The Aesthetics of Death:
The Role of Architecture in Our Experience of Death in the Modern Era

by

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DEDICATION

FOR MOM, DAD AND ROBIN.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Human perception towards death has fluctuated enormously throughout history. As Western culture has moved through periods of pagan worship, extreme religiosity and into the spiritual decline of modernity, our relationship to death has slowly eroded, creating a dilemma unique to the modern era. The representation of death in Western art provides us with an opportunity to further understand these changes through narrative and iconography as the work of the artist often speaks a truth other sources cannot or will not. These explorations have revealed a onetime reverence, a time when death was considered something meaningful and to be taken calmly. As a culture, we have moved so far beyond this through various aspects of modernity, namely the loss of our collective narratives, and the medicalization of death, to the point where we have forgotten entirely *how to die* and are now perhaps 'death-phobic'.

The institutionalization of our death is as much an architectural problem as it is one of bureaucracy, and demands our attention. The spaces we die in are continuations of the medical machinery with little regard to the beauty and profundity of these last moments. The typology currently in use is predicated on technology and the institution. A move away from this, toward thoughtfulness, clarity and connection to a place is required if we are to abandon our current relationship with Death and once again remember *how to die* in a more meaningful and beautiful way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> For we are only the rind and the leaf, the great
> death, that each of us carries inside, is the fruit.
> everything enfolds it.[1]

Death has always accompanied Life. The enigmatic end of a living being has occupied society's mind for as long as our collective memory can recall. It is believed that humans are alone in the a priori knowledge of their own personal deaths and the deaths of others. This awareness coupled with our emotional attachments and understandings makes us particularly susceptible to sadness, grief and anxiety. The omnipresence and unknowns surrounding deathn have filled mankind with a disquiet and wonder that has perplexed cultures for millennia at all strata of society, from peasants to popes. As a cultured response to these anxieties, society would create and maintain narratives to temper the fear and uncertainties associated with death and dying and allow for proper preparation, both spiritual and practical. These narratives existed as a manner of understanding and coping, and placed the dying within a human continuum where they would not feel isolated but rather contextualized and protected within the story itself. As centuries passed, these narratives changed form or were lost entirely, resulting in drastic transformations in the perception towards, and of, death. Periods of intense religiosity placed focus on reaching heaven, leaving

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1 Rainier Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, trans. by A. Barrows and J. Macy (New York: Riverhead, 1996), 132.

one's time on Earth as something temporary while the spiritual decline of modernity stripped society of any chance of a meaningful death. Contemporary scholars, counsellors and philosophers have suggested that this lack of a collective narrative combined with the medicalization of our death has created a culture that has forgotten entirely how to die and are now 'death phobic'. [2]

The degradation of these narratives through the widespread secularization of Western society is only one aspect of the toll modernity has taken in regards to our deaths. The medical machine has taken a one-time reverence towards death, a thing both spiritual and physical and focused solely on the convalescence of the body, leaving the soul abandoned and in a state of existential terror. The scientific achievements turned technological dependence has infiltrated our medical system and is responsible for the institutionalization of death and dying and our fundamentally flawed relationship towards death. This dependence developed following the Enlightenment and continued through the 19th century to today, where through medical technology we are able to extend the lives of those previously considered terminal. Obviously considered a virtue, it is important to note that this prolongation of life, in some scenarios prolongs also the dying and therefore the suffering of all those involved. The technological achievements of the

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2   Stephen Jenkinson, *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul.* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 222.

past 200 years have translated into medical promises which cannot always be fulfilled, and as a result have altered fundamentally the way in which we perceive death. Twentieth Century Philosopher H.G Gadamer believed that the technological advancements of Modernity "has brought about a "demythologizing of death"[3] clearly relating the importance of the lost narrative and how this perception is particular to us, now: "It is a radical and specifically contemporary occurrence…the gradual disappearance of death in modern society… which has now taken hold of every section of the population and which is entirely based on the technological control of reality facilitated by the dazzling achievements of modern science." [4] We are no longer able to fully accept the presence of death, as medical technology has programed us to faithfully think, and hope otherwise.

Our unquestionable faith in technology, science and progress is another aspect entirely peculiar to Modernity, which in turn, according to Poet Octavio Paz is "an exclusively Western concept that has no equivalent in other civilizations." [5] This stems from our unique perception of time, no longer cyclical but linear, irreversible and progressive. [6] A cyclical notion of time allows for the value of the past and its traditions to inform the present and the fu-

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3   H.G. Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health,* trans. J Gaiger & N. Walker (Stanford: University Press, 1996), 61.

4   Ibid., 61.

5   Octavio Paz, *The Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant- Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 23.

6   Ibid., 23.

ture. Models like this have existed, "such as that of classical antiquity by which the distant past represented an ideal that would return at some time in the future"[7] writes Hilde Heynen in her *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*. She states that a gradual degradation of the cyclical model began in the Renaissance resulting in being "definitively replaced by a progressive model that viewed every age as unique and unrepeatable and as an advance on the achievements of the previous period."[8] With this began the breakdown of the narrative as well as the unflinching faith in technology and progress, both creating the conditions for a society no longer able to properly acknowledge, or work through our death.

This failure to recognize death as a *thing*, is a systemic denial of a part of life no less important than birth. We have diminished our death, and any meaning, grace or beauty once associated with it has experienced its own slow and painful demise. This modern relationship to death and dying is a multifaceted issue resulting from a milieu of cultural, religious and technological influences all acting in concert towards an overall denial of death. The word denial here is an intended double meaning, where at once it is the dismissal of something real on your own behalf, and also, a conscious refusal to allow something *to be*. To allow death to be, and to allow it to proceed in a graceful manner,

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7   Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 11.

8   Ibid.,11.

one must commit entirely to the living out of their death: when all medical interventions have been exhausted, one must give themselves over to the fullness of their suffering, away from the machines, hope and sadness of a hospital. It is here, that hope is replaced by this commitment to a pure, most dignified and beautiful death.

The institutionalization of our death is as much an architectural problem as it is one of bureaucracy, and demands our attention. The spaces we die in are often the same we are born in: sanitary, noisy and lonely with little regard for the beauty, poetry and profundity of these last moments. What is required is a reconsideration of the historical hospice typology, its influences and intentions combined with an exploration of regional perceptive attitudes towards space, exposure and materiality. The typology currently in use and in use for the past 150 years, is one that is predicated on technology and the institution. A move away from this, to combine thoughtfulness, clarity and connection to a place is required if we are to move away from our current relationship with death and once again remember *how to die* in a more meaningful and beautiful way.

This thesis project, situated on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, explores the phenomenological implications of place, landscape and culture to further understand how, through architecture one can begin to bring together these elements and offer a new environment for one to experience their dying.

Thesis Question

The effects of modernity have collectively degrad-
ed our relationship with death to the point where
as a culture, we have forgotten entirely *how to die*.
As architecture has doubtlessly played a significant
role in this forgetting, how can a reconsideration of
the current hospice typology, one that accounts for
the spiritual, the profundity and the aesthetics of
death, with an emphasis on *place*, come to aid us
in our remembrance of *how to die*?

CHAPTER 2: REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH IN WESTERN ART

Human perception towards death has fluctuated enormously throughout history. As Western culture has moved through periods of pagan worship to extreme religiosity and into modernity, our relationship to and perception of our death and the death of others has ebbed and flowed tremendously. We have much evidence of these in a wide variety of forms, from historical recordings, literature and art, all useful in attempting to construct a timeline or at the very least an idea of our ever dynamic perceptions towards death.

The representation of death in Western art provides us with an opportunity to further understand these changes in perception through narrative and

Iacop Avanzi, *The Funeral Rites of Saint Francis*, c 1450; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

iconography. From images of Christ on the cross to sharks placed in formaldehyde, the image of the artist often speaks a truth other sources cannot. "Death loves to be represented", says French Historian Philipe Airies, "the image is still the richest and most direct means that man has of expressing himself, faced with the mystery of the end of life…(retaining) some of the obscure, repressed meanings that the written word filters out." [9] These countless representations over the past roughly one-thousand years describe an attitude towards death, complete with a time, a place and subject, acting as a sort of 'death zeitgeist'. We can begin to read these works as we would a story, from how the light touches the skin, the incorporation of the landscape, to the date it was created. All of these

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Son Punished,* 1777; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

9   Philippe Aries, *Images of Man and Death*, trans. J. Lloyd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1.

details reveal perceptions from a time and place, working towards an overall picture of Western culture's subtle yet constant changes in perception, which when totalled bring us to the place we currently inhabit, a place we have never been before as a culture.

In his 1974 book, *Western Attitudes Towards Death*, Aries notes of the stark difference in past perceptions and those of contemporary society, "in a world of change the traditional attitude toward death appears inert and static. The old attitude in which death was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or awe, offers too marked a contrast to ours, where death is so frightful that we dare not utter its name." [10] Aries work is important as it tells us not only how perceptions have slowly changed for the worse, but also what is culturally possible in regards to the relationship we have with death.

As the literal representation of death gives us a clear image this will focus primarily on paintings and drawings, with few exceptions of key examples found in literature.

As we move forward with the survey of perceptions and attitudes towards death from the past millennia we must consider not only the scope but also the general aim of the task. Each individual from the past had their own notions, perceptions and anxieties towards death and dying, as do we.

10 Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Towards Death,* trans. P.M. Ranum (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 13.

These perceptions and emotions are the response to an infinite milieu of factors; class, age, religious beliefs, social/familial dynamics, sensitivities, and a general collective consciousness. In turn, the concept of a collective consciousness is influenced by this assortment of factors and this is the interest of this survey.

The Tame Death

This exploration will begin in a period of stasis, covering nearly a millenium where little to no perceptible change occurred in our relationship towards death. During this period a gentle calm prevailed as people saw their time on earth as merely a temporary stay, and their passing on into the afterlife part of a much larger natural process. Aries refers to this attitude towards death as the 'tame death'. "Tamed Death, I do not mean that death had once been wild and that it had ceased to be so. I mean, on the contrary, that today it has become wild." [11] There are two main aspects of what we will refer to as the tame death of this period. The first being the consistently public aspect of dying, the other the familiar simplicity that people viewed death with. We can turn to the countless numbers of death-bed scenes painted from this period, each showing us a chamber fully occupied by a priest, friends, family, neighbors and even children, "and to think of how carefully people today keep their children away from anything having to do with death!". [12] This social characteristic of death, would have existed

11 Ibid., 14.
12 Aries. Western Attitudes Towards Death. 1974.

because of a collective consensus regarding yourself and the death of others. People did not shy away, or avoid the topic, when news reached the village that someone was passing, people hurried along, to pay their last respects and no doubt, to be near death for a moment or two. This alone tells us something interesting, that perhaps there was something to be gained, spiritually or emotionally by being near death.

The second aspect or characteristic which defined dying throughout the nearly thousand year period was the familiarity and calm that people faced it with. When faced with their own imminent death, people calmly focused on presiding over the customs of the time, and making the necessary arrangements. Literature has given us many fine examples of this, Tolstoy will come to the mind of many, however it is another Russian writer whom provides us with an example of this tranquil attitude of people faced with their own death. In Alexanders Solzhenitsyn's *The Cancer Ward*, Yefrem "remembered how the old folk used to die back home in Kama… They didn't puff themselves up or fight against it and brag that they weren't going to die- they took death calmly. The didn't stall squaring things away, they prepared themselves quietly and in good time, deciding who should have the mare, who the foal… and they departed easily, as if they were just moving into a new house."[13] This overall calm and familiarity with death was the result of a collective acceptance of one's time on earth and individual

13 A. Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward* (New York, 1969), 97.

role in a higher order of things. The higher order here is that of nature, and an acknowledgement of one's temporary position within it. Our modern relationship with nature contrasts completely with this as it has become one where its role is subservient *to* us. This relationship to nature as a result of modernity certainly plays a significant role in our contemporary/modern attitude towards death. Instead of accepting death, we commonly deny and fight it, "familiarity with death is a form of acceptance of the order of nature…in death man encountered one of the great laws of the species, and he had no thought of escaping it or glorifying it. He merely accepted it with just the proper amount of solemnity due one of the important thresh-

Josse Lieferinxe, *Saint Sebastian Interceding for the Plague-Stricken*,1497; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

olds which each generation always has to cross."[14] Again, here we find a stark contrast to our contemporary situation which is ceaselessly searching for ways to lengthen lifespans, stop aging and ignore death. With these observations we can not rule out that death was not a phenomenon which evoked fears, anxieties or uncertainties to those faced with it during the middle ages, however we can say that the fear was of a very different kind than the type of 'existential fear'[15] we face today. This stems back to the notion of acceptance to the laws of nature and a collective destiny. Until this point the idea of the 'individual' does not exist in the sense which we are familiar with it and one's property had less significance in the pre-capitalist environment. Where the slide towards a more personalized death perhaps began was when society, and as a result our death, become focused less on the collective destiny, and more on the individual being, his/her biography

Stefan Lochner, *Last Judgement*, c. 1435; Wallraf-Richartz Museum, www.wallraf.museum/en/collections/middle-ages

14 Aries. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. 1974. 28.

15 Jenkinson, *Die Wise. 2015. 223.*

and their belongings. This shift is revealed through an analysis of the theme of the Final Judgement. Traditionally in the commonly painted theme of The Judgement, Christ is portrayed as Judge in the act of weighing of souls, and applying the good and bad deeds through one's life to the scale. The important aspect of these events is that traditionally they occurred on the *dies illa*, the last day of the world. This provided the dying a period of existence between the moment of their death and the final judgement at the end of the world. This extension displaced the moment of judgement, so as "There was no place for individual responsibility, for a counting of good and bad deeds"[16] and the dead could sleep well knowing they would be granted a place in paradise. There is an interesting link here between the moment of death and the existence afterwards; as part of society's abhorrence to link physical decay and death, this post mortem period allowed this deep-rooted reluctance to continue, albeit cosmically or theoretically. This reluctance comes to a close as new macabre themes emerge, portraying death often as a corpse involved in the final moments of one's life. These themes had many intentions and a range of narratives, each of which we will cover in the next section, but first we will continue to describe how the period of extended existence became shortened and fundamentally changed death from that of the collective to the personal. Afterwards, during the 15th and 16th Centuries, a shift occurred
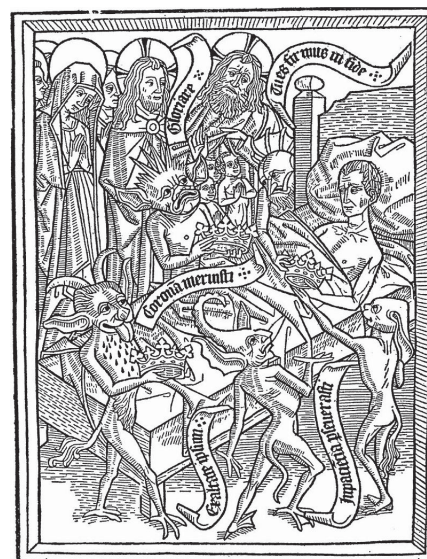
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16 Aries. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. 1974. 24.

where this extension of existence became com-pressed to the very moment of death, making it, the Judgement of a much more personal nature. This theological change caused death to become more biographical than it had ever been, caus-ing immediate concern for those facing their own death. To contextualize this change it is important to note the other major events taking place which would have played a significant role in the shaping of the general attitude toward death at the time. Following a period of relative theological stability, the 13th century was ravaged by The Black Death, devastating Europe and lingering into the next century, adding a new fragility to life.[17] Wars and violence compounded the dying, which was be-coming omnipresent. The brutal, macabre violent images of the plagues and wars had become im-bedded in the common psyche, doubtlessly caus-ing a shift in thinking around the subject of one's death. This new fragility of life brought on by these conditions was contemporary with the above men-tioned theological shift, compounding the anx-ieties and uncertainties surrounding the move-ment of the judgement to the deathbed. These anxieties warranted an aid in one's preparation for death, spawning a new body of Christian literature known as the *Ars Moriendi* or *the art of dying* which would become a key genre or theme for the fol-lowing several centuries.

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17 Aries. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. 1974. 28.
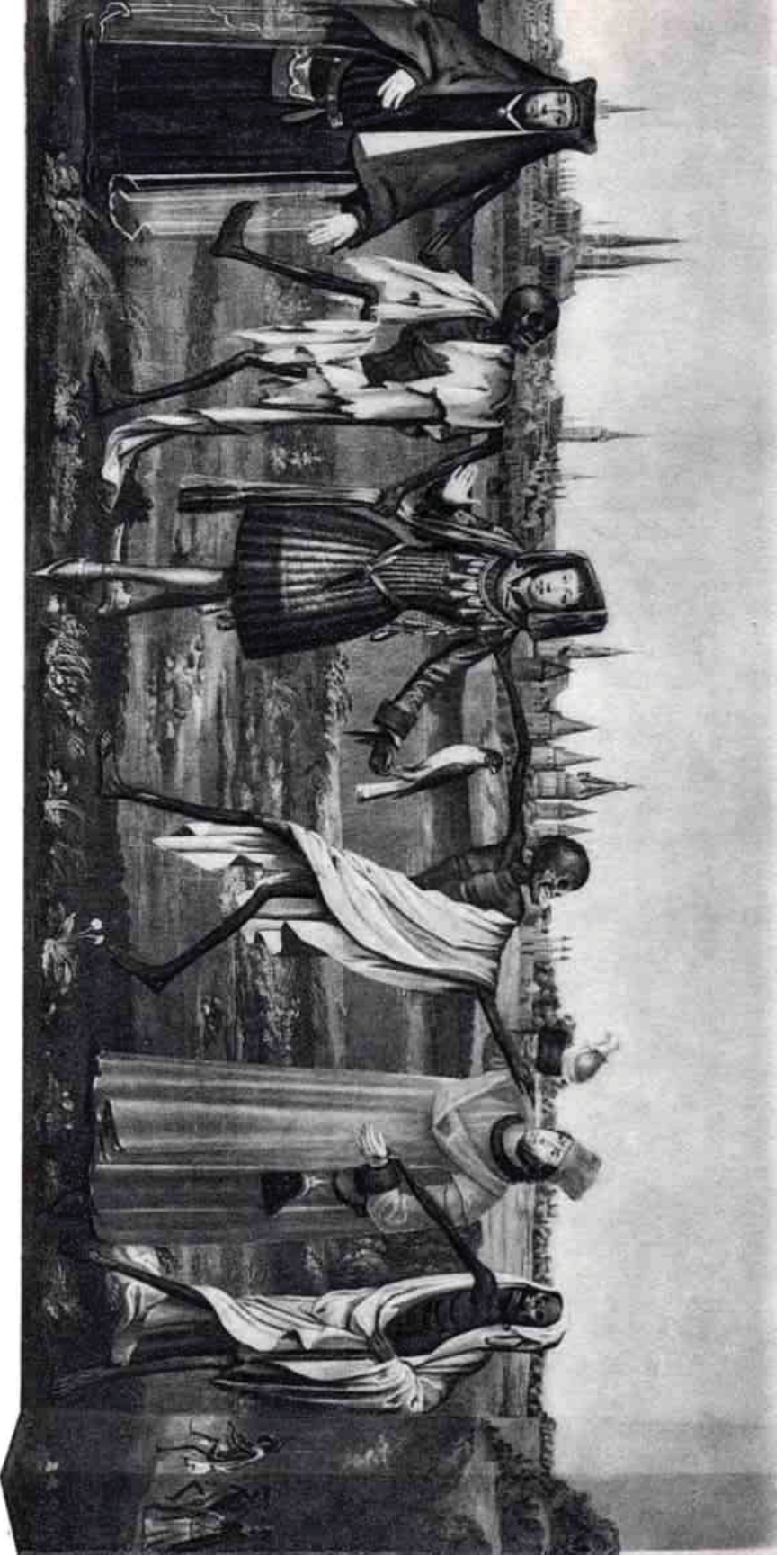
Ars Moriendi- **The Art of Dying Well**

This eschatological shift brought a new iconography forward to replace the Last Judgement. Proved necessary by the current conditions, and aided by the invention of the printing press, the treatises on a good death were made available to individuals for contemplation. Here the image became fundamental, as readying an almost entirely illiterate society through only the written word would have been futile. The printed reproductions of the original woodcuts prescribed prayers, customs and attitudes that would ensure a 'good death' and eventually lead to one's salvation. The belief heralded at the time was that the best preparation for a good death is a good life, and this worked as an encouragement to Christians to "live in such wise…that they may die safely, every hour, when God will",[18] Despite this encouragement to 'live a good Christian life' the *Ars Moriendi* focuses entirely on the deathbed and assumes that through proper preparations and repentance, one can still achieve total salvation. The largest and perhaps most important section of the *Ars* is the second chapter where each image portrays a dying man confronted with one of five temptations and the corresponding remedies to avoid falling victim to them. One example of this is viewed in the image on the upper right, where "temptation to vainglory or complacency versus humility and recollection of

Top & bottom; Illustrations from *Ars Moriendi* c. 1450; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

18 Frances Comper, T*he Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Early English Tracts concerning Death* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 45.

Bernd Notke, Totentantz, 1463; from WikiCommmons, www.wikipedia.org/wiki/danza_macabra_di_Lubecca

sins". [19] This is an important element when considering the new biographical nature of the deathbed judgement, as it is emphasized through the *Ars* the active role of the dying in choosing correctly, and ultimately deciding their destinies.

Later versions of the *Ars Moriendi* were adapted by Protestants and Catholics for their own theologies and understandings. The revised versions, albeit differing in the theology all contained one basic change: they placed the "art of dying" within a broader "art of living," which itself required a consistent *memento mori*, or reminder to be aware and prepared for one's own death.[20] This spawned another iconographic theme which would remain present for the next three centuries; the *Momento Mori*, which will be discussed following the macabre.

The Personalization of Death: *Le Danse Macabre*

The *Danse Macabre* and other macabre subjects first appeared as part of the iconography contemporary with the Black Death, wars and multiple famines of the 14th century. Its theme is also contemporary with that of the *Ars Moriendi*, both a result of the previously discussed compression of time between death and personal Judgement. With this compression of time, we can see for the first time an opposition to the "deep-rooted refusal to link

Anton Wortmann, *Le Danse Macabre*, 1701; from Doden Fra Lubeck, www.dodedans.com/dborchers.htm

19 Donald F. Duclow, *Ars Moriendi*, Last modified 2016, www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/Ars-Moriendi.html#ixzz4AoKMlPpL

20 Ibid.

the end of physical being with physical decay" [21].
Until this point, there had existed a collective de-
nial of the biological fact of decay and there existed
no iconography or imagery supporting this. This
theological shift, again combined with the terrify-
ing events of the 13th and 14th centuries saw the
beginning of the macabre, or the portrayal of death
and its rotting, barren corpse. This half composed
corpse, or *transi,* found as early as 1320, was to be-
come the most recognisable and common personi-
fication or representation of death.

The imagery of le danse macabre was an allegor-
ical response to the death that was seen and felt
everywhere during this period, stressing the fragil-
ity of life. Its main purpose was to force people to
remember that death was of course, inevitable, but
also an equalizer beyond any other, taking with it
everyone regardless of their riches, ancestry or so-
cial stature. The traditional imagery of the macabre
generally portrays society in its totality, beginning
with those closest to God: Popes, bishops, priests
then working through the lay, the kings and all the
way to the labourer and the beggar. Each personi-
fication is shown involved in a sometimes comic
dance, representative of the struggle of life and one
final amusement, Death shown uttering the under-
lying theme, "as we are, so shall you be and neither
your strength nor your piety can provide escape."
[22] Again, this pairing up, of Death with a human,
shows the personalization of death, and a focusing

21 Aries. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. 1974. 33.
22 Ars Moriendi, unknown source. c. 1400.

of the fears, anxieties and uncertainties upon the individual that were once diluted throughout the entire of society. Traditionally each pair is supplemented with a small text, highlighting the would be dialogue occurring between the two sides, Life and Death. Following is a description of the *Totentanz* painted in 1463 by Bernt Notke, where Death addresses the Emperor:

> Emperor, your sword won't help you out
> Sceptre and crown are worthless here
> I've taken you by the hand
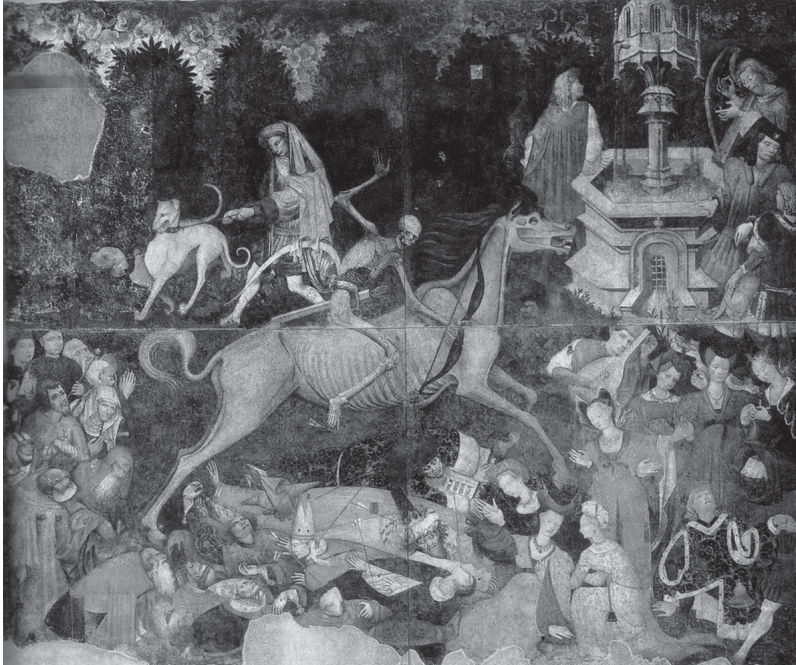> For you must come to my dance

At the lower end of the Totentanz, Death calls, for example, the peasant to dance, who answers:

> I had to work very much and very hard
> The sweat was running down my skin
> I'd like to escape death nonetheless
> But here I won't have any luck

The dance finishes (or sometimes starts) with a summary of the allegory's main point:

> Who was the fool, who the wise [man],
> who the beggar or the Emperor?

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, c. 1562; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, www.museodelprado.es

Whether rich or poor, [all are] equal in death.[23]

After centuries of aversion towards a quick and sudden death, society now came to prefer this following the firsthand experience of the slow-to-kill horrors of the Black Death. *Le Danse Macabre*, a didactic dialogue between Death and the living was as much as the *Ars Moriendi*, a preparation for Death which at any moment could ask you too to dance.

The Collective Power of Death: *Il Trumfo della Morte*

Another macabre theme at least as old as both the *Ars Moriendi* and *Le Danse* is that of the *Triumph of Death*. In the *Danse* we saw the individual confrontation between man and death, however in the *Triumph* the subject is the collective power that

Unknown artist, *The Triumph of Death*, c.1446; Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo, from www.wikipedia.org/wiki.the_triumph_of_death

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23 Vierzeiliger oberdeutscher Totentanz, Heidelberger Blockbuch, c.1460.

death beholds over a defenceless population.[24] The common object in the imagery, aside from the merciless corpse is the oxen-driven chariot, slowly proceeding from one victim to the next, as a pile of bones accumulates in its bed. Although operating in the realm of the macabre, the *Triumph* offers up an entirely different allegory, contrary to the traditional attitude toward death. In this death, there was no warning and therefore no time for preparations or resignations. In *Le Danse* we witnessed an almost sweet acceptance, in the Triumph, any good nature has vanished and it is only madness. "The language of the triumphs expresses an attitude that is undeniably different: the desire to express not so much the equality of conditions and the necessity of death as its absurdity and perversity."[25] Here it seems all of the horrors and tortures and wildly apocalyptic scenes of the 13th and 14th century seem to have been condensed into one terrifying genre with one message: you never know, when you too will die. Perhaps the most well known painting on this theme is that of Pieter Bruegel the Elder from 1562. Set back from its subjects, the painting frames a blackened, smoking landscape complete with shipwrecks and sad leafless trees. The painting, as **Le Danse**, speaks to the indiscriminate killing as Death takes its victims from all strata of society. Stretching deep into the background, the barren and charred path of destruction shows

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24 Philippe Aries, T*he Hour of our Death*, trans. H. Weaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 118.

25 Ibid., 119.

there is no escape from the wave of death. This imagery would have been especially terrifying and relevant to the survivors of the many famines and wars experienced by much of Europe during the middle ages. Images similar to this, portraying torturous scenes of mass destruction and violence also found a role within the clergy as a means of evoking terror into the minds of the masses, who may then turn, fully dedicated- to the church. As with *Le Dans*, the evocation of the fragility of life was meant to create change in the way in which people lived, day by day. *The Triumph of Death* was a large scale, course reminder that we are ephemeral beings, and that Death could strike, at any given moment without warning. Now that people had been reminded of this fact, what was needed was a gentler, more subtle suggestion of the *vanitas*, or vanities of life. This would come in the form of the *Memento Mori*.

Memento Mori: Earthly Detachments and Other Reminders.

As a genre, the *Memento Mori* has its beginnings in the Classical era but was truly developed as a Christian moralizing device during the Medieval Period. A Latin expression *memento mori*, 'remember you too will die', was used as an everyday reminder often in the form of small allegorical paintings, to cultivate detachment from the vanities of life and life itself. As aforementioned, a prevalent thought of the period was 'the best preparation for a good death was a good life' and the *memento mori* provided the grounds and generally subtle

Philippe de Champaigne, *Vanity*, 1650; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

reminder to regularly meditate on one's mortality, the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. [26] As was seen through the lense of the Macabre images of the middle ages, Death had been brought into the forefront of society's mind and now needed to be considered a very real prospect which warranted a focusing of one's thoughts. Commonly arranged and represented as a still life, the image would juxtapose one or several earthly pleasures, with a human skull or some other allegorical item meant to represent Death. The message was clear, the importance placed upon your jewels, money, land and achievements meant nothing when face to face with one's own mortality. The above image, by Nicolas Pouisson titled, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, translates roughly to, 'I too was once in Arcadia', acts as a *Memento Mori*, where Arcadia, the beautiful land outside of the city of Athens, was seen as Paradise.

Nicolas Pouisson, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1639; from Patton, *Poussin's Arcadian Vision*

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26 Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (New York: Arno Press, 1977),

Top; Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793; Royal Museum of Fine Arts Belgium, from V a u g h n / W e s t o n, *David's, The Death of Marat*

Bottom; Enguerrand Quarton, Pieta of Villeneuve les Avignon, c.1450; Musee du Louvre, Paris, from www.en.wikipedia. org

The young shepherds, while out on the land, have encountered a tomb with this inscription, offering a clear warning, that their time too, is limited.

Romanticism or the Age of the Beautiful Death.

After extended periods of fear and anxiety aimed at death and dying, the period following The Enlightenment gave the space and grounds for a new, Romantic view of death. This was not necessarily an increased affection toward the morbid, but rather a widespread re-understanding of the goodness within death. The authors of the French journal, *Encyclopedie* offered the suggestion that the church and its clergy had concealed beneath its strange and frightening machinery the "narcotic sweetness" of death, and for changing its nature. [27] This concealment was to be uncloaked by Romanticism, where the virtues of death and dying would become revealed and renewed to society. The previous fears towards death are a result of the events

Girodet-trioson, *The Funeral of Atala*, 1808; from Aries, *Images of Man and Death*

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27 Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*. 1981.

of a time and place, but also of education and prejudice, and "before death can become happy, it must be divested of the prejudices that distort it." [28] This education and prejudice existed primarily in the towns and cities where the exposure to such thoughts and ideas were more dramatized and widespread, creating a profound terror and sensitivity found in its people. This contrasted with the perceptions of those found in the countryside, the peasants and farmers, making up the working-class *illiterati*, who for many, saw death as an end to the perpetual struggle of life. In the countryside there existed a calm familiarity with death, and it was this idea that the man of the Enlightenment wanted to recapture within the urban society. Philippe Aries suggests that "there are two tendencies to this thought: a nostalgia for the simple and familiar death of yesterday and a desire to taste the narcotic sweetness and the wonderful peace" to be found in death. In this period we have a gradual movement away from the strict medieval superstitions towards the great liturgies of the Romantic death. [29]

We have a vast variety of examples of this newly formed understanding of death to be found in the arts. The following is an excerpt of a poem by Charles Baudelaire:

> It is Death that consoles and makes us live, alas!
> Death is the goal of life, death is our only hope,
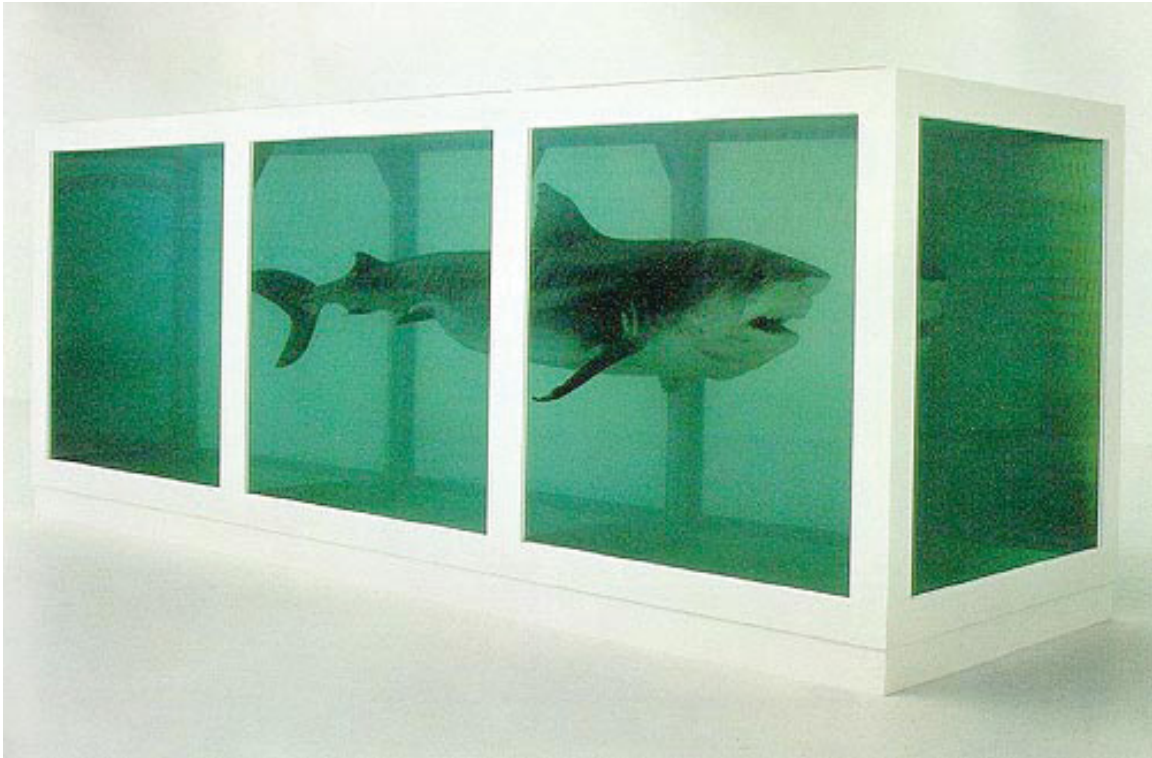> Which like an elixir cheers and intoxicates

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28 Ibid., 410.
29 Ibid., 411.

Hugo Simberg, *The Garden of Death*, 1896; from Wiki-commons, www.commons.wikimedia.org

And gives us heart to live another day. [30]

In painting and sculpture, this Romanticized sweetness of death is represented to us through beautifully portrayed corpses, lit softly from above evoking an almost heavenly, angelic air. We see this in the work of Jacques-Louis David in his perhaps most well know work titled, *The Death of Marat*. Here the subject, actually a murdered political figure from the French Revolution is portrayed in gentle light, emphasizing the softness of his skin, and giving the entire scene a layer of peacefulness, whereas the crime committed would have been anything but. We see religious suggestions here, as many would have perceived Marat as a hero and a martyr, in the manner in which is right arm is painted, hanging, lifelessly and beautifully detailed similar to those found in versions of La Pietà, with Christ in the arms of Mary. Another peaceful representation is found on the previous page, titled *Garden of Death*, by Finnish painter Hugo Simberg. Here we have death, again represented to us as in the macabre images of the Middle Ages, only this time, Death is not voraciously taking lives, but rather sweetly, nurturing life in a quasi-comical rendition suggesting the virtues of death. These paintings are an expression of the eventual shift that took place during the Late Enlightenment and Romantic Period, where the overall fears and anxieties were replaced with serenity and acceptance.

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30 Charles Baudelaire, Oeuvres Completes (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

This period and perceptions although dating back only two centuries, offers a very marked contrast again to our current relationship to death, as modernity was yet to have taken its toll.

Sharks in Formaldehyde: Modern Perceptions of Death.

As aforementioned, our relationship with death is in its current state as a result of modernity and the various aspects that make up this era bereft of culture and genuine spirituality. As many of the issues facing culture brought forth by modernity have been described in the introduction, they will not be further dwelt on here but rather several examples of the current relationship to death, shown to us again through art will be presented. The first, although not a painting, but a sculpture is surely and

Damien Hirst, *The Physical Impossibility of Death inside the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991; from Wikipedia, www.wikipedia.org

commentary on our contemporary perceptions of death, titled, *The Physical Impossibility of Death inside the Mind of Someone Living*, by American artist Damien Hirst. Firstly, we will start with the title itself, where it is admitting to the idea of death as something foreign and very distant, in the mind of a living person, which of course defines a group that excludes a dying person, for whom the opposite is true. Here death is no longer represented as an image of a corpse or skeleton, but rather as an abstraction, with a preserved Tigershark placed in a tank of formaldehyde. This can be seen and interpreted as symbolic of the distance between ourselves, in our everyday lives and the realities of death, which until we are fully immersed in them ourselves, they continue to have nothing to do with us. Another artist notorious for his contemplations of death and dying manifested through his artwork is American painter Mark Rothko. Here again we can witness a total unnerving attitude in his works. His work aimed at capturing the rawness in human emotions, and no emotion is more essential and raw than those surrounding death. Rothko struggled throughout his life with mental anguish, eventually taking his own life, but not before leaving a great survey of his metaphysical intentions: "to offer painting as a doorway into purely spiritual realms...to directly communicate the most essential, raw forms of human emotion."[31] These existential battles have been distilled onto the canvas,

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31 "Mark Rothko Paintings." Black in Deep Red, Last modified 2014, http://www.markrothko.org/paintings.

where we are again dealing with the world of the abstract, free to contemplate and reflect upon what may lie at the depths of each of our souls.

Conclusion

As aforementioned , the dilemma we currently face in regards to our relationship with death is one unique to our modern era. Never before have humans been plagued by a gripping existential terror when faced with their death. As the adage goes, ' you cannot know where you are going until you know where you have been', we must break the linearity of our time, and look back for inspirations and reminders of how we once were. This is especially important for the recovery of the strained relationship between us and death, as we must be properly versed in the range of possibilities and capabilities of our wide human culture. Architecture is just one of many factors affecting our experience of death and dying and needs to facilitate, through an architectural typological shift, a rethinking of the current manner in which we build, its intentions and influences, any gains towards a revived relationship with death.

**CHAPTER 3: A MISSING LANGUAGE: A LIN-
GUISTIC ANALOGY FOR HOW TO BUILD AND
DWELL POETICALLY**

We are now aware of what our society is capable of in terms of its relationship towards death and dying, including the entire spectrum; from the terrifying omnipresence of death during the Middle Ages to the general calm of the Enlightenment. This gives us an opportunity for comparison with our contemporary relationship and apply this knowledge in the reconsideration of the hospice typology.

The drastic societal changes and technological advancements that have defined the past two-hundred years have left us without the necessary vocabulary to deal with or speak about death in any meaningful or constructive way. Teacher, counselor and philosopher, Stephen Jenkinson speaks to the breakdown in communication often experienced around the deathbed, "There isn't a drug, surgical procedure, medical appliance, profession, or a conceptual counselling language used to deliver palliative care these days that derives from the physical, social, intellectual, or spiritual realities of dying. All of them are conceived, developed, taught and perfected elsewhere, in labs and factories and classrooms and boardrooms, and imported to the deathbed…predicated on the goals and ideals of coping and healing."[32] The language we use is one familiar with the abstraction of science and its role in dying, and defining it as something

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32 Jenkinson. *Die Wise*. 2015. 324.

separate from living. This emphasis on the scientific aspects of dying diminishes the importance of one's spiritual and existential needs in their final hours. This cultural failure to recognize the role of spirituality and poetics negates one's experience completely, often turning instead to the topic of the disease, the desired outcome and symptoms. "Dying people need to hear and speak a language that does justice and bears faithful witness to *how dying is*. They deserve that kind of language. It is their right. This isn't a language of technical information, prognostic probabilities, and survival rates…Without such a language there is no way to have a shared understanding between dying people and those they love. There is no way to be sad together."[33] The existing vocabulary does not allow for clear and honest communication and is unable in its origins to address the often overlooked and unspoken emotions of sadness, uncertainties, anxieties and existential terror often experienced as a part of dying. Jenkinson continues that this vocabulary actually attempts to "banish dying from the dying room" and that "the first casualty is the truth."[34] By way of euphemisms, the truth becomes cloaked in a vail of understatement denying the involved parties any chance of an honest and constructive conversation. Turning to etymology for further insight, the origin of the root of palliative, pall, or pallare- *to cloak*, either literally as in cover the face or to disguise or conceal the truth. Famously, in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Illych*, the ele-
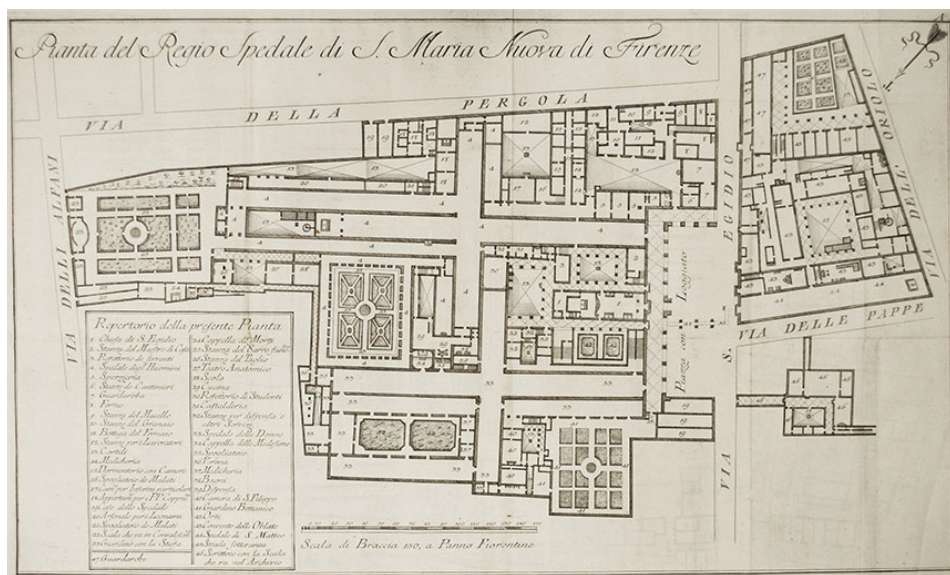
33 Ibid., 328.
34 Jenkinson. *Die Wise*. 2015. 329.

ment of truth is kept from him as his very real situation is kept under a cloak of lies and euphanisms, but something told him otherwise, "in the depth of his heart knew he was dying but not only was he accustomed to such an idea, he simply could not grasp it, could not grasp it at all. And it simply was not possible that he should have to die. That would be too terrible. And so his feelings went." [35] This is a much too common default for many facing the death of a close one, as communication is broken for lack of understanding and narrative.

Architectural Language Barrier

This linguistic breakdown has a analogy in our built environment and how we conceive the buildings we are to die in is an expression and manifestation of our relationship to death. There exists no architectural language to satisfy or address the totality of fundamental and unique emotional and spiritual needs of a person facing their own death. Our hospitals, clinics, palliative care and hospices are missing an element that connects them to something *else*, where transcendence and healing of another type may begin to take place. The very early Renaissance hospitals were examples to this philosophy and incorporated chapels, cloisters and frescoes within their walls, knowing of their importance to one's *total* health. The Santa Maria de Nuovo in Florence, dating back to the 14th century combined elements necessary for the body, the soul and the afterlife all into on sprawling complex. "To the right

35 Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Illych, trans. Lynn Solotaroff* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 93..

was the Chiostro delle Medicherie, a transitional space between the cure of the soul in the church and the cure of the body in the ward. On the left of the frescoe was the entrance to the so-called Chiostro delle Ossa, or Cloister of Bones, a graphic name for the hospital's cemetery".[36] This critical understanding of spiritual health is often absent from the vocabulary utilized within the walls of hospitals. As in the medical language there is an intense focus on the physical and technical requirements which often eclipse the more intangible psychological and spiritual essentials. The architectural typology of health care is one that is predicated downward via the institution in an aim to express the technological advancements and abilities of the medical machine. We are using a vocabulary based on the institution and its technological promises that it is not always able to keep. We build based on this criteria to satisfy only the physical needs of a sick

Plan of Santa Maria Nuova, Florence; from Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*

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36 John Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body Healing the Soul*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xxviii.

patient, hopeful of a full convalescence, and not necessarily a dying one. In these environments, the machines, the lighting and the colors are designed to foster hopewhich does provide a small degree of emotional comfort but little else.

There exists a marked difference between the aforementioned patient undergoing treatment for a potentially curable condition and the one whom in an acknowledgement of their dying has elected to forego any further treatments and medication and enter into a hospice and live out there final days. The act of crossing the threshold into a hospice gives the building a sense of the absolute and profundity as it becomes a part of their dying and their *final* building. It is this which must be referred to, the *absolute* and the *profound* nature of this program when we are called upon for its conception. This decision to enter into a hospice and forego any further treatments and fully engage themselves and live out their final days causes a fundamental shift not only in their thinking but also in their needs as a patient. No longer are their needs technical and medical in a bid for more time but much simpler where the emphasis can now be taken off of the extension of life and focused onto the spiritual, existential and the aesthetic. The hospice by definition should provide support to these needs, often neglected because of their intangible and ethereal nature.

Here exists a potential for a new architectural language or typology which is supportive to the total-

ity of needs of a dying patient. In an acknowledgement of the necessity of beauty the innumerable considerations can now be of an aesthetic nature, dealing with metaphor, symbolism brought forth through space, materiality and a profound relationship with the landscape.

Precedents

Architecture honorific to those passed has existed in many forms, in many societal and religious contexts for centuries and although guised as a building specific to a program or typology, its higher role is that of a symbolic and spiritual nature. This represents the architects consideration of the aesthetic, and the overall consensus to go beyond simply the pragmatic and technical and enter into the realm of beauty. We have countless architectural examples and precedents charged with the double agenda of fulfilling a programmatic requirement while still answering to aesthetics. Cemeteries, crematoriums, memorials and funerary chapels are all developed with a language based on the symbolic use of materials and their interaction with light and the landscape. This language occupies a position at the far end of the architectural spectrum from the hospital, or medical research centre built on a technological promise at the compromise of the poetry and aesthetic considerations necessary when dealing with the realities of death.
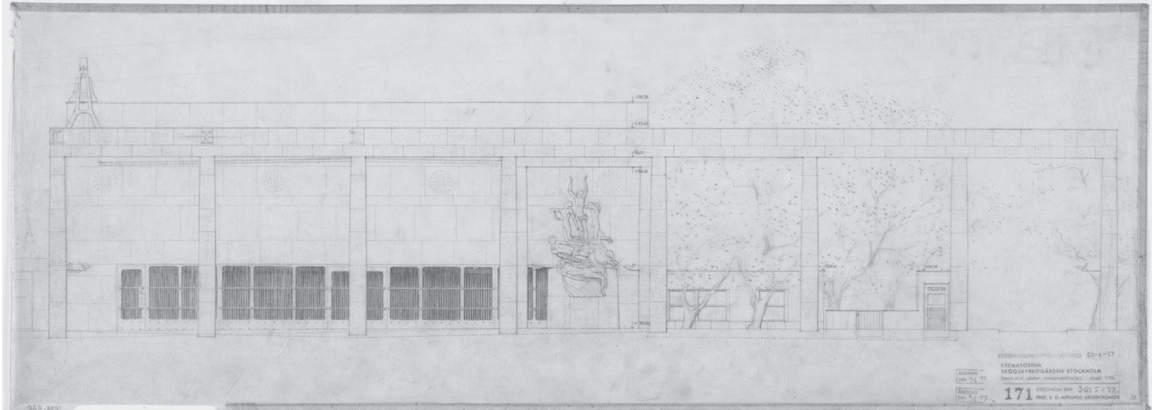
Woodland Cemetery

With its simplified classical forms entirely orches-

Top; Erik Gunnar Asplund, View of Wood-land Cremation, 1935; photograph by Hassan Bagheri, from La Capilla de la Sagrada Cruz,http://www.habitar-arq.blogspot.ca

Bottom; Erik Gunnar Asplund, approach to Woodland Cemetery, 1935; from Museum of Modern Art, www.moma.org

trating one's relationship with the landscape, Gunnar Asplund Woodland Cemetery and Crematorium provides an example of the trinity of landscape, architecture and the profundity of death. The relationship becomes immediately physical in its manifestation as the approach is defined by a moderate incline, engaging the body before revealing the stark crematorium to the eyes. This approach, choreographed to intensify the slow reveal of architectural space and landscape, vis a vis. This acts to strengthen the symbolism here, as "Asplund's forms were highly charged, landscape and building together suggesting a hidden meaning uniting earth and water, fire and sky. Beyond historical allusions and the mood of the forests and ground, there was a deeper suggestion of release from the material to the spiritual" .[37] The simple stone-clad portico, classical in its conception, plays many roles, primarily one for the gathering of groups, in a space delineated by its wood framed roof. Once under its expanse, the columns, suggestive of the surround-

Erik Gunnar Asplund, Facade Drawing of Woodland Cemetery, 1935; from Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org

37 William J. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900, Third Edition*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2000), 341.

ing forest work to frame the picturesque landscape views, engaging the viewer, or the mourner with a context much larger than themselves and with something beyond the earthly, intensifying dramatically one's experience of nature. This juxtaposition of the built with the natural world, and its en framing of the picturesque as intended by Asplund to "evoke the transition from life to death and death to paradise" .[38] This is a beautiful display of the use of an architectural language made of elements based on their symbolic might in this evocation of our ultimate passage.

Memorials to the Dead

Despite an infinite variety of formal qualities, narratives and symbologies, the language of memorials is clearly distinguished with a limited palette of natural materials, an intensity of expression and a strong emphasis on connection to place. As an established typology, memorials deal with the matter of death- and the memorializing of a particular event or loss for a segment of a society sharing a collective interest in the lost party or parties. As part of our built environment, memorials become technical hybrids crossing multiple disciplines, combining both factual documentation and artifice in an attempt to create a historical representation of an event.[39] Peter Carrier speaks to the dual es-

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38 Ibid., 341.

39 Peter Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Culture in France and Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 35.

Bottom; Peter Zumthor, *entrance of Steilneset Memorial, Vardo, Norway, 2008,photograph by Andrew Meredith, from Steilneset Memorial by Peter Zumthor and Louise Bourgeois, http://www.dezeen.com*

Top; Georges-Henri Pingusson, *Memorial des Martyrs de la Deportation, Paris, 1962*

sence of memorials, " as historical documents they testify to past events: dates, names, statistics and motives. As art, they testify to the intervention of individual artists and spectators in the mediation and transmission of historical information, and to their attempts to recognize, understand and draw moral lessons from events of the past". [40]

We have for our inquiry countless examples of memorials all in remembrance of an event linked to war, persecution or natural disaster. We will focus on two distinctly different memorials separated by geography, culture and content, yet still exhibit many similarities in their execution and intention.

The *Memorial des Martyrs de la Deportation* in Paris by Georges-Henri Pingusson and the *Steilisnet Memorial to the Victims of the Witch Hunt* in Northern Norway by Peter Zumthor are both built in remembrance of peoples persecuted. One situated in a dense urban setting, the other extremely isolated and rural, the two in their evocation of remembrance use these extremes in site to convey an important part of each narrative. The memorials tell two different stories concerning two groups in separate societies, yet surprisingly exhibit striking similarities and an utmost clarity and intensity of intention. Despite fundamentally different sites, the two exhibit one essential element of buildings charged with the task of purveying meaning and narrative through architecture: a profound connection with place. The *Memorial des Martyrs de las*

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40 Ibid., 36.

Deportation in Paris, located in perhaps the most visited area in the city, is so immersed and literally hidden from view that it is prone to overlooking by the thousands visiting the nearby Notre-Dam Cathedral, perhaps speaking to the general apathy to many 20th century atrocities or what 20th Century Philosopher Hanna Arendt referred to as the banality of evil.[41] "Rather than rising heroically, the memorial is meant to evoke the unspeakable, anonymous drama of deportation. To enter one must leave street level downwards via a high-walled, narrow staircase where the discomfort only begins, clearly part of the story and intention. The phenomena of discomfort, caused by constricted, unevenly lit spaces convey an important part of the narrative, one that engages not only our senses but our nerves and imaginations as well. As a memorial to the 200000 people sent away to concentration camps between 1940 and 1945, the intention of the architect was to evoke certain characteristics particular to such an experience. As one proceeds through the space these intentions become clearly felt- imprisonment, the impossibility of escape, and oppression.

One's entrance into the *Steilneset Memorial* is similarly evocative of the discomfort experienced by the persecuted. A discomfort which maintains itself the full 120 meter length as one proceeds through the darkness, faced with 91 biographies dimly lit by small gently swaying pendent lamps.

41 Hanna Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, (New York City, Viking Press, 1963), 135.

Each biography engraved on silk describes the individual victims, their date of birth, the charges, confession and verdict, and the date on which they were burned alive. The structure is meant to convey this story, as Zumthor describes, " When we walk through the building and become engaged with the texts, we learn something important about the lives long past, about injustice masquerading as law, and about death."[42] . The stark landscape of the Finnmark is brought into the interior space of the memorial via the wooden structure evocative of the vernacular fish drying racks of the region. The wooden structure responds to the strong coastal winds through creaks and screams, unsettlingly reminiscent of the attributed victims final

Peter Zumthor, *entrance of Steilneset Memorial, Vardo, Norway, 2008,photograph by Andrew Meredith, from Steilneset Memorial by Peter Zumthor and Louise Bourgeois, http://www.dezeen.com*

42 Thomas Durisch, ed., *Peter Zumthor 2002-2007 Vol.4* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015),172.

moments. Although firmly planted within the arctic terra-firma via 240 wooden columns, the entire structure emits a hint of the ephemeral as though its time here on this extreme landscape is finite, acting as a *Memento Mori* or a stark reminder that our time too, is limited.

Conclusion

These examples, despite their multitude of differences distinguishing them, offer us another way of considering a building or space dedicated to death and a deep reverence towards it.

The architectural language currently employed in the design of health care institutions is one concerned almost entirely with the pragmatic requirements of the building, and the medical needs of the patient. This typology lacks any consideration of the aesthetics or poetics of the place. As the medical machine has dictated by and large the language of our hospitals, medical research buildings, palliative and seniors care, it has focused its attention mainly on the practical, objective, science based elements, leaving our spiritual, existential and phenomenological needs untended to. These buildings respond to very real needs, in many but not all scenarios. In a hospital the technology and machinery is a vital necessity for the people undergoing major treatments and operations and convalescents hoping for a full recovery.

Again, this technology and linguistics is only necessary in some cases. In the cases where it is not,

where the clearly dying patient has exhausted all medical options or has elected to forego any further treatments, this sense of false hope is only detrimental and requires we overlook the spiritual and the beautiful, both much required in one's experience of death. When a dying patient is told they *will* recover, they *will* be well again, it is a total negation of their reality and experience and denies them to fully live out or experience their own dying and any meaningful or poetic way. Hope, machines and technology are the last thing a man needs whos death is immanent in the short term, but rather a "gathering" up of all the elements; the sky, the landscape, the space and the light in an act of poetry, "poetry which does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it, poetry as what first brings man into the earth, making him belong to it, and this brings him into dwelling". [43] This gathering up of the elements in a poetic way "makes human existence meaningful and meaning is the fundamental human need." [44] Through this we can begin to offer another way of building for and considering our death, remembering that there too is another way to die, a way that is without the many anxieties and terrors that are experienced by many of those in their final hours.

After examining these several projects, from

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43 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1979), 23.

44 Ibid., 24.

Asplund's Crematorium/Cemetery to the Memorial for Victims of the Witchunt by Zumthor, three significant qualities became clear and provided commonalities between the selection of projects. As each of these works deals in the narrative of death, however different the story may be they are bound by several qualities which provide us with a particular and focused traction when further considering a building built for dying. The first quality is that concerning the narrative or the intent of the project: for each there is a clarity and intensity of the expression and the intent of the project. Each of these works is doubly tasked with conveying a story whether in terms of the human and the universal, or focused clearly on a historical event and through their creative and poetic means evoking an atmosphere and a feeling which is relatable. This is no simple matter, but each of these manages somehow, through a combination of the next two qualities to convey these narratives and have them become real to all of our senses. The second quality recognized within these works is the concerned use of materials, each project displays a limited natural palette of stone, wood, concrete and brick in a way animates and intensifies the qualities of the material. Textures are brought to life as oblique natural light is anticipated and colors are both expressed and muted in favour of the intention. When possible these materials are sourced from the very region of the project, adding a cultural and collective memory to the work. The third quality is the profound connection to a

typological spectrum of death

Typological Spectrum of Death, 2016

landscape/culture: a *place*. These projects are not simply additions to a landscape or a place, they are works which act to bring together the entire environment which includes not only the natural phenomena and elements as rocks, water and sky but also the cultural realm, the histories, memories, and lives of the place.

Each of these qualities informed this project and helped further understand what an architectural language for death and dying may look like. Particular attention was paid to the connection to place, and how a proper understanding of the elements which comprise the totality that is an environment can aid in one's experience during their final hours.

Clarity of Expression, Materiality, Profound Connection to Place, 2016

CHAPTER 4: SITE

Situated along the tempestuous East Coast of Cape Breton Island, the project has been inserted into the dramatic landscape overlooking both the Atlantic Ocean and the town of Ingonish, Nova Scotia. Its proximity to the town allows easy access for patients and guests alike. As Ingonish is one of the main centres, and can be reached from any-where on the island in under two hours, the hospice would serve not only the residents immediately adjacent to the site, but also the 180,000 inhabit-ants of the island. A densely forested region, Cape Breton has forever subsisted on its natural riches with a culture of harvesting, both from the sea and the land. This relationship between the sea and the landhas been a reciprocal one, as the vast forests provided wood for boats of all sizes, and in turn, many of those boats would spread their catches of lobster, cod and salmon throughout the commun-ities. This strong resource dependence created a profound collective connection to the land and the sea, a connection which continues on to this day despite significant changes to the traditional land and sea-based industries. Much of the population of the island has been involved either directly or indirectly with these industries, and this has funda-mentally shaped the culture and this is reflected in the stories, perceptions and traditions of the is-land. Owing to the size and geography of the is-land, people are equally at home within the deep canyons and lush forests of the Highlands as bat-tling the storms somewhere along the coast. This

Delineate, 2016

sociological situation combined with the collective connection to nature has created a unique milieu which in turn shapes attitudes, perceptions, emotions and memories towards their environment. It is these qualities and human sensitivities and their relationship to both the natural and built environment that are of interest to this work and will be explored throughout.

The phenomenon of mass urban migration has not forgotten Cape Breton as thousands of islanders have elected to leave in search of opportunities elsewhere. Whether to a large city centre or the mining mecca of the west, the collapse of fishing and changes in the lumber industry have transplanted islanders throughout the country, and now after decades of this, many are choosing to return home. This addition to the population is having an amplifying effect on the number of seniors on the

Left; *Visual Connection*, 2016
Right; *Occupied Space*, 2016

Regional Site Map, 2016

1   Entrance
2   Parking
3   Loading/unloading
4   Building Exit
5   Building Entrance
6   Pathway
7   Chapel

0m 5   10   20

Site Plan, 2016

island, a phenomenon which is in favour of a hospice/end of life facility. This is a brief introduction to the social and demographic dimensions of the project. These practical elements were vital in the selection of Cape Breton for the project, however the particular site was chosen for reasons beyond pragmatic and objectifiable: the symbolic value of the landscape and its relationship to the sea was a fundamental element to the narrative and content of the project, which is described in the following.

Genius Loci

This particular site is exemplary of this cultural tradition of harvest, as a dense softwood forest drapes over the mountainside, while just off-shore, several dozen buoys mark the placement of lobster traps. Here we have a coming together of the natural concrete elements, phenomena and a traditional culture, the true definition of *place*. It is with this notion of place that we must begin in order to achieve an appropriate, sensitive and thorough reconsideration of the hospice typology, as "place is more than an abstract location... a totality made up of con-

Photo of Site, 2016

Top, Site Map, 2016
Bottom, *Visual Connection*, 2016

site section   1:1000   0   50   100

crete things having material substance, shape texture and colour. Together these things determine an 'environmental character', which is the essence of a place".[45] Christian Norberg-Schulz suggests it is incumbent upon architecture to gather the elements, as "architecture belongs to poetry, and its purpose is to help man dwell".[46] He refers to these 'elements' as the *genius loci*, and it is this, the *spirit of the place*, which must become concretized in order for it to be made 'visible' to man. This 'essence' is visible from the site, and from within each individual room which is granted a view of all of the elements brought together in their totality: the sea, the mountain and the forest and all their related phenomena. This *bringing together* of these elements is what Norberg-Shulz refers to as *concretization*, and this action, is where the elements: the sea, landscape, sky, culture and the materials come

Site Section, 2016

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45 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 1979, 7.

46 Ibid. 23.

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water
traps
roads
buildings
sunpaths
trees

1:2000

a concretization of the elements

A Concretization of the Elements, 2016

Earthly Detachments, 2016

together to create the poetry of a place, and pays reverence to the lives, and the deaths, of all whom lived within this environment. Architecture, when placed into a setting such as this can act to bring together these elements, as "the basic act of architecture is therefore to understand the 'vocation' of the place".[47] This could be understood as the totality of natural elements, traditions, phenomena and memories of a place.

Between Heaven and Earth

The site was chosen for several different qualities owing mainly to the nature of the landscape, however. The selection was based on the symbolic value of the site, expressed through its relationship to the sea. The point which holds the project, strikes out into the sea, rising upwards nearly four-hundred meters and covered with trees. Almost as though occupying a place in between two worlds: land and sea, heaven and earth, life and death. This site works to set up a duality between the landscape and the sea, without the extreme or dramatic effect of placing the project itself on an island. This selection for a site utilizes the symbolic value of the geographical point in relation to the seascape, placing the project in a position which is between two worlds, or in a sense already detached from earthly sentiments. This is intended as an allegorical device when we understand the action of crossing into the threshold of a hospice building as an acknowledgment of one's dying and death. This is

James Wheeler, *The Modern Druid*, 1747; from Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

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47 Ibid., 23.

Occupation of Space, 2016

Occupation of Space II, Model, 2016

not to suggest that the person of whom we speak is no longer living, or with us, on the contrary, as they are very much living, but living out their dying in a place detached from normal concerns where they can now pass on in a meaningful, calm and beautiful way. As the patient, the site is now in between our earth, and some *other* place, whether that be the afterlife, heaven or paradise. Norberg-Schulz brings forth a similar understanding of an cosmic merging of two separate elements, only his is describing the relationship between the mountain and the sky. The mountain, a part of the earth pierces into the sky, as if to join it as one, 'The marriage between heaven and earth forms the point of departure for the further differentiation of 'things'. The mountain, thus belongs to the earth but it rises towards the sky. it is 'high', it is close to heaven, it is a meeting place where the two basic elements come together.' [48] We can now apply this understanding of a 'merging' of two elements into one, to the geographical point or archipelago and take it from its cosmic origins and lay it horizontal on the earth's surface. The near infinite horizon of the ocean offers a convenient metaphor for the vast afterlife and the extension of terra-firma into it immerses one both physically and metaphysically.

Comfort in the Storm

This exposure, out into the Atlantic ocean will no doubt place the building in the path of regular ocean winds and sou westers, but to the Cape

Occupation of Space II, Model, 2016

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48 Ibid. 25.

Unamed, 2016

Bretoner, the noise and vibration caused by these winds will bring a collective comfort and solace as they recall a lifetime of storms. This reaches into the collective histories that each of us belong and how we relate to our environment, its elements and forces. To a person from a large city, a mountain town or a valley, this type of coastal exposure may bring no comfort or calm, but may evoke the opposite and only add to their current fears and anxieties. This placement is an intention to satisfy, or understand these collective perceptions towards space and environment, and how through a phenomenological exploration, they may be used to provide comfort. To dwell in a place such as this, somewhat at the mercy of the elements, can intensify one's experience of what it is to be in a house or building, enwrapped and safe within it's walls. This brings about an intensification of the contradiction, "indeed everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate". "When the shelter is sure, the storm is good."[49] Bachelard speaks of a 'cosmic negation' when describing a winter landscape and the effect the whiteness, this negation could perhaps be applied to the phenomenon of the sea as well, as "the dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities with increased intensity."[50] The sea, to the inhabitant of an overlooking building becomes one enor-

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49 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Spaces*. trans. Maria Jolas. (Boston, Boston Press, 1958). 39.

50 Ibid., 41.

mous mass, silent and foreboding, and like snow seems to muffle all sounds and erase any sense of scale or distance. This negation of elements can effectively increase the phenomena and experience-of what it is to dwell inside a room, within a much larger context.

Elements in Tension

The images on the following pages are an exploration of a particular phenomenon involving oneself, and a object or element, either man-made or natural in the distance. In all environments there exists some element, whether it be a mountain, a building, or the sea, that is a consistent part of the peoples lives whom inhabit the area around it. It is present in all weather, in all seasons and at all times of the day, and it is this presence which can bring comfort to those who engage with it daily through an evocation of the past, their pasts, memories both happy and sad. The object stays in one place, year after year, while your location changes constantly, and the your relationship with this element is also dynamic, creating a tension of sorts between it and you. Proust speaks of this in a deeply nostalgic sense, where he is describing his own tension between a building and the solace it would bring,

> "And on one of the longest walks we used to take from Combray there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on to an immense plain...which rose the solitary point of Saint-Hilaire's steeple, so slender and so pink that it seemed to be no more than scratched on the sky by the finger-nail of a painter anxious to give to such a landscape, to so pure a piece of

'nature', this little sign of art, this single indication of human existence...It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that shaped and crowned and consecrated every occupation, every hour of the day, every view of the town." [51]

This steeple not only marked a position in space for the character, but also become symbolic of his time spent in Combray, with its point becoming visible from the carriage as they approached the town, only to disappear again behind a hilltop. This element brought forth comfort and memories of an entire childhood.

This particular site was chosen on this basis, where it has both a visual connection with the mountaintop behind and the small archipelago stretching outwards from the town, as shown on page 56 in the drawing titled *Visual Connection*. The image on the following page titled Visual Connection II is an exploration of this idea using the man made spire of Chartres Cathedral and the naturally carved Matterhorn. Both occupy the space found immediately around them and in the distance. The third image titled Visual Connection III is an exploration of a mountainside site, exploring the notion of a landscape element and the visual connection from one position out to the sea. These elements, the mountain, the sea, and the town all resonate deeply with the inhabitants of the Island and to continue to see them daily will remind them of this and their pasts.

[51] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*. trans. C.K.Scott Moncrieff (New York City: Vintage Books,1989), 68.

Top, Visual Connection II, 2016
Bottom, VIsual Connection III, 2016

CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

Introduction

The design was approached at two different scales of utmost importance to the intent of the project: the scale of the individual room and its haptic details, and the scale of the building as object and-memorial in the larger, dramatic landscape. The initial intensity of focus was placed on these two major aspects of the building, and then was spread throughout the program, into the supportive and ancillary spaces.

To begin, the cellular nature of the building was explored, knowing that there would be a strong seriality as a result of the need for many individual rooms as part of the program. Room shapes, sizes and arrangements were studied both for their efficient use of space and also for their phenomenological implications. Once the proper size of the individual room was discovered, the arrangement, or the relationship between the individual rooms themselves was explored. This resulted in several varying arrangements, from circular, V-shaped, and linear. Ultimately the linear arrangement of the rooms was decided on because of its simplicity, rationality and expression. This exploration of the arrangement of the individual rooms was as much a formal exercise as it was a placement of program, as the relationship would manifest itself externally and announce the form of this building. Special consideration was placed on the individual rooms for obvious reasons, as it is the final room of

the dying and it was decided that attention must be paid to the smallest details. When considering this space a certain quote from Heidegger focused the attention and served as a reminder as to whom this building was for, "We all die someday, but until then it has nothing to do with us."[52] This pointed quote speaks not only to the fact that the one truly experiencing the dying is the one faced with his or her own death, but also of the immense loneliness which can take place. From this, every detail and view was designed for the comfort and psychological benefit of the individual. However, with this being said, often times there is family and visitors in the space and their comfort, as well as their psyche must be fully considered.

The other main aspect of the initial focus was that of the building-as-object/memorial-in the landscape. As the individual room was important for the comforts of the dying person, and their families, the building itself, positioned in the vast landscape along the sea must act as a beacon and memorial, for those passed. It's mountainside setting, overlooking the busy waterways off the Cape Breton coast, makes it a very visible element to those continuing the centuries old culture of the sea. The initial challenge was finding the proper form and striking a proper balance between silence and monumentality for a building that would appeal to the universal but speak to the memory of the indi-

52 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), ?.

From the Sea, 2016

vidual.

Each of these aspects, the individual room and the larger building as a whole will be discussed in further detail after a description of ones approach to the site and the building.

Approach

The site, being located on a point, off of the main established highway requires one to travel through the forest, following the rise and fall of the topography while capturing isolated views of the Atlantic Ocean and nearby coastline. This roughly two kilometre approach acts as a transitional period for all parties involved as they travel towards the vast open entity that is the sea. The views alternate from sea and forest, changing also the sense of exposure one experiences throughout this journey. As one nears the actual site, the view of forest and sea becomes sporadically highlighted with limited glimpses of the building itself, the soft sheen of the white brick standing out against the dark land and seascape. This slow reveal allows for an extension of the transitional period, giving an extra few moments for ones thoughts. Also by isolating small views of the building against the vast backdrop, and avoiding a direct, linear or perpendicular approach, any sense of grand monumentality is broken, lessening the oppressive or anxious effect of the building. This is certainly an important consideration for a building of this profundity as there is doubtlessly a heightened sensation of fear, anxiety and uncertainty as one approaches it for the
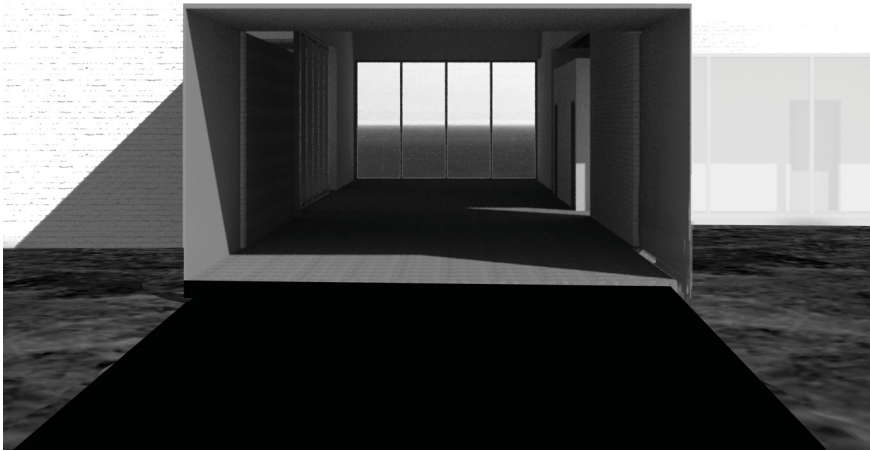
Approach Diagrams, 2016

From the Land, 2016

first, *and last* time.

Entrance and Exit

Upon arrival to the building itself, one is confronted with two very pronounced and seemingly identical sets of doors. Despite their similarities, their function is strikingly different. The one found furthest to the right of the building and marked as such, is the entrance, a passageway if you will to a place between worlds, as described in Chapter Four. This act, of crossing through the threshold of a hospice marks a very significant point in ones life, and death, and as such should be demarcated architecture ally from the exit, which of course has countless other practical and metaphysical implications. The entrance allows one an extension of the transitional period provided by the approach, time for one to further consider the profundity of the building and what it means as the cross through its threshold. This extension is made possible through a corten steel vestibule extending four meters beyond

Isolated Views Upon Approach, 2016

Top; Entrance, Drawing, 2016

Bottom; Entrance, Model, 2016

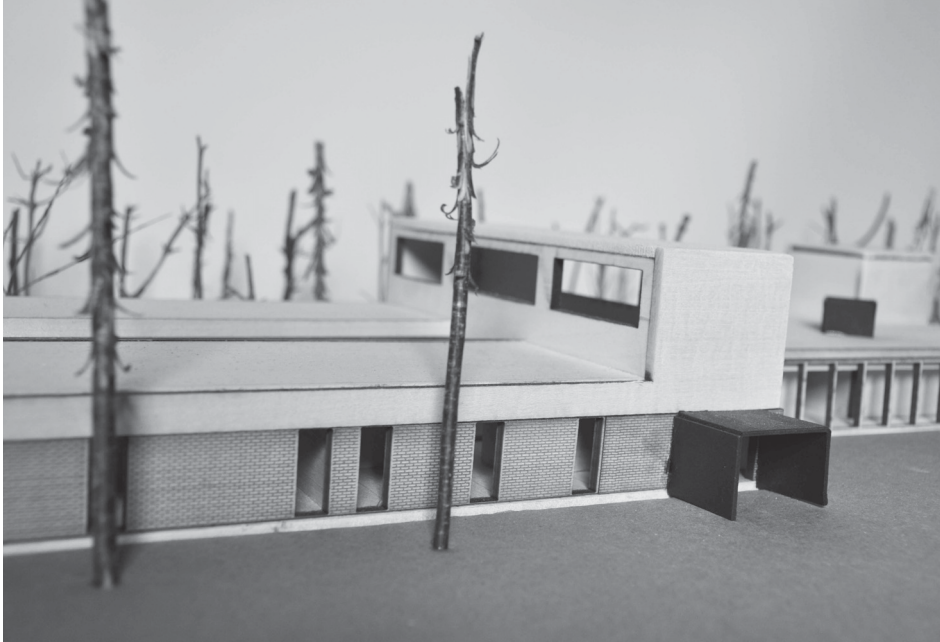Entrance and Exit, Model, 2016

entrance

the facade of the building. This forces those proceeding through to focus only forward on the threshold and the sea which is which is located on axis with the entrance and made visible through large glazing. This sea views act as a metaphor for the vast afterlife facing one, and a magnificently vast context with which to further contemplate one's life. Symbolically, this entrance threshold marks this important point in ones illness, but also practically it allows for a separation of those entering the building and the inevitable exit that they all will make.

This inevitable exit, made after both time and illness have run their course, marks another important point in the journey of those whom have chosen to enter this place of dying. As the entrance faces one head

Entrance, Drawing, 2016

Steel Vestibule Construction
- Waterproof membrane
- Steel Plate   20mm
- Thermal Insulation   100mm
- Vapor Barrier
- Steel Plate   20mm

Detail 03

0 m   0.5   1   2

Entrance Detail, 2016

on with the sea, and its metaphorical afterlife, the exit turns ones position 180 degrees to face the mountain, the landscape, the earth. This is implied as another symbolic threshold, where one is now, after their contemplations and death, is acting out a return to the earth, from which man is made. This concept stems from the Christian Burial Rite based on the biblical passages that state that we both begin, and end as dust:

> We therefore commit his body to the ground;
> Earth to Earth,
> Ashes to Ashes,
> Dust to Dust.[53]

This return to the Earth is emphasized through the same architectural means as the entrance, an elongated steel vestibule, only now it is confronted

Model, 2016

53 "The Burial of the Dead: Rite One." *The Online Book of Common Prayer*, accessed May 30, 2016, http://www.bcponline.org

from the opposite side, from the interior. Once again, the view is forced through the vestibule, focusing the attention on the passage through this important threshold.

The separation of the entrance and exit is a crucial consideration for this program, although each are acting as thresholds, the world beyond them is completely different and it is this difference that continues the narrative surrounding life, dying, death and the afterlife.

Courtyard

Marking the centre or heart of the building is the courtyard, open to both the sky above and the stone below. Effectively a cloister, rooted in Renaissance tradition, the courtyard offers a place of contemplation and reflection while being protected within the walls of the building. Referring to the Ospedale Santa Maria Nuova again we see that courtyards, or cloisters have been included in health care buildings for nearly 500 years. Traditionally a part of a place of worship such as a church or monastery, the courtyard is symbolic of thought, contemplation and meditation all within the walls of a building, and protected from the world beyond. Historically, the courtyard has been found in particularly warm climates, where its walls offer some much needed shade in periods of high heat and during cooler periods, the overhead sun warms the interior, drawing people out from inside the building. The virtues of the courtyard space extend beyond thermal regulation, and it is these virtues that can
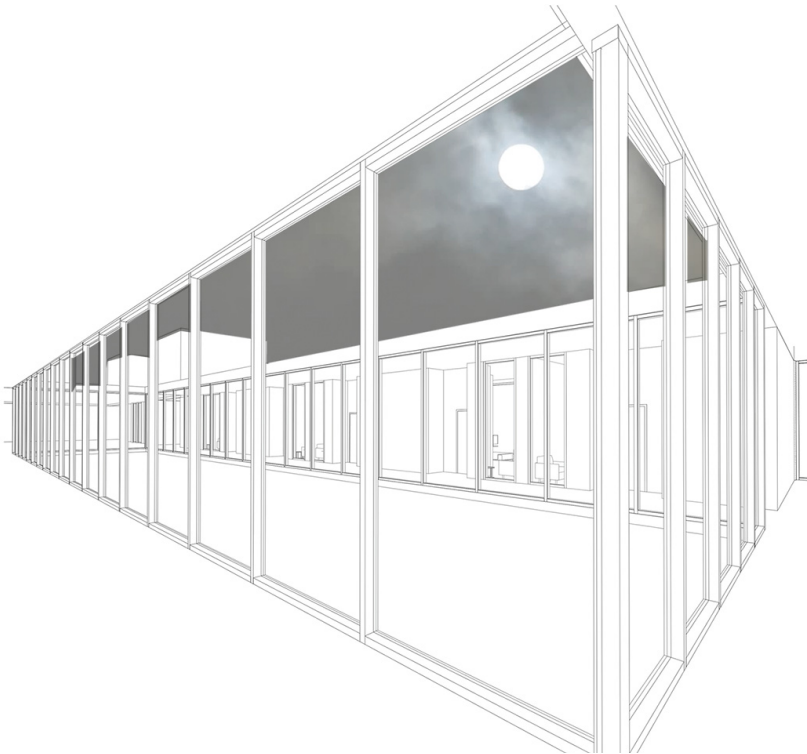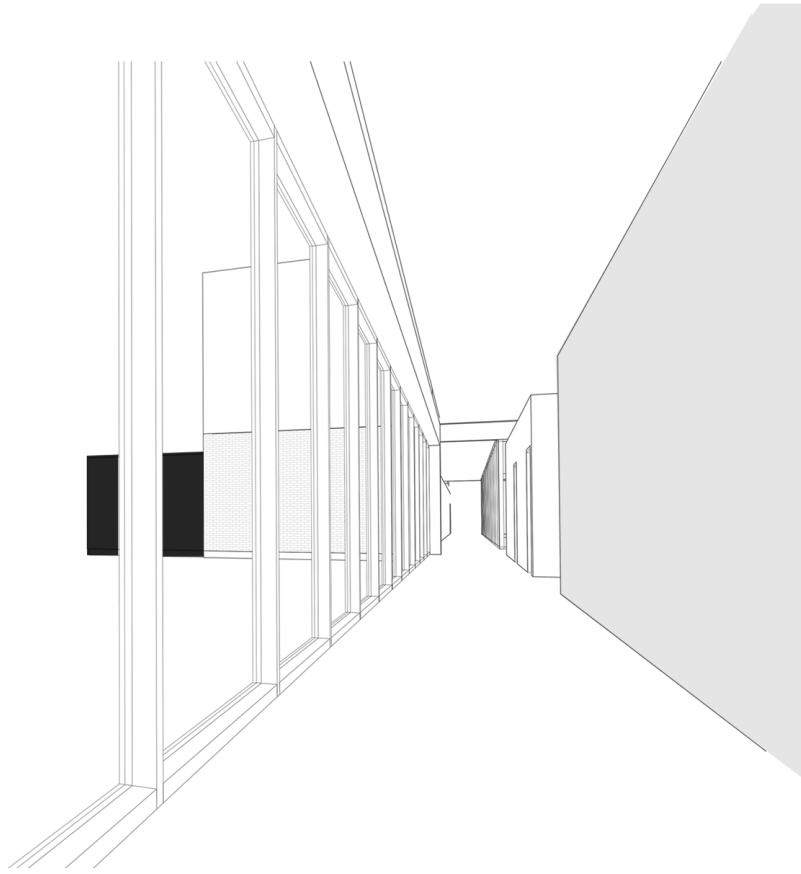
Courtyard Drawing, 2016

justify a courtyard found in a northern climate. The
same way buildings can delineate a square or piaz-
za in a town, a courtyard can be defined by its wall,
and the result is one of where the spatial qualities
provide both comfort, security and isolation. These
spatial qualities can be seen as quite pleasant as
they act to remove one from the surrounding en-
vironment, forcing one to focus solely on them-
selves and their thoughts, and to be able to do so
protected within its walls. Traditionally monasteries
have at their core, or heart, a courtyard, and this is
intended to provide an extension from the individ-
ual cells, where meditation and conversation may
take place, in a new context, open to the elements
above. Here in this space, the courtyard is seen as
this, an extension of the individual rooms as well   Courtyard, Drawing, 2016
as the other interior spaces of the building as well.
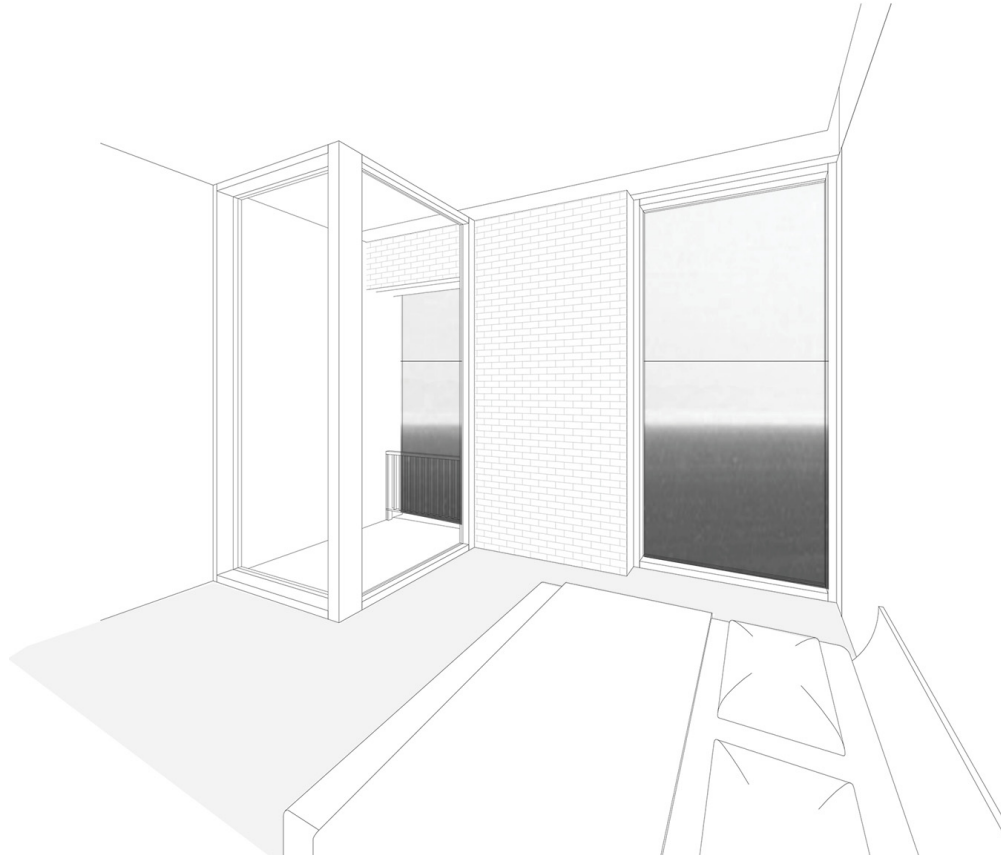The tall glazing blurs the line between interior and

Top; Corridor, Drawing, 2016
Bottom; Courtyard, Drawing, 2016

Roof Assembly
- Concrete   120mm
- Thermal Insulation   150mm
- Fair-Faced Concrete   150mm
-

Wall Assembly
- Fair-Faced Concrete   250mm
- Thermal Insulation   150mm
- Fair-Faced Concrete   150mm

Floor Assembly
- Finished Concrete slab   75mm
- Thermal Insulation   150mm
- Concrete Slab   250mm

Detail 02

0 m   0.5   1   2

Courtyard Detail

Model, 2016

exterior and questions the idea of a threshold in a northern climate. Found parallel to the corridors on either side, the courtyard brings dynamic natural light and a heightened sense of spatiality to the traditionally confined circulatory public space. Accessible from all sides, the space reveals the granite foundation of the site, circumscribed by a level pathway for mobility. The pathway provides the medium for a daily journey around its boundary, perhaps becoming a ritual to some, as the proceed through what may be their final days.

Individual Room

The essence of the entire building is distilled into the individual rooms facing outwards to the vast

Individual Room, Drawing, 2016

Individual Room,
2016

0 m   1   2

horizon of the sea. This is a space dedicated entirely to those experiencing their final days, and to providing the necessary comforts to them and their families in this emotional period. As fear, sadness and anxiety are all still a part of the modern death, it was decided that the architecture of the room must commit to limiting these emotional responses, allowing more time and space for spiritual preparations. This was addressed through both the spatial qualities of the room and the materials used. Firstly, the size and proportions of the room were considered, which were explored through both drawings and models. In a space too large, one becomes lost, in a space too tall, one feels small: these were the qualities initially explored, followed by the overall dimensional proportions of the room and its relationship to the seascape found constantly in the horizon. The overall size needed to fulfill the spatial needs of not only the patient, but also that of their guests, whom if desired could

Model, 2016

spend and extended period within the room.

Once these spatial qualities were considered fully, the question of temperature and atmosphere of the room were explored. Turning to the term *atmosphere*, most notably used by Swiss Architect Peter Zumthor, allows one the means to explore something beyond the physical, yet using the physical elements to create the architectural quality of a space. Our perceptions are not limited to the visual and to do so negates our multi-sensory abilities in regards to understanding a space. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that the visual imagery or quality of architecture is only a limited part of the architectural experience in its

Individual Room, Drawing, 2016

totality, "The judgement of environmental charac-
ter is a complex multi-sensory fusion of countless
factors which are immediately and synthetically
grasped as an overall atmosphere, feeling, mood
or ambiance."[54] To create these types of param-
eters for a project, ones that account for the feeling
or atmosphere of a room displays an understand-
ing and compassion for those whom the room is
intended. This notion of compassion was ever-
present throughout the development of the indi-
vidual rooms, and how one could create the setting
that will eventually become a spiritual passageway
to the afterlife. The combination of materials com-
pliments one another in their texture, color and
warmth. The white-brick walls are evocative of a lo-
cal tradition of both brick production and masonry,
bringing forth distant memories of prominent local
buildings. The local wood found on the floors, in
the millwork and as the frames of the doors and
windows softens the effect of the brickwork while
again perhaps reminding one of their own home,
cottage or church.

In an attempt to de-institutionalize the institution
these materials were used in a manner that would
limit the extensive use of only one, as found in most
health-care buildings where one surface is applied
throughout its entirety denying any rhythm or bal-
ance to the space.
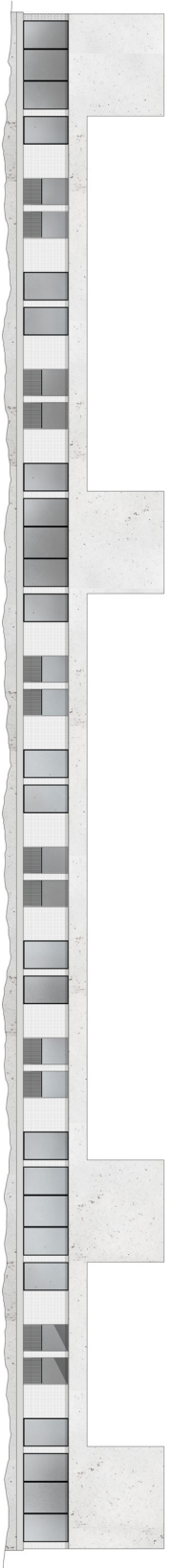
Prior to entering the room itself one is met with

54 Juhani Pallasmaa, *'Space, Place and Atmosphere'*
   Lecture (The Hague: Royal Academy of Art/
   STROOM, April 2012).

Steel Skylight Construction
- Steel Plate   20mm
- Thermal Insulation   100mm
- Vapor Barrier
- Steel Plate   20mm

Roof Assembly
- Topsoil   60mm
- Drainage/Protection mat 35mm
-
- Thermal Insulation   200mm
- Vapour Barrier
- Concrete Slab   200mm

Floor Assembly
- Finished Concrete Slab   75 mm
- Thermal Insulation   100 mm
- Water Barrier
- Concrete ground Slab   250 mm

Detail 01

0 m   0.5   1   2

Roof/Skylight Detail, 2016

Building Plan, 2016

0

5 m

10 m

Top; East Elevation, Drawing, 2016

Bottom; East Elevation, Model, 2016

a small space outside the door. Aside from interrupting the linearity of the corridor by extending the space laterally, it offers a brief transitional space for those about to enter the room. As the death of a loved one is an emotional and difficult event, this small gesture offers one last moment for reflection and preparation before entering. Perched high above the coast, the room offers one upon entrance a view outwards to the vast horizon of the sea. A small patio is located in each room for guests and patients alike wishing to be out of doors and feel the coastal breeze as the become lost in the vast context that is before them. To completely fulfill the primordial needs of man, a fireplace brings the final element to the room along with the sky, earth and water. For millennia mankind has sat next to a fire being warmed by its flames and becoming lost in its dance.

The remainder of the building is dedicated to the programatic requirements necessary to provide the care to those staying within the hospice. This ranges from medical and physical therapy rooms, to rooms specifically for couselling and group sessions. These meeting rooms can be used both professionally and also for family. A small kitchen provides food for the patients and is attached to a small refrectory faced with large glazing overlooking the coastline and the sea. To those still mobile enough , this offers a place for a communal gathering where food and company can be enjoyed while looking out into the landscape.

As an object in the landscape the building is defined by the four main volumes spaced throughout its length. Each of these volumes marks a vertical expansion of the space within the building. Reaching upwards over eight meters, each volume is a public space, lit naturally from the side and looking out to the sea. These spaces work to bring light into the building, interupt the linearity of the corridors and provide a contrast from the individual room.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the program of this project offered an excellent theatre for the exploration of the human emotions including, but not limited to, fear, anxiety and uncertainty, brought forth in response to death, and how architecture may play a role in mediating these emotions. However it is an impossible task to simply theorize about such profound emotions and their roots, as each person brings with them something unique: a different history which influences their preferences in regards to space, light, materiality and exposure. To fully and truthfully explore such notions, one would need to not only understand more about the psychological and emotional state of the person or persons but also explore the space and lighting effects through large scale, 1:1 models. These large scale models of isolated building elements would allow for a near full realization of the built work. With these models in place and through the aid of healthcare professionals, those with chronic -life threatening conditions could have been invited to experience these spaces. Those willing to participate could then fully engage with the space, conscious of their comfort, security and state of mind. A transcribed dialogue with the dying, their

loved ones and medical professionals would supplement a deeper understanding of the emotional responses and needs that transpire when the recognition of ones death is at hand. This may have provided a systematic methodology, giving the thesis more validity in the medical and architectural fields and
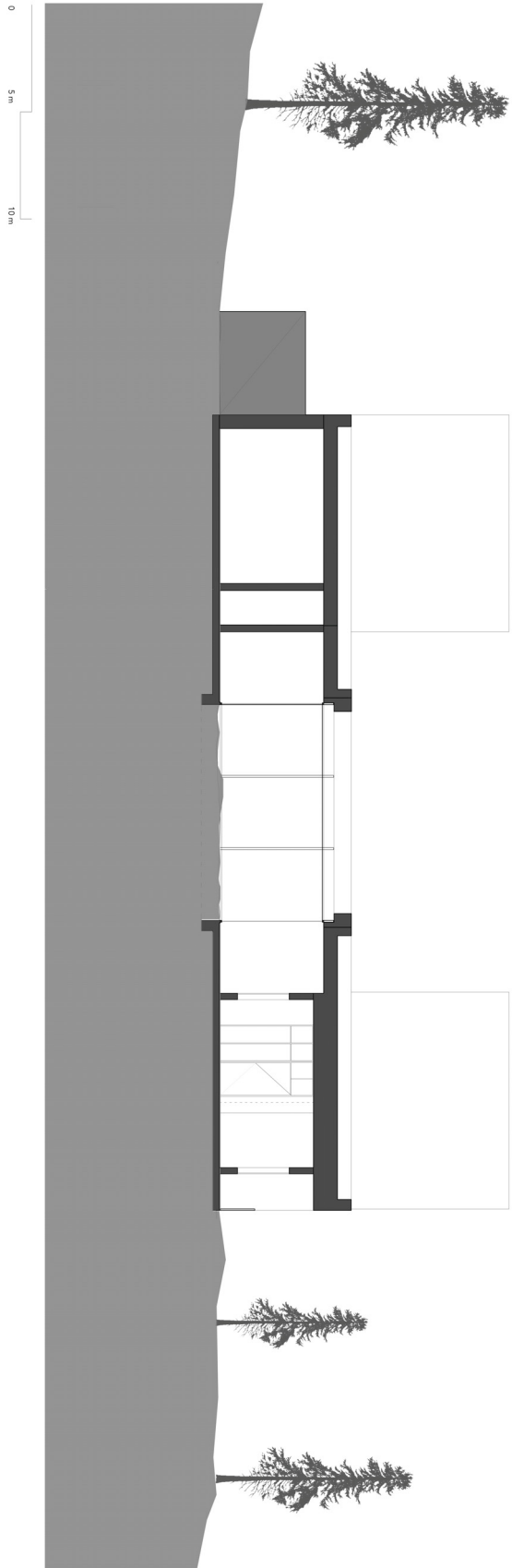
As this exploration involved the human psyche, phenomenology, architecture and aesthetics, perhaps the scope of the thesis project was too large for the timeframe. The project may have benefitted from increased focus and concentration. This focusing could have been aimed at the individual architectural elements in isolation, or on an individual case study with a known life-threatening condition, history and preferences. Either of these examples could have served as the point of exploration and further study of architecture's role in ones experience of death and dying.

This topic and program were chosen as it offered a excellent platform for the exploration of the phenomenological implications of architecture in the most essential and profound circumstances. It has proven as such, and these ideas and thoughts gained from this work may be applied toward future projects, specifically in health care.
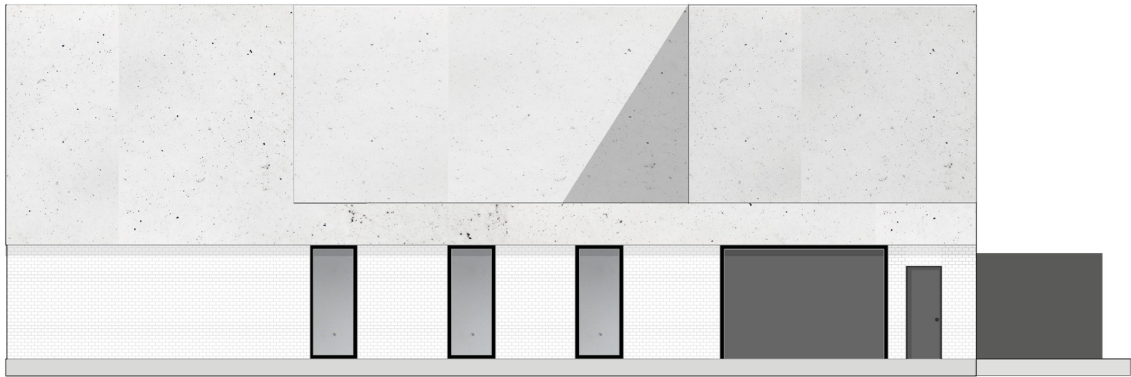
Images

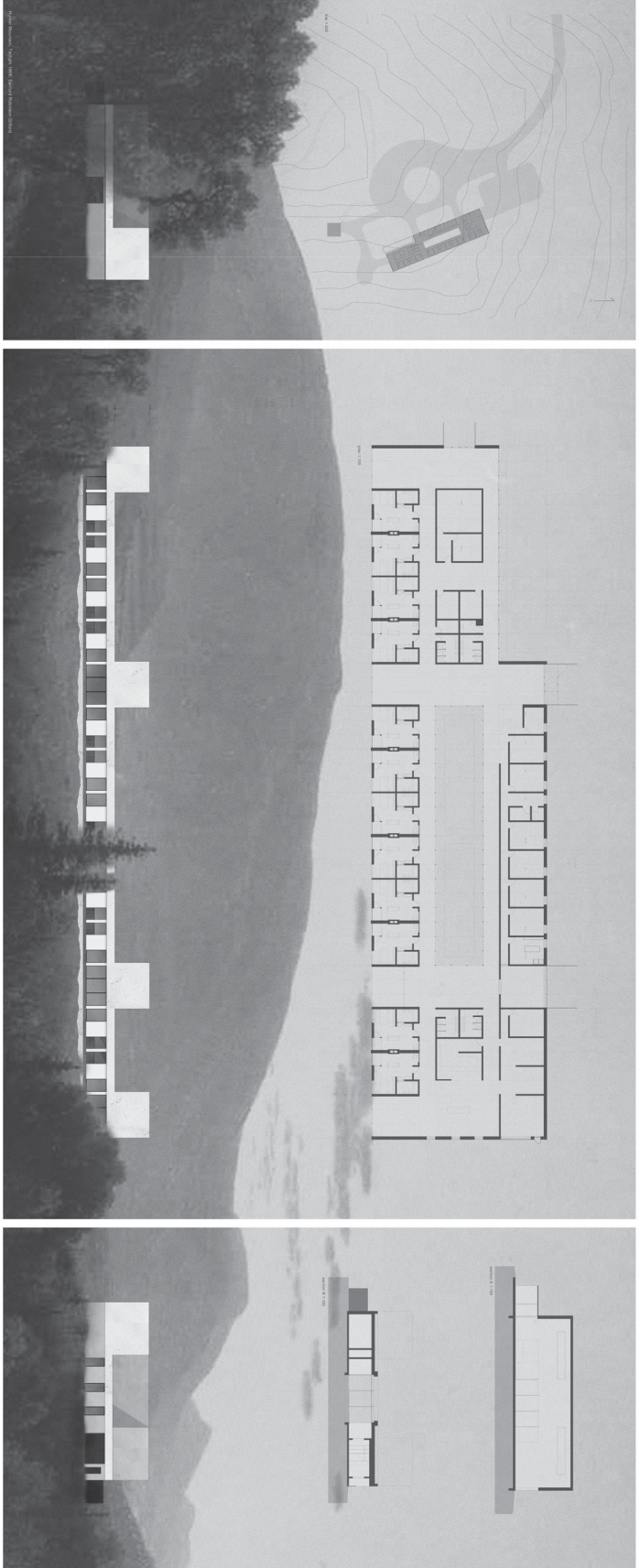Model, 2016

Transverse Section, 2016
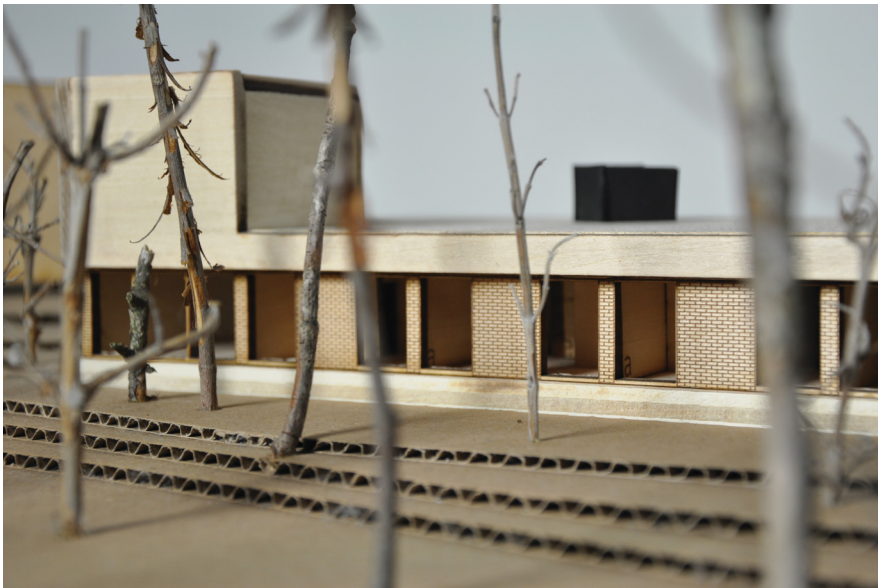
0

5 m

10 m

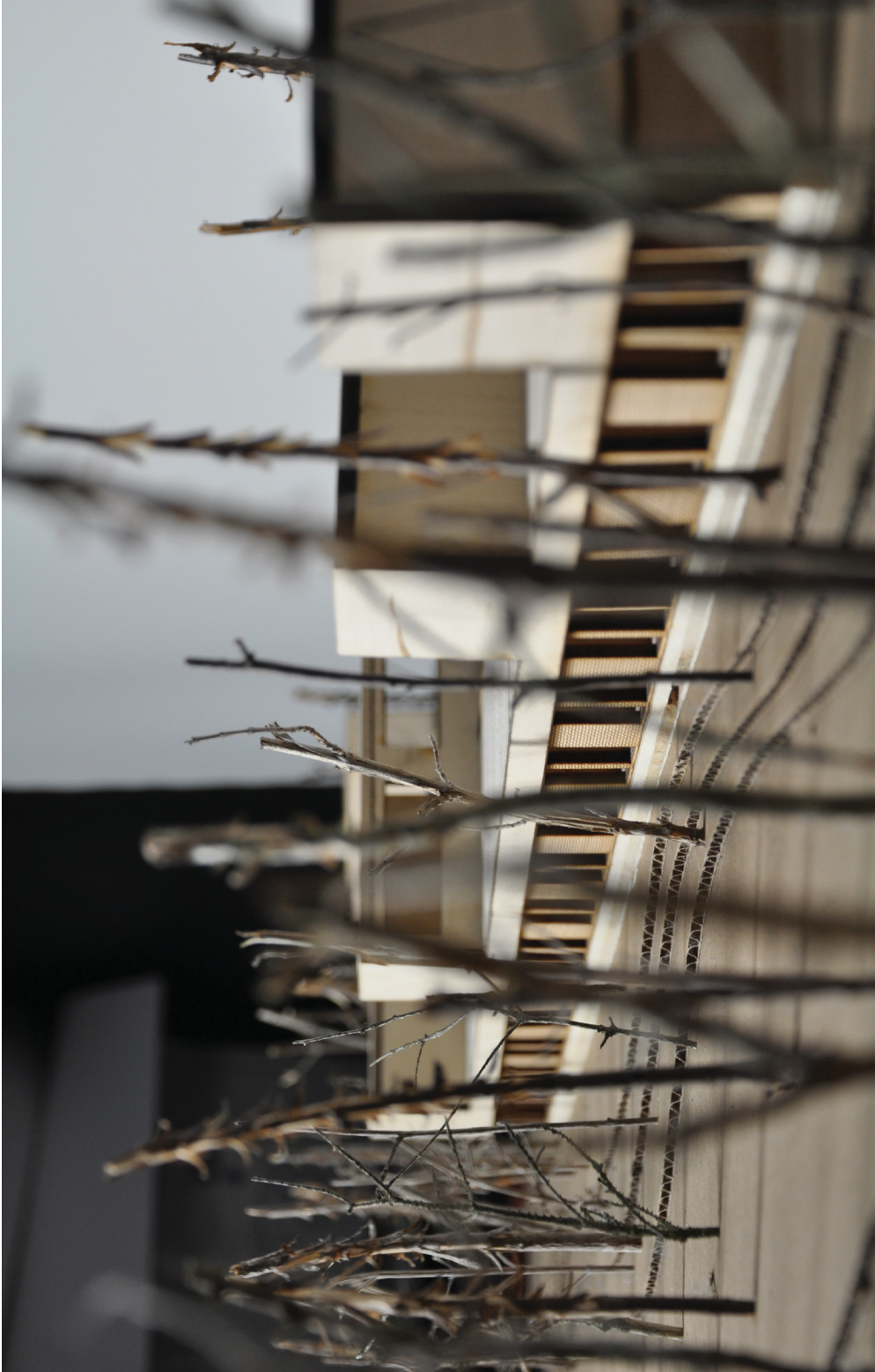0

5 m

10 m

Transverse Section, 2016
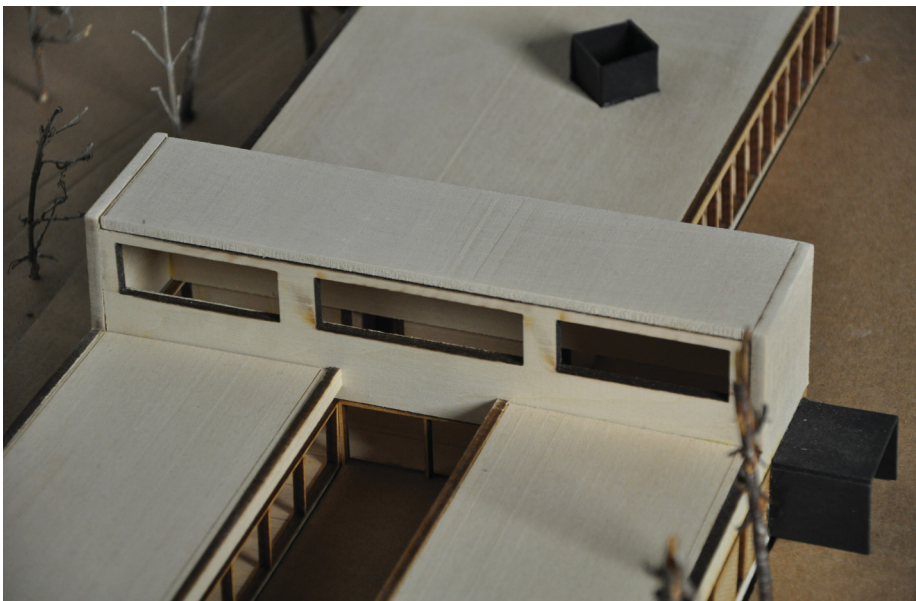
Top; North Elevation
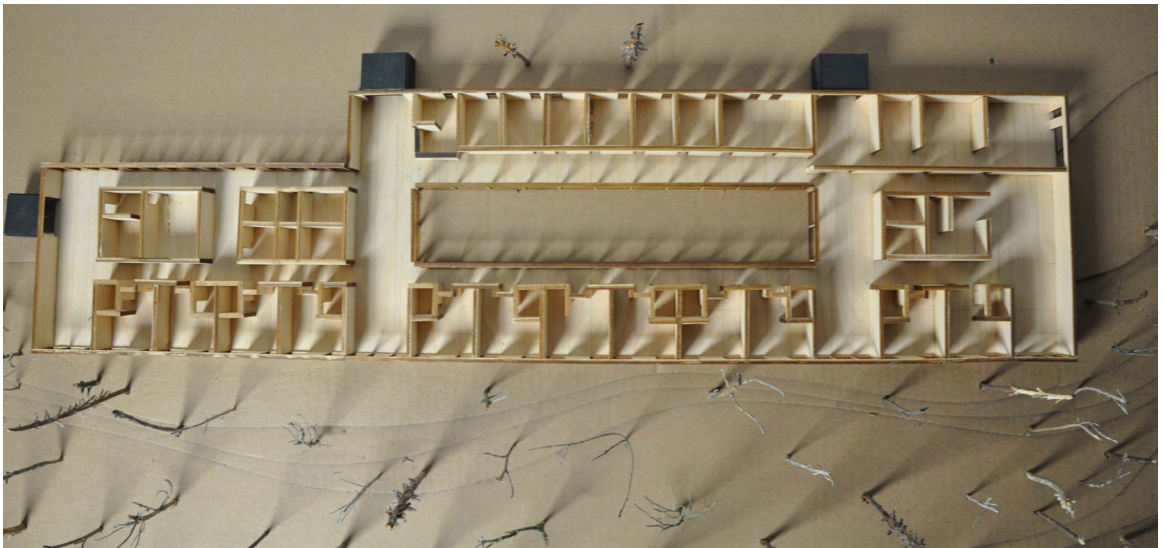
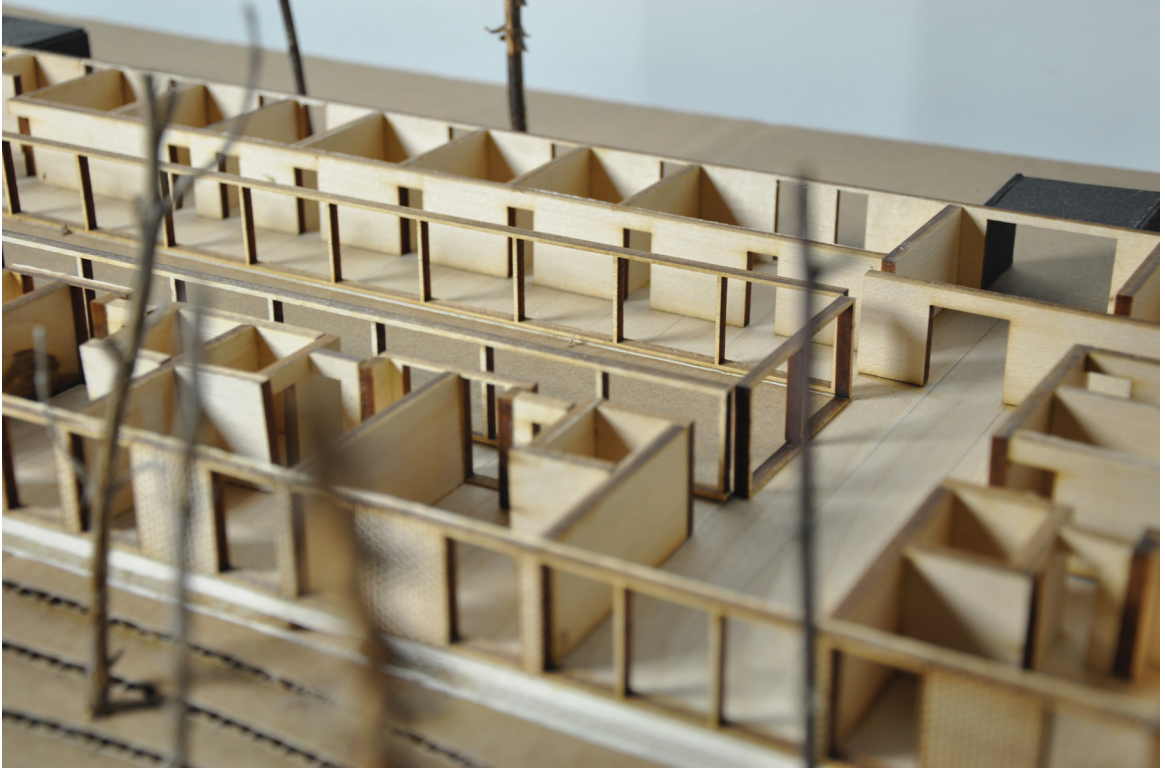Bottom; South Elevation

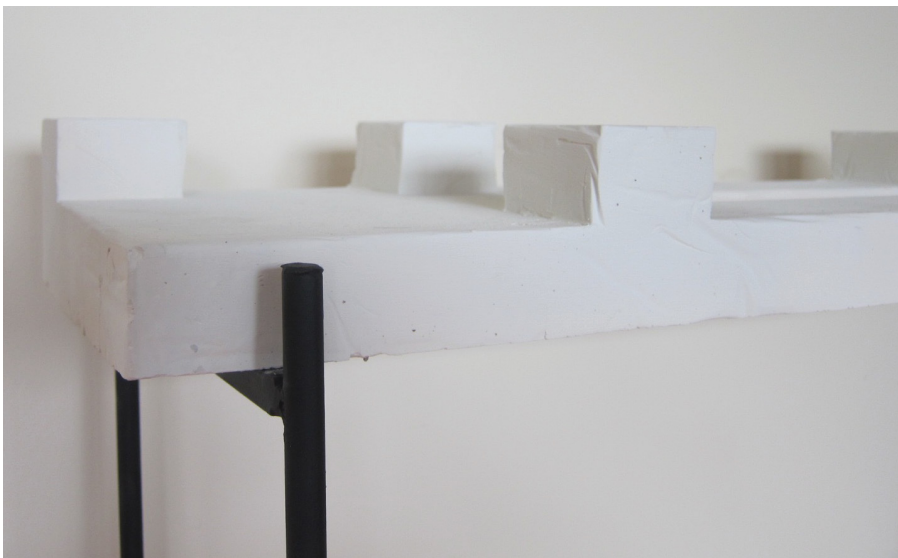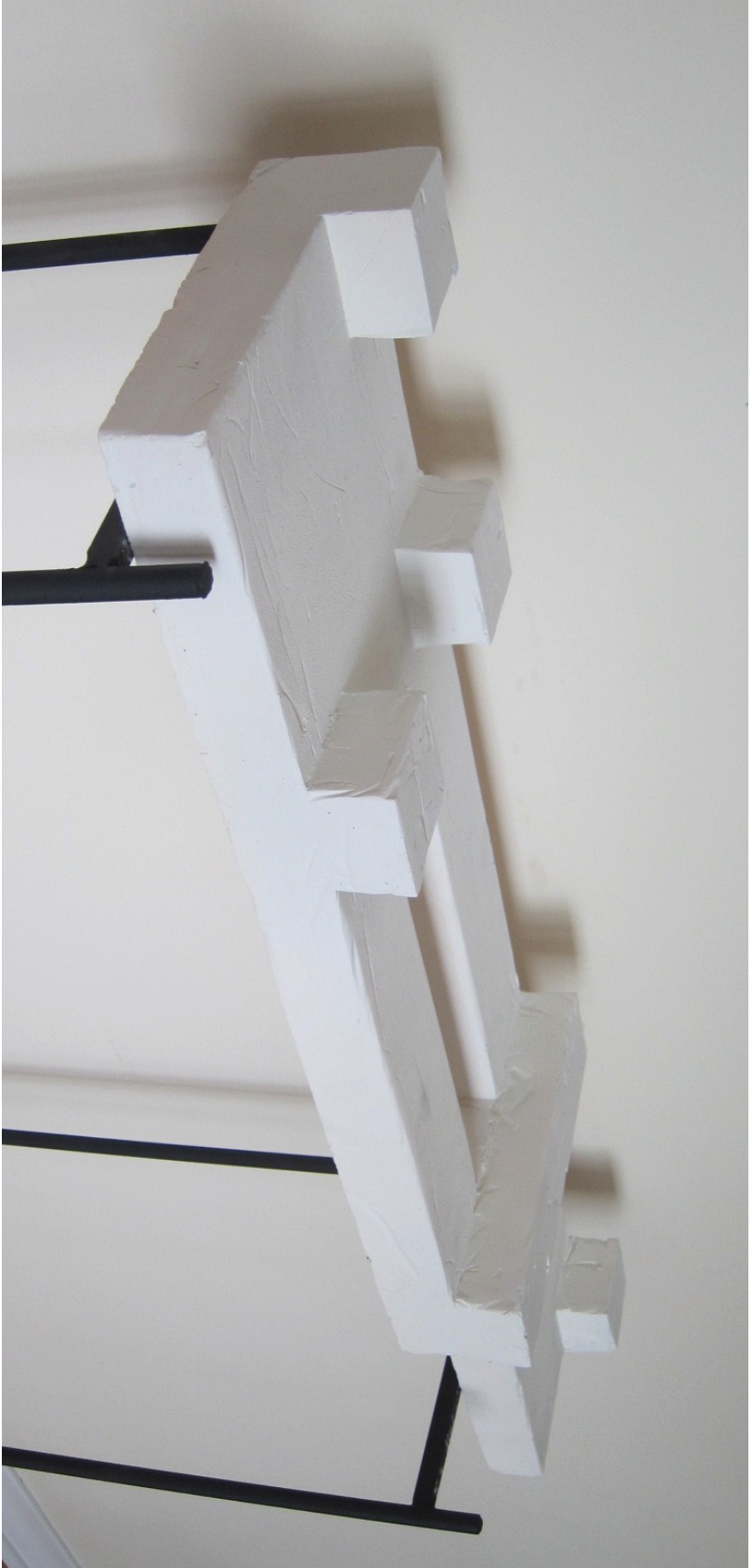Triptych Presentation Layout

Top/Bottom; Model
Detail, 2016

Model. 2016

Top/Mid/Bottom; Model Detail, 2016

Top/Bottom; Model
Detail, 2016

Top; Mode, Plaster, 2016
Bottom; Model Detail, Plaster, 2016

Model, Plaster, 2016

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