June - July 2018

Passage

process book

Venice, Italy

Venice is eternity itself

-Joseph Brodsky

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Site Background

San Michele Island

The Capella Emilliana designed by Guglielmo dei Grigi was added.

1530

A neighbouring island of San Cristofo della Pace was selected to become a cemetery.

1807

Napoleon declared the island an official cemetery. Before that, Venetian practise had been to bury the dead under church floors or paving stones, which was deemed unsanitary given Venice's susceptibility to Aqua Alta, the floods which spread throughout the city several times a year.

1837

A new regulation was put: people can now only rest on the island for 10 to 20 years, or 99 years if buried in a family tomb. Afterwards, the remains are cremated or moved to another cemetery.

1995

1469

Camaldolese monks asked Mauro Codussi to build Chiesa di San Michele next to their monastery- the first Renaissance church in Venice.

1565

Remains of those whose families were unable to pay for the maintenance, fees were shipped off to Sant'Ariano, often referred to as the island of bones. Common graves were dug to accommodate large numbers of human remains.

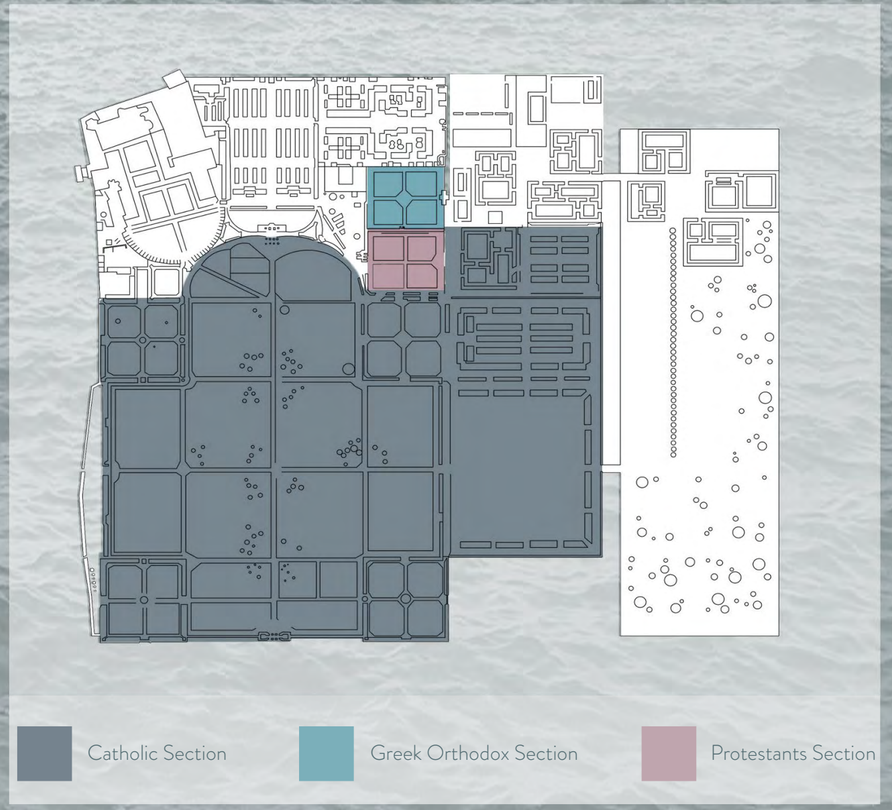
1836

The canal that separated the two islands was filled in, and the larger island became known as San Michele.

1933

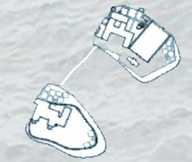
By the time the island of Sant'Ariano was finally closed in 1933, a layer of bones three meters deep had amassed within its stone walls.

San Michele Island: Old and New



The island of San Michele has undergone significant changes and additions.

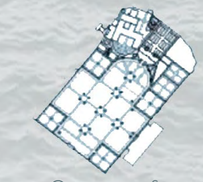
San Cristofo
+
San Michele



San Cristofo
+
San Michele
cemeteries

Bridge of San
Cristofo +
San Michele
infill

As population continues to grow, so does the need for another addition.



Cemetery of
Isolda
di San
Michele

1908
addition

Chipperfield
addition

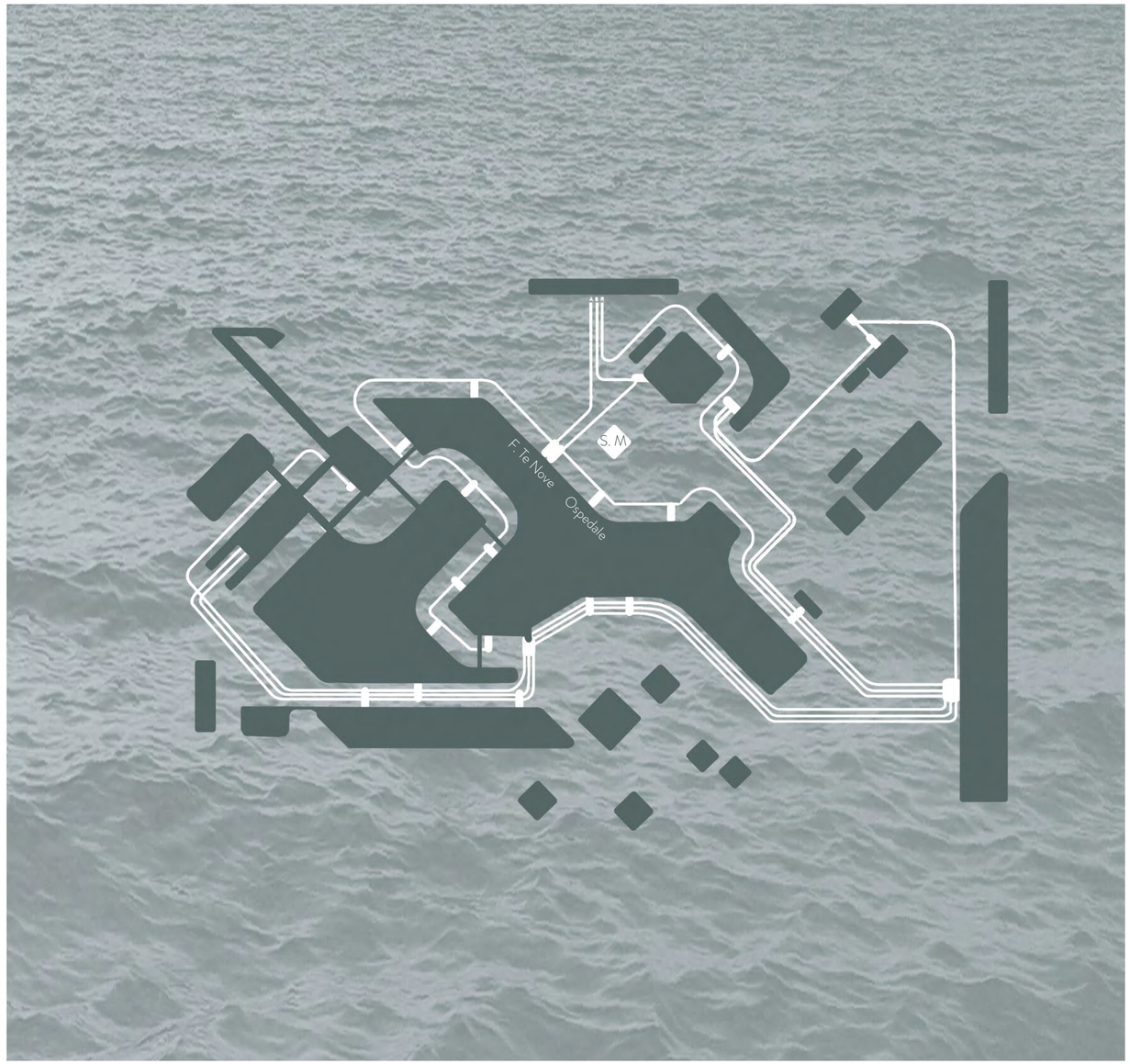
“I was born 500 meters away from here”

said one of the waiters at a restaurant at Fondamente Nove, pointing at the water.

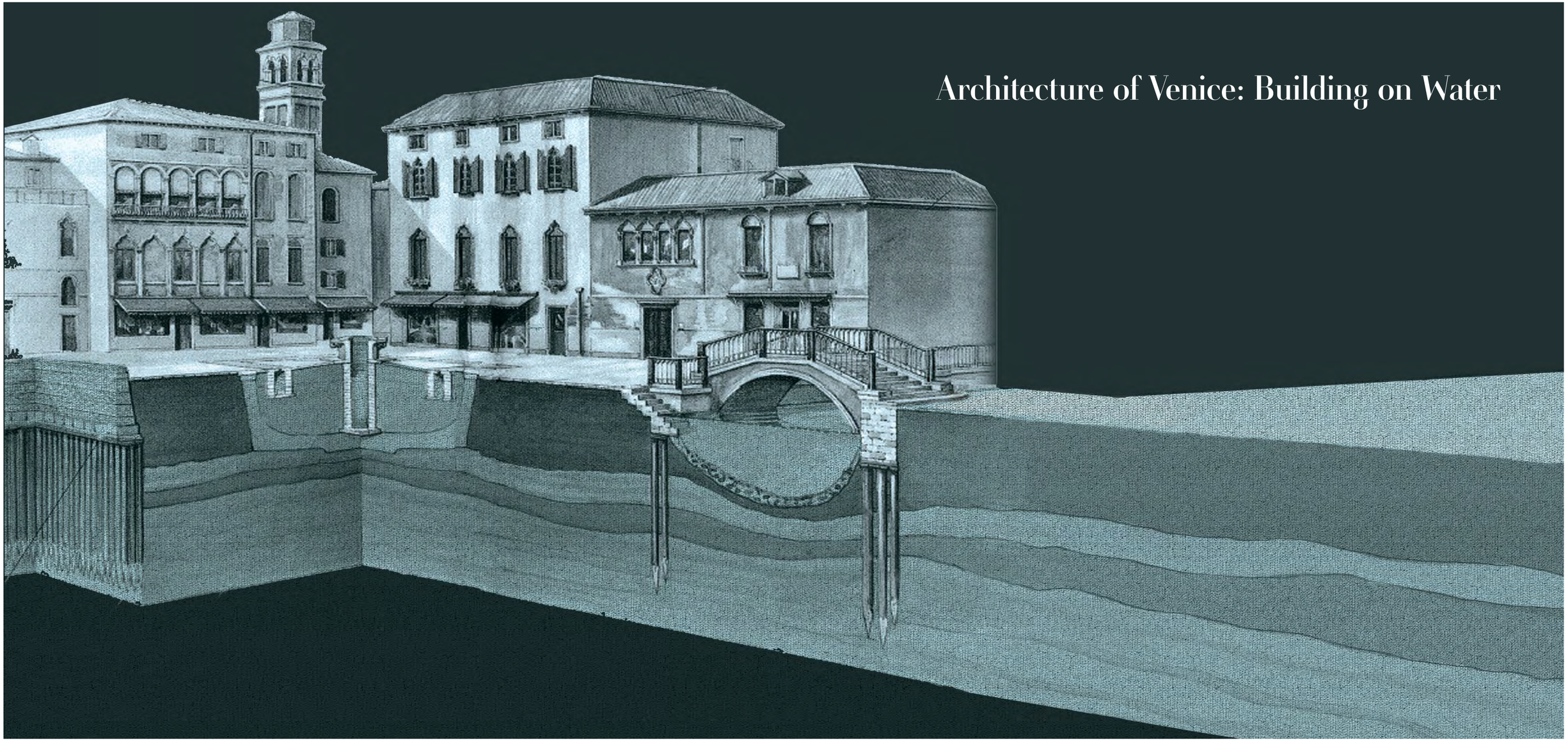
The distance between Ospedale Santi Giovanni e Paola (General Hospital in Venice) and Island of San Michele is 860 m.

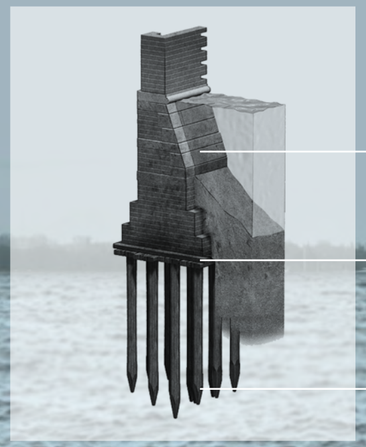
Both of the stops are located on the same line of Alilaguna.

Death and birth essentially become two of the stops of the Vaporetto.



Architecture of Venice: Building on Water

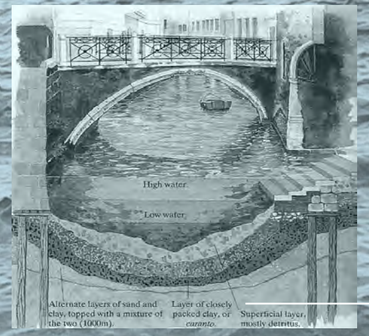




The stones were the only parts to have contact with air and water; the wooden beams and poles stayed within the mud and *caranto layers* and as time went by they were affected by a mineralization process that made them actually even harder and more resistant.

On top of the poles there are 2 layers of wooden beams to support the actual foundation of stones (still underground / water level) and then the brick walls or columns on top of the stones.

Larch or oak poles into the underwater ground. The poles are 3 meters long, with a diameter of 20 cm and were driven underground until they reached the harder caranto layer composed of clay and sand. They were driven along the ground line (building perimeter) that had to support the walls.



To build a city where it is impossible to build a city is madness in itself, but to build there one of the most elegant and grandest of cities is the madness of genius.

Alexander Herzen

Death in Venice

Besides San Michele Island, Venice is home to other cemeteries: old Jewish Cemetery (founded in 1380s) and a former Greek orthodox burial in San Giorgio dei Greci (built in 1547)

↑

The old cemetery functioned until the 1770s when a new cemetery was opened: its entrance is now around the corner, a few hundred meters away. This cemetery is still in use by today's Jewish community — it includes grand family tombs and other monuments from earlier times.

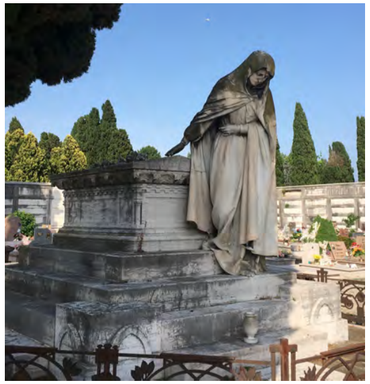
→

Cyrillic inscription in the ancient former cemetery at the back of the Greek-Orthodox church, of San Giorgio dei Greci (Venice) ("Saint George of the Greeks").
(Translation:
I was the first one to arrive to you/ And the first one to leave you/ Don't cry / I feel good here / I am home)

San Michele Island: 1808 - 2006

Almost every gravestone had a photo of the deceased and evidence of a recent visit... fresh flowers, handwritten notes and little mementos.

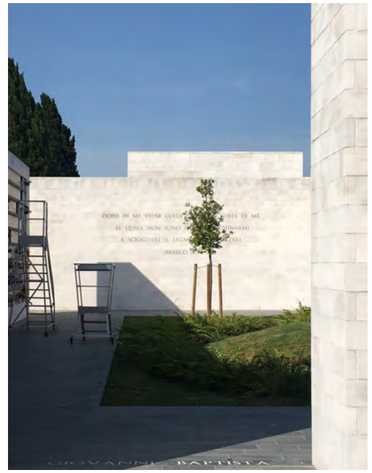
The more modern sections of the cemetery have long, towering rows of tombs with rolling ladders parked at each end. We watched family members climb ladders, replace fresh flowers, pass a kiss to the photo and cross themselves before climbing back down.

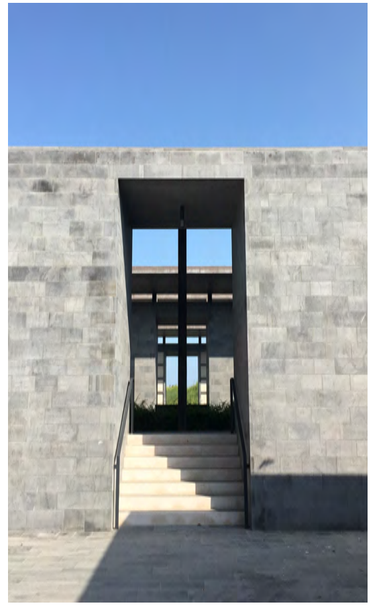


San Michele Island: Chipperfield Addition

The project itself comprises two phases: in the first, the burial grounds of the current cemetery are complemented through the construction of a series of new courtyards, a crematorium, and a chapel.

The second phase of the project involves the construction of a new island, running parallel to the existing cemetery but separated by a 15m-wide channel. This new island will feature four tomb buildings - designed as simple, sculpted blocks - together with a series of gardens at water level. Unlike the remainder of San Michele, built higher above the water line and with its perimeter wall, this new island looks to create a more open, accessible monument so as to provide a greater sense of place not only for the cemetery but for the lagoon and Venice as a whole.



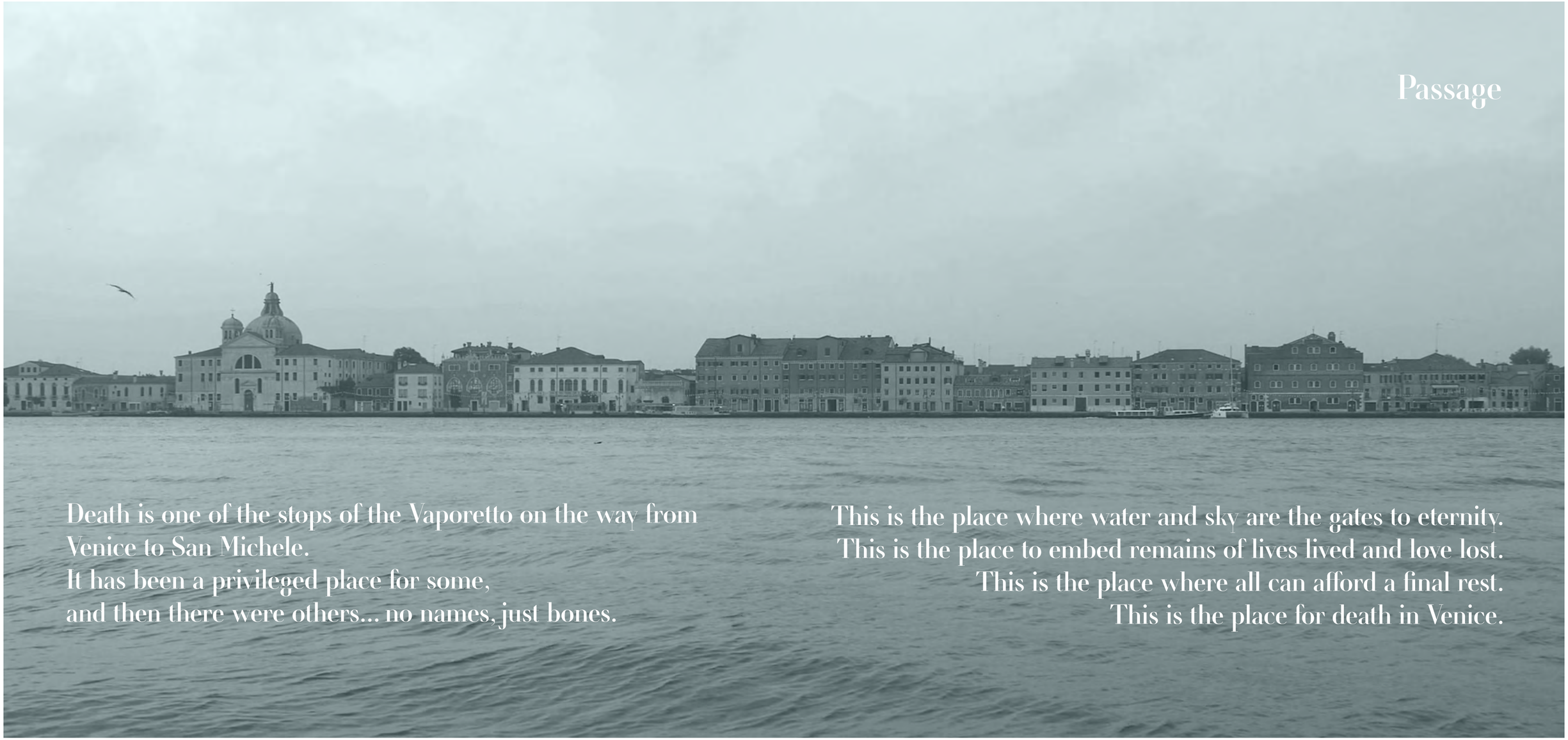


Until 1954, all private tombs in the city, whether below or above ground, were leased for eternity. Since then, the city of Venice has leased tombs for a varying number of years (12-30).

In some cases, leases can be renewed; otherwise, graves are exhumed and the remains can be cremated or deposited into the cemetery 's common ossuary, usually with little to no information of those who are buried there.

Ossuary niches are renewable for 20 more years as long as families are able to provide payments.

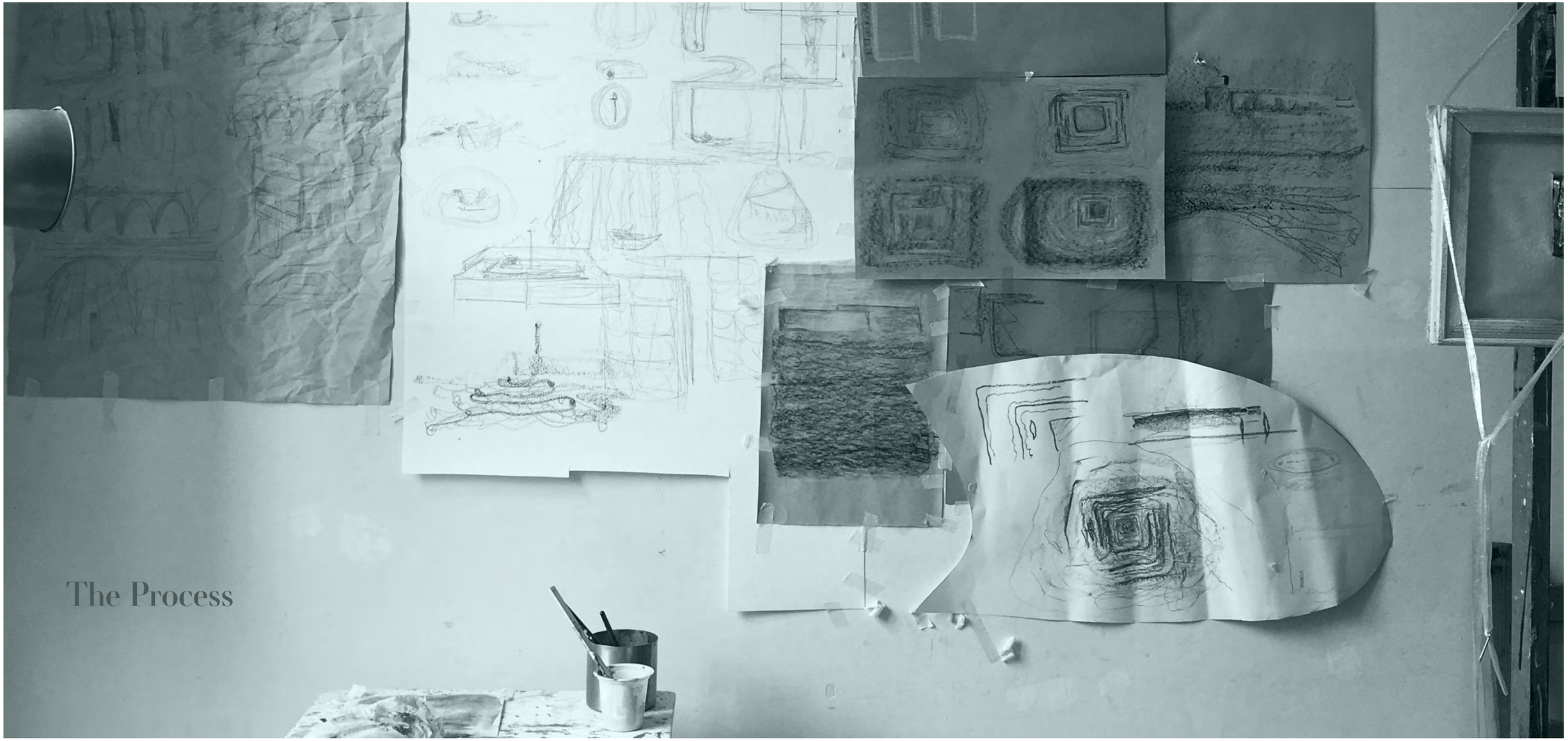
For those occupants whose relatives are unable to pay the lease, the prospect of being forgotten for eternity looms ahead.



Passage

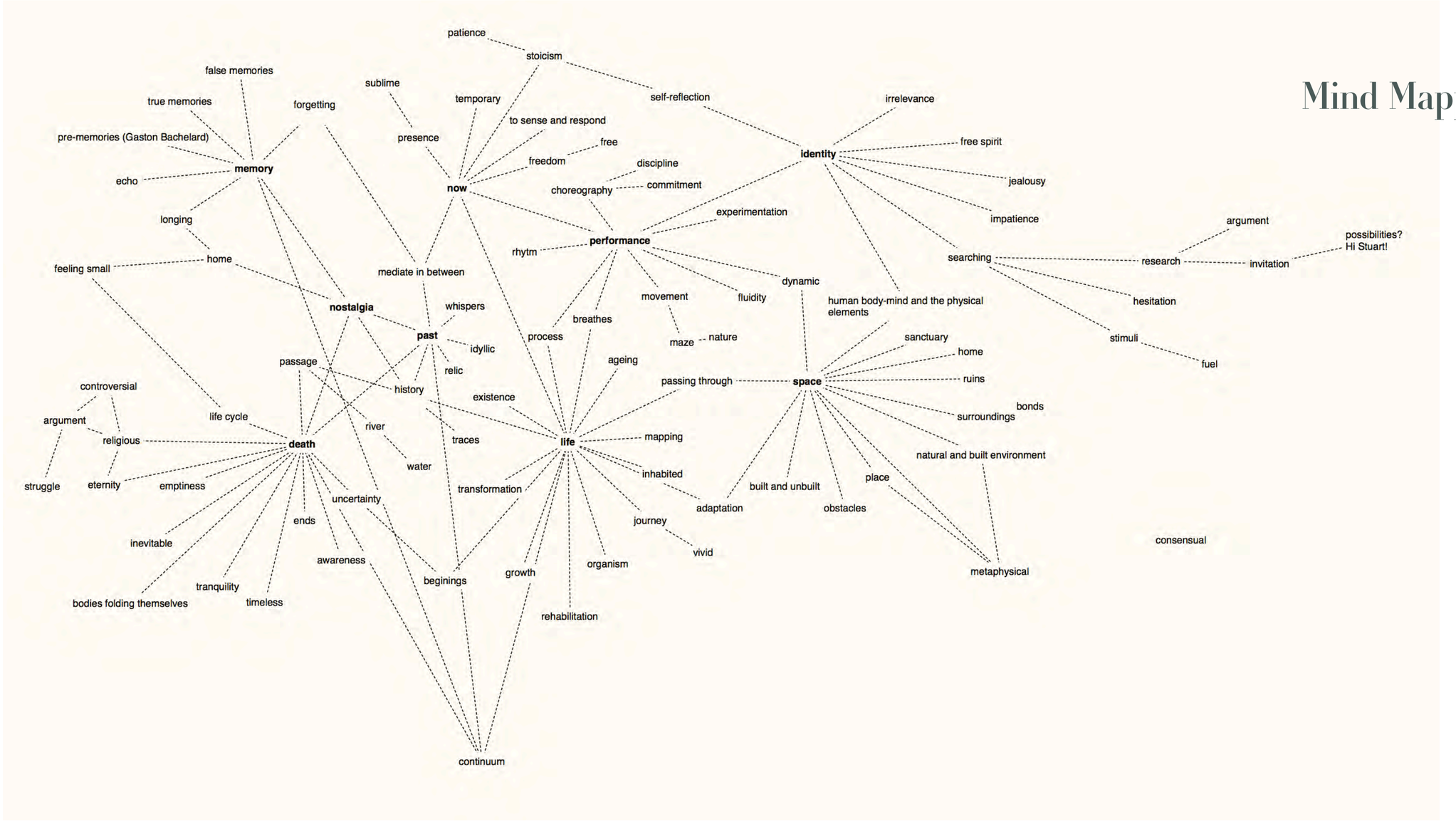
Death is one of the stops of the Vaporetto on the way from
Venice to San Michele.
It has been a privileged place for some,
and then there were others... no names, just bones.

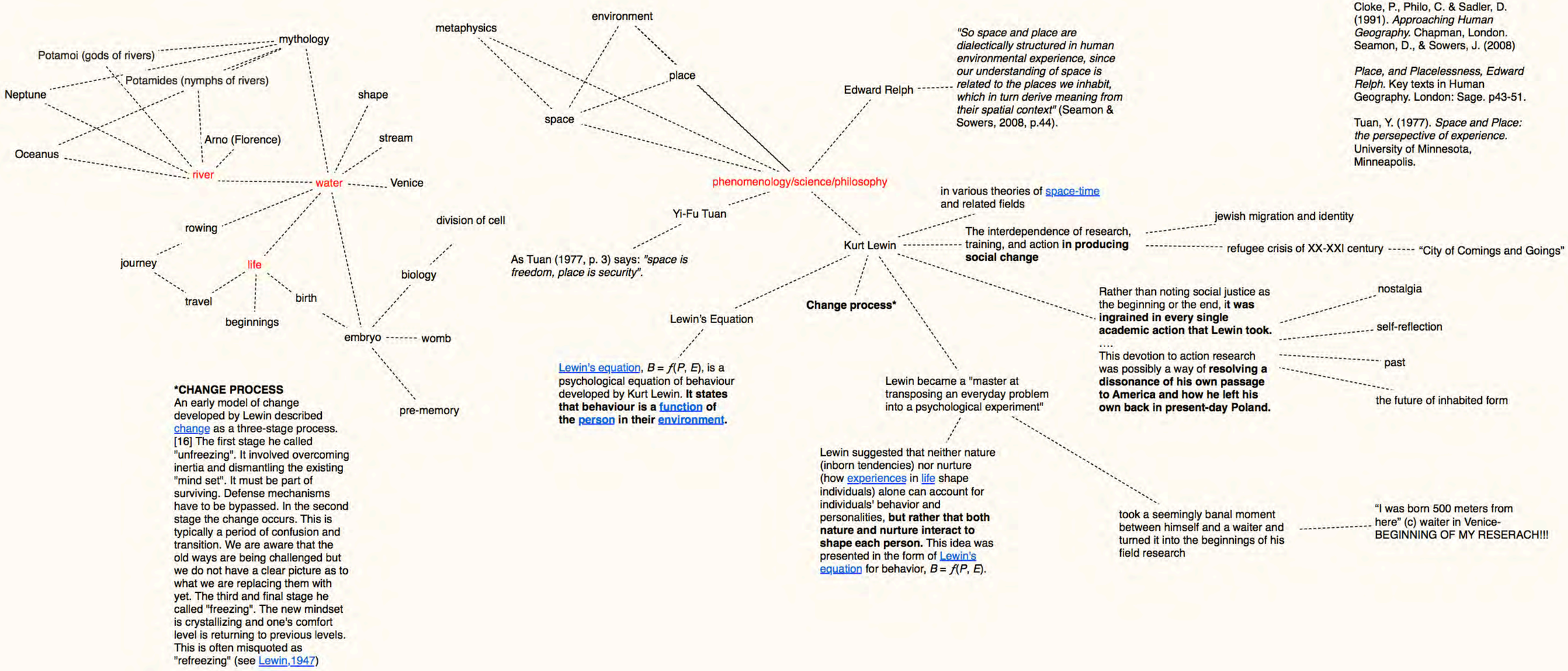
This is the place where water and sky are the gates to eternity.
This is the place to embed remains of lives lived and love lost.
This is the place where all can afford a final rest.
This is the place for death in Venice.



The Process

Mind Mapping





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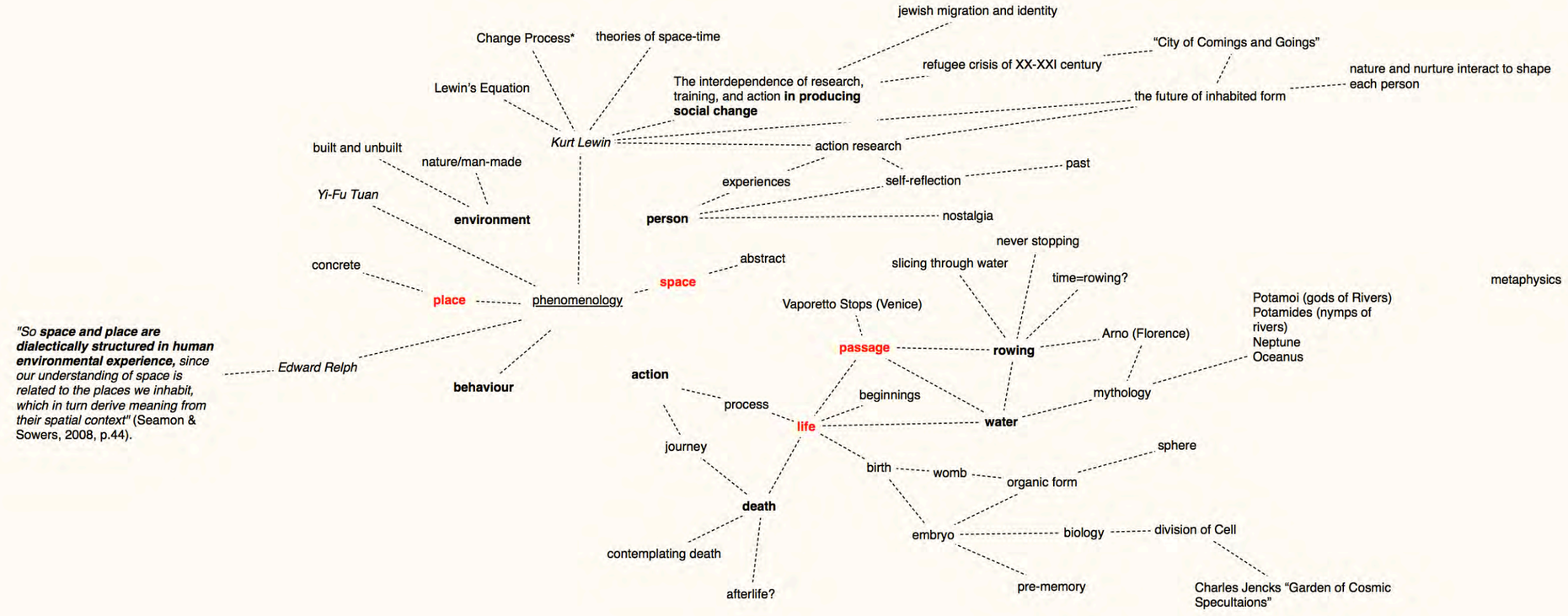
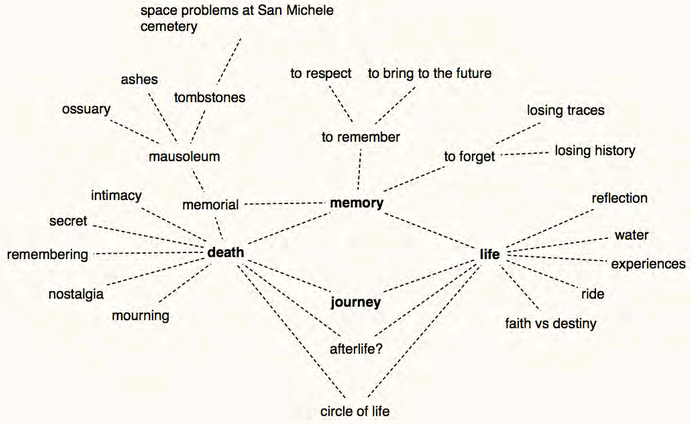
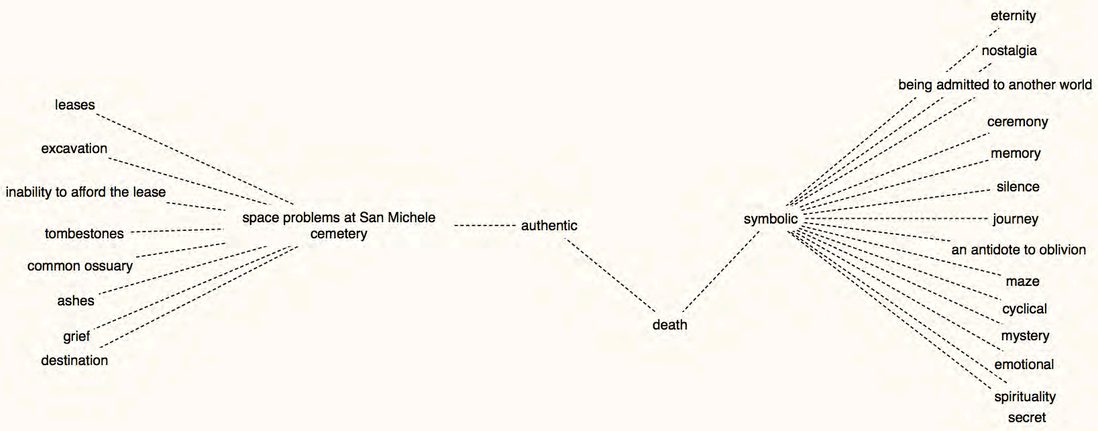
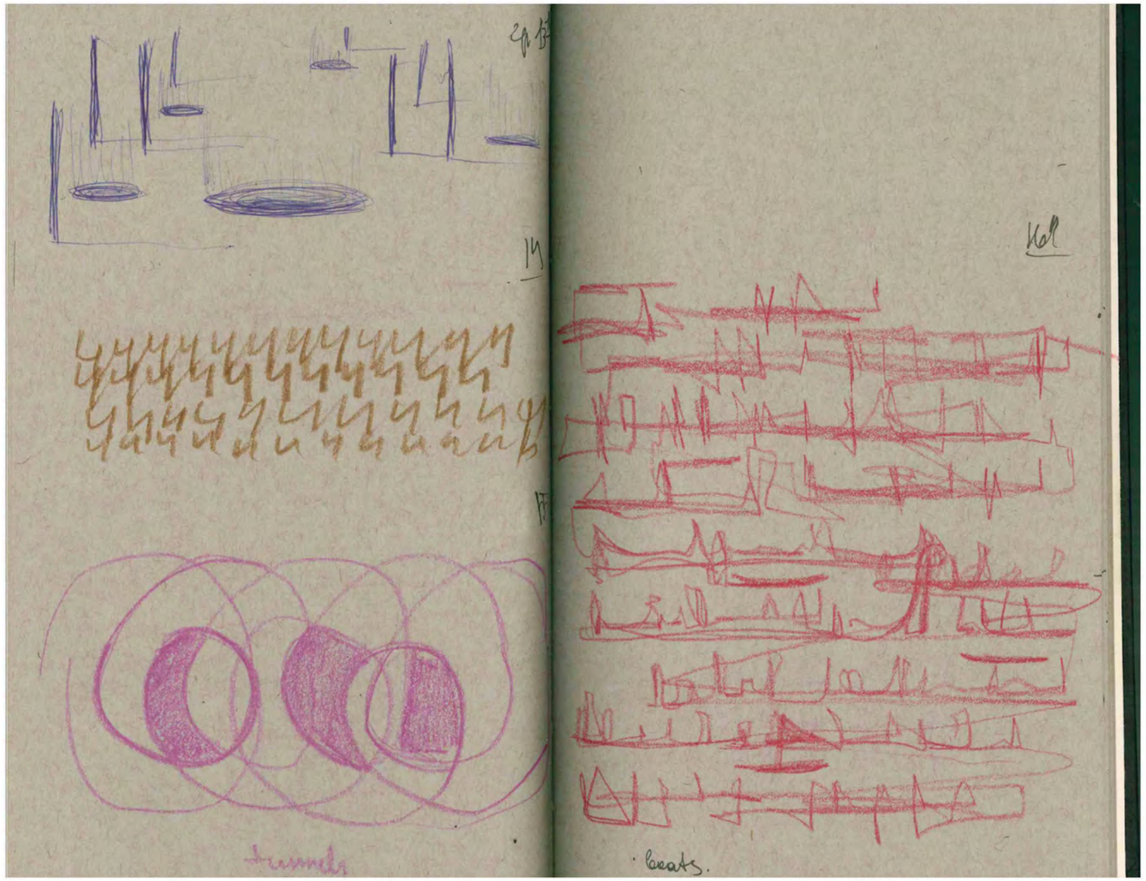
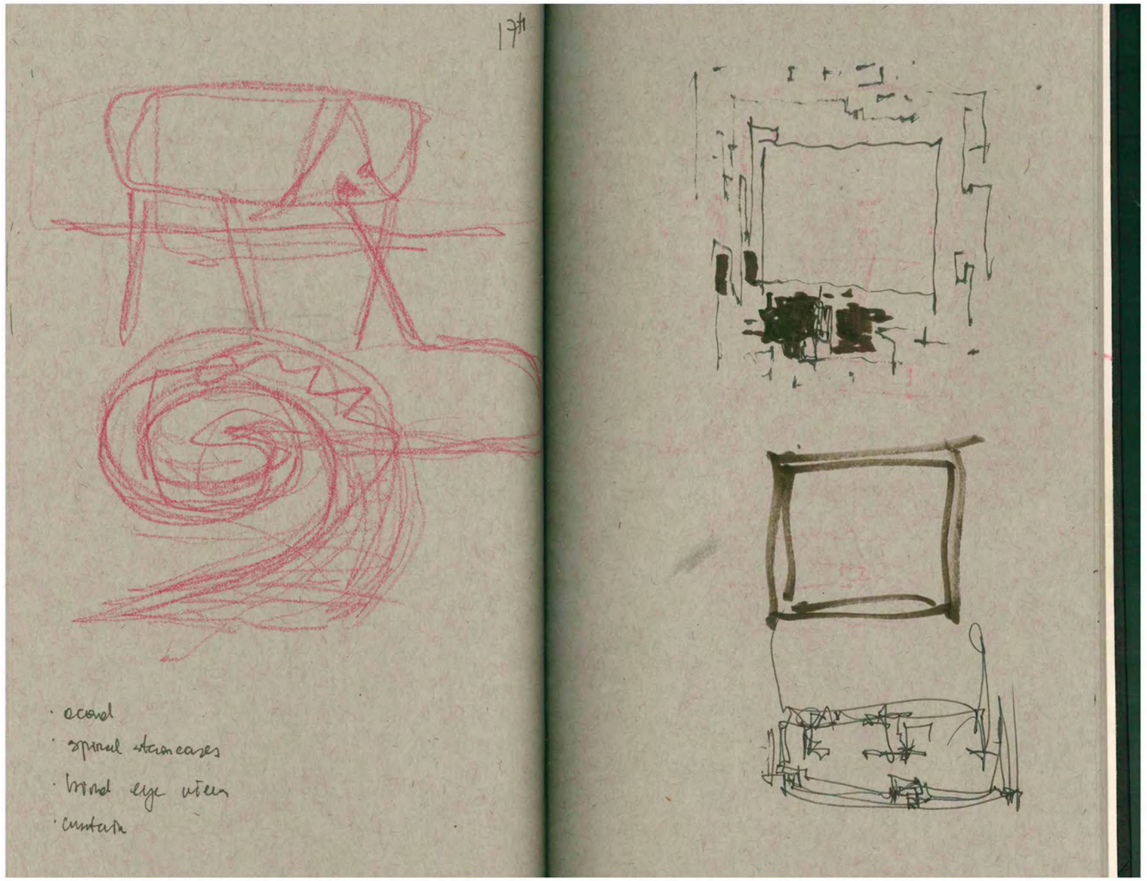

jewish migration and identity
Change Process*
theories of space-time
"City of Comings and Goings"
refugee crisis of XX-XXI century
Lewin's Equation
The interdependence of research, training, and action **in producing social change**
nature and nurture interact to shape each person
the future of inhabited form
Kurt Lewin
action research
built and unbuilt
nature/man-made
past
experiences
self-reflection
Yi-Fu Tuan
environment
person
nostalgia
never stopping
abstract
slicing through water
concrete
space
time=rowing?
metaphysics
place
phenomenology
Vaporetto Stops (Venice)
Potamoi (gods of Rivers)
Potamides (nymps of rivers)
Neptune
Oceanus
passage
rowing
Arno (Florence)
*"So **space and place are dialectically structured in human environmental experience,** since our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context"* (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p.44).
Edward Relph
action
mythology
behaviour
beginnings
process
life
water
journey
sphere
birth
womb
organic form
death
embryo
biology
division of Cell
contemplating death
pre-memory
Charles Jencks "Garden of Cosmic Specultaions"
afterlife?

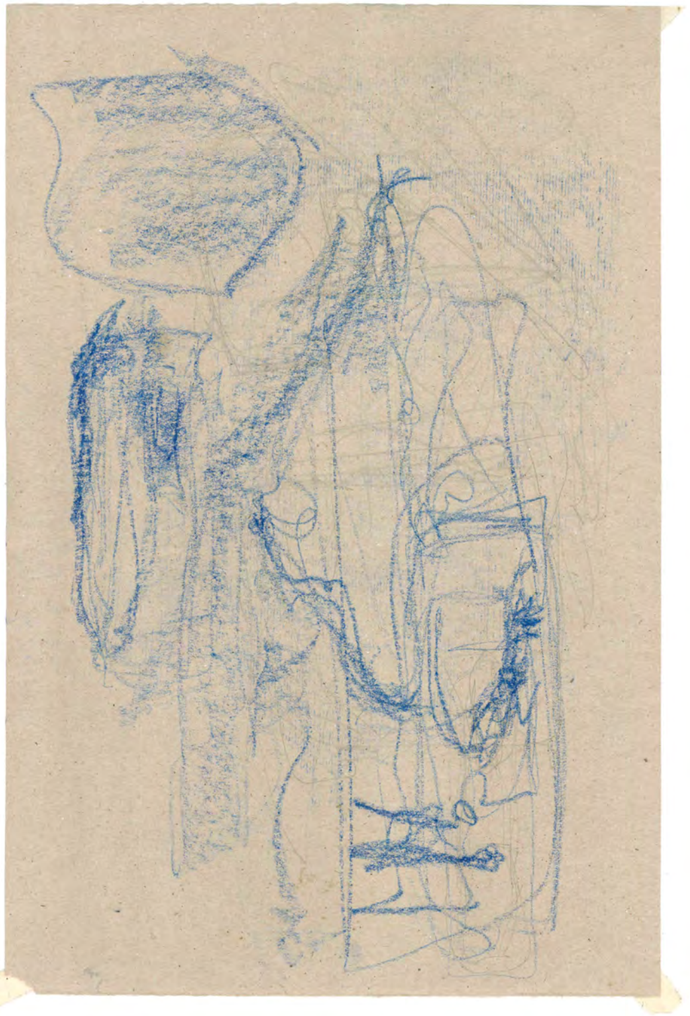

space problems at San Michele cemetery
ashes
tombstones
ossuary
mausoleum
to respect
to bring to the future
to remember
losing traces
to forget
losing history
intimacy
memorial
memory
secret
death
life
reflection
water
remembering
experiences
nostalgia
journey
ride
mourning
faith vs destiny
afterlife?
circle of life

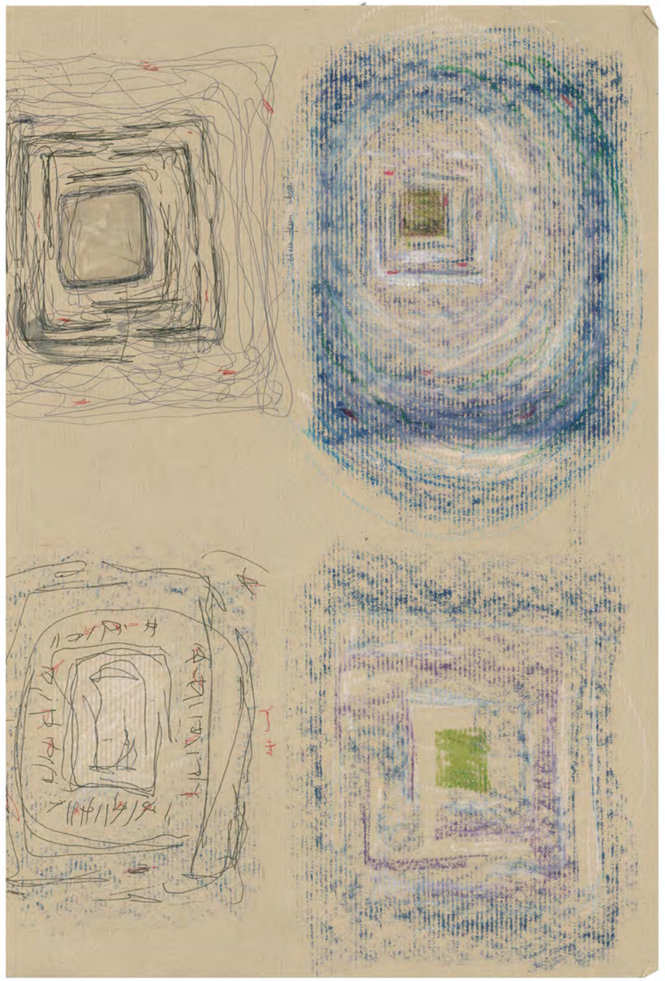

leases
excavation
inability to afford the lease
space problems at San Michele cemetery
tombstones
common ossuary
ashes
grief
destination
authentic
death
symbolic
eternity
nostalgia
being admitted to another world
ceremony
memory
silence
journey
an antidote to oblivion
maze
cyclical
mystery
emotional
spirituality
secret

Dream Drawings



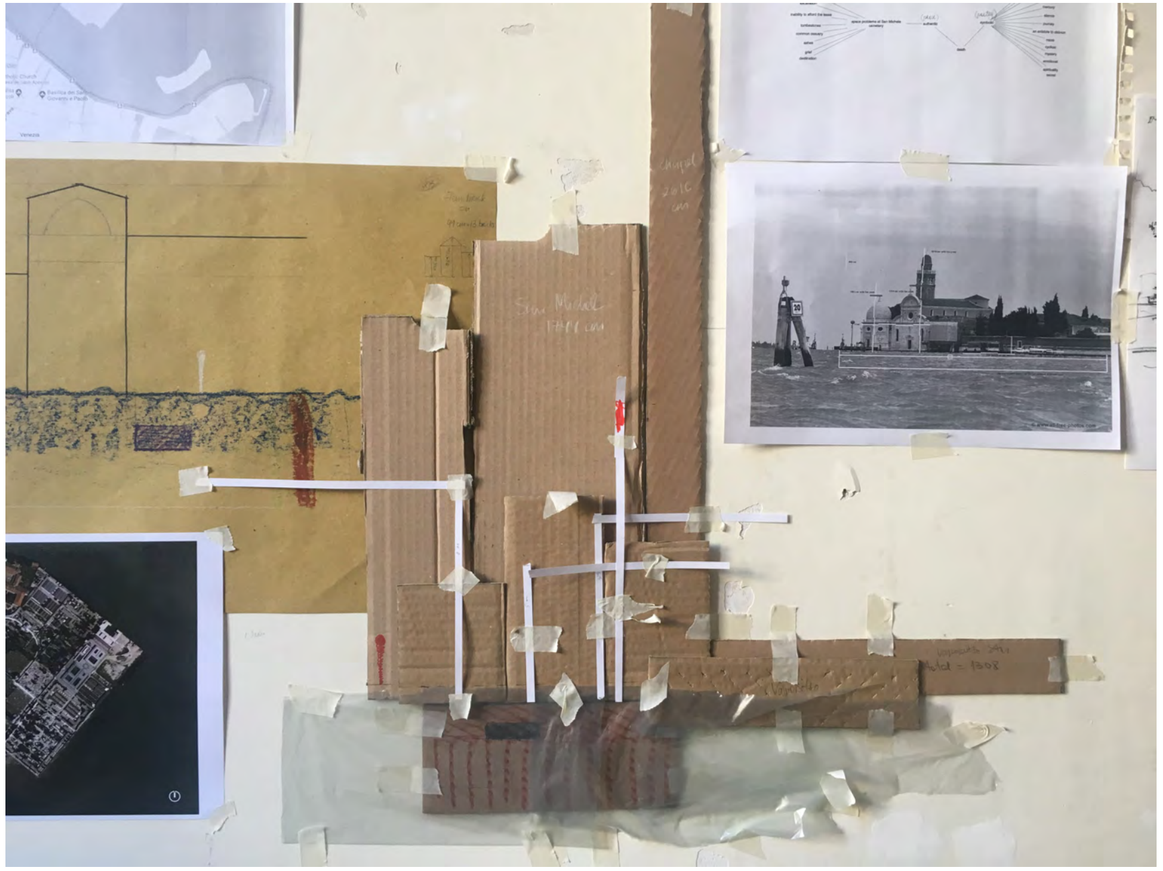


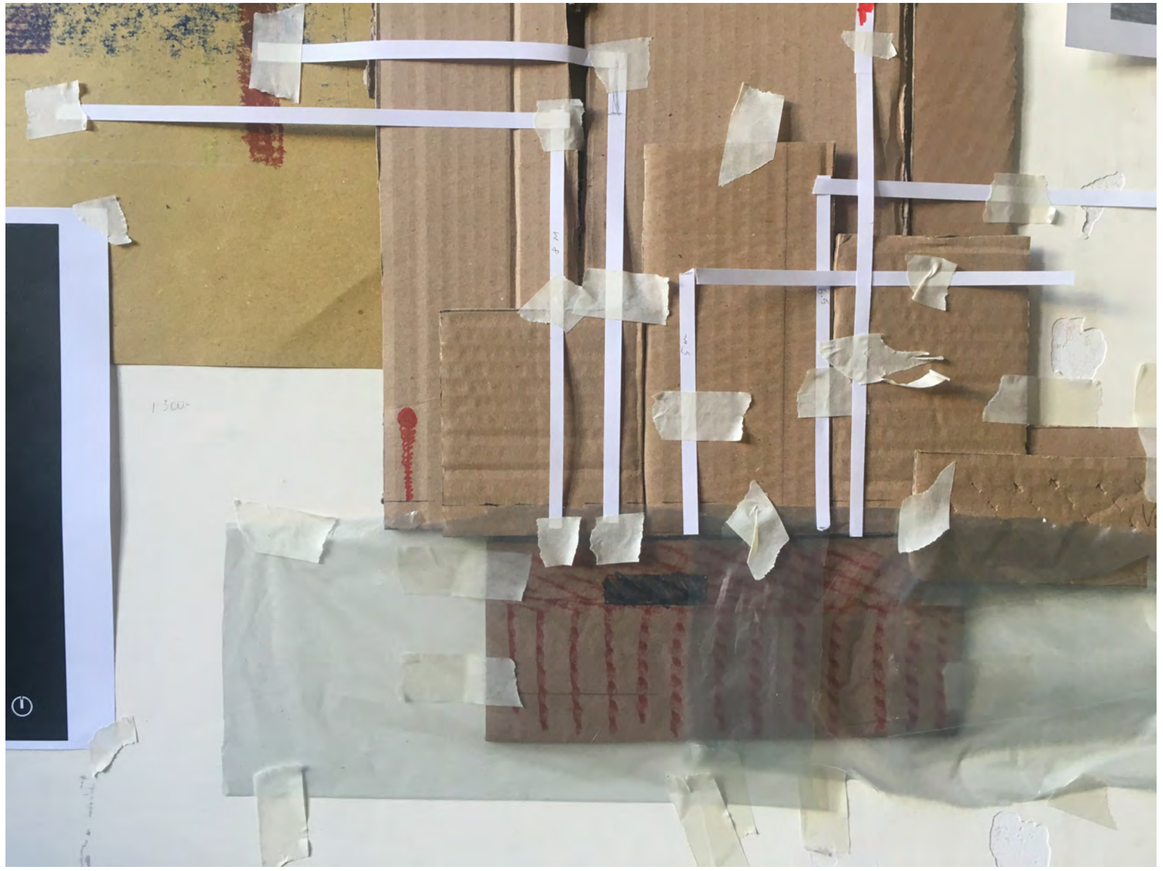


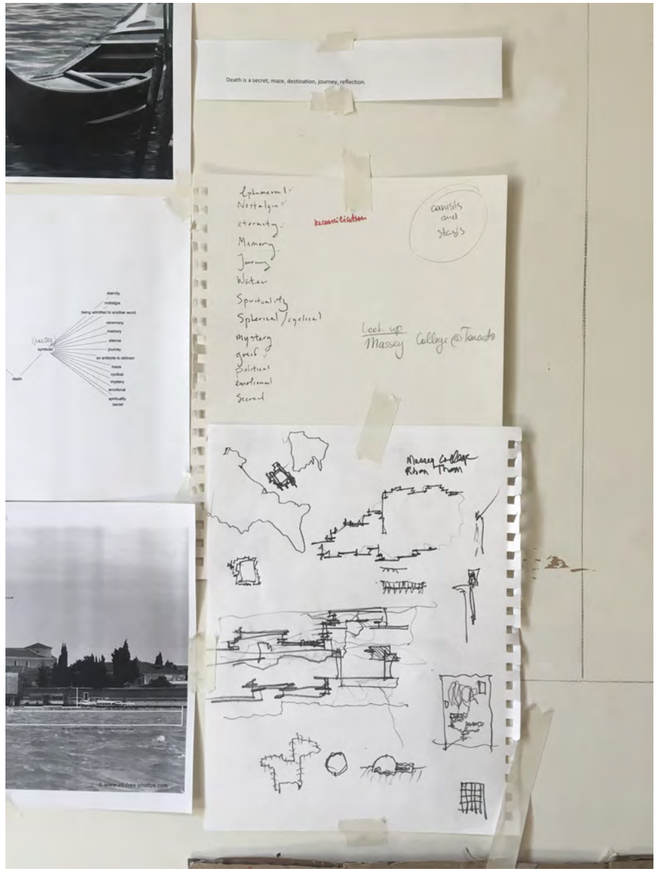


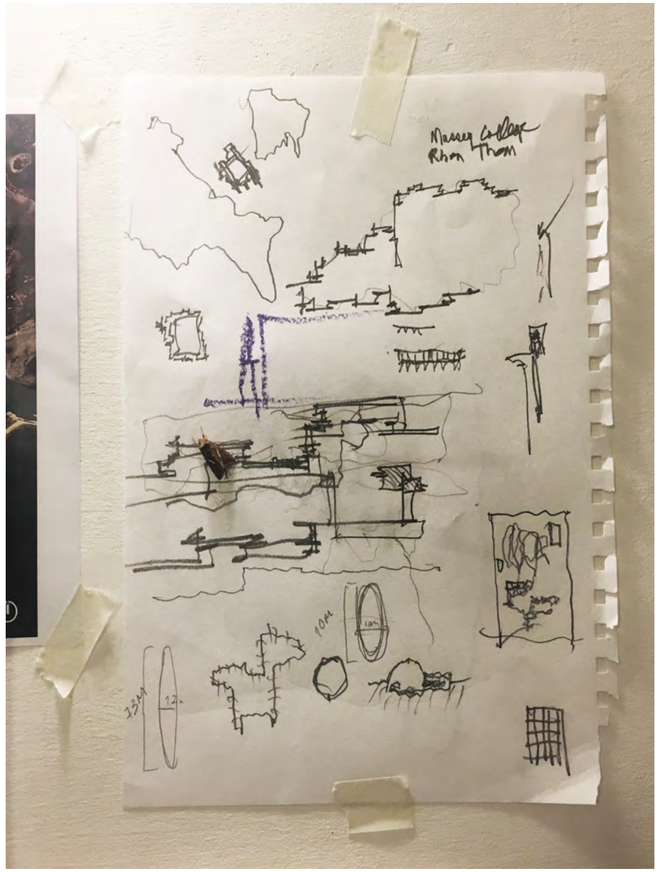
Concept Site Models

Figure - Ground Relation

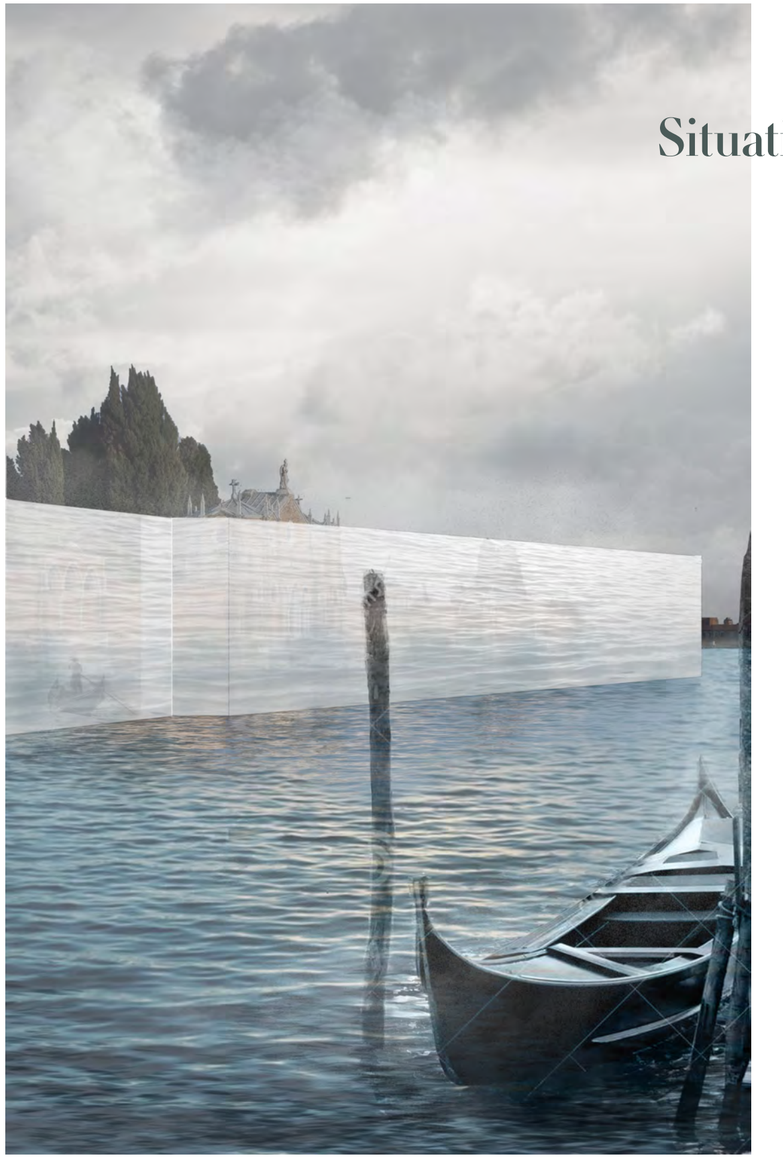





Death is a secret, maze, destination, journey, reflection.
Ephemeral
Nostalgia
eternity
Memory
Journey
Water
Spirituality
Spherical/cyclical
mystery
grief
political
emotional
Sacred
Look up
Massey College @ Toronto
Massey College
Rhon Thom


Massey College
Rhon Thom

Situations



Final Design

Site Plans

San Michele Cemetery, Venice
1:10000

San Michele Cemetery, Venice
1:3000

An ever-growing columbarium in the Venitian Lagoon where everyone can afford a final resting place.

Washed by waves, translucent walls of the mausoleum let in and reflect the sunlight, shimmering through the clear water.

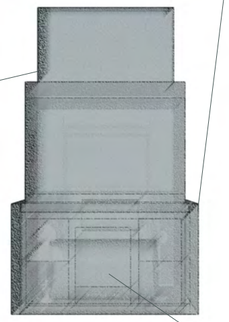
Death is not hiding from one's view - it stands still at the end of the body's journey and at the beginning of the soul's new journey.

A gondola ride to the cemetery is no longer a destination, but a ceremonial passage to the afterlife.

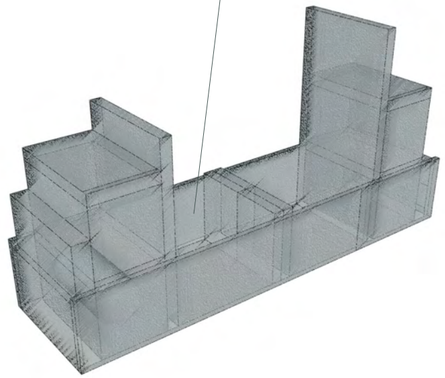
Passage expands as Venice population continues to grow, allowing more people to be able to afford a final resting place, regardless of their status.

Passage keeps memories, names, dates and photographs of those we loved and lost, and becomes an antidote to oblivion.

Overall niche dimensions are
40 cm (W) x 50 cm (D) x 25 cm (H).
Each wall is 2 inches deep and 25 inches high.



Enough space for multiple urns or a separate ossuary



Glass-front niches are seamlessly integrated into the space with aluminum trim work. Each plate has a place for a name, photograph, epitaph, candle and flower holders.

Future Design Development

1. Materiality and construction

2. Landscape and vegetation

3. Laws and policies

4. Maintenance

Венеция, постоянная вдохновительница наших успокоений

-Sergei Diaghilev

Bibliography and references

1. Cover: Dante and Virgil, sculpture by Georgy Frangulyan.
2. Lion of Saint Mark (p 2), a photograph by Jakub Hałun
3. Site Background: (p 6-7) http://veniceapartmentrentals.com/foundation-of-venice
4. Island of San Michele: a Timeline (p 8-9)
   Chiesa di San Michele, a photograph by Didier Descouens
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6. Alilaguna Map (p 16-17) graphics by author
7. The architecture of Venice: Building on Water (p 16-17) http://veniceapartmentrentals.com/foundation-of-venice
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   Venice Waters: section (https://www.veniceguideandboat.it/history-of-venice/venice-fundation/)
9. Death in Venice (p 20-21), photomontage
   Decorations on funeral barges, Venice; photograph from Ben Shneiderman Collection, 1950
10. Island of San Michele and other cemeteries (p 22-23)
    (San Michele Island from above) https://www.vivovenetia.com/en/guided-tours/venice-in-helicopter
    (Old Jewish cemetery) http://www.museoebraico.it/en/ancient-cemetery/
    (Greek Orthodox Tombstone), a photograph by Jakub Hałun
11. Island of San Michele: before and after Chipperfield additions (p24-25)
    all pictures are taken by an author
12. Ancient Funeral Gondola (p 27) https://rexvalrexblog.wordpress.com/2015/03/23/la-mort-a-venecia-adaptacio-de-regi-vii-la-lugubre-gondola-anuncia-la-mort-per-amor/
13. Giudecca Canal, Venice (p 28-29) https://videohive.net/item/venice-giudecca-canal/14421002
14. The Process (p 30-31) photograph by author
15. Mind Mapping (p 32-39), Scapple app
16. Dream Drawings (p 40-43), artworks by authors
16. Site Plans (p 54-55), Google Maps
17. Future Design Development (p 62-63), photograph by author
18. Statue of San Todaro (p 64-65), photograph by Stefano Bolognini