

Abstract

The theoretical argument not only informs the architectural language, but also the selection of an appropriate programme. The following section considers the relationship between the theoretical position of the contemporary philosopher Mark C. Taylor and the selection of an appropriate programme.

problem statement

Death Denial

Modernus, the Latin for the word modern which means "just now", is, as suggested by Malevich the negation of the past so as to affirm the present (Taylor 1992, 50). Abstraction, purification, negation of every figure, signifier, and above all the past contributes to Modernism's affirmation of the present, the new and the original, yet the ceaseless quest for originality implies an inherent primitive desire. Nietzsche calls this negation of the past "creative forgetting", but "Modernity remains inseparably bound to the very past against which it struggles to define itself". (ibid) The denial of the past disassociates the present being from that which has shaped and defined it, whether the individual or society (Wass 1979, p.41). The impact, of those who have died, on those living in the present is therefore undeniable. The isolation of the dead from the living is perhaps the result of a deeper issue rooted in a philosophical paradigm.

The dominant scientism and agnosticism of our times leads to a more difficult experience of death (Wass 1979, p.40). The search for absolute truth by means of rational reasoning and science, being a preoccupation of Modernism, leads to myth being replaced by fact and religion by technology. According to Wass (1979), we find ourselves living in a society that increasingly finds itself without a credal or mythic framework in which to understand life and interpret death. In the case of Modernism, if through purification and abstraction this absolute were to be attained, all uncertainty and unpredictability would vanish under its light. Yet, death and the afterlife is a mystery which rationality could never unfold, but which can only be explained by myth and religion. The presence of the unpredictable is real and undeniable

Mark Taylor's critique of the archaeoteological process of both Modernism and Modernist Postmodernism, which were supposed to culminate in the reconciliation with the "Real", suggests that neither calls into question the assumptions and conclusions of theoesthetics. (term used by Taylor throughout *Disfiguring* which refers to the process of defining absolute beauty) Taylor suggests that the third guise of disfiguring "neither erases nor absolutizes the figure but enacts what Freud describes as the process of 'denegation' through which the repressed or refused (death) returns" (Taylor 1992, p.230).

The re-introduction of burial space within the confines of the city therefore not only considers a practical and spatial problem, but extends into the theoretical domain of contemporary philosophy. Death is part of that which was refused and by the establishment of the urban cemetery, that which was deliberately forgotten returns

Refuse

The following section deals with the concept of refuse and its application by means of the selection of an appropriate programme and site.

Programme

"Architecture will define the places where reality meets fantasy, reason meets madness, life meets death". (Taylor, 242)

The *Oxford Dictionary* (1976) defines refuse as: "What is rejected as worthless or left-over after use."

The process of negation through purification negates the excessive, figurative, myth, irrational, erotic etc., so as to enter the direct presence of the sacred and the absolute. Mark Rothko applied the process of abstraction, a certain sacrificial act which disposes of all that is excessive or superfluous, in his paintings. Yet, his suicide in February 1970 perhaps suggests that all hope was lost when his expectations of discovering the "absolute" by means of purification was shattered. Perhaps he found that nothing was indeed no-thing.

The lesson perhaps best learnt through a study of Modernism and Modernist Postmodernism is that they "share nostalgia for the perfect moment in which all distinctions and oppositions coincide fully and completely. In addition both rely on Hegelian abrogation and the idea of the double negation." Taylor (1992) suggests that this perfect moment is forever deferred: perfect union does not exist because of the existence of an elusive, extraneous third, the "between". Derrida's "différance", "chora", the space between polar oppositions, "is not only the necessary condition for their existence, but also breaks down the pretensions to completeness of the respective poles of all oppositions" (Goosen 2001, p.109).

The juxtaposing of the abrogated and preferred expresses the imperfect world through which presence appears as it disappears through the "cracks, faults and fissures" between that which is juxtaposed; presence is forever deferred in the "between". The return of the abrogated or refused makes apparent these cracks and fissures, necessary for the existence of both the negated and preferred.

The uncomfortable juxtaposition of life and its polar opposite, death, brings forth and illuminates "différance", the elusive third

which fragments any possibility of perfect unity. Through the cracks and fissures which separate life and death, our imperfect world becomes an insuperable void in which presence appears through its disappearance

A spatial problem

The custom of placing cemeteries outside of the city boundaries, mostly owing to health reasons, originated as early as 1804 when Napoleon required every city to establish a cemetery at a distance of at least 35 to 40 metres from the city boundaries (Harries 1998, p.295). The isolation of the dead from the living will be discussed under the heading 'Death Denial'.

The practice of placing cemeteries outside of the city boundaries resulted in the escalation of a spatial problem. Their distance, which necessitates much travelling, in our contemporary society that revolves around convenience, increases its isolation. The lack of people visiting the space isolates it even further. The space where the dead are buried itself dies.

As the city grows, the cemetery, using the Hero's Acre as an example, is often left within the confines of the fabric. The time it took for the city to surround the cemetery, longer than a generation in this instance, resulted in the simultaneous depletion of burial space. The result is that the cemetery is located on valuable land better suited for other, perhaps commercial, purposes. Figures 009 and 010 illustrate the development around the Hero's Acre cemetery.



Figure 009: Plan of Pretoria 1887



Figure 010: Recent Aerial photograph of Pretoria.

The need to address the spatial issues surrounding cemeteries is clear and the development of a new typology more sensitive to these issues is crucial. The economic and environmental benefits of cremation as compared to burial, including statistical evidence indicating a growing demand for cremation among some religious groups in South Africa, support the feasibility of providing such a facility. (Statistics)

Site (Theoretical)

"Residual space is sometimes awkward. Like structural poché, it is seldom economic. It is always leftover, inflected toward something more important beyond itself." (Taylor 1992, p.230)

The places where natural features meet built forms are, as Taylor suggests, sometimes awkward. The free organic form of the Apies River that snakes through the rigid city grid and the buildings which respond to this grid create these awkward spaces between the river and buildings. Figure 011 illustrates this concept.

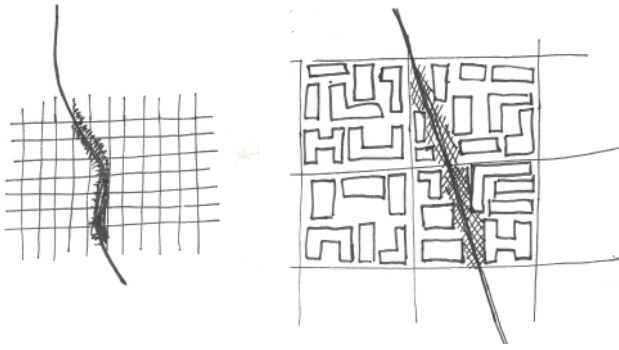


Figure 011: Visual diary sketch of residual segments as a result of natural features meeting a rigid city grid.

The site comprises a segment left over between the Apies River and the boundary wall of the Drie Lelies buildings: it is a residual space, a space which gathers waste and criminal activity. The inescapable waste, the excrement upon which modernism turns its face, constitutes a prominent quality of the site which defines its condition.

The site's awkward dimensions and linearity render the segment unusable in terms of economic development. Through the eyes of the utilitarian observer the site is useless, like waste left over after the completion of the production process. The leftover segment is the wound through which the modernist body drains its idealistic blood. The celebration of this wound by making an architectural intervention brings forth the juxtaposition through which the cracks, tears and fissures of our complex, imperfect world become apparent

Furthermore, the theoretical concept of the site's existence as an edge or border justifies its feasibility for the purpose of establishing a burial facility. The significance of the site as edge is discussed in further detail throughout the context and site analysis

Site (Practical)

The site's locality, between the high-density residential areas of Berea and Sunnyside, furnishes the necessary large population to sustain an urban cemetery. Furthermore, census data reveals that the majority of the population belongs to the Christian Faith, which according to Elion (2001) makes use of both cremation and

conventional burial as a means of burying the deceased.

Sufficient pedestrian activity through the site is important to ensure utilization of the facility by means of reducing its total isolation from the public realm. Activity centres such as the Oost-Eind Primary School and the proposed Nelson Mandela Development Corridor contribute to the intensity of pedestrian movement through and around the site. Pedestrian and vehicular movement is discussed in further detail below, in the context analysis, meso-scale section.



Figure 012: Land uses surrounding site

The project, being an urban cemetery and memorial, therefore incorporates use and experience as a convergence and juxtaposition of life's dualisms, while simultaneously juxtaposing the dualism of death and life itself.

With the appropriateness of the programme and site justified, the following step in the project is to understand the site in terms of the physical and theoretical contexts. The connection between them will inform the design responses relevant to both of them. The context will be considered on the macro, meso and micro scale in the following sections.