Image Practices at Highgate Past and Present Introduction

Marie-Therese Mäder, Alberto Saviello, Baldassare Scolari

Highgate Cemetery has many faces. In 1839 the commercially-driven London Cemetery Company opened «The Cemetery of St James at Highgate», the western half of the present-day cemetery, which quickly became one of the most popular burial grounds for wealthy London families.[1] The demand was so great that in 1854 another adjacent plot, the part east of Swain's Lane, was purchased. The remains of more than 170,000 deceased people are resting at Highgate Cemetery, which continues today to be an active burial site and a place of personal mourning and family remembrance.[2]

However, Highgate Cemetery is also a tourist spot. It is the most popular of the «Magnificent Seven» – as the seven cemeteries built in the 19th century around London are called. Today managed by a non-profit trust, it annually attracts about 70,000 visitors guided by different intentions.[3] The famous tomb monument of Karl Marx and on a more modest scale the grave of the novelist and avowed atheist Douglas Adams, both in the eastern part of the cemetery, serve as kinds of secular pilgrimage sites where like-minded people gather to remember their ‹idols› and to give expression to the worldviews associated with them. At the same time, the natural landscape of the cemetery, which was once accurately and formally planted but is today tended more naturalistically, offers a place of recreation and retreat that can also be explored as a place of natural history.[4] In the 1960s and 70s the then neglected cemetery, which had been closed for several years, was even considered a haunted place where ghosts and vampires were sighted and occult practices were celebrated. The unique atmosphere of the cemetery has continually inspired artists and the cemetery has become the setting for numerous novels as well as serving as a backdrop in

1 On the history of Highgate Cemetery see especially Barker 1984 and Bulmer 2014.
2 See Bulmer 2014, 8.
3 See Symington 2011, 15.
4 Tours focusing on the flora and fauna of the cemetery are offered by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery; see the article by Marie-Therese Mäder in this volume.

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various films.[5] The western part, which nowadays can only be visited on guided tours, can be regarded as an open-air museum of the distinctive cult of the dead and the stylistic eclecticism of the Victorian era. Thus, it was aptly described by the British poet Sir John Betjeman as «Victorian Valhalla».[6] Highgate's history offers a window into Victorian and contemporary society and politics, exemplified by its handling of death, a topic *Ann Jeffers* provides further insights into, complementing this introduction. In her chapter «The Politics of Death/Death and Politics in Victorian England» she considers the various sociological, economic and political dimensions that undergird the creation and history of Highgate Cemetery until the present day.[7]

As the various contributions to this volume reflect, Highgate cemetery is not only a burial site but is also a place of pilgrimage, a museum, a nature reserve, a recreational area, a ‹haunted› place and a stimulus to artistic invention. The chapters in this volume are dedicated to images and image practices in and around Highgate. We use a decidedly wide definition of «image» that includes material and literary as well as mental images. Further, we understand Highgate Cemetery as a constellation of images. This refers to the location itself, where various images are set in relation to one another providing a larger context for image perceptions and meaning making practices, as well as to the representations of the cemetery in different media that constitute another kind of constellation outside of the actual place.

The book collects contributions from scholars of different academic disciplines who often choose an interdisciplinary approach to focus on one or more specific images. They discuss the manifold representations of and at Highgate, their respective functions in different practices and how images and practices are intertwined in meaning making processes.

In this introduction we explain why we consider the modern cemetery a particularly fruitful object for the investigation of socio-religious image practices and the different dimensions of image practices. Of central importance for our theoretical approach is the relationship between material images and the imaginary. The latter we understand as collectively shared

5 On different novels see the article by Niels Penke in this volume. The films that use Highgate as a location are mainly fantasy or horror films like *Taste the Blood of Dracula* from 1970. More recent films include *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* (2018), *Hampstead* (2017) and *Dorian Gray* (2009).

6 See Highgate Cemetery 1978, 2. On the Victorian obsession with death see Rutherford 2010 and Curl 1972.

7 See Ann Jeffers' contribution on «The Politics of Death» in this volume.

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and handed-down, but at the same time as a continuously changing pool of images and ideas. Every concrete image practice necessarily refers to the imaginary and at the same time has an effect on it. We argue that the cemetery, as a place that confronts its visitors with death, afterlife and memory, occupies a prominent position in the iteration and transformation of religious images and the religious imaginary.

Heterotopia and Liminality: Cemeteries as Spaces of Image Production

The special relevance of burial grounds for modern image practices can be deduced from two corresponding theoretical models. Remarkably, Michel Foucault chose the 19th century cemetery as one of his main examples to elucidate his notion of heterotopia.[8] Heterotopia refers to a place outside of everyday life. In fact, the cemeteries were deliberately built on the outskirts of the metropolises. Due to rapid population growth the traditional burial sites in the inner city churchyards had become overfilled with human remains. This was not only an ethical and aesthetic problem, but also a sanitary concern. The bodies were buried on top of each other and covered with so little soil that they were occasionally flushed out in the rain or even stolen by body snatchers. The condition of the graveyards was regarded as a threat to public health: the corpses were understood to emit harmful ‹miasma› and death was considered to be contagious.[9] Hence the dead had to be segregated from the centre of everyday life and, instead, came to be housed, following an ancient model of the necropolis, in their own «cities» at the periphery of the Victorian metropolises. The hygienic problems of the 19th church graveyards that resulted in the displacement of the burial grounds also found expression in epitaphs and tombstone designs. As *Ann Jeffers* observes in her contribution «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral? Performativity of Living Images in Highgate Cemetery» representations of plants and animals on individual sepulchral monuments constituted an «ethico-hygenic» space to brighten the onlookers' feelings and to improve morality. Referring to contemporary poetry and other literary sources she shows how these images of nature, often associated with women, were

8 See Foucault 1984. The Foucauldian model of heterotopia has also been fruitfully applied to Highgate Cemetery by Clements 2017.

9 See Foucault 1984, 6.

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symbols and icons with a corresponding emblematic character to oppose the negative connotations of bodily decay.[10]

Although the modern necropolises were detached from the cities of the living and were governed according to their own rules and regulations, yet the arrangement of the cemetery, for example the implicit hierarchy of burial plots and tombs and the segregated sections for different denominations and faiths, mirrored the structures of society.[11] As a burial ground that was open to the followers of all religions and non-religious people and that had an area reserved for pauper's graves, the cemetery was committed to the ideal of religious and social community building. As *Baldassare Scolari* highlights in his contribution «Remembering Karl Marx. Image – Icon – Idol», «a sort of cosmopolitan necropolis for leftist activists, politicians and intellectuals» has formed around the tomb of Karl Marx in the eastern part of the cemetery, transforming the latter into a place of political contestation and identification.[12] In fact, the cemetery offered different opportunities for social (re-)positioning. Being an «other place», the cemetery was not intended to be a mere reflection of society. Foucault characterises the heterotopia rather as a «utopia» in a real site. Representing society and at the same time being spatially dissociated from its centre, the cemetery offers a place for a creative and sometimes even subversive use of images that can deviate from normative modes and forms of representation and can try out new semantics and structures. This is what *Dolores Zoé Bertschinger* considers in her discussion of a radical feminist imaginary in «Looking for Jenny & Co. The Image as Practice for a Feminist Imaginary». Visitors have the potential to actively control the imagination and interpretation of objects. By looking for women's representation, Highgate Cemetery can become a place where history is performed through the remembrance of women and their achievements.[13] Bertschinger's contribution shows that the recipients are not at all passive «consumers» of pre-established meanings and highlights that, on the contrary, every act of perception and interpretation is able to generate new feelings, ideas and mental images.

Further examples show the permeability of social hierarchies at the cemetery with some prominent tombs of people who were deemed not-quite respectable or even dishonourable. The circus owner and stunt man

10 See Ann Jeffers' contribution «Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?» in this volume.
11 See Foucault 1984, 3–4.
12 See Baldassare Scolari's contribution in this volume.
13 See Dolores Zoé Bertschinger's contribution in this volume.

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Andrew Ducrow (1793–1842) or the convicted murderer and quack John St. John Long (1798–1831) were able, thanks to their own financial resources or supporters, to erect flashy tombs in the immediate vicinity of highly respected contemporaries which at the time led to some controversy.[14] Thus, the heterotopia of the cemetery provides a space of compensation in which the symbolic reproduction of society allowed one to change or at least to move within its hierarchies.

Highgate Cemetery can therefore also be interpreted according to economic law, namely as a club that is the more exclusive the harder it is to become a ‹member›. This perspective is taken by *Michael Ulrich* in his chapter «Highgate Cemetery at a Crossroads: How to Take the Right Turn? A Contribution Based on the Economic Theory of Clubs». In his theoretical deliberations Ulrich considers an optimal balance between the quantity of visitors and burials, cost of graves and the optimal degree of vegetation to protect Highgate's «imaginative power» and to preserve the possibility for liminal experiences. He concludes that a partial equilibrium is possible taking into account all the variables.

In the case of a cemetery the spatial aspect of the heterotopia is additionally accompanied by a heterochrony.[15] The ever-progressing time of everyday life seems suspended and the remembrance of the deceased makes the past especially present in this place. Furthermore, the cemetery confronts the short span of human life with different concepts of time, such as religious ideas of afterlife, or cyclically renewing nature. *Paola von Wyss-Giacosa*'s chapter «Requiescant in Pace. Staging Nature as a Socio-Religious Practice in Highgate Cemetery» describes these qualities of the new cemeteries that provided a space for different performative practices. While the cemeteries were places of leisure and recreation through the enjoyment of the gardened landscape, the flora and fauna were also perceived as an image of timelessness that supports the mourners dealing with their loss and conveyed comfort.[16]

14 Both men were buried at Kensal Green Cemetery, the first of the Magnificent Seven cemeteries to be opened in 1832, Long in 1834 and Ducrow in 1842. The huge and pompously decorated monuments were criticised by contemporaries as being stylistically crude and vulgar (in the case of Ducrow) and inappropriate to the (missing) merits of the buried persons (regarding both). See Cunningham 1871, 103; Brooks 2001, 211, 226–227; Moulder 2001, 254–255; Matthews 2004, 207–209.

15 See Foucault 1984, 6–7.

16 See Paola von Wyss-Giacosa's contribution in this volume.

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Cemeteries can also be addressed as sites of liminal experiences. They are border areas marking an in-between that separates and connects two spheres at the same time. Topographically, the cemetery does not only lie on the ‹fringe› of the city, but it also defines a ‹threshold› on which the living come into contact with the dead and this world with the hereafter. Back in the 19th century, John Strang highlighted a similar aspect. In his famous guide to the Necropolis of Glasgow from 1831, he specifically focused on the gravestone as a threshold and called it a «monument placed on the confines of two worlds [...] which points out the termination of this life's miseries on the one hand, and the beginning of a blessed immortality on the other.»[17] The tombstone thus opens the horizon of experience to the hereafter, but at the same time alienates the world and enables a kind of external perspective on one's own existence. The concept of threshold opens up different approaches to the use and perception of cemeteries. Besides understanding Highgate as a landscape and a text, *Carla Danani* expands the notion of the threshold in her hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. A threshold not only connects realms like life and death, past and present, but also public and private. Her contribution «Experiencing Highgate Cemetery as a Place: Landscape, Text, Threshold» further highlights that as a point of discontinuity the threshold is a space of liminal experience and a tool for novelties.[18]

The term «liminality» refers to a theory developed by the anthropologist Victor Turner that follows Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* (1909) focusing on the threshold and transformation phase in rites of passage.[19] The latter take place to achieve a change in a person's or a group's social status. Puberty rituals, marriages and funerals belong to these rites. They normally consist of a set of several distinct actions and are divided into three stages: liminality is a characteristic of the central second stage when the participants have already been separated from their group and former social status (phase one) but have not yet completed their transformation to be finally reintegrated into society (phase three). The phase of liminality, in which participants are temporally detached from everyday social norms and conventions, is not only regarded as the critical stage of transformation but also as a time of creativity. Symbols that represent the cultural order and structure of society play an important part in transformations rituals. Especially during the phase of liminality, they can be creative-

17 Strang 1831, 56.
18 See Carla Danani's contribution in this volume.
19 See Turner 1969.

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ly acted out and retain new meanings. Accordingly, Turner claimed «Liminality is the mother of invention.»[20] Following Turner, the concept of liminality was applied not only to concrete topographical thresholds such as gates, borders, harbours and cemeteries but also to the (ritual) use of objects, (theatrical) performances and the reception of artworks.[21] The latter is considered by *Natalie Fritz* in her contribution «Highgate Cemetery – A City of Angels» that discusses the many angel figures at the cemetery as a liminal motif. Supposed to be mediators between the immanent and the transcendent, the realms of the living and the dead, angels not only represent religious concepts of afterlife but are also mediums of personal imagination located in a liminal in-between. In their function as figurative interfaces they bodily and emphatically address the onlookers and shape the images and practices through which the deceased person is remembered.[22]

Similar to the heterotopia, liminal experiences effect a temporary detachment from normative social structures and enable a creative use and procession of images and symbols. As a «different place» and as a site of liminal experiences, the cemetery appears to be a promising object for the investigation of images practices.

Images as Socio-Religious Practices

We propose to distinguish between five modes of practices, by which material images can achieve social and religious meaning. These modes don't exclude each other but might intersect, are necessary co-active and mutually function as co-agents. To understand how objects acquire meaning we have to keep in mind all five levels of action.

First, material images themselves are the product of a practice. Most of the material objects are products of creative work. We speak here of the *practice of the image production.* According to this mode, the following questions are central: Who is producing the image? For whom is the image produced? Who finances the production?

Secondly, material images achieve meaning only when someone is watching, observing, or interpreting them. This *practice of the image reception* is always anchored in specific social, cultural and historical traditions in which the concrete materiality and the specific aesthetic of an image are

20 Turner 1974, 10.
21 See for example Fischer-Lichte 2004; Krüger/Saviello 2017; Krüger 2018.
22 See Natalie Fritz's contribution in this volume.

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perceived and become meaningful. Each culture, historical time and social group has its own specific way of looking, its own (pre-)understanding of visual and multi-sensory signs, shaping what it expects from the observed image. In reference to this mode of practice the following questions are central: What are the material and aesthetic properties of the image? Who is watching (consuming) it? Who has access to the image (and who does not)? With whom, in what context and for what purpose is the image observed?

Thirdly, material images can be used in different kind of practices (rituals, concerts, speeches, recitation, etc.). Here too, the analysis of the *use of images within practices* should pay attention to the historical, cultural and social context in which the images are enacted. It is essential to grasp the image's meaning for the involved agents. As before, we have to ask: Who is using the images, with whom and for what purpose?

Fourth, images themselves can represent practices staging single or multiple agents doing something. In this case we speak of *representation of practices within images*. This mode of action asks the following questions: What kind of practice is represented in the image? Which (iconographic) conventions are followed or modified to represent practices and agents within the image?

Finally, material images themselves can act as space markers, as in the aforementioned example of the gravestone as a boundary between this world and the hereafter. But also a tree can function as an image that marks a certain space, providing it with a particular meaning rather than another. Then we speak of *images as space marking practices* that methodologically investigate how a specific spatial structure is shaped and characterised by images. Here the questions are: What function does a certain image have in the cemetery space and what is its semiotic position in this particular constellation of images?

In order to analyse these modes of image practices, it is important to place them in relation to the imaginary and consider to what extent they are material manifestations of *reproductive* or *creative* activities. In other words, we have to investigate the dialectical relationship between imaginary and image; imagination is then the name we give to the relationship itself. The performative force of this relationship is ambivalent particularly from a political point of view. In fact, if the reproduction of images, stories and practices tend to legitimise and to reinforce the status quo and the dominant power structures, most of the time the creation of novelty is subversive. This also applies to the iteration of dogmas, rules, moral and aesthetic models, as well as to the reinforcement or subversion of religious

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identities and traditions. Therefore, images can express both the continuity and the rupture of religious traditions.

Another mode of practice that expands the above outlined socio-religious practices of images, specifically in the context of a cemetery, are memory practices. A cemetery is an almost exemplary space, where practices of memorialisation are embodied, passed on, changed and transformed. It is also a place where memory can be questioned through subversive images, images that challenge the way to remember the past, perhaps by offering alternative models of memorialisation. Many objects within Highgate Cemetery act as *memorial signs*. What they do is first and foremost to memorialise for example past persons as well as historical events, ideas, feelings, aesthetical forms. Moreover, these memorial signs frame and affect the ways in which past, present and future visitors perceive and experience not only history, but also the inevitability of death, the feeling of loss, the practice of mourning, and many other psychological, cultural and social phenomena. In the case study of Tom Sayer's grave at Highgate the memory practice is further elaborated. *Alexander Darius Ornella's* contribution «Sport as Bodily Practice of Remembrance. Remembering Heroes, Remembering Nations», examines how ritualised practices of sporting activities become the actual instrument through which remembrance is bodily performed.[23]

As outlined so far the constellation of images that we face at Highgate Cemetery is a concrete manifestation of memorialisation practices of different historical times, social strata and cultures. In reference to Jay Winter, we can call these practices *performances of memory*: «The performance of memory is a set of acts, some embodied in speech, others in movement and gestures, others in art, others still in bodily form.»[24] Although they do so in different ways, all the contributions to the current book deal with material and sensory dimensions of such performances of memory. As Foucault rhetorically asks: «Could one speak of a statement if a voice had not articulated it, if a surface did not bear its signs, if it had not become embodied in a sense-perceptible element, and if it had not left some trace – if only for an instant – in someone's memory or in some space?»[25] The same can be said of the image: its performativity is unthinkable, without

23 See Alexander Ornella's contribution in this volume.
24 Winter 2010, 12.
25 Foucault 1972, 100.

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taking into account its embodiment and manifestation in material objects and its mediation as a concrete act of communication.[26]

Image, Imagination and Imaginary: Production and Exchange of Meaning

According to Stuart Hall, one of the founding figures of British Cultural Studies, culture «is not so much a set of *things* […] as a process, a set of *practices*.»[27] Hall does not deny the materiality of culture, on the contrary, he aims to highlight that every cultural product is the material expression of a practice. The same applies to a cemetery as a cultural product that carries meaning. But the objects that we perceive and experience when we visit the cemetery don't provide one single distinct meaning in themselves, they are rather «vehicles or media which *carry meaning* because they operate […] as *signs*. Signs stand for or *represent* our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to ‹read›, decode or interpret the meaning in roughly the same way that we do.»[28] The exchange of meaning is thus always achieved by the means of media or, to use a metaphor, by *material anchors* of meaning. This is also the case during the tours offered in the western part of the cemetery and events organised by the Friends of Highgate Cemetery as outlined in *Marie-Therese Mäder*'s contribution «Public Events at a Historic-Religious Site. Highgate Cemetery in London as a Cultural Practice». Even though the guided tours and events provide sets of meanings that regulate religious and non-religious references as to how the cemetery should be received and interpreted, the tour participants engage in their own meaning making process, she argues in her ethnographic approach. By doing so the cemetery undergoes reiterated and various interpretations in a regulated setting based on the visitor's personal imaginations.

Just as it is true that the transmission and exchange of meaning is not possible without material anchors, it is equally true that the latter could never occur without imagination. In the last decade, different academic disciplines have (re)discovered the concepts of imagination and imaginary, highlighting their heuristic value for understanding and describing historical, social and cultural processes.[29] Some aspects of the academic discus-

26 See Hjarvard 2012, 26.
27 Hall 2013, xvii.
28 Hall 2013, xxi.
29 See Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015, 9–38.

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sion of these concepts frame our approach to Highgate Cemetery. In this section we highlight five different dimensions of the dialectical relationship between image, imaginary and imagination, which in different ways and to different degrees play an important role in all the chapters published in this volume.

First of all, the ability to imagine as a cognitive function enables human beings to perceive and experience the world's animated and unanimated objects as meaningful things. Imagination is a cognitive operation that produces ideas or, more precisely, mental images or «frames». These frames influence the individual sensory perception like a filter. According to Eva Brann, «this activity of semi-deliberate ‹seeing as›, which falls between straight perception of a simple sensory signal and unconstrained imagining […], is surely the imagination's most significant work in the world.»[30] This conceptualisation of the cognitive function of imagination is not very distant from that given by Immanuel Kant to the epistemological function of the *Einbildungskraft*, which has been translated into English by the word «imagination».[31]

Secondly and as already touched upon before, the ability to imagine is what enables people to produce novelties, such as creating objects and providing new meanings to existing ones. Without imagination, there could be no history, society and culture. The human ability to produce something new has perhaps been most strongly emphasised by Cornelius Castoriadis, who refers to it as «the radical imaginary.»[32] The radical imaginary creates things – forms of language, paintings, sculptures, music, architecture, etc. – by «bringing into being a form that was not there before.»[33] Castoriadis distinguishes between the radical, which creates the new, and the actual or institutional imaginary, which «provides continuity within society, the production and repetition of the same forms».[34] The dialectical tension between the imaginative creation of new forms, the institutionalisation of imaginaries, and the latter subsequent imaginative subversion through new imaginative practices stands at the core of the dynamics of historical, cultural and social transformation. Within these dialectical processes, the reception, consumption and interpretation of cultural objects play a fundamental role.

30 Brann 1991, 21.
31 See Kant 1999, 256–259.
32 Castoriadis 1987, 127.
33 Castoriadis 2007, 73.
34 Castoriadis 2007, 73.

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As highlighted above, the objects in Highgate Cemetery are material anchors of past beliefs, ideas, mental images and feelings. It is primarily through the production of cultural artefacts that new forms are created or old ones are reproduced, that culture is consolidated or transformed. But without consumption, interpretation, appropriation and subversion of the old, novelty could never emerge. This is what *Anna-Katharina Höpflinger* considers in the chapter «A Top-Hat, a Mad Murderess, a Vampire King. Practices, Imaginations, and the Materiality of Haunted Highgate», namely the imagination's ability to invent haunted narratives in relation to practices and places. By means of the reception of ghosts she differentiates in a diachronic perspective how on the one hand religious traditions influence media representations of haunted places and how on the other hand New Age practices reproduced, adapted and specifically renewed these representations during rituals taking place in the 1960s and 70s at the then abandoned cemeteries.[35]

The third important aspect to be outlined is thus that the imaginative process plays a central role not only in the production of cultural objects, but also in the practice of experiencing and interpreting them. These objects, material anchors of «imaginative things» are themselves triggers of imagination; in this context, one can also speak of *imagination-induction*: «through the most diverse media and sensory impressions that are made possible by them, the imagination process is stimulated and controlled.»[36] A landscape can be just such a «trigger of imagination», as *Alberto Saviello* considers in «Highgate Cemetery's Landscape as a Matrix of Imagination». To cultivate one's imagination was already considered to be a pleasant and beneficial occupation by the British Philosopher Joseph Addison (1712).[37] Addison considered the strong impact that nature and landscapes exerted on the human senses and thus on imagination. By discussing the original landscape design and architectural elements of the western part of the cemetery Saviello argues that the cemetery's layout implied a fancy and extravagant but nevertheless normative semantic frame to stir and guide the visitors' imaginations.[38]

The fourth aspect is the «privileged link between imaginary and image».[39] In contemporary cognitive, media and cultural science, the word *image* is used to refer to both mental images and concrete-material images.

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35 See Anna-Katharina Höpflinger's contribution in this volume.
36 Traut/Wilke 2015, 51 (translation by the authors).
37 See Addison 1803 (1712), 72–73.
38 See Alberto Saviello's contribution in this volume.
39 Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015, 19.

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For the study of cultural imaginaries, this «hybridization of the image concept between mental act […] and material form» is of great importance.[40] However the contributions published in this book examine very different material phenomena such as tombs, walls, paths, plants, flowers and also moving bodies, and follow diverse interpretative and methodological trajectories. They are based on the assumption that Highgate Cemetery is more than a collection of material objects, but above all the expression and the source of inspiration for mental images. *Niels Penke*'s contribution deals with a specific effect of mental images stirred by literary reception. The images of Highgate Cemetery in literature inspire the readers' imagination and in turn influence the perception of the concrete-material Cemetery. He demonstrates in «Tales of the Dead. Narrating Highgate Cemetery between Nostalgia and Heterotopia» how the reception of the actual place of the cemetery is highly influenced by literary images specifically by «social readings», namely when readers share their reading experiences in internet comments.[41]

The concept of the material image, as we use it in connection with the terms of imagination and imaginary, does not exclusively encompass visual phenomena, but also includes active, auditive and haptic perception. For example, *Sean Ryan*'s contribution «‹Simply to thy Cross I cling›. Hymns and the Performance of Memory in Victorian Highgate Cemetery» deals with the power of hymns inscribed on tomb stones. Beside moral guidance of a good death in Victorian times the grave monument becomes both script and performer that multiplies the sensual experience of those left behind.[42] The example shows how Highgate Cemetery's cultural artefacts are perceived as «images» through the whole human sensory system.

The fifth and final aspect concerns the performativity of the imaginative process. Performativity is a complex concept used in many different ways in a wide range of research fields. In general, it is used to indicate the active dimension of language, the way in which language *does* something, exerts effects and thus produces changes in the world. The first researcher who drew attention to the performativity of language was John Langshaw Austin in his general theory of speech acts.[43] According to the American philosopher, speech acts are not simply a way to communicate something but a way to *do* something. They actively deploy effects on reality and fac-

40 Traut/Wilke 2015, 52 (translation by the authors).
41 See Niels Penke's contribution in this volume.
42 See Sean Ryan's contribution in this volume.
43 See Austin 1962.

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tuality. Since the publication of Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, the concept of performativity has been discussed, redefined and criticised many times, becoming a *terminus technicus* of many academic disciplines. Within cultural studies, Austin's concept of performativity has been redefined in order to comprehend not only phenomena of spoken (and written) language, but all kinds of materially and medially embodied forms of language. Starting from this redefinition, the contributions published in this book are connected by their effort to answer the following question: What do the objects and the images of Highgate Cemetery do? One common point is that they all, although in different forms and with different intentions, take a stand on death. As *Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati* further differentiates, Highgate Cemetery provides a place where death as the universal and uncontrollable *conditio humana* is staged in material and visual interpretative practices that combine the bodily dimensions of the visitors with spatial practices in the cemetery. In her contribution «Performing Difference in Front of Death. The Gravestone and Material, Bodily and Spatial Practice» she further states that the materiality of the graves affects the visitors and allows them to engage in communication processes about death that demand interpretation.[44] The interpretation of death and the handling of liminality connected to the cemetery's images and their use is undoubtedly located at the core business of religion.

Coping with Death and Liminal Experiences

Death shapes life not only in the sense that it marks the moment of life's end; rather, as the German sociologist Georg Simmel argues, it «colours all its contents». «Every step of life manifests itself not only as a temporal approach to death, but as something which is positively and *a priori* shaped by death, which is a real element of life.»[45] In every moment of life, all living organisms adapt to strategies to stay alive and escape death. Humanity has developed, over hundreds of thousands of years, a whole series of specific strategies, which have sought to reduce the daily dangers to which all species are exposed in their environment – lack of food, aggression by beings of the same or other species, weather changes, diseases – with the goal of prolonging their life span as well as making life more liveable. Humans have succeeded in shaping their environment to be sufficiently safe that

44 See Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati's contribution in this volume.
45 Simmel 1993, 31 (translation by the authors).

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their ability to act is not constantly dominated by the task of escaping death. These strategies have enabled them to devote themselves to cultural practices that transcend efforts to merely survive, such as for example drawing, playing, reading, sculpting, writing and, yes, also burying the dead and building cemeteries. The practice of burying the dead paradigmatically shows that for human beings, unlike all other creatures, death is not simply the end of life that can potentially occur at any moment, but rather a border that shapes life and without which life could not be experienced as meaningful.

Therefore, coping with death can be regarded as the metaphysical task *par excellence* and has often been considered as the true core of religions. Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religion is based precisely on the idea that human beings, inasmuch as they are aware of themselves and of the world, have invented religion to give meaning to the finiteness of life. Since consciousness has no boundaries and is able to imagine the infinite (and therefore also immortality), humans tend to oppose the idea of finiteness. The Feuerbachian critique of religion is summed up in the belief that «without death, there would be no religion.»[46] Feuerbach, like Marx and Freud, understands religion as a compensation for life's deficiencies, which can be resolved in the course of social-political and intellectual emancipation processes, so that, as they believed, religion would sooner or later disappear.

According to Hermann Lübbe the fault with such theories is that they misjudge the specific cultural significance and function of religion. What Feuerbach and others misunderstood is that religion is the cultural form of the human relationship to those very facts of life that intellectual education, political programmes or emancipation principally cannot deal with.[47] There are certain emotional experiences of fear, suffering, distress, loneliness and loss, but also of happiness, love and contentment, which remain inaccessible, mysterious and inexplicable for enlightened thinking and argumentative reasoning. For modern, «rational» thinking such experiences are contingent, that is, they are related to facts and events that cannot be rationally embraced but happen «by chance». Death is clearly one of these mysterious and inaccessible facts or events of life. The enlightened thought of modernity, in particular natural sciences, can explain why we all die. But in most cases it is unable to explain why we die at a certain time and in a certain way, and is even less able to give meaning to death. This is why, Lübbe argues, we should embrace religion as a «culture of behaviour to the

46 Feuerbach 1960–1964 (1853), 41.
47 See Lübbe 2004.

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unavailable or as a practice of contingency management.»[48] Religion, in other words, is what allows individuals and communities to cope with contingency.

Lübbe's rather abstract and amorphous definition of religion is similar to definitions given by different researchers in the field of social and cultural sciences, which emphasize the intrinsic relationship between religious practices and the experience of death. For example, Peter L. Berger considers religion, and more generally culture, as what enables humans to orient themselves in life and to establish meaningfulness. The desire for meaning is located especially where human beings find themselves on the border of the conceivable, where their experience of the world is destabilised. A person's death as well as the imaginative anticipation of one's own death may be highly unsettling. The radical threshold situation of death leads to the confrontation with chaos. Religion channels these liminal experiences (such as dreams or states of ecstasy or the experience of a beloved one's death) and relates them to everyday life, establishing a connection between exceptional situations and normal situations.

This is exactly how Martin Riesebrodt understands religious practices: they are primarily aimed at preventing or managing risks and dangers. Along with such crises that deal with the control of nature and social relations, he considers the human body: «Fertility and birth, disease and death are central to all religious traditions, where superhuman powers intervene in human existence, fostering or destroying life, punishing or rewarding the human beings.»[49] Above all, according to Riesebrodt, it is through «interventionist practices» such as prayers, songs, gestures, and sacrifices that individuals and groups are able to cope with crises and liminal experiences.

Riesebrodt understands these interventionist practices as symbolic practices. Nonetheless, he distinguishes between primary interventions and secondary language articulations of these interventions: «[…] here, religion is not viewed primarily from the perspective of linguistic articulation of beliefs and religious categories, however important these processes may be, but the social actions of individuals, groups, and institutions relating to imaginary superhuman powers are placed in the centre […].»[50] Riesebrodt may distinguish and separate these two areas of human activity – linguistic articulation and social practices – because he almost complete-

48 Lübbe 2004, 150 (translation by the authors).
49 Riesebrodt, 2000, 42 (translation by the authors); see also Riesebrodt 2010, 71–91.
50 Riesebrodt 2000, 42 (translation by the authors).

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ly refrains from considering the material and medial dimension of both language and social practices. In fact, as soon as these dimensions are taken into account, one immediately realises that every linguistic signifier is the result of a practice that manifests itself in a medium. In other words: every social practice communicates something by the means of one or more media. Often these media are bodies, but they might also be texts, images, architecture, or any other kind of cultural object.[51]

Thus, although the assertion that religious «interventionist practices» are «the core component of any religion»[52] is not wrong per se, it must be revised by emphasising that religious practices always convey meaning by means of linguistic elements – gestures, sounds, words, clothes, etc. – which are materially communicated. Moreover, we argue that not only strictly cultic acts but also other practices of production and reception of media, in which elements of religious systems of representation play an important role, can serve to cope with liminal experiences and crises. In order to understand how Highgate Cemetery can serve as a site where liminal experiences are enabled, framed and controlled, we must take into consideration the concrete objects and media, the cultural images, as well as the practices with which these objects are produced, used and received. The volume guides its readers through Highgate Cemetery's past and present images, to hopefully provide illuminating insights into a fascinating place and its manifold social-religious practices.

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51 See Pollack/Rosta 2015, 71–72.
52 Riesebrodt 2000, 41 (translation by the authors).

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