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# ‘Further remarks on modern sepulture’: twenty years of cemetery study and eight core questions defining cemetery research

Julie Rugg  
Cemetery Research Group  
University of York

✉ [julie.rugg@york.ac.uk](mailto:julie.rugg@york.ac.uk)

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## Abstract

This paper reviews cemetery publications over the last twenty years and considers current trends and new directions. In these two decades, cemetery research has included contributions from the humanities, social sciences and sciences and its international reach has expanded substantially, echoing the expansion in geographic scope of death studies. The study of cemeteries has also benefited from a spatial turn within a number of disciplines: within death studies, conceptions of “deathscapes” or “necrosapes” has expanded the range of questions asked of all locations where death is encountered. The paper is ordered using eight core questions that can be asked of any kind of space used for the interment of the dead either as a full body or as cremated remains: how do we define this space?; how has this space come to be?; what does this space mean?; what does this space look like?; how is it used?; what do we express through this space?; how is the space managed? and how is this space valued? The review indicates that

the field of cemetery studies is intrinsically interdisciplinary, where nuance of meaning and degree of significance is best captured in the interstices between and interplay of separate discipline traditions, themes and methods.

## Key Words

Cemeteries, cemetery studies, deathscapes, necropolitics

## Introduction

This review paper updates an article which appeared in 1998 and considered current trends and new directions in cemetery research (Rugg, 1998). Since that time, the study of cemeteries has developed rapidly and made further inroads into disciplines including history, geography, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, politics and economics but also extended out to areas such as theology, management and social policy and into newer fields of inquiry including museum studies, conservation studies and tourism studies. There has also been an increased interest in cemeteries amongst science scholars, and their concerns—in areas relating to chemical pollution and natural habitats—evidence a re-engagement with themes that first emerged in the eighteenth century. Since 1998, the study of cemeteries has become a more markedly international undertaking, extending beyond Northern Europe, North America and Australia into Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia and echoing the expansion in geographic scope of death studies, itself an interdisciplinary endeavour which considers all aspects of mortality. The study of cemeteries has also benefited from a spatial turn within a number of disciplines: within death studies, conceptions of “deathscapes” or “necrosapes” has expanded the range of questions asked of all locations where death is encountered.

This paper is ordered using eight core questions that can be asked of any kind of space used for the interment of the dead either as a full body or as cremated remains: how do we define this space?; how has this space come to be?; what does this space mean?; what does this space look

like?; how is it used?; what do we express through this space?; how is the space managed? and how is this space valued? The review indicates that, within the field of cemetery studies, nuance of meaning and degree of significance is often best captured in the interstices between and interplay of separate discipline traditions, themes and methods.

## **Interdisciplinarity and the study of cemeteries**

Value is generally attached to the practice of “interdisciplinarity” whilst the academic “discipline” as a concept has become contested. It is difficult to maintain that disciplines are bounded fields of academic inquiry: they are, rather, “fragmented and heterogeneous” (Krishnan, 2009: 5). Indeed, a lack of clarity on boundaries is acknowledged by the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines “discipline” as a “branch of learning or knowledge; a field of study or expertise; a subject. Now also: a subcategory or element of a particular subject or field.” This fracturing of disciplines into multiple subdivisions is for many commentators a necessary reflection of the complexity of the world: arguably, the very notion of “disciplines” appears to be less relevant. The personal practices of academia are becoming increasingly unbounded: the internet creates spaces where academics can be at greater liberty to self-curate their own intellectual identity through engagement with specialist networks (Sugimoto and Weingart, 2015).

Notwithstanding these definitional difficulties, consideration of what “discipline” means and how “interdisciplinarity” is practiced creates a useful framework for assessing the current status of cemetery research. This paper argues that cemetery studies is developing into a coherent field. The cemetery itself is often the central focus for investigation: academics are framing questions, devising methods and deploying theoretical stances specifically to understand this particular kind of burial site. It is possible to borrow Buker’s definition, and characterise cemetery studies as a “disciplined mode of inquiry that draws from an interdisciplinary knowledge base” (Buker, 2003: 1). Indeed, the level of interdisciplinarity travels some way into Nissani’s conception of a “fruit smoothie,” where disparate discipline approaches are fully blended

rather than being rather more discretely definable as would be the case in a fruit salad (Nissani, 1995).

Buker indicates that development of any field of study rests in part on forming “shared sets of questions to guide inquiry” (Buker, 2003: 78ff). This paper will use its review of cemetery research over the past twenty years as a means of proposing and testing a set of questions. These questions aim to provoke a revisiting of aspects of cemeteries that can easily be taken for granted, but which merit critical interrogation.

## **What kind of space is this?**

The last twenty years has seen substantial new scholarship attached to the places of burial, reframing the questions that can be applied to cemetery space specifically. Much of this interest reflects a spatial turn in humanities and social sciences, and is explored via the concepts of necrogeography (Semple and Brooks, 2020) and deathscapes (Maddrell and Sidaway, 2016). In any interdisciplinary international endeavour some attention needs to be paid to definitional frameworks. In the case of cemeteries, it is always worth asking why a particular space can be defined specifically as a cemetery. Rugg (2000) proposed that burial sites can be understood through four components: the site’s ownership and purpose; the site’s role in enhancing or obscuring aspects of personal or national identity; the physical features of the space and evidence of design; and degree of “sacredness” judged in terms of pilgrimage to the site, its appropriateness as a setting for the expression of grief and spirituality, its permanence, and the respect afforded to the site. These characteristics were then used to define cemeteries, churchyards, burial grounds, mass graves, war cemeteries and pantheons. The study of cemeteries benefits substantially from researching these and all other types of places where the dead are buried, not least because this kind of study often provokes re-exploration of the characteristics of cemeteries as a mode of interment (Pae *et al.*, 2006).

Studies focussing on churchyards are starting to question the distinctions between churchyard and cemetery in two principal arenas. First, there is evidence that the landscape of the churchyard could be

subject to active design and indeed change over time (Buckham, 2016; Bazaraitė *et al.*, 2018). Further work needs to explore the ways in which Christian Churches of all denominations managed their burial spaces both within the church building itself and in the churchyard, and ways in which evolving management practices were reflected in later cemetery administration. Second, studies on the economics of churchyard burial indicate that this space could be highly commodified (Harding, 2002; Laqueur, 2015; Boulton, 2014); indeed, competition between churchyards and cemeteries was evident (Rugg *et al.*, 2013).

One defining characteristic of cemeteries is the intention that they should serve the whole community. Within this frame, cemeteries can either accommodate or marginalise differences. Early Australian and New Zealand cemeteries were combined parcels of land owned by different Christian denominations (Trapeznik and Gee, 2013). More commonly, cemeteries contain sections for other faiths but some groups seek independent provision. Traditionally, Jewish burial need is often met by the Jewish community itself although—with some exceptions—there has been little academic exploration of this practice within its broader cultural context (Jacobs, 2008). The fate of diasporic Jewish burial grounds has been the focus of anthropological study (Jay, 2017; Pechan Driver, 2018) and attention has been paid to conservation efforts across Europe (Heymann, 2019; Majewska, 2017).

Other studies have considered less formal types of burial grounds used by populations that are subject to extreme marginalisation. Recent work has recognised the importance of such sites in signalling historic injustices. For example, social contexts exemplified by the Black Lives Matters campaign have called for a reframing of the history of slavery and increasing attention has been paid to the protection of slave or plantation burial grounds (Yeoman, 2006). A number of studies have underlined the disregard afforded to marginal burial spaces attached to hospitals and prisons (Philo, 2011, and see also Honderich, 2021) to the burial of indigent people (Sheppard-Simms, 2016), and the destruction of sites sacred to indigenous people (Ralph *et al.*, 2021). Attempts to secure heritage protection for such sites signals restorative justice intent, but this is not always welcomed (Yeoman, 2006).

In even more extreme circumstances, mass burial takes place with no attempt to formalise the place of interment. Research relating to mass burial reflects the occurrence of crisis events and genocide and writing in this area often links to the Foucauldian concept of biopower. Within sociology and anthropology, emergent sub-disciplines relating to terrorism, violence, memory and migration chart the ways in which some types of death rob the body of its individuality and where restitution often relates to the task of reclaiming and naming the dead (Azevado, 2016; Dreyfus and Anstett, 2017; Ferrándiz and Robben, 2015).

War cemeteries are a very particular type of deathscape, where dead bodies are reordered into a statement of national identity built on personal sacrifice. Over the last twenty years, scholarship in this arena has started to explore what might be contested, problematic and political about the creation of war cemeteries, particularly in locations where the victor and the vanquished are not so clearly defined and where conquest redraws national boundaries (Popa, 2013; Raivo, 2004). Welcome exploration has taken place of the liminal places and practices emerging in the immediate aftermath of battle and before any formal reordering of the war dead, when decisions must balance logistics and politics (Faust, 2008). Work has also explored family responses to the military appropriation of the dead and their identity (Tradii, 2019; Stice, 2020).

The notion of “pantheon” expresses some of the political rhetoric inherent in war cemeteries. Burial within a pantheon confers honour to a named individual and places them within a category of special cultural significance: many nations have burial sites where a nation’s military or cultural “genius” resides (Wrigley and Craske, 2004). These pantheons could also be localised: in nineteenth-century Italy, the new monumental cemeteries each contained a *famedio* for citizens regarded as honourable (Malone, 2017). Communist regimes throughout the world have used cemeteries to distinguish party supremoes, although it is no longer necessarily the case that the status of those individuals and sites are respected (Taylor, 2004).

It is likely that scholarship will continue to explore—throughout the whole spectrum of burial site types—the now well-established theme of necrospatial marginalisation. However, more generally, exploration of site

typology could usefully travel further beyond Europe, encompassing—for example—African practices of homestead burial (Parker and Zaal, 2016; Seebach, 2018), and burial at frontiers and margins (De León, 2015).

## How has this space come to be?

It is always valuable to understand a cemetery's establishment both within its particular local historical context and as it relates to the wider meta-narratives of change. The number of historical, archaeological and historical archaeological publications that present accounts of modern cemetery development has increased substantially. Notable contributions have been made by Bertrand on France (Bertrand and Carol, 2016), Fischer on Germany (2001), Nešporová on the Czech Republic (2021) and Cappers on the Netherlands (Cappers, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Scholarship is now well placed to undertake more comparative analysis, perhaps deploying historical institutionalism/path dependency approaches.

A number of themes have emerged from the recent contributions of historians and here three will be mentioned. First, in many nations, the history of burial comprises the struggle of religious authorities to retain control of funerary practice. Through the nineteenth century, across Europe and in colonised regions, cemeteries were sites of conflict between the Church and the state and between opposing denominations (De Spiegeleer, 2019). These conflicts constitute a strong bass note which reverberates still, for example in policy debates on *laïcité* and burial provision in France and Belgium (Fornerod, 2019), the role of the Lutheran Church in Scandinavian cemeteries (Markussen, 2013) and on conflict between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the promoters of cremation (Rotar, 2020).

Second, a number of historical studies have explored the emergence of new conceptions of sanitary burial practices from the second half of the eighteenth century, when the first burial laws began to relocate interments from churches and churchyards to the outskirts of settlements. In particular, attention has been paid to the implementation of the laws, often

1 Much of this paper will be reviewing texts in English.

including localised resistance to change in traditional practices (Tinková, 2011; Marsetič, 2012; Rugg *et al.*, 2013). Of particular interest is the imposition of burial legislation in countries falling under French (Malone, 2017; Bertrand & Carol, 2016) and Russian influence (Pae *et al.*, 2006).

Third, there has been a sustained flow of historical studies relating to cemetery and crematorium provision under Communist and Socialist regimes. These studies have evidenced the ways in which traditional funeral practices were reshaped by political agendas for example, in East Germany (Schulz, 2013), Yugoslavia (Lilly, 2019), Bulgaria (Pashova, 2013), the Czech Republic (Nešporová, 2021) and Russia (Mokhov and Sokolova, 2020). In each of these three themes, cemeteries are understood primarily as locations where authority and identity have been contested and reframed through law and practice. New historical approaches might borrow from Strange (2005) and consider cemeteries in the context of emotional and familial relationship, gathering data on commonplace practices.

The expansion of historical studies beyond Europe is drawing together some less familiar narratives (Aveline-Dubach, 2014; Droz, 2011; Henriot, 2016; Lee and Vaughan, 2008; Minkin, 2013), which introduce a new range of symbolic meanings for cemetery development that step away from presumptions of progressive secularity. These narratives suggest the need for fresh historiographical approaches to understanding the sweep of cemetery history (Rugg, 2018).

## **What does the cemetery mean?**

Historical understandings of cemeteries merge into and inform the next primary question: what does the cemetery mean? The fact that the cemetery is so routinely a location of contested power and identity is a strong indication that cemetery space is sufficiently significant to warrant such contestation. Here it is suggested that scholarship should delve deeper into that meaning and further explore the cemetery as a human response to mortality. Jeden *et al.* (2020) substantially advanced the sophistication of approaches in demonstrating the plurality of ritual spaces within the

cemeteries using historical documentary sources, spatial analysis and mapping technology and qualitative interviews with policy makers. The article is a reminder that cemetery space shapes, enables and restricts ritual expression in response to mortality. There have been long-standing presumptions that the cemetery is a signal of modern secularity (Rugg, 2019b). In actuality, cemeteries are places where individuals express both formal beliefs relating to the afterlife (Venbrux, *et al.* 2013; Garces-Foley, 2015) and less formal “spirituality” and hope (Davies and Rumble, 2012). The requirement to meet the burial needs of Muslim migrants to northern European countries has provoked a new engagement with the theological significance of burial (Rugg, 2016; Fornerod, 2019).

The cemetery also fixes the decomposing body in place. Kristeva's characterisation of the dead human body as “abject” (Kristeva, 1982) is belied by substantial investment in the careful ordering of bodies in cemetery space where families can guarantee protection for their dead. Ruin's chapter gives deeper consideration to the act of burial, and defines the debt of solicitude owed to dead family members. He proposes that an apposite framework for the relationship with human remains is a Heideggerian “being-with” the person who has died: “in tarrying alongside him in their mourning and commemoration, those who have remained behind are *with him* in a mode of respectful solicitude” (Heidegger, 2001: 282 [original emphasis]; Ruin, 2015). Being in physical proximity to the material remains of dead loved ones provides consolation for loss (Rugg, 2018; Jedan *et al.*, 2018). It is this materiality which allows the cemetery to become a site of communication between the dead and the living (Francis *et al.*, 2005). Insufficient attention has been paid to the physicality of the dead body within cemetery studies. Debate relating to grave re-use practices is a fruitful arena for exploration in this regard (Blagojević, 2013; Rugg and Holland, 2017).

## **What does the cemetery look like?**

Three major essay collections have expanded the geographic reach and depth of historic exploration of cemetery architecture and design

(Kmec *et al.*, 2019; Denk and Ziesemer, 2005; Giuffrè *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, the cemetery as a concept and design challenge has continued to engage contemporary practitioners in this field (Sabra and Troyer, 2020). Cemeteries were initially a response to urban densification: delivering burial space at scale whilst offering respect for individuality—at least, for those able to pay—continues to be a central challenge. Contemporary cemetery design has attempted to resolve the issue of space restrictions, for example, through new storage models for cremated remains (Siu, 2005) and the creation of vertical spaces (Hariyono, 2015). Effective design responses have attempted to understand the meaning of cultural preferences, and—again—the most interesting work sits in the intersections between design and aesthetics, psychology and urban policy. However, it is notable that economic considerations and affordability for users are rarely central to the design endeavour and, so far, little work has been undertaken to explore user response to highly densified models.

There has been perhaps rather more discussion in the last twenty years of the cemetery as a natural landscape, reflecting the growing global engagement with the concept of “woodland” or natural burial, where interment takes place in a naturalistic setting. Substantial new scholarship has explored iterations of woodland cemeteries throughout the world (for example, Balonier *et al.* 2019; Boret, 2012). Clayden *et al.*, 2015 includes detailed landscape analysis which pinpoints the sometimes messy contravention of regulations by cemetery users, again suggesting that evidence of user behaviours within “high concept” cemetery designs should not be overlooked.

## **How do we use these spaces?**

Ethnography introduces a method that is essential to cemetery studies: close observation of behaviour and analysis of associated meaning-making. Francis *et al.*'s substantial examination of behaviour in London cemeteries demonstrated the significance of the grave as domestic space, where gardening demonstrated an on-going solicitude for the corpse and the continuation of active dialogue with the deceased (Francis *et al.*, 2005).

A similar method was adopted in a study of three Piedmontese cemeteries, which aimed to capture change in the meanings of the cemetery as social space (Gusman and Vargas, 2009); and a programme of research on woodland burial in the UK encompassed both ethnographic elements and anthropological approaches, including having a member of the research team live near and work in a woodland burial site for three months (Clayden *et al.*, 2015). Håland (2014), in looking at Greek death rituals, chose to focus on the role of women specifically and this is a reminder of the paucity of references to gender in the field of cemetery studies. Ethnographic methods have also been used to consider the behaviour of visitors to burial spaces by individuals who were not mourners, exploring the myriad purposes burial space can serve in the urban environment (Evensen *et al.*, 2017; Deering, 2010).

Cemetery visits have also attracted quantitative approaches which have asked important questions, for example, around religion and commemorative behaviour and emotional responses to burial space (Colombo and Vlach, 2021; Yan Lai *et al.*, 2020). Most research on cemetery use has comprised sociological engagement using mixed or qualitative methods (Bachelor, 2014; Venbrux *et al.*, 2013). Within sociology, the study of cemetery use often takes change as a starting point, aiming to identify and assign meaning to new trends in ritual practice. Cremation and the creation of cremation-related rituals was a central concern of early death scholarship; more recent research has engaged with the practices associated with natural burial and with increasing freedom attached to the disposal of cremated remains, outside the formal bounds of cemetery spaces (Mathijssen, 2017; Vaczi, 2014). Globally, attention is being paid to changes in traditional practice provoked by massive urban expansion and population densification (Aveline-Dubach, 2014; Kong, 2014; Lazzarotti, 2014; Tremlett, 2007).

Integrated into the studies that explore change, but also expanding out from that focus, is work relating to analysis of grave markers. The emotional significance of cemeteries rests in part on its accumulated material expressions of individual loss. Academics offer varied readings of this commemorative landscape; grief and loss are not always central concerns. Art historians have long been engaged in assessing the sculptural

and design quality of funerary monuments, change over time and the influence of particular monument designers across Europe (Berresford, 2004; Denk and Ziesemer, 2005; Georgitsoyanni, 2019). In cultures where memorials are less sculptural, archaeologists have often focussed on creating typologies and recording headstone features. A new strand of work in this area promises a greater level of theoretical depth, combining material and spatial turns to explore the cemetery as relational space in which material expression becomes sedimented over time (Streb and Kolnberger, 2019).

There is a growing trend in applying linguistic analysis to inscriptions, where the sheer number of individual inscriptions and their value as a diachronic dataset suggests quantitative analysis, contributing essential material on vernacular expressions of loss, grief and spiritual hope (Anderson *et al.*, 2011; Herat, 2014). Other studies have considered the design of grave markers and the inclusion of symbolic images, photographs and other indicators of the personality of the person who died (Vanderstraeten, 2009). Gaps in this arena remain, including data collection on decision-making around memorial choices and a better understanding of the ways in which the memorial industry responds to individual demand and introduces new fashions in memorial design.

A freshly emergent area of research looks specifically at the ways in which cemeteries facilitate distinctive commemorative practices around the loss of children, babies and stillborn infants (Charrier and Clavandier, 2019; Nolin, 2017; Sørensen, 2011). This work also explores the material expression of parental loss through the act of curating and re-curating ephemeral items on the grave as the child ages in imagined time (Christensen and Sandvik, 2014).

The leaving of ephemeral items is a reminder of the non-material affordances of cemeteries. Ritual activity on the day of the funeral extends spatially from chapels or memorial halls, and temporally in annual community commemorative events. Actions will include procession to the grave, rituals on interment and community involvement in backfilling the grave. These elements of funerary ritual can be marked in Eastern European countries with Orthodox Church traditions (Mokhov, 2022; Pavićević, 2021). In many cultures it is common to return to the cemetery

on a specific day in the liturgical calendar: Roman Catholic countries observe a blessing of the graves at All Souls', and similar practices take place within the Orthodox Church, for example *zadušnice* in Serbia where candles are lit and food is shared (Pavićević, 2021). There has been some interest in the "re-invention" of All Souls' practices in the Netherlands (Arfman, 2014).

Discussion of uses of the cemetery can be linked to the rapidly burgeoning field of Memory Studies. This subject underlines the fluid nature of memory formulation, and considers cemeteries as malleable *lieux de mémoire*, particularly in highly contested political contexts (Yea, 2002; Spira, 2014).

## **What do we express through cemeteries?**

Sociology has, as a discipline, come to the cemetery via a number of pathways and here space will restrict discussion to four major themes. The cemetery holds considerable "semiotic depth" (Sautkin, 2016: 661) and is a site where people express who they are in relationship to each other and the wider community. This theme explores the use of funeral practices by ethnic groups to evidence cultural retention and resistance to assimilation and has been particularly strongly pursued by academics based in the US. Here, a long tradition of global migration has created a nation of multiple identities: burial grounds dedicated to use by specific cultural groups have become commonplace (Amanik and Fletcher, 2020). Accommodating migrant identity can also be seen as an opportunity to promote inclusivity. Research in Northern Europe has addressed how cemeteries and burial law can be adapted to meet the needs of Muslim migrants to European cities (Ahaddour and Broeckaert, 2017; Akšamija, 2014; Klapetek, 2017; van der Breemer, 2021). This theme has wider geographic relevance. Onoma (2018) explored why some settlements in Senegal include faith-segregated cemeteries and others have cemeteries operating for all faiths. The paper integrated analysis of historical sources and ethnographic approaches and in doing so underlined the importance of understanding of both the modes of migration

and the impact of proselytization on the dynamic formation of religious community identity.

A second theme explores the symbolic deployment of power and resistance. Foucauldian concepts of biopolitical governmentality and cemeteries have been examined in the historic context (Johnson, 2008) but rarely deployed in contemporary settings (Matthey *et al.*, 2013). Leshem observed a lacuna in studies addressing the nexus between necropolitics and necrogeography, which he explored in a study of political tensions arising over an ancient Muslim burial site in Jerusalem (Leshem, 2015, see also Balkan, 2019). Certainly this is an arena where further exploration would be fruitful.

A third theme that has also been explored rather more thoroughly in a historic context is ways in which social class is expressed in the cemetery. The last twenty years has seen a substantial increase in wealth inequality, and this has been expressed in the cemetery context: the financialisation of cemetery services has created new iterations of funerary exclusion (Rugg, 2020). Research might also usefully focus on the agency of excluded classes, and consider how funeral rituals are refined and reframed in circumstances where economic resources are constrained. Other iterations of class refer to conceptions of taste. Here it is useful to touch on Bourdieu's conception of "habitus" and reflect on ways in which particular social collectives are defined by cemetery behaviour. Howarth (2007) has commented on the absence of class analysis from death studies in the UK and this call suggests the value of considering the varied ways in which class can define cemetery use. For example, class-related differences in aesthetic sensibility can restrict modes of commemorative expression regarded as "tasteless" or in some way inappropriate (Rugg, 2013).

There are links here with the fourth theme, which creates connections between the study of consumerism and the ways in which the grave and commemorative practice might be regarded as "commodity" purchases. Tremlett draws on a number of themes in discussing changing funerary practices in Taipei and Manila, and posits the view that some elements of society are likely to adhere to higher-cost traditional practices as a status marker (Tremlett, 2007). Academics have also considered the

market in new alternative modes of body disposal (Canning *et al.*, 2016) and the role of consumerism as an essential element in defining funerary choice over time (Rugg, 2018).

## How do we order cemeteries?

Cemeteries sit within what has been described as the “nomosphere” or the spatial materialisation of the legal (Matthey *et al.*, 2013). The cemetery constitutes an ordering of the dead within a complex network of laws and regulations that govern how demand for burial space can be defined; how sites can be owned and managed; where the dead can be; and the contractual arrangements specifying how a grave is used and reused. Recent work in this arena has begun to draw on very disparate disciplines. Planning for the dead has emerged as a particularly strong theme in recent years. A number of studies have reported straightforward population projections (Ibhadode *et al.*, 2017), but rather more significant work in this arena has sought to understand the nature of funerary preferences and how this might frame demand analysis (Davies and Bennett, 2016; Allam, 2019). Laws restricting where the dead can legally be interred generally reflect scientific understanding of the polluting nature of decomposing human remains, coffins and coffin material (Neckel *et al.*, 2017; Fiedler *et al.*, 2018; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2018), and evidence a long-standing association between cemeteries and the technologies of sanitary practice (Rugg, 2019a). Scientific studies now often acknowledge the challenge of balancing the social significance of burial space and the need to meet broader ecological and public health agendas (Uslu *et al.*, 2009).

Modes of owning the grave are very rarely the subject of academic exploration. Conway is one exception: her work includes discussion of the familial tensions arising from grave lease ownership disputes (Conway, 2016). Nevertheless, grave tenure is an integral element to cemetery systems: modes of controlling grave use and re-use evidence both spatial and temporal inequalities (Rugg, 2020). Further, grave re-use defines how a cemetery “works” as a dynamic process of continual reordering:

bodies are placed in cemeteries to be remembered and then eventually forgotten. This theme is markedly under-developed, and suggests that the concept of time should be rather more central to cemetery studies. Precarity and perpetuity are temporal expressions that are highly relevant to the consumption of cemetery space, and link with the materiality of bodily decomposition (Santarsiero *et al.*, 2000).

Finally, cemetery ordering is also effected through professional management and policy implementation. Again, this aspect of cemeteries tends to be under-researched: studies are recognising cemetery management as a specific local government function (Woodthorpe, 2011; Zavattaro, 2020), and are addressing the task of defining basic national differences in approach (Kjøller, 2012). Bayatrizi and Ghorbani (2019) explore the professionalization of ritual in Iran's largest cemeteries, where the scale of operation requires highly efficient technical and bureaucratic operation. Matthey *et al.* adopt a more strongly theoretical framework and define cemetery managers as "nomosphere technicians," drawing on Foucauldian theory to define "the administration of cemeteries as a means of governance" (2013: 429). Conversely, the challenge of cemetery administration in poorly-functioning states is also emerging as a theme (Mokhov and Sokolova, 2020; Douglas, 2013).

A small number of studies have addressed the economic challenge of cemetery management within a municipal context (Longoria, 2014; Rugg, 2016). Cemetery pricing structures have been the subject of economic consideration and have demonstrated some understanding of the complexity of grave tenure (Faye and Channac, 2016). Again this is an area that requires further exploration, particularly in understanding the relationship between local taxation and subsidy, fee setting and welfare support in defining the way in which burial is construed as a citizen right or a commodity purchase (Rugg, 2020).

## **How do we value cemeteries?**

The final question in this series of eight asks how the cemetery is valued. "Value" is defined as the worth attached to cemetery space in terms

of the benefits it delivers back to the community and here there are two broad subject areas. First, the cultural value of cemeteries is evidenced in attempts to categorise that value and in the conservation resource dedicated to historic cemetery protection. There is a substantial practitioner literature relating to conservation techniques which will not be reviewed here. Academic debate has offered some commentary on the uncertain progress of cemetery conservation in particular countries (Gecse-Tar, 2011; Rugg, 2017). Nevertheless, the significance of the cemetery as a “heritage asset” is now well-established and there has been a proliferation of interpretative materials and events at sites deemed to be nationally, regionally and often simply locally important. Much of this literature relates to rapidly growing interest in cemetery tourism, and the meaning of cemetery tourist visits as they relate to the concept of “dark tourism” (Sobotka, and Długozima, 2015; Tomašević, 2018; Seaton *et al.*, 2015). However there is, arguably, need for further debate to elucidate the relationship between cemetery tourism and funerary heritage (Rugg, 2021 forthcoming).

Second, cemeteries are also valued in terms of their contribution to urban green space. In recent years there has been close scientific scrutiny of the biodiversity benefits delivered by cemeteries as long-undisturbed urban green spaces where mature trees can contribute substantially to carbon capture (Čanády and Mošanský, 2017) A comprehensive review by Löki *et al.* (2019) called for active management to preserve and enhance biodiversity, and also recognised the “tightly interwoven” nature of conservation and spirituality within these spaces. Recent studies—particularly in Scandinavia—have reviewed the multiple leisure uses made of cemeteries (eg Grabalov and Nordh, 2020); other research has started to explore their possible restorative qualities (Yan Lai *et al.*, 2020).

## Conclusion

This review of current trends and new directions in cemetery research evidenced substantial academic engagement over the past two decades: the cemetery is sufficiently intriguing as an idea, space, process and

practice to elicit academic attention within humanities, social science and science disciplines. Indeed, this paper has demonstrated that cemetery research benefits substantially from collaborative approaches incorporating multiple disciplines. These approaches are better able to accommodate the semiotic complexity of this particular kind of burial space, with its particular affordances for material, natural and ritual expression. Multidisciplinarity as an approach requires attention to the development of shared vocabularies (Bracken and Oughton, 2006), and is a fruitful context for the interrogation of basic presumptions. Indeed, international collaboration across languages creates the possibility of exploring the etymology of the words used to define different spaces of interment, of graves, monuments and funeral practices to elucidate the tenor of their embedded connotations (Libert, 2017).

The review has introduced eight core questions to guide cemetery research. In answering these questions it has become evident that the study of cemeteries can be likened to a complex woven fabric: pulling at one thread very quickly demonstrates the strength of its connection to others, and patterns within the fabric frequently repeat but in different colourways. Nevertheless, it is hoped that these questions will provoke a deeper critical interrogation of aspects of cemeteries that appear self-evident, and contribute a schema for further interdisciplinary exploration. This review has also indicated a number of possible new avenues for research, indicating that—withstanding substantial advances—there are tremendous lacunae that invite first-time exploration.

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