

Chapter 5

Programmatic precedents

Second artificial landscape as intervention: contemporary precedents for restoring significance to cemeteries through escape and artificiality.

Reanimation through artificiality (fantasy of bioluminescent nature):

The architectural firm DeathLAB is a trans-disciplinary research and design initiative, based at Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, which researches and reconceptualizes how the dead is dealt and lived with in the metropolis, recognizing that death is both personal and infrastructural in dense cities. DeathLAB makes projections of future cemetery typologies, both as interventions into existing cemeteries (as remnants in the landscape) as well as newly imagined landscapes within the existing fabric of the city. Their projects *Constellation Park* and *Sylvan Constellation at Vale Cemetery* are investigated as programmatic precedents which not only deal with the infrastructural requirements of cemeteries in the metropolis, but also uncovers the psychological benefit of the ritual element that these sanctuaries offer the city dweller. Cemeteries offer spaces of escape where the dweller, absorbed in ritual and death, can engage with the cosmic significance of the self, seldom provided elsewhere by the city. These projects further promotes an ecologically responsible solution in dealing with the dead, by proposing a system in which energy released from biomass during biodegradation is sublimated into artificial luminescence, allowing their cemeteries to become spectral, nocturnal public parks, where ritual and death is perpetuated into the creation of space.



fig. 5.46. Perspective of the processional promenade in Constellation Park.



fig. 5.47. Constellation Park suspended below Manhattan Bridge.

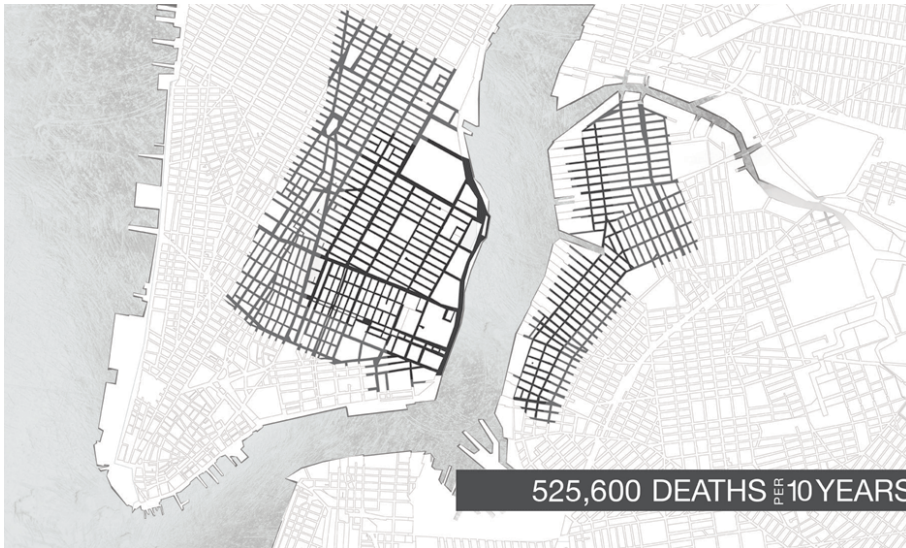


fig. 5.48. The physical occupation of death in Manhattan over a decade.

CONSTELLATION PARK:

Spaces of Remembrance Amidst Everyday Life

Location: Manhattan Bridge, New York, USA

Date: 2017 (unbuilt)

Architect: DeathLAB

Keywords:

Infrastructural intervention, landscape, bioluminescence, ritual, death, imagination

This project speculates about the potential of a cemetery as infrastructural intervention into existing fabric of the city by imagining a new ritualistic and civic landscape of shrine clusters, memorial vessels, a processional path, pedestrian pathways and public spaces suspended from Manhattan Bridge with structural cables. The park is a public memorial, embedded within the urban metropolitan life, which “conveys the acceptance of the physical finality of death, while recognizing the transience of remembrance, and the cyclical nature of organic life” (DeathLAB: 2017). The intervention proposes a system by which biomass of individuals collected in shrines or ‘mourning lights’ are transformed into a constellation of light under the bridge, powered by the energy released from the corpse over a year of decomposition. This constellation of individual vessels accumulate into a landscape which perpetually honours the dead, and, through the cyclical nature of organic life and decomposition ensures that the cycle of the park itself will never cease and lapse from memory. Death and imagination sustain the park, which is woven through the vertically layered constellation of shrines and mourning spaces, ceremonial areas and processional routes with pedestrian corridors, bike paths, communal spaces (hosting 700 people) and a diversity of public functions. An estimated 10% of all annual deaths (5,400 lives) in New York can be hosted in this park.

This precedent is conceptually and programmatically relevant to the project due to the introduction of bioluminescence in relation to the imaginative significance and infrastructural requirements posed by death in the metropolis. It further suggests how the spectrality of this constellation allures public and individual imagination and prevents the loss of significance of the landscape by allowing the cyclical nature of decomposition, where “spaces of death and remembrance are defined by, and continually fortified within the cycles and energies of urban life” (DeathLAB: 2017). The idea of park and cemetery not only functioning in co-existence to each other, but maintaining each other is also drawn from and applied to the project. The project furthermore draws from Constellation Park in recognising the spatial and urban potential created by binding New York to Manhattan Island with a pedestrian corridor which occupies a spatial negative. The new artificial landscape not only adds value to an otherwise desolate space, but also wrings out potential from the surrounding city fabric.



fig. 5.49. The forest at Amos Vale reclaiming graves.

fig. 5.50. Amos Vale cemetery.



fig. 5.51. Sylvan Constellation at Amos Vale.

SYLVAN CONSTELLATION:

A truly perpetual future for Amos Vale Cemetery

Location: Amos Vale Cemetery, Bristol, England

Date: 2017 (unbuilt)

Architect: DeathLAB

Keywords:

Historic landscape, nostalgic remnant, bioluminescence, ritual, death, imagination

Sylvan Constellation at Amos Vale cemetery, located in Bristol, England, is another project by DeathLAB which speculates about the potentiality of cemeteries as public spaces. Amos Vale cemetery is a nostalgic remnant bearing a stark likeness to Brixton cemetery. The cemetery, which was established in 1837, was the most desirable place to be buried in Bristol, until it fell into disrepair during the 20th century, as burial space became overburdened. Similar to Brixton cemetery, Amos Vale was designed as an Arcadian landscape and is covered by a lush forest saturated with clusters of granite graves and tombstones facing towards the pedestrian corridors that traverse the forest. Following a public petition, the cemetery is currently awaiting restoration and development while graves are being desecrated and overgrown.

DeathLAB, again, proposes a bioluminescent intervention into the cemetery, however, differing from *Constellation Park* in that the project is an investigation into the reanimation of a cemetery existing as nostalgic remnant. The significance of this precedent is further recognized in the intervention's potential to manifest resilience against amnesia through the overlap of imagination and the encounter with death. The project proposes new woodland pathways and sanctuary spaces within the historic cemetery to be illuminated by a constellation of light similar to that of *Constellation Park*. A network of memorial vessels which are buried in the forest floor or supported by tectonic steel pylons aggregate over time and form clusters that illuminate the forest. The accumulation of these light bearing vessels over time, growing from the forest, not only memorialize the dead, but also enshrines the cyclical nature of life and remembrance. A second, artificial surface rises from the remnant, which, through the performance of the process of death, amnesic death, and degradation, reanimates the deteriorating landscape.

Both these project situate themselves in a position to ruminate over the relevance and opportunities of spaces for burial and memorialization within ever-densifying cities — spaces which, furthermore, inevitably lose significance and often devolve into

urban blight when custodial and financial burdens overshadow their amenity. These projects, which can be identified as *second artificial illuminated landscapes*, not only propose how deteriorated conditions in the city can be reanimated by reimagining the significance and potential of death through architectural intervention, but also suggests how the significance of these spaces can be maintained. Their spaces act as an “enduring collective urban cenotaph for intimate individual memories” (ibid., 2017) - both relating to the dead, but also to imagination intimated through how the architectural interventions reimagine death. DeathLAB not only provokes and unpacks the diverse perspectives of both the urban and social significance of death-related spatial practices and their intersection with civic life environments, but also reveals how architecture can innovate new ways of reweaving the cycles of life and death into the metropolis, augmenting civic space while being sensitive towards the environment and the revering of the deceased.

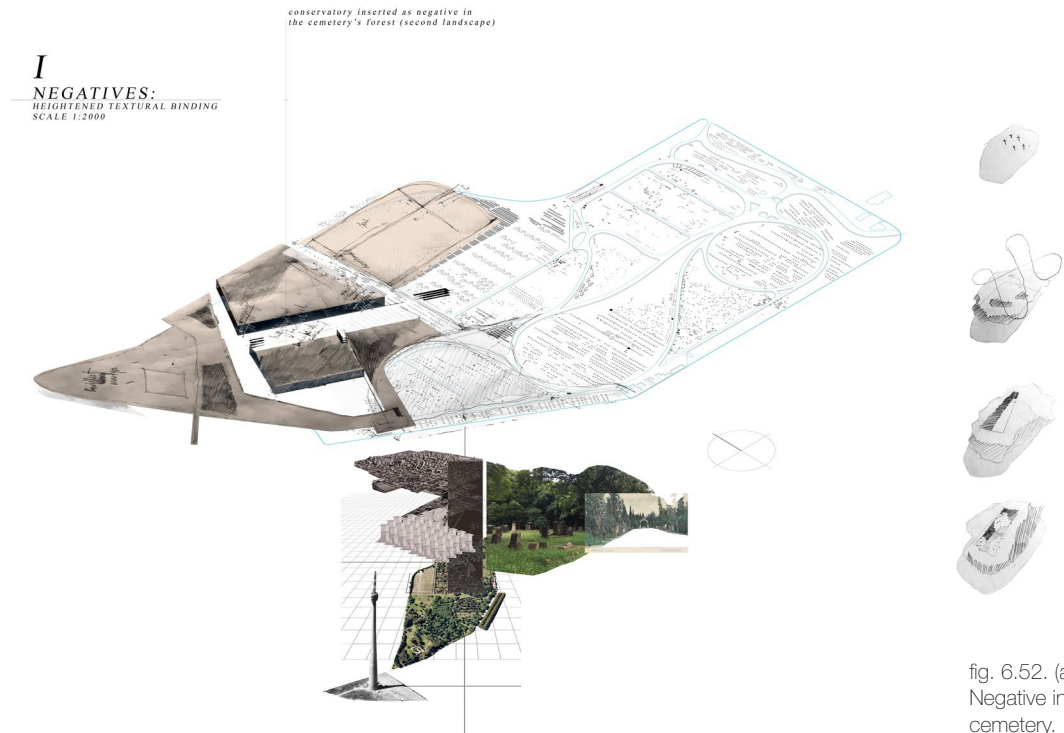


fig. 6.52. (author)
Negative insertion in the cemetery.