

“A Tale of Two Cities”: Cemetery Heterotopia and Spatial Relations in Lagos City

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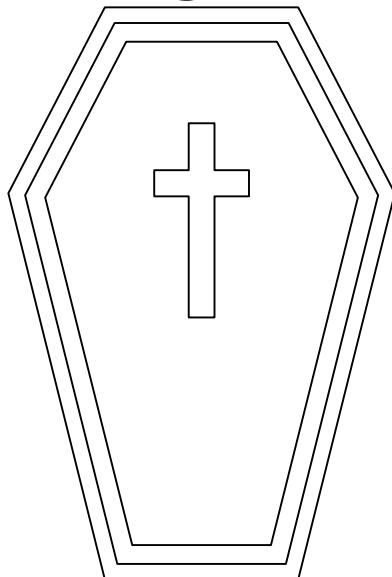
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Outline of the Lecture

1. Introduction
2. “Space”: A Useful Category of Social Being?
3. Welcome to Lagos
4. Cemetery in Lagos, Lagos in the Cemetery
5. Conclusion



Abstract

- What does cemetery teach us about the social world? How do spatial configurations of cemetery mirror urban social realities? In what ways can the understanding of spatial order of necropolis contribute to the episteme of spatial relations? In this paper, I juxtapose space practices in the cemetery with spatial relations and practices in the city of Lagos to frame an alternative way of imagining and writing about cityscapes and a new approach of thinking about social taxonomies such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and power. Following Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia and relational ontology of space this paper frames cemetery as a counter-site to the city. Drawing from oral interviews, participant observation and archival document, the paper argues that cemetery is a container that encloses different sites and sets of social relations as well as lived experiences.

“Space”: A Useful Category of Social Being?

Science and the Spatial Turn

1884-1885 Africa Berlin Conference and The Scramble for Space

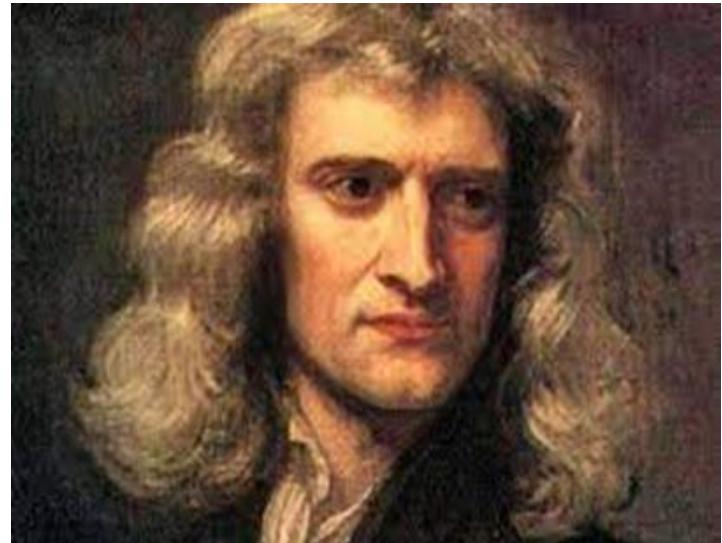
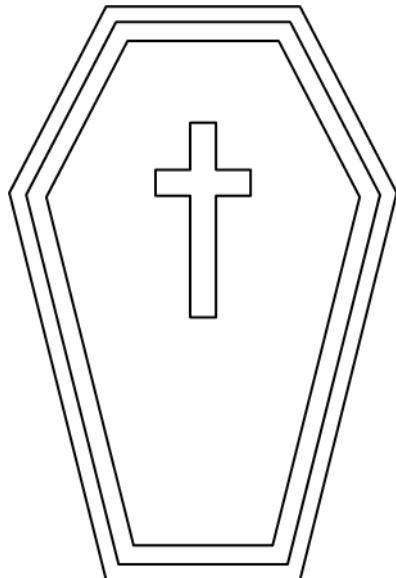
Cold War and the New Scramble for Space

Space Exploration since 1957



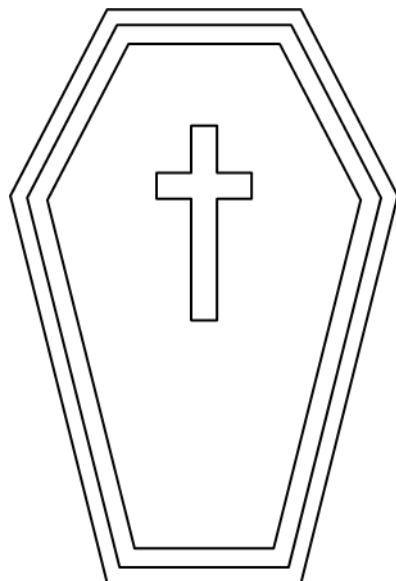
Theories and ontologies of Space

- Isaac Newton
- Absolutization of Space
- Dualism of space and Matters
- Emphasized Dualism



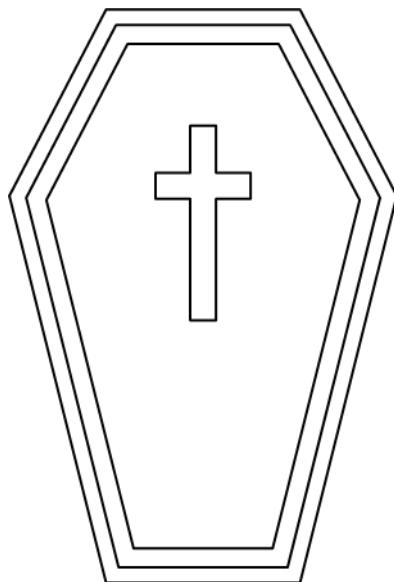
Immanuel Kant

- space is the ordering principle prior to lived experience.
- space according to Kant is something that people construct in their perception. He further argues that space cannot be externally intuited, nor be taken absolutely as something in itself.



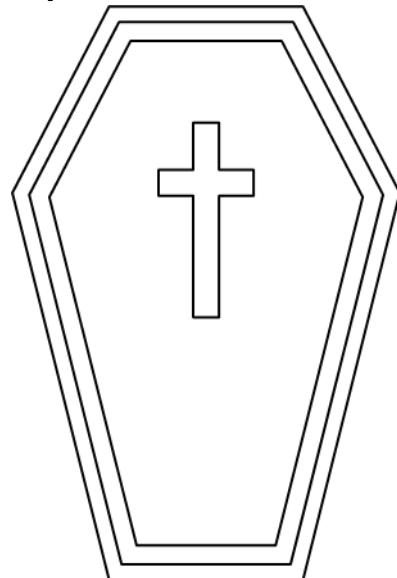
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Leibniz holds that space is “something merely relative, as time is.” For him “Space is an order of coexistence as time is an order of succession”.

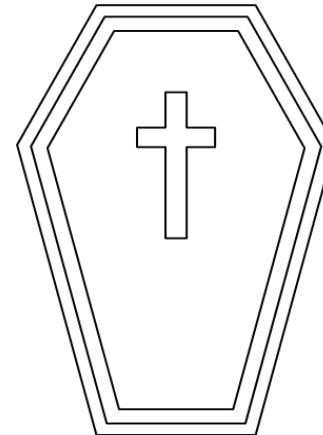
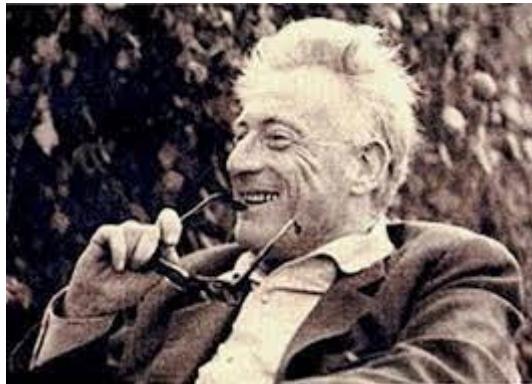


Georg Simmel

- He posits that contents of the forms of space become comprehensible through other contents. He argues that “space remains always the form, in itself ineffectual” without bodies (Simmel, 1989: 544-545). Within the intersection between spatial form and matter, Simmel identifies exclusivity as an important feature of space.



Henri Lefebvre and Martina Low

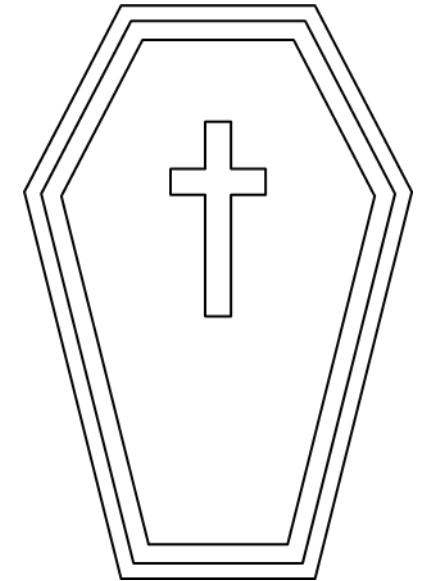
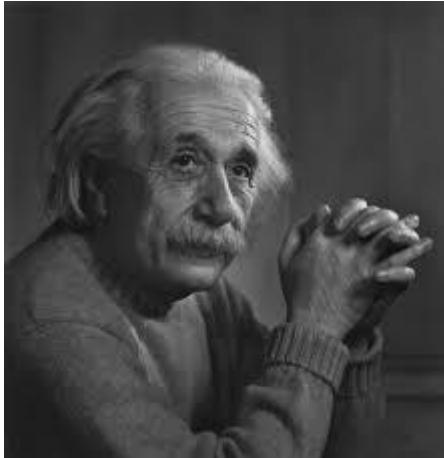


For Lefebvre, space is neither a passive nor a neutral geometry but a socially produced and reproduced action.



space as social production. She argues that “spaces only become spaces for people in as much as they are – again and again and again- produced socially”

Albert Einstein



Einstein concluded based on the General Theory of Relativity that space is not a finished 'lodging house' of matters. Hence, for him matter is the significant determinant of the structure of space.

Michel Foucault's Heterotopias

- Foucault's relational principle of space was framed as heterotopia and heterochrony. He defines heterotopias as real places as against "utopias" that are perfect yet unreal places. Heterotopias are "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other sites that can be found within culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted". Foucault's perspective of relational space encompasses yet transcends internal constituents of any given space. Its meaning exists in the dualism and dialectics of other counter-sites.

The kernels of the relativist spatial analysis

Relationality:

- theory of relational space emphasizes spatial forms and shapes of things in space.
- Spatial forms are revealed in the contents that constitute the space.
- But the organization of space holds social and psychological consequences on the bodies or object that constitute the space.

Boundaries:

“space is an activity of the psyche, only the human way of binding unbounded sensory affection into integrated outlooks”

Time:

space constitutes an order of coexistent and as time is an order of successions

“Welcome to Lagos”



Lekki: The Domain of the Rich

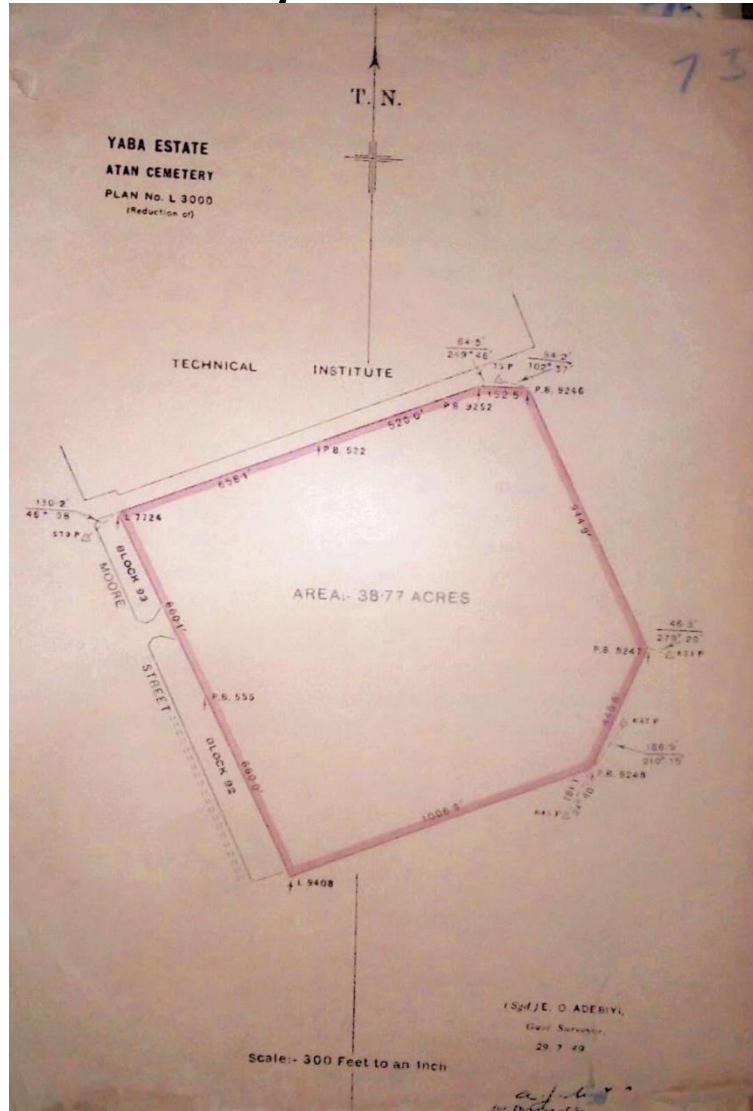


Makoko: Lagos Mega-Slum



Cemetery in Lagos, Lagos in the Cemetery

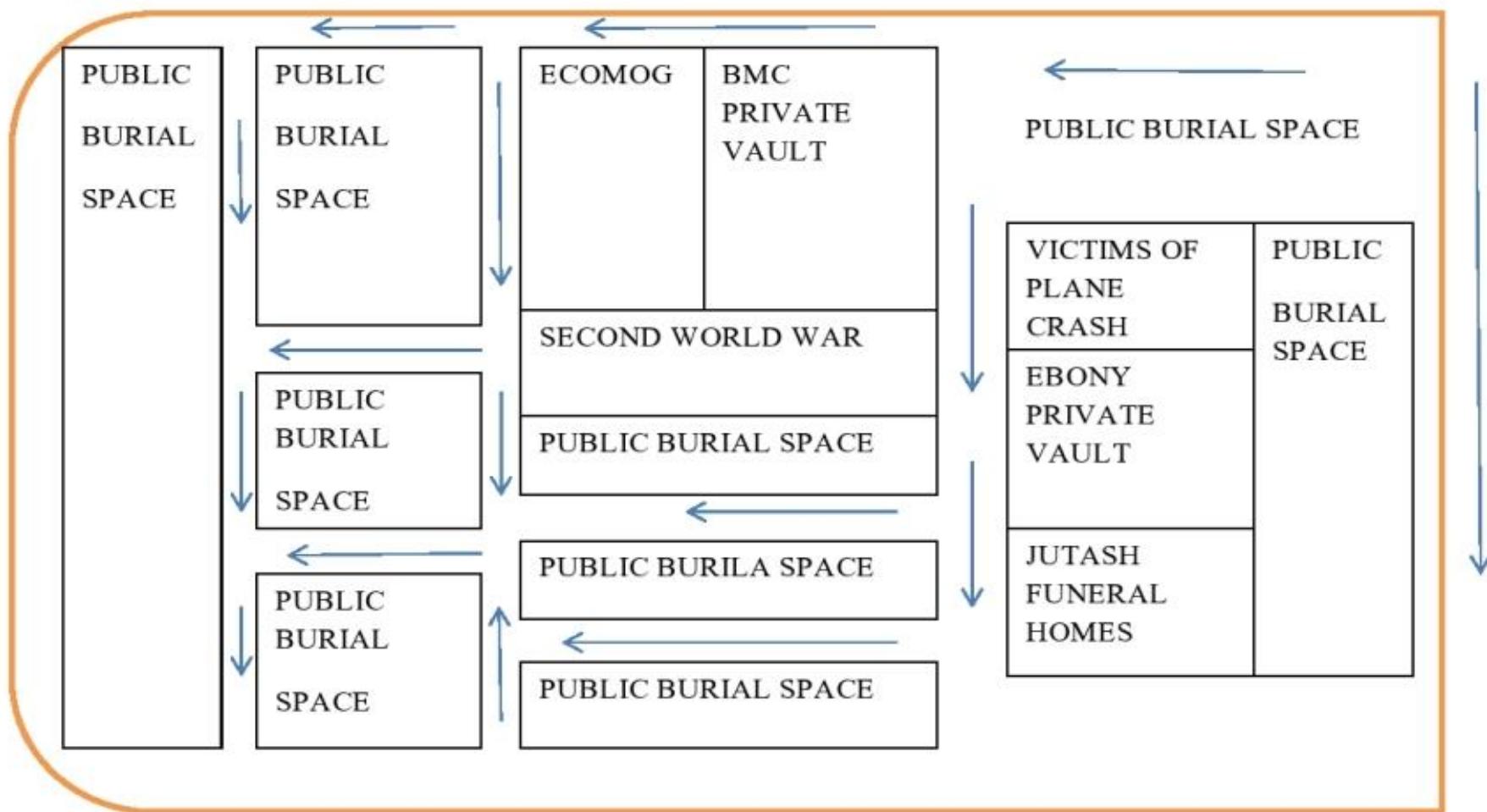
A survey Plan of Atan Cemetery



An Aerial view of Atan Cemetery



ATAN ESTATE CEMETERY LAYOUT, YABA



General Burial Space



General Burial Area showing Chaotic spatial order



Private Burial Space



War Memorial



Conclusion

- This paper has demonstrated that cemetery is a heterotopic space that stands as a counter-site to all other places in the city. With a particular reference to the relativist theories of spatial relation, I argued that the idea of space in itself is meaningless without an understanding of how materials are constituted and arranged in space. By extension, it was noted that the social arrangements of people, materials and residential spaces in Lagos constitute an effective way of understanding how space is socially produced in the city.

Conclusion

- Atan cemetery is a metaphor that mirrors dualism and dialectics of mega-city and mega-slum in Lagos. I also argued that as the mega-city and the mega-slums are relational, so are the cemetery and the city. The close similarities and relationality of Atan cemetery and the Lagos city are evidential in the spatial constitutions as well in the internal ordering of the two spaces.

Conclusion

- The paper has also established that cemetery is a pluriversal heterotopic space that relates with all other places and institutions, and depicts heterogeneity of the city. Lastly, the study showed that the material constituents of necropolis confer the status and feature of heterochrony on cemetery through the accumulation of time and convergence of different historical epochs.