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Project for the Architecture of Transition

Leslie Buerk
Daniel Herr
Karl Puljak

Critic: Vladimir Krstic

Like birth, death retains its unknowability ... Incomplete as any work of art, death exists for the living as something profoundly invisible which we cannot make visible. The moment. All we have to work with are fragments, hints, clues to give the imagination room to create, to restore.

David Meltzer

Death as a subject of architecture is the art of the depiction of the invisible. It transgresses the field of architectural signification delineated by utility and purpose and imposes an unavoidable need to examine and question expressive limits of architecture. The absence of a precise (definable) content invalidates common architectural discourse — the metaphysical subject of death remains only approachable through the capacity to probe into the nature of architectural elements beyond the canonical preconceptions and seek intrinsic conditions of architecture in which the invisible becomes a silent counterpart of its physical presence. Death, thus, inscribes the annihilating territory of the unknown in the context of which the meaningful proposition of architecture can be sustained exclusively through the analytical reconstruction of its elementary condition.

The intention of the design exercise was to explore a different condition of architecture in which rational determinants are rendered tentative (by displacing the actual design subject from the domain of their rhetoric) and where, in order to pro-

vide a plausible resolution, the very idea of architecture had to be put to question and accordingly reconfigured pointing towards the realization of its more intrinsic aspects. Hence, the cemetery project. The topology of the project was defined by the two problematic extremes: funerary architecture as an instrument of celebration of death; and funerary architecture as a means of inquiry into the idea of antithetical world and the aspects of its phenomenal depiction and representation.

Daniel Herr

PROCESSION

downhill toward the west
through corridors
of shadows and light

TRANSITION

series of layered spaces
experiential qualities of the journey
the experience of death

BEGIN THE JOURNEY Procession begins at the top of a hill where columbariums (monuments to the dead) are placed, and then into a wall (corridor) which leads down the hill and to the west.

FOCUS

toward the west
symbolic notion of an end

WALK Compression of space within the wall creates a strong focus on the west — the direction of the setting sun.



REMORSE

shadows ... traveling west ... down

LAYERS

space, shadows, understanding — experience to accommodate different participants of the ceremony: intimate friends, family, acquaintances ... death

ARRIVE Intimate friends and relatives first enter a place to meditate before the ceremony. The rest of the participants continue into a courtyard. The courtyard is filled with shadows.

CHAOS

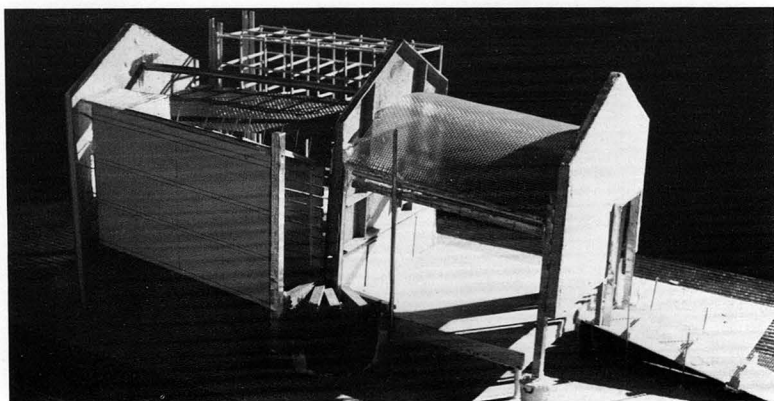
deterioration and disorientation of chapel elements
walls
light
space
materials

FOREBODING The courtyard of shadows is violated, interrupted — by a wall which floats above the ground. The

wall's position, orientation, and material indicate hostility. The procession continues beneath the wall. Into the place of death.

CONFRONTATION The structure of the chapel is perceived to be temporary. This is not a place to dwell, but a resting point on a journey — the beginning and the end. Light, air, moisture enter gaps created by walls which do not join. The final realization of death's claim occurs in this place.

YEARNING The final view from inside the chapel is through a window which is focused on the crematorium at the bottom of the hill (to the west). The window serves as a doorway, suspended in the air, providing access to the pathway that the deceased will begin his new journey upon.



Karl Puljak

everything emanates
from the Still Point
primal moment
both known
and unknown
that which is
and that which is to be

evolution
linear time
ongoing
irrepressible time
pulls away
from the Still Point
complexity

man
shepherd
deciphers
attempts
orients himself
aspires reunification
to the Still Point

misinterpretation
subjectivity
man misunderstands
fragments
reunification
to Still Point
proves futile

linear time
relentless complexity
culminates
Death
sheds subjectivity
reunification
with the Still Point

cemetery
city
monument to Death
walls
urban space
houses
nature

wall
collumbarium
mnemonic
city wall
built over time
by Death
towards the Still Point

urban space
denotes realm
between the wall
and the houses
hard
denies Nature
place

house
chapel
the last house
chaos
fragmented human memory
journey ends
opens to sky

Nature
beyond
to the east
towards the river
uneffected
intrinsically tied
to the Still Point

Leslie Buerk

After presenting this exploration to my peers, I succumbed to a compelling desire to destroy a large portion of the presentation. I later realized why this unexpected act seemed necessary. The consequence of the destruction strengthened an interesting point fundamental to the project and to the concept of cemetery. Does physical loss make the impact of an existence — whether in the form of a set of ideas or an independent consciousness — any less significant? The destruction of the physical form, or the absence of the object itself, leaves us to consider its fundamental make-up: a set of ideas that led to the creation of a project, influenced its development, and led to its destruction. Perhaps it could be said that the real substance of the existence — the impact it has made on other existences — receives more attention after the demise of the concrete image. The absence of form allows us to investigate the spirit of the project and the conflicts from which it has arisen. Memory allows us to find the significance of what was.

Part one: As it is

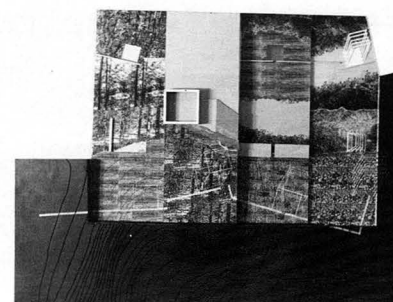
Objects mark the places where human bodies decompose.

Part two: The conflicts

Feeble monuments and symbols, stripped of their power through banality, that are left to commemorate the significance of individual lives and ritualistic beliefs rarely attain any of these meanings; in reality they create a landscape that serves as a reminder of the process of entropy on the human body and the emphasis this society places on material wealth. Memory is deceived by distorted monuments left to represent things that are absent.

Part three: Toward resolution

A path is built through the landscape. Immersed in life, it brings us to a place of absence. It is the absence itself that allows



us to see the richness of the life that surrounds us. The path allows us to pause at places in which we are at once imminently aware of a specific natural context, but are deprived of the experience of it. The result is that we have a heightened awareness of the absent forces and can more completely appreciate the memory of their existence. Awareness is instigated by phenomenological experience instead of faltering symbolisms.

The path continues; cutting into the earth without warning and emerging at a place void of reference to the familiar. The columbarium is merely a fragment of a larger entity. Stored within an expanding structure, individual remains become part of a collective whole, a fragment of which is evident at this site. The columbarium offers no answers, but gives rise to many questions such as those of immortality and the significance of the individual to the whole.

A memory is instigated by observance of an absence and encouraged to expand when liberated from physical limitations.

