

Figure 028: Concept Sketch, implying the notion of discontinuity

Theoretical Precedent Studies

Theoretical precedents introduction

The following discussion focuses on precedents which translate deconstructivist theory into architectural form. These precedents will act as a guiding tool throughout the design process, informing decisions at different scales of development. The production of meaning or lack thereof is considered so as to determine an appropriate design response to the theoretical context. The precedents will include the Wexner Centre for the Visual Arts by the American architect Peter Eisenman and Parc de la Villette by the Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi. The respective methodologies they have employed will be briefly considered and compared so as to determine their position in relation to the production of meaning.

Wexner Centre-Peter Eisenman

The influence of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida on the work of American architect Peter Eisenman is probably most evident in his design of the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts. In Eisenman's more contemporary designs the notion of the inassimilable other finds its concrete expression.

According to Taylor (1992), Eisenman begins by disfiguring. The centre occurs between two buildings, the Mershon Auditorium and Weigel Hall. By means of cutting the link between these buildings Eisenman opens the time-space of the "between" in which the Wexner centre is suspended (Taylor 1992, p.262). This is, as Venturi (1977) describes, a residual space. The river which metaphorically separates the realms of the living and the dead seems to gain a new relevance to which the present design should respond. The river as a boundary that opens the time-space of the "between" can now be viewed as the crack or fissure through which the "between" appears by means of its disappearance.

Eisenman's utilization of architectural elements to communicate his theoretical stance is most evident in his design of the towers and grid. These elements will be briefly analyzed so as to determine what they refer to.

The tower:

Eisenman uses structure and figure against themselves so as to dislocate Modern and Modernist Postmodern architecture as if from within (Taylor 1992, p.263). The tower, viewed from a specific angle, seems to be perfect, yet as one moves around it and the point of vision changes it appears broken and fragmented. The split stable structure embodies an interesting irony. Eisenman cleverly constructed a symbol which refers directly to the authoritarian, hierarchical structures of Modernism, yet the symbol (or the negated 'other' in the case of modernism) fragments these structures, dislocating them from within. In this instance the figure fragments the abstract, while the reverse seems to occur in the use of the grid.



Figure 029: The Wexner Centre towers (Ghirardo 2004, p. 80)

The grid:

The grid, which conventionally serves the purpose of a functional element indicating direction for the purpose of orientation, especially in urban planning, is used decoratively in the Wexner Centre. The method employed, in which Eisenman's grids double and redouble, disorientates and confuses the observer and disallows the possibility of determining any orienting axes. Furthermore the load-bearing ability of the grid in modernist buildings is also used decoratively in Eisenman's building, where the grid bears nothing but itself.

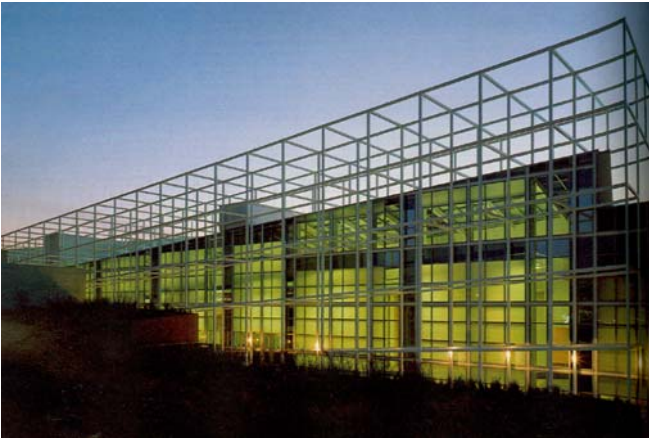


Figure 030: The Wexner Centre grid exterior view (Ghirardo 2004, p. 80)



Figure 031: Interior view of the Wexner Centre (Ghirardo 2004, p. 85)

It is therefore evident in the Wexner Centre that Eisenman uses the elements of both Modernism and Modernist Postmodernism in such a way that they seem to disentangle and fragment each other, as if from within. Eisenman intelligently communicates the "between" which appears through the cracks, tears and fissures of his juxtapositions.

The thread which connects surrealism and deconstruction is found in the exploitation of the rejected other through the process of denegation in which the "repressed returns to disrupt and disorder systems and structures of control" (Taylor 1992, p.248). Surrealism is defined as the "pure psychic automatism by means of which one sets out to express, verbally, in writing, or in any

other manner the real functioning of thought without any control by reason or any aesthetic or moral preoccupation" (Fleming 1995, p.607). In the design of Parc de La Villette Bernard Tschumi's association with the surrealist artists becomes apparent.

Tschumi's standpoint on the production of meaning as suggested by Mark Taylor is "to stimulate rather than to repress multiple meanings; Tschumi attempts to erase the preprogrammed program by shifting the locus of the production of meaning from the masterful architect to a plurality of readers" (Taylor 1992, p. 251). Meaning must therefore be produced rather than discovered. Tschumi's disjunctive strategy superimposes three distinct layers which include point, line and surface with no orderly relationship existing between them. Control, hierarchy and order, the foundation of the production of modern architects, is inverted by the utilization of the disjunctive strategy. Tschumi removes the roots which ground Modern architecture and plants the tree upside-down.

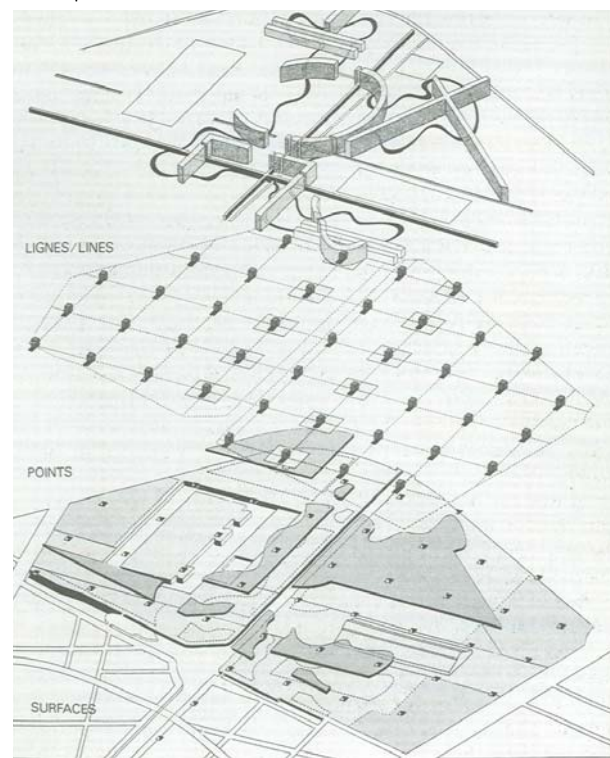


Figure 032: Tschumi's disjunctive strategy of superimposition (Taylor 1992, p.249)

Tschumi's follies which occur at the intersections of the 120 meter point grid constitute different variations, deformations or deconstructions of a 10 x 10 x 10 meter cube. According to Garcias (1989) the follies represent a contemporary reflection on alienation and the unbalanced mind. By the creation of these follies the negated (dreams, irrationality, excess, refuse etc.) is not negated in the final act resulting in completion, but affirmed. "This un-negation allows the return of the refused" (Taylor 1992, p.236). This act of denegation results in an architectural intervention that separates itself from function and focuses on the dynamic and 'coincidental or chance' relationship of movement and architecture (Giovannini, 2004).



Figure 033: One of the 34 follies at La Villette.

The difference between Eisenman and Tschumi's translation lies perhaps at their respective scales of theoretical translation. Tschumi's disjunctive strategy starts as a design principle; it is less physical and apparent than Eisenman's method of disfiguring. Eisenman in his Wexner Centre seems to prefer the utilization of architectural elements which are the manifestation of a certain era, so as to communicate his theoretical position. The method in which Eisenman utilizes abstract and figurative elements against themselves dislocates them as if from within. In the Parc de la Villette Tschumi utilizes the disjunctive strategy as a direct

reaction to the principles and premises upon which conventional architecture is based, such as composition, order and hierarchy (Van der Merwe 1996, p.16) Meaning is therefore something which is produced rather than discovered by the Parc de la Villette user. Eisenman purposefully generates his architectural elements to mean something which should be discovered through experience.

Eisenman's architectural intention is made clear in an interview in which he states that people relate to their environment as being a source of security, but he suggests that the environment can only provide physical security, for example shelter and comfort, and it should never provide psychological comfort. Hence, if his buildings were to create a sense of anxiety within their users, they would be forced to look inward to find psychological comfort (Giovannini, 2004). The success of Eisenman's projects depends therefore on the level of confusion and psychological discomfort which they generate within their users. Yet, his claim to advocate an alienating architecture has failed because Ghirardo (1990) defines the building as "profoundly ingratiating" and adds that it "has been warmly accepted by those deceived by contemporary consumer culture" (Ghirardo 1990, p.86).

Eisenman's design methodology and crystallization, driven according to the architectural critic Heinrich Klotz by intellectual impulses, appear ordered, controlled and intentional. (Giovannini, 2004) Yet, there seems to be something missing, intentional or not, a certain poetic quality which enriches the experience of the excessive, the erotic abrogated "other", emotion.

Diane Ghirardo (1990) criticizes Eisenman's work in an article titled, "The grid and the grain" in which she compares the work of Aldo Rossi and Terragni to the Wexner Centre. She explains: "the difference between the Wexner and works by Terragni and Rossi lies in the absolute controlled, if apparently arbitrary, surprises that the Wexner offers, which skirt dangerously close to one-liners." When compared to that of Rossi, Eisenman's work seems two-dimensional in terms of the richness of experience. Terragni, rather like Eisenman, struggled with grids, cubes, and transformations, but those manipulations neither remain concealed nor are overwhelmingly present in the built work; they are discovered by rather than forced upon the viewer.

Theoretical precedents conclusion

If Eisenman's production of meaning is almost obvious and Tschumi's is non-existent, then Rossi's seems to lurk between. By his use of repetition and the grid he is able to create architectural meaning, discovered in subtle, rich and poetic spatial interventions. Barthes describes obtuse meaning in terms of "the filmic", as constituting that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and meta-language end (Taylor 1992, p.251). Rossi's clever interplay of architectural form and natural light which generates conditions of multiple light qualities creates this sense of obtuse meaning: meaning which surpasses the rational and obvious, extraneous meaning which seems to appear, but disappears before its intention can be defined.

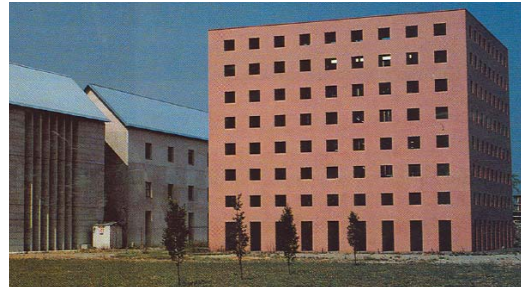


Figure 037:
Exterior
View of the
communal
columbarium
building



Figure 035: Addition to
cemetery of San Cataldo
in Modena by Aldo Rossi



Figure 036: Interior View
of the columbarium building
and concrete niches. Rossi's
concept of the house for
the dead manifests its
concrete expression

Crematoria precedents.

The following section involves the analysis of an international and local precedent so as to inform the technical requirements of the crematorium. The technical issues which will be considered include the following:

- Spatial interconnectivity (Diagrams) (Location)
- Circulation
- Sizes

The aim of diagrammatically analyzing the spatial connectivity and circulation requirements of the precedents is not to inform the design language, but merely to inform decisions with regards to the spatial functioning of crematoria.

International Precedent

The international precedent considered is the Cremation unit and Ashes Temple designed by Uribe de Bedout Arquitectos in Medellin, Antioquia Columbia.



Figure 038: Crematorium unit and Ashes Temple view of the Ashes Temple

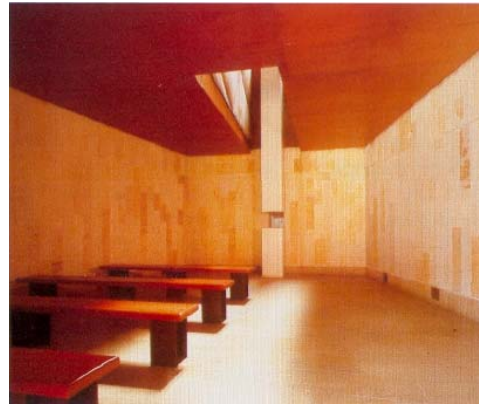


Figure 039: Interior view of Chapel

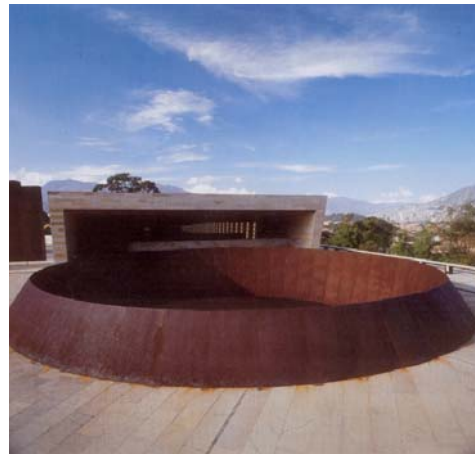


Figure 040: Open skylight to gathering space clad in cor-ten steel



Figure 041: Gathering space and skylight

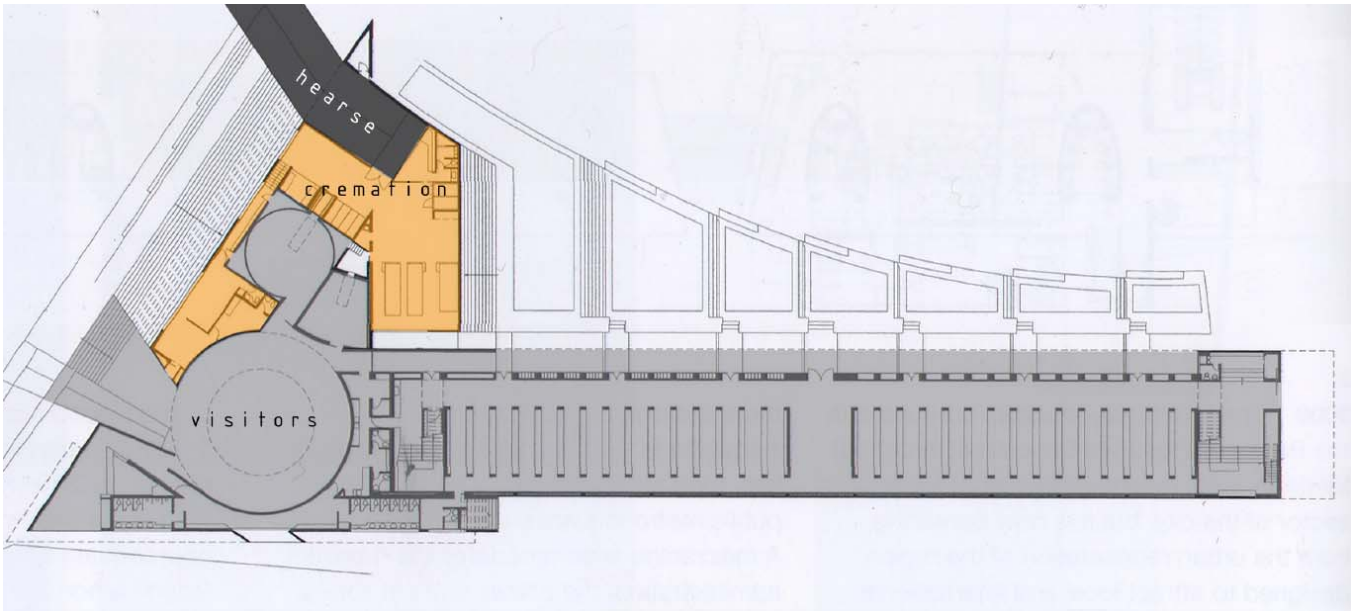


Figure 042: Cremation Unit and Ashes Temple diagrammatical analysis of the separation of the public and cremation related functions.

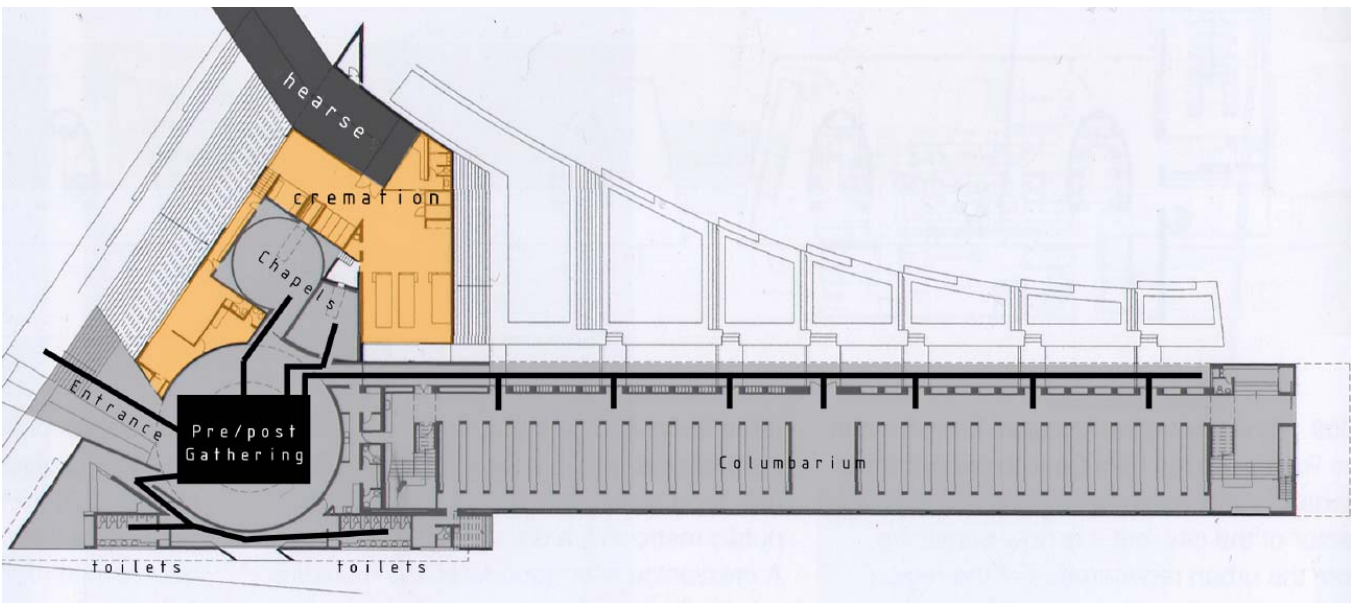


Figure 043: Cremation Unit and Ashes Temple diagrammatical analysis of the visitor circulation.

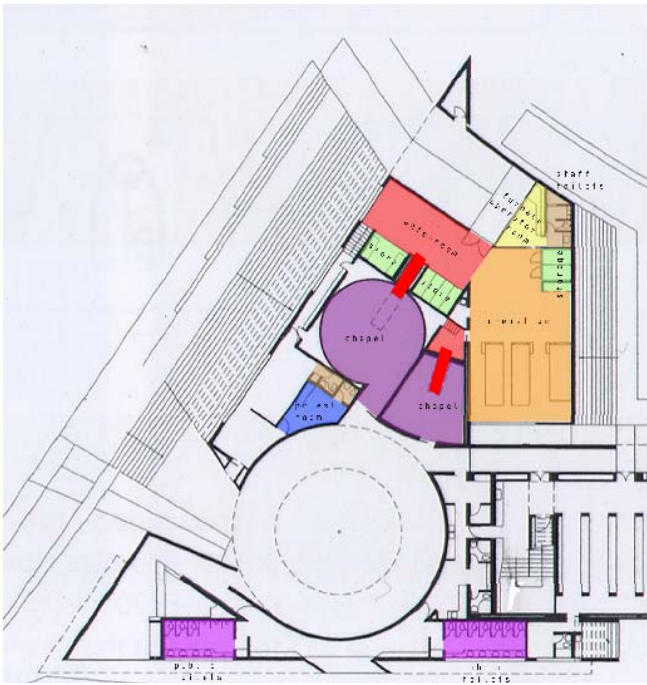


Figure 043:
Cremation Unit and
Ashes Temple and
functional spatial
breakdown



Figure 044:
Cremation Unit
and Ashes Temple
and diagrammatical
analysis of the
coffin circulation

Local precedent

Name: Pretoria Crematorium
 Location: Adjacent to Rebecca Street cemetery
 Ownersip: Local Metropolitan Council - Pretoria.

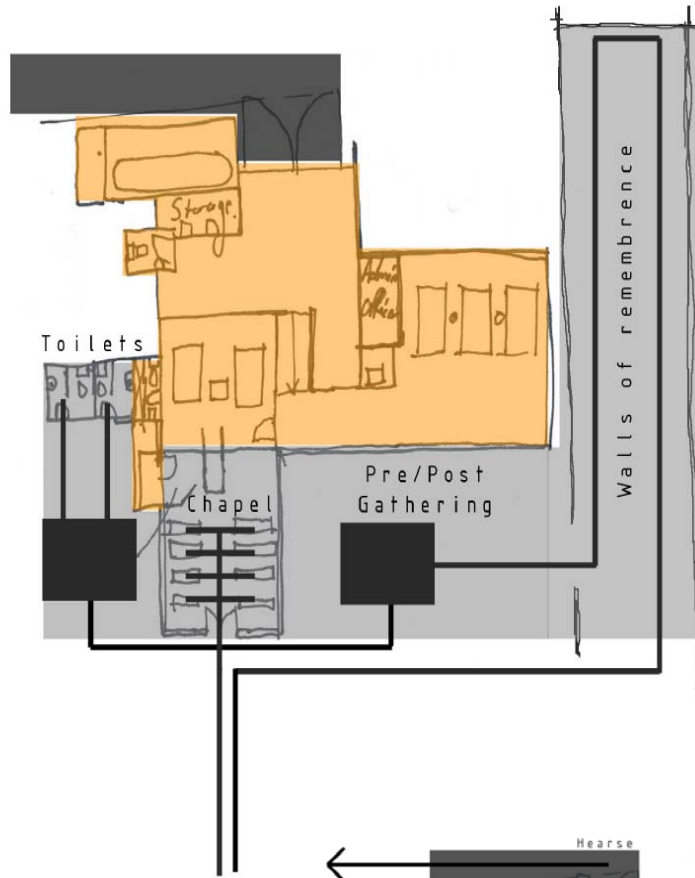


Figure 045: Pretoria Crematorium and diagrammatical analysis of the visitor circulation.



Figure 046: Photograph of entrance to Pretoria Crematorium chapel.

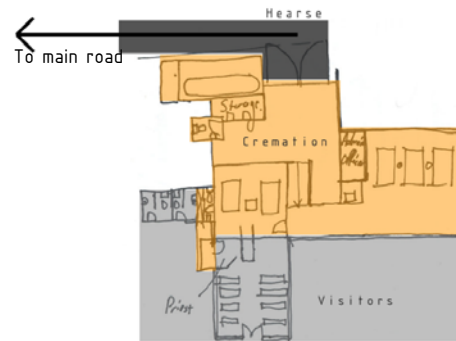
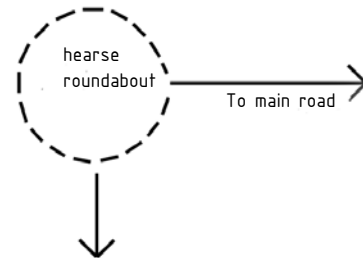


Figure 047: Pretoria Crematorium and diagrammatical analysis of the separation of the public and cremation related functions.



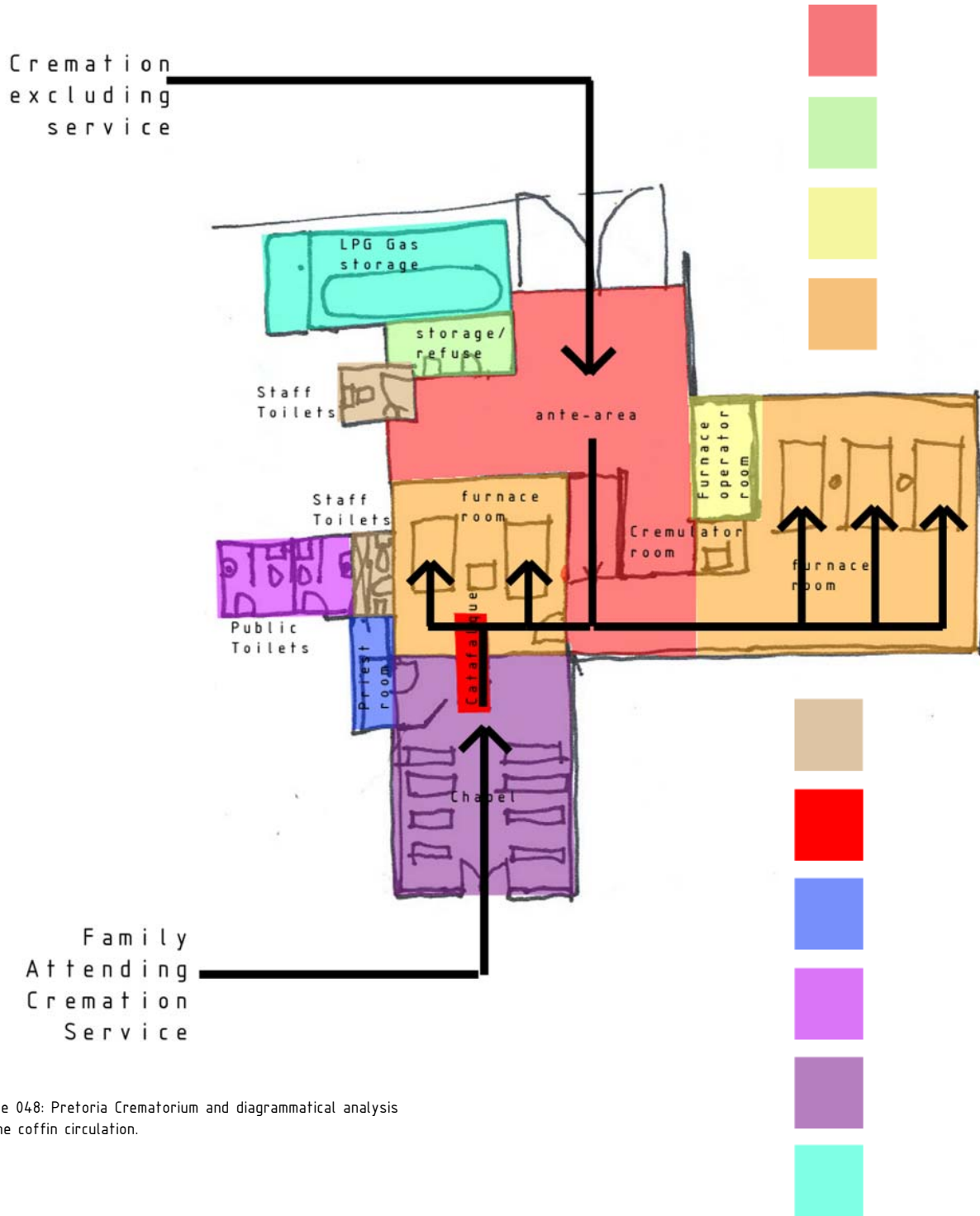


Figure 048: Pretoria Crematorium and diagrammatical analysis of the coffin circulation.