

IV CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE E INTERDISCIPLINARE
SU IMMAGINI E IMMAGINAZIONE
4th INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
ON IMAGES AND IMAGINATION

IMG23

PUBLICA ISBN 978 88 99586 32 4



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PUBLICA



A cura di / Edited by
Stefano Brusaporci, Pamela Maiezza, Adriana Marra
Ilaria Trizio, Francesca Savini, Alessandra Tata



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Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale e Interdisciplinare
su Immagini e Immaginazione

Proceedings of 4th International and Interdisciplinary
Conference on Images and Imagination

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© PUBLICA, Alghero, 2023
ISBN 978 88 99586 32 4
ebook ISBN 978 88 99586 32 4
Pubblicazione Luglio 2023

www.publicapress.it

con il patrocinio di/under the patronage of:



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IMAGIN(G)
HERITAGE

Atti del Convegno | Proceedings



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Visual Heritage and Memory Design

Abstract

The digital turn opens up new perspectives in image-based design fields. Imaging materialize hybrid spaces that join physical reality and digital simulation. Besides cultural industries, other activities can benefit from new representation issues. Among them there are the funeral system and the cemetery management, which undergo the growing cremation increase. Images have a potential in relation to the development of new memory spaces, starting from the heritage of image significance in the relationship between life and death.

Keywords

Visual heritage, Memory, Visual rhetoric, Hybrid spaces, Digital computing.

INTRODUCTION - THE DEATH OF THE CEMETERY

In few architectures do the images conveyed by artefacts pass on the memory of an intangible heritage as in western cemeteries. Since its post-Enlightenment foundation, the contemporary necropolis has developed as a model translated into the image of the city of the living. As it has grown, it has sedimented memory and social custom in the 'direct' images of effigies and the 'indirect' images of symbols in the rhetoric of remembrance (Aries, 1978, Sborgi, 1997).

In spite of the primitive Napoleonic concept of rotating burials within the same spaces, the desire to survive one's own demise led to the proliferation of perennial monuments. For two centuries, cemeteries have grown, losing their original form, but accumulating valuable artefacts that have turned them into open-air museums of art, history and customs. Thus, the architecture of memory crystallises the intangible transformations of society and its values in its real spaces. material heritage becomes the image of civic history (Rossi, 2007). Collective structures and private sepulchres juxtapose sacred and profane references conveyed by a strong rhetorical charge, narrating the socio-cultural transformations of the last two centuries, from the primitive secular conception to the contemporary multi-ethnicity (Felicori & Sborgi, 2012).

Up to now, funeral management has ensured the continued use, hence maintenance, of the structures. In the long run, the increased awareness of the testimonial value compensates for the departure of the cult of the dead from a civilisation that rejects death. But in the long run?

The very relationship with society that determined its essence is the cause of a looming crisis (Felicori, 2023). The exponential growth of cremations makes the death of the cemetery predictable. This can only survive by rethinking its use with a transformation that ensures the functional continuity of activities capable of making management sustainable. What is needed, however, is a response capable of adapting over time to the needs of a fluid demand. The legacy of the accumulation of the past offers a design cue based on the physical-digital hybridisation of different disciplines and arts to create new spaces of memory infinitely reconfigurable thanks to the power of images.

RETHINKING PLACES OF MEMORY - HYBRID SPACES FOR A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

In Italian cities, the growth of cemeteries has come to an unexpected halt and has left unfinished the extensions planned to redesign the haphazard expansion of the second half of the last century. Insiders believe a further contraction in the demand for burials and the consequent slow 'depopulation' of the architecture is inevitable.

The latent loss of function will have serious repercussions on the maintenance of cemetery structures and thus on the preservation of the testimonial heritage they contain. In fact, museum valorisation alone is not sustainable from an economic point of view. The prospect pushes towards the adoption of specific measures, such as the recent law of the Emilia Romagna Region¹. The measure defines monumental and historical cemeteries to promote their valorisation in implementation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro 27/10/2005). The law commits the managers to 'organise forms of cooperation in the territory, promoted by the Region for the valorisation, interpretation, dissemination, study and research on the themes of their own pertinence and the identification and valorisation of cultural itineraries, understood as paths, material or immaterial, that gather around themes of cultural, historical, artistic or social interest, naturalistic developing cultural landscapes', with contributions to the interventions of protection and cultural valorisation, also digital. It also

promotes the inclusion of places of memory in tourist circuits (Art. 3, paragraph 1 LR-ER 21 of 15/12/22). Cultural tourism attendance linked to the spread of new forms of slow tourism is growing, but cannot guarantee economically sustainable management. Among the possible uses, those in charge hypothesise the re-functionalisation of urban structures, now encompassed by the expansion of suburbs poor in public spaces and greenery in parallel with the contraction of burial requirements. Authoritative voices envisage the transformation of burial grounds into public parks and the social reuse of twentieth-century buildings, often of poor architectural quality, reserving only the monumental parts for the preservation of ashes (Felicori, 2023). The urban redevelopment of spaces cannot, however, neglect the adaptation of cemetery spaces to new needs, different from the historical ones, because forms and rituals change but the need to remember remains and therefore it is necessary to rethink spaces. Funeral facilities were created to accommodate a special service activity, with a dual function of primary importance and a not inconsiderable economic spin-off:

- public hygiene for which the cemetery was reborn at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries as collective architecture, developing a varied typological research that qualifies it as a collective civic structure;
- the cult of the dead in dynamic societies, which has imprinted the signs of its cultural transformation in private artefacts, which determine the historical and artistic value of a cultural asset of common interest.

The hygienic function has lost its significance, because cremation remains do not require the same precautions as decomposing bodies and the preservation of ashes does not imply large spaces or respectful distances. The memorial function is affected by the transformations of a complex society, in which cultures and customs linked to a different relationship with death and memory coexist, but the pain of mourning remains unchanged.

After the edict of Saint Cloud, the western cemetery developed as a secular and non-denominational monument. Soon, however, references to religious culture emerged and the different faiths of the population marked its layout (Rossi, 2007). Today, religious sensibilities and the ethnic composition of society have changed greatly. They no longer correspond to the connotation of the cemetery and its ability to reflect customs in the image of symbols and effigies (Alberti, 2010). Beyond the differences between religions and between believers, agnostics and atheists, there is a need for an adequate response to the demand for new spaces for mourning. This innate need is alleviated by funeral customs which, in the ritual diversity between cultures, provide for community participation with the collective sharing of grief and remembrance with specific times, spaces and rites. The changing social structure and prevailing forms of burial lead to new rituals and the need for new spaces. To keep the memorial function of the cemetery alive in a society open to social transformation, it must therefore be made inclusive with respect to different sensitivities to the image of memory and its physical spaces.

Images, which have always been linked to the symbols of funeral rites, become the key to the creation of flexible spaces, capable of adapting to different sensibilities and visual cultures. The modern perspective tradition, which with the Quadrature has shown how an opportune projection allows for the visualisation of spaces that are different from the constructed but equally convincing, offers interesting insights into the integration of physical space and digital imagery. The digital image can transform a neutral space and adapt it to the different needs of memory. Digital, virtual and ephemeral frameworks can connote physical space in relation to changing visual cultures and demands, even in support of new non-denominational rituals. Memory is prolonged in the expansion of the digital universe.

IMAGE HERITAGE - VIRTUAL SPACES FOR INCLUSIVE MEMORY

Cemeteries have always been the places of memory of those who have lived and of the manifestation of gestures, rituals, values, ideals, and feelings associated with loss and mourning. They are the symbolic places of inner transcendence, but also containers of historical memory and archives of art, collecting in their enclosures a 'repertoire of knowledge'. These memories, which take the form of images, plant essences, decorations, and highly symbolic architecture, mirror the communities that built and 'lived' them and are an expression of the continuous transformations and evolutions of society over the centuries.

The funerary monument, particularly in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cemeteries, was the guarantor with its rich vegetation of signs of the survival of the identity of an individual or an entire family, recounting their fortunes, virtues and civic and personal deeds (fig. 1 and 2).

The result achieved was on the one hand the condition of immortality and perpetual remembrance of the deceased, as long-lived as the monument itself, and on the other hand the recognition of the cemetery as an enormous library (Urbain 1998), where one could consult biographies and family trees of thousands of people, and search for information on the history of art and customs of a city or nation.



Fig. 1 -Collage of funerary symbols from European cemeteries.

Fig. 2 - Meanings and funerary symbols.

SIGNIFICATI	FLORA	FAUNA CREATURE MITOLOGICHE	OGGETTI / STRUMENTI	PARTI DEL CORPO
AMORE	REHUBERUM			RUSTO / CUORE
ARMONIA		COLOMBA / CROCCIELLA	ARCHIPENDOLO / LAURO / AIPA	
BELLEZZA	ROSA / GALLA	CIGNO		
BUONA CONDOTTA			CADUCEO / SQUADRIA	
CARITA'			MONETE	
COSTANZA	CAMPANULA / GIRASOLE GIACINTO	SALAMANDRA		
CREAZIONE			INCISIONE / CANCELLO	
DIGNITA'	LOTO		PORTA	
DISTRUZIONE		APIA		
DOLORE	SALICE / SPINE	ANGELO		CUORE
ETERNITA'		URIBORDO	CROCHIO / GLOBO / FIANONE	
FEDE	SITE		ANCORA / CANCELLI / LUCERTINA	
FERITA	CICLAMINO			
FERMEZZA			ANCORA / COLONNA	
FERTILITA'	PANOCCHIA / MELA ALBERO DI FIO			
FORZA/POTENZA/CORAGGIO		LEONE / DRAGONE	CASTELLO / BOCCA	MANO / CUORE
FRAGILITA' INIZIALE	SEMI BOCCHIA			
FUGACITA' VITA / CICLICITA' / SCORRERE TEMPO	BESCO	URIBORDO	CLESSIDRA	TESCHIO / TALATO
GIUSTIZIA / GIUDIZIO			ARCHIPENDOLO / BIANCA CANCELO	
GRATITUDINE	CAMPANULA			
IMMORTALITA'	EDIPIA / CIPRESSO / PINA CRISTANTINO / ALLORO / GRANO MELGONANO / AGRIPIODIO	URIBORDO / LIBELLULA / ANIONE / LUCERTOLA		
LEALTA'		CANE		MANO
LIBERTA'			CAZZUOLA	
LONGEVITA'	CRISTANTINO / ROSA	ELEFANTE / TARTARUGA		
LUCE DIVINA / FORZA DIVINA	GRASOLE		RUOTA	
LUSSURIA	ALBERO DI FICO	ROSO / SETTEMBRE		
LUTTO		ANGELO	VELO / DRAPPO	
MATRIMONIO				MANO / CUORE
METAMORFOSI		FARFALLA		
MORTE	PAPABERO	PANE / SEPENTE / CIVETTA	SEDA / COLONNA SPEZZATA / FALCE	TESCHIO
ONESTA'	FELCE			
PACE	ULIVO		ARMI	
PASSIONE CRISTO / REDENZIONE	PASSIFLORA		SCALA	
PAZIENZA		ASINO / TARTARUGA		
PIENEZZA / COMPLETEZZA / TOTALITA'	URIBANTINO	CROCHIO / SIFONONE	GLOBO RUOTA	
POVERTA'		ASINO		
PROSPERITA' / ABBONDANZA	MELA / OLIVERA	UOVO / ELEFANTE	CORNICOPA / GIRLANDE	
PUREZZA / INNOCENZA	MUGHETTO / GIGLIO / MARGHERITA	AGNELLO / COLOMBA	LIBRO	NUDITA'
RESURREZIONE	ACANTO / MARCIANO / ARS / GRANO	DELFINO / GALLO / LUCERTOLA LEONE / PALLINA / PISCIO MAMA FENCICE	RUOTA	
RICORDO	MOLA			
RIGENERAZIONE / RINASCITA	TEDEA / MARCIANO / LOTO PANOCCHIA / MELGONANO	ORIO / LIBELLULA / AQUILA CROCCIELLA	CORCHINGIA / DELUSCO / PIRAMIDE MUSICA	
SACRIFICIO				
SAGGEZZA		PELLICANO		
SONNO	PAPABERO	DELFINO / CIVETTA		
SPERANZA		CIVETTA		
STRAVAGANZA	PAPABERO	CIVETTA	ANCORA	
TENTAZIONE	MELA			
TRASFORMAZIONE		BALENA		
TRINITA' / DIO	TRIFOGLIO		CANCELLO	OCCHIO / MANO
TUTELA		CROCODA	ELEMETTO	
UGUAGLIANZA			CAZZUOLA	
UMILTA'		ASINO		PIEDE
VANITA'	NARCISO			
VERITA'	QUERCA			
VIAGGIO / PERCORSO / PASSAGGIO			BARICA / CONCHIGLIA / VELO DRAPPO / PORTA / SCALA	
VITA	TIBA			
VITALITA'	TRIFOGLIO			
VITTORIA	ALLORO / PALMA			

Contemporary burial spaces, on the other hand, are the outcome of the post-modern rationality of the middle of the last century, of a society that shunned the concept of death, distancing with it also the spaces of remembrance. The cemetery thus becomes a secular 'city of the dead', opposed to and distant from inhabited centres, standardised and homologated by legislation, in which not the memory but the loss of the deceased is celebrated, summarising their life with two dates. Starting from these opposing types of cemeteries, two main attitudes have developed in recent decades: the first aimed at protecting and making historical-monumental cemeteries the shared heritage of the community by recovering their cultural function; the second aimed at giving back to the community the spaces of memory through innovative projects adapted to the transformation of society. The most significant example of the protection of cemeteries of historical and artistic value is the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE) founded in Bologna in 2001 and now networking more than 180 cemeteries in 22 countries. Its activities focus on promoting and raising awareness of the importance of these places, enhancing their historical and artistic significance with the aim of activating cooperation in the promotion, protection, restoration and maintenance of cemeteries. Week of the Discovery of European Cemeteries (WDEC), European Cemeteries route (European Cemeteries route), ARTOUR mobile guide, Symbols project (Symbols project) are just some of the projects that, through new technologies and com-

munity involvement, seek to preserve the historical and ethnographic asset that cemeteries represent (Legniti, 2018).

On the other hand, many scholars, architects and artists try to rewrite thinking about death with projects that are the result of interdisciplinary work, mending the rift between cemeteries and society. New buildings of remembrance are thus being created within the urban fabric or in the buildings of large metropolises, virtual cemeteries, or traditional cemeteries that transform the space for the dead into parks and gardens for the living. The Memorial Necropole Ecumenica, founded in Brazil in 1983, is the world's largest vertical cemetery. A skyscraper designed for those who are no longer there located within the city, becoming a significant part of it and a daily reminder of the existence of death. Another example is that of architect Kiyoshi Takeyama in Nagoya, who has designed a hi-tech room inside the Bansho-Ji Temple where the ashes of the dead can be placed. A space that denies the visual recognisability of personal identity, homologising all the cells with an image of the Buddha. To commemorate one's deceased, the only option is an electronic contactless identification card, which identifies the correct urn by colour and reproduces images and films on some of the monitors present.

Technology and the image is also behind virtual cemeteries such as The World Wide Cemetery, cimiterovirtuale.net and RipCemetery, which offer the possibility of commemorating the deceased by eliminating the constraints of space and time. In these virtual spaces, it is possible to insert photographs and videos, hyperlinks, and messages of condolence so that the memory of the deceased can be passed on to posterity. Capsula mundi and Arborvitae, on the other hand, are two projects that create a cemetery-landscape in which funerary architecture gives way to trees, giving life to an urban park, a place of memory capable of cancelling the distance between the two worlds. An egg-shaped capsule symbolising life and fertility, made of biodegradable material and containing the remains of the deceased, will be buried like a seed. A tree, chosen in life by the deceased, will be planted above as a memorial and legacy for posterity and for the future of society.

Through a careful reinterpretation of the funeral symbols of 19th-century tradition belonging to the plant world, it is thus possible to rethink the spaces left vacant inside cemeteries, thanks to cremations, creating gardens of remembrance that also acquire a social and environmental value for cities, or designing hybrid and customisable parting spaces as an expression of personal identity (fig.3).

CONCLUSION – THE 'PHYGITAL CEMETERY'

In the cemetery, ideal references and artefacts merge into a world suspended between earthly concreteness and immateriality beyond death. In many ways this relationship recalls digital virtuality, capable of infinite accumulation.

The Napoleonic cemetery was born as a rational and efficient time machine. The rotation of burials cyclically renews 'inhabitants' and visitors, bringing them together in an appropriate space. The artefacts erected in memory of the dead, which were intended to remain permanent only for illustrious and well-deserving citizens, perpetuate the memory. The increasing use of cremation jeopardises the preservation of a testimonial heritage of dual material and immaterial value. The cult of memory, kept alive by the effigies and symbols of architecture and their ornamentation, underlines the importance of images and the role that the visual culture of the West can play in the creation of inclusive spaces of commemoration with respect to different cultures and needs.

The immateriality of digital images supports the symbolic value of digital memory, capable of extending beyond the physical place. The barriers of real space dissolve in the new digital universes, where the perpetual preservation of memory will finally be possible. The virtual cemetery can expand indefinitely without interfering with the city of the living.

Fig. 3 - Meanings and funerary symbols of the plant world.



NOTES

1. Regional Law no. 21 of 15 December 2022 - Amendments to Regional Law 24 March 2000, no. 18.

CREDITS

Although the article was conceived jointly, Michela Rossi is the author of the paragraph *Introduction* and *Rethinking Memory Places*, Sara Conte is the author of the paragraph *Image heritage - virtual spaces for inclusive memory and images*. The conclusions were drafted jointly.

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