Death at Lunchtime: An Ethnographic Study of Locals Lunching at Cimetière Des Rois

Abstract:

Michael Singer, an author on the topic of inner growth, asserts that happiness in life comes from remembering death, for it is the temporal nature of life that gives it meaning.1 There is a famous old cemetery in Geneva where many of the big names in Genevois history have been interred. Today, many professionals, seemingly too caught up in climbing the corporate ladder to trouble themselves with inner growth, go to the cemetery to have lunch. From about noon to two o'clock every summer weekday afternoon, you will find the cemetery abuzz. It takes on a peculiar character as the living intermingle with the dead, sitting on benches or on the grass interspersed between the tombstones with their ham and cheese sandwiches. My paper uses short-term ethnographic fieldwork to investigate how these luncheoners interact with and conceptualise the cemetery as a public space. Are they here to visit the dead, or do they come here simply because it offers a pleasing green space? How does the visual landscape of tombstones impact the way they interact with the space? Do they consider death over their lunch breaks?

Keywords: *public space, cemetery, associational functionalism, heterotopia.*