

Reflection

Xiao Cheng

5782244

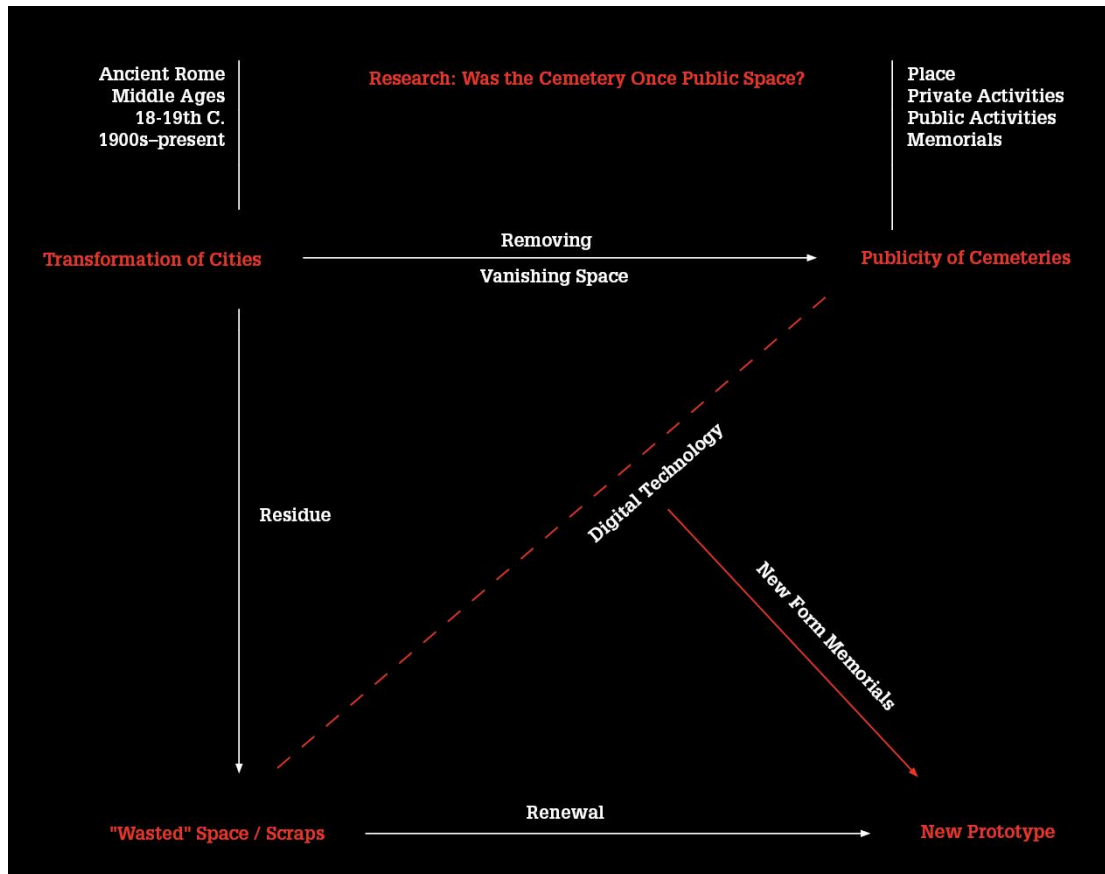
The complete project is a one-year research and design about the cemetery, including a research part, “was the cemetery once public space?” and a design part, “somewhere in between.”

The result of the research is a paper on the publicity and accessibility of Western cemeteries from the ancient Roman era to the present. The paper focuses on four periods: ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, the 18th to 19th centuries, and the 20th century to the present, and discusses how cemeteries were once integrated into urban life as active public spaces from four aspects: places, private activities, public activities, and memorials. The hidden reason behind the changes in the public nature of Western cemeteries is the continuous need for space due to urban development and expansion. As cities continued to develop and their populations grew, there was no longer enough space to store the dead. Cemeteries began to move further and further away from cities, and the concept of death gradually became more distant from daily life as distance increased and medical conditions improved. However, the unique nature of cemeteries as places of personal and collective memory is irreplaceable and is the starting point for the design project.

The primary methodologies employed in this research include extensive literature review, along with archaeological and phenomenological approaches. Initially, the study aimed to perform a spatial morphological analysis of cemeteries of various typologies across different periods, coupled with a quantitative evaluation of visitor numbers. However, the long historical timeframe presented significant challenges, as much of the relevant data is no longer accessible, and accurate drawings or materials for cemeteries predating the Middle Ages are scarce.

Fortunately, historical literature provides insights into interactions between ancient people and cemeteries, offering valuable context. The breadth of the literature and the availability of related scholarly papers greatly facilitated this aspect of the research. For analyzing spatial and activity-related aspects, phenomenological methods allow for imaginative reconstructions and interpretations to fill in the gaps left by missing historical images. I believe this approach holds broad applicability for studying certain types of architectural spaces throughout history. By analyzing archaeological findings through a phenomenological lens informed by architectural knowledge, we can gain valuable insights into architectural spaces where image data is unavailable, offering a deeper understanding of their form, function, and experiential qualities.

In the design project, the cemetery is deconstructed into a memorial place that allows people to temporarily escape from their daily lives, “somewhere in between”, where people can gather, meet, and feel connected to the city and even the universe. This is not only a retelling of the cemetery as a place between life and death, but also an emphasis on the potential of the cemetery to be integrated into community life as a free and equal space where people can enter without pressure. How to integrate cemeteries back into crowded cities and busy community life is a major design issue.

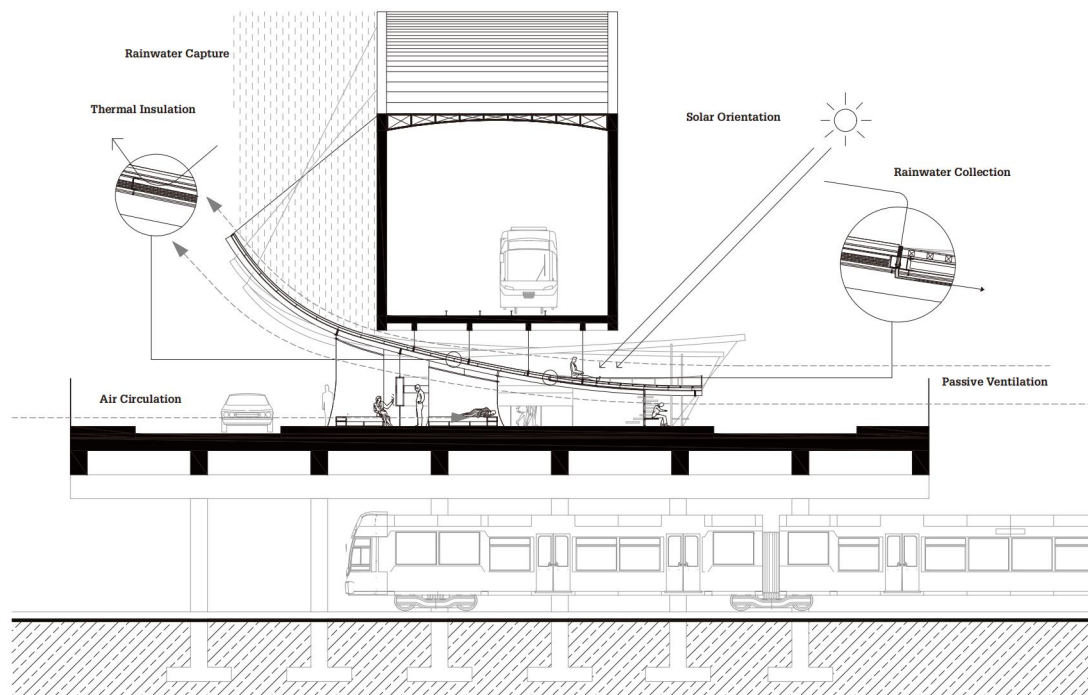


Urban transformation, a key driver behind the disappearance of cemeteries from urban life, has also generated numerous residual spaces—“wasted” or overlooked areas often found between buildings or beneath bridges and roads. These underutilized spaces, frequently passed by but seldom engaged with, present an opportunity for reimagining urban functions. By integrating modern digital technologies, these spaces could serve as prototypes for reintegrating cemeteries into community life.

Building on the concepts of digital cemeteries and urban renewal, the selected site is located beneath a viaduct in Paris, a city renowned for its density and historical significance. The goal is to transform this challenging space, shaped by various negative factors, into an open and dynamic cemetery space. This reimagined site leverages digital memorials to create a new, meaningful connection between modern urban contexts and the act of remembrance. The design raises numerous questions about creating monumentality and fostering interaction between people and the city, significantly reshaping my perspective on the relationship between architecture and urban environments. Architecture can act as an addition, introducing new energy and stimulation to a neighborhood, or as an insertion, responding adaptively to the dynamic factors shaping the city and its communities. My project transcends traditional architectural space; it is an interactive installation situated beneath the bridge, offering citizens a place of shelter and contemplation that evolves with changing weather and the passage of time.

These reflections, in turn, have shaped the evaluation criteria for publicity and accessibility in my

research, providing deeper insights into the transformation and disappearance of cemeteries within urban environments.



This unique project presented numerous challenges, providing valuable lessons on transforming an abstract concept into a practical design. The special nature of the site required a lightweight structure with excellent sound insulation, all while addressing the challenges of an outdoor environment. This led me to conduct extensive research on hanging structures, roof designs, and soundproof materials. Ultimately, I developed a unique structural approach by integrating the roof design with ceiling technologies.

Feedback from my mentors was instrumental throughout the process. When I faced difficulties selecting materials, Roel advised starting with materials suitable for an indoor environment and then adapting them for outdoor use, leading to an effective material solution. During the design phase, when my plan became overloaded with elements, Rufus pointed out that it resembled a collage. This prompted me to simplify and refine the design, enhancing its clarity and coherence. In organizing my paper, I initially struggled with structuring the content chronologically. Elise suggested focusing on themes that span different periods to create a more cohesive narrative, which ultimately shaped the framework of my paper. These insights not only resolved immediate challenges but also enriched my approach to design and research.

At this point I have a clear vision of how the project will develop in its final stages. The first is to further concretely demonstrate the digital media images and interactive methods involved. This project involves the use of digital media, and it is exciting and important to finally show the interactive aspects of media and audio-visual equipment based on the current roughly finalized space. Secondly, in addition to all the technical drawings at the end, I hope to transform the entire narrative into a graphic novel. This project is already a very narrative project, and it will be

very beneficial to show its literary and philosophical implications in this form.

1. What is the relation between your graduation project topic, your master track (A, U, BT, LA, MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

As I reach this final milestone, reflecting on my previous master's courses through the lens of my graduation project has been deeply enlightening. My architectural exploration has consistently sought to create spaces that evoke emotional resonance and provide spiritual support as we look toward the future. Courses like Why Factory, Temporality, and Architecture and Architecture and Philosophy have pushed me to contemplate the concept of eternal architecture. My understanding is that while functions may become obsolete and structures may decay, the emotional interactions that occur within a space imbue it with a lasting significance and enduring meaning. In the Co-housing course, I delved into strategies for fostering human connection and interaction, exploring themes such as agendas and shared experiences. These ideas have profoundly informed my graduation project, shaping its approach to creating spaces that not only serve practical needs but also nurture profound human connections.

2. How did your research influence your design/recommendations and how did the design/recommendations influence your research?

During my research, I uncovered how cemeteries functioned as vibrant, public, and accessible spaces across different historical periods. This insight became the foundation for my design project. Additionally, my study of roadside cemeteries in ancient Rome served as a conceptual prototype, informing the core ideas of my design. My project goes beyond traditional architectural spaces—it is an interactive installation beneath a bridge, offering both shelter and a space for reflection. It adapts to changing weather conditions and the passage of time, emphasizing the fluidity of public space. This dynamic approach has shaped my research criteria for publicness and accessibility, deepening my understanding of how cemeteries have evolved and often disappeared within urban environments. Through this iterative process, the design both influenced and was influenced by my research, creating a feedback loop that enriched both the conceptual and practical aspects of the project.

3. How do you assess the value of your way of working (your approach, your used methods, used methodology)?

I believe my approach offers significant value for studying specific types of architectural spaces throughout history. By applying a phenomenological lens, informed by architectural knowledge, to archaeological findings, my method enables us to gain valuable insights into spaces where visual or image-based data is lacking. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of these spaces' form, function, and experiential qualities, revealing aspects that might otherwise remain overlooked. It combines analytical rigor with an appreciation for the sensory and lived experiences of space, providing a more holistic perspective on architectural history.

4. How do you assess the academic and societal value, scope and implication of your graduation project, including ethical aspects?

Cemeteries, once central to community life as spaces for emotional connection, worship, or brief escapes from reality, have largely disappeared from contemporary society. My project aims to

bridge this gap by combining the traditional concept of cemeteries with modern technologies, creating a new prototype to address this social loss. The goal is to offer a space that provides peace and reflection in today's increasingly chaotic world. The project intersects with several academic fields, including the transformation of neglected spaces, the use of outdoor materials, and the application of materials to shape spatial atmosphere and memory. It also explores innovative structures for unique sites.

While the project may spark ethical debate, particularly around the use of digital technology in spiritual spaces—an area of controversy for many years—my approach treats technology as a tool rather than the focal point. The essence of the project remains the creation of meaningful space, allowing people the freedom to choose how they wish to interact with it. Ultimately, I believe it is both unreasonable and outdated to exclude digital technology from the creation of memorial spaces in the 21st century.

5. How do you assess the value of the transferability of your project results?

This project is first of all a reference for building in negative conditions. It not only deals with how to deal with noise and humidity, but also an example of how to create a space that is elegant and active in a way that is not usually beautiful. In addition, it is a prototype for the new cemetery proposal, a balance between new technology and classic form, which can be replicated in every city and every community.

6. What do you think of homeless people in public spaces?

The neighborhood where the project is located is home to a significant number of homeless individuals living under the viaduct, which has sparked ongoing debates about how to address their presence. My perspective is that, first and foremost, they should be seen as an integral part of the site, not something to be ignored or avoided. Secondly, since this project aims to create a space accessible to everyone, it should also be welcoming to them. Lastly, fostering self-management and trust in their ability to explore the space is crucial. I believe that providing them with inclusive, well-designed spaces that offer a sense of belonging—while connecting them to the shared experience of honoring life and death—could encourage self-regulation and personal responsibility. This approach, I feel, would be more humane and effective than more conventional, top-down management methods.

7. What do you think about building structures in outdoor environments?

In most building projects, interior materials are commonly used, while the selection of materials for outdoor environments is much more complex. This is because it involves not only the inherent qualities and expectations of the materials, but also factors such as durability and sustainability. Therefore, I believe that a more effective approach is to first consider the space as an indoor environment, selecting materials based on their expected qualities. Then, the focus shifts to determining which other materials are suitable for use outdoors as alternative materials, while considering their durability and performance in the external environment.