

THEORIES OF DEATH, RITUAL, AND SPACE: EVOLVING THE FUNERAL
TYPOLOGY IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CANADA

By

Katherine Susan Isaac, BID

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Masters of Interior Design

Department of Interior Design

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Typology in Twenty-First Century Canada**

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Of

MASTER OF INTERIOR DESIGN

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mary Isaac, for whom death means getting wings,
and
To Jacques Vrignon, for whom death is obscurely imminent.

ABSTRACT

Distinguished among design typologies by its unique program that bears responsibilities to both the living and dead, and by its nearly exclusive claim on those services it offers to the public, funeral space performs a significant role within Canadian culture. Interest in the funeral home was provoked by the recognition of its peculiar station in the discourses of designed space; there is a dearth of research on the topic within the design fields. Despite the availability and continuing development of research on the topics of death, loss, and ritual in the fields of thanatology, religion, and the social sciences, these processes have yet to be fully explored in the context of the built interior environment. My thesis asks: How can interior designers more effectively accommodate changing social practices in funeral space in Canada?

In my study, changing death rituals are examined through post-structural analysis of texts, images and spaces, framed by a variety of current discourses on death drawn from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and cultural analysis. My research is also grounded by interviews with funeral industry professionals and experts in the fields of thanatology and ritual. Concepts drawn from each discourse frame new ways that funeral spaces can materialize as meaningful environments, powerful in their ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the ritual experience. Findings support that differences in meaning are now being reinterpreted in death rituals to reflect cultural mutability, and the shift towards new performance of ritual is well established. Designed space for funeral ritual cannot be conceived as reflecting a homogeneous rite, but must acknowledge the individuality of each unique celebrated person. Additionally it should provide opportunities for congregation, spontaneity, privacy and memorializing. Interior designers must approach the funeral typology from an informed stance, understanding that space for death in Canada today is influenced by various cultural conditions through which experience of death is mediated.

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INTRODUCTION

THEORIES OF DEATH, RITUAL, AND SPACE

The Question of Space for Death

The Canadian funeral home, a space designed to house rituals, purvey merchandise such as caskets and urns, accommodate funeral planning processes and to store the deceased body and prepare it for burial or cremation, maintains a peculiar station in the discourses of designed space. As simple as these functions seem, they have rarely been the subject of a close reading for their collective significance: according to the functional outline sketched out above, funeral space is ceremonial, retail-oriented, client-focused, and bio-medical in purpose. How do all of these functions co-exist harmoniously?

Due to significant shifts in Canadian culture over the past century, rituals housed within the funeral establishment have changed, and continue to do so. For example, religious affiliations have decreased and the church's role in providing the venue for the funeral ritual is diminished.¹ Additionally, the culturally diverse dimension of what it means to be "Canadian" continues to expand, and so a funeral takes on new characteristics in light of a Muslim or Hindu ritual, for example, which both eschew embalming and require community participation in washing and preparing the body for

¹Kathleen Garces-Foley, "Funerals of the Unaffiliated," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 46 (1988): 287.

burial or cremation. In this sense, death is as much a cultural concept as a spiritual and physical one.

How does the funeral home accommodate and reflect all of these cultural shifts? There is a dearth of literature to address precedent in this area, which neither questions approaches to the interior design of funeral space nor probes existing conditions. It is necessary, then, to critique the current characteristics of funeral space in order to establish a ground on which to build, and from there to respond to my thesis question: How can interior designers more effectively accommodate current social practices in funeral space in Canada?²

Specifically, my thesis points to ways that interior designers can become sensitive to the multiplicity of factors at play around the issues of death, ritual, and space, integrating new knowledge into the design process of future ritual space. To ensure a rich response, it is necessary to explore a number of supporting questions: What is the function of the funeral typology? What are the functions of ritual in Canadian society? How can individual and social attitudes to death be characterized? How are these attitudes reflected in changing rituals and trends? And finally, how can these findings be interpreted within the practice of interior design, and manifested in new spatial interpretations of ritual space?

²In my thesis, social practices are defined as any “coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized.” Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187. In this case, social practices refer to that group of activities that are implemented by Canadians in order to recognize and manage death, in both ritualistic and practical terms.

The Funeral Home in Society

The promise of death is assured for every person, and reminders of death are all around us. Death is seen in nature, in the news, and in video games: however thanatological and sociological discourses have theorized that western cultures hold an aversion to death when it refers to one's own mortality.³ So while it is accepted that television crime series that showcase death in gory detail may attract strong interest, personal experience with death and loss are not guaranteed as in the days before advanced health care.

Technological advances in the past fifty years, and the fact that death often occurs due to old age as opposed to illness or accident, means that the average person will not have to contemplate their own death until their later years.⁴ For this reason, finding authentic death, not sensationalized or reduced, but witnessed as the funeral cortege, or in black swathed state of mourning, is rare in Canada today compared to half a century ago.

Correspondingly, in the twenty-first century, looking for outward signs of the funeral industry in the urban fabric presents a challenge. Lacking a strong identifiable presence, most funeral homes externally reflect their religious counterparts, churches, or more stereotypically, assume an aesthetic that is aligned with domestic architecture.⁵

³Joseph A. Amato, "Death, and The Stories We Don't Have," *The Monist* 76 (1993): 252-269; Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981); Charmaine Caldwell, Marsha McGee, and Charles Pryor, "The Sympathy Card As Cultural Assessment of American Attitudes Toward Death, Bereavement and Extending Sympathy: A Replicated Study," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 37 (1998):121-132; and Dave Green, "Death, Nature and Uncertain Spaces: A Commentary from Paganism," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 44 (2001): 127-149.

⁴Francois Nault and Kathryn Wilkins, 1995, in Herbert C. Northcott and Donna M. Wilson. *Dying and Death in Canada* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2001), 14.

⁵Institute for the Advanced Study of Architecture, "The American Funeral Home Project Brief," *The American Funeral Home* (Los Angeles: Institute for the Advanced Study of Architecture, 2004), <http://la.advancedarchitecture.org/Projects/TheAmericanFuneralHome> (accessed 8 January, 2006).

Increasingly, new funeral establishments are located outside of urban centres, further removing reminders of death from everyday experience.

The sociological study of death and culture supports the view that physical space afforded death has shifted: sociologists Phillip Mellor and Chris Shilling cite the sequestration of death in western society.⁶ They point to the loss of public space as related to a decrease in the scope of the sacred, the privatization of death, and subsequent shifts in corporeal boundaries of individuals.⁷ Visible reminders of death in Canadian's immediate surroundings, in the form of advertisements or buildings that house funeral space, for example, have become saddled with implications that westerners actively seek to avoid: people around us die, and so will I.

The increasing secularization of death combined with government and industry bureaucratization of the funeral have both acted to relegate the funeral home to less urban areas that are not highly visible, inhabitable real estate. The work of urban planner and activist Jane Jacobs pointed to this forty years ago, in her questioning of the funeral home's label as an undesirable land use. She cites "proponents of rigid use controls, who object so firmly to death in the city", in the removal of funeral homes from the urban context.⁸ This is considered "presumed harm" in the sense that this damages the urban fabric by negating a necessary aspect of western culture.

Forty years ago, the funeral home was already being displaced by businesses that were perceived as less unsavoury, and the subsequent span of time has barely impacted

⁶Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, "Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death," *Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association* 27 (1993): 411.

⁷Ibid., 414.

⁸Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Toronto: Random House, 1961), 232.

this trend. According to provincial zoning in Manitoba, the funeral typology is permitted only conditional zoning within three of eight available commercial classes. It is fully permitted within three of eight available industrial classes as well, along with such industries as fish packing, farm implement sales centres and meat packaging.⁹ Although other industries permitted within these zones include grocers, daycare providers, and florists, it is questionable whether these users would consider it desirable to locate within what appears to be a decidedly industrial area that also hosts large-scale trade associated with strong odors, large machinery and noise.

If a funeral professional should desire to locate a funeral establishment within any of the business zones, they are expected to consult with the authority having jurisdiction to obtain permission to do so. In the United States, it is also recognized that state practices can control the location of funeral homes for a variety of reasons, including prohibition in residential areas or near hospitals “in order to shield neighbours and patients from the constant reminder of death”.¹⁰ Jacobs’ presumed harm, highlighted half a century ago, is now fully entrenched within government regulations.

Today’s new mortuary spaces are relegated outside of urban neighbourhoods, located instead on properties where they hover between big box style commercial areas, and fast food architecture. Simulacra of the residential typology from which they derived their title, these establishments often appear to imitate their namesakes. The interior

⁹City of Winnipeg Planning, Property and Development, *Comprehensive Review of the Winnipeg Zoning By-law 6400/94* (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg Planning, Property and Development, 2006) www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/zoning_6400review.stm (accessed 6 July, 2006).

¹⁰Hannelore Wass, Felix M. Berardo, and Robert A. Neimeyer, ed., *Dying: Facing the Facts*, 2d ed. (New York: Hemisphere Publishing, 1988), 316.

spaces of funeral homes and parlours are awkward versions of living spaces that fail to convince users of their authenticity.¹¹

The funeral home is a complex typology that resists definition; it prevaricates in the interstices between the sacred and the domestic in attempting to comfort and provide for the needs of an unwilling clientele.¹² And yet it was created by the very culture that reviles it for a variety of reasons: to houses the physical needs of the corpse, and facilitate the rituals that a vast majority of Canadians choose to enact to acknowledge their loss and to mark the interment of the body.

This resistance to definition provoked my specific interest in the funeral home. As with its sequestered place in the public sphere, the typology has been ignored within the design disciplines, and it appears only sporadically in the existing literature; when it does appear, it is often addressed in historical contexts or in analyses of modernist European crematoria.¹³ An interior design perspective on funeral space is needed in order to build up the body of design research knowledge available to others in this line of work.

Ritual space for death plays a complex role in Canadian society in the twenty-first century, when attitudes to death and rituals themselves are shifting. The funeral home acts as a mediating structure within society, allowing for the public expurgation of grief and hinting at the inevitability of mortality. But by its very existence, it is also a reminder that there are survivors who will come together to mark loss. By making the funeral home

¹¹Institute for the Advanced Study of Architecture, *The American Funeral Home*.

¹²Neil Bardal, interview by author, July 27, 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording. Neil Bardal Incorporated, 3030 Notre Dame Ave.

¹³Notably, James Stevens Curl has written extensively on death and architecture within an historical perspective in *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (1972) and *A Celebration of Death* (1993). As parts of Europe, specifically Northern Europe, embraced the disposal method of cremation in the early 20th Century, crematoria have figured as a significant architectural typology there. Cremation's later acceptance in Canada has resulted in a lower profile for the crematorium here.

the subject of this inquiry, I can isolate these factors through the focusing lens of interior design.

The Scope of this Research

In order to ground my inquiry, Chapter One mines the historical roots of the funeral industry in Canada, critiquing the ways it has evolved over the past century, and exposing characteristics that have continued to feed into current approaches to funeral space.

Chapter Two looks at critical discourses on death and individuals, questioning the ways that meaning for the self is defined in western culture, especially through the search for ontological security in an existential analysis. Constructions of personal identity that rely on physical definitions of self pose interesting challenges to understanding of being-in-the-world, tenuous as the physical self is, even in light of numerous opportunities to extend life through medical means and self-betterment regimes.

Additionally, dramaturgical aspects of the funeral ritual are also explored in Chapter Two, where post-structuralist understanding of meanings for the self influence death rituals and the space in which they occur. The funeral is analysed as a spectacle, as both a performance and a performative act. Influences on, and possibilities for, the funeral interior based on the characterizations of these events are then explored.

In Chapter Three, critical discourses around death and society are based upon the sociological framework of resurrective practices, wherein individuals band together in dialogue, through imagined communities and in revivalist discourses, to stave off death. Through an analysis of discursive acts in the media, and in both modern and post-modern therapeutic discourses, new possibilities for ritual space are isolated and explored. For

instance, death is made acceptable by constructing meanings that justify it as a matter of national pride, or as a generative act.

Trends, such as that of generativity, have emerged to mark the event of death today, when it becomes essential to create meaning for life outside of religious ideologies. Just how different trends affect the funeral industry and have bearing upon the funeral interior is the subject of Chapter Four, which explores the medieval concept of *ars moriendi*, or art of dying well, for the twenty-first century.

Finally, in Chapter Five, findings will be interpreted within the framework of interior design practice, and multiple paths will be charted to explore the ways that interior design practitioners could incorporate my research into their own approach to the design of funeral interiors and other spaces for death ritual.

Methodology

One way that my thesis adds to the body of interior design knowledge is by introducing methods for analyzing meanings imbedded in spaces, objects, images, and other texts. These methods, when implemented with interior designers' existing skills, allow designers to disassemble and examine messages that were previously unidentified as relevant to the design process. "To be an accomplished practitioner of an occupation one must be able to read meaning where a novice might misinterpret a message or see no message at all."¹⁴ Developing awareness that subtle themes are layered onto cultural artifacts encountered in the everyday environment is a necessary step to enriching the language and techniques used by designers. I have therefore made seeing and reading

¹⁴Stephen R. Barley, "The Codes of the Dead: The Semiotics of Funeral Work," *Urban Life* 12, no. 1 (1983): 3-31.

messages for significance one of the primary objectives of my thesis, as I have traveled along meaning networks constructed around death, ritual and space in Canadian society.

Positioning the research within a qualitative, social constructionist methodology allowed for the reflexive analysis of artifacts selected, and provided a framework that was hermeneutic and iterative.¹⁵ Rather than supposing that death's significance in Canada can be understood within a formalized, scientific structure, social constructionist methods characterize death's meaning as a creation of culture, in which it has no single identifiable definition. Instead, understanding for death and ritual space is gradually, and collaboratively, generated by the inquiry process itself, evolving as the research progresses.

Consequently, post-structuralism was selected as an appropriate methodology, as it does not conceive of reality as pre-constituted, but as constructed.¹⁶ Constructions take the formal shape of "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws...philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions", and are known as discursive formations.¹⁷ These formations have played an essential role in my thesis as the specific discursive formations of designed spaces and images, written texts, and discourses stemming from interviews can be read from a post-structuralist position. Rather than employing post-structuralism as a theoretical framework that acts to explicate my findings, I therefore engage with it as a system of inquiry.¹⁸ I use tools such as

¹⁵ Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, (Newbury Park: Sage, 1989), 174-175.

¹⁶ Seale, *Researching Society and Culture*, 42.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194.

deconstruction, for instance, to expose rhetoric around death and funerals in the marketing material of the Canadian funeral industry.¹⁹ In addition to reading images and other texts, I also used interviews as resources to probe constructions of meaning within the industry itself, questioning perceptions of what environments for death ritual are, and do, and how changing rituals affect how space is conceived. The analysis of discursive formations therefore occurred within a multi-methods approach that considered the aforementioned texts to be accessible, rich sources for discourse analysis, while interviews provided personal connections to individual voices within the industry.

Both methods mentioned above focused on how language and images are used to construct and represent reality. Grounding my analyses were the works of French post-structuralists like Roland Barthes, exploring the concept of mythologizing, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, analysing language and its relationship to power, and Jacques Derrida, locating death in culture. Further, poststructuralists Judith Butler and Mieke Bal examine notions of the performative in my investigation of the ways that funeral spaces both reproduced and created ideologies of death and funeral rituals in Canadian culture.

Purposive samples of individuals and texts were selected in order to hone on in the research question, how can interior designers more effectively accommodate changing social practices in funeral space in Canada? Texts generated by the funeral industry are not abundant due to the sensitive nature of the profession, therefore a community questionnaire and public advertising material were deemed appropriate

¹⁸Strictly speaking, other theories are named if they are brought to bear upon my analysis. For instance, post-modern theory assists in the breaking down of meta-narratives framing self identity as presented in media images and through consumerism.

¹⁹ See Chapter Two, page X for a discourse analysis of marketing material.

selections because they were both designed specifically to be consumed by the public within the Canadian marketplace. Complementing these written samples, additional reading explored images of death and memorializing for their constructions of meaning: chosen from among a group of Canadian photographers that include Tijen Roshko, Shelley Niro and Michel Lambeth, the photographs are used both to question assumptions and to generate dialogues that create potential design directions for funeral space.

Interview participants were also purposively selected for their practical experience of rituals and their evolution within the industry, and for their theoretical knowledge about death and western culture. Professor of Death Studies, Kenneth MacKendrick, of the University of Manitoba, was interviewed to gain an understanding of constructions of meaning for death, changes in death ritual practice in Canada, and psychological theories in death studies. Clive Seale, a sociologist based at Brunel University in Britain, was selected for his knowledge of the sociology of death in the western world and views on the reconstruction of death in the social sphere.

Funeral celebrant Norma Wellwood, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, was interviewed for the uniqueness of her role as an independent creator of highly personalized rituals and director of non-traditional funeral services. Wellwood effectively bridges practice and theory in her choice to act outside the established boundaries of her profession; her participation was desirable because she rejected the orthodoxy of the funeral industry, in which she originally trained, for a specialized role in death care. Caroline Yewchin, a practicing funeral director in St. Paul, Alberta was interviewed because she works within a rural-based practice that contrasts with industries located in

urban centres, and she also developed educational material for the funeral profession, having written about changing rituals and the quest for the perfect funeral. Similarly, Neil Bardal is also a practicing funeral director, and was selected because of his long independent career in the industry in Winnipeg, Manitoba; his views, and those of funeral director Christopher Climie of Burlington, Ontario, were sought on the personalization of funerals taking place within urban environments and shifts in funeral space that have consequently occurred.

Interviews were performed by telephone for the majority of participants, with the exception of Neil Bardal, who was interviewed in person, and Christopher Climie and Dr. Clive Seale, who were interviewed by email correspondence due to distance and timing considerations. Two additional individuals initially agreed to participate in interviews with me but did not respond to further attempts to organize meeting times.

Because of the specificity with which I approached the researching of my thesis question, results are non-generalizable to the wider funeral industry. It was not my intent to produce a data set that was representative of typical conditions in the industry or Canadian culture. Yet by obtaining an “insider’s unique perspective” through the deliberate selection of interview and text samples for study, I have obtained a deeper understanding of a number of theories on death, funeral practices, and spaces.²⁰ This has contributed to the generation of useful concepts that are of value in assessing potential new directions for the interior design of funeral space.

²⁰ Robert Sommer and Barbara Sommer. *A Practical Guide to Behavioural Research: Tools and Techniques*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 239.

Suppositions and Limitations

In undertaking my research a number of suppositions and limitations come into effect that are based upon my own personal stance. First, it should be inferred that my choice to pursue an investigation of funeral space is a reflection of my own interest in the conviction that the funeral home holds enormous potential for Canadian society. This potential remains to be questioned and analysed with the belief that the results of my inquiry will be relevant to all of those affiliated in any way with funeral space.

Due to the constructive nature of the work, my own experience necessarily influences the outcomes of open-ended interviews. The interviews follow the guide of an initial set of questions and are supplemented by spontaneous prompts and additional queries based on the new information being gathered. In interpreting the findings, my own biases – of practising interior designer, location in the small city of Winnipeg, and my own experiences with the funeral industry – influence my analysis.

More specific limitations also circumscribe my research: first, this study focuses solely on the funeral home interior, secular in nature, and not the religiously designated interiors of the church or sanctuary. In some instances, provisional spaces for ritual, like community halls or even street sidewalks, will be examined for their bearing on attitudes to death and the funeral. Second, specific rituals enacted within the funeral home that are themselves extensions of religious ideologies are not subject to analysis, but are acknowledged for their influence upon the program of the interior. In these instances, there are ramifications for those interior spaces that must accommodate a variety of religious groups through the careful staging of symbols and props, transforming space from one recognizable set to another.

Canadian Culture Defined

Literary critic and cultural analyst Jacques Derrida views the relationship of death to culture as indissoluble: culture is a product of death and it is the manifestation of death's history. "(C)ulture itself, culture in general, is essentially, before anything, even a priori, the culture of death. Consequently, then, it is a *history of death*".²¹ Derrida's characterization of culture is apt in the context of this inquiry, where an examination of the funeral home amounts to a study of Canadian cultures' diverse beliefs, and the enactment of those beliefs through ritual. Death creates culture, but the culture in which death is experienced, in turn, creates meaning for death and the funeral event.

The pursuit of my inquiry is challenged by the notion that experience is culturally specific; it is natural that one's experiences are shaped by the culture within which they were learned.²² Cultural influences deepen in the context of discourses around death and the rituals honouring the corpse, where frameworks and norms may be deeply entrenched. In defining the culture within which this study takes place, it is most logical to look at the culture of the Canadian funeral home market.

While Canadian culture is an idea that is difficult, and in this case, not necessary, to pin down, I use the term throughout the thesis in reference to that group of individuals that use the services of the funeral home industry.²³ This covers a wide range of cultural

²¹Italics author's own. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) The "Limits of Truth,"* trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 43.

²²Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Counterpoint, 1985); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

²³The impossibility of cultural unity as a modern mythic hunt is discussed in Herbert Blau, *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theater, 1976-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 142. In the same sense, attempting to define the diverse group of cultures that make up Canada would require a crude reduction incongruent with reality.

sub-groups, all of them members of Canadian culture: however the funeral industry is prepared to accommodate the needs of all who approach it. For instance, McInnis and Holloway, an Alberta business, has published a handbook of *Customs and Traditions in Times of Death and Bereavement* as a service to its clientele.²⁴

I attempt not to generalize about the group of funeral home users that I have included in my definition of Canadian culture, yet it is made difficult by the diversity of the aforementioned members. When confusion might result, I clarify my statements by using the term “western culture”, directly referencing a specific sub-group of funeral home users that live increasingly secularized lives, divorced from religious affiliation.²⁵

The ways that have developed to manage death within the greater structure of society, regardless of cultural or religious affiliation, are known collectively as the death system. Within the death system, humans mediate complex relationships with mortality.²⁶

The Death System Defined

The death system takes the form of a variety of institutions, events, and behaviours that relate to death and function in an interconnected network of activity. It is important to understand the moderating role that the death system plays within Canadian culture; it

²⁴Now in its 4th edition, it covers no less than fourteen different groups whose needs it regularly meets, from those of Hutterite colonies to the Sikh community. Kathy Cloutier “Customs and Traditions In Times of Death and Bereavement,” 4th ed., Special manuscript prepared by McInnis and Holloway Funeral Homes, Calgary, AB, Publishing no. 400037, 2000.

²⁵A group of individuals that have a ‘contemporary’ approach to the funeral are isolated in Kathleen Garces-Foley and Justin Holcomb, “Contemporary American Funerals: Personalizing Tradition,” in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 208. In place of theologically based rites they adapt rituals to reflect the personality and meaning of the life of the deceased.

²⁶Robert J. Kastenbaum, *Society and Human Experience* (Heedham Heights, MA: Ally & Bacon, 1998), 76.

has evolved as a structure within which one finds the possibility of reconciliation with the idea of death. "It teaches us what to think about death, how to feel about it, and what to do with reference to it".²⁷ Places such as the funeral home, times such as Remembrance Day, objects and symbols such as the skull and cross-bones, and individuals like the priest, veterinarian, or butcher, all have roles within the system; each acts to bridge the impossible notion of mortality.

The butcher shop, for instance, makes the death of animals a familiar aspect of the built environment, normalizing animal slaughter and making it acceptable to the majority of passersby, those with vegetarian ideologies notwithstanding. The shop physically represents death and its inevitability for farmed animals as just another aspect of the busy streetscape: animal mortality is not shrouded and sequestered, it is available for full purview through shop windows that display meat in all its forms.

Some sociologists believe, like Ernest Becker, that western societies are death denying.²⁸ In this sense, mortality, individuals' knowledge of their own certain demise, is an impossible idea. While living, a true understanding of personal death cannot be known. But broader culture finds means to cope with death in the everyday environment through the death system, as evidenced by the butcher shop: in as efficient a manner as possible, death is systematized, contained and managed. In the case of my research, the actions of the funeral directors who arrange funeral rites, and those of the celebrants who perform those rites, the rites themselves, the manifold objects that are involved, and the funeral home as a site for all of these needs, constitute the specific aspects of the death

²⁷John D. Morgan, ed., *Readings in Thanatology* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1997), 12.

²⁸Kenneth MacKendrick, interview by author, 17 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording. University of Manitoba.

system that provide a window to the ways in which Canadians mediate their collective relationships to death.

The death system is therefore a socio-physical structure that is an artifact of the society from which it emerged.²⁹ The death system is not extended by nature; it is a product of organized society. The funeral space is therefore a cultural invention that has evolved to a particular position within the physical world that is both ordinary and extraordinary: Ordinary for its attendance to the common occurrence of the body's storage and interment, and extraordinary for its act of housing rituals that have the potential to bring meaning to death, and therefore, to life. Mortuary space contributes to the negotiation of death's meaning in Canada, and is a classification of space that demands further analysis.

Recent anthropological research recognizes the significance of mortuary artifacts in tracing changes in the death system, and further, links these changes to socio-political development.³⁰ In *The Space and Place of Death*, a publication resulting from an archaeological conference on mortuary "Sighting, Siting, and Citing", held in 2002, new territories, both imaginal and real, were analysed for their bearing upon the reconstructions of culture through the exploration of mortuary behaviours.³¹ The

²⁹The term artifact is defined as "a product of human workmanship", and refers to the agency that has created the system within and from Canadian culture. *Penguin English Dictionary* (Toronto: Penguin, 2001), 74.

³⁰ Anne Eyre, "Post-disaster rituals" in *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz, and Neil Small (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 256-266; Sylvia Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines and Public Memorialization" in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 246-264.

³¹Helaine Silverman, introduction to "The Space and Place of Death," in *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, ed. Helaine Silverman and David B. Small, no. 11 (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 2002): 1.

approach adopted by the contributors was considered unique, in that it not only surveyed physical location, but also ideological space, and the expressive qualities of the rituals associated with burial, including the use of symbolism.³²

The directive that compelled the conference supported the concept of explaining culture through an exploration of its coded spaces. In fact, the funeral home, as a mediating structure in the death system, could move beyond its simple reflection of cultural beliefs, for it has the potential to ameliorate the expression of grief by more sensitively tracking changes in cultural needs, effectively educating the consumer by improving its service range, and leading change.

Conclusion

Individual responses to the mention of the term “funeral home” from within and outside of the context of interior design have ranged from disbelief, to dismay, to morbid curiosity. Interest in mortuary space, much like death itself, is subject to strong reactions; it has been coloured by the aversion that defines prevailing attitudes to death in the western world. Yet this kind of space is no less deserving of a serious research study than the most revered sacred typologies. I believe such research stimulates new thinking about the funeral home typology, thereby opening doors for the potential of the space to meet the increasingly complex demands of western culture, and advancing its essential role in the enactment of meaningful rituals in Canada.

³²Ibid., 1-3.

CHAPTER 1

SPACE FOR DEATH IN CANADA: A CRITIQUE OF FUNERAL SPACE THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

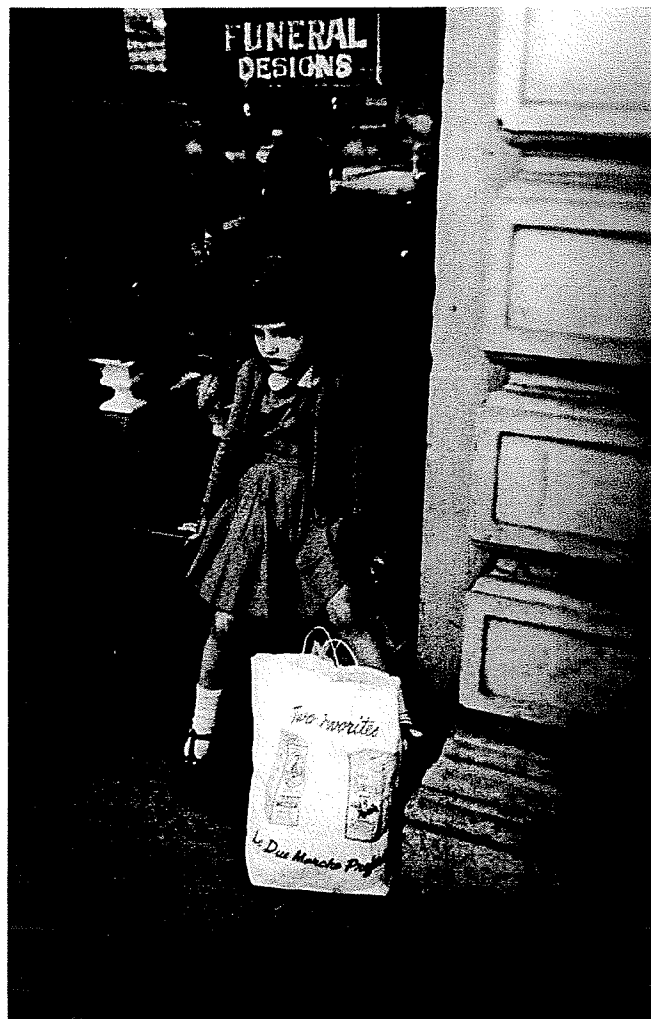


Figure 1.1: Michel Lambeth, *St. Lawrence Market, Toronto, Ontario, 1957*.
1957, Gelatin silver print. 35.3 x 27 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of
Contemporary Photography, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
Reprinted with permission, McGill-Queen's University Press,
September 8, 2006, © McGill-Queen's University Press.

Introduction

In Figure 1.1 above, a young girl sits in front of a shop window advertising “Funeral Designs”. Michel Lambeth’s photo, taken in 1957, illustrates death in the midst of busy St. Lawrence Market in Toronto.¹ In this representation of the everyday world, the discrete sign is neither apologetic for nor excessive in its assertive presence on the street. The girl is oblivious to its significance; she is caught in some other drama, disconnected from the bustle happening around her. The funeral industry in the mid-twentieth century can be characterized through this image: as quotidian, accepted, and conventional. How could the funeral home be characterized one hundred years ago? And how did today’s funeral industry evolve from its earlier status?

This chapter critically analyses the creation and evolution of funeral space over the past century. The assumption of a post-structuralist position allows me to critique Canadian Anglo-Saxon beliefs around death as they have evolved over the past one hundred years, and provides a framework for the deconstruction of meanings applied to funeral space, both as it was originally conceived and as it has evolved. Bringing post-structuralist theory to bear on the funeral typology’s development from the perspective of interior design is uncharted territory, but is a necessary initiative: it brings to the surface a number of key dimensions along which the funeral home can be read, questioning historical accounts and understandings of its evolution.

I review geographical and cultural conditions that effected the funeral home typology’s formation in the early twentieth century and explore popular attitudes around death at that time. Based on prevailing notions of romantic death, and shifts in beliefs

¹Penny Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 60.

around death, conditions were such that they provided an ideal context for the establishment of the funeral industry around 1920.

As the industry became increasingly defined through the mid-century, Canadians witnessed the funeralization and professionalization of the death ritual. Mourners were cast in the newly minted role of funeral customers, which brought with it numerous responsibilities and pressures, such as planning for a socially acceptable event that reflected favourably on both the deceased and the family.² The profession in the mid-twentieth century was very much a part of the urban fabric: services were expanded to include not just the coordination of the variety of elements necessary to support a church service and cemetery burial, but also planning and hosting of the funeral event itself. This development re-positioned the funeral industry as an alternative to the church, because an ideology of individualization and privacy reigned over religious obligation and community inclusion.³

Retail orientations to the funeral industry necessarily cast it in contrast to the church as well, but through careful staging of domestic cues and the manipulation of religious symbolism, the industry was able to promote a sense of familiarity and neutrality. Funeral homes still today express the quality of their own services and products within domestic systems: advertising for an Ontario funeral home states “we pride ourselves in creating a warm, comfortable

²James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (London: David & Charles, 1972), 20.

³Kathleen Garces-Foley and Justin Holcomb, “Contemporary American Funerals: Personalizing Tradition,” in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharpe), 207-227.

atmosphere for all our families being served, by making our home, your home”.⁴ Notions of comfort that are entrenched within the lexicon of home still prevail. Why is the space designed for the funeral ritual influenced by a domestic aesthetic, and how did this come to be? Are recognizable religious referents still appropriate expressions for ritual space?⁵ This chapter explores these questions, starting with an exploration of the development of the funeral home’s place in Canadian society more than a century ago.

Rural Canadian Funerals: The Village Model

In the late nineteenth century, Canada was predominantly rural, and ritual and physical funeral needs were attended to by the community and family.⁶ Although the undertaker, as a member of the local community, had a role in assisting funeral arrangements, the space for the funeral was firmly located within the familial home. The space for the funeral ritual was controlled by loved ones who cared for and prepared the body for burial, and by the church that formalized the death within the physical and ideological framework of religious authority.

According to funeral director Neil Bardal, this “village model” was common throughout rural Canada and prevailed until the early 1900s.⁷ Poor

⁴T. Harry Hoffman & Sons Funeral Home, *General Services* (Winnipeg: T. Harry Hoffman & Sons Funeral Home, 2006), <http://www.hoffmanfuneralhome.com/generalservices.htm> (accessed 27 May 2006).

⁵A referent is defined as “the real or extra linguistic object designated by a sign”. David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2001), 325.

⁶Herbert C. Northcott and Donna M. Wilson, *Dying and Death in Canada* (Aurora, ON: Garamond Press, 2001), 24-25.

standards for health care and low standards of living in Canada at this time resulted in high mortality rates. As such, the experience of other's dying and death was an ordinary aspect of life around the close of the century, and individuals in small communities were knowledgeable of their responsibilities with regard to the deceased.⁸ There were well-established routines around death that determined the unfolding of the ritual and mourning process.⁹

Despite the frequency of funerals at the close of the nineteenth century, death was still accorded a high degree of recognition when it occurred within a tightly knit, rural community. For instance, the funeral of a neighbour was attended by all members of the immediate area, despite the hardships of setting aside work or the travel required to get to the burial site.¹⁰ The importance of the efforts of each member of the surrounding community to the collective well being of a district was still essential in the late 1800s.¹¹ The village model cast death through a lens that recognized personal loss, but primarily focused upon the individual's role as part of the social group. Bereavement was recognized at both personal and social levels, and community members would both

⁷Neil Bardal, interview by author, 27 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, Neil Bardal Incorporated, 3030 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg.

⁸Northcott and Wilson, *Dying and Death in Canada*, 24-25.

⁹As distinguished from mourning, grief is considered private and spontaneous in nature, while mourning is the outward, public expression of bereavement. Jeanne Katz, "Introduction" in *Grief, Mourning, and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz and Neil Small (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁰Robert W. Habenstein and William N. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee, WI: Bulfin Printers, 1955), 393.

¹¹Northcott and Wilson, *Dying and Death in Canada*, 24.

acknowledge the importance of the loss by attending the funeral service, and come together to show solidarity with the grieving family.¹²

At the societal level, in the late nineteenth century, the body was not viewed as a foreign object. The event of death had not yet been relocated to the hospital, except in unusual circumstances, and even if the deceased had passed away in a medical environment, the family would immediately transport the body back to the residence for preparation.¹³ The body still had a role in the familial sphere, specifically the domestic environment with which it would have been inseparable.

Today, the notion of a corpse being displayed in one's living room is a foreign concept in most of Canada, as opposed to one hundred years ago. Then, the coupling of body and home was natural; the parlour's foremost function was to display the dead, and it was only right that those who knew and loved the deceased prepared it for burial through washing and dressing. Death rituals, prior to the funeral typology's creation, were firmly entrenched within the domestic environment. While the church would ensure the ritual for the soul was borne out, the parlour was the nineteenth century hybridized funeral interior; it was the morgue, the preparation room, and place of repose, all in one space. Inhabitants would very simply reveal the home's status as place of mourning by manipulating specific elements of the decor, and in doing so, signal the recent death to the public.¹⁴

¹²Bardal, interview.

¹³Northcott and Wilson, *Dying and Death in Canada*, 90.

¹⁴Lewis R. Aiken, *Dying, Death, and Bereavement*, 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 239.

The Role of the Domestic in Funeral Space

The home served as a common site of symbolic gesture to communicate to the surrounding area that death had taken place. Mourning would have been indicated by the attachment of a crepe badge to the front door knocker, symbolizing the general age of the deceased. A white badge indicated the young and black indicated the elderly, although the choices in colour evolved through to the early 1900s to include mauve and grey, and door wreaths also became more popular than badges.¹⁵ Candles were lit, holy water sprinkled, drapes drawn, and windows closed; the house became the corpse, shrouded and anointed, with its eyes, normally looking out onto the world, turned inward.

In exception to this, the front door was left slightly ajar to admit any who desired to pay final respects.¹⁶ The door was a portal to mourning. This potent symbol, that when open welcomed the friend, and closed signalled retreat, was left only slightly ajar. As in photographer Daniel Boudinet's Polaroid image of a curtain, the image that philosopher Roland Barthes chose to open his meditation on photography, the door left ajar was a *punctum* that pricked the consciousness of the passer-by.¹⁷ It both concealed and revealed; the shadowy depths that it bounded were a metaphor for the mystery of death, and the light that it allowed to enter a symbol of hope.

All who entered the house would understand the implications of ingress; participating in mourning by choosing to join the cortege of mourners was an act of

¹⁵Habenstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 397.

¹⁶Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 560.

¹⁷Punctum is defined as a detail, or "partial object" in an image that pricks the consciousness. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 25. Here, I extend the metaphor to space, to define events and moments that interrupt the users unconscious experience of the interior, bringing them to awareness of their surroundings.

support and a reaffirmation of life.¹⁸ Uniting with the family in the face of loss was both natural and self-preserving in a small community. The ongoing well being of the survivors was re-established as the deceased was mourned in time-honoured tradition. The home became the space that signified loss in the community, but also reminded mourners of the value of life.

Similar reminders of death were found outside the home, within the limited commercial buildings in the community. As regards the actual practice of arranging for the funeral service at this time, it was common for the funeral equipment, furniture, and carriages to be rented or purchased from what was referred to as the “combination establishment”. This typology combined mercantile sales of items such as furniture and general supplies with the specialized items necessary for funerals.¹⁹ The owner of this store acted as an adviser, known in this role as the resident undertaker, recommending the necessary accoutrements, coordinating the rental of the hearse, and responding to any special wishes for the service such as the need for funeral notices, flowers, or extra seating for a home funeral service. The role of the funeral director evolved from this position as overseer of the activities that were not accommodated by the family or community. In this way, both the domestic space and the retail establishment housed the variety of services that would come together within the institution that is today known as the funeral industry.

As the end of the nineteenth century came to a close, the roles for the home, the local undertaker, and even mourning, were characterized by an authenticity and certainty

¹⁸Tony Walter, *The Revival of Death* (NY: Routledge, 1994), 53.

¹⁹Habenstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 550.

that was soon to be superseded. Each member of the community understood the course of actions to be taken post-death, and a well-coordinated effort contributed to an efficient and proper burial. In literary analyst Julian Murphet's critique of post-modernism and space, the certainty of this era, rooted in historicity and tradition, would be replaced in a "triumph of surface over depth".²⁰ As visually oriented, superficial factors began to dominate values in western culture, notions like the religious sense of having done the right thing, or following God's will, began to weaken. Prevailing attitudes, based upon fear of God as taught by Christian religion, were questioned by individuals in a more personal search to understand mortality, and were now expressed within the context of the relationships between individuals.²¹ As was evidenced through developments influenced by romantic era thinking, death began to take on new meanings.

The Victorian Romanticization of Death

Redefinitions of relationships between individuals and God were characteristic of the Romantic era, during which challenges to Enlightenment thinking – thinking based in uniformity and rationality – characterized a move toward individuality and humanity.²² The development of a romantic notion of death was based on the death of the other in the nineteenth century.²³ Death was presented as a physical loss, and signified a break in a

²⁰Julian Murphet, "Postmodernism and Space," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 116-119.

²¹John D. Morgan, "Living Our Dying and Our Grieving: Historical and Cultural Attitudes," in *Readings in Thanatology*, ed. John D. Morgan (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1997), 25.

²²Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 9-10.

²³Characterized by the expression of "passions without limit or reason", this new ideology of death and loss lent new significance to mourning by transferring the pathos of death from the individual to the other. Margaret Stroebe et al., "Broken Hearts or Broken Bonds: Love and Death in

relationship as opposed to the body's simple move into the grave and the soul's travel to the unknown.²⁴ Romantic loss was not perceived as horrific for the survivor, but as beautiful; nature was reclaiming its own, and, as in a cruel dream, the survivor was left behind to suffer. Death defined in this framework became "unbearable," but it also allowed for the act of mourning to become personal, and no longer solely tied to the tenets of religious dictates.²⁵ To comfort the mourner, images of the sweet hereafter provided the consolation of knowing that the deceased was in a heaven attended by cherubs and angels, and that such a reward awaited all.

Accordingly, the aesthetic of the funeral ritual now took on a new role, and death was considered more private than social. In both working class and bourgeois societies, death's accompanying rituals evolved to include a myriad of accessories meant to signify the importance of loss. This approached a level of fetish around 1925, when it would be common to have special shoes sewn for the swollen feet, or special clothing sewn that was split up the back, allowing more convenient dressing.²⁶ Appearance and status were values that were emphasized in the funeral at this time in Canada; traditions grounded in modesty were discarded for what historian James Curl calls the obsequies of the times.²⁷

Historical Perspective," in *The Path Ahead: Readings in Death and Dying*, ed. Lynne Anne DeSpelder and Albert Lee Strickland (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995), 231-241.

²⁴Morgan, "Living Our Dying and Our Grieving," 18.

²⁵Tony Walter, "Modern Death: Taboo or Not Taboo?," *Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association* 25 (1991): 293-310.

²⁶Bardal, interview.

²⁷Curl, 12.

The new semiotics of death included such other artifacts as ornate floral arrangements, mourning jewellery, and the casket.²⁸ In fact, no other object rejected the symbolism of the fearful death as did the casket in its departure from the coffin.²⁹ The coffin had served as a *memento mori* in previous centuries, but in the Romantic era, death was no longer affiliated with dread or fear; the casket now emerged as a new type of object, a signifier that was instilled with grace and refinement.³⁰ Much like the rhetoric around dying at that time, the design of the casket itself reflected the drama of enduring love and notions of the intimacy between the soul of the dead and their survivors (See Figure 1.2).

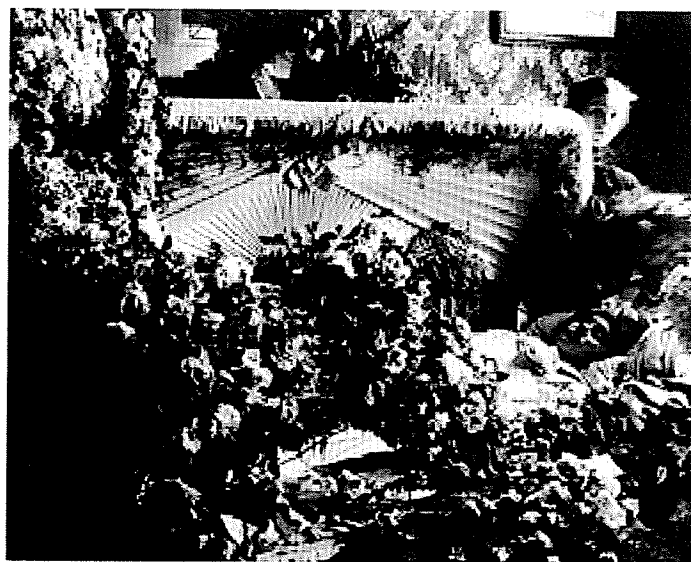


Figure 1.2: Anonymous, English, *The Victorian Casket as Jewel Box*. Late nineteenth century, daguerreotype. Reprinted with permission, Strong – National Museum of Play®, September 18, 2006, © Strong – National Museum of Play®.

²⁸The term *semiotic* is defined here as the science of signs and the study of the signifying units of discourse. As expanded by philosopher Roland Barthes, it includes systems of images and gestures. David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2001), 347.

²⁹Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 597.

³⁰The Latin term *memento mori* is defined as physical reminders of mortality. *The New Penguin English Dictionary* (London: Penguin, 2001), 866. The use of photography to document the dead was often the only visual record to show that the deceased had existed and became its own form of *memento mori*.

The traditional preparation of the body now evolved to the status of a treatment undertaken with a new sense of reverence for the corpse. The body is encased like a jewel in its box, placed within surroundings that provide comfort to both the body itself and, presumably, the bereaved. The shape of the casket itself no longer crudely mimicked the form of the body, but now resembled a box designed for the preservation of something rare.³¹ Brass hinges and handles replaced crude joints, and locks and keys were dramatic elements that signified the protective nature of the casket, implying, too, that the casket might be opened again by the key holder in some version of the afterlife.³²

In this photograph, the deceased is couched in a meticulously pleated silk lining that would ensure a comfortable rest, as if they were only slumbering in sheets of the finest fabrics. Mounds of flowers similarly romanticized the scene, and an onlooker, poised like a protective angel, watches over the casket and its contents. The image, one of many that acted to document the dead for loved ones, appears staged, and like a set, is meticulously composed to show the deceased to the best advantage. This would have served to increase the dramatic effects of loss and pathos: death, dressed so sublimely, could not fail to make the loss feel that much more cruel and unbearable.

The corpse's status as an object of fascination and glorification created a market for the accessories with which to furnish the funeral event and dress the body. The notion of elaborately preparing the body for death was not new, the ancient Egyptians being a well known example of this. This particular shift in attitudes around death, from perfunctory enlightenment funeral to the romantic staging of a dramatic performance,

³¹Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 597.

³²Habenstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*.

provided an opportunity for the emergence of the funeral industry, as it could facilitate the fashionable ritual. Increasing values placed on privacy and individualism made the home-based, public event unpopular.

As Canada's population grew and the urbanization of the country increased with an influx of European immigrants, new influences were brought to bear upon death rituals. Specifically, romantic views of death caused a cultural shift. A re-orientation of the self within the private sphere, as opposed to within the religious community, meant that death's meaning was being redefined within new parameters. The outcome of this was that as death began to be seen as a personal experience, its ritual was increasingly subsumed within the private realm, as opposed to the social one. The actions of the grieving were less influenced by the concept of social inclusion, although they were certainly prevailed upon by ideas of propriety.

Growing Alienation Toward Death: Death as Unnatural

The result of this new individualism and a decrease in death rates contributed to a phenomenon that has been identified across numerous discourses, most prevalent of them those of thanatology, or death studies: the alienation of the individual from death itself.³³ As the experience of death became less frequent, and as the rituals associated with religion were slowly eroded by increasingly humanist views, individuals were left alone to cope with death within their private lives. Understandably, when new rituals did not emerge from the secular world to replace religious ones, the concept of individual mortality became threatening.³⁴ As fear of death increased, and as its actual presence in

³³Jeffrey Kauffman, "Blinkings: A Thanatocentric Theory of Consciousness," in *Awareness of Mortality*, ed. Jeffrey Kauffman (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1998), 75-89.

³⁴Walter, "Modern Death: Taboo or Not Taboo?": 293.

individual lives decreased, it took on the new aspect of the foreign. Death was increasingly conceptualized as an unnatural event.³⁵

It is of particular interest here that in Murphet's conception of western society's evolution toward post-modernism, surface would increasingly overtake depth in importance. As traditional understandings of the body were affected by industrialization and urbanization, its surface slowly evolved into a distinct space upon which the status of the deceased and their family was advertised; it is not surprising then that the popularization of embalming as a method of treating the body prior to burial would take hold at a time when the funeral was increasingly a sign of station in life.

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard sees the contemporary history of the body as its locus as a space of marks and signs that annihilate the body's difference and re-appropriate it for the purposes of becoming a place of sign-exchange.³⁶ As such, the body becomes a meaningful structure designed to signify material liberty; the body is now freed to assume its own significance outside of religious definitions. In a Protestant ethic, at the point of death the soul was cast off, and the remains were dealt with within the confines of religious structures. Now, the body was freed to convey new meanings in its role as a surface, literally reflecting shifting values for death.

³⁵Kauffman, "Blinkings: A Thanatocentric Theory of Consciousness," 79.

³⁶Baudrillard uses the term sign-exchange to refer to new concepts of value relocated from the realm of traditional economics into the world of the pure sign; value is instead located in the signified itself. In this sense, the body is viewed as a commodity. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 1993), 101.

It is no surprise then that the practice of embalming would emerge as a significant new practice in response to humanist leanings.³⁷ Originally, embalming was established as a preservation technique during the civil war in the United States.³⁸ At that time, embalming allowed for casualties of the war to return to their families in a state that would allow for traditional burial. However, in many minds, the preserved corpse also provided the opportunity for continued contact with the deceased.

Embalming altered the perceived state of the corpse. By maintaining a semblance of naturalness, embalming achieved a number of ends: first, it provided a sense that justice was done to the deceased by defraying its decomposition, as if the corpse itself would be offended at being allowed to decay. Second, it allowed the survivors to see the body in a recognizable state, not unlike its living condition. This had the effect of extending the sense of connection between the living and the dead, thereby allowing for the promulgation of grief.³⁹ As it was explained by historian Robert Habenstein:

To preservation and sanitation, the major purposes of embalming ... has been added the function of restoration... the embalmer restores the tones to the face in such a manner that resembles the appearance of the person in health and life, and is in aesthetic keeping with the beauty of the casket and its floral backdrop.⁴⁰

It is possible to see that embalming was a process that held more potential for the living than the corpse, as it served to perpetuate the notion that death's effects could be staved off, that the effects of nature and time could be controlled, and most disturbingly, that the

³⁷Embalming is the process of injecting the corpse with fluids that temporarily preserve the signs of life in the body. Jill Watt, *Canadian Guide to Death and Dying* (Vancouver: International Self-Counsel Press, 1974), 154.

³⁸Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 200.

³⁹Douglas J. Davies, "Forms of Disposal," in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharpe), 232.

⁴⁰Habenstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 572.

state of the corpse would not distract from the carefully manipulated surrounding environment.

The embalming process was a technical specialty, and although in the late nineteenth century it could be achieved within the home, it most often occurred outside of the domestic sphere, within space that was equipped for such purposes. Requiring special education for the correct removal and replacement of fluids, often the trained mortician could also enhance the body's preserved state through the application of make-up or insertion of special internal prosthetics that increased the appearance of naturalness. These processes began to replace the traditional preparation of the corpse by the family or loved ones. Bodily preparations were now taken over by technicians, whose sole purpose was to make of the corpse a simulacrum of its living self; the dead body was no longer attended by family within the realm of the familiar, but was subjected to processing within the newly minted funeral industry. Ironically, these special treatments, sold to promote the dignity of the dead, objectified the deceased. The corpse became the subject of discreet processes that required manipulations unthinkable in their indecency. Yet these same ministrations were presented to the public as dignified and natural.

The popularity of the embalming process as a way of simulating natural death is just one example of the ways that modern influences effected change in funeral ritual. Additionally, the power invested in the funeral professionals, the construction of the funeral home user as 'client', and emphasis on efficiency and rationalization acted within Canadian society to mold what has become today's death care industry.

The Professionalization of the Funeral

The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth –

The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity⁴¹

Based upon knowledge gained from consolation literature of the mid to late 1800s, the new funeral director's role was redefined to include the professional understanding of death in order to better serve their clientele.⁴² In the early decades of the twentieth century, the influence of the romantic notion of pathos allowed for the public expression and prolongation of grief: this could be ably moderated through the newly acquired counselling skills of the funeral director. This new component of service was just one benefit that the industry could offer to the public.

Previously concerned with the provision of services or material requirements, directors were now established within an association: the Canadian National Funeral Directors Association was founded in 1921.⁴³ This organization lent strength to the director's position as purveyor of a fully organized experience because the funeral was no longer a ritual whose arrangement was entrusted to close family members, the local undertaker, or religious leaders in the community.

⁴¹Emily Dickinson, "The Bustle in a House," in *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Ralph W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981), np.

⁴²Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 596.

⁴³Funeral Service Association of Canada, "History of FSAC" (Aurora, ON: FSAC, 2003) <http://www.fsac.ca/page.php?pageId=MTc%3D>.

Increasingly, the modernization of industry was rejecting traditional methods and seeking more efficient modes of production. In the early decades of the twentieth century, this was also true of the funeral industry. Business was now beginning to flourish and, as with any other establishment seeking to establish viability, funeral directors took it upon themselves to educate the public about their services. In advertising, the public was carefully trained to see the funeral industry as a necessary component of the treatment of the deceased: they were exposed to the most recent innovations in burial attire, body preservation options, and caskets.⁴⁴ In fact, the industry as a whole was initially challenged to establish itself as a legitimate trade. It was commonly claimed by those outside of the funeral industry that this focus on creating demand was an attempt to justify the industry's own existence.⁴⁵ However, by representing their methods and products as aligned with the modern needs of a sophisticated clientele, the professionalized funeral could be shaped as an improvement on less refined provincial traditions. The funeral's initial function of properly disposing of the body in a religiously correct manner was now a ritual to be professionally marketed, orchestrated, and experienced as an event.

Often criticized for its emphasis on the material sales of the trappings of the modern funeral, the industry responded by encouraging customers to provide for the best death that they could afford, stressing that it was only a natural response for the bereaved to allow this final dignity to the deceased. However, mistrust of the funeral industry had been an ongoing problem since its inception, and some guarded attitudes toward its

⁴⁴Habenstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 499.

⁴⁵Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*; Mitford, *The American Way of Death*; and Northcott and Wilson, *Dying and Death in Canada*.

services have prevailed, despite polls showing that the majority of its users today are content with its level of services.⁴⁶

A significant shift in the industry followed the publication of Jessica Mitford's expose, "The American Way of Death," in 1963.⁴⁷ Regardless of practices within the funeral industry, funeral customers became wary about the financial implications of their choices, resulting in the formation of Memorial Societies, which lobbied on behalf of their members for better, more economical services.⁴⁸ The funeral was politicized, as customers began to exercise their power over suspect funeral service providers by co-opting the funeral planning process, thereby gaining control over specific services, products, and consequently prices, for the funeral.

The Early Funeral Typology

In the view of death historian Phillipe Aries, the creation of the funeral establishment, and specifically the space for the funeral ritual, was the ideal evolution to accommodate the dead prior to burial:

... they came to provide a special space entirely devoted to death, a death that was no longer shameful and secret, as in the hospital, but visible and dignified. The church had never been the place of death. The dead passed through the church, and sometimes remained there, not without irritating purist clergymen... this secular space reserved for death is called the funeral home or funeral parlour.⁴⁹

The funeral home had emerged as a solution to both the hidden death that occurred in hospital, and the uncomfortable role of the church in housing the body for any length of

⁴⁶Watt, *Canadian Guide to Death and Dying*, 48.

⁴⁷Bardal, interview.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 599.

time. To this day, the church declines to provide for the ritualistic viewing of the body in the days prior to a church funeral; this is provided for by the funeral home.⁵⁰

The required functions of medical laboratory and ritual space could both be met satisfactorily within mortuary walls. By the 1950s, typical physical requirements for this typology would have included the preparation area required for embalming, cold storage space for the corpses, a generous garage to house a fleet of hearses, and office space for staff. Retail sales of caskets, floral arrangements and other accessories would occur in a showroom replete with samples and catalogs. Space for the grieving included a reception lobby, family gathering rooms, viewing rooms designed to show the prepared body in its casket, and the ritual space proper.⁵¹ This hybrid space and its staff were more than prepared to accommodate the growing needs of their increasing clientele.

The displacement of the funeral into this newly created typology had ramifications for the users themselves, who were now not only mourners, but customers. Thrust into the position of making appropriate choices while under time constraint, without the benefit of community support, and in foreign surroundings, was potentially alienating to the client base. The behavioural aspects of the funeral home required careful consideration. How could the establishment assume a professional yet calming appearance, reassuring customers that they were not mistaken in choosing a modern funeral?

⁵⁰ Ibid., 599-600.

⁵¹ Watt, *Canadian Guide to Death and Dying*; and Mitford, *The American Way of Death*.

Simulations of Domesticity in Funeral Space

The funeral typology's relationship to domestic space originated at the inception of the funerary establishment, from a desire to maintain a semblance of authenticity and to provide recognizable signifiers that connoted comfort and security. This is evidenced in the choices by the funeral industry itself to treat the interior spaces like "dens, with pile carpeting, upholstered chairs and chesterfields."⁵² Further, "(i)n the lounges and offices the lighting will be soft and the temperature comfortable – much like in your own home."⁵³ The conventions of the ordinary domestic space functioned to create a scenario in which the grieving would find something familiar and theoretically comfortable. Yet in striving to do so, the industry embraced an aesthetic that failed to do any more than reproduce notions of the routine nature of the everyday.

Returning to Murphet's conception of flattened reality, the funeral typology has not evolved out of its domestic guise, but has instead relied consistently upon the codes of the parlour to inform its design. Opportunities for depth and authenticity have been flattened in the processes of simulating reality.⁵⁴ The funeral interior, in its domestic guise, envisioned its early self as a recognizable, unthreatening space that would not intimidate its clientele, who would be unfamiliar with the typology and its processes when it was first established around 1920. Adopting the parlour in both name and spatial arrangement was a reassurance to clients. And through the evolution of funeral space, domesticity has prevailed as the simulatory source.

⁵²Watt, *Canadian Guide to Death and Dying*, 49.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Murphet, "Postmodernism and Space," 118.

The funeral home's public spaces, now sometimes difficult to discern from the interiors of characterless domiciles, affect the image of the home without containing any of its warmth or familiarity. In the place of allusions to aspects of ritual and death that transcend the quotidian are staged simulations. Like the 'naturalness' of the embalmed body, the pseudo-familiar, almost real, funeral interior, does not represent reality. The reposed corpse is not merely asleep, nor has the funeral home ever been domestic space: these simulations are the generated models of a "real without origin or reality: a hyperreal."⁵⁵ As Baudrillard expresses this concept of the simulation, signs of the real have come to replace the real itself; order and symmetry stage the formality of the nineteenth and early twentieth century parlour.

The term "parlour", with implications of "restraint, punishments, Bible reading, and unbearable boredom... (i)ts furniture stiff, uncomfortable, too delicate, and too neat" has now been virtually abandoned as the name for the ritual space.⁵⁶ However, the simulated "chapel" still remains to ground the new, more secularized funeral ritual.

Simulations of Religious Space

When the funeral home adopted the service from Christian religion, it fashioned its chapel to emulate the sanctuary. This space would need to refer to the familiar doctrine of a religious ideology, yet maintain a distance from its identification as a church. The funeral chapel evolved to fill this role. The chapel, the name either given to the space within the funeral home that accommodated the funeral rites, or the name reassigned to

⁵⁵Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), 166.

⁵⁶Robert Woods Kennedy, 1953 in Stanley Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design* (Toronto: Harper and Row, 1990), 73.

the entire establishment, was increasingly the focus of the funeral establishment, to which it lent a vestige of religious authority.⁵⁷

The chapel could never perform with doctrinal certitude, however, as it was functionally required to meet the needs of whatever denomination happened to be celebrating rites. "All things to all men", the chapel circa 1965 was equipped like a stage, with a variety of props to fabricate the variety of environments that were demanded of it.⁵⁸ The concept of the funeral chapel functioned as a flexible space that could only ever simulate sacred space.

The contradiction that emerged for the funeral home, and that continues to today, was that throughout the past century, modern ideas of identity were decreasingly tied to religion, and yet a majority of funeral home customers still requested religiously based rites.⁵⁹ Allusions to the sanctity of the funeral rite, especially through the use of language in naming the funeral chapel, and in its ability to flexibly meet the demands of a variety of users, assumed great importance.

Mitford also discussed the deliberate choices of terminology that were made to frame the typology.⁶⁰ The name chapel could be borrowed to legitimate the ritual aspect of the mortuary establishment, as mentioned above, and also allowed for the establishment's avoidance of the need to address the less savoury aspects of the industry

⁵⁷Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, 60-61.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Kathleen Garces-Folley, "Funerals of the Unaffiliated," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 46 (1988): 301.

⁶⁰Mitford, *The American Way of Death*, 60.

such as the body preparation rooms, or the retail aspects such as the casket showroom or offices.

Today's funeral spaces increasingly refer to themselves under new monikers: "memorial center" is more prominent today, as the disposal method of cremation becomes more popular.⁶¹ Similarly, general terms like "tribute centre" have also emerged, along with more sophisticated branded spaces like "Memoria" in Montreal, Quebec.⁶² However, it is rare to find the industry experimenting with radical change with regards to the referents from which it has borrowed.

As the typology continues to evolve it is relevant to consider that the various functions of the funeral home, supporting sacred ritual, counselling grieving families and other loved ones, selling products and services, and preparing corpses, may never resolve itself in a single unique framework. Unlike the 'Funeral Designs' advertised in the window in Michel Lambeth's photo, today's funeral typology conflates disparate functions in one building, a complex task when considering the sensitivity of the client user group. The funeral industry's attachment to familiar and trusted simulations, perceived as effective in establishing an appropriate tone, does not appear to be dissipating.

Conclusion

In summary, the funeral home as a design typology plays a significant role within Canadian culture and the death system in the western world. It functions to accommodate ritual needs for an increasingly secularized population, yet it is

⁶¹ Davies, *Forms of Disposal*, 234.

⁶² Norma Wellwood interview.

questionable whether it does so in a way that is most accommodating to the evolving ritual needs of Canadians. Composed of a diverse group of sub-cultures, the Canadian context for this study requires the understanding that attitudes around death are shaped by culture, and that shifts in cultural ideology will be affected by changing social, political and economic patterns.

Understanding why, and how, the typology is positioned in such a way within current culture requires an investigation of its evolution within Canadian history. A survey of common practices around death in the late nineteenth century situated the evolution of the funeral home within a particular framework of social and religious beliefs. However, growing acceptance of a romantic view of death promoted individual as opposed to social orientations to death, and loss and grief were contextualized within private relationships; the death of a loved one was viewed as a break in a relationship that could instigate an intense and prolonged mourning period. The influence of the romantic notion of the death of the other was seen to have a stronger affect within urban centres than rural ones; denser living areas, increased anonymity, and the general systematization of industry all contributed to evolving rituals that were decreasingly associated with religious community.

One effect of this trend toward increased individualism was the creation of the funeral industry around 1920: as responses to loss were changing, the funeral home essentially formalized these changes. By providing a customized environment that would also provide for a variety of other physical functions such as the preparation of the body by embalming and the sales of caskets, the funeral home created a new relationship with the grieving. Now considered customers, the users of the funeral services were also

provided a modicum of grief counselling, and were accommodated within spaces that were intended to be both soothing and familiar. However, the domestic and sacred references, still evident in many of today's funeral homes, fail to convince. Instead, the simulation of the residential and religious interiors inhibits the evolution of the space for ritual: by duplicating existing referents instead of invoking new ones, the funeral home remains rooted in the traditional and conservative. Yet today's clientele, dominated by the baby boom generation in particular, demand highly personalized responses to their requests: the funeral ritual will continue to evolve, and the typology that exists to house it must respond.

CHAPTER 2
LOOKING FOR DEATH IN CANADIAN SOCIETY



Figure 2.1: Anonymous, Canadian, *Family gathering around grave*. Mid-twentieth century, photograph.

“For Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere...”¹

Introduction

Philosopher and theorist Roland Barthes’ observation in *Camera Lucida* forms the central problem taken up by this discourse. Where is death, if not residing contently within religious confines? Understood literally, Barthes is asking the reader to consider that Death, capitalized, ennobled Death, cannot have effaced itself from society

¹Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (1981), 92.

altogether. It must inhabit culture somewhere if it is no longer totally ascribed to sacred ideologies.

It is now well-accepted in western society that death ritual occurs outside of traditional religious frameworks. Even rituals still couched in the sacrosanct are redefined in the discourses of post-modernity.² In Canada, society itself looks less to religious doctrines for guidance and leadership in defining values; although death is still an event addressed in religious discourses, the move towards secularism has created particular conditions within which death is now framed.³ According to sociologist Clive Seale, humans construct social and cultural life in the face of death, and so all of culture can be viewed as a manufactured defense against mortality.⁴ Like the family gathered around the grave in Figure 2.1, social groups act collectively to reaffirm life for each other while simultaneously acknowledging the deaths of others.

An investigation of the ways that meanings for death are constructed within society then provides a way to analyze the funeral home, which is a part of this cultural construction. It is an aspect of the built environment that serves society in a number of ways: it manages the physical processes necessary to the disposal of the dead body, it accommodates for the planning of the disposal, it provides space for the ritualizing of its disposal, and extends grief counseling to the grieving loved ones.

²Robert Fulton, *Death and Identity* (New York: Wiley, 1965), 3; Kathleen Garces-Folley, "Funerals of the Unaffiliated," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 46 (1988): 288; Paul Irion, "Changing Patterns of Ritual Response to Death," *Omega* 22, no.3 (1990-91): 163; and Kathleen Garces-Foley and Justin Holcomb, "Contemporary American Funerals: Personalizing Tradition," in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 209.

³Kenneth MacKendrick, interview by author, 17 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

⁴Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 211.

Death as it is constructed in discursive practices is central to this inquiry. Knowledge of being in the world, as discussed here, is reoriented through social activity. Established sociological analyses look at society as having many useful tools to mediate everyday life through this social activity; the most potent, language, is vested with power and authority and in turn, its users shape meaning for death. Yet language is not the only cultural construct reflecting values. Death as it is found in discursive formations, including the built environment, language, texts and visual artifacts, is readable for its significance to society.⁵ Through a deconstruction of these elements, I position death in a number of locations within post-modern sociological frameworks, isolating each concept for its value in informing funeral space.

The framework for this chapter tracks Barthes' question: Where is death in Canadian society, if not in religion? In my exploration, I locate death in the idea of liminality, and show how this concept of the in-between acts to position individuals, both deceased and living, within specific frameworks.⁶ I find it too in sociologist Benedict Anderson's theory of the imagined community, where individuals join together within a conceptual group to bolster a sense of belonging, which acts to help individuals to reorganize themselves to acknowledge death.⁷ Death is also in the narratives of the mass media, where cultural scripts are both conceived as producing and mirroring Canadian attitudes to death, and in post-disaster rituals that act to create transitory space for death in public space. Finally, I find death in revivalist discourses that bring death back into the

⁵Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194.

⁶Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), 10-11.

⁷Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

everyday, in turn making death less foreign, suggesting that space for death itself can also be reintroduced into the land of the living.

In reinstating the physical spaces for death ritual as important to the communal needs of broader society, the funeral home can be viewed as having cultural value. In its repositioning, funeral space in the Canadian milieu takes on significance as an aspect of the built environment that contributes to attitudes around death. Interior designers, interpreters of culture by our capacity to read both space and behaviours, are also creators of culture, in our ability to critique those readings and reject or re-direct meanings through design. As such, we are integral to the process of responding to and reproducing attitudes.⁸ A post-structuralist reading of images, text and space will be employed to pursue Barthes' question and to demonstrate ways to reveal differences in meanings associated with the funeral. As rituals themselves are increasingly dynamic events, it follows that my first site of analysis focuses on this rite of passage itself, specifically as it has been conceptualized by ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep. He classified ritual into three stages, those of separation, *limen*, and re-aggregation, each of which occurs over a duration of time that can be exceptionally brief or drawn out.⁹ It is in his liminal stage that an interpretation of meaning for death can be isolated and extended to the realm of the funeral interior.

⁸Ellen Lupton, "The Designer as Producer" in *The Education of a Graphic Designer*, ed. Steven Heller, 159-160 (New York: Allworth Press, 1998).

⁹Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 11.

Death in Liminal Space

Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the liminal phase as a fluid space that exists between the profane, the context in which the rites begin, and the sacred, which is the destination of the funeral rite.¹⁰ Characterized by Turner as liminal *personae*, individuals in this phase elude the network of classifications that normally locate positions in cultural space.¹¹ Most important to this inquiry, the liminal *personae* is subject to paradox, being both what Turner calls betwixt and between, “cultural and natural”, lowly and sacred.¹²

The funeral ritual, when subjected to an analysis of the rites of passage, has been cast as a practice that recognizes each of the three phases, with an emphasis on the aggregation, or reincorporation of the deceased into a new role.¹³ However, I argue that the funeral home typology benefits from an analysis of its liminal aspects, as the deceased is essentially a liminal *personae* when their body is initiated to the processes of ritual preparation within the funeral home. The funeral home, as the site of the rite of passage, is the transition space for the deceased, from their active, physical place in the social fabric to something new. In the context of the postmodern discourses that construct relationships in imagined communities and within which individual meanings are paramount, liminality offers a metaphor for physical space that encourages pliancy and mutability, characteristics that can also be said to distinguish personalized rituals.

¹⁰Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 94-95.

¹¹Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), 49.

¹²Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 49.

¹³Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 146.

“Actuality gives way to possibility” in the liminal space.¹⁴ Analysis of the funeral in this context posits that society seeks space to recognize the separation of the individual from the social group, and that space is characterized as fluid, tractable. The funeral home typology can and should recognize the tenuous nature of invented rituals, and the increasing desire to reshape those rituals to reflect the cultural place of the deceased.

In reading the image of the shadowy space in Figure 2.2, I respond to a liminality that reveals possibilities for the application of this concept within funeral interiors. In this image, the void between strong vertical planes is liminally charged: a seemingly impassable opening entreats an intrigued young viewer to experience the mysterious connection between the space he occupies, known, illuminated and therefore less interesting, and the dimly lit territory within and beyond. The slot between the two surfaces is an active challenge, causing him to question his own relationship to the space he inhabits. Engaging his sense of scale, the liminal phenomena reconnects his experience of the forms, and the path between them, back to his own body. Does this space invite or prohibit?

Shadow, like an incision, cleaves the bright homogeneity of the spatial experience and invokes contrasts between lightness and darkness. The strength of the shadow as representation of liminality is its ability to stimulate imagination; choosing to explore the passage between bright illumination and shade contextualizes the liminal death ritual in individual experiences of space.¹⁵ Turner’s conception of liminality, its betwixt and

¹⁴Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, 50.

¹⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (Chichester, WS: Wiley, 2005), 46-47.

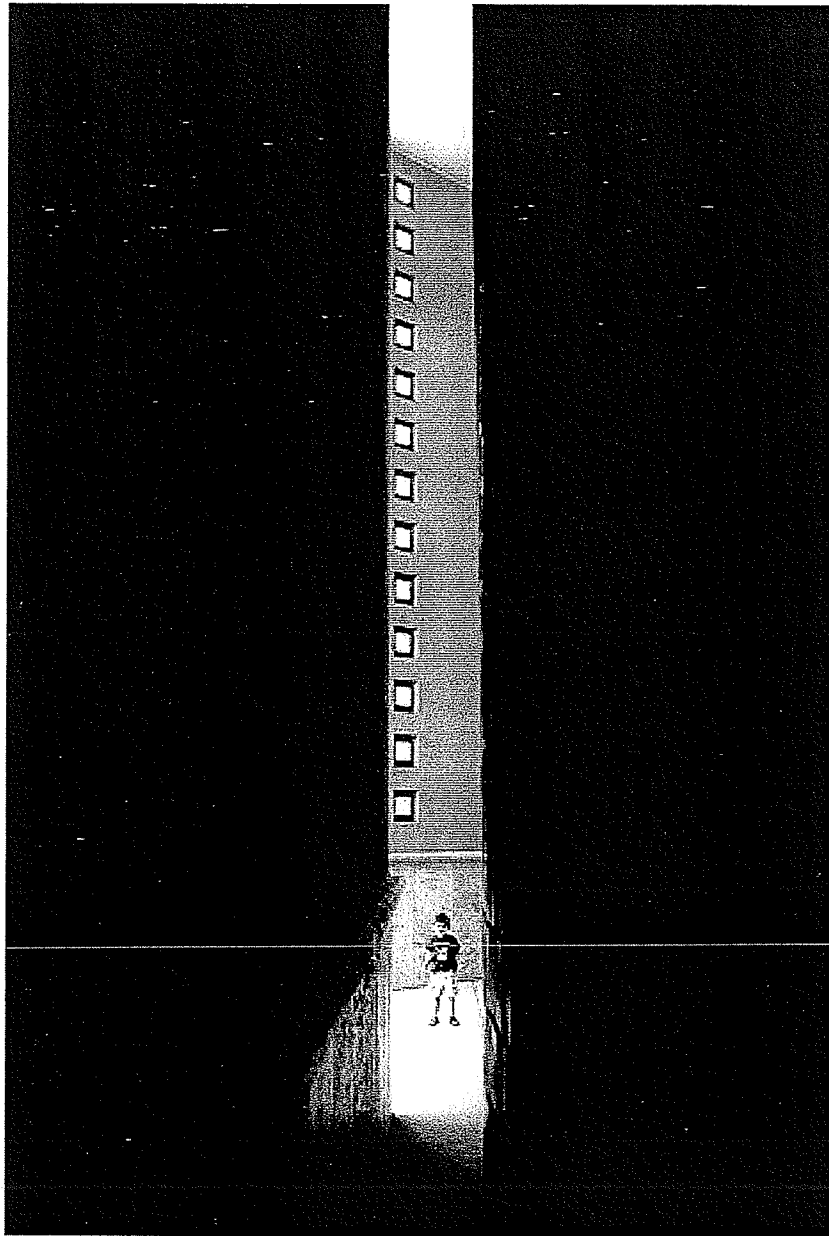


Figure 2.2: Bitmapr, *The liminality of betwixt and between*. 2006, photograph.
Collection:Flickr.com. Reprinted through creative commons agreement.

between nature, is literally manifested here.¹⁶ The deceased neither occupy their living role in Canadian culture nor have they assumed new status post-ritual. Representing this transitional state, the cleavage between the walls is death and the dead, as both accessible and inaccessible. The void is not classifiable, yet because it is perceivable, it is not entirely formidable; so too can death and the status of the deceased be characterized.

Engaging the liminal phenomena as metaphor for the mystery of death promotes new ways to conceive of mortality; not foreign, but present to those willing to consider its role in their surroundings. Liminality therefore has significance as a concept imbedded in funeral space; it proves valuable in its power to represent the unqualifiable nature of loss and the mystery of death ritual. In its ambiguity, liminal space has the potential to attract a diverse group of survivors, an imagined community that grieve together and share the experiences of both the physical environment and loss.

Death in the Imagined Community

Anderson defines an imagined community as an imaginary social group to which one's belonging is conceptual.¹⁷ Members of the imagined community will never meet or know one another, but will identify themselves with larger collectives by participating in acts that advance the ideologies of the imagined communities to which they belong. Initially presented by Anderson as the foundation for constructing nationalist identities, Seale expands upon this concept to include other imagined communities that have relevance to death and dying, such as those created within the discourses of medicine, government, or

¹⁶ Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94-95.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5-7.

hospice care.¹⁸ Ways of understanding death are conveyed in these various systems, and individuals interacting with these systems join communities by virtue of their association and adoption of the system's norms.

Imagined communities are abstract but potent: they are a ground against which individual action is legitimated as being-towards an ideology. Seale alludes to how imagined communities frame moral acts or provide justification for behaviour.¹⁹ This is important because it illustrates how structures exist for the expression of individual attitudes within a wider sphere, and it is within these structures that I can search to answer Barthes' question about where death is in society.

In the context of this study, the funeral home becomes an environment that constructs a discursive community of grieving. Similarly, Seale corroborates this view that an imagined community is discursively constructed within the group of clients that use the services of the funeral industry.²⁰ Spatially, the funeral home supports the ideological community of grieving by reflecting back the cultural scripts that are enacted around grief, loss and memorialization. At the heart of any imagined community is its own discursive practice: this practice is known as the cultural script, and is the sum of "ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting".²¹ Cultural scripts provide templates for being that are adopted by communities of people that anonymously participate in the same system.

¹⁸Seale, *Constructing Death*, 3.

¹⁹Ibid., 32.

²⁰Clive Seale, interview by author, 25 April 2006, Winnipeg, email transcript.

²¹Virginia Lea and Judy Helfand, eds., *Identifying Race and Transforming Whiteness in the Classroom* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 1.

How cultural scripts are produced is of particular interest. Philosopher Michel Foucault critiques how individual experience is described, extrapolated, then normalized into meta-stories, and used to moderate behaviour.²² From individual experiences, norms are invented that define boundaries for what is acceptable within society. Cultural scripts therefore act to permit personal agency and to limit it. For example, scripts derived from psychotherapy qualify grief in stages, which locates individuals along a grieving process, and either provides comfort that individuals are progressing in an identifiable pattern²³, or acts to objectify the bereaved subject by asserting that there is only one correct way to grieve.²⁴ Depending upon the cultural scripts to which one has access, there is great variability in how understanding for death is constructed.

Despite this, the exploration of cultural scripts is a useful way to uncover how individuals in any culture come to understand death in a social context. They are projected within the funeral industry, about the funeral industry, and are reinforced through the traditional repetitions of funeral ritual. Whether consciously adopted or unconsciously reproduced, they are available for deconstruction through a close reading. In the following example I show how one funeral chain constructs messages about grief and loss. These constructions are then questioned in the context of their influence on funeral space. In this way, discourse analysis becomes an important tool for interior designers willing to question cultural patterns at a deeper level; through discourse

²²Foucault in Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2004), 39.

²³Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volume 14, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 237-259; and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969).

²⁴Hedtke and Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives* 23.

analysis, it is possible to better understand the subtleties produced within meta-narratives and to challenge them from an informed position in the designed solution. In the following section, I examine two sources, the first an advertising billboard on Broadway Avenue in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the second a mass-mail out questionnaire that I received at my home in a middle-class neighbourhood, also in Winnipeg (see Appendix A).

Death in the Cultural Scripts of Advertising

Cultural scripts in the funeral industry characterize the funeral and death in a number of ways. On a billboard outside a local funeral home, the funeral is “Celebrating a Life”,²⁵ and in a questionnaire, “one of the hardest things a family has to face...is the death of a loved one”²⁶. These decidedly different messages offer two tones for analysis: the first, celebratory, message impacted me because of the marked contrast in its directive to focus on life rather than loss (see Figure 2.3). The second immediately provoked interest because of its didactic tone: as both of these messages construct meanings that are consumed by the public, they are able illustrations of how death is discursively constructed in funeral industry media.

The first message is that the funeral ritual provides an opportunity to focus on memories of the deceased through a celebration of life as an achievement. It is a humanizing and specific ritual, as opposed to impersonal, detached, dispassionate, routine, which focuses on sombre mourning and loss. Yet it is also a reflection that the corporation is aware of trends, and intent upon influencing its consumers. Death is

²⁵Alderwoods Group advertisement billboard at 669 Broadway Ave, Winnipeg.

²⁶Alderwoods Community Outreach Questionnaire, 2005. See Appendix A.

cloaked in terminology that challenges notions of the traditional in order to appeal to an expanding market consisting of baby boomers. This market category has been isolated as demanding new approaches to ritual, requesting simpler, more personal ceremonies that avoid traditional interpretations of performance based in religious contexts²⁷. So this text can be read as an appeal to one of the industry's largest markets, in a manner reflective of current attitudes to death.



Figure 2.3: Katherine Isaac, *Celebrating A Life Lived*. September, 2006, Colour photograph.

²⁷Norma Wellwood, interview by author, 4 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

The second comment is that death of a loved one is “one of the hardest things a family has to face”. Found on the first page of a questionnaire, this statement does not give its recipients an alternative way to respond. The language acts to normalize death as difficult and as something that must be faced.²⁸ The questionnaire reflects one cultural script - that of the modern discourses of psychotherapy. Here, loss is cast in absolute terms, where it is experienced by a grieving subject, and a knowing other, in this case Alderwoods Group, who assumes the dominant, though friendly, voice of expert.²⁹ Social anthropologists Neil Small and Jenny Hockey identify this paradigm in their article on the production of bereavement care, and describe the act of subordinating the individual “to the discursive practices of experts” as a modern approach to the event of death.³⁰ The language used in the questionnaire is deterministic, rooted in the authority of the funeral establishment, which bestows its distinct expertise upon a readership that observes the message positioned as a consuming subject.

In the choice of language, assuming that the family “faces” the death, establishes an adversarial, binary relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. The death is something inevitably difficult in the text, and the family is positioned against the loss, in a classically modern conceptualization of grief: a distinct condition to be reckoned with,

²⁸Hedtke and Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives*, 38.

²⁹I use the terms “subject” and “other” in a specific post-structuralist context to describe, first, the individual who is acted upon by discourse, in this case, the grieving person. In the role of subject, the individual is seen as a product of meaning, not its source. David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2001), 368. Otherness is then defined as a polarity to the subject, as a thing not able to be identified with the self that is different, and therefore other. *Ibid.*, 285.

³⁰Neil Small and Jenny Hockey, “Discourse into Practice: The Production of Bereavement Care,” in *Grief, Mourning, and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz and Neil Small (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 119.

something to be 'got over', and time bound. Grief stands in opposition to normalcy and health.

An alternate interpretation focuses on the consolatory tone of the same statement, that loss is "one of the hardest things a family has to face ...": a public expression of empathy that presupposes an emotionally literate readership. Discussed by media theorist David Gauntlett in his text *Media, Gender, and Identity*, emotional literacy has the effect of connecting disparate individuals by engendering common understandings of the self in terms of emotional intelligence and independent aspirations.³¹ The emotionally literate are an imagined community of self-aware individuals that respond to such extensions because the impression is created that the company is aligned with questionnaire participants and reinforces the bond between those who understand the cultural scripts of emotional literacy.

Cultural Scripts Reproduced in Funeral Space

A close reading of language like this uncovers patterns and repetitions that can be questioned for their relevance to the funeral establishment, and then engaged to challenge established approaches to space. For instance, the readings above can be extrapolated into the funeral environment in a number of ways. First, the celebratory focus on the life, rather than death, of the deceased, has meant that funeral space is required to accommodate more than a casket, urn, or other representation of the body. New rituals increasingly engage with technology to literally project backwards, constructing meaning for death through a careful assemblage of biographical details of the deceased while still living.

³¹David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction* (New York: Taylor & Francis Gauntlett, 2002), 245.

Be it through slide shows, streaming audio, or video, effectively the funeral home becomes a theatre, wherein the life of the deceased is re-performed through images and sound. A naïve interpretation of the desire for these performances has resulted in the creation of funeral environments that, like the multiplex theatres, do not project themselves with any particular depth.³² Where the imagistic funeral celebration is concerned, surfaces dominate; surfaces on which to project, on which to recycle the life of the deceased person from fragments of the past.

One example is a funeral home in Ontario that offers their customers a choice of backgrounds that are reverse projected onto a screen behind the casket.³³ Nature scenes and sunsets fabricate a superficial and temporary reality. The intended uniqueness of the background is only an illusory benefit because it too is recycled through countless rituals, bearing no authentic significance to any particular individual, yet perpetuating the cultural script of individuality. This interpretation of the script of the personal, celebratory funeral ritual results in space that necessarily evacuates any meaning from the fixed form of the interior. This makes way for the implantations of personality that cycle through the funeral space the way that films cycle through the cinema.

The analysis above focuses on a superficial interpretation of the celebratory role in ritual, but how is the second example, the construct of the grieving subject and the authoritative funeral industry perpetuated in space? Spatially, the funeral environment is separated into areas prescribed for public and private purposes. Although some funeral

³²Julian Murphet, "Postmodernism and Space," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 118.

³³Camie Leard, "Windsor's Families First is on the Cutting Edge," *Canadian Funeral News*, June, 2005, 7.

homes will allow access to the sequestered spaces for embalming, sorting of cremains, and other body preparation processes, I have not yet come across an example of a funeral home that blends these two areas with the intent to promote involvement of family with the preparation of the body.³⁴ Although there are movements to reclaim the funeral rite back into the community, these are happening outside of the funeral profession, often in opposition to it.³⁵

This script of opposition, of industry professionals to the grieving clients, is echoes through the division of the spatial program for the funeral home, where hard edges delineate public from private. At another Ontario funeral home, visitation rooms, lounges, chapel, reception and kitchenette areas are all readily accessible on the main and upper floor to participants during the funeral, while the body preparation room is relegated to the basement, an area that is only accessed by the public in the instance of needing to identify the deceased. All administrative offices, the boardroom and coordination office are discretely and definitively sealed behind closed doors.³⁶ The public is not invited into these regions of the funeral home because they have been designated as practical and operative, and designed as such.

Restriction of movement between areas designated for public consumption and those that are utilitarian and private reproduces the cultural script of expert and naïve

³⁴Neil Bardal Incorporated and Yewchin Funeral Chapel will allow access to their 'back-of-house' area at the request of family. Similarly, Bayview Gardens Memorial will also, but explicitly states that it would actively discourage the viewing of the embalming process.

³⁵Jerri Lyons, founder of Final Passages, an organization that trains individuals to perform home funerals. Jerri Lyons, "Trends," *Final Passages* (San Francisco: Final Passages, 2001) www.finalpassages.org/ (accessed 3 July, 2006).

³⁶Christopher.Climie, interview by author, 5 August 2006, Winnipeg, email transcript.

public. Furthering this argument, interiors are symbolically familiar, furniture mimics the domestic, artwork is neutral, and lighting is discreet, because clients are perceived to need comfort and stability, and this is how those needs are often interpreted. Establishing a personal relationship with the client is important to planning a meaningful ritual, and so familiarity is facilitated by the non-offensive, recognizable interior.

However, private spaces are clinical and effaced of any symbolic qualities that would layer meaning onto them. They resort to pure function in their ordering for efficiency and convenience: bodies here remain anonymous, not because they are not diligently attended to, but out of professional respect for what cannot be known about them.³⁷ They are expertly treated, illuminated and inspected for such physical concerns as bruises, bedsores and foot health.³⁸ The cultural scripts of authority reign in this zone, where spaces reflect the professional concerns of death that are not evidenced on the opposite sides of its walls.

The classification of spaces for comfort versus those for utility emanates from a modern desire to establish difference within binary structure.³⁹ Private, back-of-house spaces are not intended to accommodate the grieving. They function to separate the expert, clinical treatment of the physical from the expert, therapeutic treatment of the behavioural, reproducing the cultural scripts proposed within the discourse analysis of the marketing material discussed earlier. While print media and billboard advertising have influences on consumers in the physical environment, television media has been cast by

³⁷Neil Bardal, interview by author, 27 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, Neil Bardal Incorporated, 3030 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox," in *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 116.

many, including sociologists Jennifer King and Bert Hayslip in their study on *The Media's Influence on College Students' Views of Death*, as a strong influence on fear of death among teenagers in their study.⁴⁰ In this view, dominant beliefs around death come from above and are consumed by a passive viewing audience.

Death in the Narratives of Television Media

The prevalence of death on television cannot be denied; stories about death and natural disasters, wars, murders, and horrific accidents dominate television news, for instance, while various fictional dramas place death or the threat of it at the centre of their plots.⁴¹ Popular programs such as *ER*, *Gray's Anatomy*, *House*, the *CSI* franchise, and *Da Vinci's Inquest* show individuals dealing with death and the dying every night of the week. Programs like the recently concluded series *Six Feet Under* invite the viewer into the funeral parlour and its nether regions to highlight the everyday workings of the death services industry. There are obviously narratives developed for television media that create meaning for death, some subtle and others overt. How are the ways that these meanings are received, characterized within theoretical discourses?

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer credited the corporations running mass media with the power to create culture.⁴² Culture and its scripts are produced and delivered en masse to the viewing public; the power in this relationship is centred in the

⁴⁰Jennifer King and Bert Hayslip, Jr., "The Media's Influence on College Students' Views of Death," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 44 (2002): 37.

⁴¹Popular programs such as *ER*, *Gray's Anatomy*, *House*, the *CSI* franchise, and *Da Vinci's Inquest* show individuals dealing with death and the dying every night of the week. Programs like the recently concluded series *Six Feet Under* invite the viewer into the funeral parlor and its nether regions to highlight the everyday workings of the death services industry.

⁴²Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979).

media's ability to make products that are distributed to society specifically for the purposes of profit.⁴³ Cultural scripts emerge from all types of media as commodities that are created for mass consumption.

Contrasting with this view, Gauntlett, focusing his studies mainly on screen media, believes that media is not consumed by a naïve public that passively internalizes its messages, but is instead seen by an audience that recognizes the multiplicity of messages available to them. Gauntlett speaks of "a slow but engaged dialogue between media and media consumers", and characterizes the media-society relationship as continually variable; he does not subscribe to the theory that either party has power in itself, but that each has powerful ideas.⁴⁴

The manner in which media messages are integrated into the social psyche cannot be reduced to a conversation about the hegemonic powers of the media; there is agency in the public's selection of what is important. Yet there is a paradox in imagining access to an unlimited variety of programming, as anyone who has experienced frustration when searching for quality television can attest; limitations always exist based on the availability of programming from which to choose.

Death in Post-Disaster Ritual

The news media present a myriad of death narratives to the public every day. Death may be veiled, evidenced by the moratorium on photographing the caskets of American soldiers returning home for burial, sensationalized like the murders of celebrities, or ceremonious such as the coverage of the Roman Catholic death ritual for Pope John Paul

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity*, 255.

II.⁴⁵ According to Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, media sources are predisposed to homogeneity because they are all part of the same process of mass cultural production.⁴⁶ In this sense, cultural narratives for death emanating from media sources are delivered to a passive consumer audience. The positioning of power is in the hands of the corporations that own the media; therefore, there is authority in what those corporations deem acceptable in media presentations.

John Fiske, however, asserts that the listening, viewing public is exactly the site for the production of cultural meaning, "it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above".⁴⁷ In this way agency remains centred with the individual. "The freedom of audiences as producers in the cultural economy is considerable".⁴⁸ This argument puts power to discern content and meaning construction back into the realm of the community, giving agency to select the stories that will be heard, the narratives to which importance will ascribed, and the ability to respond in ways that are deemed appropriate.

In the Fiske critique, possibilities are created when news events are broadcast live into millions of households at the same time. Television's role in what has been termed 'post-disaster ritual' is of significance because it connects like-minded individuals, supporting the formation of spontaneous communities and the collective response to

⁴⁵ "Website posts coffin photos, Pentagon unhappy" *CBC News Online*, 23 April 2004, online edition.

⁴⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

⁴⁷ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 24.

⁴⁸ John Fiske, "TV: Re-Situating the Popular in the People," in *Film, TV and the Popular*, Ed. Philip Bell and Kari Hanet, *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 1, no. 2 (1987): paragraph 12.

public disasters.⁴⁹ These formations corroborate Fiske's assertion that people are not just consumers: the audience rejects this role "and becomes a producer, a producer of meanings".⁵⁰

Since the mid-1960s, it has been documented that television has contributed to the ability of communities to produce traditions around disaster sites in the western world.⁵¹ From the laying down of flowers and memorabilia to the holding of vigils and musical events, death sites have been transformed into shrines, stages, and memorials. This phenomenon, known as spontaneous memorialization, is an embodiment of public grief over the death of someone who may or may not have been personally known. Temporary shrines are erected by private individuals, at either the site of an accident, near the place of residence of the deceased, or another designated spot that has meaning for the public in relationship to the deceased.

Spontaneous Memorials as Transitory Space

Spontaneous memorialization is a physical manifestation of public grief, and has evolved into a public ritual event that brings private, often anonymous grief, into the public realm. In the context of this exploration of the many ways that Canadian societies construct meaning for death, the phenomena of the spontaneous memorial, or shrine, is viewed as a

⁴⁹Small and Hockey, "Discourse into Practice," 260.

⁵⁰Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 24.

⁵¹The site of a coal slide that destroyed a school and took the lives of 116 children in Aberfan, South Wales was widely broadcast in the British media in 1966. This event is recognized as one the first sites of spontaneous memorialization influenced by the television media. Anne Eyre, "Post-disaster rituals" in *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, ed. Jenny Hockey, Jeanne Katz, and Neil Small (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001), 261.

tool for expressions of condolence in the face of senseless violence or tragedy.⁵² It is a meaningful act from a public unused to loss of control over death in modern society, one that grows spontaneously as aggregations of artifacts accumulate at the site of death. Moving into this analysis of the social response to death allows me to explore both the human side of loss, and the performative power that is imbued on this variation on space for memorialization.

While funeral rituals tend to be highly organized and often exclude the participation of an extended public, spontaneous memorials are improvised and inclusive (see Figure 2.4). The fence in the photograph holds an assemblage of objects of significance that accumulated over the course of one year in response to the attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City. The shape of the totality of objects left and events that have taken place at the site have, in essence, become the space of memorialization, transitory but not less relevant as space of ritual.

What do these objects convey about public expressions of grief? This form of recognition for the victim or the bereaved, although in a public forum, is actually personal. It grants permission to express feelings where they might not otherwise have an outlet, immediately after an event, and the objects of memory are conceived as having significance in their materiality. Personal effects like stuffed animals and articles of clothing combine with text-based messages on banners and note paper. Flags, wreaths, and flower arrangements, traditional symbols associated with funerals, combine with the

⁵²Allen Haney, Christina Leimer and Juliann Lowery, "Spontaneous Memorialization: Violent Death and Emerging Mourning Ritual," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 35 (1997): 169.



Figure 2.4: Mutantfrog. *St. Peter's Fence – Origami Wreath*. 2002, color photograph.
Collection: Flickr.com. Reprinted with permission, creative commons agreement.

miscellany of other artifacts. Taken together, these artifacts “unify ideation and action into concrete objects that signify.”⁵³

The assemblage in this example becomes a shrine that signifies the diversity and resilience of humanity in the face of destructive violence. Miles Richardson discusses the potency of the physical presence of the spontaneous memorial as a denial of absence.⁵⁴ By manifesting something, anything, a presence is asserted through the materiality and longevity of the objects left at the site. But not just a presence of the object; symbolically, their robustness acts against the fragility of life, they defy weather, time and circumstance in a way that the victims of the World Trade Centers no longer can. The objects are activated against death.

A unique aspect of the spontaneous memorial is that it occurs as a transitory event – it appears and dissolves in any space that is appropriated by anonymous individuals, for ritualistic purposes. In this sense, memorial space is cast as ‘sacred’ space for the duration of its existence.⁵⁵ It is uniquely owned by no one and by everyone who should choose to look at it, touch it, or contribute to it; its sanctity is neither qualifiable nor static. Its temporal limits lend it an accessibility that fixed monuments do not possess.

⁵³Miles Richardson, “The Gift of Presence: The Act of Leaving Artifacts at Shrines, Memorials, and Other Tragedies” in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 263.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Sylvia Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines and Public Memorialization,” in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 247. Sacred space is defined by Grider as sites distinguished from their surroundings in such a way as to call attention to their existence. Additionally, Joel Brereton believes that sacred spaces need not have any specific content, but must have a common role to “express fundamental cultural values and principles”. Joel Brereton, “Sacred Space,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 534.

The democracy of the spontaneous memorial is in the anonymity of representations that construct it, yet its totality can also be read as a powerful statement by a grieving public.

Space is annexed to acknowledge grief that has no other adequate receptacle: liminal in its condition of being both betwixt and between culturally established built forms, the spontaneous memorial is a vernacular space that denies the specificity of status, being both humble and sacred.⁵⁶ In the figure above, its boundaries are not fixed, and it has inserted itself into the indefinable zone of the sidewalk – fence threshold. The highly individualized aggregations form a liminal phenomenon, spontaneously erected, transitory and difficult to define: it is both common when broken into the simple elements that constitute it, and exceptional for its total impact. In its cumulative nature, it is a typically post-modern jumble, mixed and matched as individuals see fit.⁵⁷

In many ways, liminal aspects of ritual are reflective of this post-modern condition. Proscribing to no single set of beliefs or meaning for the death or the event that caused it, the ritual can be interpreted in as many ways as there are individuals participating in it and viewing it.⁵⁸ It bestows power in the individual, and does not privilege any particular manner of observance. Additionally, spontaneous memorials provide a link between individual expressions and collective grief. In a post-modern setting, they are part of the movement to bring the private into the realm of the public sphere, reviving death in the everyday.

⁵⁶Grider, "Spontaneous Shrines and Public Memorialization," 248.

⁵⁷MacKendrick interview.

⁵⁸Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*; and Hedtke and Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives*.

Death Revived in Discourse

Conceptualized by Tony Walter as the practices of discourse that bring death back into visibility in society, revivalism puts the individual and their own needs at the centre of the dying, grieving and ritual processes.⁵⁹ This concept illustrates another important dimension along which it is possible to see how death is resurrected in society, allowing me to extrapolate new possibilities for the funeral typology. From within imagined communities a variety of cultural scripts emerge to provide templates for being, acting and speaking. Dying or bereaved individuals re-conceptualize their experiences as unique and meaningful through the appropriated scripts. This act is central to Walter's concept because it addresses how death discourses act to bring death back into the social world, make it speakable, and by so doing, revive it in the everyday.

His framework for the revival of death and dying challenges views that these topics are taboo in western civilizations. Revivalist discourses occur along two strands. The first is qualified by Walter as post-modern, and seeks to break down barriers between public and private, relocating the private and individual in the domain of the public and general.⁶⁰ The second strand, that of the late-modern revival, replaces medical discourses with psychologically based ones, transferring control from the one field of discourse to the other.⁶¹ Both revivalist frameworks locate the individual's experiences at the centre of meaning for death and dying, with the first strand placing power to interpret meaning in the individual, and the second one placing it in the domain of expert counsellors.⁶²

⁵⁹Tony Walter, *The Revival of Death*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 41.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 40-41.

Revivalist discourses do not shy away from laying bare unique emotional experience in the public realm, and feelings are therefore the basis upon which narratives for death are based. A post-modern revival of death cannot be reduced to stages or subject to interpretations of correct action within authoritarian discourses; instead post-modern death is singular, and unique. In a late-modern revivalist narrative, however, individuals derive meaning through established discourses that frame death and dying, and professional listeners guide the interpretations of grief.

Walter's theory corroborates changes already taking place in the funeral industry. As meaning for death is constructed in limitless configurations, and the power for constructing meaning is centred in the individual, the funeral home must anticipate customer demands for highly individualized service. Both strands in Walter's theory empower the individual through discursive practice, enabling them to narrate death, whether it is their own story of dying, or another's. And in both post-modern and late-modern revivalist narratives, discourse shifts into the realm of self-help, whether that is facilitated from the outside or not.

The funeral industry has, not coincidentally, shifted its own discursive practices to align with the helping professions in order to better connect with their market. This approach has often led to commentary that maligns the insidiousness of the industry in selling unnecessary products and services to vulnerable clients.⁶³ Accordingly, a recent Pollara Report published in a Canadian funeral industry journal illustrates that the public agrees overwhelmingly with the statement that funerals "are too elaborate" and that they

⁶³Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

would “prefer a service that was simple and cost effective”.⁶⁴ General consensus shows that Canadians want to make choices that include alternatives not rooted in pre-determined industry standards, but those demanded by an aware public.

It is notable then, that power over the decision-making processes is now repositioned with the customer controlling a highly customized ritual event. Walter notes this phenomenon as a by-product of the post-modern revival of death: “[t]he more we emphasize personal experience and feelings, the more business cannot but attend” to satisfying consumers requests, enriching the funeral ritual and thus their quality of life.⁶⁵ As demographic studies show, the consumers of funeral services will increasingly emanate from a generation that has high levels of expectations for the quality of services and products offered, and for their participation in the planning of the funeral ritual.⁶⁶

Revivalist Consumers

Understanding the user of the funeral home from a consumer perspective becomes a complex study, considering the variability within the Canadian cultural make-up. How individuals consume becomes a helpful way to theorize this question, and I look to the work of design educator Guy Julier to assist. Julier has written extensively on the topic of the culture of design, exploring the intersecting roles of design, culture, and consumerism. When analyzing western consumers in the twenty-first century, Julier invokes anthropologist Daniel Miller’s argument that consumers can be best grouped

⁶⁴Rob Heppell, “It’s Not the Funeral Product Industry,” *Canadian Funeral News*, June 2005, 52-54.

⁶⁵Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 41.

⁶⁶MacKendrick, interview.

based on their forms of consumption.⁶⁷ Characterized by Julier as fluid and fragmented, this conceptualization provides for consumer profiling based on personal desire, and the ways individuals consume, and not according to the class from which consumer habits emanate. This concept of the consumer inevitably creates problems for the funeral industry marketer attempting to establish the client ideal type.

Locating the funeral consumer at the centre of this discourse allows me to propose how interior design practice can approach the funeral home in a revivalist paradigm, where death is not hidden or denied, but evidenced in the discursive formations of Canadian culture. Because revivalism addresses death narratives in a framework of the private located within the public, I expand this into a spatial paradigm through the use of phenomenological experience rooted in the sensorial.

Reviving the Funeral Experience in Space

The need for sensory stimulation is highlighted in Jenny Hockey's interview with a Catholic priest, who states that, compared to baptismal rites, death rites are "impoverished", and explains that mourners do "need sights, sounds and smells and touches".⁶⁸ The death ritual becomes more than a vague experience if the funeral home can revive the haptic and temporal experiences that have become rare in the highly dense, urban environments of Canadian cities. The use of forms, finishes and textures that promote touch, convey temperature or reflect light, for instance, engage the bereaved user with the interior in a way that flat, featureless forms and volumes do not. An emphasis on sensory experience brings the funeral home's users to a conscious state, where they

⁶⁷Guy Julier, *The Culture of Design* (London: Sage, 2000), 98.

⁶⁸Small and Hockey, "Discourse into Practice," 203.

connect with the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of life.⁶⁹ The funeral ritual is then naturally reinforced by construction of the space in which it takes place.

Well-informed material choices speak a language of their own and reinforce explicit and symbolic meanings; Juhani Pallasmaa articulates this in his argument for haptic, sensory architecture.⁷⁰ The privileging of matter over form has an inherent attachment to time, to weathering and decay, but is mute, and therefore fragile.⁷¹ In this sense, matter has an advantage of provoking interest due to the fragility of its nature. Materials become powerful metaphors for loss and vulnerability and can encourage understanding. Citing Goethe's "Delicate Empiricism", Pallasmaa highlights the ability of a weak architecture to enable understanding of "a thing's meaning through prolonged empathetic looking", by grounding the understanding in direct haptic experiences like touch, or smell.⁷²

The interior designer invokes such experiences when they consciously employ haptic devices in the funeral interior. Manipulated light, for instance, materializes through apertures in the ceiling to create vertical shafts that powerfully suggest upward movement, evoking notions of transcendence. Scent, a powerful memory trigger, is imbedded in natural materials like cedar, which when left untreated is given the opportunity to wear through weathering; as it is affected by rain, snow, and sunlight, its smells are also given up, to gently mark the passage of time.

⁶⁹Juhani Pallasmaa, "Hapticity and Time," *Architectural Review* 207, no. 5 (2000): 78.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., 79.

⁷²Ibid., 81.

Edward Hall proposes that time is a tool that pins down consciousness.⁷³ The prolongation of interaction between the funeral home's users and the space itself underscores the opportunity to reinforce the transitional aspects of the rites of passage. Connections with deep time can be transferred through materials that "speak of opaque depth and mystery".⁷⁴ Materials like soapstone, dense and smooth, remind of gentler versions of the life cycle that wear down the stone subtly, almost invisibly. Thick sheets of colored glass reflect and absorb light, promoting visual access but also asserting itself between the viewer and the impressions it allows. The glass filter slows down the visual experience, stopping the gaze at multiple points rather than baring the spaces behind it. Glass also deflects sound, creating auditory experiences that respond to survivor's own movements; the echoed sounds of footsteps, voices, and closing doors thicken the sensory encounter to engage aspects of the rooms that are often unconsciously ignored. All of these examples of material implementation act on user's perceptions within the ritual interior, creating a multivalent experience of the space and enriching its meaning.

Conclusion

Meaning for death has not disappeared from Canadian society, although it is no longer uniquely defined within religion. As argued, death is located in the language used to build discursive formations, be they spatial, spoken and written, or visual formations.

⁷³Edward T. Hall, "Experiencing Time," in *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 134.

⁷⁴Pallasmaa, "Hapticity and Time," 79.

In my investigation of social theories around death in Canada and their relevance to funeral interiors I have identified a number of significant concepts that contribute to design practice.

Finding death in liminal space, be it permanent, like the funeral home itself, or temporary, like the spontaneous memorial, is a valuable way to explore meaning for death both in ritual space proper, and on the sidewalks and boulevards that often act as sites for transient memorials. Death in the narratives of the mass media highlights the prevalence of cultural scripts that dominate language and influence the formation of attitudes; through a deconstruction exercise, I identify how media can be read for subtle and overt repetitions of scripts around death attitudes. This exercise promotes a deeper understanding of imbedded, and often carefully veiled, meanings perpetuated within Canadian culture.

Finally, I find death in revivalist discourses, where acknowledgement of death in Canadian society is cast as highly visible and sophisticated. Bringing this theory to bear upon funeral space proposes ways to integrate death into space through the engagement of users' senses to experience deeper concepts of time and matter. From this direct confrontation with spatially imbedded concepts, the experience of space is enriched and death is introduced back into the land of the living.

CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL DISCOURSES: MAKING MEANING FOR DEATH AND SELF

Introduction

This inquiry is as much a quest to understand the ability of interior design to address personal issues such as grief, as it is an exploration of evolving rituals and how interior designers might accommodate them. Does interior design have a part to play in mediating emotions? Can space encourage, placate, mediate, catalyze? It is not difficult to argue that well-designed space engages people with the interiors they inhabit.¹ How then does the funeral interior affect the state of mind of its users? What do mourners need in the way of designed space? What do users bring with them emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually to the funeral space? Just as it is the interior designer's responsibility to understand the psychological and behavioural aspects of spa clients moving between zones of veiled intimacy and openness, so must the designer also be aware of the identifiable needs of the funeral customer prior to and during the funeral planning and ritual process.

To question the role of designed funeral space and its place in the facilitation of death rituals, it is important to understand how Canadians characterize death. This process was initiated in Chapter Two, wherein I explored sociological responses to death in society. Here, I narrow the investigation to the level of the individual, exploring the

¹Juhani Pallasmaa, "An Architecture of the Seven Senses," in *Questions of Perception Phenomenology of Architecture*, ed. Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and Urbanism* Special Issue (July 1994): 30-31.

discourses of thanatology, philosophy, and anthropology, all of which look at building meaning for death in the context of the self. Each of these fields questions constructions of death as it is conceived in everyday lives. As in Michel Lambeth's photograph (Figure 3.1) showing the young boy assuming the form of the crucifix on the Mexican beach, how does death appear to the self? What are the ways that the self-identity is reflected in the death ritual, and how does funeral space support the performance of identities?

This chapter contrasts how individual identities are constructed within an existential framework, against what has been characterized as our current fluid, post-modern approach.² Existential and thanatological theories of mortality are discussed as illustrations of how Canadians approach death. The increasing identification of the physical body with self-identity provides new possibilities for analyzing how meaning is assigned to the corpse at the centre of the funeral ritual. Ritual is introduced as important to the framing of turbulent events, and is recognized as a reflexive response to the human desire for sacredness in western culture. The funeral ritual's ability to create meaning, be it framed as sacred, spiritual or simply significant, is explored through its dramaturgical aspects and its performative nature. This performativity provides opportunities to re-think designed funeral space, where the interior has the potential to support the uniqueness of each individual within a powerful ritualized framework.

By beginning to understand how individuals construct meaning for themselves and their deaths, interior designers find new ways to conceptualize funeral space. Limited though this purview of philosophical and anthropological ideas may be, it introduces an awareness that the beliefs and attitudes of funeral home users translate into behaviours

²Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 1-2.

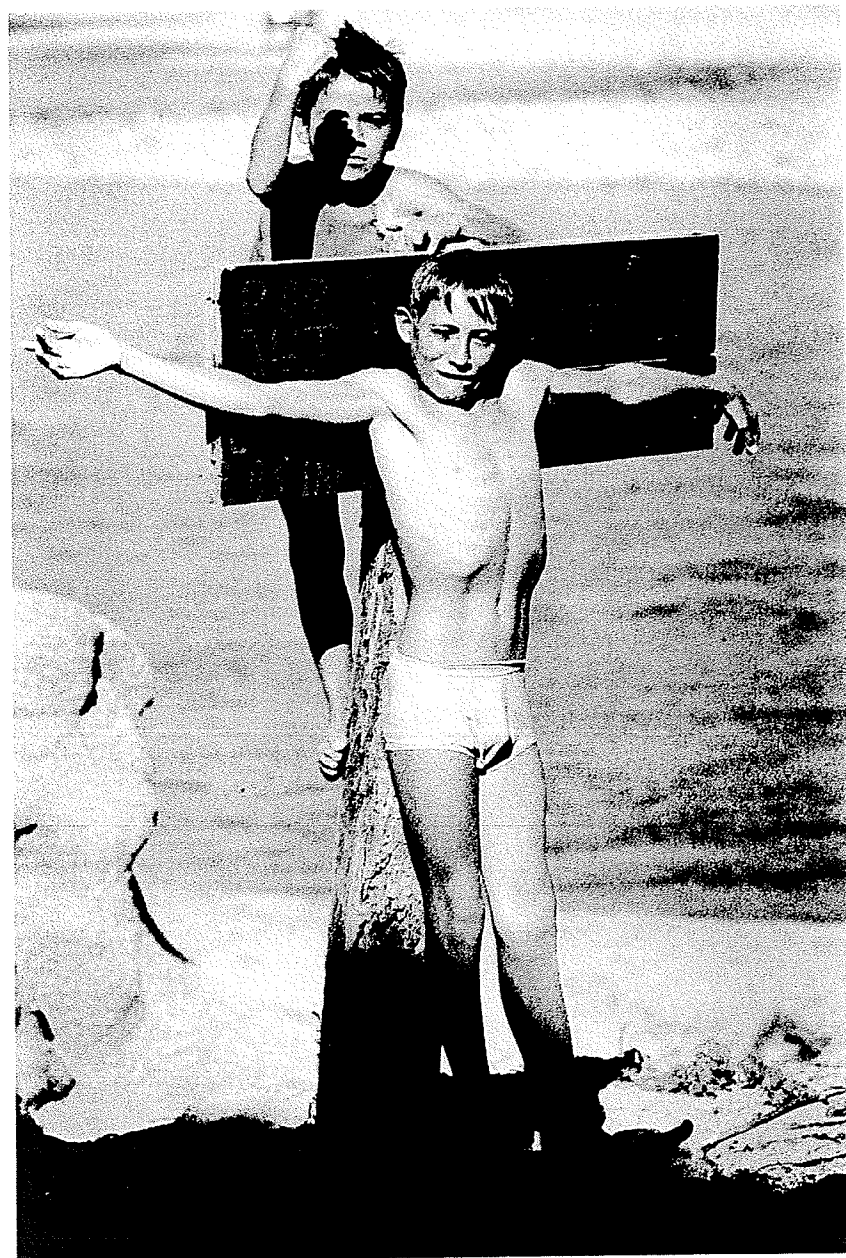


Figure 3.1: Michel Lambeth, *Tchuantepec, Mexico, 1969*. 1969, Gelatin silver print. 25.4 x 17.2 cm. Collection: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Permission to reproduce McGill-Queen's University Press, September 8, 2006, © McGill-Queen's University Press.

and responses, intangible and often ambiguous, which in turn must be considered by the designer as just as important as general aesthetic concerns. Self-understanding framed in both existential philosophy of being-in-the-world and post-structuralist fluidity will necessarily affect the client's attitude to the space in which they may find themselves unwilling customers.³ In turn, the interior designer, aware of dominant discourses on these topics, can choose how to accommodate those attitudes and behaviours.

Existential Understanding of Being-in-the-World

In the existential discourses of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Simone de Beauvoir, the fact that human beings live in a world bounded by time and space means that existence is dominated by the certainty of death, or "being-towards-death".⁴ Although each of these early twentieth century philosophers propose unique variations on this notion, at the core of their philosophy is the belief that meaning is created, not inherent. For Heidegger, the expectation of death is the backdrop against which life is lived, while for Sartre, individuals are free to choose their own being against a meaningless birth.⁵ For de Beauvoir, actively made connections create meaning; we are not born into relationships, but they are made to give meaning to life.⁶ Meaning can be derived from the connections that are built up with other individuals. So while Heidegger sees existence as grounded by being-towards-death, Sartre sees it as an intentionality

³Caroline Yewchin, interview by author, 13 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

⁴Joseph P. Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 31-33; Jo-Ann Pilardi, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 10.

⁵Jean-Paul Sartre in Jo-An Pilardi, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self*, 13.

⁶Pilardi, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self*, 78.

born out of nothingness, of being-towards a pursuit of the individual's choice, and de Beauvoir views existence as being-with-others.

Naturally, interior designers need not be expert philosophers, yet the notions of meaning for life and death presented within existentialist theory have significance for the practice of designing funeral space. That humans are aware of the inevitability of death, and seek to create meaning for the life leading up to it, is a basic tenet derived from existentialism; whether the designer's awareness of such a tenet is structured or intuitive, it informs the design process and conceptual approach to potential solutions for funeral space.

An existentialist perspective sees the temporality of 'being' in the present, as inextricable with the space of 'being'.⁷ The bounds of time and space are entwined through experience. Specifically, questions of being are bounded by environment, or ground: a ground "makes possible", enables one "to be" within an environment.⁸ The environment is constituted as a theoretical backdrop to being; it is not possible to understand being away from a ground – there must be a reference against which to understand it. The possibilities proposed above – being-towards-death, being-towards-nothing, and being-with-others – as modes of creating meaning for existence, each act against environmental bounds. It is against these backdrops that individuals experience phenomena: The three constructs of meaning for existence generate various scenarios for the funeral home. How can these be explored for their influence on ritual space?

The funeral home typology, as a physical space that is experienced within the greater built environment, holds implications for understanding death. As a ground, it

⁷Joseph P. Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre*, 31-33.

⁸Ibid.

apprehends the totality of beliefs and previous experiences that an individual casts upon it. For example, a religious person sees the funeral home as a place of sacred ritual, or as a sacrilegious space, in that it has no specific religious designation. A sectarian sees the funeral home in purely practical terms, as a business that can arrange for the disposal of the body. For the person that fears death, the funeral home is both repugnant and necessary. It is repugnant because it is a physical harbinger of human mortality, but is necessary as space that accommodates the processes necessary for the storage of the body and the ritualizing of death. As a visible aspect of the built landscape, the funeral home symbolizes the vulnerability of life, acting as a reminder that each person has a finite time within which to create a meaningful existence. Each user will experience this space and the funeral event uniquely, and come to apply meaning to death through these experiences.

Inevitably, interior designers bring their own meanings to bear upon the design of funeral space. Responses to the needs of the end user are filtered through the designer and the experiences, both personal and professional, that they bring to bear upon the design process. The backdrop against which the professional designer measures decisions is the filter that bears their unique stamp. Physical places are not only phenomenal embodiments, but also representations of the grounds against which one performs daily routines and within which one negotiates an existence.⁹

⁹Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 15-16.

Similarly, physical places support modes of being; they facilitate behaviour or impede it.¹⁰ Funeral space is a context that makes possible the congregation of loved ones, facilitates public expressions of grief, accommodates final viewings of the deceased and consequently provides space for physical contact and final goodbyes. It also performs a number of practical roles; the funeral space stores the body and prepares it for disposal. As a ground, the funeral home has the potential to activate modes of being that form experiences for the users that transcend given understandings of death, awakening them to something outside of what they would otherwise expect.

The challenge in designing funeral space in particular is that the typology must accommodate the needs of individuals who are often unwilling clients.¹¹ The experience of funeral planning and ritual brings the client into an environment that exists solely to manage the consequences of death; awareness of personal mortality is an unsurprising outgrowth of this experience. I now turn my attention toward the characterizations of mortality within existential and thanatological models.

Existential and Thanatological Mortality

In the existential framework, phenomena are experienced in their totality within consciousness, and can be studied at face value. In describing the phenomenal, Sartre says: "What it is, it is absolutely, for it reveals itself as it is. The phenomenon ... is *absolutely indicative of itself*".¹² No duality of meaning and appearance is imbedded

¹⁰Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 16.

¹¹Yewchin, interview.

¹²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1957), p.xlvi.

within the phenomenon; the visible world reveals the invisible – the subject and object are dissolved within the phenomenal world – thereby making it accessible to study.

Death as a phenomenon resists personal knowledge in an existential analysis because it is necessarily inaccessible to experience.¹³ Although death as a true phenomenon cannot be studied due to the philosophical limits of existentialism, mortality awareness presents a concept that can be mined for how attitudes are formed toward death. For instance, interior design can shape the environment to promote experience using a phenomenological approach, acting to promote consciousness of being in funeral space. The approach articulated by architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa makes clear how the connection between environment and personal experience can be fostered: “It is evident that life enhancing architecture has to address all the senses simultaneously and fuse our image of self with our experience of the world”.¹⁴ A design response that directly engages all of the senses, not just the visual, but also other tangibles such as touch, smell, and sound, actively encourages relationships with space.

Extrapolating on de Beauvoir’s understanding of existentialism, meaning here is derived through the participatory act. This is echoed by sociologist Clive Seale who discusses the usefulness of social bonds created through the smallest interactions, which in turn co-construct an orientation toward life.¹⁵ Through concepts of involvement, agency and participation, the interior designer similarly constructs space to send users on

¹³Paul Edwards, “Existentialism and Death,” in *Language, Metaphysics, and Death*, 2d ed., ed. John Donnelly (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 49.

¹⁴Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, WS: Wiley, 2005), 11.

¹⁵Clive Seale, interview by author, 25 April 2006, Winnipeg, email transcript.

unexpected trajectories. For example, the move to touch an interesting surface texture, or a feeling of warmth emanating from a well-placed window, apprehend the user, whether understood in the conscious or unconscious mind. A phenomenologically based experience of ritual space has the potential to make a meaningful experience of the funeral by sponsoring interaction between individuals and their surroundings; the tangibility of textures, sounds and light can make the intangible – death – less foreign.

In thanatologist Jeffrey Kauffman's view, existentialism resists death as a real concept because it cannot exist as a knowable phenomenon, only a potential one; death is idealized, as existentialists "are prone to devalue actual death and make it nothing".¹⁶ In the context of the examination of meaning, this is an unsettling condition. There are no explanations, such as might be found within theological discourses, to provide a strategy for approaching death as anything but a vague idea. The individual is then left to conjure meaning in other ways in the face of death's inaccessibility.

Fear of the actual unknown leads to what thanatologist Robert Kastenbaum calls "mortality attacks", the realization that defines that instance when one becomes conscious of the actuality of their own death; the terror that is experienced upon awakening to this consciousness is known as a "radical unknowing".¹⁷ Notions of being, as defined within the parameters of everyday phenomena, are cast off in light of an intense awareness of mortality. The ground, against which being is contrasted in the existentialist framework, now becomes subjective, not reflexive.¹⁸ Mortality is no longer understood just as a

¹⁶Jeffrey Kauffman, "Blinkings: A Thanatocentric Theory of Consciousness," in *Awareness of Mortality*, ed. Jeffrey Kauffman (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1995), 77.

¹⁷Robert J. Kastenbaum, "What Should We Expect From Philosophy?," in *Awareness of Mortality*, ed. Jeffrey Kauffman (Amityville, NY: Baywood: 1995), 6-11.

¹⁸Kauffman, "Blinkings: A Thanatocentric Theory of Consciousness," 79.

possible mortality that cannot be known, but an actual mortality that will be experienced personally and viscerally.

In light of this intense awareness, how can interior design act within a subjective ground to bring meaning to death? Although this radical unknowing of death contrasts with the existential desire for personal knowledge through experience, it is useful to return to phenomenology to explore Sartre's concept of the "situation" as a potential exploration of the question.

As described by Fell, the situation is "the circular affair man has with the world in which he loses himself in order that the world may come back to him as meaningful, as inscribed with his meanings".¹⁹ It is an existential given that beings exist as one with the world, but that they also make meaning for it from outside of that unity, from personal experience derived from their own situation. This situation is made up of the totality of the temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries that place them in the world. Individual situations constitute constraints that provide limits against which individuals may assert themselves, allowing them to rise above them in their conscious desire to defend their individual being in the world.²⁰ The situation promotes both the assertion of a freedom that transcends the constraints of cultural norms, and the advancement of the radical, unknowing conscious that Kauffman discussed.

The funeral space could provide such opportunities because it is not only a mirror of cultural beliefs around being and death, but also a creator of new definitions for them.

¹⁹Fell, *Heidegger and Sartre*, 149.

²⁰From a lecture given in 1946 by Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism, in Walter Kaufman, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, trans. Philip Mairet (New Haven, CT: Meridian Publishing Company, 1989), n.p.

In this sense, it can redefine the boundaries of what is considered normal within Canadian culture. Funeral space, as the environment that grounds death ritual, has the potential to challenge, to act as a provocation, inviting reinterpretations of death against what is accepted within the confines of cultural norms. This space can act to prick the conscious, promoting rather than nullifying the existence of death within the subjective conscious.

A precedent that challenges accepted ideals of funeral space can be found in the Memoria establishment at 4231 rue St. Laurent in Montreal, Quebec. Part of the Alfred Dallaire chain of funeral homes, Memoria includes Salon B, an art gallery and *biblio-café*, oriented toward increasing death and grief awareness. Situated in the midst of a bustling retail district, Salon B redefines what it means to be a consumer of funeral services and products; it is frequented more often by those looking for a satisfying meeting place or lunch spot, than those who explore it as an off-shoot of Memoria's funeral services. By introducing death into the everyday lives of those who live and work in the district, it melds with the environment that constitutes a ground against which lives are lived. In occupying the space, interacting with it even by peering curiously through windows, inhabitants are responding to a new boundary edge, against which ideas of death are redefined. Death and grief are not hidden or denied, they are an integrated part of the environment and insinuate themselves into each individual's phenomenological situation.

Up to this point, I have addressed the ways that individuals generate meaning through an existential understanding of their being, against the ground of their personal situation. Being situated existentially provides a temporal, spatial and cultural context, which in turn points to the importance of place as a component of being. Although place

in the existential view is associated with the metaphysical understanding of self, it is also important within the western world today to question “embodied” physical existence in space.²¹ Physical ways of identifying the self are increasingly featured within critical discourses as essential to the development of meaning for life within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The Physical Self and Fluid Identity

The relationship between identity and body is important to this interior design inquiry because the funeral environment should support the meaningful enactment of a death ritual that recognizes the individuality of the deceased. In the words of Catherine Belsey, a “human being ... is not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change”.²² No single definition of meaning for the identity or the death ritual can be sought from a post-structuralist position because a multiplicity of constructions can co-exist. In this critique, the self is substituted by the term “subject” where appropriate, as the self becomes the subject of a construction process as the identity is manufactured within and from discursive formations.²³

Existentialism sought to determine the meaning of human being as a unity of both spirit and body, where the body was an essential part of the whole individual, but not

²¹Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 104.

²²Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), 132.

²³Discursive formations are the totality of cultural discourses, institutions, architectural forms, laws that act upon the subject to create it. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194.

worthy of significant attention.²⁴ And yet, “western society’s powerful orientation to individual experience has also resulted in the exclusive focus on the body as an isolated and isolatable organism”.²⁵ The identity, like that of the reversed form in Shelley Niro’s photograph below, is a pregnant terrain hewn from a blank environment (Figure 3.2). The discourse of post-structuralism allow me to consider constructions of self that have no inherent value save for the culturally projected meanings inscribed upon the body. Here, the perspective of the critique views the body as site for control and manipulation, thereby imparting the corpse with significance.

Cultural shifts have bearing upon the ways that meaning for being is defined, and a significant trend that has been isolated within sociological theory is the increased fixation with the importance of physical identity.²⁶ Identity here is defined as “who or what somebody or something is”, and the “individual characteristics that define a person ... or by which a person or thing can be recognized”.²⁷ In the post-structuralist theory engaged by this discourse, identity is framed within a significantly different construct than that conceived by existentialism. In essence, it conflates the “who” and the “what” in the definition of identity above. The self, or subject, derives meaning from the physical and material as much as the metaphysical.

²⁴David Michael Levin, “Existentialism at The End of Modernity: Questioning the I’s Eyes,” in *The Development and Meaning of Twentieth-Century Existentialism*, ed. William L. McBride (New York: Garland, 1996), 85.

²⁵Arthur Kleinman, 1995 in Suhita Chopra Chatterjee, “Death and the Discourse of the Body,” *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 45 (2002): 322.

²⁶Kleinman in Chatterjee, *Death and Discourse of the Body*, 322.

²⁷*Penguin English Dictionary* (Toronto: Penguin, 2001), 695.



Figure 3.2: Shelley Niro. Detail from *Are You My Sister?* 1994, colour photograph, hand-drilled mat board. 101.6 x 640 cm (overall). Collection: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Reprinted with permission, Shelley Niro, August 30, 2006, © Shelley Niro.

Sociologists Phillip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling point to the increasing corollary of the corporeal body with self-identity as an important aspect of contemporary European and North American culture that has had a significant impact upon how death is constructed.²⁸ Canadians and their western counterparts continue to view the physical personage as more than a mere container; instead it is seen as an extension of the metaphysical being, as important to identification of self as the personality.

The result of the increasing importance of the body to the identification with self is that the physical identity is now subjected to new responsibilities within post-modernity; definitions for identity are not confined to established grand narratives. The lack of guiding principles in assisting the creation of personal values complicates the construction of post-modern identities because the body becomes the site of a variety of uncertainties.²⁹ This also re-focuses the funeral ritual. In an existentialist mind-body unity, the physical was an aspect of the funeral that was dealt with in a structure that provided the framework for an efficient yet still meaningful preparation of the body for disposal. Questions arise as to how today's bodies should be prepared, displayed and memorialized. For what ends are each of today's deceased being treated? Tenuous individual orientations necessitate a reconstruction of the ritual for each particularity.

Further complicating the construction of identities is what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls the "liquidity" of life: the ideals against which physical identities are measured morph so swiftly that it is not possible to stay apace.³⁰ The effort to do so

²⁸Phillip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, "Modernity, Self-Identity and the Sequestration of Death," *Sociology: The Journal of the British Sociological Association* 27 (1993): 411

²⁹Dave Green, "Death, Nature and Uncertain Spaces: A Commentary from Paganism," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 44 (2001): 127.

³⁰Bauman, *Liquid Life*, 2-3.

constitutes what makes meaning for the self as individuals advance toward their death. In Niro's photograph, imagine that the cultural landscape that fills out the figure suddenly shifts: the significance of the new self is redefined with each new context. In this way, the body is an essential subject of meaning creation. It comes to signify difference with each new cultural influence that bears down upon it. situated as the site of action

As expected, when the materiality of the self becomes the focus of identity, the event of death takes on meanings that are outside of discourses formerly rooted in the historical security of known frameworks. For instance, a faith-based belief system provides a narrative that guides its followers beyond the concept of death to the afterlife, but affiliations to religion are decreasing, and existing ones are shifting in orientation.³¹ Religion ignores the physical identity, instead emphasizing the spiritual aspirations of the reverent mind as sacred, disregarding the uniqueness of the deceased. Funeral director Caroline Yewchin often sees the focus of religious ritual "take the individual who's died out of the celebration", instead emphasizing prayer for the afterlife.³² As the individual is increasingly identified within physical orientations, the nature of the funeral market is shifting.

In the practice of interior design, the designer must consider how the funeral home user is accommodated, with an understanding of the trend toward decreasing religious affiliation. The appropriateness of religious imagery within the funeral space

³¹Religious Studies professor Kenneth MacKendrick believes that those who are affiliated with religion have a re-orientation toward God; their participation in a religious community is less rooted in obligation, and more rooted in therapeutic terms. Individuals now like to belong because it helps them to feel better about themselves. Kenneth MacKendrick, interview by author, 17 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

³²Yewchin, interview.

should be questioned. Interview participant Norma Wellwood, an independent funeral celebrant, asserts that improved ritual environments would include no signs of religiosity whatsoever.³³ In her view, the removal of the words “chapel”, “parlor” and even “funeral” from the names of funeral service providers, and erasing physical vestiges of Christianity – the organ, pews, and other vague referents like gothic arches in-filled with purposely obscured imagery – would provide a less prejudiced canvas upon which rituals could be enacted. In place of meaning-charged icons, the uniqueness of the ceremony becomes central to the funeral event, and places the deceased individual’s identity at its centre.

In abandoning grand narratives, such as those found in religious ideology, that define meaning for being, Canadian bodies are subjected to a variety of new interpretations. Philosopher Michel Foucault asserts that bodily conceptions are now bound in discourses of medicine and biology.³⁴ Death’s definition within these paradigms has emerged over the past half decade, as medicine increases in efficacy and availability. A notable result of a medical definition of death is the shifting of perceptions of death from inevitable end to avoidable one. Due to advancements in medicine life can be prolonged, regardless of its quality. As death defined in biological terms often focuses upon the cessation of bodily functions and the exact timing of this cessation, it privileges the notion of death as a termination, over that of a transformation, of existence.³⁵

³³ Her chosen replacement for the term ‘funeral home’ would be ‘memorial centre’ or ‘tribute centre’. Norma Wellwood, interview by author, 4 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1990), 197.

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard sees the modern corpse within bio-medical discourses as the “ideal limit” of the body.³⁶ This definition of death as termination affects the funeral ritual, wherein the body, the totality of the individual, has met its end. Like the focus in the medical system on the precise moment of death, ritual in this paradigm seeks to mark termination with a physical effect like a stone monument. Death as a finality looks to substitute the body with a marker, while transformative death does not require the reassurance of the physical. Instead, death as transformation simply repositions the individual in a different context. The corpse does not embody the self, but is one effect of life to be framed within post-modernity.

Corpse as Signifier

Interpretations of the corpse within post-modern discourses reposition the corpse in a number of ways. For example, death is cast as unclean. Baudrillard discusses the irony of the efforts made to cleanse the world of death:

The detergents in the weakest washing powder are intended for death. To sterilize death at all costs, to varnish it, cryogenically freeze it, air-condition it, put make-up on it, ‘design’ it, to pursue it with the same relentlessness as grime, sex, bacteriological or radioactive waste.³⁷

The gradual signs of death’s victory over the flesh remind us of our own impending end. This is not new, and practices in many cultures similarly seek to physically enhance the corpse. Baudrillard, however, isolates the desire to do so as the need to “stave off the social abjection of decomposition which voids the corpse of its signs and its social force of signification”.³⁸ It is the loss of the social force that is discomfiting to the living.

³⁶Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 1993), 114

³⁷Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange of Death*, 180.

³⁸Ibid.

Through the physical representation of the deceased in the guise of the living, by making it up in a semblance of its natural condition, by dressing it appropriately, by deferring the decomposition, it is possible to avert notions that death will overtake the physical body, that nature, forestalled during life, will regain control through death.

The subsuming of nature by technology represents a significant problem for the formation of identity in the western world today. As increased control is extended to individuals through the manipulations that have evolved within technical medical discourses, constructions of meaning for identity increasingly move outside of the realm of the psychic being. Identity is most easily manufactured, and managed, in the physical realm:

The individualism of technological civilization relies precisely on a misunderstanding of the unique self. It is an individualism relating to a role and not a person. In other words it might be called the individualism of a masque or persona, a character [personage] and not a person.³⁹

Theorist Jacques Derrida's statement above closes this section on the variety of ways that the self and individual identities can be understood in both existentialist and post-structuralist theory.

The Use of Ritual

This discourse revolves around the ways that it is possible to identify with a purpose for existence and how meaning for existence is related to ritual:

All legitimations of death must carry out the same essential task – they must enable the individual to go on living in society after the death of significant others and to anticipate his own death with ... at the very least, terror sufficiently

³⁹Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) The "Limits of Truth,"* trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 36.

mitigated so as not to paralyze the continued performance of the routines of everyday life.⁴⁰

Ritual, defined this way, mitigates between life and death and legitimates continued existence. The space for the funeral would not exist as more than a storage and sanitation facility if it were not for its designation as a space for the funeral ritual.

Why ritualize? What purpose does ritual provide within western culture?

Performance theorist Richard Schechner has studied rituals as actions that are “devised around disruptive, turbulent, and ambivalent interactions ... [a]mbivalent symbolic actions pointing at the real transactions even as they help people avoid too direct a confrontation with these events”.⁴¹ Schechner illustrates the potential of ritual in the reconciliation and mediation of difficult events, acting as it does as a symbolic framework that scaffolds the authentic event. The scaffold exists at a short distance around the event – it does not negate it, but mirrors it in form, providing limited views of the reality that is its *raison d’être*. Importantly, it provides a means for navigating the event without having to brush directly against it.

Theorist Herbert Blau sees ritual as a way to satisfy natural physical and psychic needs through an alternative form of theatricality. He believes a deficit of ritual in everyday activity results in a lack of a repository for the sacred; this is a distinguishing feature of the western world at the beginning of the 21st century.⁴² Accordingly, “[w]e

⁴⁰Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 94.

⁴¹Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Ritual and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 230.

⁴²Herbert Blau, *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theatre, 1976-2000* (Minneapolis: MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 143-144.

look to ritual ... for missing energies, psychic liberations, de-sublimated sexuality, carnival spirits, structures of participation, the redemptive side of repetition".⁴³ The desire for ritual in daily life is here recognized as a reflexive response to the human need for sacred meaning in western culture. Ritual acts can provide an interstice in the course of daily life through which it is possible to participate in the extraordinary. Funeral celebrant Norma Wellwood discusses notions of bringing death back into the land of the living, that give permission to experience funeral space within the everyday environment.⁴⁴

If funeral establishments were more accessible, would individuals confront death more readily? In the case of Alfred Dallaire's *Memoria*, there has been a high degree of positive response from the public to the space's siting on a busy retail street. In its design approach, the interior has been made accessible through a grounding that is recognizably retail based; through its incorporation of the public spaces of a café and art gallery, it invites curious visitors inside without confronting them directly with mourning. Instead, permission is granted to use the space the way that consumers would, and as a result, to see death in a different light, by perusing at a distance the visual imagery in the gallery or books in the lending library, or sitting down to a cup of coffee. By participating in the space as regular consumers, the funeral home is incorporated into the realm of the quotidian, and is just another merchant among a busy street of shops.⁴⁵

Death in the western world as contextualized in a secular culture that seeks meaning through ritual, yet the ritual has been divested of its inherent spiritual value. It becomes less of an expression of a spiritual realm and more a replacement for the

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Wellwood, interview.

sacrosanct, and the funeral no longer retains its spiritual potential for transcendence. Instead it is transient, not repetitive, potentially meaningless for anybody else, and totally unique.

As religious affiliation decreases, shared codes disappear and the frameworks for response shift. Modes of communication abandon these sacred structures, which provide individuals with a way of understanding loss. So, if meaning for the funeral ritual has eroded along with religious affiliations, then what does the new funeral represent?

The dramatic element that is sought within western societies, as cited by Blau above, provides one potential perspective on the funeral event itself. Turner and Edgley extend the framework of dramaturgy to the funeral event in their essay "Death as Theatre".⁴⁶ The performance of the funeral ritual is seen as a celebration that has a variety of functions, one of which, its dramaturgical potential, provides a unique perspective on social behaviour.⁴⁷

The Dramaturgy of the Funeral Event

The funeral home is a space for transformation, a space that acknowledges the metamorphosis of the deceased and its effects on the grieving. Schechner recognizes ritual as a domain within which performance is routine, and so the funeral event can be viewed as a dramaturgy, wherein society gains an opportunity to perform various unwritten roles: stoic son, hysterical mother, naive child.⁴⁸ The manifestation of grief is not predictable and, therefore, does not seek to delimit roles for the grieving. Within the

⁴⁶Ronny E. Turner and Charles Edgley, "Death as Theater: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the American Funeral," in *Life as Theatre*, 2d ed., ed. Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 285-298.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 286.

⁴⁸Schechner, *The Future of Ritual*, 20.

framework of loss, the performance of identities is an important aspect of the funeral that lends greater understanding of the social reality created within the funeral environment.

Sacred ritual used to provide an authentic outlet for personal agency, but today's ritual is merely a set of actions that refer superficially to religiosity. At this point, the funeral, under the pretense of "event", becomes a spectacle, unsuitable for the display of real emotion. "The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life".⁴⁹ There is no longer a role for authentic expression in the spectacle of the dying.

When the funeral replaces authentic spiritual expression and is no longer an expression of transcendence, the event becomes the totality of the experience. And in replacing authentic attachments to the sacred, current ritualistic framing of death assumes new meaning, becoming what Raymond Williams has termed "habitual experience".⁵⁰ Deprived of the authentic drama inherent in ritual, Canadians seek drama in their daily lives through alternative means, mainly through media sources, but also through opportunities presented by gatherings such as funerals.⁵¹

As defined by Schechner, rituals "are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems".⁵² Defined in this way, funerals, as ritualistic acts, have the capacity to transcend immutability, to become discrete events, each telling the specific stories of the deceased. The funeral, as a performative system, has not only the potential to recognize the uniqueness of each individual commemorated,

⁴⁹Italics author's own. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), 42.

⁵⁰Blau, *The Dubious Spectacle*, 142.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Schechner, *The Future of Ritual*, 228.

but also, in its siting and spatial requirements, to become a type of cultural event enacted in space.

Performativity and the Funeral

Pursuing the drama that is the funeral ritual further allows me to consider performances of death ritual through an exploration of the power of language and performance to create meaning. Specifically, the use of language to name is seen as the device by which performances become “performative” in the sense that this word is used.⁵³ The understanding and individual performance of identity has so far been the subject of this analysis, because it is necessary to think about the subjects for whom the designer is designing and to question how death is performed within the dramas that are funeral rituals.

Schechner has analyzed ritual as an ancient display of re-behaved behaviour; not merely the representation of behaviour, but the active declaration of performed behaviour as authentic and original.⁵⁴ Today’s funeral is performative in a number of ways. First, it presents itself as a specific act that is both re-behaved and unique in its interpretation of how it presents individual lives. This, in effect, follows John L. Austin’s definition of performativity, which emphasizes the uniqueness of the act because it happens in the present moment.⁵⁵ So funeral rituals, although re-enacted, are performative by virtue of the fact they are authentic and intentional, they create an effect and perform a deed, in this case formalizing death through socially understood language and space.

⁵³Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

⁵⁴Schechner, *The Future of Ritual*, 20.

⁵⁵Kira Hall, “Performativity,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9 (2000): 184-187.

Second, in its stimulus of memory, cultural theorist Mieke Bal discusses the recent intersection of the concept of performativity with memory: the act of remembering requires a re-performance of a time-bound event or idea.⁵⁶ This effects a return of the deceased to the social sphere, albeit in a new form. Memorialization contextualized in the funeral home performatively instates the deceased into a new realm that is defined by the congregation.

Finally, the funeral is not a static, but a sincere, participatory event that actively produces what it names.⁵⁷ While a performance would enact a set of memorized, repetitive actions in space, only temporarily suspending the reality of death, the performative death ritual spontaneously makes death real by officially naming it. In a discursive purview of ritual language it does not matter whether the funeral is traditionally scripted or created specifically for the deceased, the ritual and the space in which it is enacted performs the death and creates the mourners. How can space itself preconceive meaning for death and shape mourning? The following section will undertake an analysis to explore the dramaturgical possibilities that can be analysed as communicated meanings within a semiotic framework, prior to addressing how these meanings perform the death. Philosopher Roland Barthes' concept of mythologizing assists in decoding the language of the interior, its *langue*.⁵⁸ In this case the space's

⁵⁶Mieke, Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 176-177.

⁵⁷Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

⁵⁸*Langue* refers to the general system of language within which signs are organized. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 113.

codes can be read for their connotations of flawlessness, naturalness, and normalcy.⁵⁹

This analysis is based on a tour of a funeral establishment in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The *Langue* of the Flawless Funeral

According to sociologist Stephen Barley, the expectation of a perfect funeral performance is at the essence of death ritual; in his semiotic analysis of the funeral profession, he identifies the need to perform the flawless funeral as central to the successful rite, and therefore central to a thriving business.⁶⁰ The need for a flawless funeral is based on notions similar to that of any other performance based in theatre or cinema. The careful construction of performance is undertaken with the intent to produce a meaningful experience, as defined by the industry, and satisfy the paying customer that their money has been well spent. In the context of the funeral, a mistake is not only an indignity to all involved, but discredits the performance's authenticity. Like the wizard standing behind the curtain in Oz, mis-steps deconstruct carefully built frameworks that the grieving rely on for a satisfactory ritual.

Barley's focus in his analysis is the importance of the communication of the 'natural'.⁶¹ The performance of funeral ritual, it is theorized, is predicated upon shared codes that denote death as restful and funerals as normal.⁶² The denotations are carefully constructed, not at all 'natural' because they are inauthentic. Barley alludes to mistakes

⁵⁹ *Codes*, or higher order systems of signs, are differentiated through denotation and *connotation*. Denotation refers to the basic factuality of an object, while *connotation* refers to ideological meanings in coded language, for example, a book signifying learnedness. Barthes in Don Slater, "Analysing cultural objects: content analysis and semiotics" in *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. C.Seale, (London: Sage, 1998), 273-274.

⁶⁰ Stephen R. Barley, "The Codes of the Dead: The Semiotics of Funeral Work," *Urban Life* 12, no. 1 (1981): 4.

⁶¹ Barley, "The Codes of the Dead," 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

in impression management, such as seeing incisions in the body, that reveal the artifice of the 'natural death' and destroy the ritual's intent by reminding mourners of the salience of the real death, something that is to be actively avoided.⁶³

Just as preventing these reminders is essential, so too is the careful management of the environment in which the funeral occurs. Glimpses of undesirable spaces, private and disjointed from refined public regions, disturb the believability of the performance. The specific semiotic deployment of *langue*, therefore plays an essential role in supporting the performance. Coded meanings can be read in various aspects of the space; I explore the spatial program and furniture arrangement as coded factors that signify control, order and naturalness.

First, the spatial program of the funeral home delimits client access, establishing clear public zones and private areas for staff. Public areas are generally open and unified in their interior arrangements, visually connected through the use of coordinated furnishings and finishes, and planned in order to facilitate easy circulation.⁶⁴ Few complexities challenge way-finding, conversation areas are clearly designated, and thresholds to private zones are carefully concealed in order to discourage uncomfortable conflicts with undesirable sights, sounds, or smells.⁶⁵

In a semiotic analysis, the *langue* of the public spaces and their programming geared towards client use assumes the codes of normalcy and naturalness. The organization and planning of such areas, typically open, well lit, neutral smelling, silent,

⁶³Ibid., 20-22.

⁶⁴Christopher Climie, interview by author, 5 August 2006, Winnipeg, email transcript.

⁶⁵Ibid.

and spotlessly clean, are easily consumed. They are unchallenging and vaguely familiar, while private preparation areas remain hidden and unknowable. The orthodoxy of the separation of the body and its preparation from the ritual planning itself is reinforced through this typical delineation of space: the procedures taking place behind hidden doors need not be mentioned, therefore maintaining the careful construction of the perfect ritual, *sans* corpse.

Following this theme, exacting placement of seating arrangements, with their focus on symmetry and alignment, denote classic notions of order and control as well. Seated in upright, formal bergère chairs, mourners are ostensibly reassured that the event is being managed and will unfold without mishap. The choice of furnishings reflects acceptable postures, composed and straight-backed, denoting the mien expected from the compliant client.

The highly ordered *langue* of the funeral interior is also coded to influence behaviour. Formal and symmetrical interiors signify control: similarly, emotions should also be controlled at all costs, as outbursts cannot be tolerated within such highly structured spaces. As Barley states, such expressive behaviour hampers the funeral director's attempts to pace funeral events and upsets the dignity of the ritual.⁶⁶ Like the false naturalness of the funeral itself, carefully staging defines normalcy in the interior, supporting specific behaviours, as in the emotional containment deemed acceptable by the funeral industry.

Ritual space has a central goal to facilitate acts that, as Peter Berger claimed earlier, both conciliate against the inevitability of each survivor's own anticipated end,

⁶⁶Barley, "The Codes of the Dead," 11.

and legitimate the death of the deceased. This semiotic analysis of the funeral home explores significations from within the funeral industry around desired behaviours that have a conciliatory effect but, act against the legitimation of the death by coding its authenticity in signs of forced naturalness and normalcy. This points to the funeral home's performative potential; ritual space is not passive space that receives mourners and couches the ritual. Its spaces preconceive ritual and actively performs mourning and death.

The Performative Funeral Home

In the semiotic analysis above, I show that both the spatial organization and furniture planning of a funeral home denote an ideology of "natural" and "normal" behaviour through careful coding of spaces and objects to signify control and order. Design choices about the adjacencies of the programmatic parts, decisions made about the separation of public and private areas, and furniture specifications were made in order to facilitate the chosen *langue*. These decisions were not arrived at arbitrarily, but were premeditated: furniture is not soft and deep, but rather inflexible and erect, meeting areas do not meld with administrative or preparation areas. Boundaries and guidelines were established in the funeral industry, and were reproduced by the designer to construct a final interior space that interpreted the ideology of a natural, and therefore acceptable, death.

In implementing this ideology, the interior designer, as producer, actively supported the performance of the selected *langue* in the space. In the case of interpretations of natural and normal, codes of control and order were engaged to activate the space, not visually, as the term is sometimes used within the interior design discipline, but performatively. The funeral space is both the result of a design act that can

be conceptualized as a performance of the ideology, and a built form that subsequently performs the ideology of death through its identification as designated ritual space. In this sense, the identity of the space “is not a being, but a doing... representations precede and define identities rather than identities determining or expressing themselves through representations.”⁶⁷ Thus, funeral space can be conceptualized as performative. It reverses the semiotic notion of expression of ideology through representation; instead, representation creates expressions.

Pursuing the spatial example introduced in the semiotic analysis above, the organization and planned adjacencies of the program perform death by sequestering it. As death is marginalized and denied access by the survivors, residing in its authenticity behind closed doors, the funeral home performs a separation of the living and the dead. Private: this word found on those doors that discreetly prohibit public access, names death, re-affirming the status of the survivor as different, and fashioning their role as the mourner.

Similarly, the survivor is received into public areas that perform mourning, again by doing, rather than being space for, mourning. Like the theatre, in which the ticket-holder is “folk, herd, woman, Pharisee, patron, idiot”, ritual space acts upon its inhabitants with a “leveling magic”.⁶⁸ Performative ritual space neutralizes previous identities to refashion roles for its users. It names the mourning, and not the reverse. Survivors are received in coded spaces that act to name mourning by drawing them into

⁶⁷Southern Oregon University “Terms: Performativity,” (Ashland: SOU, 2006)
<http://www.sou.edu/English/IDTC/Terms/terms.htm#anchor42031>, (accessed 26 June 2006).

⁶⁸Friedrich Nietzsche in Karsten Harries, “Theatricality and Re-Presentation” *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 26 (1990), 25.

greeting spaces, lounges, and viewing rooms, where they stand in clusters, sit in pre-arranged furniture groupings, or congregate together to face the coffin or the funeral celebrant. Ushered to sit comfortably among the assembled group in fixed pews, mourners are performatively created as those who require guidance, comfort, and fellowship. As seats are fixed, there is little form of recourse offered by the space to escape identification as in the mourning role.

The death too, is also performed by the space. The corpse is named as the deceased in a number of ways; in reflection of its binary relationship to the living, it is relegated to restricted private areas, and when placed in public for viewing, it is given privileged positioning at the head of the congregation. A raised dais elevates the body in its casket, differentiating it from its surroundings and from the mourners, separating the dead from its social group. The act of separating the living and dead from one another in highly structured ways is itself performative of the life and death difference.

The funeral home is a performative typology by its very existence as ritual space. Just as the funeral event is a sincere, participatory event that actively produces what it names, the space for ritual also produces what it names: mourners, the dead, the funeral, the celebrants. Each has a role that is created in the space by its specific language, enacted by the interior designer and the funeral client to portray an ideology of death.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to mine different post-structuralist theories, such as those found in performativity and semiotics, to better understand the ways that constructions of death are rooted in the self, and vice versa, how constructions of the self

are rooted in death. In the work of existentialists de Beauvoir, Sartre, and Heidegger, understandings of being are cast against the ground of death, while post-structuralist discourses on identity focus on bodily constructions that act to psychically stave off death.

In both analyses of meaning for the self, the death ritual is cast as an essential activity that frames turbulent events and emotions, allowing for the enactment of grief in the context of the funeral space. Funeral space is analysed for both its coded denotations and its performative nature in for its promotion of death as “natural” and normalization of controlled grief. Through these analyses, it is possible to understand the power of interior design to both reflect and shape Canadian attitudes and behaviours around death.

CHAPTER 4

CURRENT DEATH RITUAL PRACTICES: *ARS MORIENDI OR VANITAS?*

Introduction

Poet, funeral director, and writer Thomas Lynch states that somewhere between the killing of Robert and John F. Kennedy, and Lady Diana Spencer, the Princess of Wales, “something essential has changed in the conversation about death and grief and funerals”.¹ First, the framing of death is now explained within other cultural frameworks; death is found in popular culture, which presents no certainty other than that it exists in many ways for a culturally diverse viewing audience. It appears in television media, in such popular programs as *Six Feet Under*, *Hatched Matched and Dispatched*, *CSI*, and even *The Simpsons*, in musical genres like Death Metal and Black Metal, and video games.² It appears in daily newspapers, in graphic representations found on clothing and jewellery, and around religious and secular holidays like Easter and Hallowe’en. In short, death and related imagery are prevalent in Canadian culture.

¹Thomas Lynch, *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997, 12.

²Kenneth MacKendrick, interview by author, 17 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Secondly, death appears routinely within other professional discourses to which the public domain has access, specifically those of medicine, increasingly as the subject of ethical debates that are brought into the cultural sphere through the media: Do individuals have the right to choose their own moment of death? How should the ability of medical technology to sustain those who are clinically brain dead be treated – as opportunity or objection? In another professional world, that of therapeutic discourses, death is subject to a plethora of frameworks that attempt to reorganize it to be more acceptable and less foreign. The notion that death, grief and ritual have changed is echoed in the words of philosopher Jacques Derrida: “In short ... the dominant feeling for everyone is that death, you see, is no longer what it used to be. And who will deny it?”³ The fact that death has changed is clear, but how?

My inquiry addresses this question by looking at current practices used within death ritual – deconstructing an *ars moriendi* for the present day.⁴ Presented within post-structuralist theories of performativity and mythologizing, these practices are, in many cases, re-interpretations of long-established traditions, re-emerged as consumable products and services.

“Individuals no longer compete for the possession of goods, they actualize themselves in consumption.”⁵ These words point to the most critical manner in which

³Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) The “Limits of Truth,”* trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴*Ars moriendi*, or “the art of dying”, is a term that was first documented in an anonymous Latin text called the *Tractatus*, dated 1415. The text was a primary on protocols for how to die well, and was widely accepted throughout Europe, where as a tradition, it carried on until the seventeenth century. Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study of the Literary Traditions of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970).

death has changed: Canadian rituals shift and evolve beneath the sweeping marquee of consumerism. The funeral planning process, the enactment of the service, and the spaces in which the rituals are performed are all coloured by the practices of consumption. Understanding the multiplicity of products emanating from the marketplace that influence ritual practices helps the interior designer to interpret both the needs of the funeral profession and the purchasing clients; as modes for ritual change under the influence of new products and services, so, too will the interior program and the design priorities assessed by the profession.

I begin with an exploration of an *ars moriendi* and what that means in Canada today, and go on to address the concept of monumentalist behaviour under which many new practices related to death ritual are canopied. The relationship of monumentality and memory is discussed, with reference to the nature of “re-membering” practices that act as a type of abstract monument making.⁶ Narcissistic tendencies that are evidenced in many of today’s practices are highlighted; these practices exhibit traits of *vanitas* and highlight individual preoccupations with maintaining an identity post-death.⁷ Examples of a variety of current and emerging trends are used to illustrate the concepts as I move through this section.

⁵Jean Baudrillard in Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 115.

⁶Re-membering is a term used by narrative therapists Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade in their text *Re-Membering Lives*. From their social-constructivist position, the act of re-membering conflates notions of membership with remembered conversations, in the deliberate act of generating and maintaining a role for the deceased in the lives of the survivors. Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2004), 6-10.

⁷*Vanitas* is the latin word for vanity, as well as the genre of still life paintings undertaken in Northern Europe during the renaissance period that featured objects like skulls, musical instruments, and mirrored objects to symbolize the brevity of life and human vanity. Getty Museum, “Vanitas Still Life,” *Explore Art* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006) <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=607> (accessed 30 July 2006).

I then explore French philosopher Roland Barthes' concept of mythologizing, questioning how myth-making supports different death attitudes, especially as it acts to manufacture impressions of control within the funeral environment. A critique of the funeral interior as it supports the myth of controlled expression is undertaken in order to reconnect the discourse with the field of interior design. Finally, I conclude with an exploration of how the funeral industry promotes pre-need package sales in its continuing attempt to be relevant in a consumer culture that wants to control its own death, reshaping the concept of the *ars moriendi* from a good death that serves God, to one that serves the self.

Ars Moriendi Today

In the *ars moriendi* of medieval Europe, teachings for a good death were portrayed visually, as most western Europeans did not know how to read (see Figure 4.1). Often a series of wood cuts depicted the dying being tempted by demons, and then guarded against these temptations by angels in the final hour before death.⁸ In my analysis, *ars moriendi* is a trope that returns repeatedly within the text to ask: What does a good death in the twenty-first century mean? Similar to Jessica Mitford's forty-year-old study, *The American Way of Death*, examining a good death means mining established practices and exploring emerging currents in death ritual practices.⁹

⁸Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying*, np.

⁹Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

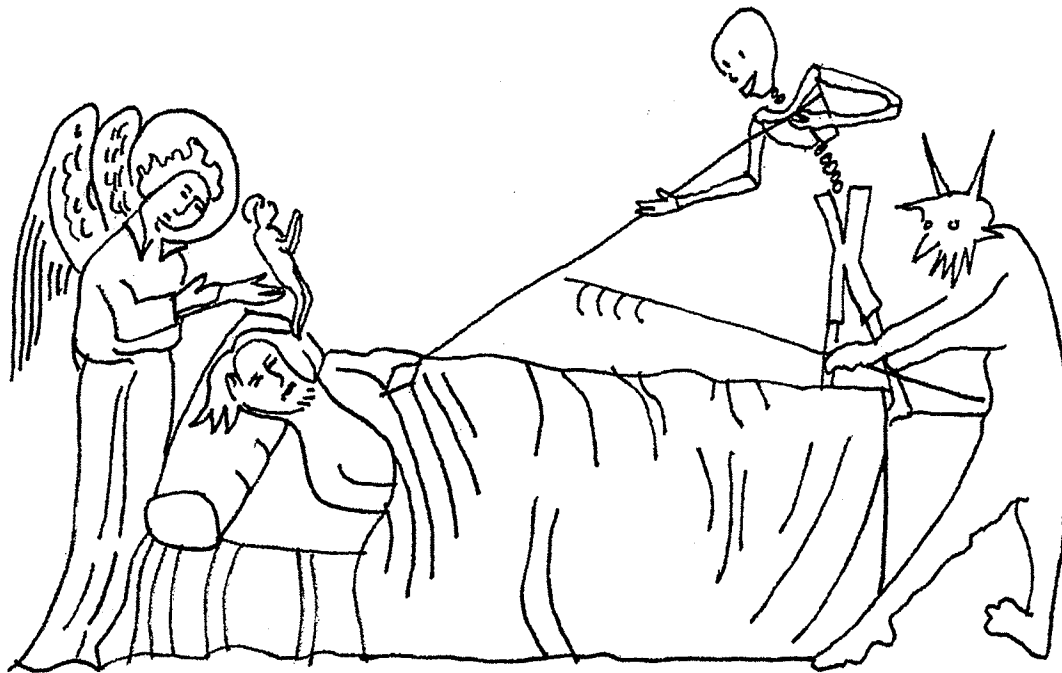


Figure 4.1: Katherine Isaac, *Sketch - Ars moriendi*. Based on English fifteenth century wood block.

The concept of what a “good death” means in a western, secularized culture has been discussed at length in the discourses of sociology, popular culture, and philosophy. According to sociologist Tony Walter, dying right “is the death that we choose”.¹⁰ Notions of personal agency, awareness, and opportunity are inherent in a chosen death, and, much like choosing what to wear, imply a self-conscious and creative act. Another framing of the good death casts it as “one contemplated and prepared for”.¹¹ Again, elements of self-awareness and forethought are implicated here in the aspiration to shape death. Where the importance of individualization has been shown to dominate secular

¹⁰Tony Walter, *The Revival of Death* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

¹¹Ronald Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 223.

western death and dying processes, this is not surprising.¹² Individual agency over the death ritual is also to be expected and is emerging as the driving influence of funeral industry change. As noted in course material offered to industry members by the Funeral Service Association of Canada, personalization of the funeral and a focus on the individual needs of the customer are core issues in effective funeral transactions.¹³

Despite the central fact of personalization, choice is not limitless in all frameworks: modern discourses idealize how dying and death are experienced, and instill a sense of obligation and determinacy for individuals who strive to fit within a process that is measured by time or in stages.¹⁴ The issue of choice, in this conceptualization of the good death, is circumscribed by cultural, personal and religious boundaries for appropriate behaviour; death planning is not seen by all as a *tabula rasa*. This is evidenced by reactions of funeral planning professionals to what are considered inappropriate requests, for example, the scattering of cremains has been discouraged by some funeral directors and the Catholic religion because, respectively, survivors have no established place to return to commemorate the deceased, and the body is dispersed, making a future resurrection impossible.¹⁵ However, at the essence of evolving discourse on choice is the notion that a good death is one that is under personal control, it is self-

¹²Guy Cook and Tony Walter, "Rewritten Rites: Language and Social Relations in Traditional and Contemporary Funerals," *Discourse & Society* 16 (2005): 367.

¹³The Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) offers a course *The Quest for the Perfect Ritual* to its members, which approaches personalization of the funeral ritual through an action-oriented approach. Caroline Yewchin, *The Quest for the Perfect Ritual*, on-line continuing education course, Funeral Service Association of Canada.

¹⁴Allan Kellehear, *Dying of Cancer: The Final Year of Life* (New York: Harwood Academic, 1990), 7.

¹⁵Geoff Carnell, "Cremation and the Catholic Church" *Canadian Funeral News* 33, June (2005): 10-11.

oriented, and particular, whether choices are wrought within existing frameworks or invented ones.

The funeral home, in a post-structuralist view, is the site of a creative act that negotiates between these individual constitutions of self and cultural boundaries. As a place that mediates between the two variables, the space is both a reflection of accepted norms and a challenge to the construction of ritual, calling into question static repetitions of homogeneity. In so doing, the funeral home has the potential to become a constructed *ars moriendi*, a visible testament to the art of dying well. In a culture that has been characterized as both death denying and death aware, what would this mean for the interior? The next sections isolate a number of current ritual practices and explore the ways that evolving ideas around death affect interior space; the first concept, that of monumentalism, insures a continuation of personality after death, extending the influence of the deceased beyond the bounds of time.¹⁶

Monumentalism and Memory

The notion that it is possible to continue to be relevant post-death is a vital aspect of rationalizing meaning for life; symbolic immortality can be achieved through a number of ends that generate continued meaning for the deceased in the realm of the living.¹⁷

Monuments, both physical and abstract, are symbolic trace impressions that act to immortalize the deceased. They take various forms, from physical objects like adopted

¹⁶Talcott Parsons in Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63.

¹⁷Seale, *Constructing Death*, 63.

benches that line public pathways, to corpses that are donated to scientific research, to financial endowments that support various endeavours.

For Barthes, the built monument was immortal and memory was eternal.¹⁸ Both monument and memory appear to resist the effects of time, and yet are subject to its constancy. Nature inflicts weather, and moss obscures the stone surface (see Figure 4.2), while accumulations of experiences interpose themselves between a memory each time it is recalled and continually re-contextualize it. The desire to monumentalize derives from a desire to persist. Through the monument, the dead are represented in a less temporally limited manner; however, even monuments have a life span. Headstones will crumble and cadavers will be expended for their resources. These monuments most obviously act not to replace the dead, but to resituate them in the memories of the living, at least while the survivors, and the monuments themselves, persist.

Monuments are spatial claims, replacing the deceased themselves with symbolic markers that activate memory. In this way, their locations have a place-making quality. Monuments are also performative catalysts: they encourage recollection, a unique re-performance of the past in memory. As discussed by cultural analyst Mieke Bal, the extension of the concept of performativity from its basis in language to include other cultural phenomena, “to all sorts of events that happen because someone does them, in the cultural domain”, allows for the embrace of remembering as a performative act.¹⁹ If

¹⁸Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 93.

¹⁹Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002), 176-178.



Figure 4.2: Tijen Roshko, *Passage of Time*, 2005. 2005, color photograph.
Reprinted with permission, Tijen Roshko, September 14, 2006,
© Tijen Roshko.

the monument encourages memory, it does so in the performative sense, by actively engaging a viewer in the present tense, guiding them to remember.

The practice of "re-membering", as described by anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, derives from the process of the re-aggregation of individuals; described as the re-introduction of members back into their respective groups of family and community, re-membering practices are socially distributed, dialogically recalled, and context dependent.²⁰ Memory is therefore spatially associated; environments are elemental to the practice of re-membering.

Re-membering practices are not acts of reminiscing, they are active ways to bring the dead back into the lives of the living, through discourses that constantly reconstruct meaning for the dead in the present reality.²¹ This special type of re-membering posits that the dead do not have to die, that stories can continue to mark a place for them in the patterns of the everyday. Remembering itself is a constantly fluctuating, esoteric way of monument building: the creative act of remembering is isolated in its ability to make and communicate stories that take on a life of their own in the physical absence. Memories can be revisited, passed on, given new meanings through the variety of ways that they are told.

This type of monumentalism is an elemental aspect of the funeral ritual, a way of creating a symbolically immortal construction that the living can carry with them. If, in

²⁰Barbara Myerhoff, "Life History Among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility and Remembering Life History Among the Elderly," in *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) in Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2004), 9. I understand her term *dialogical* as being transcribed to the physical: not only written in text, but also inscribed in space.

²¹Hedtke and Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives*, 9.

the words of philosopher and literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard, "the dead are not truly dead until stories, and only stories, remain as testament to one's existence", then it is at the funeral event that re-membering is solidified, wherein the cortege participates to reconstruct a life for the deceased.²²

Funeral Space and Time

The concept of the funeral home as monument is a valuable consideration when designing its interior spaces. Should the space be a metaphor for permanence? Physically, how does permanence manifest itself? Or, as the concept of permanence itself has limitations, does the funeral interior reflect an *ars moriendi* through the notion of permanency's adversary, time? Indications from the previous analysis of Barthes' comment on monuments, notions of memory found in the performative act of recollecting, and re-membering practices allude to the importance of time. Time will eventually topple the monument and re-forge, if not efface, the stories of remembered lives.

Although time is often perceived as linear in nature, Edward Hall posits that human beings live in a "sea of time...characterized by many diverse currents and countercurrents".²³ Time therefore need not be treated as just a continuum but also the process of accretion, in this case, of spatial 'moments' that accrue in both single and repeated visits to the funeral home; these moments are markers for experience, becoming points to which memories adhere. Understanding the funeral interior as a space of

²²Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Lessons in Paganism," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, trans. D. Macey (Oxford, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 126.

²³Edward T. Hall, "Experiencing Time," in *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension in Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 127.

cumulative experience rather than a single homogeneous one has a number of benefits. First the space becomes a composite of participatory opportunities; typical programmatic requirements that have the capacity to encourage participation include viewing, congregation, and ritual spaces proper, but there are less orthodox additions that extend beyond the conventional program.

Hall discusses 'extensions' of time as those tools and instruments that make us aware of the passage of time.²⁴ Humans have created extensions in the form of watches and clocks, even music and language, that all mark time.²⁵ Extensions can contribute to the art of dying well by engaging the users of funeral space in conscious acts of participation with their surroundings.

Planting commemorative flowers in gardens requires active participation of the survivors, extending the ritual act to include awareness of the surrounding landscape and nature's seasonal shifts. Similarly, the strategic directing of natural light into spaces to mark the passage of time illuminates chosen forms and textures at specific times of day while leaving them in the shadows at other times. Perceptions of shifts in light and shadow, even subliminally experienced, include users in the experience of funeral space, forming impressions of the ritual event. In addition, other symbolic markers of time investigated by the interior designer, such as those imbedded in sound and acoustic echoes, forms that shift to embrace human scale and then expand to distend time, and colours that are applied in subtle processions of intensity all actively engage users in the present tense, guiding them to experiences that later return in the form of re-performed

²⁴Hall, *Experiencing Time*, 129.

²⁵Ibid.

memories. Questioning permanence and encouraging memory through the concept of time is an abstract approach to monumentalism in the funeral interior. Returning now to other evolving trends, I explore similar nature-based practices along with more manipulative, material approaches to death rituals.

Emerging Monumentalism Practices

Many ways of creating monuments to the self have evolved over recent years, including a diversity of aesthetic and nature-based practices that are highly personal and sometimes highly unique in character. The *vanitas* of each practice is at the core of these practices; each represents the desire to individually mark the space of death in some way, and in so doing, claim physical space that becomes a reflection of a personal ideology.

Although a stark contrast to the hard footprint of the stone monument, the trend toward natural plantings to replace headstones in natural cemeteries is noteworthy (see Figure 4.3).²⁶ Still monumentalist in orientation, trees, shrubs, and other natural objects mark the burial sites of individuals who prefer not to contribute to burgeoning traditional cemeteries, yet have the desire to continue in physical form into the future. The *capsula mundi* is composed of a bio-plastic material to which a sapling is coupled, the womb-like vessel below enfolding the body back into its ordinary fetal position.²⁷

Once the capsule is planted, the body nourishes the earth and the tree above, physically and metaphorically transforming into new life and manifesting in a natural,

²⁶Douglas Davies, "Forms of Disposal," in *Death and Religion in a Changing World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 239.

²⁷"Capsula Mundi," weblog post 2005 (New York: Inhabit Weblog, 2006) http://www.inhabitat.com/entry_721.php (accessed 4 July 2006).

rather than manufactured, monument. The *capsula mundi* was designed and is marketed as the product of two Italian designers desiring to redefine death as natural.²⁸



Figure 4.3: Katherine Isaac. *Sketch - Capsula Mundi*.
2006, pen sketch, 20 x 10 cm.

Yet the careful crafting of the capsule itself and the focus on its representation of a good death is not dissimilar to the conception of the Victorian casket one hundred years earlier.²⁹ While the body, in that instance, was ensconced in a jewel-like case, this body is

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹See Chapter One, 25-29 for my discussion of the Romantic era and popular approaches to death ritual at that time.

now ensconced in today's accepted substitute, the sustainable, environmentally sensitive solution.

Returning to notions of the Victorian practice of treating the body as jewel, today's LifeGem® is a corporation that will immortalize an individual's carbon cremains in the form of a memorial diamond.³⁰ Perhaps the most blatantly consumerist of all trends, this company markets their products in the framework of a good death being one that actualizes in the form of gemstones. Their web-site proposes to support the continuation of loving bonds through the intimacy of a worn object: the company by-line, "LifeGem® ... because love lives on" implies that a true love itself is monumental, transcending the bounds of death.³¹

Not new in the territory of the accessories of death, memorial jewellery was often produced from the braided hair of the deceased as early as the renaissance period; the hair brooches, necklaces and pins were intended as *memento mori*, reminders to the wearer of death.³² LifeGem's diamonds are not so much *memento mori*, morally rooted in an ideology of how to die, but products that are sold under the banner of continuing bonds with the deceased, a consumable product of their *vanitas*.

In a similar vein, the use of cremains in the manufacture of coral reefs also promises contributors that they become a part of a "permanent environmental living

³⁰LifeGem, "Love Lives On" (Elk Grove, IL: LifeGem, 2005) www.lifegem.com (accessed 1 March 2006).

³¹Ibid.

³²iGavel, "Mourning and Memorial Jewelry in America," *iArt@iGavel: In-Depth Art News and Information*, 4 August 2005 (n.p.: iGavel, 2005) <http://www.igavel.com/iart/?p=10> (accessed 1 August 2006).

legacy".³³ In addition to this trend, ritual planning for an *ars moriendi* can also include symbolic quantities of ash will be shuttled to space on behalf of the deceased, or scattered over the Golden Gate Bridge by organized charter planes. These services highlight the importance of personal connections with the ritual acts, and advertise the uniqueness of the practices as desirable alternatives to traditional burial.³⁴ Cremated remains, simply ash and small bone particles, are highly transportable and are now proving to be a mine of possibility for various entrepreneurs capitalizing on the interest in alternative disposal practices. Attending to the myriad of ways that individuals personalize the storage or dispersal of their own remains will provide countless opportunities for new ways to consume a supposed *ars moriendi*.

My final example of body disposal, as analysed by Walter, is another alternative practice of monumentalism.³⁵ Plastination, a process developed by Doctor Gunther van Hagens, is the process by which a corpse is forcibly injected with polymers that act to preserve the body indefinitely. In this sense, it promises to offer a way for donors to "be useful to others even after their death", arguably into the far future.³⁶ Six thousand living individuals have formally arranged to donate their bodies to the plastination process

³³*Eternal Reefs* (Decatur, GA: Eternal Reefs Inc., 2006) <http://www.eternalreefs.com/index.html> (accessed 26 February 2006). The same organization offers "Pearls for Pets", a reef manufacture service for your pet.

³⁴*Memorial Spaceflights* (Houston: Memorial Spaceflights Inc., 2006) <http://www.memorialspaceflights.com/> (access 26 February 2006); and SF Bay Adventures, "Memorial Services, Ash Scattering and Sea Burials" (San Francisco: SF Bay Adventures, 2002) http://www.sfbayadventures.com/ash_scatterings.htm (accessed 26 February 2006).

³⁵Tony Walter, "Plastination For Display: A New Way to Dispose of the Dead" *Royal Anthropological Institute*, no. 10 (2004): 603.

³⁶Body Worlds (Heidelberg: Institute for Plastination) <http://www.bodyworlds.com/index.html> (accessed 2 March 2006).

under van Hagens, while three hundred persons are on display in his *Body Worlds* exhibition.³⁷ The success with which van Hagen has been able to solicit body donors is a testament to the desire for individuals to continue to contribute to society post-mortem, albeit anonymously.

Generativity and Post-Mortem Identity

Plastination is a form of monumentalism that can be described under the designation of *generativity*.³⁸ Generativity refers to the effort made by individuals to leave “a positive legacy of the self for the future”, and although it would appear to emerge most commonly where older individuals are concerned, it is also practiced by anyone preparing for their own deaths, regardless of age.³⁹ Generative practices are a form of monumentalism because they isolate ways to leave something for the future, but in the generative sense, they are tied to the well being of a future generation.

Psychiatrist Calvin Colarusso analyses generativity as it relates to adult development and mortality awareness; he turns to the notion of reminiscence in his isolation of the concept’s relevance.⁴⁰ The generative nature of passing along aspects of family history to other generations enhances relationships and strengthens genetic bonds. The passing along of cultural artifacts, be it in the form of stories, objects, or experiences,

³⁷von Hagens, Gunther, *Body Worlds: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies* (Heidelberg: Institute for Plastination, 2006) <http://www.bodyworlds.com/index.html> (accessed 2 March 2006).

³⁸For a fascinating overview of the generative aspects of the cadaver, see Mary Roach’s *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, which isolates the ways that cadavers have served the interests of the living. Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (New York: Norton, 2003).

³⁹Ed de St.Aubin, Dan P. McAdams, and Tae-Chang Kim, *The Generative Society: Caring for Future Generations* (Washington: APA, 2004), 3.

⁴⁰Calvin Colarusso, “A Developmental Line of Time Sense In Late Adulthood and Throughout the Life Cycle,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 53 (1998): 113.

is elemental to the generative act because it assists younger generations in understanding their ancestors and can improve their lives materially.⁴¹

The careful planning of dying and death can serve to pass along the benefits that the deceased has accumulated over a lifetime. Essentially, the monumentalism of generativity can be conceptualized as a giving of the self in order that meaning for the identity of the deceased can be absorbed into the family fabric.

Generativity acts against the phenomenon of disappearing time, and in its shifting of awareness onto the past, it “defends against what might be a difficult present.”⁴² A poignant example of this is illustrated in the stories of terminally ill parents practicing generativity in order to continue parenting beyond the grave. Gifts for future birthdays are planned, video and audio recordings are made, and cards and notes are written, and sometimes hidden, to be discovered on special occasions. One note reads: “Try not to wear heels, dyeing your hair is o.k. A little pink or purple is good, ear piercing is o.k., at 11 or 12.”⁴³ Parents continue to influence their children’s lives, and have a relationship, after they are dead. There is an emphasis on continued living, even in the rhetoric around the use of the word death. “He didn’t die”, said one parent, “he lived the experience of dying.”⁴⁴ The difference that a generative practice can make in the approach to death is one that shapes the framing of the event. The focus moves onto the experience, away from the narratives of loss, as the parents focus on what is important to leave behind.

⁴¹ Colarusso, “A Developmental Line of Time Sense In Late Adulthood and Throughout the Life Cycle,” 127.

⁴²Ibid., 126.

⁴³Lizette Alvarez, “Last Words,” *New York Times*, 6 Oct. 2005, G1.

⁴⁴Ibid.

The emphasis on life over death is mirrored in the trend for funeral homes to emphasize celebrations, life, and hope in the marketing rhetoric. A view to re-cast the death ritual as a focus on the wishes of the deceased and as a marking of their uniqueness shifts the funeral ritual away from its traditional role as an "intergenerational transaction" for the family, to a narcissistic one for the deceased.⁴⁵ The need to be remembered and appreciated post-mortem is an aspect of generativity that cannot be ignored. The scores of ways that death rituals will change to accommodate increasingly personalized ways of marking death will only reinforce this.

Although most of the practices in this inquiry point to a certain level of vanity due to the nature of the self-aware funeral, one is particularly descriptive of the narcissistic aspects of death today. The marketing of "Heritage DNA" by Orchid Cellmark at funeral establishments, stresses the value of having DNA stored in case of future need. According to a Heritage ID pamphlet, "DNA is a valuable record which will be destroyed through cremation and compromised through burial."⁴⁶ The stress of this practice is on the importance of unique identities and their preservation for posterity, for medical identification, and for legal use in the case of estate settlement disputes. The subtle threat of becoming genetically extinct cannot be avoided in the pamphlet's statement; where individuals have not considered the full ramifications of their choice of disposal, the pamphlet makes it clear that these acts are, in the case of DNA retention, final. The

⁴⁵Thomas Lynch, "Funerals-R-Us: From Funeral Home to Mega-Industry," *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 28, no.2 (2004), 14.

⁴⁶Orchid Cellmark, *Heritage ID Pamphlet* (Dayton, Ohio, n.d.).

language used in Heritage ID's pamphlet is targeted to those individuals who are vulnerable to the myth that DNA is an essential aspect of the care for the deceased.

How do all of these practices affect interior design? The *vanitas* of each is at the core of evolving trends; each trend represents the desire to individually mark death in some way, and in so doing, claim a personal ideology. Interior designers, recognizing the potency of both monumentality and generativity as concepts that shape death, respond by reconsidering the variety of ways that individuals conceive of meaning for the self. As the art of dying well and the vanity of twenty-first century death increasingly conflate in new rituals, funeral space will increasingly be consumed in the same spirit as the myriad of disposal methods emerging today. The market, and the design consultants that act as cultural interpreters, have a responsibility to conceive of and offer up a heterogeneous sample of establishments to appease diverse tastes, promoting alternatives. By treating the design of funeral spaces as unique opportunities to reframe death, the funeral typology expands its image and establishes new meanings for death in the cultural sphere.

Funeral Ritual and Mythologizing

The world of ritual has been conceptualized as an alternative reality.⁴⁷ The singularity of the funeral ritual acts to create illusions that can only be achieved if the participant frames the event to differentiate it from other events or scenes.⁴⁸ How the funeral and the funeral space frames the death ritual acts to define that ritual, granting it a level of

⁴⁷Ronny E. Turner and Charles Edgley. "Death as Theater: A Dramaturgical Analysis of the American Funeral" in Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley, eds. *Life as Theatre*, 2nd ed. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 285.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

seriousness, isolating it in space and time from the mundane. And how ritual takes its form in the funeral performance stands in dialectical contrast to ordinary behaviour: in ritual, meanings are created or rhetorically re-translated within the dramatic, illusory frame.

Professor of Religion and Culture Ronald Grimes calls ritual activity the product of imagining, but is careful to assert that imaginative creation does not stand in opposition to reality.⁴⁹ The ritual is a creative act that proposes to elevate reality, and in doing so, consciously engages against the ground of the everyday to which it responds. At the essence of ritual is its ability to structure transitional points along the continuum of birth and death; it is necessarily embodied and social, it cannot exist as a purely creative idea that exists only in the mind of the creator.⁵⁰

In the sense that ritualizing conflates the imaginal with the real, it recognizes mythic qualities of existence. Paul Irion identifies the mythic as putting individuals in touch with meanings that are difficult to articulate, or taboo.⁵¹ To the extent that rituals, ironically, rely on both a suspension of the everyday and an accedence to portrayals of repetitive acts that, in their repeating, act to pattern and normalize those difficult meanings, myths serve to further the ideologies of a good death. As far as myths draw on fictions of what is acceptable, desirable, or taboo, the funeral customer confronts *ars moriendi* in many forms in the myriad of scripts available to them. In fact, I contend that

⁴⁹Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 4.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Paul Irion, "Changing Patterns of Ritual Response to Death," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying* 22 (190-91), 160.

mythologizing, the creating of myths, acts in the interests of establishing an acceptable standard for both the funeral customer and the industry itself.

Roland Barthes approaches the subject of semiotic constructions in *Mythologies*. According to Barthes, “myth is a type of speech chosen by history,” and mythologizing, conflating history and nature, is a form of ideological abuse.⁵² By making what is historical appear to be natural, mythologizing fashions a reality that controverts its origins in the subjective, elevating it to the level of objective. In so doing, the newly natural becomes a sign-vehicle that conveys specific content: coupled together, the sign-vehicle and its signified meaning constitute a sign.⁵³

By isolating the phenomena of mythologizing as the construction and promotion of “what-goes-without-saying”, Barthes is able to pull apart everyday events to discover in them latent meanings that embellish reality.⁵⁴ By presenting as natural something that is in fact created, myth has the ability to insinuate itself as orthodoxy. Stephen Barley also adds that the connection between the sign-vehicle and its signified meaning is arbitrary, “in the sense that it is a convention of the group to which the sign’s user belongs”.⁵⁵

Extending the semiotic device to the phenomenon of the *ars moriendi* is useful in exposing it as a type of myth – no more than a constructed fiction that some individuals will adopt to give meaning to life and seemingly secure a good death. Although Grimes

⁵²Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), 11.

⁵³Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 68.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Stephen R. Barley, “The Codes of the Dead: The Semiotics of Funeral Work”, *Urban Life*, April 1983, 3-31.

warns that ritual and myth are not synonymous terms – “a myth is a story, a rite is performed” – it is possible to isolate the use of mythologizing through the *ars moriendi* to manufacture meaning for the funeral service and its itinerant merchandise.⁵⁶ Much like the wedding industry plays on mythical notions of love to proffer exorbitantly priced merchandise and services, the funeral industry focuses on a stereotype of the relationship between the deceased and the grieving to suggest that the experience of loss is mitigated through the planning for and purchase of specific services and accessories for the funeral event. In couching signs of a good death within the rhetoric of planning the funeral, an *ars moriendi* is constructed and sold to the customer.

For instance, staging a good funeral that signifies a good death means showing respect to the deceased by not defaulting to what is known in the funeral industry as the “price funeral home” over the “full service” one⁵⁷. The price funeral home, among other things, offers less ambience, lower quality equipment, and, humiliatingly, a lack of discretion in advertising their pricing strategies.⁵⁸ These are all signifiers of a lack of care for the deceased and are deemed inappropriate. In contrast, a full service home will “take seriously the role of caretaker of the dead and caregiver to the living”, and, due to its high visibility and good reputation within the community, signal the value that the bereaved

⁵⁶Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 116.

⁵⁷Todd Van Beck, “Handling the Price Shopper: Part I: How Price Shoppers Present a Golden Opportunity For Your Funeral Home,” *Canadian Funeral News*, June 2005, 14-15. What does a price funeral home mean in I/D terms?

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

has for their loved one.⁵⁹ This focus on consumer value has ramifications for the funeral space itself.

Barley's qualification about the arbitrariness of meanings can also be applied here to understand how the myth of the good death is variable depending upon the context in which it is experienced. The purchase of an economical service signifies alternative meanings when reviewed in the context of a group that valued simplicity, or one that is ecologically concerned. Here, the selection of a simple event and a pine coffin can signify the humility with which the deceased wished to be remembered, while a woodland burial within a bio-degradable casket signifies the deceased's respect for a natural environment, or wishes to avoid a highly material event. These funerals signify something radically different in their own cultural contexts than in the eyes of an industry that relies upon traditional ceremonies and burial in affiliated cemetery spaces. A good death has a variability of meanings depending upon the perspective with which they are dissected.

The Myth of Control

Just as specific choices in the planning of funerals signify a good death, the space in which they are performed, when submitted to such an analysis, is also isolatable as the subject of ideological manipulation. As previously mentioned, the funeral is an alternative reality and requires a knowing suspension of everyday understandings of its attendees. The fact of death is hidden behind layers of stitching and make-up in order to portray the natural effects of sleep, for instance, and mourners accept the peaceful aspect of the deceased as appropriate. Regardless of the gymnastics required of the mortician, the lotions and chemicals that have been applied to simulate a flushed cheek or a softened

⁵⁹Ibid.

lip, the production of a presentable corpse is central to many funerals.⁶⁰ In this case, the myth of a 'good death' literally hinges on a healthy visage and relaxed positioning of the body. Despite the manner in which the individual has died, be it violent, accidental, or after illness, it remains important to present the body in a semblance of controlled order, prepared as it is for being viewed, dressed and ensconced in the fabric-lined casket on a dais in the funeral space.

Correspondingly, there is a quiet and calm demeanour for the funeral home, one in which it is easy to imagine sleep, that reflects this desire for order and control. While the myth of a natural death is presented in the body of the deceased, the myth of control over this indefinable process is portrayed in the careful manipulation of design principles intended to quiet and lull. "Quiet" here is used with its corollary "visual noise"; the former usually implies a neutral state, and the other, a dynamic, sometimes overwhelming sense of activity. Visual quietness is evidenced in a lack of patterning, and through the use of solid colours, by sensitivity to scales for furnishings and interior spaces that do not challenge personal scale, and through selective use of light to diminish contrasts.

Expanding upon this, it is also possible to derive a subtle message conveyed in its interior language: the space is designed with the goal to soothe, ostensibly to comfort, and visitors should respond accordingly. In the dramaturgical performance that the customer enacts within, "acutely expressive behaviour can interrupt ... upset the

⁶⁰ A 2004 Pollara Report on 'Value of Products and Services (10 point rating scale)' in Canada, places professional services including embalming as the most important aspect of offerings within the funeral industry, rated at 7.1 out of 10, along with conducting the funeral, visitations and receptions. Rob Heppell, "It's Not the Funeral Product Industry," *Canadian Funeral News*, June 2005, 52.

“dignity” of the setting”.⁶¹ The funeral director’s role to keep order and ensure that the funeral event comes off perfectly, is supported by props and a set that are intended to normalize quietness and passivity as dignified, implicating that emotive expressions upset the established pattern of the funeral. The question here is how are expressions of grief that do not fit into this mould accommodated?

Amos Rapoport responds to this question by proposing that meaning for the environment cannot be endowed from above, and is instead generated by the user.⁶² In a culturally diverse country like Canada, and in a space that accommodates many cultural as well as religious user groups, it is apparent that a heterogeneity of meanings will be brought to bear upon the funeral home, from outside of the realm of the designer or the client.⁶³ The interior designer’s role becomes one of interpreting how best to support the practices of individuals who bring multiple meanings to the funeral home, and also to meet fundamental behavioural and physical requirements.

Rapoport posits that to design meaning into an environment, is inappropriate, particularly if it is a single meaning.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the funeral home is in a predicament in two ways: attempts to impose orderly conduct limits authentic experiences by establishing rigid controls around interior spaces, often predetermining the ways that individuals move through highly ordered space. Second, the meaning conveyed through many funeral interiors is anchored in an aesthetic with which certain

⁶¹Barley, “The Codes of the Dead,” 11.

⁶²Amos Rapoport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach* (Beverly Hills, Sage, 1982), 20-21.

⁶³Van Beck, “Handling the Price Shopper,” 15.

⁶⁴Rapoport, *Built Environment*, 21.

individuals will not relate. The imposition of an aesthetic ideal is a way of reinforcing the myth that the funeral home is a stable space, one in which perfect funerals can be performed, but trends point to different ways that funerals take place, and the unpredictability of new ritual frameworks.

Funeral director Caroline Yewchin, working in a rural community, states that many funerals that she organizes do not take place within the walls of the funeral home, but in makeshift ritual spaces.⁶⁵ In one example, she recalls a meaningful tribute for a family of three enacted within a hockey arena holding more than one thousand people. The space was accessorized with large graphic elements symbolic of peace and transcendence, and floral arrangements re-oriented the mourners' views to a makeshift dais. The hockey arena, a place of community gathering and leisure, was transformed into meaningful ritual space.

As a result of the trend towards highly orchestrated funerals it is natural that alternative venues are being substituted for funeral space. Individuals like New York socialite Nan Kempner and billionaire executive Robert Tisch planned their memorials for places like Christie's auction house and Avery Fisher Hall.⁶⁶ As death ritual infiltrates public space, it assumes the form of cultural event: by affiliating with places that are layered with meanings derived from evenings at the theatre or fine art sales, the experience of the funeral is transported into high culture. Perceptions of funerals in such spaces remain untouched by the realities of the dead corpse, concrete mortuary parking

⁶⁵Caroline Yewchin, telephone interview by author, July 13, 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, Winnipeg.

⁶⁶John LeLand, "It's My Funeral and I'll Serve Ice Cream if I Want To," *New York Times*, 20 July 2006, Style section, online edition.

lots, or the structured funeral interior viewing spaces, chapels and lounges. Instead, the congregation of mourners associate their commingling with other evenings spent consuming fine art and opera.

As ritual practices expand out of the funeral home, influenced by consumerist tendencies and the desire for carefully managed celebrations, the industry has to consider ways to safeguard their role. From the preservationist perspective, the funeral industry has responded by assuming a protective stance on the tradition of the funeral ritual.⁶⁷

Preserving Funeral Practice

Where cultural shifts have taken place, ritual changes have followed, especially with regards to blindly following established traditions.⁶⁸ Although the industry is, as any capitalist undertaking must be, focused on maintaining their profitability, Emke argues that they have also become the advocate of the funeral ritual. By providing the structure that individuals fall back upon in times of extensive emotional turmoil, they are providing a public service.

Some individuals will find themselves planning funerals unexpectedly, and in this situation, the thought of an alternative manner for marking the event of death, or a different venue than that which is already provided by the funeral industry, is unthinkable because of the emotional toll of loss. While many rituals are prepared for well in

⁶⁷Ivan Emke, "Why the Sad Face? Secularization and the Changing Function of Funerals in Newfoundland," *Mortality* 7 (2002): 269.

⁶⁸Camie Leard, "Windsor's Families First is on the Cutting Edge," *Canadian Funeral News*, June, 2005, 4.

advance, most funerals are planned in the space of two to four days.⁶⁹ In the midst of complicated emotional responses, questions arise as to how to handle processes involving the body that were once widely practised, but are now foreign.⁷⁰ The industry bears responsibility for those necessary processes that no longer fall in the domain of the private, or rather, makes private what once was the charge of the public.

However, in response to the funeral industry's role in defining body preparation and burial methods, a number of simpler practices are emerging in Canada that are facilitated through or partnered with funeral industry services.⁷¹ These practices promise the funeral industry continued growth if they continue to heed their customer base. In a recent article in the journal *Canadian Funeral News*, the trend toward simpler merchandise has been noted across all demographic cohorts.⁷² Although the professional services of the industry are still sought after, the types of merchandise that some individuals are seeking does not appear to hinge on the perception of cost, but on its appropriateness in its reflection of the deceased.

For instance, the trend toward green burials is certain to influence some in the funeral industry to consider the benefits of green-oriented, sustainably designed funeral homes. This has yet to emerge as a response to the environmentally conscious client, but it appears that with the expansion of this market in certain geographic areas in Canada, it will be a logical development. In smaller ways, this is already proceeding; Neil Bardal

⁶⁹Christopher Climie, interview by author, 5 August 2006, Winnipeg, email transcript.

⁷⁰Walter, *The Revival of Death*, 16-17.

⁷¹Heppell, "Funeral Product Industry," 52-53.

⁷²Ibid.

Industries (NBI) has planned an extension to its existing premises on Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg, Manitoba that visually expands its north side to include large views of the Brookside cemetery across from it, itself a well-established, park setting. Also planned for this expansion is a memorial rose garden designed to receive cremains within the expanded space. By interfacing the natural elements of the cemetery with the commemoration process and the rose garden, NBI connects the signifiers of nature and wellness with ritual, softening its approach. As Religious Studies professor Kenneth MacKendrick has stated, the Canadian marketplace will continue to take advantage of opportunities to supply services and products to a consuming public.⁷³

Pre-Need Funeral Sales

One manner in which the funeral industry competes for market share is by selling pre-need packages, which serves a number of purposes for the funeral home. It ensures future business, generates capital, and puts funeral planning in the hands of the living, where there is ostensibly less stress than when planned after the death has occurred. As a form of generative industry planning, pre-need packages are driving competition because family owned businesses are acquired by publicly traded industry giants in order to gain a larger share of this retail market.⁷⁴

Within this retail paradigm, the funeral home is no more than a space to clinch deals, a sales environment that has objectives distinguishable from ritual celebration. The trend towards pre-need sales has been critiqued by funeral director and poet Thomas Lynch, as “a thing to be marketed, like solar heat, sold like insurance, and delivered like a

⁷³Mackendrick interview.

⁷⁴Lynch, “Funerals-R-Us,” 14.

bulky home appliance".⁷⁵ As such, pre-need sales re-purpose funeral space, begging the question whether the move towards pre-planning will move out of the funeral home altogether, relocating into commercial sales environments not unlike Lynch's insurance office.

The image of funeral sales kiosks lining the shopping mall is not far off if the retail leanings of the industry are fully exploited. Moreover the function of separating sales of these packages from the funeral home proper allows for new framing of planning itself, immersing it within familiar consumer practices that blend consumption with production. In this case, 'prosumers' design their own funerals, both consuming and producing them simultaneously.⁷⁶ Theoretically, customers would prosume in spaces that support the branded funeral in order to sell it: 'The Natural Way' woodland funeral brand is sold in space composed of biodegradable materials, with simulations of natural light and imagery of vegetative life. The 'BE4' minimalist funeral package is sold in stark surroundings coded in white, with reflective surfaces mirroring images of the prosumer back to themselves as they sign paperwork. Neither branded concept names death directly, instead focusing on bonding the customer's living identity to an available package.

The blatantly retail nature of the pre-needs package flaunts the capitalist leanings of the funeral industry in the face of traditions of funeral rituality and the sanctity of death. However, as Lynch notes, the selling of these packages like insurance must be effective because this is a highly lucrative part of today's industry. As individuals attempt

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (London: Collins, 1980), 11.

to plan for their futures, they are sold the pre-need package as a means of securing control over their own personal death needs, ostensibly removing the pressures of decision making from loved ones. Yet this is also an opportunity for the funeral industry to capitalize on the self-aggrandizing whims of customers who want to remain immortal.

Conclusion

What do all of these practices around death ritual say about Canadian culture? Certainly, it is not difficult to see that death is finding new footholds, specifically in consumer culture. The market is accommodating mortality quite ably, and alternatives are available to complement any life style. Monumentalist behaviours range from the nature-based, environmentally sensitive earth capsules, to the generativity of cremain-compressed diamonds. There is no lack in the ways that consumers can re-construct themselves in death through the mythologized funeral ritual. The death ritual re-focuses on the wishes of the deceased, reflecting their uniqueness, and subsequently shifts from its traditional role as intergenerational transaction to narcissistic celebration.

As the *ars moriendi* in Canadian society is increasingly reflective of the *vanitas* of the inflated identity, the space for funerals and their planning is challenged to diversify. Its interior program, supportive of the myths created around funerals themselves, is not only required to reflect controlled expression, but now must modulate between industry structure and highly variable personal demands. As the site of the creative acts of consumers, it is called upon to become a spatial *ars moriendi*, a built form that re-interprets death in each unique undertaking.

CHAPTER 5

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTERIOR DESIGNERS ON THE DESIGN OF FUNERAL SPACE

Introduction

The first four chapters of my thesis have established the historical development of the funeral space, charting its evolution through time. I have explored meanings for death in Canadian society by looking at the ways that individuals approach death in psychological discourse, how individuals mediate feelings about death through sociological means, and how death is framed in a variety of modern and post-modern discourses. Further, I have explored the ways that death is ritualized, how current trends have evolved from established ritual practices, and examined cultural attitudes toward death through trends themselves.

How are interior designers to interpret the findings of these explorations, or to understand and apply new concepts in the context of design practice? In this chapter, I look back at a number of ideas presented in the earlier chapters, re-examining them for their bearing upon funeral space, and specifically pulling concepts into the practice and vocabulary of interior design. In the process of extrapolating on these concepts, I isolate and question them for their potential impact on the future of death ritual and space. This act is necessarily one that requires a stance, and is influenced by my own cultural location and history. My aim is to sensitize interior designers to the possibilities inherent in their

roles as consultants within the death care industry, and to assist them in developing informed responses to enhance the experience of the users of funeral spaces and services. This analysis effectively resituates funeral spaces within the context of other sites of cultural significance in the Canadian landscape, thereby constructing a new meaning for the funeral typology.

***Ars Moriendi* – Bringing Death Back into the Land of the Living**

I return specifically to the notion of the *ars moriendi*, the art of the good death, to frame the following inquiry. Is a good death one that is couched in the referents of the domestic? Do other typologies offer more appropriate grounds against which to cast funeral ritual? How do the concepts of being-in-the-world and sacred space contribute to the interior designer's ability to shape a more meaningful ritual?

Dramaturgical aspects of the funeral ritual and new therapeutic discourses frame compelling ideas for the future of the funeral venue. Can the funeral home become like a stage, a *tabula rasa* upon which rituals are performed as completely unique events? How do mourning practices and therapeutic theories on the use of memory also contribute to ways for the funeral interior to re-shape itself? In what way does the increased use of media contribute to this questioning? Finally, just as media projections re-shape space and temporarily transform it into something specific and individual, the liminal, transitory nature of ritual space can also be interpreted in a weak design. In this approach, consciousness can be apprehended in the interior, bringing the experiences of users into the present moment, and enhancing the experience of the ritual.

In general, an approach to the lack of an *ars moriendi* for today is to re-instill respect for death in the language of the everyday environment. This requires a conscious inclusion of spaces for death ritual in the world of the living. A step in this direction can be achieved through creating awareness that funeral spaces can be designed to perform in a more sophisticated and effective way for their users, while remaining lucrative commercial businesses, anticipating and meeting the needs of an increasingly sophisticated Canadian public.

From Domestic to Retail

Sociologist Tony Walter observes a direct link between the desire for privacy and the commercialization of the funeral ritual.¹ A century ago in western society, it was the professional disposers of the dead who were in demand, as opposed to the community lady who traditionally had laid out the body. "They did not want her inside the house doing something so intimate."² As the intimate acts of preparing the body were handed over to industry, the funeral ritual moved out of domestic space into a commercial space intentionally designed after the home's parlour. It is not surprising that domestic signifiers were intentionally implanted into the new funeral typology, given that they lent familiarity and legitimacy to a young typology that needed to prove itself. But these referents are still to be found in many funeral establishments to this day, and I question their relevance. Do users still need domestic signs to ground them in the space? What is an appropriate design response for the twenty-first century to the need to create a comfortable and non-intimidating funeral interior?

¹Walter, Tony, *The Revival of Death* (London: Routledge, 1994), 20.

²Ibid.

It is logical that the consumer of designed space no longer relies on the domestic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that 'home' today means something different than it did one hundred years ago. According to architect and theorist Witold Rybczynski, "To speak of domesticity is to describe a set of felt emotions, not a single attribute ... [it] has to do with a sense of the house embodying – not only harbouring – these sentiments".³ Sentiments around family relationships and intimacy have continued to evolve since the early days of the funeral home typology, and similar to the community woman's disappearing role in preparing the corpse for ritual and burial, so, too, is the notion of the home's role in housing the dead body now unfamiliar.

Further, and extending upon this, the funeral industry has always been commercially driven. As sales of both products and services are at the core of the funeral business, it seems logical, even inevitable, that the industry align itself with other retail functions.⁴ The funeral business exists to earn profit and, increasingly, please shareholders, as is the case with Service Corporation International (listed as SCI on the New York Stock Exchange), which will formalize their agreement with Canada's largest funeral service provider by the end of 2006, making them the largest funeral corporation in North America.⁵

³Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 75.

⁴Rob Heppell, "It's Not the Funeral Product Industry" *Canadian Funeral News* 33, no.6 (2005): 52-55.

⁵Service Corporation International (SCI), North America's largest funeral services provider, showed annual quarterly revenues of over 430 million dollars for the second quarter of 2006. Positive gains were attributed to "strategic pricing initiatives combined along with... continued focus to control discounts." Service Corporation International, "Service Corporation International Announces Second Quarter 2006 Financial Results," *News* (Houston: SCI, 2006), <http://www.sci-corp.com/PubNews.html> (accessed 11 August 2006).

The commodification of the funeral ritual is in many regards parallel to developments around other rites of passage that stress the importance of events in the context of material trappings, such as births, coming of age ceremonies like bar and bat mitzvahs, and weddings. The consumerist backdrop against which most western lives are lived has become a new version of comfort and familiarity: Canadians shop to feel good.⁶ As an extension of this, the funeral home finds itself in a position to offer its goods and services within what is known as the “commodity experience”.⁷ The packaging of experiences, in this case, ones that encapsulate both products and services within a memorable event and space, effectively sells the funeral as fashionable.

Examples of establishments that have adopted an open approach to their role as consumer spaces have garnered success. Witness the Alfred Dallaire Memoria funeral home on a busy retail street in Montreal, Quebec. In an effort to look after survivors as well as the deceased, this funeral space includes a *biblio-café* named Salon B, which proffers café au lait and pastries to visitors who drop in to meet friends.⁸ Salon B also provides a lending library and art gallery that deal directly with death and mourning, placing human mortality directly in the context of its busy retail and restaurant neighbours on rue St. Laurent, signalling an integration of this typology within the retail world.⁹

⁶Kenneth MacKendrick, interview by author, 17 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

⁷Anne Friedberg, *Window shopping: Cinema and the postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 115-116.

⁸Graeme Hamilton, “Death Be Not Obvious,” *National Post*, 22 February 2005, sec. A, p. 3.

⁹*Ibid.*

Passers-by receive this unconventional hybridization of services – the café, gallery, library, and funeral home –in many ways. However, the directness with which Alfred Dallaire Memoria addresses its responsibilities provides a striking example of a shift to a retail typology that questions the domestic status quo and confronts death in a new way in public space.

Given that westerners are so familiar with the retail shopping experience, the association with retail space provides a more appropriate signal than the domestic. References to the home no longer holds the same connotations that it did in the days when the parlour was the traditional space of laying out the body.

Being-In the World and Sacred Ritual Space

Where domestic signifiers once hearkened to a place of security, today, post-modernity has been characterized as a condition in which security "... is sacrificed on the altar of ever-expanding individual freedom and liberty, producing endemic insecurity in its wake."¹⁰ There remain few existentially meaningful ways to conceptualize death in a culture that values individuality and no longer widely values religious structure. So an understanding of being-in-the-world, predicated upon ontological security, is abandoned for new ways of creating, and reading, the death ritual and the space in which it is enacted.

While affiliation with religion long held sway over the form and enactment of death rituals, funeral celebrant Norma Wellwood comments that her clients often couch

¹⁰Mark Neocleous, "Against Security," *Radical Philosophy*, issue 100 (March/April 2000): paragraph 1, http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2188&editorial_id=10065 (accessed 1 May 2006).

their beliefs in the much less-defined realm of the “spiritual”.¹¹ Coordinator of alternative and highly personalized rituals for families and loved ones, Wellwood characterizes the attitudes of many funeral directors as “very closely affiliated with the Christian faith, (they) would still identify Christianity as their faith of origin and the current way of shaping their nature.”¹² When contrasted with Wellwood’s role, the dogmatic views of more conservative practitioners exemplify this contrast between security rooted in religious tradition and the insecurity of undefined rituals.

The interpretive and malleable nature of personalized rituals has a significant ability to connect with family and loved ones, but it in its tentative, undefined status, can cause conflict in decision-making and make planning difficult.¹³ How might the funeral home become a place of ontological security without doing so in a reductionist design language? In other words, can the funeral home become a place of security against a ground of post-modern insecurity? Professor of Theology, Douglas Davies, posits that it is through the direct experience of ritual space that individuals come to assign spiritual importance to places they otherwise would deem utilitarian.¹⁴ So by inviting experience of ritual space, individuals overcome their own preconceptions. Davies points to two important aspects of the space that are required to formulate new impressions of the space as spiritual: first, the view that the space is specifically oriented toward congregation, and second, that the site encourage memorial visits, at which point, the bereaved recall, in a

¹¹Norma Wellwood, interview by author, 4 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Neil Bardal, interview by author, 27 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, Neil Bardal Incorporated, 3030 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg.

¹⁴Douglas J. Davies, “The Sacred Crematorium,” *Mortality* 1, no. 1 (1996): 86.

private setting, the significance of their visit, and have the opportunity to re-connect with their past participation in the funeral.

As individuals seek to reinterpret the funeral ritual, bringing authentic sanctity and privacy to the funeral home offers compelling direction for interior designers. These concepts, very closely affiliated with religious space, have appeared little, if at all, in the context of the literature reviewed for my thesis. The funeral industry's past approach to the sacred has involved, as discussed in Chapter Two, many simulatory aspects of religiosity that are benign metaphors for transcendence and peace, and other spiritual concepts deemed therapeutic.

A design approach to the sacred in the funeral interior is a complex task because it requires sensitivity to the fact that not all individuals will seek a sense of the sacred within ritual space, nor will they appreciate overt expressions of the spiritual.¹⁵ According to Davies, this is averted because those who do not want to connect with the sacred aspects of space will simply remain oblivious to them: however, this assumes that those expressions are not explicit and dominating.¹⁶

Privacy, a significant aspect of western culture, especially with respect to the Canadian funeral, has in fact been regarded within a very narrow view. Often interpreted within the restricted realm of familial need, as in the design programmatic requirement of "Family Room", in which direct relations can retreat from view and partake of the event

¹⁵I also use the term spiritual to denote what Davies has called sacred. He is careful to note that an interpretation of the term "sacred" refers to the source of identity from which individuals derive significance, to the point that this source is regarded as sacred. This in effect reflects onto the identity of the dead as "sacred other". Ibid., 91.

¹⁶Davies, 86-87.

from within secure boundaries, the interior designer must consider the wide variety of relationships that make up the group of survivors to whom privacy will be important.

The funeral home could consider itself a space that accommodates the many kinds of rituals required of a post-modern clientele, anticipating a fluid spatial organization that permits multiple uses for its rooms, allowing for the merging or definition of public areas, and facilitating services that range from small, intimate rituals to those that break out into large informal gatherings. A miscellany of options is now available to individuals planning their funerals: in a consumer culture, the market ensures that there is a stream of products and services from which to choose.¹⁷

Dramaturgy and the Event Space

The spaces within which bodies are visited and exhibited at the funeral home, sometimes still called chapels, parlours, or sanctuaries, are slowly evolving from the original state of pseudo-religiosity. Today, many establishments have become flexible in their approach to the use of religious iconography, sensitive to the variety of religious groups that use their services.

The dismembering of spaces to fit specific needs resembles that of the theatre in that there are unique contexts that are created for distinct sets of rites. As rituals are becoming fluid and personalized, the spaces in which they take place are also required to shape themselves accordingly. Auction houses and even cemeteries have been known to host elaborate, highly produced funerals in the United States, and it is not difficult to see

¹⁷MacKendrick, interview; and John LeLand, "It's My Funeral and I'll Serve Ice Cream if I Want To," *New York Times*, 20 July 2006, Style section, online edition.

this trend being reflected in Canadian rituals as well.¹⁸ Funeral director and educator Caroline Yewchin comments that many of her clients opt for funerals in community centres or non-denominational halls, as opposed to the traditional funeral home.¹⁹ If this trend continues, the funeral home's role in providing for the specific function of the ritual will be significantly decreased.

So a new approach to funeral spaces – one that recognizes the dramatic nature of the funeral's performance and the ritual that frames it – bares the interior space, conceiving it to be like a shell. Its sole purpose is to be assembled, disassembled, and reassembled for the next performance that it hosts. Devoid of religious iconography, it is regarded as a blank canvas upon which the personality of the deceased will be projected, both physically and metaphorically. Arrangements of the ways that the mourning gather, in this scenario, are not bound by traditional pews, nor are they oriented toward a stage or dais, and the use of props to support the ritual is interpreted in whatever means are appropriate.

The organization of the funeral home to support the funeral as a celebration of a life, or an event as it is also starting to be called, conjures numerous theatrical devices. For instance, the employment of what Roland Barthes has termed *punctum*, or punctuation, prompts and inspires moments of awareness and memory while moving through the spaces, such that the attendees of the funeral are provided with a more

¹⁸John LeLand, "It's My Funeral and I'll Serve Ice Cream if I Want To," *New York Times*, 20 July 2006, Style section, online edition.

¹⁹Caroline Yewchin, interview by author, 13 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

meaningful experience of the ritual.²⁰ It should be noted that the planned use of *punctum* is antithetical to Barthes' use of the term, which for him entails a piercing, sharp experience of meaning that is unique to himself, as the reader of an image. However, it is useful as a concept in modulating spatial experience, and need not have an effect on all who experience it; it is simply a strategic device that has potential to support the dramaturgy of ritual by providing highlights to promote awareness, and prick memory, as individuals move through the space. For Wellwood, sharing memories is essential to the enactment of death ritual, often serving to bring loved ones together. In fact, the planning meetings that take place prior to the funeral are often so cathartic for her clients that they will comment on their sense that there is no longer a need for a funeral.

Mourning and Remembering

Philosopher and literary theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote, "There shall be no mourning."²¹ Mourning, that outward display of grief, would no longer constitute the public demonstration of feeling. What if, as in theorist Jacques Derrida's analysis of this statement, the act of mourning was to become unnecessary, or unfashionable?²² What would this portend for the future of the death ritual, and for the act of remembering, that is so inextricably tied to the memorial event and commemoration?

Without the formality of the funeral, the memorial, or whatever name is chosen to designate the gathering of survivors to remember the deceased, the remembering process

²⁰Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 27.

²¹Jacques Derrida, "Lyotard and Us," in *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 217.

²²Derrida, "Lyotard and Us," 218.

becomes *dispersed*. Derrida uses this word to describe the lack of “the very horizon of a consensual meaning, of a translatability”.²³ Death is experienced across an indefinite territory that is never named, never shared, and in effect never performed. The death, and therefore the life, is not given meaning as it is never construed through language, never risking reification or devaluation, but never generating an essence of what came before.

Language and memory are both used to perform. Derrida focuses on the subordination of an individual’s illocutionary intentions to social conventions, conventions that rely on personal understanding accrued through experience and recollection.²⁴ The performance of Lyotard’s death is precluded by the ban on mourning: without the social convention of the funeral, there is no performance of his death, no opportunity to generate a shared significance.

So Lyotard’s intent that there be no mourning highlights the risks of the performative aspects of the death ritual. A less acute approach is posited within the therapeutic discourses of narrative therapists Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade. Not in opposition to the funeral, but in opposition to its focus on loss, they prefer to focus on aspects of memory that continually re-elect the deceased into the community from which they are physically absent.²⁵ In narrative therapy, loss is not emphasized because the continuation of connections post-death are as important as those that came before. In this sense, the death ritual’s focus on remembering serves survivors well in acknowledging

²³Ibid., 223.

²⁴Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 178.

²⁵Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade, *Re-Membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2004), 7.

meaning generated in the past, and creating possibilities for growth and change in the relationships between survivors and the dead into the future.

Both of the concepts discussed above have implications for funeral space. Language is at the essence of each; Lyotard's funeral is tentative, recognizing the importance of shared understandings, but also highlighting the reductive dangers of naming and limiting through speech. Hedtke and Winslade's funeral is avoidant of preconceptions of loss and focused on continuing membership. In this focus upon remembering, the funeral industry must provide space to encourage memory and the active participation in memorialization in dialogue would serve this function well.²⁶ It is logical that the same space that is used for the ritual facilitates this, but separate rooms also accommodate this function, where participatory memory spaces become a vital part of the funeral program.

As another way that survivors participate to remember the dead, there is a small but growing movement of individuals who wish to reclaim the act of preparing the dead body for burial.²⁷ Keeping the body's ministrations within the community of loved ones is a potent message of membership. Preparatory events include washing, dressing, and laying out the deceased, often within a private home, but sometimes within the funeral home, for viewing prior to the death ritual (See Figure 5.1).

²⁶Alderwoods Group uses the term "Celebrating a Life Lived" in print advertising, while Alfred Dallaire Memoria web-site's byline is "*Chaque vie est une histoire*", or "*Each life is a story*".

²⁷Rachel Cox, "A Movement to Bring Grief Back Home: Many Bereaved Opting to Bypass Funeral Industry, special to *The Washington Post*, Sunday, June 5, 2005, p. A01.



Figure 5.1: Jerri Lyons. *Jasmine's body as prepared by her friends and family*. 2005, colour photograph. Reprinted with permission, Jerri Lyons, director FinalPassages, September 5, 2006, © Final Passages.

Jasmine has been carefully laid out by her friends and lies in honor at a home overlooking the Pacific Ocean.²⁸ Her death ritual was developed within the ideologies of a home funeral, as promoted by Sebastopol, California organization "Final Passages", which educates individuals and families on topics of family-controlled funerals and disposition practices.²⁹ Having more time with the body and less pressure to commemorate the death within a schedule convenient to a mortician, as well as the increased comfort and intimacy of a non-institutionalized environment are cited as advantages of the home funeral.

This is not a trend that will appeal to a large swath of the population; according to celebrant Wellwood, many Canadians are more inclined to have paid last respects to the body immediately post-death, and often do not wish to have further contact with it. However, for those who are interested, this reclamation poses interesting possibilities for the death care industry because it can anticipate the needs of individuals who wish to partake in the preparation procedures. Some funeral establishments are accustomed to these requirements. For instance, in the Jewish community, it is common that a group of community volunteers especially trained in the process will perform preparations within the funeral environment.³⁰ In these funeral homes, there is an understanding that the private spaces will be opened to the public under specific circumstances. Although home funerals are specifically performed outside of the realm of the funeral industry, the

²⁸Final Passages, "Why do it?" (Sebastopol, CA: Final Passages, 2001), <http://www.finalpassages.org/html/why.html> (accessed 15 July, 2006).

²⁹Final Passages, "Why do it?".

³⁰Kathy Cloutier, *Customs and Traditions in Times of Death and Bereavement*, 4th ed., special manuscript prepared by McInnis and Holloway Funeral Homes, publishing no. 400037 (Calgary, AB: McInnis and Holloway, 2001).

citation of the typical funeral environment as a factor in choosing an alternative venue is notable.

Should this custom of more intimate interaction between the survivors and the dead body become more prevalent, how would the funeral venue plan, its thresholds and ordering be affected? No longer strictly defined by a front end and back-of-house, the space becomes fluid and open, promoting the flow of people beyond previous defined boundaries. Thresholds no longer need strict edges determined by who is permitted into specific areas. Instead, a focus on inclusion and participation is established. The participation by the survivors, particularly through haptic experience, is a vital part of the final day of presentation.³¹ When asked about her opinions on the most important part of the event for the family, Wellwood cited the planning meeting and the creation of, and active role in, ritual as most cathartic and meaningful; note that both are highly participatory. For instance, the tossing of rose petals into water by the mourners, or passing out of goody-bags full of candy to attendees, mark highly personal ways of encouraging interaction.

Participating in the preparation of the body is viewed as an extension of this concept of inclusion and remembering, with the invitation of the loved ones into this stage of the preparations having positive ramifications on many fronts. The funeral establishment is perceived as transparent, with nothing to hide behind closed doors, and the process of grieving expands and integrates loved ones in an intimate process with the dead. Permission is granted to spend more time with the body, and to determine and

³¹Wellwood's use of the terms presentation and event are preferred over funeral, which she feels is "loaded" and tightly bound with religious traditions that many Canadians no longer practise. Wellwood, interview.

participate in its treatment. The possibilities for layering the experiences of the mourners in this way, by encouraging their participation in the planning of the funeral, preparation of the body, and participation in the funeral ritual itself, provides a number of ways that the interior designer and funeral industry might work together to expand upon the services and suitability of the spaces that are provided. Another approach that layers the spatial experiences of the survivors and encourages memory is the televisual funeral space.

Another approach that both layers the spatial experiences of the survivors and encourages memory is the televisual funeral, wherein various forms of media come together to form an environment that participants experience through numerous senses.

Televisual Funeral Space

This approach to the design of funeral space is informed by another typology entirely, in order to gain new understanding for what funeral homes can become. Mainly undertaken in leisure and entertainment-retail typologies, televisuality is a dense layering of experiences – physical, visual, auditory, and narrative. Design educator Guy Julier highlights the work of Nigel Coates and other designers that use this device in their approach to their work.³² Conscious that brands are scripted successfully within spaces that consistently and repetitively deploy images, narratives and experiences under one roof, the designers, Coates among them, use the televisual concept to make exhibitions more engaging, multi-valent, and consumable.³³

³²Guy Julier, *The Culture of Design* (London: Sage, 2000), 158.

³³*Ibid.*

As understandings of the self within a post-modern paradigm are continuously reconstructed through the re-ordering of self-narratives, a televisual approach provides interesting possibilities for the portrayal of the life of the deceased. Within the televisual funeral space, meanings are proposed in multiplicity, and images and stories of the bereaved are broadcast in space that shifts to provide a performance of the deceased's life in both sound and picture. According to Julier, televisual space provides moments of "immersion and detachment".³⁴ The funeral home therein provides opportunities for private moments with the deceased identity along with promotion of social bonding against the death itself.

Televisuality's intention to "heroicize what is normally hidden, to play up ... differences" allows the funeral home to expand upon its role in the performance of the ritual by actively choreographing the event, and providing both the technology to enhance the various narratives and the space to exhibit them.³⁵ It is important to note that trends have already emerged that mimic the televisual concept on a smaller scale. Multiple narratives are often encouraged during the funeral rites through the use of cues that reflect individual choices in music, flowers, clothing, stories, and images. Inherent in the televisual event is the notion that there is an indeterminate process of experiences that happen within a protracted period of time. The funeral space now takes on new meaning because it acts to display more than the casket or urn, staging not a single visual focus and physical event, but a multitude of spatial moments with which individuals choose to interact.

³⁴Julier, *The Culture of Design*, 160.

³⁵Julier, *The Culture of Design*, 160, quoting Nigel Coates, "Street Signs," in *Design After Modernism: Beyond the Object*, ed. John Thackara (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 95-114.

The story of the life of the deceased is told in a way that promotes individual participation through interaction with technology. While the funeral rites make up a significant aspect of the funeral, they are now fragmented within the various points of interest that occur within the funeral space. According to Julier, users “accept that a certain level of artifice is at play and they are willing to go along with it”. This suspension is an important aspect of participation, and one that has already been pointed out as an attribute of more traditional funeral events.³⁶ The televisual concept provides a dimension in which individuals leave their individuality behind to become part of a collective. Taking a cue from another typology entirely, the funeral home becomes a space for the attendees to participate in the creation of a narration of the deceased’s life.

Liminal Space – Toward Weak Design

What can liminal space for death mean?³⁷ Liminal space need not be fixed and definable; death can be marked in spaces that transition, that are themselves transition spaces, and that mark time in a variety of ways. A liminal approach precludes the use of modern design ideologies. While modern architecture privileges usefulness in its machine-like stripping away of unnecessary complexity to arrive at a transparent order, presenting only the essential and defined, the post-modern provides for the manipulation of materiality, scale, and other elements of design to challenge those definitions and to remain fluid. The modern lays bare the essential, ousting the seemingly extraneous. The result of this is

³⁶Julier, *The Culture of Design*, 158.

³⁷Liminality is that plane of classification of ritual that describes the messy, ambiguous phase between a deceased individual’s separation and reintegration into society. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 94.

often a featureless, smooth, graphically defined space that does not haptically engage. An alternative approach allows for more complexity, for the merging and overlapping of spatial experiences.³⁸

At the root of this line of thought is that design must solve increasingly complicated problems, and that over-simplified, easily grasped spaces do not honour the intricacy and sophistication of the problem. "Understanding a design from the often unspoken internal perspective of various human participants presents a very difficult problem for the designer".³⁹ I do not believe space need be reduced to its most explicit form in order to be effective for its users. A number of therapeutic and philosophical discourses, which include Hedtke and Winslade's concepts of re-membering, and Wellwood and Yewchin's participatory approach to funeral planning, include intimacy, active collaboration, and remembering as essential processes to a successful death ritual.

An interior design response that would encourage engagement of all of these criteria would not seemingly derive from ideas generating from modern theory, which are structured, refined, and systematic, but from a post-modern approach that allows for interchanges that are unstructured and spontaneous. The liminal nature of these processes is echoed in the writings of Victor Turner, who describes the liminal as humble, statusless, and passive. Understanding the funeral home as a space that accommodates transition and liminality, and knowing that the meaningful rituals it houses are most often

³⁸Steven Holl "Enmeshed Experience: The Merging of Object and Field," in Holl et al eds. *Questions of Perception*. p in *Questions of Perception Phenomenology of Architecture*, ed. Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and Urbanism* Special Issue (July 1994): 45.

³⁹Cathy Ganoë, "Design as Narrative," *Journal of Interior Design* 25, no. 2 (1999): 2.

characterized as intimate and participatory, allows the designer to assume a “weak” approach to the design of the space.

A haptic methodology, as explained by architect and theorist Juhanni Pallasmaa, encourages both intimacy and participation.⁴⁰ It encourages the engagement of the senses through the use of tactility, specifically touch, in order to increase user’s perception. “An awareness of one’s unique existence in space is essential in developing a consciousness of perception”, Stephen Holl has written.⁴¹ Establishing connections through materiality, light and shadow, form, scale, and acoustic intimacy are but a few of the design devices that appeal to the senses, evoking both conscious and unconscious responses.

For instance, scale, specifically deployed to increase overall volumes beyond human scale in the environment, has the effect of slowing down the experience of time.⁴² This fosters an awareness of, and presence in, the moment, as opposed to dulling the senses and promoting the distancing of the mourner from the ritual process. Further, the manipulation of light and shadow defines areas of congregation and intimacy and acts to diminish or enlarge space. Metaphorically lightness and darkness are powerful tools to influence perceptions of space:

The perceptual spirit and metaphysical strength of [design] are driven by the quality of light and shadow shaped by solids and voids, by opacities, transparencies, and translucencies.⁴³

⁴⁰Juhani Pallasmaa, “Hapticity and Time,” *Architectural Review* 207, no. 5 (2000): 82.

⁴¹Steven Holl, “Questions of Perception - Phenomenology of Architecture,” in *Questions of Perception Phenomenology of Architecture*, ed. Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and Urbanism* Special Issue (July 1994): 40.

⁴²Edward T. Hall, “Experiencing Time,” in *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 150.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 63.

In the context of *liminality*, those medial zones indicated by shifting light, shifting scales and other transitions in materiality, sound, and color actively engage users. As Barthes' *punctum* pricks the consciousness of undefinable viewers, a weak architecture can only make an appeal to every inhabitant of the funeral interior. It does not impose itself into the psyche of each client, but is available to involve those who choose.

In this sense, a weak architecture reinforces participation in the funeral event at subliminal levels. The multiple layers of engagement in experiencing the funeral, consciously and unconsciously, acts to re-classify it and the space in which it occurs as significant cultural effects.

Conclusion

By exploring the issues above, interior designers and the funeral industry itself can avoid defaulting to the expected. Through a questioning of the role of domestic space in the funeral home, and addressing its function as retail space, the funeral home aligns itself with an equally familiar yet more appropriate typology than that derived from notions of home. In accepting the ontological insecurity that is common in post-modernity, the funeral typology does not need to attempt to dictate, through a rigorous spatial ordering, what is expected of the funeral, but instead provides space to accommodate the interpretive nature of changing death rituals. The design treatment of the event spaces can accommodate the dramaturgical aspects of the ritual by presenting a blank slate upon which meaning can be projected.

As personalized rituals are also increasingly focused on participation, intimacy, and remembering, the funeral industry and interior designers can work in tandem to create spaces that support these requirements, experimenting with the use of narrative and

the televisual in telling stories of lives lived. And finally, by considering the role of the funeral space as a liminal space, transitional both for the physical body that moves from the community of the living to its final resting place, and for the mourning who recognize, through the death ritual, the shift in their relationship with the deceased, a weak and haptically grounded design approach can bring the attendees to awareness. Through this awareness, meanings for death continue to be generated in new directions, altering in their significance and having wider implications for the cultural acceptance of death in Canadian society. As a model of death attitudes, instead of a reflection of death avoidance, the funeral typology has potential to become a spatial *ars moriendi*, bringing death back into the land of the living.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

As I approached the end of my thesis investigation, much of what had initially appeared to me to be self-evident and grounded in the banality of everyday reality had become contingent, uncertain and more complex. How could interior designers more effectively accommodate current social practices in funeral space in Canada? Responding to this question has been a sometimes confusing, often iterative, circuitous experience. I am certain it will continue to be an almost-reflexive act for some time, as I continue to unravel the meaning in both the question and the answers that I have discovered along the way.

Some of the pathways that lead from my thesis question are well trod by now: where and how are meanings formed, specifically as they relate to death and ritual in Canada? How does a post-structuralist perspective deconstruct meaning? Other paths have been less urgently pursued, yet proffer a rich yield of possibilities that will be developed by interior design professionals as opportunities arise. Does televisual space, with its multiplicity of spatial moments, unite survivors, or further disconnect them, via their hyper-real nature, in the ritual environment? It is my intention that the ideas that have been mined for their bearing on ritual and death, and generated as responses that

offer direction for future development, serve to illuminate the uncertain territory that is death and space for its ritual in Canada in the twenty-first century.

Uncovering

I use the term uncertain territory above, with care. Death is changing; that is what theorist Jacques Derrida argued.¹ There is no assurance anymore that rituals will be predicated on a particular set of religious beliefs, or that within specific religious doxology, new, more personal interventions will not be enacted to change the meaning of the funeral. Invented rituals, not rooted in tradition, bring with them exciting possibilities for meaning, but also inherit in them is the ambiguity of the lost framework, creating new anxieties.² Bodies themselves have taken on new, fluid meanings, and the construction of identities has become strongly linked to the phenomenon of transformability, and subject to other cultural influences such as consumerism. Differences in meaning are now being reinterpreted in death rituals to reflect cultural mutability, and the shift toward new performance of ritual is well established.

Following the lead of this cultural instability, the core of my research process has focused on reading space, artifacts, and texts for difference; subtle shifts in perception of what had previously seemed tacit has made exposing discoveries all the more exciting. Much of what I have uncovered has fallen close to the ground from which it was unearthed, yet remains potent in its complex new relationship to its originary concept.

¹Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying-Awaiting (One Another at) The "Limits of Truth,"* trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

²Neil Bardal, interview by author, 27 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording, Neil Bardal Incorporated, 3030 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg.

An important example of this is found in the simulations of both the sacred and the domestic interiors – a practice I critique – that has roots in the invention of the funeral homes in the 1920s. A practice that continues today due to the prevalence in Western culture of spaces that simulate the absent real, or that are themselves “real fakes”, has distorted the potential of what the authentic domestic and the authentic sacred have to offer ritual space.³

When I examine the roles that the home played in symbolically supporting the death ritual, it is possible to see that there is potential for today’s ritual space to re-interpret and integrate new traditions and methods that stem from these humble origins. Similarly, while I have not chosen to focus on an analysis of sacred precedents in ritual space, Chapter Five highlights the value of the sacred in the construction of meaningful ritual, and explores ways that the funeral typology can generate notions of the sacred without reducing itself to replication. Only through the deconstruction of the two potent conditions of simulated domestic and sacred space was I able to access and explore the possibilities possessed beneath their superficial flaws.

Along similar lines, it is very evident that funeral rituals are changing, and have been in a state of flux since Jessica Mitford’s *American Way of Death* exposed supposed funeral industry greed in the early 1960s.⁴ However, two distinct factors affecting this ritual shift – decrease in religious affiliation and increased desire for personalization – are not as straightforward as they seem. Moving away from religious frameworks means only

³Edward W. Soja, “Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring-Generated Crisis,” in *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Scott and Edward Soja (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 451.

⁴Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963); Funeral director and crematorium owner Neil Bardal isolates the moment this book was published as pivotal in the direction of funeral ritual planning and awareness. Bardal, interview.

a shift from one meaning network, imposed within religious ideology, to another, imposed within intimate communities. It does not necessarily signify an abandonment of the desire for a spiritual event.⁵ The space for funeral ritual need not reflect the specifics of any one death ritual, but must acknowledge the transformative potential of the funeral event, providing opportunity for congregation, spontaneity and memory.⁶

It is with care, then, that the interior designer approaches the funeral home project in which new and existing spaces take on meanings that are malleable and sometimes previously foreign to the program. Public desire to access embalming and retort rooms containing the cremation furnace, previously considered rare, is a natural extension of one trend toward increased involvement with the body and the formerly veiled processes of its preparation and disposal. Other trends illustrate how variegated the directions for independent rituals are. While certain individuals will go to great lengths to be monumentalized, others wish to leave no footprint whatsoever, simply wanting to dissolve back into the earth from which they came. What these directions in funeral rituals hold in common is that they are less and less often entrenched within formal structures, they are participatory in nature, and they rely on individual characteristics to emphasize the relationship of the deceased to the survivors in the service itself. Repeatedly, these aspects of personalized funeral rituals were named as the most effective in grounding a meaningful ritual.⁷

⁵Norma Wellwood, interview by author, 4 May 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone.

⁶Douglas J. Davies, "The Sacred Crematorium," *Mortality* 1, no. 1 (1996), 84-87; Bardal, interview.

⁷Caroline Yewchin, interview by author, 13 July 2006, Winnipeg, tape recording via telephone; and Wellwood, interview.

These characteristics echo the way that existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir defined meaning for “being” in the context of being-towards-death, as she emphasized the essential aspect of defining the self in relationship to others.⁸ Congruent with ritual practice, especially today’s evolving form of ritual that is participatory, spontaneous, and personal, the specificity of relationships has bearing on spaces that are often conceived to convey a homogenized, non-offensive interior.⁹ Memory and its extensions – memorialization and re-membering practices – are central to creating meaningful ritual, and space that supports these practices becomes an extension and expression of the identity of the deceased.

“Expression”, that unit of language critical to the definition of performativity, is essential to the conceptualizing of the ways that ritual space performs the ritual. Death rituals are performative, and the environment that makes them possible is also conceived as such.¹⁰ Spaces assume unique influence in housing performative acts – acts of power that occur within the here-and-now – that are contextualized within the funeral ritual, and that in their enactment name death, constructing meaning for those individuals present. Performative spaces facilitate the repetitive act of the funeral ritual. Funeral space, the environment that is shaped to foreground the death, repeats it by its simple identification as ritual space and in its silent assertions of finality.

⁸Jo-Ann Pilardi, *Simone de Beauvoir Writing the Self: Philosophy Becomes Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 78.

⁹Institute for the Advanced Study of Architecture, “The American Funeral Home Project Brief,” *The American Funeral Home* (Los Angeles: Institute for the Advanced Study of Architecture, 2004), <http://la.advancedarchitecture.org/Projects/TheAmericanFuneralHome> (accessed 8 January 2006).

¹⁰Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 174.

Many Canadians will return to ritualize others, or in some cases return to remember past ceremonies, and in doing so, retrace steps, remembering, bringing both the deceased and the funeral back into the present, into the land of the living. This returns me to a final theme around which my thesis has evolved: it has been theorized in sociological, thanatological and philosophical circles that death is denied, that mortality is feared, and that as a result, the dead cease to exist.¹¹ The messages are forceful in their insistence that death is essentially no longer to be found. And although each of these views has its merit, it appears that a few individuals and businesses are challenging this theory by merging death again within the land of the living. I use the term, again, to hearken back to the roots of the funeral industry that emanated from a tradition of the parlour room in the domestic sphere, that saw the community mortician running his business out of the local general store, and in which death was nothing if not familiar.

Although today's funeral customers are almost always unwilling customers, their direct affiliation with grief can be discerned from a broader social construction of death that is in evidence in the media, in therapeutic and medical discourses, and in the urban core. Funeral businesses that have deliberately challenged notions of propriety are vibrant members of the communities in which they are located, they reach out to communities as opposed to focusing inward and remaining unmentionable. My experience with the profession through this research is that they have been, and continue to be receptive to change within market constraints. Constant tension between the provision of services and products delimits offerings available in the marketplace. In my interactions with funeral directors, their staff, and the Funeral Service Associations of Canada and Manitoba, it is

¹¹Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981); Robert J. Kastenbaum, *Death, Society and Human Experience* (Heedham Heights, MA: Ally & Bacon, 1998); and Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 1993).

overwhelmingly clear that the industry has the will to lead the way. Yet, change is slow in manifesting itself in the spaces that house both practical and ritualistic needs of Canadians. In this regard, my questioning of how interior design can better accommodate death rituals has value as a timely and informative questioning of an under-explored typology ripe for change.

What seemed clear to me at the outset of this investigation were preconceptions, not surprisingly, rooted in and inferred from dominant discourses in the fields of philosophy, sociology, the funeral profession, and interior design itself. Reading deeper into these conditions allowed me to make discoveries that spun some of the original problems into new solutions, rather than discrediting them altogether. Although it was never my goal to undermine the value of the funeral typology to Canadians in this inquiry, neither did I set out to prove its inviolability. Yet as a by-product of this research, I have learned from the participants of the sincerity and respect with which they approach their work, and am convinced of the current necessity for a funeral typology within the built environment and Canadian culture.

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APPENDIX A

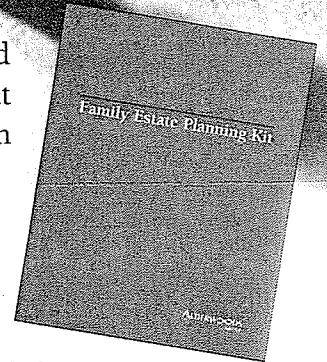
COMMUNITY OUTREACH QUESTIONNAIRE

WE REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE!

We are currently researching how members of our community plan for one of the hardest things a family has to face...the death of a loved one. A funeral is about commemorating a life lived.

The questions that follow are designed to help us know more about what people want and need at this most difficult time. This will help us improve our service by acknowledging what is most important to you. Please answer these questions as completely as you can and return the questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.

For taking a few minutes of your time to complete our questionnaire, we will deliver a *Family Estate Planning Kit*...
ABSOLUTELY FREE!



1 HOW OLD ARE YOU?

26-40 41-65 66-85 86 or older

2 ARE YOU CURRENTLY:

Employed Retired

3 DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CANADIAN PENSION PLAN DEATH BENEFITS WILL BE?

Yes No

4 HAVE YOU EVER BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING FUNERAL/CEMETERY ARRANGEMENTS?

No In last 12 months 12-24 months ago Over 2 years ago

5 ARE YOU AWARE THAT PRE-ARRANGED FUNERAL/CEMETERY PLANS EXIST?

Yes No

6 HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED PRE-PAYING FOR A PRE-ARRANGED FUNERAL/CEMETERY PLAN?

Yes No

7 HOW MUCH MIGHT YOU EXPECT TO PAY FOR A FUNERAL?

\$1,000-\$2,000 \$2,000-\$4,000 \$4,000-\$6,000 \$6,000-\$8,000 Over \$8,000

Presented by:

GREEN ACRES

Funeral Home & Cemetery

Hwy #1 E. @ Navin Rd.
Winnipeg MB - R2C 2Z3
222-3241

THOMSON

Funeral Home

669 Broadway
Winnipeg MB - R3C 0X4
783-7211

KLASSEN

Funeral Home

1897 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg MB - R2G 1P4
338-0331

WAVERLEY

Memorial Gardens

1501 Waverley Street
Winnipeg MB - R3T 0P7
925-1120

THOMSON "In the Park"

Funeral Home & Cemetery

1291 McGillivray Blvd.
Winnipeg MB - R3T 5Y4
925-1120

ALDERWOODS
FUNERALS

Embracing
Life's Journey

COMMUNITY OUTREACH QUESTIONNAIRE

9 HOW IMPORTANT TO YOU PERSONALLY IS THE LOCATION (PROXIMITY) OF THE:
FUNERAL HOME?

Very important Somewhat important Not important at all Not very important

CEMETERY?

Very important Somewhat important Not important at all Not very important

10 IF YOU HAVE GIVEN ANY THOUGHT TO THIS SUBJECT, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF?

Burial Cremation

11 HAVE YOU MADE FIRM PLANS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR:
CEMETERY PROPERTY?

Yes No

THE TYPE OF FUNERAL SERVICE YOU DESIRE?

Yes No

12 ARE YOUR LOVED ONES AND FAMILY MEMBERS AWARE OF WHAT YOU DESIRE AND PREFER FOR YOUR OWN ARRANGEMENTS?

Yes No

If yes, who in your immediate family has access to this information? _____

13 IN THE EVENT OF YOUR DEATH, WHO WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING ARRANGEMENTS?

Spouse Children Family Member Other

14 DOES YOUR FAMILY HAVE A PREFERENCE FOR A SPECIFIC LOCAL FUNERAL HOME?

Yes (please indicate name) _____ No

15 ARE YOU GOING TO BE PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR A LOVED ONE OR CLOSE FRIEND?

Yes No

16 WOULD IT GIVE YOU PEACE OF MIND TO KNOW YOU COULD DO THE PLANNING IN ADVANCE AND THAT YOUR FAMILY WOULD NOT HAVE TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS?

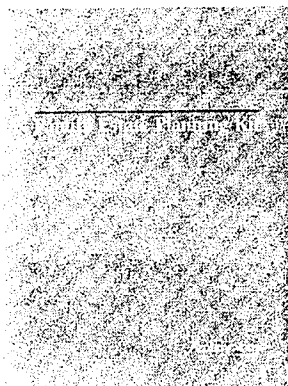
Yes No

17 WOULD YOU LIKE FREE INFORMATION ABOUT...

Cemetery choices Funeral service choices Other funeral benefits Cremation options

We would like to inform you that, in accordance with Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, the personal information we collect from you will be used only for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a responsible relationship with you and providing you with the information you request. This information shall be kept confidential and shall not be disclosed to any unauthorized third party or used for any other purpose without your consent.

TO RECEIVE YOUR *FREE Family Estate Planning Kit*, PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE, AND PLACE THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENCLOSED PREPAID ENVELOPE. Unless otherwise indicated, we will contact you personally to ensure you receive the information requested and answer any questions you may have regarding costs.



NAME: _____

STREET ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

PROVINCE : _____

POSTAL CODE: _____

PHONE No. () _____

BEST TIME TO CALL: _____

AM PM

APPENDIX B



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Architecture

Interior Design
201 Russell Building
84 Curry Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-6578
Fax: (204) 474-7532

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM A

Research Project Title: Ritual, Performativity, and Space: Evolving the Funeral typology in 21st Century Canada.

Researcher: Katherine Isaac, BID, MID Cand. University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of Research

This research investigates cultural developments that have contributed to an evolution of ritual, and examines current trends affecting funeral practices, in order to respond to the following question: How can interior designers better accommodate changing demands upon funeral space?

I aim to understand the existing funeral home typology and its program through interviews with death industry executives and independent funeral home owners, who are responsible for the marketing and direction of funeral businesses, and with funeral directors and celebrants, who are responsible for organizing and performing funeral ceremonies. Interviews with independent death experts will be undertaken to complement the interviews with death industry members. Finally, I will also undertake interviews in conjunction with interior building tours of existing funeral homes in Vancouver, BC, Calgary, AB, rural MB, and Montreal, PQ.

Interviews

Unstructured interviews will be conducted over the course of a one-hour period, and will be taped using an audio recorder that will be present at the interview. In all cases I will attempt to perform interviews in person, at the place of employment of the interviewee, however, if necessary, telephone interviews will be substituted. Telephone interviews will also be recorded using audio recording techniques.

Confidentiality – Group A – Funeral Profession

In the case of all participants, confidentiality will be offered to those participants in the funeral profession. Should they desire, privacy will be maintained by substituting pseudonyms for interviewees and business names, due to the sensitive nature of private industry information. Access to the results of the interviews will be limited to myself and a transcriber. City names and descriptive terminology will be used, however, to identify such details as type of establishment (family owned, corporation) and target market (culturally diverse, culturally homogeneous), as these factors will have a bearing upon the data. Data collected from Group A as well as photographs, notes and sketches from the funeral home tours may be included in the thesis document

unless privacy is desired. In the case of requested privacy, data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

Risk

There is no presumed risk involved in participating in this research.

Debriefing

All transcripts from interviews and tours (excluding personal notes and sketches) will be submitted back to the appropriate interviewee for their review and approval via email, prior to their use within the research document.

Feedback

Results of my research can be forwarded at the participant's request in the form of a word document that will be emailed at the time of completion.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have any concerns, please contact me:
Katherine Isaac, xxx-xxxx, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 204-474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Architecture

Interior Design
201 Russell Building
84 Curry Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Tel: (204) 474-6578
Fax: (204) 474-7532

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM B

Research Project Title: Ritual, Performativity, and Space: Evolving the Funeral typology in 21st Century Canada.

Researcher: Katherine Isaac, BID, MID Cand. University of Manitoba

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Interviews

Unstructured interviews will be conducted over the course of a one-hour period, and will be taped using an audio recorder that will be present at the interview. In all cases I will attempt to perform interviews in person, at the place of employment of the interviewee, however, if necessary, telephone interviews will be substituted. Telephone interviews will also be recorded using audio recording techniques.

Confidentiality – Group B - Field Experts

In the case of participants who are considered experts in their field of death research, I will use names to identify information sources. Names will appear in the data transcriptions and within the body of the thesis document, as I believe it is important to the credibility of the research itself that the quality and professional standing of these primary sources is noted.

Risk

There is no presumed risk involved in participating in this research.

Debriefing

All transcripts from interviews and tours (excluding personal notes and sketches) will be submitted back to the appropriate interviewee for their review and approval via email, prior to their use within the research document.

Feedback

Results of my research can be forwarded at the participant's request in the form of a word document that will be emailed at the time of completion.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

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Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____