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INTERSTICES 23

Missing you already: Losing the love of the unhomely homes of the dead

Introduction: Heterotopia, death, and landscapes of love

Cemeteries are landscapes created to hold the physical remains of people who have died. They are also places that reflect cultural processes. Foucault theorises cemeteries as heterotopias, spaces that are ordinary and institutional, but also disturbing in their otherness.¹ According to Foucault, their uncanny duality describes a world within a world, reflecting but at the same time distorting what lies outside.² This inherent duplicity forms the foundation of cemeteries' cultural meanings, as places where enduring expressions of love, grief, and longing intersect with death, decay, and horror.

Modern cemeteries are typically arranged as microcosms of a living city.³ Structured to support rituals of visitation and remembrance and create a permanent home for the dead visited by the living. Materially temporal but conceptually eternal, cemeteries embody an unsettling tension with memory, time, and meaning. Landscapes built to preserve memory change and decay almost as soon as they are established. Academics David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi discuss weathering as “the gradual destruction of buildings by nature,”⁴ asserting this as a desirable attribute of structures intended to undergo transformation over time. Cemeteries are heterotopic in the ways they juxtapose time and reality, combining notions of permanence, perpetuity, and continuity, with death, the ephemeral, and expiration.

Burial rites are sometimes used to reach back into the past to construct narratives of admiration and honour guiding contemporary remembrance of individuals. In other cases, the histories of those interred have been forgotten, even as the physical commemorative markers and cemeteries have been maintained and preserved. Fear of illness and contagion has led to the modern conditions of burial places displaced from the homes of the living, located on the outskirts and outside the “city wall.” According to Foucault, this “radical isolation” lends a deviant quality to the dead, who remain present in the memory of the living but must be contained and separated.⁵ These unsettling tensions and the various ways they symbolically and physically manifest across cultures, religions, and historical epochs, create fascinating distinctions in cemetery landscapes.