

**RememberMe**

**MEMORIALISATION IN  
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

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## **Displaying Self: Memorialisation in Contemporary Society**

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<sup>1</sup> Deceased 28.8.2017



## Research Highlights

- Contemporary memorials may be categorised as traditional (e.g. the gravestone), contemporary established (e.g. the now commonplace roadside memorials), or emerging (e.g. the fast growing use of digital forms and online memorial sites); these forms co-exist, including contemporary adaptations of traditional forms and several modes may be used in commemorating one individual.
- Memorialising processes are less documented than memorial forms but there is evidence that these are intensely personalised. However, most research is confined to the occasion of the funeral and immediate aftermath of the death and scant attention is paid to the ongoing functions of memorialisation, its relationship with grief, or to diversity and difference.
- Traditional and public memorials may be used as the site or occasion for personal, private behaviours.
- Ritual remains significant in contemporary memorialisation but is distinguished by the imbuing of traditional rituals with personal touches as well as employment of unique personal and family rituals.
- Identity is a significant theme and spans personal relationships in life as well as social status and networks after death.
- Places and spaces are recurring motifs across physical, virtual, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions.
- Memorials set up in the wake of, and at the sites of, natural disasters and other traumatic events causing mass or several deaths are a significant and escalating phenomenon which touches on all of the above dimensions and combines personal, public, spontaneous, planned, formal and informal elements.
- Ritual and identity may be reinforced along traditional cultural lines among migrant communities where dislocation of place and space is felt in death.
- While many features of postmodernism are characterised by their transitory and impermanent nature, contemporary memorialisation shows an interesting trend towards the enduring and permanent.
- Secularisation is highlighted as a significant feature of contemporary memorialisation but there is a lack of critical appraisal of what this constitutes and how it continues to interface with contemporary expressions of spirituality or use of religious tradition.
- The distinguishing feature of contemporary memorialisation is its employment in personal meaning-making. While the need to find meaning in death is not a new phenomenon, it is the trend towards the creation of personal meaning rather than the taking of meaning from traditional and socially prescribed forms and practices which governs the shaping of memorialisation today.

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## Executive Summary

### 1 Purpose and scope

The survey was undertaken as part of the *Remember Me. The Changing Face of Memorialisation* research project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council ([www.hull.ac.uk/rememberme](http://www.hull.ac.uk/rememberme)). The purpose of this survey was to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on memorialisation from the mid-twentieth century to the present in order to:

- (i) Provide a comparison with archaeological and historical themes and trends identified in the companion survey,<sup>1</sup> and;
- (ii) Embed the project's contemporary in-depth case studies in established themes and enrich their articulation with key questions and developing trends.

### 2 Method

Extensive searches of the academic, popular and grey literature and internet sources were conducted. An immediate methodological problem emerged in that much of the literature intertwines the different topics and processes belonging to the aftermath of death; there is relatively little focus on memorialisation as a distinct process. Nonetheless, 199 references are incorporated in this review on the grounds of their more substantial treatment of memorials and memorialising processes. Some significant sub-topics are briefly reviewed but given full coverage in other reports from the *Remember Me* study. These include photography<sup>2</sup>, memorialisation arising from armed conflict<sup>3</sup> and migration.<sup>4</sup> Coding and analysis were guided by the *Remember Me* overarching research questions. The review is divided into two main sections: Memorial Forms and Memorialising Processes.

### 3 Memorial Forms

Three sub-divisions of memorial forms used today are suggested, although it should be noted that they co-exist and overlap.

**Traditional memorials**, including gravestones and other markers in cemeteries, war memorials, other public monuments, and various forms of private memorial or shrine maintained in the home, including keeping the cremation ashes. These sites are the focus for private and public behaviours and may be regularly refreshed. They embody emotion, the social and relationship status of the deceased,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Deep in Time: meaning and mnemonic in archaeological and diaspora studies of death*, Yvonne Inall and Malcolm Lillie

<sup>2</sup> See *The photograph as vehicle for mourning and remembering*, Jane Hutchinson and Liz Nicol

<sup>3</sup> See *Heroes and loved ones; death arising from armed combat*, Malcolm Lillie, Miroslava Hukelova, Yvonne Inall and Jenny Macleod.

<sup>4</sup> See *Countries old and new: memorialisation among Polish migrants in Hull*, Lisa Dikomitis and Marcin Biernat

and may be used by the bereaved to determine how they wish the person to be remembered. All forms of public memorial frequently contain a political or moral message and may be the subject of contention. Memorial donations provide an active engagement for all mourners, and though traditional, are increasing as a form of tribute to the deceased combined with support of a cause associated with the deceased's life or death.

**Contemporary established forms** are those which have emerged over the late modern period so as to become commonly adopted types. These include memorial trees and benches, roadside memorials and ghost bikes. They are intensely personalised and/or belong to a particular group or community. Spontaneous and grass-roots memorials represent a now established trend and may occur at the site of a roadside accident or other tragic event, including those involving several or mass deaths such as a natural disaster. Mass displays of flowers and personal messages are common after the deaths of celebrities, the public reaction to the death of Diana Princess of Wales being acknowledged as a watershed phenomenon. As with traditional forms, these new forms are the site or vehicle for mourning behaviours and some writers suggest that these practices represent a desire to develop new forms of ritualised mourning as old rituals prove inadequate for modern needs.

**Emerging forms** are those which are continuing to develop at a rapid pace, in both form and function. Predominant in this category is the use of the internet and social media with the creation of web cemeteries, memorial pages and continuing Facebook identities for individuals now deceased. Commentators suggest that the ever-growing popularity of internet memorials is due to its accessibility to a wide range of mourners, its function as a virtual support group for the bereaved, its capacity to foster a sense of continuing connection and the ease with which memories can be shared, including on important dates and anniversaries, such as birthdays. However, significant conflicts and concerns are also emerging, principally concerning ownership of the deceased's identity and memory. There may be conflict between friends and family concerning the representation of the deceased; the phenomenon of 'stranger mourner' is little understood and may cause offence; trolling and spam activity are proving difficult to control and add a negative dimension and unwanted intrusion.

The camera phone is an important element in the use of the internet and in its own right, with the 'funeral selfie' providing both immediacy and a chronological marker. Photos taken on a personal mobile phone and then shared through social media exemplify the blurring of the public and the private as an intimate memorial is publicly displayed.

Memorial tattoos are growing in popularity but are more correctly seen as a resurgence of an ancient tradition. They are notable in the contemporary context for their permanence, an indelible marker of grief which encapsulates a continuing bond with the deceased.

#### **4** *Memorialising Processes*

The literature tends to conflate discussion of memorial practices and emotional, behavioural and spiritual processes around a focus on the funeral and other events surrounding the death. By contrast, there is relatively little on the ongoing process of memorialisation (with the exception of the treatment of the ashes). The review highlighted four major themes, each with significant sub-topics, which are themselves interconnected.

**Identity**, with its extensively explored subtopics of personal, social and cultural, and multiple and contested identities, emerges as a key aspect of contemporary memorialisation. The laying down of the distinct personal identity of the deceased can be seen as a continuation of the life-centred funeral, the identity reflected and reinforced through objects, symbols and other evokers of memory as well as the telling and re-telling of personal stories and construction of narratives. Equally important, and impinging on the personal identity of the individual, are the social networks within which they operated and the relationships and social status which they held in life. Culture, social class and identity following migration are highlighted as important influencers. Across these various life domains, therefore, the several and simultaneous identities of the deceased open up the potential for disagreement and contention amongst the bereaved as to how the deceased is to be remembered and their life and death commemorated.

**Relational aspects** stem inevitably from the social identity of the deceased and some authors argue that at its heart memorialisation is inevitably concerned with continuing and renegotiating relationships between the living and the dead. Memorialisation, it is suggested, allows for the social identity of the deceased to persist and their social agency to continue into life as well as for the bereaved to maintain bonds with the deceased. A considerable body of literature considers how memorials and memorialisation practices facilitate grief although there is also the potential for conflict between mourners, insensitivity on the part of social institutions and cultural dissonance to aggravate distress and complicate the grieving process.

**Ritual and symbolism** span the different events and processes in the aftermath of death. It is a core feature of memorialisation influencing both the construction of the memorial and the ensuing memorialising behaviours and practices. Memorials may be seen as the markers of the ritualised transition from life to death and the relationship between the living and the dead. The earliest literature reviewed suggests a dearth of (meaningful) ritual but later research is keen to detail the richness and diversity of ritual around death in the twenty-first century. The significant feature of this, however, is the need for wider socio-cultural affirmation alongside the incorporation of private, informal rituals and symbols. There is some evidence that traditional rituals are being re-interpreted, adapted and enacted.

**Secularisation, contemporary spirituality and religion** are given relatively sparse attention as a whole, although there are numerous scattered references to the impact and influence of secularisation on ceremony and ritual, particularly in the funeral. Broadly speaking, religion is posited as a traditional meta-narrative which postmodern societies have discarded in favour of individualised, customised responses to death in a secular context. Some writers question whether this has led to a dearth of wider meanings but only a handful of sources consider the articulation of contemporary understandings of spirituality with the management of death and this is barely developed to consider the role and function of spirituality in contemporary memorialisation.

## 5 Conclusion

The literature provides a rich descriptive account of memorial forms but less attention to memorialising processes, particularly its ongoing nature after the funeral and immediate aftermath of the death. Other gaps relate to systematic analysis of socio-cultural diversity; secularism, spirituality and religion; the relationship between grief and memorialisation. Traditional, modern and emerging forms co-exist in a fluid and dynamic relationship and it is this which accounts for the changing face of memorialisation. However, the distinguishing feature of contemporary memorialisation is its employment in personal meaning-making. While the need to find meaning in death is not a new phenomenon, it is the trend towards the *creation* of personal meaning rather than the *taking* of meaning from traditional and socially prescribed forms and practices which governs the shaping of memorialisation today.

# 1 Introduction

A considerable body of material continues to explore the changing face of death in the 21st century, amongst which is growing evidence of new and diverse forms of memorialisation as people seek to mark the passing of those to whom they felt a close association in life – colleagues, friends and public figures as well as family members. However, this evidence, much of it anecdotal and in the popular literature, raises new questions concerning the content, meanings and purposes of memorials and the process of memorialisation. Holloway (2007) charts the growing literature around death, dying and bereavement since the 1960s. At the heart of what has come to be known as Death Studies, according to Holloway, are the ways in which death is individually and socially mediated. According to Holloway, diverse forms and practices of memorials are developing at a pace with new and old forms of tribute existing alongside one-another. As traditional forms are being replaced or supplemented by personalised, customised responses it appears that these choices lay bare the fundamental human urge to memorialise but with little to guide mourners in developing forms which will meet those deepest needs, or what precisely constitutes ‘needs’ in this context.

Walter (2005) suggests that contemporary funerary practice has been shaped by three inter-related influences: secularisation, personalisation and migration. These factors, in turn, highlight the changing role of religion and shifting cultural attitudes around funeral practices and, by extension, memorialisation in twenty-first century Britain. Holloway (2007) describes how contemporary memorials can be categorised as an object, an event or an ongoing activity. This literature review suggests that these categories function together in fluid combination, and that forms are more usefully considered alongside the associated roles, identities, emotions and behaviours of mourners. For example, there is emerging evidence that mourners may subsequently regret choosing to scatter the ashes as they are denied an exact site for remembering; families may seek to transgress the ethos and rules of a woodland burial site by mounting a plaque on a tree (Naylor, 1983).

## 2 Method

This comprised of a review of the English language literature on all forms of memorials and memorial practices from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to 2016, from searches of academic, popular and grey literature and Internet sources.

### 2.1 Search strategy

Search terms were derived from the ‘Remember Me’ project main research questions and developed along the lines of their original categorisation into: *Forms and Purposes*; *Roles and Identities*; *Emotions and Behaviours*. The literature bases for funerals, disposal and grief respectively are extensive and this literature was reviewed only where a specific reference to memorialisation could be identified, although in many sources the discussions are intertwined.

Keyword search via the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Web of Science and Google Scholar:

1. *Forms and Purposes – 9/11, Armenia, Atomic Bomb, Auschwitz, Australia, Bosnia, Cambodia, Canada, Cemeteries, Chechnya, Christchurch, Commonwealth, Croatia, Cyclone Tracy, Dark Tourism, Darwin, Family Memorials, Fukushima, Genocide Memorial, Grass Root/Community Memorials, Graves, Green Burials, Gulf, Holocaust, Indonesia, Katrina, Mass Deaths, Mass Fatality, Mass Grief, Material Culture, Memorialisation, Memorial/s, Natural Burials, Northern Ireland, Northern Territory, Online Memorials, Personalised Gravestones, Photography and Death, Poppy/Poppies, Post-conflict, Post-disaster, Private Memorials, Public Memorials, Roadside Memorials, Rwanda Space, Tsunami, USA, Vietnam, War Memorials/Graves, World War 1/Great War, World War 2*
  
2. *Roles and Identities & Emotions and Behaviours– following keywords combined with ‘Memorial’ keyword search: Agency, AIDS, Ambiguity, Ambiguous, Behaviour/s, Bereave/d/ment, Bio politic/s/al, Body, British, Collective, Community, Complicated/Grief, Conflict, Conscious/ness, Contemporary, Contested, Continuing/Bonds, Cultural, Culture, Death, Dementia, Diaspora, Difference, Disenfranchised/Grief, Displaced, Diversity, Embodies/d, Embodiment, Emotion, Ethnicity, Family, Forget/ting, Funeral, Funerary, Gender, Grassroots, Grief, Homeland, Identity, Individual/isation, Keepsake, Living, Material/ity, Meaning, Memento, Memory, Migrant, Migration, Military, Mourn/er/ing, Necro/politic/s/al, Personal/ise/isation, Philosophy. Politic/s/al, Process, Race, Racial, Relation/s, Relationship/s, Religion, Religious, Remember/ing, Remembrance, Return/ed, Rite, Ritual, Role, Secular/isation, Sexuality, Shared, Social Class, Soldier, Spiritual/ity, Tension, Trauma*  
*In addition, library, manual and internet searches were undertaken across the death studies field.*

Over 280 sources were surveyed of which 199 are directly cited in this review. These included books, journal articles and in-house reports, as well as websites (see Appendix 1).

## 2.2 Coding and analysis

Memorial forms identified in the literature were categorised according to traditional, established and emerging forms and practices. Traditional includes those which can be observed in modern history; established are those which emerged in late modernity and are now widespread as a common type; emerging refers to those which might be deemed personalised and ‘new’ but which are beginning to see wider replication and adoption.

The literature was also reviewed in relation to the following questions arising from roles and identities, and emotional and behavioural aspects:

- What is the relationship between personal identity and memorialisation, and when and how might memorials become a site for contested identity and representation?



- How do public and private processes of memorialisation interface?
- Are memorials sometimes ambiguous?
- To what extent, and how, do memorials indicate ambivalent memories of the deceased?
- How significant is permanence, and what are the implications of utilising transient and impermanent forms?

### 3 Memorial forms

Holloway (2007) suggests that traditional forms of memorials are beginning to give way to new traditions and alternative structures. Her subsequent analysis divides memorials into two types – permanent structures (such as private graves, war memorials, plaques and benches), and transitory memorials (such as roadside flowers), both of which are further divided into the following categories: concrete objects (e.g. gravestones), one-off events (e.g. memorial services), and ongoing activities (e.g. memorial foundations). Holloway (2007) observes that increasingly diverse forms of memorial co-exist alongside more traditional forms, highlighting interesting possible uses by both individuals and communities. In addition, there is a need to examine memorials alongside funerals and to place contemporary memorials within the growing practice of new and ‘alternative’ funeral practices. In this way, new forms of memorial can be analysed in relation to the three types of alternative funeral that have been identified by Holloway (2007): 1) the DIY funeral, 2) the celebratory event, 3) the technological funeral. The first emphasises personalisation, the second celebrates life over death, and the third form exploits new frontiers – such as the realm of cyberspace.

#### 3.1 *Traditional memorials*

This section discusses forms deemed traditional in the modern period and contemporary uses and adaptations of these traditions. Traditional forms of memorials, such as the cemetery and gravestone, continue to be chosen, often in combination with newer forms.

##### 3.1.1 War memorials

In the aftermath of the First World War some 3,000 corpses were dug up from their last burial place and re-interred. ‘During and after the conflict the battlefield was in fact a crowded emptiness, crowded with soldiers hidden in noisome labyrinths and occupied for ever after by the bones and bodies of the dead’ (Gough, 2010: 280). Those who survived talked about being reborn. The dead became official property of the state: war memorials celebrated their lives and the end of the war, but they also function as state propaganda. This resulted in remembrance of the war dead on the one hand but also political action on the other: ‘It shifts the memory of the death of soldiers into an inner-worldly functional context that aims only at the future of the survivors’ (Koselleck and Presner, 2002: 291). This approach introduces equality in death as each soldier who could be identified has their name on a memorial and the headstones are uniform in nature – regardless of the social class, race or status of the deceased. However, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate religion from politics. War memorials play an important part in the healing process which follows after war – a way that people can comprehend the catastrophes of war and transcend them (Winter, 1995). A similar view is

offered by King (1998: 44), who saw war memorials and commemorations as providing both, 'relief for mourning relatives' as well as, 'home front propaganda'. Before the Great War, commemorative practices were focused on memorializing members of the ruling elite, particular events and battles, or perhaps families might have commemorated individual soldiers. However, the First World War introduced killing on a scale that was unprecedented, and which revealed the inadequacy of current mortuary and commemorative practice. As Stephenson (2007) explains, bodies were not repatriated to Britain. The dead (when they could be identified) were interred in foreign cemeteries, thereby depriving families of accessible graves. Stephenson argues that, 'This circumstance forced a class of memorial that ... combined local commemoration with the treatment of the war dead as a special category' (Stephenson 2007: 245).

There are, however, some rather critical voices which argue that war memorials are more contested than is commonly realised. Harrison (2012) argues that the focus on the individual dead soldier has been lost. Instead, our commemoration practices of the military dead have been 'commercialised, corporatized and militaristic'. The commemoration practices have moved from their original purpose and 'glorify war'. Harrison suggests that the Cenotaph in Whitehall with its inscription, 'The Glorious Dead', confirms his theory and encourages young men to join the Armed Forces. In fact, Harrison (2012) argues that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the practices of commemoration moved from remembering the dead and their suffering and instead took on a more celebratory and patriotic role. Remembrance Day is chosen partly for its significance as a Christian liturgical calendar date where winter is a time of mourning and atonement. Harrison's (2012) view of the poppy is also rather critical. He explains that, 'the poppy became the natural link between the mystery of death, which has disturbed and fascinated mankind since time immemorial, and the battlefield slaughter of the new Industrial Age' (Harrison, 2012: 151). The colour is to evoke blood, which for some connects those dead and dying soldiers to Christ, whilst at the same time representing rebirth or resurrection and the 'hope for return to normalcy' (Harrison, 2012: 169).

### 3.1.2 Public memorials and monuments

Public memorials and monuments are similar to war memorials, representing private emotions of individuals translated into public commemorations. However, more often than not, contemporary public memorials and monuments are also charged with some political agenda. As Burk (2003: 218) explains, the 'taking of public space is a uniquely effective tactic in that it allows invisible social relations to become visible'. Burk (2003) uses a study of two public memorials in Canada, both charged with controversy and causing significant rifts within the local society. Both memorials pay tribute to minority groups, politicising their identity and raising questions about public space and who gets to speak in public and claim the space for what purpose. A similar example is highlighted in the work of Frances and Kimber (2008), which examines a controversial public monument in Australia dedicated to sex workers. Specifically, it pays tribute to a deceased sex worker from Sydney. As in Burk's (2003) example, Frances and Kimber (2008) illustrate that the statue was intended to outline the problems faced by sex workers and pay tribute to sex workers in Australia. The statue has split local communities; for sex workers the statue acquired a hero-like status but for others it represents a taboo topic and something that should not be displayed in a public space.

### 3.1.3 Cemeteries

Vanderstaeten (2004: 457) suggests that cemeteries are places where the dead are publicly remembered. Cemeteries are separate from other lived spaces and places; they are in their own designated locations, away from the living. Francis, Kellaher and Neophytous (2000: 49) add intergenerational continuity to this public demonstration, as spaces which connect past generations to the current generation and forge links to future generations. Vanderstaeten (2004: 458) comments that cemeteries and funerary monuments vary considerably in form and design, despite regulations and standards imposed by those who administer and control cemeteries. As Meyer (1993: 3) explains, 'Far more than ...space...set aside for the burial of the dead, cemeteries are...open texts, there to be read...by anyone who takes the time to learn...their special language'. Inevitably, there are regional, cultural and historical differences when it comes to cemeteries. Meyer suggests that inscriptions may show the shift identified by Aries (1974) from the medieval preoccupation with 'the death of the self', to the modern concern with 'the death of the other'. This coincided with a decline in the preoccupation with hell, hell becoming something reserved for particular groups such as outcasts and criminals. The focus shifted to loss of the loved one and with the hope of being re-united in the afterlife. There was a juxtaposition of secular and religious beliefs in which the deceased lived in the memories of the living, and could be reunited with them in Heaven (Goody, 1993: 277). These signifiers of religious beliefs survive to this day in cemeteries and grave markers, but Vanderstaeten (2004: 461-462) also observes that they are currently also used to communicate particular social distinctions.

A photograph of the deceased may be integrated into the grave marker. The increasing use of visual images, cards, and grave markers can result in tension within a family over how the deceased should be represented. For example, should they be depicted before sickness or old age? There is an increase in the use of images of the deceased in informal situations, doing something they enjoyed or at times or occasions when they were happy. Often it is believed that this is how they should be remembered. The funeral is becoming increasingly personalised and diversified – in addition to images and photos, they can now include a large screen with videos and slideshows which preference the personal and the individual over 'collective identities' (Vanderstaeten, 2004: 463). Memorialisation is a process in which the families of the deceased increasingly combine and personalise religious and non-religious elements. Family members leave personalised messages, flowers, or objects, and these are no longer confined to particular dates in the calendar, such as All Souls Day (Vanderstaeten, 2004).

Francis *et al.* (2005) suggest that to select the stone and the material environment of the cemetery and to design the memorial so that it suits the deceased's personal preferences can also be seen as an expression of continuing care and protection for the departed (Francis *et al.*, 2005: 172–176). Petersson and Wingner (2011) illustrate with an example the relationship between personalising and meaning-making:

*...the grave of a young man who died in a car crash: the memorial stone, on which his name is engraved in his own handwriting, stands next to pebbles collected at the site of the fatal accident. The memorial stone and the pebbles bring together the past and the present, life and death, the symbolic and diabolic realities. (Petersson and Wingner (2011:59)*

Memorial items, and perhaps particularly the memorial stone, help us recall and feel the presence of the deceased. Francis *et al.* (2005: 124) argue that the hard stone material of the memorial may be a metaphor for the 'enduring' bones of the deceased, whereas the ephemeral flowers placed on the grave symbolise the more transient flesh. By tending to the memorial stone and decorative plantings, 'the body – bones and flesh – is symbolically reconstructed' alongside the identity, personhood and memory. However, Hallam and Hockey (2001) note that contemporary memorial displays use an increasing range of materials, which enable greater permanence – such as the use of artificial flowers and photographs. Just as a piece of clothing from a deceased loved one can compensate to a degree for the familiar smell and touch of the person lost (Gibson, 2004: 288–289), to care for the gravesite and to touch or even hug the memorial stone may perhaps in some way compensate for the immateriality and absence of the deceased (Petersson and Wingner, 2011: 60).

### 3.1.4 Cremation and ashes

Davies and Mates (2005) chart the rise of cremation as a death rite and an increasingly popular form of disposal from the mid twentieth century onwards, pointing out the symbolic function of fire and its connection to religious doctrines, myths and cultural rites of passage. Today cremation is preferred over burial across much of northern and western Europe and, increasingly, worldwide. As a process, its growth mirrors increasing secularisation and a reduced reliance on religious institutions (Davies and Mates, 2005). However, in countries such as Russia, China, Korea and Japan, cremation is being used as a cultural and political vehicle of protest, and is centred on the fault line between traditional rituals and the growing need for innovation and personalisation (Davies and Mates, 2005). Kawano (2004) describes how scattering ashes emerged in Japan as a new ritual in the 1990s and served to challenge the traditional practice of interment in which the bereaved visit a family altar or family grave in order to conduct their mourning rituals. Countering some of the dissent surrounding this new practice, Kawano (2004) highlights how this new trend has increased options for mourning and, in turn, enabled, rather than reduced, a more personal and creative expression of loss and filial respect.

Vandendorpe (2000) claims that the growing popularity of cremation has, by necessity, led to the development of a range of new memorial forms and associated practices. Common memorials, linked to cremation, include having pictures of the deceased with flowers and candles, making family trees or patchworks, publishing family books, death announcements and virtual cemeteries. Vandendorpe argues that cremation is a private rather than a public affair which leaves little or no visible trace of the expression of grief (Vandendorpe, 2000: 25). However, according to Coenegrachts (1999), the choice is now shifting towards burying the urn or placing it in a columbarium, thereby creating a material marker similar to the grave. Coenegrachts interprets ashes as a 'mobile material residue of the corpse' (Coenegrachts (1999:881), and similarly, Prendergast *et al* (2006) explore the UK practice of removing ashes from crematoriums and cite the ways in which this has led to innovative new forms of disposal, and associated rituals which are no longer tied to traditional notions of space and place.

Kellaher *et al* (2005) explore the choices of people who dispose of ashes away from the cemetery. Their study found that mourners rely on both established practices, drawing on traditional rituals, and establish new practices, as well as more ambiguous approaches which move between both. As such, the study – which draws on interviews with professionals and the bereaved across four UK sites – shows the strong parallel between burial and cremation practice and equally, innovative alternatives

to this. The data also touches on the sometimes conflicting ways in which family members negotiate preference, as well as potential conflicts between the bereaved and the deceased. Three categories emerge – bodily integrity; protected and defined space; ownership and visiting.

Internet sources evidence the range of options. Cremation ashes can be buried, contained in an urn in the home or scattered at a site that was meaningful to the deceased, such as a beauty spot (mountain, river, park or sea). In addition to scattering and interment, recent years have seen an increasingly diverse range of options for storing and transforming ashes and, by extension, memorialisation rituals and practices. There are options for ashes to be incorporated into glassware (<http://www.withloveandlight.co.uk/my-story/>), records (<http://www.andvinyly.com/>), jewellery (<http://www.forevertogetherjewellery.co.uk/>), dinnerware (<http://www.justincrowstudio.com/>) and, for the more adventurous in spirit, to be blasted off into a firework (<https://heavenlystarsfireworks.com/>).

### 3.1.5 Home memorials

The most common place for the siting of memorials is the cemetery. However, there is some evidence that there is a quest for new domestic rituals of mourning. Wojtkowiak and Venbrux (2010: 208) argue that contemporary home memorials have antecedents in the form of Catholic domestic shrines, but most people with a home memorial today are not church members. The contemporary home memorial has a different function: it is located in the space of the everyday and it is private. This study found that 34 % of the Dutch population has or had a private memorial in their homes, 80% of these maintaining it for longer than a year. On the one hand the deceased are separate from the living, on the other the living are trying to keep an ongoing connection with the dead. They describe how memorial spaces are embedded in daily life as the bereaved try to find a place for the deceased, most home memorials being set up in the living room, the one area of the private home which is the most ‘public’. Thus, ‘the memorial space has a place in everyday life, but the ritual actions around it create moments for remembrance and continuing bonds. The memorial space stimulates mourners to perform symbolic acts of commemoration and to think of or communicate with the deceased’ (Wojtkowiak and Venbrux 2010: 17). Rosenblatt (2000), in his work on remembering deceased children, found that many parents felt home-made memorials were crucial in staying connected and in touch with their child.

### 3.1.6 Memorial donations

With increasing frequency, the family may request that charity donations be made by other mourners in lieu of flowers (Holloway et al, 2010). In their study of 46 funerals Holloway et al (2010) found that three quarters featured charitable donations, many of which were personalised, for example by placing a photograph of the deceased next to the donation box. Reading the messages on a remembrance fund can be a source of great comfort for the grieving families. It can be inspiring to know that all of the money raised in the loved one’s name will help families affected by dementia, cancer or other terminal illness. As well as providing an important source of comfort, fundraising activities provide financial assistance to charitable endeavours, serving to increase information and awareness (Funeral Service Times, April 2011). There is also a transformative effect. Where the identity of the deceased might have been associated with negative connotations (such as the loss of

an individual due to dementia or cancer) this can, via fundraising activity, become after death a source of positive action (Bailey et al, 2014). However, academic literature on the topic is scarce.

### **3.2 Contemporary established forms**

Some 'new' forms of memorials, popularised from the late twentieth century, have become so widespread and replicated as a type that they constitute established contemporary forms.

#### **3.2.1 Memorial trees and benches**

Memorial trees and benches are forms of memorials that are often positioned in a beautiful environment, which was frequently visited by the deceased during their lifetime. Personal mementos and shrines are common practice and memorial trees and benches can be seen as another step in this process of personalisation. Their installation is not spontaneous as they require permissions and an agreement from local authorities. In contrast to memorials which represent an end-point, trees and benches are intended for ongoing enjoyment by the community. It is a contribution on behalf of the dead to the living. Kellaher and Worpole (2010: 162) argue that, 'the spaces in which dedicated benches and trees are situated can be read as liminal', allowing for a progressive transformation of identity and subsequent reintegration of the deceased into the society of the living. Local authorities may, however, restrict the number of memorial benches and trees and, further, are opposed to corporeal remains (ashes) being placed near the memorial. The study by Kellaher and Worpole (2010: 174) suggests that, 'the bereaved need the dead to be close at hand at least some of the time'. Cloke and Pawson (2008) focused their study on memorial trees and the identity they have taken on for the bereaved. Cloke and Pawson (2008: 107) explain that:

...trees can be socially constructed as markers of memory, but they also make active contributions to the relational agency of place-related nature culture assemblages, so deepening the significances of the places concerned. The living, growing, changing presence of trees can outgrow the original intention of their planting, and contribute to a wider portfolio of memories and unfolding emotional geographies.

#### **3.2.2 Green, natural and woodland burials**

Clayden and Dixon's (2007) study explores the ways in which, within the context of woodland burials, trees have replaced more traditional grave markers. The authors highlight a growing preference for trees, as permanent markers which, they claim, embody symbolic and sensory qualities associated with the living and natural environment, which, by turns, provides positive connotations and the continuation of memories for the bereaved.

Natural burials – also referred to as ecological, green or woodland burials – have emerged as a new and innovative burial practice, becoming a third viable option to cremation or the traditional burial. The phenomenon of natural burials began in the early 1990s and, by 2010, an estimated 250 sites were in existence in the UK – incorporating farmland, woodland, local authority land and privately-owned land (Clayden et al, 2010a). According to Davies and Rumble (2012: 1) the difference in naming reflects differing connotations, equating 'ecological' with science, 'green' with environmental activism, 'natural' as a counter to commercialism and 'woodland' as projecting a 'more specific cultural affinity with British landscape tradition.' The authors highlight an interesting process that emerges at the site

of a natural burial – whilst graves ‘disappear’ into the natural landscape, the space that is left becomes a fruitful site for ‘an imaginative creation of identity’ (Davies and Rumble (2012: 3). The deceased and the bereaved together create this imaginative new realm, transforming the space into a place which embodies the core values and identity of the deceased and wider concerns over sustainability and ecological welfare.

Natural burials represent a new deathscape, defined through the absence of permanent memorial markers, such as a formal headstone, and associated paraphernalia – artificial flowers, ornaments and photographs. For Hockey et al (2012: 121) this raises the question: ‘How do these absences become present in sites designed to bear limited evidence of human intervention?’ Their subsequent study drew on interviews with various groups of people contributing to natural burial sites – bereaved users, site managers and owners - to examine tensions arising between the Natural Burial Movement’s goals (for ecological preservation and, by extension, an unmarked and unspoilt landscape) and the realities of everyday engagement and practice. Whilst, in theory, no memorial markers are supposed to be permitted within natural burial sites (Clayden et al, 2010b), the study revealed that there still remains a need by some mourners to mark the exact burial site of their loved one – via the planting of a native tree or plant species or by using local white chalk to mark out the site boundaries of the deceased. The authors interpret this as signifying the human need to maintain death as the focal point of the sites in order that the deceased should not be erased and forgotten. The study also highlighted emerging conflict between the need for access (and landscaping) amongst bereaved users and, by turns, the distress that was caused when users perceived that the sites were overgrown and neglected, despite the site policy for non-intervention.

### 3.2.3 Spontaneous memorials

The phenomenon of spontaneous shrines reveals much about contemporary mourning rituals. Spontaneous shrines are created by members of the public in response to tragic and unexpected deaths. They are erected in response to a number of events: traffic fatalities, celebrity deaths, terror attacks, gang-related violence, suicide deaths and natural disasters, and often attract a lot of media attention.

Franzmann (1998:116), writing in the wake of the large scale public display of emotion following the death of Princess Diana, argued that such outpourings serve as proxies for private expression of grief, making permissible a show of emotion where open mourning of personal losses might have been discouraged. Clark and Franzmann (2006: 581), in their exploration of the emergence of spontaneous memorials in the last thirty years, suggest that this phenomenon has evolved as a means of reconstructing ‘new forms of ritualized mourning’ as a reaction to traditional mourning practices, which were seen as ‘old fashioned’ and ‘irrelevant’ to contemporary Americans. Petersson (2010: 142) agrees that spontaneous memorials respond to a general dissatisfaction with formalised or tightly controlled memorial forms or practices. Nonetheless, spontaneous memorials are frequently criticized for their alleged impermanence, and their temporality is seen as characteristic of an increasingly secular and personalised society:

In such an instant and throw away culture, the flowers with which people chose to mourn the “Queen of Hearts” are an entirely instant and throw away memorial, brilliantly colourful one day, eclipsed and swept away the next’ (Independent magazine, 29 August 1998).

Spontaneous memorials are, in most cases, temporary and are often adorned with flowers and personal objects. Maddrell and Sidaway (2010:4) link this to the fluidity of contemporary understandings of the sacred, reflected in an increasing diversification of memorial forms, places of remembrance, and the practices which are associated with them. Spontaneous memorials are a product of a very organic action which makes it incredibly personalised on the one hand, and perhaps a little disorganised and short-lived on the other. Spontaneous memorials may combine flowers with objects which belonged to the deceased, or which have been purchased as a symbol of the deceased’s personality, their social presence and the continuing bond between the deceased and the bereaved. Hallam and Hockey (2001) explain that these practices are also emerging in cemetery spaces where graves are elaborated with similar objects, these ‘new gifts expressing desires to participate in a persistent shaping and personalising of memorials’. (p.209)

Some commentators point out that the purpose of these memorials is more complex than sometimes implied. Not only do they come into existence as a response to the victims of traumatic and unexpected death (and in some instances also to the perpetrators, as for example in the case of Columbine shootings) but spontaneous memorials also fulfil a wider role; in particular this relates to ‘ritualised performance of social protest’ (Margry and Sanchez-Carretero, 2011:3). Often the more public tragedies such as celebrity deaths or national disasters bring people together and unify a nation. Spontaneous memorials then serve a whole community of bereaved individuals who have never met and in all likelihood did not know the deceased personally, yet they feel, in some shape or form, affected by the death and have a compulsion to show and share their grief, respect and memories with other strangers in a public space. As Gibson (2011: 148) explains, traditional social boundaries are ‘blurred’ by social media, melding the public with the private. In essence, ‘even strangers are feeling a connection with those who have died a violent death’ (Petersson, 2010: 150). Spontaneous memorials take on the task of bringing communities together in the face of tragic death and in search of social action, whether it is to show respect to the deceased, or to unite in order to bring about change in policies and attitudes to prevent similar deaths from occurring again. Santino (2006) also argues that spontaneous shrines serve a dual purpose of commemorating the individual whilst simultaneously highlighting a public issue, suggesting that whilst the former is often a private process, the latter is a performative act, arising from the interplay between cause of death and the societal and policy issues they invoke. This is especially so, Santino claims (2006: 2), in the context of commemorations which are, in large part, forms of resistance and fighting back – forms of ‘mourning in protest’ - such as the Bloody Sunday commemorations in Northern Ireland or the making of the AIDS quilt in New York. Spontaneous memorials therefore embody a mixture of public, material and the private; emotions, identities and politics blend together in one ‘transient memorial’.



### *Roadside memorials*

Roadside memorials are an important subset of spontaneous memorials and are a highly visible feature within contemporary society. However, contrary to popular belief, roadside memorials are not a recent invention. In fact, they can be traced to the ancient world, as revealed by Clark and Franzmann (2006: 580).

In addition to this, their growing visibility in the late twentieth century and proliferation in contemporary society merits their inclusion as an established contemporary form. Clark and Franzmann (2006: 584) highlight how these 'unofficial' memorials serve as 'intensely personal expressions of grief, their style and form drawn from a mixture of cultural habit, religious convention and idiosyncratic choice'. Most roadside memorials are organic in structure - they grow and change - and are not controlled by a single authority. Often they are adorned with flowers, personal items, candles and, in most cases, will also have a cross with a name, dates and possibly a message of grief (Clark and Cheshire, 2004). They are also highly personalised memorials, serving to bring the deceased and the bereaved closer together in a public space which becomes a symbol of the tragedy and pain endured by both groups.

Clark and Cheshire (2004) argue that roadside memorials, and spontaneous memorials in general, highlight the changing practice of memorialisation, arguing that, 'the trappings of the cult of celebrity' (p.16) are afforded to an individual' regardless of whether they lived their lives in the public eye. For MacConville (2010), instead of serving as a means for bereaved family and friends to say goodbye, roadside memorials instead emphasise the continuing bond between the bereaved and the deceased, which is subsequently opened up to a wider range of onlookers and grievers. As such, the roadside memorial becomes a site of grief where strangers come together and where emotions are publically visible, manifested, performed and rendered meaningful.

Space is a particularly important dimension of roadside memorials - it represents the scene of death, a public place intended for transition from a point of departure to point of arrival, a place where death should not occur. Roadside memorials highlight the presence of death in these transitory and ordinary places, these 'death in transit' spaces which are 'neither here nor there' (Gibson, 2011: 158). According to Aries (1975), society shields itself from death and, in particular, the dividing line between life and death. The boundaries are noticeably enforced both spatially and symbolically when it comes to particularly violent or traumatic deaths. In a similar vein, Gibson (2011: 146) argues that both the place and space of death are managed and regulated in modern society, ensuring the 'taken-for-granted attitude that death will be largely absent and invisible in most everyday environments'. However, Gibson also notes that roadside memorials serve to disrupt this separation, confronting viewers with the reality that death and grief is routinely present in everyday life (Gibson 2011: 154). As a result, the boundary between private grief and public display is blurred: the public space in question is transformed into a site of private loss whilst, simultaneously, private acts of grief are thrust into the public spotlight. The public space, which is for many passers-by an ordinary space, holds a special meaning for the bereaved where they can communicate with the deceased. It is a space where the spiritual and the material meet - and a place of pilgrimage.

Roadside memorials can also serve another function, reaching beyond individual grief. Studies by Smith (1999), Clark and Franzmann (2006), MacConville (2010) and Gibson (2011) reveal how roadside memorials often act as warning signs for motorists, indicating danger and place of death. Gibson (2011) describes roadside memorials (2011) as consciousness-raising devices in 'spaces and places that might otherwise be perceived as death neutral or untouched by death' (Gibson, 2011: 47). Government authorities generally see the roadside as an open public domain, not one to be assumed as a mourning space, and argue that roadside memorials create a safety hazard.

Clark and Franzmann (2006) explain how visits to roadside memorials do not necessarily follow a conventional pattern and, in keeping with other 'temporary' memorials, behaviours follow informal, self-designed modes of ritual:

Often beer or spirit bottles are left at the memorial where mourners have shared a last drink; one bottle regularly remains unopened. Poems are written and attached to the memorials. (p.593)

From this perspective, the roads and spaces of transport become 'deathscapes'. We only see what has been marked. Traditionally, the scene of death is cleaned, sanitised and erased from visibility. Roadside memorials bring it back to public consciousness and imbue the space (and death) with special meaning. However, in the studies by Clark and Cheshire (2004) and Petersson (2010), roadside memorials were found to be less important than the memorials at the cemetery. This suggests that the memorial process and its location changes over time. Initially the bereaved are drawn to the site out of 'feelings of unreality and disbelief' but, later on activity at the roadside diminishes and is transferred to the cemetery or home (Petersson, 2010, 149). As such, the roadside memorial can serve as a temporary place where the bereaved can grieve before the grave is prepared. Equally, anecdotal evidence suggests that roadside memorials may continue to be refreshed at special times in the yearly calendar.

### 3.2.4 Ghost bikes

Ghost bikes represent a relatively novel form of memorial. The first ghost bike appeared in St Louis, US in 2003 to mark a place where a cyclist was killed in a road accident (Grist 2015). Since then, the practice of leaving a white bicycle as a memorial has spread all over the world, and today ghost bikes are an increasingly common phenomenon. As Bedell (2008) explains, most ghost bikes are the work of cycling groups who want to remember one of their own, but who also want to draw attention to the vulnerability of cyclists on roads today. Ghost bikes therefore, like roadside memorials, serve two functions – emotional and practical, acting as memorials or shrines, and as a warning. However, as Bertulis-Fernandes (2014) points out, unlike roadside memorials, ghost bikes often follow a uniform format. Some ghost bikes show a more personalised approach with flowers, photos or candles, but in general ghost bikes are painted white and sited at, or near, the place of a cyclist's death. In addition, unlike roadside memorials, which are erected spontaneously, ghost bikes require careful planning and permission from the authorities.

They also serve as statements or forms of protest, reaching beyond individual memorialisation to highlight the dangers that cyclists on the road face, serving as a caution to, and raising awareness amongst, drivers. According to Bertulis-Fernandes (2014: 6): ghost bike creators intentionally fashion

a memorial which extends beyond the individual, ‘enmeshing it within a wider cognitive web of meaning.’ The identity of the deceased is distilled into the collective identity of the cyclist and, by extension, the cyclist’s death becomes a public concern, transformed into a political and protest tool, warning against the dangers of cycling on public roads.

### 3.2.5 Memorials for mass deaths

A significant feature of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries is memorials, both spontaneous and planned, associated with sudden and multiple deaths caused by natural or man-made disaster or serious incident. The literature in this field is burgeoning and theorisation still emerging, as revealed by the following sections.

#### *Political and public context*

There is a growing body of literature exploring the unique set of issues embodied by memorials erected after global and localised terrorist events. Further, much of the literature on mass deaths from all causes highlights the underlying social and political structures around memorial planning and reception. Tuggle (2011: 65) describes how Hurricane Katrina was ‘as much governmental as environmental’, reminding us that whilst many drowned, many more died from exposure in the aftermath of the hurricane and, longer term, as a result of the stress of the evacuation itself. In 2008 the unidentified bodies of Hurricane Katrina victims were interred in mausoleums on an existing burial site for the anonymous dead, and incorporated within the New Orleans Katrina Memorial. Despite being designed to evoke the ‘meditative quality of a labyrinth’ (p.65), Tuggle claims that the memorial instead evokes memories of the failed evacuation, the interred remaining forgotten and unknown, encased in a largely inaccessible memorial site on the edge of town, with no-one to claim them and no-one to grieve for them.

Stow (2012: 692) takes issue with Tuggle’s (2011) interpretation of the Katrina Memorial as perpetuating inequalities by reminding the reader that the Katrina Memorial is a local, not a national, monument and that its function is best understood as ‘a more productive form of remembering... a precursor to social and political engagement’ (Stow, 2012: 692). However, Stow also comments that, in contrast to the National September 11 memorial in New York, which expressed a national narrative and which received its millionth visitor less than four months after opening on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the New Orleans Katrina Memorial is little visited or known in the wider world. David (2008) also comments on memorialisation after Hurricane Katrina. Utilising the case study of the ‘Women of the Storm’, David focuses on the ways in which post-disaster activism constitutes remembrance work. The author reveals how the performative actions of the group - a collection of women from New Orleans who strove to increase government support for the recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina - drew on traditional remembrance practices, symbols and place-based rituals to raise awareness and to prevent the country – and world – from forgetting this event, imprinting moral responsibility within collective mourning and cultural memory.

Representative of the kinds of issues raised by man-made responses to natural disaster memorialisation in the Australian context, is Frew and White’s (2015) case study of the Cyclone Tracy exhibition at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin. They explore how commemoration of the event shapes, and is in turn shaped by, Australian national identity. The

authors see Cyclone Tracy (which occurred in 1974) as the first Australian cyclone to be interpreted as a national event, but highlight the town's reticence, some thirty years later, to erect a permanent memorial on the basis that it 'would bring back too many unpleasant memories' (Frew and White, 2015: 230). However, according to Carment (2002), whilst there was initial controversy over whether the cyclone should be celebrated or mourned, the museum later became a popular site of commemoration.

In the context of post-conflict Northern Ireland, Mcquaid (2016) examines the growing number of permanent memorials that have been made to commemorate those who died during The Troubles. Constructed by paramilitary organisations (The Provisional Irish Republican Army, The Irish National Liberation Army, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association), these permanent memorials share with more temporary memorials – such as murals and parades – the same issue of discursive struggles between communities over representation and the dissonance between the intentions of those creating memorials with the meanings taken from them by others.

Nicholls (2006) explores how memorials serve to foster communication between communities that are affected and government, with the latter responsible for responding to community need, contributing to community recovery, and being clear about their involvement in the response to the disaster and memorial process. In this way, Nicholls argues that governments may 'tacitly recognise ...their 'implicitness' in....the ills that befall their communities' (2006: 39). As such, disaster memorials serve a more complex purpose than other types of memorial and are invested with greater expectation to acknowledge and name, to recognise courage and loss, to display appropriate emotion and to serve as a call to remember and a warning not to forget (Nicholls, 2006: 38). The layers of grief that are infused within disaster memorials – and the sheer range of people affected (from those directly bereaved to local and international communities) means that competing claims of 'ownership' are likely. In their discussion of the 2002 terrorist bombings in Bali, which killed 202 people (including 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians and people from more than twenty other nationalities) Tumarkin (2005: 8) emphasises 'the little-understood issue of the symbolic and practical ownership of sites of trauma in the era of global terrorism', and highlights the cultural differences around trauma and grief between locals and tourists. According to Stevens and Sumartojo (2015: 2):

...memorials remain pertinent and powerful loci of public values, embodying contestations over a community's identity, memories, politics and built form'.

### *The online world*

On the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011, articles commemorating the 2005 London bombings were published online in a special issue of the journal *Memory Studies*. The date was significant – marking the sixth anniversary of the attacks and the issue was concurrent with the large public inquest into the bombing. The articles, and indeed much of the scholarly work around mass deaths, can be interpreted as functioning as important memorials in and of themselves which, in their theoretical explorations, assist in imprinting the terror attacks into cultural memory, remembrance and legacy.

Recuber (2012) describes the growing wealth of memorials dedicated to traumatic events in the online world, particularly in response to 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. The author looks at the phenomenon of, what he terms, 'prosumption' within online disaster commemoration whereby users both produce

and consume online content. In keeping with public mass death monuments, Recuber (2012) notes that the creation of online memorials is also a highly contested and contentious process, with individuals and institutions vying for ownership over representation. As such, the selection of documents, images and viewpoints for inclusion is socially and politically loaded and actively shapes the collective memory. Recuber also notes that the potential for alternative readings of memorials – which may deviate from the intentions of their creators – is especially heightened in the online sphere, where content is readily uploaded, shared and changed by wide-ranging visitors around the world (Recuber, 2012: 535). Here, vernacular forms of commemoration exist alongside official forms, with alternative viewpoints pitted against hegemonic ideologies. Online memorialisation, in keeping with the growth of spontaneous memorials, ‘reflect(s) a breakdown of boundaries between elite and popular culture’ (Recuber, 2012: 536).

### *Ritual and symbolism*

According to Eyre (1999), informal rituals start within hours of a disaster striking, with people bringing flowers, candles and other mementos to the site of the disaster. Eyre describes how, immediately after the Hillsborough disaster of 1989 – which killed 96 football fans – visitors brought flowers, football scarves and team mementos to the stadium at Anfield, and scrawled messages on the walls during the seven days of official mourning. Eyre goes on to state that, as news of the event travels, flowers and mementos are then sent to the site from around the world. This was the case after the Aberfan disaster of 1966 – when 144 people, mostly children, were killed when a coal heap slid onto a school in Wales. The flowers that were sent were then laid out by the park director in the shape of a large cross on the nearby hillside (Eyre, 1999). However, according to Eyre, ‘giving’ is not always appropriate or wanted – such as the large number of toys that were given to Aberfan, a town that lost a generation of children. More helpful, claims Eyre, are messages from others who have been bereaved in a similar manner – such as the bereaved families of Dunblane sending their condolences to the bereaved families of Lockerbie on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lockerbie Air Disaster. She also highlights the importance of messages of support from key public figures, such as the Queen and Prime Minister, but warns that the presence of a notable figure during a memorial service may serve to push the bereaved to the side-lines both during the service and, subsequently, during the grieving process. The media attention in the immediate aftermath of a disaster reinforces the sense of it being a national tragedy with an international and wide-reaching impact (Eyre, 1999: 23).

The empty chair is one of the most evocative symbols that emerges out of the writing and scholarship around disaster memorials. Jaksch (2013) writes about the chairs that were found in the abandoned homes of post-Katrina, New Orleans, interpreting them as an absent-presence and a ghostly trace, embodying memories of tragedy and loss but tinged with signs of a necessary recovery:

The chairs have travelled. Moved from room to yard. From upright to upside down. From here to there. The chairs now occupy places of disaster, of trauma: a broken living room with its cracked and crumbling wall, the front yard with fallen trees, the empty streets, and a field that looks like the resting place of an exploded building. The chairs have also witnessed. They have seen. The evacuation. The flood. The return (Jaksch, 2013: 104-105).

In 'Meditations on the Empty Chair', Ochsner (2016) describes the ways in which empty chairs have been converted into memorials in the aftermath of a range of tragic events, such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the Christchurch earthquake, and the tenth anniversary of 9/11. In the case of the Oklahoma terrorist bombing of 1995, the memorial (named 'The Field of the Empty Chairs') is comprised of 168 chairs representing each of the lives taken. The chairs are arranged in nine rows, each row representing a different floor of the building and each chair engraved with the name of the deceased. There are smaller chairs representing the children who died.

### *Meaning-making narratives*

According to Sather-Wagstaff (2011), public interaction with memorial sites is a key part of meaning-making, ensuring their cultural significance and permanence as sites of commemoration and remembrance. Focusing on the 9/11 memorial, Sather-Wagstaff (2011) claims that sites of commemoration 'are spaces that are continuously negotiated, constructed, and reconstructed into meaningful places through ongoing human action' (p.20). Frew and White (2015) argue that the collective memory of an event will also change in keeping with a shifting social, political and cultural landscape.

Grider (2001) explores the numerous spontaneous shrines created in response to 9/11: namely, the placement of flowers and memorabilia at or near to the sites of disaster in New York and Washington D.C. These, Grider suggests, serve to make an overwhelming tragedy more bearable and manageable, reducing the sense of helplessness. By extension, Grider interprets the behaviours enacted around the shrines as ways in which individuals can work out their personal connections to the catastrophe. Shrines therefore become a temporary sacred space that offers comfort and meaning during a particularly confusing and overwhelming time. Rituals in the aftermath of a disaster include the wearing of ribbons, candlelight vigils, singing and contributions of objects and words to the site of spontaneous shrines. Taken together, the employment of material objects serves to connect a population and, in the process, create meaning: 'In the creation of these dynamic shrines, people are calling on the vast panoply of our cultural repertoire to create a tactile and visual expression of our connectedness to one another.' (Grider, 2001: 2).

Miller (2014), in an examination of the memorials commemorating the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, claims that, in contrast to the Holocaust memorials, the Atomic Bombing memorials do not convey the experience of enduring trauma but, instead, turn to spiritual and religious symbols and occasions for reflection and comfort. This is reflected in the construction of the Bell of Nagasaki on the thirty-third anniversary - a traditional Buddhist date for memorials. Miller further contends that, as well as honouring victims, Atomic Bombing memorials also serve to educate with the goal of preventing similar events in future. They mark causes and motivations, not simply the events themselves. Since WWII, therefore, memorials have taken on the additional function of commemorating non-combatants, and acknowledging trauma.

Drawing on interviews with female survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Samuels (2016) highlights the central role played by the body both in the telling of traumatic experiences ('embodied narratives', p. 810) and in connecting these to a shared understanding of remembrance and memorialisation in a post-disaster world. In a similar vein, Jarry's (2015) thesis demonstrates how the

memorial museum in Aceh, Indonesia, and other similar memorial sites, serve as focal points of growth and healing for communities dealing with the aftermath of trauma. Elsewhere, articles dedicated to or mentioning the 2004 tsunami had a more practical focus on disaster prevention and management (Phillips et al, 2008; Scanlon et al, 2007) or reconstruction (Supprasri, 2011), rather than an explicit focus on memorialisation per se.

### *Shared emotion and memory*

Allen and Brown (2011) focus on the 'living memorials' that have emerged since the London bombings which, they claim, make 'connections at the level of life rather than that of symbols' (p.312). This is done, they argue, through embodied acts of caring and emotional labour – reaching out and connecting with others who have been affected. The resultant 'affect economy', the authors argue, serves to preserve the commemorative process.

Hoskins (2011: 269) employs the notion of 'connective memory' to interpret how the use of digital devices, such as mobile phones, and social media serve to translate memorials into moments of memory. In other words, Hoskins distils memory into a series of connections which contribute to, what he terms, an 'emergent post-scarcity memorial-media boom' (p.269). In similar vein, Reading (2011: 298) claims that the media coverage following the 2007 London bombings highlights the pervasive theory that the current digital and social media era serves to collapse the past and future into an 'extended present'. Central to this has been 'mobile witnessing' via the mobile phone cameras used by survivors and witnesses of terror attacks in recent years. The author charts how this footage is then used by the media and incorporated into national and international messages of grief and commemoration via online media. In the longer term, however, Reading (2011: 304) shows how this process serves to create a non-linear progression of commemorative time and mourning.

Drawing on Darwin, Australia, as a case study, Tumarkin (2002) focuses on 'traumasces', identifying these as sites 'marked by the recurrence of pain, loss and violence, and constituted through the experienced and imagined repetitions of trauma' (p.4). For Tumarkin, traumasces are integral to both the geographical and social landscape and transform traumatic legacies into cultural performances of mourning, remembering, emotionality and meaning-making. In a similar vein, Durbin (2003) looks at the increasing popularity of makeshift memorials which, he claims, are due to mass culture and the increasingly reverberative effect of mass death tragedies underscoring the sense of disruption caused in the lives of individuals with or without connection to the victims. As such, makeshift memorials are a way for society at large to try to make sense of traumatic and wide-reaching events. According to Webb and Wachtendorf (2000), material culture, such as graffiti, produced in the wake of disaster are spontaneously produced and publicly consumed, populist and democratic. It is only later that permanent memorials are erected, under strict government supervision, which, as a consequence, turn the makeshift memorials into interim expressions of the event.

Whilst several papers have been written about the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, they tend to focus on disaster tourism (Kensinger, 2014), architectural uses of public space (Davies, 2012), post-earthquake recovery (Tudor et al, 2015) or representations of grief (Theunissen and Mersham, 2011) rather than memorialisation per se. However, Stevens and Sumartojo (2015) draw on the Christchurch earthquake memorial to show how regular and ritual use maintains the act of

memorialisation and that this repetition of ritual helps traumatised communities. In contrast, Suppasri et al (2015) note that, at a local level, some memorials can have the opposite effect. The authors describe how a Sri Lankan train that was caught up in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami – killing 1700 of the people on board - was rebuilt and preserved as a memorial. Named ‘the queen of the sea’, the train was put back into service to run on December 26<sup>th</sup> 2008 as a memorial event. A wave was painted on the side of its carriages as a memorial, though the authors note that the writing on the train has been erased. Whilst they acknowledge the importance of preservation, the authors nonetheless note that the preservation of the train might be too ‘emotionally difficult’ for people living nearby due to the sheer number of deaths on board (Suppasri et al, 2015: 3325).

For McCarthy and Doyle (2007) the Oklahoma memorial chairs (discussed previously) are in keeping with a growing trend in mass deaths memorials whereby the iconography is becoming increasingly ‘emotivist and individualist’ (p.9). The impact of mass culture has meant that, in today’s society, we feel a sense of attachment to people we have never met – the ‘imaginary real’ - and, by extension:

The memorial has become a form and a forum for the masses, for everyone; a public place we have appropriated as our own and where we become spectator participants; a place where we seek emphatic experiences, eliminating psychic distance between ourselves and what and whom we memorialize; the new memorial sites themselves are consequential, for they situate and frame these emotional acts (McCarthy and Doyle, 2007: 14-15).

Whereas memorials have historically been dedicated to the memory of the elite, today’s mass death memorials are ‘democratic’ – made for, and commemorating, ordinary people. They are also experiential and transformative - transforming the event as well as those who visit them (McCarthy and Doyle, 2007).

### *Dark tourism*

Much of the recent literature on mass deaths memorials focuses on the topic of dark tourism – also known as death tourism, thanatourism or grief tourism – which refers to places of tragedy, mass death, trauma and remembrance that have also become tourist attractions. Examples include Auschwitz (Poland), Jeju Peace Park (South Korea) and the Choeung Ek killing fields (Cambodia). Kaelber (2007) divides dark tourism into three distinct subsets - sites associated with trauma (dark tourism), sites where the trauma actually occurred (darker tourism) and virtual recreations of sites (darkest tourism). An example of the latter are the virtual Auschwitz tours which allow online audiences to be guided around reconstructions of the site, serving to ‘create and recreate past trauma’ (Kaelber, 2007: 24). In ‘Benefits of visiting a ‘dark tourism’ site’, Kang (2012) builds on this to categorise sites of dark tourism into four types:

- 1) battle sites and death camps,
- 2) death sites of celebrities,
- 3) sites of extraordinary disaster,
- 4) prisons or other incarceration sites.



Interpreting dark tourism as serving both educational and emotional functions, Kang (2012) finds that the most common reason for visiting such sites appears to be out of a sense of obligation. However, Kang questions the morality of commodifying and marketing death, disaster and atrocity. Stone (2011) likewise discusses dark tourism as the commodification of death, acting to filter the consumption of 'extraordinary death' by the living. However, according to Stone, death tourism is not new, as confirmed by records revealing the popularity of morgue visits by tourists in nineteenth-century Paris. Interpreting dark tourism as a form of memorialisation, Stone (2008) shows how the commemoration and memory around a traumatic event may change over time, eventually evolving into remembrance. This process, however, is organic and fluid with new generations experiencing the commemoration of dark tourism differently from their forbears. Focusing on the consumption of dark tourism, Stone questions whether it is possible to categorise the diverse intentions and experiences of tourists at a wide range of sites connected to death or suffering. Podoshen (2013) attempts to do just that by linking the growth of dark tourism to, amongst other things, the growing popularity of 'black metal' subculture, highlighting the appeal of certain death sites with music fans of this genre.

### 3.3 Emerging Forms

Some new memorial forms continue to emerge, expand and diversify and are more fluid than those which have been categorised as contemporary established.

#### 3.3.1 Online memorialisation and social media

Although use of the Internet features in those forms identified in the preceding section (particularly in relation to responses to mass death), online memorialisation is developing at such a rate as to constitute a still-emerging form. It is a relatively recent phenomenon, directly connected to social networking and the online world. New York magazine has recently published an article concerning online memorialisation quoting the staggering statistic that nearly a million Facebook users will die this year and arguing that within a century dead users will outnumber the living, creating 'an unstoppable digital graveyard' (<http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2016/08/twitter-is-changing-how-we-deal-with-death-on-social-media.html>).

##### *Web memorials*

According to Graham et al (2015), web memorials are impermanent – undergoing changes, constantly being refreshed, and subject to changes in service providers' regulations. However, online memorials entail fewer bureaucratic processes, and may be seen to offer a more accessible and available means for people to create and update their own informal memorials to loved ones, adding flowers or lighting candles at the click of a button, from the privacy of their own homes. Visitors can also pay tribute by leaving messages via a range of websites containing virtual grave markers, memorial symbols, web guest books and books of condolence. Online memorials can be conceived as supplementing, rather than replacing, other more concrete, physical forms of memorialisation and, in turn, become another form of remembering. In Roberts (2004) study of bereaved parents, many of the participants visited physical memorials frequently, but online memorials were seen as 'convenient' and were visited often from any location.

## Photographs

The camera phone plays a key part within online memorialisation and forms of remembering via social media, serving to bring the remembrance event into a public and even global domain. Meese *et al* (2015) conducted a study of funeral selfies posted on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, suggesting that the funeral selfie belongs to the trend to situate bereavement within the public space of online and social media networks. Gibbs *et al*'s 2014 study focused primarily on Instagram. According to the authors, hash tags linked to images were self-centred and lacked recognition 'of the solemnity and gravitas of funeral rites' (Gibbs *et al*, 2014: 260). However, none of these pictures were actually taken at the funeral. Other images were more reflective, using tags including #saday, #nothappy, #notsmiling, #sad with sombre notes. Another common theme was the expression of togetherness, with images of the family gathered together and showing the importance of the funeral as a 'social occasion'. Many comments communicated feelings of togetherness and intimacy. Only a very few images showed the deceased. #RIP represented a different picture, mostly focusing on celebrities and old photos of deceased friends and family. The focus was on commemoration and remembrance.

## Continuing social presence

Online memorialisation uses a growing number of technologies and actors which present novel challenges and questions about memorialisation (Walter, 2015). One such challenge is the social identity of the dead. Social networks enable us to 'live forever' in the sense that our social identities and relationships are preserved in a virtual world (Klaassens and Bijlsma, 2014). Facebook has a new facility - "Remembering our loved ones" - which means that the network will memorialise the profiles of deceased users, allowing friends to access their profiles and share memories on their Facebook 'wall'. This is a major shift which is accompanied by another significant move: since their social identities remain 'active,' the dead are no longer shifted to the margins but instead remain within the social spheres of the living (Brubaker *et al*, 2012). The personhood of the dead online does not remain static but continues to evolve through the participatory construction of memories, bereavement, and remembrance (Gibbs *et al*, 2014). Gibbs *et al* (2014) also comment that physical and online memorialising activities, are 'hybridized in performative assemblages like funerals' (p.258). Roberts (2004: 59) argues that virtual cemeteries strengthen 'continuing bonds with the dead' as well as existing relationships between the living. In fact, in the virtual environment, the relationship with the dead becomes more prominent.

Some online memorials are created for persons who died twenty or thirty years ago, revealing long-lasting online bonds (Roberts, 2004). From their study of online memorial sites, Graham *et al* (2015:50) argue that found that these continuing communications with the deceased make a collective statement about their continuing social identity. This also extends to many people who were famous in life but after death may otherwise have been forgotten. In his study of the famous deceased, Clancey (2015) examines how the use of virtual memorials and websites memorialising the dead can bring the deceased back to life. Websites including *Political Graveyard*, *Wikipedia*, *Biography online* or *Deathlist*, have been set up precisely for this purpose. Within these examples, many famous and other noteworthy citizens who have died years even centuries ago have been brought 'back to life' and subsequently re-claimed and re-remembered. Other deceased were not known during their lifetimes

but became famous only after death. Clancey (2015) describes how virtual memorials to the famous dead become an 'online graveyard as elaborate and friendly as the 19th century garden cemetery, but in other ways, even more intimate and descriptive' (p.392). However, even with the famous dead there is a level of selectiveness and not all famous citizens are remembered in the same way - some are deliberately forgotten or erased from the online world altogether. This includes, for example, famous criminals or porn stars, and Clancey raises the question - who is worthy of remembrance?

### *Online identity*

The question of ambiguous or contested identity is also evident within online memorialisation. Online memorials enable open access to various groups of people from different spheres of the deceased's life, serving to bring together people who would otherwise not be in contact. As such, online memorials serve to bring together people from different backgrounds and geographical locations into one place. Moreover, online memorials enable the bereaved to bring together their differing experiences and memories of the deceased into an online repository which connects and integrates those memories into a shared remembrance of the deceased's life and ongoing legacy, reconstructing the deceased's identity (Klaassens and Bijlsma, 2014). However, some grieving relatives may find information emerging about their loved ones particularly difficult or even unacceptable. On some occasions, contrasting views and memories of the deceased can cause friction. Marwick and Ellison (2012) found evidence in online memorials of conflict over assumptions and understandings of the deceased and 'a hierarchy of legitimacy' (p.393) concerning the greater right to grieve and represent the deceased being asserted by close friends and family. The notion that some people have more right to grief is a common one. However, in the online world this takes on a different form. Those who are often excluded or disenfranchised in their grief in more traditional settings are often more included in the virtual world. However, Marwick and Ellison (2012) highlight instances where those who did not know the deceased well are excluded or barely tolerated in the online memorial world. Tensions also exist over the appropriateness of those who do not know the deceased very well 'liking' the Facebook page of the deceased.

### *Connectedness and communication*

There is a wealth of literature highlighting the fact that, far from isolating individuals, the use of social media for the purpose of memorialisation may assist bereaved individuals in reaching out and finding support, something which they perhaps would not do in the offline world (Roberts, 2004; Brubaker *et al.*, 2012; Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Meese *et al.*, 2015). Klaassens and Bijlsma (2014: 283) explain how online memorial sites provide platforms for open expressions of grief which had previously been discouraged in contemporary Western societies. What is more, the ease with which we can access the online world today means that we can be connected to the dead in an instant. It is no longer necessary to make a physical journey to the cemetery or another physical site - our connection with the dead is literally at our fingertips (Graham *et al.*, 2015). Clancey (2015) argues that the effect is to extend and add depth to communities of the living, through the creation of a 'virtual diaspora of the deceased' (p.390).

Roberts (2004) examines the role of online memorials dedicated to children and centres discussion on the 'Empty Arms Web'. Here, participants discussed their reasons for creating and engaging with the

website, with many people feeling that it gave them: ‘...a meaningful activity that I could still do for my child’ (p. 61). Almost half of the participants explained that part of the reason for setting up the memorial was to give others the opportunity to remember the child and share their memories. Surprisingly, 84% of participants indicated that they visited the online memorial with another person present. It was a common practice to read a virtual guestbook without commenting but, instead, to read other people’s comments and find solace in the emotions and sentiments expressed (Roberts 2004). Similar findings emerge from other studies (Cann, 2014; Stokes, 2012; Walter *et al*, 2014; Meese *et al*, 2015; Gibbs *et al*, 2014; Maddrell, 2012; Klaassens and Bijlsma, 2014; Marwick and Ellison, 2012), whereby the online memorial serves as a medium for direct communication with and about the deceased. For example, Graham *et al* (2015) found that almost all posts used the first person to address the deceased directly, and de Vries and Rutherford (2004) noted the reciprocal relationship between the bereaved and deceased, the dead appearing as ‘active listener[s]’ (p. 21). According to Ryan (2008), there is a sense that the dead ‘are being typed into being’ (p. 186).

### *Blurring of the public and private*

A typical characteristic of online memorialisation is its open, interactive and relatively freely accessible form (Roberts, 2004; Walter, 2015). The boundary between public and private is blurred and, unlike the more traditional forms of memorialisation, the virtual character of online memorialisation enables direct interaction between users who have perhaps never met. A number of studies focus on the public versus private aspect of online memorialisation (Walter *et al*, 2014, Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Graham *et al*, 2015, Brubaker *et al*. 2012). In theory, complete strangers are able to see memorial pages for an individual whom they have never met and are able to view associated images and comments written to the deceased by their loved ones. In addition, social media can attract a large audience. In August 2016, 30 people attended the funeral in Orangetown, New York State of an older woman, for them a complete stranger, after it became clear that there would be no mourners at the funeral. A young girl who found out about the fact that nobody was going to attend the funeral rallied support on Facebook: ‘there were tears, anyone passing would have thought we were burying a loved one’. (<http://www.insideedition.com/headlines/18194-dozens-of-strangers-turn-up-at-funeral-for-woman-after-learning-no-one-was-attending>).

This public display of private emotions has its pros and cons. Brubaker *et al* (2012) undertook a study of *MySpace* and related *MyDeathSpace* profiles. The authors found that after the death of a loved one, friends and relatives post comments and share memories intended for the deceased on their profile page. This provides the bereaved with the opportunity to engage in post-mortem social networking as a way of keeping in touch with the deceased. As highlighted by other studies (Roberts, 2004; Walter *et al* 2014, Klaassens and Bijlsma, 2014; Maddrell, 2012), online memorialisation brings mourners together in a close virtual community where they can share and release their distress, grief, pain and frustration. Perhaps even more revealing is the fact that this public space is also open to those who might, in traditional forms of memorialisation, be excluded; ‘disenfranchised grievers’ who do not belong to the community of immediate family and friends (Brubaker *et al*, 2012: 2). Some used the opportunity to ‘talk’ to others about the deceased and to, by turns, enhance their understanding of the deceased.

### *'Stranger' mourners*

Perhaps surprisingly, 48 % of the individual online guestbook entries in Roberts' (2004) study, did not appear to have known the deceased and many explicitly identified themselves as strangers. Guests often showed compassion for the bereaved, and sometimes shared that they had also been through a similar experience of bereavement. As Graham *et al* (2015) comment: 'the public and private merge in a celebration of inner experience, propagated through new information and communications technology' ( p.52).

In a recent study of Twitter and online remembrance, Cesare and Branstand (2016) found that online memorialisation on Twitter fell into three categories: first, where the bereaved knew the person; second, concerning famous people; and third, and which the authors found most compelling: whereby the deaths of some ordinary people sparked public interest and debate via Twitter. In most cases, the debate shifted from the deceased towards broader issues like gun control or suicide prevention. In other cases, it was simply a space where strangers could acknowledge a tragedy.

### *Ethical and contentious issues*

Despite the benefits attributed to online memorialisation, it also raises a number of problematic issues. There are various instances of online memorials created by individuals who did not know the deceased, raising the question: who controls the memorial? In addition, some sites are the target of spam robots promoting pornography or medication, or Internet 'trolls'. Marwick and Ellison (2012) discuss the impact of such comments on mourners, which may include expressing pleasure that the person has died. Funeral workers and grief counsellors point out that people rarely, if ever, leave negative comments in cards or physical guest books, but such comments are common online. They are so common that Legacy.com devotes one-third of its budget to moderating such comments, deleting them before they are published (Marwick and Ellison, 2012).

Not all these issues are particular to the virtual world. However, to date, there is little guidance on how to proceed with these challenges when it comes to online memorialisation. There have been calls for online ethical protocols, which could prevent some of the conflict and associated trauma. Each corporate site, such as Facebook or Snapchat, has its own set of rules around user conduct which are frequently updated, however, as the online environment changes rapidly, it is necessary to update these norms and regulations in keeping with the growing pace of technological advance and engagement (Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Walter, 2015). Moreover, it is essential that such protocols are enforced and applied effectively to limit and, where possible, curb online spam and trolling activity.

In the past few years a new set of questions has arisen regarding the digital legacies of deceased individuals. In 2012 an online magazine, *MarketWatch*, dedicated a feature article to how the bereaved deal with the deceased's digital legacy. With the catchy title 'Who inherits your iTunes library?' they exposed legislative gaps in the current system (Fottrell, 2012). The topic has since attracted academic attention as well, with Walter *et al* (2014: 5) raising the question of how 'mourners give meaning to, and interact with, digital objects representing the deceased'. Other academics have directed their interest in more futuristic explorations which could follow on from online memorialisation as we see it today. Stokes (2012) examines the possibility of artificial intelligence replacing the deceased loved one. A company in Japan, which was inspired by 'Pokémon Go' (a mobile

game in which players ‘catch’ Pokémon in public places, including at funerals) has come up with a new app named ‘Spot message’ which would catch pre-recorded messages from loved ones in specific locations. The owner explained how the idea came to him after the loss of his uncle:

I would often visit his grave, consulting with him in my mind whenever I had issues concerning my business. I wondered how comforting it would be if he could talk to me at his grave, with messages like “How are you doing?” or “Hang in there” (Billingham, 2016: Blog - ‘Death goes digital’).

How successful this venture will be remains to be seen. However, it re-affirms the common need for a continuing relationship with the deceased.

### 3.3.2 Memorial tattoos

Memorial tattoos today are treated as a particularly personalised and permanent form of memorialisation. However, they are not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to ancient Egypt. Memorial tattoos have become increasingly popular amongst the bereaved, whether it is to remember loved ones or to commemorate those who perished but were unknown to them. Catastrophic events and natural disasters, including 9/11, Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina or the Boston Marathon bombing, have presented opportunities for individuals to recount and share their unique stories of grieving and loss through tattoos. As Slotnick (2013) suggests, people often get memorial tattoos ‘to maintain control, to honour, to remember and perhaps to endure the physical pain in an effort to permanently etch the emotion of grief into the psyche of the tattoo recipient’ (p.3). Many of those who have a memorial tattoo explain that they feel closer to the deceased, that the deceased is always with them and they will not be forgotten Slotnick (2013). In some cases, the ashes of the deceased are incorporated into the tattoos (<http://bubblegumink.com/tattooing-ashes-into-clients>). Children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors have been known to get memorial tattoos with their grandparents’ concentration camp number (Rudoren, 2012). When asked why they got the tattoo, most participants highlighted the desire to be ‘intimately, eternally bonded to their survivor relative’ as well as to live with the mantra “Never forget” (Rudoren, 2012: 3). The permanency of memorial tattoos can be interpreted as marking a new relationship between the deceased and the bereaved, one defined through an integrated and continued embodiment. Salluce (2012) comments that the permanency of ink strengthens bonds and places no limit on mourning.

## 4 Memorialising Processes

Four major themes, themselves interconnected, run across discussions of the process of memorialisation and memorialising practices: *identity; relationships; ritual; and secularisation*. Further, the afore-going review of memorials for mass deaths and online memorials demonstrates how closely memorial forms are tied into emerging behaviours and rituals in contemporary memorialisation. Aside from these examples, of note is the fact that, although quite extensive, analysis of memorialising processes is largely focused on the funeral and events surrounding the death rather than *ongoing* behaviours and practices. An exception to this is the ongoing treatment of the ashes. Clearly, however, the funeral and choices about the disposal of the body mark the establishment of memorial objects and sites and the laying down of memories – all of which are integral to ongoing

memorialising. Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests an increasing conflation of the rites and rituals in the aftermath of death; for example, it is not uncommon for a brief funeral service attended by close family only to be followed on the same day by a memorial service for wider friends and community.

## 4.1 Identity

Possibly the pre-eminent theme running through the literature is representation of the identity of the deceased – as an individual and a social actor - in relation to their cultural belonging. Starting with the importance of the funeral for the bereaved being both what the deceased would have wanted, and the bereaved wanting to convey the essence of the person (Holloway et al, 2013), the ongoing process of memorialisation is closely tied up with preserving these several identities.

### 4.1.1 Individual identity and personalisation

Walter (2006) suggests that the stories we tell after someone has died serve to bridge the gap between the living and the dead. These stories are told in a range of settings – public and private – and are often linked to various kinds of memorials – such as obituaries and funeral eulogies as well as spiritual meetings and conversations with family and friends. Walter (2006) explores the ways in which mourners make sense of, and incorporate, public or official tales into their own accounts of the deceased's life (and death). However, he warns that the ease or difficulty of identity reconstruction and mourning is impacted by the degrees of harmony or dissonance between the public and private narratives surrounding the individual. Hallam *et al* (1999) describe how aspects of personal identity are 'gathered, sifted and recast' (p.5) during the memorialisation process. In a society which prioritises biographical consistency, any gaps or silences in personal biography are heightened and deemed disturbing. This is particularly pronounced in death – both immediately upon death and during subsequent eulogies and reminiscence via 'anecdotes, clothing and memorabilia' (Hallam *et al*, 1999:5).

According to Caswell (2011a), the eulogy is always necessarily incomplete because it relies on the memories of the bereaved and the limited amount of information that they know and interpret and wish others to know and make judgments about that person and their life. If negative aspects are highlighted, then they have to be carefully framed. At the heart of the eulogy is the recollection and understanding of personal biography – both the life stories of the deceased and the ways in which they intersect with the biographies of the bereaved. As such, the eulogy is often described as the 'final chapter' in someone's life, and this chapter continues to evolve after death via the continued gatherings and conversations of those who are left behind, during their recollections of the dead. Each family member will have different experiences of life with the deceased and will therefore have a different interpretation of their life and personal identity. As a result, multiple biographies are created, each of which will change over time as memories are negotiated and reconstituted, where no one moment can encapsulate the life (Caswell, 2011a).

Hallam and Hockey (2001) found that the increasing diversity of memorials was an attempt to express the varying identities and personal preferences of the deceased and included objects that were treasured by the deceased in life, or gifts that were perceived to be what the deceased would have wanted. The inscribed name on the gravestone is a primary marker of individual personhood and,

according to the authors, other words are also important in declaring the main characteristics of the memorial subject and their social bonds. Clayden and Dixon (2007) describe the choice of memorial trees as particularly important for embodying identity in terms of conveying to the bereaved characteristics of or associations with the deceased. Objects in home memorials may be considered to represent the deceased's intimate self (Wotjtkowiak and Venbrux 2010) whilst artefacts found at roadside memorials also express aspects of a broader conceptualisation of identity (Reid and Reid 2001).

In linking memorials to the shifting practices of funerals in contemporary society, Holloway (2007: 161) notes that 'memorials show a marked trend towards personalisation'. Personalisation, according to the funeral professionals interviewed as part of Caswell's (2011a) study, translated into flower arrangements, coffin design and decoration, choice of music, poems, eulogies and photographs. Holloway et al (2013) found in their UK study that funeral directors saw their role as facilitating families' choices, but, according to Schäfer (2007), in his examination of European post-mortem practices in New Zealand, funeral directors dictate the boundaries of appropriate funeral behaviour. As such, Schafer shows how Foucault's concept of 'pastoral power' is central to the rise of personalisation, existing alongside, and often interpreted through, the lens of increased democracy, begging the question: how much choice do the bereaved really have? Caswell (2011a:) argues that this process of personalisation is problematic, because funeral professionals have different definitions and understandings of personalisation (planned by the deceased before their death, planned by the family, planned by funeral director etc.). However, Caswell remarks that mourners have become increasingly vocal about their needs and requirements, forcing funeral directors to expand the current funeral options available. This has resulted in greater autonomy and choice and a request for increasingly personalised services.

Hallam and Hockey (2001) examine the ways in which personal identity is expressed through the choice, form, function and placement of the memorial. The authors focus on how memorials and other objects associated with the deceased – the material markers of the dead body (relics, *memento mori*) – blur the line between 'object' and 'subject', invoking memories and emotional responses and thus enabling the expression of grief and social identity. These items (memorials) include private keepsakes, such as items left behind by the deceased (clothing, diaries etc.), and objects created from appendages of the deceased (jewellery made with locks of hair or ashes from cremation) as well as public markers, such as public plaques. The authors note that written forms of grief – such as the writing and sending of condolence cards as well as the messages on small cards attached to wreaths – require further attention as markers of social as well as personal identity.

#### 4.1.2 Social and cultural identities

In his seminal work, Fulton (1965) interpreted the memorial as both preserving yet also disrupting and altering social relationships and identities, in keeping with wider dialectical relations between life and death, individual and society. In keeping with this and coming from an anthropological perspective, Chesson (2001) shows how analysing mortuary rituals enables a better understanding of a range of individual and group identities. As signifiers of material culture, memorials are here shown to embody social memories as well as the renewing (and breaking) of social bonds.



In the British context, Howarth's 2007(a) article – 'Whatever happened to social class?' – can be interpreted as marking a turning point in death studies, moving away from ethnographic observations of death studies culture towards an examination and interrogation of the scholar's own position, and interpretation, of the social norms and markers that underpin memorialisation practice. Howarth makes an important plea to UK sociologists to consider working-class experiences and histories of death, claiming that death studies scholars have tended to ignore working class experiences in favour of prioritising middle class experiences, a bias Howarth attributes to the largely class-privileged interests and backgrounds of death studies scholars themselves. She argues: '...although gendered and ethnic differences are acknowledged and respected, the ritual and emotional experiences of working-class communities tend to be relegated to a lower division'. Elsewhere, Howarth (2007b) provides a useful summary of the impact of cultural trends on the development of the funeral industry, showing how memorial practices will differ according to whether a cremation or burial has taken place, and that memorial forms and functions will be shaped by migration patterns, cultural traditions and other social characteristics – such as class, gender, ethnicity and age.

Critiquing the notion of death as the 'great leveller', Field et al (1997) highlight the ways in which social identity is revealed rather than transcended during death, in order to emphasise the persistence of social inequalities at the end of life. Focusing on death and the dying phase, the authors demonstrate the impact of social standing and demographics – such as age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and social class - on the timing, place, manner and social implications of an individual's death, and the resultant effect on the responses and experiences of the bereaved. As such, the authors argue, social identity at death is both constituted and constitutive of difference and diversity. They claim that death, dying and bereavement are shaped by a person's social identity and key markers – such as gender and ethnicity – and that a person's death mirrors their social position in society. As a result, social differentiation is produced by, 'the ways we live our lives and encounter our deaths' (p.1) and the processes and implications of death and dying are constituted by, and constitutive of, social identity.

Following this theme, in her study of Scottish funeral practices, Caswell (2011a) highlights the complex processes which underpin a personalised funeral, claiming that it needs to be understood as a relational concept which is part of a wider social process rather than understood in isolation. Drawing on the notion of the 'sociology of personal life' (Smart 2007), Caswell presents a challenge to previous work around funerals and memorialisation, which interprets personalised funerals as symptomatic of post-modernity and the epitome of individual selfhood and autonomous expression, to instead highlight its social function and wider social context. She argues that an important function of the funeral and subsequent memorial is to demonstrate the social identity, including social status, of the deceased. By turns, the social identity of the deceased and bereaved is a significant influencer of memorialising behaviours and practices.

#### **4.1.3 Multiple and contested identities**

Walter (1994) theorises that contemporary approaches to 'post-modern death' can be understood via the concept of plural identities. Whilst they acknowledge that the deceased have social agency, Hockey *et al* (2005) nonetheless argue that disembodied social identities are, by their very nature, precarious and therefore easily contested. This is because the dying or dead body represents a transitional body between life and death. It acts as a vessel for shifting social identities and cultural

trends and can sometimes represent a site of contested identity, belief or practice. In earlier work, Hallam and Hockey (2001) touch on the notion of contested identity in their exploration of contested sites of memory, in which they note the unreliability of memory and the privileging of certain memories over others. This poses the problem of how connections between the 'real' and the 'remembered' are sustained 'in the maintenance of self and identity' (p.25). However, Bailey and Walter (2016) draw on data from a Mass Observation directive, which centred on the experiences of funeral attendees, to show that the most important aspect of the eulogy was its authenticity, namely the personal knowledge that the speaker had of the deceased.

Contested identity may emerge in tragic or stigmatised deaths such as murder, traffic accident, suicide, AIDS-related illness, or a drug overdose, where the public narrative depicts a person and lifestyle which bereaved family members do not recognise (Guy and Holloway, 2007). Martin (2010), drawing on ethnographic research with parents whose children were murdered or killed in an accident, also talks of 'a series of narrative occasions' (p. 36) whereby various and sometimes competing accounts and claims about the victims are made by officials, friends and neighbours, all of which may be at variance with the identity of the person remembered by the family. In some instances these families may also experience disenfranchised grief and in cases where the victim's lifestyle or identity deviated from conventional norms or expectations, Martin explains that, 'families must selectively and creatively restock his or her narrative identity with sanctifying stories if that identity is to be publicly acceptable – and privately, a source of comfort' (Martin, 2010: 37).

#### 4.1.4 Migration

A historic theme re-asserting itself in contemporary scholarship is the impact of migration and diaspora on identity and memorialisation. In her participant-observation study at a multicultural Swedish cemetery, Reimers (1999) examined migrant funerals to highlight how funerals and graveyards can be read as symbolic actions for the construction of ethnic and cultural identity. The study involved the observation of 19 migrant funerals (10 different migrant groups) and compared the funerary rituals of migrant families with those of resident Swedish families. Reimers describes how the graves lie side-by-side in the cemetery and are almost identical save for the different religious symbols and different languages that are engraved onto the headstones. The contrast with an otherwise segregated Swedish society is clear and Reimers highlights this evidence of growing multiculturalism, ethnic diversity and equality in contemporary Sweden. As such, whilst Reimers interprets the cemetery as reflective of wider societal norms and markers, she also reveals the ways in which it functions as a site of defiance and disruption to prevailing norms and customs. Identity is enforced and formed as a result of this resistance:

In a situation of migration, the larger society offers little or no affirmation of migrants' traditional values, norms and status systems. It is plausible that many immigrant groups experience the dominant culture as a threat to their own heritage and traditions. The death of a person in the collective accentuates this lack of affirmation. In the context of migration, a funerary ritual therefore offers an opportunity to enhance an identity and an origin that is under pressure from the surrounding culture (Reimers, 1999: 149).

The migrants discussed in Reimers' study used funerary rituals in order to emphasise aspects of ethnic and cultural identity, both at an individual and collective level. There were instances where they might be torn between preserving traditional rituals associated with their homelands, on the one hand, and, on the other, assimilating new customs and rituals associated with their new home in Sweden. Reimers claims that rituals bridge the gap between the past and present and therefore serve to work against the potential erasure of individual and collective identity that may come with each death.

Jonker (1997) explores the function of memory after migration and, in particular, how memory structures the migrant's response to loss and burial in a new environment. Jonker discusses the ways in which, when a person dies, the bereaved 'stitch' together memories of a shared past and that, after migration, this past is, 'an ever-present reality which is continually being produced' (p. 197) to reminisce, express homesickness, and address the problems of the present. Whilst the author acknowledges that the process of remembering as linked to death and memorialisation is universal, the particular situation and impact of migration adds an entirely new dimension and set of circumstances to processes of remembrance: '...when one has left one's place of origin, memory of earlier losses and burials becomes a necessity. With its help a train of new dynamics is set in motion' (Jonker 1997: 200). Drawing on research conducted in 1994-5 into the experiences of members of Greek and Turkish migrant communities in relation to dying, death and burial practices in Berlin, Jonker also found that the men surveyed were more likely to opt for the role of cultural protector whilst women were, according to Jonker, more likely to be transmitters of cultural values.

## 4.2 Relationships

The relationships which the deceased had in life and which the bereaved continue to maintain with their loved one after death feature strongly in the literature.

### 4.2.1 Continuing social presence

Hockey et al (2005) argue that social identity is always relational and inevitably incomplete. In their exploration of the relationship between death and social identity, Hallam et al (1999) take issue with the concept of embodied agency, arguing that identity and embodiment must be examined alongside disembodiment where (in death) bodily and social being are dislocated. The authors explore the ways in which the dead are interpreted as having a continual social presence, in terms of the feelings, dreams and apparitions that are sometimes experienced by the bereaved, as well as the ways in which the bereaved create social memories and experience social destabilisation as a result of enduring loss and grief. Likewise, Caswell (2011a) draws on the notion of relationality to describe the social reality of an individual's life, which, she claims, is embedded in a network of relationships (past, present) with people who are dead or alive. Caswell goes on to argue that this provides the framework for which a funeral is organised and personalised.

Baglow (2007) focuses on the corpse as a social entity, a 'repository of meaning and value' (p.223), by virtue of its human-ness and connection to living human community. As a result, the corpse has obligations and rights which need to be honoured by the living. In addition, Baglow claims that the very fact that people are obliged by their culture and society to observe the rights and wishes of the deceased means that the deceased have agency and are not 'owned' by the living. Memorials are the

key medium of expression for both the continued functions of social presence and, by extension, social rights.

Klass et al's (1996) work on continuing bonds highlights the continued social presence and influence of the dead in the lives of the living. This seminal work has shown that social contact is maintained even in the absence of a body. Seale (1998) also considers the ways in which contemporary society continues social bonds even after the event of death. Using the term 'resurrective practice', Seale argues that death permeates every aspect of everyday life and is therefore central to any examination of cultural life and social embodiment. As placeholders of identity, the memorial becomes the vessel and mechanism through which continuing social bonds are enacted, permanently imprinting the identity, personality and experiences of the deceased onto the social fabric and collective memory of the living. Hallam et al (1999) point out that social identity is not lost in the moments after death but instead, 'continues as a site for meaningful relationships between the living and the dead' (p.126). Holloway (2007) argues that this creates a form of immortality for the dead whilst also serving to recalibrate relationships with the living. Seale (1998) refers to this as 'the monument' of the self (p.64).

#### 4.2.2 Continuing emotional and spiritual bonds

Holloway (2007) argues that memorials combine a 'focus for social transition' with a 'psychological and spiritual link between the living and the dead' (p.161). Memorials therefore function to both facilitate mourning and strengthen connections between the living and the deceased (Walsh-Burke, 2006). In their study of spirituality in contemporary funerals, Holloway et al (2013) identified the theme of continuation as integral to the process of memorialisation. Connection with the deceased was experienced for the bereaved through: a continuing sense of their physical presence; reassurance of their continuing role as protector; memories and love which did not die; and the legacy of their life.

Hallam *et al* (1999) suggest that, post-death, and via processes of memorialisation, material objects associated with the deceased can become embodied, taking on a life of their own: 'clothing and significant sounds, sights and smells associated with the former partner begin to assume powerful, new resonances' (Hallam *et al.*, 1999: 16). Funeral professionals entrusted with caring for the body, 'strive to re-humanise the corpse and to create an image of conscious embodiment' (Hallam *et al*, 1999:126). The result is a dead body which resembles the living body as remembered by the bereaved, made to represent the living identity it once contained. As such, 'the memory picture' which is created, enables continued meaningful contact with the living. Howarth (1996) argues that rather than witnessing a 'restoration' of identity, mourners viewing the body of the deceased participate in the 'reconstruction' of that identity. In her later work, Howarth (2007) explores this theme in relation to the precariousness of the boundaries between life and death, self and other, and the consequences for human relationships.

Hockey *et al* (2005) also explore the theme of connection and continuing bonds, suggesting that key to this is the preservation of body-based objects and practices generated by or representing the deceased, and the subsequent memories that are evoked. Viewing the body and tending to memorials are central to this process, requiring a consideration of the ways in which materials are used, what functions they serve and, most importantly, the ways in which they invoke identity and social existence. An example of this is the photograph, which 'permits the recovery of the dead as favourably

remembered in life' (Hockey, 2005: 51), both via flattering images displayed in the home and images used for the obituary or service sheet, which represent the deceased via markers of social identity.

There is considerable overlap between discussions of the social agency of the deceased and the emotional and spiritual connections generated by preserving these markers of social identity. Harper (2010), in her ethnographic comparative study of viewing practices of the deceased in the UK and US, looks at the ways in which mourners ascribe meaning and value to the physical remains of the deceased. Drawing on Gell's (1998) theory of agency, which claims that agency arises from key relationships, Harper applies this theory of agency to the relationships that develop between the living and the dead, from the final moments of death until the memorialisation processes that occur after disposal. In this way, human remains themselves become a form of memorial, representing a multiple meanings to different people at various points in time (Harper, 2010: 309). The dead body is thus imbued with 'traits, characteristics and meaning' (p. 311) which are reinforced through Western mortuary and memorial rituals (Harper, 2010). Holloway et al (2013) discuss the 'social space' occupied by the deceased between death and the funeral, arguing that:

...the 'deceased' occupied this space in ways which were quite different from either their preceding status as a dying person (Valentine, 2007) or their subsequent status as 'lost loved one' (p.43).

In this study of contemporary funerals, the deceased is represented as one of the actors who come together to stage the funeral, exercising considerable influence on the shape of the funeral and establishing the nature of the continuing bonds felt by the bereaved.

#### 4.2.3 Grief

Through the maintenance of continuing bonds, memorials are also seen to facilitate emotion. Many authors referred to the phenomenon whereby the bereaved turn to memorials in order to communicate with deceased loved ones (Wotjkowiak and Venbrux, 2010; Clark and Franxmann, 2006; Francis *et al*, 2004) and, in the case of virtual memorials, in which they write messages to them (De Vries and Rutherford, 2004). The messages may tell the deceased how much they miss them but also update them with family news and ask for help for other family members (Roberts, 2004; Francis *et al*, 2000). Mourners may bring flowers, pebbles, personal possessions and food and drink to the graveside or shrine. They may tend a material memorial, say prayers and tell stories about the deceased to fellow mourners, especially younger family members, in order to create forward-memory (Francis *et al*, 2000). Thus, these behaviours sustain a lasting relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, who continue to participate in the social world through their influence (Klass, 1996). As such, memorials become charged with meaning and serve as vessels for an array of difficult and sometimes overwhelming emotions.

Howarth (2007) highlights how, in contrast to middle class 'nomads' who rely on verbal communication and an elaborate code of ritual in order to emphasise closeness, tight-knit working class communities do not need to rely on the same mechanisms. She points out that the alleged lack of verbal expression around working class responses to death has been misinterpreted by some death studies scholars as an indication of stoicism of the working classes. Howarth turns this assumption on

its head to show that, far from not experiencing ‘pure grief’, silence can instead be ‘the most potent form of grief’ (p. 430).

Claiming that insights into the ways in which people memorialise the deceased have been relatively slow to gather momentum, Woodthorpe (2011) combines, what she terms, the psychological bereavement model of adaptation with the social bereavement model of continuing bonds in order to better understand the memorialising behaviour of the bereaved. Drawing on an ethnographic study of contemporary memorialising activity in two London cemeteries, Woodthorpe found that memorials (both fixed and temporary) serve a number of purposes related to grief work: to mark the location of the deceased; to continue connections with the dead; to provide a focal point for visits; to honour the deceased; and, to enable communication between the living and between the living and the deceased. Woodthorpe’s study reveals that the meanings associated with memorialisation were highly contested with resulting friction, depending on whether staff and visitors at the cemetery viewed the memorial as a symbol for ‘moving on’ or whether they viewed the memorial as a marker of an ongoing bond with the deceased – and whether one or other model was viewed as evidence of complicated grief or expression of caring. Woodthorpe suggests a balance between memorialising ‘too much’ and ‘not enough’ to accommodate surveillance within the public space of the cemetery and concludes that there is a need for clear guidance about memorialisation in public settings, which takes into account multiple experiences of grieving and subsequent engagement with memorialisation practices. Other issues which interrupt or exacerbate grief revolve around a lack of respect regarding memorialisation altogether – such as the theft of memorial items (e.g. artificial flowers) left at the grave, vandalism (particularly of the headstone), rubbish left at the site and general messiness of the grounds (Naylor 1989, 327).

Gamino *et al* (2000) examined the grief of 74 mourners via the Grief Experience Inventory (GEI) to ascertain the impact that engaging with funeral services had on the grieving process. The study revealed that those who found the funeral ‘comforting’, or who participated in the planning of the funeral, reported less grief misery later. As such, the study builds on the work of Bolton and Camp (1986-7, 1989) to quantify Doka’s (1984; 1985) theory that funeral participation may aid the grieving process. The author takes aim at a previous study – by Fashingbauer (1981) – which failed to take into account factors affecting non-attendance, such as a problematic relationship with the deceased or the mourner’s social isolation (Rando, 1993), which may serve to exacerbate grief.

In the case of tragic deaths – such as suicide– continuing bonds become a crucial part of the grieving process for the bereaved and research has shown how the use of online memorials in particular (including both standalone memorial pages and the social media pages of the deceased) serve as important vehicles of expression, enabling the bereaved to still feel connected with the deceased whilst simultaneously forming supportive relations with others who are bereaved (Maple *et al*, 2012; Bailey *et al*, 2014; Bell *et al* 2015). In a society where suicide is still stigmatised, those bereaved by a suicide often experience disenfranchised grief, and may feel isolated, shunned and forgotten. The Internet, and its facilitation of continuing bonds, therefore enables a socially condoned way to honour and memorialise the deceased’s life (Bell *et al*, 2015).

Other factors associated with the funeral and memorial may exacerbate grief and cause conflict between mourners. Gamino *et al* (2000) point out that not all funerals proceed smoothly. The authors

highlight adverse events which have occurred during funerals, which can be summarised as: conflicts among the bereaved, discrepancies between the wishes of the deceased and the preferences of the bereaved, and problems involving funeral professionals (in terms of service, treatment of the body etc). Conflicts among mourners often result from pre-existing unresolved disputes or competing family allegiances and the authors refer to, 'blatant interpersonal strife ... supercharged by the intense emotions of acute grief' (85). Where conflict occurs or where funeral participation is not possible, the authors encourage mourners to enact their own bereavement rituals.

Sofka (2004) also focuses on conflict amongst mourners. Charting the influence of psychological, physiological and social factors on the processes of grief and mourning, the author explores how the quality of the relationship with the deceased and the social role of the deceased impact on the grieving process of the bereaved. Drawing on Rando's (1993) notion of the 'death surround', Sofka (2004) draws attention to how the varying degrees of involvement by mourners regarding the preparations of the deceased impacts on the grieving process and how the educational, economic and occupational status of the main players involved in the funeral and memorial process influence subsequent interactions, communication and grief behaviours. Although intended as a practical guide for managing grief and resolving conflict, the article highlights the impact of identity and demographic difference on memorial selection and engagement and the roles, relationships and behaviours therein.

Parsons (2003) highlights the ways in which funeral directors can become the focus of anger expressed by the bereaved, focusing on the economic environment of funerals and the notion of profiting through loss as linked to three factors: the monopoly on service provision; the "hidden" aspect of funeral costs; and the nature of the purchase as well as the contractual relationship between the funeral director and client, and resulting levels of control over the funeral service. Parsons also highlights the ways in which the funeral director can serve as a mediator between the bereaved and other third parties (other members of the congregation etc.) during the funeral itself.

### **4.3 Ritual**

Gorer's 1965 seminal text on 'Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain' represents one of the first explorations of the role that rituals play in bereavement and memorialisation processes. Gorer charted (what he saw as) the reduction of ritual usage in death practices which he linked to a decline in religious affiliation and belief. For Gorer, ritual usage was synonymous with post-death support and he called for a re-assertion of rituals around death. Other British and American scholars also detailed the increasing de-ritualisation of funerary and mortuary practices during the twentieth century (Mitford, 1963; Fulton and Bendiksen, 1965; Palfi and Abramovitch, 1984; Kameron, 1988).

#### **4.3.1 Re-affirmation of ritual**

Naylor's 1989 PhD thesis enquired into British death rituals in an urban setting. Naylor presented empirical evidence to show plentiful use of ritual, claiming that, in his study, the bereaved and funeral directors clung to long-established funeral rituals even more than the clergy. Naylor also argued that unexpected deaths are furnished with greater ritual than those where death is anticipated. From the same period, Martins (1983) claimed that de-ritualisation, where it existed, was linked to secularism and the increasing modernisation of the church which had led to the absence of a single national tradition. Clark's 1982 study examined ritual use and rites of passage in the context of Staithes, a small

village in Yorkshire, and found evidence of heterogeneous rituals and memorials which he linked to the expansion of individual choice and the continual relevance that rituals and rites of passage have in everyday life. Clark divided rituals into pre-, during- and post-funeral rites with the latter (most closely tied in with memorialisation) found to be most effective in coming to terms with loss (Clark, 1982; Clark, Bolton and Camp, 1987). Kamerman (1988) claimed that the growth of memorial societies and the increasing rationalisation (and predictability) of funerals is evidence of what Fulton originally termed the 'deritualization of mourning' (Fulton and Bendiksen, 1965). However, he remained ambivalent about whether the advent of new funerary and memorial practices would marginalise or indeed replace traditional rituals altogether.

Recent studies confirm a continuing and growing use of ritual. An American study (Collier, 2003), analysing burial patterns and trends from the early modern to contemporary period, revealed an increase in individualised markers and symbols on gravestones and a decrease in affiliation to social institutions within American burial practice. However, the authors concluded that alongside the growth of individualisation within burial practice exists the continued observation of past customs and traditions – a pattern observed across other industrialised nations. In a British context, Holloway (2007) also notes the co-existence of traditional forms of memorial alongside an increasing diversity of contemporary memorial practice before going on to highlight the fact that secularised societies show an enduring need for shared ritual and symbolism in addition to personalisation. In her study of contemporary cremation and related practices in Belgium, Vandendorpe (2000) asserts that contemporary practices incorporate as many symbols and rituals as before, with new forms and meanings generated. In keeping with Walter (1996), Vandendorpe argues that criticisms of modern practices are rooted in imaginary views of the past. As such, new rituals exist alongside old, both of which combine and interact, leading to changes both in form and purpose. In fact, the literature identifies a number of ways in which ritual functions in memorialisation which point to the reasons why it remains significant in contemporary society. Behaviours around the memorial include a variety of rituals connected with visiting a memorial site and connecting with memorial objects. Adamson and Holloway (2013) conclude that the funeral ritual is itself a 'symbolic act which must be performed in a particular way, with events in a particular order and accompanied by particular words' (p.151). They categorise the symbols used by families in their study as: symbols of personal identity; symbolic behaviours expressing feelings for the deceased; symbols which mark the 'passing on' as well as those which represent continuing existence; and finally, those which symbolise life and death itself, including religious or quasi-religious symbols and metaphors.

#### **4.3.2 Transition from life to death**

Memorials commemorate a life lived, and signal its death, serving as an important focus for understanding the social transition from life to death. Memorials can be interpreted as markers of this ritualised process. Van Gennep, in his seminal work on 'Rites of Passage' (1960), examines the use of rituals in marking the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood via initiations around tribal/social belonging. According to Van Gennep, rites of passage have three phases – separation, transition and reincorporation. The first phase – which is here termed the 'preliminal rite' – is marked by the detachment of the individual from a former self and social grouping. The second phase – the 'liminal rite' – denotes the period of existing between states, whereby the individual leaves one place



but has not yet joined the next phase. The final 'post-liminal' phase marks the completion of the rite and the subsequent re-absorption of the new self into society. Scholars of death and bereavement have drawn on Van Gennep's model as a means of theorising the significance of the funeral (and, by extension, memorial) for enabling the rite of passage from life to death. Both the deceased and the bereaved can be read as passing through each stage – the former in terms of a metaphysical passing and the latter group in terms of a psychosocial metamorphosis.

Following on from Hertz's (1960) interpretation of mortuary rituals as a means of disposing the corpse, releasing the soul, and enabling social re-integration, Kamerman (1988) explores how changes to the form and functions of funerals can be linked to shifting trends within American culture – most notably, decreased mortality rates and a consequent decrease in religious faith, rituals and preparedness. Interestingly, however, Kastenbaum (2004) argues that contemporary mourners still perform rituals to appease the dead, and that this is in keeping with the need to connect to our ancestors who performed rituals both to affirm communal bonds and to secure the goodwill of resident deities. As such, according to Kastenbaum, mourners continue to be motivated by love, but also fear, to look after the dead. Holloway et al (2013) noted the overriding influence in planning the funeral being bereaved families' desire to hold a ceremony which would be in keeping with the wishes of the deceased and where specific elements would actively 'please' them (p.43).

#### 4.3.3 Accommodating loss

According to Ramshaw (2010), rituals function to confront people with the reality of death and to draw out grief emotion. Holloway et al (2013) similarly observed that ritual is an important element of the funeral and claim that it helps to imbue the death with meaning for the community, the family and the individual, thereby assisting in making sense of, and coming to terms with, the loss. Austin (1976) highlights the ways in which rituals serve as performative actions of identity and belonging. In a similar vein, Myerhoff (1984) builds on the notion of rituals as a means of uniting the bereaved. According to Wouters (2002), the follow-on effect of experiencing kinship, is the acknowledgement and regulation of emotions that grief evokes. Davies (2002) suggests the ways in which funerary rites ensure community connectedness, enhancing self-awareness and identity as well as benefiting society. The author highlights the power of words as a framework for understanding death – this includes words used during the funeral service (such as songs, poems and scriptural passages) as well as newspaper tributes and even séances and medical certificates, all of which help to explain death to enable the bereaved to accept and come to terms with it.

Howarth's (2007b) discussion of mortuary rituals highlights how they serve two functions: a personal function to help the individual come to terms with loss and a social function, which considers the social impact of death in its wider context. 'All these rituals can be perceived as strategies for the symbolic transformation of death from an event that creates disorder to one that reinforces social structures and personal meaning systems' (p. 234).

#### 4.3.4 Socio-cultural affirmation

The notion of the use of ritual practices to regularise social situations is not new, and rituals are employed to mark significant life transitions or rites of passage, which are often intensely embodied – such as birth, marriage and death – with subsequent social journeys and shifts in identity. Added to

this, Cook and Walter (2005) describe the growth in ‘innovative rites of passage’ (p. 366) to mark new life stage events, such as divorce, career change, house moves, and baby naming. Reimers (1999: 164) interprets gravestones as rituals ‘in the sense that they assert the value of an identity that belonged to the deceased, an identity that the successors still cherish’ (p.164). Rituals maintain and contribute to identity construction at both individual and at group levels. Moreover, rituals serve to anchor the deceased and the bereaved in a particular value system. Rituals therefore serve three functions: to show respect for the deceased; to support the bereaved; and, to preserve the identity of both deceased and bereaved (Reimers, 1999). However, Howarth (2007b) points out that rituals are also dynamic, in keeping with the shifting patterns and trends of wider society so that increasing cultural diversification is reflected in increasingly diverse (and numerous) rituals surrounding death, including the retention and/or modification of traditional practice, along with the creation of new rituals and the discarding of others. Parsons (1999) earlier highlighted how an increasingly diverse society – in terms of culture, religion and lifestyle – had forced the funeral industry to be more flexible and client-focused in response to new markets and interests, catering for a broad spectrum of society – Afro-Caribbean, LGBT, Hindu, Muslim-centred funerals with corresponding personalised memorials.

Studies of specific groups show how rituals vary according to culture and religion and even regional, national, ethnic differences within each, and may signal cultural blending of identity as a result of social movement, migration and diaspora. Kalsi’s (1996) examination of the funeral rituals of Sikh communities living in Britain demonstrates the impact of the Sikh reform movement and migration on traditional funeral rituals, linking the behaviours of participants, and their engagement with funeral rituals, with hierarchies of power which emphasise social status, caste, religion and differing gender roles. Grief counsellors, Collins and Doolittle (2006), urge professionals to cultivate culturally competent practice, illustrating with a case study of the rituals used by an African American family in rural Kentucky. Whilst the authors note that a range of subcultures, cultural and religious beliefs exist within African American culture, they nonetheless claim that one’s culture may dictate certain customs used, and that meaning-making can inform and be informed by spiritual practice to demonstrate the worth of the deceased, and facilitate their crossing over into the ‘next life’. Francis *et al* (2000) identified differences in visiting behaviours by mourners at the graves of people from different religions, e.g. Orthodox Jews and Greek Orthodox and in popular custom, e.g. Christmas, Mother’s or Father’s Day, birthdays. Mourners may visit out of duty or religious requirement (Francis *et al*, 2000; Collins and Rhine, 2003; Roberts, 2004).

#### 4.3.5 Permanence versus impermanence

The theme of permanence versus impermanence runs across contemporary memorialisation. Miller and Parrott (2007) highlight the double-sidedness of permanence in terms of serving both as a reminder of the continuing presence of the deceased, yet simultaneously existing as hard evidence of the permanence of death. As Webster-Goodwin (2007) notes: ‘...the very permanence of the object works both as an enduring monument and persistent reminder of loss’ (p.135). However, Miller and Parrott (2007) suggest that the temporary nature of some material objects belonging to the deceased (such as clothing which degrades) and relative permanence of others (such as jewellery) facilitates both detachment and continuing bonds.

Webster-Goodwin (2007) highlights the symbolism of tombstones – the way they mime the hardness of bones and how they embody the duality of stabilising the site of death whilst simultaneously destabilising the passing of the body from life. In their case study of the use of photographs, Miller and Parrott (2007) highlight how one participant, Mary, took photographs of her father’s funeral and then sent the images to family and friends in the UK and Nigeria, ‘as a portable and appropriate form of transmittable memory’ (p.151). The photographs used for the hymn sheet showed both the elderly father (on the front) and the father first arriving in England years previously (on the back) in order to highlight different aspects of his life. Both Mary and another participant, Beryl, used a more desirable image of the deceased, prior to illness, which became the main focus of the domestic shrine and which was shared with relatives. Other participants accumulated additional photographs after a relative’s death, which, as Miller and Parrott point out, counters the notion of people divesting themselves of objects after a death. This accumulation further builds identity and maintains connection.

#### 4.3.6 Private and informal

Wouters (2002) claims that, since the 1960s and 70s, mourning has become more privatised and individual, and less of a formalised social obligation. According to the author, this mirrors a wider shift from a ‘we’ culture towards an ‘I’ culture. However, the author also notes that, since the 1980s, there has been a move towards ‘re-formalization,’ which has emphasised the ‘we’ ideals and the corresponding need for ritual. This, in turn, has led to the creation of new, and more informal, rituals. Wouters also notes the rising need for more opportunities for the public recognition of personal mourning, claiming that, via these rituals, participants are seeking to assert membership of a larger symbolic or ‘imagined’ community’ (Wouters, 2002: 2). As such, these rituals enable participants to feel more connected to a larger symbolic community which, according to Wouters, theoretically at least, serves to build solidarity and, in so doing, potentially erase hierarchical differences. Likewise, Howarth (2007b) points out that whilst some rituals are public, others are private, and others still may be a combination of private and public.

Building on the work of Hallam and Hockey (2001), Miller and Parrott (2007) show how domestic settings enable more private and individually meaningful forms of ritual. Drawing on an ethnographic study of households in South London, Miller and Parrott (2007) show how informal domestic rituals can exist alongside more formalised rituals, arguing that these informal rituals re-interpret formal rituals. Holloway et al (2013) likewise refer to the ‘patterning of informality’. Miller and Parrott (2007) describe the ways in which contemporary rituals incorporate the objects left behind by the dead (photographs, clothes and jewellery), suggesting that the temporary nature of some (such as clothing which degrades) and relative permanence of others (such as jewellery) facilitates both detachment and continuing bonds ‘Material objects play an important role in the way people reject the arbitrary, episodic nature of death’ (Miller and Parrott 2007: 148). The use of clothes as memorial objects evokes other senses aside from the visual, such as smell and touch, which serve to conjure up the deceased person (Layne, 2000). There is a difference between intentionally reconstructed object worlds – where certain clothes are chosen to be kept – versus finding clothes unexpectedly (Hallam and Hockey, 2001). The wearing of the clothing of the deceased is a means of bringing them back into the land of the living, and assimilating the clothes into the wardrobe of the bereaved. Miller and Parrott (2007) found that it is mainly women who take on the role of organising family memory,

centring their grief around objects, but men focussed on memorialising through activities, such as annual ritualised informal get-togethers.

Gadberry (2000) cites an example of a 'celebratory "fun" funeral' in which mourners signed a coffin made of wood with felt-tip markers and then held a party reflecting on the good times shared with the deceased. In the same ceremony, in place of a eulogy, a storyteller recounted the life of the deceased with food and drink on offer beforehand. Gadberry comments that this example highlights the melding of traditional and non-traditional forms of memorial, which often precedes a practice (such as writing on caskets and celebratory 'fun' funerals) becoming normalised: 'Today's non-traditional becomes the next generation's traditions. As a result, the examples of deviant body dispositions...become that new tradition and thus non-deviant' (Gadberry, 2000:177). Summing up, both Vandendorpe (2000) and Holloway et al (2010) remind that representing the essence of the deceased (through music, readings, speeches and material reflections of hobbies and tastes) is at the core of these customised private rituals. Both these studies, the one in Belgium and the other in the UK, found authenticity to be critical: 'nothing is of any value if it does not respect the person's inner identity' (Vandendorpe 2000: 24); 'if the symbol chosen by the celebrant did not also have personalised meaning for the mourners, it did not operate as a social symbol because there was no consensus of meaning' (Holloway et al, 2013, p.39). The personality of the deceased can be further enacted by the mourners through, for example, the placement of the ash-remains, a process Davies (1990) describes as 'the retrospective fulfilment of identity' (p.31).

#### **4.4 Secularisation**

There are frequent references throughout the literature on the impact of secularisation on contemporary funerary and memorial practices. However, much of this relates to forms, symbols and rituals and rather than secularism per se as an alternative to religion. Despite extensive literature on the functions of the memorial as a repository of beliefs and practices, as maintaining a continuing connection between the bereaved and the deceased, as facilitating meaning and as markers of the essence of the person, there is little which looks at contemporary belief or the absence of belief and its impact on memorialisation. Ramshaw (2010) offers a typical amalgamation of these issues under the banner of postmodernism:

...increasing pluralism and secularism, the decline of tradition-bearing communities, the decreasing authority of traditional meta-narratives, the public/private split and the relegation of questions of meaning to the private sphere, and the growing values of individualism and consumer entitlement to choice (p.171).

##### **4.4.1 Secular ritual**

Cook and Walter (2005) highlight the impact of the growth of secular ceremonies on contemporary rituals, paying particular attention to semantic and linguistic changes on the basis that ritual relies on language. They compare a traditional Christian service with a contemporary religious service, and a contemporary secular service, highlighting the differences between traditional and contemporary forms of ritual. The authors claim that contemporary services are marked by the following factors: the reduced authority of the celebrant; increased personalisation; the use of euphemisms for death; less poetic language; and, what they term, 'diminished ritual movement' (Cook and Walter 2005: 365).

The latter refers to the lack of a procession or other such movement or action revolving around a mortuary ritual or object undertaken by participants. As such, the authors claim, more recent services are notably short of the ‘prescribed postures, proxemics, behaviours, attitudes, and trappings’ attributed to ritual (p. 377). In contrast, Holloway et al (2013) found that certain behaviours – for example, kissing or embracing the coffin, each mourner making a formal farewell as they leave the chapel, individually or in groups – are emerging as new rituals and commonly replicated, with older generations sometimes following the lead of younger mourners. Their study also found a tendency among non-religious celebrants to create their own liturgical forms and use a dramatic tone, notably at points such as the dismissal of the body or lowering of the coffin in a burial. Cook and Walter (2005) do, however, cite the influence of religious changes and multiculturalism on the form and function of what they term ‘transition rituals’, which have diversified as a result.

In earlier work, Walter (1996) considers how we can ritualise death in a society that is, ‘secular, individualistic, bureaucratic and where everything has a price’ (p.32). Claiming that the use of post-death rituals has become distilled into assisting with the grief process, and that humanist funerals highlight the personality of the deceased (via the memories of the living), rather than focusing on the dead person’s body and soul, Walter asks if this is enough to ‘provide a satisfying last farewell’ (p. 33). He weighs up the benefits of traditional, religious services, on the one hand, and increasingly personalised services on the other, arguing that religious rituals are multisensory, incorporating : ‘Candles, scents, music, processions, offerings’ (p.33), which can be more expressive than mere words. However, Walter bemoans ‘dead traditions’ and the ‘soul-less form-filling’ of bureaucracy.

In contrast to Walter, in a study of funeral practices in Newfoundland, Canada, Emke (2002) highlights the impact of secularisation and personalisation on ritualization but concludes that, rather than creating a process of de-ritualisation, post-modernity instead changes the forms and processes surrounding ritual usage. Drawing on interviews with funeral directors, the study found that funeral professionals now play an important role as the ‘protectors of ritual’ (Emke 2002: 278), partly as a response to increased secularisation. Whilst Howarth (1997) observes the loss of meaning as linked to the increased professionalism of deathwork, Emke instead argues that, ‘...it is a part of the professional mission of deathwork to infuse modern funeral rituals with meaning’ (p. 278). Emke’s conclusions are reinforced by Holloway et al’s 2010 UK study of spirituality in contemporary funerals, which traced how funeral directors saw their job as facilitating meaning, while celebrants felt they were involved in the co-creation of meaning with the bereaved families (Holloway et al, 2013). The forty-six funerals the researchers studied were indeed multi-sensory with music from mixed traditions playing a particularly prominent part across the spectrum of secular – religious funerals (Adamson and Holloway, 2012).

#### 4.4.2 Secular meaning-making

Hallam and Hockey (2001) examine the need to find alternative meaning in contemporary secularized society, where individuals and groups may believe that there is no independent existence after death, and death is therefore loaded with the threat of oblivion and erasure of individual identity. Even where there are religious or other beliefs in an afterlife, the modern emphasis on identity and individual meaning-making means that death management processes focus on the individual who has died (Giddens 1991). The bereaved invest considerable time and effort in planning and performing the

funeral service around the identity of the deceased and feel a need to integrate that identity into the memories of mourners (Holloway *et al* 2013). This may carry over into a need to create a more lasting memorial object on which to focus continuing memories of family and friends, and to mark the existence of the deceased more permanently in the wider community.

Central to the cultural shifts towards secularisation and individualisation has been the rise of the humanist funeral, which Holloway *et al* (2010), remark has grown in popularity since the 1980s as a reaction to the increasingly impersonal conduct of funeral services. Humanist services, with their emphasis on commemorating and celebrating the life of the deceased, have afforded families a more active role in the planning and delivery of the service. However, whilst funerals are becoming increasingly secular, Holloway *et al* (2010) have shown that there is still a demand for, ‘appropriate ceremony and choice of words. Something of the traditional ceremony appears to have endured, and we have to ask why?’(p.2), highlighting the continuing role played by religion and spirituality within contemporary society. This study examined the spiritual dimensions of contemporary funeral practices and, in particular, the meaning-making attached to the rite of the funeral itself as well as the personal beliefs and actions of its key players – family members, funeral directors and celebrants.

Caswell (2011b) discusses how individuals planning funerals employ a degree of self-reflexivity as part of the process whilst also making use of traditional mechanisms, such as the family and church. The author goes on to claim that self-reflexivity has become increasingly necessary in late modernity due to the decline of church, state and family to dictate choice. As such, the onus is on the person to take responsibility for the decisions surrounding their wishes and identity. Caswell builds on the work of Walter (1994) who discusses the reflexive decision-making that takes place both pre- and post- death, claiming that individual decisions always operate within a wider social setting that is informed both by the traditional and the post-modern – in what he terms a ‘neo-modern approach to death’(p.47).

Hallam *et al* (1999) note that in increasingly secularised societies, ‘the dead body has become ...the primary signifier of mortality and a key site at which the lost self of the deceased can be represented’ (p.126) In keeping with this, Holloway (2007) notes the ways in which memorials, as well as facilitating mourning, ‘become fixed for the bereaved as substitutes for the person who has died or the shared life which is lost’ (p.160). Alternatively, memorials and memorial services can be interpreted as serving to divert attention from the corpse (Cook and Walter 2005). As such, memorials are for the life lived and the relationship lost, and simultaneously offer a form of immortality for the deceased as well as a continuing link (social, psychological and spiritual) between the deceased and the bereaved (Holloway, 2007).

Following on from this, Ramshaw (2010) claims that the need for personalised ritual within funeral and memorial services (such as including hymns that the deceased would have liked in the service) reflects the increasing desire for a more celebratory and ‘upbeat’ tone, which serves to meet the emotional needs of the bereaved. The growing need for personalised post-mortem rituals is, Ramshaw asserts, symptomatic of the rise of postmodernity and typical of those who might describe themselves as ‘spiritual-but-not-religious’ and who question the use of communal rituals which they see as anti-individualist, restrictive and which do not speak to their personal experience. Thus, ‘meaningful’ becomes synonymous with the ‘personal’ and rituals are meaningful only so far as they are personally constructed and tailored to personal experience - an important finding also in Holloway

et al's (2013) study where mourners were unable to take meaning from symbols or rituals chosen by others unless resonating with their own experience. Ramshaw goes on to explain that when people are not part of a traditional community, collective rituals do not speak to them, so they turn to the private world to make sense of loss and to find meaning.

#### 4.4.3 Religion and spirituality

Whilst much has been written about the secularisation of death, less attention has been paid to the role of spirituality and the sacred in contemporary funeral rites. In their 2010 study of funerals in Hull, East Yorkshire, Holloway *et al* (2010) note the popularity of the secular, humanist service in recent years, but also highlight the increasing need for ritual and meaning, even among those who are not necessarily religious or spiritual. As such, this study confirms the earlier opinion of Reimers (1999) who states that even if individuals do not regard themselves as religious, they are still able to employ religious rites in meaningful ways because of the sense of belonging that religion, as a not necessarily verbal practice, can induce.

Broadening understandings of spirituality from religious belief systems, Holloway *et al* (2010) look at how meaning is sought, ascribed and expressed in contemporary society through the funeral, asking whether, and for whom, this can be deemed 'spiritual'. As part of this, the study explored the changing nature of belief in contemporary society as linked to rituals and practices, secularisation, postmodernity, meaning-making, identity, behaviour, roles and diversity. There was little evidence of adherence to formal belief systems but considerable evidence of people drawing on religious tradition (for example, requesting the Lord's Prayer in an otherwise non-religious funeral) to imbue the funeral with spiritual meaning, the funeral thus becoming a vehicle for spiritual experience (Holloway et al, 2013). The study also found that while overtly religious or spiritual content may not be intrinsic to the music or readings chosen by the bereaved, spiritual experience nevertheless resulted from the meanings and connections held with these elements by the bereaved (Adamson and Holloway, 2012).

The rise of humanist funerals and woodland burials has impacted on the ways in which the bereaved employ and interact with memorials. In the case of woodland burials – many of which do not allow material markers for the body – the bereaved may either find solace in the surrounding landscape, or may resort to other material objects (photographs or subtle grave markers – such as wild flowers) in order to mark-out memories for loved ones (Clayden and Dixon 2007). Moving away from traditional practices of remembrance, Wasserman (1998) shows how memorial landscapes serve as places of reflection and healing for communities, as necessitated through the relationship between art, landscape and architecture. Holloway et al (2013) suggest that this connection with the natural environment echoes the eco-spirituality of the indigenous peoples of North America and Australasia; their study also found humanist celebrants and bereaved individuals echoing this philosophy in their reflections on death.

## 5 Conclusion

This literature review traced the patterns and trends around the development of memorialisation, and its associated behaviours and social effects, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, covering themes such as the relationship between permanent and transitory memorials; public versus private rituals; secularisation; personalisation; changing social conventions; social identity, agency and relationships; continuing bonds; migration; and material culture. The literature review found a rich, but largely descriptive, documentation of contemporary memorial forms with a wide range of academic and grey literature and online sources. We have sought to categorise these and identify trends. There is, however, little examination of ongoing memorialising processes associated with these forms and most research focuses on the funeral and other events in the immediate aftermath of the death. The findings show that in our contemporary society there is an increase in personalising both memorialising processes and forms. Traditional forms of memorials such as the cemetery and gravestone, war memorials or public memorials have not necessarily lost their prominence, instead they are often used in combination with newer and emerging forms or personal rituals. Spontaneous memorials, ghost bikes and roadside memorials represent contemporary established forms of memorials which are often associated with unexpected or tragic death and which, in many cases, combine emotional, practical and moral messages: the identity of the deceased is presented as that of a loved one, but also as a victim of a tragic death in a wider context. The established forms of memorials communicate personal messages of grief, with often very unique and personalised memorials, together with more practical messages and warning signs. These public and transient spaces become places of private emotions and memorialisation, emphasising the continuing bond between the deceased and the bereaved. They represent a combination of old and new rituals which are packed with meaning for the bereaved but also for the community as a whole. Memorialisation in the wake of mass and several deaths arising from tragic or violent circumstance is a growing feature of the twenty-first century, which combines personal, public, spontaneous, planned, formal and informal elements. Emerging forms of memorials and memorialising practices in the twenty-first century extend the connection between the old and the new even further through online memorialisation and memorial tattoos. Memorial tattoos have seen a revival in recent years as deeply personalised and permanent forms of memorialisation. Memorial tattoos create an everlasting bond between the dead and the living with a degree of permanency, which continuously maintains that connection. Online memorials may be continuously refreshed, thus bridging the permanent and transitory divide, and are frequently used in combination with traditional memorial forms. The boundaries between the deceased and the living are diminishing in the online world, with the social identity of the dead carrying on in the world of the living. The personhood of the deceased is retained and the living communicate with them as if they were actively listening, strengthening the continuing bond between the dead and the living. The public display of private emotions also provides space for griever who would otherwise be disenfranchised under traditional memorialising processes. Bringing together a diverse community of grievers raises a number of key questions around who and what the deceased represented, and who can ultimately lay claim to that representation and, subsequently, their commemoration.



The literature is scant on the role of contemporary spirituality and religion, and assumes the impact of secularisation without systematic analysis of the philosophical and cosmic beliefs influencing personal and cultural responses to death and subsequent memorialisation. This is an area for further research, including the meanings associated with continuing bonds and the ‘immortality’ afforded by the Internet. Also worthy of further exploration is the relationship between grief and memorialisation. References are made to the role of memorialisation in both facilitating and exacerbating grief but these processes are not explored. Further analysis of how and why these effects occur would provide an important tool for bereavement support. Overall, the ongoing nature of memorialisation practice, whether it diminishes, strengthens or changes over time, the challenges and tensions of the twenty-first century, are all questions which require further exploration and which the ‘Remember Me’ project is seeking to address.

The distinguishing feature of contemporary memorialisation is its employment in personal meaning-making. The need to find meaning infuses all contemporary memorialisation forms and practices. While the need to find meaning in death is not a new phenomenon, it is the trend towards the *creation* of personal meaning rather than the *taking* of meaning from traditional and socially prescribed forms and practices which governs the shaping of memorialisation today.

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