

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Woodlawn Cemetery: Trees of Time, Colonialism, and Privacy

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ABSTRACT

This paper begins with a vignette to situate the reader in the landscape of the Woodlawn Cemetery and gain a better context for the analysis that follows. Through primary and secondary research, the Woodlawn Cemetery reveals the ways that temporality, power, and culture are reflected in this deathscape. Historical records of the Woodlawn Cemetery support the argument that temporality is being realised in the landscape in a linear way, here, time is an important part in shaping the landscape. The concept of memoryscapes, which involves spaces of memory, show that the connection of nonlinear time also exists within deathscapes, specifically within the Woodlawn Cemetery. Power is imbued in the landscape of the Woodlawn Cemetery through burials. Burials in this deathscape serve as powerful symbols of control when considering concepts such as necro-colonialism and the establishment of war monuments. Through methods such as walking the land there are other overt displays of power at the Woodlawn Cemetery that reflect the ownership of the land and governance of access imposed by the City of Saskatoon. This paper focuses on how aesthetics are used to manipulate emotions and ease the discomfort of confronting death and create a sense of familiarity for Euro-Canadians. An analysis of the surrounding landscape and changing attitudes toward death through time support the idea that death is not something to be looked upon by everybody as it has been deemed a private affair.

Keywords: Deathscape, Memoryscape, Cultural Landscape, Necro-colonialism, Cemetery, Temporality

INTRODUCTION

A memoryscape, defined by R. Rose-Redwood et al., is a place “of memory – such as statues, monuments, place names, and other memorials” (2022, 449). A site such as this becomes a space of memory; it invites those who visit to remember people and events of the past while being confronted with the future. Woodlawn Cemetery, located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, is one such place. Arriving at the front gate there are two large pillars marking the entrance in addition to a second wire gate reinforcing the notion of access, refer to Figure 1. Mature trees, each with a memorial

plaque line for Next-of-Kin Avenue, lead all visitors into the space, as can be seen in Figure 2. Through the trees, grave markers stick out of the snow in organised rows made of all different materials, shapes, and sizes. Smaller lanes begin to split off from the main avenue dividing the area into large sections of grave markers. Next-of-Kin Avenue eventually reaches a circular roundabout with multiple small lanes leading off like spokes on a wheel. Figure 3 shows the section in the centre of the roundabout where columbaria and benches are erected. At this point the grave markers surrounding the roundabout are visibly older,

recognisable not only by the dates but also by the pale sun-bleached look of the stones reflecting the many years they have endured. Dense February snow may be hiding some of the flat markers but the formation around the roundabout is a unique feature of the cemetery as the grave markers are placed in a circle rather than in neat rows found elsewhere in the cemetery. Houses stand parallel to the north side of the cemetery separated by a fence, shrubs and a small alleyway. Along the east side of the cemetery a ditch follows along the edge which is preceded by train tracks and, further down a small hill, is a busy street. During my time spent in the cemetery there was the occasional car parked in a lane, or a small group of people putting tokens next to a grave marker. Once, on a frigid afternoon in early March after two hours of observations, a row of vehicles drove down the avenue led by a car with a single red flashing light on top and a hearse. The funeral procession was short,

consisting of no more than five cars. This event was notable as it was the only time over five hours of observation in February and March of 2023 that multiple vehicles were observed entering the cemetery; on all other occasions no more than two other vehicles present within the entire cemetery.

This paper seeks to explore how a Canadian cemetery, such as Woodlawn, reflects human interactions with the landscape revealing elements of time, power imbalances or displays of control, and cultural perceptions surrounding death. The methods used to analyse this landscape included walking the land, recording people's interactions with their environment, taking photos, examining maps, and secondary research of historical and academic sources through a cultural lens. Using these methods, Woodlawn Cemetery reflects the ways that temporality, power, and culture are echoed in the landscape. Temporality is first examined in its more linear



FIGURE 1: *Next of Kin Avenue main entrance (Photo by author).*

form by reviewing the history of Woodlawn Cemetery and analysing how the past is portrayed in the contemporary landscape. Temporality is then further explored in the form of nonlinear events which include analyses of the cemetery as a memoryscape and a connection of the dead in living time. The following topic that will be discussed is the way in which power is expressed through the landscape. Power is seen in the form of colonial imposition of land that creates deathscapes, forcibly making its presence known through time and space. Power is also seen at Woodlawn Cemetery in the control that is exerted by the City of Saskatoon through access to and within the grounds. The last topic that will be explored is the way culture is reflected through the cemetery. Plants reveal



FIGURE 2: *Next of Kin Avenue (Photo by author).*



FIGURE 3: *Roundabout in the Old Blocks at Woodlawn Cemetery (Photo by author).*

important cultural values placed on aesthetics and comfort when being forced to confront death. An expression of fear and privacy associated with death in Euro-Canadian culture is seen in the way that the cemetery is sheltered from view not only by physical barriers but also in the arrangement of houses.

TEMPORALITY

A brief history of Woodlawn Cemetery provides a better understanding of the cemetery and its relationship to power and colonialism. Temporality can be understood from two different perspectives. The first is linear akin to chronology and is described by Tim Ingold as "the A-series, in which time is immanent in the passage of events" (1993, 157) relevant to a discussion of history. The Nutana Cemetery was the first colonial burial grounds established in Saskatoon by the 1883 Temperance Colony (City of Saskatoon, n.d.d). The colony was erected on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River but, once "the railway finally arrived" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.d) in 1889, the population spread to the west side of the river. With the promise of more infrastructure and development, colonial presence in Saskatoon became more pervasive in 1906 and "By 1911 had more than doubled" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.d). Euro-Canadians began to feel the need to have another colonial cemetery built that

was more accessible to those settling along the west side of the South Saskatchewan River. Travelling to the Nutana Cemetery on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River was considered “very poor and unsafe to use a hearse thereon” (City of Saskatoon, n.d.a) and left colonists missing funerals of loved ones. The distress felt by those residing on the west side of the South Saskatchewan River led to a petition and eventual establishment of Woodlawn Cemetery. Originally built in 1906 next to the Roman Catholic Cemetery, Woodlawn “was transferred to the City in 1918” (City of Saskatoon, n.d.a) but was always considered the official burial grounds to the colonists who settled on the west side of the South Saskatchewan River. The A-series of temporality not only exists in the linear string of events of colonisation that led to the creation of the cemetery but also in the present-day appearance of the landscape.

The physical structure of Woodlawn Cemetery reflects the same A-series of linear temporality when comparing older blocks to newer blocks. Maps of the Woodlawn

Cemetery reveal which section contains some of the earliest colonial burials from 1906. This historical section has been aptly named the Old Blocks and has a marked difference in layout compared to other sections of the Woodlawn Cemetery. As can be seen in Figure 4, the layout of the Old Blocks is circular which is a stark contrast to the straight grid pattern in the rest of the cemetery. The grave markers themselves are scattered around the roundabout in the Old Blocks forming a large circle, whereas the rest of the cemetery has rectangular blocks in neat rows and predictable spaces between each marker. There are also crossroads going in diagonals that do not appear in any other areas besides the Old Blocks. One suggestion made by Hite (2011, 1-2) is that a circular arrangement of grave markers might be symbolic of a wagon wheel. Wagon wheels were an important part of colonial pioneer life which existed “throughout the prairie homesteading era, from 1870-1914” (Jackel 2015) coinciding with the establishment of the Woodlawn Cemetery in 1906. If a wheel broke and could

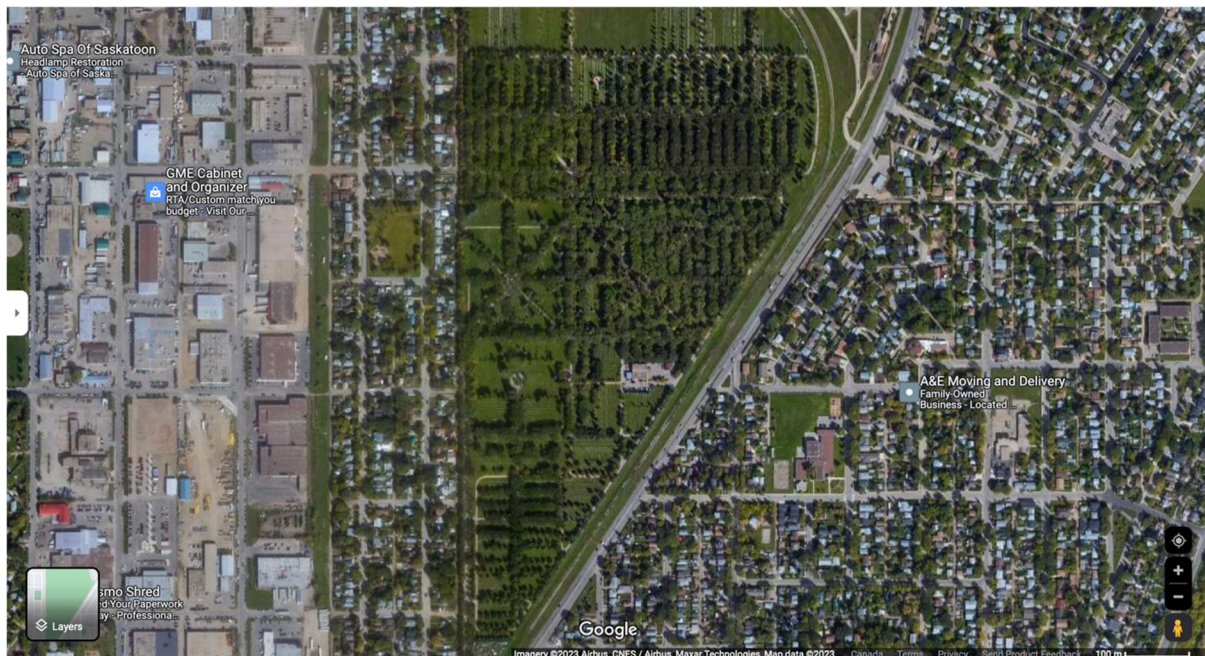


FIGURE 4: Satellite view of Woodlawn Cemetery. Maps data: Google ©2023 Airbus, CNES/Airbus, Maxar technologies, Map data ©2023 Canada, Terms, Privacy, Send Product Feedback 100 m



FIGURE 5: *Satellite view of Old Blocks. Maps data: Google ©2023 Airbus, CNES/ Airbus, Maxar technologies.*

not be replaced or fixed "they would end their journey" (Hite 2011, 1); thus, the wagon wheel became a symbol for the end of life's journey. This suggestion seems to be supported by the crossroads in the Old Blocks of Woodlawn Cemetery as seen in Figure 5, which resemble spokes on a wheel. A consideration that could support this hypothesis is the originally planned layout of the older Nutana Cemetery which constituted straight lines and square shaped sections (City of Saskatoon, n.d. e). The choice to construct the Old Blocks with a circular layout and diagonal crossroads resembling a wagon wheel after typical block styles had been considered in an earlier cemetery may reflect a significant colonial symbol. While it has proven difficult to find applicable research on circular patterns of tombstones from the early 1900's, Hite's (2011) proposal alludes to sociohistorical reflections of temporality in the landscape. The idea of the Old Blocks representing pioneer life supports this notion where history exists within the specific formations of the Woodlawn Cemetery.

The second aspect of temporality that will be discussed is "the B-series, in which events are strung out in time" (Ingold 1993, 157) allowing for exploration of the memoryscape and the uniqueness of time in deathscapes. Deathscapes refer to "a wide range of landscape features associated with death and burial" (Barker 2019, 1136), including official and unofficial burial grounds, which additionally invoke memories of the past. Each grave marker represents one moment of the past, every one unique but overlapping with another. This applies to specific people, families, and even events.

The collections of military stones grouped together and the avenues of trees encourage reflection on wars of the past and present. Reflections of the past serve to connect the living and the dead through time and space which reveals the nonlinear aspect of temporality in Woodlawn Cemetery. While a "funeral symbolically removes the individual from linear time" (Francis 2003, 222-223), the grave markers then place them back into the realm of the living. Death involves a certain

cessation of time, a finality in the end of consciousness but there are still rhythms of it present in memory, and even ceremonies, as time does not end, even in death. The act of remembrance places individuals in the past while existing in the present and simultaneously confronting the future. The B-series of temporality is reflected through the landscape of Woodlawn Cemetery in the unique layers of memory that exist within it. There are additionally reflections of time outside of memory which are included in the B-series that relate to the activities constantly occurring within the cemetery.

These rhythms within Woodlawn Cemetery can be described as a taskscape, "an array of related activities" (Ingold 1993, 158), which occur socially. Being present in the deathscape allows for people to feel the presence of others even if they are not readily visible. The dead are present through their respective grave markers and the living through the activities that affect the landscape. Grounds keepers are always changing the landscape, mourners leave evidence of remembrance, and ceremonies occur once or cyclically, drawing in small to large crowds. There are dualities in the rhythms present at the Woodlawn Cemetery where the dead are memorialised through life. Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue is a unique way in which the dead are represented in physical eternal time. Trees are symbolic of a particular point in time and evoke a bygone past while also being symbolic of the future as they live and endure seasons, years, and taskscapes. These memorial trees are the perfect symbols for time as they are not only representations of the past but also the present, the future, and the cycles of time all at once. The Woodlawn Cemetery is an incredibly temporal landscape due to the many layers of time that exist in this memoryscape. The trees are very important to understanding the Woodlawn Cemetery, not just because of their representation of time but also in the way that they reflect power

dynamics, being living monuments to colonisers who passed.

POWER AND CONTROL

The landscape of the Woodlawn Cemetery is laden with aspects of power which began with its conception. Power here refers to the anthropological definition made by Ronald Niezen as "control, authority, or domination, which involves the ability to influence the decisions and behavior of others" (2018, 2) in this case as it is expressed through the landscape. The trees along the Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue serve as a living monument to the ongoing "dispossession of Indigenous People from their lands" (Chalmers 2019, 379). Although what is now the City of Saskatoon and Woodlawn Cemetery itself exists on Indigenous lands, these trees symbolise those who passed in World War I, a war that involved Indigenous peoples but whose contributions are often overlooked. Before colonists arrived in 1882 to settle, the land which is now known as Saskatoon belonged to the Métis (City of Saskatoon, n.d.b; Anuk 2011, 11), unfortunately, there is little written on the history of their burial grounds. The Métis were pushed to the outskirts of the community reflecting their "marginal place in Saskatoon society" (Waiser 2017), where they established their own cemeteries such as the Métis Round Prairie Cemetery. The Woodlawn Cemetery has very little information or observable features suggesting Indigenous presence within the cemetery but there is extensive history, plaques, and monuments dedicated to the settlers who established the cemetery. A term brought about by Adam Barker (2018, 1134) aptly refers to deathscapes, such as the Woodlawn Cemetery, as sites of necro-colonialism. While the Woodlawn Cemetery is not the first major colonial imposition on the west bank of the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon, it has been one of the most long lasting.

Necro-colonialism not only involves imposing colonial rule on deathscapes, but it imbues the land with culturally specific "complex, meaning-laden landscapes of dead and memory" (Barker 2018, 1134), in this case that of British peoples. Less than 20 years after the establishment of the Woodlawn Cemetery, two settler women, Mrs. Margret Hanson and Mrs. Jarvis, "proposed that a tree be planted along a road through the cemetery, along with a plaque, for each individual killed" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.a) during World War I. Both women belonged to the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) whose objective was "promoting its vision of hegemonic British Canada" (Pickles 1998, 195) and uphold British patriotism. The IODE contributed to the oppression of Indigenous peoples by "demanding the assimilation of difference and demanding conformity to the British democracy" (Pickles 1998, 195). The avenue of trees that were planted in the Woodlawn Cemetery, known as the Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue, was "officially recognized as a site of national historic significance" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.a) in 1994. The nomination as an official site of historical significance is problematic in that it positively highlights a monument that pays respect to and was created by the people who colonised Saskatoon. It is increasingly problematic that there is no mention of Indigenous peoples on Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue. The Woodlawn Cemetery resides on Treaty 6 territory. During the creation of Treaty 6 and other numbered treaties in Canada, Indigenous peoples "were worried that they might lose their territory to settlers" (Taylor 1985). Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue is an enduring testimony to their fears being realised. The memorial trees lining the avenue are living remembrance to those who lived and died supporting Canada as a British colony. A monument such as the Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue "erases Indigenous peoples from the landscape while constructing settler society"

(Chalmers 2019, 379) and a Euro-Canadian history. The Next-of-Kin Memorial Avenue not only reflects the necro-colonialism of the land but also the overarching colonial power that will forever endure through this deathscape.

Power dynamics, such as the imposition of colonialism on the landscape, are also reflected in the management of the cemetery. Power is wielded over the landscape by controlling when it is to be accessed and how people should move through it. The cemetery is under the control and ownership of the City of Saskatoon in addition to being "a member of the Western Canada Cemetery Association" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.c) which comes with its own rules and regulations. While the cemetery is free to visit and open to the public during the day, there are some notions of power placed on the land. One example being that after visiting hours end at 9:00 pm, while the main entrance remains open "the 36th and 39th entrance gates are closed and locked" (City of Saskatoon 2022, 111). There is an authoritative presence discouraging use outside of visiting hours, between 8:00 am and 9:00 pm, through locked gates and posted signage stating no trespassing after hours, as shown in Figure 1. Further, the sporadic appearance of power and control is shown in the construction of borders placed upon the land. Fences and thick brush, to block access, are erected along some edges but other areas have gapped fencing or none at all.

Inside the borders, the space throughout Woodlawn Cemetery, at least in the winter, does not allow for people to easily navigate the property. While the City of Saskatoon upholds the bylaw that states the city is to "provide for an orderly, well-groomed" (The City of Saskatoon 2015, 35) property, the snow builds up throughout the winter and only small lanes to drive cars through are cleared. For those who wish to visit a grave of a loved one they must either make the journey through knee-deep snow or visit from the small road that has

been cleared. Though people are allowed to make their way through the snow to grave markers, it gradually becomes an increasingly difficult task as it builds up and compacts, which many people may not be physically able to accomplish. Notions of privilege become a consideration when the maintenance regulations upheld by the City of Saskatoon allows only those who are able bodied, or own the necessary equipment such as shovels, the ability to visit their desired grave markers. Seasonal maintenance can allow or restrict movement and reflects the way in which control over the land is not only made through borders around the cemetery but also by maintenance regulations. It is worth noting the dynamics of power visible during the winter may differ from what is seen during the summer as snow is a seasonal observation that reflects an authoritative presence in the cemetery. The Woodlawn Cemetery symbolises colonial power which is enforced around and within the landscape. The City of Saskatoon is always making its presence known, through signage, gates, and maintenance, demonstrating who has power over the landscape which allows or restricts access throughout the cemetery. By deciding what is and is not considered orderly, the City of Saskatoon not only has power over appearances and access but also upholds cultural perceptions of what is appropriate in a landscape dedicated to death.

CULTURE

The Woodlawn Cemetery reveals cultural perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours surrounding death in its landscape. The British Red Cross put forward the idea "that graves would be less miserable if they were planted with grass and simple flowers" (Morris 1997, 413) which expanded to the use of other greenery and shrubs. The concept of aesthetic "beautification of the final resting place" (Miller and Rivera 2006, 336) was thought to help to strengthen relations with the dead,

making cemeteries more appealing to visit. Further, by incorporating "elements of the surrounding suburb" (Francis 2003, 226) such as manicured trees and shrubs, the cemetery has created a sense of place that people who live in similar areas would be comfortable leaving their dead and visiting. Emulating the surrounding life to create a more comfortable environment is also seen in the sections of the cemetery that are set up in grid-like patterns to mimic city streets. In addition, these walkways and blocks also serve to eliminate the "need to constantly walk over and among the actual graves" (Miller and Rivera 2006, 336) maintaining that sense of familiarity and comfort so important to Euro-Canadian culture while separating visitors from "feelings of terror and seclusion" (338) from walking past the unknown dead. The choices to display and utilise flora in the design of the cemetery is meant to convey a sense of comfort and familiarity while visiting the dead.

Nature is not only used to comfort those walking among the dead but is also used to symbolise the "victory of life over death" (City of Saskatoon, n.d.a), thus equating death to losing. The view of death as a failure represents the fear that is held within Euro-Canadian culture of death. The cemetery itself is a sacred "site where the living confront the reality of their own death and possibly receive comfort" (Francis 2003, 223) in that others may not let them be forgotten. Contributing to the fear of death is that its ritual is less seen as belonging to the current social, now more "subsumed within the private realm" (Isaac 2006, 31). It has shifted to become a private affair. European immigrants brought new cultural ideas with them to Canada, often involving more "romantic views of death" (Isaac 2006, 31) where it became a more personal experience. As the popularity of religion decreased, the notion of death being a private affair remained. This, coupled with the lowering mortality rates, and death becoming a more foreign concept, left people with

increased fear over their own mortality (Isaac 2006, 32). The landscape of the Woodlawn Cemetery exemplifies the privacy and fear associated with death in Euro-Canadian culture.

The houses bordering the Woodlawn Cemetery reflect the way in which death is not something to be observed by the greater public and to symbolise the separation between the realms of the living and the dead. The fence separating the cemetery and residential neighbourhood is reinforced with thick shrubs and tall trees creating a strong border between the landscapes which can be seen in Figure 6. The border itself signifies the separation of life and death and as phenomena that only exist together within specific shared spaces. If people were to look out into the cemetery, the trees and shrubs shelter the cemetery from sight. Beyond the physical barriers, Figure 7 shows how the houses that stand parallel to the west side of cemetery are all facing away so that the back of the houses, with only a few windows, face toward the cemetery. The landscape of the Woodlawn Cemetery reflects

the fear associated with death through nature, and the privacy awarded to the dead through the physical barriers and layout of the surrounding area. Analysis of the Woodlawn Cemetery has shown how culture and Euro-Canadian perceptions of death are reflected in deathscapes.

CONCLUSION

Woodlawn Cemetery is a place to explore aspects of temporality, power, and culture within a deathscape. The landscape reflects temporality in linear and nonlinear ways. From the view of linear time, history reveals Woodlawn Cemetery's historical connections to colonial imposition and how history is clearly reflected in the landscape today. In a nonlinear sense, temporality is then explored through memoryscapes and the unique rhythms of time that exist within the cemetery. Power is first explored in the way that colonial settlers used necro-colonialism to gain control over the landscape by imbuing it with memory. The present-day control and



FIGURE 6: *Border trees blocking houses from view (Photo by author).*



FIGURE 7: *Backs of houses facing the Woodlawn Cemetery (Photo by author).*

ownership over the landscape also reflects power in decisions affecting access and movement in and across the landscape. Woodlawn Cemetery reflects cultural perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours toward death in the choices of plants and organisation meant to emphasise a pleasing aesthetic to deliver comfort in an uncomfortable landscape. Culture is further reflected in the landscape by revealing how perceptions of fear and privacy surrounding death are taken into account and upheld specifically by colonial cemeteries. The use of plants, symbolising the victory of life, and the way that houses bordering the Woodlawn Cemetery face away from the deathscape, give it the privacy that is afforded to death in Euro-Canadian culture. These factors all reflect how landscapes like Woodlawn Cemetery can reveal aspects of temporality, power and cultural attitudes surrounding death when analysed. Moving forward, this work is meant to inspire future research analysing necro-colonialism and

deathscapes in Canada as little work currently exists on the topic (but see Barker 2018; Chalmers 2019; Gambell 2009). With the increasing focus towards reconciling with Indigenous peoples it would be a missed opportunity to not explore and acknowledge how colonialism has been imbued into the land through the dead in ways that may never be undone.

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