



DEATH x DESIGN x CULTURE

RADICAL RE-IMAGININGS FOR THE END OF LIFE

4-6 September, Falmouth University

An interdisciplinary conference
aiming to support knowledge exchange
between the social sciences, the
humanities, and design

In partnership with

FALMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

M STAMPS
SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

 DaCNet

 University
of Glasgow

 GLASGOW
END OF LIFE
STUDIES

Moth
Design for Life & Death

• **able**

THE
DEATH STUDIES
PODCAST



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Death x Design x Culture



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DEATHx DESIGNx CULTURE

Welcome

Death, dying, and disposal are scholarly subjects. But they are also profoundly personal: filtered through the intersecting lenses of our particular social determinants and conditions. Design, as a cultural and material practice, significantly mediates our understanding and experience of mortality: from memorialisation rites to the architecture of end-of-life care and beyond.

DeathxDesignxCulture: Radical Re-imaginings for the End of Life is pleased to welcome a diverse community of scholars, researchers, artists, designers, and practitioners to explore the role of design as it relates to death at individual, community, and broader cultural levels, and to suggest radical alternatives for the future.

We extend our gratitude to MOTH: Design and Death, the Death and Culture Network at the University of York (UK), the Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan (USA), and the Glasgow End of Life Studies Group at the University of Glasgow (UK) for their collaborative efforts in organising this conference.

We understand that some of the topics discussed at this conference may be challenging. If you require any support, please refer to the list of organizations provided at the back of these proceedings. We encourage you to prioritise your well-being throughout the event.

On behalf of the organizing committee, we extend our sincere gratitude for your participation and look forward to hosting you here at Falmouth University.

Dr Robyn Cook
Senior Lecturer, School of Communication





Julijonas Urbonas is an artist, designer, researcher, engineer, founder of the Lithuanian Space Agency, associate professor at Vilnius Academy of Arts. Former Director of a Soviet amusement park in Klaipeda.

Working between critical design, amusement park engineering, performative architecture, choreography, kinetic art and sci-fi, he has been developing various critical tools for negotiating gravity: from a killer roller coaster to an artificial asteroid made up entirely of human bodies. In these projects, he coins the term of gravitational aesthetics, an artistic approach exploiting the means of manipulating gravity to create experiences that push the body and imagination to its extremes.

www.julijonasurbonas.lt



Laura Cramwinckel studied Man & Public Space (BA) at Design Academy Eindhoven and Religious Studies (MA) at Tilburg University in The Netherlands, with a thesis on the makeover of Dutch crematorium architecture.

Working to improve death awareness she landed a job at the infamous Museum Tot Zover ('So Long'), a fringe museum on dying, funerals and grief in Amsterdam. Here, heritage, art and contemporary design all come into play when luring visitors over the threshold. She masterminded the development of a new website, educational and participative projects, a nationwide marketing campaign as well as curating thematic exhibitions The Last Pet (2019/2020), Dutch Death Design (2022) and A Delicious Death 2023/2024).

Currently Laura is Head of Program & Research (chief curator).

Keynote Speakers

Keynote Workshop



Provocative Designs for End of Life Reflection

Despite the prevalence and great repute of “provocation” to improve people’s reflection on death and dying, little is settled regarding best practices. As discursive designs (critical design, speculative design, design fiction) are often presented as not fully functioning, merely speculative, and not necessarily even earnest proposals, they can be seen as “safe” and unshackled from the common mechanisms and attitudes toward ethical oversight. More so than advocating codes of conduct and standards, vigorous, longitudinal, reflective, inclusive, and consensual debate is posited as a responsible path forward for a community of practice. This interactive 90-minute workshop contributes to what that might involve and help to evolve. Participants will be introduced to one practical and one ethical framework to help discuss, evaluate, and re-design some of the real world artefact examples that are on display in the DeathxDesignxCulture exhibitions. The goal is to generate robust debate around specific cases and contexts to understand better where the ethical “line” might be. Oh, and we will be using the humour of stand-up comedians to open up the dialogue.

Professor Bruce Tharp

Professor Dr Stephanie Tharp

• able

Post-Conference Opportunities

We are pleased to announce a partnership with .able Journal. With its shared focus on practice-based research at the intersections of art, design, and the sciences, this image-based journal is an ideal publishing partner for the conference's multi-modal ambitions. Initiated by La Chaire Arts & Sciences (2017-2023) of the École Polytechnique, the École des Arts Décoratifs – PSL, and the Fondation Daniel and Nina Carasso, .able is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal supported by approximately thirty international academic partners.

Selected conference papers will be developed into image-based contributions in collaboration with the Department of Graphic Design at Falmouth University for submission and review post-conference. This opportunity aligns with the conference's commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge dissemination.

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Organising Committee

About Falmouth University

FCAC

The Faculty of Creative Arts & Communication encompasses the Falmouth School of Art, The Institute of Photography, and the School of Communication. Across the faculty our disciplines include verbal and visual storytelling and communication, from drawing and fine art, design and advertising, photography and through to writing and journalism.

The faculty aims to be a centre of excellence not only in our discipline areas, but also in cross cutting themes that have emerged across the faculty that align to the university's Mission, Vision and Values. The faculty RKE plan embeds the university's mission that there is creativity in everything, that we build the foundations of the future economy, and that we generate positive and sustainable opportunities for all.

The Faculty of Creative Arts & Communication research centres around five key themes, which inform our teaching facilitate the university mission to be at the nexus between creativity and technology, to position Cornwall as the county for creative learning; to generate positive change through Leadership and Creativity and for our RKE to deliver experimental, environmental and societal impact.

School of Communication

The School of Communication is committed to conducting interdisciplinary, multi-modal, and critically-focused research at the intersection of communication, technology, and pressing global challenges. Research themes include Critical and Creative Narratives, Environmental Futures, Creative Pedagogies, Design for Health and Wellbeing, and Emerging Technologies and Behaviour Change. Research is integrated into the curriculum through research-led teaching.

The School's strong culture of innovation drives its commitment to making significant contributions to theoretical and practice-based scholarship that positively impact society and the environment. Areas of research excellence within the School include 'Dark Narratives', exploring Gothic and Victorian literature, 'Narrative Futures', examining immersive storytelling, 'Bodies and Identities', focusing on social justice, 'Creative Pedagogies', fostering innovative learning and teaching methods, 'Creativity for Health and Wellbeing', and 'Human-Centred Design', driving inclusive technology solutions.

The School's emerging 'Centre for Behavioural Change Studies' focuses on leveraging behavioural science to create positive change. Our designers use established academic inquiry, alongside more radical and experimental approaches, to take an expanded view of design practice towards developing ground-breaking, critically responsive knowledge for, through, and about the discipline. Looking ahead, emerging opportunities lie in exploring the relationship between emerging technologies and communication to address global challenges.

The subject area of Graphic Design at Falmouth University delivers courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, on campus and online and with partner organisations in the UK and internationally. Our MA in Graphic Design was at the forefront of distance-based learning in the field and brings together students from across the world in the global exploration of the subject.

All of our courses are connected by the aim of building critically engaged communities of learning, where a drive for research informed teaching questions and provokes what graphic design is and what graphic design can do. In this context, we seek to test and challenge the transformative power of design to effect change and address the critical urgencies facing our contemporary world. Ideas are central to this and the growth of our students and staff, responding to human-centred communication problems, to create genuine, positive outcomes with lasting impact.

We are immensely proud of our graduate's achievements, who work across the world in many of the subject's leading creative studios and cultural organisations. However, we also see their role and ours, (through our research and teaching) to be a catalyst for questioning design's relationship to established forms of practice and the society and culture in which it resides. This conference we hope plays to this philosophy, so we can question and contribute to an urgency poignant to us all. Across these coming days and beyond them, building a new community of learning is a key objective, to share ideas and to discuss and debate how we can imagine and reimagine the connections between death, design and culture.

Bryan Clark

Head of Graphic Design

About our Partners

STAMPS School of Art and Design

The Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan is a tight-knit but outward-looking creative community, housed in a tier-one research university. The school offers undergraduate degrees in art and design and two graduate level degrees: an MFA in Art and an MDes in Integrative Design. Ranked among the top eight graduate schools in the United States for art and design, the school provides a unique approach to research and creative practice.

Stamps was one of the first art and design schools in the world to institute a transdisciplinary curriculum of self-directed study that allows undergraduate students to move freely among creative media.

stamps.umich.edu

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DACNET

The Death and Culture Network based at the University of York seeks to explore and understand cultural responses to mortality. It focuses on the impact of death and the dead on culture, and the way in which they have shaped human behaviour, evidenced through thought, action, production and expression. The network is committed to promoting and producing an interdisciplinary study of mortality supported by evidence and framed by theoretical engagement.

york.ac.uk/sociology/research/death-and-culture/

End of Life Studies Group

The End of Life Studies Group at the University of Glasgow is a research and teaching group which aims to bring together the best ideas and perspectives from the social sciences, humanities, public health and clinical disciplines in order to shine a light on the individual and collective responses to the challenges presented by dying, death, grief and loss in a rapidly changing world.

In addition to researching emerging responses to end of life care and structural inequalities at the end of life, we also run the End of Life Studies Programme (Micro-credential/PGCert/PGDip/MSc).

gla.ac.uk/research/az/endoflifestudies/endoflifeeducation/

Moth: design for life & death.

Moth investigates the skills and contributions which designers can make to death studies and end of life experiences. Examining contemporary attitudes and anxieties to death, dying and belief systems, through the lens of design communication.

The work focuses upon the importance of ideas as triggers of creativity, as devices for narrative and as loci for opportunities of chance and transition in the context of loss, bereavement and death symbolism. Examining, both formal conventions as well as future-thinking, how mourning in (a largely secular) society can be made more visual (grief aesthetics). It investigates how we can confidently express 'negative' emotions in both the digital and analogue realm, creating an evolving graphic visual language to help navigate grief and sadness and to communicate empathy and loss in our social relationships.

Projects provide platforms for creative exchange and contribution, equipping us to talk about death with greater confidence, giving us courage to see death as being something we can learn from rather than fear.

Nicola Salkeld & Ashley Rudolph

moth.org.uk | moth@falmouth.ac.uk | moth_design_death

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The Death Studies Podcast

The Death Studies Podcast is a platform for the diversity of voices in, around and contributing to the academic field of Death Studies.

The Death Studies Podcast features emerging as well as established researchers, independent scholars and practitioners sharing their ideas, research and experience. Contributions from all disciplines, from different countries, cultures and contexts, as well as from diverse and diverging perspectives, are all welcome.

As theories and ideas around death and dying are always changing, this podcast aims to serve as a starting point to ongoing dialogue between the range of people involved in researching dying, death and the dead.

We aim to support the development of the death studies community and individual researchers, as well as the dissemination of research in an accessible format.

thedeathstudiespodcast.com

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Exhibitions, Film Screenings, Rituals

Fine Lines: Discursive Design and End of Life

While conventional product design emphasizes user functionality, discursive design aims to inspire audience reflection upon important sociocultural issues; they are tools for thinking. Addressing difficult and controversial topics, designers typically employ “edginess” and the “strangely familiar” to provoke such thought. Radical forms can grab attention and allow audiences to think differently and more deeply, but they can also go too far and turn people off—completely backfiring. How can designers leverage the advantages of discursive dissonance, without crossing the line? What’s “too much”, for whom, and under what conditions?

Fine Lines presents designers’ attempts over the last two decades to shed light and inspire reflection on various aspects of death and dying. Despite being difficult to consider and to talk about, avoiding life’s inevitable endings can create many challenges at the individual, family, professional, and societal levels. Here, designers are confronting end of life head on. Rather than provocation for provocation’s sake, they use it to open-up new channels and passageways through sensitive, neglected, and contested waters.

Working with death and dying mostly within European and North American contexts, some designers have chosen more poetic, humorous, and playful approaches, while others are dead serious and defiantly confront the status quo. Some are well established leaders in their field, and others recent university graduates. Some embrace new capabilities of digital technology, while others lean into the purity and potency of the analog. Some projects are highly refined, functioning artifacts, while others are more schematic and speculative. Some are viable and even available commercially, while others are outlawed or promote a do-it-yourself approach. Some are proposed for the public at the level of the city and nation, while others are for the individual and deeply private. Some forms are deliberately alienating, while others seductively styled. Some are durable and meant to last forever, while others leverage impermanence and eventually fade with time and use.

Visitors are asked to consider both the visible lines that shape these artifacts and the ethical and discursive ones they establish. How do these things resonate with your values, attitudes, and beliefs. With the morals that they invoke, what feelings do they evoke, and thoughts do they provoke? Amid the many mortal issues raised, where do you draw the line?

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RCA, London, UK and Resting Reef

Aura Murillo Perez
Louise Skajem
Co-Founders
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Memorial Reef Makerspace

Resting Reef and The Royal College of Art working with the New Economic Models for the Ocean (NEMO) team as a part of the UNESCO Ocean Decade program. NEMO is a multi-year project for human and planet-centred futures focused on achieving sustainable socio-economic interactions with the ocean.

Resting Reef transforms the ashes of those who have died into beautiful oyster reef memorial structures that regenerate marine biodiversity, capture carbon, filter water, and prevent coastal erosion.

Mortem Stores
Designer, Maker,
Design Researcher,
and Lecturer

IW218870@falmouth.ac.uk

School of Communication
Falmouth University

Mortem Stores: Death at your convenience

At the intersection of critical design theory and death studies, Mortem Stores is a discursive design installation, attempting to generate discourse around the subject of Old Age Rational Suicide and the wider debate around choices of how and when we die.

Available to visit by appointment over the duration of the conference,

**Moth: Design for
Life and Death**

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MOTH Design for Life & Death Selected Projects: 2012-2024

The exhibition of works respond to key MOTH themes:

- 1. Symbols of Death: The Emotionalisation of Graphic Symbols** A collective digital vocabulary of pictorial signs to articulate and communicate the nuances of death, dying and grief.
- 2. Objects**
The Materiality of mourning.
- 3. Ars Moriendi**
The Art of Dying (well) and Magical Thinking.

An Extra Place at the Table

The table as a physical and metaphorical place to break bread and boundaries about our relationship with dying, death and grief.

Moth Investigates the skills and contributions, which communication designers can make to death studies and end of life experiences. Examining contemporary attitudes and anxieties to death, dying and belief systems, through the lens of design communication.

The work focuses upon the importance of ideas as triggers of creativity, as devices for narrative and as loci for opportunities of chance and transition in the context of loss, bereavement and death symbolism. Examining both formal conventions as well as future-thinking how mourning, in (a largely secular) society can be made more visual (grief aesthetics). Investigating how we can confidently express 'negative' emotions in both the digital and analogue realm, creating evolved graphic visual language to help navigate grief and sadness and to communicate empathy and loss in our social relationships.

Projects provide platforms for creative exchange and contribution, to equip us to talk about death with greater confidence, giving us courage to see death as being something we can learn from rather than fear.

The DEATH x DESIGN x CULTURE: RADICAL RE-IMAGININGS FOR THE END OF LIFE, presents Moth with an opportunity to share and articulate selected project work from 2012-2024, and to gratefully acknowledge all the partners, contributors and students who have been part of the journey so far.

The event will be hosted at The Greenbank, one of Falmouth's most Historic hotels looking out over the water towards Flushing on Wednesday 4 September.

Julijonas Urbonas
Associate Professor

info@julijonasurbonas.lt
Vilnius Academy of Arts.
Vilnius, LITHUANIA

Euthanasia Coaster

Euthanasia Coaster (2010) is a hypothetical death machine in the form of a roller coaster, engineered to humanely – with elegance and euphoria – take the life of a human being.

Riding the coaster's track, the rider is subjected to a series of intensive motion elements that induce various unique experiences: from euphoria to thrill, and from tunnel vision to loss of consciousness, and, eventually, death. Thanks to the marriage of the advanced cross-disciplinary research in aeronautics/space medicine, mechanical engineering, material technologies and, of course, gravity, the fatal journey is made pleasing, elegant and meaningful. Celebrating the limits of the human body, this 'kinetic sculpture' is in fact the ultimate roller coaster: John Allen, former president of the famed Philadelphia Toboggan Company, once said that "the ultimate roller coaster is built when you send out twenty-four people and they all come back dead. This could be done, you know."

"Euthanasia Coaster" is nothing but a falling trajectory, curved and tangled in such a way that would leave nobody apathetic, neither the passenger, nor the spectator. Where it lands to it is up to the public to decide. It is a prop for non-existent horror movie, a real fiction, a black humour scenography, social sci-fi design, the world's most extreme ride, a mourning sculpture, a monument for the end of the carousel evolution, a gravitational weapon, the very last trip...

Since its presentation to the public, the project has become a unique media phenomenon. It has drawn enormous attention from the public and received extremely extensive coverage from international media. The content and form of the feedback ranged from special TV shows, dedicated songs, a film script, a series of virtual replications, a project for school science fair, and a tattoo to knee-jerk online comments and thorough expert discussions. The project was awarded the Public Prize of New Technological Art of Update 2013, Ghent, Belgium.

Andrew Tibbles
Designer in Residence
at Marie Curie Hospice,
Liverpool and
PhD Researcher

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School of Engineering
Liverpool University, UK

WIP: Desirable Futures of Dying, Death and Digital Legacy

A collection of six conceptual artefacts representing technological and environmental futures for a desirable end-of-life narrative, co-imagined and co-designed with patients and staff from a Liverpool hospice as part of a PhD research programme.

The exhibition is the outcome of an exploration questioning how emerging technology could support our values, and relationships between individuals, healthcare systems, and communities throughout the journey of palliative and end-of-life care, dying, and remembrance.

This work-in-progress exhibition aims to spark conversation about possible futures in death and dying by presenting one set of ideas emerging from the participatory speculative and systemic design process that could be used to inform service and policy changes, demonstrating that anyone can imagine radical futures.

Paul Mulraney
Senior Lecturer

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The School of Film & Television
Falmouth University, UK

Film Screening

Winner of the 2021 Venice Film Festival Special Jury Prize, *Il Buco (The Hole)* leads a screening programme for the DeathxDesignxCulture conference. The programme features a selection of short films by local filmmakers which look at themes of death and the deep – including Mark Jenkin's work with *The Smile Skirting on the Surface*, Paul Mulraney's *From the Culch*, and *Fathom* by Andres Orella.

The films will be introduced by director Paul Mulraney.

8pm, Thursday 5 September
The Poly, Market Street, Falmouth.

All proceeds go directly to the Poly200 Fund.

Laboratory Workshops

Jocelyn Affleck
Designer

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A Funeral for Funerals

"Ritual is able to hold the long-discarded shards of our stories and make them whole again." - Francis Weller

Half performance piece, half workshop, A Funeral for Funerals will contrast the bland, hidebound practices of the current-day funeral industry with a participatory, individualised exploration of death, ritual, and how creativity can allow us to truly grieve.

We'll begin the service with damp cucumber sandwiches, flaccid flowers from Tesco, and a TV with a video of a flickering candle on a loop. Here we will say a sad farewell to the commercial funeral before we bury it forever – it's what the funeral industry would have wanted! After this final hurrah to the traditions that no longer serve us, we will parade outdoors for a workshop exploring personal rituals in small discussion groups, looking to answer the important question: can we grieve more creatively?

Marius Moen Holtan
Designer and Maker

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Worthing, UK

Design and Afterlives: Knitting Again and again and?

How can re-imagining the temporalities of a life provide more meaningful connections with past, present and future beings? Employing knitting as methodology, this workshop will engage with temporal materiality to visualise, and make tactile, the strands of knowledge, culture and skills that weaves generations together.

Again and again and? is a design interaction and workshop about how what has come before may come again, how those who left us still reverberate through those still present, and how the threads of the past are on our knitting needles now.

A multi-strand, multi-fibre and multi-coloured knitted artefact will be presented to participants before asking them to select new strands to be incorporated into the piece. The yarn may represent a physical or metaphysical concept that the participant wants to leave behind or that was left behind for them by a loved one. The participants may also choose to share the story behind their selection and should provide context for how the concept ties past or future beings to the present.

By the end of the workshop, the knitted artefact will embody a unique view of the past, present and future, as viewed by those in the room.

The aim of the workshop is to question and envisage an afterlife that, beyond the physical body, connects with and materialises in those around us. It may also evoke ideas about new ways of memorialising a life – such as how would a knitted blanket that is added to through generations compare to visiting a family grave?

Shannon Larkin
Creative Consultant
Design Researcher

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RCA, London, UK and Resting Reef

Aura Murillo Perez
Louise Skajem
Co-Founders
of Resting Reef

restingreef.co.uk

Memorial Reef Makerspace

This laboratory will explore Resting Reef's innovative concept of memorial reefs while offering participants an immersive experience at one of Falmouth's local beaches. During the laboratory, the team will guide participants through the process of creating their own reef mementos using natural materials gathered from the coast. Participants will explore the significance of Resting Reef's approach to memorialisation of loved ones in memorial reef structures and will reflect upon the intersection of art, nature, and remembrance. Through this conversation, attendees will gain insights into the ecological and emotional considerations around memorial reefs, fostering a deeper connection to their community's relationship with loss, grief, and remembrance.

The Memorial Reef Makerspace laboratory invites participants to not only create tangible artefacts of remembrance, but also to deepen their understanding of the connections between art, nature, sustainability, grief, and community memory. Insights gathered from this event will continue Resting Reef's mission to create memorial reef structures that benefit both marine environments and coastal communities as a whole.

Janine Marriott **learning@arnosvale.org.uk**
Public Engagement Mngr. Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust Bristol
University of Hertfordshire, UK

Dying2Talk - Discussing Death, Dying, and Bereavement with young people

Death, dying and bereavement affect us all; it is a fact of life, but young people often lack the language and confidence to talk about it. This is partly because adults are generally not very good at talking to young people about death or even discussing their own thoughts and feelings on it. Not being able to talk about death, dying and bereavement can create mental health problems - and other issues - in the future.

The activity draws on Allan Kellehear (2012) and uses research from the Dying to Talk project (<https://dying2talk.org>) to set about building a model of a compassionate community that can be adopted by schools and youth groups, and families etc. This work can help build resilience in the next generation, buttressing their mental health for the future and helping to break down the taboo around the subject of death. This activity will happen off campus at Falmouth Cemetery (old part).

Attendees will join a grave symbolism tour designed for young people. This will be followed by some Dying2talk activities which will include coffin making and gravestone design activity and will demonstrate that undertaking the activity will open up discussion and there will be a conversation about the use of arts and crafts to facilitate difficult discussions on death among many different audiences.

Meeting point is corner of St Anthony Way and Penance Road <https://w3w.co/daisy.thinks.brokee>

Paul Mulraney
Lecturer

Paul Mulraney
School of Film and Television
Falmouth University, UK

Death in the Celluloid: Film as Memento Mori

The paper will detail a film production process that was driven by a desire to remember the dead, to remember that we will die, and to retain the sense of discovery that comes from opening a can of film whose contents are deemed worthless to some, yet are priceless to others.

Death in the Celluloid: Film as Memento Mori proposes that these discarded moments of aesthetically and narratively undesirable footage are in fact a more fitting container for emotion and memory than the carefully staged and framed footage that is common to mainstream cinema.

We will consider how film can be driven by a desire to remain true to the memory of people, language and place. This essentially humanist intent finds a kinship in the films of Tim

Plester and Rob Curry (The Way of Morris, upcoming documentary The Island of Doc Rowe), the editorial work of Nick Hector (Sharkwater Extinction), and the docudramas of Michelangelo Frammartino (Il Dono, Il Buco) whose use of archival footage will be considered as a model for this approach.

Mark Shtanov
PhD Researcher

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Department of Architecture
University of Manchester, UK

Respectful disposal design lab

This proposed workshop is open to anyone else interested in creatively contributing to a pertinent issue in disposing of human bodies. The purpose of the workshop is to discuss, challenge, and re-think the spatial, material and ritualistic organisation of respectful disposal. The latter refers to the procedure used at clinical and high temperature waste incinerators for disposing of anatomical waste, including human torsos, heads and limbs, imported into the UK for medical research.

Given the vague and non-visual guidance within the relevant policies and in view of the existing ad hoc practices, the procedure of respectful disposal needs a re-design. The Workshop invites its participants to visually explore the improvements to the existing procedures.

At the start of the workshop, the participants will be visually presented with existing practices, based on the author's findings at the waste incinerators. Participants will then be divided into small groups to design the potential alterations, however radical or subtle, through sketching over the diagrams and drawings of the existing practices, collages, mock-up models, re-enactment and other visual means. Materials will be provided. Towards the end, each group will briefly summarise their ideas, identifying whether the proposed changes are mainly ritualistic, spatial or material.

The participants will gain experience in creatively approaching the challenge of respectful disposal in material and spatial ways. After the workshop, sketches, models, videos, photos and notes will be documented, examined and formulated into design strategies with the prospect of a publication contributing to death and waste studies, as well as informing regulations.

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With

Jennine Wilson, lecturer and Senior Technician; Liliana Ovalle, Senior Research Fellow; Luke Sellers, PhD candidate – School of Design, Northumbria University Newcastle, UK and Dorthe Refslund Christensen, Associate Professor; Dr. Mórna O'Connor, grief researcher – Aarhus University, Denmark.

Mere Mortals Collective

Death x Design x Culture Laboratory

We are an interdisciplinary group called the Mere Mortals Collective (from the disciplines of Design, Death Studies and Applied Psychology), who all have an interest in the intersection between design, art and death in research. This lab will creatively explore a surrealist art method (cubomania), which we find relevant to death because of the embodied characteristic of the technique and how the surrealists valued fragments, assemblage and disassemblage of experience in aesthetic modes of production to explore the plurality/multiplicity of mortality. We propose a lively 60 minute session involving making, conversation and annotation of visuals all in relation to death, design and discursiveness.

The Cubomania activity – we will ask participants to bring an image of an object that represents loss to them. We will also bring images ourselves and cubomania example boards (collages of square images in a grid formation – comprising details taken from various images) to demonstrate the method to participants. Together we will make new cubomania collages with participants in the laboratory. Throughout we will capture people's thoughts, ideas and interests on sheets of transparent acetate that can be put over each cubomania board for people to annotate.

What will people take from this?

Everyone will be able to experience a creative, dialogical approach to thinking about loss, death and mortality. They will see their image in relation to others and how other people think creatively through mortality themes and they will be invited to think about mortality/loss through the lens of the relationality of things.

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Apothecary of Tears

A collection of crafted lachrymatory bottles designed to look like bone forms the starting point for Apothecary of Tears laboratory. Created from white earthenware and fired in my memorial garden, they'll take on the appearance of bone-blackened, charred, imbued with narratives. How do these objects allow us to talk about grief? In this one hour laboratory the lachrymatory bottles will be laid on a tabletop, on hand-stitched cloth. Participants will be guided to explore their relationship to tears. Tears shed and unshed, tears of joy, ecstasy, sorrow and grief and their significance in mourning practices.

Informed by personal experiences of grief, I'm intrigued by lamenting for the dead and how this is integrated into contemporary art. The notion of the artist as a medium, a conduit between the seen and unseen worlds, drives my current studio practice. I aim to provide participants in my laboratory with a platform to share their stories. A space where tears may be considered.

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Papers

Designing for End of Life: Bridging the Personal and the Universal

Teaching design through the theme of death—Two professors of design discuss their own interest in the topic of death, their own experiences in teaching design through the theme of death. They express both challenges and possibilities when using death as a theme with design students that go beyond the field of design and which enrich the students world view long term. Death and dying has moved from part of life to the forbidden, the taboo, and institutionalized. There is a need to re-examine death, the services and products around death and dying, that aligns better with the needs of people and planet and which perhaps can help people cope with inevitable loss—both the loss of life for the individual dying but also the loss of presence for those left to live on.

We aim to explore the transformation of personal experiences into a product design course focused on the topic of End of life. We will delve into how design, together with anthropology and psychology, becomes a powerful tool that bridges the gap between the personal and the universal aspects of death, thereby bringing us closer to this inevitable part of life, particularly within Western cultural contexts. Through a series of examples drawn from both personal narratives and universal themes, we will illustrate how the design process begins with individual observations and emotions. These personal insights then evolve into thoughtful responses that have the potential to resonate with a broader audience. By examining case studies and practical applications, we will demonstrate how design can play a significant role in facilitating conversations and rituals surrounding death, ultimately fostering greater understanding and acceptance.

We believe that this lecture will provide valuable insights for designers, researchers, and practitioners interested in exploring the intersection of death, design, and culture.

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Identifying design patterns of charitable digital memorial sites

UK charities are investing in designing, developing, and delivering digital memorial websites for bereaved people as part of their in-memoriam fundraising programmes. Although this is an increasingly commonplace tactic, our understanding of this emerging charitable memorialisation landscape is limited.

This paper has three aims: 1) to develop a taxonomy of the types of digital memorials that are being offered by UK charities; 2) to reveal which other actors are involved in the design and development of these sites; 3) to identify patterns of design in these memorial sites, including the use of symbols, the transference of offline rituals to the virtual space, temporality (including potential for evolution or decay), interactivity, and the level of user-customisation. It will explore the ways in which the design of digital memorial websites influences the online afterlife of the deceased, through the collective-curation and ongoing interaction with the deceased's data.

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Augmented: the future of death and disability

Profoundly hard of hearing, Cann's reliance on hearing aids from the age of four make her optimistically curious about new technologies, and she challenges the audience to rethink the ways in which they might create accessible spaces and interrogate traditional notions of biology and death. From robots to augmented and virtual realities, metaverses and gaming, Cann makes the argument that these technologies are not as foreign or as strange as they first might seem. Along the way, she also argues for a more inclusive world that recognizes the gifts that disability might teach a world that privileges non-disabled people and spaces.

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Design considerations for end-of-life delirium experiences: spaces, places and people

This paper outlines a set of culture-sensitive design considerations that can help manage delirium during end-of-life care. Experiences of delirium during end-of-life care are commonplace and involve a state of heightened confusion. During episodes of delirium, individuals can express hyperactive behaviours, such as agitation and shouting, and/or hypoactive behaviours, such as low mood and acting in a withdrawn manner.

Expressions of delirium can occur unexpectedly, are seldom consistent and an individual can oscillate between hyperactive and hypoactive behaviours. At what is already an emotionally difficult time, this unpredictability makes delirium difficult to manage and its episodes can have traumatic impacts on the individuals at end-of-life and their care-givers. The design considerations made by this paper to manage such difficult experiences are developed via a literature review on how delirium has been managed in varied care spaces, i.e. hospitals, hospices, care homes and in private homes.

The findings of the review are augmented through ethnographic reflections on being a care-giver to a family member who experienced increasing episodes of delirium at end-of-life. These two knowledge-bases are assessed through a design-thinking approach, which involves the ideation and creation of designed objects and environments to support real-life contexts and challenges. Consequently, the recommendations made by this paper address how designed objects and care environments can help manage delirium in a variety of spaces and places, and for all individuals involved in a person's end-of-life care.

Changes to a person's sensory responses and cognitive state are also accommodated in the design considerations. Overall, spaces, places and people, and the cultures of these subjects, become leading influences for design in this context.

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Haunted Homicide Hunters

Homicide-focused detective fiction is a dominant storyline of the crime/police procedural genre in literature, popular fiction, and film. While researching how death is designed in televised series, I noted a striking pattern: the haunted homicide hunter, the investigator tortured by the death of a spouse, lover, or child by murder, accident, or terminal illness.

A romantic figure, the haunted homicide hunter is a sensitive loner nursing a broken heart, unable to move on with life because his or her happy old world is lost. To cope with their grief, these pursuers of killers may seek relief through solitude, cynicism, substance abuse, daredevilry, or immersion in the sublime settings of nature, but their dominant means of coping are sublimation and displacement. Haunted homicide hunters are crusaders who relentlessly pursue murderers while vicariously experiencing their own loss through identification with the grief of survivors.

The plots, as well as the characterizations, of this sub-genre are tropes, blending features of the Gothic, noir (especially Nordic), and hard-boiled detective genres and the use of narrative devices such as flashbacks and visitation by the 'ghosts' of those whom they mourn. Themes of guilt, vengeance, rule-breaking, troubled relations with supervisors, and exposure of corruption are formulaic aspects of their journey toward redemption.

Appearing in series in North America and Europe, the haunted homicide hunter is situated in geographic locations that mirror their desolate inner lives. Data from the study has been gathered through content analysis of several dozen series set in the USA, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland.

Another aspect of the study is identifying the appeal of the homicide hunter for the audience. Theoretical frames used to analyse the findings are interdisciplinary, from sociology, anthropology, criminology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and literature.

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Fallen: Re-imagining Death, Dying and Un-Aliveness as Becoming Multiple

In this illustrated paper Dr. Cat Fontoura offers a re-imagination of death and dying in the context of ecocide. Using rotten wood, nurse logs, novel storms and fallen trees, she argues for creative practice as a means to connect to life affirming death and dying framings. Leaning into anti-imperialist, eco-criticism scholars such as Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, Tyson Yukaporta, Adrienne Maree Brown, Maggie Nelson and others, Cat Fontoura thinks through what the process of dying can mean in the face of the current polycrisis.

The paper also considers forms of differentiation between dying and other more violent forms of 'un-aliveness' produced in the context of extractive capitalism. Using colonialism as a trigger pinpoint for the Anthropocene, as argued by Katheryn Yusoff in her seminal essay 'A Thousand Black Anthropocenes or None'. Arts-based case studies are used to illustrate these differences and nuances, making use of death and dying not a final point of arrival, but as a starting point for imagining new, more just futures.

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Designing for Death: Victorian and early twentieth-century Mourning Jewellery

This paper, illustrated with images and examples of jewellery from museums and private collections, mainly focuses on the period 1800 to 1920. Many of the pieces to be discussed and shown are mass produced, reflecting the increasing accessibility of consumer goods during this period in Britain. Other modern technology including the printing press, railway, the telegraph and later on the telephone, combined to facilitate a boom in consumer culture during the Victorian period, and the accoutrements of mourning were no exception to this. This was the era when the moneyed and socially sensitive mourner could address her (and the gendered nature of this will also be noted) mourning requirements to 'Everything, Harrods, London' and be assured of prompt, personal service. Meanwhile new materials enabled mourning jewellery designs to be reproduced accurately, quickly, and above all cheaply for the mass market; these included the very first plastics, which can often be very difficult to distinguish from more traditional materials!

However at the very height of Victorian mourning culture, sensibilities were already beginning to change as life expectancy began, gradually at first, to increase. The 1870s onward therefore witnessed the beginnings of a decline in the popularity of mourning jewellery. This trend would only be exacerbated by the mass fatalities of the 1914-18 Great War, and subsequently the youth culture of the so-called 'Roaring Twenties.'

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Designing for Death: Stuart and Georgian Mourning Jewellery

This paper is first in a sequence of three papers examining changing designs of mourning jewellery. Illustrated with images of jewellery from museums and private collections, it covers the period 1660 to 1800 and particularly explores the sources of designs.

The same time-span covers the shift in Philippe Ariès' Western Attitudes towards Death from 'One's own death' to 'Thy death'. There was a complete revolution in the design of mourning jewellery around the late 1760s. Previously, designs emphasised bodily decomposition, commonly featuring skulls.

Now it emphasised the emotional impact of death, and showed grieving women, reflecting the new 'Cult of Sensibility'. Using sources such as novels by Sterne and Goethe, and paintings by Angelica Kauffman, designs also appear in jewellery, appropriating the grief of fictional female characters to real, bereaved Georgians.

The personal element was added with hair cut from the head of the deceased. Finally, designs specifically for 'hair workers' making jewellery were published by Garnet Terry, a London jeweller.

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The Vernacular Art and Design of Death of Barbara Jones

This paper explores the vernacular art and design of death through the work of artist, author, and curator Barbara Jones (1912-1978), whose work came out of a lifelong interest in popular art.

Ahead of her time, Jones saw value in the often overlooked everyday items around us, and she approached objects that relate to death and the customs that dictate their use, on the same terms as food and drink packaging or visiting the seaside, in a radical departure from how the western world generally engaged with death in the 20th century.

For Jones, death wasn't a taboo subject to avoid, but one worthy of examination as part of her personal canon of vernacular art. Her 1951 exhibition of British popular art, *Black Eyes and Lemonade* at Whitechapel Gallery, included among its themes, 'Birth, Marriage, and Death,' complimented by her book *Unsophisticated Arts*, published the same year. Its concluding chapter, 'The End,' outlined conventional British practices and customs surrounding death.

These works re-contextualised items of the everyday as art worthy of consideration and Jones continued this surfacing of cultures of death in her later work. *Design For Death*, published in 1967, expands on the chapter in *Unsophisticated Arts*, dissecting the subject into themes such as coffin design and decoration, tombstones, hearses, and the preparation and display of corpses. Here, Jones approached death with wit and humour to bring acceptance to the end of our lives.

Lastly, in her book *Follies & Grottoes* (1953, 1974), Jones explored death as part of landscape given that many follies erected in Victorian Britain were memorials to the dead. Building on previous work that documented the effects of war on the landscape, this work addressed death as part of the everyday environment.

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Black Ecologies: the Design of Radical Relationality

Black Ecologies and the Design of Radical Relationality, subsume the politic of colonial death into a stratum of new ecological thinking. Drawing upon intersectional thinking and liberatory strategies, 'black imagination and its undisciplined ways of knowing' offers critical ways to re-think and recalibrate our personal world(s) in symbiosis with others.

Within an assembly of worlds, an alternative ecology of the living moves across and interconnects with cultures of materiality, resonant spaces, and living matter. It is from this position that we can revive creative practices as a more generative, generous, and perhaps fantastical praxis. Aiming to de-centre itself from colonial capital, symbolic/real death, and extinction, new concepts of relational thinking and practice provide us with re-imagined meanings and modes of living.

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The absence and presence of visual representation of grief and death following perinatal death.

This paper draws on research with parents who have experienced perinatal death. In doing so, it makes a critical contribution to the discourse surrounding perinatal death, and the absence of visual representation which is at odds with the prevailing discourse of pregnancy. That is, smiling, content mothers with healthy babies. Turning to genres of online representation of memorialisation, and medical ultrasound images, it demonstrates that the dominance of the biological model of personhood limits the ability of both forms of representations to assure the status of babies who die because of stillbirth and neonatal death to a status of a baby as having been real.

Indeed, parents seeking reconciliation with their grief and with it a deep human need to continue rather than relinquish a bond with their deceased baby. To secure this relationship parents treasure mementoes such as the photographs, baby feet and handprints taken at the time of birth and death, objects which bring a familiar memory and at times an imagined future on significant anniversaries. These meaningful objects can be understood as contributing to the continued lineage of the baby who has died. In turn these objects serve to contest both idealised images of pregnancy and lack of representation in death. They also reveal otherwise disenfranchising experiences of loss brought about by a lack of acknowledgement by the social milieu and wider society to which parents relate. This paper argues for an embracement of the visual, and the graphic as a medium by which to acknowledge such loss and with it a grief that endures for a lifetime.

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Grief in the Digital Age: Embodied Technology and New Grief Rituals for Complicated Grief

Social and economic shifts in American society have increased the number of unanticipated deaths, resulting in an influx of individuals experiencing complicated grief – grieving outside the conventional standards of bereavement. Historical events such as natural disasters, wars, and global pandemics have further exacerbated grief and bereavement. Despite extensive research confirming that grief is a highly individualized and phenomenological experience, traditional bereavement treatments continue to centre a standard, normative form of grieving. Grief and grieving is often publicly short, secluded, and lonely.

Even with the acknowledgment and attempted acceptance of death, it is difficult to adequately prepare oneself for grief's emotional and physical turbulence. The physical and mental symptoms of grief often mimic those of trauma – heightened anxiety, an overwhelming flood of emotions, and pangs of acute, nearly physical pain. Professional treatment for grief is available but not necessarily affordable, widely known, or even necessary.

Complicated grief is often treated as a trauma-related disorder, and together with the social stigmas and monetary constraints surrounding mental health treatment, it is unlikely that a complicated griever will seek professional support. Digital grief applications and telehealth opportunities are fleeting often result in temporary relief. Though societal standards place a specific time limit on grief, the process can ebb and flow for months, sometimes years. Additionally, current digital grief technologies focus on surface-level interactions and disregard the physical and intangible experiences of grief.

This paper speculates how digital technologies, specifically a system of designed, embodied objects, could be harnessed to aid in developing new grieving rituals to help the bereaved throughout the grieving process.

“Of course, we make it pretty” - The Role of Design in Sustainable Death Concepts

It is no secret how harmful our modern way of living is to the environment; however, our way of dying, is also ecologically problematic. In the funeral industry, it is primarily designers who are developing innovative solutions for sustainable burials. In several European countries, designing for a greener death has led to fascinating ideas such as the Italian burial pods by Capsula Mundi or the Living Coffin by LOOP Biotech. Design is crucial not only to bring about change, but also to visually shape our relationship with death, create atmospheres and channel emotions.

“Of course we make it pretty...” said one of my interview partners, Pablo Metz. His start-up MEINE ERDE is the first in Europe to legally offer Natural Organic Reduction (NOR). With this new form of burial, the human body is transformed into soil within 40 days. The idea of decomposition is not a sightly one per se, but MEINE ERDE has established a stylish and clean visual strategy for its “Reerdigung”.

The reason given by Pablo Metz is: “...because we work with people.”

Based on qualitative interviews with German pioneers in the field of 'green death', this paper explores the importance of aesthetics and design in presenting and promoting ecological alternatives to conventional burial methods and products.

At the intersection of human-centred design and biodesign, the following questions are addressed: How can mourning processes be aided by design? What sensitivities and associations are intended to be evoked by certain aesthetic considerations? Are altered visual narratives capable of fostering a (radically) more positive image of death?

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The Aesthetics of Online Grief: Analysing Design Tendencies in the Context of Death

The way people grieve online has undergone significant changes and expansions (Walter, Hourizi, et al., 2012). Images that are framed in the concept of Internet Aesthetics (Berghman, Giolo, 2023), more specifically certain aesthetics in relation to death, trauma and grief such as Dreamcore (Aesthetics Wiki, 2021) and Traumacore (Aesthetics Wiki, 2021), become key scenarios for the exploration of death and pain online.

These aesthetics, characterized by their ability to evoke intense and ambivalent emotional states, reflect the complexity of grief in the digital age, fusing dreamlike and traumatic elements with the everyday life of online browsing. Online communities interact and appropriate these images and virtual spaces for personal grief processes, creating a new version of photography as a tool for grieving (Jiménez-Alonso, Brescó, 2021). Through the analysis of images and discourses generated around some internet aesthetics, we seek to understand how digital culture configures new ways of facing and conceptualizing death and suffering today.

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Cellular Legacies: Exploring Organ, Tissue and Body Data Donation through Augmented Reality

Donate Yourself is an Augmented Reality (AR) experience that blends sound and 3D visuals with non-linear narrative to spark debates about our organs, tissue and body data. It was created through a yearlong collaboration with interactive design collective body>data>space and scientists from the Human Cell Atlas project (HCA), funded by the Wellcome Trust.

Donate Yourself explores the connection points between: humans as material; embodied data; and the interdependency of scientific futures as careful cartographies (Braidotti, 2016). It sits at the boundaries of ArtSci, Science Communication, Medical Humanities and Interaction Design, extending the body of research which explores public attitudes to tissue (Locock & Boylan, 2016; Domaradzki & Pawlikowski, 2019) and body data donation after death (Harbinja, 2019) using web AR to layer the debates over our everyday environment.

Humans – down to our cellular structure – can be simultaneously seen as both human and non-human depending on scale. This duality was expressed by scientists (who use human tissue) during Donate Yourself's participatory research phase. This distinction points to concerns over how we care for the dead, ritually and literally, and whether the dead can be in symbiosis with the living through 'making use' of their biological materials as an active part of personal legacy. This fragile equilibrium also challenges us to navigate whether we trust both the scientists working with human tissue but also the connected institutions that govern and fund them, which often have contested histories.

The AR works to explore this by de-constructing and reconstructing parts of the body(s). The artworks create tension by sharing people's discomfort with the dis-assembly that occurs through autopsy, along with fears of this cellular data being used in ways that don't respect their values.

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Afterlife, Afterdeath, or None of the Above? Designing research tools to explore contemporary British death, dying and destinies

Against a complex religious-spiritual-secular landscape, quantitative explorations of contemporary British afterlife beliefs have produced wide-ranging, even divergent, depictions of people's hopes and fears for the hereafter (YouGov 2021; Rozario and Shimada 2023; Duffy 2023).

Qualitative research produces a similarly imprecise impression. Interlocutors are consistently attributed afterlife beliefs which are uncertain, under-considered, amorphous or inchoate (Walter and Waterhouse 1999, Rozario and Shimada 2023). Indeed, some have suggested that they do not operate like 'beliefs' at all, often too formless to function or provide comfort amid crises or bereavements (Singleton 2012, 2016).

This presentation introduces ongoing mixed-methods research into contemporary British grave goods practices. Grave goods – the objects, clothes and materials which are deposited alongside dead human bodies, when buried or cremated – are among the myriad material cultures of death created and curated in contemporary Britain (Harper 2012; Härke 2014).

While it seems logical that the decisions and design of these items would be directly linked to beliefs, ideas or impressions about what happens when we die, the deeply unsettled, uncertain status of afterlife beliefs for many contemporary Britons means this logic may not hold.

The presentation gives particular focus to the challenges associated with capturing afterlife and afterdeath conceptualizations and complexities – and their implications for grave goods practices and other aspects of death materiality – within survey instruments. It argues that this complexity illuminates the value of mixed-methods approaches, methodological piloting, and embracing the 'mess' of people's attitudes and practices when studying death and dying.

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Designing for Death: Memento mori in contemporary art and jewellery.

Traditional mourning jewellery, as discussed by my colleagues Helen Frisby and Clare Gittings, may have declined in popularity after the 1914-1918 Great War, but the skulls, coffins, weeping willows, and other memento mori did not disappear altogether from visual culture.

Art works such as Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* (2007), clothing such as Alexander McQueen's "Skull Scarf" (2003), and jewellery shops such as *The Great Frog*, London make clear, the emblems of death are still very much a part of popular visual culture. After providing a brief history of the resurrection of memento mori imagery beginning in the 1970 and 80s with metal and Goth cultures, this investigation will focus on the contemporary artists/jewellers Melanie Bilenker, Lola Brooks, and Julia deVille, who all reference traditional mourning jewellery in their designs and installations. While these artists use many of the same forms and materials as traditional mourning jewellery such as broaches, rings and necklaces fashioned from hair, precious metals, and jewels, they also incorporate less traditional materials in the form of animal bones and taxidermy animals, for example, that nonetheless evoke death and remembrance.

Their symbolic language also conjures images of the mourning keepsakes of earlier centuries, as skulls, bones, crosses, doves, flowers, hearts, and eyes abound in their works. However, these familiar symbols are often juxtaposed with other less familiar objects such as the preserved body of a spring lamb, or a hand-carved baby elephant skeleton.

This paper will explore the rich dialogue these artists have with the materials and motifs of traditional mourning ritual and jewellery, and discuss the ways this re-imagined memento mori imagery may continue to have resonance and meaning in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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Changing Perspectives: The Impact of Legalising Assisted Dying on the Stigma of Suicide and Societal Attitudes

The topic of death by suicide has long been fraught with complexities, stigma, and societal taboos. In recent years, discussions surrounding the legalising of assisted dying have sparked debates regarding the ethical, moral, and legal implications of end-of-life decisions. This paper explores the intersection of these issues, examining whether the legalising of assisted dying, albeit only available to a specified group, will diminish the stigma associated with death by suicide and alter perceptions of it as taking the “easy way out.” And whether using “assisted suicide” instead of “assisted dying” would improve or worsen societal attitudes towards death by suicide.

Death by suicide has historically been accompanied by stigma, shame, and a sense of moral failure. Those who have died by suicide or expressed a desire to do so have often been met with judgment and condemnation. This stigma is deeply ingrained in cultural attitudes, religious beliefs and teaching and have contributed to the precious reluctance to openly discuss or address suicide.

Despite the legalising of assisted dying introducing a new dimension to the discourse on death and dying, challenging traditional notions of autonomy, dignity, and the sanctity of life, it is unlikely to entirely eradicate perceptions associated with death by suicide. Cultural attitudes and societal perceptions may persist even in the face of legal reform with broader societal changes, including increased education, awareness, and support for mental health issues required.

Moreover, individuals may continue to struggle with feelings of shame, guilt, and the perception of taking the “easy way out,” Affle irrespective of the legal status of assisted dying.

While legalising assisted dying may prompt change in addressing the underlying factors and promoting open dialogue and compassionate support for individuals facing end-of-life decisions further steps towards fostering a more empathetic and understanding society are required.

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Human Leather as a radical material for the future

The history of human leather is steeped in darkness, often sourced from criminals, murderers, or victims of atrocities like the death camps of Nazi Germany. However, for those drawn to leather fashion, alternative methods of production are worth exploring. While any animal skin can yield leather, the notion of human skin being utilised raises numerous questions.

The production of human leather has largely disappeared, however there have been several explorations of human leather production. A website claiming to offer products crafted from donated human skin stopped taking orders a few years ago due to overwhelming demand outstripped supply. Whilst artist Tina Gorjanc set about creating a project "Pure Human". This work consisted of a series of fashion items made from cultivated human leather, that had been developed from lab-grown cells purporting to be from the DNA of fashion designer Alexander McQueen.

As an artist, I became interested in the materiality of human leather following my own abdominoplasty operation after years of natural weight loss. I later transformed my removed skin into leather as part of a creative investigation. This endeavour prompted interesting discussions on the ethical boundaries of human leather, and I am interested in extending this discourse to consider it as a radical alternative material for the future. I am interested in exploring questions such as, can it be considered vegan if sourced consensually from a living donor like myself? Why are we still so horrified by its materiality when the living donor is alive, well and happily consenting. Many people already donate their organs after death, is skin the next step? Could being turned into a leather accessory be a good way to be immortalised?

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Co-imagined desirable futures of dying, death and digital legacy

Through a designer-in-residency model, where a design researcher is placed within a working hospice for one year, we co-created a system map of cause and effect of the hospice service system. Using key components of this holistic system map, patients, staff and the designer engaged in a reflexive design thinking process to question the purpose, values and ideals of those components. Using emerging technologies as a lens to explore these futures, we came up with 6 desirable futures of dying, death and digital legacies.

These outcomes span from technology as a mediator between patients and care systems, to reimagined death civic spaces at the centre of cities. These ideas provide insights and experience-based mindsets that can inform service and policy changes for a more desirable future for all.

Combining participatory methods, systems thinking, and speculative design, we've created a unique approach and

method for co-imagining futures in palliative and end-of-life care based on experiences. This work aims to inform and contribute to changes that proactively address known upcoming systemic challenges to healthcare systems.

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Gothic and Menhera: The Visual Language of Grief in Contemporary Japanese Pop Culture

This essay has been prompted by an examination of my own works, some of which have been deeply influenced by contemporary popular Japanese art, ranging from anime, illustrations, music (and music videos), to street fashion. Much of these visuals were used to convey emotions of loss, desperation, and anxiety. These emotions mirror what I perceive to be stages in the complex emotional process of “grief”, such as “depression”, “bargaining”, and “anger” respectively (Kübler-Ross, 1973).

It has thus been my interest to investigate how and why these depictions have manifested in Japanese visual culture. I hope to offer an objective summary of their origins, before analyzing how they relate to their audience in the contemporary era.

An emotion born out of tragedy and loss, “grief” has always served as a strong emotional cornerstone in art and storytelling, resonating deeply with creators and audiences alike. If we consider tragedy “produced out of a tension between the past and present” (Bushnell, 2007: 106), then perhaps we can consider the visual language of grief in contemporary Japan as an expression of post-colonial cultural hybridity that holds the tension between the past (the loss of childhood, and a promised future) and present (anxiety arising from confronting an uncertain future)..

Presentations

Karen Miranda Augustine
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Public Displays of Affection

Public Displays of Affection is a video short and mixed-media art project on makeshift, spontaneous, and unconventional memorials randomly encountered throughout the city of Toronto, Ontario (Canada). Personal yet often activist in nature, many of these tributes document the passing of marginalized, murdered, and lesser-known individuals. Found in public spaces of civic sprawl, these sites were photographed and filmed between 2019 and 2024 in public housing, alleyways, sidewalks, store fronts, bridges, parks, street poles, and parking lots.

We are all interconnected. And death, loss, and grief are obvious equalizers. These ad hoc memorials – disengaged from commerce or the need for social likes – yield beautiful, community-minded, radical expressions of dignity, remembrance, outrage, and love.

Laura Blight
Lecturer

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Invisible Worlds: The Interplay of Photography, Death, and Commemoration

This presentation will explore the role of photography in re-imagining conventional cultural approaches to death, with a focus on alternative storytelling upon death and grief. It examines how photography reshapes perceptions of commemoration and disposal, engaging with themes of memory, ritual, and grief. At the individual level, death prompts us to reflect on our own existence, leaving behind a physical manifestation of human presence, embodied as dust and residue. Community rituals and disposal practices are steeped in cultural and spiritual significance. Ritual allows the living to move forward.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, my practice based research explores how creativity can foster a deeper understanding of death and dying, bridging visible and invisible worlds.

By embracing the inherent magic and mysticism of these remnants a holistic approach to death and disposal emerges—one that honours the interconnectedness of life and feeds into the circular economy of death. In envisioning the future, these radical alternatives not only offer ecological benefits but also foster a deeper connection to the natural world and facilitate the process of individual and collective remembering.

Bron Findlay
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The Designing of Time

In the presentation, we will consider the measurement of time as a limited commodity by considering the linguistic and philosophical perspectives that highlight the parallels between time and money as a resource in the context of mortality. Exploring how we can use physical and visual reminders to foster conversations on the impermanence of life and the inevitability of death in a constructive format in society.

The presentation aims to 're-design' the look of time as a physical object and share design artefacts that prove similar visual reminders. In the hope of encouraging individuals to reflect on their mortality and to live their lives with a sense of purpose and intention. Rather than being morbid or pessimistic, the idea behind 'The Designing of Time' is to inspire people to prioritise what truly matters to them, to make the most of their lives, and to appreciate the present moment.

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It's not the cough that carries you off it's the coffin they carry you off in.

The presentation is a cradle to grave (or cremator) account of the processes behind the designing and making of a hand built sustainable coffin using locally harvested green Bamboo.

The inspiration for the coffin came from my mother's (who is still very much alive and kicking) desire to go out in style, which generated a brief to produce a sustainable coffin that would be a reflection of her forthright and creative personality and our love for her.

The coffin is constructed from Bamboo collected and processed in Cornwall, biodegradable cremfilm (the plastic liner required in all coffins), plant based twines and organic textiles.

I will describe the design processes, prototyping and production of a handmade sustainable coffin, from the initial inspiration through to construction, testing and final use. It will include the contrast between what we thought could be done and the realities of handling and disposing of the recently deceased and how this has influenced the shape and construction of our casket and the commercially available coffins in western culture.

The presentation will also cover:

Some of the alternative methods of body disposal and unconventional coffins available and the cultural and design influences behind their conception.

A brief history of Bamboo farming in Cornwall.

The link between the COVID pandemic and the rise of direct cremation as an acceptable means of body disposal by the general public.

There will be materials, models, drawings and a casket - basket on display for attendees to handle and if they wish they can try-out the casket - basket.

Cyanotribes: A Speculative Journey into a Post-Anthropocentric Future

The fundamental principal of a post anthropocentric future is based around the idea that humans have had a substantial negative impact on the planet and thus, brought about a new geological age. In the many narratives and texts, both fictional and academic, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon exploring post human temporalities. However, scientific and historical research strongly suggest that a true post anthropocentric future will likely be devoid of human or humanoid lifeforms altogether. Building on a previous practise based research output that utilises illustration and visual imagery (Cyanobacteria, 2023), this presentation seeks to engage and provoke a meaningful and critical dialogue around this very theme.

It speculates on a future whereby all carbon based life has ceased to exist following a total collapse of our planets eco systems, and a new life form is beginning to emerge. In doing so, it forces us to confront and realise a range of existential questions regarding both our existence, and more specifically, our death. In addition, it will look at how the framework of speculative fiction in literature could be used to provide a useful methodology in relation to exploring post anthropocentric futures and scenarios when applied to the discipline of art and design.

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RCA, London, UK and Resting Reef

Aura Murillo Perez
Louise Skajem
Co-Founders
of Resting Reef

restingreef.co.uk

Loss, Legacy, and Community Engagement: A Collaborative Research Project Between the Royal College of Art and Resting Reef

This presentation will highlight findings from a collaborative design research project between the Royal College of Art and Resting Reef and will explore how Resting Reef aims to sensitively and effectively engage coastal communities as part of their innovative memorial reef services. The presentation will also explore the project's approach towards conducting design research around sensitive topics such as bereavement, grief, and remembrance.

The team will provide an overview of the insights from during research activities conducted in Falmouth on the topics of death, grief, memorialisation, and innovation within the death care industry. To provide context to the research, the team will provide an overview of Resting Reef's innovative approach to memorialisation, highlighting its potential to transform not only how we memorialise loved ones, but also how we interact with, honour, and contribute to coastal ecosystems.

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FINE DYING Co-Designing Death Culture

In order to offer more choice for citizens, we believe we should adopt a more holistic approach and disrupt this taboo system. This is why our first Fine Dying Study (2013) was launched to focus on the transition between the dead to the living.

It concluded with the Open Diamond Project where we looked into the possibility of the dying designing their own "death jewellery" along with the living; who will receive the pieces. The transition starts when ashes of the dead are turned into synthetic diamonds and then "death jewellery" is created and passed to the living one. Unlike medical or social service experts, who ensure a good death or better end of life, ENABLE FOUNDATION (EF) advocates a new disruptive approach to the taboo subject of death which we call 'Fine Dying'.

Working directly with Hong Kong citizens, we discovered their aspiration for better ways to cope with death and personal loss. Together we researched and designed a series of objects to address our deeper emotional and mental health needs at this difficult time. The objects we designed and put into production, illuminate and dramatize Hong Kong citizens' aspiration for "Fine Dying". Our work looks at how we grieve as well as preserve our loved one's memories. The Light (2015) by EF with London designer Pascal Anson, is like a candle holder and it holds a loved one's death gemstone in an enclosed tube where it can be illuminated by pressing a switch. The Envelope (2018) by EF with Hong Kong design studio, Milk Design, is a patented, one-off, paper ash scatterer by.

It enables citizens to have a better ritual of garden burial (scattering ashes in the city's gardens of remembrance) and it has been in production since Jan 2019.

www.enable.org.hk/details/2017/8/15/fine-dying

youtu.be/L3d7-u7n6m8

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Resurrecting the Past: Exploring the Intersection of Death and Architecture Through Re-imagining Abandoned Sanatoriums

This presentation explores the re-imagining of abandoned sanatoriums as serene end-of-life care centres, focusing on transforming abandoned buildings into meaningful environments that honour end-of-life care. It showcases AI-generated artefacts addressing end-of-life experiences within the built environment. It showcases AI-generated artefacts that address end-of-life experiences within the built environment by integrating biophilic principles, historical preservation, and modern technology, prioritizing empathy, inclusivity, and environmental consciousness.

In these imagined visuals, decayed structures are transformed into sanctuaries of tranquillity where the integration of AI-generated artefacts and human-centred design is emphasised. Attendees are encouraged to contemplate the significance of dignity in end-of-life care and architecture's transformative role in revitalising neglected, abandoned, and forgotten spaces.

This aims to ignite conversations and prompt further exploration into reshaping perceptions surrounding death and dying, fostering a more compassionate and sustainable approach within the built environment.

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Listening With Silence: Documenting the Contextual Spaces of Commemorative Silences

This presentation is an experiment in participatory and performative formats, combining live audio essay, visual material, and audio streams to explore silence as a response to tragedy and loss. My research delves into the historical roots, ethical considerations, and contemporary practices of commemorative silences, offering insight into their role in mourning.

Official silences, like Armistice Day, demonstrate historical and communal practices, while personal and artistic silences, gathered globally, reveal the emotional depths of private grief. I analyse silence as a 'social technology' that mediates memory and emotion, creating space for reflection. By comparing these practices, I highlight the role of silence in collective memory and its documentation, inviting contributions to a global archive.

This work explores the fabricated 'space' of silence and its varied 'temporality,' illustrating the dynamic nature of silence and its ability to embody multiple realities. With a transdisciplinary approach to 'participation,' I aim to show how collective behaviour shapes the experience and impact of a sonic-ritualised reading of communal silence.

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Talking to people about death in graveyards; Designing with and around Bereavement

The COVID-19 pandemic and related lock-downs, fundamentally disrupted traditional rituals and practices of processing grief. This presentation discusses the detail of who and what participants, lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted within in one of Edinburgh's historic burial grounds.

This presentation explores the ways in which these experiences were processed, without access to traditional rituals. Whilst grief is a recognizable aspect of bereavement, it can also be experienced in relation to other loss events (Breen et al, 2022). The after effects of the pandemic and the continued influence on the lives of the bereaved are highlighted through objects designed and made by the bereaved. In relation to these events, this presentation positions design as a therapeutic activity uniquely placed to support grieving, as a processual practice.

This presentation will be of interest to designers who are currently working with the bereaved, or those who hope to work with them. This presentation may also be of interest to practitioners from other disciplines; such as, grief counselling, therapy, and the funeral industry. In addition, custodians of historic spaces of grief and memory may view the approaches here as an opportunity to adapt the sites that they control.

This presentation, seeks to re-frame the grieving process as a design process, facilitated through decision making and the design of spaces, processes and practices (such as grief rituals). Secondly, identifying the pandemic as a source of pluralities of grief which may have been experienced concurrently. Thirdly, suggesting the design and/or re-appropriation of public spaces that support grief processing. Finally, contributing methodological knowledge, advocating for a transdisciplinary and participatory approach to facilitating speculative dialogues into how and where we grieve.

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Ongoingness Artefacts: ReFind and Ivvor

I would like to show two artefacts and share the ideas behind them and the experiences people have had living with them. Both artefacts are physical with digital capabilities. 'ReFind' and 'Ivvor' were made within the Enabling Ongoingness research project (Wallace et al 2020, South et al 2021, Wallace and South 2022), which explored if and how design and digital technologies can help people find new dialogues with their dead that draw on the continued state of becoming of both the bereaved and the deceased. We were an interdisciplinary academic research team of designers, craft practitioners and computer scientists.

The artefacts were inspired by propositions from Dialogicality (Bakhtin 1934 - 41) and Continuing Bonds (Klass et al 1996). The central idea being that all things (including people) are in a continued state of becoming and that we partly construct self through relational means, where we have the capacity to help support and shape one another. All of these things are in potential jeopardy in grief. The philosophical positionings of Dialogicality and Continuing Bonds offered 'ways in' to designing objects and interactions that may avert the danger of losing a sense of self caused by the death of someone. The thinking behind Dialogicality and Continuing Bonds not only normalises notions of continuation of relationships after death, but also gives us the means to think about how aspects of the deceased may be still open to change, newness and fresh forms of dialogue. Neither objects are about reminiscence. They were driven by the potential of traces of someone dead, that still exist in the world, to enable an ongoing agency - where a sense of dialogue may be created and, more than that, new dialogues that relate to how both the living and their dead are both becoming and changing over time.

Pete Williams
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Tears and Rain

This presentation explores the evolving nature of authorship and meaning-making in illustration against the backdrop of AI generative art technologies and image saturation.

Moving beyond surface debates around AI obsolescence, it aims to re-frame discourse through an interdisciplinary lens of theory, visual culture, and futurism.

The central hypothesis posits that in our eagerness to declare authorial intent's "death," we may have failed to recognize how meaning has migrated rather than disappeared.

By synthesizing perspectives from games theory to alter-modern frameworks, I argue authorial significance has shifted into uncharted territories we remain blind to - with critical repercussions for illustrators' roles as cultural curators.

In an era where AI can infinitely generate "unique" images devoid of human touch, perhaps the true value for illustrative arts lies in cultivating "rareness" - contextually-embedded artefacts imbued with intention that cut through visual noise. This pivot has profound implications for professional practice, ethics, and training. The paper aims to initiate new dialogues examining these future-facing considerations.

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Life's purpose through mortality: Reflections on the Mortals programme

The first Mortals programme explored mortality awareness with six people over six weeks in a virtual setting. Participants engaged in activities designed to confront their mortality, imagine their ideal death, and reflect on their lives' purpose and meaning. The programme facilitated profound personal insights and strengthened participants' sense of aliveness, despite the discomfort and challenges faced. The group setting fostered vulnerability, connection, and significant personal growth. Key findings include the effectiveness of structured activities, the impact of diverse group dynamics, and the therapeutic benefits of a safe, communal environment. This programme demonstrates that awareness of mortality can profoundly enhance life purpose and self-awareness.

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'Til Death-Tech Do Us Part: Can a Product Preserve a Legacy Forever?

Phonograph, AI chatbot, or hologram: nothing quite stirs the public imagination like a new way to preserve, memorialise and reanimate our loved ones - and ourselves - through technology. Entrepreneurs continue to seize on this by creating products that promise to preserve our legacy 'in perpetuity'. In reality, perpetuity tends to mean 'as long as that business lasts', which in many cases is no longer than a decade.

In this presentation we'll look at the problems that designers and digital creators actually have to overcome in order to offer data 'forever', using knowledge from The National Archives and Findmypast to show what's involved in surfacing a century old piece of personal data in today's digital landscape. We'll examine the triggers that underpin the pull towards legacy preservation and memorialisation; look at the real life businesses that aimed to serve these needs but died before their time; and consider new design and product practices helping us design better 'endings'.

List of Support Organisations

National Organisations

Cruse Bereavement Support: Offers face-to-face, telephone, email, and online support.

cruse.org.uk
0808 808 1677

The Good Grief Trust: A charity run by bereaved people, offering information and support.

good-grief.org

Dying Matters: Promotes open conversations about dying, death, and bereavement.

dyingmatters.org

Samaritans: Provides 24/7 emotional support.

samaritans.org
116 123

Sands: Supports those affected by the death of a baby.

sands.org.uk

Sue Ryder: Offers bereavement support, including online resources.

sueryder.org

Additional Resources

NHS Information: Provides guidance on understanding and managing grief.

nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-bereavement-loss/

Hub of Hope: A database of mental health services, including bereavement support.

hubofhope.co.uk