

### Dying.dialogues

24th – 25th January 2020  
MOTH Keynote Lecture  
OCADU, Toronto, Canada

'Dying.dialogues' is a mini-symposium on design for end of life running in conjunction with DesignTO, with collaborators from the Health Design Studio at OCADU and Taboo Health. Dying.dialogues invites participants to share and reflect on design practice as it relates to the process of end of life. The symposium will engage across multiple domains, including – designers, artists, scholars, health care practitioners and the wider public. These dialogues are an opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives and participate in open conversations about death, dying and design.



Design  
TO 10 Years

FALMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY



The catalyst for MOTH design & death came about after a conversation a between a Norwegian student, following the Massacre at Utøya 2011. (During which a far right extremist Anders Breivik slaughtered sixty-nine people most of them teenagers).

Most of the social media at the time defaulted to using the heart as a universal symbol of sympathy - in the absence of anything else available? This seemed highly inappropriate.

Why are we so visually mute when it comes to death?  
So we asked the question.

Can there be a universal symbol to express sympathy?

Beyond the morbidity of the skull?  
The traditional conventions of the Christian cross.

Does the uniqueness of a death, the individual, circumstances or particular legacy require a unique symbol.

The significance of the poppy for example as a lasting memorial to those who died in World War One and later conflicts.

But symbols can and do change over time according, to social, cultural and political beliefs, values and trends.

Signs employed in the past can become regarded by modern audiences as inappropriate or "primitive" and their context and meaning lost. Perhaps the most obvious contender for international symbol of death is ....the Angel, argues Tony Walter of CDAS his article *The Revival of Death: two decades on*. With a great deal of interest and curiosity we initially set out to explore how can communication design can help navigate these profound moments in our social relationships?

Why Moths?  
Well these seemed to be ideal mascots for our project.  
Emblematic of their doomed suffering.  
One of the most poetic images of self-renewal.  
Aborigines imagined them as returning souls that entered the afterlife in the form of earth bound caterpillars.  
Their fragile and transient beauty.  
Their self-consuming attraction to light have made them potent images of longing and self destruction...fingers crossed we wont spontaneously combust during the presentation.

# Design & Death

Why Design & Death? - Indefatigable nosiness is a designers gift, twitching at the net curtains of life, anticipating change and responding to it. In his introduction to his book Beautiful Evidence, Tufte talks of the wonder and the spectacle, the beauty of the everyday. Science and art have in common intense seeing, the wide eyed observing that generates empirical information. Wide eyes in graphic design are essential; observation and absorption in the world. Engagement with ideologies and the relationships between the beautiful and the vulgar. Constructed narratives are given meaning and context through problem solving: analysis and syntheses. A willingness to embrace new directions and listen to other voices; the whole is the sum of many parts. For the last 7 years we have been complete interlopers in this field of study field but we do have expertise in graphic design and design education.

Moth has helped us discuss, communicate and yield substance and connectedness. The liminary nature of the design brief, inspires us to look at problems and distinguish new opportunities and relationships, beyond the form and function and aesthetic of objects, brands and experiences.

It can give us courage to see death as being something we can learn from rather than simply fear, and recognition of this can simultaneously, liberate and ground us. Make us grateful for the life we live - reminding us to live it well.

Graphic design is a discipline that constantly evolves in order to accommodate changes in culture, society and technology, it is well placed to embrace difficult questions about mortality, aid understanding and provide relevant visual signifiers in the context of death.

Artists and Designers have a responsibility to help people make meaning, they have the ability and the sensory vocabulary to express rather than explain and designers are happy dealing with uncertainties. We are therefore, arguably in a unique position to engage with an audience on a very deep and essentially human level. But as Alice Rawsthorn says in her book 'Hello World' Taking on more onerous challenges also raises the stake - failure is so much more grave so we need to navigate carefully between humility and vulgar emotional exploitation.

As part of the design process: we test, evaluate, learn and move forward with new knowledge.

*Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.* Søren Kierkegaard.

SO...What we really need to design is a comprehensive time machine! Perhaps - Woody Allen has got it right...

*"In my next life I want to live my life backwards. You start out dead and get that out of the way. Then you wake up in an old people's home feeling better every day. You get kicked out for being too healthy, go collect your pension, and then when you start work, you get a gold watch and a party on your first day. You work for 40 years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. You party, drink alcohol, and are generally promiscuous, then you are ready for high school. You then go to primary school, you become a kid, you play. You have no responsibilities, you become a baby until you are born. And then you spend your last 9 months floating in luxurious spa-like conditions with central heating and room service on tap, larger quarters every day and then Voilà! You finish off as an orgasm!"*

As the scientist and author Dr Guy Brown describes in his book *The Living End : The Future of Death, Ageing and Immortality* Death is not just happening later and taking longer, it is also fragmenting.

There are different types of death occurring in the same person at different rates and to different extents in different people. There is death at different levels: molecular death, cell death and organ death, death of the individual, death of the culture and death of the species.

There are multiple deaths in different parts of our body and mind: death of our physical abilities and appearance, death of our various mental capacities.

There is reproductive death, social death and psychological death. There is death of desire, there is death of memory, and there is death of the will to live.

All these things fade away at different ages, at different rates and to different extents. Death is no longer a unified event. It is shattered into multiple uncoordinated processes.

That could be the subtext for MOTH's process - perfectly - imperfect.

— *In the Face of Death*

— *Still Life*

— *Hope is not a Plan*

— *An Extra Place at the Table*

— *MOTH...*

We have organised this presentation into 5 chapters each one capturing one or two projects around a central question.

- In the Face of Death: brings together some of the work we have done around Symbols of death
- Still Life: this is essentially about STUFF: collections & curation
- Hope is not a plan: references two projects one about digital legacy and the other about end of life choices
- An Extra Place at the table: How food and funeral feasting can positively contribute to grief and mourning.
- Finally MOTH...

## In the Face of Death

What do you believe happens to you  
after you die?

2016-17 / Augsburg, Germany  
2019 / Kuopio, Finland

In the Face of Death

What do you believe happens to you after you die?

In The Face of Death was a collaborative project between MOTH and Augsburg University of Applied Sciences.

It focused on ideas and beliefs at the end of life, (the moment at which we die).

The challenge was to design a graphic system of symbols for the four immortality narratives:

Elixir; staying alive  
Resurrection; life, death and rebirth  
Soul; the non-material part of the body  
and Legacy: Genetic, cultural or meme

We asked students to question existing formal conventions of death narratives and belief systems (both secular and non secular).

Thinking and talking about these ideas and issues was for many in the team the first time they had either contemplated mortality or discussed openly any personal or societal belief systems.

The project outcomes: included a print Publication, an Exhibition of works in both Falmouth and Germany as well as and a Symposium held at Falmouth called MOTH Talks. To which we invited ...

- A Sociologist Dr Tony Walter the former head of the Centre for death and Society at the University of Bath. Affectionally known as Dr Death
- A digital Designer specialising in Closure Experience Joe Macleod
- and the Writer and Philosopher Stephen Cave\* Director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence at the University of Cambridge and the author of "Immortality: The Quest To Live Forever and How It Drives Civilisation". Biteback publishing. 2013 who also wrote four essays for the publication: these just represent the headlines: to give you a flavour of the text...and design aesthetic of the publication.

The students were equally and randomly divided into the 4 immortality groups and each student was asked to design a set of 12 symbols, thus ending up with a total of 288.

In one set of symbols an Austrian student referenced how in Vienna, Death is often personified as a constant and friendly companion in the form of a large black bird. Based upon a popular song called “come Big Black Bird” (by the Austrian singer/songwriter Ludwig Hirsch)

An in another set a student contemplated how because we fear finite existence, we hope for the afterlife – even though our rational mind tries to resist believing in its possibility and probability. We cannot simply perceive the concept of ‘nothing’.

Scientific thinking has informed the way we look at and understand the world, around us. But as John Keats suggests in one of his poems, in a line referencing Newton, this comes at the expense of our loss of wonder, or in his words, ‘Unweaving the rainbow’.

In science fiction, the idea of transferring human consciousness to a machine, either as a robot or as a character into a virtually created environment, is a reoccurring theme.

In the symbols entitled ‘Copying the soul’ a student explored this speculative technology from both a utopian and dystopian perspective.

In this symbol set for LEGACY entitled “I am turning into my Mother” the designer focused on inherited characteristics and traits as well as material objects that have been passed on to her.

In semi-furious but submissive resignation - that she was after all recognising she was ‘her mothers daughter’

Whilst the experience of the project was fantastic — and some of the symbols really interesting - they did not address our original design ambition to create ‘universal symbols’ ...which is ongoing.

We are in the process of compiling a repository of symbols, which explore visual signifiers of mortality and beliefs around the afterlife. The relevance, significance and potential re-launch of traditional symbols as well as the creation of new ones. A set of tools to provide a visual language that acknowledges a fascinating and diverse heritage of death symbolism, but one that also seeks to prompt dialogue and bring discussions of death and mortality to the surface.

The first manifestation of this was trialled last September for the ANTI International Contemporary Art Festival in Kuopio, Finland.

Here 30 Memento Mori vinyl images were placed in shop windows around the city centre of Kuopio – reminding us to live life well – and to contemplate our relationship with death, and what might happen to us, when the one inevitable event we plan for the least comes to visit?

The public were invited to start some (difficult but) important conversations with those they love, sharing their own memento mori images with us on [instagram#](#)

We gave additional context to each of the symbols on line.  
The Crow for example: an Intelligent / destructive / mischievous / carrion eater / often referred to as a dark angel.

Referencing the novel ‘Grief Is the Thing with Feathers’. by Max Porter, who in turn pays homage to Emily Dickinson’s poem, “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers”, as well as Ted Hughes ‘Crow: from the Life and Songs of the Crow’ written following the death of Sylvia Plath.

## Still Life

### Is Graphic Design rubbish?

2018 / *Stuff* / *Curation and Collections*  
2014 / *Memento Mori* / *Curation and Collections*

Is Graphic Design rubbish?

Designers can be liberated by the non permanence of our work, the transient nature of a magazine, a poster, packaging, but yet have on the whole an inability to throw anything away!

In this section we want to talk about a number of projects where we have thought about the life and meaning of objects and 'stuff'. in the form of Collections and Curation.

Our objects and possessions can reveal much about ourselves, they may outlive us and it begs the question, of what happens to them beyond our lifetime - who will become the new custodians of our stuff.

In Paul Wood's sculptures he subjects the deceased, creating poignant memorials from charity shops, in this case to a person known only known as L.S.Fowler, transforming unfashionable clutter and resurrecting it into small monuments to a past existence.

Graphics Designers can be walking talking Cabinets of Curiosities. Archiving material that might be handy 'one day' - and yes, it can look like clutter to some folk. We like to think of it in terms of visual flotsam - equivalent to tins of screws and drawers of miscellaneous random things which the anal amongst us might meticulously catalogue and archive.

Bruno Mouron and Pascal Rostain were drawn to an article *Le Monde*, where a sociology professor had written a piece about a study aimed at analysing consumption and social behaviour in relation to trash.

They went onto illegally raid and photograph the entire content of the bins of Hollywood celebrities: the likes of Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson and Madonna, Liz Taylor to name a few. They also documented non-celebrity trash in 42 different countries, from the favelas in Rio de Janeiro to the affluent neighbourhoods of Qatar, their aim to show the widespread development of standardised consumerism.

Each photo is a personal portrait of each consumer.

In the 1950's Jacques Villeglé, used the phrase "affiches lacérées" (torn posters) to describe his work, these were essentially posters torn down from the streets of Paris.

He was fascinated by the process of plenty being reduced to the fragmentary transience of decay, by random forces.

People collect and keep things in an effort to remember and relive the past.

Bricks from the Berlin wall, dust from the Whispering Gallery in St Paul's Cathedral.

Often-times we pick something up or keep stuff without fully knowing why?

Why do we collect stuff?... Christian Jarrett who is a psychologist suggests that...

A football fan who collects club memorabilia, might want to express loyalty

For a stamp collector proud of rare find, it can be an obsessive streak.

One psychoanalytical explanation for collecting, is that unloved children learn to seek comfort in accumulating belongings. (Yikes! Are designers all the result of being unloved children?)

Collecting can be motivated by existential anxieties – the collection, an extension of our identity, lives on, even if we do not.

Evolutionary theorists might suggest that a collection was a way for a man to attract potential mates by signalling his ability to accumulate resources.

The Endowment effect, describes our tendency to value things more once we own them.

The Contagion theory – is that some collectors are attracted to celebrity belongings because these objects are seen as being infused with the essence of the person who owned them.

Us humans are pretty unique in the way we collect items purely for the satisfaction of seeking and owning them.

This slide has the missing title of: THORNS | TOOTH | RUBBLE | TOE NAIL | WART | DUST and SHIT in a can

Some objects are valueless - until they are rediscovered and transformed into a durable and wanted items.

Others have no value, save for their meaningful and personal relationship to a person, place or thing - determining provenance.

Possibly the most beautiful piece of luxury packaging imaginable is the - The Holy Thorn Reliquary, made in about the 1390s in Paris for John, Duke of Berry, to house a relic, a single thorn from Christ's, Crown of Thorns. The reliquary was bequeathed to the British Museum in 1898 by Ferdinand de Rothschild as part of the Waddesdon Bequest.

A transparent rock-crystal vessel holding a relic that is identified as a tooth of Saint John the Baptist, Rubble - Souvenir Stones from a pilgrimage housed in the Vatican, Elvis's wart and toe nail (plucked from a Graceland Carpet), A tear drop belonging to Greta Garbo aged 6 in 1911 (fictional). and 30gm shit in a can - (not fictional) by Piero Manzoni this is poo no4 out of a total of 90 cans.

We ran a project over a year called STUFF which invited students and staff to share and exhibit a personal collection, in a Cabinet of Curiosity. \

These ranged from a collection of cookbooks and recipes spanning 4 generations, beer mats, Virgin Mary's, puncture repair kits and royal memorabilia to name a few... what was interesting was the both the joy of sharing their Stuff with the 'world' but also the anxiety that went with it, of revealing part of themselves which was then open to public judgement and scrutiny.

Objects that we have as children, the stuffed penguin, silk from the blanket are all destined to be abandoned but yet they leave traces that will mark the rest of our lives.

They specifically influence how we can develop a capacity for happiness, an aesthetic experience and creative play. D.W. Winnicott (an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst who was especially influential in the field of object relations theory) believed that during stages of our lives we continue to search for objects we can experience as both within and outside the self

DESIGN IS STORY TELLING (referencing Ellen Lupton) - Emotional intelligence is the ability to read peoples feelings and to respond in ways that build understanding and co-operation (empathy). To think about how users will anticipate an experience and how they remember that experience later. Designers tap into our emotions to trigger feelings of delight, desire, surprise, trust. They play a vital role in our reasoning and ethical judgment.

They effect the design of everything from fonts to shampoo packaging.

The success of a product does not just rely on its function/utility but its meaning in the life of its users.

Marshall McLuhan talks of our fundamental need to find meaning, we need to make sense of the world, in order to survive.

Curation and collection have been recurring MOTH themes, In a one of our first projects Memento Mori we focused on objects traditionally associated with Vanitas paintings - symbolic of the inevitability of death and the transience and vanity of earthly achievements and pleasures; exhorting the viewer to consider mortality and to repent.

Revisiting Vanitas again in 2017, when we worked with the artist, writer and Director of Museum of Contemporary Art, London, Michael Petry who had curated a touring exhibition in Europe called Nature Morte.

Working with over 180 international contemporary artists reinvigorating the still life, a genre previously synonymous with 16th- and 17th Century Old Masters. Exploring themes of life, death and the irrevocable passing of time which invite us to pause and reconsider what it means to be human.

*In Ori Gersht Time after time*

The large-scale photographs entitled Blow Up depict elaborate floral arrangements, based upon a 19th Century still-life painting by Henri Fantin-Latour, captured in the moment of exploding. Flowers, which often symbolise peace, become victims of brutal terror, revealing an uneasy beauty in destruction. This tension that exists between violence and beauty, destruction and creation.



# Hope is not a Plan

## Endless Hope or Hopeless End?

2017 / My Digital Future  
2017 / Choice in end of life care

Hope is not a Plan

Endless Hope or Hopeless End?

In the project entitled ....Four Deadlines & a Dinner, we worked with Design students across a four week period in collaboration with external partners.

There were two main themes:

The first - My Digital Future: Questioning the Mortality of Data and closure experience, working with writers and designers and the

The second being: Choice in End of Life Care: exploring design solutions around 'choice' in end of life care, working with a palliative care consultant in the NHS,

We are living through the greatest period of change since the industrial revolution. Our end of life wishes, the way we prepare for death, remember the deceased and grieve have recently changed beyond recognition. James Norris CEO of DeadSocial

In questioning the Mortality of Data and closure experience, we worked with Ben James, the Creative Director at Jotta Design and the writer Anna Kiernan. Students were invited to consider -our Digital Futures: Developing a product, service or representation of 'us, post-life' that explores or archives how digital tools may be used to keep us 'alive' once we've passed away.

In the context of these design challenges we looked at...

- Descendent Marketing – campaigns targeted at generations that haven't been born yet.
- Legacy - need to understand the consequences of our actions beyond the immediate moment.
- Growth Products – modular items adapted for each new stage in life.
- Closure experiences 'Bit Rot' Technology is outstripping our ability to control it. Outdated software and forgotten ID's leaving a digital wasteland of stuff.

One such solution: Memory Safe was in response to concerns, that having access to a huge amount of data storage encourages us to keep superfluous information, without ever really considering what we are keeping and why, and would we like our family and friends to have access to it following our death? There is estimated to be 40 zettabytes of data in the world, 5,200GB for every person on earth. Of this, only 33% of that data would be considered 'valuable.'

For a family coming to terms with the death of a loved one, being 'gifted' this quantity of data noise is overwhelming.

*Memory Safe* encourages users to be mindful regarding their ongoing curation of data across their life span, creating a more valuable and responsible digital legacy. If you had just 100MB of space to document your life, what would you choose?

The project *Coda* explored the relationship between accounts of near death experience coupled with the theory that at the end of our life, the moment before we die, our last sensory experience to leave us is our sense of hearing. *Coda* is for people dying in unfamiliar, depersonalised and medicalised environments, to experience one last positive 'sense of life'. Using pre-selected recordings from a sound archive. Sound-waves relate to a chosen recording played in parallel to the heartbeat until eventually, it flat-lines, where it continues momentarily.

*Fragments* is a journey of our digital presence illustrated on scrolls of wallpaper. The design is made up of highlighted fragments of objects and sections of images taken from an individual's Instagram feed. Each object acts as trigger for a memory, which contains parts of a narrative. Turning the digital into analogue by curating artefacts and memories to form poignant domestic pieces.

'*Sixth Sense*' archives information from the deceased's online profile, to create a holographic aura to retain the memory of the individual who has passed away. The hologram 'breathes and glows' when commanded by an app, and self triggers at significant, specific dates such as anniversaries and birthdays.

For the second theme: Choice in End of Life Care: we worked with Dr Mark Taubert, the Clinical Director/Consultant of Palliative Care at NHS Cardiff, we explored how visual communication designers and medics could benefit from sharing knowledge and skills to impact on policy and practice with regard to end of life matters. Allowing a natural more dignified and anticipated death in patients and families affected by life-limiting conditions, in particular with patients and their choices regarding DNACPR.

Mark wrote... *We are at a starting point with disseminating information that is hard to understand and often unwanted and deeply unpalatable. Just imagine talking to someone about not wanting to have chest compressions and electric currents applied to your body in its last living moments. There is so much potential for such discussions to go wrong.*

Some of the work was used as part of the centre's Invigorate Campaign, as well as in NHS #TalkCPR project.

So, why is it important that we feel empowered to talk about death? Well...because the fall out of not knowing what our loved ones want at the end of life can often burden the bereaved with additional anxiety.

In a study for the Australian Centre for Health Research 2016 nearly half the carers for critically ill patients reported having moderate or high levels of decisional conflict, because they were forced to make decisions without knowing what their loved one would have wanted (Chiarchiaro,2015).

Families are left feeling bereaved, guilty and uncertain about the decisions they made or were made for them. Those who did have conversations with their loved ones had less decisional conflict, suggesting that the benefit of end of life conversations and advance care planning extends beyond respecting patients' choices to also ameliorating the burden on patients' loved ones

We welcomed the designer Lucienne Roberts to Falmouth in November 2019, who was the co-curator of the exhibition Can Graphic Design Save your life at the Wellcome Collection in London 2017. The Exhibition was about the role Graphic design plays in matters of life and death...and acknowledges that If graphic design can save your life, it is also eminently capable of killing you, too. That conflicted message at the heart of this exhibition, which explored graphic design's complex relationship with health, medicine, and the world of big pharmaceutical companies – and the different ethical positions that designers choose to take.

But design Educators are working to improve death education and death literacy. Just as health education has been crucial to the prevention and harm reduction strategies of those working in cancer care with information about the importance of sun screen and the dangers of smoking, to campaigns to discuss sexual health, or in trauma medicine - the importance of protective bike helmets etc.) So too education in death should normalises and equip us to better prepare for death, dying and loss. Combating the stigma of dying and promoting open awareness of death as a normal part of life. (Kellehear, 2008).

## An Extra Place at the Table

Do we eat more food at funerals  
than weddings?

2019 / Food and funeral feasting

An Extra Place at The Table.  
Do we eat more food at funerals than at weddings?

In a largely secular society how can we be better equipped to discuss and facilitate bereavement?

*The older I become, the more unbearably obvious it seems to me that my constructions of the afterlife comprise of an eclectic assortment of fragments from the secular and non-secular carefully woven elements of truth, faith and fiction. Partly through association and memory, a pick 'n' mix approach to faith, philosophical writing, learned conventions and cinematic angels.*

*After the death of my father I waited for a sign from him to tell me his was OK and at peace, 'on the other side'. I wasn't expecting a text message or a ghostly visit, just a feeling would have been adequate, to bring me comfort and hope but above all proof.*

*I'm still waiting.* Nikki Salkeld

The truth is that 99% of me believes that when I die there is nothing; I simply cease to be body and soul, but there is also some truth in the fact that the other 1% is unaccounted for. And I am prepared to back the outsider and retain some positive speculation regarding the afterlife, if only to exercise emotional damage control as without religious structure to my life I have no other conventions to turn to.

By 1400 Christianity had well-established beliefs and practices concerning death, dying, and the afterlife. The *Ars Moriendi* “art of dying,” was a body of Christian literature that provided practical guidance for the dying and those attending them. These manuals informed the dying about what to expect, and prescribed prayers, actions, and attitudes that would lead to a “good death” and salvation.

Death research is experiencing a resurgence within international academia and industry. The 2019 Global Wellness Trends Report named ‘Dying Well’ as its 8th trend, according to the author Beth McGroarty...fuelled in part in the US by the Silicon Valley biotech industry aiming to cure death, a ‘21st century secular belief system ... fundamentally directed at avoiding death anxiety... by convincing oneself that the right regime of diet and exercise will keep you perpetually young or...perpetually alive’ (Soloman, cited in McGroarty 96: 2019). The UK Competition and Markets

Growing trends in home and green funerals, question the commodification and perceived value of the traditional funeral service, with demand for a traditional funeral declining whilst costs are rising, with the cost of dying rising 7 times faster than the cost of living, (the average UK funeral leaving one in six bereaved families experiencing Funeral Poverty with an industry estimated to be worth £1billion annually).

Conventionally the funeral, is an agreed space for mourning, deliberately designed to reflect current belief systems, where survivors are expected to find closure and immediately start re-integration into society and ‘just move on’.

Death has become medicalised and professionalized, the domestic rituals have been lost and the dead and dying are taken away to hospitals. We are obsessed with delaying ageing and avoiding discussions about our mortality.

In many cultures, grief is seen as a collective experience, expressed through community rituals and verbal declarations. These expressions of communal grieving are often seen as integral aspects of addressing and working through experiences of loss. When grief is expressed and acknowledged by others, this can be incredibly validating.

In the WWI centenary commemorations at the Tower of London in 2014 ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’ by the artist Paul Cummins, saw the Tower of London moat filled with 8 hundred and 88 thousand 200 and 46 888,246 ceramic poppies to commemorate the British casualties in the First World War ( Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images ). The unprecedented scale of death almost 10million, fundamentally changed social attitudes to grief. In Britain Mothers and wives were expected to meet the news of loss with stoic patriotic pride, to be brave, to endure with quiet dignity, and to wear their grief on the inside. Excessive public displays of grief threatened to disrupt the war effort and crucially damage morale.

Following the tragic and sudden death of her teenage son Jack, the Artist Lucy Willow observed that death was not permitted to share space with the living. It was considered to be frightful and polluting. She wrote movingly about her grief and how she wished with hindsight that she had not conformed to constructed conventions and social norms and desperately wished she had felt able to photographically document his broken body, to bear witness and observe in silent communion the bruises on him.

“With the camera I could have caressed each part of his body with great love and sensitivity, moving it gently over his feet, his hands, his face; remembering and communicating all that I felt unable to say in words”.

She laments that we cannot think of death as Victorians did, as something which should share a place with other big life events such as births and marriages. Reconsidering the Victorian practice of photographing children following death. Laid out as if in a deep eternal sleep, captured at peace, keeping that soul alive in the hands of whoever held that image.

Sharing the view with Nan Goldin the American photographer known for her deeply personal and candid portraiture, who thought that she couldn't lose anyone if she photographed them enough.”

Nan Goldin. Sharon with dear friend Cookie just before her death from AIDS related illness in on the bed, Provincetown, MA, 1989

For our ongoing project *An Extra Place* - We worked with Dr Elsa Richardson who is a Chancellor's Fellow in the History of Health and Wellbeing the Centre for the Social History of Health and Healthcare (CSHHH) at the University of Strathclyde. Working at the intersection between the medical and cultural history, her research considers the relation of heterodox practices, beliefs and movements to mainstream society and culture, with particular focus on the interaction between medicine and the imagination, science and the supernatural, psychology and the occult. Her research specialises in the Victorian spiritualist movement. Looking at consumption within the seance, by the living and the dead, as a way of thinking about death/corporeality/spirituality/domesticity.

The project had the snappy title of...How can food and funeral feasting positively impact and disseminate creative exchange around mourning, bereavement and end of life choices.?

*An Extra Place at the table*, which examined how through food and funeral feasting rituals, the bereaved can be comforted in the knowledge that the wake/funeral can feel purposeful and positive,empowering them to take control and create the best and most personal 'goodbye' for loved ones.

Sharing stories with others and constructing narratives to create, 'a durable biography that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives'.A NEW MODEL OF GRIEF: Bereavement and Biography Tony Walter. Published in *Mortality*, 1(1), 1996: 7-25)

Food and feasting is important at every event and milestone in life. In the process of communication, food expresses our social relationships, it acts as messenger, it can give a sense of identity and belonging, kinship, and bring emotional and ritualistic comfort. The very act of eating gives affirmation of life itself.

The sharing of meals, symbolizes and denotes social bonds and divisions, drawing boundaries between those who still eat together and those who do not.

We tasked our design students to think about the death/loss of 'something' be it an object place thing or ideology... (just= not a not a person) it had to be something that they lamented, or wished to extol the virtues of that which has been lost or in the process of being lost.

This could have been a negligible, or small personal grief, something on an epic scale or anything in between. Then based on this create a food and feasting editorial piece and a speculative experience design event to communicate this loss.

One student wrote: I was struck by the notion that death is not a unified event, but something we experience multiple times in our lives, in many different forms. The idea that death is the loss of something (the passing of an era, or a relationship, the absence of a heartbeat etc.) was revelatory and immediately made death seem more approachable. A 'loss' is less final than an 'ending', as there is chance that something lost can be retrieved, or revisited. Although things may disappear, they are never gone completely; their presence is 'lost' but their legacy (whether a memory or physical mark) lives on...and design is not simply about the visual, but also about the sensory, immersive and experiential opportunities[...] it is performative and transformative.  
Emma Baker

'In 'IS INSTAGRAM KILLING FOOD?' - lamented our changing and superficial relationship with food, the fact that almost half of us take more care over a dish if we think a photo might be taken of it, and nearly 40% claim to worry more about presentation than they did five years ago.

They took inspiration from Teddy Robinson, the creative director for the London café-bar chain Grind, who has spent five years making the company as "Instagramable" and savvy as possible.

DEATH OF A RELATIONSHIP: THE BREAK UP. students were interested in the history of love and loss within relationships, and how we cope with 'breakups' creating a tongue in cheek guide to help a 'dumpee' through a relationship breakup. Focussing on the stages of grief to create a practical food based process - 'to aid recovery' of a broken heart.

The event was performative and interactive. using visual language of pharmaceutical products and medical intervention to interpret the narrative. The 'Love Doctors' prescribed to everyone in the audience a pill tray along with a prescription (for serotonin and dopamine - the two positive hormones responsible for a feel-good factor). The trays contained five heart shaped chocolate pills flavoured, with hot, sour, bitter and sweet ingredients. Each 'dose' represented a remedy for a broken heart.

Dose 1. Denial

Dose 2. Anger

Dose 3. Bargaining

Dose 4. Depression

Dose 5. Acceptance

Dose 6. Over it

In lamenting the loss of THE ENCHANTED WORLDS WE KNEW AS CHILDREN, BUT HAVE FORGOTTEN AS ADULTS...this explored what happens when adults are given the opportunity (or permission) to interact with food in the way that they did when they were younger. Inspired by the limitless potential of a child's imagination, removing place-settings and having the entire room as a canvas, inviting guests to create their own 'enchanted world'.

A recipe to bring out your inner child.

Hilary Mantel writes ... that when someone we love dies, When we are in mourning, we also lose ourselves, we forfeit our identities as wife, mother, sister, daughter. When loss and misery enter our lives we want to 'name our condition' and we want a timetable. Mourning has become tardy driven - we have to move through it in systematic stages. *The New Black. Mourning Melancholia and Depression*

An Extra Place at the table invites us to take our time to say goodbye not simply -'move on' and 'get over it' - it aims are to empower individuals to move away from the depersonalised conventions of the golf club wake and feel enabled to take control and create a durable and meaningful send off for loved ones, which may happen over time. To grieve properly and understand who we are, how we love and how to continue to live with unbearable sorrow.

## MOTH...

### What are our next steps?

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2020 / *Goodbye Box*  
2020 / *Good Grief / Dying Matters Week*

MOTH...

What are our next steps?

In the immediate future we are hoping to work with the Blue Cross Pet Charity with our Goodbye Box, which was developed as a 'product' to help children cope with bereavement and allow them to begin to understand and process loss.

The story centres around the loss of a beloved pet Rabbit called Dr Tinkle and the difficult but necessary questions which followed.

For most children their first encounter with bereavement is usually with a pet, this cardboard coffin and book help children navigate the language and issues around death as well as support parents who find it challenging to know what to say - they may otherwise shield and avoid difficult but important conversations.

The idea is that the coffin can be either purchased and funds go directly towards the Blue Cross, or a template downloaded and simply stuck on a shoe box.

The illustration on the coffin itself represents a resting place akin to a beautiful mausoleum.



**DESIGN & DEATH**

We are also involved with 'Good Grief' during Dying Matters week in the city Bristol, we have been asked to create work around our 'In the Face of Death' symbols, which will be installed in the city centre in restaurant and cafes, the vinyl symbols will be accompanied by a printed menu, about death and dying choices.