AN URBAN ANCHORING CEMETERY

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes an urban infill cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee. By infilling seven blocks within the arts district of downtown Memphis with a new urban cemetery, further significance is given to both the city and the cemetery. Because it would be a newly built cemetery, it could initially function as an urban park and become a cemetery over time as the space is needed to remember the dead. The same elements of the cemetery would compose the park, but by allowing a slow transformation from park to cemetery, the resulting public space will carry much more meaning than either space could alone. The cemetery connects the continuing evolution of the city with the lives of its citizens. Each block is different yet linked and intertwined, just like Memphis residents. The blocks are multi-use and so are the history and legacy of those who have died with those who live in and visit the city.
DEDICATED TO

My father and mother,

Thank you.
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GRAPHIC CONTENT

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTENT

Untitled, ink and coffee

Photograph of site

Section 1 of 20

Untitled, ink and coffee

Section 2 of 20

Untitled, ink and coffee

Section 3 of 20

Untitled, ink

Section 4 of 20

Untitled, ink and coffee

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Section 6 of 20

Untitled, ink

Section 7 of 20

Untitled, coffee

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Section 18 of 20

Untitled, ink and coffee

Section 19 of 20

Untitled, ink and coffee

Section 20 of 20

Inked plan of block a

Untitled, ink and coffee

Context plan

Context plan of prominent buildings

Context plan with cemetery

Aerial photograph of site

©2011 Google - Map data ©2011 Google

Initial plan

Aerial photograph of site with cemetery

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Photograph of trolley on site

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Cemetery site plan

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Aerial photograph of site with cemetery

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Inked section perspective 1

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Inked section perspective 2

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Inked section perspective 3

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Inked section perspective 4

©2011 Google - Map data ©2011 Google

Photograph of weathered headstone

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Ink collage 1

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Ink collage 2

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Ink collage 3

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Photograph of model of block a

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Inked collage 1

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Inked collage 2

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Inked collage 3

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Inked collage 4

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Inked collage 5

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Inked collage 6

©2011 Google - Map data ©2011 Google

Inked collage 7

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Inked collage 8
EXISTING SITE

Downtown Memphis, Tennessee

On South Main Street from Linden Avenue to Huling Avenue
Downtown Memphis, Tennessee, only has a small area that is the proper density to sustain urban life. As the downtown spreads out, many of the buildings are abandoned or no longer there. These blank spaces affect the success of businesses attempting to revitalize a larger part of downtown.
The black buildings indicate prominent features in the downtown Memphis area such as Beale Street (1), the FedEx Forum (2), and the National Civil Rights Museum (3), and the site of the cemetery (4). The site for the cemetery was chosen not only for the missing teeth within the blight, but for the proximity to the daily activities of Memphians. The cemetery has entrances at various points on South Main Street.
By weaving an urban cemetery through the existing buildings, the area will become more complete. Initially, the cemetery will function as an urban park, which will cater to the surrounding businesses.

The urban park will have the necessary structure to transition into a cemetery. If there is no need for a large burial plot, it would be wasteful not to use the allotted space to eat lunch or listen to live music. By having multiple uses, the cemetery can have many social memories attached to it and grow with the people who use the space.
The existing site consists of restaurants, shops, art galleries, abandoned warehouses, and empty lots. The area is known as South Main and has a reputation as an arts and music district.
The original concept places a new cemetery into the empty lots. By weaving one particular function throughout several blocks will help to unite the whole area.
The city benefits from the urban cemetery, but the cemetery also gains advantages from its location within the city. Cemeteries have become too far removed from everyday life and lost their significance. The life of the surrounding neighborhood will help to revitalize the importance of the cemetery.
Each of the seven blocks that the cemetery weaves through has a similar language of materials and structures. However, the cemetery responds to and changes according to the existing elements at that block.
Because the existing structure of the city blocks is not changed, where the cemetery crosses the street becomes an important transition. The materials of the cemetery continue as the street is comprehensible that the cemetery continues into another block.
Much of the cemetery sinks down into the blocks to provide some sense of privacy. Likewise, stairs are a prominent feature within the cemetery. People can be buried within the walls encasing the stairs, and the stairs also act as benches.
A new addition to the city and the cemetery is an archive building that faces South Main Street. The archive would maintain the history of the city and the cemetery.
Water is interwoven through the blocks in different forms as a common element.
There are numerous restaurants in this area. The cemetery is flexible enough to accommodate room for comfortable outdoor seating.
There are elevated areas within the cemetery that compliment the sunken parts. The higher elements provide overlooks over the other blocks. Thus visual connection is important when understanding the cemetery as a whole.
Because the cemetery will not fill up immediately, the adaptability of its spatial usage is important. The block is designed to initially accommodate an urban community garden that can transform into a cemetery using the same structures.
The chapel is situated in this block because it overlooks the Mississippi River. This is the one moment where the ceremony is completely enclosed, creating a sanctuary for the family that is totally isolated from the street sounds, away from the city.
CHAPEL SECTION

PERSPECTIVES

The chapel is a distinct feature within the mostly open air cemetery. It provides a place for wakes and other ceremonies. Here the focus is not the city. The views are restricted to walls of the courtyard, the sky, and water.
The two chapels are split by a drawn path to the Mississippi River.
Columbarium walls are open until someone’s remains are enclosed inside. As more people are buried within the wall, the light conditions will reflect this change.
Because the chapel is enclosed, pools of water and skylights are used to brighten the spaces without adding distractions.
WEATHERING

"Weathering adds the "finish" to the environment."

Different materials are selected because of how they might weather and wear. The plaques commemorating the deceased will show the wear of being touched by hands. The steps where people sit to be near their loved ones will also reveal the time people spent there.
As time passes and more people interact with the cemetery, the more the cemetery will show it. People will see the mark they left, which keeps the place of the dead alive with change.
The actual weather will also show its mark on the cemetery. Grooves and overhangs in the walls will help to direct the weathering.
COLLAGED PHOTOGRAPHS
OF BLOCK A MODEL

The forced rolling hills and manicured forests will prove less comforting to those who use the cemetery. The city provides a meaningful context for the cemetery. The walls of the cemetery create new frames in which to view the surrounding buildings.

These photographs were taken from a basswood and chipboard model of block A.
In each section, a continuous line through the entire site is illustrated to emphasize that the cemetery is truly one entity that spans over seven different blocks.
Water plays an important part in the cemetery as a life source. It provides sound, coolness, and a reflectivity that contrasts with city and cemetery.
The doors of the underground tombs incorporate the metal work history of the city and mimic the lines of the adjacent old warehouses.
By not over saturating the entire site with specific functions, there are opportunities for the cemetery and the city to grow into something more than originally planned.
By thinking about the role of weathering throughout the entire design process, the cemetery can have simple lines and carry the character of the space on the materials surface.
Because the cemetery grows from the city and extends into its infrastructure, there is no steep end to the cemetery. For instance, the walkway between the two chapels joins to a staircase which connects into an existing park system along the Mississippi River.
The walls of the cemetery that become a part of the street front are crucial in the balance of separating and combining the cemetery with the city.
Repetition of elements ties the entire cemetery together. These recurring elements will deteriorate in distinct ways, making them unique.
Although many features of the cemetery are tall, there is always an accessible part. This reachable part bears the marks of those who visited and, over time, adds an additional scale to the cemetery.
The heat in Memphis can be unbearable at times, which means providing shade in public spaces is essential to the success of that space. The cemetery is recessed into the ground with tall walls to create this shade.
The cemetery within in each separate block is particular to that block. Some of existing buildings add character to the site while others are more of a detriment. The walls of the cemetery expose the charming and disguise the dilapidated.
By creating inhabitable space underground for the living as well as space for the dead above ground, the cemetery embraces a unique duality.
The varying heights of the cemetery walls reinforce a progression through the cemetery. The use of consistent patterns, textures and materials throughout the entire site grounds this movement.
The columbarium walls are a common element found in all seven blocks. Not only do the walls house the remains of the deceased, they create a new frame to view the existing buildings.
The cemetery possesses a certain stillness and quiet beauty, though this does not mean that the cemetery cannot be an active, lively place. The placement of muted and loud elements helps achieve this balance.
A slope produces more possibilities for weathering from rainwater. Although it is impossible to accurately predict how something will weather, it is important to provide guidelines like slopes and groves, for how this might happen.
The existing buildings create the parameters for the cemetery; however, at some points such as the sidewalks and streets, the cemetery’s characteristics bleed over the community boundary, enriching not the cemetery but its surroundings.
The sounds of the materials on the ground add to the rhythm of the cemetery. Introducing moving water into this rhythm creates a relief to the sounds of grass, stone, and gravel.
Some walls in the cemetery house the remains of the deceased. The change in material denotes the presence of the dead, and the difference in how the material weathered over time adds another layer of time and memory.
Although maintenance is required for the general upkeep of the cemetery, stains from water, rain, or people are not imperfections. The wear enhances the beauty of the cemetery.
In addition to a traditional headstone, an underground mausoleum, or a plaque, there are above ground family tombs. These tombs give the cemetery a physical presence in the city.