

Images of Life:  
A Crematorium on Time and Memory

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## PART I.

## CRISIS OF MEMORY

Contemporary life presents a crisis of memory. An increasingly complex globalizing society of exponential growth and change has deeply altered humanity's relationship to its history, abstracting modern culture away from a living connection to memory as 'things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past.'<sup>1</sup> In his essay *Realms of Memory*, Pierre Nora writes of a loss of *milieu de mémoire*, the settings in which memory takes an active role in daily life through ritual and 'situates remembrance in a sacred context.'<sup>2</sup> What we are left with is a fundamental longing, as 'the memory we see tears at us, yet it is no longer entirely ours: what was once sacred rapidly ceases to be so, and for the time being we have no further use for the sacred. We feel a visceral attachment to that which made us what we are, yet at the same time we feel historically estranged from this legacy, which we must now coolly assess.'<sup>3</sup> Andreas Huyssen suggests the inadequacies of the modernist linear historical narrative have produced a rift in perception: 'Historical memory today is not what it used to be. It used to mark the relation of a community or a nation to its past, but the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears to be today.'<sup>4</sup> This discontinuity has engendered a yearning for a reconnection to living memory that positions us meaningfully in relation to our past, present and future.

1 Nora, Pierre, and Lawrence D. Kritzman. 1996. *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past*. New York: Columbia University Press. p 01.

2 Nora 1996, p 3.

3 Nora 1996, p 7.

4 Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. p 01

## DENIAL OF DEATH

No aspect of society more poignantly reflects this discontinuity than the loss of a meaningful position for death within the context of urban life. Bruce Miller elaborates on this modern problem, explaining how the denial of that which is mystical and not readily subject to rationalization has caused a dilemma. 'The part of the psyche most affronted by death is the ego. The ego is shaped by the reality principle, which is also the place where our fears dwell. Any comprehension of death, therefore, is instinctive, intuitively based, as we cannot contribute much to any genuine understanding of death. If reason cannot illuminate the myriad questions posed by death, and yet reason is considered the only valid inroad to any insight or 'answers,' subsequent dark crevasses, or vortexes are created, and these are assiduously avoided.'<sup>5</sup> This anxiety reflects the loss of ritual as a means of communally addressing issues of life and mortality and has much to do with the loss of a sacred role for places of memory through their connection to the experience of urban life.

The writings of Juhani Pallasmaa elaborate on the role of the poetic image as a means of evoking communal understandings of place and memory that links subjective, phenomenological experience to a deeper collective sense of place and being. Pallasmaa's poetic images are 'condensations of numerous experiences, precepts, and ideas.' He asserts that 'we do not live separately in material and mental worlds; these experiential dimensions are fully intertwined. Neither do we live in an objective world. We live in mental worlds, in which the experienced, remembered and imagined, as well as the past, present and future are inseparably intermixed.'<sup>6</sup> This thesis explores the role of the poetic image in architecture and film as a means of evoking a deeper, more personal sense of meaning through ritual experiences that connect living memory to a communal understanding of place.

5 Verderber, Stephen, and Ben J. Refuerzo. 2006. *Innovations in Hospice Architecture*. London: Taylor & Francis. p 45.

6 Pallasmaa, Juhani. 2001. *The Architecture of image: existential space in cinema*. Helsinki: Rakennustieto. p 09.

## ISSUES OF BURIAL

It is becoming increasingly evident that technological advances and healthcare innovations are allowing for a longer span of life. This trend towards older societies will be increasingly prevalent in many countries, as the number of people 65 and older will triple to almost 2 billion, or 21% of the world population by 2050. This is especially exemplified in the United States, where the 65 and older population is expected to rise from 34 million in 1997 to over 69 million by 2030 (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> Population growth is putting increasing pressure on the need for burial sites, yet limited land in urban areas is outpacing available interment space and driving up the cost of traditional burials, which can now exceed \$11,000 up from an average of \$1,800 in 1980 (fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> In her article 'Running Out of Space,' Maureen Van Norstrand profiles two cemeteries in Redmond, Washington that are already resorting to drastic measures to combat land prices, such as the densification

7 "S0103 - Population 65 and Older in the United States." 2011. *American FactFinder*. Bureau of the Census.

8 "NFDA General Price List Survey", 2010. National Funeral Directors Association.

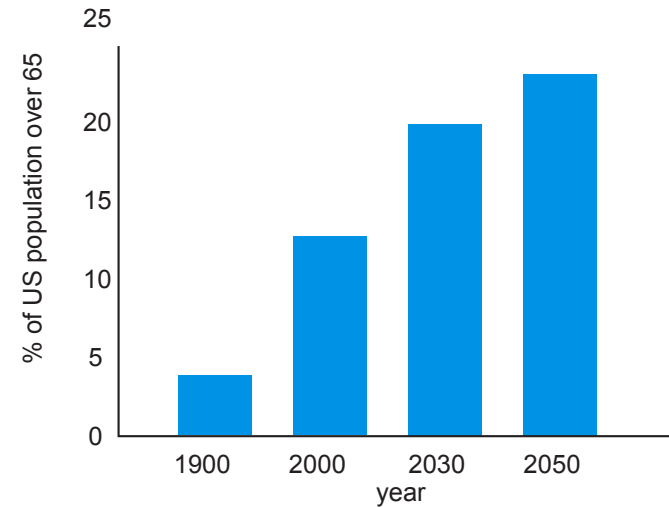


Figure 1: Rising 65+ Population in the United States  
source: US Bureau of the Census (2000)

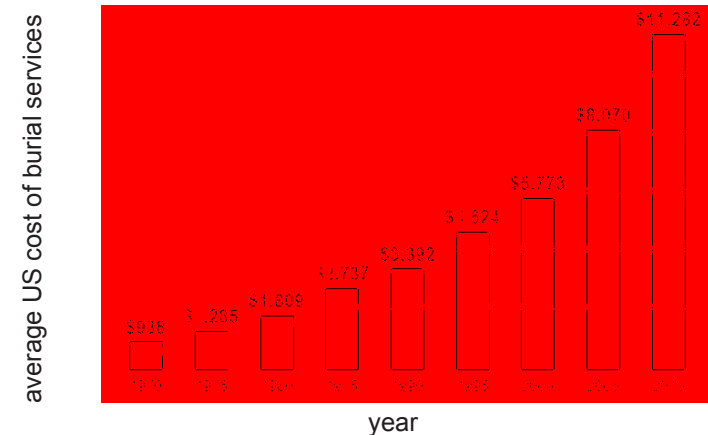


Figure 2: Rising Funeral Costs  
source: 2010 NFDA General Price List Survey

of some areas from 1,000 to 1,500 burial sites an acre, requiring the placement of two caskets in a traditional single plot.<sup>9</sup> Sites of remembrance in the city have been increasingly commoditized; creating an environment in which adequate respect for those past is treated as more of a luxury than a basic civic duty. As Norstrand expounds in a more practical sense, “[Burial] should be regarded as a community responsibility in the same way as a provision of water and an adequate sewerage and drainage system, all of which, of course, also have a bearing on public health.”<sup>10</sup> The increasing demand coupled with the lack of available urban space for traditional burial will continue to push these locations further into the periphery of the growing urban cores that they serve, broadening the disconnection between these vital sites of remembrance and the daily life of the city. In response, cremations are rapidly replacing traditional casket burials in America and the west, presenting an opportunity to redefine the paradigm between memory, mortality and the city.

## TRADITION OF CREMATION

The ritual burning of the dead has ancient origins in human history, with evidence of cremated remains in prehistoric sites as early as 8,000 B.C. and through thousands of years of tradition in Hindu and Buddhist cultures. In Europe, cremation was a common practice in regions of Ancient Greece and into the Roman Empire until the spread of early Christianity, which forbid the ceremony in an attempt to eradicate the influence of Greco-Roman pagan rituals in favor of the doctrine of resurrection. The practice all but disappeared from Europe until the modern form of cremation was introduced in 1873 by Professor Brunetti of Italy at the Vienna Exhibition, at which he presented a model of his

9 Norstrand, Maureen Van. 1993. “Running Out of Space.” *Column 5* (27). p 29.

10 Norstrand 1993, p 31.

reliable cremation chamber design, establishing a movement that resulted in the formation of the Cremation Society of Britain in 1874. The emergence of cremation in the United States came shortly thereafter with the construction of the first crematorium by Dr. Julius LeMoyne in Washington, Pennsylvania in 1876. Early groups behind the adoption of cremation included Protestant clergy eager to reform burial practices and members of the medical establishment concerned by sanitation issues involved with early cemeteries.<sup>11</sup>

Cremation has seen a steady adoption in the United States that escalated in the 1960's after the Catholic Church softened its previously uncompromising stance against the practice. This marked shift shows a change in the perception of cremation in society, as 'between 1890s and 1990s crematoria underwent a major change of status as they were increasingly invested with a sacred value.'<sup>12</sup> This shift in public opinion is clearly evident in the rising cremation rate within the United States, which is currently measured at approximately thirty-eight percent and expected to rise to over fifty percent before 2050<sup>13</sup>. The underlying factors behind this momentum reflect a growing awareness of the issues associated with burial. In a funeral industry sponsored survey from 2006, the five most common reasons for choosing cremation were reported with the primary factor being rising burial costs at thirty percent, followed by a desire to save land at thirteen percent, a preference for what is viewed as a 'simpler' process at eight percent, and a desire for the body to not reside underground following closely at six percent<sup>14</sup>. Evidence also shows these trends to be stronger amongst urban populations in the country, highlighting the need for a reconsideration of burial if we are to redefine the way death is experienced in the city.

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- 11 Cremation Association of North America. 2002. *History of Cremation*. "<http://www.cremationassociation.org/?page=HistoryOfCremation>"
- 12 Davies, Douglas J. 1996. "The sacred crematorium". *Mortality*. 1 (1).
- 13 Cremation Association of North America. 1997. "Special Report." *1996/97 Cremation Container, Disposition and Service Survey*.
- 14 Cremation Association of North America, 1997.



## CREMATION IN SEATTLE

Throughout its history, Seattle has played a leading role in the spread of cremation in the United States. In 1939, the People's Memorial Association was founded in Seattle as a non-profit organization serving to arrange reduced prices for simple cremations in an attempt to offset the prevailing funerary customs that promoted expensive, ostentatious displays and emphasized the material rather than spiritual aspects of death. Partnering with the Blietz Funeral Home, the PMA soon preformed the most cremations in the western United States as their membership rose from 650 in 1952 to over 30,000 in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> This shift continues to be seen in Seattle to this day, which currently has a cremation rate of sixty percent, well above the national average of thirty-eight percent<sup>16</sup>. While the communities of Seattle are evidently attracted to a change in funerary tradition that favors a more honest meaningful approach to the commemoration of the dead, the actual experience of the cremation ceremony remains largely fragmented, as many funeral homes preform the service off site and arrangements for the memorial, cremation, and interment can be handled at different times. There is currently no architecture type in Seattle that truly addresses the specifics of cremation in all its aspects. The isolation and fragmentation of memorial sites has challenged the relationship between community, place and memory in everyday urban life and asks us to reevaluate the way our cities can respond to the issues of memory and mortality.

15 People's Memorial. 2011. *History*. <http://peoplesmemorial.org/about/history/>. Accessed November 15, 2012.

16 Dizon, Kristin. 2002. "More People are Making it their Wish to be Cremated" *Seattle Times*. November 12, 2002. <http://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/article/More-people-are-making-it-their-wish-to-be-1100841.php> Accessed November 15, 2012.

## PART II:

## MEMORY AND PLACE

The return to a collective, symbolic understanding of memory requires a reevaluation of the notion of a linear, progressive history. Walter Benjamin clarifies in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* how in the modern industrial worldview 'progress was regarded as irresistible, something that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course.'<sup>17</sup> Pallasmaa argues that it is architecture's intrinsic role to mark memory through the delineation of place and orientation, asserting that 'the first task of architecture is to mark man's place in the world.'<sup>18</sup> These notions underscore the significance of the poetic and monumental in architecture as a vital human function. Sigfried Giedion writes of this need for a connection, stating 'monumentality derives from the eternal need of people to own symbols which reveal their inner life, their actions and their social conceptions.'<sup>19</sup> Monuments are able to speak to the truth of our existence through layered, multiple meanings; the power of the monument is in opening up these possibilities.

## DEATH AND THE CITY

Sites of remembrance such as burial sites and monuments have the potential to fulfill this role, providing place as an anchor for memory to contextualize life within the progression of time. The physical reminder of this communal understanding within the context of the city plays a crucial social role. Prentis Hale expands on this function: 'Separating

17 Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. p 260.

18 Pallasmaa 2001, p 08.

19 Giedion, Sigfried. 1984. "The Need for a New Monumentality." *Harvard Architecture Review*. (4). p 64.

the living from the dead, the cemetery defines a room that is isolated from but bound to the urban landscape. It is a room that has the potential to strengthen communal ties. These obligations are sacrifices that sustain the life of the city.’<sup>20</sup> The ‘communal sacrifices’ that sites of remembrance compel of us provide a link between individual and collective experiences of memory and death. These two modes of perception are inexorably linked, as “the less collective the experience of memory is, the greater the need for individuals to bear the burden.”<sup>21</sup> The internalized, phenomenological experience of the individual evokes a powerful confrontation of a subjective relationship to time and memory that is processed as a collective through ritual gathering and communal sacrifice. These sanctified sites that bring us together establish the importance of place to memory.

## FILMIC IMAGES OF PLACE AND MEMORY

Pallasmaa suggests that we can look to cinema as a potent medium of living memory and as a means of revealing the potential for expressions of architectural space as a mnemonic device. “I am interested in the way cinema constructs spaces in the mind, creates mind-spaces, thus reflecting the inherent ephemeral architecture of the human mind, thought and emotion...even in the art of architecture, a mental image is transferred from the experiential realm of the architect to the mental world of the observer, and the material building is a mere mediating object, an image object. The fact that the images of architecture are externalized in matter, whereas cinematic images are only an illusion projected onto the screen, has no decisive significance.”<sup>22</sup> Both art forms articulate images of life, allowing us to reexamine the

20 Hale, Prentis Cobb. 1996. The Gas Works cemetery. Thesis (M. Arch.)--University of Washington, 1996. p 03.

21 Nora 1996, p 04.

22 Pallasmaa 2001, p 22.

symbolic dimensions of memory and space. Through a closer look at filmic representations of memory that challenge linear, progressive determination we can begin to speak to the crisis induced by a loss of orientation, as Nora concludes that ‘The whole dynamic of our relation to the past is shaped by the subtle interplay between the inaccessible and the nonexistent.’<sup>23</sup> Gianni Vattimo describes a notion of ‘weak ontology’ as a reaction to the singular ‘strong’ sense of being promoted by a modern perspective, challenging this singularity of rhetorical intent in architecture to allow for the layers of subjective individual experience to work upon it. As Vattimo writes, ‘the work of art as the occurrence of a ‘weak’ truth is understandable, in so many senses, as a monument.’<sup>24</sup> An analysis of the work of two filmmakers, Andrei Tarkovski and Federico Fellini, most notably their respective films *Nostalgia* and *Roma*, exhibits the potential of film’s temporal qualities as a means of engaging this sense of ‘weakness’ in architecture.

It becomes clear that these two films exhibit very different tonal and stylistic approaches in their explorations of meaning in memory and place. The exaggerated scale of public life and transgressive imagery employed in *Roma* stands at stark contrast to the poetic emptiness at work in *Nostalgia*. A means of interpreting this dialectic is revealed in Denis Hollier’s article *Bloody Sundays* which forms a discussion of public space and the carnival through a reading of the philosophers Georges Bataille and Mikhail Bakhtin. Hollier contrasts their sensibilities towards the festival and its relation to time and memory, relating that ‘Carnival, in [Bakhtin’s] view, is not time wasted but time filled with profound and rich experience.’ This richness is reflected in the extravagant imagery that fills Fellini’s *Roma*, as the subject of the film extends beyond Fellini to Rome and the collective experience of the Romans. ‘The first person has disappeared; a joyful purge has swept subjects away in the great sewer of anonymity, the syntax of the irreplaceable has been excluded from

23 Nora 1996, p 12.

24 Leach, Neil. 1997. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge, p 159.

the festivities. Bataille's carnival, on the contrary, is the moment in which the "I" lives its loss, lives itself as loss. This is not a time of plenitude; it is, on the contrary, the time when time's vacancy is experienced. This is not innocence rediscovered but bottomless guilt."<sup>25</sup> Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* is imbued with this Batailleian sense of loss, where the emptiness of time saturates the film and its characters. The filmic techniques used in both films further reveals these attitudes of restraint and excess at work in the articulation of experience and memory as embedded in place.

## EXPOSING TIME

While establishing specific tonal approaches, each film introduces notions of rift and erosion expressed through the filmic rendering of temporal fluidity. These rifts illustrate a break from linear models of historical memory, allowing the subjective memory to form associative layers with its contextual setting. In his writings on the monument, Henri Lefebvre alludes to a lack of true stability of symbolic meaning: 'Monumental 'durability' is unable, however,

<sup>25</sup> Hollier, Denis. 1989. "Bloody Sundays." *Representations*. p 88.



Figure 3: Poetic emptiness of Bagno Vagnini in *Nostalghia*



Figure 4: Transgression and abundance in *Roma*

to achieve a complete illusion.’<sup>26</sup> An analogous sentiment towards a notion of filmic continuity is raised by Gilles Deleuze in his work on the philosophy of cinema, noting that ‘[t]here will always be breaks and ruptures, which show clearly enough that the whole is not here, even if continuity is reestablished afterwards.’<sup>27</sup> The image expression of an erosion of continuity in memory as a means of challenging notions of a singular, progressive metanarrative can be seen articulated in the poetic images of both film and architecture.

Pallasmaa describes a similar conception of erosion as poetic expression challenging the durability of history in Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* through its depictions of ruin and decay, most notably in the slow, panoramic tracking shots revealing the interior of Domenico’s home (fig. 5): ‘As he allows erosion and mould to corrode the walls, rain penetrate the roof and water flood the floor, he takes away the buildings mask of utility, which addresses our reason and common sense. He removes the inaccessible and rejecting perfection of the building, and reveals the vulnerability of its structures, conceived for eternity. Time is grafted into space and matter.’<sup>28</sup> Tarkovsky’s poetic images of eroded space begin to speak to a notion of time defined by its fissures and ruptures, allowing for a perspective that more accurately positions experience within the cycle of ritual. Nora begins to describe how the poetic sites of memory create these rifts and act as a form of ‘*templum*: something singled out within the continuum of the profane (whether in space, time, or both), a circle within which everything counts, everything is symbolic, everything is significant.’<sup>29</sup> Temporal rift and erosion becomes similarly evident in the perspectival shifts of *Roma*. These rifts of time and memory are also expressed in *Roma* through the juxtaposition of the ancient and contemporary faces of Rome as they appear through the different temporal shifts in

26 Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell. p 140.

27 Deleuze, Gilles. 1986. *Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. p 27.

28 Pallasmaa 2001, p 27.

29 Nora 1996, p 20.

the film. Familiar locations and monuments reappear in palimpsest memory, each iteration reflecting a new dynamic between ancient and modern. This tension manifests in a scene where Fellini follows a archaeological group through the site of the Roman subways, finding a sealed chamber full of beautiful frescoes of antiquity that immediately begin to fade and dissolve when exposed to the air of the modern city (fig. 6).

Through Tarkovsky and Fellini's filmic images of existential space it is revealed to us the potent function of architecture as the stage and setting of collective memory. As Tarkovsky writes: 'The task of art is to prepare one for death, soften and mould his soul and turn it towards good.'<sup>30</sup> Tarkovsky sees opportunity in the shared experience of art as a means of utilizing the poetic images of personal, existential 'lived space' to evoke a communal relationship to memory. 'In the course of my work I have noticed, time and again, that if the external emotional structure of a film is based on the author's memory, when impressions of his personal life have been transmuted into screen images, then the film will



Figure 5: Erosion and memory in Domenico's home



Figure 6: Fading frescoes in *Roma*

30 Tarkovskii, Andrei Arsen'evich. 1989. *Sculpting in time: reflections on the cinema*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. p 04.

have the power to move those who see it.<sup>31</sup> Tarkovsky's reflections on the position of the filmmaker suggest similar possibilities within the role of the architect in mitigating the connection of the individual to the sacred. Lefebvre calls upon the living role of monumental space, as 'only through the monument, through the intervention of the architect as the demiurge, can the space of death be negated, transfigured into a living space which is an extension of the body.'<sup>32</sup> Reframing a human connection to memory is paramount to our orientation of self, and through the experience of the poetic within architectural and filmic space we can begin to reengage the sacred collective memory in relation to the individual. It is the work of the artist to challenge the absolute, revealing the rifts and erosions in the artifice of the historic narrative to reveal more potent, symbolic collective truths of human experience and memory.

31 Tarkovsky 1989, p 182-3.

32 Lefebvre 1991, p 140.



Figure 7: Sacred space in the work of Tarkovsky



Figure 8: Sacred space in the work of Fellini



## PART III:

## RITUAL EXPERIENCE

In order to evoke these poetic qualities of filmic representation through architecture, it is crucial to examine the dynamic between the layered experience of memory and the role of ritual in the delineation of sacred space. Davies considers this recurrent connection, suggesting “[t]he dead may, of course, be recalled in many ways and in many places quite apart from crematoria. Dreams, along with a general sense of presence gained in the waking state, are frequent sources of recall... While the everyday life-world provides few explicit categories for giving social expression to these experiences, the crematorium, its chapels and grounds, bring them to a focus, especially when people make return visits to these centers of remembrance.”<sup>33</sup> These observations highlight the vital role of marking sites of memory through architecture, allowing sacred places to serve as an anchor for a community to bring these issues to focus in a way that is not possible through other means. Through ritual we solidify the value of these sites, which become a world within themselves, or as Nora describes a ‘*templum*: something singled out within the continuum of the profane (whether in space, time, or both), a circle within which everything counts, everything is symbolic, everything is significant.”<sup>34</sup> The cremation process involves a progression several distinct stages held within various programmatic elements, exhibiting an inherent predisposition to a ceremonial, ritualized experience. The crematorium serves two main uses: facilitating the cremation ceremony event and process as well as providing a place of remembrance for loved ones to continually return. This dual function reflects the need of both communal and individual experience in understanding and dealing with death, and provides a basis to explore the multi-layered role of ritual in the continual experience of memorializing the dead.

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33 Davies 1996, p 90.

34 Nora 1996, p 04.

## THE RITUAL OF CREMATION

In order to address these layers of use and ritual, an urban crematorium would require facilities not only for the act of cremation itself, but must also address the experience of those who come to commemorate the dead and participate in the experience of the cremation process. These necessities begin to define a loose set of spatial requirements to encompass the full experience of the cremation process, including a ceremony hall for vigils and memorial services, the crematory itself, a waiting area for mourners to pass time while the remains are cremated, and the columbarium for interring urns as a burial site. The spaces used for ceremonial purposes should be appropriately respectful in character, and the spaces linking those rooms should provide a natural flow and sense of purpose between activities. In order to get a better sense of the specific moments of architectural experience that compose the cremation ritual, it is useful to examine the qualities of existing precedents that show the various organizational possibilities in defining the ritual experience. In his essays on *Film Form*, Russian film theorist Sergei Eisenstein introduces the concept of *montage*, a filmic technique through which a 'collision' of shots could be used to manipulate the emotions of the audience and create film metaphors. Using Eisenstein's notion of montage as it may relate to poetic expression in architecture, we are able to similarly dissect the qualities of the individual spaces in the cremation procession to better understand how these projects address the emotional weight of the ceremony stages through spatial 'conflicts'.

## EISENSTEIN AND THE IDEOGRAM

Eisenstein's montage theory presents a means of analyzing the poetic experience as an accumulation of images in time, seeking to understand how the power of juxtaposed moments and sequential relationships of images in film begin to speak to a deeper meaning than their purely representational qualities. Through his analysis of the ideogram and articulation of the montage theory in film, we are able to better understand how the layered temporal, spatial, and material qualities of architectural experience can start to evoke these complex, abstract issues. Eisenstein writes of the ideogram as the earliest form of human abstract expression, through which the 'copulation' of two simple representational pictographs or symbols achieves the representation of something that is intangible or graphically undepictable. For Eisenstein, the ideogram provides 'a means for the laconic imprinting of an abstract concept'<sup>35</sup> which is precisely what cinema achieves in time through montage, thus positioning film within this tradition of poetic expression. Eisenstein expands on this poetic relationship in his discussion of the Haiku, which he views as a form of concentrated impressionist sketch: 'from our point of view, these are montage phrases. Shot lists.'<sup>36</sup> Eisenstein meditates on the relationship between these images and how they speak to concepts through their qualities of contrast: 'But what, then, is montage characterized and, consequently, its cell--the shot? By collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision.'<sup>37</sup> He identifies several cinematographic conflicts at work with in the frame, such as conflicts of scale, graphic direction, volume, mass, and depth. The spatial qualities of these terms brings light to the tight link between filmic expression and architectural experience, providing a means of understanding these relationships and their qualities in how they are able to speak to larger concepts through their organization.

35 Eisenstein, Sergei, and Jay Leyda. 1949. *Film form; essays in film theory*. New York: Harcourt, Brace. p 29.

36 Eisenstein 1949, p 32.

37 Eisenstein 1949, p 37.

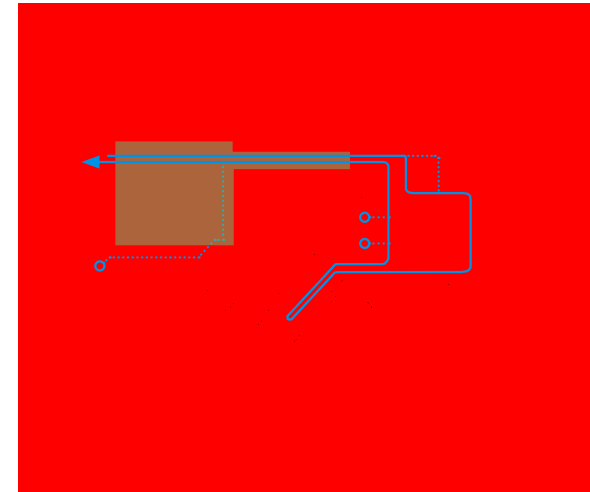
## PROGRAM STUDIES

A closer look at three distinct crematorium precedents reveals divergent expressions of the processional experience of the cremation process, however it becomes clear that all three projects are guided by a similar series of programmatic elements that serve to define the key moments in the emotional and spiritual journey of the cremation ritual. The Kaze-No-Oka Crematorium by Fumihiko Maki in Nakatsu, Japan is a quiet building that reveals itself slowly through the stages of the process, embodying Maki's assertion that "[t]he cremation ceremony requires a kind of psychological journey, in which neither the destination nor the experiences along the way can be made clear from the beginning."<sup>38</sup> The Woodland Crematorium by Gunnar Asplund in Stockholm, Sweden embodies a similar sense of discovery and procession, differing in its several options for scales of gathering and strong relationship to the landscape. Axel Shultes' Baumschulenweg Crematorium in Belgium, Germany takes a different organizational approach, adopting a more open scheme with the major program elements opening to a powerful central waiting area. Through the analysis of these unique strategies in an attempt to identify common core emotional moments that compose the cremation ritual sequence, we are able to develop a strategy for design that employs this cumulative power of the montage to delineate the story of the cremation process while still allowing for the multiplicity of personal experience through ritual and continual return.

38 Maki, Fumihiko, and Mark Mulligan. 2008. *Nurturing dreams: collected essays on architecture and the city*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. p 169.

## ARRIVAL

In all three projects, the entry and arrival to the site is a crucial stage in the transition of the visitor from familiar context of the surrounding area and into the sacred space of the crematorium. The use of a landscape zone buffers the arrival area from the larger context. Covered entryways and portecheres provide sheltering space to pause and gather before entering the crematorium and leaving the world behind.



KAZE-NO-OKA CREMATORIUM



BAUMSCHULENWEG CREMATORIUM

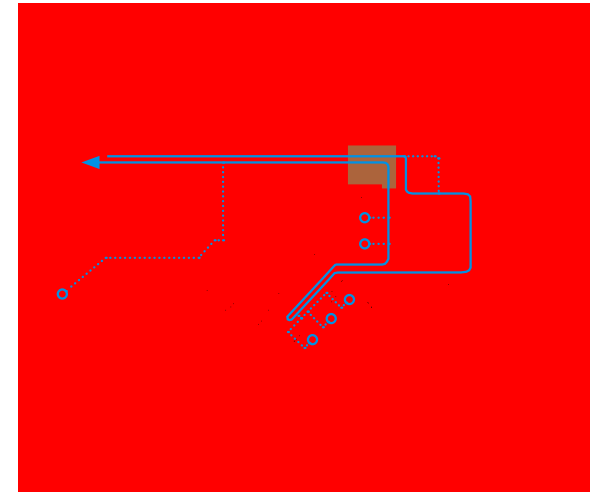
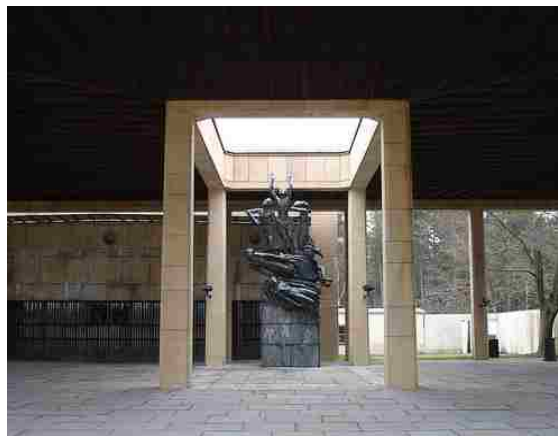


WOODLAND CREMATORIUM

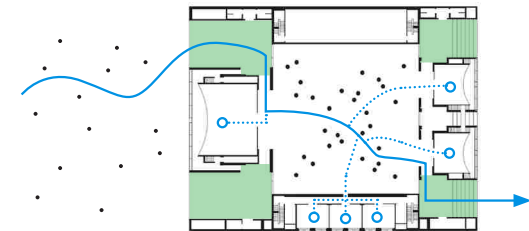
Figure 9: Case Study 'Arrival' Analysis

## THRESHOLD

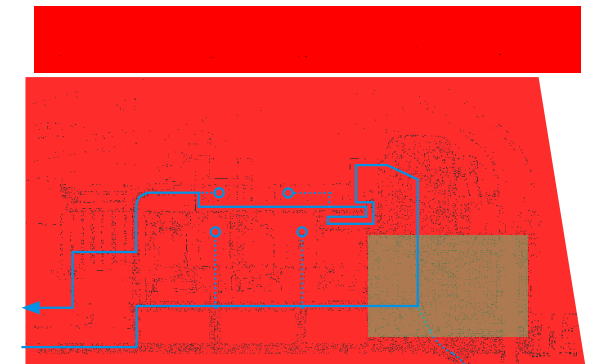
The threshold serves as an important dramatic moment of entry in which the visitor crosses from the outside into the sacred space, beginning the ritual sequence. The moment of threshold is usually denoted by a powerful gesture of light or the absence of mass that emphasizes the point of entry and imbues a sense of uplift as the relationship between earth and sky is brought into sharp focus in an arresting way.



KAZE-NO-OKA CREMATORIUM



BAUMSCHULENWEG CREMATORIUM



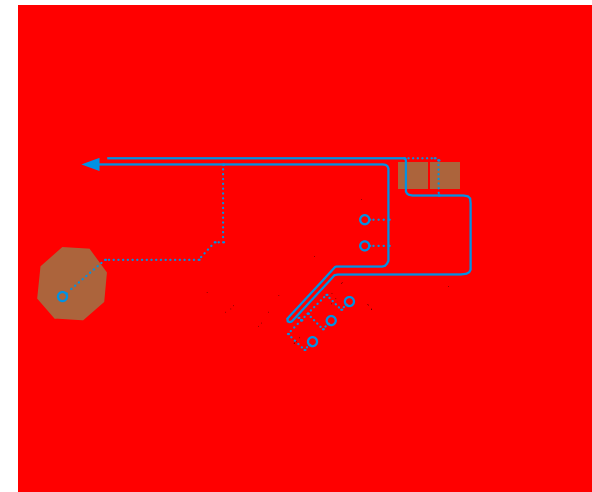
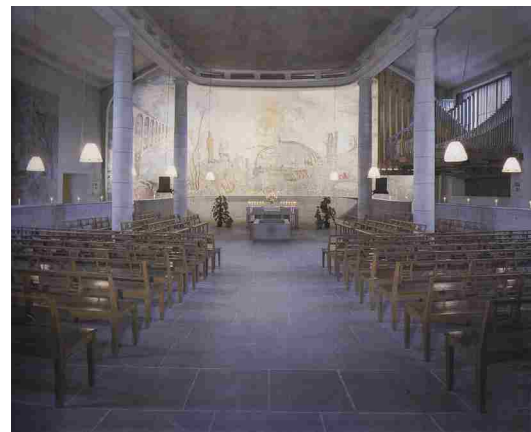
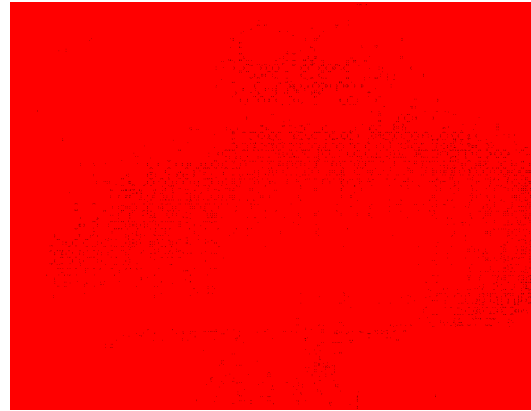
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Figure 10: Case Study 'Threshold' Analysis

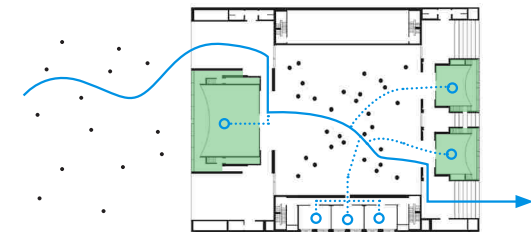
## CEREMONY HALL

The ceremony hall serves as a primary gathering space for spending final ceremonial moments with the deceased in a communal way, sharing memory together in the experience of loss. The ceremony hall can be scaled for use or a facility can include halls of different scales. The use of light is controlled to highlight the focus of the ceremony space, bringing the visitors eyes towards the altar. The size and character of the space significantly varies between the schemes, suggesting multiple ways of understanding the role of ceremony in the cremation process.

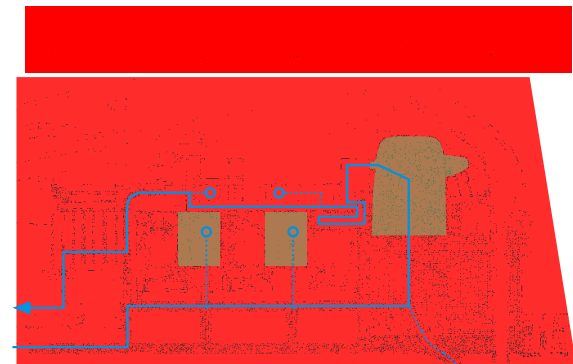
Figure 11: Case Study 'Ceremony Hall'  
Analysis



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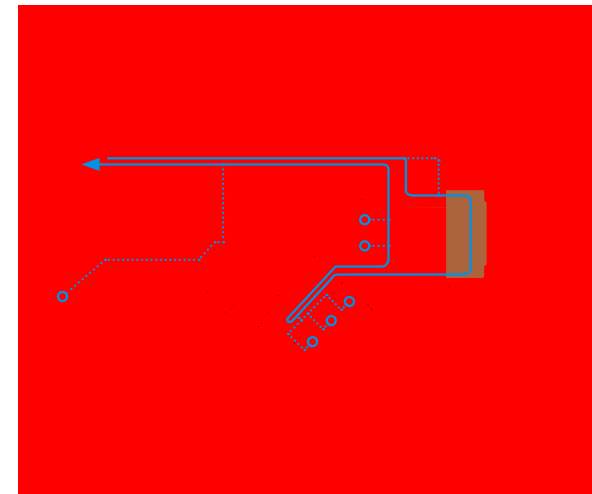
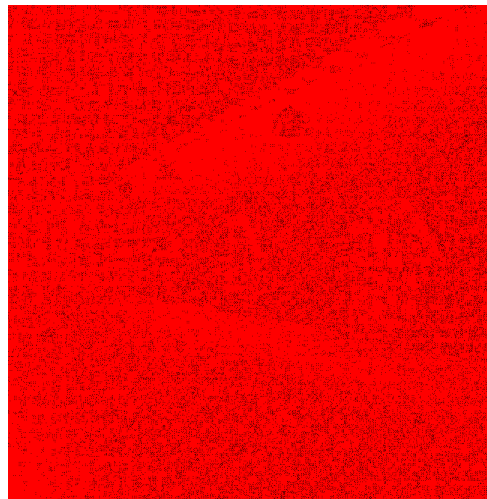
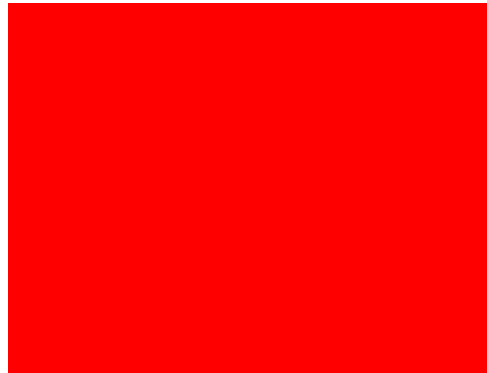
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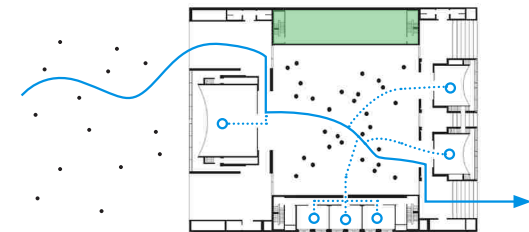
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## COMMITTAL CHAMBER

The committal chamber marks the important moment of transition in the procession where the body is actually committed to the furnace. The chamber signifies the last point where the bereaved are able to be with the body in its final moments, providing a space for gathering in front of incinerator doors for a final farewell. The sensitivity of this moment calls for a more intimate space, where light is heavily controlled, highlighting the coffin in its final moments.



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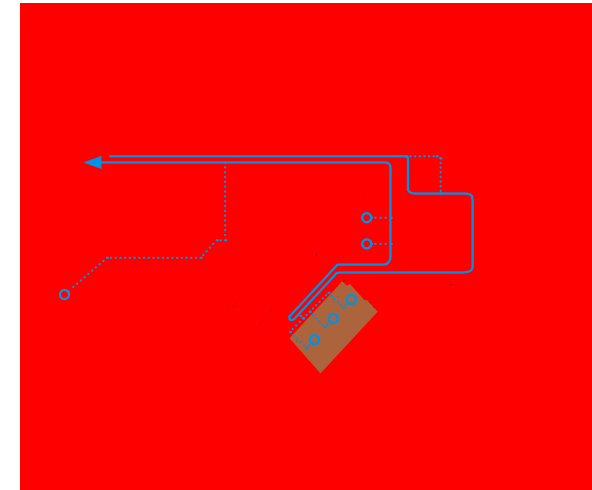
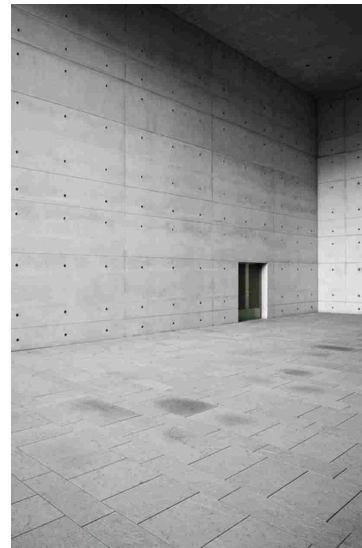
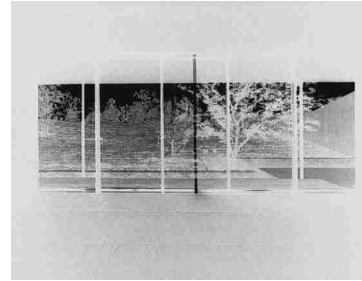
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Figure 12: Case Study 'Committal Chamber' Analysis

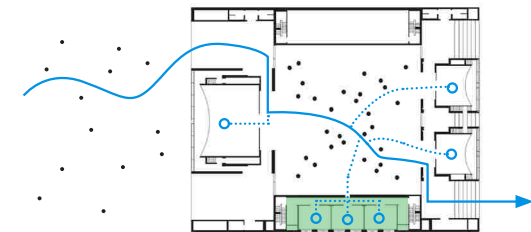


## WAITING AREA

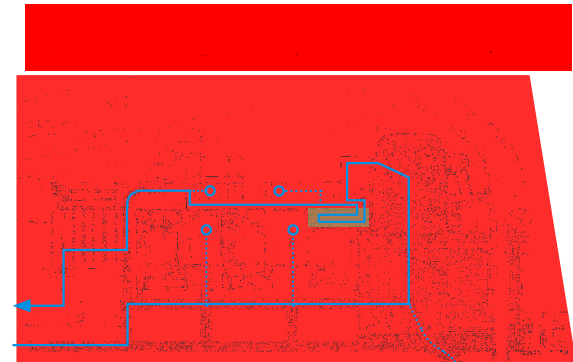
As cremations can take from an average of ninety minutes to three hours to complete, mourners are released from the solemnity of ceremony into spaces for both group conversation and private reflection. These spaces can take the form of private rooms or more collective open gathering areas. The schemes seem to present two distinct attitudes towards the character of the waiting space, both attempting a reconnection with nature as a way of grounding the participant, while alternatively serve to internalize the space highlight a sense of emptiness as a way achieving a sense of peace during this period.



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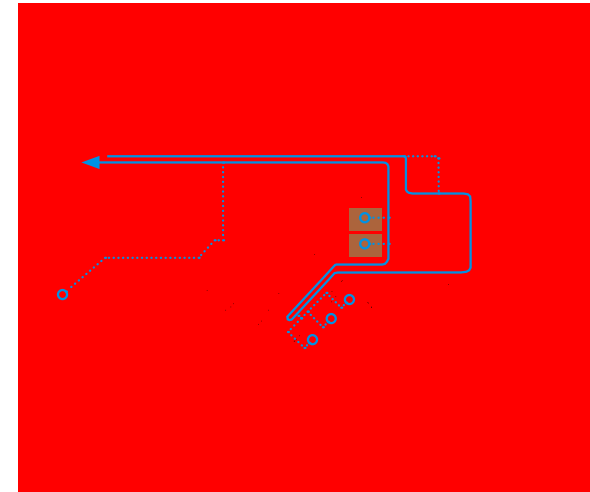
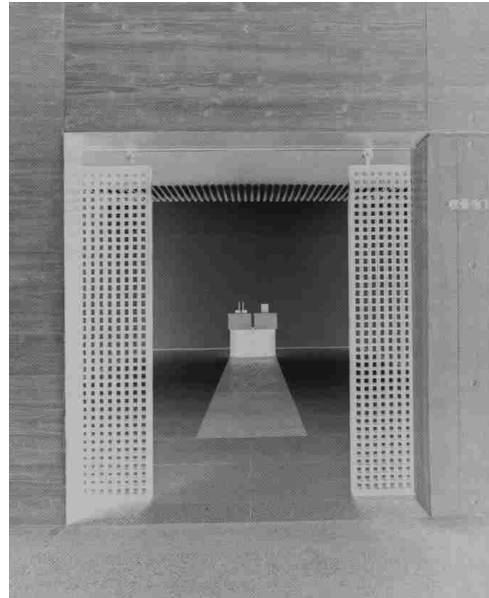


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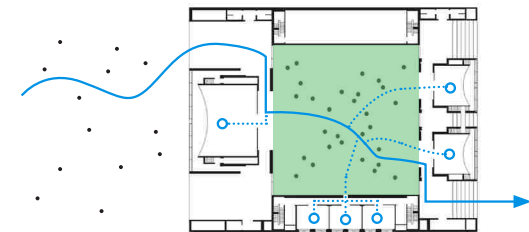
Figure 13: Case Study 'Waiting Area' Analysis

## ENSHRINEMENT ROOM

Once the cremation is complete, visitors are led to an enshrinement room where bones and ashes of the deceased are returned from the incinerator in an urn or vessel. In most cases, this is a small intimate space where the position of the urn is highlighted. Some cultures observe a ritual purification ceremony before departure, marking the end of the cremation service and a the beginning of a return to the outside world. The ashes would then be interred in the columbarium or taken home with by the mourners as they leave.



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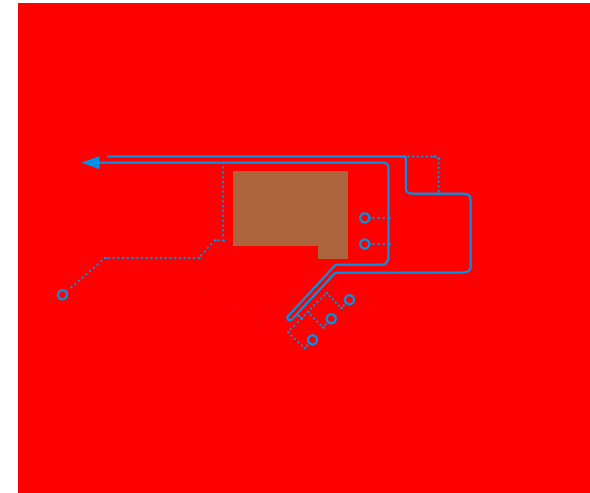
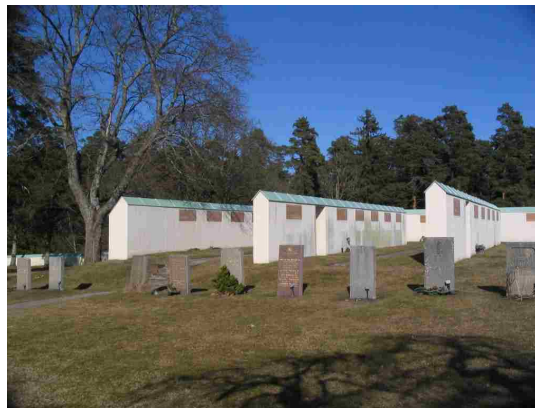
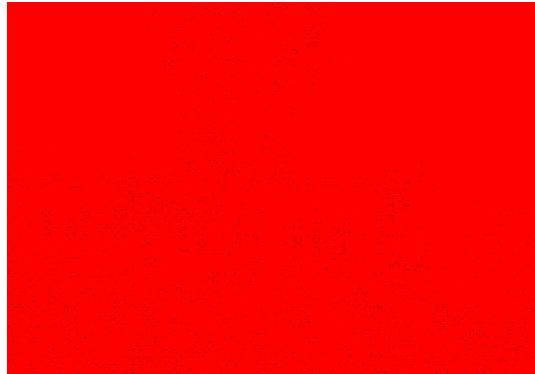


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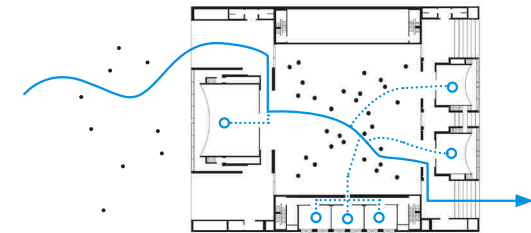
Figure 14: Case Study 'Enshrinement Room' Analysis

## COLUMBARIUM

The columbarium serves as a place for the permanent interment of ashes, acting as a site of continual return. While some mourners depart with urns, the columbarium also acts as a place of repose and reflection for those who return to commemorate those they have lost. The ashes are stored in niches that can be arranged in several smaller groupings or in a larger unified element. The columbarium often has a strong relationship to the natural context, creating a sense of solace and peace.



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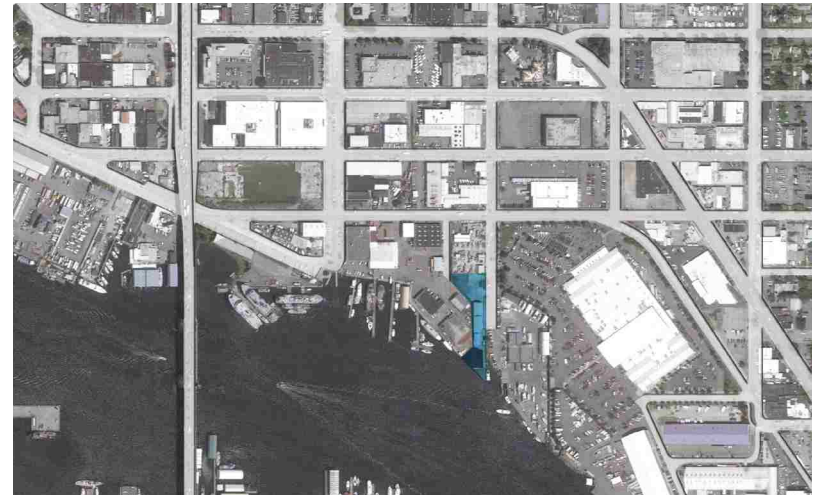
WOODLAND CREMATORIUM

Figure 15: Case Study 'Columbarium' Analysis

## PART IV:

## SITE INTRODUCTION

The project site for the Seattle Crematorium is located in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle, along the Lake Washington Ship Canal at the terminus of 11th Avenue NW. While somewhat isolated and removed from the heart of Ballard, the site enjoys a rather central urban location easily accessible from major arterial connections through NW Leary Way to the east and from the Ballard Bridge at its west. The site also shows the potential for further access from expanded transit options in the near future, as the Seattle Streetcar system has proposed new line extensions that follow NW Leary Way to the northeast of the site. The Burke-Gilman Trail, which currently terminates just north of the site, is expected to expand along NW 45th street, furthering new connections and points of access. The site exists along a border between divergent conditions in this area, straddling the light industrial marine character of the shipyard shoreline and the almost suburban qualities of the





Fred Meyer parking lot and store to the northeast. This location is unique in its isolated, protected waterfront location while able maintaining a degree of visual presence and strong circulatory connections to the larger city. The immediate surrounding light industrial context consists of mostly single-story warehouse and maritime commercial facilities that form an unassuming low profile along the water's edge more dominated by sea vessels than the buildings that serve them.

The property itself is a 25,000 square foot waterfront lot housing an existing 4,000 square foot structure as well as large portions of undeveloped buildable site. The existing structure was constructed in 1935 by the Exxon Corporation and originally served as a refueling station for the maritime industry. The single-story building is of reinforced concrete masonry construction with the original light steel trusses framing the metal roof. The floor is an exposed slab-on-grade foundation and the site exhibits a slight even slope at one-quarter inch to one foot across a majority of the site, creating an elevation change of 18" between the north and south edges of the existing building. In 1968, the property was converted to the Divers Institute of Technology, a premiere training facility for commercial diving which moved to a larger facility in the early 2000's leaving the site in disuse since.

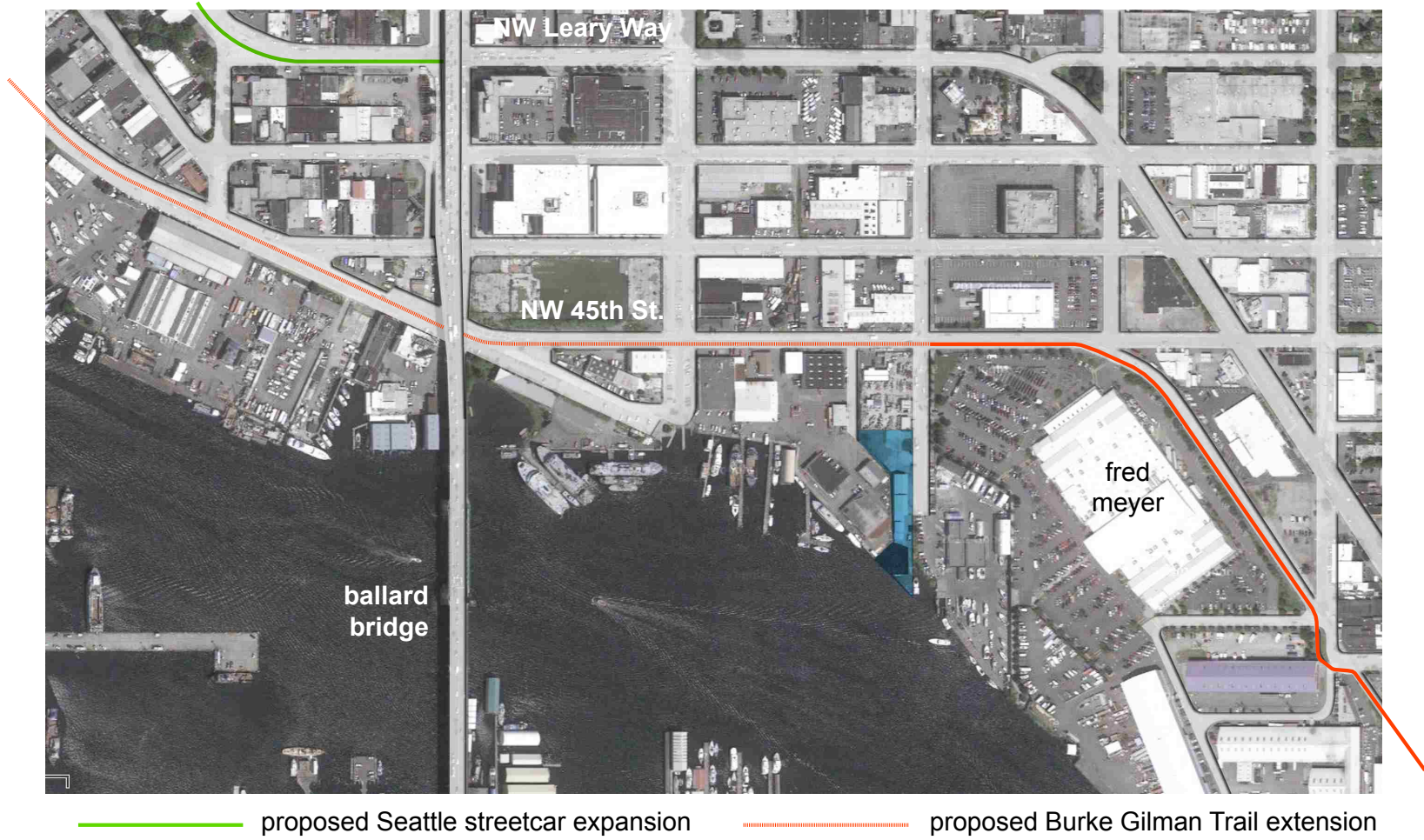


Figure 19: Site Plan



Figure 20: Site Photo Analysis

## SITE READINGS

The unique site geometry and contextual relationships required significant study to determine appropriate response to issues of access, daylight, visual screening, and internal circulation in the balance between the experiential procession of the visitor and the functional needs of the working facility. The site exhibits three predominant conditions: the 13,000 unbuilt northernmost portion of the site, the existing structure and its adjacent open spaces, and the waterfront pier area of the site. A preliminary reading of the site suggests the notion of a strong circulatory axis along the eastern edge of the property, as this region affords open access to the site from 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, runs along the unbuilt portion of the site adjacent to the existing structure, and lies on axis with the existing dock, forming a clear and direct path with access to all adjacent areas of the site. A secondary access route would be introduced from the alley northwest of the site, allowing for service access and a back-of-house corridor to run parallel to the main procession along the

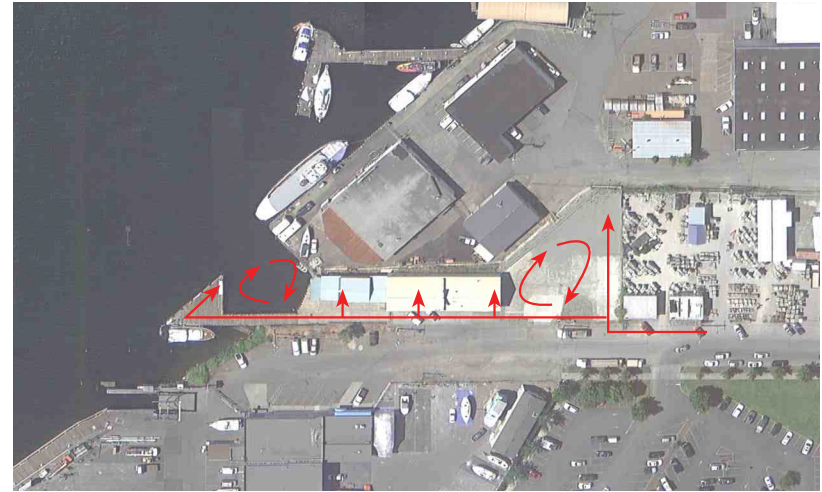


Figure 21: Initial Circulation Diagram

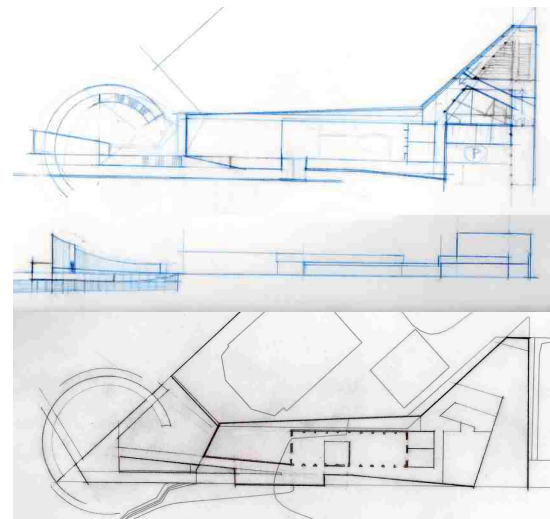


Figure 22: Initial Schematic Studies



easement between the existing structure and the buildable edge of the site. Initial schematic gestural schemes sought to play off these observations in the massing of built form and open spaces to define possibilities of procession, connection, disconnection, and revelation within the experience of the site and program. These begin to define an architectural strategy that draws character from the site's existing qualities to form a series of experiences that culminate in a sense of catharsis when brought together, while maintaining the functional integrity of the scheme in streamlining the discrete support operations of these services.

## MONTAGE AND RITUAL

Building upon analysis of the poetic image and architectural space within the films of Fellini and Tarkovski, an application of the communicative properties of montage allows for an understanding of how these architectural moments can work together to reveal a deeper connection to living memory through the formation of ritual. The spatial experiences catalogued in the case study analysis give us an index of programmatic elements that stage the major emotional events of the ceremony, and the qualities of the site begin to suggest an arrangement of programmatic spaces and interstitial moments that compose the experience. These poetic images of temporal rifts at play in films like *Roma* and *Nostalghia* challenge our assumptions, providing a language through which these themes can start to describe a way of organizing transitions and allowing notions of 'collision' or contrast inform the way natural light is admitted, spaces are proportioned, and how materials relate throughout the project. A series of programming studies and experiential sketches were used to explore the potential spatial interactions in the sequencing of the cremation ceremony on site.



Figure 23: Site Section

## TECTONIC HIERARCHY

The approaches to site and program also inform an attitude towards the material relationships in the project that speak to these notions of spatial ‘conflicts’ through the dynamic relationship between heavy and light materials. This relationship changes as the procession advances, speaking to the larger themes at work in the poetic expression of emotional transformation. Drawing from the material relationships between the thick masonry walls and the light steel frame that comprise the existing structure on site, a series of continuous board-formed concrete walls are introduced to frame the site along its edges and anchor the existing building within and serve as a unifying guiding element throughout the procession. A lighter steel framework is employed as a foil to the concrete vertical elements, playing against the

heaviness of the wall as one progresses through the scheme. The formwork used to create the concrete walls would be preserved on-site and used as an interior cladding material, forming a dialogue with the concrete that echoes the texture of the material used to create it. As Eisenstein relates in his discussion of the cumulative power of montage, 'The simple combination of two or three details of a material kind yields a perfectly finished representation of another kind-- psychological.'<sup>39</sup> The dynamic relationship between the concrete and masonry heavy walls, the lighter existing and added steel framework, and the wood formwork engage another layer of montage through the cumulative effect of their dynamic relationship throughout the scheme.

<sup>39</sup> Eisenstein 1949, p 34.

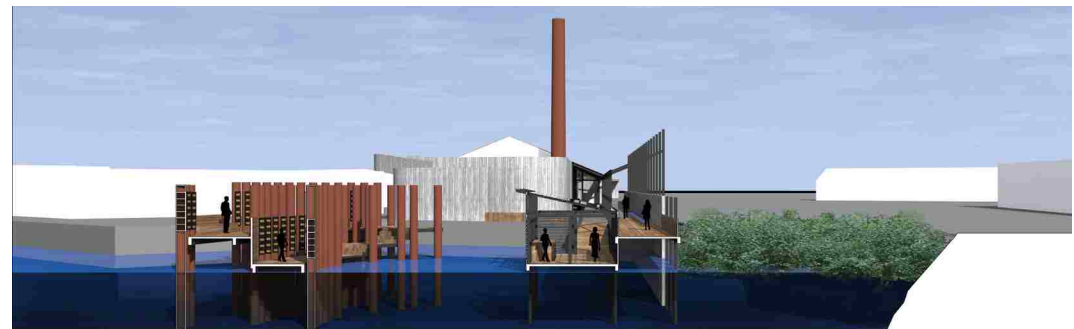


Figure 24: Sectional relationships through the scheme

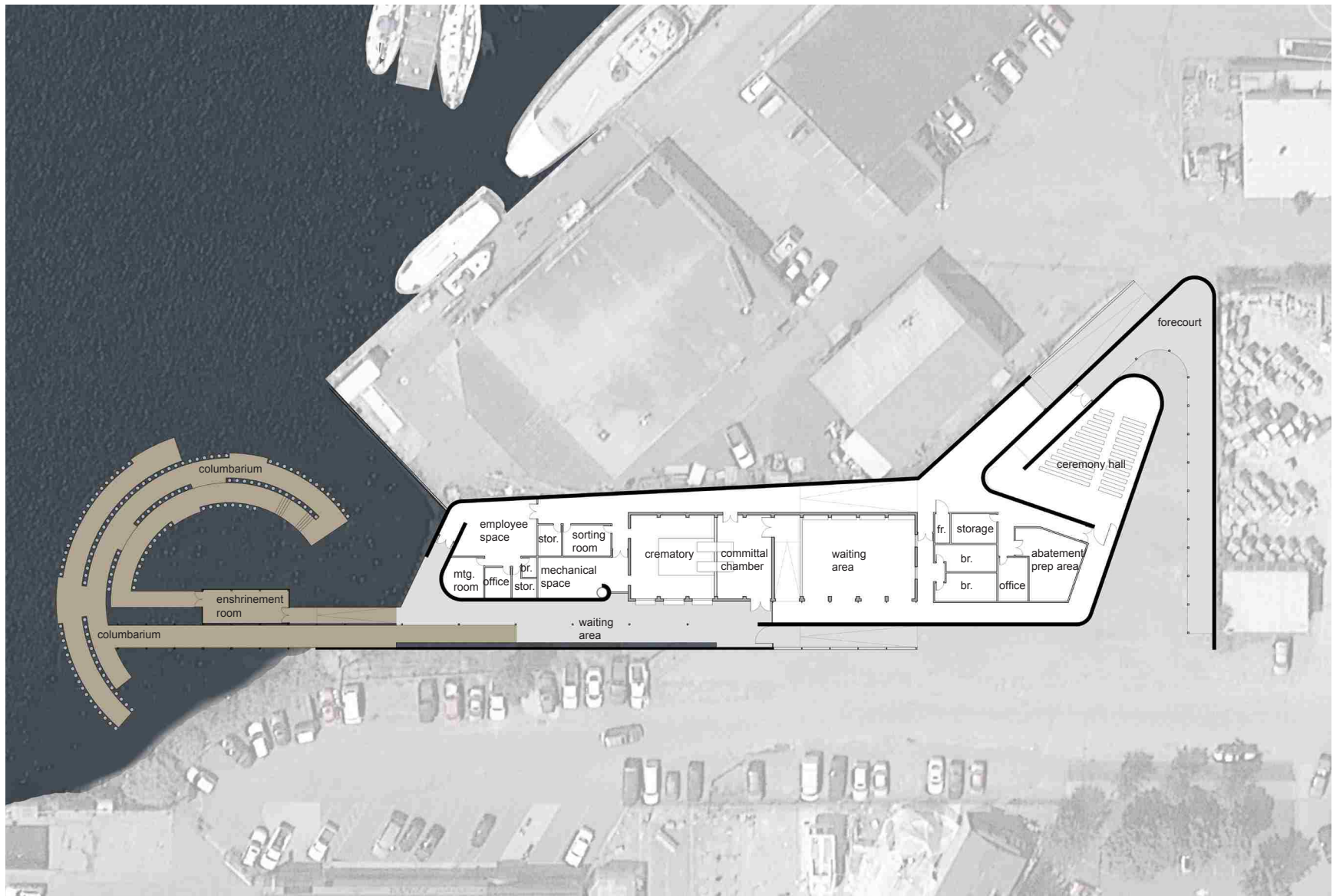


Figure 25: Floor Plan

## THE CREMATION EXPERIENCE

The role of the Seattle Crematorium begins at the time of death, at which arrangements would be made for the remains to be delivered to the site and put into cold storage within twenty-four hours of passing. The body would be subsequently prepared for cremation, a process involving the removal of heavy metals and other objects to maintain purity and environmental standards. The remains are then be returned to a wood coffin and stored until the date of the ceremony when it would be transported into the ceremony hall for viewing. At the time of the remembrance event, the arrival of guests would begin at the drop off location on 11<sup>th</sup> avenue, where a low, processional covered walkway envelops the visitors and delineates the transition from the context of the city to the inner-world of the crematorium. The moment of threshold is marked by a punctuation of light at the end of the darkened walkway, creating a visual draw that guides visitors towards the entrance. As guests enter the ceremony hall, they are first greeted by a votive candle display, allowing for a moment of

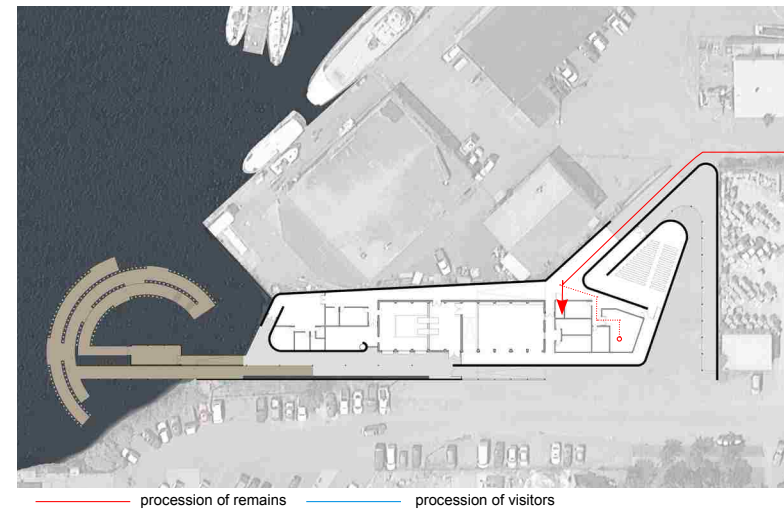


Figure 26: Arrival of Remains

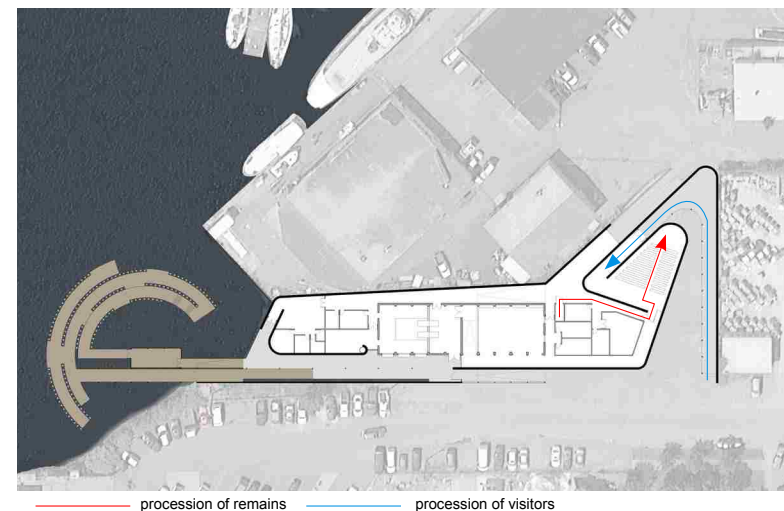


Figure 27: Ceremony Arrival



Figure 28: Arrival Perspective

pause and reflection before joining others in the central gathering space. The continuous curved concrete walls serve as a reference that guides the visitor through the entry procession into the main space and beyond, as daylight brought from above washes the surface of the wall, highlighting its texture and earthen, rough qualities. As guests turn the corner into the large ceremony hall, the wall rises in height as the space deepens, creating a dramatic sense of enclosure as the wall curves back around to frame the space. The light steel trusses that support the roof are anchored within and subservient to the wall. The roof plane pulls back to allow for long thin glazed apertures along the perimeter of the space, washing the concrete walls with even natural light and highlighting the subterranean qualities of the space. The ceremony hall experience creates a sense of enclosure in which the wall becomes the space, embedded away from the outside world to bring focus to the people within and put an emphasis on the communal experience of the event.



Figure 29: Forecourt Perspective



Figure 30: Entry Perspective





Figure 31: Ceremony Hall Perspective

After the ceremony, participants proceed through the south exit of the hall into a skylit hallway linking the ceremony hall to the central waiting area and committal chamber beyond. The corridor brings to focus the dialogue between the concrete wall and wood formwork cladding, and a view through glazing at the southern end of the hall hints views at the water and columbarium beyond. The steel structure framing the hallway picks up the roof slope of the existing structure, creating a dynamic relationship between the steel and concrete that starts to subvert the distinction between old and new. The eastern openings in the existing structure create a permeable field of entry from the adjacent hall into the central waiting area, whose integration of plant life and water elements create a quality within the space that starts to challenge notions of permanence and stability that the existing structure portrays. The waiting space further contrasts the ceremony hall in exhibiting the experience of erosion, as light penetrates the roof membrane and nature interrupts the floor plane. While guests partake in a reception in the waiting area, the casket would be brought back through the main support hallway into the committal chamber

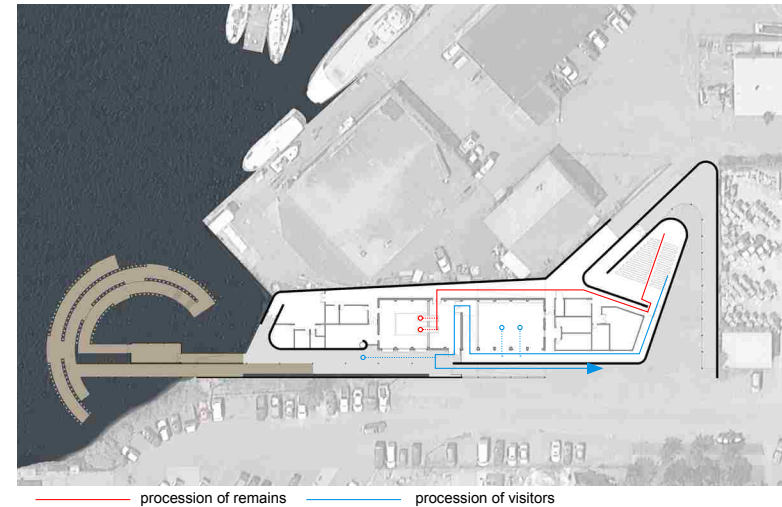


Figure 32: Committal of Remains



Figure 33: Hallway Perspective



Figure 34: Waiting Area Perspective



Figure 35: Committal Chamber Perspective

where it would be placed on the elevated platform entry to the cremation furnace. Guests leaving the reception would then continue down the ramp at the edge of the waiting space, passing through the committal chamber for a final moment with the deceased before exiting through the east to the exterior courtyard. Depending on the size of the service, many guests may customarily depart at this point through the eastern gate, leaving close family and friends to experience the rest of the cremation ritual. This spatial arrangement also allows for the accommodation of more intimate cremations in which the main ceremony hall is bypassed altogether, allowing a small group to arrive through the eastern entrance directly into the committal chamber for a viewing with the body before the cremation event.

Like the waiting area and committal chamber, the crematory is also housed within the existing structure, as a thin skylight reveal in the roof delineates this moment of transition for the deceased and participants. The cremation may take from ninety minutes to upwards of three hours, allowing for the

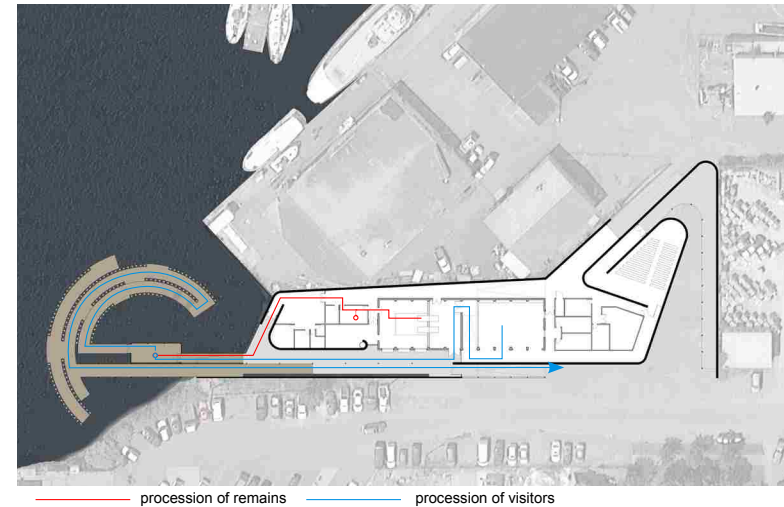


Figure 36: Retrieval of Ashes

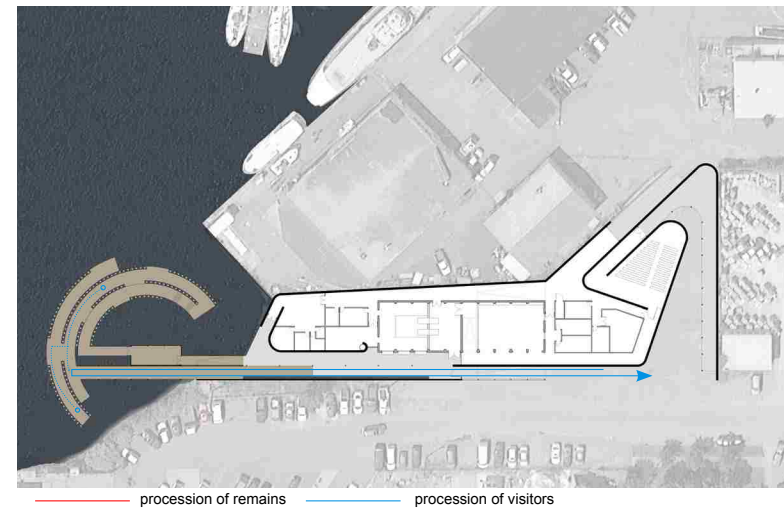


Figure 37: Continual Return

bereaved to leave the committal chamber and spend time in the waiting area or to continue on outside to the courtyard seeking moments of quiet repose while the cremation process commences. Upon the completion of the cremation, the remains are removed and taken through a sorting room before being transferred to an urn, which is then brought out to the enshrinement room. Those waiting would then be notified to proceed to the enshrinement room, led outside through the exterior courtyard down a ramped dock to the water. The courtyard space is partially covered by an extension of the roof that continues the structural rhythm of the steel through interior and exterior along to the water, expressing the transformation from heavy to light at work throughout the scheme. A channel of water runs along the edge of the courtyard's exterior concrete wall, bringing the experience of water deeper into the site and drawing visitors out towards the columbarium. The enshrinement room comes into view as a small steel and glass pavilion on the water, set lower than ground level as it rests slightly above the water's edge at high tide. As the guests approach the ramped dock leading down to the enshrinement room, they begin to experience the rows of steel piles that compose the columbarium, whose curvilinear form produces a sense of enclosure that connects the participants to those who have made similar journeys in times past and those who will come after. This final revelation is reinforced as guests exit the enshrinement room onto a path that follows up through the columbarium before returning through the courtyard and out the northeast gate. The columbarium's series of steel piles each house six niches approximately one cubic foot in volume for the permanent storage of urns, providing a powerful site of continual return and a gesture of community through time that culminates from the larger experience of the cremation ritual, binding the visitors to a living sense of memory through a final shared experience of place.



Figure 38: Courtyard Perspective



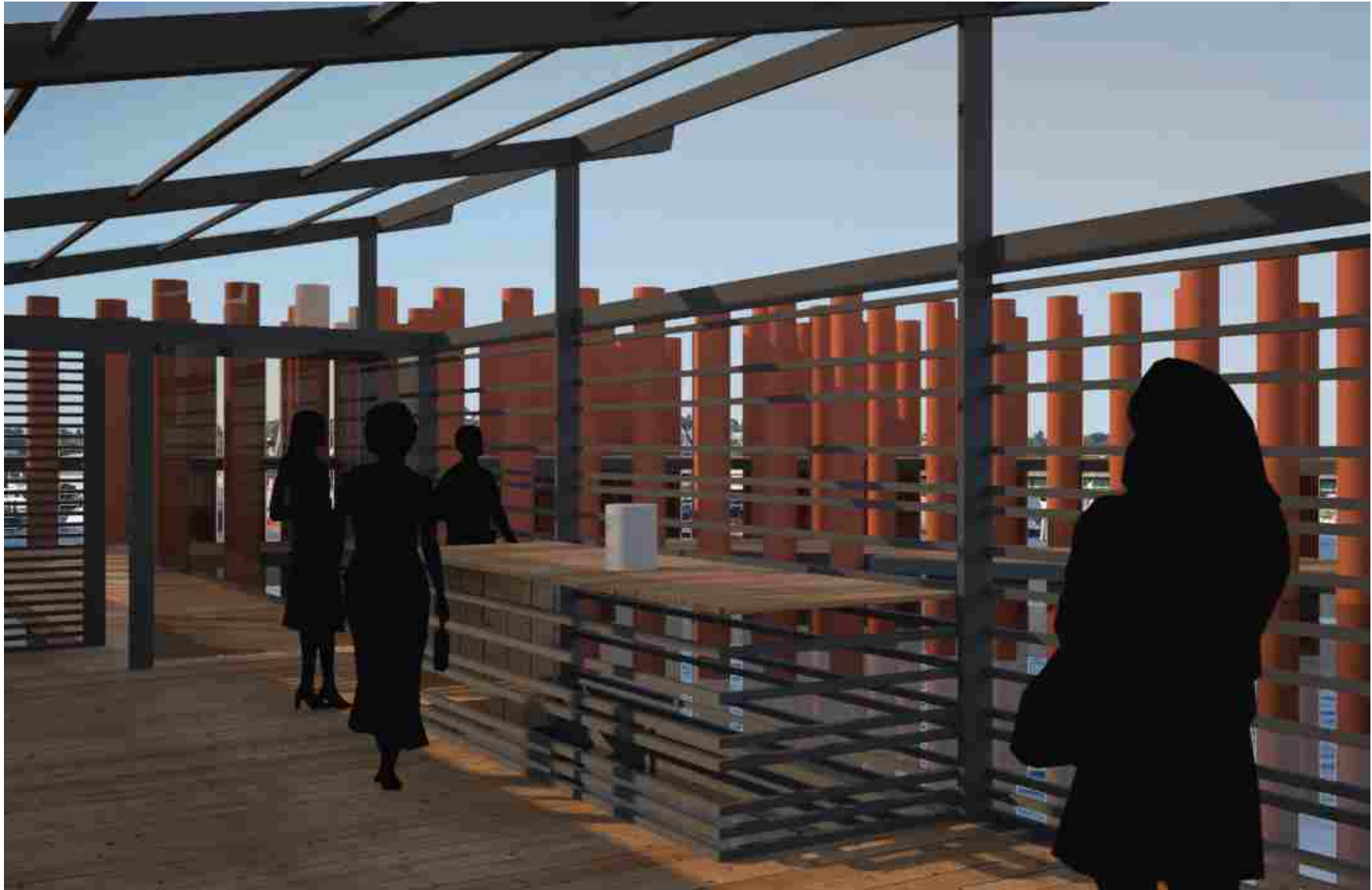


Figure 39: Enshrinement Room Perspective



Figure 40: Columbarium Perspective

PART V:  
CONCLUSION

The loss of a living connection to memory and history has profoundly altered the relationship between death and society, as we are no longer able to meaningfully relate our individual experiences of loss in a collective way. Through a critical study of the poetic image in architecture and film and how notions of contrast and montage allow us to evoke deeper senses of place and memory, we can start to understand the role of ritual in establishing a meaningful and lasting connection to place through architecture. Sites of remembrance have the potential to engage these deeper truths over time: 'As the place of last respect, and of collective sentiment, [the crematorium] acquires a sense of depth and significance.'<sup>40</sup> It is in this way that The Seattle Crematorium attempts to reposition the role of death in the city, allowing for a site of meaningful ritual and continual return that reconnects us as individuals to an enduring and meaningful collective experience of memory and time.

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40 Davies 1996, p 87.

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