



THE CIRCLE OF LIFE:

The Role of Architecture in the Embodiment of Grief

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THE CIRCLE OF LIFE: THE ROLE OF ARCHITECTURE
IN THE EMBODIMENT OF GRIEF

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THESIS ABSTRACT

If it is true that we understand ourselves through the other, is it possible that a piece of ourselves is therefore within the other? How has distancing ourselves from the death of others impacted the understanding of the self?

Once an essential part of the public realm, death has been increasingly reduced to an efficient process in our modern economic lives. With it has faded away our participation in the symbolic and ritualistic acts that ensured the reciprocal influence of the dead on the living. In their absence, we have gained an aversion which has generated a distance in the connection to one another, and from a piece of ourselves. Considering the underrepresentation of death in modern cities, this thesis examines the role of architecture in the experience of the bereaved by opening a space for active remembrance; an effort to continue the life of one being inside the other, through a continued presence of memory.

By employing Federica Goffi's assertions on memory and fragments, the Hart Island Archives aim to serve as a "corporeal time machine". Here, mnemonic architecture opens an opportunity for the retelling of a tale, and the recombination of the exquisite corpse which is Hart Island.



THEORETICAL NARRATIVE

DEMYTHOLOGIZING OF LIFE AND DEATH

In light of the second enlightenment, there has been a gradual disappearance of death in our modern societies and in doing so has resulted in a shift in its perception. According to German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, death, and consequently life have become 'demythologized' in that they are no longer revered as miraculous or phenomenal as was the case for the ancient man. Instead, dying has become an 'innumerable process of production' in the wake of modern economic life. In his 1996 work, *The Enigma of Health*, we are told that "there is perhaps no other experience in human life which so clearly marks the limits placed on that modern control of nature acquired through science and technology." Instead, "It is precisely these enormous technological advancements with their goal of artificial preservation of life, which reveal the absolute limit of what we can achieve. The prolongation of life finally becomes a prolongation of death and a fading away of the experience of the self" (Gadamer, 1996). Inevitably, this regression of the miraculous culminated in the gradual disappearance of the experience of, and participation with death and its processes.



THE REVERSIBILITIES OF FLESH

In her work, *Embodying Death: Emotional Apprehension and Reversibilities of Flesh*, Suzanne Cataldi utilizes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh to analyze the carnal aspects of death, and specifically, our phenomenal reduction and relation to the dead through the sensations of horror and of grief.

From this perspective, flesh is an area of perception that so-called opposites can reverse with respect to each other, only because they are not opposite at all; they do in fact share a common ground.

According to Cataldi, because of its interconnected and reversible nature, the grief which accompanies death is emotionally analogous to phantom limb; a state in which there exists a counter action between sensing a presence and realizing an absence. When a loved one is lost, we feel as though we too have lost a piece of ourselves.

PRESERVATION THROUGH MNEMIC SPACES

In her work, *Time Matter(s): Invention and Reimagination in Built Conservation*, Federica Goffi explores new means of preservation through the utilization of mnemonic spaces. According to Goffi, mnemonic architecture is a “place that is known and experienced time and again, generation after generation, producing always new memories which sediment and connect with previous ones, producing a proliferation of interconnected meanings and images of a place, which strengthen and construct memory over time” (Goffi, 2013). It is a place of collective imagination, interwoven through the multiplication of narrative and fragment that elicit a proprioception and thus create a collective body image. Understood as an extension of the self, it is for this reason that in architecture, as with grief, the loss of a mnemonic space may manifest a sensation of phantom limb; the loss of a piece wholly ingrained in the self and a desire for what once was.



F04

RESURRECTION THROUGH FRAGMENTATION

Through the work of Goffi, we are posed a question. In preservation, is it always in fact necessary to restore the body to its original state. Can a space be altered yet maintain its identity? Is it possible to here open a space for creative interpretation, an effort in which an essence is transformed and, “Is not advocated as a way of forgetting but as a way of meaningful remembering” (Goffi, 2013).

St. Peter's Basilica becomes the epitome of this defense as its conservation has been composed of creative additions and subtractions, both across authors and through time; it is a transformation in which the core essence has been preserved and its life continued in a new way. This is achieved through the utilization of materiality and its ‘encrypted meanings’; its spoilia or fragments, are reimagined and reconfigured, bridging the ‘critical dialogue between conservation and design creating an exquisite corpse, or hybrid body of past and present.

PRESERVATION THROUGH IMAGINATIVE RESTORATION OF THE MEMORIAL

Once an essential part of the public realm. Death has been increasingly reduced to an efficient process in our modern economic lives. With it has faded away our participation in the symbolic and ritualistic acts that ensured the reciprocal influence of the dead on the living. In their absence, we have gained an aversion which has generated a distance in the connection to one another, and from a piece of ourselves. Considering the underrepresentation of death in modern cities, this thesis examines the role of architecture in the experience of the bereaved by opening a space for active remembrance; an effort to continue the life of one being inside the other through a continued presence of memory. This is achieved through the employment of theoretical argumentation which explains to us the embodiment of grief and postulates a way in which the invisible can be made visible once again.



F05

PROJECT TYPOLOGY:

This thesis proposal questions the traditional mode of built memorial spaces through the creation of the Hart Island Archives, a space erected through the recombination of spoilia and utilized to preserve the precious fragments whose encrypted histories house the ability to resurrect those who have passed.

Amidst the impending demolition of structures on Hart Island, I plan to collect traces of their spoilia which are to be reassembled in an imaginative recreation of their predecessors. As symbols of memory and omission, these elements are to be reused to conjure their memory while constructing a new place for furthered remembrance.

These archives will provide a space for individual memorial, specifically through the collection of story and encrypted fragment. As the lives of the interred become preserved in the material world, so too will the cross section of American History which marked the land of Hart Island.



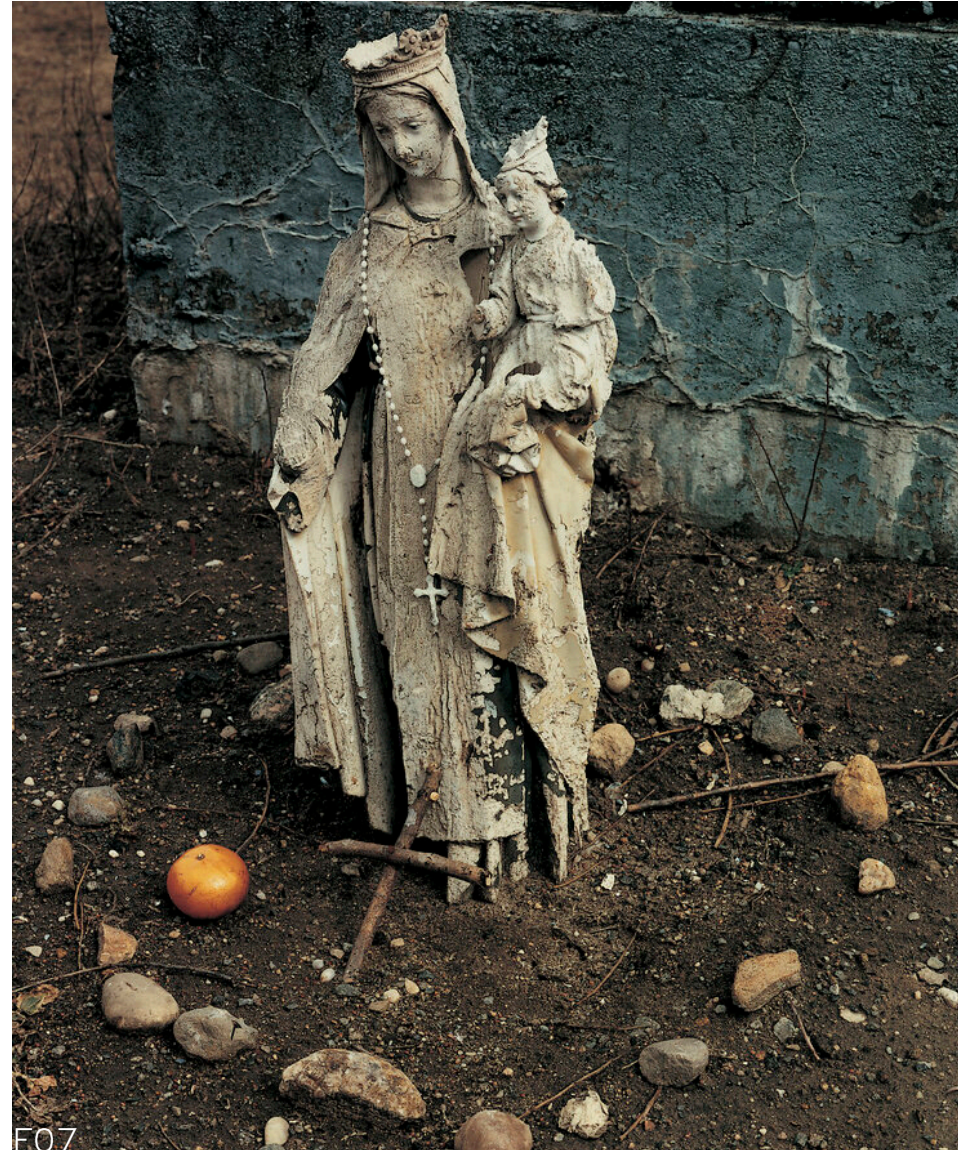
MAJOR PROJECT ELEMENTS

MEMORIAL | ARCHIVES

The interactive archives will act as a final resting place in lieu of traditional burial sites. They will house valued fragments of memory such as photos, letters, fabrics and so on, which assist in the process of active remembrance. These momentos allow for the recollection of memory which is to be shared in the present and their place continually reaffirmed as they are shared with others. Spaces are also allocated for island history to build a context of time and place. These spaces will function as a timeline to situate oneself in the history of the island.

FRAGMENT | SPOILIA

As explained by Federicca Goffi in her discussion of the exquisite corpse, spolia are fragmented building elements that are reused and reassembled in a new way. While this speaks to the amalgamated nature of the site, the collection and recombination of elements to form a new structure assists in the creation of a mnemonic space; a space which maintains an essence and allows for the preservation of the site's history while opening a space for moral growth.



COMMUNITY | SANCTUARY

The remediation of Hart Island and its buildings will allow for its return to the people of New York. Now under the operation of the parks district, its people and its histories will now be shared with the public as well as the families which were previously prohibited. For this reason, a family room and gathering space is necessary to aid in group gatherings or celebrations of life. A sanctuary space will provide a private and intimate experience for those mourning the loss of a loved one as other members of the public explore the site and its structures.

HEIRARCHY OF SPACES

- Memorial archives, island archives, sanctuary/community space
- Outdoor spaces, spaces for contemplation
- Circulation
- Storage, mechanical

USER DESCRIPTION

THE GENERAL PUBLIC:

Once deemed a hidden American landscape, Hart Island has served as home and host to numerous historical events and structures since its purchase from indigenous groups in 1654. Upon the completion of the Hart Island Archives, the land will serve not only as a memorial for the lives interred but a memorial of place achieved through the preservation and reimagination of historical structures which provide a broad cross sections of the land's history.

HART ISLAND PROJECT & THE TRAVELING CLOUD MUSEUM:

Incorporated in 2011, the Hart Island project aims to assist families and individuals with limited resources in accessing public burial records. Its online platform for storytelling called the Traveling Cloud Museum provides a database for those buried between 1980-present and provides a space for the sharing of memories. A physical manifestation on the site will assist in their efforts to increase public awareness of the island's history.



F08

FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF THE INTERRED:

Considering the current lack of individual memorial or monument, the Hart Island Archives provide a unique space for active remembrance. In tandem with the existing Traveling Cloud Museum, the archives provide a place for the collection of physical fragments whose encrypted meanings aid in the conjuring of memory. Through a shared history, it is the intent that visitors are able to gain a greater understanding of one through the other as a collective loss is mourned and memorialized. The physical manifestation of this project finally opens a space for visitation and a conscious understanding of final resting place.



SITE CONTEXT

LOCATION:

Hart Island, New York

LATITUDE & LONGITUDE:

40°51'9"N 73°46'12"W

SITE CHARACTERISTICS:

Waterfront, Island, Cemetery

SIZE:

131 Acres

CLIMATE:

Humid Subtropical

SITE SELECTION:

The site is located on Hart Island, located off the coast of the Bronx Borough of NY. The site lies immediately east of City Island which serves as the island's access point for ferry transportation. While it has a rich history of exiled uses, today the site serves as a city cemetery or a potter's field which allows for the rapid burial of remains in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

F09



F10

THE PROJECT EMPHASIS

THE TOPICS WHICH I HOPE TO EMPHASIZE THROUGH THE IMAGINATION OF THE HART ISLAND ARCHIVES ARE

AS FOLLOWS:

THE REDUCTION AND RELATION TO MORTALITY:

Not only does this design thesis highlight the modern underrepresentation of death in our modern society, but it initiates a conversation surrounding our relation to its entirety. Through the contrast of ancient and modern man, we are shown a modern distancing from death and a fading away of its understanding. The modern repulsion of death has prevented the reciprocal influence of the dead on the living and in turn, has distanced us from a piece of ourselves. This thesis reintroduces the miraculous phenomena of death into the public realm and acknowledges it not as a cessation of life, but instead as a part of it.



F11

MEMORIAL AND MONUMENT THROUGH IMAGINATIVE INTERPRETATION OF PRESERVATION:

This thesis also calls for an examination of current practices of preservation. Discovered through the lense of Federicca Goffi, this thesis examines if it is in fact necessary in preservation to simply rebuild and restore to its original state.

The selected site calls not only for preservation of the people but of the history itself. The task at hand presents us with the challenge: what to preserve and what to let go on an establishment that has caused such grief. In this thesis, an interpretive imagination allows us to capture the essence of the past while paving the way for a brighter future.

GOALS OF THE THESIS PROJECT

THEORETICAL GOALS

- Investigate new realms of architectural thought.
- Create a cultural work that draws from its layers of history.
- Gain a deeper understanding of the influence of architecture on our society and the responsibilities we take on when we create.

DESIGN GOALS

- Transform body of research into a sophisticated and thorough built imagination.
- Foster a greater connection between myself and those the project aims to serve.
- Social Goals
- -Reunite those interred on Hart Island with their loved ones.
- Investigate a new way to assist the grieving process.



ACADEMIC GOALS

- Open a space for conversation regarding our experience with death and how we grieve.
- Provide commentary on how we approach loss and how these modern practices may be improved.

While improved upon by theoretical and design motives, the primary goal of this thesis is to honor the lives and the families of those now entombed in the grounds of Hart Island. It is through their memory and collective experiences that we are able to ignite a conversation about our relationship with death and the influence those who have been lost continue to have on those who live on.

A PLAN FOR PROCEEDING

DEFINITION OF RESEARCH DIRECTION:

Upon the synthesis of the theoretical premise, research will be conducted to examine relevant project typologies, provide an analysis of the cultural and historical contexts of the topic, and investigate context and conditions of the site. In conjunction with this research, an exploration will be conducted into the creation of an artefact; a physical manifestation which embodies the project ideas and informs its process.

DESIGN METHODOLOGY

This thesis will consist of a mixed method analysis, those utilized are listed as follows:

- Historical research: as relates topically and in relation to the site
- Qualitative: including exploration of ethnography and phenomenology
- Logical argumentation: through examination of theoretical reasoning
- Case studies: as relates to typology of investigation



A PLAN FOR PROCEEDING

FINAL DOCUMENT COMPIATION:

Adobe PDF Submitted to the NDSU Repository

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT:

Hand Sketching
Rip and Tear Modeling
Creation of the Artefact
Frotice Piece

DESIGN / RENDERING SOFTWARE:

Sketchup
Lumion 12

REPRESENTATION SOFTWARE:

Adobe Photoshop
Adobe InDesign

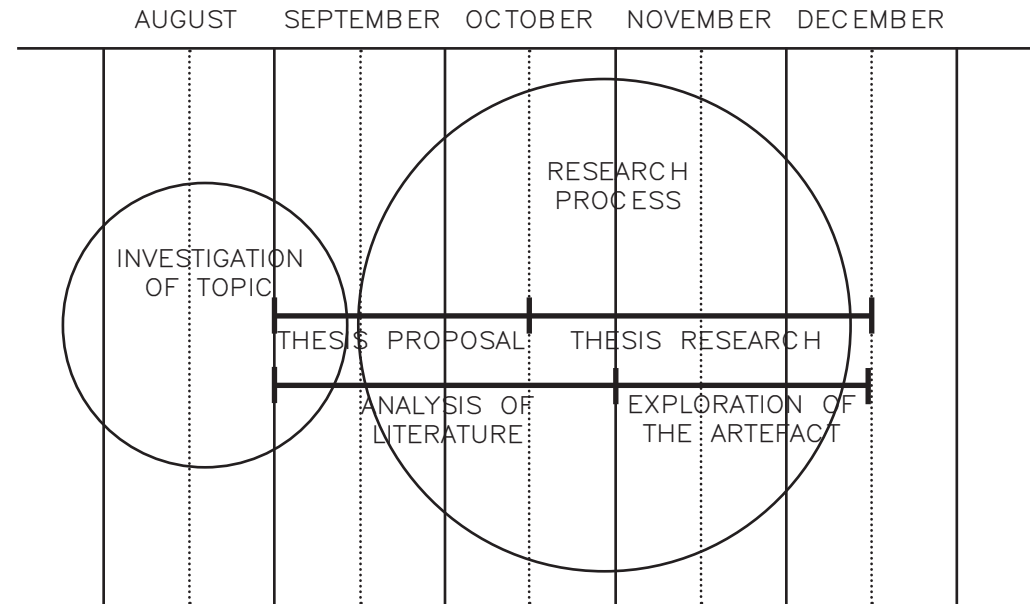
PROCESS PRESERVATION METHODS:

Research documented through thesis proposal and mid-crit presentations
Photographs of working models and artefact iterations
Archives of digital drafting files

PRESENTATION MATERIALS:

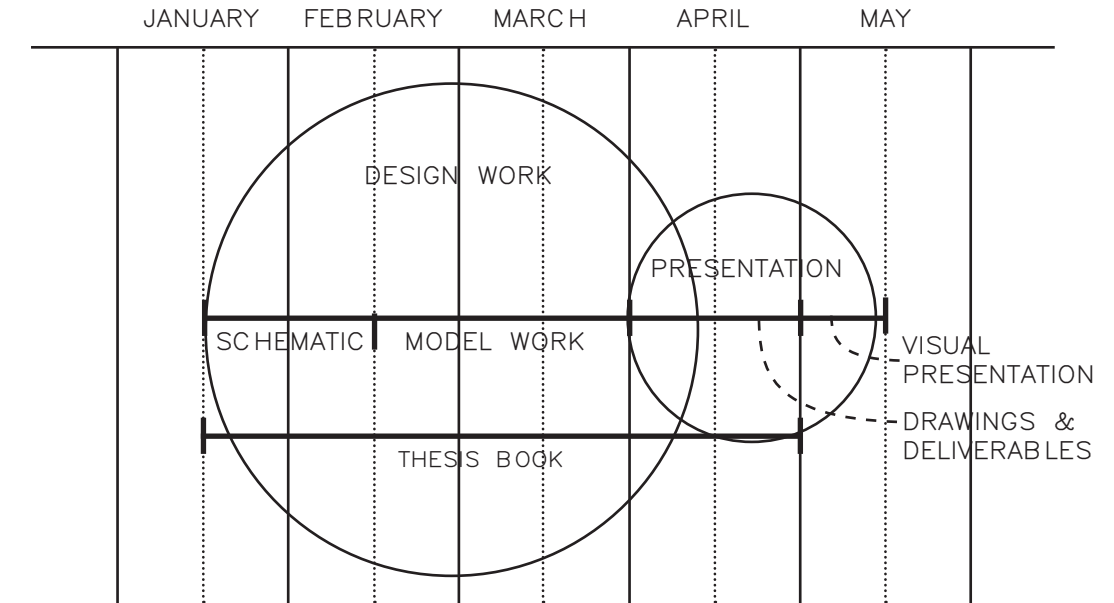
Google Slides
Presentation Boards
Presentation Script

PROJECT SCHEDULE – FALL SEMESTER



F14

PROJECT SCHEDULE – SPRING SEMESTER



F15



LITERARY ANALYSIS

THE WORLD OF PERCEPTION

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

In her article, Cataldi examines death and our embodiment of it through the context of the ontology of 'flesh'. To properly understand this position, it is important to first define the concept of 'flesh' put forth by Maurice Merleau Ponty in his text, *The Visible and the Invisible*. In this, flesh is noted as, "the set of non-objective phenomena by which the subject's own corporeity is given to him as his "lived body" or the "I body", distinguished from his objective body, appearing publicly as a thing among things of the world". He elaborates that, "the flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch- the sensitive sensible: inasmuch as in it is accomplished an equivalence of sensibility and sensible thing." (Goffi, 1997). The generality of flesh embraces an intercorporeity or an anonymous sensibility shared out among distinct bodies. One can touch the sensibility of another. It is in this elemental concept of flesh that sensibility is to be sought as we are able to view the visible alongside the invisible. This article utilizes Ponty's concept of flesh and further analyzes the carnal aspects of death, specifically, our phenomenal reduction and relation to corpses through two sensations; horror and grief.



F17

The first sensation, horror, is a combination of fear and repulsion in the presence of objects either threatening or impure; something incomplete. The latter, grief is the sense of separation, the emotional distress we feel in response to loss or deprivation. While Ponty lays the framework for the ontology of flesh, Cataldi enables a further transference of meaning and of understanding by recreating concepts through metaphor. She does this in hopes of answering the question of why we feel, so deeply and so painfully, the loss of a loved one.

We can begin by analyzing the concept of 'flesh' as a fabric. We are told by Cataldi that flesh, "In its 'elemental' or metaphysical senses, it is conceived as a surface of sensibility, a 'skin' or fabric into which our enfleshed sensitivities - the sight of our eyes, the taste of our tongues, the touch of our hands - are indivisibly interwoven or enmeshed" (Goffi, 1997). This interweaving of senses is suggestive of a fabric that is both perceptible and perceiving at the same time and as is possible with the flesh of a jacket, we are told that the fabric of flesh too hold the capability to turn into so that 'whose inside and whose outside may reverse'. In this, Cataldi is presenting the readers with a poetic image, one in which new meanings emerge as we are able to now see such an entangled framework of each strand of our being and our senses joining together and reversing or weaving into the other. It is ultimately this overlapping element that is shared amongst us and serves as a medium of exchange.

This metaphor is only deepened when Cataldi presents us with the image of grief as an injury; an ‘open wound or torn tissue’. The concept of flesh as the skin of reality or that which we are indivisibly enmeshed is expressed in the Jewish tradition of Kriah, or the tearing of garments after the death of a loved one. In this tradition, Jewish mourners “rip their clothing to symbolize the ruptured relationship and the pain of grief. What is felt, on the inside, crosses over onto the outside and is expressively exposed: the external tearing of a fabric dramatically symbolizing a stabbing finality, the internal tearing asunder that mourners feel in their relationship with the deceased” (Cataldi, 1997). This not only denoted the disruption to the intertwining of the other into our own being, but illustrate the physical pain often accompanied by the psychological battle associated with the loss of a loved one.

Grief can also be thought of as amputation; a sense of a missing element or part of ourselves. In this situation, as in grief, an element is swiftly ‘cut off’ and requires time to understand as well as to mend. This sensation is analogous to the phenomena of phantom limb; a state in which the brain continues to receive signals from the nerve endings that originally supplied signals to and from the missing limb. It is often, through the presence of a mirror situated amongst a remaining limb that the illusion of wholeness can be once again achieved. The back-firing of impulses that occur as we are becoming accustomed to the loss may be felt as a counter action between sensing their presence and realizing their absence.



F18

Finally, this notion of a missing element, one that unites and binds us all can be perceived by the notion of loss as disorientation. As Cataldi writes, “We may feel as though ‘in a thick fog’ as though the atmosphere of our life were changing. It has of course. It has lost this particular bearing, this particular ‘mooring’; and the sense of its withdrawal, its removal may cross-over onto us so that it is we who appear to be withdrawn, we who appear to be ‘removed’ and disconnected from life” (Goffi, 1997). This again puts for the notion of the loss of part of a whole and the redirection of a course or weave to repair the hole that threatens the integrity of the fabric.

While the original concept lies in that of Ponty’s view of flesh, Cataldi utilizes an even further expansive list of metaphor to deepen the resonance and paint a poetic image in the reader’s eye. We are now able to more clearly comprehend flesh as an intricate fabric. One in which each of our senses leads a strand in the creation of a reversible fabric which communicates our true connection and possession of one another. For is is her belief, and the argument of this article that “We could not feel this way at all- so hopelessly dispossessed or deprived, of a side of ourselves, of our own flesh and blood, unless we are [as Merleau Ponty supposed] existentially bound to significant others in the sensitive depths, the fabric, of our own embodied being” . As she continues, it is “ the flavor of life [of his wife] that is drained out and which crosses over into the body of [the living]”(Goffi, 1997).

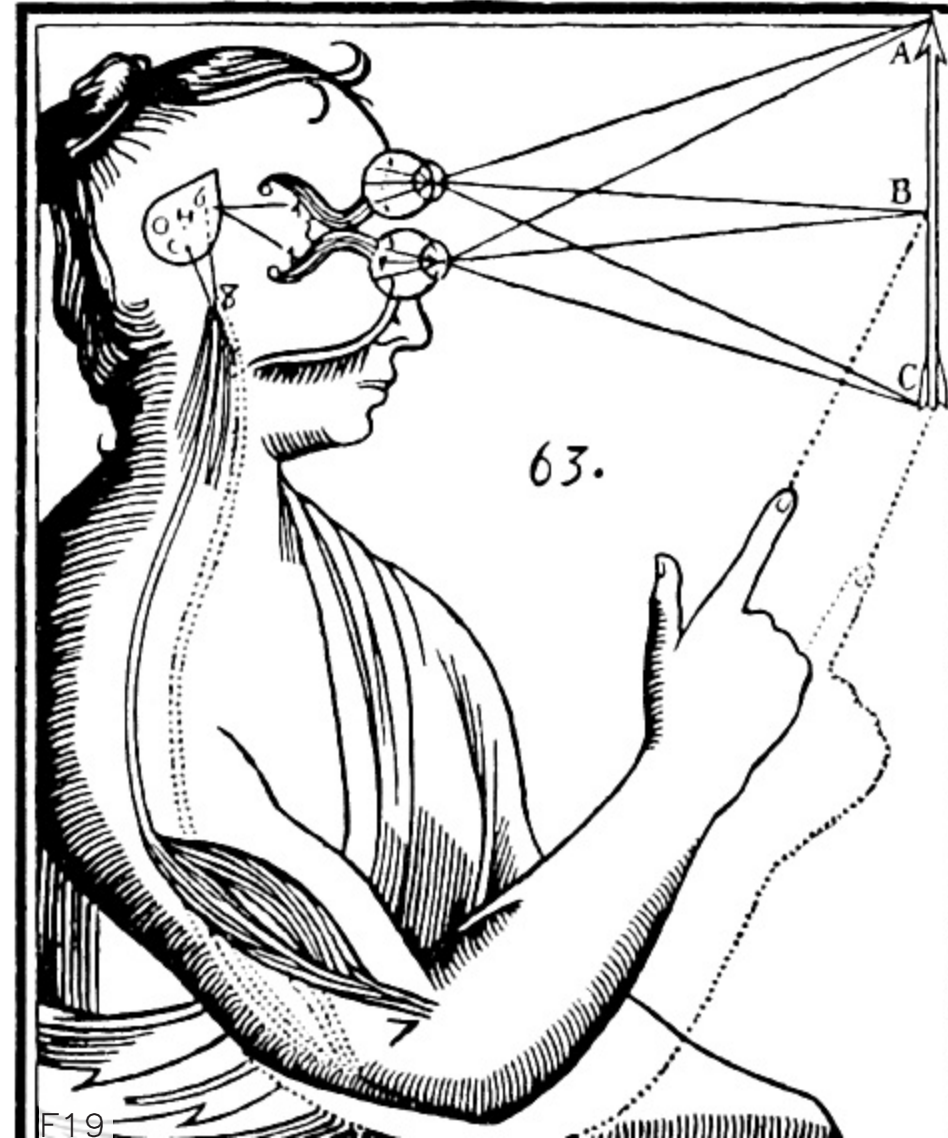
LITERARY ANALYSIS

THE WORLD OF PERCEPTION

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

Born in 1908, Maurice Merleau Ponty was a prominent French philosopher of the twentieth century who explored the meaning of human experience and perception. In 1948, Ponty wrote and delivered a series of 7 lectures on his ideas relating to perception. These lectures were delivered on a French radio station, and include in depth reflections on science, space, our relationships with others and art.

Merleau-Ponty opens his lectures with a call to rediscover the perceived world, the one in which he defines as 'the world which is revealed to us by our senses in everyday life.' For while this world, one we may claim to fathom through the mere act of opening one's eyes is, as Ponty claims, is a delusion and instead an unknown territory, contradictory to our complacent view. Alternatively, he suggests that, "much time and effort, as well as culture, have been needed in order to lay this world bare and that one of the great achievements of modern art and philosophy has been to allow us to rediscover the world in which we live, yet which we are always prone to forget" (Ponty, 1948). Instead, we reduce ourselves to holding science in such high esteem that our lived experiences hold little value in compiling our knowledge.



These laws and theories, as he claims, are merely an approximation of expression. While he states that modern art and philosophy have rehabilitated perception and the world as we perceive it, this is not an attempt to limit science, but rather to ask "whether science does, or ever could, present us with a picture of the world which is complete, self-sufficient and somehow closed in upon itself, such that there could no longer be any meaningful questions outside of the picture" (Ponty, 1948). The critique therefore lies with the perception of science as absolute knowledge.

In his second lecture, Merleau-Ponty begins by examining the 'modern thinker', one in which he defines as one who, "seeks to render obscure even the simplest of ideas and to revise classical concepts in the light of our experience" (Ponty, 1948). He progresses to explore the concept of space and argues against the idea that there is a clear distinction between space and objects. This is the classical view that space is a uniform medium and remains the same regardless of their positions. Rather, Ponty argues that objects do not inhabit an empty neutral space, but exist instead in distinct spatial regions which affect it. This therefore indicates that there is no longer a clear distinction between identity of an object and change since form and content are mixed.

He connects this argument by presenting us with modern artists such as Cezanne and argues that, “ Neither in the world as we perceive it nor in the picture which is an expression of that world can we distinguish absolutely between, on one hand, the outline or shape of the object and, on the other, the point where colours end or fade, that play of colour which must necessarily encompass all that there is; the object’s shape, its particular colour, its physiognomy and its relation to neighboring objects” (Ponty, 1958). This negates the classical doctrine of art that painting is based purely on perspective.

In his third lecture, the topic is switched from the examination of space to the objects which occupy that space. We are first presented with the definition of an object through the classical lens of psychology, that is, “ a system of properties which present themselves to our various senses and which are united by an act of intellectual synthesis” (Ponty, 1948). In summary, an object is a series of properties. This does not tell us however, how these qualities are bound together. Modern psychology would approach this in a different view, rather addressing each of these qualities as an ‘affective meaning’ that therefore helps to establish a connection between the qualities and our other senses. As an example, he presents us with the idea that a carpet in a room- a mood can be identified by each color. So too is true about sounds and temperature not differing from that of tactile data. Furthering this example, he states that this is how a blind person may manage to picture a color when it is described to them by way of an analogy.

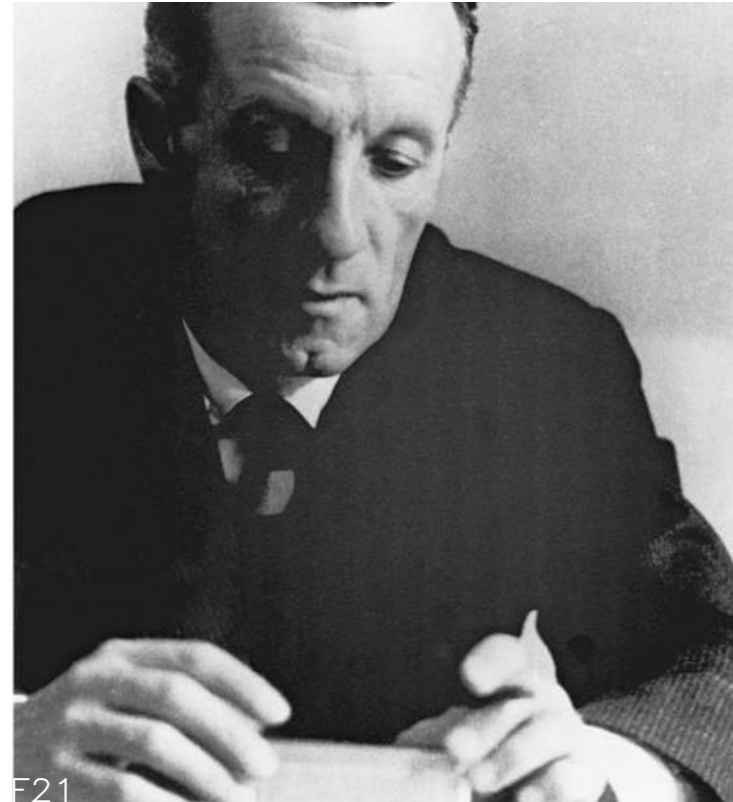


He states that, “ Provided that we restore a particular quality to its place in human experience, the place which gives it a certain emotional meaning, we can begin to understand its relationship to other qualities which have nothing in common with it. Indeed, our experience contains numerous qualities that would be almost devoid of meaning if considered separately from the reactions they provoke in our bodies” (Ponty, 1948). This tells us that the ‘things’ in our world are not merely ‘neutral objects’ presented merely for our contemplation, but rather one that recalls a particular way of behaving which therefore provokes an involuntary response within.

Lecture six expands upon the arguments from lecture two; that modern art helps us to rediscover the creation of the perceived world and that the ‘things’ of the perceived world are manifest to us in experience. His argument is continued in that much of the same is true of works of art; their meaning is created through our experience of them. What we have learned from our examination of the world of perception is that it is impossible to separate things from their way of appearing. Ponty tells us that rather than perceiving, we are defining and neglecting further examination of its unquity. Once accepting of this view of perception, one is ready to understand and to contemplate a work of art.

Thus the work of art resembles the object of perception; its nature is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyse it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of the direct perceptual experience” (Ponty, 1948). He applies this view to art in the forms of painting, cinema, music and literature; the most prominent being the first and the later. Painting does not try to imitate the world, but instead becomes a world of its own as the painter works to create a spectacle sufficient unto itself. This furthers the argument that form and content cannot exist separately from one another. So too is true about the art of poetry. The poet, “Replaces the usual way of referring to things, which presents them as ‘well known’, with a mode of expression that describes the essential structure of the thing and accordingly forces us to enter into the thing” (Ponty, 1948).

In the seventh and final lecture, Merleau-Ponty assesses the contrast he has drawn between the classical and modern worlds and their views of philosophy. The idea of the first believing in the possibility of a rational and final understanding of the world, an understanding that will last for all time; one that ‘purges its knowledge of all mystery’. The idea of the second, being accepting of the fallibility of our solutions and the ambiguity of the human condition. He concludes that with this internalization of the ambiguity of human life, we are able to create something that is ‘solid and lasting’.



LITERARY ANALYSIS

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a French phenomenological philosopher of the twentieth century. Heavily influenced by fellow philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, his primary interest of study was the constitution of meaning in human experience, and maintained the understanding of perception as an on-going dialogue between one's lived body and the world in which is perceived. In this, perceivers both actively and passively strive to express the perceived world in tandem with others. *The Visible and the Invisible* was Merleau-Ponty's final work and was published posthumously and incomplete after his passing. The work includes *The Intertwining - The Chiasm* which presents Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh as well as a section of selected working notes composed before his passing.

In his final chapter, Ponty presents his ontology [the philosophical study of the concepts of existence, being, becoming and reality] of his notion of flesh, or the non-objective phenomena by which the subject's own corporeity is given to him as lived body.



F22

First notable to understand is Merleau-Ponty's concept of Flesh as it comes forth as the ultimate notion of the text. In this, flesh is noted as, "the set of non-objective phenomena by which the subject's own corporeity is given to him as his "lived body" or the "I body", distinguished from his objective body, appearing publicly as a thing among things of the world". He elaborates that, "the flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch - the sensitive sensible: inasmuch as in it is accomplished an equivalence of sensibility and sensible thing." (Ponty, 1968). The generality of flesh embraces an intercorporeity or an anonymous sensibility shared out among distinct bodies. One can touch the sensibility of another. It is in this elemental concept of flesh that sensibility is to be sought as we are able to view the visible alongside the invisible, "discovering the world in degrees, in distance, in depth and in difference for, "flesh captures the lines of force of the world, brings itself up to the levels about which visibility is modulated, and rises upright before vertical being" (Ponty, 1968). In summary, the sensible flesh, which in this case is deemed as the visible, is not one sided, for it also holds the capability to sublimate itself into an invisible dimension or the flesh of ideas.

In his work, Merleau-Ponty puts forth the concept of the body as a chiasm, meaning the crossing or intersection that demonstrates the continuity between body and world, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible.

An example of this chiasmic structure is the body's ability to double into sensible and sentient aspects in the moment of self-touch. The events of this phenomenon can be examined on three different levels and further examine the intertwining nature of that which is sensed and that which is sentient and depict the circular course of perception. The first is the assessment of the body, as a sensible sentient, an exemplar sensible which he assigns due to the fact that, "the body interposed is not itself a thing, and interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a sensible for itself, which means not that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself - but this paradox: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by touch, a vision and hence an exemplar surface" (Ponty, 1968). This again demonstrates the ontological continuity subject and object among sensible things in general. The second examination comes from the reversible nature of the aforementioned relationship. In this passage, Ponty states that, "if one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course ... If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement, incorporates itself into a sensible in itself" (Ponty, 1968).



The third is that the sentients and the sensible are always separated by a gap that prevents their unity. "There is a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet, they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable" (Ponty, 1968) For example, "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is of it, unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of he visible, capable, by singular reversal, of seeing them- he who is one of them" (Ponty, 1968).

Ultimately, we can return to the concept of flesh to exemplify the cyclical nature of the chiasm. "Things can solicit the flesh without leaving their places because they are transcendences, rays of the world, each promoting a singular style of being across time and space; and the flesh can capture in itself an allusive, schematic presence of the things because it is itself elemental being, self-positing posture, self-moving motion adjusting itself to the routes and levels and axes of the visible. This intertwining, this chiasm affected across the substance of the flesh is the inaugural event of visibility" (Ponty, 1968).



PROJECT TYPOLOGY SUMMARY

A large sum of knowledge is to be gained from the thorough examination of precedent studies of architectural typologies. For this thesis, it is necessary to examine a multitude of typologies as several of their elements will be necessary to serve a unique purpose. For this purpose, four separate typologies have been selected for analysis. The first being a memorial; a commemorative element which strives to preserve through memory. Due to the opaque nature of the site, this element will become useful in translating those interred into the hearts of their families. The second to be considered is the concept of a monument; something that is erected in memory and intended to honor a person or event. This element of veneration is something which is currently absent at the existing site and is to be regained through the thesis work. Third comes the analysis of sanctuary; a space for peaceful tranquility, contemplation and introspection which becomes important in the grieving process and one must begin to understand themselves in the absence of the other. Finally comes the analysis of cemetery and mausoleum; specifically gauging how they accommodate both the needs of the living and the dead as well as the strategies in which to keep these elements sustainable.



LAKWOOD CEMETERY GARDEN MAUSOLEUM

LOCATION:

3600 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55408

PROJECT TYPE:

Crypt / Mausoleum

ARCHITECT:

HGA Architects & Engineers

SIZE:

24,500 s.f.

YEAR BUILT:

2012

HISTORY:

Lakewood Cemetery was founded in 1871 and has long served as the foremost resting place for the citizens of Minnesota. The cemetery is private and non-sectarian meaning that it is not devoted to any singular religious sect or political group. The grounds cover approximately 250 acres in total and are considered a landmark of the city of Minneapolis.



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ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSE

With a mere 25 acres remaining of the 250 acre property, the Lakewood Cemetery Association sought to find a master plan to ensure the vitality of the site. This task was taken on by Joan Soranno and John Hook who were led by their strong desire to both protect and enhance the cemetery's historic identity. Following an extensive site analysis, project designers decided to locate the new, 24,500 s.f. building along the northern edge of the site and in between the existing mausoleum and the memorial chapel. This was done in order to consolidate both traffic and infrastructure to one distinct portion of the grounds while leaving the original landscape and view sheds unaltered such as the nearby Chapel. To further this concept, the new Garden Mausoleum was tucked two-thirds of its height below the ground, held neatly in the existing, south-facing hillside which overlooks the lower garden. This allowed a green roof to be planted seamlessly over the top, blending the area of work with the already neatly manicured lawn. The lawn is then punctuated with earthen mounds, projections for skylights which seamlessly fuse building and landscape; achieving the original goal of preserving yet enhancing what was already there.





SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSE

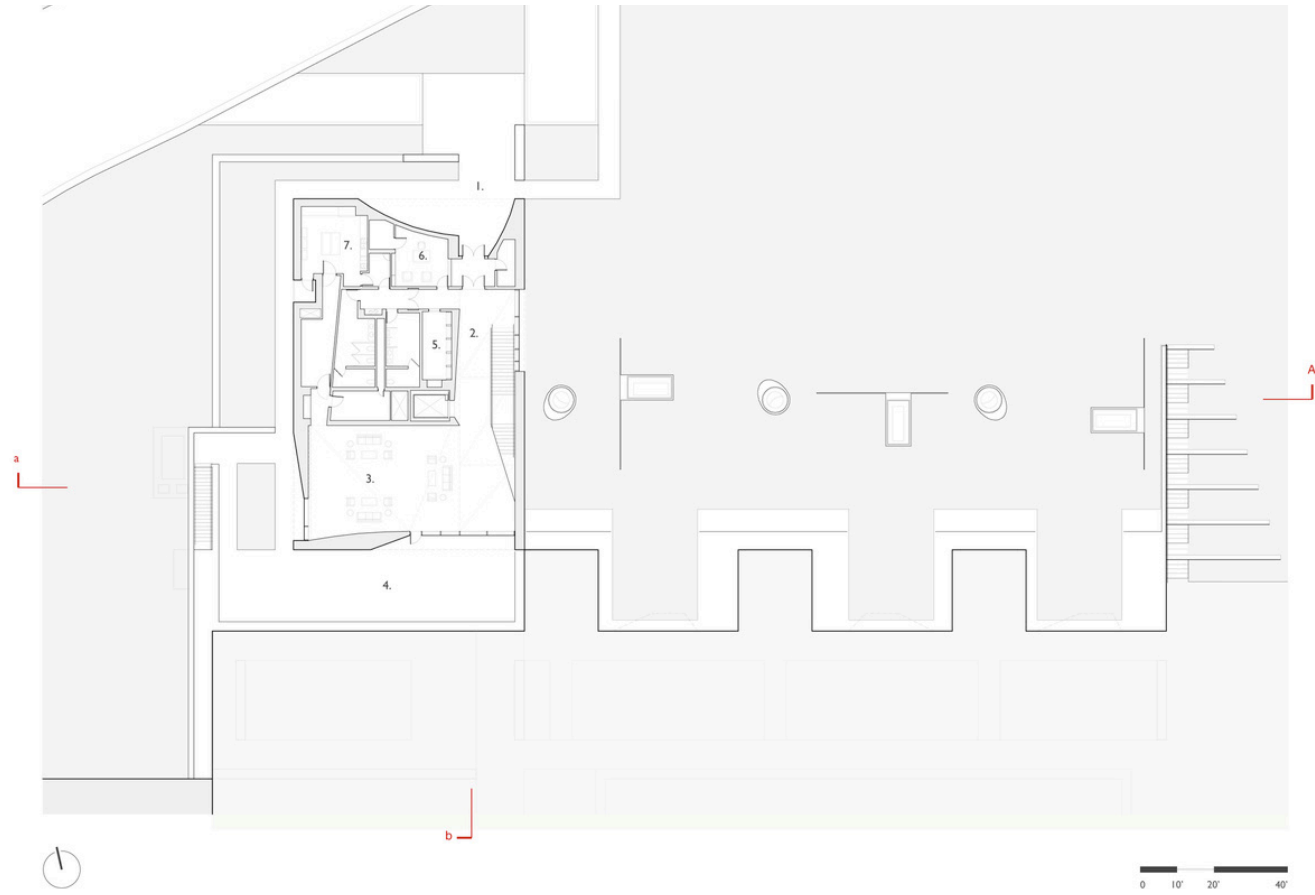
In their work, Soranno and Cook recognized early on that when designing a non-sectarian resting place, individuality, human scale, and sensory connections to the natural environment are vital. This was often achieved through lighting, view sheds, and materiality. While geometrically similar, each chamber and projecting room contain subtle univities to provide diverse experiences. The inset floors of varying shades, windows and skylights with altered orientation to frame views and capture light all enhance the overall individual experience and call on the natural environment. This level of intentionality was translated further into the material selection of granite, marble and bronze which are reminiscent of traditional memorial architecture. For the human experience, the immediacy of light and dark, the immutability of its textures and the echoes throughout the surfaces achieve the Cemetery's unified mission.



Interior crypt room; showcasing the utilization of natural light by way of a skylight and the coordination of materials to define space and individuality.

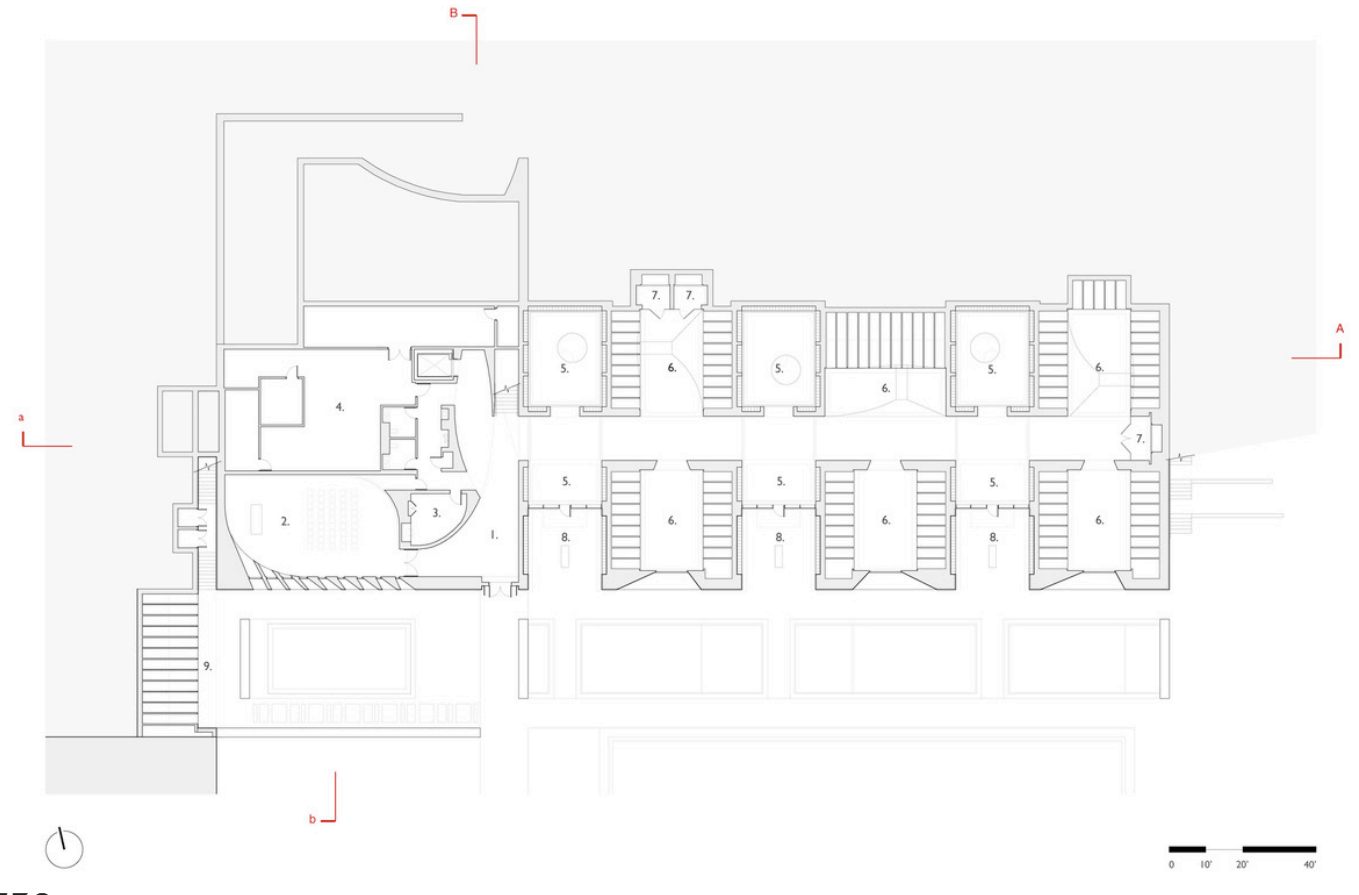


Garden level crypt room; showcasing the framing of views and connection to natural elements while providing a visual temperature contrast with neighboring crypt and columbarium rooms.



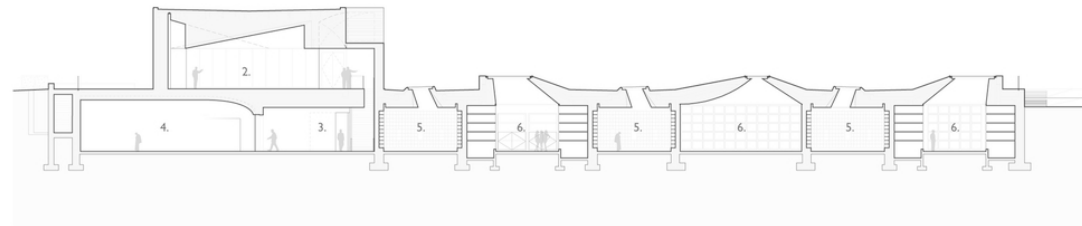
F31

The Entry Level Plan consists primarily of circulation and secondary spaces such as offices, restrooms and contemplation space.



F32

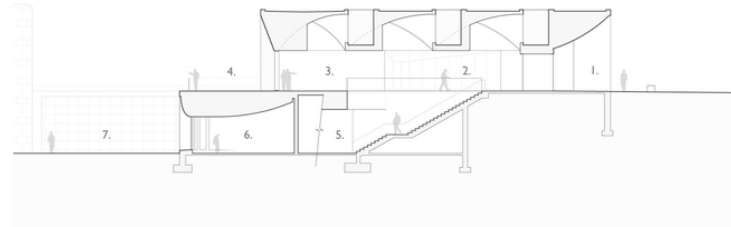
The Garden Level Plan consists primarily of interment spaces. There exists a combination of columbarium and crypt spaces to accommodate both cremated and whole remains respectively.



LONGITUDINAL BUILDING SECTION aA



1 Foyer 2 Multipurpose / Reception Room 3 Lower Foyer 4 Committal Room 5 Columbarium Room 6 Crypt Room



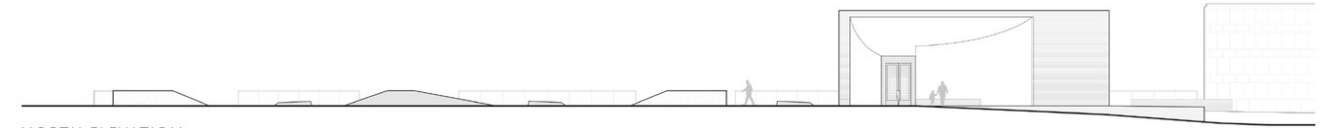
TRANSVERSE BUILDING SECTION bB



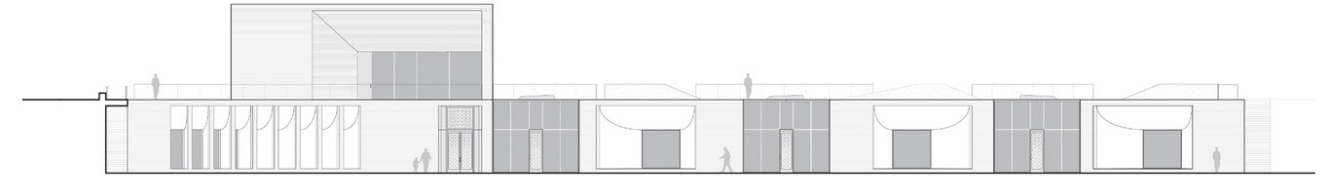
1 Street Level Entry 2 Foyer 3 Multipurpose / Reception Room beyond 4 Terrace 5 Lower Foyer 6 Committal Room
7 Garden Crypts beyond

F33

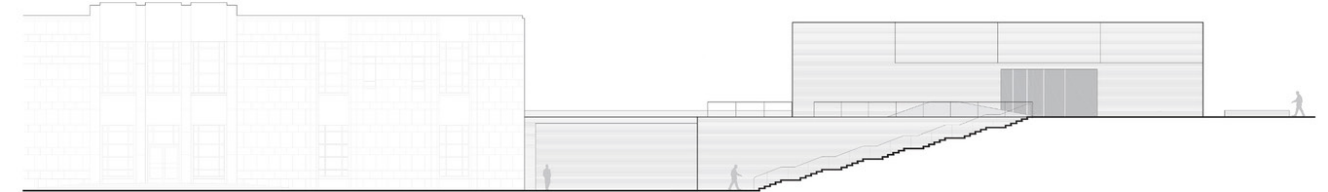
Longitudinal and transverse sections showcase the relationship of spaces and areas of penetration to provide natural lighting at both the entry and garden level.



NORTH ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION

F34

Project elevations showcase the fused relationship of the building with its site in addition to the intentional, algorithmic rhythm of spaces and materials.



F35

ANALYSIS

This project was selected as a precedent due to its goal of non-sectarian burial space as well as its incorporation with the existing environment. Much like the Hart Island Project, Lakewood Garden Cemetery is run by a non-profit and is designed to serve the masses while acting as a cultural landmark for Minneapolis, MN. Major take aways from this successful project are the utilization of materials to pay homage to traditional funerary practices while also creating options for individuality in addition to a further reference and call back to nature. This is furthered through highly intentional punctuations of natural light and framing of elements which establish an atmosphere of harmony between the site and newly design structure, effectively marrying past and present.

JEWISH MUSEUM, BERLIN

LOCATION: Lindenstraße 9-14, 10969 Berlin, Germany

PROJECT TYPE: Preservation Site

ARCHITECT: Studio Libeskind

SIZE: 15,500 s.m.

YEAR BUILT: 1999

HISTORY:

In 1987, the government of Berlin called for an anonymous competition to design and expansion to the existing Jewish Museum of 1933 which was closed shortly after its opening in 1938 during the era of Nazi rule. Daniel Libeskind, born to Holocaust survivors Dora and Nachman Libeskind, was selected for the task due to his formal design which expressively represented the Jewish lifestyle before, during and after the Holocaust.



F36

SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSE

The goal of the Jewish Museum, Berlin, was to reignite Jewish presence back into Berlin following WWII and to embed it both socially and culturally. For his conceptual design, Libeskind wanted to capture the feelings of absence, emptiness, and invisibility, all of which were felt by the Jewish people amidst the disappearance of their culture. This concept created an architectural narrative grow upon the existing Jewish Museum and to guide the visitors through the effects of the Holocaust on both the people and the cities in which the project lies.

The project form was inspired by an abstracted view of the Jewish Star of David which stretches around both the site and its context. Although it appears separate, there is no formal entry from the exterior to the expansion, this causes visitors to endure the anxieties that accompany the loss of direction before being confronted with three possible routes which present the Jewish experience of emigration during the Holocaust. This labyrinth guides visitors through a combination of galleries, empty spaces and dead ends, insighting the experiences of loss, confusion and emptiness.





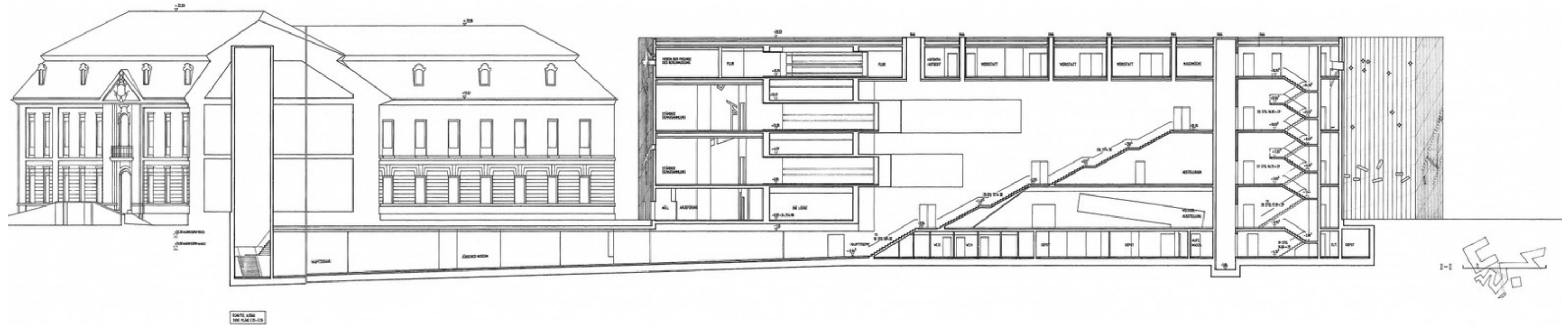
F38

Perhaps most emotionally powerful is the 66' tall void that runs through the entirety of the building. The cold concrete atmosphere is emotionally analogous to the experience of the Jewish people. Its ground is covered by over 10,000 cast iron faces; a representation of those so carelessly lost amidst the Holocaust.



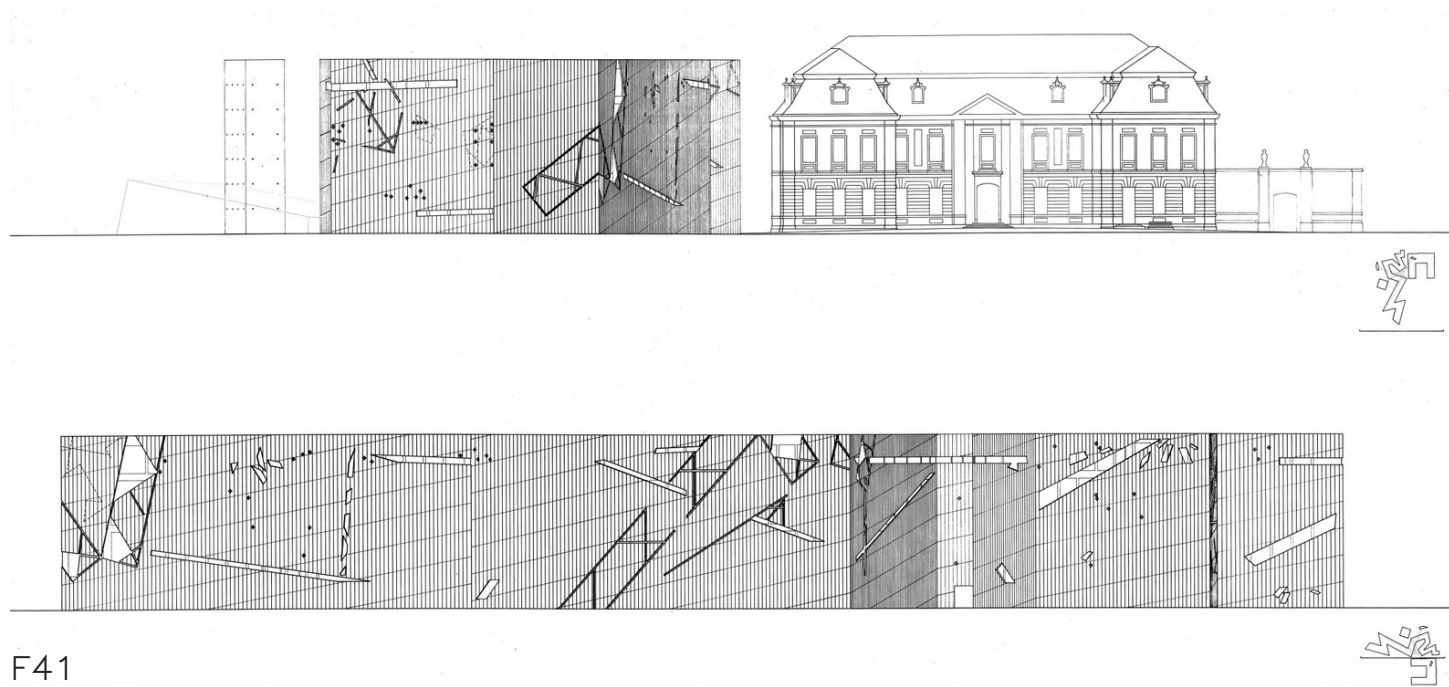
F39

This daze of confusion is continued outside in the Garden of Exile where visitors become overwhelmed and lost amidst 49 tall concrete pillars which are overgrown by plants. Inside the assembly of structures, the only view unobstructed is upwards, providing a moment of exaltation as one looks up towards the sky.



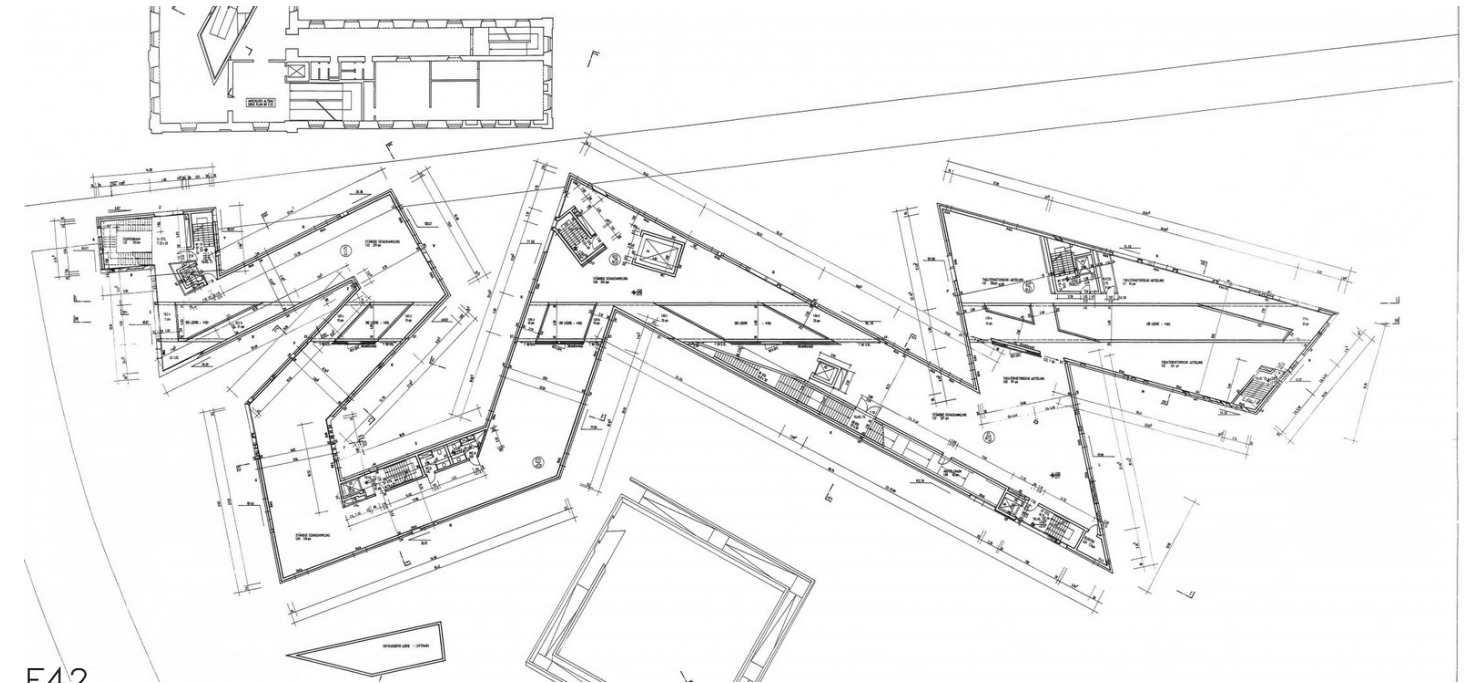
F40

The Longitudinal Section showcases the entry between the new structure and the existing Jewish Museum. It highlights the interplay of levels and spaces, showing the importance of scale in creating an atmosphere.



F41

Longitudinal Elevations showcase the intentionality of light penetrations into the structure in addition to the proximity and juxtaposition of aesthetics with the existing Jewish Museum which was erected in 1933.



F42

The Project Floor Plan showcases the overhead, modified 'zig-zag' form which was inspired by the Jewish Star of David in addition to the juxtaposition of gallery and empty spaces.



F43

ANALYSIS

The Jewish Museum, Berlin was selected as a precedent study to highlight the architectural mode of both memorial and monument. The project plays a key role in embodying emotion which allows the facilitation of memory through the stories it tells. During the Holocaust, cultural traditions and stories were stripped from the Jewish people, it is these stories that Libeskind aims to unearth and reincorporate into the city of Berlin which has faced insurmountable loss. In a similar fashion, the goal of this thesis project is to uncover the histories of Hart Island and bring to light the many stories which lie with the people, often forgotten beneath its ground. A new element of memorial will assist in the continued memory and passing of stories from one generation to the next, providing solace and ease for the families of those interred.

SOUTH HAVEN CENTRE FOR REMEMBRANCE

LOCATION: 5004 Meridian St NW, Edmonton, AB T6P 1R3,
Canada

PROJECT TYPE: Cemetery, Cultural Architecture

ARCHITECT: SHAPE Architecture, Group 2 Architecture

SIZE: 650 s.m.

YEAR BUILT: 2019

HISTORY:

The South Haven Centre for Remembrance is a non-denominational facility which supports the city of Edmonton in Canada. The primary concept for the design was to 'memorialize moments' in time and spatially capture the seasons.



ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSE

The design features a 13-meter tower which emerges from the site's prairie landscaping. This pays homage to the existing gravesites, moments, and columbaria as well as the latent memory that they embody.

The building is positioned upon a twenty-one hectare site and is partially submerged within the landforms to provide a seamless visual connection between site and structure.





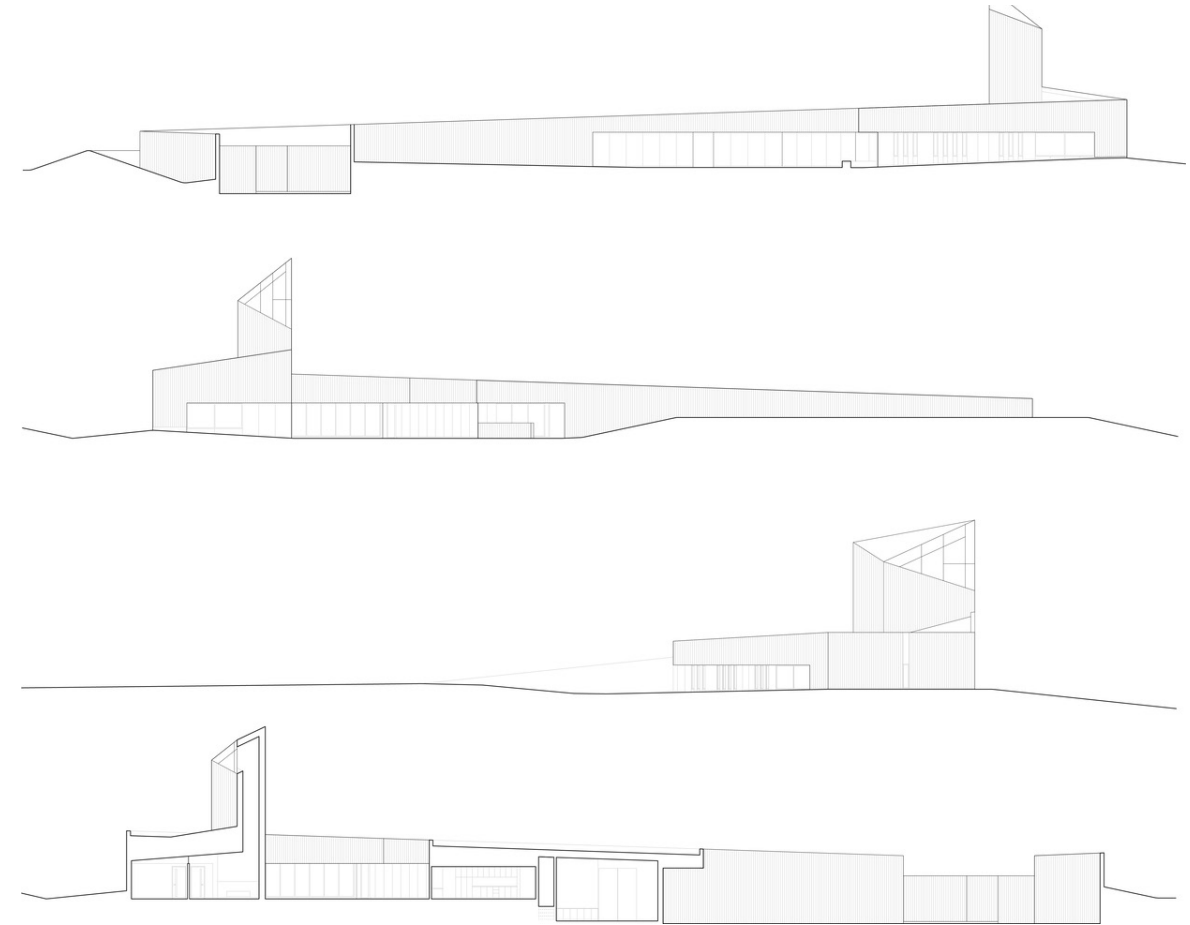
SOCIOCULTURAL RESPONSE

Designers of the project recognized that memory is marked by time; accompanied and impacted by the position of the sun, the quality of its light and the weather which punctuate our memory. Because of this, the planning strategy of the space focused on careful placements of entries and key program spaces to allow a sequence to unfold which provides areas for silence, pause and reflection. This pattern is intended to be analogous to the distinction between the permanent and the ephemeral. The former is designed in reference to the short, habitual visits which respond to characteristics of light, sound and temporality of seasons; the latter responds to the permanence of burial and everlasting memory.



F47

The project floor plans showcase the program of spaces and how they supplement familial and coordination needs for the site.



F48

The longitudinal elevations and section showcase the incorporation of structure and site and well and the unfolding of spaces throughout the building.



F49

ANALYSIS

The South Haven Centre for Remembrance was selected as a precedent due to its interpretation of typology as a cemetery and mourning space. Unlike a traditional cemetery or mausoleum, the building which was constructed is designed to work in tandem with the grieving process and the ceremonies or traditions that often accompany it. Its design is analogous to the juxtaposition of the ephemeral and the immortal and utilizes this to inform the overall design which is enhanced by the changing of seasons. This is imperative for the site as the winter months often provide difficulties for the mourning process in the northern winter climates. This will assist in informing the design for Hart Island as due to the nature of the grave sites, individual visitation of memorial stones is not possible and therefore necessitates an alternative mode to facilitate the mourning process.



F50

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

OVERVIEW

An active burial site since 1868, Hart Island is known as the potter's field of New York City. It has served as a site of rapid disposal of human remains in light of the yellow fever, AIDS and presently, COVID-19 pandemic. As a city cemetery, is also the interment place for individuals who are unnamed, unclaimed or unable to pay for traditional funerary practices. As it was previously operating under the direction of the prison system, family members were omitted from visiting the remains of their loved ones. Due to recent legal action, families are now able to visit the island on the third Thursday of the month. This experience is to transform in years to come as Hart Island was recently signed over to the New York Department of Parks who aim to transform the visiting experience.

PERSONAL RELEVANCE

My project has an emphasis on grief and this is something that I have a personal connection to. In 2019, I lost my stepfather to cancer after acting as one of his caregivers. This time was filled with great reflection as we knew inevitably what would happen. During this time, one of the things I would often contemplate was how I would remember my dad. I was worried that after he passed, my memories and dreams would be clouded by the images I had of him while he was sick; a body and person that was very different than that of the man I knew. Upon his passing, I discovered that that was not the case and quickly understood the importance of active remembrance throughout my experience with the grieving process. This is something that I am hoping to give to others through my thesis exploration.



RELEVANCE OF SITE

Site plays a very large role in this project, primarily because it expresses a need but it also requires a solution. Hart Island has a long history of lacking transparency. While it technically is a final resting place, it does not meet the needs of what we know to be a cemetery. It lacks the personal connection and the experience of those who are living to facilitate memory and grief. Because of this transformation, the bounds of typology are going to need to be challenged as the site in particular breaks “tradition”; we need to find how to create that intimate nature of individual connection in the midst of the nature of the mass graves.

PROJECT FINANCING

In 2019, it was ruled by the New York City Council that Hart Island would be removed from penal control and new jurisdiction would be assumed by NYC Parks and recreation. Because of this transition, NYC Council has allocated \$50 million dollars for construction projects on the site in order to make it safe and welcoming for visitors. The Hart Island project is also a 501-(c)-3 which is a charitable foundation which raises money for creative projects which serve to restore the identities of those buried at Hart Island. Until recently 2019, visitors were not allowed at Hart Island meaning that families were not allowed access to their loved ones. In 2021, visitors are allowed monthly visits, escorted by armed guard to either a singular gazebo, or an approximation of the burial site. There is now a massive push to transform the site in order to facilitate families and provide them the opportunity to mourn their loved ones. This cannot be done until the site is made safe for those visiting and a space is created to support them in this process.



F52

HISTORICAL & CULTURAL CONTEXT

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL CONTEXT

Hart Island is located in the Southwest portion of the Long Island sound or the northeastern part of the Bronx, New York. The island's first public use was a training ground for the 31st Regiment of the U.S. African American Troops which were a segregated regiment of the Union Army. Hart island later housed a Union Civil War Prison Camp, psychiatric hospital, tuberculosis sanatorium, reformatory, rehabilitation center and finally, a mass burial cemetery.

A secret kept under lock and key for 150 years, it is a grave of biblical nature; liked to that of Akeldama, the field of blood purchased by the high priests of Jerusalem with the bloodied silver of Judas Iscariot; to inter the strangers, the poor, and the criminal; a potter's field.

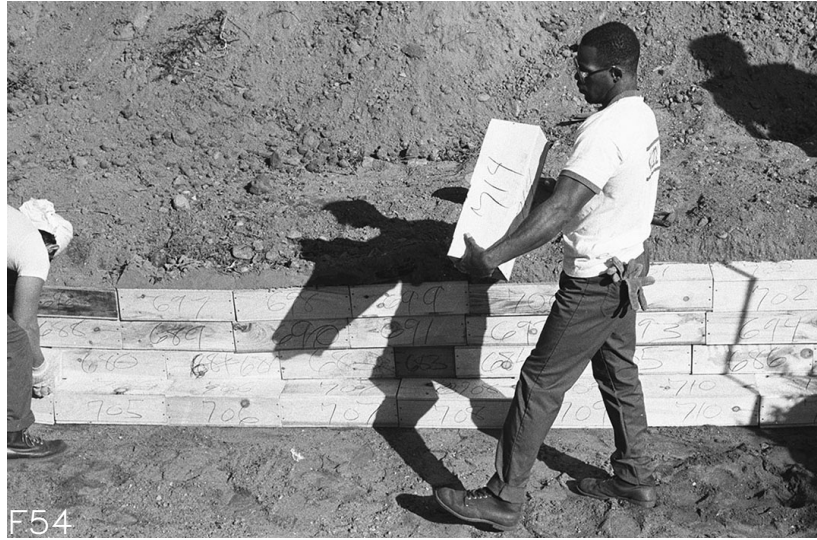
Today, the site remains active, a place for rapid and disposal of the deceased in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cemetery occupies 131 acres of land which is scattered with remnants of buildings past, scarred stories left behind. Since 1869, prison labor has been used to bury the unclaimed and unidentified in mass graves of 150 adults, or 1000 infants; a singular white post denoting each group of 1000 lives.



F53

Until 2014, following lawsuits from the families of the interred, these graves were inaccessible. Today, visits to family members are allocated monthly, and are to be pre scheduled with, and escorted by armed guards. The largest opportunity for connection lies in the Traveling Cloud Museum, an online database where family members are able to claim their loved ones, and stop the clock of anonymity through the leaving of a story of the one that is lost.

Because of its inaccessibility and opaque nature, the island has become a place where people disappear. Here lies an opportunity of reconnection, a place of active memory through architectural space.

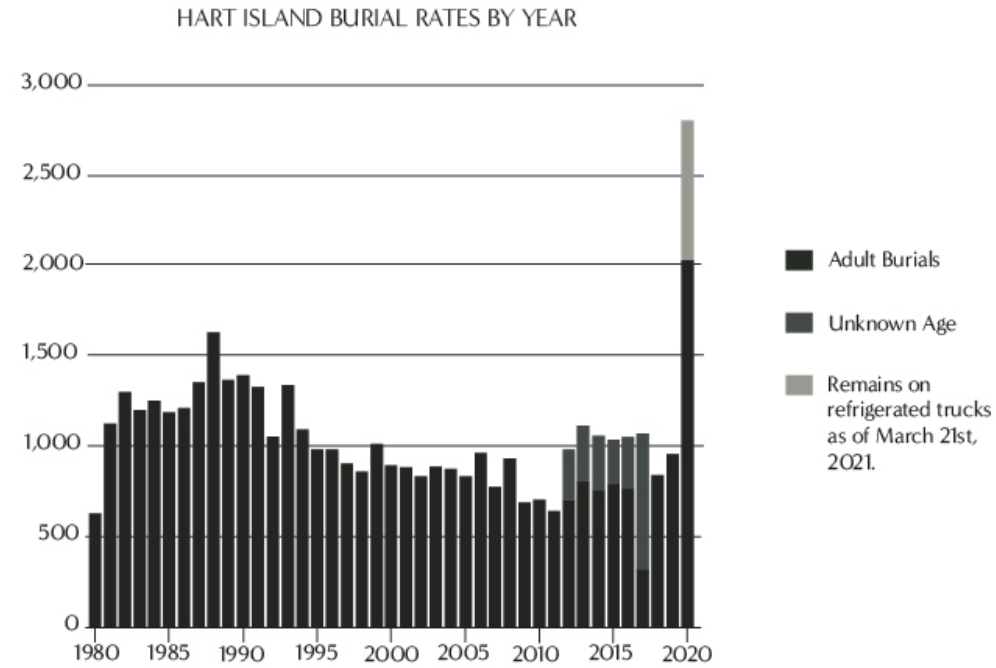


To the left are images of the burial process at Hart Island. Inmates from the nearby Rikers Island facilitated are transported via boat to bury the deceased for \$0.37 an hour. Bodies arrive in a pine paupers box in which they are buried three bodies deep and 36" below the surface in a shallow mass grave. The deceased are layed in groups of 150 adults or 1000 infants which are often still born or miscarried. They are denoted with a number on the side of each makeshift casket.



To the right are images reflecting the solemn nature of Hart Island. At the top is depicted a focal point from the inside of a pre-dug mass grave. Much of the surrounding land is worked and overturned by the industrial equipment which assist with the burials. At the bottom is an established field of grave sites. Noticable is the lack of adornment and memorial stones which is traditional in most burial grounds. This speaks to the level of anonymity and carelessness which the site is often criticized for.



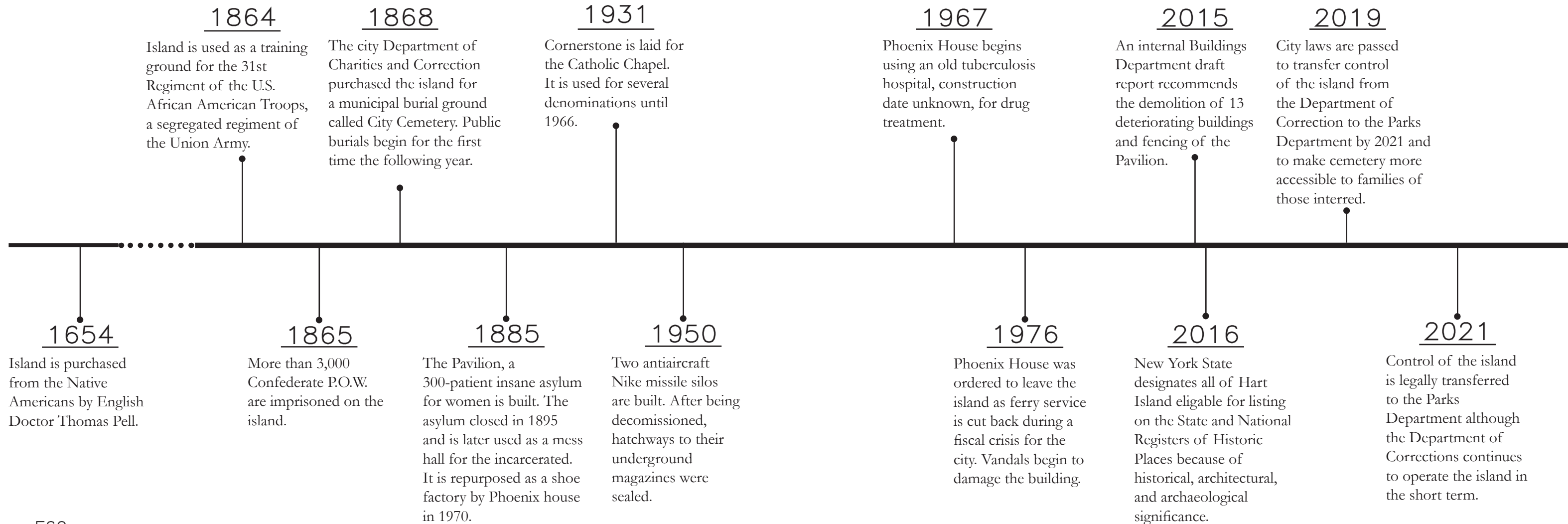


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In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City faced one of the highest rates of positive Corona Virus cases. Amidst the influx of demise, hospitals and morgues face difficulty accommodating the overwhelming number of remains as the pandemic continues to surge on. Because of this, remains were stored on refrigerated trucks hastily interred at the city cemetery; a potter's field known as Hart Island. Sadly, more people were interred on Hart Island in the year 2020 than any year during the AIDs epidemic; as of 2020, the burial number reached approximately 2,334 adults, over 2 times the number accommodated in 2019 and over a 1,000 more than was reached during the peaks of the AIDs virus of 1988. It is now estimated that one in ten local COVID victims will receive burial at Hart Island .



F59



HART ISLAND PROJECT

FOUNDERS:

From 1991-1994, interdisciplinary artist Melinda Hunt, accompanied by photographer Joel Sternfeld were granted access to Hart Island to document it as a 'hidden American landscape'. Over this three year span, Melinda became dedicated to the remembrance of those interred and would found the creation of the Hart Island Project; an online database of recent burials and home to the online storytelling platform, the Traveling cloud museum.

MISSION:

Mission of the Hart Island Project is to assist families with limited resources in accessing public burial records. Through this the foundation hopes to both raise awareness about public burial, but reunite family members. This online database has mapped public burials from 1980-present day. The charity also supports creative works which serve to restore identities of the deceased.



F61

OUTCOMES:

Due directly to efforts of the charity, New York City Council ended penal control of the island in 2021 which had been in place for 150 years. \$50 million has been allocated for the remediation of the building structures. NYC Parks and Recreation assumed jurisdiction in 2019. This change will make the island freely accessible to citizens.



F62

SITE AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

CHARACTER SUMMARY

TEXTURES AND REMNANTS

EXISTING STRUCTURES

PRISON PRESENCE

MASS BURIALS



F63

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Analogous to the people who are interred there, it is not difficult to feel the sense of abandonment and dejection that is Hart Island. As discussed in the historical context, the island was home to a myriad of uses, each leaving their own unique mark on the site.

First and foremost noticeable is the presence of existing buildings on the site. Similar to the current population of burials, these buildings served those outcasted from society, operating as hospitals during times of epidemic, drug rehabilitation, a reformatory workhouse and a supplement to the prisons. Much like their patrons, the buildings have been left behind without care, further enforcing the neglected atmosphere. One must not travel far to find remnants of tenants past; many abruptly leaving or being forced from their spaces now succumbed to the overgrowth of vegetation. Today, many of the structures erected on the island are crumbling, presenting us with an underlying texture for the site. In 2021, amidst the transfer of the island from penal to park control, the city has ordered that many of these are to be demolished, taking with them a piece of the site's history and a chapter in its story.



F64

The presence of the prison system can also be felt. In addition to the work provided by inmates, workshops and outbuildings under prison control are abruptly fenced and wrapped with barbed wire. This element of control is also transferred to visitors as upon their arrival, allocated only on the third Thursday of each month, they are escorted by armed guard and required to stay within a singular covered gazebo a mere 100 yards from the ferry docks. They are left no choice but to watch as massive graves are gouged from the earth in preparation for the dozens of bodies which inevitably are delivered. Amidst the influx of deceased in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, refrigerated trucks are used to assist the crews in preserving the remains of the deceased as they await their final interment.



F65

Remnants of a hatchway to underground magazines for anti-aircraft Nike missile silos which were utilized during the Cold War with Russia.



F66

Portions of sport seating once utilized by prison inmates to observe games taking place in the prison yard.



F69

Brick structural remains of the laundry building utilized by the boys reformatory workhouse.



F70

Waterside view of the Phoenix House which once functioned as a tuberculosis ward and insane asylum. The building was utilized as a rehabilitation center for substance dependents.



F67

Discarded shoes, left behind from manufacturers based in the Phoenix House on Hart Island.



F68

Interior view of abandoned butchershop, utilized by the reformatory camp for boys.



F71

Exterior view of the continually deteriorating butchershop entry. The butcher shop was utilized by the reformatory camp for boys which was housed on the island.



F72

Exterior view of the Catholic Sanctuary. The building was utilized by numerous denominations throughout its 30 year lifetime. Today it stands across from the Pavilion.



F73

Existing work camp built for prison inmates in 1982, fenced in and wrapped with barbed wire for security. This space also stores equipment used for burial plots and site maintenance.



F74

Corrections officer's garden run by inmates from the near by Ryker's Island and located on the central portion of Hart Island.



F77

Aerial view of trench prepared for mass grave beginning to be filled with paupers boxes.



F78

Refrigerated truck used as cold storage for human remains amidst surge of deaths due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



F75

Inmates organizing a mass grave of 150 adults. Names are denoted on the side; a number is assigned to those who remain unidentified. Burial information will be logged in the Traveling Cloud Museum database.



F76

Burial tools and paupers boxes being stored in one of the workhouse shower rooms. Paupers boxes are biodegradable and allow for plots to be reused after their 25-50 year deterioration period.



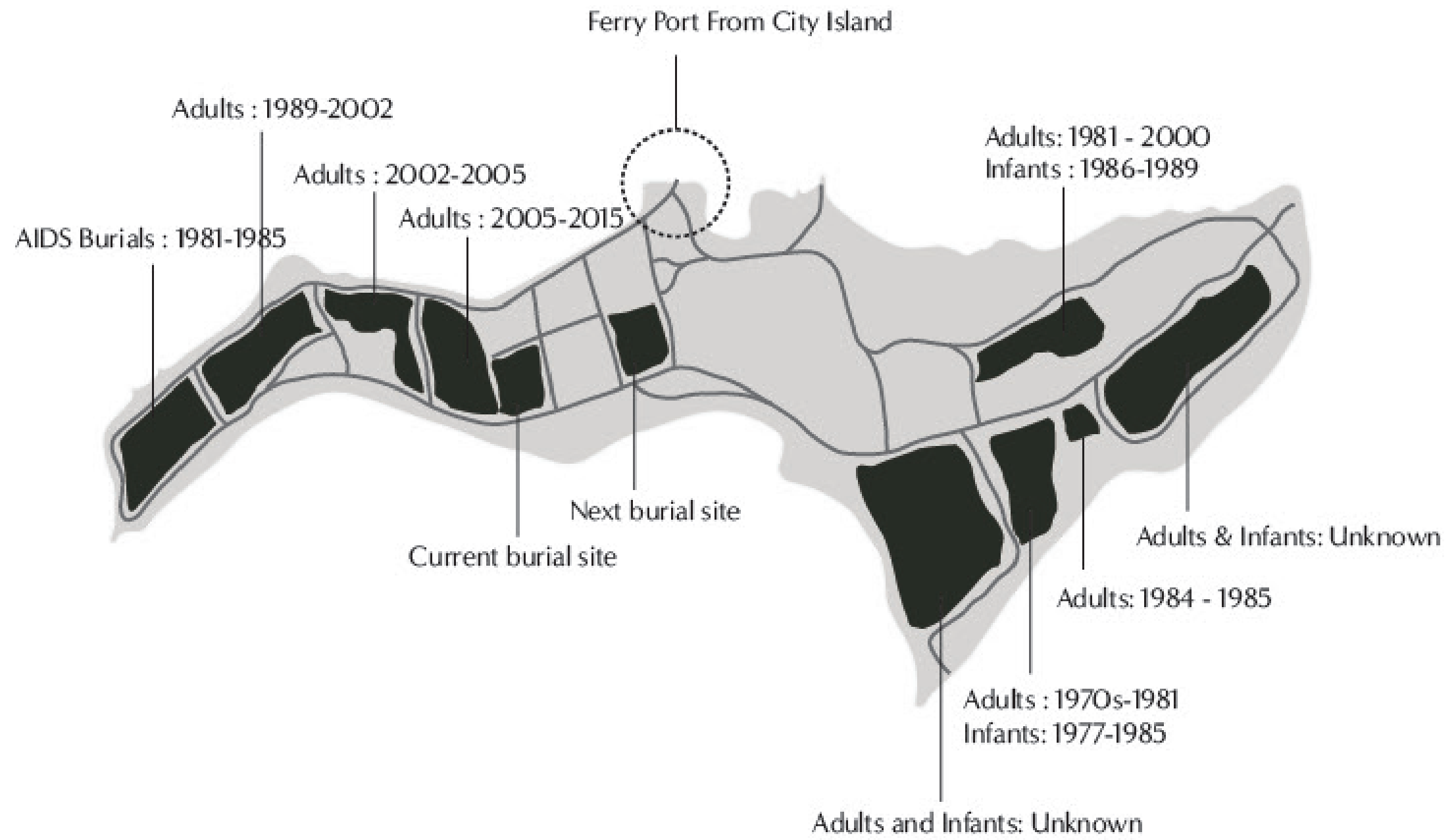
F79

White grave marker used to denote location of each 150 adult or 1000 infant burial site.



F80

Infant burial plot awaiting final additions before full concealment.



QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

SOILS

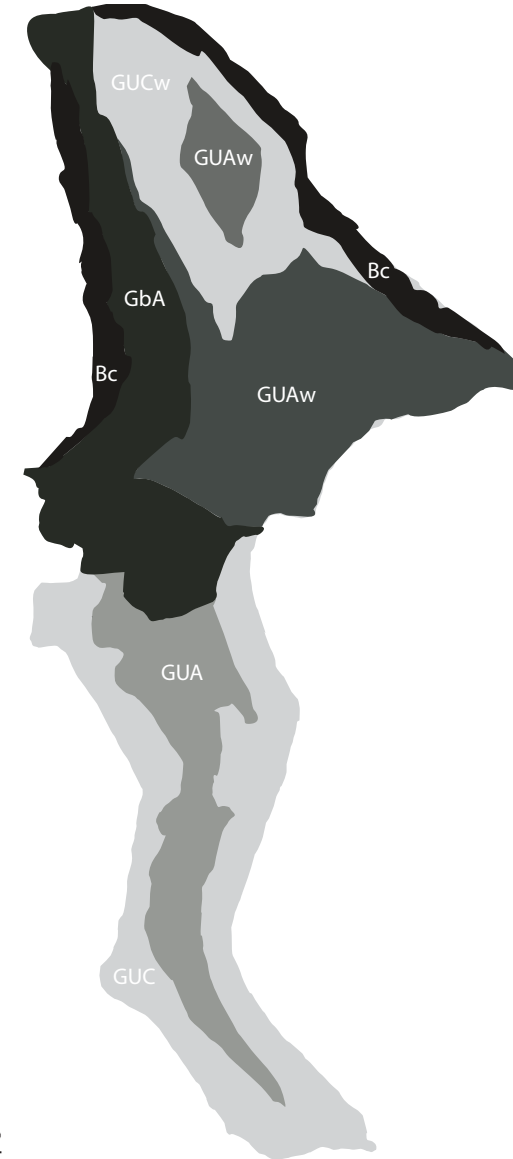
TRAFFIC & UTILITIES

SITE CHARACTER

TOPOGRAPHY

CLIMATE CHARACTERISTICS:

- Sun Path Diagram
- Average Temperatures
- Humidity Index
- Annual Precipitation
- Wind Studies
- Annual Cloud Cover
- Daylight Hours



SOILS & SEDIMENTS

To the left is a map representing soil categories and their locations on the site. The site consists of beach cobble and greenbelt, the most predominant being GUAw which makes up 23.8% of the site.

Bc: Beaches, Cobble - 7.4 acres (6.6%)

GbA: Greenbelt loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes - 20.8 acres (18.7%)

GUA: Greenbelt - Urban land complex, 0 to 3 percent slopes (13.6%)

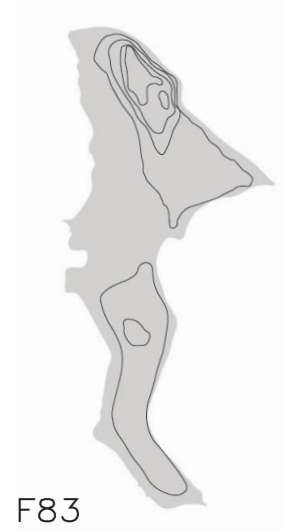
GUAw: Greenbelt - Urban land complex, very deep water table, 0 to 3 percent slopes, cemetery(23.8%)

GUC: Greenbelt- Urban land complex, 8-15 percent slopes(16.2%)

GUCw: Greenbelt - Urban land complex, very deep water table, 8 to 15 percent slope, cemetery (14.9%)

TOPOGRAPHY

The site has minimal elevation change with the most concentrated change located on the north eastern portion of the site. The north eastern region of the island lies low, largely consisting of soft marsh lands. The largest quantity of structures lies in the flat, central and south central regions of the site.

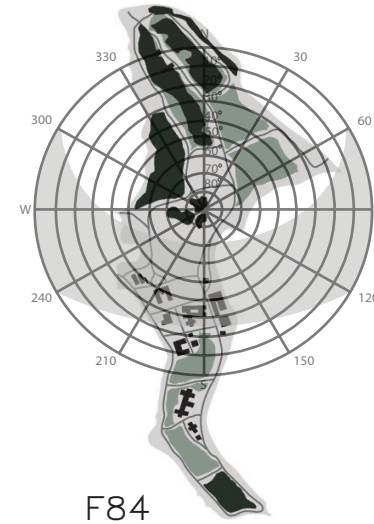


SITE CHARACTER

On the site exist several abandoned buildings, most of which have been ordered by the state to be demolished or fenced from the public as a safety precaution and many have been deemed past the point of remediation. Because it is an active grave site, much of the land has been overturned by equipment with the exception of older plots which are grassed and treed along the northern and southern points. Remains of past site activity litter the ground such as shoes and clothing from the prior clothing factory and stadium seating which was donated to the prison yard for sports spectating.

SUNPATH DIAGRAM

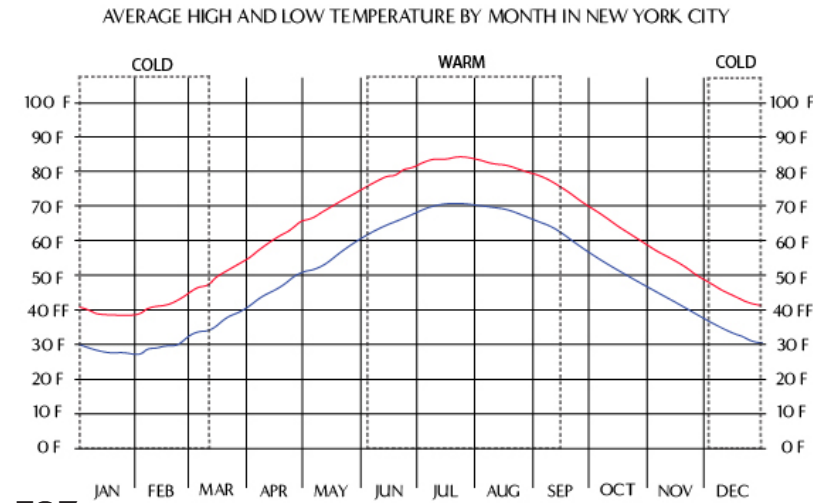
To the left is a graphical representation of the sun path diagram for New York City which depicts the lines for the summer and winter solstices.



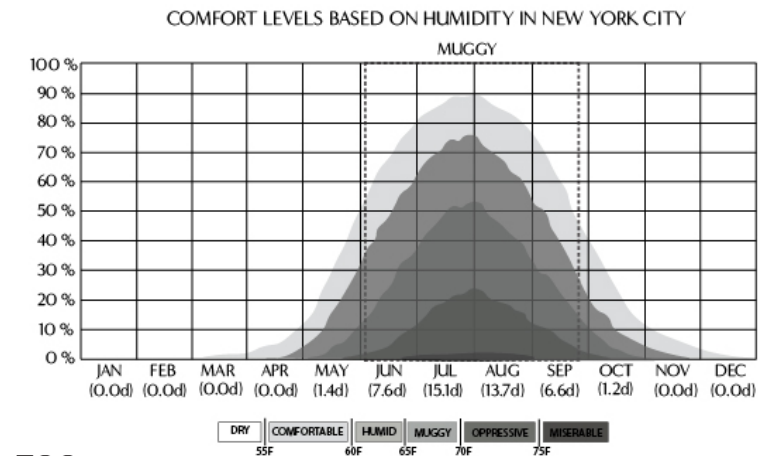
TRAFFIC & UTILITIES

Due to its secluded nature, there are little existing utilities on the site. There is a singular ferry dock on the West side of the island which escort visitors from City Island. There are unpaved walking paths which are remnants of prior site usage to direct people on the island and a fenced prison yard which houses equipment used to upkeep the site and prepare the ground for new burials.





F87

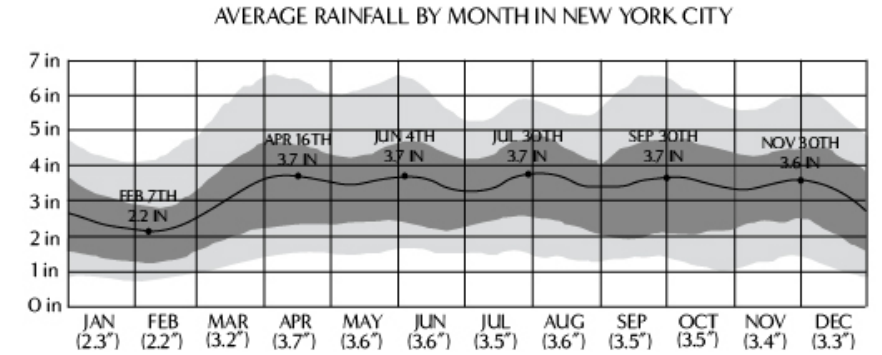


F88

To the left is a graphical representation of high and low temperature patterns throughout the year. The warm season begins in June and lasts approximately 3.5 months. The cold season begins in December and lasts approximately 3.3 months.

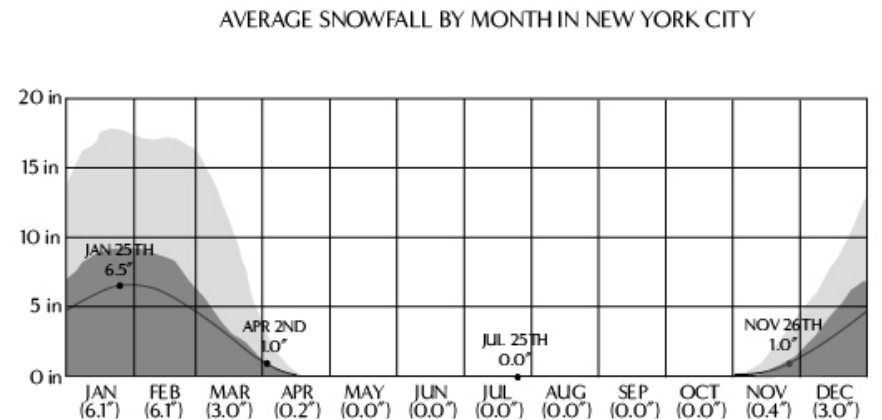
To the left is a graphical representation which gauges comfort level based on humidity. The muggy period begins in June and lasts approximately 3.8 Months until September.

To the right is a graphic representation of rainfall by month in New York City. Rain falls consistently during the spring and summer months averaging approximately 3.7 inches.



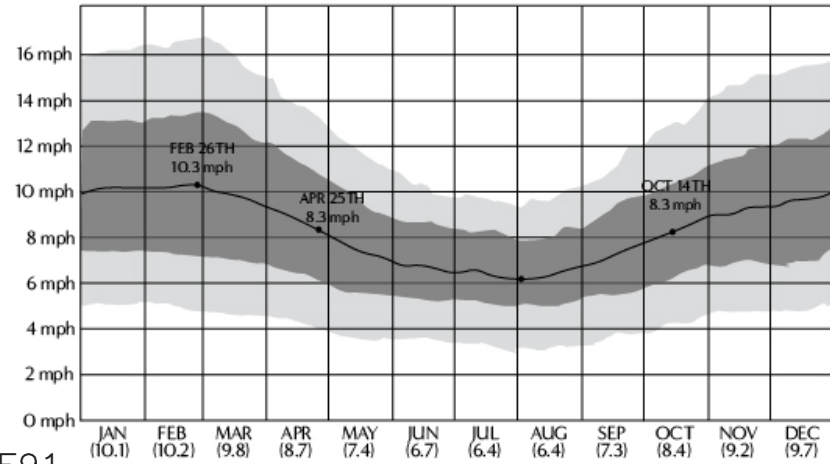
F89

To the right is a graphic representation of snowfall by month in New York City. The snowy period begins at the end of November and lasts approximately 4.2 months until the beginning of April.



F90

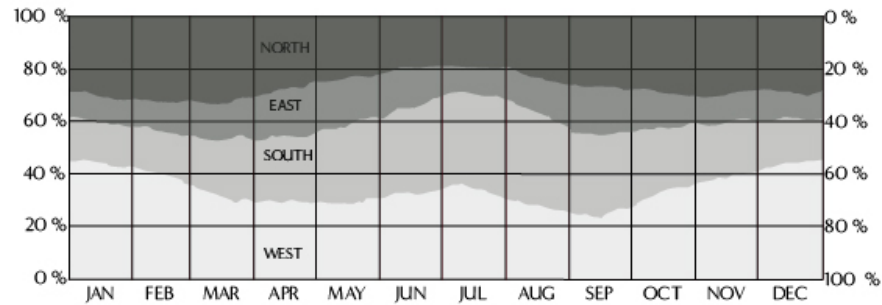
AVERAGE WIND SPEED IN NEW YORK CITY



F91

To the left is a graphical representation of average monthly wind speed in New York City. The windy part of the year begins in October and lasts approximately 6.4 months until April.

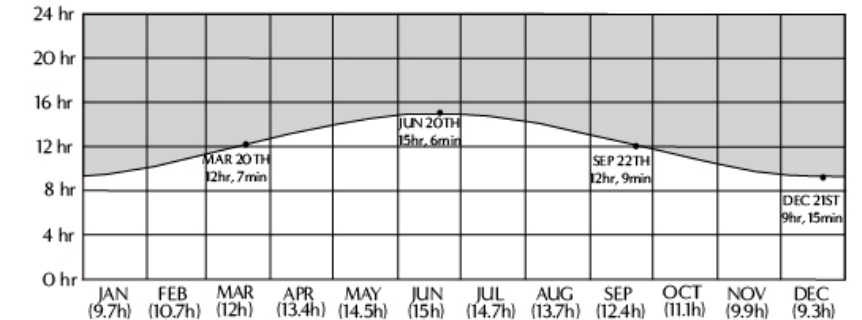
WIND DIRECTION IN NEW YORK CITY



F92

To the left is a graphical representation of average wind direction by month in New York City. The predominant direction varies throughout the year.

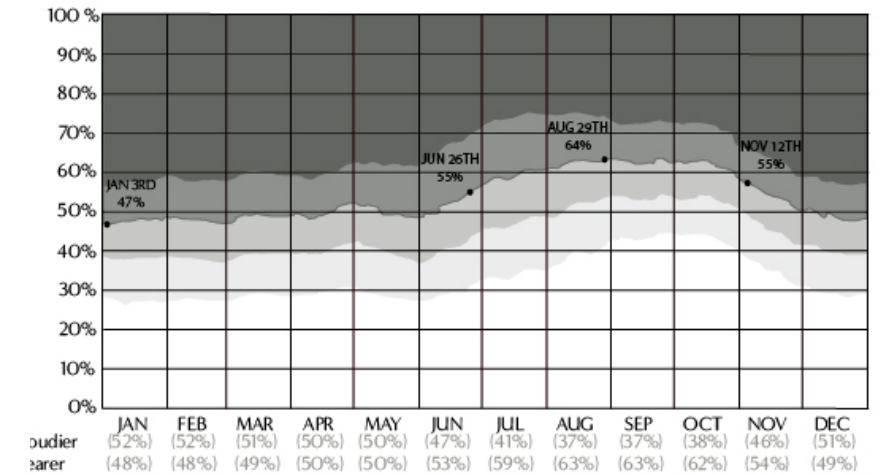
HOURS OF DAYLIGHT IN NEW YORK CITY



F93

To the right is a graphical representation for the hours of daylight per month in New York City. The shortest day of the year is December 21st lasting 9 hours and 15 minutes; the longest day of the year is June 20th, lasting approximately 15 hours and 6 minutes.

CLOUD COVER CATEGORIES BY PERCENTAGE IN NEW YORK CITY



F94

To the right is a graphical representation of cloud cover categories by month for New York City. The clearest part of the year begins in June and lasts approximately 4.6 months. The cloudier part of the year begins in November and lasts approximately 7.4 months.





F95

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA FOR THE THESIS PROJECT

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

SPACE ALLOCATION

The creation of space will play a major role in the design process. First and foremost, the design will have to not only accommodate but facilitate the program of the project; for example, a private mourning space for families, and sanctuary space for gatherings. Spatial relationships will also play a key role in design and can be determined through the use of an interaction matrix and analysis of the flow of people through the space.

BEHAVIORAL IMPACT

Behavioral impact will be best gauged by activity on the site; for example, a positive outcome would be an increase in overall visitation and usage as the site becomes accessible to families. Also noteworthy will be how visitors use and move through the space. Because most of the land is dedicated to burial, it will be important to design a considerate and intentional path to move visitors through the site. This will be best achieved through post occupancy evaluations.



PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The overarching and possibly most important goal of this project is to investigate how to positively impact the mourning process and experience. This will be important in the design process to strive to create an intentional, atmospheric space. This will be achieved highly through materiality, and well as influence of light, sight and sound. Measurements of this success would be best achieved through post occupancy surveys and analysis.

COST

Due to the existing infrastructure that the city is requesting to be removed or altered, the initial costs of the project will be significant. My goal is to stay within the \$50 million umbrella that has been promised by the city in addition to creating a design with passive and sustainable features to mitigate additional operation costs over the lifetime of the project.

In summary, it is important that my project be considerate to historical and personal elements of the site, while also supporting the programmatic activities. The predominant goal remains to facilitate the grieving process while also aiding in the conservation of memory.



F97

THE DESIGN

THE ARTEFACT:

Like Paul Ricoeur's concept of fiction in his work, *The Function of Fiction in Reshaping Reality*, the artefact works through the establishment of metaphors to introduce new and layered understandings of reality. This artefact works through the remaking of context and memory into a material reality. What is presented through the artefact and the chronologizing of death in essence is a work of fiction. It is a work of fiction in that it is a mimesis of death and also "changes reality in that it both "invents and discovers it" (Ricoeur, 1979). This is achieved through the continued reciprocity of fiction and metaphoric imagination. The semantic innovation of metaphor creates a 'display of images' but further reveals them through a reinterpretation of their representation. This gives further contour of meaning and further participates in its invention as often it is supplemented by lived experience. Whether it be the metaphoric layering of the fabric of flesh, the flame of the being or the fragments of memory, it is an "imaginative process" in which the viewer embarks, reexamines, and increases their construct of reality through the new combinations of simple images and the physical manifestation of the artefact before them.



In order to understand the importance of the process of grief, it is first necessary to consider why we grieve. In her article, *Embodying Death: Emotional Apprehension and Reversibilities of Flesh*, Suzanne Laba Cataldi moves us towards an answer to this question. In her article, Cataldi examines death and our embodiment of it through the context of the ontology of 'flesh' which has been put forth by French philosopher Maurice Merleau Ponty. In this context, flesh is an area of perception that so-called opposites can reverse with respect to each other, only because they are not opposite at all; they do in fact share a common ground. Flesh is a 'skin' or a 'fabric' into which our own enfleshed sensibilities are indivisibly interwoven.



F99

After the moment of mortal death, as the flesh of the dead and the flesh of the living meet, we are unable to know who is perceiving and who is being perceived; we fail to continue to recognize it as our own in the absence of its vitality. Horror arises within us in the presence of change and we begin to grieve the sensation of the familiar element which is lost. We are left with a conflict between the acceptance and the denial of the reality of loss as we begin to navigate the internal sensing of their presence and external realization of their absence. Parallel to the phenomena of phantom limb, we are unable to accept the absence of something whose presence we remain able to sense. Can we deny its reality if we are able to perceive it? My artefact seeks to address these questions, as it is the proposal of this artefact, that it is in the intimate moments of perception that we reverse and are stored within one another and are able to be resurrected through memory.

This physical manifestation began with the creation of hands; a sensitive limb which performs as we greet, as we comfort, and gesturally, as we communicate with one another. Our hands can both touch and be touched; hold and be held. They are intimate and intricate, and along with the face; they are often among the first to be concealed to obscure the identity of the deceased. Folded or raised, they are how we pray and open a portal between the mortal and the divine. The flesh of the hand is composed of white wax; a material that holds that capability to melt and to transform, to bind together and to seal. It is a manifestation of the living being, light a pure; curiously familiar.



In the final moments, the body is cloaked in death; obscuring its familiarity and omitting its mark of purity and finality, as was the the cloth which was wrapped around the body of Christ by Joseph as he collected him from Pilate, and laid him to rest in the tomb where he would later rise again. Like flesh, the fabric is an intricate weaving of strands and senses in which we are all enmeshed in which the immortal part of the being is transferred on to the other.

To signify the process of passing, a flame is ignited; burning from below marking the passing of time and the movement of energy from one side to another. It is a flash of light amidst darkness and a signifier of the next world. As it nears the flesh, it transforms the body, melting it, burning it and transferring it to the chasm which awaits below in another. As birth comes as a spark of life, fire becomes the symbolic reversal of birth and allows the spirit to be set free. As the sole element capable of being conjured by humans, a connection or portal is created between the mortals and the gods.



As the flame of body, and of memory, continues to burn, its fragments are collected in the void below where it is to be held and cherished. What is absent above becomes present below as the void is filled with the weaving of time and of memory as the being is resigned to their final resting place within. What emerges is a melding of fragments, recreated and reintroduced in their new form.

As the bodies have been amassed and their flames extinguished by secrecy, a call awaits for the excavation of memory and the admittance of family to carry them through their passing phase.

Unearthed from the masses, the fragments are aligned to be reexamined as their own individual being where they await a reunification and a remaking of their memory into the present world. As mourners enter, mass flame awaits before them, a memorial for the shared loss and the grouping of tragedy which has laid waste the land. A piece of this flame is then carried by the mourners to each fragment, separating their memory from that of the masses and contouring the life of the individual before them. It is the reignition of life as the flame of one being is carried through to another and a gateway reemerges between the living and the dead. It is through this interactive process of mourning which opens a dialogue between the mourned and the mourner, and reclaimed the fragments of one inside the other; remade and realized in a new way.



DESIGN TRANSLATION

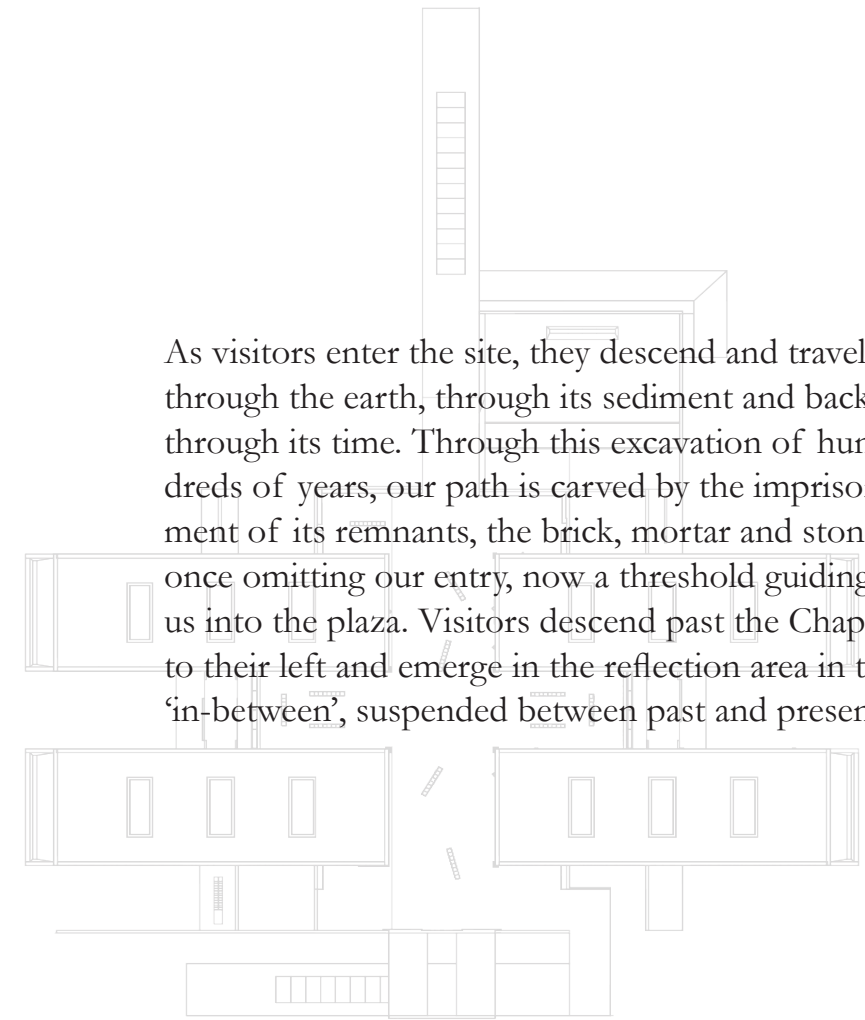
Much like the rubble of 9/11, or the spoils of St. Peter's previously discussed in Federicca Goffi's conversations on preservation, Hart Island is tattered with the remnants of the past, hollow shells of what once was, and pillars of its atrocities. As it lays in neglect, so too do the lives of those interred below, unmarked and unacknowledged. The question remains; in preserving the lives lived, how do we preserve the essence of their story while allowing for the continuation of a new one? How do we pay homage to the dead while acknowledging the wrongdoings of their keeper? How can we best preserve through a continued presence of memory?

We begin with an inverse of story, the mass of the old becoming the void of the new, interring the pain which it induced and allowing an insight beyond the visible. What is left behind is a fissure of the earth, a grave for the past and the possibility of reciprocity as the tips of its fingers yearn for one another, now able to share in a narrative





F106

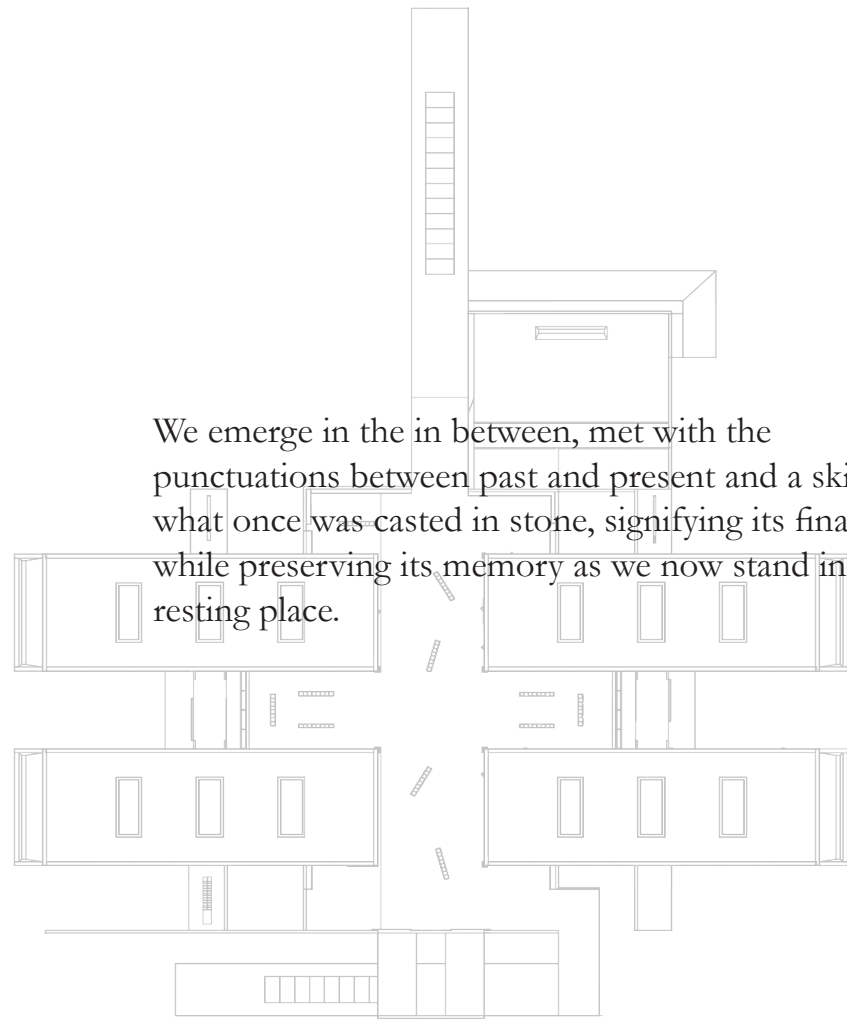


As visitors enter the site, they descend and travel through the earth, through its sediment and back through its time. Through this excavation of hundreds of years, our path is carved by the imprisonment of its remnants, the brick, mortar and stone once omitting our entry, now a threshold guiding us into the plaza. Visitors descend past the Chapel to their left and emerge in the reflection area in the 'in-between', suspended between past and present.



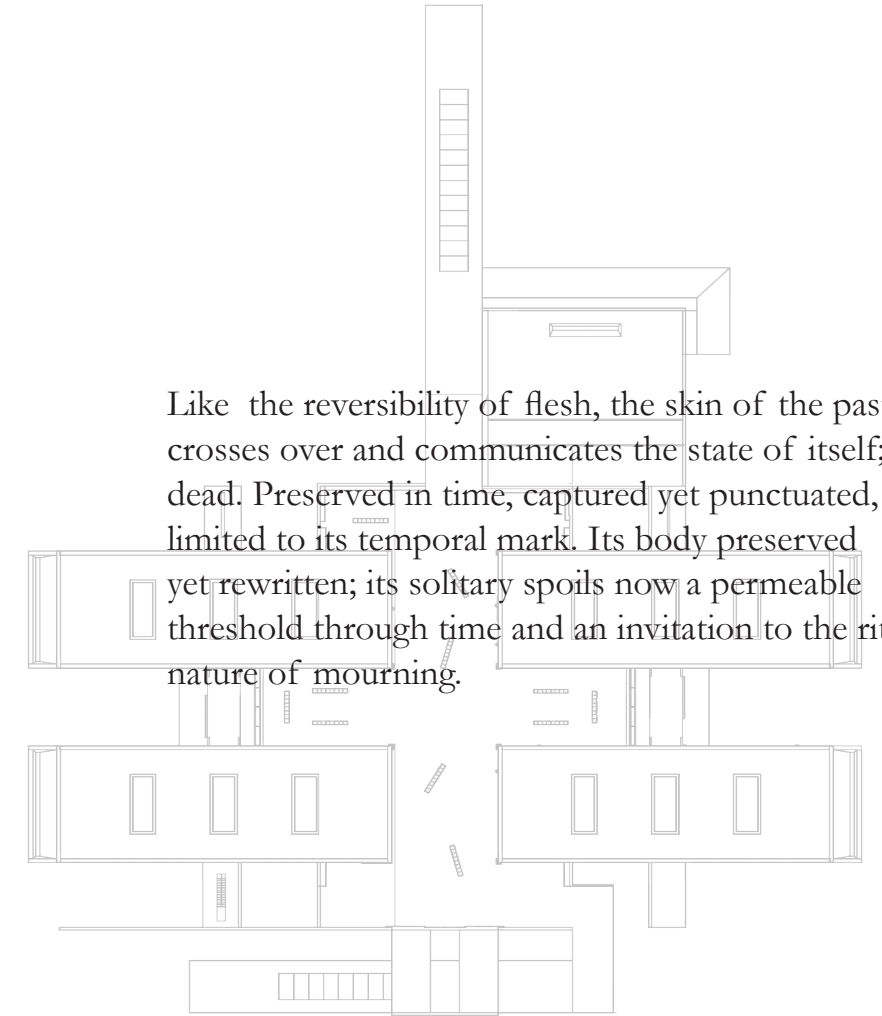
F107

We emerge in the in between, met with the punctuations between past and present and a skin of what once was casted in stone, signifying its finality while preserving its memory as we now stand in its resting place.





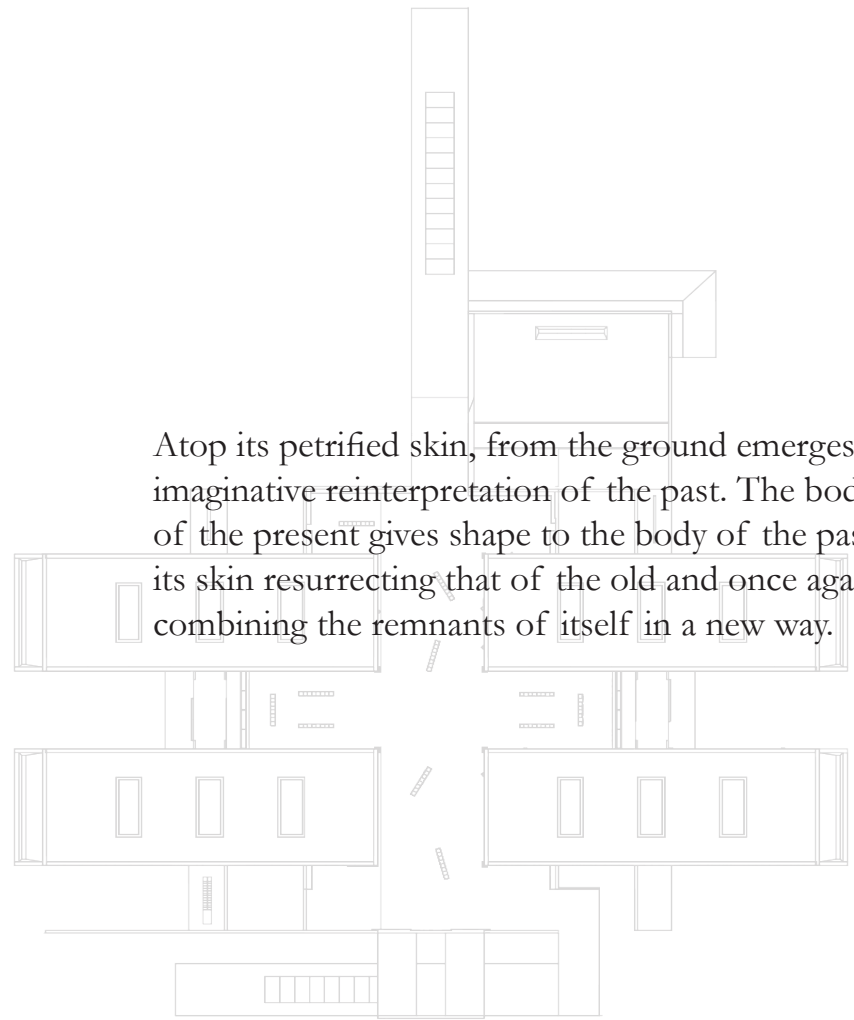
F108



Like the reversibility of flesh, the skin of the past crosses over and communicates the state of itself; dead. Preserved in time, captured yet punctuated, limited to its temporal mark. Its body preserved yet rewritten; its solitary spoils now a permeable threshold through time and an invitation to the ritual nature of mourning.



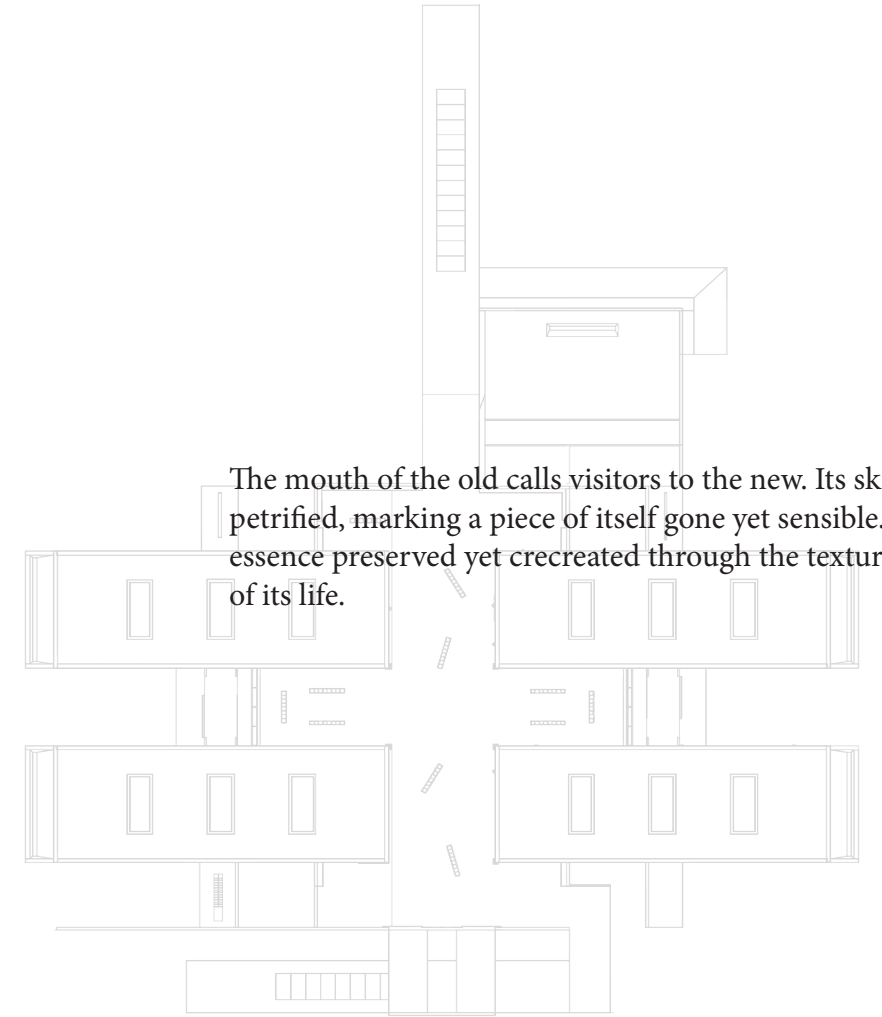
F109



Atop its petrified skin, from the ground emerges an imaginative reinterpretation of the past. The body of the present gives shape to the body of the past; its skin resurrecting that of the old and once again combining the remnants of itself in a new way.



E110



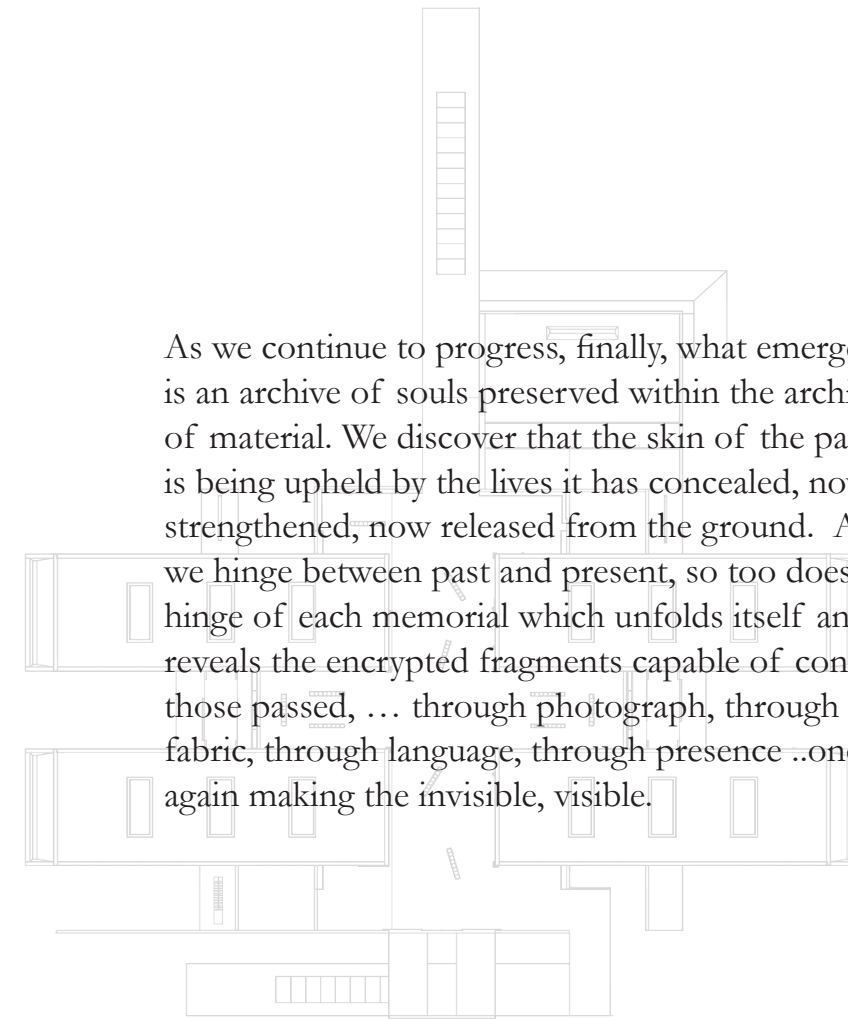
The mouth of the old calls visitors to the new. Its skin petrified, marking a piece of itself gone yet sensible. Its essence preserved yet recreated through the textures of its life.



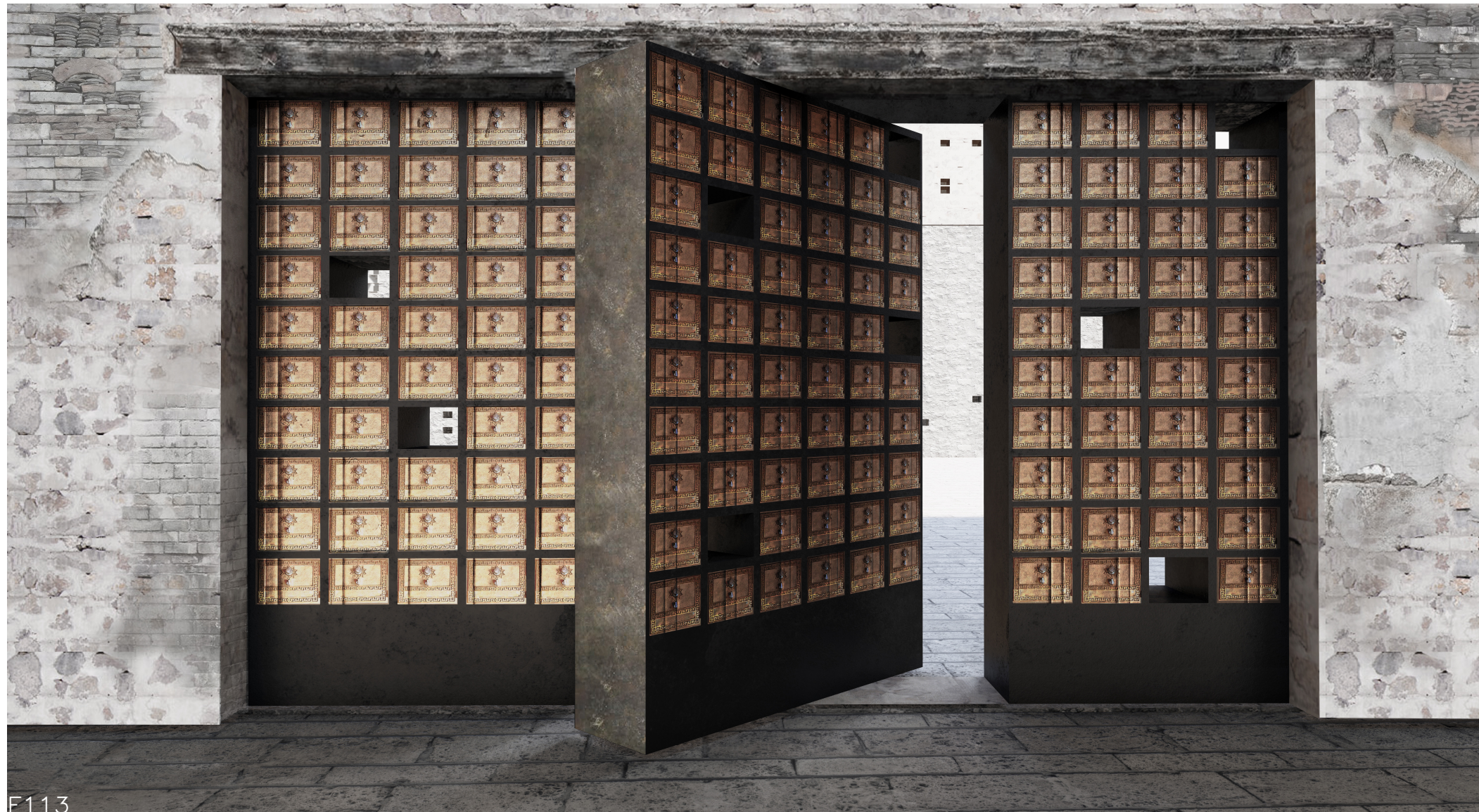
As we crossover; through the skin, hinging between past and present; the now and the then, through the labyrinth haze of mourning, to the east we are invited to a gathering space. A space for mourning, and sharing; allowing our memories to be shared with on another, growing in their narrative, strengthening their presence and solidifying their place within the beating hearts of another.



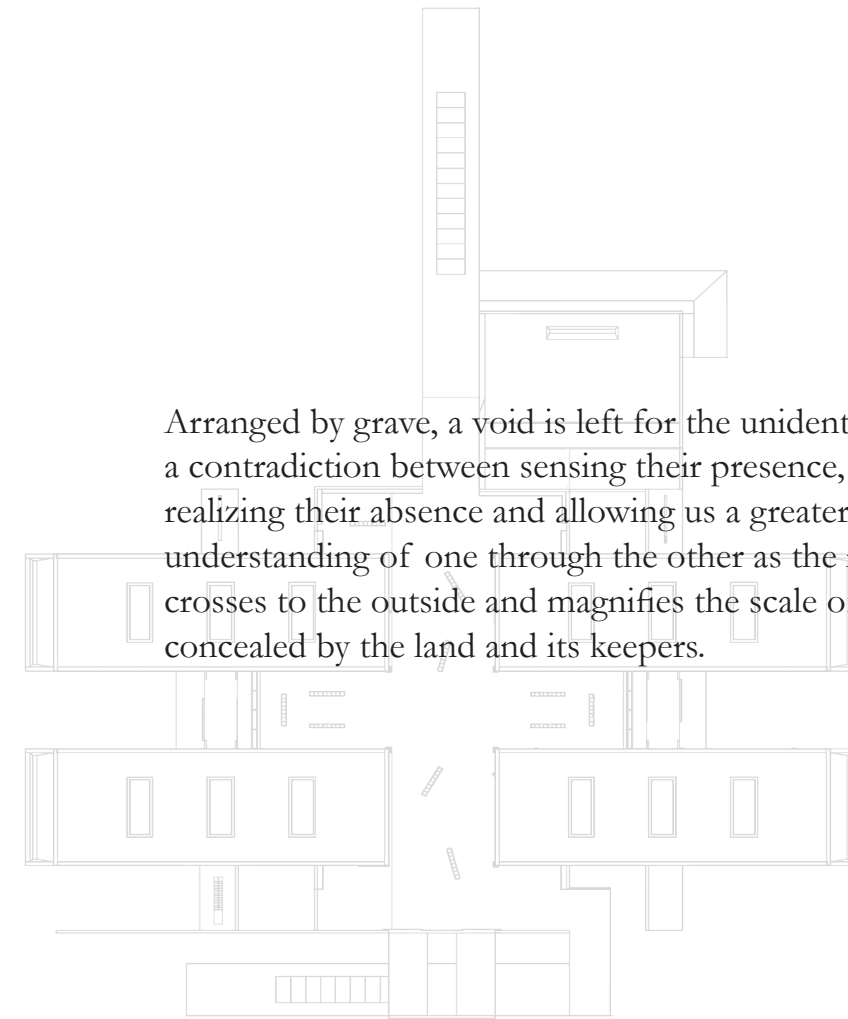
F112



As we continue to progress, finally, what emerges is an archive of souls preserved within the archive of material. We discover that the skin of the past is being upheld by the lives it has concealed, now strengthened, now released from the ground. As we hinge between past and present, so too does the hinge of each memorial which unfolds itself and reveals the encrypted fragments capable of conjuring those passed, ... through photograph, through fabric, through language, through presence ..once again making the invisible, visible.



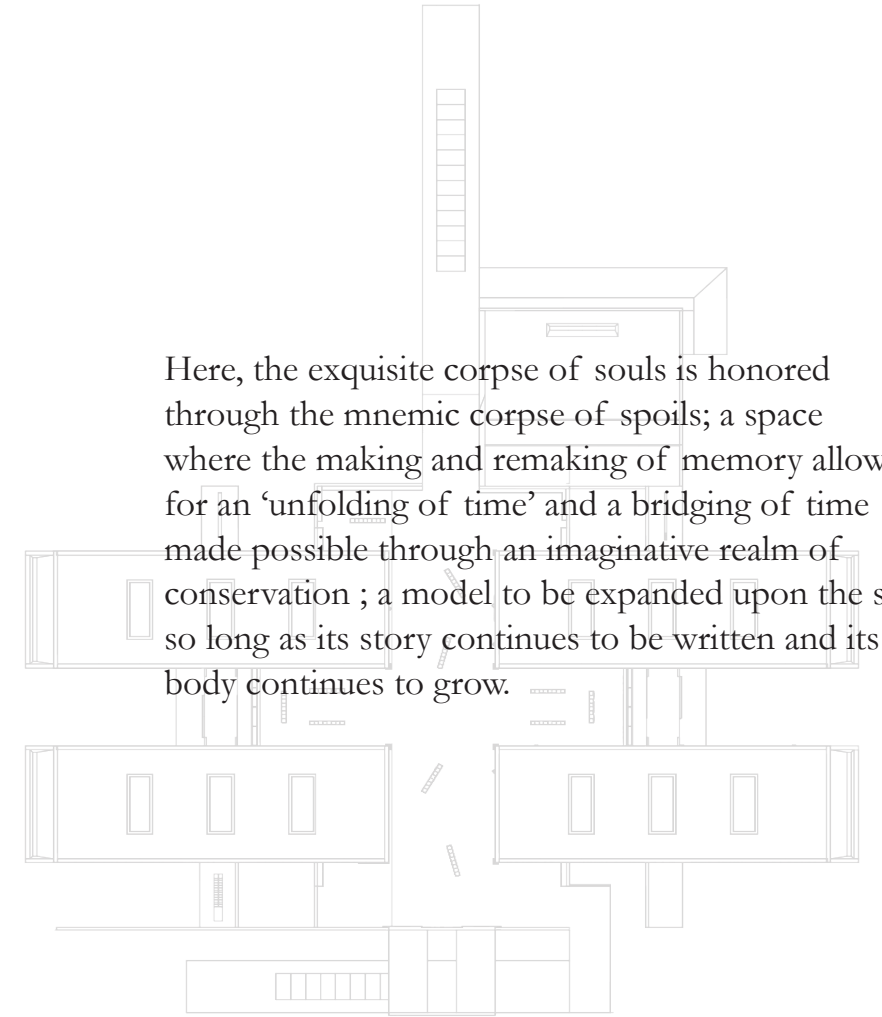
F113



Arranged by grave, a void is left for the unidentified, a contradiction between sensing their presence, and realizing their absence and allowing us a greater understanding of one through the other as the inside crosses to the outside and magnifies the scale of loss concealed by the land and its keepers.



F114



Here, the exquisite corpse of souls is honored through the mnemonic corpse of spoils; a space where the making and remaking of memory allow for an 'unfolding of time' and a bridging of time made possible through an imaginative realm of conservation ; a model to be expanded upon the site so long as its story continues to be written and its body continues to grow.



whether it be through encrypted fragment, through cherished image, through intricate texture, it is as Cataldi reminds us, that “When memories blur and blot our vision, when we swallow that ‘lump’ in our throat, or hear that ‘crack’ in our voices, we can emotionally perceive that loved ones are behind it, that they are still there, still intermingled. Intermingling with us, as they have been - all along. These moments of heartfelt recollection are a gift of grief”. (Cataldi, 1997). It is this gift of grief that has been regiven to the lives and loved ones of Hart Island.

FINAL PRESENTATION

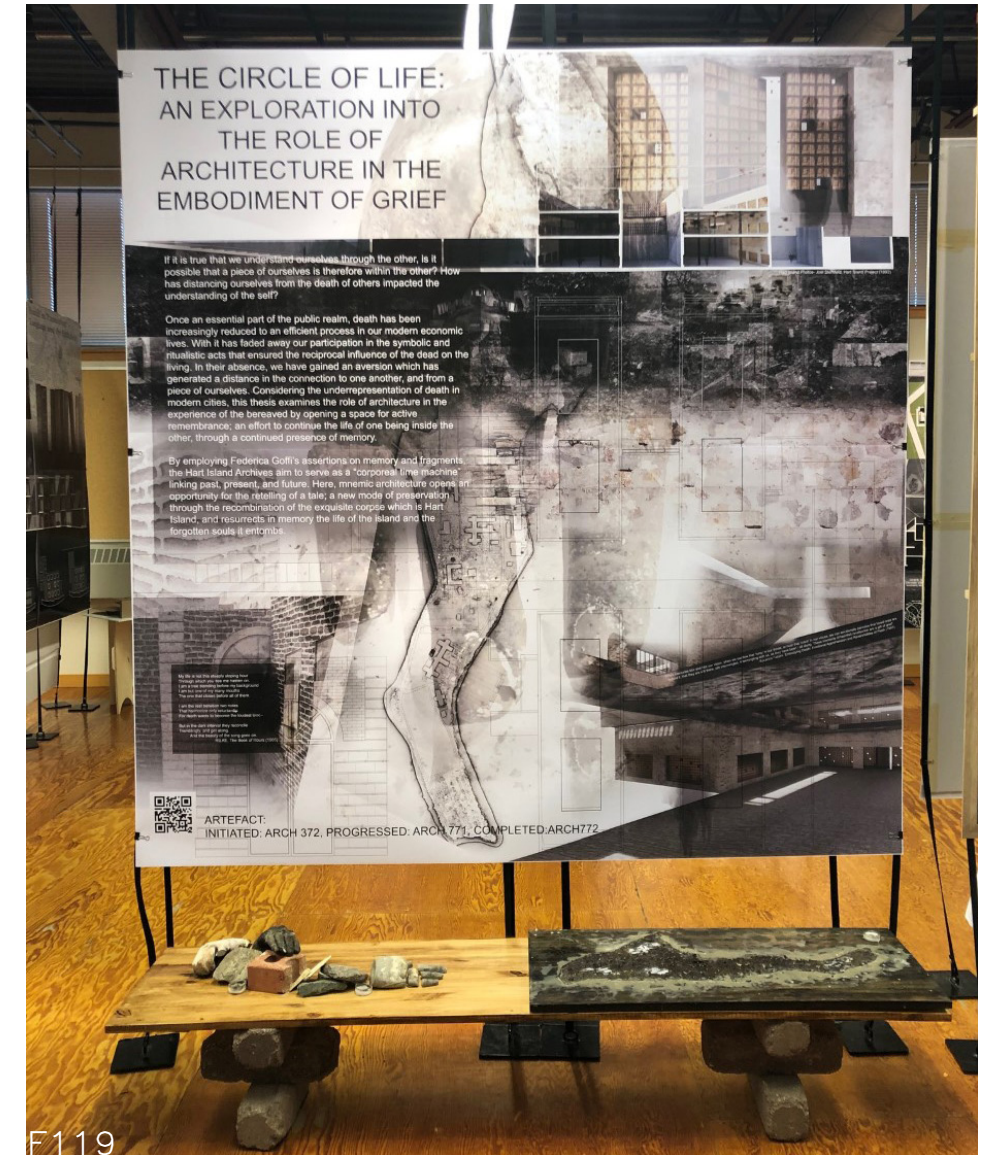
In the spring of 2022, our final thesis presentations were conducted on the fifth floor of renaissance hall in front of students and faculty. My presentation was reviewed by the Department of Architecture Chair Dr. Susan Kliman and invited critic Professor Christopher Bardt of the Rhode Island School of Design in conjunction with my thesis advisor Dr. Stephen Wischer. This digital presentation consisted of stories and images shared in this thesis document as a supplement to physical boards.



F117



F118



F119



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Finally, above all, thank you to my classmates who have been there for every late night and early morning, who have become family and who have created memories that I will cherish for a lifetime. My love for you all runs deeper than you will ever know.





Ashton Barta, MA, LEED Green Associate

PREVIOUS STUDIO EXPERIENCE

SECOND YEAR 2018–2019

Fall: Darryl Booker

Meditation Garden | Moorhead, MN

Boathouse | Minneapolis, MN

Spring: Cindy Urness

Small Dwelling | Marfa, TX

Multi-Family Mixed-Use | Fargo, ND

THIRD YEAR: 2019–2020

Fall: Niloufar Alenjery

Hyde Park Cultural Center | Chicago, IL

Spring: Niloufar Alenjery

Vertical Cemetery | Shanghai, China

Bismarck Capital Office | Bismarck, ND

FOURTH YEAR: 2020–2021

Fall: Amar Hussein

Reverence, Miami High Rise | Miami, FL

Spring: Kristi Hanson

Marvin Windows Competition | Pelican Rapids, MN

A ViSion For Medora | Medora, ND

FIFTH YEAR: 2021–2022

Thesis Advisor: Stephen Wischer

Circle Of Life: Role Of Architect In The Embodiment Of Grief

