

Workshop, On Cemeteries

**ca. 10–19 February 2022
Mendrisio**



*La Villette.
Islands of the moon picnic grounds under cherry, almond, pear, apple blossom of 1982.
AUS. January 1984*

'Perspective of hillock of pools at the picnic islands. Each island can be rented for picnic groups or for fishing in the gently flowing water'; Alison Smithson, Parc de la Villette (Competition Entry), Paris, France, 1982–84

... Not an example related to a cemetery per se, but we are interested in this sort of creative thinking about landscapes and how they can be re-imagined for contemporary life.

The English word, *burial*, is etymologically related to *barrow*, *burrow*, and then *borough*, implicating that a singular interment or collective mound for the dead is connected to the foundations of a living community. Italian words such as *tomba* and *tumulare* derive from a Greek root originally meaning *to swell*. The ground of the earth literally rises. Naturally, and also often culturally, our deaths thereby affect an alteration of our physical environment. In a time when the influence of formalised religious moral values has waned, how do we rediscover an adequate and dignified setting for the ritual of mourning? Should we search for and approach a more universal solution through an exploration of historical, pre-Christian customs of antiquity? Would this assist us in then incorporating all religious groups, as is the case in our multicultural communities? When there is a lack of commitment or desire to care for the upkeep of individual graves, what can a group memorial be; moreover, what are the inherent and potential advantages of such? What is the current relation of a cemetery to the city? In the early 20th century, there was an impetus towards considering urban cemeteries *also* as parks of recreation for the living – is this still in accord with our thoughts today? If not precisely the case, what is the appropriate image to create for our contemporary outlook? What is the character of a place which can absorb a dynamic range of thoughts and emotions, from the desire for calm mourning of the dead, to a hastened awareness of our own mortality?

Why such a workshop?

A movement in Germany has developed in recent years considering new ideas, forms, and rituals of burials and cemeteries, caused by major changes in behavior as well as needs of the society. Individual or family graves and tombs have transformed into group burial grounds which are taken care of by a community. Tragic and/or young deaths are dealt with in an even more specific way. This is strongly effecting the character and work within cemeteries. Communities react individually to deal with each situation. From all over Germany, this movement, a group of people engaged with cemeteries through their everyday work, is now searching to formulate potential answers. Anna Staudt, a stonemason based in Düsseldorf, involved in these seminars, has now requested my advice. I in turn ask anyone curious to help out in discussing and developing contemporary ideas regarding specific fragments of cemeteries and eventually presenting them in model form (1:10, 20, 33, 50, 100 et. al). We would think about the aspects in a typological manner, but consider a specific, existing cemetery in Düsseldorf as the theoretical place of intervention.

Exhibition

There is the intention that the work and models would be exhibited publicly.

Costs

Basic model materials will be covered. So for participants, you would need to organise yourselves to arrive and stay in Mendrisio for the period. Best if everyone could bring any model-making tools they have. For anyone not a student at AAM, we could possibly arrange a few places to stay, with kind hosts.

What would we do?

In reality, if cemeteries in Germany would implement any such adjustments, they would most likely do so in a surgical, fragmentary manner. Therefore for our study, we propose to break down topics into parts of concentration as well. These might include:

- Entrance gate, place**
- Flower shop, café**
- Arrangement of burial plots in a field**
- Arrangement of burial plots in a forest**
- Collective gravesites**
- Place to access water**
- Place to take cover in a storm**
- Place to meditate away from graves, et. al**

An example

We can look at the problem of an entrance – considering the arrival of guests for a funeral ceremony. In Germany, typically many people drive; then they get out of the car. They don't want to go into the cemetery alone or in their small group yet, so they wait ... standing in the parking lot, next to their cars (or worse, if raining, inside their cars). Others follow suit, and people feel the need to make some small-talk or confront others in a light manner, so they stick around here – in the end, without realising it, the initial point in the ritual is the parking lot – a situation that few would agree is ideal ...

Would it be possible then that a nearby gate could be more than just a clear threshold – and become a place in itself? A place people know they can wait in a dignified manner, covered from the rain or sun, and between the two worlds?

Working

Depending on the number of participants, each person would concentrate alone or in a pair to develop one of the above fragments, although involved in discussing all.

Guests

Emilie Appercé, Architect, www.emilieapperce.com

Marianne Meister, Architect, www.svnm.eu

Anna Staudt, Stonemason, www.meyer-staudt.de

(tentative) Liviu VasIU, Architect, www.grillovasiu.com

... others to be defined

Sign-up

We imagine a group of approximately 12-20 people. For interest to participate, please write, with a small (10 MB) portfolio attached, by 12 January, via email:

logan@atelier-amont.ch

Questions?

In case you have questions, or could only participate for part of the period, please get in contact.

If new, extreme lockdown measures come into effect, we would postpone the workshop.

www.atelier-amont.ch