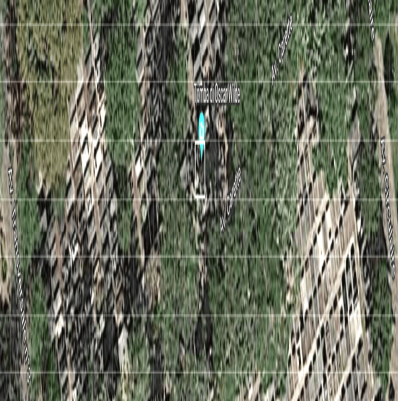




## Word-based geocoding

### Description

The tomb of Oscar Wilde is at at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. The What3Words (W3W) address is `///crawler.falls.gossip`. Tombs are good objects to locate via W3W geocoding as they typically fit within a 3m x 3 meter grid system. The cell immediately to the right of `///crawler.falls.gossip` is geocoded as `///bottled.premises.beards`. So the code does not reveal that the cells are within several metres of each other. Furthermore, if you mistakenly typed `///bottled.premises.bars` into the What3Word app then you would be directed to a field outside Mexico City.

Three words randomly pre-assigned to a grid of 3m x 3 squares that covers the entire globe are sufficient to provide a unique 3-word tag to each of the earth's 57 trillion squares. The square mesh is adjusted to fit the curvature of the earth's surface, and each cell maps on to geodesic coordinates (latitude and longitude).

W3W is available in different languages. The code for Oscar Wilde's tomb in French is `///terrien.démener.bocaux`. That translates as `///earthling.move.jars`. So there's no correspondence between W3W geocoding across languages. In fact that English translation takes you into the sea off Korea.

The creators of the W3W geocoding designed the system to be intuitive to use. You only have to write or recite three words to determine your location, which is easier than reciting numerical map coordinates. There's also a chance that you can remember the words more readily than strings of numbers. The lexicon of admissible words was compiled with some care, avoiding offensive words, and words with multiple spellings that could be construed as inappropriate, singly or in combination.

W3W has been adopted by delivery services, and some rescue and emergency services, including for vehicle breakdown. It is more accurate than the UK postcode system. A single postcode in a low density rural area can be several square kilometres. People have used W3W geocoding to meet others at camping spots, picnic sites, etc. With the app on a smartphone you can allow people to pinpoint where you are, and google maps will direct you there, or nearby at least.

The wordy nature of the location method is interesting in the context of urban semiotics. It's yet another example of the profligacy and potential of words, text and conversation in the city. W3W is designed so that location information can be conveyed aurally and clearly in potentially noisy and stressful circumstances.

Outside of those circumstances, the W3W idea is something to be played around with. That the tomb of Oscar Wilde is located via `///crawler.falls.gossip` invites invention. With no human beings to hand I invited ChatGPT to make up a sentence using those 3 words that is somehow in accord with his life. It responded

In a life marked by controversy and brilliance, Oscar Wilde might have mused how society, like a relentless **crawler**, often **falls** prey to **gossip** and superficial judgments, ignoring the profound depths beneath.

The relationship between any 3 words and its 3x3 grid square is semantically vacant, ready to be filled by the human imagination and its capacity for metaphor and mnemonic methods. ChatGPT and I had an interesting conversation about how it might be possible to devise a localised system that generates 3 semantically and contextually rich words, through AI feature detection of aerial photographs. That's for another post.

## References

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## Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

## Tags

1. cemetery
2. city
3. geolocation
4. tag
5. urban
6. what3words
7. words

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