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Thresholds: activating the Braamfontein cemetery through an interpretation centre

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2. CONCEPT



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CONCEPT

2.1 PLACE AND NON-PLACE

According to Augé (1997, p81), place is the “established and symbolised sense of an anthropological place (places of identity, relation and history; p52).” By this continues to elaborate that it is something that needs to come alive with journeys. A non- place on the other hand is defined by Auge as “to designate two complementary but distinct realities; spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transit, commerce, leisure, transit) and the relationships individuals have with these spaces (Augé , 1997, p94).
By this, it is suggested that non-places are responsible for the creation of relationships between disconnected spaces.
The cemetery is one such place. It is currently devoid of any widely acknowledged identity. It’s for this reason that it has been easily over-looked by it’s passer-bys. What makes this particular cemetery different is it actually has a rich sense of identity that is under-explored and poorly announced. To someone who does not make use of it’s traditional functions, it currently acts as a latent landmark that is between one destination and another; a suggested connector.

One could further stretch this metaphor by exploring it’s potential as not only a geographical connector but one that links the past to the present through individuals being able to access not only the cemetery grounds but the knowledge behind the events and individuals’ memorials in it.
This is not an attempt to duplicate the spatial characteristics of the cemetery’s immediate neighbours, because after all due to it’s nature, it is fixed in it’s state of otherness. However, the architectural programme attempts to celebrate the non-place by encouraging controlled periods of it being permeated and experienced as a place.

“SPACES OF TEMPORARY AND TRANSIENT ACTIVITY; PLACES THAT COULD BE ANYWHERE, ARE EVERYWHERE BUT ARE NOWHERE”.



http://fc08.deviantart.net/fs70/f/2012/236/5/e/hallway_to_hell__motel_666__by_midnight_vanburen-d5cbld7.jpg



http://crispme.com/the-heterotopia-of-vincent-j-stoker/





http://anotherpotofchai.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/airport.jpg

AN AIRPORT LOUNGE OR TERMINAL:

Between: destinations
Defined by: it's single purpose
As opposed to: a museum because it is a place conceptualised around an experience that is intended to have emotive purpose.



http://ad009cdnb.archdaily.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/197578320_big-reikind-tamayo-iiz-interior-2-528x297.jpg



http://crispme.com/the-heterotopia-of-vincent-j-stoker/

AN ABANDONED BUILDING:

Between: ruin and restoration/disrepair
Defined by: damage and neglect
Place it's opposed to: a functioning building; because it is a destination with an identity and is contained by ownership, use and regular upkeep.



http://cfri.ca/images/room-bookings/cfri2108.jpg



A HIGHWAY:

Between: destinations
Defined by: a singular function: transit
Place it's opposed to: a street; because they are a social spaces designed for people to gather and interact in addition to transit.



http://hanainthailand.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/3.jpg

2.2 BOUNDARIES AND ACCESS INTO PLACES & EXPERIENCES

The allure and dissuasion a cemetery presents is its inaccessibility. Being of significant size (21 hectares), this creates a tension in its contextual urban fabric. Accessing it requires behavioural protocol to be observed. The challenge posed is how to acclimatise pedestrians who enter the cemetery to neither mourn nor pay any homage to the deceased there to the behaviour of people that would.

Crossing over into the cemetery space involves knowing what the boundaries are. The defining perimeters separate in this case, the sacred and the secular. In the context of sacred realms; boundaries range from physical, cultural and spiritual. To cross over to a sacred space, actions akin to ritual are practised. There are different stages of immersion into the sacred. Much like how the lighting and sound are gradually controlled when entering a cinema so not to thrust patrons into the screening rooms directly from the noisy, brightly lit foyers.

Sacred Space: Ancestral spiritual realm
Medium: Trance
Process: Dance and singing

In order to access the ancestors to communicate with them, a sangoma will dance and chant/sing himself into a state of trance. At the peak, the ancestor will "descend" and possess the sangoma in order to clearly communicate with him.



http://i.ytimg.com/vi/CvI4fU2WJ_0/hqdefault.jpg

Sacred Space: Isibaya
Medium: Offering
Process: Announcement, praise

At a Zulu cattle kraal is where it is believed the family's ancestors dwell. Not everyone is allowed inside and entering requires reciting praise names and announcing the visit. The selected people will proceed to the holy place in the kraal to make a request and/or sacrifice.



http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_B5H4eO1llWs/THXC334Z-MI/AAAAAAAAAKs/AzuZnosTtI4/s1600/IMG_1105.JPG

Sacred Space: Church
Medium: Water, body
Process: Genuflection and holy water blessing

When entering most orthodox churches, the ritual of dipping your fingers into holy water near the doorway then making a cross with them on your forehead. You would then go on to bow or genuflect before sitting at a pew.





http://posttrib.suntimes.com/csp/cms/sites/dt.common.streams.StreamServer=image/jpeg

Sacred Space: Temple
Medium: Steps, height, nature
Process: long ascent

Temples and holy places from Japan, Greece and Machu Picchu are at the top of a mountain. Whether at the centre of the city or at the outskirts of one, the temple is distinguished from the secular through the medium of height. Approaching them requires a long, pilgrim-like ascent to the top which spiritually prepares one.



http://www.duskyswondersite.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/bud-mon-hanging-temple-61.jpg

Sacred Space: The Forbidden City
Medium: Water
Process: Crossing over

The 13th century Ming dynast city is a historical gem of Beijing. It remains untouched by the modernity of the city that surrounds it.
A moat surrounds it and acts as a physical barrier between the co-existing cities. Crossing over this moat is an in fact an act of crossing over to another time and cultural space.

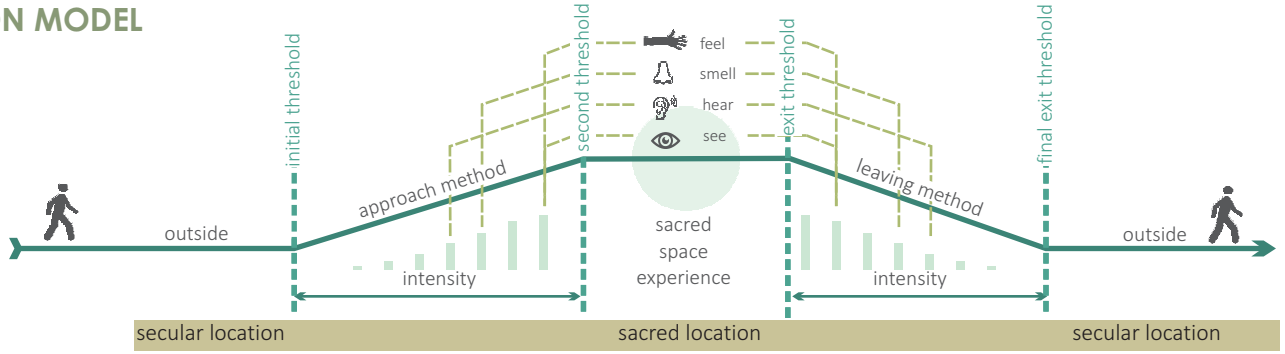


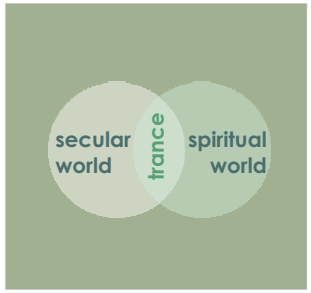
http://static.thecitypictures.net/cache/1890x1920-3/5431.jpg

2.3 THRESHOLD SIMULATION MODEL

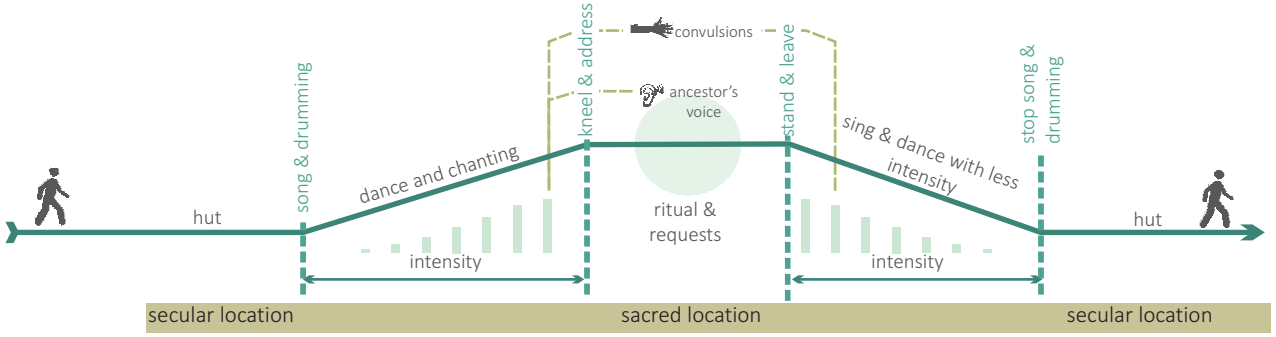


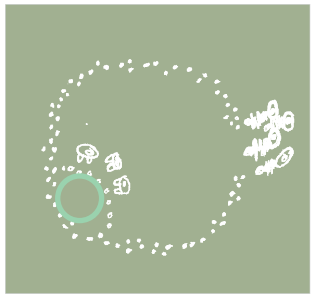
APPROACH SIMULATION



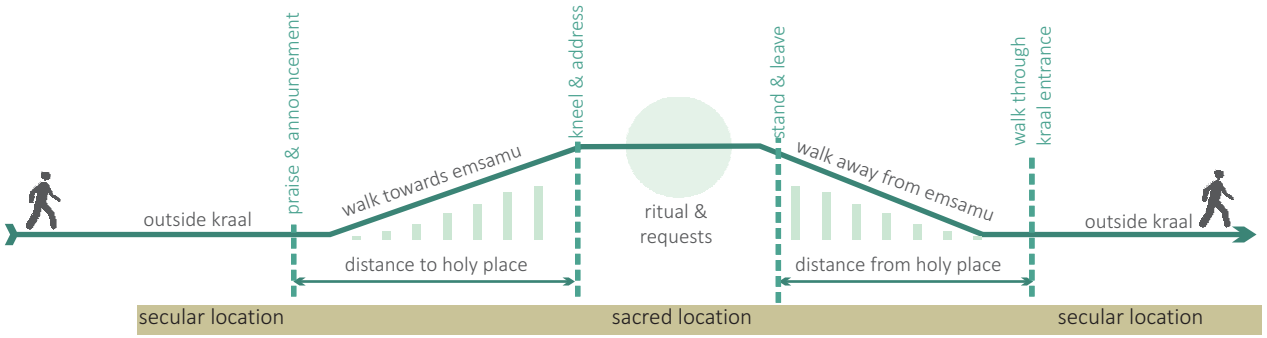


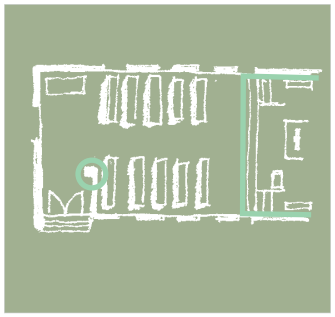
SANGOMA



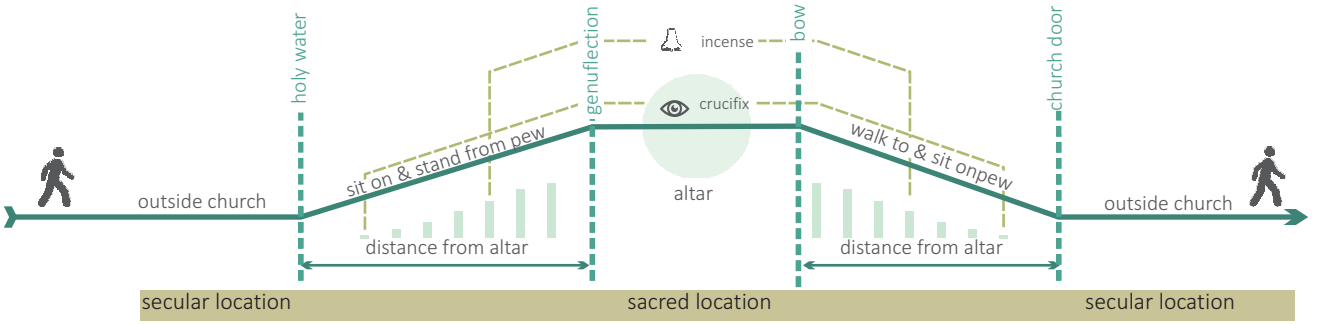


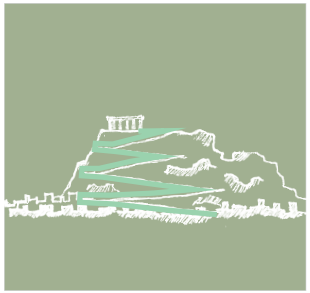
CATTLE KRAAL



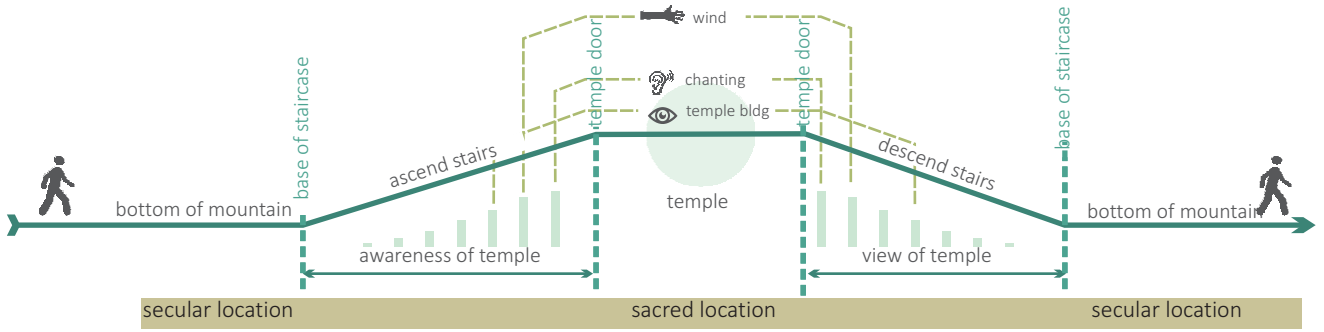


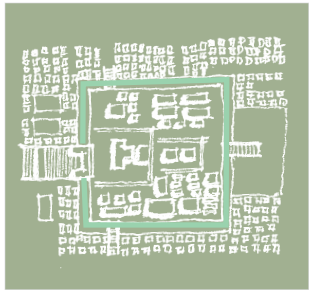
CATHOLIC CHURCH



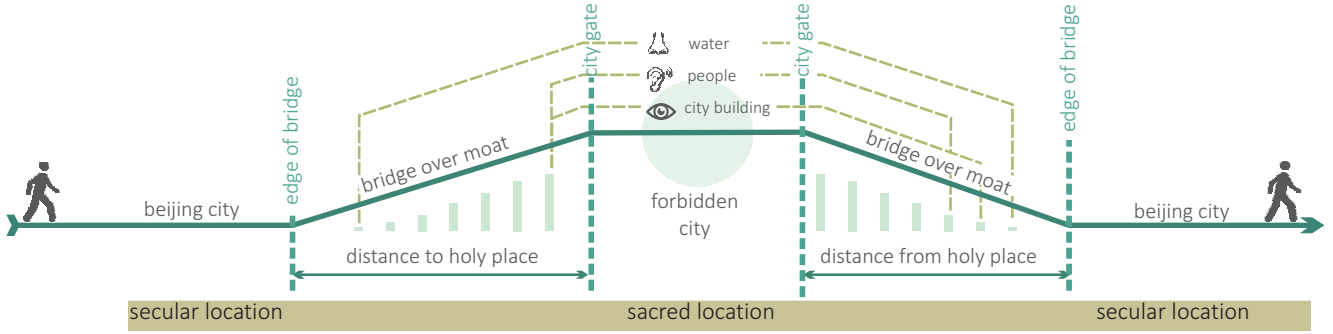


TEMPLE





FORBIDDEN CITY



CONCEPT:

2.4 INTERPRETATION CENTRE FOR BRAAMFONTEIN CEMETERY

As a primary architectural intervention for the integration of the "place and non-place" as represented by the cemetery and it's immediate surroundings (the city), is an interpretation centre.

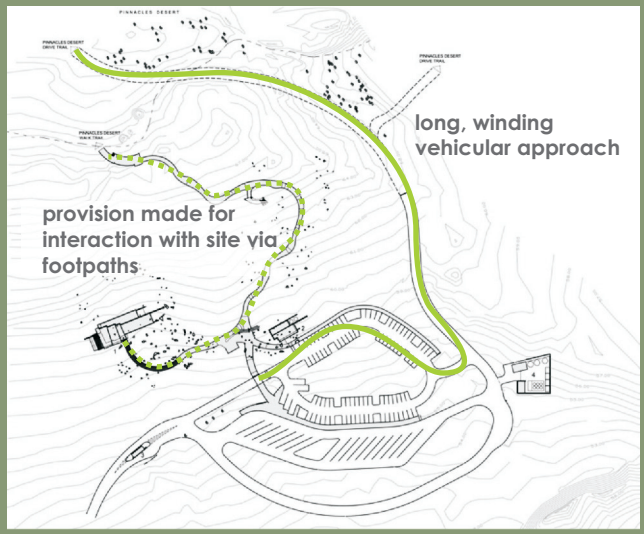
What makes an interpretation centre suitable is the following characteristics it has:

- quiet architectural program
- has an educational function
- usually an intermediary to external people and actual site where its located
- appropriate tool to communicate heritage

All of the above interventions will ensure a fulfilling experience to the visitor while monitoring and protecting the cemetery site by responsibly administering access into it.

2.4.1 PRECEDENT STUDY: PINNACLES INTERPRETATION CENTRE, AUSTRALIA

Pinnacles Interpretation Centre, located in Nambung National Park, West Australia, is a celebration of the landscape it is located. Unique limestone protrusions surround the centre and are the focus of this unique phenomenon. Materials selected were used to compliment those in the landscape to suitably integrate the building to the land.



http://www.archdaily.com/14074/pinnacles-interpretive-centre-woodhead/









◀ Draws tectonic inspiration from the site in order to blend with it easily.

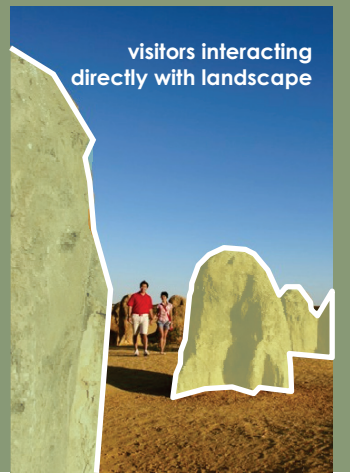
Integrates well in the landscape ▶











2.5 SITE BOUNDARIES

The previous illustrations are of the different manners of arriving at a sacred space as mentioned in the previous page. As illustrated there are sacred and secular layers, each differing in intensity and framed by a threshold. Not only does the threshold need to be acknowledged in order to enter the next space each one serves as a medium of acclimatisation and preparation for the next stage.

The cemetery, the proposed site and the sites' edges each have their own set of boundaries that are physical, psychological and in between. My aim is to identify ones that are relevant to the needs associated to the site program and needs.

2.5.1 THE CEMETERY

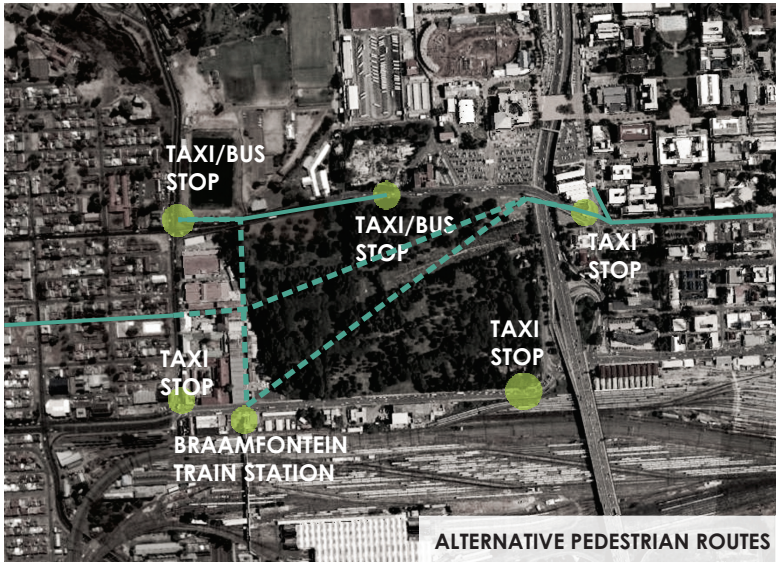
The cemetery is a physical boundary in the sense that it is a massive land mass that cannot be permeated and so must be circumnavigated to reach one's destination.



existing paths

transport stop

Prominent existing pedestrian paths that lead to destinations or the transport stops that lead to destinations. All paths are at the periphery of the cemetery.

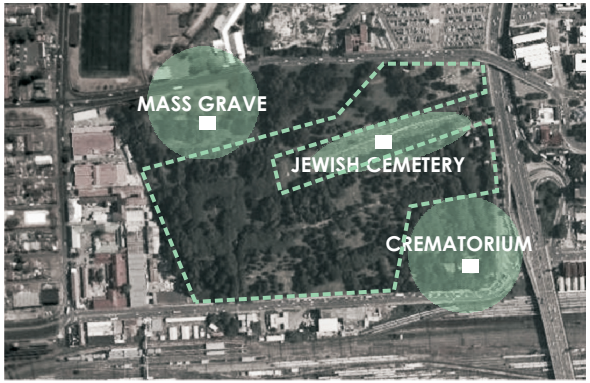


proposed paths

existing paths

transport stop

Proposed alternative paths that would lead to the destinations or desired transport stops quicker while allowing for interaction with the cemetery in safety.

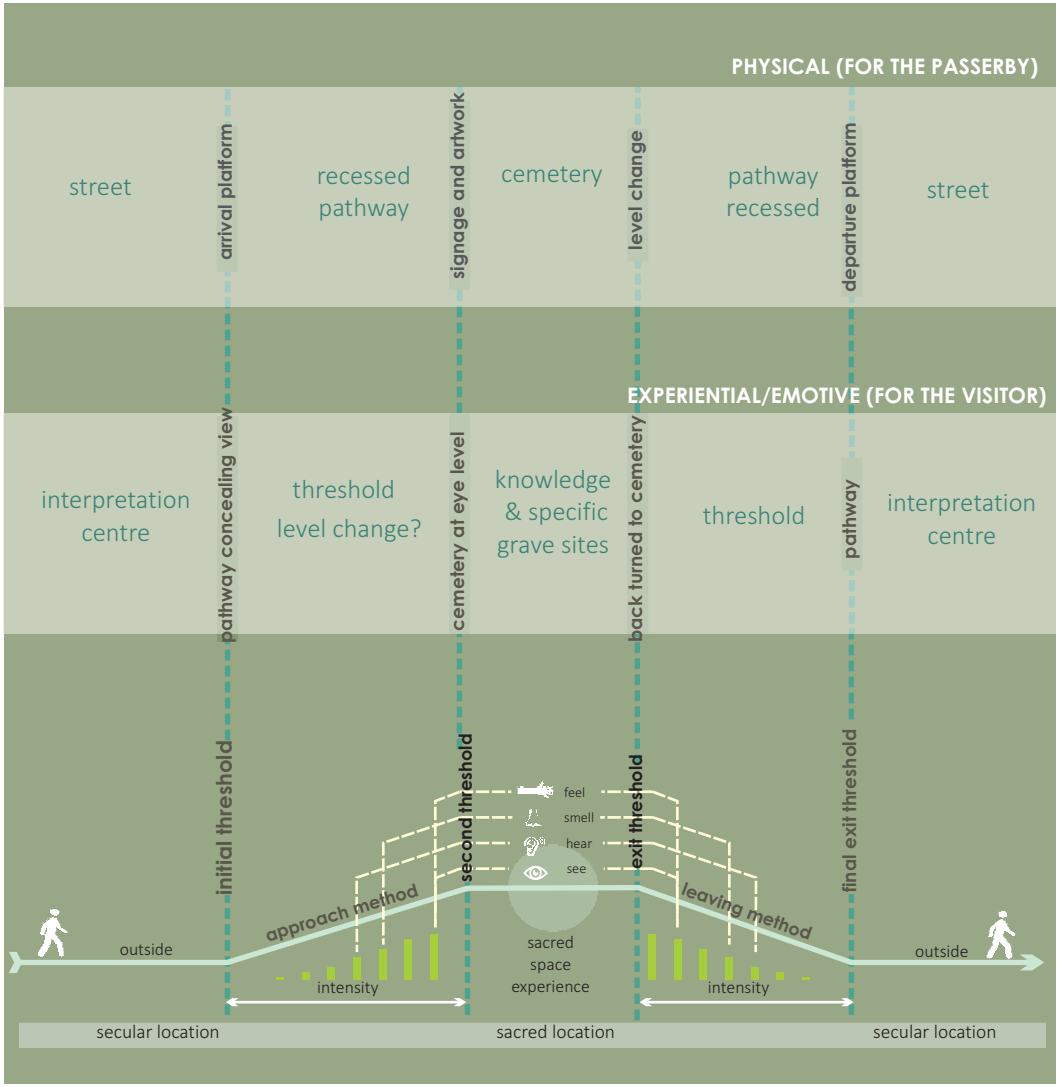


▲ **Areas to avoid secular activity in.**

- **Mass grave:** can't build or excavate
- **Crematorium:** is active and has recent mourners frequenting there.
- **Jewish cemetery:** is fenced off.

In addition, within the cemetery, there are further boundaries that disallow physical access into those parts for people intended for the purpose of the programme.

Therefore, entering the cemetery whether as a visitor (of it and the interpretation centre) or as a passer-by, requires a mindful and layered approach to it.



2.5.2 NON-PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

Perception

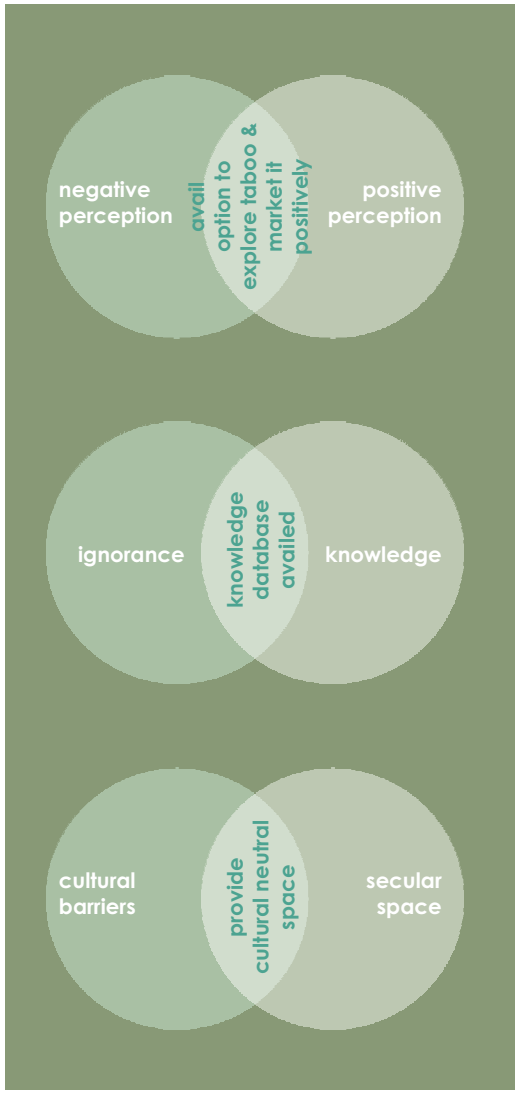
Usually, nobody will willingly walk into a cemetery if it were for no intent or reason. Overcoming the psychological barrier would require acclimatisation and opening the closed sealed space for exploration.

Knowledge

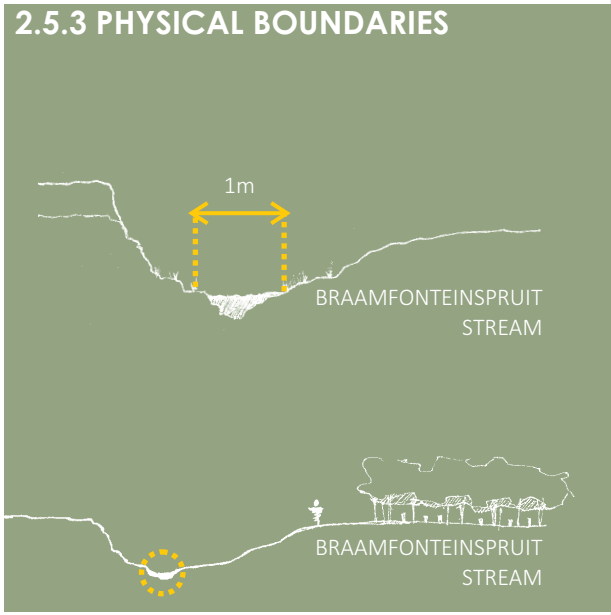
As mentioned during my investigation, knowledge activates memorials and places. While the cemetery's historical and cultural significance remains unknown, this remains a barrier to people's interest to interact with it.
Activating the cemetery will require the organised managing and distribution of this knowledge.

Culture

According to most Southern African cultures, walking amongst the dead is an activity carried out in ones own homestead or during an organised trip to the burial grounds/cemetery.
In both instances, its common for only elders or selected people to do so as the deceased are consulted for ceremonial purposes more than they are visited for sentimental reasons.



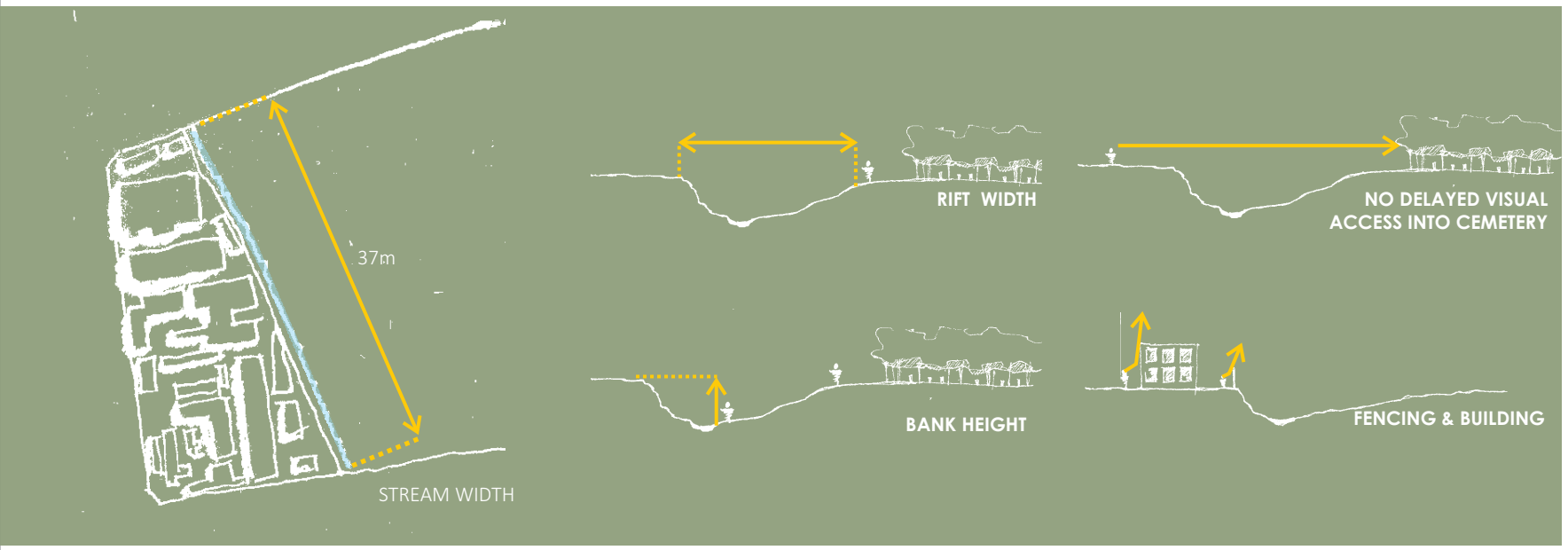
2.5.3 PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES



Braamfontein Spruit

The river, originally called the Klein Jukskei divides the proposed site and the cemetery (Clarke, 2009). It's a relatively smaller stream in that area and swells during the months of August and December. Although a physical barrier, the stream is a significant threshold that signifies cleansing.
This is particularly apt as cleansing is a common feature in ritual which is a threshold activity.

sketch: level
easy view of cemetery



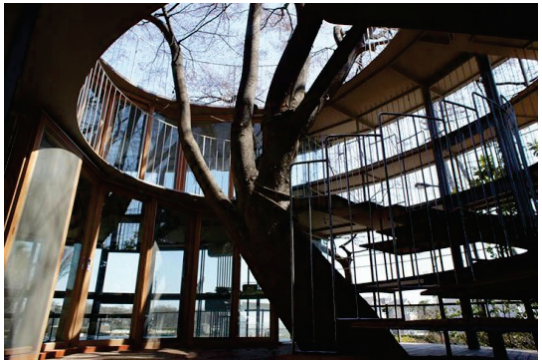


Bank

In addition to the stream creating physical barrier between the sites, it lies at the bottom of a bank. At it's deepest, the bank is 5-6m high and at widest is 9-10m gap between each site.
The bank suggests a deliberate and designed means to cross over.
This also is a metaphorical reference to ritual of leaving one state and place to enter another.



2.5.4 DESIGNING AROUND BOUNDARIES

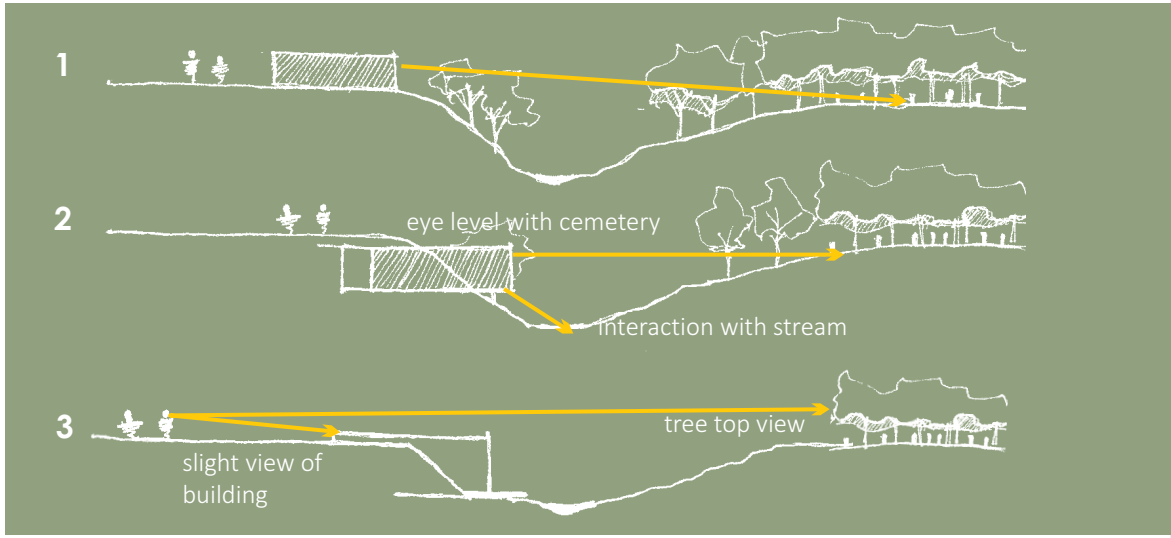


Tetzuka-Architects-
Tree Wrapped Classroom, Japan



Peter Eisenman
Holocaust Memorial, Berlin

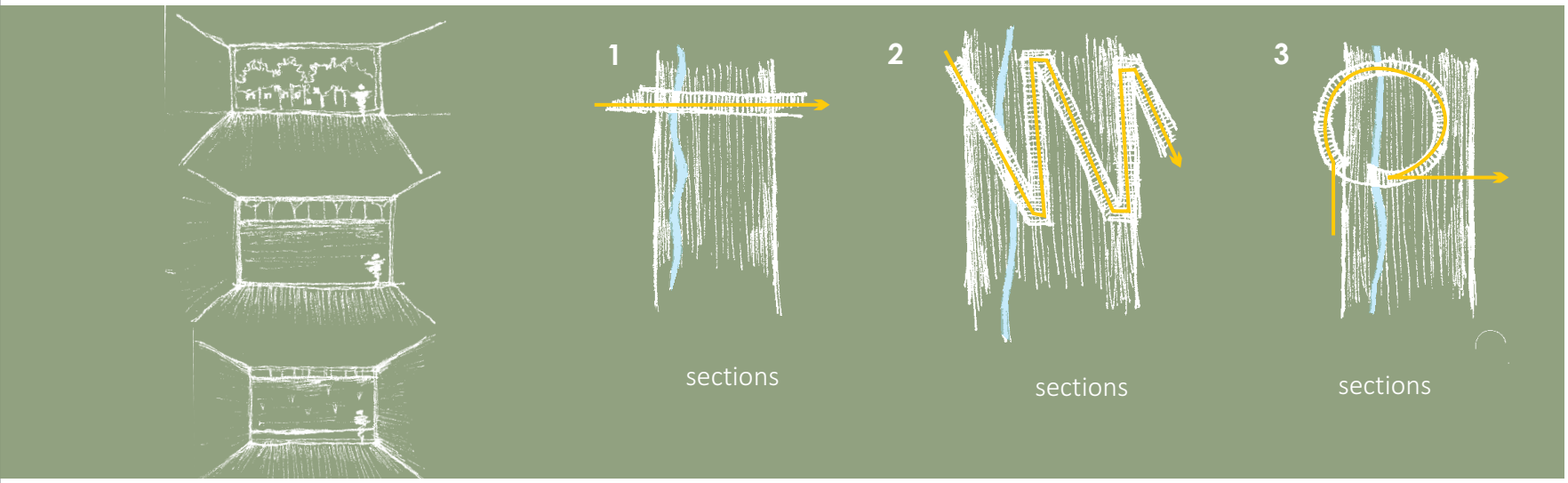
Physical and emotive boundaries negotiated



Position 1: On top of bank
Allows direct views to cemetery to people arriving without acclimatisation the building is completely separate from the cemetery.

Position 2: Concealed in bank
Building is buried; when in it, one can see the cemetery at eye level and stream is visible. The building is not seen at street level and arrival to the exhibition is delayed.

Position 3: Partially buried in the ground
Allows slight visibility at street level but is at eye-level with the cemetery to those inside it. Again, arrival to the exhibition is delayed





Position 1: Straight
The shortest route from the interpretation centre site to the cemetery. There are few opportunities to effectively acclimatise the visitor from one space to the other.

Position 2: Zig-zag
Long and winding option which allows for gradual descend into the cemetery space. Resembles a mountain pilgrimage path.

Position 3: circular
The circle is a sacred form in most cultures and used in many forms during ritual (dancing in a circle, demarcating a holy place etc.). Descending in a circular motion takes advantage of this.



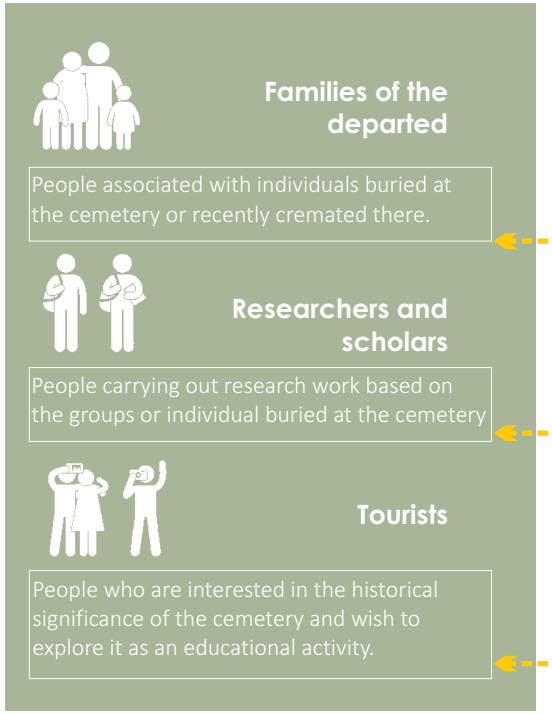




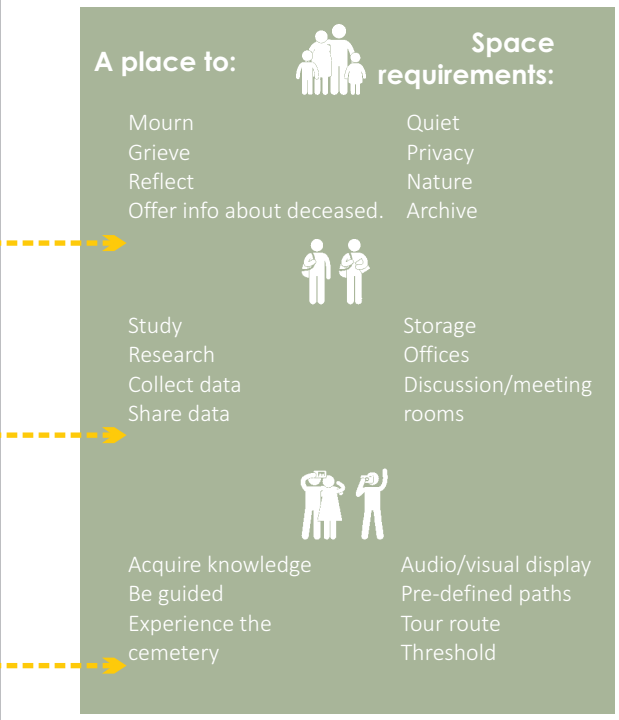
2.6 INTENDED PATRONS

The programme is designed in response to the dormancy issues in the area as explored in previous chapters, the needs of the pedestrians in the area and to preserve the heritage of the cemetery through managing it and providing a knowledge base about it for those who intend on entering it.

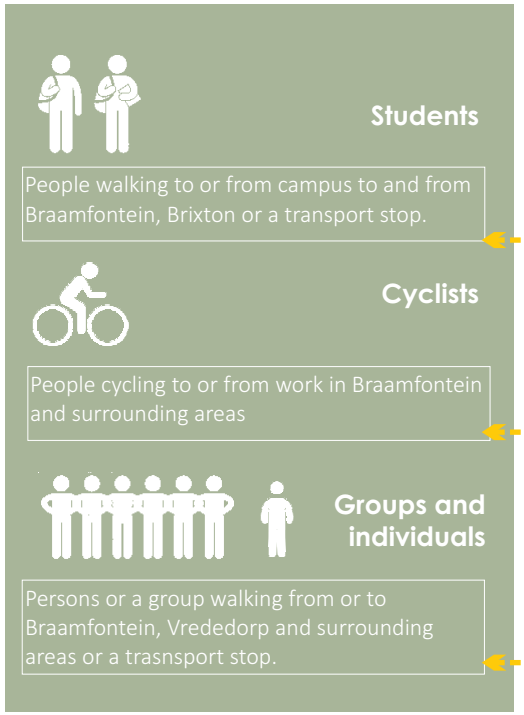
People who will have direct affiliation with the site (other than those that work there) are in one of two groups: the visitors and the pedestrians. Visitors arrive at the site with the intention to enter the cemetery on a guided tour, having learned the historical relevance of it prior to doing so. Pedestrians on the other hand are persons passing through the programme site or cemetery for the sole means to get somewhere else safely and quickly in the scenic backdrop of the Braamfontein cemetery.



Visitors are a group of people who deliberately go to the centre for the sake of learning more about the cemetery and commemorate (or remember) individuals or groups buried or recently cremated there.
They are either visiting the exhibition building or the archive building.



Spaces and functions required for these two buildings are a direct response to the needs of people in this group to ensure a fulfilling experience.

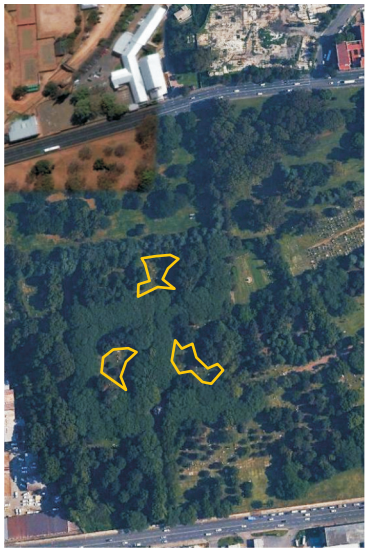


Pedestrians are wide group of people who currently walk *around* the cemetery in order to get to their destination. Since there is no activity in the large expanse of cemetery land, this makes this group vulnerable to safety issues.



Using the cemetery itself as a solution to the navigation and safety issue, it is required that the space and its routes are safe.





2.7 ARCHITECTURE IN THE CEMETERY

There is only a small amount of infrastructure in the cemetery, namely the gatehouse, the crematorium and the keeper's house.
However, when walking through the cemetery, the trees (some aged over 100 years) form clusters and open spaces of varying densities. This forms a pattern of covered spaces and opened spaces; lit 'rooms' and shaded 'rooms'.
These spaces are reminiscent of (albeit crude) architectural forms in the cemetery.



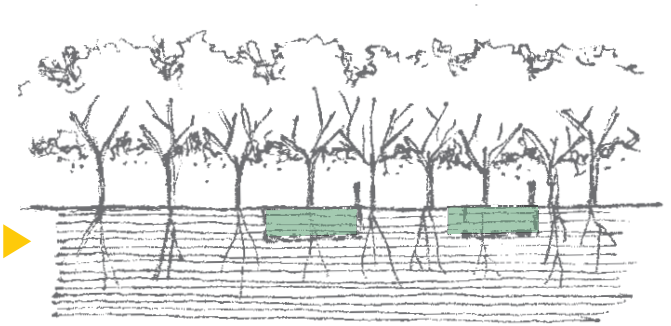
FOREST ROOMS:
Clearings in a heavily-wooded forest create a light-filled space that appears to be like a room.



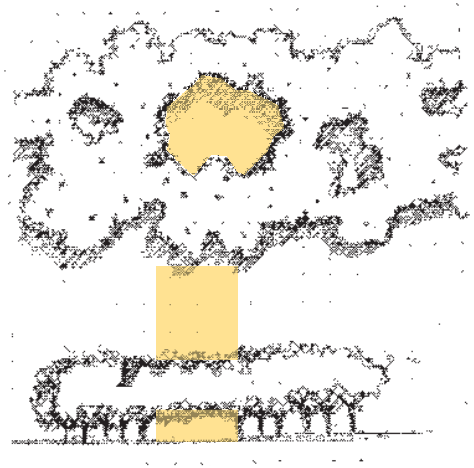




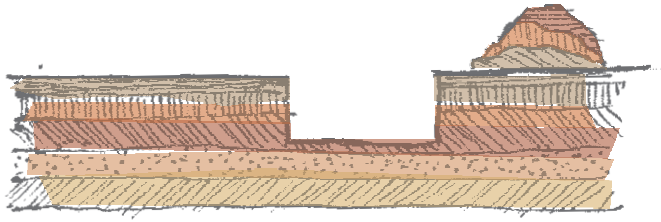
Cemetery with dense trees creating a canopy above graves.



The remains of the departed are housed in beneath the ground

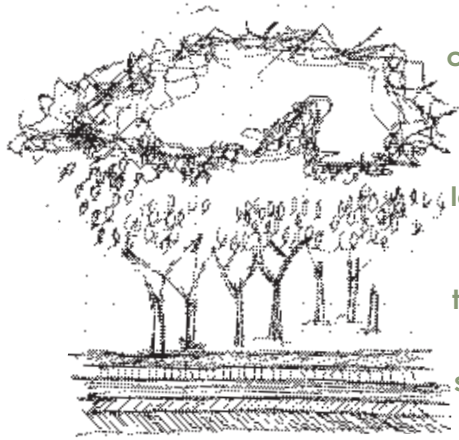


Gaps in canopy as shown from above. Patterns of sporadic forest rooms created by tree density variation in the cemetery.

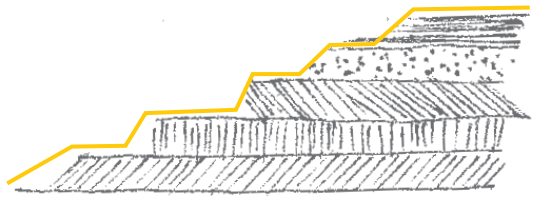


Layers or sediments of the soil are dug out to accommodate the coffin.

Forest room or clearing with shaft of light entering it.



The sediments represent a variation of depth and different soil density the deeper one digs.



The structural formation of a forest room including a foundation, columns, shading