. The houses are the tombstones of the lives And dreams that were lost on the streets in-between them. The graveyards are the temporary gathering grounds of the bones and the poor

folks that were left behind to mourn. After a short stop there both parties, the dead and the living, are redistributed throughout the city again, let it be by war, by the development plan or by the wind as dust. From this point of view, the city and the graveyard are one, identical. It is a pessimistic interpretation of your question. In this scenario the cemeteries could well be neglected, it would not matter.

Second: - what is beneficial for the urban planner? Raise talented and tolerant children? Get home from work early? Work on his/her professional or political or academic career? Care about the people he is responsible for?

Care about the parks and gardens he is responsible for? Care about the businesses that would like to get close to those people? Lead them together? Send the people or the businesses away?

In many professions this sort of questions is answered using the Technical term sustainability. It tries to say, that not more resources are used than can be reproduced. The work life balance needs to be sustainable.

Society needs to organize it self in a way that is ecological, socially and economical sustainable. From this point of view the cemetery is not one with the city but one important part of the city. It has a central social function. An active and functioning community is fundamental for the existence of a city as a social system. Graveyards provide understanding, identification, heritage and peace among today's, previous and tomorrows generations and are thus as important as streets and other infrastructure. So the graveyard is as important as a church or school and should not be neglected.

Third: - from my practical work experience I learn that many decisions On urban planning are dependent on the financial aspects connected to them.

So I don't know the economics of graveyards, but I guess they are, monetarily

speaking, a net loss to the community. So one would call them like other public commodities, e.g. security, streets, primary education, "public goods". To pay for them with tax money is justified because an individual would supposedly not invest money to produce these goods in the first place, because it underestimates the benefits to him/her self as well to society.

But the status "public good" is not god given or a law of nature. It may change as soon as we reorganize its production. E.g. private autopistas in Italy, private schools and so on. In this scenario the municipal communities could decide weather they would like to invest in a graveyard or not to.

Reasons to invest could be a real demand by the citizens. Or other Reasons not connected to the interests of the citizens: eg. a strong clerical Lobby or the wish to gain a certain profile in comparison to other communities.

Reasons not to invest could be a good cooperation with neighbouring communities to share a cemetery, or a lack of interest of the citizens (possible in the future...)

Finally - I am not sure how to answer. Cemeteries should not be Neglected and might become more important because of our demographic change..?

Tore Dobberstein, architect and partner of German practice Complizen (www.complizen.com).
Contacts details: email: dobberstein@complizen.de, tel.: 0049 345 2024056.

* * *

Adrian Friend, architect and lecturer.

Which one are your thoughts on the separation between city and cemetery?

I would argue that the rise in displaying flowers at traffic accident locations is a symptom of the separation between city and cemetery and a sign that death is less private now than it has ever been.

Do you think it will be beneficial for urban planners to think of planning the cemetery as an integral part of the city?

Yes it is integral. The best cemeteries our micro-cities, but I do not believe they need to be professionally planned they have always defined very common human characteristics in ways not too dissimilar to the way houses engage with and replicate the city. I quote Leone Battista Alberti from *De Re Aedificatoria*, Book 1, Chapter 9:

“If, as the philosophers maintain, the city is like some large house, and the house is in turn like some small city, cannot the various parts of the house —atria, loggias, dining rooms, porticoes and so on — be considered miniature buildings? Could anything be omitted from any of these, through inattention and neglect, without detracting from the dignity and worth of the work? The greatest care and attention, then, should be paid to studying these elements, which contribute to the whole work, so as to ensure that even the most insignificant parts appear to have been formed according to the rule of art.”

What are your thoughts on the future of the relationship between the city and the cemetery?

I think that the 21st Century is still unpacking and replaying much of what happened in the 20th Century. Cemeteries were and are a great way of placing individual memories within the construct of a shared memory. In a secular western society cemeteries maybe the only building type that does ultimately bring us all together!

Adrian Friend is the partner architect at Blackwell Friend Architects (www.blackwellfriend.co.uk) and Studio Leader and lecturer the School of the Built Environment, University of Nottingham.
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* * *

Thomas Muirhead, architect and writer.

Since the mid nineteenth-century, the city and the cemetery have been separated - for hygienic and health reasons. What are your thoughts on the separation between the city and the cemetery?

In history, death in the city was very commonplace. London had the Plague of 1664-65 and outbreaks of cholera in the 1800s. Thousands of bodies were buried within the city. Today, the removal of death from the city is a Western phenomenon, no doubt related to the cycle of production and consumption (now mainly consumption) to which the Western city is dedicated since industrialisation. Nothing must interrupt the continuous manufacture of happiness. Death is, of course, omnipresent in Baghdad or Beirut. Temporary cemeteries, to stop rotting bodies from smelling, are common in such cities as they once were in Western cities.

Paradoxically, the cemetery as monument on the urban scale reached its highest point of development in the 19th century, the age of industrialisation. Père Lachaise in Paris is sometimes called a City of the Dead. Modern architects in Italy have contributed major works which are cemeteries (from Aldo Rossi in Modena to David Chipperfield in Venice) but these cemeteries are not inside the city.

Urban planning regulations today actually forbid the construction of cemeteries inside cities, and it is also forbidden to build anything near an existing cemetery. This is part of the process of removing death from the general consciousness. This is very unhealthy, as death is always very close. In the writings of Mircea Eliade, the closeness of death and life is a central theme; eliade attaches great importance to establishing communication between the living and the dead. Urban planning (in the west) does everything in its power to hide this relationship.

In the last years of his life, film director Luis Bunuel lived in a house overlooking a cemetery. In the last years of his life, Gabriele D'Annunzio

slept every night in a coffin. As a man grows older, it is important to make peace with death.

I believe it would be a great advance in civilisation if new cemeteries were built right in the heart of the city, with houses and flats directly overlooking them.

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