

Dániel Barcza
Theses of DLA dissertation

SPACE AND LANDSCAPE
Plant architecture in rural cemeteries

Supervisor: Anikó Andor, DLA
Supervisor: István Janáky, DLA

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Doctoral School
Budapest, 2009

Problem statement and rational

A piece legislation that was passed a half century ago drastically changed the environment of rural funerals in Hungary by forbidding the performance of funeral ceremonies in one's house and prescribing that the ceremonies must take place in mortuaries and funeral homes situated in the village's cemetery. The long standing traditions determining the community's sacral life and sacral space linked to death have been abolished and have almost completely disappeared by now. The sacrality, which was previously visualized during the rituals, has vanished and has left behind a painfully profane emptiness. Without architectural traditions to look back to, the local craftsmen fell back on everyday examples to design the funeral homes. This led to the proliferation of mortuaries resembling weekend houses, garages and bus stops. The desperate search for architectural expressions still dominates rural mortuary buildings today.

Research questions, aims and objectives

The state of Hungarian rural cemeteries and funeral houses raise several questions. In the absence of traditions, is it possible to create a new architectural path that gives sacrality to funeral spaces in rural settings? Does sacrality exist independently from religion and what gives its basis? Is it possible to plan sacrality and tradition? The objective of my dissertation and master piece is to answer these questions with the help of plant architecture.

Structure of the dissertation

The first part of my dissertation gives the theoretical background to the master piece. The first chapter in it reviews the processes leading to the current state of rural cemeteries: the traditions related to death and cemeteries and their transformation during the 20th century. This chapter also analyses the spatial and landscape design aspects of the traditions and rituals. The second chapter explores plant architecture, the tool that I use to design my master piece. It gives a short overview of the history and the engineering and technical aspects of plant architecture. The third chapter returns to the questions surrounding sacrality. This chapter looks into the 20th century transition of one of the meanings of sacrality and into how a new interpretation has emerged in arts and architecture. With the help of selected case studies, the

dissertation shows how the relationship between space and landscape can be used to portray the contemporary meaning of sacrality.

Structure of the master piece

The second half of the dissertation contains the plans that together form my master piece. The master piece – *Études for Funeral Homes Made of Plants* – is a collection of designs of rural funeral homes. The master piece roots in the findings of the theoretical research and can be interpreted as its graphic follow-up.

The dissertation is linked to the study carried out by István Janáky and Tamás Herczeg, who have been looking into the architecture of Hungarian rural mortuary buildings and funeral homes. During our work together we have designed funeral homes for cemeteries, in these design plans we have used plants and the building as equal players. After finishing our joint research I continued to experiment: creating open air mortuary buildings made out of plants only.

My mater piece is composed of these designs. The first part consists of design experiments, and focuses on disclosing the opportunities and poetics hidden in plant structures. The 23 design studies all highlight one specific characteristic of plant buildings. The designs are grouped under four topics: (1) *foliage canopy roofs*, (2) *hedge walls*, (3) *dynamic structures* and (4) *traditions and site specific characteristics*.

Designs for three small funeral sites in the cemetery of Tát form the second part of my master piece. These analyze how plant structures behave when placed into a physical and cultural context, and what opportunities are hidden in plant architecture to redefine the relationship between space and landscape.

Complementary to the master piece designs I will construct an installation in the garden of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. I plan to surround an evergreen tree with a three dimensional structure of willow branches. This installation firstly is a model of a design experiment from the first part of the master piece: demonstrating the interplay between deciduous and evergreen plants. Secondly the installation represents the plant structure of the island off the shore of the Tát cemetery. Thirdly the installation is a piece of art of its own.

Findings

1. Symbolic sacrality and the loss of traditions

Over centuries rural communities have created funeral spaces out of everyday life sites with the use of ritual and symbolic tools. Funeral traditions defined the way these sacral spaces were laid out. By the mid 20th century, after changes in health requirements and in the social system, funeral ceremonies were forced to move to mortuary buildings located in cemeteries. The new legislation overwrote the long standing traditions surround death – the processes, the spaces and the modes for conveying sacrality. The old traditions lost their meaning in the new surroundings and slowly faded away. What has been left is the sacral deficit.

2. A new sacrality

The interpretation of sacrality has undergone changes in the 20th century, its connections to religion have been weakened and in the fields of art and architecture a new reading has emerged. Instead of symbolic and depictive methods, the new sacrality is conveyed through direct perceptions, through revealing the ontological face of the world and experiencing the *a priori* reality. As it is illustrated through the old and contemporary examples presented in the dissertation, the redefinition of the relationship between space and landscape and the establishment of the dialogue between the two can play a role in reestablishing the sacrality of funeral spaces and in conveying the new type of sacrality.

3. Plant architecture

Plant buildings are two faced entities. On the one hand they show the signs of human culture: formality, creativity, traditions and history. On the other hand they bear characteristics from nature: dynamics in space and time and seasonal changes. Plant buildings speak two languages, so they can tell stories in a simple and understandable manner, which stories could only be referred to by objects speaking only one language. They can mediate between the created (thematized) and the original (ontological) worlds.

4. Weakness, as design strategy

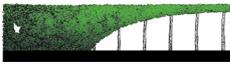
The lost sacrality is still present in rural cemeteries; it has only moved its seat from the center to the peripheries. To put our hands onto it, we have to approach her softly with silent and weak architectural strategy. Plant architecture opens a new path, which via an unpredictable way, possibly leads us to spatial sacrality.

5. The excess that cannot be planned

The sacrality of funeral homes made of plants is given by the added values brought by the plant to the designed layout; the excess that cannot be planned, but that cannot come into existence without the architect.

ÉTUDES FOR FUNERAL HOMES MADE OF PLANTS

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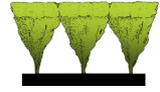
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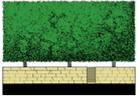
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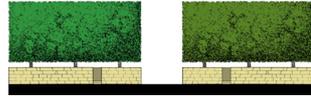
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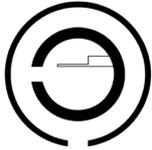
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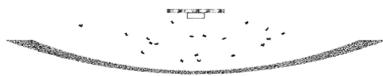
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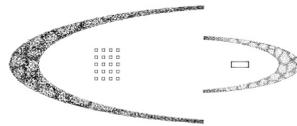
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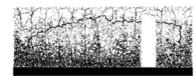
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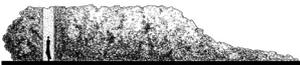
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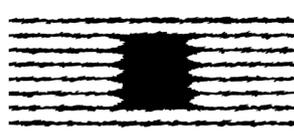
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