

## The Performing Dead

*Forgotten Bodies at Vor Frelser Cemetery and their traces through Copenhagen*

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## **The Performing Dead: Forgotten Bodies at Vor Frelser Cemetery and their traces through Copenhagen.**

This audio-paper is a site-specific investigation into the relations between cemetery space, users, cultural history and public memory in Copenhagen. The chosen site is Vor Frelser (Our Saviour) Cemetery at Amagerbrogade 33-35, just next to Prags Boulevard.

Urban cemeteries are unique places, however recent developments in burial practice, urban densification, green space policy and societal attitudes towards death and dying Danish urban cemeteries have become spaces of contest and their everyday embodied spatial and cultural practices challenged (Jacobsen 2001, Baumann 1992). In the literature the cemetery is usually represented either as a cultivated metropolitan landscape of pause, fixity and estrangement (Rugg 2000, Sommer 2003, Worpole 2003), a necro-geographical deathscape (visual objects, symbols and meaning-making attributes) (Kniffen 1967, Francaviglia 1971, Maddrell and Sidaway 2010) or in light of a socio-spatial-temporal framework (Tuan 1977, Foucault 1986, Lefebvre 1992, Cresswell 2004). This paper explores the cemetery as an intricate locus of relations beneath the surface of Vor Frelser Cemetery, as the background for affective resonances of the un-seen and un-told networks that connect people with time, places and spaces, through media.

By following a non-representational research approach (Thrift 2004, 2007; Lorimer 2005, 2007, 2008) the project tries to *enliven* this particular cemetery rather than *report* it (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000), to animate the *hybridity of its life-world* (Vannini 2012, 2015) by focusing on its residents (the dead) and their once performed lives and the traces they have drawn across real spaces (sites, locations, neighborhoods) and fictional places (stages, plays, movie settings) in Copenhagen.

Since its inauguration as functional assistant cemetery in 1790, the 1,66 Acre of Vor Frelser Cemetery have had significant cultural and emotional roothold in the citizens of Amager and the adjacent Copenhagen districts (<http://www.vorfrelserkirke.dk/kirkegaard>, accessed 28.01.2015). Today it serves as both the traditional ritual space for the interment of the dead (bodies or cremated remains), as the place for the bereaved to practice their social and private mourning and as a small recreational ‘pocket-park’ for the Amager-dweller, visitors or the tourist enjoying the natural, horticultural and contemplative affordances of the cemetery.

Vor Frelser Cemetery host sixteen graves; small time-pockets containing the narratives of dead dancers, figurative artists, musicians, writers and actors of theater and cinema. Beyond their individual gravestone marker, eleven of them have their legacy preserved online, as assessable audio and video recordings. With offset in the late actors and musicians at Vor Frelser cemetery, this audio production will focus on user-generated media from online archives (e.g. Youtube) to draw up their specific places of performance and play. The sounds and audio tracks will merge together with the sounds of the present and thus constitute another soundscape, an *assemblage* that convey a weave of bodies, sites and memories along with a bodily exploration of the city of Copenhagen. Here invisible life-traces and their way through the urban landscape are *animated* as a *meshwork of relations* (Ingold 2011) between the real and the fictional, unfolding in the interplay between performance and location. This non-representational understanding might lead to further exploration of the hybridity of urban cemeteries, their materiality, spatiality, memory, cultural history and relevance as *liminal in-between places* of fiction and reality (Schechner 2006), the city and the people that perform or once performed their lives there.

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