Ashes to Art, Dust to Diamonds:
The incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos in contemporary British practices

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Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and all the material provided in this thesis are original and have not been published elsewhere.

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the University's research degree, I have

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Abstract

This thesis examines the incorporation of human cremated remains into objects and tattoos in a range of contemporary practices in British society. Referred to collectively in this study as 'ashes creations', the practices explored in this research include human cremation ashes irreversibly incorporated or transformed into: jewellery, glassware, diamonds, paintings, tattoos, vinyl records, photograph frames, pottery, and mosaics. This research critically analyses the commissioning, production, and the lived experience of the incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos from the perspective of two groups of people who participate in these practices: people who have commissioned an ashes creations incorporating the cremation ashes of a loved one and people who make or sell ashes creations.

This qualitative study begins by exploring processes of commissioning; it argues that ashes creations are practices concerned with commissioners' desires to maintain spatial proximities and an intimate relatedness with their deceased loved ones. The thesis moves on to explore the making of ashes creations, tracing how conceptual and physical boundaries are transcended as creative materials and cremation ashes irreversibly intermingle. The ashes creations that emerge from these processes perform as subjects and objects as they are experienced as loved ones and beloved things. Concluding with an exploration of how ashes creations are lived with in participants' ongoing lives, this thesis considers the ways in which intimate relatedness is enacted through performances of presence. These performances are characterised by notions of loved ones returning as the deceased continues to participate in the lives of the living. What emerges, across the materially disparate practices of ashes creations, are recurring narratives of relationality, uniqueness, and presence.

As cremation ashes are increasingly being located away from landscapes traditionally associated with death and towards the spatial domains of the living, this study contributes to our understanding of the personalised practices that people engage in with cremation ashes.

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Introduction

This thesis is a qualitative study exploring the incorporation of human cremated remains into object and tattoos in a range of contemporary practices in British society. It explores the experiences of two groups of people who participate in these practices: people who make and sell objects or tattoos incorporating cremation ashes and people who commission objects or tattoos incorporating the cremation ashes of their loved ones. All of the practices explored in this research irreversibly incorporate cremation ashes into a new material form during processes of their making; from ashes to art, from dust to diamonds. The irreversibility of this material transformation distinguishes the practices explored in this research from cremation urns or cremation jewellery that contain cremation ashes as a vessel, rather than incorporating cremation ashes into their materiality. This thesis investigates how objects or tattoos that are created using cremation ashes are conceived, commissioned, made, exchanged, and lived with. The practices explored in this research include the making of: ashes-jewellery, ashes-glassware, ashes-diamonds, ashes-paintings, ashes-tattoos, ashes-vinyl records, ashes-frames[1], ashes-pottery, and ashes-mosaics. Ashes-pottery in this thesis includes examples of ashes-raku[2] and an ashes-teapot. Ashes-glassware includes ashes-paperweights and ashes-vases. Ashes-jewellery includes ashes-necklaces, ashes-bracelets, and ashes-rings.

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first British academic study to consider the incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos across a range of contemporary practices. The establishment of Thanatology, the study of death and dying, reaches back as an area of sociological enquiry into the foundations of the discipline (Durkheim 1897). In addition, studies exploring cremation, crematoria, and associated practices have provided a rich research area for British Thanatology academics[3]. However, as a number of contemporary thanatology academics (Davies 2002, Hockey et al. 2005, Howarth 2007 a, Williams 2011) have argued, empirical

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[1] Ashes-frames are photograph frames made with resin and cremation ashes.

[2] Raku is a type of Japanese pottery that uses a specific firing method to create highly individual pieces.
[3] For examples see Davies (1996), Jupp and Howarth (1997), Jupp and Gittings (1999), Davies and Mates (2005), Jupp (2006), Davies (2009), Grainger (2006), Grainger, (2008).

explorations of practices that are increasingly locating the cremated dead outside of landscapes traditionally associated with burial, internment, and scattering practices[4] are few and far between:

> Recent studies have explored the institutional framework and human experience of ash disposal, yet little detailed attention has so far been paid to the materiality of mortuary material culture, monuments and landscapes associated with ashes when they are disposed of away from the cemetery environment (Williams 2011 p220).

Yet, as we will explore in more detail in the literature review, the small number of empirical studies that do focus on contemporary cremation ashes practices outside of landscapes traditionally associated with burial, internment, and scattering practices have begun to reveal cultural practices filled with complex interplays of established and emerging material and spatial practices (Hockey et al. 2005, Williams 2011). By focusing exclusively on the incorporation of human cremation ashes into object and tattoos, this thesis is making a contribution to our academic understandings of the ways in which cremation ashes practices are diversifying as the cremated dead are increasingly located alongside the living.

Although studies focusing exclusively upon practices with cremation ashes may be uncommon, there is a growing body of research concerned with contemporary material practices associated with the dead which are located in the spatial domains of the living. Santino (2006), for example, explores the phenomena of unofficial "vernacular responses to untimely death" (Santino 2006 p1), which he collectively refers to as 'spontaneous shrines'. From toys left at the roadside for victims of road traffic accidents[5] to artwork left in response to the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon on September 11th 2001 (Yocom 2006), spontaneous shrines involve a wide range of personalised material offerings and ephemera. Spontaneous shrines materially transform the spatial domains of the living and, in so doing, the dead become a visible and tangible presence in these environments. The practices explored in this research differ from spontaneous shrines in a number of important ways, not least in the distinction between the spatial domains

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[4] Landscapes traditionally associated with burial, scattering and interment practices include: cemeteries, Gardens of Remembrance, graveyards, and columbaria.

[5] For examples see Hartig and Dunn (1998), Everett (2002), MacConville and McQuillan (2005), MacConville (2010), Dickinson (2012).

in which they are realised, as spontaneous shrines are enacted in public spaces and the objects and tattoos explored in this research are predominantly kept in homes and on bodies. However, like Santino's (2006) exploration of spontaneous shrines, this thesis enriches our understanding of the ways in which people are increasingly acting to materially locate the dead in spaces shared with the living.

This study also makes a valuable contribution to academic explorations of the contemporary turn towards personalisation in a wide range of rituals and practices associated with death. These rituals and practices bring to the forefront specific aspects of the deceased's personhood and the life that they shared with others. For example, the funeral service, once preoccupied with mournful contemplations of the immortal soul, has shifted in focus towards sharing stories and music reflective of the life of the deceased (Parsons 2012, Davies 2002). The practices that dead bodies are subject to are also increasingly reflecting the tendency to personalise. For example, you can choose to go out with a bang and have your cremation ashes scattered across the sky in a rocket (Heavens Above Fireworks 2012)[6] or select coffins resplendent with personalised designs that are "as individual as you" (Colourful Coffins 2012)[7]. This thesis shall explore the ways in which incorporating cremation ashes into objects and tattoos foregrounds specific aspects of the deceased's personhood and the life that they shared with others. Consequently, this study makes an academic contribution to the field of research concerned with the personalisation of practices associated with death.

I developed this thesis because I wanted to explore first-hand stories of people engaging in practices that incorporate human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos. I wanted to establish how practices that are materially diverse compare when they share the common feature of incorporating human cremated remains. I was curious to discover if an individual who commissions an ashes-teapot had shared experiences with an individual who commissions an ashes-tattoo, and to explore the ways in which they differ. I was also intrigued by those who create and sell ashes-objects or ashes-tattoos

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[6] Heavens Above Fireworks (2012). Heavens Above Firework's website states that: "We arrange special fireworks displays which include a number of unique fireworks designed or modified to incorporate cremation ashes, allowing for a spectacular memorial event and happier farewell."

[7] Colourful Coffins (2012) Colourful Coffins website states that: "We've helped thousands of families celebrate the life of their loved one in a unique and special way, let us help you to do the same."

and wanted to explore how they experience their practices. I wanted to understand these practices by listening to the experiences of people who directly engage in them. This desire to locate the research in the experiences of people directly participating in the practices influenced theoretical and methodological decision-making and has shaped the main research aim:

> To critically analyse the commissioning, production, and the lived experience of the incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos in contemporary British practice.

This research is concerned with in-depth explorations of practices that incorporate human cremation ashes with the aim of bringing people's experiences into vivid focus. Before we move on to explore these first-hand experiences in the thesis, this introduction will briefly consider the contexts from which these practices have emerged.

Historic Context

As we shall go on to explore later in this introduction, the practices examined in this research have emerged relatively recently in contemporary British context. However, there is evidence of practices incorporating cremation ashes into objects reaching back into the archaeological record. For example, funerary pottery from the late Neolithic age has been found to contain ground-cremated bone mixed with a fixing agent to decorate urns (Curtis et al. 2010). This practice has strong parallels to the ashes-raku and ashes-teapot included in this research, where cremation ashes are incorporated as an intrinsic visual feature of the object. Because the stories for ancient objects have been lost to time, we can only speculate as to the significance of incorporating cremation ashes in their decoration. Curtis et al. (2010), in their consideration of the incorporation of cremation ashes into ancient pottery, wonder if:

> The presence of bone fill perhaps marked the Beaker as an idealised and ancestrally verified representation of personhood and genealogy to be considered in connection with the particular, named identity of the dead (Curtis et al. 2010 p4).

Before the development of modern cremation technologies in the late nineteenth century, the Anglo-Saxon era of the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. was the last period in which cremation was widely practiced in Britain (Williams 2004 b). Cremated remains produced during this period were much more materially diverse than ashes that are produced by modern cremation technologies, often containing large segments of bone, teeth, and non-human matter (Williams 2004 b). There are indications in the archaeological record from this period of cremated remains being mixed with other materials in rites and practices, which, claims Williams (2004 b), suggests that: "Ash, charcoal and bones can be used in the construction of the dead social person and their remembrance" (Williams 2004 b p279).

Although both Curtis et al. (2010) and Williams (2004 b) suggest that historic practices where cremation ashes are mixed with other material are potentially concerned with the maintenance of the personhood of the deceased, caution is required not to make presumptions about the applicability of contemporary understandings of bereavement in relation to ancient practices associated with death. Hockey (1995) notes how there is a tendency, when coming from a Western[8] academic tradition, to privilege emotional and therapeutic responses to death when considering practices enacted in other contexts. Although meanings of historic practices may elude us, what can be established with some certainty from the archaeological record is that the mobility and materiality of cremation ashes has been enabling death rites and practices for as long as we have been disposing of our dead by fire (Williams 2004 a, Williams 2004 b).

In pre-twentieth century Europe, practices associated with death were tightly bound within traditional and religious customs, and were therefore slow to produce change (Aries 1974, 1981). In comparison, the twentieth century ushered in rapid changes in the ways in which we manage and remember the dead. This was due, in no small part, to the devastation of two world wars, rapidly increasing urban populations, and the lessening of the social pressure to adhere to traditional and religious customs (Walter

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[8] When using the term 'Western', this thesis is referring to the effect of European influences on global culture; specifically: literary, scientific, political, artistic, academic, spiritual, religious, and philosophical principles. Whilst being aware of the term is politically continuous and has the potential to obscures differences in practices (Harper 2008), it is used in this context to capture a broad cultural tradition.

1994, Howarth and Jupp 1996, Hockey 2001, Hockey et al. 2001, Howarth 2007 a). For the practices explored in this research, the most fundamental of these changes over the course of the past century was the shift away from the domination of centuries of burial practices and towards cremation as the main method of disposing of the corpse (Jupp and Howarth 1997, Jupp 2006).

Although legalised in the U.K. in 1884, with the first working crematorium opening in 1885, cremation rates remained low until after World War Two when they steadily increased until they superseded those for burial in 1967 (Jupp and Gittings 1999). In 2013, the number of cremations that took place in the U.K. was 436,280, accounting for around 75% of all deaths (The Cremation Society of Great Britain 2015)[9]. The changes influencing this drift towards cremation are multi-faceted, they include: the transfer of significant responsibilities for the disposal of the dead from the church to local government; improvements in life-expectancy which shifted the dying from the young to the old; changes in social and geographic mobility; and the rationalisation of the funeral industry (Jupp 1992).

As cremation rates grew over the twentieth century, so did the potential to engage in practice with cremation ashes. When burial is the chosen form of disposal, this is the final practice involving the body, after which time the body is placed in the ground out-of-reach (Davies 2002). When bodies are cremated, the act of cremating is in itself not the final destination for human remains and subsequent rites and practices often accompany the burial, storage, or scattering of ashes (Davies 2002). Because modern cremation methods transforms corpses into safe, dry, mobile, and divisible matter, the materiality of ashes offers the potential of diverse rites and practices (Prendergast et al. 2006, Williams 2011). However, despite a small number of exceptions (Parsons 2005), for the majority of the twentieth century, cremation ashes practices entailed interning, scattering, or storing cremation ashes in graves, Gardens of Remembrance or columbaria, which were located in landscapes traditionally associated with burial, such as cemeteries and graveyards (Kellaher et al. 2005). In these environments, material and spatial practices with cremation ashes often mimicked those of burial. This included:

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[9] The Cremation Society of Great Britain provides annual statistics from 1885 onwards. Cremation statistics for the U.K. in 2014 are not available at time of writing (The Cremation Society of Great Britain 2015).

providing allocated uniform sites for cremation ashes and associated material culture; installing plaques giving biographical information about the deceased; and leaving flowers for the deceased at the site of remains (Kellaher et al. 2005).

The practices explored in this research are notably distinct from those that cremation ashes have been subject to across much of the course of the twentieth century in terms of the spatial domains they occupy and material forms they take. Therefore, this research investigates an emerging area of cremation ashes practices with the potential to reveal the ways in which rites and practices associated with death are evolving in contemporary British culture as the twenty-first century continues to unfold.

Changes in Practices

There are two interconnected changes in the rites and practices associated with death that have emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, which have paved the way for the emergence of the practices explored in this research. The first change is the shift in the location of cremation ashes, away from landscapes traditionally associated with burial, internment, and scattering practices and towards the spatial domains of the living. The second change is concerned with the increasing tendency to personalise rituals and practices associated with death (Davies 2002).

The first change, the shift in the location of cremation ashes, away from landscapes traditionally associated with burial practices, such as cemeteries, Gardens of Remembrance, columbaria, and church graveyards, is evidenced by the significant increase in the collection of cremation ashes by bereaved people from funeral directors and crematoria, which at 60% in 2005 was up 400% since 1970 (Kellaher et al. 2004). Although a proportion of cremation ashes collected from funeral directors and crematoria are interned in family graves or scattered in Gardens of Remembrance, an ever-increasing number are subject to practices that take place outside of landscapes traditionally associated with burial practices (Davies 2002, Prendergast et al. 2006).

It is now common practice in Britain for cremation ashes to be located in domestic spaces, such homes or in gardens, for prolonged periods after a death (Prendergast et

al. 2006). In addition, aided by the ease of personal travel in the latter half of the twentieth century, cremation ashes are frequently scattered in a variety of natural and urban landscapes. They can be found, amongst other places, on mountains (B.B.C. 2006 a) and on beaches (Guardian. 2010) as well at cultural attractions (Telegraph 2008). The selection of specific locations often prioritises aspects of the identities of the deceased; for example, if the deceased was a football fan, the grounds of their club may be thought to be an appropriate choice. In fact, request to scatter cremation ashes is now such a common occurrence that many football grounds have their own Garden of Remembrance, so they can offer this service to fans while protecting the integrity of the pitch (Scattering Ashes 2009).

Practices that locate cremation ashes outside of traditional landscapes of cemeteries, Gardens of Remembrance, columbaria, and church graveyards are enabled by a culture of lenient cremation ashes disposal regulation and enforcement in the U.K. Once cremation ashes have left the care of Funeral Directors or crematoria, the U.K. has regulations concerning dispersal in waterways and establishing the landowner's permission before scattering (Environment Agency 2008). However, knowledge and enforcement of this legislation is minimal in regards to the general population, which can lead to ambiguity and confusion about if particular practice is legal (Hockey et al. 2005). Consequently, many people scatter in informal rituals without gaining explicit permission to do so.

This illicit or informal scattering has the potential to cause frustration for landowners or other users of scattering sites who feel that cremation ashes can have visual or environmental impacts on landscapes[10]. For example, so many people are now scattering in natural landscapes that the Scottish Mountain Authority asked people to avoid the most popular sites and to bury ashes rather than scatter them to avoid unwanted environmental and visual impacts (B.B.C. 2006 a). at Jane Austen's home, fans of the author have been asked to stop scattering cremation ashes in the garden of the attraction without permission because it is happening with such frequency that it has been the source of numerous complaints from gardeners and other visitors to the

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[10] For examples see: B.B.C. News (2006 a), Telegraph. (2008), Guardian. (2010).

site (Telegraph 2008). These examples illustrate how claims of legal or moral ownership over spatial domains sometimes come into conflict with cremation ashes practices.

The second change that paved the way for the emergence of the practices explored in this research is the increasing tendency to personalise rituals and practices associated with death. As cremation ashes shift from Gardens of Remembrance to the gardens of domestic homes, a multitude of practices are emerging that reflect the increasing inclination to engage in rites and practices where kinship ties, passions, identities, and traits of the deceased and bereaved are reflected (Walter 1994, Davies 2002). As we touched on at the start of this introduction, from material culture to funeral services, personalisation is increasingly evident in every aspect of the rituals and practices associated with death. A Co-operative Funeral Care study entitled "The Ways We Say Goodbye" starts by encapsulating this shift towards personalisation:

> Everyone is unique and everyone is special. Similarly, the same should apply to the funeral, whose rituals are one of Britain's most treasured customs. At a funeral only one person is the focus of attention: the deceased. This alone is sufficient reason for each funeral to be, like that individual, unique in both concept and creation (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009 p4).

As illustrated by this quote, the 'choice' of the deceased and their families to personalise their practices is increasingly becoming a sacrosanct concept within the death sector (Walter 1994). The capacity of funeral directors to provide opportunities to personalise demonstrates how these 'choices' are no less guided by the death sector than traditional practices (Schäfer2007, 2012). The individuality of the deceased is justification in itself for the turn towards what Co-operative Funeral Care refers to as funerals that are "individual, unique in both concept and creation" (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009 p4). This stands in stark contrast to traditional Christian teaching, in which you cease to be an individual at the point of death as your soul joins the kingdom of heaven unencumbered by the trivial concerns of individuality (Davies 2002). As the collective concern for the immortal soul fades into the background, it is replaced by a desire to commemorate the life of a unique individual (Davies 2002).

Although many people are guided by a Funeral Director as they personalise practices associated with death, a significant number engage with personalisation outside of this

relationship (Prendergast et al. 2006). This especially applies when people have collected ashes and therefore relationships with Funeral Directors have ended. Practices led by bereaved people have become a common feature of our death experiences; for example, many of us have been present when a loved ones' cremation ashes are scattered in ceremonies and locations chosen and organised by family, friends of the deceased. Practices led by bereaved people have a strong tendency towards personalisation as intimate knowledge of the deceased is drawn upon to inform practices. As shall be explored in this research, many bereaved people access practices that incorporate cremation ashes into objects or tattoos without the involvement of a Funeral Director. Therefore, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the ways in which bereaved people are increasingly making personalisation choices in practices associated with death that sit outside of the sphere of the established death sector.

The increasing tendency to place cremation ashes in locations outside of landscapes traditionally associated with burial practices and the increasing tendency towards personalisation are two changes that have paved the way for the emergence of the practices that will be explored in this research. These changes are embedded in each other as they entwine in the practice of incorporating cremation ashes into objects and tattoos. First, in these practices, cremation ashes reside outside of traditional landscapes associated with death, specifically, they are located in home and on bodies. Second, they reside in homes and on bodies in personalised material forms that are unique to each ashes-object or ashes-tattoo. Therefore, this research offers an opportunity to understand a practice that typifies two of the most influential changes in the rituals and practices associated with death that have begun to emerge since the latter half of the twentieth century. Specifically, the increasing tendency to locate the dead alongside the living and the increasing tendency to personalise practices associated with death. By focusing in detail on one practice that typifies these changes, we are able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how broad cultural tendencies are manifesting in the lived experiences of practices.

Practices that Incorporate Cremation Ashes

In this introduction, I have considered the context from which practices that incorporate cremation ashes into objects and tattoos have emerged; I now move on to offer a more detailed consideration of the practices themselves. There are currently businesses trading in Britain that incorporate or transform cremation ashes into objects as diverse as: diamonds, gun cartridges, gems, glassware, fireworks, jewellery, ceramics, vinyl records, sculptures, paintings, birdhouses, photograph frames, egg timers, and wind chimes[11]. In addition, cremation ashes are also transformed by a range of artists and artisans on a commission basis; examples in this research include ashes-tattoos and ashes-mosaics. Objects and tattoos incorporating cremation ashes started to emerge as commercial features of contemporary cremation ashes practices in Britain incrementally over the last twenty-five years[12]. The most established in this research is the transformation of ashes into certified diamonds, which has been available from a U.K. based supplier for approximately twenty-five years. The most recently emerging practices in this research are ashes-tattoos and ashes-vinyl records, both of which started to emerge in the last five to seven years.

In general, practices that incorporate cremation ashes into objects or tattoos require only a very small proportion of the ashes produced from an individual cremation by modern cremation processes. Most adult cremations produce approximately 4lb - 6lb of remains and most of the practices explored in this research require a few ounces of this ash. Therefore, practices that incorporate cremation ashes into objects and tattoos are dependent upon sets of cremated remains of an individual being divided into smaller parts. The majority of practices incorporate cremation ashes during the making of objects by mixing them with other materials such as: inks, paints, liquid glass, grout, clay, or glaze. The creation of ashes-diamonds differs from this process because cremation

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[11] These businesses were all identified as currently operating in the U.K. during the research for this study. However, in interest of anonymity of research participants, identifying details of these businesses have been excluded from the thesis.

[12] The dates for the emergence for practices that incorporate cremation ashes are an approximate developed by the researcher from discussions with providers of these services, academics, and death sector professionals, who gave timeframes that correlate with the emergence of media stories about the practices.

ashes are subject to intense pressure and heat to form a diamond, transforming rather than incorporating cremation ashes.

Artists and businesses are free to create objects or tattoos incorporating cremation ashes without having to adhere to legislation in regards to the storage, handling, or treatment of cremation ashes[13]. This is a reflection of the legally permissive culture in the U.K. surrounding cremation ashes once collected from Funeral Directors and crematoria, which contrasts sharply with the strictly enforced legislation and regulations that apply to the death sector in regards to the treatment of cremation ashes (Jupp 2006). The legally permissive culture surrounding cremation ashes enables artists and businesses to work in diverse environments, from living rooms to studios, from laboratories to workshops. It is therefore straightforward, from a legislative perspective, to establish a variety of business types that incorporate cremation ashes into a wide range of objects. In addition, because ashes-objects are frequently kept on the body or in the home, their location once they have been created is not subject to restrictions in comparison to ashes scattering practices where the land owners' permission is required (Environment Agency 2008).

Establishing statistical rates of occurrence of the wide range of practices that cremation ashes are subject to in Britain once they have been collected from Funeral Directors and crematoria can be challenging endeavour. Unlike burial, which is strictly regulated, cremation ashes become difficult to trace once they have been collected. Regulation leaves trails that can be followed by the researcher, but we simply do not know, for example, how many sets of cremation ashes are scattered informally by families each year or how many are kept and where they are placed. Practices that irreversibly incorporate cremation ashes into objects and tattoos present a number of additional challenges to the gathering of data to establish prevalence.

First, ashes-objects or ashes-tattoos are sometimes created as bespoke commissions with strict client confidentiality. In these cases, knowledge of the practice is limited to the artist, the commissioner, their families, and friends. Second, ashes-objects or ashes-

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[13] Although it should be noted that individual practices, such as glassmaking or diamond creation, are subject to their own particular regulations in regards to health and safety in the workplace.

tattoos are often just one element of a service offered by a company. For example, some glass companies offer non-ashes glassware alongside ashes-glass. This makes it difficult to establish from outside of the business what proportion of sales relates to practices that incorporate cremation ashes. In addition, many people who make ashes-objects or ashes-tattoos are small enterprises or sole traders, which makes sales records difficult to access. Third, unlike Funeral Directors (National Association of Funeral Directors 2015)[14] or Coffin Makers (Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association 2015)[15], providers of practices that incorporate cremation ashes are not a collective industry; consequently, they do not have representative bodies to collect data. These factors combine to make it difficult to establish statistical rates of occurrence of practices that incorporate cremation ashes.

At the time of writing, there is no statistical data available to establish the occurrence of practices explored in this thesis and it is outside the scope of this study to ascertain precise rates of participation. Yet, following discussions during my research with Funeral Directors, academics, crematorium managers, bereaved families, and providers of services that incorporate cremation ashes into objects or tattoos, it can be asserted with some degree of certainty that these are minority practices, engaged in by a small proportion of the people who have the potential to do so.

The reason why only a small number of people choose to participate in practices that incorporate cremation ashes requires further investigation. However, it is likely to be a number of overlapping and interrelated factors; for example, during the course of my research, I have found low levels of awareness in the general public of the range of practices incorporating cremation ashes currently available. This is especially the case when practices are more recently emerging, such as ashes-tattoos or ashes-vinyl. Therefore, we might expect prevalence to increase with the passing of time as practices

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[14] The National Association of Funeral Directors was established in 1905. The website states that "the NAFD represents the interests of the entire spectrum of funeral directing businesses – including independent businesses, the Co-operative and major funeral groups – who conduct in excess of 80% of UK funerals every year." (National Association of Funeral Directors 2015)

[15] The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association was established in 1939. The website states that "FFMA is the link between manufacturers/suppliers of goods and the end users - the funeral directors and the crematoria. Its aim is to ensure that quality goods are produced and the traditionally high standards are maintained within the profession." (Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association 2015)

become more established. This gradual increase has been witnessed with a number of remembrance practices that have increased in popularity over several decades, such as such as the naming and establishment of memorial benches (Maddrell 2009). Certainly, practices that incorporate cremation ashes that have been established for longer periods of time, such as ashes-diamonds or ashes-glassware, are demonstrating slow and steady growth as established companies have expanded and new ones have come onto the market. However, low participation rates in certain practices may reflect deep-seated concerns about their appropriateness. Incorporating cremation ashes into teapots, tattoos, vinyl records, and paintings might just be a step too far from traditional cremation ashes practices for many people.

Although minority practices, there are clearly enough people currently choosing practices that incorporate cremation ashes to support a diverse range of business and traders offering services, which forms the basis of this research. This thesis is making important first steps towards understanding how minority practices that incorporate cremation ashes intersect and overlap, as well as establishing the ways in which they differ. Whist practices as diverse as ashes-tattoos and ashes-teapots may materially differ in a number of important ways, this thesis will consider if there is enough common ground in how they experienced by those that engage in these practices to academically explore them as part of the same family or web of practices with cremation ashes. Thus, instead of seeing practices that incorporate cremation ashes as individual minority practices, this thesis develops an understanding of how, when explored together, they can illustrate a tendency towards certain types of relationships unfolding between the living and the dead. This contributes to academic knowledge of the ways in which rites and practices associated with death in contemporary Britain are changing in their expression.

As minority practices, stories of cremation ashes incorporated into objects or tattoos generate media and online interest because they are perceived as being outside of the ordinary. For example, a Channel Four documentary 'Ashes into Diamonds' (Brindley 2009) and the BBC documentary 'Both Feet in the Grave' (Child 2009) included bereaved people who had loved ones' cremation ashes transformed into diamonds, gun cartridges, jewellery, and oil paintings. Facebook sites of companies that transform

ashes are 'shared' or 'liked' across social media[16], local[17] and national[18] newspapers and internet sites carry articles about ashes creation practices. When media stories involve death, in any of its complex forms and experiences, there is a tendency to sensationalise; a tendency to exclude the everyday for the extraordinary; a tendency to reduce complex experiences to sound-bites of text (Walter et al. 1995). Therefore, media and online stories can only give a partial and potentially distorted understanding of the practices explored in this research. This study is an opportunity to understand practices that incorporate cremation ashes by exploring in-depth the experiences of people who participate. In so doing, it reaches beyond media headlines or comments on social media sites to reveal a detailed understanding of practices that have not received this level of academic scrutiny in Britain.

Although this thesis focuses on British practices, businesses that incorporate cremation ashes into objects or body modifications are available in a number of countries; however, there are preconditions required for the emergence of these practices. First, cremation has to be an established method of disposal. Second, there must be an entrepreneurial approach to commerce, from which businesses and ideas can emerge. These two factors may go some way to explaining the emergence of some practices, such as ashes-tattoos and ashes-diamonds, from the U.S.A. wherea commercial and entrepreneurial death sector thrives. This is reflected in the diversity of practices with cremation ashes on offer in the U.S.A; for example, you can have your ashes incorporated into a marine reef by a company in Florida (Eternal Reefs 2011)[19] or sent into space by a company in Huston, Texas (Celestis Memorial Spaceflights 2011)[20].

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[16] For example see Ashes into Glass (2014) who have 349,257 'likes' on the social media site Facebook (please note, this is not a research participant).

[17] For an example of stories about ashes creation from the local press see Atroughton (2014) (please note, this is not a research participant).

[18] For an example of stories about ashes creation from the national press see Francis (2014) (please note, this is not a research participant).

[19] Eternal Reefs (2011), who are based in Florida, incorporate cremation ashes into environmentally-safe cement and create an artificial reef with the mixture.

[20] Celestis Memorial Spaceflights (2011), who are based in Huston Texas, sends cremation ashes into Earth's orbit, onto the lunar surface, or into deep space.

Third, legislation regarding the disposal of cremation ashes must permit the incorporation of cremation ashes into objects and tattoos. The comparably tighter regulation of cremation ashes disposal in many other countries may prevent the development of these markets. In Europe, for example, only Finland, France, Spain, and the U.K. are without legislation that strictly controls the disposal of cremation ashes (Hockey et al. 2005). In all other European countries, ashes must be disposed of in pre-identified locations, thus limiting opportunities for the growth of the practices considered in this thesis. There is currently limited evidence in English language academia for of the prevalence of contemporary practices that incorporate cremation ashes outside of Western contexts. However, anecdotal evidence, such as businesses in South Korea that turn cremation ashes into beads that are kept by bereaved people (CBC News. 2011), indicate that the picture is more complex than can be revealed by labelling the contemporary incorporation of cremation ashes a 'Western' practice.

Research Terms

Individual practices explored in this research are referred to by their form, for example 'ashes-tattoos' or 'ashes-paintings'. However, as the study developed, it became apparent that a collective term that encompassed all the practices in the research was necessary to aid succinct writing. The inclusion of cremation ashes is the central aspect of these practices; therefore the term 'ashes' was essential to a collective term. Finding an appropriate term to accompany 'ashes' that is reflective of the variety of practices in the research proved to be more of a challenge. I did not want to locate the term in a specific theoretical approach or language. I started to develop this term during the ongoing collection of data and I felt that it was an inappropriate stage in the research process to make presumptions about the applicability of specific theories. In addition, I was influenced by Law's (1994) approach to field research, which advises not locating terms potentially shared with participants in theoretically driven language which removes the research from their data. Although I was not reliant on participants to 'approve' a term, I did not want a collective term to be unidentifiable or unrecognisable from their experiences.

In my quest for an appropriate term to accompany 'ashes', I began by considering terms grounded in materiality; for example, 'ashes-objects'. However, this failed to express the diverse materiality of practices, particularly that of ashes-tattoos. In addition, it became apparent during the collection of data that 'object', with its inherent dualistic relationship to 'subject', is not how participants experience their ashes-paintings or ashes-raku. I considered using terms grounded in traditional material culture associated with death, such as 'ashes-memorials'. However, it became apparent during the course of the research that people who commission objects and tattoos that incorporate cremation ashes distance their practices from such material culture associated with death, which is a finding that I shall go on to explore. I therefore attempted to identify a collective term that could apply to all practices whilst being reflective of participants' experiences.

All of the varied practices in this research share a common feature: they all incorporate cremation *ashes* in the *creation* of something that did not previously exist. 'Creation' was chosen as an appropriate term to accompany 'ashes' for three reasons. First, 'creation' implies a creative result, which captures the artistic / artisan aspect of the practices in this research. Second, it does not imply a material form. A tattoo can be described as a 'creation' as can a glass paperweight or an oil painting. Third, it was a term that both sets of participants could recognise as being reflective of their experiences as they frequently spoke of the great value they attribute to the creative aspects of their practices. Therefore, this research will use 'ashes creations' as the collective term for the practices that it explores.

Participants in this research who sell and / or make ashes creations are referred to as 'providers'. Although the majority of these participants make their ashes creations, there are a small number who act as agents for other parties who make the ashes creation. Therefore, a term was required that did not refer to making processes. In addition, not all ashes creations in this research were sold commercially, with a small number being created as gifts or bartered. So the term could not make reference to the commercial aspect of ashes creation practices. Therefore, the term 'providers' was selected because it applied to every participant in this category who provided ashes creations.

Participants in this research who have ashes creations made using their loved ones cremated remains are referred to as 'commissioners'. This term was selected to focus the reader upon participants' relationships with their ashes creation, as opposed to terms like 'the bereaved' which focus upon participants' relationship to their deceased loved ones. In addition, during the course of the research, a number of providers shared mortality experiences that influenced their ashes creation practices and therefore, they could also be considered 'the bereaved'. The term 'purchaser' was also considered, but not everyone in this research purchased or paid for their ashes creation. Therefore, the term 'commissioner' was selected because it applied to every participant in this category who all commissioned ashes creations.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Chapter One and Chapter Two comprise of the Literature Review and Research Design respectively. Chapters Three to Five explore the data generated by the qualitative research study. These chapters are divided into sections and each section is titled with a quote from a participant that exemplifies the findings in that particular section.

Chapter Three – Discovering, Deciding and Commissioning

This chapter is concerned with how ashes creation practices come into being. It explores narratives of discovering, deciding, and commissioning ashes creations: starting before ashes creation practices have been contemplated; moving though decision making processes; and ending with the commissioning of ashes creations. Each section introduces a principal actor in this thesis: commissioners, the deceased, providers, and ashes creations.

Chapter Four – Making and Exchanging

This chapter explores processes of making and exchanging ashes creations. It investigates aspects of the making process that are specific to the inclusion of cremation

ashes, exploring two recurring themes: cremation ashes as creative materials and cremation ashes as precious materials. The chapter moves on to consider the subsequent exchange of ashes creations between providers and commissioners by exploring concepts such as value and ownership. It concludes by exploring how exchanges of ashes creations between providers and commissioners are permeated by notions of the deceased returning to their loved ones.

Chapter Five – Living Together

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which commissioners live with ashes creations following their exchange. It establishes how, for commissioners, ashes creations sit outside of traditional material culture associated with death as they experience their ashes creations as loved ones and beloved things simultaneously. It investigates presence as a recurring narrative in commissioners' accounts, specifically in relation to the ways in which the deceased continues to participate in the on-going lives of the living though ashes creation practices. It concludes by exploring how experiences of presences in ashes creation practices are embedded in personhood and relationality which are realised through narratives of nearness and continuity.

To summarise, this is the first British academic study to consider the incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos across a range of contemporary practices. This research investigates the experiences of people who directly participate in these practices, which are referred to collectively as 'ashes creations'. Aided by a permissive British legislative environment, over the past few decades a multitude of personalised cremation ashes practices have emerged that reflect the increasing inclination to spatially locate the cremated dead outside of the landscapes traditionally associated with burial, internment, and scattering practices. This research contributes to our understanding of the ways in which cremation ashes practices have diversified since they have started to leave these landscapes. In particular, it provides an in-depth exploration of practices that illustrate the increasing tendency to locate the dead alongside the living whilst personalising rituals and practices associated with death. Therefore, this thesis contributes to our understanding of how broad cultural tendencies are manifesting in the changing rites and practices in which people engage.

Ashes creation practices started to emerge as features of contemporary cremation ashes practices in Britain incrementally over the last twenty-five years. There is now range of businesses that incorporate cremation ashes into objects as well as a number of artists who create bespoke commissions. Although actual rates of occurrence of these practices are not currently available; it can be said with some certainty that ashes creations are a minority practice. This study will explore how materially diverse practices that incorporate cremation ashes interconnect and the ways in which they differ. Consequently, this thesis is making important first steps towards establishing if ashes creations can be understood as interrelated practices in how they are experienced. This knowledge increases our understanding of how materially diverse minority practices, when considered collectively, are indicative of certain types of relationships unfolding between the living and the dead in contemporary Britain.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Death, ordinary and inevitable yet unique and unpredictable, shapes our understanding of what it means to be human. Bauman (1992) reasons that our knowledge of the inevitability of death gives form to all aspects of human culture. Knowing our time is finite underpins not only how we relate to ourselves and to each other but also every aspect of the human experience. It is therefore little wonder that thinkers through the ages, from Plato (Hamilton 1961) to Heidegger (1962), have grappled with mortality and our responses to it. Yet, in all its complexity and magnitude, death refuses to fit into the intellectual boxes we create for it. As Bauman (1992) argues, in defining, qualifying, and categorizing death, academia persists in its efforts to 'know' the 'unknowable' and in doing so attempts, and ultimately fails, to bring death to some kind of order:

> We all 'know' very well what death is; that is, until we are asked to give a precise account of what we know - to define death as we 'understand' it. Then the trouble starts. It transpires that it is ultimately impossible to define death, though attempts to define it - to master it (albeit intellectually), to assign it its proper place and keep it there - will never stop. It is impossible to define death, as death stands for the final void, for that non-existence which, absurdly, gives existence to all being (Bauman 1992 p2).

Remaining forever unknowable, just outside of the grasp of our understanding, death repudiates our endeavours to academically domesticate and therefore symbolically triumph over it (Davies 2002). Yet, without academia's attempts to bring death to heal, discussion of death becomes cumbersome, too vast to comprehend and therefore too unwieldy to research in any meaningful way. The impossibility grasping the vast finality of death for the human condition is, in no small part, what is so compelling about undertaking academic studies that glimpse the rituals, meanings, practices, and social expressions humans create and experience in our dealings with it. Although attempts to academically domesticate death maybe forever be in vain, contributions from philosophy, science, sociology, psychology, archaeology, art, theology, and anthropology have enriched our understanding by revealing aspects of it. Although the cultural context in which death is experienced is forever shifting, practices with the material dead, that is to say practices that involve corpses, ashes, and bones, reach as

far back into our human experience as academic inquiry is currently able to trace (Williams 2004 b). This thesis makes its own small contribution to attempts to glimpse death by shining a light onto emerging practices with the material dead in contemporary British contexts.

This literature review is broadly embedded in the concerns of the social sciences, and draws from sociological, anthropological, psychological, geographical, historical, and philosophical thanatological texts. The theories and concepts explored in this thesis are relevant to the study of death in a Western context. This is not to imply that death in this context is homogeneous and that the findings of this thesis are applicable across western contexts. In her comparative thesis of North American and English practice, Harper (2008) illustrates through an exploration of corpses viewing practices at Funeral Homes how the notions of 'Western' practice has the capacity to obscure culturally distinct and potentially interesting phenomena by hiding diversity in practice. Rather, this thesis uses theories and concepts that are reliant on conceptual devices that are prevalent in the study of death within a Western academic tradition.

This literature review has three sections. The first section contextualises the thesis by outlining key texts that have influenced the academic study of contemporary death. It focuses on studies based in the social sciences that have been particularly influential in shaping public and academic discourses of death in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, with particular regards to how death manifests in contemporary society and how bereavement is understood. The second section moves on to explore the research context from which this study of ashes creation practices has emerged. This section establishes the contribution to academic knowledge made by this thesis' exploration of emerging cremation ashes practices by identifying and exploring relevant literature. When considered together, the first section of the thesis establishes the broad academic traditions in which the contemporary study of death practices are rooted and the second section establishes the need for and value of this particular study whilst introducing some of the key themes explored in the thesis.

<u>Section One – Contemporary Death</u>

Sequestration theories – the death denial thesis

Sequestration theories present a range of concepts and claims built upon the premise that modernity separated experiences of death from public or collective spheres and relegated those experiences to the realm of the private individual[21]. Central to sequestration theory is the claim that the way in which modernity constructs death is markedly distinct from earlier forms of social organisation. This is signified by a shift away from collective traditional and religious expressions in our dealings with death and towards individual meaning making. The sequestration of death is possible, sequestration theories argue, because the institutions and structures of modernity hides death away in hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and cemeteries, which has the effect of sequestering death from collective experiences and discourses.

Sequestration theories are an appropriate starting point for an exploration of the literature in this thesis because they identify the broad cultural shift from 'collective' to 'individual' in rituals, discourses, and practices associated with death, which was a prerequisite for the emergence of the ashes creation practices studied in this research. As discussed in the literature review, until the latter half of the twentieth century, the majority of cremation ashes were stored in publically accessible spaces where cremation ashes are subject to collective traditions, such as Columbaria or Gardens of Remembrance (Jupp 2006). Since this time, cremation ashes have become increasingly subject to highly individualised practices, such as scattering at sites of personal resonance (Hockey et al. 2005). The ashes creations explored in this research are particularly demonstrative of this shift from collective to individual death practices. Not only do ashes creations sit outside of established collectively recognised practices regulated by religion or tradition, but they also shift the material dead from Columbaria or Gardens of Remembrance to the comparable private domains of homes and bodies. Therefore, ashes creations typify the broad cultural shift from 'collective' to 'individual' in rites and practices associated with death that took place across the twentieth century.

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[21] For examples see, Gorer 1955, Gorer 1965, Becker 1973, Aries 1974, Illich 1976, Aries 1981, Elias 1985, Giddens 1991, Mellor and Shilling 1993.

British social anthropologist Gorer (1955, 1965) was amongst the first proponents of the idea that modern society sequestered death from the public sphere, where he argued that it traditionally resided, and relocated it in the realm of the private individual. Gorer (1955, 1965) claimed that the secularisation of modernity led to a decline in the guidance offered by religion and collective rituals with which society used to make sense of death in the public sphere. This loss of collective guidance has resulted in what Gorer termed socially 'maladaptive behaviour' (1965: p116). This, he claims, is evident in the taboo with which death has come to be treated; as if death, and the resulting grief, were extensions of modesty, to be undertaken only in private. Denied public expression, death came to be regarded as if it was obscene, with the reality of death being hidden from collective experience, but with violent or unusual deaths filling our books, screens and news media:

> The 'pornography of death' whether it be furtively enjoyed or self-righteously condemned, manifests an irrational attitude towards death and a denial of mourning (Gorer 1965 p114).

Historian Aries (1974, 1981) traces the shift from the 'tamed' death of the medieval period, in which death is understood to be ordinary and inevitable, to the 'forbidden' death that began in the early twentieth century, in which death is hidden away and denied in public discourse. To evidence his claims of 'forbidden' death Aries uses the example of dying people being hidden away in hospitals where life is prolonged at all cost in an attempt to deny the inevitability of death. For sociologist Elias (1985), it is the loneliness of dying in a death denying society that is of concern and he calls for openness towards death in order to reintegrate the dying back into the wider community. Death denial, argues both Elias (1985) and Aries (1974, 1981), has developed from the predictability of dying, as life expectancy has increased and death is postponed into older age. Dying people are no longer common place and can be forgotten in the course of everyday life, creating societies in which death is dealt with by denial.

> There are various ways of dealing with the fact that all lives, including those of the people we love, have an end. The end of human life, which we call death, can be mythologized through the idea of an afterlife in Hades or Valhalla, in Hell or Paradise. This is the oldest and commonest form of the human endeavour to come to terms with the finiteness of life. We can attempt to avoid the thought of death by pushing it as far from ourselves as

possible - by hiding and repressing the unwelcome idea - or by holding an unshakable belief in our own personal immortality — 'others die, I do not'. There is a strong tendency towards this in the advanced societies of our day. (Elias 1985 p1)

What Elias (1985) refers to as a "…unshakable belief in our own personal immortality" (Elias 1985 p1) is reflected in the work of Giddens (1991) who is concerned with the effect of sequestration upon the individual. Giddens argues that there has been a privatisation of meaning in high modernity, resulting in the individual engaging in continual processes of reflexive construction of identity via self-narratives. Death, contends Giddens (1991), creates a crisis for the individual, who is unable to cope with the threat of the inevitability of death on this process of reflexive identity construction. According to Giddens (1991), de-sacralisation and an orientation towards the future are inherent in high-modernity and these cultural tendencies have removed religious and traditional structures of guidance. This has left the self-referential individual of high-modernity isolated and threated by death's bleak finality. Consequently, death is sequestered in institutions and routines in an attempt to counter the threat it poses to an individual's ontological security (Giddens 1991).

Sequestration theories have been influential in shaping how we think and talk about death in contemporary society (Walter 1994, 1996). This is evident in the prevalence in public discourses of notions that society has lost connectivity in our relationships with dying people or those who have been recently bereaved, especially when compared to other cultures or times (Howarth 2000). These notions draw upon the concept that there has been a shift from public to private or collective to individual in the rites and practices associated with death and, crucially, that in this shift, something of our connectivity to death has been lost. For example, in an article in the Daily Mail (2014), Maddy Paxman (2014), whose husband died, asks "Why can't we cope with grief anymore?" as she states that:

> We may think the Victorians were a bit extreme with their culture of mourning. But, in today's society, the time allocated to grieving is minimal and you are expected to function as usual within a very short period of time. Bereavement is treated almost like a bad dose of flu; a short time off work and then you are assumed to have 'put it behind you' (Paxman 2014).

Although the widow notes that the Victorian culture of mourning might be thought of as a little "extreme" for our contemporary taste, she implies that in a culture of "minimal" grieving, connectivity, or at the very least visibility, of bereaved people to wider society has been lost. Paxman's (2014) quote is evidence that sequestration continues to be influential in public discourse; however, sequestration theories have increasingly come under academic scrutiny and revision since the latter half of the twentieth century. Some critics have questioned the indiscriminate way in which the concept of sequestration is applied with a broad brush to an indiscriminate array of disciplines and practices. For example, in his review of sequestration theories Kellehear (1984) claims that the embeddedness of notion of 'death denial' in psychiatric approaches to grief management means that it is ill-defined and inappropriately applied in sociological context:

> ...the key concept of the sociologically intended phrase 'death-denying society' is psychiatric in origin and implication. Denial is an unsuitably sociological concept because of its epistemological tendency to personalise social systems, in artificial ways (Kelleher 1984) p714.

In his critique Kelleher (1984) first considers the ways in which sequestration theories are rooted in the concept that death is an all-pervading source of fear for society and for the individual and points to how this notion is advocated by theorists whose work is rooted in psychological approaches to death, such as Freud (1957) and Becker (1973). This notion of the inherent terror of death, argues Kelleher (1984), is frequently asserted by sequestration theorists without the provisions of empirical evidence and by ignoring recalcitrant evidence. People do fear death, argues Kelleher (1984), but this fear is not universal, and he offers the example of older people, who often fear dependency and disability more than death.

Kelleher (1984) then moves on to consider the sequestration claim that there has been a crisis of individualism in the twentieth century that has resulted in a 'death-denying society'. This argument which, as discussed previously, is advocated by sociologist Giddens (1991), claims that increasing movements towards individualism have created societies that hide death away in order to preserve the ontological security of the individual. Although acknowledging that twentieth century death is 'decontextualised', in that there has been a decline in adherence to religious or traditional death ideology,

Kelleher (1984) points to how this has required the individual to engage with an increasing number of choices concerning death and dying. We are becoming, argues Kelleher (1984), masters of our own deaths in the array of choices we are faced with, which contradicts the notion of death denial.

In her critic of sequestration theory, Howarth (2000), like Kelleher (1984), draws attention to the ways in which peoples' practices contradict the notion of sequestration as an all-pervading phenomenon. Specifically, she draws attention to the disparity between the firm conceptual boundaries between the living and the dead inherent in sequestration theories and the prevalence of rituals and practises associated with death that are reliant upon notions of permeability. Howarth (2000) argues that sequestration theories require firm conceptual boundaries in order to separate the living from the dead, the public from the private, or society from the individual, so that death can be relegated, hidden, forbidden, or denied. However, Howarth (2000) claims, the rigidity of sequestration's boundaries fails to capture the many rites and practices associated with death, be they individual or collective, requiring permeability to enable a wide range of relationships to continue between the living and the dead.

Grief theories – breaking and continuing bonds

The influence of sequestration theories is evident in process orientated grief theories, which have been instrumental in shaping public discourses of death and dying across in the twentieth century. Rooted in the same modernist discourses of separation as sequestration theories, process orientated grief theories are built on the assumption that the living and the dead should be bound to their own spheres (Smith 2006). Mirroring the work of Kübler-Ross (1970) on psychological stages of dying, process orientated theories take a therapeutic approach to grief management ¨and psychiatrists, such as: Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), Parkes (1972), Worden (1982), and Parkes and Weiss (1983). These theories are based on the assumption that death brings an ontologically threatening loss of identity for the bereaved and they stress the importance of limiting ties with the dead in the long term in order for the bereaved to develop an identity free of the deceased. These theories advocate a psychological

process orientated approach where emotions are moved through like stages in order for the living to 'recover' from their bereavement and 'move on'. This is achieved via guidance from death professionals such as grief councillors, psychiatrists, or Funeral Directors (Walter 1994).

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, process orientated grief theories were increasingly challenged by grief theories that, like Howarth's critique of sequestration theories, highlight the maintenance of ongoing relationships between the living and the dead in many practices. The most influential of these challenges came from Klass et al. (1996) 'continuing bonds' grief model, which is an explicit critique of what they call the "breaking bonds hypothesis" of modernity's process orientated grief theories (Klass et al. 1996 p32). The principal theme of the continuing bonds thesis is that, following bereavement, it is not unusual, or undesirable, for bonds to continue in ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, as:

> Memorialising, remembering, knowing the person who died, and allowing them to influence the present are active processes that seem to continue throughout the survivors entire life (Klass et al. 1996 p17).

More than just a memory, continuing bonds involves the active maintenance of relationships between the bereaved and the deceased in the present. This requires the continual crossing of the boundaries between the living and the dead to order and reorder relationships in ongoing processes. To enable these processes, Klass et al. (1996) argue that the boundaries between the living and the dead are permeable and in a constant state of flux. Although Klass et al. (1996) present a significant amount of empirical research[22] in support of the model, the notion of continuing bonds is operationalised differently by the various authors in the text with little reference to a common definition of the key concepts, such as what Klass et al. (1996) refer to as the 'inner representation' of the deceased or 'interactive relationship' with the deceased:

> When we describe the dynamic of the construction of the inner representations of the dead or absent person, it should be clear that we do not have a common definition of what is meant by an inner representation or an interactive relationship. (Klass et al. 1996 p349)

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[22] Evidence presented is primarily, but not exclusively, in the form of psychological studies with bereaved people.

Despite, or possibly because of the lack of clarity in regards to operationalising key concepts in the original text, continuing bonds has become a broad brush term within death studies to capture a wide range of practices and behaviours associated with bereavement that maintain emotional, practical, material, embodied, and spatial connections between the living and the dead. For example, Woo and Chan (2010) draw from Klass et al. (1996) to explore the management of transplant survivors' guilt through continuing bonds. Woo and Chan's (2010) focus on the case of a man whose wife died after donating a portion of her liver to him. They observed the ways in which the deceased's identity is integrated into the ongoing life of the bereaved man through the active creation and maintenance of emotional bonds. Pertinent to this study are the ways in which Woo and Chan (2010) explore how fragments of bodies have the potential to enable continue bonds between the living and the dead through notions of personhood and presence.

The influence of Klass et al.'s (1996) continuing bonds has moved beyond the psychological approaches from which it emerged and has become a feature of texts that develop sociological and anthropological perspectives to the grief model. This includes explorations of material culture, rituals, and practices at sites of bodily remains, such as Francis et al.'s (2001) exploration of continuing bonds in cemetery practices. In their study of London cemeteries, Francis et al. (2001) argue that bereaved people actively continue bonds with their deceased loved ones through material, spatial, and embodied practices, such as: selecting burial plots, selecting gravestones and epithets, maintaining graves, placing flowers and other graveside ephemera. They claim that: "These materially manifest tasks also allow the living to re-work the deceased's identity and in doing so, to appropriate attributes of the departed for themselves" (Francis et al. 2001 P227). Francis et al. (2001) shift the notion of continuing bonds beyond the inner-life of bereaved people and into the material and embodied world that bereaved people experience. They acknowledge the importance of the material dead in the continuation of bonds as they trace ongoing relationships enacted via spatial, material, and embodied practices.

Klass et al.'s (1996) continuing bonds model of grief is widely cited across the multi-disciplinary field of death studies[23]and the original work had been refined and developed by the original authors and contributors to the text[24]. For example, Klass (2006), warns against what he refers to as mistaking "a description (that survivors do maintain bonds) for a prescription (that it is helpful for survivors to do so)" (Klass 2006 p884). In this text, Klass (2006) broadens the concept of continuing bonds from the psychological based notion of an "inner representation" of the deceased that was so formative to Klass et al. (1996) by arguing that social, cultural, community, and political narratives are essential in developing an understanding of how bonds continue between the living and the dead.

In its successful challenge to process orientated grief theories, Klass et al.'s (1996) continuing bonds model has become increasingly influential in public discourse and in lay interpretations of grief. This is evident in narratives that emphasise the importance of enduring connectivity with our dead loved one through personalised material and spatial practices, which have become increasingly influential in shaping how we think and talk about death in contemporary society. For example, Woodthorpe (2010) acknowledges the powerful normalising discourse of process orientated grief theories on the meanings ascribed by staff and visitors in a London cemetery to a range of graveside material practices. However, Woodthorpe's (2010) study "…reveals the cemetery as a contested and dynamic space" (p117) with conflicting interpretations of 'appropriate' memorialisation, as she explores how notions of continuing bonds are also evident in staff and visitors' normalising discourses. The influence of continuing bonds, Woodthorpe (2010) argues, can be found in staff and visitors' discourses that move "…towards an incorporation of the social context and materiality of grief" (p128) in portraying the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead as being positively enacted through memorialisation practices, such as leaving gifts on graves on birthdays or other annual events; thus illustrating how continuing bonds narratives are being draw

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[23] For examples see: Francis et al. (2001), Packman, W. (2006), Valentine, C. (2009), Woo and Chan (2010), Kasket, E. (2012), Jahn and Spencer-Thomas (2014), Gassin and Lengel (2014).

[24] For examples see Boelen et al. (2006), Klass et al. (2006), Schut et al. (2006), Stroebe, M. (2010), Klass, D. (2014).

upon by academics, death professionals, bereaved people, and the general public to interpret mourning, grief, and associated practices.

Klass et al.'s (1996) continuing bonds model has taken our understanding of grief away from the psychologist's couch and into the everyday world where people engage with deaths that they experience in their lives through spatial, material, and embodied practices. However, in the same text in which she offered her critique of sequestration theory, Howarth (2000) rightly illustrates that this recent focus on continuing bonds does not mean that we are forging 'new' relationships with the dead. Rather, Howarth argues, in stressing the importance of continuing bonds we are uncovering a layer of communication between the living and the dead that was once common, but that modern grief theories viewed as deviant or pathological:

> The task is not to produce a 'new model of grief'. Rather it is to amplify the whispered communication across the boundary between the living and the dead that has hitherto been muffled by the noisy, dominant discourse and prescriptive professional rituals of modernity (Howarth 2000 p136).

What Howarth's (2000) thoughtful critique reminds the reader is that continuity can be found in the most contemporary of theories associated with death. As this thesis examines ashes creations, an emerging practice associated with the material dead that has received scant academic attention to date, the tendency to attribute such practices as revealing something new in our relationships with death are tempered as continuity in experiences of rites and practices associate with death are also highlighted.

Section Two – Research Context

Seminal studies

As discussed in the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, the ashes creations explored in this research have emerged in the last few decades of British practices; however, the material dead have been subject to post-funeral rites and practices across cultures and time (Williams 2004 a). In this way, ashes creations are a continuation of rites and practices with the material dead that reach far back into our shared human culture. In

his influential work 'Death and the Right Hand', Hertz (1960)[25] develops the concept of post-funeral practices with bones and cremation ashes as 'second burials', which he explores using the positions of body, soul, and survivors. Hertz (1960) explores how the status of the deceased changes, from member of society to dead ancestor, as they pass from the domain of the living to the domain of the dead during second burials practices. Hertz's claims that cremation creates a 'second body' from which the deceased can continue to encounter the world in subsequent rites and practices.

> This is precisely the meaning of cremation: far from destroying the body of the deceased, it recreates it and makes it capable of entering a new life (Hertz 1960 p42).

Hertz's (1960) assertion that cremation creates a second body for the deceased to encounter the world reflects two of his central claims about rites and practices associated with death. First, Hertz's (1960) argues that death is not a fixed point when life leaves the body; rather, death is a transition between states that reaches well beyond biological death into rites and practices with the material dead. Second, Hertz (1960) argues that all death rites, no matter their expression or cultural context, are concerned with resurrection and renewal. Hertz (1960) work is seminal in the exploration of second burial practices and his work has been developed by a range of authors; notably by Bloch and Parry (1982) and Metcalf and Huntington (1991) who utilise Hertz's (1960) in cross-cultural anthropological exploration of second burial practices.

Hertz's influence is evident in this research in regards to his notion that the physical qualities of cremation ashes have the capacity to shape, influence, and inform second burial practices. Hertz (1960) claims that second burial practices are frequently performed following a cremation because the physical materiality of cremation ashes affords the performance of subsequent practices. Hertz (1960) develops wet / dry dualisms to capture how 'dry' cremation ashes (or bits of bone removed of their flesh and dried) encourage and permit second burial practices, especially when compared to

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[25] Although published in English in 1960, Hertz's work 'Death and the Right Hand' was originally published in 1907. In this seminal work Hertz's focuses upon rites and practices associated with death in traditional Indonesian cultures, but draws examples from practices from across the non-western world.

the 'wet' corpse. Hertz's (1960) wet / dry dualisms have continued influence over the theorisation of cremation ashes and have been utilised in the exploration of evolving British cremation ashes practice's, such as scattering ashes at sites of personal resonance (Prendergast et al. 2006). Hertz's (1960) focus on dualistic categorisation has a tendency to conceptually locate his work at the start of the twentieth century when it was written; however, the notion that the physical qualities of matter itself shape human practice is reflected in the work of much later theorists, such as Latour (2005) and Gell (1998), who explore the relationships between agency and matter and who will be considered later in this chapter.

Although this thesis is does not draw directly from his wet / dry dualisms, Hertz (1960) is influential in this research in his assertion that the materiality of cremation ashes enables transformative post-funeral practices with the material dead. Hertz's dualisms conceptually locate 'dry' cremation ashes in continual relations with the 'wet' corpses and it is unclear if cremation ashes are experienced in this way by people engaging in second burial practice; which is unsurprising, given that Hertz (1960) work was conducted entirely from secondary sources. Therefore, this thesis will explore how people who directly participate in second burial practices of ashes creations experience cremation ashes by investigating the ways in which the materiality of the cremated dead shape, influence, and inform practices. It will explore this from two perspectives. First, from the perspective of people who creatively work with cremation ashes and second from the perspective of people who commission and live with ashes creations.

Hertz's (1960) claim that cremation ashes create a 'second body' for the dead to reside in faced criticism from his contemporary Van Gennep (1960)[26],who argued that the purpose of cremation is to destroy the body and therefore enable the soul to move on to the realm of the dead. Although disputing Hertz's (1960) 'second body' thesis, Van Gennep's (1960) influential work 'Rites of Passage' echoes Hertz (1960) concern with resurrection and renewal. Van Gennep (1960) explores how rites of passage performed in rituals and ceremonies cushion the disturbance of transitional periods, such as the transitions from life to death, from child to adulthood, or from being single to being

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[26] Although published in English in 1960, Van Gennep's (1960) influential work 'Rites of Passage' was originally published in 1909.

married. Van Gennep (1960) saw regeneration and renewal as laws of life and the universe, which is evident, he argues, in the concern with rebirth that can be traced in all rites of passage.

Van Gennep (1960) developed three categories of rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation. Although rites and practices with the material dead contain an aspect of separation from the living, Van Gennep (1960) illustrates how they are equally concerned with transition and incorporation. Specifically, Van Gennep (1960) argues that post-death rites and practices with the material dead involve transitions between states, such as those that distinguish the living from the dead, and incorporation into the world of the dead. Van Gennep's (1960) exploration of liminality is particularly useful when thinking about practices associated with the material dead because it captures the ambiguity that exists betwixt and between states. In doing so, it captures the notion of transition as processes rather than as static events or moments in time. This has the effect of highlighting the importance of examining processes of changes as well as the outcome of change when considering rites and practices with the material dead. This is reflected in this thesis's focuses on the processes between states, such as decision-making and physically making ashes creations, which is given due consideration alongside outcomes of practices.

Contemporary context

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the collection of cremation ashes from Funeral Directors and Crematoria did not become common in British practice until the 1990 onwards[27]. This increase in collections of cremation ashes by families is symptomatic of the growing tendency to engage in personalised practices that locate the material dead outside of burial's traditional landscapes of cemeteries, Gardens of Remembrance, columbaria, and graveyards. Although British cremation and crematoria practices are established research areas[28], as noted by a number of authors (Bradbury 2001, Davies 2002, Jupp 2006, and Howarth 2007 a, Williams 2011), academic

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[27] At 60% in 2005, collection rate were up 400% since 1970 (Kellaher et al. 2004).
[28] For examples see Davies (1996), Jupp and Howarth (1997), Jupp and Gittings (1999), Jupp (2006),

knowledge has yet to catch up with recent shifts in cremation ashes practices as only a few studies have produced empirical data on strategies and practices cremation ashes are subject to once they have left the care of Funeral Directors and crematoria.

Howarth (2007 a) claims that, although modern cremation was legalised in the U.K. in 1884, it is still the new comer when compare to the domination of centuries of burial practices. Therefore, the academic neglect of recently emerging practices with the cremated dead is a reflection of the relatively recent re-emergence of cremation in British practice: "As a relatively new practice in Western societies, the implications for the memorialization of the cremated dead are unclear" (Howarth 2007 p228). Certainly, burial practices, which dominated British practices since Anglo-Saxon periods until the middle of the twentieth century (Williams 2004 b), provide a rich, varied, and well established research area[29]. The quantity of research concerning burial practices is a reflection not only of the establishment of the practices, as argued by Howarth (2007), but also of the availability of data. A cemetery is a publicly accessible space with accessible written records, although this is not to imply that they are always complete. In comparison, contemporary cremation ashes practices become fragmented and difficult to trace once they leave the care of Funeral Directors and crematoria and enter the comparably private domains of the family. The newness of the practice and availability of the data means that contemporary cremation ashes practices remain an under researched area. Therefore, this study addresses this gap in academic knowledge by making a contribution to understandings of practices with the cremated dead that are recently emerging in a contemporary British context.

Although still limited in number, studies have emerged in the last decade investigating emerging practices with cremation ashes located outside of traditional landscapes associated with death. Of particular note is Williams' (2011) archaeological mapping of a Donkey Sanctuary, which is an exploration of the emergence of commemorative landscapes though practices such as scattering cremation ashes and locating memorial benches. This study is of particular relevance to this thesis because it explores the ways

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[29] For examples see Francis, Kellaher et al. (2001), Gittings (2007), Clayden, Hockey et al. (2010), Walter and Gittings (2010), Woodthorpe (2010), Rugg (2013 a), Rugg (2013 b), Vanderstraeten (2014).

in which the cremation ashes have the potential to act as agents in post-cremation practices, which this chapter will go on to consider in more detail.

The most comprehensive British study concerned with collected cremation ashes to date is Hockey et al.'s (2005) sociological qualitative study 'Where have all the ashes gone?'. Hockey et al.'s (2005) study investigates the social and cultural implications of cremation ashes practices by conducting semi-structured interviews with bereaved people and death sector professionals across three British sites, exploring the differing strategies of people who collect cremation ashes from Funeral Directors and crematorium.

Hockey et al. (2005) examined where people locate cremation ashes and how those involved decided upon and experience these practices. The study identified a combination of traditional and emerging practices, including: scattering, interment, and keeping ashes in domestic environments. Participants in Hockey et al.'s (2005) study often enacted personalised practices that were felt to be fitting to the identity of the deceased and the relationships they shared with others: for example, scattering ashes at sites of the deceased had enjoyed in life or dressing urns with the deceased's favourite hat and keeping it at the kitchen table. The inclusion of people involved in cremation ashes practice from a professional perspective added insight and comparisons to the interviews of bereaved people and influenced the decision in this thesis to include providers of ashes creations in the collection of data.

Hockey et al.'s (2005) original research formed the basis of a number of publications. Kellaher et al. (2005) explores the extent to which private disposal of cremation ashes outside of crematoria are informed by practices surrounding whole body burial, such as notions of bodily integrity and the creation of a demarked space for the deceased with expectations of visiting and upkeep. In this text, the authors argue that there is evidence for the continued influence of practices surrounding whole body burial with collected creation ashes, but that trends are emerging in which people are intentionally standing apart from "the shadow of the traditional grave" (Kellaher et al. 2005 p237) by scatting fragments of cremation ashes at sites that leave no notion of a demarked space.

In Prendergast et al. (2006), the authors argue that the practice of removing cremation ashes from crematoria has led to rituals of disposal no longer concerned with spaces

and places of traditional burial grounds. These rituals, they claim, may be 'new' practices in the spaces and places that ashes creation come to occupy; however, they can be understood as an appropriation of late nineteeth century Romantic values where a re-enchantment of the everyday world is expressed through concepts such as returning to 'nature' and emotionally expressive approaches to the loss of the beloved 'other'. Therefore, in this text Prendergast et al. (2006) argue that practices that cremation ashes are subject to by bereaved people can be understood as a challenge to the stark modernity of contemporary cremation, which grew from scientific rationality of the ninetieth century, where each body is reduced to indistinguishable ash and traditionally placed in collective disposal locations.

It is the extent to which private disposal of cremation ashes outside of crematoria can restore concepts of 'well-being' following a bereavement that concerns the authors in Hockey et al. (2007a). Although acknowledging that notions of 'well-being' are contested amongst bereaved people and death sector professionals, the paper argues that independent ashes disposal is orientated towards the exercise of agency in the decisions bereaved people make in managing their relationships with the dead. This purposeful exercise of agency, they argue, contributes to feeling that something has been achieved for the dead by engaging in these practices, which positively impacts on bereaved peoples' sense of well-being.

The authors continue to focus on decision-making in Kellaher et al. (2010) as they draw from Ingold's (2007) work on line-making as a metaphor for the emotional geographies that bereaved people create as they navigate cremation ashes decision-making. The collection of cremation ashes from crematoria, they claim in this text, often sets beavered people on 'open-lines', which are characterised as "unpremeditated and creative movements towards unidentified destinations." (Kellaher et al. 2010 P134). These open lines, which are grounded in bereaved people's experiences of being-in-the-world, are determined by "the transitions undergone by the dead as their ontological status was scrutinised, if not resolved" (Kellaher et al. 2010 P147). This understanding of cremation ashes practices reveals the process of decision-making to be complex, uncertain, and as theoretically interesting as the outcome of practice. This influenced

the decision to include an investigation of ashes creation decision making processes in this research.

Hockey et al.'s (2005) study is illustrative of the academic value of collectively considering practices with cremation ashes that can appear diverse in how, where, and why they are enacted. In their research, Hockey et al. (2005) explore cremation ashes practices that differ in terms of decision-making processes, people involved, timeframes, actions taken, practices enacted, locations, and associated material practices. Yet, in their subsequent publication detailed above (Kellaher et al. 2005, Hockey et al. 2007a, Prendergast et al. 2006 and Kellaher et al. 2010), the authors identify recurrent trends that enable academic insights; offering validation for this study into ashes creations by providing evidence that cremation ashes practices that differ in how, where, and why they are enacted can share commonalities in how they are experienced. The academic contribution made by Hockey et al.'s (2005) study gives weight to the premise that examining cremation ashes practices, such as ashes creations, that are materially diverse and enacted across multiple sites, can be a source of academic insight when consider collectively.

Although Hockey et al.'s (2005) study brought insight to contemporary cremation ashes practices; it was explicit in its preference for commonly occurring ashes strategies. Practices enacted by a minority of people that attract media attention, such as those explored in this research, are referred to as "exotica" by Kellaher et al. (2005 p134), who openly favoured commonly occurring practices, such as storing cremation ashes domestically or scattering cremation ashes at sites of personal meaning to the deceased and their families. Therefore, there is a significant gap in the literature in relation to less common or minority cremation ashes practices, such as ashes creations. As established, data collection concerning the practices that collected cremation ashes are subject to is somewhat limited as practices become difficult to trace. When we consider minority practices with cremation ashes, such as ashes creations, then data collection with people who directly participate in practices is even sparser.

Studies investigating practices currently enacted by a minority of people have been essential in developing our understanding of the ways in which rites and practices associated with death are developing new expressions in contemporary culture. For

example, Santino's (2006) study of spontaneous shrines brings together eclectic minority practices that are spontaneous and vernacular in their responses to untimely deaths. Often contributed to by more than one person and containing a wide range of ephemera and material objects, spontaneous shrines are practices that have attracted significant academic interest and includes: roadside memorials at sites of accidents[30] and shrines at sites where a number of people have lost their lives through accident or atrocity[31]. Spontaneous shrines are enacted in public space and are therefore more visually accessible to the researcher and evident to the public than ashes creation practices, which can distort understandings of the prevalence of these practices. However, Santino (2006) notes how spontaneous shrines are directly participated in by a relatively small number of people when compared to the number of potential participants and are therefore minority practices.

Santino (2006) study of spontaneous shrines challenges hegemonic understandings of rites and practices associated with death by bringing into view how practices that are diverse in their material and spatial expressions can be both fragmented and yet interrelated. Spontaneous shrines are inherently personal and specific to their creators and the people and situations they memorialise, which suggest a series of fragmented practices. However, Santino (2006) demonstrates how spontaneous shrines are connected by the qualities of commemoration and performativity that can be traced to the ways in which they invite participation and interpretation. Therefore, in common with Hockey et al. (2005), Santino (2006) illustrates how examining practice that can appear diverse in materiality and spatiality can provide academic insight as common themes emerge.

This study of ashes creation practices will contribute to academic studies into minority practices associated with death that, like Santino's (2006) study, have enriched understandings of the ways in which contemporary practices are evolving. However, it is worth noting that emerging minority practices that have received academic interest, like spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006), tend to be located in publicly accessible spaces.

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[30] For examples see Hartig and Dunn (1998), Everett (2002), MacConville and McQuillan (2005), MacConville (2010), Dickinson (2012).
[31] For examples see Grider (2001), Spencer and Muschert (2009), Svendsen and Campbell (2010), Allen and Brown (2011), Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011).

Therefore, they are comparably easier to access than ashes creations in this research, which are mostly located in intimate spaces of bodies and homes that present practical and emotional challenges to access. The academic neglect of ashes creation practices to date is explained not only by the relatively recent commercial emergence of the practice but also by the challenges accessing the intimate spaces and places that ashes creations occupy.

Personalisation

As explored in the introduction to this thesis, ashes creations are illustrative of the shift towards the personalisation of practices associated with death that has become increasingly evident in contemporary British society since the latter half of the twentieth century (Davies 2002). First, each ashes creation is made bespoke for each commission by incorporating a deceased individual's cremation ashes and is therefore highly personal to specific bereaved people. Second, ashes creation are further personalised by modifications to text, image, or form for each commission to reflect the deceased's identity and relationships with others. For example, ashes-paintings depict locations of family holidays or ashes-jewellery engraved with intimate words shared between a husband and wife.

Personalised practices are characterised by an emphasis upon the deceased individual and their families and friends and thus present a notable shift from the dominance of theological or tradition focused practices (Davies 2002). To provide evidence of the shift towards personalisation, one only has to consider changes in British funeral services over the past few decades, where you are as likely to hear popular secular music chosen by the deceased and their families alongside hymns depicting heavenly afterlives. For example, Parsons (2012) establishes that the piece of music chosen most often at funeral services in 1978 was the 23rd Psalm ('The Lord is my Shepherd') set to music; however, by 2006 Sinatra's "My Way" topped the funeral service charts.

Personalisation, in contemporary practices associated with death, has been linked to particular cultural tendencies in Western societies, including: the growth of secularism

(Schäfer 2007); the increasing value placed upon subjective experience (Wojtkowiak and Venbruxa 2009); the declining importance of formality and tradition (Sørensen 2010); as well as the influence of an increasing consumer-orientated culture on the death sector (Venbruxa et al. 2009). Tarlow (1999) develops the work of Stone (1977) when she attributes the growth of personalisation in practices associated with death to the increasing influence of affective individualism. Affective individualism, Tarlow (1999) explains, has arguably become a dominant cultural tendency across the latter half of the twentieth century, characterised by: "...a high degree of self-awareness, sentimentality and feeling, increasing desire for autonomy in social, religious and political life...and fewer, but more intense social and familial relationships" (Tarlow 1999 p139). Affective individualisms concern with the relational, sentimental, and autonomous self, argues Tarlow (1999), has contributed to the growth of practices where the deceased individual, their families, and friends, take centre stage in the rites and practices associated with death.

This foregrounding of the relational, sentimental, and autonomous self of affective individualism is evident at the sites where the material dead can be found, as cemetery practices and scattering sites have increasingly shifted away from collective traditions and towards individualised practices (Littlewood 1993, Walter 1994, Davies 2002). This shift is sometimes concerned with the modification of existing practices; for example, Petersson and Wingren (2011) and Sørensen (2010) explore how gravestones are becoming less concerned with chronological biographical information and more concerned with capturing feelings and multiple identities of the deceased and their families. This shift towards affective individualism has also ushered in new practices; for example, Hockey et al.'s (2005) study found that cremation ashes are increasingly interred or scattered outside of the cemetery at sites of personal meaning to the deceased's life and their relationships with others. When considered collectively, these changes in practices at the sites of the material dead illustrate that notions of the deceased's unique personhood are increasingly extending beyond death through the bespoke disposal of human remains (Clayden et al. 2009, 2010).

The increase in personalised practices since the latter half of the twentieth century has been accompanied by a shift in regards to who is perceived to have the authority to

regulate rites and practices associated with death (Walter 1994). In his work tracing broad sociological patterns in death practices, Walter (1994) traces the turn away from the collectively prescribed management of the dead of religious and traditional authorities in preference for practices embedded in the authorities of deceased and bereaved people. This shift in authority, argues Walter (1994), is associated with the growth of increasingly personalised practices with the material dead, which are understood to be valid by the death sector, bereaved people, and wider society specifically because they have been chosen by bereaved or deceased people. A 'good' choice, argues Walter (1994) becomes the self-authenticated choices involved in each unique death and Walter uses the popularity of the Frank Sinatra song "My Way" at funeral services (Parson 2012) as a metaphor for this shift in authority.

However, Walter (1994) goes on to contend that these self-authenticated choices are not happening in isolation to each other. Rather, Walter argues, as practices become increasingly individualised rather than collectively prescribed, we look to what other individuals are doing to normalize our own practices and validate our choices. Therefore, as we validate our choices through our knowledge of other peoples' practices, Walter changes the metaphor for this shift in authority in rites and practices associated with death away from Sinatra's "My Way" to another Sinatra song "Come fly with me" as those engaging in in ashes creations validate practices for others though stories in the media, word of mouth, and from online sources.

What is interesting about Walter's (1994) work is that he highlights how practices that are highly personalised are full of connectivity to the practices of other people. This has the effect of drawing to the foreground the relational aspects of personalisation, rather than presenting personalisation as the sole accomplishment of the autonomous self. This conceptualisation of personalisation, as relational and full of connectivity, is also reflected in the work of Schäfer (2012) and Caswell (2011). Schäfer's (2012) ethnographic study of personalisation in post-mortem practices in contemporary New Zealand and Caswell's (2011) qualitative study of personalisation in Scottish funeral practices make a number of points that are pertinent to explorations of personalisation in practices associated with death that have been influential in the development of this thesis.

First, both note the tendency in the death sector and academia to present personalisation as an all-pervading replacement of traditional rites and practice associated with death. However, in both their studies they identify how, in many practices associated with death, the traditional, religious, and personal enmesh or sit alongside each other. For example, as previously noted, the most popular song played at funerals shifted from a religious hymn to a secular song (Parsons 2012). However, it is worth noting that in 2006 only 40 percent of all music played at funeral services was secular (Parsons 2012) as personalised music choices co-exist with existing musical tradition.

The characterisation of personalisation as an all-pervading replacement of traditional practice can fall prey to the tendency to portray personalisation as a new phenomenon (Howarth 2000, Schäfer 2012). Although personalisation has grown increasingly prevalent in the latter half of the twentieth century, the work of academics such as Rugg (2013 b) and Gittings (2007) illustrate how movements towards personalisation began much earlier. Rugg (2013 b), who examines churchyard commemoration across the twentieth century, and Gittings (2007), who explores historic unusual burials and commemorations, both note how desire for personalisation has long since been a feature of material practices at sites of bodily remains. We are reminded that personalisation is not simply a product of the reflective individualisation of high modernity (Giddens 1991), but part of a continuum of people's practices. Acknowledging personalisation as part of a continuum that enmeshes the traditional, religious, and personal is especially important when a practice can be presented as 'new', such as ashes creations, because it opens up the potential for exploring continuity in emerging practices.

Second, Caswell (2011) draws attention to how the concept of personalisation is frequently used by academics and death professionals to describe practices in isolation when bereaved people frequently experience personalisation as a process. That is to say, there is a tendency to focus on the outcome of acts of personalisation rather than the complex and relational processes that contribute to it. Caswell (2011) argues that this has the effect of homogenising practices, so that differences in personalisation processes become hidden. These processes of personalisation, Caswell (2011) claims,

are most frequently concerned with the connected 'self' where memorialisation, biography, embededness, and relationality entwine. In this thesis, the understanding of personalisation as relational processes has developed a commitment to capturing ongoing processes rather than focusing on personalisation outcomes. This has informed research decisions, such as including explorations of decision-making processes. In addition, understandings of 'self' in post-mortem practices as relational and deeply embedded in 'otherness' (Caswell 2011) has enabled this thesis to trace complex networks of people, places, and things that constitute 'self' and thus bring to ashes creation practices a relational understanding of personalisation as an ongoing process.

Third, personalisation is characterised by narratives of unfettered individual choice, especially by the death sector; just consider this extract from the Co-operative Funeral Care study into funeral practices (2009):

> What many people are celebrating is the uniqueness of the individual: their character, their passions and interests, the things that made them unique. Increasingly they are arranging funerals to capture these aspects of a person's life. As someone arranging a funeral for someone else, or pre-planning a funeral for yourself, you may wish to do the same. We hope this booklet will reassure you that whatever your choices, funerals in the UK today are more varied and more personal than ever before (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009 p4).

Despite Co-operative Funeral Care (2009) assurance that "…whatever your choices, funerals in the UK today are more varied and more personal than ever before" (p4), Schäfer (2007) illustrates how personalisation is better understood as an outcome of negotiation with a number of controlling influences. For example, Schäfer (2007) explores how Funeral Directors make claims of democratisation of deaths rites and practices via personalisation whilst controlling personalisation choices through normalising discourses of 'appropriate' grief. This is enacted, argues Schäfer (2007), as an element of their continued pursuit of professionalisation.

It is also worth noting how control is enacted by landowners and organisations responsible for land management whenever personalised practices associated with death are located in public places, such as cemeteries (Woodthorpe 2010), roadside memorials (Everett 2002) or in bereaved-led ashes scattering practices in landscapes

(B.B.C. 2006 a, Telegraph 2008). In contrast, ashes creations often sit outside of the established death sector and are destined for the comparably private domains of homes and bodies. Therefore, the study of ashes creations will contribute to our understanding of how personalisation is subject to negotiation and control outside of the more established research areas of the death sector and public spaces.

The work of Schäfer (2012) and Caswell (2011) illustrates the importance of acknowledging complexity and contradiction in explorations of personalisation in practices associated with death. Both Schäfer (2012) and Caswell (2011) argue that we fail to acknowledge complexity in practice when we simplify personalisation as a new and all-encompassing phenomena concerned primarily with the deceased individual's identity. Schäfer's (2012) and Caswell's (2011) studies expand discourses of personalisation, so that relationality, continuity, process, and control come into view and this conceptualisation of personalisation has been influential in the development of this thesis.

Agency

The last section of this literature review explored the increasing tendency to personalise practices associated with death by focusing upon aspects of the deceased individual, their families, and their friends. Sometimes, the deceased act as an intentional agent in these personalisation processes, stating their intentions for rites and practices with their remains by leaving verbal and written instructions in the form of wills, letters, conversations, or recordings (Exley 1999). On other occasions the dead act mnemonically through memeories that bereaved people draw on as a resource to direct their actions (Exley 1999); such as scattering creamtion ashes at sites of personal meaning to the deceased where they shared memories with their loved ones (Hockey at al. 2006). However, as noted by Hallam and Hockey (2001) and Williams (2004 b), these notions of agency are embedded in intentional acts and cognitive meaning making and therefore fail to adequately capture practices where it could be argued that the material dead, who are incapable of intentionality or cognition, effect action as entities in the present.

Gell (1998) has been an influential theorist in developing approaches to understand the ways in which the material dead can effect action. His writings on art and agency have been adapted by a number of academics to make a valuable contribution to theorisations of agency in practices associated with death. For example, Hallam and Hockey (2001) utilise Gell to explore how the dead continue to be part of the lives of bereaved people through the objects that they leave behind. They argue that these objects cannot be reduce to the mnemonic reminisce of bereaved people, as the objects and the deceased are also active generators of agencies in these processes. Another example is provided by Langer (2010), who employs Gell (1998) to examine the transformation of agency at a coroner's inquest. Langer (2010) focuses on the ways in which issues of agency, objects, and personhood are played out, arguing that different kinds of agents, such as humans and 'things', all enact agency in the creation of different kinds of 'persons' in the inquest process. Gell's work is particularly applicable when research, like Langer's (2010), includes the material dead because it attributes agency by the detection of effect. This removes the requirement for intentionality and thus enables the recognition of the material dead as co-producers of agency in a 'world of people and things':

> Because the attribution of agency rest on the detection of the effects of agency in the causal milieu, rather than an unmediated intuition, it is not paradoxical to understand agency as a factor of the ambience as a whole, a global characteristic of the world of people and things in which we live, rather than as an attribute of the human psyche exclusively (Gell 1998 p20).

The four categories Gell (1998) develops in his anthropological work to theorise art and agency have been adapted by death studies academics to conceptualise relations between the living and the dead. Gell's (1998) category of index is particularly relevant when the material dead are present, be they corpses or cremation ashes, because it captures their presence as material entities. In addition, because any of the four categories can act as 'agents', Gell's theory recognises the material dead as entities with the capacity for agency. For example, Gell's categories of index (material entities), prototype (what it represents), artists (who is responsible for the index) and recipient (those for whom the index exerts agency) were developed by Harper (2010) to analyse viewing practices in a funeral home. Harper (2010) utilises Gell (1998) to explore agency

relations between the dead body (index), the pre-deceased (prototype), the mortician (artist) and the bereaved (recipient). Specifically, Harper uses Gell (1998) to trace how the material dead have the potential to generate agencies in relationships with other people and things. In doing so, she illustrates the corpse's ability to effect action and therefore demonstrates that the material dead have the capacity to acts as a social agent in the present.

Harper's work applies Gell (1998) to explorations of the ways in which corpses, which are visually reminiscent of living people, have the capacity to generate agency and affect action. Williams (2004 b, 2011) draws from Gell (1998) and Hallam and Hockey(2001) to consider what happens to notions of agency when bodies become fragmented and transformed during cremation, unrecognisable as a human form. Williams (2004 b, 2011) examines the ways in which cremated remains exert agency, both during cremation and in post-cremation rites in Anglo-Saxon England (Williams 2004 b) and, as previously discussed, at a contemporary Donkey Sanctuary (Williams 2011). Williams (2004 b) points to how recent academic challenges to distinctions between people and things have left the cremated dead relatively untouched. The cremated dead, Williams argues, are primarily viewed as materials that act as a conduit for the agency of mourners, they are: "…understood only as a set of material without agency or the ability to affect the actions and perceptions of the living" (Williams 2004 b p264). However, Williams (2004 b, 2011) goes on to argue, the cremated dead are agents with specific material, social, and mnemonic qualities that have the ability to effect action, such as influencing the rites and practise they are subject to and influencing the actions of mourners.

Williams (2011) draws the reader's attention to the ways in which cremation ashes, as remnants of the once living, occupy both subject and object positions with the capacity to act both as matter and as people. He draws from his early work (Williams 2004 b) as well as Predergast et al. (2006), when he describes how people can experience cremation ashes as "a potent mnemonic substance: part person, part material." (Williams 2011 p220). To illustrate this, he offers examples of the ways in which cremation ashes act and influence action as persons and as materials in a wide range of post-funeral practice, this includes: the post-cremation collection of cremation ashes;

the scattering of cremation ashes; the mixing of cremation ashes with other matter as well the interment of cremation ashes at specially selected sites.

By drawing from Gell (1998), Williams (2004 b, 2011) recognises the ways in which the cremated dead influence cremation ashes practices, directing actions and enacting change beyond notions of mnemonic resonance or intentionality. Williams (2004 b, 2011) claims that, in these practices, cremation ashes are materials with the capacity to act as sites of the deceased's personhood and, as such, they demonstrate the capacity for agency in their ability to effect action.

> Gell's theory allows both bodies and bones to be regarded as having social agency through their continuing relationship with artefacts, monuments, places and the bodies of the living. This is because the body in death is often linked biographically and retrospectively to the person as they were in life, as well as prospectively to an aspired ancestral or afterlife existence for the deceased (Hallam and Hockey, 2001: 133–41). In this way, the dead body can be conceptualized as a node in a nexus of social relationships, objects and exchanges through which personhood and remembrance are distributed and constituted (Williams 2004 b, p267).

Particularly useful to understanding the relationship between cremation ashes and personhood that Williams (2004 b) is highlighting here is Gell's notion of 'distributed personhood' (1998). Developing Wagner (1991) notion of 'fractal personhood', in which personhood does not reside in an entity but is constituted through genealogical, social, cultural, and linguistic relationships, personhood, argues Gell (1998), is not located in specific individuals, but is generated through networks of relationship that includes people, things, and places because:

> A person and a person's mind is not confined to particular spatio-temoporal coordinates, but consists of a spread of biographical events and memory events, material objects and traces which are a biographical career which may indeed prolong itself long after biological death (Gell 1998 p222).

Whether it is the personhood of a deceased person generated through networks that include their former possessions (Gibson 2004, 2008) or the personhood of an artist generated by networks that include their artworks (Gell 1998), Gell's (1998) conceptualisation of distributed personhood transcends notions of entities with intentionality as containers of personhood, enabling personhood to be distributed

across time, space, and materiality. This notion of distributed personhood does not preclude personhood from being embedded in notions of an entity with a specific identity, what Woodward (2007) refers to as:

> …modern conceptual construct used in the social and behavioural sciences to refer to people sense of themselves as distinct individuals in the context of community – people socially determined sense of who they are – like a social statement of who one is – personality traits, values identity is what distinguishes oneself from another person – the personal sense someone has of themselves (Woodward 2007 p134).

Rather, in notions of distributed personhood, it is how being an entity with a specific identity generates that differs. Specifically, Gell (1998) argues that it does not generate from within a particular being, as is the dominant conceptualisation of traditional Western philosophy; rather, personhood is an outcome of practice generated in heterogeneous networks. Gell's (1998) notion of distributed personhood is of particular relevance to this thesis because it enables explorations of the ways in which cremation ashes have the potential to act as both material and social agents influencing action in post-cremation practices. In this conceptualisation of personhood, cremation ashes, with their association with the former living body and once intentional agent, are cable of generating personhood associated with the identity of the deceased in networks with other people, places, and things. However, Gell's theory of agency is not without its limitations.

First, by assigning only four primary positions in his analysis of agency, Gell's (1998) theory has a tendency to flatten out the effects of other agents. For example, ascribing creative agency to the 'artist' position has the effect of obscuring how heterogeneous materials, technologies, and locations are all involved in generating creative agency with the capacity to effect creative outcomes and actions. Second, Gell (1998) cannot fully let go of intentionality and makes distinctions between the agency of human beings (primary agency) and the agency of inanimate objects and other matter (secondary agency). This does not allow for the ambiguity of cremation ashes, which straddle Gell's distinctions in their refusal to fit neatly within human and non-human distinctions (Williams 2004 b). Although lacking intentionality as entities in themselves, cremation ashes cannot be simply reduced to 'secondary agents', because they are often ascribed

intentionality by bereaved people and therefore could be said to act as if they have the capacity for intention in networks with other people, places, and things. Third, Gell (1998) assigns positions of active (agent) and passive (patient) to categories to analyse the manifestation of agency. This presupposes that agency is something one category does to another, that agency is unidirectional and can be frozen for the purpose of analysis.

An alternative conceptualisation of agency is offered by proponents of Actor Network Theory; particularly the work of Latour, (2005) and Law (1992, 1994). In common with Gell (1998), both Latour (2005) and Law (1994) challenge distinctions between people and things to argue that agency is generated in heterogeneous networks of relations. Agency, argues Latour (2005) and Law (1992, 1994), does not reside in entities, but is a (temporary) outcome of the heterogeneous networks that exist between or connect entities. In these conceptualisations of agency, action is: "…a node or a knot and conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly detangled" (Latour 2005 p44). However, unlike Gell (1998), Latour (2005) and Law (1992, 1994) do not limit the number of actors involved in the generation of agency; make distinction between human and non-human agency; or ascribe roles of active and passive in the generation of agency. Rather, Latour's (2005) and Law's (1992, 1994) notion of agency is both multi-directional and co-constructed, allowing agency to be much messier and more complex and in its relations than Gell's (1998) theory is able to capture.

Although not embedded in Actor Network Theory, this thesis does draw from Latour's (2005) and Law's (1992, 1994) notion of generalized symmetry in research which assumes that all entities in a network can be described and investigated in the same terms. These theorists argue that the differences between all actants[32] in a network are generated by relations between them and that how these differences are generated is in itself is worth investigation. When applied to this research, this approach makes heterogeneous actors apparent in the generation of action as multiple material and semiotic aspects of ashes creations practices become visible. This has the effect of opening up the actants capable of having an effect well beyond Gell's four categories

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[32] Agents in a network are often referred to by Latour, (2005) as actants, rather than actors, to demonstrate that both human and non-human actors are being referred to and to distance the term from notions of intentionality.

into a potentially infinite field of relations, making visible a much wider range of actants in ashes creation practices, including: the materials, technologies, and places involved in the making of ashes creations; the homes and bodies ashes creations occupy; as well as wider kinship connections that shape ashes creation practices.

Latour (2005) and elements of Actor Network Theory have influenced a number of authors whose work is utilised in the analysis of data in this thesis. This includes: Sørensen (2010), who examines absence and presence in the enactment of agency via spatial and material practices in the cemetery; Jalas (2009), who examines reciprocal relationships between humans and the special objects that they create and maintain through an exploration of wooden boating practices; and Jensen (2010), who explores the agency of fragmented body parts in his exploration of presence in organ donation and transplantation. These authors contribute to this thesis through their analysis of how people, materials, objects, and fragments of bodies perform in the enactment of agency.

Although current academia may draw from theorists such as Latour, (2005) and Law (1992, 1994) to explore the agency of non-human objects, it is worth noting how the notion of the material dead effecting action goes back into the foundations of the sociological discipline. Specifically, Hertz (1960), working at the turn of the twentieth century, brought attention to the ways in which the material dead perform as social and material entities and are therefore much more than biological remnants of a once living being.

Presence

Material practices associated with the dead, especially those enacted in proximity to the material dead, such as ashes creations, have the potential to realise presence in the lives of the living[33]. For example, Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008) draw from Woodthorpe's (2007) earlier work in a London cemetery to explore the ways in which carefully selected objects left on graves by bereaved people give materiality to the presence of the

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[33] For examples see: Hallam and Hockey (2001), Gibson (2004), (2008), Lohman (2006), Lewis and Brown (2007), Bleyen (2010), Sørensen (2010), Petersson and Wingren (2011).

deceased in cemetery practices. When considering the practice of leaving toys by gravesides they observe that: "…what is particularly interesting is that by using toys at the sites of the grave the dead are made to be 'present'" (Meyer and Woodthorpe 2008 p5). Such objects enact agency, argue Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008), as they move beyond mere representation, to "create a social existence and therefore possible 'life' for deceased people" (Meyer and Woodthorpe 2008 p8).

In Sørensen's (2010) exploration of absence and presence in cemeteries, it is proximity to the material remains of the deceased that conveys presence in material practices. Sørensen (2010) refers to this entwining of presence and proximity in death's material culture as "an active practice of nearness" (Sørensen 2010 p125), where presence is a feeling of emotional and physical closeness to the deceased experienced through proximity to their remains. Sørensen (2010) embeds presence in Runia's (2006) conceptualisation of presence as "'being in touch' with the 'awesome reality' of people, places, and things" (Runia 2006 p5). Runia (2006) argues that presence via 'being in touch' is realised through performance and he distinguishes this from an orientation towards meaning making, where there is a tendency for something to stand in for something else via representation. Runia (2006) claims that it is this performative presence via experiences of connectivity that people are looking for when they participate in practices that commemorate, and the examples he offers include an example of ashes creations[34].

> For it is, I think, not a need for meaning that manifests itself in, for example, nostalgia and retro-styles, in the penchant for commemorations, in the enthusiasm for remembrance, in the desire of monuments, in the fascination for memory. My thesis is that what is pursued in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in having a diamond made 'from the carbon of your loved one as a memorial to their (sic) unique life', in the reading of names on the anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Centre, in the craze for reunions, and in a host of comparable phenomena, is not "meaning" but what for a lack of a better word I will call "presence" (Runia 2006 p5).

In common with Runia (2006), the notion of presence being realised in continual performances is a defining characteristic of Brown (1981) concept of 'praesentia'.

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[34]Runia's (2006) quote refers to ashes-diamonds as "a diamond made 'from the carbon of your loved one as a memorial to their (sic) unique life'" p5

Developed to capture experiences of the presence of holy saints through the material culture of relics, Brown's (1981) notion of praesentia is concerned with the proximities shared between the remains of the saint, the relic, and the faithful. Thus, praesentia is a useful concept in explorations of ashes creation practices where, like relics, fragmented bodies are incorporated in material objects and share close proximities to the bereaved (the faithful). Brown's notion of praesentia was developed by Hetherington (2003) beyond the notion of holy presences to encompass material encounters with the presence of an absence. In experience of praesentia, Hetherington argues, presence is not created or represented in the confines of the mind. Rather, it is realised in material encounters where the presence of an absence is realised in continual performances in the spaces between presence and absence as: "Something absent that can attain a presence through the materiality of a thing" (Hetherington 2003 p1941).

Chapter Summary

The literature review set the broad context for this thesis by examining theories that have shaped contemporary discourses concerned with death. This included an exploration of sequestration theories, which are built upon the claim that death is hidden or denied in society (Gorer 1955, Gorer 1965, Aries 1974, Aries 1981), as well as processes orientated grief models, that stress the importance of 'moving on' from the deceased (Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980, Murray Parks and Weiss 1983, and Kübler-Ross 1970). These theories highlight the shift from collective to individual responses to death, as rites and practices came to be increasing enacted in the sphere of intimate family relations over the course of the twentieth century. Sequestration theories and processes orientated grief models, which require firm conceptual boundaries to separate the living from the dead, came to be increasingly challenged by theories that argue that these boundaries are permeable as illustrated by a wide range of memorial practices that enable ongoing post-death relationships (Howarth 2000). The most successful of these challenges came from the continuing bonds grief model (Klass et al. 1996), which claims that it is not unusual, or undesirable, for bonds to continue indefinitely between the living and the dead.

This literature review established that there is a gap in academic knowledge of the practices that cremation ashes become subject to once they have been collected from funeral directors and crematoria, especially in relation to minority practices, such as ashes creations. Hockey et al.'s (2005) study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of bereaved-led cremation ashes practices that emerged in the last few decades of the twentieth century. However, it demonstrates an explicit preference for relatively common ashes disposal strategies, such as the storing cremation ashes domestically or scattering at sites of personal meaning. Yet, the academic interest in practices such, as spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006), demonstrates how explorations of practices enacted by a small minority of people can challenge hegemonic understandings of contemporary memorialisation and bring into view a picture of a multitude of diverse yet interrelated practices. Although research on post-cremation ashes practices is currently limited, the work of seminal theorists, such as Hertz (1960) and Van Gennep (1960), ground the research by providing an academic context for exploring rites and practices with the material dead. In addition, the contemporary academic context is provided by literature exploring phenomena such as the shift towards personalisation in practices associated with death; the ability of the material dead to effect action as entities in the present; and the way in which the presence of the dead is enacted though material culture.

Chapter Two: Research Design

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study and includes discussions of the epistemological approach taken, the positioning the researcher in relation to the research topic, sampling processes and procedures, data collection, data analysis, and research ethics. It details how this qualitative research study was conducted and traces the rationales of these processes.

Epistemological Approach

This section outlines the epistemological approach taken in this research; specifically, it documents the shift in the research from an initial phenomenological approach towards Law's (1994) concept of 'modest sociology'. The initial development proposal for this research took a phenomenological approach, drawing from the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967), Schütz (1962, 1970) and Seamon (1979). This decision was founded upon my interest in and commitment to research that values subjective experience. This grew from my encounters as a researcher and as a research participant in Manchester's economically poorest communities, where I experienced the value of an approach that attempts to capture the lived embodied experiences of participants. This was instrumental in developing my interest in exploring subjective experiences of phenomena and my commitment to valuing these experiences as knowledge. In addition, I felt that social phenomenology's calls for detailed descriptions of phenomena as they are experienced by embodied beings in a material world would aid explorations of how ashes creation practices unfold and are achieved in the life-worlds of participants (Schütz 1970, Seamon 1979).

The constructivism of social phenomenology does not seek to find 'true facts' that reflect an objective reality; rather, it recognises the existence of multiple realities, which are constructs created by selection and meaning making in people's inter-subjective life-worlds (Schütz 1962, 1970). The safeguarding of the subjective point of view, argues Schütz (1962, 1970), is the only guarantee that a fictional non-existing world constructed

by the researcher will not replace the world of 'social reality' experienced by participants. This is more than simply preserving participants' subjectivity in research findings; it is also concerned with understanding the very formation of social research as subjective constructions (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

Valuing participants' subjective experiences as knowledge entails a commitment to remain responsive to themes emerging from data as they are prioritised by participants (Blaikie 2000, Silverman 2001). Using this approach, it became apparent during data collection that phenomenology's privileging of the intentional human subject, in its focus upon selection and meaning making, was not reflective of phenomena emerging from the data. By making a commitment to continually return "back to the 'things themselves'" (Husserl 2001, 168) and focus on participants' lived experiences of ashes creation practices, it soon became apparent that the intentional human subject was not the sole generator of agencies. Heterogeneous actants that sat outside of notions of intentionality all had traceable effects on outcomes and actions. Participants gave accounts where cremation ashes, ashes creations, their materials and the spaces they occupied all influence action in participants' lived experiences of the phenomena.

These observations moved the thesis away from privileging the intentional human subject of phenomenology and towards explorations of agency as heterogeneous performances. This led to the work of theorists such as Latour (2005), Gell (1998), and Law (1994), for whom notions of agency are not the preserve of the intentional human subject. As discussed in the literature review, this approach makes visible the dynamic nature of the relationship between people as embodied beings and the material world of which they are a part. The data gathered for this thesis increasingly expressed the ways in which the material world and human experience are co-constructed and interdependent and therefore demonstrated how:

> Objects need symbolic framings, storylines and human spokesperson in order to acquire social lives; social relationship and practices in turn need to be materially grounded in order to gain temporal and spatial endurance (Pels et al. 2002 p11).

A particular influence on the methodology of this thesis's has been Law's (1994) study 'Organising Modernity'; particularly because Law (1994) embeds his epistemological

approach in his own field research. Consequently, Law's (1994) work deals thoroughly with how his approach influences the collection, management, and analysis of data. Law calls for a 'modest sociology' in research practice that avoids the 'hideous purity' of the hegemonic order of modernity by being aware of the context of its own production and therefore only making claims that are relatively limited in their scope. Law's modest sociology has four key elements which have an effect on research practice.

First, it is a sociology of symmetry, as every class of phenomena is understood as being equally worthy of exploration and thereby assumptions that some knowledge is true and other knowledge is false are avoided. This approach shifts the centring of the intentional human subject in research and calls for detailed descriptions of how participants order and reorder phenomena that are embedded in the data, because:

> …what we call the social is materially heterogeneous: talk, bodies, texts, machines, architectures, all of these and many more are implicated in and perform the social. So it is that the question is reshaped. The problem with the 'social order' is replaced by a concern with the plural processes of socio-technical ordering (Law 1994 p2).

In common with social phenomenology, Law is arguing that all social reality is a construction that requires ordering. However, Law's notion of ordering is distinct from social phenomenology's concerns with the social construction of reality because he brings to the forefront the ways in which 'the social' is materially heterogeneous. It is not that the acts of intentional consciousness of phenomenology's lifeworlds are replaced; rather, by acknowledging that what we think of as the 'social' is in fact materially heterogeneous, we recognise how things, places, ideas, texts, materials, and more, play their part in performing 'the social'. The focus for the researcher then shifts from establishing the phenomenological 'social order' to understanding the ways in which people, things, places, materials, and ideas intersect in heterogeneous knots of agencies to continually perform the social through processes of ordering and reordering phenomena. This notion of heterogeneous agents performing 'the social' is embedded in the conceptualisation of agency as an outcome of practices and, as explored in the literature review, it makes visible a much wider range of actants and agencies for the researcher to trace by the way they influence action.

Second, Law's modest sociology is non-reductionist, rejecting the notion that there is a class of phenomena that drives action. A commitment to non-reductionism requires the researcher to avoid using overarching theories and concepts to explain the data. Consequently, this thesis does not contain overarching structural explanations of why practices incorporating cremation ashes have emerged in the contemporary British context. Rather, it offers explorations of ashes creations that are embedded in the data. This approach is particularly appropriate in this research because ashes creations have not previously been collectively explored in a British academic context. Blaikie (2000) and Silverman (2001) advise that when little is known about a particular area of study, research needs to begin with a detailed exploration of the 'how' of a practice before 'why' can be appropriately considered. This thesis explores questions of how: how people who engage in these practices are introduced to them; how they make decisions to commission ashes creations; how people make ashes-objects and ashes-body modifications; how they are exchanged and how they are lived with. Exploring questions of how is aided by Law's modest sociology's commitment to non-reductionism because it embeds the research in detailed explorations of the data and therefore focuses the study on how ashes creation practices are experienced by people directly participating in the practices.

The third element of Law's modest sociology is closely connected to the first two. It argues that the social is best understood as recursive processes. The job of the researcher is to trace the ways in which recursive processes create and maintain the social rather than succumbing to the tendency to treat the social as an external 'thing'. Law advises that one way to achieve this is to reach towards a sociology of verbs as opposed to a sociology of nouns. This developed my commitment to examining the recursive processes by which participants create and maintain their ashes creation practices as opposed to drawing from explanations that impose an external 'social' thing upon interpretations of the phenomena.

The fourth aspect is concerned with reflexivity and states that the researcher should not set themselves apart from the participants of the study. Law's interpretation of reflexivity is not an attempt to systemically deconstruct the researcher as 'self' in relation to the research; rather, Law frames reflexivity as an extension of symmetry. As

such, it serves to remind the researcher of their own recursive processes by which they create and maintain the social and encourages these processes to be made explicit in the research process. So, for example, it is important to acknowledge that how research is 'done' is a series of interconnected recursive processes by which we create and maintain the notion of 'research'. Not only does the researcher's notion of 'self' continually shape the research, which precludes any notion of objectivity, but the places research is conducted and the technology used also play their part in ordering and reordering research processes.

The methodological shift away from social phenomenology and towards theories of heterogeneous agencies influenced the collection and analysis of data in this research. For example, social phenomenology recommends the development of typologies (Schütz 1970), but Law (1994) and Latour (1993, 2005) warn against a desire for such modernist orders of purity in data. These theorists argue that the social is complex, messy and uncertain; yet, when complexity is encountered, academics tend to treat it as a distraction, as if it is a limit to order. Law (1994) argues that research practice should be concerned with ordering much more than order; that is to say, the processes by which participants order and reorder recursive patterns in the data. If ordering is, as Law argues, an inescapable verb, which is always in processes of imperfect creation, then the categorical distinctions presented in this thesis have to be understood as fluid, always becoming and forever incomplete. As such, distinctions that this thesis makes in the data are what Law calls 'tendencies towards' particular patterns that have been ordered by the researcher and participants, as opposed to fixed certainties that simply present themselves. Law terms the tendency towards particular patterns to group themselves together in the data as 'stories':

> Stories are part of ordering, for we create them to make sense of our circumstances, to re-weave the human fabric. And as we create and we re-create our stories we make and remake both the facts of which they tell and ourselves (Law 1994 p52).

In this thesis, the process of ordering that Law refers to as 'stories' are referred to as 'narratives'. To tell a 'story' implies linear temporal qualities, as every schoolchild knows, the best stories have a beginning, middle and end. However, the continual motion of

processes of ordering as "we create and we re-create our stories" (Law 1994 p52) renders concepts of beginnings and endings irrelevant. A narrative, however, is concerned with the process of narrating, with telling the story as a creation in the present. This captures how participants' accounts of ashes creation practices are best understood as fluid, as ebbing and flowing in a perpetual cycles where ordering is always in processes of being achieved, destroyed, reordered, and recreated in the present (Law 1994).

Positioning the Researcher

This research grew from my personal and academic interest in cremation ashes practices in general and more unusual or atypical cremation ashes practices specifically. One category that began to emerge from this general interest in unusual or atypical contemporary ashes practices were examples where cremation ashes are irreversibly incorporated into objects. These practices appeared to be relatively recently emerging and receiving media attention and therefore of cultural relevance to contemporary British practice. I have been present during the deaths of loved ones and assumed responsibility for their cremated remains, although I have never engaged in ashes creation practices. Though my personal experiences of bereavement do not sit outside of my research practice, I was sensitive to the impact on myself and on participants of disclosure of these experiences during the research process (Valentine 2007). A number of participants asked questions that required self-disclosure, often concerned with if I 'had lost someone'. In these cases, I answered honestly and sincerely but without shifting the focus of the research to my experience.

Hockey (2007) discusses how, by choosing the field of death and dying, the researcher is opening themselves up to a much higher level of personal scrutiny about their choice of subject matter than is applied to other research areas. I have certainly found this to be the case. When discussing my research, I often encounter questions that imply that there must be 'something' explaining my interest in this field of study, 'something' behind it, which is not an experience I had encountered in my other research areas. This 'something' is most frequently interpreted as my father's career managing a

crematorium and working at a cemetery for thirty-five years. When I mention my father's working background, I frequently encounter an expression of 'Oh, that explains it!' from academics and the general public alike.

Hockey (2007) points to how this higher level of personal scrutiny in death studies research builds upon an ill-founded presumption that death and its associated practices are always inherently painful and frightening and therefore choosing to research in these areas must be 'driven' by something. There are ways in which my experiences have informed my research practice. I first started to consider researching the field of death studies when two people in my life died in quick succession. This was the first time in my life I had directly and intimately experienced the processes and practices of death and dying and it piqued my intellectual curiosity. In addition, I am sure that my father's work influenced my particular interest in cremation ashes practices, an interest that started to develop around the time of his retirement. However, these experiences do not 'drive' my practice. First and foremost, I find the study of post-death practices to be the most interesting and rewarding academic subject area I have encountered and this is what continually motivates my practice.

Sampling

Defining the research parameters

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, this study has developed the term 'ashes creations' to collectively refer to a set of practices with cremation ashes. The sampling section begins with a clarification of the characteristics of ashes creations included in this research in order to define the parameters of the study. The first criterion for inclusion in the study is concerned with what constitutes an ashes creation. It defines ashes creations as objects and body modifications in which cremation ashes have been irreversibly incorporated during their creation. Sometimes the material form of an ashes creation is atypical because they sit outside of established British cremation ashes practices, as is the case with ashes-paintings or ashes-vinyl. On other occasions, the material form of an ashes creation shares common features with established British

cremation ashes practices. For example, ashes-jewellery shares characteristics with cremation jewellery. The distinction lies in how ashes-jewellery irreversibly transforms cremation ashes into a new materiality which differs from cremation jewellery, which acts as a container for cremation ashes.

Body modifications incorporating cremation ashes were not initially included in the research as the study focused on material objects. However, following lengthy discussions with tattooists and academics during the development of the thesis, it became apparent that ashes-tattoos share common features with particular ashes-objects in the research. Ashes-tattoos irreversibly incorporate and transform cremation ashes for display on the body of the bereaved and this is also the case with ashes-jewellery. In addition, they incorporate cremation ashes in the display of images, as is the case with ashes-painting. The decision was therefore taken to include ashes-tattoos in the study to enable the comparison to participants' experiences of ashes-objects.

The second and third criteria for inclusion in the study were developed to focus the research on exploring relationships between bereaved people and their ashes creations. In the second criterion, only ashes creations commissioned by loved ones of the deceased to reside in locations with a direct and ongoing connection to the commissioner are included in the study. As a result, artist-led ashes-objects created to be displayed in art galleries were excluded from the study (For example see B.B.C 2006 b).

The third criterion was concerned with the temporality of the relationship between ashes creations and their commissioners. During the course of this study, lengthy discussions took place with two providers of ashes-fireworks. These companies irreversibly incorporate a portion of cremation ashes into fireworks to be fired either by the deceased's loved ones or in an organised display. It quickly became apparent that these experiences had a great deal in common with the bereaved-led ashes scattering practices explored by Hockey et al. (2005) and less in common with the ashes creations that are kept by the bereaved. Specifically, in common with ashes scattering in natural landscapes, ashes-fireworks involve gatherings of family and friends where ashes are irretrievably dispersed. Therefore, there is no ongoing relationship with the firework

post-scattering as it performs as a dispersal mechanism. Conversely, ashes creations in this research are objects and body modifications that bereaved people keep for sustained periods of time. It was the nature of this ongoing relationship with which this research is concerned. Ashes-fireworks were therefore excluded from the study.

The fourth criterion is concerned with the geographic boundaries of the study. This study originally defined its geographic focus as the United Kingdom; however, as the research progressed, this was altered to British practice. This decision was made because participants in this research live in and originate from England and Wales and there were grounds for continuing to include Scotland. First, a number of providers were found with links to or operating from Scotland, but, due to a combination of practical factors, none participated in this study. Second, during the course of the research I was told anecdotal stories of ashes creation practices in Scotland.

The decision was made to exclude Northern Ireland from the parameters of the study. When undertaking this research, I had reasons to visit Northern Ireland on a number of occasions. During these visits, discussions were held with industry professionals and academics with knowledge of contemporary Northern Irish death practices. During these discussions it was indicated that there was currently limited evidence of ashes creation practices in Northern Ireland. This was corroborated by online research, which was unable to find media stories about ashes creation practices or providers from Northern Ireland. This may be a reflection of Northern Ireland's cremation rate, which, in 2013 was at just under 19% of all deaths and is much lower than either England and Wales (78%) or Scotland (65%) (The Cremation Society of Great Britain 2015). Although perceived or potential differences between British and Northern Irish ashes creation practices provide an interesting future area of research, they were enough to exclude Northern Ireland from this particular study.

Obtaining a sample

This research involved two groups of participants who occupied different positions in relation to ashes creation practices. As outlined in the introduction, participants referred

to as 'commissioners' are people who have commissioned ashes creations that irreversibly incorporate the cremation ashes of a family member or friend into an object or body modification. Participants referred to as 'providers' are people who make or sell ashes creations. The study of the practices in this research presents a number of challenges obtaining a sample of either of these two groups; these include: the relatively recent commercial emergence of ashes creation practices; the diversity and dispersal of participants; the rarity of practices and the lack of regulation or collated data. Combined together, these factors contribute to the scarcity of reliable data regarding either target population; therefore, the population parameters are unknown.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants because it does not rely on established population parameters (Blaikie 2000). Purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher; therefore, it is an appropriate method to use when the emotive nature of the research makes participants potentially sensitive to contact or when contact has to be negotiated via a number of sources (Blaikie 2000, Maddrell 2009). The scope to make broad generalisations from the research findings in relation to the wider population when using purposive sampling is limited because established population parameters are unknown (Blaikie 2000). However, being influenced by Law's (1994) calls for a modest sociology, the approach of this study is incompatible with making grand sociological claims that are often inherent in broad generalisations; therefore, purposive sampling is epistemologically compatible with the research.

Maximum variation sampling was used to counter the tendency of purposive sampling to oversubscribe subgroups in the population that are readily accessible (Blaikie 2000). By using maximum variation sampling, the researcher samples for heterogeneity by selecting cases that enable the examination of different positions in relation to the phenomena. In this research, I chose to sample participants according to the ashes creation practices in which they engage. Stratifying the sample according to characteristics of the population, such as demographically segregated data, is problematic in this research because the sample size is too small and a limited amount is known about the sample population. In addition, sampling according to characteristics of the population in this research does not guarantee that participants will illustrate different positions in relation to the phenomena. However, stratifying the sample

according to different ashes creation practices ensures participants will have divergent experiences of the phenomena being researched as ashes creations are made in different ways, take different forms, and reside in different locations.

I decided to stratify the sample according to the type of provider producing an ashes creation and where ashes creations reside once they have been created. The selection of these particular characteristics for development into stratification categories was grounded in analysis of different forms of ashes creation practices gathered from media stories, online research, and in discussion with a wide range of professionals. The first category ensures that the research has a wide range of provider types, from business that exclusively sell ashes creations to artists creating bespoke commissions. This category ensures that providers will have different relations to their particular ashes creation practices. The second category ensures that ashes creations take different forms: from jewellery, which resides on bodies, to painting that hangs on walls. This ensures that commissioners engage in different types of ashes creation practices. Within both stratifications, I sought to maximise the diversity in form an ashes creation took, targeting providers and commissioners who engaged in different material types of ashes creation practices. The prioritising of these particular stratification categories is not to imply their privileging over other aspects of ashes creation practices. Rather, these categories have been utilised because they can be consistently applied over a range of ashes creation practices.

The stratification categories are:

Sampling stratification	Category	Description
Production 1	Created by a provider with an established ashes creation business	Ashes creations created or sourced by dedicated companies and sole traders who offer the services via their points of sale. These ashes creations often involve a financial transaction. Examples in this research include: ashes-diamonds, ashes-glassware, ashes-vinyl, ashes-paintings, ashes-raku, and ashes-jewellery.
Production 2	Created as bespoke commissions	Ashes creations provided by individuals and companies who do not usually offer ashes creation services, but have responded to bespoke requests. These ashes creations may or may not include a financial transaction. Examples in this research include: ashes-teapot, ashes-tattoos, ashes mosaic, ashes-paintings, and ashes-jewellery.

Form of ashes creation 1	Ashes creations worn / displayed on the body	This category refers to ashes creations that are worn / displayed on the body. Examples in this research include: ashes-tattoos, ashes-diamonds, and ashes-jewellery.
Form of ashes creation 2	Ashes creations kept / displayed in one location	This category refers to ashes creations that are kept in one location, often in the home and often on display. Examples from this research include: ashes-paintings, ashes-vinyl, ashes-teapot, and ashes-glassware.

Research is always part of the world it investigates; as such, it is messy and incomplete, refusing to fit neatly into categories (Law 1994). Certainly, two ashes creations created untidy edges around the stratification categories. Although a home object, ashes-vinyl are not kept on display. They were put into category 2 because playing ashes-vinyl can be understood as a form of display. The ashes-mosaic is on public display because it is fixed to the outside wall of the family-run social club, but it is on display in a fixed location chosen by the commissioner that is strongly associated with the deceased. However, on the whole, these sampling stratifications proved to be workable categories as the research progressed, more importantly, they produced theoretically revealing data by enabling the comparison of different positions in relation to the phenomena of ashes creations.

A research journal was an aid to sampling decisions. The journal was kept as a reflective tool throughout the research process. I got into the habit of completing the journal each time I worked on the research, starting before the field work commenced and stopping making entries post-analysis when data chapters were completed. As well as including notes about research decisions and processes taken that day, I had the opportunity to write freely about any aspect of the research. I would take time to read and reflect on the journal at the end of each week as part of my research routine. In addition, having the journal to revisit proved valuable when faced with mental blocks or ethical dilemmas.

Providers

Once the parameters of the study had been established and a sampling technique developed, participants of the study were identified and approached. The decision was

made to approach providers of ashes creations directly because it was apparent from websites and media stories that commissioners of ashes creations often directly approached providers and therefore this was an established route of communication. Providers offering ashes creations as part of their established businesses were identified via their websites. Providers who made ashes creations as bespoke commissions were identified by a combination of newspaper stories and by third parties who were aware of their commissions. In all cases, contact was made with providers using publically available information. Following this initial contact, a letter and information sheet was sent out to participants (Appendix One and Appendix Two). In total, eighteen providers of ashes creations were approached and eleven agreed to participate in the study, these include:

- two providers of ashes-paintings
- two providers of ashes-jewellery
- two providers of ashes-tattoos
- one provider of ashes-diamonds
- one provider of ashes-vinyl
- one provider of ashes-mosaics
- one provider of ashes-frames
- one provider of ashes-pottery and ashes-raku

Four of the providers were women and seven were men, with ages ranging from forties to mid-seventies. Five participants had an established ashes creation business and four providers produced ashes creations as bespoke commissions. Two providers produced ashes creations that fitted within both ashes creations categories. For example, the potter sold ashes-raku on his website, but also created a bespoke commission for the ashes-teapot. Of the eleven providers who participated in this research, seven are sole or traders or individuals and four are small businesses employing less than ten people. The size of the business involved is reflective of the majority of British based ashes creation business and traders who tend to be small owner-run businesses and sole traders. Two of the larger British based ashes creation businesses were approached to

participate in this study and declined, citing that they felt their business to be too sensitive to contact commissioners of their ashes creations to participate in research.

Two providers requested that direct quotes were not included from their transcripts, both citing commercial sensitively, although they wanted to have their interviews included in the study. Specifically, these providers did not want to say something that could be directly attributed to their business that might be misused out of context by a competitor at a later date. The likelihood of the data being used in this way is unclear; however, both of these participants were involved in legal disputes with competitors regarding patents, which heightened their sensitive to such a possibility. As these providers were happy for their data to be used in analysis, I proceeded with these participants, but did not include direct quotations from their interviews.

The number of ashes creations created by providers in this research varies. Three providers produced a couple of ashes creations each week, four produced a couple each month and four had produced less than ten each in total. Ashes creations are not the sole source of income for providers. Six providers offer ashes creations as an aspect of their business, earning additional income from related fields, such as pottery or jewellery making. Two of the artists/artisans offer ashes creation as a single aspect of their business, although it was not their only income. Three do not consider the production of ashes creations to be a business; rather, they view ashes creations as part of their artistic practice.

The date participants started to provide ashes creations ranges from the mid-1990s to 2008. The sample therefore contains a mixture of established and new providers. These dates are reflective of the emergence of ashes creations in British practice, which, as discussed in the introduction, has grown incrementally over the last twenty years. Eight providers produce ashes creations from a dedicated studio or office space external to their home, two have home studios and one works from her living room. The majority of ashes creations require specific skills, knowledge or technology to create. Ten of the providers are artist/artisans who physically produce their own ashes creations. Seven of these artist/artisans providers produce ashes creations without assistance. Two collaborate with others and they consist of: the Jeweller who works with glass blowers

and the Vinyl-Record provider who works with vinyl-pressing factories. Nine of the ten artist/artisans providers had previous experience of their particular artistic practice before creating ashes creations. The majority of providers had experienced limited contact with the established death sector in terms of successfully selling of their ashes creations. Two of the providers in this research regularly sold ashes creations to the established death sector, such as funeral directors or urn suppliers. Two of the providers in this research occasionally sold to the established death sector, three made approaches but had not been successful in establishing sales relationships and the remainder had never approached the established death sector. However, one provider has previously worked as a Funeral Director and continued to work in the death sector dealing with burial alongside offering ashes creations. This provider did not have a background in the creative arts.

Commissioners

There were a number of challenges in locating and recruiting commissioners of ashes creations. Ashes creations are minority practices; therefore, the overall number of potential participants is limited. People can participate in ashes creation practices immediately following bereavement. People also can participate in ashes creation practices a number of years after a death. This broad timeframe makes contact via death professionals somewhat unreliable as the sample would be biased towards commissioners who participated in ashes creation practices shortly after the death of the loved one. Online opportunities for recruitment were limited. Although appearing on occasion as a discussion thread, no forums or online discussion groups dedicated to ashes creations were identified outside providers' Facebook pages. Upon investigation, providers' Facebook pages were discounted as an appropriate method of recruitment because the emotive posts seemed to offer a cathartic outlet for customers where it did not seem appropriate or ethical to initiate unsolicited contact.

Negotiated access via providers was identified as the most appropriate method of contacting commissioners. Before participating in the research, providers were asked if they would be willing to contact people who had commissioned an ashes creation to

invite them to participate. Although access via providers has an obvious sample bias, as they are unlikely to facilitate access to a participant who has been unhappy with their service, it does offer a number of benefits as a sampling method. First, bereaved people were not receiving unsolicited approaches about the study directly from the researcher. I felt that this approach was an important element of the informed consent process. Valentine (2007) also takes this approach in her qualitative research with bereaved people. She argues that it is important not to approach potential participants directly because unsolicited contact by a researcher has the potential to stir complex feelings of grief much more than when a previous relationship with the person making initial contact exists.

Second, negotiated access enables discussions between the researcher and providers to identify commissioners who may be willing and suitable to participate. In her study of memorial benches, Maddrell (2009) found sampling methods that allow for assessments of participants' suitability before contact to be essential given the sensitive nature of the research. Maddrell (2009) felt it was inappropriate to track down everyone who had erected a memorial, preferring instead to select cases where participation was felt to be appropriate. Similarly, I felt that it to be inappropriate to write to a providers' entire customer base, instead selecting cases where participation was felt to be appropriate. Providers felt that some commissioners may experience intense distress or emotional harm when participating in research concerning the deaths of their loved ones and would therefore be unsuitable to participate. Although this approach requires subjective judgements regarding potential participants' emotional states, providers demonstrated a good understanding of their customers' suitability to participate in the research, as demonstrated by the excellent response rate and quality of the data.

Providers contacted selected commissioners by telephone and email to discuss the research. Providers stressed to commissioners that participation was something they could take time to consider and was in no way an expectation of the provider. If commissioners indicated that they were interested in finding out more, participants were sent a letter and information sheet regarding the study (Appendix Three and Appendix Four). Recommendations for researchers made by participants in Dyregrov's (2004) study with bereaved people were adapted for this study, such as: contacting

potential participants by letter when approaching for the first time; giving potential participants thorough written information before participation; always giving time to decide upon participation; and letting participants decide the location of the meeting.

In total, providers approached fifteen commissioners of ashes creations and thirteen agreed to participate in the study (resulting in twelve interviews, as two participants were interviewed together). This included:

- three commissioners of ashes-paintings

- three commissioners of ashes-jewellery

- three commissioners of ashes-tattoos

- one commissioner of an ashes-diamond

- one commissioner of an ashes-mosaic

- one commissioner of an ashes-teapot

- one commissioner of ashes-raku

Five of these participants commissioned ashes creations incorporating their husband's cremation ashes. Five of these participants commissioned ashes creations incorporating the cremation ashes of their parents. The remaining three ashes creations incorporated the cremation ashes of a participant's grandmother, a participant's friend, and a participant's child. Nine of the commissioners were women and four were men. Ages ranged from twenty-seven to eighty-five with the majority of participants being between forty-five and seventy-five. Four of the commissioners came from North East England, three from the North West, three from the Midlands, two from the South of England, and one from Wales. This included a mixture of urban and rural areas. The thesis includes direct quotes from all commissioner participants.

There is little consensus about how soon after a death it is appropriate to invite bereaved people to participate in research, certainly when death has been recently experienced this can be a difficult decision-making process (Beck and Konnerta 2007). However, in the case of this research, participants' loved ones had died between one and twenty years previously. Only two participants knew each other. They both had ashes-tattoos that incorporated one of the participants' husband's cremation ashes and

these commissioners were interviewed together. Commissioners were from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Of those who were working, professions included: cleaner, antiques dealer, taxi driver, pilot, nurse, business owners, and administrator.

There were two types of ashes creations where interviews took place with providers but not commissioners. These were ashes-vinyl and ashes-photograph frames. In the case of ashes-vinyl, the provider had only produced a small number of ashes-vinyl records. A suitable commissioner of ashes-vinyl had been identified and discussions had taken place regarding participating in the research. However, a sudden immediate family bereavement experienced by the commissioner made this an unsuitable contact to pursue in the timeframe of the research. In the case of ashes-photograph frames, a member of the providers' immediate family who suffered a chronic illness became very unwell shortly after her interview, resulting in the provider feeling that she was unable to continue to participate beyond her initial interview.

Interviews

Twenty-three interviews were conducted in the course of this research. Interviews took place in a combination of homes and workplaces because I felt that participants' intimate knowledge of these locations would facilitate their ease discussing personal topics. I also felt that this approach inconvenienced participants the least, as the travel burden was placed upon the researcher. Each provider interview took between 2 and 3½ hours and each commissioner interview took between 3 and 4½ hours. I allowed each participant to dictate the duration of their interview, bringing interviews to a close when it became clear that participants were ready to do so or when interviews became repetitive. During longer interviews, breaks were taken to get a cup of tea or to have a walk in the garden, to offer a chance to emotionally recharge for both participants and the researcher.

The majority of interviews were conducted in person and recorded, with the exception of one commissioner who preferred to communicate in writing. This participant cited

the negative press coverage he had experienced in regards to his ashes creation practice, in which he felt that his practice had been mocked by the press. Although he wanted to participate in the research, he wanted to have the opportunity to think about what he was going to say and commit it to paper before he would comment on his ashes creation practices. During the course of the research, five emails, four letters and numerous phone calls were exchanged with this commissioner.

Being removed from lived experiences of phenomena, interview-based studies are better understood as commentaries on lived experience (Valentine 2007) or as stories that people tell about what they do as they continually order and re-order their experiences (Law 1994). Locating interviews as stories or commentaries of lived experiences makes visible the co-construction of data between researchers and participants because it dispels the myth that there is an external 'truth' to uncover and places the data generated in the context of the interview (Law 1994, Maykut and Morehouse 1994, Valentine 2007). To support this approach, Valentine (2007) advocates encountering interviews with a 'collaborative paradigm' between participants and researchers. Developed during her research with bereaved people, Valentine's collaborative paradigm advises researchers to put down prescriptive interview schedules and adopt a conversational style of interviewing. In this way, Valentine (2007) claims, the researcher can create a space where participants are active contributors in the setting of the research agenda, which is, argues Valentine, necessary for an ethical approach when working with bereaved people. Valentine's (2007) collaborative paradigm requires the researcher to locate themselves as a co-constructer by observing, noting, and analysing their emotional, physical, and intellectual participation in the interview.

Valentine's (2007) approach to researching with bereaved people influenced the decision to make interviews in this study as unstructured as possible in order to encourage a conversational quality. By using unstructured interviews as the data collection method, participants were free to prioritise which aspects of their ashes creation practices they wanted to discuss and to what degree. I moved interviews on only if they became particularly repetitive or removed from the broad topic of ashes creations, allowing enough time and space to enable a "depth of the conversation,

which moves beyond surface talk to a rich discussion." (Maykut and Morehouse 1994 P76). In keeping with the epistemological approach discussed at the start of this chapter, questions and prompts focused upon encouraging participants to explore the 'how' of their ashes creation practices experiences and avoided questions that pushed participants to locate their ashes creations in broader social contexts.

Valentine (2007) also discusses the ways in which a collaborative paradigm is a methodological tool capable of generating surprising and rewarding data. This was certainly the case in this research. In avoiding formulaic interview schedules, it soon became apparent that themes that I, as the researcher, would have included were not of particular relevance to participants. For example, I presumed that spiritual notions of an afterlife would be a feature of the data. However, by following a collaborative paradigm, conventional notions of spiritual afterlives seemed of little concern to participants. In the case of commissioners, unstructured interviews enabled detailed explorations of emotionally complex topics. In the case of providers, their practices had not come under the same academic scrutiny as Funeral Directors or other death professionals (for examples see Howarth 1992, Bailey 2010) and unstructured interviews presented an opportunity to gain a more descriptive understanding of providers' experiences than quantitative methods, such as survey questionnaires, could offer.

Using unstructured interviewing, my direction as a researcher was essential in ensuring that the purpose of the interview was not lost in conversational meanderings. Participants were guided to tell the story of their ashes creation practices with the aim of creating a temporal quality to the interviews. Interviews begin by asking participants when and where they first became aware of ashes creations and how they subsequently became involved in the practice. Having started interviews at the beginning of their ashes creation practices, participants tended to move temporally through their experiences. For commissioners, moving temporally through their experiences included choosing and contacting providers, collecting their ashes creation, and how they live with their ashes creations in their ongoing lives. For providers, moving temporally through their experiences included creating their first ashes creations, physically making ashes creations, and exchanging ashes creations.

Once these aspects of ashes creation practices had been established as points of relevance to participants across a number of interviews, they emerged as broad themes which I used as anchor points for subsequent interviews. This created a structure to the interviews, keeping participants focused on moving temporally through their ashes creation practices. This structure aided analysis by creating points of comparisons across interviews which is reflected in the data chapters. On a few occasions I asked participants a direct question. For example, I asked commissioners about their practice with the remainder of their loved one's cremation ashes not used in their ashes creation practices and I also asked if they considered their ashes creations a memorial to their loved ones. I asked providers about their relationships with the death sector. I tried to keep these direct questions to a minimum and only included them where I wanted a direct answer to that particular question rather than using questions to guide the interview topic areas.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

Coding

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using Silverman's (2001) transcription system, with notes included about body language, pauses, and emotional expression, which I had noted during interviews whenever possible. Whenever direct quotes have been included in chapters, the index number for the quote has been included to aid retrieval of the full text should it be required. Given the length of each interview and the comprehensive transcription process, transcription required a significant investment of time. However, this formed part of the analytic process as I became increasingly familiar with the data. To aid analysis, notable patterns and differences emerging from the data during transcription were made a note of in the research journal. I attempted to capture words as they were spoken by participants and therefore reflect their inflections and regional accents.

Following transcription, qualitative data analysis software Nvivo was utilised to assist the indexing, retrieval, and coding of data. Barry (1998) rightly stresses that qualitative

data analysis software is not a method of data analysis in itself and that theoretical thinking remains the responsibility of the researcher. In this research, coding decisions were explored reflexively in the research journal and regularly reviewed in order to reflect on the formation of key themes. Because coding is never analytically neutral (Mason 2002), this method offered opportunities to critically reflect on the coding processes with the aim of producing robust themes reflective of participants' interviews. Using Nvivo improved the speed and flexibility of the indexing, retrieval, and coding of themes in the data. However, I often utilised other approaches, such as mind-mapping software or flip chart paper and coloured pens, to trace connections between codes emerging from the data. Combining data analysis software with more traditional methods of analysis created the right balance for me between making the most of technology to assist the data management process and leaving data analysis in the hands of the researcher.

In qualitative research, it is essential to treat the data comprehensively if claims of validity are to be substantiated (Silverman 2001). It is possible in qualitative data collection for atypical or emotive aspects of the interview to impress upon the researcher's recollection. This has the potential to emphasise certain elements of the data whilst pushing into the background other potentially revealing aspects. By considering data systematically, I was able to move beyond aspects of the data that are easily recollected to consider the data in its entirety. To aid this process, data was subject to contextual as well as cross-sectional analysis.

First, each interview was coded using contextual analysis combining transcripts, images, and research journal notes that pertained to that particular interview. This process enabled the identification of concepts that run through an interview, such as 'kinship', which do not always appear as convenient sections of data and therefore are challenging to code in cross-sectional analysis. Second, cross-section analysis was used to identify similarities and differences, connections, and negative instances across participants' interviews. This generated themes by recognising recursive patterns across data sources. Participants' interviews were first explored as two distinct groups, commissioners and providers, and then these two groups were compared to identify themes emerging from both types of participant. Coding types were formulated to

contextualise codes and key concepts and themes emerging from the data were operationalised to ensure they were being applied in a consistent manner.

The exclusion of data

In this thesis, interviews generated a large amount of rich data as participants were keen to participate and to discuss their ashes creation practices. Consequently, there are themes, points of interest or findings, which cannot be included in this thesis due to space restrictions. The themes selected for detailed exploration in the thesis occurred with significant regularity in the data. These were identified as key themes and formed the basis of the data chapters. Less frequent, but no less interesting, themes had to be excluded due to the structural demands of the thesis. Examples include: the reactions of people outside of immediate family networks to ashes creation practices or relationships with the media. Although these areas produced very interesting data, they simply were not prioritised enough by participants to justify inclusion in this thesis; however, they will be developed in future papers and publications.

One particular aspect of participants' experiences did generate a great deal of data but is not represented in the data chapters. Commissioners' interviews intertwined with stories, observations, descriptions, and interpretations concerning the dying trajectories, deaths, and funerals of their loved loves. Despite the researcher not broaching these topics directly, commissioners returned to them repeatedly. Experiences were incredibly diverse and it became clear that there is not a 'type' of death that leads towards ashes creation practices. Recurrent themes included: medical experiences, physical processes of death, reactions of family and friends, and attendance at funerals. Commissioners spoke of love, happiness, loss, loneliness, humour, confusion, peace, anger, pain, guilt, and regret.

This desire to discuss the varied experiences of the death of loved ones is not uncommon in studies concerned with human remains. Walter and Gittings (2010), for example, found that accounts of domestic burial practices were permeated by stories of sickness, dying, and loved one's funerals because participants do not compartmentalise their

experiences into neat categories of dying, death, and post-death. Regardless of the particular circumstances, it was evident that the physical, practical, and emotional processes of their loved one's death had a continuing impact upon commissioners. Although this data was coded and analysed, it does not feature in the data chapters of this thesis. This decision was taken to give as much opportunity as possible to discuss ashes creation practices directly, although there are plans to explore this data in subsequent publications.

Quality and generalisation

Concepts of validity and reliability are essential to the critical evaluation of quality in qualitative research practice because they provide frameworks to assess the integrity of findings (Seale 1999, Silverman 2001). Seale (1999) explores how reliability in qualitative research is associated with the low-inference descriptors which are used in this research, such as: verbatim accounts, tape recording interviews, using participant's own words to describe experiences, and contextualised extracts of data. Although acknowledging that sections of verbatim accounts can be selected by the researcher out of context to support their claims, low-inference descriptors, argues Seale, nevertheless demonstrate that data has not been misrepresented by the researcher to a greater extent than constructed case studies or generalised accounts. Therefore, this research is committed to drawing all data directly from the verbatim accounts of participants, and avoids developing data from generalised accounts of interviews; this is reflected in the use of participants' quotations throughout the thesis.

Although this research values subjectivity, it does not situate validity in notions of the 'authenticity' of participants' experiences that the research captures. Silverman (2001) warns against downplaying validity and reliability in qualitative research and replacing them with anti-positivist criteria, such as 'authenticity'. For Silverman (2001), the 'romantic impulse' to identify experience with 'authenticity' implies an inherent 'truth' by which the authenticity of experience can be established. In understanding research data as a construction in which the interviewee and researcher are complicit (Law 1994), we render notions of authenticity unusable. Ashes creation practices described in this

thesis should be recognisable to participants as identifiable to their experiences; however, this is distinct from the use of 'authenticity' as a method of establishing validity. Instead, in assessing validity, this study has drawn from Silverman (2001) to establish the extent to which the findings accurately represent the phenomena of ashes creation practice described in participants' interviews. This includes processes of continually testing and reformulating findings against different permutations of the data in processes of analytic induction by:

- Always attempting to find comparative examples from the data to test out findings.
- Inspecting all data fragments from a single case by utilising constant comparative methods.
- Using deviant case analysis to explore examples that potentially contradict key findings.

In qualitative research, the relationship between the sample group and the wider population is not always explicit and therefore, generalisation claims require addressing in the context of each study (Seale 1999). This thesis draws from Payne and Williams (2005) notion of 'moderatum generalizations' to consider the extent to which findings can be applied outside of the research sample. Payne and Williams' (2005) reject the notion that generalisation in qualitative research should be minimised or denied on one hand or treated like quantitative data on the other. Instead, they call for an intermediate type of limited generalisations:

> These resemble the modest, pragmatic generalizations drawn from personal experience which, by bringing a semblance of order and consistency to social interaction, make everyday life possible. Indeed, a strong claim can be made that in qualitative research (even in the interpretivist sociology loudest in its rejection of generalization) such moderatum generalizations are unavoidable (Payne and Williams 2005 p296).

Payne and Williams' (2005) moderatum generalizations are reflective of Law's (1994) calls for a modest sociology. Both state that the researcher must be moderate in the scope of the claims that they make and avoid sweeping sociological assertions about society as if society is a structure external to the individual. Although data generated by the research may be reflective of broader trends and changes, these can be understood as tendencies towards certain patterns emerging, rather than being placed in

reductionist causal relationships (Law 1994). Just as Law (1994) advises the researcher to hold theories lightly when exploring data, Payne and Williams (2005) also state that moderatum generalizations should be moderately held, remaining always open to challenge and change. This, argues Payne and Williams (2005), is essential because moderately held generalizations are hypothetical in character and therefore produce testable modest propositions that further research can sustain or modify. Findings can therefore be sustained or modified as subsequent studies find, or fail to find, similar tendencies, whilst acknowledging that subsequent findings will never be identical. Payne and Williams (2005) discuss ways in which we can moderate generalizations, which includes limiting claims made in the thesis to discussions of basic patterns or tendencies in the data. They warn against stressing the validity of a study as a lone justification for generalizations and suggest that ensuring generalizations are located in and evidenced by data findings is the most appropriate generalization justification.

Research Ethics

This section considers different ethical aspects of the research, including how participants' levels of participation in the research were negotiated, issues of informed consent, processes of anonymisation, systems of data protection, and an exploration of the risks and benefits of the research. Ethical guidelines from Manchester Metropolitan University (for most current guidelines see M.M.U. 2011), as the lead institution, and the British Sociological Association (B.S.A. 2002), as the relevant professional body, were used as resources in developing the ethical framework for the delivery of this research. Although ethical codes and guidelines are valuable, if solely relied on as a simple checklist then they have the potential to disconnect ethics in the research process from the cultivation of a personal ethical stance (Valentine 2006). Therefore, this research also drew from my personal ethical commitments as a researcher developed whilst working with geographic communities and communities of identity who have limited access to power and resources. This includes a commitment to ensuring informed consent is an ongoing and inclusive process and a commitment to ensuring participants' experiences of phenomena remains central throughout the research.

Levels of participation

One of the challenges of researching is balancing appropriate levels of participation for participants. Valentine (2007) argues that balancing levels of participation is ethically complex when working with bereaved people because post-interview involvement can potentially place difficult emotional demands on participants. Drawing from Valentine's experience of offering participants varying levels of involvement in the research process, participants in this study were encouraged to be involved beyond their interview, but were not placed under any obligation to continue participation. All participants were offered the opportunity for post-interview contact in order to receive a copy of their transcript for comment, discuss any concerns, and receive copies of the findings. This concern with the emotional demands of continued participation was reflected in the take up of post-interview contact with most providers wanting continued involvement in the study and most commissioners wanting limited involvement post-interview.

Informed consent

The emotionality of the research topic requires consideration when exploring issues of consent. Although bereavement experiences in themselves are not a barrier to informed consent processes (Beck and Konnerta 2007), participants may experience emotional distress or feelings of grief before, during, or after the interviews, which can have an effect on how they feel about participating in the study. In addition, the epistemological approach taken by this study is centred on the valuing of participants' subjective experiences. Yet, valuing participants' experiences does not imply that power in the research process is evenly distributed. Although participants are not intrinsically powerless, researchers do have familiarity with the research process and control of the data, and are therefore in a position of power. A comprehensive and ongoing approach to informed consent makes the research objectives, processes, and choices as explicit as possible to participants and therefore attempts to acknowledge inherent power

relations in the research process whilst being mindful of the emotionality of the research topic.

To formulate a comprehensive and ongoing approach to informed consent, care was taken to ensure all information provided to participants was relevant to their participation and written in an understandable and approachable language. Participants signed informed consent forms to formalise consent to participate in the research (Appendix Five). I discussed with each participant the taking of photographs and the use of these images as part of the informed consent process. In addition, informed consent was explored in ongoing conversations with participants throughout their involvement in the research. I discussed the practical and emotional implications of participation and emphasised my approachability in exploring these issues.

After data collection had taken place, informed consent was woven through data analysis and it continues as findings are disseminated. However, when participants are offered varying levels of participation in the research, as is the case in this thesis, informed consent post-data collection is not always a possibility. This places a greater responsibility on the researcher to develop a sense of personal responsibility towards participants' data (Valentine 2007). For example, a number of participants expressed their distress at the particular ways in which their ashes creation practices were represented in the media as 'odd' or 'weird'. This developed a deeply felt personal commitment to not engage in dissemination opportunities that replicate these experiences. I therefore consider each opportunity to disseminate my findings with great care to this particular aspect of participants' experiences. For example, Vinnie commented:

> *I don't mind doing it [the research] 'cause it is helping towards your thesis. I do not mind doing that, 'cause it must be quite hard for you to find [people to do it]. I have not got a problem helping somebody out, because I know that she [his Nan] would want me to, but I would not want my face in the paper or nothing like that (Vinnie: 15.4).*

Vinnie's statement was also echoed by other participants, who were willing and enthusiastic to participate in the research, but did not want involvement in any associated media coverage. I understood that my thesis would be a publically available

document, from which images could be copied. I therefore reduced the potential for images of participants being used without consent by not including participants' faces in photographs in the thesis. This was a decision taken post data collection as it emerged as a consent issue from the data. Therefore, the decision limited the images that could be displayed in the thesis, as many photographs taken during the course of the research included images where people could be identified.

Anonymisation

Anonymity for participants is often assumed to be an essential aspect of ethical research practice (Grinyer 2002). However, a number of studies have illustrated that participants' desire for and benefit from anonymity varies. Grinyer (2002) for example, argues that the allocation of pseudonyms by the researcher when working in sensitive research areas can cause distress to participants who feel that they lose their ownership of the data. It is emotionally important to some participants, argues Grinyer (2002), that their experiences are recognised in the research as belonging to a particular person. Walter and Gittings (2010) also found that participants in their research, which was concerned with domestic burials, wanted the real names of the deceased to be used throughout the research process. This is not unusual when researching with bereaved people, when reflecting on her earlier work with cremation ashes, Hockey notes:

> In the case of work on the destinations of ashes removed from crematoria for informal disposal (Prendergast et al. 2006), some interviewees chose not to have their data anonymised. In using their own names, and those dead family or friends, interview material, like the ashes themselves, was being made to stand as a memorial for the person who has died. In this setting, anonymity became an anathema. Rather than the collectivising of remains at the cemetery, or the submersion of the individual within an aggregated body of data, the fostering of personal identity and individual memory was a primary concern (Hockey 2007 p443).

These studies draw attention to how problematic it is to make judgements of anonymity on behalf of participants when researching emotionally complex topics. This research starts with the presumption that anonymity is an outcome of negotiation. Anonymisation was discussed in relation to direct identifiers, such as the identity of

participants, their businesses, and the deceased. Anonymisation was also discussed in relation to indirect identifiers, such as ashes creation practices, or relationships discussed in the course of the research. Anonymising appropriately without compromising the quality of the research can be challenging because identifying data, especially indirect identifiers, can be central to the examination of qualitative data. For example, an examination of participants' experiences of different type of ashes creations is central to the aims of the research; however, distinct types of ashes creations could potentially identify participants who had participated in media stories. Therefore, participants were supported to make decisions surrounding anonymity in partnership with the researcher by exploring the implications on a case-by-case basis.

Upon discussion, it became clear that all participants wanted references made to their particular ashes creation practices, demonstrating the importance of the form of an ashes creation to participants. Commissioners were particularly keen to use their own names in the research and those of their bereaved loved ones. However, this extended only to first names, with commissioners seemingly indifferent about the use of their family names. This may relate to the intimate nature of the relationships being explored in this research as we only use our first names with our loved ones. Therefore, the decision was made to use the first names of commissioners and their deceased loved ones and to make direct reference to their particular ashes creation practice. Researchers and participants are not always aware of the implications of choosing not to anonymise data post-thesis when the researcher has limited control of the representation of findings. Given the negative media experiences of some participants, I had concerns regarding anonymisation post-thesis, I therefore discussed with participants my right to anonymise data in subsequent publications should it be required.

Providers were generally happy to have their names and business identities used or changed according to the needs of the research. However, one provider strongly felt that data should be anonymised expressing concern about a particular business rival who was not participating in the research with whom they were currently involved in a legal dispute. The practicalities of mixing real names and pseudonyms in publication can be complex (Grinyer 2002). Therefore, to present data consistently, the decision was

taken to refer to provider participants according to the type of ashes creation they provided as a proper noun, for example, Potter. This allowed data to be rigorously examined and compared in the research, but excluded direct identifiers. The exclusion of direct identifiers sometimes impacted upon evidence that could be provided in the research with regards to ashes creation practices. For example, specific newspaper articles, lists of providers, websites, and Facebook pages which contributed to understandings of practices had to be excluded as it was possible to identify participants in this research.

Data protection

This research falls within the remit of the 1998 Data Protection Act (Legislation.gov.uk. 2015) and Manchester Metropolitan University's Data Protection Policy (M.M.U. 2015) because guarantees cannot be made that data of living people will be completely anonymised. This research is ethically committed to offering anonymisation as choice rather than a requirement. In addition, the detailed exploratory nature of qualitative data means that, even when data has been anonymised, it can be possible to identify participants using indirect identifiers. The Data Protection Act is concerned with the protection of the rights of individuals in respect of personal data held about them by a range of bodies, including academic researchers at Universities. Processes and procedures were developed during the study to ensure all data was collected, treated, and stored using the standards of Manchester Metropolitan University's Data Protection Policy, which is compliant with the 1998 Data Protection Act (see Appendix Six).

Risk and benefits

To aid the management of risk in this research, I developed and implemented a Risk Assessment Strategy (see Appendix Six). Working with participants who have experienced bereavement demands an ethical responsibility to take into consideration the potential benefits and risks of participation in research (Stroebe et al. 2003). If an individual is emotionally vulnerable, participation has the potential to cause harm to

both participant and researcher (Stroebe et al. 2008). It was therefore important to competently assess the suitability of potential participants before inviting them to participate. In this research, appropriateness of participation was assessed by the researcher in partnership with providers and then sensitively negotiated with potential commissioner participants (see Appendix Six). During interviews, I attempted to create an environment which participants felt comfortable and able to express their emotionality. It became apparent that this approach was as important to providers as it was to commissioners. To aid building this type of relationship, I spoke to each participant a number of times before interviews took place. As well as discussing the research, often, participants wanted to talk about their deceased loved one, other family members or their professions. I directed conversations away from lengthy discussions about ashes creation practices and focused on encouraging participants to talk about themselves. This basic familiarity not only aided the collection of meaningful data during interviews, but it also increased my confidence in assessing participants' emotional well-being. Before commencing the interviews, I collected a range of bereavement support services information and at the end of each commissioner interview I tactfully discussed emotional support available outside of the research context.

It is important not to frame participation in research with bereaved people only in relation to emotional risk (Rowling 1999). Central to working with participants who have experienced bereavement is the requirement to respect bereaved individuals' own views regarding the benefits and risks of their involvement (Stroebe et al. 2003). The majority of participants commented at the end of their interview or in subsequent communication how they had enjoyed or benefited from the interview process. In his last correspondence John wrote:

> *I must thank you for asking me to do this as it is a very releasing exercise and something I would recommend to anyone who has lost someone close. The act of writing down you're [sic] feelings and memories is very rewarding. Good luck with you're [sic] research and squeeze the very last piece of enjoyment from those that you love cause you never know when it's going to be taken from you (John pers. comm.).*

This reflection and gratitude was also evident during interviews, for example, Queenie commented:

Researcher: Is there anything you want to add before I turn the recorder off?

Just to thank you for letting us rabbit on. Oh, thank you. To sit and talk about him, because as I say, not a day goes by [I don't think about him – referring to earlier statement] (Queenie 40.1).

This feedback from participants tended to fall into two categories. The first category is concerned with the ways in which commissioners often appreciated an opportunity to talk at length about their relationship with their deceased loved one and felt a cathartic effect from being listened to. The second category is concerned with participants being motivated by the potential to help other people through contributing to collective understandings of practices.

First, commissioners' spoke of feeling cathartic benefits from participating in research, this is consistent with other research studies with bereaved participants. Rowling (1999), for example, suggests that for a number of her participants who had experienced bereavement, interviews had a cathartic effect because they offered an opportunity to reflect on experiences without the negative connotations that participants associated with other 'talking' opportunities such as bereavement counselling. In order to aid the potential of participants experiencing cathartic effects from the interview process, I took a number of measures. For example, I did not set time limits on interviews. It was important that participants did not feel hurried and interviews of several hours not only offered opportunities to explore the topic of ashes creations in-depth but also enabled participants to explore their loved one's death and other aspects of their relationship should they choose to do so.

In addition, to support cathartic effects from the interview process, I did not stop interviews without negotiation if participants became emotional. Understanding decisions around emotionality and participation as negotiations requires the researcher to walk a line between become immersed in the feelings of participants on one hand and being detached from their emotionality on the other. Rowling (1999) refers to this as being emotionally 'alongside' or 'with' bereaved participants. She distinguishes this approach from being 'in' or 'out' of the research encounter, as both of these approaches can be emotionally detrimental to the researcher and participant when working with

bereaved people. King and Horrocks (2010) warn researchers not to immediately end interviews if participants become upset as prematurely stopping interviews can prevent participants from experiencing cathartic benefits; yet, failure to take action when a participant is in distress is an unethical breach of trust.

On a number of occasions during interviews, participants became visibly emotional. This was especially the case during commissioner interviews, but it also occurred during provider interviews. I took the approach of always actively listening and allowing the person to finish talking about the aspects of their experiences that were causing them to feel emotional and this enabled me to really hear the stories being shared. For example, during the course of the research an older woman started to cry when talking about her happy honeymoon in Blackpool when she was in her late teens. On another occasion, a woman in middle age started to cry talking about the sudden death of her eighteen-year-old son. If participants are to experience cathartic benefits from participation in research, it is essential that they feel listened to (Rowling 1999, Valentine 2007). This is especially important when working with people who have been bereaved because experiences of grief differ widely. Remembering a happy marriage differs enormously from the emotional pain of a lost child. By activity listening, I acknowledged participants particular experiences. If participants became upset I discussed with them the options of taking a break, continuing the interview another time, or stopping the interview completely.

Second, a number of participants expressed the view that, by participating in the research, they were potentially helping others through contributing to collective understandings of ashes creation practices. Rowling (1999) also found that her participants befitted from participating in research concerning their bereavement experience from feeling that they "were offering their experience so that it might help others." (Rowling, 1999 P173). Providers and commissioners often cited contributing to academic knowledge as a benefit of participation. Both groups of participants were aware that only a minority of people engage in ashes creations practices and they were eager to contribute to a study exploring different practices collectively. This is also reflected in the work of Cook and Bosley (1995) who found that participants and potential participants in bereavement research prioritised contributing towards

academic knowledge as a benefit of participation. Given that ashes creations are a relatively recently emerging phenomenon, it could be argued that the good response rate from both providers (eighteen approached and eleven participated) and commissioners (fifteen approached and thirteen participated) was a reflection of participants' eagerness to have their practices academically recognised and therefore validated by the researcher, by the University and, by implication, by the wider academic community.

The risks and benefits of participating in research apply to the researcher as much as the participant. This research included a number of risks to my personal safety, including travelling alone. As an experienced lone worker, I have developed ways of working to protect myself from harm (see Appendix Six). In addition, the realities of death studies fieldwork can place researchers at significant emotional risk (Hockey 1996). Valentine (2007), Rowling (1999), and Woodthorpe (2009) argue that examining the emotional impact of death related research via a journal is a tool that can enhance the understanding of data, support the emotional welfare of the researcher, and support the continued development of a personal ethical stance. When a researcher questions, explores, and reflects upon their own emotional reaction, these authors argue, they are assisted in locating their role in the creation of the research findings. I used my journal to reflect on my feelings generated by the research. In this extract I was exploring my feelings having spent the afternoon exploring if Facebook groups were an appropriate method of recruitment. I wrote this after reading the pages of an ashes creation provider who did not participate in the research:

> *It was really hard to look at hundreds of thank you's on the site, tales of people who had died, really hard. More than dealing with one person really in some ways. I felt I was taking by reading and not giving people anything in return. Talking to supervisor helped, he said - but people want them to be read that is why they post them. I suppose this is right, each one I read was like a life acknowledged in many ways – the kids [who had died] were really hard. I tried to talk to Frey and Ginny [family] about how I felt – I felt so sad – they tried but did not want to really listen. It was a difficult day. (Research Diary July 2010)*

It is important to recognise the importance of good supervision and emotional communication skills in coping effectively with the emotional risks of bereavement

research (Valentine 2007, Rowling 1999, Woodthorpe 2009). Although I am not a bereavement counsellor, I have professional experience supporting people suffering mental distress and felt able to listen to emotionally challenging experiences. As this data extract indicates, I find this easer to do in person than online. Throughout the data collection period, de-briefing sessions were held with the supervision team, with whom I felt able to discuss my emotionality surrounding the research process. I also had access to counselling support services at Manchester Metropolitan University. On the whole, sharing participants' experiences during the interview process left me feeling privileged and positive.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this thesis gathered data through twenty-three interviews. Eleven interviews were conducted with providers of ashes creations and twelve interviews took place with thirteen commissioners of ashes creations (one interview took place with two commissioners). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to make judgements on the appropriateness of participation, which is essential due to the emotive nature of the research, and maximum variation sampling identified participants who occupied different positions in relation to ashes creation practice. Interviews were approached with a 'collaborative paradigm' (Valentine 2007) which involved adopting a conversational style of interviewing.

Although unstructured, interviews tended to follow a temporal path moving through participants' ashes creation practice, and this is reflected in the structure of the data chapters of this thesis. Being influenced by Law's calls for a modest sociology, interviews concentrated upon exploring the 'how' of ashes creation practices: how people who engage in these practices are introduced to them; how they make decisions to commission ashes creations; how people make ashes-objects and ashes-body modifications, and how they are exchanged and how they are lived with. Exploring questions of how is aided by Law's (1994) modest sociology's commitment to non-reductionism because it embeds the research in detailed explorations of the data.

Therefore, this research aims to provide a detailed analytical account of participants' experiences of ashes creation practices as they are presented in interviews to develop theoretical inferences embedded in the data. In exploring 'how', this thesis will attempt to establish if materially diverse practices of ashes creations share common features in how they are experienced and the ways in which they differ, which this thesis now moves onto consider in detail in the data chapters.

Chapter Three: Discovering, Deciding, and Commissioning

This first data chapter of the thesis is concerned with how commissioners and providers initially engage in their ashes creation practices. It explores their narratives of discovering, deciding, and commissioning ashes creations: starting before ashes creation practices have been contemplated, moving though decision-making processes and ending with the commissioning of ashes creations. In Hertz's (1960) seminal exploration of second burial rites, he forms his considerations around three central players: the body, the soul, and survivors. In doing so, Hertz (1960) enables the comparison of different positions in relation to phenomena and is therefore able to identify areas of commonality in seemingly diverse practices. Each section of this chapter introduces one of four central players in ashes creation practices: commissioners, the deceased, providers, and ashes creations. By echoing Hertz's (1960) approach of forming considerations around principle actors, this thesis is able to compare practices and thus identify common themes emerging from materially diverse ashes creations.

The first section of this chapter introduces participants who commission ashes creations by exploring their narratives of discovering and deciding upon particular ashes creation practices. In the second section of this chapter, we meet the deceased, as we explore the part they play in ashes creation decision-making by considering how the deceased does and does not manifest in the decision to commission an ashes creation. The third section continues the chapter's focus upon the ways in which ashes creations emerge into the lives of those who participate in practices by exploring the accounts of providers. The fourth section of this chapter is concerned with ashes creation commissioning processes, which follows from processes of discovering and deciding upon ashes creations. Not only does this section bring together the principle actors introduced so far in this chapter, by focusing on the ways in which ashes creation take shape, it also introduces ashes creations themselves.

'…that is for me' (Barbara 14.4). **Commissioners: Discovering and Deciding**

This section of the chapter explores how commissioners discover and decide upon their ashes creation practices. It explores how ashes creation practices emerge from outside of the established death sector, tracing the influence of the media, the internet, and personal networks in distributing stories as it locates ashes creations as part of a diverse range of practices that commissioners engage in with the cremation ashes of their loved ones. In this section I argue that although ashes creation decision-making is primarily concerned with commissioners' needs, wants, and desires, nevertheless, decision-making are processes embedded in relatedness.

Discovering and deciding

The overwhelming majority of commissioners in this research were not aware that these practices existed before they became engaged in their own ashes creation practices. With the exception of Marie and her father, who we shall consider in more detail later in this chapter, ashes creations were practices that commissioners became aware of following their loved one's death. This could be any time from weeks to years after a loved one had died. Just over half of commissioners were actively seeking out practices to satisfy their yearnings to remain physically close to their loved ones' cremation ashes when they came across their ashes creation practice. These commissioners had frequently considered a number of practices with their loved one's cremation ashes before they settled on their particular ashes creations. Just under half of commissioners in this research were not actively seeking to engage in practices with their loved one's cremation ashes. These participants discovered their ashes creations by chance though their personal networks and via stories in the media.

 Not one commissioner in this research discovered or commissioned their ashes creation from Funeral Directors or Funeral Companies. Certainly, as we discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a number of Funeral Companies now offer access to a range of ashes creation practices (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009). However, the providers in this research also said that the majority of their commissions come from people

approaching them directly. Therefore, it would seem that many people are accessing their ashes creation practices from sources outside of the established death sector.

Once commissioners discovered their particular ashes creation practice, their decision to commission quickly followed, with the majority having a strong positive reaction towards the practice upon first hearing about it. Let us consider Vinnie's account of his decision to commission ashes-tattoos. The majority of Vinnie's Nan's ashes are scattered at the Shropshire home where she spent the Second World War following her evacuation from Liverpool. The remainder of Vinnie's Nan's ashes were distributed amongst family members. With his portion, Vinnie decided upon two ashes-tattoos on his lower forearm, having *'googled'* (*Vinnie* 2.5) the practice after seeing it on a TV programme[35], thus illustrating the growing influence of the media and the internet on how we discover and decide upon rites and practices associated with death. One of Vinnie's ashes tattoos depicts the lyrics of the Carpenters song 'close to you' and a snow-drop flower. Vinnie's Nan loved the song Carpenter's song and he sang it to her as she was dying and snowdrops grew on the bank of the river at the back of the house where the majority of Vinnie's Nan's ashes are scattered. Vinnie's second ashes-tattoo incorporating his Nan's ashes is on the other side of his forearm. This is a poem from a fridge magnet that he brought for his Nan for her treasured fridge magnet collection[36].

> *I don't like the idea of having like an urn, do ya know what I mean? Because, I do not know, dat's [that's] a (pauses and pulls an exaggerated sad face).*
>
> *Like me personally, again, I suppose it all comes down to individual choice and how ya feel about it. Now if someone gets the same feeling dat I get [from having an ashes tattoo], comfort, ya know, from having the urn on the fireplace, then I am one hundred percent for it.*
>
> *But me personally, I do not know, it's, it's, it's dead like 'uuumm' [pulling a sad face], downbeat, do ya know what I mean? It is dead downbeat to me dat, ya know?*
>
> *And the tattoos? (Researcher)*
>
> *It is a nice way, it is like a celebration in't it? Do ya know what I mean?*

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[35] Miami Ink', a U.S.A based documentary style show about a tattoo parlour.
[36] See Fig. Ten for Vinnie second ashes tattoo.

But a celebration that ya can manipulate any which way dat ya want, do ya know what I mean?

I don't know, dat [rubbing his ashes-tattoos] *to me was just 'Yeah, yeah'* [smiling and nodding head] *(Vinnie 18.2).*

Fig. 1: Vinnie's ashes-tattoo (1).

Vinnie's quote illustrates two intertwining narratives that characterise commissioners' accounts of their decision to participate in ashes creation practices. The first narrative portrays ashes creations as positive choices in comparison to traditional material culture associated with death. Vinnie's ashes creations are choices that are distinct from a *"downbeat"* (Vinnie *18.2) "urn on the fireplace"* (Vinnie *18.2)* because his ashes-tattoos are a *"celebration" (Vinnie 18.2).* In her exploration of a memorial wall depicting portraits of individuals who had died in gang related violence in an inner-city community, Lohman (2006) noted how families of the deceased highlight the wall as positive and celebratory. Moreover, they actively distanced the wall from the traditional material culture associated with death, specifically gravestones, which were perceived as being morbid and negative. A similar narrative is also recurrent throughout commissioners' accounts, as they highlight ashes creations as positive choices that are *"beautiful"* (Susan 7) and a *"celebration"* (Ken 1.1). As illustrated by Vinnie, commissioners contrast this with traditional material culture associated with death,

such as urns, which are by comparison *"morbid"* (Jill 12.0) and *"macabre"* (Ken 1.1) or *"downbeat"* (Vinnie *18.2.)*

The second narrative that characterises commissioners' decisions to participate in ashes creation practices highlights ashes creations' potential for material personalisation. These narratives focus upon how ashes creations can be modified for each commission; for example, they can incorporate visual meaning-making or choices can be made about design, such as colour, size, or shape. In his quote, Vinnie highlights the importance of material personalisation because his ashes creation provides: *"a celebration that you can manipulate any which way that you want"* (18.2). For Vinnie, this involved depicting words and images of particular relevance to his shared relationship with his Nan.

These two narratives, of celebration and of personalisation, distance ashes creations from a traditional sober and uniform Victorian death aesthetic, which had been so prevalent in British practices associated with death throughout the twentieth century (Walter 1994). Together, they locate ashes creations as being illustrative of movement towards increasing personalisation in rituals and practices associated with death that are celebratory about the deceased and the life that their shared with others (Walter 1994, Davies 2002, Schäfer 2007, Caswell 2011, Schäfer 2012).

The majority of ashes creations in this research only require a small proportion of the cremation ashes generated by a single cremation[37]. Therefore, decisions to participate in ashes creation practices are part of a wider process of decision-making that commissioners engage in with regards to an individual loved one's remains. Commissioners frequently collaborated with family and friends to determine where the rest of their loved ones' cremation ashes should reside and what rites and practices they should be subject too. Referred to in this thesis as commissioners' 'ashes strategies', ashes practices commissioners engaged in include cremation ashes being interred, scattered, and kept. Commissioners' ashes strategies were often concerned with continuing spatial, material, and emotional connections between the living and the

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[37] The only exception in this research is ashes-raku pottery. All ashes-raku incorporates cremation ashes in the glaze of the pot; however, Ken ashes-raku also stored his parents' cremation ashes inside the pot.

dead. As Hockey et al. (2007) found in their study of ashes scattering practices, commissioners' ashes strategies reflected an:

> …important post-mortem tendency towards securing well-being through choices that reproduce the idiom of relatedness between the deceased and their survivors during life (Hockey et al. 2007 p5).

For example, Jill has an ashes-painting incorporating her husband George's cremation ashes. Jill and her husband were avid football fans and Jill decided to scatter some of George's cremation ashes under his football season ticket seat and at the turnstiles of the ground they had visited together for many years:

> *He has to go under his seat, only a little bit, but he has to go under his seat, so I put some under the seat, just a little bit and it all blew away.*
>
> *Also on the entrances, because I always said to Lee [son], 'When I go [die] put me there, then every time you are at the turnstile, I go through with you'.*
>
> *So a little bit [of George's cremation ashes] on the way in and on the seat, so he is always there, he is always at the football (Jill 6.5).*

In Jill's quote, we see reflected Hockey et al.'s claim that cremation ashes "reproduce the idiom of relatedness" (Hockey et al. 2007 p5) as Jill's ashes strategies utilises spatial and material practices at the football ground, through scattering at the seat and turnstile, to continue connections between the living and the dead. These practices are embedded in notions of personhood, as they are concerned with particular identities of the deceased, such as personality traits or values, which distinguish the deceased from another person (Woodward 2007). Gell's (1998) notion of distributed personhood, explored in the literature review, is evident as George's cremation ashes, the materiality of the seat and the turnstiles, and the place of the football ground, all come together to perform George's personhood in Jill's practices. Personhood, in this conceptualisation, is therefore an outcome of practices, not something that reside in an individual, but something that is achieved by heterogeneous actants. As the remnants of George's once living body, cremation ashes, and the material with which they come into contact, have the capacity in these performances of personhood to not only reaffirm George's identity as a committed football fan for Jill, but also convey his presence: *"so he is always there, he is always at the football"* (Jill 6.5).

Jill talks of joining George at the football ground after her own death with the instructions to her son: *"When I go [die] put me there" (6.5).* This is reflective of Kellaher et al. (2010) finding that ashes strategies are influenced by the plans for future sets of remains of close family. In this way, cremation ashes practices reflect burial practices where cemeteries are chosen in part for the potential of future members of the family joining them in the grave (Marjavaara 2012). However, in Jill's quote, the spatial domains of these planned continuing connections have changed from the cemetery to the football ground, as the cremated dead are increasingly located in the landscapes of the living (Hockey et al. 2005).

When comparing ashes creation decision-making to decision-making in commissioners' other ashes strategies, they differ most consistently in one particular respect: the ways in which a sense of duty towards the deceased is manifested. For example, Jennifer commissioned ashes-paperweights and ashes-necklaces containing the cremation ashes of her husband Peter. A sense of duty towards the deceased and obligations towards kin manifest in Jennifer's decision to inter the rest of Peter's cremation ashes on the Isle of White, with his parents' remains, as he and his family requested. This echoes the findings of Hockey et al. (2007) concerning cremation ashes decision-making, where co-residence, proximity, duty, and affect were often enacted by fulfilling the deceased's wishes or satisfying family obligations through spatial proximities. However, in ashes creation decision-making, although the themes of co-residence, proximity, and affect were also recurrent, a sense of duty towards the deceased or obligation towards other family members was notably absent or disregarded. We can better appreciate this difference if we locate ashes creations as part of commissioners' wider ashes strategies. Barbara, who has an ashes tattoo on her hand incorporating her husband Brian's cremation ashes, is discussing dispersing a portion of her husband Brian's ashes in the sea:

> *[It was] where he wanted to be, he wanted to go back to Zante and he never got the chance, so, we have been and we took him [his cremation ashes] with us. In the lovely warm sea that he liked, because he, you know, went snorkelling.*
>
> *Researcher: He liked the water?*

> *Yeah, yeah. I had already decided that, in water; that is for me [rubbing her ashes-tattoo], but when we took him to Zante, that was for him (Barbara 14.4).*

Having fulfilled kinship obligations with their other ashes strategies, commissioners are free to privilege their own wants, likes, and desires in their ashes creation decision-making. As Barbara says, scattering a portion of Brain's cremation ashes in the sea at Zante was *"for him"* (14.4), but her ashes-tattoo *"that is for me"* (14.4). Providers of ashes creations also speak of commissioners privileging their own needs in their choices to commission ashes creations. For example, the jewellery provider distinguishes the fulfilment of duty in commissioners' other ashes strategies from commissioners being able to *"fulfil their own needs"* (12.7) in their ashes creation practice:

> *It does seem to be something the bereaved has wanted for themselves. Because they also feel that they have scattered the remainder [of the ashes] and have also fulfilled the finial wish [of the bereaved] but they have also managed to fulfil their own needs, at the same time, by having a small portion [of the ashes] put by [for an ashes creation] (Jewellery provider 12.7).*

This privileging of commissioners of *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) decision-making can also be traced in narratives of taste in ashes creation practices. Many commissioners gave accounts of how their ashes creations reflected their taste, but they either did not discuss if this was shared by their loved ones or made it clear, often by the use of humour, that it was not. For example, George's personal taste is subject to playful disregard as Jill privileges her love of art in her decision to commission an ashes-painting:

> *Like I say, I like paintings anyway. Actually, it is quite funny because George did not like art, he got so bored, a painting is a painting to him and so I find it quite funny now that I have had him stuck in a painting, which he don't like anyway. I would say to him,*
>
> *'I can do what I like now, can't I? You are stuck in the painting and you cannot do a thing about it!' (laughing and indicating towards the ashes-painting on the wall).*
>
> *He cannot see paintings like I can see paintings...I love that [ashes-painting] because I like art anyway (Jill 34.8).*

By producing stable, mobile, and divisible matter, the materiality of cremation ashes affords diversity in cremation ashes practices (Hertz 1960, Davies 2002, Prendergast et

al. 2006). Therefore, George can simultaneously be at the football as considered in the previous quote (Jill 6.5) and *"stuck in the painting"* [38] *(34.8).* Having scattered George's cremation ashes at the football ground, Jill has fulfilled her duty towards George as a football fan, leaving Jill free to privilege her love of art in her decision to commission an ashes-painting, even if *"George did not like art"* (34.8). A picture emerges of ashes creations as one element of commissioners' diverse ashes strategies that combine traditional and emerging practices across multiple sites. Commissioners can privilege their own desires, tastes, wants, and needs in their ashes creation practices because their other ashes strategies enact duty and obligation towards the deceased and kin. This reveals commissioners' ashes strategies to be much more than a series of separate happenings, ashes creations come into view as part of a series of inter-related practices that relate to a single death.

Relationality

The prevalence of *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) narratives in commissioners' accounts may initially appear to present ashes creation decision-making processes as commissioners' solo accomplishments, especially if we consider the themes explored in chapter so far, which include the absence of guidance from the death sector; the privileging of commissioners' wants and desires; the accompanying disinterest in duty towards the deceased. However, upon further investigation, ashes creation decisions-making processes emerge rooted in relatedness. Relationality, in ashes creation practice, embeds the individual in their connectivity to others. It is concerned with commissioners' connectivity to family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances, revealing the ways in which people are: "…existing within intentional, thoughtful networks which they actively sustain, maintain or allow to atrophy" (Smart 2007 p48).

This relational understanding of decision-making in ashes creation practice is evident in a number in ways, including: how commissioners discover and decide to participate in

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[38] In fact, George's cremation ashes have been subject to practices in five different locations.

ashes creation practices and how these processes are informed by informal social and personal networks; how commissioners legitimise themselves as decision-makers through narratives of intimate relatedness; and in the frequent commissioning of more than one ashes creation for other family members. We will now explore each of these aspects of relationality in more detail.

First, commissioners discover their particular ashes creation practices through connectivity to others as commissioners hear about ashes creations via stories in the media or online as well as through social and personal networks. Seven commissioners first became aware of ashes creations through a combination of newspaper or online articles, social network sites, and television shows. Six commissioners discovered their ashes creation practices via personal networks of friends and family. For example, John had not considered doing *"something final" (John pers. comm.)* with his father's cremation ashes in the ten years since his father had died, during which time John's father's ashes had been stored in a cupboard under the stairs. John's discovery of his ashes creation practice resulted from an unexpected encounter with a recently bereaved friend:

> *I was in work one day [a shop] and a customer who had become a friend over the years came in, in a rather distressed state and told me her Gran, who raised her, had just died. I spent several hours trying to assure her that the old cliché was true and time does heal.*
>
> *That is not the truth though, it needs an ending, something final, and I only realised my own deep longing for something at that moment. We talked about it and I said the one thing I would give anything for was to be able to have 1 [sic] more cup of tea with my Dad.*
>
> *She said that she thought she could arrange it because a friend of hers was a potter and he specialised in urns for people's remains. He would incorporate the ashes in the clay of the urn and also in the glaze.*
>
> *She thought it would be an idea if he made a teapot out of Dads [sic] ashes and then me, Gwyn and the boys could sit down 1 [sic] more time for a cup of tea with Dad. He in fact made 2 teapots and 6 lids and they are beautiful (John pers. comm.).*

Unlike John, who was not considering an ashes-creation practice before his encounter with his friend, Jennifer knew straight after her husband Peter's death that she wanted

"something tactile" (Jennifer 2.5) created with his cremation ashes. When considering her choices, Jennifer was influenced by stories of ashes creations circulating around the antiques trade, in which she had worked for many years. She also carried out research on the internet, reading stories of other people's practices, before finally deciding upon commissioning ashes-paperweights and ashes-pendants for herself and her daughters:

> *Because I looked up endless amounts of people [on the internet], there were stories about what people had done, like having diamonds made and this and that, you know? A lot of stories of rings being made and other things that people had done...I had the idea from just a buzz in the antiques trade really, all sorts of odd stories go around the antiques trade by word of mouth of what had been done by people (Jennifer 16.9).*

Like Jennifer, the overwhelming majority of commissioners used the internet or stories in newspapers to research providers. As we can see in Jennifer's and John's examples, networks that connect people, specifically, media, virtual, and personal networks are instrumental in creating and distributing stories of ashes creation practices as they inform commissioners' choices and influence their decision-making. As predicted by Walter (1994), the traditional authorities of death regulation, specifically, religious institutions and the established funeral sector, are absent in commissioners' accounts as these established death authorities are replaced by an emerging network of personal stories about ashes creation practice distributed via the media, online networks, and word of mouth. Ashes creations are decisions made *"for me" (Barbara 14.4),* yet they are embedded in the experiences of others. This epitomises Walter's "Come Fly with Me" metaphor discussed in the literature review, in which the dispersed authorities of the media, virtual, and personal networks invite commissioners to join others by participating in their own ashes creation practices (Walter 1994 p189). Therefore, ashes creations are choices made by individuals, but "only with reference to evolving traditions" (Walter 1994 p190) communicated through stories distributed through personal and technological networks.

Second, once ashes creations have been discovered, relationality is evident as commissioners seek the validations and opinions of family members and close friends in ashes creation decision-making. All commissioners discussed their decision to commission an ashes creation with their close kin and friends. For example, Bernard

Junior discussed commissioning an ashes-mosaic incorporating his father's cremation ashes with his wife before making any decision because: *"my wife loved him dearly"* (Bernard Junior 1.4), demonstrating how decision-making is a relational process. Commissioners generally found people they discussed their decision to commission an ashes creation with to be supportive; however, when ashes creations practices were challenged, commissioners legitimised themselves as decision-makers through narratives of relatedness. This is illustrated by Queenie, when a close friend demonstrated disapproval of her ashes-painting of Scotland, which incorporated her husband Arthur's cremation ashes:

> *Well, she said, 'How could 'ya do that? Ooohhh!' [indicating shock] 'No, no, no.' she said, 'And how can ya keep him up there? [pointing to the ashes-painting on the wall] That's not where he should be!' [very animated in expression]*
>
> *I said, 'Well, why not?' I said, 'I were with him for fifty odd year, and he belongs to me!' [with anger and upset] (Queenie 11.7).*

Queenie legitimises herself as the decision maker by reminding her friend of the length of her marriage, which means that Arthur *"belongs"* (11.7) to her. In this way, ashes creations are like other rites and practices associated with death, where legitimacy to participate is validated by the intimacy of relationships before death. Schäfer (2012), for example, found that rights to attend and take a prominent role in funerals are characterised by narratives of the intimacy and duration of the relationship participants shared with the deceased when they were living. Indeed, claims of authority based on longevity of kinship and intimacy of relatedness are common in a range of ashes strategies, such as scattering in landscapes or being kept domestically (Prendergast et. al. 2006). Narratives of relatedness occur in commissioners' accounts when ashes creation practices were challenged by close family or friends. When commissioners' ashes creations practices were challenged by acquaintances, commissioners had a tendency to dismiss the opinions of others by reinforcing their right to choose the practices their loved one cremation ashes are subject to. Implicit in this is the presumption that the commissioners are the legitimate decision-makers regarding the practices their loved ones remains are subject to. Barbara's response to an acquaintance's reaction to her ashes-tattoo is typical:

Most of the have been really positive I cannot think of anybody that said [pause] I think there was only one person, I do not know who it was now, and they went, 'mmmm' [making a face indicating disgust] and I said, 'My choice, not yours' (Barbara 10.8).

Third, relatedness is also evident in the commissioning of more than one ashes creation with one set of cremation ashes. Consider Barbara and Christine who both have ashes-tattoos containing Barbara's husband's cremation ashes. The two women met through their husbands before they were married, the two couples lived near to each other, raised their families together, socialised and holidayed together. Their ashes-tattoos were one more thing the women did together and they felt that Brain was still part of the foursome through their ashes-tattoo. Other examples include Queenie and Jennifer, who commissioned a number of other ashes-creations from the same provider for adult children. Just over half of commissioners mentioned the possibility of commissioning other ashes creations for family members using the same set of cremation ashes and said they have or would like to do this in the future. Therefore developing, or having the desire to develop, shared experiences of ashes creations in close intimate relationships with a particular individual's remains is a feature of the practice.

When the examples of relatedness in ashes creations explored in this section are considered together, it becomes apparent that, although ashes creations are practices that commissioners engage in *"for me" (Barbara 14.4),* this does not preclude decision-making from being relational processes enmeshed in networks of connectivity to others. Ashes creations being *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4), indicates that ashes creations are something that bereaved people engage in for their own need for proximity, more than to honour or commemorate the deceased in the sense of a traditional memorialisation at the site of their loved ones' remains, such as a gravestone. This is a different notion from ashes creations being solo decision-making accomplishments.   Caswell (2011) draws our attention to how the increasing trend towards personalisation in funerals may appear to be led by the 'chief' mourner, often a spouse or a child; however, if examined closely, decisions are actually relational and deeply embedded in wider networks of families and friends. Caswell's (2011) observations and the findings of this research indicate that focusing discourses of personalisation on how practices are becoming

increasingly individualised can have the effect of obscuring the high degree of connectivity to others inherent in personalisation choices.

In summary, ashes creations must be understood as part of commissioners' wider ashes strategies because the small amount of ashes required enables commissioners to fulfil their duties towards the deceased with the majority of the cremation ashes while engaging in ashes creation practices to fulfil their own desire for proximity. This reveals how decision-making across a range of practices that relate to a single death are interconnected and therefore benefit from being be considered collectively (Kellaher et al. 2005). Commissioners may privilege *"for me" (Barbara 14.4)* decision-making in their ashes creation practices; however, a closer consideration reveals ashes creation decision-making as relational processes enmeshed in networks of connectivity to others. In this section, I claimed that duties towards the deceased are absent from ashes creation decision-making narratives. This will be further developed in the next section of this thesis, as it goes on to explore the ways in which the deceased do and do not manifest in ashes creation decision-making.

'I know he will be looking at us, thinking, "You daft buggers!"' (Christine 20.9). The Deceased: Discovering and Deciding

This section considers the ways in which the deceased inform and influence ashes creation decision-making, arguing that the deceased as an intentional agent is often absent from commissioners' accounts. It traces the ways in which the deceased shapes decision-making as a material presence by reconceptualising agency beyond intentionality. This demonstrates how the deceased are influential generators of agencies, contributing to the reader's understanding of ashes creations as practices created, performed, and maintained by the living *and* the dead.

The deceased in decision-making processes

In the previous section, we explored how ashes creations are part of an eclectic mix of practices in which commissioners engage with their loved one's cremation ashes. When

developing their other ashes strategies, such as scattering cremation ashes at specific locations or interning ashes in family graves, commissioners tend to evoke ways in which their deceased loved one would approve of their decision-making. These findings are in keeping with those of Kellaher et al. (2010) in regards to how the deceased's approval of cremation ashes practices is constructed by the bereaved as part of their decision-making process. This section explores the ways in which the deceased influences decision-making in ashes creation practices and considers the ways in which this compares to commissioners' other ashes strategies.

First, in commissioners' accounts of their other ashes strategies, the construction of the deceased's approval was embedded in negotiations between the bereaved and the deceased that took place before death. In these conversations, the deceased's intentions and preferences in regards to their cremation ashes had been explicitly stated or strongly inferred. In comparison, there was only one case in this research of discussions taking place between a commissioner and their loved one regarding participating in ashes creation practices. As minority practices, general awareness of ashes creations is relatively limited. Therefore, it is not something often considered when cremation ashes options are explored with loved ones pre-death. The exception to this is Marie, whose Dad's ashes are in an ashes-painting of the Seven Sister coppice in the North East. Marie knew her father was dying and she was considering a range of ashes-strategies before he died. She read about ashes-paintings in a newspaper article and discussed it with her Dad:

> *'Well,' I says [to her Dad]*
>
> *'Actually, instead of throwing ya ashes over the Seven Sisters, liked we once talked 'bout.', I said, 'I would like to put them [the ashes] in a painting of the Seven Sisters that way I've always got 'em.'*
>
> *Me Dad says, 'Please y'self [yourself] what ya do with me Edey [his pet name for Marie], when I'm gone I'm gone.'*
>
> *And that was as simple as that. And then I said: 'Well I'ave even thought 'bout putting ya* [ashes] *into an egg timer and things like that, so'*
>
> *He says, 'Do what ya want. Do what ya want' (1.3 Marie).*

When presented with the opportunity to negotiate potential ashes creation practices, Marie's Dad surrenders any intentions he may have for the future of his body to Marie, telling her to *"Do what ya want" (1.3).* Although only one example, Marie's quote demonstrates how, even when negotiations of ashes creation practices with loved ones take place before death, it is not necessarily concerned with gaining the deceased's approval. Her statement, *"that way I've always got 'em." (1.3)* illustrates how Marie's ashes creation practice is concerned with the fulfilment of her own need to remain close to her father's remains, privileging her desire to retain her father's cremation ashes in her decision-making[39].

Second, commissioners construct the approval of the deceased in their other ashes practices by interpreting conversations, stories, and happenings as indications that the deceased would have approved of a particular practice. For example, we heard in the last section Barbara talk of scattering Brian's cremation ashes. Barbara felt that Brain would have approved of being dispersed in *"In the lovely warm sea that he liked, because he, you know, went snorkelling"* (Barbara 14.4)*.* She went on to say that Brain had always wanted to return to Zante but had become too ill to do so. Therefore, when she returned with him, in the form of his cremation ashes, she constructed his approval of her decision-making. In contrast, commissioners did not recall conversations, stories, or happenings when discussing their ashes creation decision-making. The only exceptions were cases when ashes creations depicted visual images, such as ashes-paintings or ashes-tattoos, where commissioners drew from conversations, stories and happenings with the deceased to construct their approval of the particular image selected. For example, Queenie drew from her knowledge of Arthur's love of Scotland to construct his approval of her ashes-painting depicting the Highlands. Interestingly, these narratives never construct approval of the ashes-creation practice itself. Indeed, Vinnie even noted that whilst his Nan would like the images and phrases depicted, she would have had reservations about his ashes-tattoos. Therefore, although narratives of constructing the deceased's approval are evident in ashes creations that depicted visual

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[39] After the interview tape had been turned off, Marie mentioned her ex-minor father had said he did not mind what happened to his cremation ashes, he just did not want to be put 'back underground'.

images, they are more concerned with the ways in which ashes creations are materially personalised rather than the specific practices themselves.

Third, commissioners often drew from their knowledge of their loved one's personhood, in particular their likes, dislikes, and characteristics, to construct the deceased's approval of their other ashes strategies. This is evident in Jill's scattering of George's cremation ashes around the football ground. Although Jill did not discuss this particular ashes strategy with George directly, her knowledge of his love for his club means that she is able to construct his approval of this practice. In comparison, the deceased's constructed approval of commissioners' ashes creation practices was inconsistent in the data. It was present on occasion, for example, Ken constructed is mother's approval of his ashes-raku by talking about her love for decorative objects[40]. However, Ken placed much more significance on his love of Raku pottery as an art form, which was a subject he returned to throughout his interview. There were many examples in commissioners' accounts where the deceased's constructed approval was either entirely absent or commissioners acknowledged that their loved ones may be somewhat mystified by their decision to commission an ashes creation. Both Barbara and Christine felt that Brian would have thought their ashes-tattoos containing his cremation ashes are *'daft'* *(Christine 20.9)* which was a source of great amusement for the women:

> *Researcher: Did you have some tattoos already?*
>
> *Yeah, I have got one on me shoulder, one on me ankle. I do think about him [Brian] a lot when I see that [ashes tattoo on hand], even though I think about him every day, you know?*
>
> *I don't rub it or anything like you do [indicating to Barbara], but you know that he is with you, don't ya? I know he will be looking at us, thinking,*
>
> *'You daft buggers! What are ya doing? What are ya talking about?' [getting an ashes tattoo]*
>
> *Wouldn't he? Eh? Eh? [directed at Barbara who nods, both women are laughing]*

---

[40] Ken ashes-raku also contained his father cremation ashes but he was much less concerned with his father approval of his ashes creation practices. He stated, as long as he was with his wife, his father would not mind what happened to his cremation ashes.

'Fancy doing that ya daft things!'

He would be looking down and saying,

'You silly sods!' (Christine 20.9).

Fig.2: Barbara's and Christine's ashes-tattoos.

Brian's projected reaction to the ashes-tattoos can be a source of amusement because his approval is not required to validate Christine's and Barbara's participation in the practice. In the majority of commissioners' other ashes strategies, the deceased performs as an intentional agent in the centrality of their wants, desires, and stated intentions. Conversely, in commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation decision-making, the deceased as an agent attributed with intentionality, with desires, wishes, and preferences, was frequently absent or inconsistently applied. Ashes creation practices, it would seem, do not require the approval of the deceased. These findings are consistent with the claim made in section one that ashes creation practice are *"for me" (Barbara 14.4)* as commissioners are able to satisfy obligations towards the deceased with the remainder of their loved ones' cremation ashes.

<u>Beyond intentionality</u>

As argued in the last section of this chapter, the deceased do not feature prominently as intentional agents in commissioners' accounts of decision-making in their ashes creation practices; however, by reconceptualising agency beyond the confines of intentionality, the deceased are revealed as powerful generators of agencies influencing decision-making processes. As explored in the literature review, by drawing from theorist such Gell (1998) there has been a reimagining of the agency of the material dead by death studies theorists. The material dead, it is claimed, have the capacity to generate agency in themselves, whether they are corpses in the parlour captured by funeral photography (Fernandz 2011), the dead body in a viewing room of a funeral home (Harper 2010), cremation ashes scattered in landscapes (Williams 2011), or the political dead on journeys across countries (Young 2013). By refusing to ascribe agent status to what "a thing 'is' in itself" (Gell 1998 p123), these studies shift notions of agency beyond mere echoes or remnants of agencies projected by the living onto the material dead. They demonstrate that we can re-imagine agency so that it contributes to an understanding of the material dead "as an entity that can be conceptualised as more than simply 'an object'" (Harper 2010 p319).

While the deceased and their cremation ashes are not necessarily intentional agents in ashes creation decision-making, they are, nevertheless, active performers in the generation of agencies that effect decision-making. For example, earlier I explored how Marie's father surrendered his intentionality to Marie: *"Do what ya want'" (1.3)*. Yet, a further examination of Marie's account of her ashes creation decision-making brings her father's cremation ashes into view as a powerful generator of mnemonic agencies, which Williams (2011) defines as agencies active in the present that are rooted in absences and presences of the past. In this quote, the material dead have traceable effects in Marie's ashes creation decision-making as she discounts other ashes creation ideas because incorporating her father's cremation ashes into a picture of the Seven Sisters coppice renews embodied kinship relationships with the landscape:

Fig. 3: Marie's ashes-painting of the Seven Sisters.

I had discussed [ashes] jewellery and everything like that before, but I thought:

'Well, the Seven Sisters is something, from being a child, that I was brought up with where ma' Dad always took us for walks and where he always spent his younger days and older days as well, around those fields.

There is a golf course nearby where he used to walk around there getting the golf balls and giving them back to the golfers and mushrooming and that as well.

So, we were brought up with that type of thing, doing the walking around there, doing all of those things. So it had been in the family for so long, the Seven Sisters of Copt Hill, different stories told about what happens. Basically, it has been in our lives forever, it brings us all together as a family, my Dad, the whole family, my Dad's generation.

It brings us all together as a family and now I have got it in a picture; the paths where he walked up, the ashes are in there and the trees that he liked so much as well. That is where it all come from [the decision to commission an ashes-painting] (Marie 1.5).

The agencies cremation ashes generate, argues Williams (2011), can be distributed to things, places, and materials as ashes are mixed, scattered, and buried. We can see this in a range of practices where the scattering of cremation ashes infuses sites with notions of personhood and the presence of the deceased (Kellaher et al. 2010). This is also evident in Marie's quote, as the mixing of her Dad's cremation ashes amongst the *"the paths where he walked up"* (1.5) and the *"trees that he liked so much as well"* (1.5) is felt

to enable the continuing of relationships between bodies, families, and landscapes, which effects Marie's decision to commission this particular ashes creation. The powerful mnemonic agencies generated by the presence of her father's cremation ashes combine with those generated by relational landscapes to affect Marie's decision-making as she conveys her passion for her family's embodied relationships with the place: *"where ma Dad always took us for walks" (1.5).* Exley (1999) explores how the dead, in leaving behind happy memories, are co-authors of their after-death identities and there is certainly an element of this in Marie's quote. However, these agencies may be rooted in memory, but they are not enacted in the past as they are realised through the material presence of Marie's Dad's cremation ashes, which have traceable effects on her decision-making processes in the present:

> It might therefore be suggested that the corporeal presence of the dead provides an agency to affect the experience and actions of mourners and evoke memories of the past, rather than serving as a static and passive set of substances manipulated and disposed of by mourners to serve their socio-political ends (Williams 2004 b p265).

Another example of the ways in which the deceased and their cremation ashes effect decision-making in ashes creation practices is as an entity attributed with sensory capacities in the present. Earlier, we saw how Brian's presumed approval was not an essential requirement for Barbara and Christine in their ashes creation practice. However, in this quote, Brian's ability to smell comes into play in Barbara's decision-making. The quote starts with Christine discussing how she decided on the location of her ashes tattoo on her hand, when Barbara interjects:

> *Christine - …and then I thought about me feet and I thought, no, and Nicky said it was very painful on your feet, so I thought 'No I won't have one on me feet.' So that was it really me love.*
>
> *Barbara - I don't think that Brian would want to be on my smelly feet, so I wouldn't 'ave that! [ashes-tattoo on her feet] (Barbara and Christine 22.1).*

In this quote, cremation ashes / 'Brian' are capable of sensory experiences in the present. Brian is saved from the smell of Barbara's feet by the choice of the more suitable location for her ashes-tattoo. The attribution of sensory capacities has been documented in a number of studies concerned with the material dead. Harper (2010),

for example, in her study of the viewing of corpses at funeral homes, notes how the material dead act as embodied agents attributed with sensory experiences. Harper (2010) observes how letters and material goods are given to corpses, specifically functional items such as walking sticks. Such practices, argues Harper (2010), are not only intended for use in an afterlife, but are assumptions that the material dead are sites of embodied agencies in the present, attributed with the sensory capacities to read letters, use walking sticks, or, in the case we are considering, smell feet. Nor are these capacities confined to the corpses, as Kellaher et al. (2010) found that the deceased are presumed to feel the difference between cold and heat or wet and dry depending on the location of their cremation ashes, and this has a significant effect on bereaved people's ashes strategies.

Like Barbara, a number of commissioners discussed their loved ones' cremation ashes sensory capacities when giving accounts of their ashes creation decision-making. Susan, for example, spoke of her parents being 'warm' next to her skin in her ashes-pendent, which she had chosen in preference to her children's suggestion that they be kept outside in a garden pot, where she feared that they would feel the rain:

> *The thought of somebody putting them outside! I mean, they [the children] thought, 'Well we will buy my Mum a big bowl and put a plant in with Grandma and Granddad underneath.', well I would be fetching them in if it rained, I would! (Sue 3.5).*

 It could be argued that these agencies are mere echoes of once hearing, seeing, and feeling bodies attributed by the bereaved to the material dead. In this conceptualisation, the material dead are no more than conduits for the agencies of the living. Alternatively, we can reconceptualise agency as an effect, an outcome of practice (Latour 2005). In this conceptualisation, agency does not reside in a particular person; rather, the material dead generate agencies that shape the nuances of the rites they are subject to in networks of people, things, materials, and ideas (Harper 2010, Williams 2011). It does not matter in this conceptualisation if cremation ashes can smell in any sensory capacity. What matters is that cremation ashes effect action by their presence. Therefore, although Brian's capacity to smell has long since come to an end, his cremation ashes continue to influence decision-making processes.

In this section, we have considered how the deceased are not primarily intentional actors in ashes creation practices as their stated or constructed approval is ether absent, inconsistently invoked, or subject to playful disregard: *"I know he will be looking at us, thinking, 'You daft buggers!"* (Christine 20.9). This distinguishes ashes creations from other ashes practices in which commissioners' engage with their loved ones' cremation ashes, where the deceased's intentionality through the construction of their approval was a recurrent theme. This echoes the claim that ashes creations are practices that commissioners engage in *"for me" (Barbara 14.4),* rather than out of a sense of duty towards the deceased. Yet, by reconceptualising agency beyond the acts of intentional actors, the deceased come into view as active performers in shaping ashes creation decision-making. Specifically, the material dead manifest as sites of agencies, constituted not only through memory, but also generators of agencies in the present as they continue to effect decision-making processes (Harper 2010, Williams 2011). This reveals how the dead, in relations with the living, inform and shape ashes creation practices.

'…it was personal, it was not business' (Potter 1.2). Providers: Discovering and Deciding

It is the providers of ashes creations that we meet in the third section of this chapter, which gives an overview of providers' initial engagements with and development of their ashes creation practices. Specifically, it considers the ways in which providers' first encounters with ashes creations are characterised by two narratives. In the first, ashes creation practices develop from work place experiences and in the second ashes creation practices emerge from experiences of mortality in providers' personal lives. These two narratives shape how providers portray their ongoing ashes creation practices in their accounts, particularly in relation to the maintenance and transcendence of boundaries in their relationships with commissioners.

Creative backgrounds

As outlined in the sampling section of the Research Design chapter, the providers of ashes creations in this research overwhelmingly come from creative backgrounds as opposed to the death sector. They had previous experiences of making their particular object or body modification without cremation ashes; therefore, providers came to ashes creation practice with the artistic skills and resources required to make their ashes creation. The enticement of people with relevant skills and resources from outside of the death sector to the entrepreneurial disposal of human remains is by no means unique to ashes creation practices. For example, in Clayden et al.'s (2010) study of natural burial grounds those entering the industry were more likely to be landowners than death sector professionals. Landowners have at their disposal terra firma and knowledge of its management, key resources for the development and maintenance of natural burial grounds. Indeed, before the development of the modern Funeral Director, it was the local carpenter who often acted as a part-time undertaker, due to the crafted nature of hand-making bespoke coffins (Gore 2001), thus revealing a long established link between handcrafted creativity and the disposal of remains which continues in ashes creation practices.

Providers' accounts of their initial engagements with ashes creations were diverse in their detail. However, each one explored two intertwining themes: the ways in which providers became aware of their particular ashes creation practices and the circumstances surrounding the making of their first ashes creations**.** Some providers had no previous knowledge of the practice when approached by people they knew and asked to produce an ashes creation. Others had 'Eureka!' experiences as ashes creation ideas erupted from moments of creative inspiration. Some providers already had in their possession cremation ashes to make their first ashes creations. Other providers had to acquire cremation ashes to develop their ideas. From these diverse accounts, two distinct narratives emerge that I will explore in more detail: workplace narrative and mortality narratives.

<u>Workplace narratives</u>

In the first narrative, providers initially encountered ashes creations in relation to their working practices. This narrative consisted of three providers, the two tattooists and the diamond provider, who first encountered ashes creation practices in relation to their paid employment. Both tattooists had previously heard of the practice of ashes-tattoos from within the industry, but had not considered offering the service until they were approached by customers who requested ashes-tattoos. The ashes-diamond provider first encountered ashes-diamonds at a trade show which he was attending in his capacity as a Funeral Director. He felt that ashes-diamonds had a potential market in the U.K and left his job to become a supplier. He continues to work in the death sector, in addition to providing ashes-diamonds, although not as a Funeral Director. He is the only provider in this research with death sector experience.

These three providers who encountered ashes creations in their working practices spoke of ashes-tattoos and ashes-diamonds originating in the U.S.A. before making a transatlantic crossing to British practice. Nevertheless, they stressed that ashes-tattoos and ashes-diamonds found a home in British practice because they built upon well-established British traditions of memorial tattoos (Bradley 2000) and memorial jewellery (Plotz 2008):

> *I bet you thirty-five to forty per cent of tattoos that are done are memorial [non-ashes] tattoos anyway, to celebrate somebody or something. It is just so happens that they decided to celebrate the niche side of it [by including ashes] (Tattooist Two 7.7).*

By stressing how ashes-diamond and ashes-tattoos build upon established British memorial traditions, these providers challenge interpretations of these forms of ashes creations as purely imports from the U.S.A. In addition, these providers repeatedly stressed the increasing importance of emerging British practices associated with death that emphasise personalisation and choice. Therefore, the narratives of providers who first encountered ashes creations in relation to their working practice are typified by an emphasis upon ashes-diamonds and ashes-tattoos evolving from traditional British

memorial practices combining with an emerging culture of personalisation and choice. In contrast to the majority of providers, these three providers did not offer accounts of mortality experiences that had affected their lives in relation to their ashes creation practices. Nor did they offer their own personal opinions about ashes-tattoos or ashes-diamonds, often returning to narratives of it being an individual's 'choice', rather than reveal their own feelings about ashes creation practices.

Mortality narratives

The majority of providers in this research gave accounts of first encountering ashes creation practices in connection with mortality experiences that had affected their personal lives. Specifically, the deaths of family, friends, and acquaintances were influential in providers' first considering participating in ashes creation practices. Experiences included: making their first ashes creations using the cremation ashes of deceased loved ones; developing ashes creation ideas during scattering or splitting of cremation ashes of loved ones; and developing ashes creations as an artistic contemplation of mortality following the deaths of loved ones. For example, the Potter first created ashes-pots for himself and his siblings using the cremation ashes of his father, explaining that for his first ashes creation, **"*it was personal, it was not business*"** *(1.2).* In his quote, we can see how the Potter highlights ashes creations as choices outside of *"morbid baroque" (1.2)* material culture associated with death, echoing commissioners' decision-making narratives that we explored in section one where commissioners distance ashes creations from traditional material culture associated with death:

> *Yeah, when I initially had the idea myself it was for my father; it was personal, it was not business. It was not considered a business idea, it was just something personal that I wanted to do with my father's ashes, for me, my brother and my sister.*

> *For me it had to be something that was precious that could keep of his (his father), to covert of his, rather than it just being a photograph or an item, a hat or a favourite coat or something.*

I had always considered urns morbid baroque, kind of a bit. Black marble urns or wooden boxes with a brass nameplate on, they resembled a bit of a coffin and it was just not very nice (Potter 1.2).

In contrast to providers who first encountered their ashes creation practices in working environments, these providers placed a significant emphasis on their emotional responses to ashes creations as they emerged from personal experiences. Abra (1995), in his consideration of the multifaceted interconnections between creative activity and mortality, notes how salient death experiences have influenced artistic and creativity activity across the centuries. However, it is important not to reduce mortality experiences and ashes creation practices to linear cause and effect relationships.

Providers gave accounts of mortality experiences, particularly the deaths of loved ones, colliding with mundane familial and economic aspects of their lives, where events, such as retirement or marriage, merge with mortality experiences in creative trajectories towards ashes creation practices. For example: Painter Two first considered working creatively with cremation ashes when pouring her mother's cremation ashes into a container to aid their transportation. The texture of the cremation ashes intrigued her and she wondered what it would be like to work with them creatively[41]. However, it was not until sometime later when she was made redundant from her previous position as an art teacher that she commenced her ashes creation practices. Although the death of his father was formative, the Potter spoke of a combination of factors leading towards his ashes creation practice, such as the move to a new workshop location and a change in his family circumstances. As suggested by Abra (1995), providers' accounts were full of complex shifting connections between spatial and temporal creative trajectories and mortality experiences.

Boundaries

The ways in which providers first encounter ashes creation practices permeates how they portray the maintenance or transcendence of emotional and professional boundaries in their relationships with commissioners. Providers who focus upon

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[41] Painter Two did not paint with her mother's cremation ashes.

encountering ashes creation practices in their work environments tend to utilise concepts of professionalism to construct and maintain temporal, spatial, and emotional distance from commissioners. Let us consider the Diamond Provider:

...I always view it more as an empathetic feeling to them as opposed to getting involved. You are there to do a job, just like a doctor is, you are there to do it with dignity and respect to their feelings.

So, if someone breaks down, you just give them a few moments to compose themselves or you go outside. Just to make sure that they are happy to go ahead with it. You have an emotional stance that you got to have to survive in this industry.

If you got involved in every emotion that somebody was receiving, you would not survive in this industry, you have got to be able to remove yourself from that (Diamond Provider 12.9).

In this quote, the Diamond Provider details how he maintains the emotional stance of an empathetic but detached professional, *"just like a doctor" (12.9)*, so he is able to *"survive in this industry" (12.9).* He generates emotional boundaries by creating temporal and spatial distances. If someone *"breaks down" (12.9),* they are given *"a few moments" (12.9)* which creates temporal distance or *"you go outside" (12.9)* which creates spatial distance. Likewise, tattooists spoke of using the tattoo studio to distance themselves spatially from commissioners' emotions by controlling how and when commissioners move from the waiting room to the studio and then to the tattooist's chair. As commissioners are guided from one space to another, they are brought to an emotional order by being focused by the provider upon the tasks encountered in each spatial domain. This spatial ordering enables tattooists to do their job whilst maintaining emotional distance because:

It is just a tattoo, it is just a tattoo. When somebody says they want red [ink] in it [a tattoo], I just stick red in it.

'Stick a bit of my Granddad's ashes in it?' 'All right then.' and I will put your Granddad's ashes in.

It's a job, and because there is that detachment in it and I am doing nothing out of my boundaries, then I have not got a problem (Tattooist One 18.0).

By controlling emotional, spatial, and temporal relations with commissioners, the accounts of these providers echo Howarth's (1992) description of demarcated

boundaries in her study of Funeral Directors' interactions with bereaved people. Like Howarth's (1992) Funeral Directors, these providers spatially and temporally organise objects and people in spaces to structure emotional boundaries with bereaved people. These providers guide the bereaved through the process of commissioning an ashes creation, as a Funeral Director moves people though a organising a funeral (Hockey et al. 2007, Schäfer 2007, 2012). As highlighted in the Diamond Provider's quote, these providers feel that this approach of professional distance ensures commissioners' emotional privacy, whilst offering providers protection from commissioners' grief emotions.

In placing an emphasis upon privacy and defined emotional boundaries to contain grief, these providers are drawing from what Howarth terms an "ideology of separation" (Howarth 2000 p128) in their dealings with commissioners. Ideologies of separation are embedded in staged or processes orientated approach to grief because they are built upon the presumption that grief is private to the bereaved individual and that life and death can be separated from each other, each one bound to its' own sphere, as beavered people move through their experiences of grief (Howarth 2000, Walter 1991). Processes orientated approach to grief facilitate bereaved people passage though the grieving 'process' and this is mimicked by workplace narrative providers as they facilitate commissioners' passage though the commissioning of an ashes creation.

Both Walter (1991) and Howarth (1992) highlight how process-orientated approaches to grief are a useful to professionals who deal with death on a daily basis in order to create temporally finite relationships and demarcated professional boundaries. Process-orientated approaches to grief are embedded in the notion that grief is finite as processes are worked through. This notion of finality implies resolve and is therefore particularly beneficial when, due to a high turnover of clients, relationships need to come to an end so new ones can be managed (Howarth 1992, Walter 1991). It is therefore interesting to note that both the tattooing industry (Adams 2012) and the Diamond Provider's background in the death sector (Gore 2001) are environments with a high turnover of clients. Consequently, the adopting by these providers of demarcated temporal and spatial boundaries with an emphasis upon privacy may serve to protect their emotions in order to move on to new commissions.

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In contrast, providers who cited mortality experiences as formative in their ashes creation practices had a tendency to stress the importance of permeable emotional and spatial boundaries with commissioners. These providers emphasise how they transcend temporal and spatial distance to create and maintain close relationships with commissioners by: spending time together at the providers' workplace and commissioners' homes; exchanging letters and emails over prolonged periods; and making regular phone calls. On some occasions, this took the form offering a listening ear for commissioners' grief or sharing their own experiences of death with commissioners. In other cases, enduring relationships developed between commissioners and providers, which ranged from exchanging cards at Christmas to visiting family homes.

These providers were open about how commissioners' bereavement experiences frequently had an emotional effect upon them. In way of an illustration, consider the Vinyl Record Provider who spoke of the scattering of the cremation ashes of his uncle and the associated contemplations of his own death as being formative in the development of his ashes-vinyl business. He developed a close relationship with a commissioner for whom he was producing an ashes-vinyl record of his late mother talking about her life interspersed with recordings of the sea shanties that she loved. This involved spending time together in the Vinyl Record Provider's home studio editing and re-editing master tapes:

> *It is very close now* [the relationship with the commissioner]. *I got to know this guy, I know him well now....I would have loved to have heard my grandmother speak like that about my family and about herself, so I learn a bit about myself. It is amazing that I can get that feeling from someone else's family. Almost, it is kind of weird (Vinyl Record Provider 10.5).*

The boundaries between the Vinyl Record Provider and his commissioner are permeable enough for him to "*learn a bit about myself" (10.5)*. Providers who draw from mortality experiences in their ashes creation practices felt that permeable emotional boundaries offer commissioners opportunities to share their continuing feelings of grief. In addition, it offers providers the opportunity to engage in emotionally satisfying work, bringing meaning to their practice by enabling the maintenance of post-death relationships between bereaved people and their deceased loved ones. Evident in such an approach

is the 'continuing bonds' grief discourse, where the focus is upon continuing relationships and permeable boundries between the living and the dead (Klass et al. 1996). As these providers draw from their own personal mortality experiences, where grief is frequently complex and pervading, one can see why the continuing bonds thesis would find fertile ground as providers continue to relate their own experience of grief to their ashes creation practices. In this quote, Painter Two is discussing how she able is able to relate to a commissioner's grief experiences because she still considered herself recently bereaved as her own mortality experience intrinsically connects to her ashes creation practice.

> *It is the whole process; if you have been recently, I still think of myself as being recently, through bereavements, it is a natural thing to talk to someone who has dealt with it. It was fine, the two of us [the provider and commissioner] talking about it. But it is massive, it is massive, the emotions.*

> *You think that you are over something yourself and you have to [pause and looking away] but you are the same, you can just shed a tear because you are discussing, talking, sharing a feeling [with the commissioner], which eighteen months after her [the commissioner's] husband's death she was supposed to be over it, she was supposed to be moving on (Painter Two 6.1).*

Painter Two feels that, having been bereaved herself, it is a "*natural thing" (6.1)* to talk to commissioners about their feelings. She goes on to say that putting time-frames on grief is unhelpful and did not fit with her experiences of bereavement. In this way, she opposes process-orientated discourses of grief in direct contrast to providers who encountered ashes creation in the workplace. Providers who embed their ashes creation practices in their own experiences of mortality draw from continuing bonds discourses in their management of emotional boundaries with commissioners because they identify with grief's ebbs and flows across the life course and they credit these experiences directly with their ashes creation practice. Rather than trying to control bereaved people's emotions, as was evident in workplace narrative, these providers seek to identify bereaved people's emotions with their own experiences of loss. It is worth noting that providers who emphasised personal mortality narratives in their ashes creation practices were creatives that worked with relatively small turnovers of commissioners. Therefore, it might be contended that these providers do not need to control the emotions of their commissioners to the same extent as providers who

emphasised workplace narratives, who experience a high turnover of clients in other aspects of their businesses.

As I have explored, in their accounts providers had a strong tendency towards emphasising either the importance of emotional distance or the importance of permeable emotional boundaries in their relationships with commissioners according to the ways in which they initially encountered their ashes creation practice. However, this is not to claim that these tendencies in the data can be encountered as 'facts'. Rather, it is important to remember that categorical distinctions derived from interview data are tendencies towards particular narratives being told in particular ways; the reality of peoples' practices can reveal far more complexity (Law 1994). For example, providers who first encountered ashes creation in work environments sometimes developed ongoing friendships with commissioners, just as those who emphasised mortality experiences sometimes enact emotional boundaries. Nor is each narrative without its contentions. One provider who emphasised her experiences of mortality in her ashes creation practices found permeable emotional boundaries a liability when dealing with a family with complex personal issues. As Law (1994) reminds us, there are no 'facts' to be discovered by research, only stories that people order and reorder and, in these stories, research participants emphasise certain aspects of their practice.

> Stories are part of ordering, for we create them to make sense of our circumstances, to re-weave the human fabric. And as we create and we re-create our stories we make and remake both the facts of which they tell and ourselves (Law 1994 p.52).

In summary, providers in this research predominately come from creative backgrounds and their ashes creations developed from mortality experiences that have affected their lives. Consequently, it can be said of their first encounters with ashes creation practices that: **"*it was personal, it was not business*"** (1.2 Potter). These providers draw from continuing bonds grief discourses (Klass et al. 1996) in their interactions with commissioners as their own mortality experiences entwine with the development of their ashes creation practices. Because the majority of ashes creation providers work with small numbers of people in their creative practices, they are able to accommodate the demands for flexibility in how they create and maintain relationships with their

commissioners. This is in contrast to providers who first encountered ashes creation practices in the workplace, who draw from process-orientated theories of grief (Kübler-Ross 1970) to regulate their relationships with commissioners in order to maintain 'professional' boundaries and create temporally finite relationships.

'Here's looking at you kid' (Jennifer 2.9). Commissioning, Personalisation, and Choice

Commissioning creations refers to the processes by which commissioners and providers enter into agreements regarding the production of a particular ashes creation. This section explores how providers place emphasis upon the bespoke making of ashes creations and the treatment of cremation ashes, which has the effect of developing trust whilst highlighting ashes creation's singularity and artistic value. It then moves on to consider the material personalisation of ashes creations as fragmented and relational processes that focus upon materially presenting moments or feelings that draw from intimate and entwined biographies shared between commissioners and their loved ones.

Explaining the process

Ashes creations come into view in this section as commissioning processes give ashes creations presence long before they materially exist. This is because it is through the processes of commissioning that the bespoke materiality of an individual ashes creation takes shape: the subjects of paintings emerge, appropriate jewellery settings are explored, colours are selected, and physical dimensions are established. Every commission involves an initial conversation between a provider and a commissioner before cremation ashes are exchanged and creative processes commenced. This can take place in person, by telephone, or by email. Each commission then takes its own path. Some commissioners had repeated contact with providers, others less so. Subsequent communications could take place in person and include the exchange of cremation ashes or they could continue by phone and email with cremation ashes being transported via the postal system. Commissioning processes often involved establishing the length of time required to make an ashes creation and the price, although providers

who did not produce ashes creations as a commercial practice sometimes proceeded without such negotiations. Commissioning processes defy attempts to be pinned-down to a single point in time. They are cyclical, with discussions frequently fluctuating between providers and commissioners as well as others, such as family, creative collaborators, friends, as commissioning processes are negotiated and renegotiated.

In both commissioners' and providers' accounts, providers explaining processes of making ashes creations emerged as a key features of commissioning. Providers take time to explain to commissioners how they will create their ashes creations and emphasise how cremation ashes are going to be handled, treated, and stored when in their care. Providers communicate this information using a variety of methods including: discussions by telephone or by email and in person, online videos, leaflets, demonstrations, photographs, and inviting commissioners to watch whilst providers make their ashes creation. The Jeweller, for example, sent pictures of different stages of the making process to commissioners. Regardless of the how providers communicate the making of ashes creations to commissioners, this process always starts during commissioning. Three recurring concepts are evident in providers' and commissioners' accounts of explaining how ashes creations are made and how cremation ashes are handled during these processes: artistic value, singularity, and trust.

First, providers sharing stories of making processes invests artistic value into ashes creations and fosters trust in providers' creative abilities. As providers talk confidently and knowledgeably about making processes, it reassures commissioners that providers have the relevant artistic skills to make their ashes creation. For example, as the Potter explains the complex and physically demanding processes of throwing, firing, and sealing Raku pottery, it is evident to his commissioners that he has developed these skills from many years of practice. Gell (1998) claims that, in Western Societies, peoples' perceptions of the complexities of making of art objects are central to an object's perceived artistic value. For Gell, every art object begs the question, "how did it come into being?" (Gell 1998 p67) as the challenges the viewer of art objects would face in replicating creative processes imbues artistic value. It is through explaining how ashes creations are made that commissioners become aware of the challenges of creating

ashes creations. In this process, commissioners learn to value the creative abilities of providers whilst appreciating ashes creations as artistic accomplishments.

Second, explaining how ashes creations are made has the effect of representing ashes creations as singular. In his examination of embodied practices involved in the maintenance and care of wooden boats, Jalas (2009) explores the ways in which 'human practitioners' highlight their temporal and embodied investments as values of the crafted labour that makes each boat singular and unique. As tales are told by wooden boating practitioners of particular varnishes being applied and re-applied a certain number of times or a hull being sanded in a particular fashion, Jalas (2009) argues, each boat emerges as singular, uniquely crafted by the temporal and embodied investments of their practitioners. In a similar way, providers share narratives with commissioners where they emphasise the significant temporal and embodied investments they make in each ashes creation. As providers talk to commissioners of carefully painting, blowing, sculpting, and crafting ashes creations into shape, ashes creations emerge from these narratives as special creations of crafted labour, created bespoke for each commissioner. In this quote, Ken has been recounting his provider's description of the making of ashes-raku, which they had discussed during their initial phone call, when he states:

> *I wanted it to be absolutely a one off unique thing, which with that style of raku you get. You know, you get all the crack ones (a different style of raku) and stuff like that, you can buy that in John Lewis, you know what I mean? You could buy that in John Lewis and you could pour the ashes into it. I wanted something, that there was not another one of those anywhere in the world, because there was not another one of my mum and dad in the world, and that is quite relevant, you know what I mean? (Ken 3.2).*

Ken's quote illustrates how explaining how ashes creations are made can be understood as a means of marking out ashes creations as one-of-a-kind. In these processes of singularisation (Kopytoff 1986) ashes creation are as unique to commissioners as the loved ones whose cremation ashes they incorporate, this claim will be explored further in the next chapter.

Third, by emphasising how cremation ashes will be handled, treated, and stored providers develop trust in their ability to look after commissioners loved one's remains

with care and respect. Cremation ashes enter periods of separation from commissioners when they are in the care of providers. This separation is a time of potential unease for commissioners, which will not be resolved until their loved one's ashes return to them in their form of the ashes creation:

> *Oh God it was awful [waiting for her ashes creation], because I am not the best of patient people and I just wanted it. I want to know that the ashes had not [pause] that nothing had happened to the ashes.*

> *I mean I got a fear of, 'Oh what if somebody drops the ashes and they have not got them anymore?' Or a gush of wind because they are so fine, they are so fine these ashes and I just could not wait for it to come back.*

> *One, because I had not got him upstairs. And two, I wanted to see, I was mesmerised by how it could come out. You know, you just cannot think of something as horrible as ashes, in a way, that could be produced into something, a beautiful diamond (Susan 4.7).*

Susan's quote conveys both the anxiety commissioners experience at their separation from their loved one's cremation ashes and the excitement of the ashes creation to come. She was anxious because she *"had not got him upstairs" (4.7)[42]*, at the same time, she was *"mesmerised by how it could come out" (4.7)*. Providers counter difficulties that commissioners may feel during this period of separation by explaining the care taken of cremation ashes as well as the artistic processes they are subject too. These narratives develop trust in providers' ability to create an ashes creation whilst offering reassurances about the treatment of cremation ashes whilst in their care. For example, Jennifer spoke of not knowing her provider *"from Adam" (14.7)* before she commissioned her ashes creations and how she was reluctant to leave her husband Peter's cremation ashes. However, at the provider's invitation, Jennifer visited the glassworks to see ashes being blown into glass as well as the jewellery workshop where her ashes-glass pendent and ashes-glass paperweight were made:

> *I liked her reassurances that the ashes would be completely looked after, they were kept sealed and all that sort of thing. She just gave me an air of confidence about the whole business of it being created and what have you.*

> *Researcher: Her reassurances were important?*

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[42] Susan's son's cremation ashes were kept in a draw in her bedroom before being used to create an ashes creation.

It was for me, yes. I went over to see the glass blowers and all that sort of thing. I mean I had never met her from Adam when I first arrived, so she did it, efficiently is the wrong word, but very calmly, but quite adamant about the process, that every bit of ash that was not used would be returned to me, which it was. And that it would all be kept safe and she showed me the bags, well in fact she had to decant some of the ashes (Jennifer 14.7).

Jennifer explained how seeing where cremation ashes were stored, how they were handled, and the artistic processes they were subject to was reassuring for her and consequently she felt able to leave Peter's cremation ashes with the Jeweller. These reassurances from providers in regards to the treatment of cremation ashes is reminiscent of the reassurances that Funeral Directors offer bereaved families regarding the treatment of the corpse; particularly in regards to how corpses will be dressed, treated, and stored (Harper 2008). In both cases, knowledge of how the material dead will be cared for develops trust between the bereaved and those charged with their loved ones' remains.

Material personalisation

Throughout their accounts, providers and commissioners portray ashes creations as highly personalised practices. From describing the individual handcrafting of each ashes creation, to highlighting how incorporating the cremation ashes of commissioners' loved ones renders each ashes creation unique, commissioners and providers depicted ashes creations as personalised singular creations, custom-made for individuals. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, this turn towards personalisation must be understood as part of a wider movement towards practices that can be portrayed as being "unique in both concept and creation" (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009 p4).

This section focuses on one particular aspect of personalisation in ashes creation practices which emerge as an outcome of the negotiation between providers and commissioners during commissioning. Specifically, it considers the ways in which ashes creations are adapted so that aspects of their materiality enables personal meaning-

making. This can be immediately obvious, for example, inscriptions on the back of ashes-necklaces, or it can require interpretation, such as the selection of specific colours that evoke memories. Not all commissioners chose to personalise their ashes creation. Barbara and Christine, for example, selected their tattoo designs from a book in the tattoo studio. However, the majority of commissioners materially personalised their ashes creation in some manner and they frequently highlighted this as a central aspect of their ashes creation practices.

Sometimes commissioners have a clear idea of how they want their ashes creation personalised, on other occasions, personalisation emerges from discussions with providers. For example, Jill knew as soon as she saw an article about ashes-paintings in the local newspaper that she wanted an ashes-picture of her last holiday with George in Greece. However, for Queenie, the subject of her ashes-painting developed from discussions with her provider. Providers direct and guide personalisation decisions by modifying expectations. For example, the Painters encourage people to choose subject matters that they were comfortable painting and the Jeweller kept inscriptions to a manageable size for the piece of jewellery. Schäfer (2007) illustrates how Funeral Directors guiding of personalisation choices are concerned with normalising psychological interpretations of 'healthy grief resolution'. They engage in these processes, argues Schäfer (2007), in order to protect and enhance their status as professional grief managers. However, in ashes creation practices, guidance tends to focus on the potentials and limitations of providers' technologies, embodied skills, and interests.

Although the ways in which ashes creations are materially personalised differ, the theme of relatedness between commissioners and their loved ones emerges across all practices. Ashes creations tend to be materially personalised in ways that offer glimpses of intimate moments in time, for example, Jennifer's engraving on her necklace is of the private toast she shared with her husband:

> *I have this engraved around it (shows engraving around the sides of the necklace) and also it says:*

'Here's looking at you kid'

Because that is what he always said when we had a drink, a glass of wine (laughing) (*Jennifer* 2.9).

Jennifer mimed the clinking glasses with her husband when talking of her engraving, as she relived cherished moments. Intimacy was also evident in Vinnie's ashes-tattoo, which depicts the lyrics of the song his Nan used to sing to him and that he sang to her as she was dying. Even Jill's picture of Greece was not just a standard holiday scene, as it depicts the inaccessible beach where Jill was unable to climb its steep embankments, much to her husband George's teasing and amusement. John chose an ashes-teapot, so that he could replicate the twenty-year ritual of having a pot of tea with his Dad each day when John returned from work. Echoing the findings of Caswell (2011), in her exploration of personalisation in Scottish funeral practices, it is evident in these examples from the data that the personalisation in ashes creation practices has roots in memory, biography, embeddedness, and relationality, in this respect: "Personalisation thus may be seen as a relational process, in that it develops out of the relationships of which the deceased individual and bereaved family are part" (Caswell 2011 p249).

This notion of inmate relatedness that permeates material personalisation in ashes creation practices is evident in other practices with cremation ashes. For example, Hockey et al. (2010b) explore notions of place-making in ashes scattering practices where shared memories, biographies, and kinships intertwine in the selection of locations for family-led scatterings. In the ashes creation practices explored in this research, a couple's private toast, a shared holiday moment, or a treasured tea ritual between father and son are fragmented moments scattered across time and space. These moments are of meaning to commissioners because of the intimacy that they imply, which differentiates ashes creations from material practices that offer a communicable re-ordering of the deceased's biography (Walter 1996), such as, funeral flowers in a favourite football team's colours or a coffin shaped like a train for a railway enthusiast. Such communicable personalisation is often displayed during rituals associated with death, offering a re-ordering of an individual's identity that is recognisable to others (Walter 1996). By comparison, personalisation in ashes creation

practice is highly subjective, communicating immediacy between commissioners and the deceased developed during lifetimes live in proximity.

Sørensen's (2010) notion of 'commemorative subjectification' captures the immediacy between the bereaved and the deceased that is prevalent in ashes creation material personalisation. Developed to aid his exploration of contemporary cemetery practices, commemorative subjectification captures the ways in which emerging material practices associated with death have a tendency to emphasise private communication embedded in intimacy between the bereaved and deceased. The intimacy inherent in commemorative subjectification enables material practices associated with death to:

> …function as a mirror, reflecting not only the identity of the bereaved, but more importantly their feelings of presence and absence in light of the death of the relative. The void may thus generate a pre-mediated emotional sense of nearness to the deceased, which need not be objectified or verbalized (Sørensen 2010 p123).

This emotional sense of nearness, which this thesis will go on explore in greater depth in the Chapter Five, is evident in the words a Grandson whispered to his Nan on her deathbed in Vinnie's ashes-tattoo or in the picture of a Greek bay where a husband and wife shared a joke in Jill's ashes-picture. In John's case, the whole of his ashes-teapot conveys subjective immediacy, as it has been created to be of specific relevance to John's relationship with his father where they shared intimate times together drinking tea. John's ashes-teapot implies the presence of his father and the continuity of their relationship because, through his ashes creation practice, John hopes to: *"be able to have 1 [sic] more cup of tea with my Dad"* (John pers. comm.). At the same time, absence permeates John's ashes creation practices, an absence of his father from a shared daily life as a living being drinking tea with his son. The interplay of absence and presence enables John to recapture the intimacy of his daily tea ritual and therefore experience an emotional sense of nearness to his father.

Evident in the intimacy of ashes creation personalisation practices are the interplays of agencies in decision-making explored early in this chapter. John's decision to commission an ashes teapot is, in part, an outcome of his intention to experience an emotional sense of nearness to his father. However, by shifting agency beyond

intentionally to an outcome of networks of people, things, materials, and ideas (Latour 2005), other heterogeneous actants come into play. John's Dad's cremation ashes and the materiality of the teapot have traceable effects on decision-making processes in their ability to convey personhood and intimacy. John is able to share one more cup of tea with his father though the act of combining cremation ashes, with their potential to convey distributed personhood of the deceased person (Gell 1998), with the materiality of the teapot, which affords the social and familial act of tea-drinking. Although the capacity of cremation ashes to convey distributed personhood or the affordance a teapot gives to shared tea-drinking may not have intentionality, they are actants that have traceable effects on John's practice in their ability to convey a shared intimacy with his father.

It is worth noting that ashes creations are destined for the comparably private domains of commissioners' bodies and homes. These intimate and relational places are spatial continuations of the intimacy that ashes creations materially portray. Woodthorpe (2010) explores how memorialisation practices at gravesides are subject to scrutiny as objects and ephemera left by bereaved people are interpreted by cemetery staff and visitors, who draw from discourses based on assumptions of what constitutes 'normal' grieving behaviour. Unlike material practices that take place in the public domains of cemeteries explored by Woodthorpe (2010), in the comparably private and intimate space of homes and on bodies, bereaved peoples material practices are not subject to the same level of scrutiny by people not known to the bereaved.

In order to understand the relevance of place in ashes creation practices, let us consider an exception to the rule in the data. The only ashes creation in this research displayed in a public location is the ashes-mosaic incorporating the cremation ashes of Bernard Junior's father. Mounted on the front of the building on a very busy road, the ashes-mosaic is well known in the area in which is resides, as was Bernard Junior's father. Material personalisation, in this context, is more concerned with Bernard Senior's recognisable biography (Walter 1996) than the subjective relationship between father and son (Sørensen 2010). This is evident in the material personalisation choices which give *"a real picture of a man" (4.0):*

If you ever get pair of binoculars or a lens or anything, if you look at it, in the waistcoat, which is a British thing, there is all bits of China that has Royal images on it and stuff like that. And there is some City stuff in there, so it is a real picture of a man, you know?

So it has got Royal China in the waistcoats and some Man City stuff in there, there is a real language within it, which gets lost, but it is still there (Mosaic Artist 4.0).

The language *"gets lost" (4.0)* because of the height of the mural on the front of the building. Interestingly, Bernard Junior's decision-making differed from the *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) narrative of other commissioners. Although Bernard Junior spoke of the commissioning of his ashes-mosaic as something he wanted to do for himself, which he contrasted with his father's grave, which was *"for the family" (10.8)*, he also emphasised how the ashes-mosaic is a continuation of his Dad's fifty-year relationship with the family-run social club and the wider community. Rather than capturing moments between Bernard Junior and his father, the material personalisation of the ashes-mosaic is more concerned with aspects of Bernard Senior's personhood: his values, traits, and beliefs. In this case, his identities as a Royalist and a Manchester City Football Club Fan. This focus on the re-ordering of a communicable biography stands in contrast to the material personalisation of other ashes creation practices explored in this research, which are more concerned with capturing intimate shared moments between commissioners and the deceased. This reveals that it is not the practice of incorporating cremation ashes itself that fosters a concern with commemorate subjectification. Rather, the spaces and places ashes creations are created to occupy appears to, at least in part, shape material personalisation practices.

This section has argued that providers explaining the processes of making of ashes creations and reassuring commissioners about the treatment of cremation ashes are both important aspects of commissioning processes. Explaining processes of making builds trust in providers' abilities to create ashes creations, conveying artistic value (Gell 1998) and brings ashes creations into view as singular creations (Kopytoff 1986, Belk 1988, Jalas 2009). Explaining how cremation ashes will be treated when in the care of providers reduces commissioners' anxiety during periods of separation from cremation ashes as it develops trust between bereaved people and those charged with the care of

their loved ones' remains (Harper 2008). When it comes to the personalisation of ashes creations with text, colour, form, and images, commissioners' choices tend to be fragmented and relational as they reaffirm intimate relatedness with loved ones through subjective immediacy which manifests in the personalised aspects of ashes creations materiality (Sørensen 2010).

Chapter Summary

Starting before commissioners and providers had awareness of their ashes creation practices and ending with the commissioning of ashes creations; each section of this chapter has facilitated comparison by introducing primary actors in this thesis: commissioners, the deceased, providers, and ashes creations. The presentation of discovering, deciding, and commissioning as distinct sections to aid the structure of the thesis, it is not to imply these are linear narratives; rather, these processes merge as they extend far beyond the confines of single decision-events in continual processes of negotiation and reinvention (Law 1994). This chapter has argued that, because ashes creations only require a small proportion of cremation ashes produced by an individual cremation, they are just one aspect of commissioners' ashes strategies with their loved ones' remains; therefore, ashes creations are best understood as part of a patchwork of interconnected practices with the material dead (Kellaher et al. 2010). This brings into view the ways in which commissioners are able to fulfil their duties of kinship with the majority of their loved ones' cremation ashes while engaging in ashes creation practices *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4). Commissioners' *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) narratives in their ashes creation decision making does not preclude ashes creations from being relational practices and this was traced in the chapter in a number of ways.

First, this chapter traced relationality in the ways in which commissioners discovered and decided upon their ashes creation practice as it explored the increasing influence of stories created and distributed by the media as well as through online, social, and personal networks. Second, relationality was evident in the involvement of families and friends in decision-making processes and in the ways in which commissioners legitimise themselves as decision-makers through narratives of intimate kinship. Third,

relationality to other people, places, and things is apparent in the ways in which the deceased affect ashes creation decision-making processes as the material dead shape and influence the nuances of the rites they are subject to (Williams 2004 b 2011, Harper 2010). Fourth, relationality was also apparent in the material personalisation of ashes creations, as *"Here's looking at you kid" (Jennifer 2.9)*, captures the intimate relatedness that connects commissioners and their deceased ones loved ones (Sørensen 2010).

Caswell (2011), in her work on personalisation, illustrates how personalised practice can, upon first glance, appear to signify an individualisation of choices; however, by delving deeper, she argues, it becomes apparent that they are brimming with connectivity to others as "People are thus individuals who have the capacity to make choices, but they are socially embedded" (Caswell 2011 p248).

Likewise, ashes creation at first glance can appear to be solo accomplishments engaged in by bereaved individuals to satisfy their own desire for continued proximity to their loved ones' remains; however, when considered together, the aspects of relationality traced in ashes creation reveal these practices to be deeply embedded in their connectivity to other people, places, and things. As this chapter ends with an examination of commissioning, the following chapter moves to the next stage in the ashes creation process: the making and exchanging of ashes creations.

Chapter Four: Making and Exchanging

Chapter Three was concerned with the ways in which ashes creations come into the lives of commissioners and providers; specifically, how they are discovered, how they are decided upon, and how they are commissioned. Chapter Four continues the exploration of the ways in which ashes creations come into being in the lives of those who participate in ashes creation practices by investigating how ashes creations are made and how they are exchanged. The first section of the chapter considers the making of ashes creations. Ashes creations are diverse in their making processes; from tattoos to teapots, each ashes creation emerges from its own embodied techniques and routines enacted in particular spaces, using specialised materials and technologies. An exploration of each process would take up a significant proportion of the thesis. Therefore, this chapter focuses upon a feature common to each of these diverse making processes, the inclusion of cremation ashes. In focusing on the effect of the inclusion of cremation ashes, this chapter is concerned with making ashes creations specifically, rather than art objects, body modifications, or body adornments in general. Once providers have made ashes creations, they are ready to be exchanged with commissioners. The second section of the chapter explores the multiplicity of exchange types, which reveals ashes creations as creative practices in flux without the unification of a shared identity. It concludes by arguing that ashes creations exchanges signify a shift in materiality that enables the reuniting of deceased loved ones with commissioners, evoking narratives of loved ones returning.

'...every piece is so different...' (Jeweller 10.0). Making Ashes Creations

This section explores providers' accounts of making ashes creations, which are characterised by two narratives. In the first, cremation ashes perform as creative materials that have traceable effects on the making of ashes creations. In the second, cremation ashes perform as precious materials intrinsically associated with notions of personhood. The section concludes by considering how the mixing of cremation ashes with other materials enables notions of personhood to pervade the whole ashes creations materiality.

Providers make the vast majority of the ashes creations in this research by hand from their component materials in their workshops, studios, and homes. On occasion, this can include creative collaborations; for example, the Jeweller frequently collaborates with a small glass blowing company located next door to her workshop. There are two exceptions to the handcrafting of ashes creations: the pressing of ashes-vinyl records takes place at a pressing-plant and the creation of ashes-diamonds takes place in a laboratory. Although the vinyl record is physically produced by a third party, the Ashes-Vinyl provider has a significant creative input as he guides, records, edits, and masters the content. However, the Ashes-Diamond provider has no creative or physical input into making processes. This provider acts as an agent, sending cremation ashes to the laboratory for their transformation into ashes-diamonds. Although there may be insights gained from contrasting laboratory production with the handcrafted making of ashes creations, further data on ashes-diamond production would be required. Therefore, ashes-diamonds are not included in the first section of the chapter, which considers the making of ashes creations by providers.
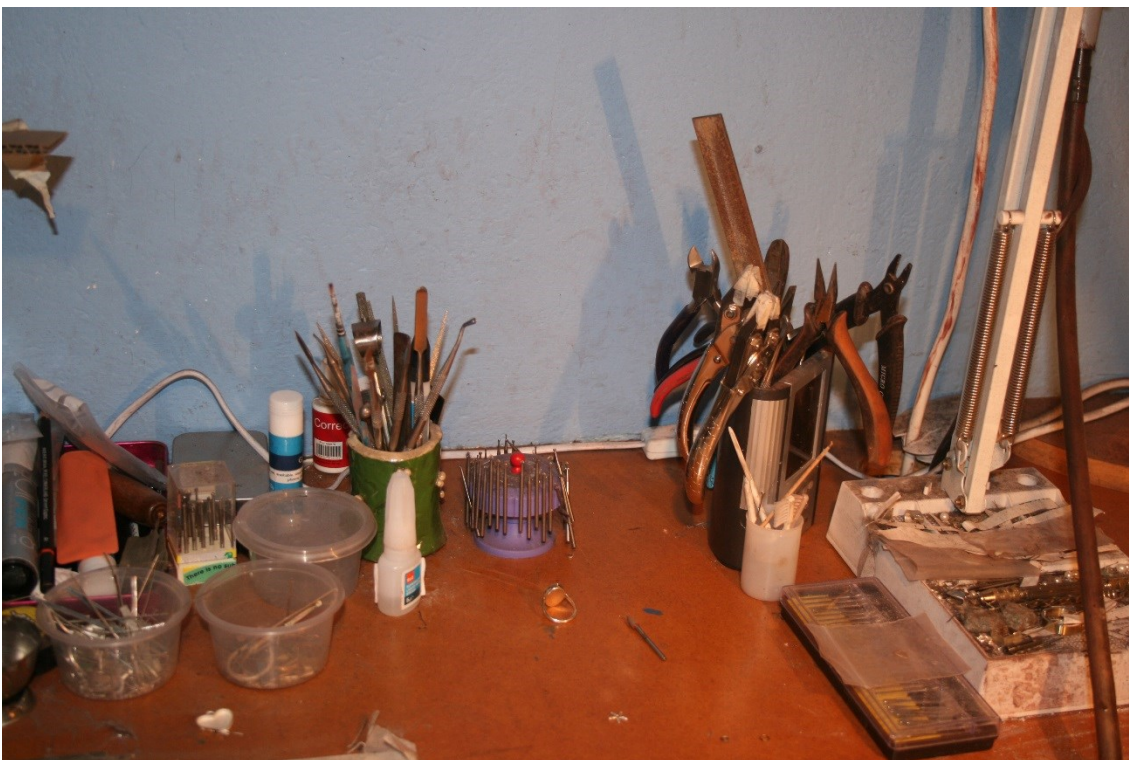

Fig. 4: The Jeweller's workspace. This small intimate space full of creative tools is typical of the environments that most providers use to create ashes creations.

As previously discussed, the majority of providers in this research were already experienced artists before they started to make ashes creations. Consequently, providers also made their object or body modification without the inclusion of cremation ashes for other commissioners and for their own artistic practices. This enables comparisons to be made which reveal the ways in which the inclusion of cremation ashes affects processes of making. Providers often spoke of ashes creations occupying different positions in their creative practice than their non-ashes work. Here, the Mosaic provider distinguishes between making his commercially successful non-ashes work and his ashes-mosaics:

> *It [making an ashes-mosaic] is a different mind-set [than making non-ashes mosaic], it is an act of compassion and love...I do not look at it as work. It is part of my practice as a human being. Work is work, and then there is practice as a human being, which I am not a great human being, but I can do little things in life (Mosaic provider 15.6).*

Providers' narratives of their non-ashes work centred on expanding and developing their creative skills, but their narratives of their ashes creation practices were much more concerned with experiencing emotional fulfilment as *"an act of compassion and love" (15.6)*. Reciprocity is evident in providers' accounts of making ashes creations as providers invest significant amounts of time and care when making ashes creations and gain a particular sense of fulfilment from their practice; for example, the ashes-mosaic gains existence as it is crafted into shape and the Mosaic provider gains fulfilment as *"part of my practice as a human being"* (15.6).

Jalas (2009), in his study of wooden boating, claims that handcrafted objects illustrate reciprocal relations with the 'human practitioners' who create or maintain them. Objects with the capacity for reciprocity are able to secure significant temporal and embodied investments from their human practitioners, argues Jalas (2009), because they are understood by those that engage in the practice to be "unique, priceless and entitled to good care" (Jalas 2009 p203). We see evidence of this as providers gave accounts of investing more time and physical care when making ashes creations than their non-ashes work because of the inclusions of cremation ashes, which are understood to be creatively unique and emotionally precious materials. This manifests in two recurring and intertwining narratives in providers' accounts. In the first narrative,

cremation ashes perform as creative materials as providers invest time and skill to ground, drip, and paint with them in order to achieve specific creative effects. In the second narrative, cremation ashes perform as precious materials worthy of significant investments of time and care because of their uniqueness and capacity to convey personhood.

Cremation ashes as creative materials

In their accounts of making ashes creations, providers invest their time and embodied skills to attain creative effects with cremation ashes. In practices where cremation ashes are not visible in the ashes creation, such as ashes-vinyl records, ashes-mosaics, or ashes-tattoos, this might only involve grinding ashes to achieve a fine consistency. In practices where cremation ashes are visible as an intrinsic visual feature, such as ashes-paintings, ashes-jewellery, ashes-glassware, ashes-frames, and ashes-pottery, providers often invest significant time to develop the embodied skills required to paint, blow, mix, or drip cremation ashes to achieve specific visual effects. In this quote, Painter Two is discussing the time she spent grinding cremation ashes with a pestle and mortar for a commission. She has to know exactly how long to work the pestle and mortar to produce specific textures for different parts of the portrait she was painting: textured for the hair, smooth for skin and so on, so they can be visible *"but not too much" (4.7):*

> *...it took three weeks, using a pestle and mortar to break the ashes down. We already discussed whether she [the commissioner] wanted to have the ashes visible or not, because that depends on how long I actually work the pestle and mortar. So, it can be like a powder or it can be granulated and she did want them visible, but not too much (*Painter Two *4.7).*

Each painting is of a subject matter unique to a particular commission and each commissioner wants cremation ashes visible to varying degrees, so cremation ashes are never ground, mixed, dripped, or painted the same way twice. Therefore, achieving desired effects with cremation ashes requires the provider to invest time and embodied skill in order to plan, perform, and judge their creative practices with cremation ashes (Jalas 2009). Painter Two's quote illustrates how working creatively with cremation ashes has its own sequential rhythms as cremation ashes have to be ground in a pestle

and mortar for varying lengths of time. In addition, painters spend hours sketching ashes-pictures before they are committed to canvas because adding cremation ashes to paint changes its texture, making mistakes difficult to rectify. In addition, ashes-paint can take longer to dry than non-ashes paint affecting the time required between each coat. The effect of cremation ashes on rhythms of making can be traced across ashes creation practices. As the materiality of cremation ashes affects the creative process by demanding certain sequential rhythms, cremation ashes and providers mutually configure temporalities (Jalas 2009).

Providers often comment on cremation ashes' unique materiality as a creative material. They draw attention to how each person's cremation ashes have slightly different textures and colours and how each grain of ash, if examined closely, has a unique colour, weight, shape, and texture. Cremation ashes perform as active and often uncontrollable creative agents during the making of ashes creations, producing slightly different colours, textures, sounds, and patterns each time they are incorporated into ashes creations, ensuring each ashes creation is unique. These differences, no matter how slight, have effects on the creative process that are valued by providers. The Jeweller articulates the importance attached to ashes creations' unique materiality, because "*…every piece is so different…*" *(10.0)* she is able to "*have a relationship with it*" *(10.0)* as she makes embodied investments of hammering and sawing with "*care and precision for that piece.*" *(10.0)*:

> *I think it's because every piece is so different you get to know every little mark on it, every little [pause] where the ashes are scattered in it.*

> *Every piece is different and you do get to know that piece through the patterns that it has made, that the ashes have made, you do have a relationship with it.*

> *It is a hands-on job really, it is not a glamorous job; it is hammering, sawing, but you do it with such care and precision for that piece (Jeweller 10.0).*

In her account, the Jeweller attributes each ashes creation's unique materiality to a skein of human and non-human agencies that come together during making (Latour 2005, Law 1994). She talks about the heat in the studio that particular day and the actions of the glassblower combining to affect the patterns ashes set in glass. She stresses the actions

of cremation ashes themselves in this process, as tiny weight and colour differentials in each grain affect patterns formed in glass. Providers stressed the diversity of agencies affecting making processes, drawing particular attention to how the actions of cremation ashes combine with materials, people, technologies, and places to create unique ashes creations (Latour 2005, Law 1994). For example, the Potter spoke of how microscopic differences in each ash grain means that they each react slightly differently to heat during firing processes, which in turn affects the colours achieved on ashes-raku pots. The creative actions of cremation ashes in the making of ashes creations also resonated with commissioners; for example, this aspect of his ashes-raku particularly resonated with Ken, whose ashes-raku incorporates his parent's cremation ashes:

> *The colours you see on the outside, because the clay starts off black and then the firing produces the colours and different materials release the oxygen within the atoms in the material at different rates, creating different colours, etc etc; including an aspect of the ash.*

> *So, some of those colours are potentially created by my mum and dad's ashes. And that whole thing of creating something else with, you know [the ashes] and it all becoming very much part and parcel of it [the ashes-raku] being a [pause], not an object, do you know what I mean?*

> *It is all [pause] it becomes even more integral and meaningful, you know? You are looking at colours there on the Raku and those colours could be created by [the ashes], because there are lots of other things in the firing as well, but that aspect of my mum and dad's ashes is contributing to the way it looks and that makes it just so unique and so beautiful (Ken 2.5).*

The unique materiality of Ken's ashes creation is an integral part of his relationship to his ashes-raku. Ken values the creative effects of his parent's cremation ashes on the unique materiality of his ashes-raku: *"…that aspect of my mum and dad's ashes is contributing to the way it looks and that makes it just so unique and so beautiful"* (2.5). Another example of valuing the unique creative effects of cremation ashes is provided by the Vinyl Record provider, who talks about cremation ashes creating distinct *"pop and crackles"* (4.8) in ashes-vinyl as they collect in the grooves of each record:

> *Yeah, basically, it is explained to them (commissioners) that it (cremation ashes) will affect the quality of the recording as it were. But the thing that is affecting the quality is the ash of the person and for me that is important that you get a bit of a pop.*

*You get pops and crackles after a while in records anyway, but this is a bit more. You don't want to put so much in that you cannot play the thing without it being a wind up, but you do want to hear a few pops and crackles in there (*Vinyl Record Provider *4.8).*

The Vinyl Record provider strongly felt that *"pops and crackles"* (4.8) created by the inclusion of cremation ashes made each record unique and communicated a loved one's auditory presence. By acknowledging the unique and often uncontrollable creative effect of cremation ashes as material agents in the making of ashes creations, providers and commissioners recognise that:

…there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence. In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action', things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on (Latour 2005 p72).

The materiality of cremation ashes affords a certain level of unpredictability when making ashes creations. As cremation ashes are mixed, dripped, or folded with other materials by providers during the making of ashes creations they create unique formations and this influences creative processes by effecting patterns, colours, and sounds. By utilising this understanding of action, the agencies acting in making ashes creations become much more dispersed than the intentional actions of providers as they make ashes creations.

Fernandz (2011) traces how corpses demonstrate this ability to affect creative processes by exploring the agencies of the material dead in American memorial photography. He considers how creative influences performed by each corpse, such as tricks of the light, effect the final photographic image, arguing that each photograph is "often recording that which is beyond human control" (Fernandz 2011 p345). Like Fernandz's memorial photographers, ashes creation providers enact their time, knowledge, and embodied skills in order to achieve creative outcomes. In these creative processes, cremation ashes refuse to be completely tamed by the creative investments of providers as they affect the materiality of ashes creations in ways that are beyond providers' control. Cremation ashes may not have intentionality in the Western philosophical sense, but they enact agency through their materiality as they have traceable effects on creative

processes (Gell 1998, Williams 2004 b, 2011, Latour 2005). As cremation ashes affect the patterns in glass, the colour shade of Raku, or the *"pop and crackles"* (4.8) of ashes-vinyl, what emerges is an understanding of the making of ashes creations as skeins of heterogeneous agencies, including interplays between the temporal and embodied investments of the living and the creative material agencies of the dead.

Cremation ashes as precious materials

In the second narrative recurrent in providers' accounts of making of ashes creations, cremation ashes perform as precious materials worthy of significant investments of time and care. One example of this is the ways in which providers develop specific techniques and routines when working with cremation ashes to ensure their protection from wastage, which they explicitly link to the preciousness of cremation ashes as a material. In this quote, the Potter is discussing how he prevents *"very precious"* (24.8) cremation ashes being lost to wastage by carefully painting ashes infused water onto pots rather than the quicker method of spraying that he uses in his non-ashes work:

> *That [cremation ashes] is then scooped out [of the mortar], it is put into the glaze mixture, water is added, it is mixed up and that is then brushed on. I don't spray it [the ashes mixture], because if you spray you miss the pot a little bit and lose a few of those elements and that is kind of a bit disrespectful.*
>
> *So, I have got to be very careful. I hand brush. Every tiny little bit of that mixture goes onto the pot. I then rinse out the bowl a little bit, use the rest of that with the brush. That is really important for me, because it makes me feel [pause] oh, it makes me feel right.*
>
> *This is such an important substance [cremation ashes] I have been sent, this is more important than gold or platinum or anything. It is very precious, beyond monetary value, so that is how it is treated.*
>
> *So when I put it on [to the pot] any wastage at all and has to be done to the absolute minimum, of course I am going to waste some, when I say atoms, it is very small amounts (Potter 24.8).*

When producing his non-ashes work, the Potter sprays water onto the pot; however, when working with cremation ashes the Potter makes additional temporal and embodied investments to paint because cremation ashes are "*very precious, beyond*

monetary value." (24.8). Providers linked notions of cremation ashes as precious to the generation of obligations regarding their treatment, which is evident in the Potter's statement that it would be *"kind of a bit disrespectful"* (24.8) to spray ashes-water as some would inevitably be wasted. This echoes Jalas' (2009) claim that certain objects are understood to be 'priceless' because of their immeasurable emotional value which entitles these objects to investments of time and embodied skill.

In providers' accounts, narratives of cremation ashes generating obligations as precious materials entwines with cremation ashes' potential to perform the personhood of the deceased and a sense of duty towards commissioners; this is evident in the Jeweller's quote:

> *As soon as the jewellery block [containing cremation ashes] is coming to be ready to be made into a piece of jewellery, it is Jack or, you know, it is the person who it is. It isn't a jewellery block. So you have a relationship with that piece of jewellery as the person. You put so much of yourself into it really because you are handling something that you have been entrusted to work, which I always find is such an honour, to be given something so precious that belongs to somebody and it is all they have left of that person (Jeweller 9.5).*

Implicit in providers' accounts is the notion that being entrusted with cremation ashes by commissioners generates obligations regarding their treatment. Providers demonstrate a sense of duty to *"put so much of yourself into it" (9.5)* because they have been *"entrusted to work" (9.5)* by commissioners with "*precious" (9.5)* cremation ashes. Jalas (2009) traces how objects can act as entities that have "moral rights that generates obligations on those with whom it interacts" by enacting "…person-like qualities of uniqueness" (Jalas 2009 p212). This is evident in the ways in which providers recurrently link their obligations regarding the treatment of ashes creations and cremation ashes to their potential to perform the personhood of the deceased. The Jeweller says: "*it is Jack"* *(9.5)* and this generates obligations for the Jeweller to make significant temporal and embodied investments when making her ashes creations.

The Jeweller has a relationship with the "*jewellery as the person" (9.5).* As I discussed in the last chapter, ashes creations are just one practice in which commissioners engage with their loved ones' cremation ashes; therefore *"Jack"* (9.5) can be distributed spatially and temporally as he is capable of being performed in multiple times and

places. If we draw from Gell's (1998) notion of distributed personhood, which enables this dispersal of *"Jack"* (9.5), then we do not look for personhood to reside within the jewellery block, as if it provided a second body for *"Jack"* (9.5) (Hertz's 1960); rather, *"Jack"* (9.5) is performed in heterogeneous networks as the provider is making her ashes creations (Gell 1998). This is evident in the ways in which providers enact practices that maintain relationships between the deceased's personhood and their cremation ashes when making ashes creations. Here, Painter One is discussing how stressful it is to put ashes-paint onto canvas due to the unpredictably of cremation ashes as a creative material, when she calls up *"George"* (9.5) for his assistance:

> *Then I put it on the canvas and once you have started doing it and that is when the stress comes (holding her hand as if holding a brush and directing the conversation towards it):*
>
> *'Come on George, Jill wants this [painting] so badly.'*
>
> *Researcher - Referring to the person?*
>
> *It is always George, always George, or whoever it is, they are a person, to me it is the remains of the person. It is not [pause] it is the remains of the person. I have conversations with them all the time, I have had family coming over and my sister will say:*
>
> *'How is George?'*
>
> *'We are going well.'*
>
> *I will not lose sight of the fact, it sounds corny, I know what I am going to say sounds corny, but somebody has entrusted their loved ones' to you, and it's a person to them, so it is still a person to me (Painter One 8.9).*

Paint One's quote reveals how *"George"* (9.5) is performed in networks that include his cremation ashes, which are *"still a person to me" (8.9),* as well as the ashes-infused oil paints, to which Painter One please: *'Come on George, Jill wants this [painting] so badly' (8.9).* Although she is not present during the making of the ashes-painting, Jill, as the commissioner of the ashes creation, is central to the performance of *"George"* (9.5) in Painter One's account of making her ashes creation. Echoing the Jeweller, we see in Painter One's quote the entwining of being *"entrusted" (8.9)* with cremation ashes and maintaining the personhood of the deceased when making ashes creations. Indeed,

even Painter One's sister is involved in the performance of personhood as she asks 'How is George?' (8.9).

To a certain extent, this concern for the bereaved in maintaining connections between the deceased's personhood and their material remains reflects the treatment of the dead body in funeral homes (Harper 2008). For example, corpses are dressed in the deceased's clothing so connections are maintained for beavered people visiting Funeral Homes between the deceased's personhood and their material remains (Harper 2008). However, the extent to which providers actively maintain connections between cremation ashes and the deceased's personhood in their own creative practice is noteworthy. This often goes well beyond engaging in practices that the bereaved would be aware of, such as dressing a corpse, as engaging with the deceased becomes an integral part of providers' creative practices. For example, Painter One's calls to for George to assist, *"Come on George" (8.9),* are reflected in other providers' accounts as they spoke of calling upon the deceased to assist in the creative process. As Painter One has *"conversations with them all the time" (8.9)* or the Jeweller makes *"Jack" (9.5)*, creative practices go beyond simply being extensions of respect for commissioners as bereaved people as providers actively integrate the deceased into the making process.

The mixing of materials

In the last section, which explored cremation ashes as precious materials, the Jeweller referred to the whole of the jewellery block she was working with as *"Jack" (9.5).* The jewellery block[43] does not *contain* Jack, *"it is Jack"* (9.5). This is not unusual in commissioners' accounts as they often referred not only to cremation ashes but also to ashes creations by the deceased's first name and in the present tense when describing making processes. The majority of ashes creations in this research involve the mixing of a small amount of cremation ashes with other substances. The only exceptions are ashes-diamonds, created by subjecting cremation ashes to heat and pressure, but, as

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[43] A jewellery block is a glass block that contains cremation ashes which the jeweller crafts into necklaces, bracelets, and other jewellery items.

discussed, they have been excluded from this section of the chapter, which focuses upon the handcrafting of ashes creations. As cremation ashes are mixed with paints, inks, liquid glass, or clay during the making of ashes creations, materials irreversibly merge. The irreversibility of this merging of materials distinguishes ashes creations from objects that perform as storage vessels for cremation ashes, such as urns or cremation jewellery. In this section, I will consider how the mixing of materials during making processes produces ashes creations that are able to transcend subject object dualisms by being *"Jack" (9.5)* and also being an ashes-necklace.

Cremation ashes and other matter go into mixing processes during the making of ashes creations as distinct materials attributed with their own particular properties and emerge as ashes-glass, ashes-paint, or ashes-grout. As materials are mixed, cremation ashes' potential to perform personhood, their potential to be *"Jack" (9.5)*, flows into inks, grout, glass or other materials, to the extent that notions of personhood permeate the whole of the newly formed matter. We can see evidence of cremation ashes' potential for personhood in the last chapter when we considered commissioners' cremation ashes strategies. As George's cremation ashes are scattered at football grounds or Brian's are dispersed in the sea at his favourite holiday destination, it is clear that cremation ashes, in networks with places and people, have the potential to perform the personhood of the deceased by conveying their presence in these locations. This is reflected by the work of Kellaher et al. (2010), who, in their study of ashes strategies also found that the potential of cremation ashes to perform personhood was a key feature of participants' decision-making. In the Jeweller's quote, the glass block does not *contain "Jack" (9.5)*, like an urn, rather, by the mixing of materials the whole jewellery block *becomes "Jack" (9.5)*, as cremation ashes' potential for personhood permeates into other matter with which it is mixed.

The ability of cremation ashes to infuse other matter with the potential to perform personhood is also evident in practices with waste materials produced by creative processes when making ashes creations. Scraps of cloth used to wipe ashes-tattoo ink or wipe ashes-paint brushes are the waste products of the mixing process; however, the inclusion of cremation ashes transforms them into something more. Commissioners and providers gave accounts of carefully preserving these materials as providers always gave

them to commissioners, who treasure them. I was shown several of these ashes infused cloth scraps by commissioners; for example, as I started to leave Queenie's house following her interview she commented that she had 'a little bit of Arthur in the cupboard' and produced a small square of cloth used to clean the brushes that created her ashes-painting, which she had framed using white card.

This capacity of the material dead to transfer notions of personhood into material with which it comes into contact is evident in a wide range of mixing, scattering, and internment practices. Williams (2011), for example, in his study of a Donkey Sanctuary that has become site for bereaved-led cremation ashes practices, argues that, as ashes are scattered and interned in the landscape of the Donkey Sanctuary in association with a wide range of materials and other living things (donkeys), various absence and presences for the dead are created. This includes the notion, claims Williams (2011), that the deceased's personhood is performed during subsequent visits to the Donkey Sanctuary by the landscapes, materials, and other living things that came into contact with the deceased's cremation ashes. Williams' (2011) highlights the ability of cremation ashes to occupy both subject and object positions in these scattering and interment practices as a feature of cremation ashes inherent ontological ambiguity. Williams' work illustrates how cremation ashes have the potential to transfer personhood to other matter by being powerful generators of agencies that have the capacity to transform whatever they come into contact with.

The potential of the material dead to transform matter that it comes into contact with is also considered by Brown (1981) in his exploration of religious relics. The fragmented and partial bodies of saints, argues Brown (1981), had the potential to transform the relics they resided in, so that together, relics and fragmented bodies performed what Brown calls the "fullness of the invisible person" (Brown 1981 p88). These practices explored by Williams (2011) and Brown (1981) speak not only of the power of the material dead to perform personhood post-death, but they also draw attention to how the fragmented or cremated dead have the capacity to transfer notions of personhood into other matter with which it comes into contact. This supports the claim made in this thesis that, as cremation ashes are mixed with other matter during the making of ashes creations, the capacity to perform the deceased's personhood is distributed into the

materials with which it comes into contact and, consequently, notions of personhood have the potential to permeate the resulting ashes creations.

During mixing, cremation ashes are between states, they are no longer purely cremation ashes as they mix with other materials, but they are not yet ashes creations. In this way, mixing can be understood as a period of liminality in ashes creation practices, where conceptual and material distinctions between materials are in flux (Van Gennep 1960, Hockey et al. 2010b). The embodied action of mixing creates transitions between states by offering the creative space for conceptual and material category transformations to take place.

The mixing of materials in ashes creation practice, are processes of mutual transformation through material incorporation. Just as incorporating cremation ashes transfers their potential for personhood into ashes creations, so the intermingling of inks, liquid glass, paints, clay, glaze, silicone, grout, or liquid vinyl has the potential to transform cremation ashes into jewellery, paintings, tattoos, vinyl records, or pottery. Mixing transfers cremation ashes potential for personhood into other matter, whilst the matter of death, in the form of cremation ashes, transforms into a new materiality as ashes-paintings, ashes-jewellery or ashes-pottery. In this process, no matter comes away unchanged, all is irreversibly transformed. The resulting ashes creation emerges able to occupy both subject and object positions, as both person and thing; this is evident in the following quote by Ken:

> *It is mum and dad and it is a piece of art. Yeah, it is mum and dad, it is the essence, that is probably the right word that I was perhaps looking for earlier on, it is the essence of mum and dad. The programme I was telling you about with Brian Cox, when he was saying that we make up the conscious universe and that is the atoms, if you like, in effect it is the atoms of the remains of my mum and dad.*
>
> *And so, all of that is encompassed in a vessel that is a piece of Japanese art. Yeah I do think of it as 'mum and dad' and I also think of it as a piece of art. Because I am not in denial about the fact that mum and dad are in the pot, do you know what I mean? I don't think, 'Oh this is a lovely pot, which happens to have mum and dad's ashes in it.' Because of the process that we have gone through, the whole thing is integral, you know? The ashes are in the firing, in the pot, in the clay and inside, so the whole thing is joined (Ken 5.1).*

Ken's ashes-raku occupies both subject and object status as his ashes creation *"is mum and dad and it is a piece of art" (Ken 5.1).* This notion of ashes creations occupying subject and object positions will be further explored in the next chapter of this thesis. However, it is worth noting how the physical qualities of cremation ashes materiality, specifically, their fluid-like consistency, enables the transcendence of conceptual boundaries when cremation ashes are mixed with other matter. One only has to tip cremation ashes from a container to witness their capacity for fluidity as they almost pour out (Prendergast et al. 2006). This materiality affords mutual permeation during mixing as materials to become thoroughly intermingled enabling the blurring of physical and conceptual distinctions between matter.

Such permeation aids the blurring of ontological distinctions between cremation ashes and other materials as physical boundaries between materialities are transcended in processes of mutual incorporation. Therefore, the resulting ashes creations do not resemble a containment of the deceased, as Kwint et al. (1999) claim is the case in mourning jewellery containing hair or cremation ashes, where the subject is enclosed by the object. Rather, via processes of mixing, ashes creations emerge that are objects or tattoos with the potential to perform the personhood of the deceased in network with people, places, and things. Although emerging from the liminality of the mixing process, these transformations are maintained by practice that continue connections between cremation ashes, ashes creations, and the personhood of the deceased. The form these practices take will be further explored in the next chapter of this thesis.

In summary, we have considered how the inclusion of cremation ashes generates obligations to make significant temporal and embodied investments when making ashes creations. This enabled explorations of cremation ashes as creative materials, enacting agencies through their corporeality ensuring *"every piece is so different"* (Jeweller 10.0). It also enabled explorations of cremation ashes as precious materials, which entwines with their capacity to perform the unique personhood of the deceased. The section concluded by exploring the mixing of materials during the making of ashes creations as periods of liminality, marking and creating transitions between states (Van Gennep 1960). Ashes creations, it was argued, emerge from these mixing processes able to

occupy both subject and object positions because they are ashes-objects permeated with cremation ashes potential for personhood. In the next section, I shall continue to explore the ways in which the inclusion of cremation ashes affects material practices by arguing that notions of personhood also permeate the exchange of ashes creations.

'..they are irreplaceable, aren't they?' (Susan 3.1). Exchanging Ashes Creations

This second section of the chapter considers the exchanging of ashes creations. It explores selling ashes creations, arguing that providers reconcile potential transgressions of conceptual boundaries between people and commoditise by developing narratives of ashes creations as singular, bespoke, and crafted. It then goes on to explore the buying and ownership of ashes creations from the perspective of commissioners who value ashes creations beyond any concept of monetary value. It concludes by arguing that ashes creations exchanges are significant happenings that evoke loved ones returning, signifying a shift in materiality that enables the returning of deceased loved ones.

<u>Exchange values</u>

The most common form of exchange-value for an ashes creation in this research is monetary exchange, which we will consider in more detail in the next section. However, the overwhelming majority of providers demonstrated flexibility in their approach to exchange. Most commissioners occasionally undertook commissions free of charge, charged only for materials, reduced their rates, or accepted barter-exchanges. Factors included:

- If the commissioner had limited resources.

- If the commissioner had experienced a particularly traumatic loss.

- If the commissioners' bereavement experience resonated particularly with providers.

- If the provider was in a period of developing their service.

- If the commissioner was known to the provider either directly or via a third party.

- If the commission was outside of the providers' normal practice and therefore presented an opportunity to develop their creative skills with cremation ashes.

For example, a number of these factors came together for the Potter when he offered to produce John's ashes-teapot free of charge although he was already making and charging for ashes-raku. First, a third party he knew in his personal life approached him to undertake the commission. Second, John's story of sharing a pot of tea each day with his father, which was the impetus for the commission, had an emotional resonance for the Potter who had produced his first ashes creation using the cremation ashes of his father. Third, the Potter had never previously produced an ashes-teapot and he was curious about incorporating cremation ashes in the creative process, which differed significantly from ashes-raku. Or consider Painter Two, when first establishing her business she bartered commissions to gain experience working with cremation ashes:

> *In fact, she did not give me any money; she gave me [pause] cheese.*
>
> *She paid you cheese? (Researcher)*
>
> *Two big boxes of cheese, because she works at a cheese factory and staff can buy it cheaper. Well, I was trying to work it out:*
>
> *'Well they are about two pound each, there are 24 in a box that is two boxes. How much have I made?' [laughing] I know! (Painter Two 5.9).*

Other forms of exchange include the alcoholic drink Guinness and art materials. As recently emerging practices, exchange values are diverse and fluctuating as providers take different approaches and the same provider can change approach depending upon the circumstances. The prevalence of alternative forms of payments as well as gift exchanges and flexible pricing, distinguishes ashes creation providers from the established funeral industry where methods of payment, price, and production tend to be standardised (Parsons 1999). The small size of ashes-creation businesses and the absence of a shared industry identity may go some way to explaining this difference.

First, as small businesses, sole traders, or freelance artists, providers felt able to be flexible with exchange values because they did not have to justify decisions to management or shareholders. Because their businesses are small, providers frequently secure an income from their non-ashes creative work (or other activities) and therefore, do not rely solely upon selling their ashes creations to earn a living, which again, enables flexibility. Second, unlike death sector professionals such as Funeral Directors (National Association of Funeral Directors 2015) or Coffin Makers (Funeral Furnishing Manufacturer's Association 2015), ashes creation providers do not have a shared identity. Consequently, providers do not consider those who offer other forms of ashes creations to be competition. Providers consider themselves potters, painters, musicians and are therefore more likely to negotiate their exchange values and prices in accordance to the profession with which they identify. Indeed, providers said that, as members of the creative industries, they have always had to take a flexible approach to exchange values, given the challenges of making a creative living.

Selling ashes creations

The majority of ashes creations in this research were exchanged for a monetary value. Prices range from forty pounds for an ashes-tattoo to several thousands of pounds for an ashes-diamond, with most ashes creations costing a few hundred pounds. Evident in the majority of providers' accounts are narratives that demonstrate unease with the notion of ashes creations as commodities in explicitly sale motivated relationships. For example, providers had a tendency to distance ashes creations from notions of 'products' as they continually emphasised ashes creations as services provided *for* commissioners rather than commodities sold *to* them. Providers spoke of feeling uncomfortable establishing standardised monetary exchange-values and repeatedly stated that they were motivated by emotional rewards much more than profit. Although Painter One has a website and has experienced several high profile media exposures that generated sales, she still strongly feels that she is not "out there selling it" (11.1). Providers distanced themselves from explicitly sale orientated relationships, as Painter One states in the following quote, *"you are doing George for Jill" (11.1).*

I do not want to be like a salesman thing, if somebody wants us to do it and I can, I will, but I am not out there selling it, if that makes sense, I am not out there selling it and I would only do one at a time, only ever.

Researcher: Why is that?

Because it is quite, it is quite [pause] you can only deal with one at a time because it is that it is kind of that experience.

It is not [a] production-line; it is not like [pause] it is you are doing George for Jill, if that makes sense? So, if somebody wants to wait (Painter One 11.1).

Ashes creations utilise fragments of an individual's (cremated) body in order to engage in commercial transactions. Kopytoff (1986) notes how practices that threaten notions of individuality by transgressing boundaries between individualised people and commoditised things have the potential to cause 'conceptual unease'. Seale et al. (2006) argues that this discomfort at transgressing people / commodity boundaries is particularly apparent in practices that involve the body, or fragments of it, in commercial exchange. Seale et al. (2006) point to the unease generated by the sale of human organs or human eggs as evidence of how: "Commodification is frequently regarded as violating personal, social and community meanings for bodies" (Seale et al. 2006 p25).

To counter the threat to notions of individuality that Seale et al. (2006) claims that the commodification of the body has the potential to generate, providers distance ashes creations from associations with commodities whilst they simultaneously emphasise ashes creations' singularity. For example, providers frequently distanced processes of making ashes creations from the ultimate symbol of commodification, mass production. This is epitomised by Painter One's assertion that *"It is not [a] production-line"* (11.1). After all, as the Potter reminds us in this quote, you are not *"making a widget for a doodah to fit into a grommet."* (4.2):

Fig. 5: An example of the Potter's ashes-raku pottery.

> *You are not just making a widget for a doodah to fit into a grommet. I was actually making something that was really quite important. I mean, I kind of knew that anyway, but it did not land home until I started to talk with people, talk with customers (Potter 4.2).*

Painter One (11.1) and the Potter's quote (4.2) are reflective of a recurring concern in providers' accounts that the standardisation of processes when making ashes creations to increase production could result in a loss of meaning-making in providers' creative practices. Specifically, providers were concerned that a high turnover of production would result in ashes creations losing their connectivity to the individuality of the deceased. These providers enact strategies to keep their practices small scale because they fear that a high turnover of clients could potentially threaten the singularity of ashes creation making processes. For example, a number of providers only ever took on one commission at a time, so they could focus on *"doing George for Jill" (11.1)* and others limited the numbers of ashes creations they would make over a month or a week. This approach was possible because the sale of ashes creations was not providers' only source of income.

In ashes creation practices, the individuality of the deceased faces a double assault of ontological threats. The threat posed by the transgression boundaries between individual people and commoditised things in the commercial exchange of ashes creations (Seale et al. 2006) combines with the threat to individuality posed by the uniformity of modern cremation (Jupp 2006). For Davies (2005), the material and ritual uniformity produced by the standardisation of modern industrialised cremation processes threatens notions of unique individuality. This threat, argues Davies (2005) is countered by the emergence of creative bespoke practices with cremation ashes, such as the ashes creation practices explored in this research, that "counter the 'production line' of cremation" (Davies 2005 p236) by strongly associating the cremated dead with the personhood of the deceased. Providers mark ashes creations as singular by repeatedly emphasising in their accounts how each ashes creation is bespoke and hand-

crafted. Such narratives distance ashes creation from the threat to individuality posed by mass commodification whilst restoring individuality to the uniform matter of cremation ashes (Kopytoff 1986, Davies 2005). These processes of singularisation by providers facilitate the acceptance of fragments of the cremated body for commercial consumption by associating bespoke making of ashes creations with preserving the uniqueness the deceased.

Although the majority of providers demonstrated unease with the notion of ashes creations as commodities for sale, there were a few exceptions. First, tattooists in this research were unconcerned with such potential conflicts. As we shall explore further in the next chapter, no distinction appears to be made by those that engage in the practice between 'tattoos' and 'self' (Sanders 1989, Vail 2010) and therefore notions of ashes-tattoos as commodity were not evident in tattooists' accounts. Second, the Diamond Provider referred to ashes-diamonds as 'products' and discussed ashes creations in an explicitly commercial manner as commodities. In this quote, he is discussing how he sometimes separates cremation ashes for commissioners in order to collect the required amount for the diamond creation process:

> *For me it is a process and when I am separating the ashes I do not think of it as a person, I think of it as, 'We require a 200g sample' basically (Diamond Provider 15.4).*

In contrast to the other providers, the majority of whom called cremation ashes by the deceased's first name, this provider referred to cremation ashes as *"samples" (15.4)*. This is not to imply that the Diamond Provider was not empathetic; he was as sensitive to bereaved peoples loss as the other providers. However, referring to ashes as *"samples" (15.4)*, with its implications of detached scientific processes, objectifies the cremated body by distancing the physical matter of the body from concepts of being an individual person (Seale et al. 2006). In doing so, it removes cremation ashes from the sphere of individual people and thereby resolves any potential discomfort transgressing conceptual boundaries between people and things by enabling the fragmented body to move into the sphere of commodity.

When considering how the Diamond Provider encounters and reconciles ashes creations as commodities when compared to the other providers a number of factors are of note. First, the Diamond Provider was the only participant to have a background working in the death sector. Professionals who come face-to-face with the physical realities of death on a daily basis, such as those working in the death sector, often create strategies to manage the intense emotional work involved by objectifying the physical matter of death (Howarth 1992). Therefore, the Diamond Provider may have adopted the language of objectification as a mechanism to cope with the high turnover of dead bodies he had encountered in his work. Conversely, most ashes creations providers work with a small number of commissioners post-cremation. As such, they do not require the same emotional management systems.

Second, it is of note that the Diamond Provider is the only provider not to artistically invest in his ashes creation. As the other providers paint, saw, sand, mix, throw, or listen during ashes creation making processes, they invest their temporal and embodied resources into ashes creations. These investments extend providers' 'self' into the ashes creation they are making because, as Belk (1988) claims, such investments can be: "…regarded as part of the self because they have grown or emerged from the self" (Belk 1988 p144). This is a two-way process; as creators extend into ashes creations so ashes creations inescapably extend into their creators (Belk 1988, Gell 1998). This physically manifests as providers gave accounts of mixing, kneading, firing, editing, painting, and sculpting ashes creations into shape as thumbs are banged, knuckles are scraped, and joints became arthritic. Creatively investing in ashes creations brings providers into close proximity with a particular individual's cremation ashes and their ashes creation for sustained periods, as they work on creating 'Tom', 'George' or 'Jack'. The longevity and embodied nature of this relationship between creator and object has the potential to interfere with processes of objectification, with its demands of separating the fragmented body as 'other'.

Fig 6: A sales display of ashes creations. Glass-wear and Jewellery containing cremation ashes on display at a provider place of work.

Buying ashes creations

The majority of commissioners in this research purchased their ashes creation in a commercial exchange. However, the monetary aspects of buying ashes creations were not prioritised in commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practice. Commissioners did not discuss at any length what they had paid for their ashes creation, how they had paid, when they paid, how they felt about paying, or any other aspect of the commercial exchange of ashes creations. It is not that commissioners avoided discussions of commercial exchange; it just did not seem to be of great interest to them in relation to other aspects of their ashes creation practice:

> *So I went ahead, I found the price reasonable really you know; it was not outrageous. And this is actually made in white gold (touching necklace), it is not silver.*
>
> *And the other paperweight, I had made just a normal paperweight, circular type shape, you know, like that (draws out shape in the air) (Jennifer 3.4).*

This quote by Jennifer is typical of commissioners' comments concerning their ashes creations monetary-exchange values. Commissioners mention that they were happy with the price they paid, especially in relation to some aspect of the quality of their ashes creation or the service they have received, and then they move on to focus on other aspects of their ashes creation practice. Jennifer comments that the prices of her ashes creation was not *"outrageous" (3.5)* and this is a reflection of how Jennifer interpreted the cost of the ashes-diamond that she had originally wanted but had been unable to afford. This had also been the case for Vinnie, who had originally considered an ashes-diamond, but was unable to afford the price. This indicates that price might be an issue across different forms of ashes creation practice.

In common with Bradbury's (1999, 2001) study, which considered widows purchasing memorials for their husbands, commissioners seem to accept the relationship between commerce and their ashes creation practice as inevitable and relatively unproblematic. It is worth remembering that, by the time they purchased their ashes creation, commissioners had already made numerous purchases involving the material remains of their deceased loved ones: commissioners had purchased coffins, urns, and traditional cremation jewellery. For example, just before Jennifer mentioned that she found the price of her ashes creation *"reasonable" (3.5),* she was talking about the coffin she had chosen for Peter:

> *Even his coffin I had made with willow, woven willow, not, you know, your standard sort of thing, with flowers woven through it. It was lovely (Jennifer 3.2).*

Therefore, before Jennifer had even considered her ashes creation practices, she had made a number of purchasing choices regarding the material remains of Peter. Although these purchases will demonstrate significant differences in how they are experienced by Jennifer, they illustrate that ashes creations are just one aspect of wider spectrum of purchases that bereaved people make in association with the material dead. As this thesis illustrated in the last chapter, commissioners frequently emphasise how their ashes creations differ from traditional material culture associated with death. This narrative is also evident in Jennifer's account as she states that Peter's coffin is not *"…your standard sort of thing" (Jennifer 3.2).* In the last chapter, ashes creations were

located as part of a range of practices that commissioners engage in with their loved one's cremation ashes. Similarly, this chapter highlights how the buying of ashes creations needs to be considered alongside commissioners' other purchases related to the deaths of their loved ones and their material remains.

While commissioners demonstrated relative ease with the commercial exchange of ashes creations, this does not imply that commissioners experience ashes creations as as commodities with a commerce value. Appadurai (1986) points to how the majority of objects move in and out of the sphere of commodities at different points in their spatial and temporal trajectories as their potential to be sold continually renews their status as a commodity. However, ashes creations are saleable for a brief time and to a limited market. Like sentimental and symbolic objects, such as wedding rings, ashes creations quickly shift from the sphere of what Folkman et al. (2004) call "saleable objects" to what they refer to as "objects outside the limits of exchange" (Folkman et al. 2004 p4). This shifts ashes creations outside the boundaries of commodity exchange with notions of commercial value, as Ken says:

> *Once it was done, you cannot possibly put a price on it (Ken 3.7).*

Throughout their accounts, commissioners emphasised intertwining narratives of ashes creations as emotionally precious, irreplaceable, and beyond monetary-value. These concepts rendered ashes creations singular and beyond the sphere of commodification by emphasising their immense emotional value and singularity (Kopytoff 1986). To illustrate this, consider how Susan values her ashes-diamonds. Susan has an ashes-diamond ring made from the cremation ashes of her son and an ashes-diamond necklace that she commissioned a few years later from the hair[44] of her deceased mother. Susan values her ashes-jewellery beyond any notion of their monetary worth, they *"mean more"* (*3.1)* than her jewellery "*that is worth thousands of pounds"* (*3.1):*

> *I just want what I felt my best in, which was the two things [the ashes-necklace and ashes-ring]. I have jewellery that is worth thousands of pounds and I never wear it, because, and that is not an insult to my husband who has*

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[44] Artificial diamonds can be created from cremation ashes or hair.

brought me them, it is these two [ashes] diamonds mean more than any other jewellery I have got upstairs.

They will never-ever [pause and sentence tails off]. No one will be able to ever replace those, they are irreplaceable aren't they? (Susan 3.1).

These narratives of singularity counteract any potential for commodification by shifting ashes creations completely outside of their exchange-value (Kopytoff 1986). It is clear that the monetary value of Susan's ashes creations is of no relevance to how she assesses their worth. Their value is quantified by what her ashes creations mean to her emotionally and this makes them *"irreplaceable" (3.1).* Susan goes on to say later in the interview:

The one thing is, it is no good to anyone else, but if somebody came and burgled this house and took either of those two stones (ashes / hair diamonds), I would be so angry because the value of it. It is meaningless to anyone else, but it would be everything to me (Susan 5.6).

Behind Susan's quote is the assumption that *"those two stones" (5.6)* have a value that she alone experiences. Although, as diamonds, her ashes-creations do have a commercial value, Susan believes that others would not share this relationship to their emotional worth, which is how she values them, they are: *"meaningless to anyone else but it would be everything to me." (5.6)*. Brown (1981) explores how value is constructed in his consideration of the circulation of religious relics. Brown (1981) argues that the bodies of saint have a shared spiritual and cultural value. This cultural and spiritual currency translates into a commercial value for relics, which has resulted in their exchange for money and influence throughout the centuries (Brown 1981). Comparably, the value of the fragmented bodies in ashes creations is of relevance primarily to commissioners and their kin and therefore does not translate easily into commercial worth. Indeed, the incorporation of cremation ashes could hinder an ashes creation resale value when compared to non-ashes paintings, paperweights and so on. The only exception in this research is the ashes-mosaic. Created by a commercially successful artist and using the cremation ashes and image of a well-known personality, this ashes creation has a cultural value that could potentially translates into a commercial value should it be sold. This brings into view how the commercial value of ashes creations is

specific to the shared cultural values ascribed to the particular bodies that they contain and the cultural standing of their makers.

Owning ashes creations

In the two previous sections of this chapter we have explored the commercial exchange of ashes creations as they are bought and sold. In the remaining two sections of this chapter we are going to focus upon the exchange of ashes creations between providers and commissioners. Although the physical exchange of ashes creations signifies a spatial shift for ashes creations, from the studios and workshops of providers to the homes and bodies of commissioners, this does not translate to a transfer of ownership in commissioners' or providers' narratives. Rather, both providers and commissioners regard the latter to be the owners of ashes creations from the moment of their commission.

These ownership narratives distinguish ashes creations from providers' non-ashes creative work. Gell (1998) discusses how, in Western contexts, there is a tradition of attributing art to a particular creator, to the extent that an artist's body of work can distribute their personhood across time and space. Gell's (1998) reasoning is evident in the majority of providers' accounts of their non-ashes work as they talk about their non-ashes mosaics, tattoos, or pots as distributing providers' sense of who they are as artists / artisans into the world. However, when commissioners were discussing ashes creations, narratives of ownership differed significantly. For example, before the interview took place, as we walked around her home, Painter One demonstrated a pronounced sense of ownership of her non-ashes work on display. Even commissioned non-ashes paintings, which, like ashes creations, are created with an end owner in mind, were discussed as extensions of the painter, reflecting her moods, interests, and creative practises. Painter One discussed ashes-paintings in completely different terms; they never belong to her even as she was investing her time and skill creating them. Here, when asked about her painting process, Painter One responds by bring attention to how she "*always*" *(8.3)* stresses to commissioners' their ownership of ashes creations:

Researcher: Can we talk about the painting process? Can you talk me through a painting?

The panting? I always stress to them that it is theirs, it is not mine, it is not mine. I will do the best I can (Painter One 8.3).

In commissioners' and providers' accounts, notions of ownership of ashes creations are characterised by two recurring narratives. In the first narrative ashes creations perform as property that can be owned. In the second, ashes creations perform as possessions as kinship narratives legitimise ownership claims of loved ones' bodies. Both of these narratives are illustrated in the following quote by Tattooists One concerning his practice of giving ashes-ink unused in the tattooing process to commissioners to keep, something that would never happen in his non-ashes practice. Although unused ashes-ink is a waste product, Tattooists One's narratives of ownership echoes providers' and commissioners' narratives of ownership in relation their ashes creations. Thus illustrating that is the incorporation of creation ashes that underpins narratives of ownership in ashes creations practices regardless of the object / material being produced:

…because it is their property (the ashes-ink), as far as I am concerned, they paid for ink to be made, that is their property, it is not mine to throw. Plus, how can you throw it? It is part of their loved one. So, to me, that was automatic, they get to keep it (Tattooist One 7.2).

The first ownership narrative illustrated by Tattooists One is one of commercial exchange, as ashes creations, or ink incorporating cremation ashes, perform as property that can be purchased and owned; epitomised in his comment *"they paid for ink to be made, that is their property," (7.2).* This narrative was only evident in providers' accounts. Notions of property tend to have inherent commercial connotations; however, as discussed, commissioners do not encounter ashes creations as commodities and this may explain why narratives of ashes creations as property were absent from their accounts.

The second ownership narrative illustrated by Tattooists One is one of possession as ashes creations, or ink incorporating cremation ashes, perform as loved ones who belong to commissioners as their kin; epitomised by his assertion that the ashes-ink belongs to commissioners because it is "part of their loved one" (7.2). This narrative of

embodied ownership was a recurring theme in the accounts of both providers and commissioners. It is an extension of the sense of ownership that commissioners feel over their loved one's cremation ashes. A sense of embodied ownership flows from cremation ashes into ashes creations as they intermingle with other materials during making. This kinship embedded claim of ownership draws its authority from the strength of relations between commissioners and the deceased. As we heard from Queenie in Chapter Five when she was challenged in her ashes creation practice, she claims the right to do what she likes with Arthur's cremation ashes because: *"I was with him for fifty odd year, and he belongs to me!" (11.7)*. Claims of ownership or rights based on kinship is a concept that we find in a number of practices associated with death. For example, this can be witness at funerals, where "Participants frequently emphasised the intimacy of a relationship before death as an obvious measure of entitlement to post-mortem participation" (Schäfer 2012 p314).

This possession narrative of ownership does not regard ashes creations as property, with its commercial connotations; rather, it regards them as possessions, something that is 'mine' or 'ours'. Belk (1988), in his exploration of the ways in which possessions extended into our notions of 'self', contends that it is our intimate knowledge of other people, especially our kin, that allows us to think of them as our possessions. Knowing a person, place, or thing so intimately allows us to think of them as part of our possessions, and therefore part of ourselves, as boundaries of 'self' permeate with material and living 'others'. This, argues Belk (1988), is a mutual process, as our possessions extend into us, we extended into our possessions as 'having' and 'being' entwine "When an object becomes a possession, what were once self and not self are synthesized and having and being merge" (Belk 1988 p146).

Applying Belk's (1988) notion of mutual penetration of 'possession' and 'self' to ashes creation practices, it can be argued that Arthur, in the form of his cremation ashes and ashes-painting, "belongs" (Queenie 11.7) to Queenie because Queenie, as a loving spouse, 'belongs' to Arthur. When possessions, such as ashes creations, include the cremation ashes of a loved one, distinctions between 'having' and 'being', or 'self' and 'not-self', melt away into entwined notions of kinship belonging. This intermingling of kinship, ownership, and belonging is evident in

Susan's quote about her ashes-diamond ring where boundaries between 'mother', 'son', and 'ring' are permeable:'

> *It is like having Mark on the end of my finger, it is like Mark being inside you, I suppose. I made Mark, I helped to make Mark, didn't I? And I looked after him, I hugged him when he died and I have got him [the ashes-diamond]. He is everything all in one (Susan 14.3).*

In Susan's quote, the distinction between 'self' and 'other' and 'possession' blur. For Susan, her ashes creation practice *"is like Mark being inside you" (14.3),* which she compares to the physical and emotion connections she shared with Mark when he was living and dying. Through her ashes creation practice, Susan has *"Mark on the end of my finger" (14.3)* as both the ashes-diamond ring and Mark are Susan's possessions; she has *"got him" (14.3).*

As well as having roots in narratives of kinship belonging, concepts of ownership in ashes creation practices are affected by space, place, mobility, and materiality. We can illustrate this by considering Jennifer, who commissioned two ashes creations for herself, an ashes-necklace and an ashes-paperweight, as well as a number of ashes-necklaces for her children. Jennifer feels differently about the ownership of her ashes-necklace than she does her ashes-paperweight, one is 'mine' and one 'ours':

> *(Researcher) Are there things about the paperweight that are different from the necklace? Are there differences between the two?*
>
> *Yes [pause] now what would I say that is? [pause] How would I describe that? The paperweight, is a home object, so when I am home that is part of the presence of him, but when I am out I don't think I would feel that presence, but I do because I have this [holds necklace]. So wherever I am, I have got him. It is ours. Because it is, it is ours, it is me and him.*
>
> *(Researcher) And do you feel the same about the paperweight, is it 'our' paperweight'*
>
> *No that is mine.*
>
> *(Researcher)Why do you think one 'ours' and the other 'mine'?*
>
> *I don't know, but there is a difference. But, no, it is 'my' paperweight'.*
>
> *(Researcher)And 'our' necklace'?*
>
> *And 'our' necklace' (Jennifer 23.1).*

Although Jennifer does not know why she feels these differences in ownership of her two ashes creations, these distinctions of 'mine' and 'ours' could reside in the different feelings of ownership of the space in which the ashes creation reside. Jennifer's ashes-paperweight is a *"home object" (23.1)* that she keeps on her desk where she conducts her small business, whereas the ashes-necklace is worn on her body so *"So wherever I am, I have got him" (23.1)*. Earlier in the interview, Jennifer spoke about how it was important to have an ashes creation that touches her body as she and her husband enjoyed a very tactile relationship throughout their marriage. The ashes-paperweight is 'mine' because it resides on her desk where she works on her business. However, the ashes-necklace is 'ours' because it resides on her body which she always shared with her husband. Jennifer's body reunites with Peter's via her ashes creation practice. This illustrates that, although notions of ownership are embedded in kinship narratives regardless of the form of an ashes creation, they are also shaped and influenced by space, place, mobility, and materiality.

Exchanging ashes creations

Once they have been made, ashes creations are sent to commissioners through the post or collected from providers in person. The method of exchange tends to be dependent on distance; with commissioners who live a few hours' drive from providers' locations often collecting their ashes creation. However, commissioners can also travel significant distances to collect their ashes creations in person.

Commissioners receiving ashes creations are significant happenings for both providers and commissioners and moments of exchange are approached with anticipation and excitement. For providers and commissioners of ashes-tattoos, the act of tattooing is similar to the 'moment' of exchange in other ashes creation practices because it is approached as a significant and highly anticipated event. Providers are keen to experience commissioners' emotional reactions when they see their ashes creation for the first time, as if exchanging a highly anticipated gift. If exchanges do not take place in

person, providers telephone commissioners to gain this feedback. The majority of ashes creations come beautifully wrapped or are presented to commissioners' in some other visually pleasing manner. Three providers buy flowers as gifts for commissioners to present alongside their ashes creation. Commissioners give providers cards and small tokens of their thanks, such as chocolate or flowers. The way commissioners and providers approach ashes creation exchanges indicates that these are moments that require marking because they signify that something special has taken place.

Recurrent in providers' and commissioners' accounts of exchanging ashes creations are narratives of loved ones 'returning' to commissioners. Narratives of returning in providers' and commissioners' accounts are concerned with *someone* precious returning to a loved one, which is reflective of kinship ownership narratives explored in the last section. In the following quote, Painter Two is discussing delivering an ashes-painting she has created for a woman incorporating her husband's cremation ashes. The woman's adult son lives at the family home and he is present when Painter Two delivers the ashes-painting. In this quote, the ashes-painting is being hung on the living room wall; for the son this signifies his father returning to their family home:

> *So, when the painting was finished I took it around, the son was there as well. I placed it in the house and they had already sort of made the space, "This is where he is going to be going". Because I had asked them to do that when we discussed the size. It was the main focal in the alcove where he was going to go.*
>
> *So, I hung him up and her son ran out of the room crying into the kitchen. So he flew out of the room, I mean I had no warning that he was going to do that. I did not know whether to take it back off the wall, or what!*
>
> *He bolted out of the room! He bolted the kitchen door! Because he went into the kitchen, bolted it shut. And I could just hear him howling and she [the commissioner] just loved it [ashes- picture], she cried. He came back out of the kitchen and he said, "Thank you for bring my Dad home".*
>
> *I am getting upset now [smiling and wiping her eyes]. But, it was amazing. I never thought, you know? (Painter Two 4.8).*

We can see in Painter Two's quote not only the emotional effect the hanging of the ashes-painting had upon the son, but also the emotional effect the moment of exchange continues to have on Painter Two. For the son, the ashes-painting gives materiality to

his Dad's presence. The ashes painting is *"my Dad" (4.8)* and he thanks Painter Two for bringing him *"home" (4.8).* Regardless of the form of an ashes creation, from ashes-paintings to ashes-bracelets, moments of exchange are characterised by narratives of loved ones returning in both providers' and commissioners' accounts. However, there were slight differences in emphasis between ashes creations worn on the body, such as ashes-jewellery or ashes-tattoos, and ashes creations created to reside in the home, such as ashes-paintings or ashes-glassware. Commissioners and providers of ashes creations worn on the body had a tendency to draw from narratives of loved ones returning to *them* via their ashes cremation practice. For example, Ruth received her ashes-bracelet incorporating her husband Tom's cremation ashes on the day of her graduation from university, she comments:

> *You can just put any other jewellery on [on graduation day], it does not matter, does it? You can wear anything, but … errmmm (emotional pause). It [having the ashes-necklace] just means that he is there with me (Ruth 1.2).*

As we saw in Painter Two's quote above (4.8), commissioners and providers of ashes creations created to reside in the home had a tendency to draw from narratives of loved ones returning *home* via their ashes cremation practice. For example, Painter One delivered Queenie's painting to her at home, to which Queenie commented:

> *It was nice that I had him home for Christmas (Queenie 3.2).*

Notions of loved ones returning home in ashes creation exchanges extend beyond notions of returning to domains shared when the deceased was living into notions of returning to homes that will be shared into the future. Ken travelled a significant distance to collect the ashes-raku that incorporates his parents' cremation ashes. He spoke of brining his parents "home" (3.4) as he returned from his trip:

> *When I got it (the ashes-raku) back into the house, it was just like I brought them home, not that they ever lived in this home, you know what I mean? (Ken 3.4).*

What is interesting about Ken's quote is that it reveals how notions of the deceased returning home in ashes creation exchanges are not just concerned with previously shared dwelling places. This was also the case for Marie, who spoke of her father

returning to her family home via her ashes-painting, although he had lived elsewhere. In these cases, the potential of sharing homes with their deceased parents into the future evokes feelings that they had "brought them home" (3.4) via ashes creation practices. As well as signifying a returning to commissioners, ashes creation exchanges mark the start of the future that ashes creations and commissioners will have together as they share spatial proximities.

Ashes creation exchanges are characterised by concepts of loved ones returning to homes and to bodies because the exchange of ashes creations signifies the resumption of spatial intimacy between commissioners and the deceased. This understanding of the exchange of ashes creations can be conceptualised using Van Gennep's (1960) schema of 'rites of passage'; specifically, they can be understood as what Van Gennep's (1960) refers to as 'rites of incorporation', signifying the deceased's incorporation into shared spatial and embodied intimacy as the deceased returns to share commissioners' homes and bodies. As the recurrent narrative in providers' and commissioners' accounts is of 'returning', which is rooted in notions off going back to a previously shared intimacy, ashes creation exchanges can be understood as a reincorporation back into the daily lives of commissioners; what Van Gennep (1960) calls 'rites of reintegration' that he locates as a subcategory of rites of incorporation. Through ashes creation practices, deceased loved ones make an embodied return to the homes and bodies of commissioners that they so intimately shared before death or that they expect to share into the future.

The three phases of separation, transition, and incorporation that Van Gennep (1960) argues are evident in every rite of passage, can be traced across the making and exchanging of ashes creations. Separation is a feature of the making of ashes creations as commissioners experience a period of separation from their loved one's cremation ashes. I considered in Chapter Three how this period of separation often creates unease for commissioners, which providers counter by offering reassurances about the treatment of cremation ashes. Transition is a feature of the making of ashes creations as cremation ashes are irreversibly incorporated into ashes creations. In the previous section of this chapter, I considered how the mixing of materials during making can be understood as a period of liminality, creating a transition between states as cremation

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ashes irreversibly intermingle with other matter and emerge as ashes creations. Finally, in the last of Van Gennep's (1960) three phases, incorporation is enabled during the exchange of ashes creations, as the deceased 'return' to their loved ones homes and bodies in the new material form of ashes creations.

Although the three phases of separation, transition, and incorporation are evident in every rite of passage, Van Gennep (1960) contends that "…these three rites will not always be equally important or equally elaborated" (Van Gennep 1960 p11) as one phases will always be more emphasised than others according to the purpose of the rite. Van Gennep's (1960) notes how rites concerned with the material dead would suggest the requirement for a focus upon rites of separation, as the dead are separated for eternity from the living. However, argues Van Gennep's (1960), although rites concerned with the material dead contain elements of separation and transition, the focus is often upon rites of incorporation, for example, the incorporation of the deceased into the role of venerated ancestor, or into the world of the dead.

Van Gennep (1960) claims that rites of incorporation are characterised by two key features. First, they mark the end of transitional periods. Second, they signify the shifting from one status to another. For example, traditionally in Christian practice, the funeral marks the end of the transitional period of dying and shifts the individual into the status of dead whilst incorporating the deceased into a heavenly afterlife as a pure soul (Davies 1997). Ashes creation exchanges are informal when compared to the ceremonial rites explored by Van Gennep (1960). Indeed, they present as a series of intimate and informal practices rather than prescribed ritualistic or ceremonial happenings. However, in the exchange of ashes creations, key characteristics of Van Gennep (1960) rites of incorporation can be traced.

First, the exchange of ashes creations marks the emergence from the transitional period of making. This chapter explored how the mixing of materials during the making of ashes creations enables cremation ashes to exist betwixt and between states as conceptual and physical distinction between materials are in flux. Cremation ashes emerge from this period of separation from commissioners transformed into a new material state as ashes creations. Therefore, the exchange of ashes creations signifies the end of the

transitional period of making as it marks the material transition from cremation ashes into ashes creations.

Second, the exchange of ashes creations marks the shifting from one material status to another for the dead, from cremation ashes into ashes creations. In the rites and practices associated with death explored by Van Gennep (1960), rites of incorporation involve a shifting from the status of dead family member to that of venerated ancestor. Or, as Davies (2002) notes, in a traditional Christian Western context, rites of incorporation involve a shifting from the status of dead family member to heavenly soul. However, these notions have lost something of their cultural resonance in contemporary Western societies, where the status of the dead has come to emphasise an intense emotional bonds between family members, reflecting the shift away from a broad community focus in practices associated with death, towards a comparably privatised family function (Naylor 1989, Walter 1994). Therefore, ashes creation practices do not seek to incorporate the deceased into the world of ancestors or heavenly afterlives; rather, ashes creation exchanges are a returning or a reincorporation back into the worlds they shared with their loved ones.

In this way, ashes creation exchanges are reflective of rites of mourning for bereaved people explored by Van Gennep (1960). Mourning rites, argues Van Gennep's (1960), are concerned with reintegration as they lead bereaved people back towards full participation in society. These rites are: "a transitional period for survivors, which they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration back into society" (P146 Van Gennep 1960). Ashes creation exchanges are also concerned primary with reintegration, the reintegration of the deceased back into lives that they shared with commissioners. In this conceptualisation, the deceased do not shift status to become a venerated ancestor or heavenly soul; rather, they resume family life as a beloved family member. Thus, reflecting Naylor's (1989) argument that the dead are no longer our venerated ancestors but continue to be family members post-death, as a manifestation of the emotional familial bonds that characterises Western societies. Although signifying a resumption of familial relationships, rather than a shift in status, ashes creation exchanges do mark a transition. They mark a transition in material form, from 'cremation ashes' to 'ashes creations'. This material transformation

enables particular types of relations to develop and to continue as the dead are incorporated into the homes and bodies of the living in new material forms. The next chapter will explore how these relationships unfold in more detail.

In summary, when it comes to the exchange of ashes creations, the prevalence of alternative forms of payments, gift exchanges and flexible pricing is enabled by the small size of ashes-creation businesses, the absence of a shared industry identity, and the creative nature of the businesses. When selling ashes creations, the majority of providers distanced ashes creations from associations with commodities, such as mass production, whilst simultaneously emphasise their bespoke singularity. Such narratives shift ashes creation from the threat to individuality posed by mass commodification whilst restoring individuality to the uniform matter of cremation ashes. Monetary aspects of buying of ashes creations were not prioritised in commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practice. Rather, commissioners rendered ashes creations singular and beyond the sphere of commodification by emphasising their immense emotional value and irreplaceability. Notions of ownership of ashes creations are characterised by two recurring narratives. In the first narrative ashes creations perform as property that can be owned. In the second, ashes creations perform as possessions, as kinship narratives legitimise ownership claims of loved ones' bodies. Recurrent in providers' and commissioners' accounts of exchanging ashes creations are narratives of loved ones 'returning' to commissioners as someone precious returns to a loved one. This understanding of the exchange of ashes creations can be conceptualised as 'rites of incorporation' (Van Gennep 1960) as the deceased returns to share commissioners' homes and bodies.

Chapter Summary

The last chapter traced the ways in which relationality runs throughout ashes creation practices as practices that are *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) are revealed as being deeply embedded in relationships with people, places, and things. Illustrated throughout this chapter are the ways in which cremation ashes and ashes creations perform the qualities of 'unique' and 'precious' in the making and exchanging of ashes creations. These

concepts generate ashes creations that are experienced as singular and incomparable and therefore as individual and irreplaceable as the loved ones who ashes they incorporate; this was traced in the chapter in a number of ways.

First, cremation ashes and ashes creations perform the qualities of unique and precious during the making of ashes creations in narratives of cremation ashes as creative and precious materials. In narratives of cremation ashes as creative materials, cremation ashes creatively affect ashes creation making processes in uncontrollable and distinctive ways, ensuring: *"...every piece is so different" (Jeweller 10.0).* What emerges from this is an understanding of the making of ashes creations as skein of diverse and distributed agencies (Latour 2005). In narratives of cremation ashes as precious materials, cremation ashes potential to perform personhood affects the embodied and temporal investments of providers, generating obligations for providers to actively maintain connections between the deceased's personhood and their cremation ashes during the making of ashes creations. Providers place significance upon the singularity of each ashes creation making process as conceptual distinctions between materials are transcended when precious cremation ashes, with their potential for unique personhood, are irreversibly mixed with other matter.

Second, cremation ashes and ashes creations perform the qualities of unique and precious during the exchange of ashes creations. I argued that the commercial exchange of fragmented bodies in ashes creation practices causes unease for the majority of providers. They counter this by evoking narratives of ashes creations as unique and precious to protect the deceased from the threat to individuality that Seale (2006) claims is posed by commodification of fragmented bodies. In these processes of singularisation, ashes creations are shifted beyond the notion of commodity exchange as they are portrayed as being: "…uncommon, incomparable, unique, singular and therefore not exchangeable for anything else" (Kopytoff 1986 p69). For commissioners, the incorporation of a loved ones' precious cremation ashes with their potential to perform unique personhood, renders ashes creations' exchange-value irrelevant and their emotional value immeasurable: *"..they are irreplaceable, aren't they?" (Susan 3.1).*

Third, I considered the exchange of ashes creations as significant happening that evoke someone unique and precious returning to a loved one. This sense of a precious loved one returning enables an understanding of ashes creation exchanges as rites of (re)incorporation for the deceased back into the daily lives of commissioners (Van Gennep 1960). This contributes to our understanding of how ashes creations enable the deceased to return to their loved ones in new material forms and the next chapter will consider how these ongoing relationships unfold.

Chapter Five: Living Together

This chapter explores how commissioners' ongoing relationships with their ashes creations unfold following exchange. Commissioners in this research had lived with their ashes creations in their homes and on their bodies for between six months and seven years when the interviews were conducted, with the average period of time being around three and half years.

This first section of this Chapter Five explores commissioners' experiences of ashes creations as subjects and objects. It argues that, for commissioners, ashes creations sit outside of traditional material culture associated with death, they are not memorials; they *are* loved ones and they *are* beloved things. This reveals performances of presence in ashes creation practice that are more concerned with the deceased's participation in the ongoing lives of the living than with commemorating lives lived in the past. The second section of the chapter investigates further how presence is experienced, arguing that ashes creation presences are embedded in notions of personhood and kinship, which do not overlap commissioners' experiences of supernatural presences. It establishes the centrality of nearness and continuity in ashes creation practices in capturing the everyday intimacy of being with a loved one where presence is both ordinary and special, exploring the ways in which materiality and place shape experiences of presence in ashes creation practices. The chapter concludes by drawing from the work of Hertz (1960) to consider the extent to which ashes creations can be understood as a 'second body' from which the deceased continues to encounter the world post-death, arguing that concepts of resurrection and renewal have resonance with ashes creation practices concern with the reintegration of dead loved ones into the ongoing lives of commissioners.

'…so I will just go and get him and put it on.' (Ruth 1.5). Subjects and Objects

This section investigates how commissioners experience their ashes creations in their ongoing lives. It traces how deceased people continue to participate in the lives of the living by exploring the ways in which ashes creations perform as loved ones and as

beloved things in experiences of presence. In this simultaneous occupation of subject and object positions ashes creations enable the continuation of relationships between the living and the dead.

Memorials

Commissioners were asked during their interviews if they considered their ashes creation to be a memorial to their deceased loved one. As discussed in the Research Design section of this thesis, such direct questions were generally avoided because of the epistemological approach taken by the research; however, an exception was made in this case for two reasons. First, providers frequently used the category 'memorial' to describe ashes creations during their interviews as well as on their websites and in their promotion materials. Commissioners' interviews provided an opportunity to establish if they also applied this categorisation. Second, aspects of memorialisation overlap with aspects of ashes creation practices:

> Thus, memorialisation can serve a number of purposes: to mark the location of the deceased person; to continue connections with the dead; to provide a tangible focus; to 'honour' the deceased person; or to act as a tool through which people can communicate with others, both dead and alive (Woodthorpe 2010 p122).

As we shall explore in this chapter, ashes creations share some of these characteristics that Woodthorpe (2010) outlines as features of memorialisation practices; specifically, they provide a tangible focus to continue connections between the living and the dead. The commonality of characteristics between ashes creations and memorials, combined with the term being used so frequently by providers, aroused my curiosity to establish if commissioners applied this categorisation to their practice.

However, all commissioners, without exception, rejected the notion of their ashes creations as memorials. Sometimes, the categorisation of memorial was side-stepped:

> *Researcher: Is Arthur's painting a memorial?*

Well you can say that. I have a photograph [of the ashes painting] but I do not know what I have done with it, it was in one of the books I have got, on my webcam, on my page (Queenie 2.0).

Queenie rebuffs the term memorial by locating it as a category of the researchers' choosing, *"Well you can say that."* (*2.0),* and quickly changing the subject to one that had not been under discussion during the interview. Mostly commissioners explicitly rejected the categorisation of memorial to describe their ashes creation practices:

I don't think of it as a 'memorial' or (pause) the word 'memorial' and the word 'urn' is a bit black to me, where as 'raku' or 'art' or you know, 'pottery' even, that has got kind of like a neutral or positive sort of connotations to it (Ken 5.4).

Ken links memorials to urns and associates them both with *"black"* (5.4), which suggests a traditional Victorian death aesthetic. He distances this from his ashes creation, which, he experiences as having *"a neutral or positive sort of connotations to it" (*5.4). This rejection is indicative of a theme running throughout the data reflected in Ken's quote (5.4); for those engaging in the practice, ashes creations sit outside of the traditional material culture associated with death, such as urns or memorials.

In her rejection of the term memorial, Susan expresses the strong sense of ownership commissioners feel towards their ashes creations by drawing from the possession narrative explored in the last chapter; Susan's ashes creation is not a memorial, it is her "most precious possession" (14.5).

Well I do not class it as a memorial. To me I just class it as my most precious possession, that is what [pause]. No one could give me anything finer to remember my son by than that (14.5 Susan).

In understanding the rejection of ashes creations as memorials, the intense feelings of ownership commissioners express regarding their ashes creations, such as that expressed by Susan, is of particular note. Santino (2006) argues that such intense feelings of ownership by the living can differentiate commemorative material practices *concerned* with the dead from memorial material practices that *belong* to the dead.

Santino (2006) claims that memorials, such as gravestones or war monuments, are often perceived as *belonging* to the dead because they are concerned with honouring and venerating the deceased. This is evident in the way in which they often impart biographical information about the deceased to the observer, by text or symbolic imagery. In this way, memorials are often thought of as mnemonic devises for reinforcing the identity of the deceased (Santino 2006, Sørensen 2010). Like a memorial, Susan's ashes-diamond is a material object involved in processes of remembering the dead, it gives her something to *"remember my son by"* (14.5). However, commemorative remembrance in the honouring or venerating of the deceased or concern with communicating biographical information about the deceased are not recurring features of commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practices. As explored in Chapter Three, where biographical elements do exist in ashes creation practices they tend to be fragmented and unconcerned with providing a biography recognisable to others as a commemoration to the deceased. Susan's ashes-diamond cannot be a memorial, because memorials belong to the dead and Susan's ashes creation belongs to her.

Santino (2006) argues that a range of material practices associated with death, such as spontaneous shrines erected at the sites of fatal accidents, are *concerned* with the dead as opposed to *belonging* to them. Often located in the environments of the living, such practices, argues Santino (2006), do not *belong* to the dead because they are not overly concerned with the memorialisation of the deceased; rather, they are primarily concerned with maintaining ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, which fosters strong feelings of ownership in those that engage in them. As will be explored throughout this chapter, ashes creation practices tend to focus on reinforcing relatedness between commissioners' and loved ones in the present. In common with the spontaneous shrines explored by Santino (2006), ashes creations are primarily concerned with ongoing relationships between the living and the dead. In this way, ashes creations are not so much symbolic or representative of the presence of the dead who are located in the past, as they *are* the deceased in performances of presence that continue bonds in the present. Consequently, drawing from Santino (2006), ashes creations can be understood as material practices *concerned* with people who are dead as opposed to material practices that *belong* to the dead.

It should, however, be acknowledged that recently emerging accounts of graveside practices present a challenge to the distinctions Santino (2006) makes between past-facing memorials that *belong* to the dead and practices *concerned* with the dead in the present (see Meyer and Woodthorpe 2008, Sørensen 2010, Woodthorpe 2010). Whilst not challenging Santino (2006) directly, these accounts bring into view performative understanding of memorial practice that merge commemoration and presence and, in doing so, distinctions between being *concerned with* or *belonging to* the deceased collapse. However, Sørensen (2010), who offers such an account, draws attention to how such understandings of commemorative practices are recently emerging and are not always reflected in public discourse. Consequently, the perception of memorials as being past-facing and commemoratively *belonging to* the deceased continues to pervade:

> In this way, commemoration is most often understood as a means of pointing back in time to deceased individuals or to past events and experiences (Sørensen 2010 p177).

In this section I have argued that commissioners differentiate their ashes creation practices, concerned with reinforcing kinship bonds in the present, from memorials' implied concern with commemorating past biographies. For similar reasons, Santino (2006) rejects the category of memorial in his exploration of spontaneous shrines. He claims that commemorative material practices that enable ongoing communication between the living and the dead are 'more' than memorials because: "[t]hey commemorate and they memorialise, but they do far more than that" (Santino 2006 p12). Commissioners do not experience ashes creations as memorials because memorials are concerned with the past and, as I will go on to explore throughout this chapter, ashes creation practices are concerned with living together in the present.

People and things

As they rejected the classification of 'memorial', commissioners revealed how they encounter their ashes creations as loved ones and as beloved things. This is apparent throughout commissioners' accounts, as they use subject and object positions

interchangeably when discussing ashes creations. Commissioners often refer to their ashes creations by their loved ones' name, or by their relational ties; they are *'Mum and Dad', 'Tom'* or *'Nan'*. At the same time, commissioners refer to ashes creations as things; they are paintings, bracelets, or teapots. I will illustrate this interchanging of subject and object with examples throughout the this chapter; however, in this section I want to focus upon the example offered by Ruth where her ashes-bracelet is subject and object within the same sentence: "*so I will just go and get **him** and put **it** on" (1.5)*:

> *Researcher: Do you think of the bracelet as a memorial for Tom?*
>
> *No, no, never thought of it as that, I don't know why, I just haven't. I just refer to it as Tom. So [pause], if I am going somewhere, and I go 'Oh I forgot Tom'. So I will just go and get him and put it on (Ruth 1.5).*

Fig. 7: Ruth's ashes-bracelet.

Although providers frequently use the category 'memorial' when describing ashes creations, they were aware that commissioners experience ashes creations as both subjects and objects. For example, at the start of her interview the Jeweller stated that she sells *"memorial items"* (1.2). However, a little later she goes on to say:

> *Researcher: I can see that you make items both with ashes and without? Can you tell me about differences or similarities you have found between the two?*

I think it [incorporating cremation ashes] makes them [commissioners] feel like it is the most precious thing in the world. It turns that piece of jewellery into a person. I think it actually turns it into that person, really.

It is not just a bracelet, it is Tom, it is not just a necklace, it is mum, you know? It is actually them, embodied within that piece of jewellery. So I think it turns it from a decorative piece of frippery, as it were, into an actual person and a real meaningful piece (Jeweller 6.6).

The Jeweller demonstrates the same interchangeable subject / object narratives evident in commissioners' accounts as she observes that ashes creation practices *"turns that piece of jewellery into a person"* (6.6) and that it is still *"a real meaningful piece"* (6.6). Numerous studies have recognised the permeability between people who are deceased and the objects with which they are associated. Gibson (2008), for example, explores how domestic objects with strong associations to deceased people can represent them in bereaved peoples' lives. Another example is offered by Patkin (2008), who argues that artefacts associated with the deceased person have the capacity to "bring someone's memory back to life" (Patkin 2008 p167). However, commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practices differ from Gibson's (2008) notion of representation though materiality or Patkin's (2008) concept of mnemonic resurrection though artefacts.

These differences are revealed in the ways in which commissioners refer to ashes creations. Specifically, by intermingling subject and object positions when referring to their ashes creations, commissioners reveal that ashes creations are both people and things. Ruth's ashes creation is both a bracelet and *'Tom'*: *'it'* and *'him'*. Tom does not own his ashes creation as if it was something external to him. It is never 'Tom's bracelet' as one might refer to 'Mum's grave' or 'Dad's urn'. Nor do commissioners refer to ashes creations as if they commemorate, represent, or contain the deceased; it is not 'for' Tom, 'like' Tom, or Tom is not 'in' the ashes creation. Rather, Ruth's ashes creation is simply "Tom" and "it", without this intermingling of subject and object presenting any ontological issues for Ruth.

In addition, commissioners refer to their ashes creations as active agents in the present. Commissioners always use the present tense when referring to their ashes creation: *"it is Tom" (Ruth 1.5), n*ot *'was'* Tom. Commissioners do not refer to ashes creations as if they are standing in for their loved ones as mnemonic echoes of loved ones who existed

in the past, thus revealing how ashes creations are active agents in the present. Jensen (2010) illustrates how fragmented parts of bodies are able to transcend subject / object distinctions by exploring organ transplantation processes. Jensen (2010) considers how the families of donors are able to perceive transplant organs as objects to enable their transplantation into a recipient's body, where they reclaim subject status and "particular kind of presence" (Jensen 2010 p74), for which Jensen (2010) offers the example of characteristics of the deceased, such as a love of rollerblading, manifesting in the organ recipient.

> In the world of the bereaved, the transformation of a person into an object for transplantation is simply a necessary premise in order for the deceased to regain the subject status and for reclaiming a *particular kind* of presence in spite of death. Therefore the categories of subject and object are not antipole; rather, paraphrasing Latour (1993), they come together as hybrids, which can be an interesting way of looking at the body parts of organ donors (Jensen 2010 p74).

The small amounts of cremation ashes in each ashes creation are, like Jensen's (2010) transplant organs, fragmented parts of bodies that perform as both subjects and objects. However, an important difference emerges when we compare Jensen's (2010) account to those of commissioners. Specifically, Jensen's (2010) transplant organs pass from subject to object back to subject status as they are removed from donor bodies and transplanted into recipient bodies. In contrast, ashes creations are more of a jumble or knot of subjects and objects. This is evident in the way in which commissioners refer to ashes creations as subjects and object within the same sentence, as noted in Ruth's quote (Ruth 1.5). For Williams (2011), this ontological ambiguity is inherent in cremation ashes, which are: "a potent mnemonic substance: part person, part material." (Williams 2011 p220).

As ashes creations perform as loved ones and beloved things in commissioners' ongoing lives, they are capable of being subjects and objects simultaneously and with apparent ease as the ontological discrepancy appears not to trouble commissioners. Therefore, ashes creations do not so much transcend dualisms as they occupy both categories of being as *'Tom'* and a bracelet, *'Dad'* and teapot, or *'Mark'* and diamond co-exists without contradiction for commissioners. This simultaneous occupation of subject and object

position is possible in ashes creation practices because they incorporate cremation ashes with their potential to perform the personhood of the deceased. In their study of cremation ashes practice, Prendergast et al. (2006) note how:

> …for many of our informants, the ashes *were,* somehow, the body of someone they loved. Via incineration, however, they had been made to both transcend and condense the particularities of their previous bodily life (Prendergast et al. 2006 p885).

Experiencing cremation ashes *as* loved ones shifts cremation ashes beyond representation as they are experienced by bereaved people as subjects in the present. They are not standing in for loved ones by representing their presence; they are loved ones. Moreover, the inclusion of cremation ashes with other matter to create ashes-paintings, ashes-frames, or ashes-jewellery and so on enables ashes creation to simultaneously be experienced as objects.

This ability to occupy subject and object positions that go beyond representation has been observed in a number of material practices at the site of the material dead. For example, Sørensen (2010) argues that gravestones, as material objects in close proximity to the deceased's remains, can be experienced by bereaved people as the deceased as they are able to perform "affective materialities and aesthetics that reach beyond mere representation" (Sørensen 2010 p118). In addition, Geary (1986), in his study of religious relics, considers how fragments of bodies are able to transcend subject / object dualisms through relationships with material culture. Geary (1986) illustrates how boundaries between persons and objects may be semi-permeable because things can be people and people can be things without the constant threat of ontological crisis. This is achieved, he argues, through processes of transition. As we discussed in the last chapter, such a transition is facilitated by the mixing of cremation ashes with other materials, which enables ashes creations to transcend subject / object dualisms. It is through the cremated bodies' intimate relationship with other matter that ashes creations are able to be both subject and object. Certainly, it is evident that Ruth experiences her ashes creation as *"Tom" (1.5)* and "it" *(1.5)* without this ontological fluctuation presenting contradictions for her.

Performances of presence

Commissioners experience the continued participation of the deceased person in family life as they live with their ashes creations in their homes and on their bodies. For example, Ken talked about how he 'introduced' his parents to their much longed for and unexpected grandchild by sitting with his ashes-raku and his new-born son the evening that he came home from the hospital. Every morning, after her breakfast, Jennifer goes into her home office and greets her husband by touching her ashes-paperweight; through her ashes creation practices Peter continues to be part of daily life:

> *I always pick it up first thing in the morning and say 'good morning' (Jennifer 20.5).*

For Sue, her parents continue to participate in family holidays via her ashes-necklace that incorporates their cremation ashes. In this quote, Sue's children playfully berate her when she *"had not got it on"* (14.5) for a particular show because *"Grandma and Granddad would have enjoyed that"* (14.5):

> *I have just been away and it (her ashes creation) comes on holiday with me. And the kids will say to me, 'Oh Grandma and Granddads come have they?' [indicating to her necklace]*

> *And we went to see a show, while we was away, and I had not got it (her ashes creation) on and so, me daughter says to me, (wagging her finger as if being admonished) `Well, Grandma and Granddad would have enjoyed that, wouldn't they?' [laughing] (Sue 14.5).*

Note the mixing of subject and object positions in this quote. Sue's ashes creation is both "it" (14.5) and "they" (14.5) as being "Grandma and Granddad" (14.5) and being an ashes-necklace inseparably intertwine in performances of presence. In these performances, "Grandma and Granddad" (14.5) are active agents capable of the discernment required to enjoy a show. In this way, ashes creation practices involve not only recollections of the relationship commissioners shared with the deceased in the past, but also an ordering and reordering of the relationship between the living and the dead in active and ongoing performances in the present. This echoes Brown's (1981) claims concerning the performances of the presence of saints in reliquary practice. Specifically, Brown (1981) argues that the presence of saints in reliquary practice does not solely rely on the encasement of fragments of holy dead bodies in material culture.

Rather, continual performances of presence by the faithful, such as acts of pilgrimage, are required to maintain a relic's sacred status in the present. In a similar way, being "Grandma and Granddad" (14.5) requires more than the mixing of Sue's parents' cremation ashes with other materials to create an ashes-necklace. It is through continual performances of presence, such as taking ashes creations on holiday, that "Grandma and Granddad" (14.5) are maintained as active presences in the present.

Fig. 8: Sue's ashes-necklace.

Performances of presence, such as Sue's parents joining family holidays through her ashes creation practice, reveal how ashes creations are frequently experienced: not as static representations of loved ones in the past, but as people and things capable of performing with commissioners in acts of kinship in the present. These performances of presence reinforce kinship connections as the deceased continues to participate in family life post-death. In ashes creation practices that are objects, which includes ashes creations explored in this research with the exception of ashes tattoos, performances of presence capture materially the presence of an absent loved one. Therefore, in its shared concern with material manifestations of the presence of an absence, Brown's (1981) concept of 'praesentia' is a useful resource in exploring ashes creation practices.

Consider what Hetherington (2003) says are of note about praesentia as he develops the concept beyond the realms of the holy dead:

> The most important thing to note about praesentia from the outset, in whatever context the word is used, is that we are dealing with a term that is concerned with performance and presence and not with representation as such.

> Praesentia is concerned with the experience of mingling: distance and proximity; presence and absence; secular and divine; human and non-human; subject and object; time and space; vision and touch. It has the effect of making those discursive categories appear uncertain and blurred (Hetherington 2003 p1940).

In materially based ashes creation practices, being the deceased person is realised in performances that capture praesentia, that is to say, in performances that capture materially the presence of an absence, enabling: "the involvement of the absent Other within the material presence of social life" (Hetherington 2003 p1937). As they perform presence, ashes creation pratices give form to the absent. Specifically, they give materiality to the presence of the absent deceased in the lives of the living.

This phenomenon of capturing materially the presence of an absence, that Hetherington (2003) and Brown (19981) explore through the notion of praesentia, is evident in other material practices associated with death. For example, Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008) claim that objects left at gravesides by bereaved people have the potential to materially realise the presence of the absent deceased, arguing that: "…absence can be made present through material objects, and that it has some agency" (Meyer and Woodthorpe 2008 p9). Or, consider Lohman's (2006) study of portraits of young dead men depicted on a mural in an inner-city community. The community's sustained interaction with the mural, observes Lohman: "ensures that you will continue to 'live' in the day-today life of the neighbourhood" (Lohman 2006 p202). In ashes creation practices: as ashes-jewellery attends family holidays; as ashes-raku becomes acquainted with grandchildren; as an ashes-paperweight is greeted at the start of each day, these performances capture praesentia as they materially presence the absent deceased.

It is worth noting that ashes-tattoos are an exception to the intermingling of subjects and objects in commissioners accounts of performances of presence in ashes creation

practices. Tattoos are never discussed as 'things', they are all subject and no object and therefore have a different relationship with materiality than ashes creations that capture praesentia. In this quote, Barbara likes to feel that her husband Brian is *'in'* her:

> *I mean the others (her non-ashes tattoos), you do not think about them at all, but that is there and I can see it all the time, and , you know, I often give it a little rub and daft things like that, yeah, yeah.*

> *It is just [pause] nice, just to know that it is there [rubbing tattoo], there is a little bit of him in me [laughing], you know, in that way, yeah, it is a nice feeling (Barbara 7.8).*

Woo and Chan (2010) consider the case of a man who incorporates his wife's identity into his own when she died following a transplant operation during which he successfully received a portion of her liver. In both ashes-tattoos and the case considered by Woo and Chan (2010) bereaved people incorporated a portion of their loved one's fragmented body into own their bodies. In both cases, the bereaved felt the deceased as a presence *in* them, and they attributed this with the capacity to perform presence. Therefore, the work of Woo and Chan (2010) offers a comparative example to ashes-tattoos. However, there are some distinct differences between the case considered by Woo and Chan (2010) and ashes-tattoo practices. These differences illustrate how ashes-tattoos, in common with other ashes creation practices, provide physical, tactile, and localised sites for experiences of presence. In the case they explore, Woo and Chan's (2010) widower often acts out his wife's identity, to the extent that he becomes subsumed by it. There was no evidence of such identity incorporation in ashes creation practices. Although Barbara discusses how Brian is *'in'* her, she continues to talk about him as a distinct presence, as *'Brian'*.

When considering this difference, it is worth noting that Woo and Chan's (2010) widower had his wife liver inside him as a functioning organ, which, in some part, may be why he became subsumed by her identity. Comparably, in ashes-tattoos presence is more localised. Ashes are infused with tattoo inks which penetrate layers of the skin in a specific area. The area of the tattoo itself becomes a site of the deceased's presence. For example, Vinnie spoke of his Nan also hugging his daughter when he held her in his arms because of his ashes-tattoos' location on his forearms. For Barbara, it was the site

of her ashes-tattoo, on her hand, that she associated with Brain presence: "*I often give it a little rub and daft things like that" (7.8)*. This illustrates how ashes-tattoos, in common with materially expressed ashes creations, provide a site for performances of presence in which bonds continue between the living and the dead.

Continuing connections and continuing bonds

As the deceased continues to participate in the lives of commissioners via ashes creation practices, bonds between the living and the dead are maintained. This continuation of bonds is central to commissioners' experiences of their ashes creation practices. This finding gives credence to the continuing bonds thesis explored in the literature review which claims that it is not unusual, or undesirable, for bonds between the living and the dead to continue indefinitely in post-death relationships (Klass et al. 1996). This approach is frequently contrasted by academics (for example see Stroebe and Schut 2005) and in public discourse (for example see Litsa 2014) with process-orientated grief theories[45], which, as discussed in the literature review, suggest that bereaved people eventually need to 'move on' by developing identities free of the deceased for 'healthy' grief resolution to take place.

As acknowledged by Klass et al. (1996) in their influential text, the notion of continuing bonds is a broad thesis covering a wide range of experiences grounded in emotionality, materiality, and spatiality. Therefore, commissioners' experiences that could be cited as evidence of continuing bonds were varied in their expression. On occasion, commissioners' narratives of continuing bonds in their ashes creation practices were concerned with mnemonic experiences, where ashes creations evoke memories of lives lived together. For example, as explored in Chapter Three, Marie's ashes-painting evokes childhood memories of walking together with her father and her siblings in the landscape of the Seven Sisters coppice. However, much more frequently in commissioners' accounts, narratives of continuing bonds in ashes creation practices are concerned with the continued participation of the deceased person in commissioners'

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[45] Exemplified in the work of psychologists and psychiatrists, such as: Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), Murray Parks and Weiss (1983), and Kübler-Ross (1970).

on-going lives. In this quote, Jill is talking about dusting her ashes-painting, when she said:

> *It is the same as Christmas when I put the tinsel around him to make it like:*
>
> *'It is Christmas, have a bit of tinsel around you.'*
>
> *Because, he loved Christmas and it is like:*
>
> *'Your bit of tinsel.'*
>
> *I am decorating him, you know? He can have his bit, I bought some nice gold (Jill 19.1).*

In these performances of presence in ashes creation practices, bonds continue between the living and the dead as George continues to participate in Christmas each year because decorating *"him"* (19.1) with tinsel means: "*he can have his bit*." (19.1). Howarth (2000) describes practices that continue bonds between the living and the dead as: "...a mechanism for continued communication – a rejection of the spatial and temporal boundaries between life and death" (Howarth 2000 p133). Howarth's (2000) focus on spatial and temporal transcendence is useful when considering the continuation of bonds between the living and the dead in ashes creation practice. Specifically, it captures how performances of presence in ashes creation practices locate the dead in spatial intimacy with the living, in homes and on bodies. In addition, it captures how ashes creations transcend temporal boundaries between the living and the dead by not relegating the dead temporally to the past as mnemonic presences. *'George',* as he is experienced in Jill's ashes creation practice, is not simply an echo of Christmas past; through the act of decorating *'him'* with tinsel, *'George'* continues to participate in Christmas in their living room in the present.

This spatial and temporal transcendence of boundaries between the living and the dead via ashes creation practice was also evident in providers' accounts. For example, the Diamond Provider told a story about a young woman who had an ashes-diamond created using her boyfriend's ashes that she wore in a belly button ring on the around-the-world trip they had planned before he died:

> *One young lady whose boyfriend died and his parents allowed her the ashes and she had it set in a belly button ring.*

She was featured in a magazine: in Vegas, up Table Mountain, trekking in the Himalayas and she basically took him where he wanted to go, but he went after he died. But to her, he was there. You know, other people say, 'yuk', but again it is a personal decision, there is no right or wrong (Diamond-Provider 5.2).

In this example[46], the temporal and spatial boundaries between the living and the dead are transcended, as the women and her boyfriend continue to participate together in life's adventures via her ashes creation practice (Howarth 2000). The woman's boyfriend is not bound to the temporal domains of the past, or the spatial domains of the dead; rather, he continues to participate in the present as he travels the globe via the woman's ashes-diamond. In these practices, ashes creations perform presence in the present as bonds continue between the living and the dead.

In the last chapter, I considered how the exchange of ashes creations between providers and commissioners evoke narratives of loved ones returning. By considering in this chapter the way in which commissioners and their ashes creations live together, it becomes apparent that moments of returning are not confined to temporally bounded events that take place during exchange. Rather, the concept of loved ones returning is continually evoked in ashes creation practices. To illustrate this, let's return to Jill decorating her ashes creation at Christmas. The quote considered above (19.1) was the second time Jill had mentioned decorating her ashes creation with tinsel. If we consider the first, we can see how Jill's ashes-painting puts George "*back in the house*" (*12.7)*:

It (the ashes-painting) put him back in the house, to me, it put him at home, to me it has brought him back, he is in his house, where he would want to be. I mean, I know I put him (his ashes) here there and everywhere, but they are places where he would have wanted to go and stay as well.

To me he would have wanted to be at home, that is the only place he would have wanted to be, because that is how he was. Like I say, he was just like a family man. So, he gets a bit of tinsel on him at Christmas, I put a bit of tinsel around him (Jill 12.7).

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[46] Relating back to chapter three, we also see the personal choice narrative emphasised in the Diamond Providers' account. Ashes creation practices might not be to everyone's taste, but it is bereaved people's right to choose it because "*there is no right or wrong." (Diamond Provider 5.2)*. The idea of appropriate practice regulated by the church or the state is absent, replaced by the idea that it is a "*personal decision" (5.2).*

George has returned home via Jill's ashes creation practice and this returning is evoked in performances that convey the continuation of bonds, such as decorating *"him" (12.7)* at Christmas. This illustrates how the (re)incorporation of the deceased into the lives of the living are processes that reach far beyond moments of exchange and into the ongoing lives commissioners share with their ashes creations (Van Gennep 1960). Other examples from the data when returning is evoked include: when ashes creations are placed in the home; when they are shown to family members for the first time; or when they are taken to family events. In her exploration of corpses washing in Bali, Connor (1995) observes how focusing on distinctions between everyday practices and ritual moments has the potential to portray practices with the material dead as bounded events. This has the effect, argues Connor (1995), of obscuring how practices continue to manifest in everyday moments well beyond what occurs in rituals events. Influenced by Connor's (1995) call to locate practices with the material dead beyond the confines of bounded events, this research argues for an understanding of notions loved one 'returning' in ashes creation practices as manifesting in everyday moments that occur well beyond the exchange of ashes creations. This reveals how 'returning' is continually performed as commissioners and their ashes creations share their ongoing lives.

In summary, although providers frequently refer to ashes creations as memorials, commissioners distance their practices from this categorisation of material culture associated with death. Memorials are often perceived as *belonging* to the dead as they commemorate loved ones who existed in the past (Sørensen 2010). However, ashes creations are what Santino (2006) describes as practices *concerned* with the dead because they reinforce bonds and enable communication with the living in the present. In rejecting the term memorial, commissioners reveal how they experience ashes creations: as loved ones and beloved things in the present. Ruth does not experience an ontological crisis when she say's *"so I will just go and get him and put it on" (1.5),* because ashes creations do not so much transcend dualisms as they occupy both categories of being. This simultaneous occupation of subject and object positions enables performances of presence that convey praesentia as they capture materially the presence of an absence (Brown 1981, Hetherington 2003). In these performances of presence, the deceased continues to participate in family life as the deceased are

(re)incorporated (Van Gennep 1960) repeatedly into the lives of the living, illustrating how notions of returning reach far beyond moments of exchange and into commissioners' ongoing lives with their ashes creations.

'It's just George...' (Jill 18.3). **Personhood, Nearness, and Continuity**

In the last section of the chapter, I explored how commissioners experience their loved ones' presence in performances that continue bonds between the living and the dead. In this section I delve further into exploring the ways in which commissioners and ashes creations live together by further unpacking how presence is experienced.

<u>Personhood presences</u>

In ashes creation practices, performances of presence are rooted in concepts of personhood. Specifically, they are rooted in concepts of personhood that are concerned with being a particular entity with a specific identity which encapsulates who we *are*: such as our personality traits, values, inclinations, and passions (Woodward 2007). However, by drawing from Gell's (1998) notion of distributed personhood, being an entity with a specific identity does not generate from within a particular being, as if personhood resides inside an agent; rather, personhood is an outcome of practice generated in heterogeneous networks people, places, and things. The notion of distributed personhood encapsulates the relationality of personhood that is evident throughout ashes creation practices because it locates who *are* in perpetual connectivity to *'others'*. This is evident in Bernard Junior's quote (*3.5)*:

> *All the punters in here, some of 'em, they say:*
>
> *'Bernard's up there* [pointing to the ashes-mosaic]*, don't forget, his ashes are there and he will 'ave you.'*
>
> *If someone is up to no good, it is like his spirit lives on in this place purely because his ashes are right 'bove 'em (Bernard Junior 3.5).*

Presence, in Bernard Junior's account of his ashes creation practice, is concerned with his father's personhood. Although he refers to his Dad's "spirit" (3.5), Bernard Junior stressed at several points during his account that it is not a ghostly presence that he experiences in relation to his ashes creation practice; rather, "spirit" (3.5) denotes defining aspects of Bernard Senior's personality traits. In particular, his legendary 'no-nonsense' approaches to behaviour management. It should also be noted that presence in Bernard Junior's account of his ashes creation practice is concerned with experiences of personhood in the present. The *"punters" (3.5)* are not reminiscing about Bernard Senior located in mnemonic presences of the past as presence is experienced as an active continuation of Bernard Senior in the present and this is directly linked to the presence of his material remains: *"purely because his ashes are right 'bove 'em" (Bernard Junior 3.5).*

The performance of personhood in Bernard Junior's account of his ashes creation practice (3.5) is embedded in relationality because it depends upon a shared understanding of the particulars of Bernard Senior's personality. Many of the *"punters" (3.5)* in Bernard Senior's social club have been coming into the family-run club for decades and therefore had a shared understanding of Bernard Senior's approach to behaviour management. This shared understanding enables Bernard Senior's personhood to be performed and presence experienced in networks that include: punters, Bernard Junior, Bernard Senior's cremation ashes, the ashes-mosaic, and the family-run social club. Through notions of personhood presence, Bernard Senior continues to be a social agent as he regulates the behaviour of those who maybe *"up to no good" (3.5)* in the club that he spent over fifty years running.

This notion of personhood embedded in relationality is recurrent throughout commissioners' accounts of presence in their ashes creation practice. With the exception of Bernard Junior's ashes-mosaic, performances of presence in the majority of ashes creation practices in this thesis are concerned with ties of kinship between commissioners and the deceased and are performed in intimate spaces of bodies and homes. In these cases, performances of presence do not require a shared understanding of the deceased's personhood outside of kinship networks. This was evident in Sue's account of taking her ashes-necklace on holiday, or Jill's account of decorating her

ashes-painting with tinsel at Christmas. Knowledge of Sue's parents' love of cabaret shows and Jill's husband's love of Christmas do not need to be understood outside of immediate kinship networks. Personhood, in these kinship practices, is intimate and relational as knowledge of the deceased's personality, values, inclinations, and passions inseparably entwines with experiences of presence.

The intrinsic relationality of personhood is captured in Wagner's (1991) concept of 'fractal personhood', which was developed by Gell (1998) to explore ideas of personhood distributed across time, space, and materiality. Personhood, argues Wagner (1991), is always made up of interrelated but distinct elements because it is generated by heterogeneous agencies and is therefore embedded in genealogical, social, cultural, and linguistic relationships. Wagner's (1991) notion of fractal personhood overcomes oppositions between parts and whole or singular and plurals. Instead, the individual person is 'multiple' because they are always constituted by numerous 'others'. The most powerful or influential of which, claims Wagner (1991), is the genealogical relationship shared between close kin:

> A fractal person is never a unit standing in relation to an aggregate or an aggregate standing in relation to a unit, but always an entity with relationship integrally implied. Perhaps the most concrete illustration of integral relationship comes from the generalised notion of reproduction and genealogy (Wagner 1991: 163 in Gell 1998 p140).

Reflecting Wagner's (1991) concept of fractal personhood in ashes creation practices, the presence of *"Tom", "Mum", or "Mark"* are not "an aggregate or an aggregate standing in relation to a unit" (Wagner 1991: 163 in Gell p140). Rather, they are Ruth's *"Tom"*, Ken's *"Mum",* or Susan's "Mark" as "an entity with relationship integrally implied" (Wagner 1991: 163 in Gell p140). Understanding personhood in this relational and mutually constitutive way defies attempt to produce narratives of ashes creations as containers of individual deceased persons because it makes evident the permeability and relationality through which the presence of the deceased is experienced.

This section further reveals the character of presence, establishing the ways in which performances of presence in commissioners' ashes creation practices differ from their experiences of beliefs surrounding their loved ones' supernatural presence. The majority of commissioners' accounts touched on their feelings, beliefs, and experiences of supernatural encounters with presence outside of their ashes creation practice. Supernatural encounters with presence in commissioners' accounts included discussions of ghosts, apparitions, supernatural spirits, heavenly souls, or visitations. Commissioners' accounts ranged from fervent rejections of supernatural presences to complete acceptance of the validity of such experiences. Within this eclectic mix, just less than half of commissioners expressed a belief in, longing for, or experience of their loved ones' supernatural presence outside of their ashes creation practices. For example, Queenie saw and spoke to Arthur in the living room of their home shortly after his death. Jennifer spoke about physically feeling her husband Peter's embodied presence in bed, his breath on her neck or his weight next to hers, she goes onto say:

> *Researcher: So, you feel him sometimes?*
>
> *Yes, particularly going to bed at night, we always slept 'like spoons', we used to call it up north, I don't know what they call it now. We always slept like that and I have woken up with the sense that he is there and daren't move in case it goes (Jennifer 20.1).*

In her account, Jennifer talks about encountering Peter's presence through sensory experiences with finite temporalities. These supernatural encounters with presence are well-documented phenomena in bereaved people's experiences (for examples see Bennett and Bennett 2000, Keena et al. 2013). It is therefore unsurprising to find such experiences in commissioners' accounts as death and bereavement is, at least partially, experienced through such discourses. However, it is of particular note to this thesis that commissioners' accounts of their supernatural encounters with presence never overlap with their accounts of their ashes creation practices. Moreover, distinguishing experiences of presence in ashes creation practices from supernatural encounters was a recurring theme in many commissioners' accounts; for example, for Marie, the idea that her Dad might *"pop out and say hello to us" (1.5)* is *"crazy" (1.5)*:

But I would not be sitting there looking at it and expecting me Dad to pop out and say 'ello to us. I am not that type of person. I am down 't earth myself and I am just happy that his ashes are there. I feel that a part of him is with me in my home and that is how it is (Marie 1.5).

Performances of presence in commissioners' ashes creation practices differ from their experiences of their loved ones' supernatural presence in a number of important ways. First, commissioners' supernatural encounters with presence frequently involves experiencing presence via sensory experiences: touching, seeing, or smelling deceased loved ones, accompanied by feeling their presence. This is evident in Jennifer's account of feeling Peter's presence in bed. This distinguishes presence in ashes creation practices from commissioners' supernatural encounters. Presence in ashes creation practices does involve sensory experiences as it is performed in tactile and visual encounters via the materiality of the ashes creations. However, presence in commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation does not involve sensory experiences of touching, seeing, or smelling deceased loved ones as supernatural beings.

Second, supernatural encounters of presence in commissioners' accounts are visitations, where loved ones appear and disappear as if whispered on the wind. This is evident in Jennifer's (*20.1)* account, where the encounter with Peter was defined by its finite temporality: she *"daren't move in case it goes" (20.1)*. In comparison, presence in commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practices is much more constant. Certainly, commissioners are more aware of presence in ashes creation practices at sometimes than others; for example, when Ruth wears *'Tom'*/her ashes-bracelet at family weddings in Ireland she feels that he is accompanying her and she feels close to this presence. However, in ashes creation practices, presence does not come and go like a visitation, it is simply always there. The ashes-bracelet is always *'Tom'*, Ruth simply notices that more when she has certain interactions with *'him'.*

The constancy of presence in ashes creation practices conveys an intimate everyday relatedness between the bereaved and the deceased. In the following quotes Jill illustrates the distinction commissioners make between supernatural experiences of presences and the more everyday presences of ashes creation practices. In the first quote, Jill, who is a strong believer in spiritualism, expressed her frustration that her

husband George's spirit had failed to appear at home, unlike that of her parents, who she experienced as visitations:

> *But I always [pause] I want George to come home to me, but he never has [getting upset], I think I look for it too much, you know? I want it too much ... I think that it is something that I know has not happened yet. I know it has happened with my Dad and even with my Mum, I am not sure about my brother (Jill 22.0).*

However, a little earlier in the interview, when discussing if she experienced her ashes creation as a memorial[47], Jill states that her ashes creation is George present at home via her ashes painting. Clearly, she does not experience her ashes-painting as his longed for supernatural presence, her ashes-painting is *"just George"* (18.3):

> *Researcher: Is it the picture a memorial to George?*
>
> *It's just George, to me it is George. It is not a memorial, it is him, to me it is him, back home. It is George. To me, he lived here and he is still here (Jill 18.3).*

Note the unchangeable use of subject and object as Jill's ashes creation is "it", "him" and "George". Jill is a believer in supernatural experiences of presence, which she experiences as temporary visitations and she is still waiting desperately for George to manifest. In comparison, through the inclusion of his cremation ashes, George is *"physically there"* (*18.3)* in Jill's ashes creation practice. Jill's quote typifies narratives of presence in ashes creation practices, in which presence is experienced as being an everyday occurrence and yet simultaneously of immeasurable emotional value. Being *"just George"* (*18.3)* demonstrates the easy familiarity of everyday intimate presences.

Runia (2006) claims that it is these feelings of connectivity in presence that people are seeking when they engage in a wide range of contemporary practices associated with death or commemoration, including practices that incorporate cremation ashes. Jill feels connectivity to George's presence *"back home"* (18.3) through her ashes creation practices and that enables experiences of presence that are intimate and relational. Runia defines presence in such practices as: "'being in touch' – either literally or

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[47] Note here how Jill does not experience her ashes-painting as a memorial to George, which is in-keeping with the findings discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

figuratively – with people, things, events and feelings that made you the person you are" (Runia 2006 p5). The notion of presence as seeking connectivity, of "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with what Runia calls the "awesome reality" (Runia 2006 p5) of people's lives, captures the essence of presences in ashes creation practice. As I have traced throughout this chapter, permeating throughout commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation practices are narratives of presence as "being in touch" Runia (2006 p5) with commissioners and the deceased's shared relatedness to people, things, places, events, and each other.

Experiencing presence in ashes creation practices as "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with the everyday presence of our loved one is, in many ways, a continuation of how we experience our kinship relationships when loved ones are alive. As we explored in Chapter Four, ashes creation are singular objects of immeasurable emotional value to commissioners; they are special and beloved. To describe presences as 'everyday' is in no way to imply that ashes creations are mundane objects. Rather, they are beloved objects that enable everyday presences as unexceptional as the familiar presence of a loved one. This demonstrates how beloved objects, such as ashes creations, can express intimate relatedness between bereaved people and the deceased which captures an ease of familiarity (Lewis and Brown 2007). Ashes creations materially capture the essence of the everyday specialness of being with a loved one, which is both unremarkable, yet beyond emotional measure; they are *"just George"* (*18.3*).

Nearness and continuity

Narratives of nearness and continuity recur throughout commissioners' accounts of presence in their ashes creation practices. Commissioners often describe this as being 'close' to their loved ones, physically through proximity to their cremated remains, and emotionally through experiences of presences, and they emphasize the importance of the continuity of this nearness. In these experiences, sharing embodied proximities inseparably intertwines with "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with loved ones' presences. To create her ashes-diamond, Susan used a small portion of her son's ashes that she had kept in her underwear draw in a silk purse:

So, then the diamond had to go back, because it had to be set, you know, into the ring. So that [pause] I mean I just wanted it back [laughing], straight away, but it took a few weeks to do it and then it came back in this lovely ring and I have never ever took it off. So, instead of my son being in my underwear draw I suppose, all those years in a little silk purse, it is on my finger and he is with me all the time (Susan 1.8).

Again, note the interchange of subject and object. Susan's ashes creation is *'it', 'the diamond' and 'he'.* Evident in Susan's experiences of presence is Wagner's (1991) notion of fractal personhood, as genealogical relationships continue via ashes creation practices. The 'Mark' that Susan's experience as present in her ashes creation practices is *"my son" (1.8)* and therefore Mark's personhood is embedded in notions of relationality. The proximity of commissioners' living bodies to their loved ones' material remains incorporated into ashes creations is experienced as "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with the qualities and identities of the deceased that are intrinsically associated with the commissioner.

The literature review explored Sørensen's (2010) description of materially grounded presences in practices associated with the material dead, such as gravestones, being increasingly characterised by a 'subjective immediacy' between the bereaved and the deceased. Sørensen's (2010) concept of 'subjective immediacy' is useful in understanding presence in ashes creation practices. First, 'subjective' captures the centrality of moments of inmate kinship in ashes creation practices. Because ashes creation presences are rooted in inmate kinship relations, they are highly subjective experiences. Second, 'immediacy' captures the importance of nearness and continuity in ashes creation practices because it implies propinquity in time and space. There is a spatial immediacy, as commissioners experience embodied nearness to the deceased in their home and on/in their bodies via their ashes creation practices. There is also a temporal immediacy, as spatial proximities performed in the present continually extend into anticipated performances in the future. Susan putting on her ring each day performs nearness and continuity and this extends into the future as she does not envisage a time this will not be part of her daily routine. This plays out in the most intimate of relational spaces, in homes and on bodies, as a continuation of the embodied and spatial connections shared when the deceased was living.

Narratives of nearness and continuity are recurring themes in practices with the material dead as graveside practices, or practices that involve scattering or burying in landscapes of mnemonic resonance, which "bring about a social encounter with the presence of the absent" (Petersson 2011 p60) through their proximity to the deceased's bodily remains. For example, Hockey et al. (2010) discovered that notions of nearness and continuity were recurrent in accounts of cremation ashes scattering practices as bereaved people often prioritised practices where spatial proximities could be continued into the future. This included keeping cremation ashes at home as well as locating cremation ashes in landscapes to which the bereaved had frequent access. Nearness and continuity are also evident in practices with the corpse. For example, Sørensen's (2010) established that ongoing practices that bereaved people engage in at the graveside, such as gardening and leaving grave goods, are embedded in notions of nearness to loved ones and continuity of shared relationships.

For commissioners in this research, it is the intimacy of the space in which ashes creations reside that enables particular experiences of continuity and nearness. Commissioners highlighted how this differentiates ashes creation practices from practices that involve travelling to sites of bodily remains. Visits to cemeteries and natural landscapes are defined by their temporality; they must end as people return to their daily lives:

> *I cannot just pop over to the cemetery and look at where he is. (Holding her ashes-necklace). I can have him next to my skin (Jennifer 7.7).*

When Jennifer visits her husband's grave on the Isle of White, her nearness to Peter is fleeting because she must return home. In contrast, Jenifer can have Peter *"next to my skin"* (*7.7)* almost continually, as she confides during the interview that she only takes off her ashes-necklace when in the shower. Being located in homes and on bodies, the sites of bodily remains are constantly accessible in ashes creation practices and thus nearness to the deceased has the potential for continuity. In the following quote, Vinnie offers narratives of spatial and temporal immediacy as his ashes-tattoo practice, which means that nearness will continue *"always"* (9.5). Vinnie distinguishes this from "being on a mantel piece or in a rose bush in the garden" (9.5).

I don't feel like it holds any supernatural power or nothin' like dat [that]*, nothin' like dat. It is just, I don't know [pause], it makes it deeply personal and I know [starting to cry] a very small part of her is with me basically, dat's it. [Pause and stops crying and starts to nod] Yeah, dat's it, dat's it.*

Rather than being on a mantel piece or in a rose bush in the garden or [pause], I'm not knocking dat, if dat's how people [sentence tails off], if dat is what does it for them, just like dis [this – referring to his ashes-tattoos] has done it for me, den [then] I am all for it. But, I just wanted something dat is always there (Vinnie 9.5).

Vinnie highlights the importance of spatial nearness by emphasising how having "*very small part*" (*9.5)* of his Nan *"with"* (*9.5)* him is central to his ashes creation practice; as he says, "*basically, dat's it."* (9.5). He emphasises the importance of continuity of nearness by choosing "*something dat is always there."* (*9.5)*[48]. Being a tattoo, Vinnie's ashes creation practice is at one end of the continuity and nearness spectrum. However, all commissioners, regardless of the particular material form of their ashes creation practice, evoked narratives of nearness and continuity as they emphasised the importance of sharing subjective immediacy with their loved one in their experiences of presence (Sørensen 2010).

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[48] It is also worth noting how Vinnie stresses a personal choice narrative as discussed in Chapter Three, he is "*not knocking 'dat"* (9.5). In addition, he distinguishes these feelings of subjective immediacy from "*supernatural"* (*9.5)* presences, as discussed in the last section of this chapter.
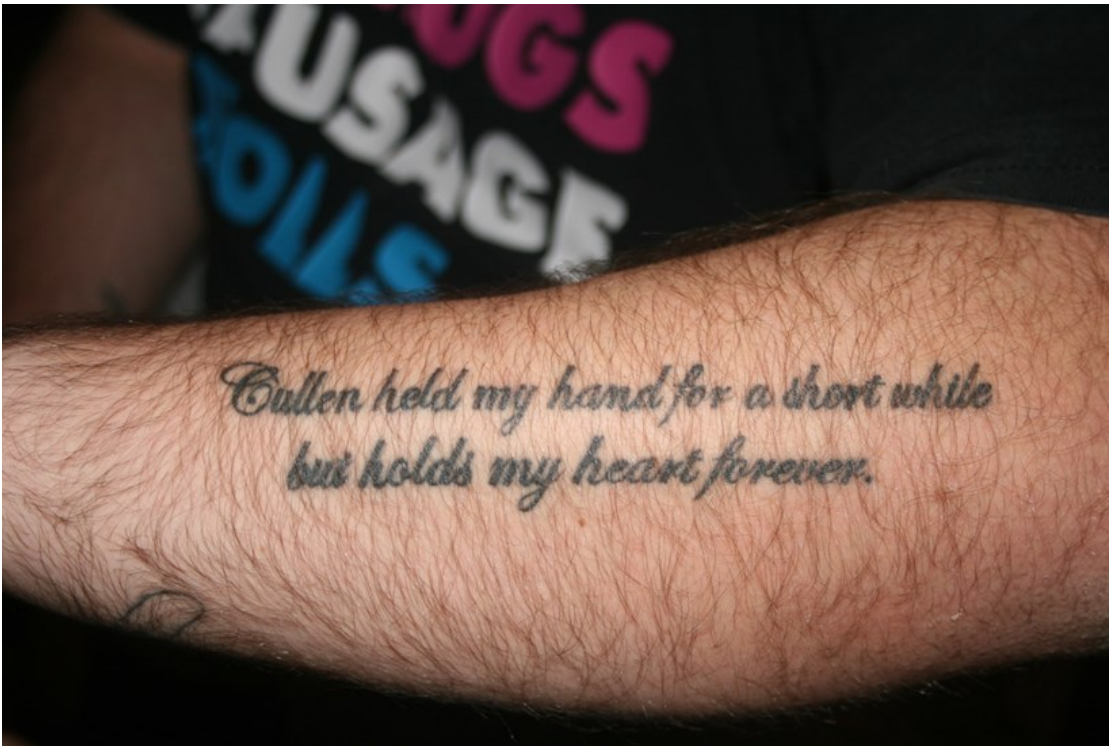
Fig. 9: Vinnie's ashes-tattoo (2).

Continuity and nearness in ashes creation practices is future extending as well as existing in the present because it extends beyond commissioners' current ashes creation practices into anticipated future actions. This can include daily interaction with an ashes creation, as discussed with Susan's ring and Jennifer's paperweight. However, a desire for continuity of nearness is also evident in a number of commissioners' plans for their ashes creations following their deaths. Commissioners spoke of wanting to leave ashes creations that are objects as inheritances to children or other relatives so nearness can continue across the generations. Sometimes, just knowing an ashes creation is nearby and ready to be involved in an anticipated future action is enough to perform nearness and continuity. John used to discuss his day at work with his father each evening over a cup of tea and on days when the children were off school, the family would all share tea in their garden. Therefore, getting an ashes-teapot created with his Dad's cremation ashes seemed like a "good fit" (John pers. comm.) for John, even if, many years after its creation, John's family had still not used the ashes-teapot to pour tea:

> *To date we have not used the teapot because we are waiting for a bright*
> *sunny day when the boys are with us and we can sit in the garden and have*
> *a chat over a cup of tea like we did when Dad was with us.*

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> *I think this will be a very emotional event for us all and things being as they are, with Josh living in the States and Ben married with a family of his own, might even be something we never actually get round to doing, but the thought that we might do it somehow keeps Dad close (John pers. comm.).*

The potential of having a cup of tea with the family is enough to experience nearness and continuity in John's ashes creation practice. In John's quote we see how the entwining of materiality and place in acts of kinship shapes narratives of nearness and continuity. Generational ties of kinship combine with the materiality of the ashes-teapot, which affords communal tea drinking, and with place, in the family garden, to: *"somehow keeps Dad close" (John pers. comm.).* The next section of the chapter considers in more depth the entwining of materiality and place in experiences of presence in ashes creation practices.

Place and materiality

As illustrated by John's quote of anticipating drinking tea in the garden from his ashes-teapot, the material qualities of ashes creations and the places in which they reside play their part in performance of presence in ashes creation practices. Regardless of the particular form an ashes creation takes, their materiality affords interaction via looking, touching and, in the case of ashes-vinyl records, listening. Because these interactions take place in commissioners' homes and on their bodies they are frequent and intimate, consider Ken:

> *Sometimes I go into that room to specifically look at it [ashes-raku], if I am thinking about my mum and dad. Or, mainly last thing, just before I am going to bed, quite often I will just be in there, I will just be in there and I look at it (Ken 11.0).*

Both the location of Ken's ashes-raku and its material qualities effect his experiences of nearness and continuity as they encourage specific types of sustained interaction. First, the material qualities of his ashes-raku are striking for Ken. Being a lover of all things Japanese and ceramic, he really enjoys looking at it. Second, the ashes-raku place, in

Ken's office[49] facilitates a special intimacy between Ken and his parents because it is a room used only by him. These interactions in commissioners' ongoing lives with their ashes creations capture how materiality and place entwine in performance of presence that convey praesentia as they capture "something absent that can attain presence through the materiality of a thing" (Hetherington 2003 p1941). Like Ken's ashes-raku, Queenie's ashes-painting is an object on display in the home. Queenie can see her ashes-painting on her living room wall perfectly from Arthur's favourite 'TV chair' that she sits in each day since his death. As she sits looking at her ashes-painting, Queenie experiences nearness to Arthur getting:

..a feeling that you hav' 'em [the deceased] *close, ya know? (Queenie 20.2).*

The closeness Queenie feels to Arthur entwines place and materiality. Their home, where the picture hangs, is their dwelling place, created through fifty years of sharing spaces and characterised by nearness, concepts of home, and embodied proximities (Seamon 1979). These concepts of relatedness, home, and proximity are evident in a number of practices concerned with the material dead. In his study into post-mortality mobility Marjavaara (2012) found that spatial movements of the dead, in particular decision making around the moving of remains, are pervaded by concepts of relatedness, home, and proximity. These concepts, argues Marjavaara (2012), are interpreted and reinterpreted by bereaved people as they influence the places that remains come to occupy. In addition, Walter and Gittings (2010) identify notions of relatedness, home, and proximity in the burial of the dead in domestic gardens and Kellaher et al. (2005) note these themes in the storage of cremation ashes in domestic locations. In commissioners' accounts, 'home' coveys the spatiality of nearness and the continuity of relatedness as bodies continue to share dwelling places post-mortality in ashes creations intended for domestic display.

Despite sharing common features, ashes creation practices do differ from other practices with the material dead in the ways in which they are performed. To illustrate this, this section will consider in more detail practices that appear to share the most

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[49] Ken moved his ashes-raku from the living room to his home office once his young son started to walk as he feared it might get 'knocked over'.

common features with ashes creation practice; the keeping of cremation ashes in domestic locations. In common with ashes creations that are designed to kept in domestic locations, cremation ashes kept within the home are practices with the potential to "generate a special sense of intimacy" (Kellaher, Prendergast et al. 2005 p238) as they transcend spatial boundaries between the living and the dead. However, ashes creation practices differ from domestically stored cremation ashes in their patterns of mobility within the home.

Kellaher et al. (2005) found that domestically stored cremation ashes move around the home into less visible locations with the passing of time. Their study established that domestically storing cremation ashes in urns is often "an interim holding strategy" (Kellaher et al. 2005 p248), as future plans include: scattering at specific locations that are currently inaccessible; future mixing with a surviving relative; or waiting for decisions to be made about their destination. Kellaher et al. (2005) argue that domestically stored cremation ashes display mobility around the home because their future destination has not been reached. There is still a sense that these cremation ashes are on the move, waiting for a future action, as they wander to and from display to storage locations: from the mantelpiece to a cupboard. Ashes creations designed to be located in the home demonstrated no evidence of the domestic migration patterns of cremation ashes stored in urns. Although a number of the ashes creations had been in commissioners' possession for many years, they are on display in the same prominent locations that they were when they first entered the home[50].

When considering why ashes creations may demonstrate a different mobility than domestically stored cremation ashes, three factors emerge. First, ashes creations are irreversible. Kellaher et al. (2005) found that bereaved people were frequently anticipating a future action with their domestically stored cremation ashes. Comparably, the irreversibility of ashes creations offers a sense of finality for the destination of cremation ashes. Ashes creations demonstrate that a decision has been reached and action taken with cremation ashes. Even though ashes creations and domestically stored

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[50] Only a potential threat to ashes creations results in their movement, for example, an ashes-painting was moved into the loft temporarily to avoid damage during construction work or ashes-raku moved into a study permanently to prevent damage by a young child.

cremation ashes share narratives of nearness, ashes creation practices can offer a sense of permanency that Kellaher et al. (2005) found to be lacking in domestically stored cremation ashes practices.

Second, their materiality gives ashes creations an established place to be located in the home: ashes-paintings are located on walls; ashes-pottery on display on shelves; and ashes-paperweights are on desks. In contrast, urns do not have specified locations in the home, which enables them to wander. Third, a painting or a paperweight that incorporates cremation ashes does not resemble traditional material culture associated with death, such as traditional urns. This enables ashes creations to be on display without being a constant reminder of the death of a loved one, either to commissioners or to visitors to the home. As discussed in Chapter Three, commissioners frequently cite how their ashes creation are *"beautiful"* (Susan 7) and a *"celebration"* (Ken 1.1), which they distinguish from traditional material culture associated with death, such as urns, which are by comparison *"morbid"* (Jill 12.0) and *"macabre"* (Ken 1.1) or "*downbeat"* (*18.2.*). In addition, commissioners' spoke of making a choice whether to disclose to visitors to their home about their ashes creation practice. They spoke of this choice being enabled by the particular materiality of their ashes creation because it was not obvious to the casual observer that their ashes creation contains their loved one's cremation ashes. They cited this as a benefit of their ashes creation. Jill's quote illustrates the two latter points:

> *He [the ashes-painting] will always have pride of place, he will always be there [indicating to the ashes-painting on the wall]. I just think that it is a nice way to do it, without it looking morbid; because I think it could be [morbid] when the ashes were on there [pointing to the table on which the urn containing George's ashes was temporarily kept] … I find it [keeping ashes in urns] morbid and I don't think that it is something that should be morbid and it [the ashes-painting] is not scary (Jill 12.0).*

Jill's ashes-painting hangs on the living room wall, so that *'George'* will *"always have pride of place, he will always be there"* (12.0). This offers a sense of finality to Jill's ashes creation practice that was lacking when Jill kept George's cremation ashes in an urn on the table in the months following his death. In addition, because ashes creations are distinct from traditional material culture associated with death *"it is not scary"* or

"morbid" (Jill 12.0.). Therefore, as time passes, ashes creations do not need to be relegated to cupboards or other less prominent locations in the home, as they are not a "morbid" (Jill 12.0.) reminder of death. In this way, ashes creations can be said to offer proximity, like domestically located cremation ashes, but with a sense of permanence to the practice.

Another way in which ashes creation practices differ from domestically stored cremation ashes is in their potential for mobility. Specifically, practices, such as garden interment and scatterings can offer a sense of permanence to the practice whilst performing nearness and continuity. However, these practices can present issues of future mobility. For example, in their study Prendergast et al. (2006) found that a participant did not want to locate cremation ashes in the garden in case she left. A number of participants in this study also cited future mobility as an issue in garden internment practices.

Ashes creations, regardless of their material form, have the potential for mobility and this differentiates ashes creations from practices that anchor the deceased in domestic landscapes. This ability of ashes creations to follow their owners, rather than be irretrievably anchored to homes, was cited as a benefit by commissioners. If they moved home, ashes creations are easy to move no matter the location. Even practices such as locating cremation ashes in garden pots can present difficulties should the new location not have suitable outside space. Therefore, in ashes creation practice, nearness has continuity because of the potential for mobility, no matter what changes life brings.

For commissioners of ashes creations worn on the body, such as ashes-jewellery or ashes-tattoos, the spatiality of nearness is an embodied experience. These practices enable physical contact between commissioners' bodies and their ashes creation and therefore their loved ones' cremation ashes, offering commissioners embodied and mobile experiences of "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with their loved one's presence. Unlike corpses, where post-mortality mobility is frequently concerned with journeys towards destination for reburial or display (Marjavaara 2012, Young 2013), ashes creation mobility mirrors the mobility of commissioners. For Sue, home objects, such as ashes-vases, do not offer the same potential for nearness as her ashes-necklace:

I could not have me mum and dad in a [ashes-creation] vase, I don't know why, that to me [pause] it is not personal enough, I mean you can go at get a vase of any old market can't you? And I think that she [the provider] does paperweights as well, [shaking head], no, no.

Researcher: What feels personal about the necklaces?

Because it is near me, it is near me, you know? ... It is personal to me it is near me, you know, and like I say, when I go on holiday I can take it with me (Sue 10.1).

Sue emphasises nearness and continuity enabled through the mobility of her ashes creation, which means: *"when I go on holiday I can take it with me." (10.1),* so nearness can continue regardless of place. For Sue, other practices are simply not *"near" (10.1)* enough. Throughout their accounts, commissioners reiterated the importance of nearness in tangible encounters with their ashes creations that manifest presence. For example, Ruth's husband was very encouraging of her returning to education to train as a nurse, but he died before she qualified. When she commissioned her ashes-bracelet she thought she might wear it on special occasions. However, she was nervous when she started to practice nursing, so she took 'Tom' in her uniform pocket each day for the first year. By frequently touching her ashes-bracelet during long and difficult shifts at work, Ruth felt continual nearness to Tom and therefore connection to his emotional support. In Ruth's account of feeling Tom's presence via touching her ashes-bracelet in her pocket we can see how materiality and place play their part in making the absent visible and tangible by effecting opportunities for sustained interaction.

By materially locating the dead in places that are occupied by the living, specifically homes and bodies, ashes creations enable frequent tangible encounters with the presence of loved ones across all practices. In his account, the Vinyl Record Provider drew attention to how ashes-vinyl records do not just provide audio encounters with presence; they are also tactile and visual objects. Even tattoos, which have no materiality outside of the commissioners' own bodies, offer tangible experiences of presence. As discussed early in this chapter, the site of the tattoo ink and incorporated cremation ashes has a particular kind of presence on the body that enables looking, rubbing, and touching, thus illustrating the importance of embodied interaction in ashes creation practices.

It is of note that there were limited examples of presence experienced through sustained verbal interaction across any ashes creation practice. Although commissioners gave accounts of having short verbal interactions with their ashes creations, these are not prolonged conversations and they do not compare to commissioners' accounts of having conversations with their loved one via other means[51]. This difference might be accounted for when we consider the importance of embodied interactions in ashes creation performances of presence, which means that ashes creations have the potential to capture non-linguistic communication through visual and tactile experiences of presence (Hetherington 2003, Woodward 2007, Sørensen 2010). For example, Ruth keeping 'Tom' in her pocket during the start of her career typifies a recurring narrative that we find echoed in Jennifer's account:

> *If I am worrying about something, or bothered about something, or trying to make up my mind about something, I find I do that [holds glass part of necklace that contains cremation ashes], it has become an automatic reaction ... as I said, if I am thinking about things, I touch (touches ashes-necklace). And although it is a bit of a habit now, I think it is Peter, it is closeness to Peter, which, if that was not there, I'd be [pause] I would feel rather lonely in making decisions, it seems odd, but I would (Jennifer 20.0).*

When Jennifer touches her ashes-jewellery around her neck, she feels Peter's support with decisions that she encounters in her life. In common with Ruth's experiences of keeping *'Tom'* in her uniform pocket, the presence of the deceased is a source of guidance and support enacted through embodied interaction with ashes creations. During her interview, Jennifer described a tactile and happy marriage to Peter as she stressed the importance of physical contact and emotional support. In Jennifer's ashes creation practices, nearness is performed via touching, which enables Jennifer to feel *"closeness to Peter"* (20.0). Continuity manifests in Jennifer's account in the intertwining of two concepts: the continuity of nearness and continuity of relatedness. In the continuity of nearness, touching is performed repeatedly to the extent that it has become *"bit of a habit now"* (20.0). In the continuity of relatedness, there is a

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[51] For example, a number of providers gave accounts of sustained verbal interactions with their loved ones via their photographs.

continuation of the support from Peter that Jennifer felt when he was alive, without which Jennifer would feel: *"...rather lonely in making decisions"* 20.0.

This intersection of embodied encounters, place, and materiality is a recurring theme in material practices at sites of human remains. For example, Sørensen (2010) considers how the material qualities of a bench, which afford embodied experiences of sitting, along with the benches place, by a grave of a child, are active generators of agencies in the performance of presence as bereaved parents sit each night to read their deceased child a bedside story. Sitting on the bench at the graveside become inseparable from the parents' experiences of presence and hence:

> ...the bench may thereby be more than a decorative or functional installation, but is instead an item that suggests return, presence and continuity, as it basically anticipates an atmosphere of emotional association and an active practice of nearness (Sørensen 2010 p125).

As discussed in the literature review in relation to the work of Latour (2005) and Gell (1998), exploring presence in this way enables an understanding of performativity in materially grounded practices as interplays of people, spaces, places, and objects enveloped in notions of agency that transcend human intentionality. This conceptualisation of the manifestation of presence increases the actants involved beyond the bereaved as an intentional agent as it recognises the importance of place and materiality in generating agency. The tactile materiality of Jenifer's ashes creation and its location around her neck enables frequent touching as place, materiality, and embodied interaction intersect in performances of Peter's presence.

Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008) explore this intermingling of place and materiality in experiences of presence at sites of human remains in their comparative exploration of cemetery practices and museum practices. They draw from Woodthorpe's (2007) previous work on cemeteries to consider how embodied encounters with place, such as looking and touching material objects left on graves, enables the objects themselves to be 'alive' and enact agency in their capacity to perform presences of absences. In these tangible encounters, argue Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008), place and materiality intersect in the generation of presence. In a similar way, we can see how, by enabling sustained tangible encounters, the material qualities of ashes creations and the places

in which they reside effect presence in performances of nearness and continuity. This brings into view how presence, in ashes creation practices, is a heterogeneous knot of agencies, where nearness and continuity are performed by things and by places entwining with agencies generated by the living and the dead.

Although notions of place and materiality are central to the manifestation of presence in ashes creation practices, it is important not to use these concepts as fixed distinctions to categorise practices. Ashes creations with a materiality that could be labelled 'home' do tend to be involved in the performance of presences in domestic environments, as we explored with Ken's Raku in his study (*11.0)*. Similarly, ashes creations with a materiality that could be labelled 'mobile' are often involved in the performance of presences outside of the home, as we explored with Sue's parents joining her family on holiday via her ashes creation practices (14.5). However, on closer consideration, ashes creation practices challenge the placement of immutable boundaries between 'home' and 'mobile' and therefore bring into question the applicability of these concepts as fixed categorical distinctions.

This study found that objects initially labelled 'mobile' in research data were just as active in the performance of presences inside the home. Presence is not 'switched on' when ashes creations leave domestic settings as ashes-tattoos or ashes-jewellery enable performances of presence when worn inside the home. In addition, presence is performed when ashes-jewellery is not being worn. Ashes-jewellery in this research is stored in intimate places, often apart from other jewellery, where it has the capacity to perform nearness and continuity. For example, Sue keeps her ashes-necklace besides the bed. Note how Sue refers to her ashes creation as "them" (13.9) as her ashes-necklace is experienced as her parents:

> *They are in a different room [than her other jewellery]. I like to see them,*
> *[her parents / ashes creation] you know? Where I am sleeping and that*
> *(Sue 13.9).*

In this quote, Sue's ashes creation could be categorised as a 'home' object kept on her bedside table, although previously in this section Sue (10.1) talked about how important mobility outside of the home is to her ashes creation practice. Even when it comes to

objects that have a fixed location inside the home, dualistic categories such as 'home' or 'mobile' prove to be permeable. For example, commissioners often gave accounts of feeling their loved one's presence through the anticipation of proximity when outside of the home. Queenie discusses how she felt Arthur's presence even when she was out in town doing her shopping because she knew *'Arthur'* was waiting for her when she got home. Performance of presence extends beyond the confines of the walls on which Queenie's ashes-painting hangs as the anticipation of proximity keeps Arthur's presence close. Furthermore, in ashes creations that include visual representations, concepts of 'home' and 'mobile' are transcended by the capacity of presence to perform in multiple locations. In this quote, Queenie is discussing how she feels when she looks over at her ashes-painting when she is sat in her living room:

> *It is really precious that I can look and he is still enjoying Scotland [getting upset and pausing]. Eeee, I am sorry, flower [to the researcher](Queenie 12.8).*

Fig. 10: Queenie's ashes-painting.

Not only is Arthur's presence inside the home via Queenie's ashes creation practice, he is also enjoying the Scottish landscapes they both grew to love during their many holidays together that is depicted in the ashes-painting. Other commissioners spoke of

this ability of ashes creations to transport their loved one to locations visually depicted whilst also performing their presence in the home or on the body. This was particularly important to Marie, who, as we explored in Chapter Three, felt that her ashes-painting located her Dad in the natural landscape with which their family felt such affinity as well as within her in the home. Vinnie spoke of the snowdrop depicted in one of his ashes-tattoos transporting his Nan to the house where she was evacuated as a child, where they grew on the bank of a river. It also evident in auditory experiences of presence, as the Ashes Vinyl Provider spoke of recordings of sea-shanties transporting a commissioner's mother to the seascapes of her childhood. These spatial and temporal transcendences of presence are enabled by ashes creations bespoke personalisations that depict locations of personal resonance. They illustrate that 'home' is where the heart is, be that a living room in the North East or the wilds of Scotland. Thus, distinctions between 'mobile' or 'home' collapse as ashes creations presences have the capacity to wander, echoing the notion of distributed personhood explored by Gell (1998) where materiality enacts agencies that distributes personhood across time and space.

Second bodies

Ashes creations create material objects or sites on the body[52] where fragments of human remains reside. As I have argued in this thesis, these objects and sites have the potential to convey the presence of an absence in networks with people, places, and other objects. Therefore, it could be argued that ashes creations provide what Hertz's (1960) refers to as a 'second body' for the deceased to encounter the world as second burial practices, and their associated material culture, offer a body for the deceased to reside in post-death. Following this argument, it could be claimed that ashes creations provide a second body for the deceased to attend family holidays, as was evident in Sue's account; a second body for the deceased to share a cup of tea with family members, as was evident in Johns account; a second body for the deceased to

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[52] In the case of ashes-tattoos.

accompany a loved one to work or to graduation ceremonies, as was evident in Ruth's account.

However, this conceptualisation of ashes creations is limited by the grounding of Hertz's (1960) second body thesis in dualisms prevalent at the time of Hertz's writing at the start of the twentieth century. Specifically, Hertz's (1960) notion of the second body draws from 'outside' and 'inside' dichotomies that characterise the body as an impermeable container of 'self', what Wagner describes as "a unit standing in relation to an aggregate" (Wagner 1991: 163 in Gell 1998 p140). This conceptualisation of the body fails to convey the mutual interpenetration of notions of 'self' with 'otherness' that this thesis has traced through ashes creation practice.

Narratives of kinship and relatedness, narratives of interchangeable subjects and objects, and narrative for personhood permeated by 'otherness' interweave throughout commissioners' and providers' accounts of ashes creation practices. These narratives defy attempts to portray ashes creations as either a contained 'self' or as impermeable objects as boundaries between, ashes creations, commissioners, and their deceased loves ones blur. What emerges is an understanding of ashes creations as having permeable conceptual boundaries, where the deceased's presence enmeshes with the 'otherness' of people, places, materials, and things. This enables 'self' to be constituted through heterogeneous 'others', including materials, people, and places. Consequently, we can cease locating 'self' inside the boundaries of the body or the confines of ashes creations and instead look at how ashes creation practices generate 'self' as complex interplays of the material and the immaterial and the living and the dead.

Transcending spatial and temporal distances

This thesis has argued that ashes creation practices enable the dead to return to commissioners' ongoing lives as active agents in the present. Therefore, it might be claimed that ashes creation practices are utilised as a strategy by commissioners to refute a loved one's absence by material locating their presence. In other words, ashes creations are a denial of the realities of the absences of death. This claim draws from

sequestration theory, which is based upon the proposition that acceptance of the all-pervading realties of death has become a taboo, hidden, or forbidden in modern society[53]. According to Giddens (1991), bereft of the collective security of traditional and religious values, the isolated individual of high modernity is adrift in their dealings with death, facing constant threats to their ontological security. Taking this perspective, ashes creations might be portrayed as idiosyncratic preservations of the post-death 'self'; thereby, saving commissioners from the ontological crisis created by the death of a close loved one. Arguing from this perspective, as ashes creations perform presence, they maintain the continuation of family life and therefore deny the realities of the absences created by death. Commissioners' and providers' accounts of their ashes creation practices were not supportive of this argument.

Notions of acceptance or denial, which are concepts central to sequestration theory, were not recurring narratives in commissioners' and providers' accounts of their ashes creation practices. As discussed in the previous section, recurrent in accounts of ashes creation practices are concepts of nearness to love ones and continuity of relationships, as Mitchell (2007) points out in her writings on remembrance practices: "To let the person go would be tantamount to losing a significant part of oneself" (Mitchell 2007 p16).

However, the desire for nearness and continuity does not necessarily constitute a denial of death. Commissioners can accept their loved ones' death, whilst still actively pursuing an ongoing relationship with them. As Howarth (2000) illustrates, the denial or acceptance of death is embedded in firm conceptual boundaries of separation with their inherent requirement for categorisation and division. The realities of peoples' practices associated with death, argues Howarth (2000), are much more fluid as people often reach towards ongoing relationships with the dead. Just as Francis et. al. (2001) discovered in their study of London Cemeteries, practices that continue bonds between the living and the dead are not necessarily evidence of the denial of the death of a loved one; rather, they are the active maintenance of post-death relationships.

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[53] For examples see Gorer (1955, 1965), Becker (1973), Aries (1974), Illich (1976), Aries (1981), Elias (1985), Giddens (1991), Mellor and Shilling (1993).

Given that dualistic concepts of acceptance or denial are reliant on symbolic boundaries of separation (Howarth 2000), narratives of acceptance or denial may not be best placed to contextualise ashes creation practices where boundary blurring go to the very heart of the practice. This thesis established and explored the ways in which ashes creations blur distinctions between 'subjects' and 'objects' or 'self' and 'others'. As the dead share intimate proximities with the living in the present, presence is performed in homes and on bodies. Therefore, ashes creation practices transcend boundaries that can temporally relegate the dead to the past and spatially relegate the dead to landscapes traditionally associated with death. Commissioners are not trying to deny their loved ones' death in their ashes creation practices. Rather, they are transcending the spatial and temporal distances that can exist between the living and the dead and this does not in itself constitute denial.

In this thesis I have explored how narratives of transcending spatial and temporal distances between the living and the dead in commissioners' and providers' accounts of their ashes creation practices are characterised by notions of deceased people returning to their loved ones. The (re)incorporation of dead loved ones into the lives of the living in new material forms, I have argued, constitutes a central aspect of ashes creation practices (Van Gennep 1960). Notions of loves one's returning through post-funeral practices with the material dead resonates with Hertz (1960) claim that practices with human remains, no matter their particularities, or the time, or the place that they are being practiced, are always concerned with resurrection and renewal: "Thus, at whatever stage of religious evolution we place ourselves, the notion of death is linked with that of resurrection, exclusion is always followed by a new integration" (Hertz 1960 p79).

Concepts of resurrection and renewal resonant with ashes creation practices concern with the reintegration of dead loved ones back into the ongoing lives of commissioners. This reintegration is not locating the deceased as memories of loved ones in the past, but as presences in the present, resurrected into their former life and renewed in a new material form. In this sense, ashes creation practices offer an after-life to the deceased. However, this is not a supernatural afterlife, located in another realm and requiring a prescribed set of beliefs, as was the case with the practices considered by Hertz (1960).

Rather, the afterlife offered by ashes creations is an everyday presence: it is *"Just George"* (Jill 18.3) back at home.

To summarise, presence in ashes creation practices is embedded in notions of personhood where identities, personality traits, values, inclinations, passions, friendships, and relational ties enmesh in relations with the living (Wagner 1991). Distinct from commissioners' supernatural experiences or beliefs, ashes creation presences are embedded in an everyday relatedness where performances of presence capture the familiarity of "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with loved ones, they are *"just George"* (Jill 18.3). These performances of presence are characterised by notions of nearness and continuity as they convey subjective immediacy between the bereaved and the deceased who share propinquity in time and space through ashes creation practices (Sørensen 2010). The material qualities of ashes creations and the places in which they reside play their roles in making the absent present as they facilitate frequent visual and tactile encounters with ashes creations. Although, ashes creation practices do not constitute a denial of the realities of a loved one's death or a containment of the deceased, they do enable commissioners to experience the returning of their loved ones to their daily lives, and therefore demonstrate the concern with resurrection and renewal that Hertz (1960) claims is evident in all practices with human remains.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I explored how ashes creation practices, that privilege *"for me"* (Barbara 14.4) decision making, are relational processes. In Chapter Four of this thesis, I illustrated the ways in which cremation ashes and ashes creations perform the qualities of 'unique' and 'precious', arguing that these narratives protect the personhood of the deceased throughout processes of making and exchanging ashes creations, ensuring *"...every piece is so different" (Jeweller 10.0).* In this chapter, I have explored how experiences of presence permeate commissioners' ongoing ashes creation practices as ashes creations and commissioners share homes and bodies, this has been traced in a number of ways.

First, I considered how commissioners explicitly distance ashes creations from the categorisation of traditional material culture associated with death, specifically from memorials. This distancing from memorials highlights how ashes creation practices are much more concerned with presences in the present than they are memorialising the past. It is not that ashes creations are unconcerned with the past, as relational bonds formed in the past inform every aspect of the practices; rather, ashes creation practices are not overly concerned with commemoration as the presence of the deceased is experienced in the present in the ongoing lives of commissioners.

Second, I moved on to consider how ashes creations traverse ontological distinctions between subjects and objects in commissioners' experiences of presence. As objects incorporating fragments of bodies, ashes creation are able to occupy both subject and object positions. This is revealed in the ways in which commissioners refer to their ashes creations: "so *I will just go and get <u>him</u> and put <u>it</u> on*" (Ruth 1.5). This intermingling of subject and object enmeshes ways of being and enables commissioners to experience a particular kind of presence where the deceased participates in the ongoing lives of the living both as loved ones and as beloved things.

Third, I further unpacked how presence is experienced in ashes creation practices by exploring notions of personhood and everyday presences. I examined how ashes creation presences draw from notions of fractal personhoods where the deceased and commissioners shared identities and kinships ties manifest (Wagner 1991). Distinct from commissioners' experiences of supernatural presences, the chapter explored how ashes creation presences are concerned with "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with loved ones' everyday presences. These performances capture intimate experiences of being with a loved one where the living and the dead are together again in their shared places: *'...it is just George'* (Jill *18.3)* back at home.

Fourth, I examined the importance of place and materiality in conveying continuity and nearness of presence in ashes creation practices. By materially presenting absence**,** ashes creation practices can be understood as encounters with praesentia performed in the entwined space between presence and absence (Hetherington 2003, Brown 1981). Such encounters continually reincorporate the deceased into the lives of the living and

therefore demonstrate what Hertz (1960) claims is the concern with resurrection and renewal that is evident in practices with human remains as experiences of presence facilitate the ongoing participation of the deceased in commissioners' lives. In these performances of presence, the material qualities of ashes creations and the places in which they reside give tangibility and visibility to the deceased as bonds continue between the living and the dead (Klass et al.1996). What emerges, across the materiality disparate practices of ashes creations, is a concern with continuity and nearness in performances of presence that convey subjective immediacy between the bereaved and the deceased (Sørensen 2010).

Conclusion

This study, to the researcher's knowledge, is the first British thesis to consider the incorporation of cremation ashes into objects and tattoos across diverse material practices. It has begun the academic process of exploring ashes creations collectively and locating these practices within a contemporary British context. This research has established that ashes creations share a number of common features in how they are experienced across materially diverse practices. In this conclusion, I will recap on some of the findings of the research, whilst highlighting the academic contribution of the thesis, and the potential for future research.

Relationality, Uniqueness, and Presence

This thesis explored how narratives of relationality, uniqueness, and presence as recurrent themes across all of forms of ashes creation practices throughout commissioners' and providers' accounts. Chapter Three started at the beginning of commissioners' and providers' ashes creation practices by exploring narratives of discovering and deciding. In this chapter, I made a case for the relationality of ashes creation practices, arguing that ashes creations are practices deeply embedded in commissioners' and the deceased's relationships with other people, things, and places. Chapter Four moved on to consider the next stage in commissioners' and providers' ashes creation practices, the making and exchanging of ashes creations. In this chapter, I argued that cremation ashes and ashes creations perform the qualities of 'unique' and 'precious', arguing that this is an important aspect of the maintenance of connections between the personhood of the deceased and their cremation ashes during the making and exchanging of ashes creations. In Chapter Five, I explored how ashes creations and commissioners live together as they share spatial domains following exchange. In this chapter, I explored how the deceased continues to participate in commissioners' lives in performances of presence in the present.

It is important to note that relationality, uniqueness, and presence are not stages that ashes creations move through as they are discovered, decided upon, made, exchanged,

and lived with. Rather, they are entwining concepts that run through all aspects of ashes creation practices. For example, in Chapter Three the uniqueness of each ashes creation was highlighted throughout commissioners' and providers' decision-making processes. This was often utilised to distinguish ashes creations from the uniformity of traditional material culture associated with a Victorian death aesthetic. In Chapter Four, I explored how the presence of the deceased affects providers' creative processes as they work with cremation ashes in ways that maintain connections between the personhood of the deceased and their cremation ashes. In Chapter Five, I explored the ways in which relationality is evident in the agencies enacted by people, places, and things in performances of presence as ashes creations are taken on family holidays, attended family weddings, or continued to participate in Christmas. Therefore, in this thesis I am arguing that concepts of relationality, uniqueness, and presence are recurrent and emphasised in accounts, and as such, they are significant in the experiences of people who directly participate in ashes creation practices.

When considered together, relationality, uniqueness, and presence speak of the importance of maintaining intimate bonds through ashes creation practices. Relationality is concerned with maintaining intimate relationships between commissioners and their loved ones. Uniqueness is concerned with maintaining the singularity of those relationships. Presence is concerned with continuing to experience these relationships in the present and into the future. Ashes creations are unique, that is to say they are experienced as being singular, because that is how commissioners experience their relationships with their loved ones. Queenie's ashes-painting is *'Arthur'*. However, it is Queenie's *'Arthur',* as her ashes creation practices maintains her intimacy with Arthur through notions of relationality, uniqueness, and presence. The spatial intimacy of this relational presence differentiates ashes creations from material practices associated with death that are enacted in public space, where practices are often interpreted and reinterpreted by people unknown to the deceased or the bereaved (Woodthorpe 2010, Santino 2006).

<u>Continuity and Change</u>

This study found that decisions to participate in ashes creation practices draw from narratives that tend to highlight commissioners' needs and desires expressed by concepts such as choice, taste, and ownership, which are epitomised in "for me" (Barbara 14.4) narratives in ashes creation decision-making. This differs from the approach commissioners took in their wider cremation ashes strategies with their loved ones' remains, which reflect Kellaher et al's. (2010) findings that decision-making in cremation ashes practices are complex interplays where bereaved people negotiate an appropriate compromise between a sense of duty towards the dead and other kin alongside their own needs and desires. By comparison, a sense of duty towards the deceased, or other family members, are mostly absent from commissioners' accounts of their ashes creation decision-making.

This study located ashes creations as one of a number of practices that people engage in with their loved ones' cremation ashes. In doing so, an appreciation was gained of the ways in which commissioners are able to satisfy kinship obligations by scattering or interning the majority of their loved ones' cremation ashes in line with more established practices, whilst privileging *"for me" (Barbara 14.4)* narratives in their ashes creation practices. This illustrates how decision-making across a range of practices that relate to a single death interconnect and therefore benefit from being considered in relation to each other (Kellaher et al. 2005).

In her study of contemporary graveside shrines, Thomas (2006) argues that evolving minority practices that sit outside of established material culture associated with death are in danger of being portrayed as revealing an all-encompassing change in our relationships with death. Such an approach, argues Thomas (2006), obscures the intermingling of continuity and change in the ways in which rites and practices associated with death have evolved across time. As we shall explore in this conclusion, ashes creations are illustrative of wider changes in rites and practices associated with death, such as shifts towards increasing subjectification. In addition, ashes creations can certainly be portrayed in the media as presenting new or unusual approaches to cremation ashes disposal that stands apart from established internment and scattering

practices, thus suggesting that our relationships with the material dead are shifting. For example, an article in a national newspaper carried a story about a woman having an ashes-tattoo that incorporates the cremation ashes of her son under the 'weird world' section of the site (Smith 2010), suggesting that her practice sits outside of the boundaries of 'normal' established practice. However, by locating ashes creations as one of a number of practices in which people participate in relation to a single death, this study acknowledges how evolving minority practices are best understood as part of an ever-shifting combination of continuity and change in practices associated with death.

This combination of continuity and change is evident across rites and practices associated with death. For example, in her qualitative study of contemporary memorial practices Bradbury (1999) illustrates continuity and change by drawing the reader's attention to how horse-drawn hearses now sit alongside the playing of Elvis songs at funerals. Nor can this intermingling of established and emerging practice be portrayed as simply a post-modern 'pick and mix' of rites and practices associated with deaths, as traditional modernist authorities come to increasingly challenge (Walter 1991) because combining continuity and change reaches much further back into our death practices. For example, Gore (2001) notes how from the late-ninetieth to the mid-twentieth century practices of keeping bodies at home before funerals or storing bodies at the Funeral Home often overlapped as compromises that combined continuity and change were reached. In this research, commissioners scatter, intern, and keep cremation ashes alongside their ashes creation practices. The materiality of cremation ashes, specifically their divisibility and mobility, affords the enactment of a number of practices with a single set of cremated remains and this enables commissions to combine continuity and change in their cremation ashes practices (Williams 2004 b).

Shifts in Authority

In finding that commissioners privilege their desires and preferences in ashes creation decision-making, whilst religious practice, the state, and the death sector, are noticeably absent from accounts. This research supports Walter's (1994) claim that there has been a proliferation of self-authenticated practices since the latter half of the twentieth

century as the influence of more established authorities decline. This shift, claims Walter (1994), is a movement away from authorities of state sanctioned practices or religious and funerary traditions and towards the increasing influential authorities of bereaved families and deceased people. This is apparent in ashes creation practices, which, as this study has established, draws authority as valid practices primarily from bereaved individuals choosing to participate in them. However, although clearly reflecting a shift in authrotity, it is important to avoid characterising ashes creations as symptomatic of Giddens' (1991) notion of the self-referential individual, that Caswell (2011) refers to as the: "…autonomous, reflexive creature who must create and recreate his or her own identity in an ongoing process from which there is no respite" (Caswell 2011 p248).

Far from being a solo-project, this thesis established that self-authentication in ashes creation practices are relational processes, full of connectivity to other people, places, and things. First, commissioners' decision to commission ashes creations may privilege their own wants and desires, but they are, nevertheless, embedded in relationality. Ashes creation choices do not take place in isolation from others, as spouses, children, siblings, and close friends are all part of the decision-making process. This finding is borne out by Caswell (2011), who explores how personalised and self-authenticated practices at Scottish funerals are actually deeply embedded in relationships with peers and kin. Likewise, relationality in ashes creation practices captures the networks of social connectivity in which commissioners are located. It makes explicit how these connections shape and inform commissioners' ashes creation practices and, in so doing, it widens our understanding of personalised practices associated with death beyond narratives of individualisation.

Second, relationality in ashes creation decision-making is also illustrated by the ways in which commissioners discovered and decided to participate in their practices. This study established the importance of the media and online stories as well as social and personal networks in creating and distributing stories about ashes creation practices that inform commissioners' decision-making. Commissioner's ashes creation practices become a possibility because other bereaved people are also engaging in them, which offers validity to commissioners' choices. As Walter (1994) notes, when it comes to practices associated with death: "Doing it yourself is therefore possible, but only in company"

(Walter 1994 p189). Therefore, this thesis supports Walter (1994) claim that stories of other people practices, distributed by technologies and relational networks, are ever more influential in how we remember the dead and the practices they are subject to (Walter 1994). This study of ashes creation practices demonstrates that self-authenticated practices can be embedded in our relational selves, both in terms of our relationships with kin as well as our connectivity to other people's practices.

Regulation and Homogenisation

Commissioners and providers distinguish ashes creations from traditional material culture associated with death. For example, both commissioners and providers stress that their ashes creations are not *"morbid"* (Jill 12.0) or *"macabre"* (Ken 1.1) like traditional urns. This is reflective of the general trend in British mortuary practices, away from the uniformity of the Victorian death aesthetic and towards the purchase of personalised mortuary products (Co-operative Funeral Care 2009). This shift away from traditional material culture associated with death is accompanied by a movement towards increasing subjectification.

Subjectification, characterised by a longing that embraces closeness, mental intimacy, and attention on the relational self, is arguably one of the main cultural tendencies in contemporary Western society (Ziehe 1989 and 1993). One of the ways that ashes creations demonstrate subjectification is through their material personalisation. For example, the engraving *'Here's looking at you kid' (Jennifer 2.9)* on Jennifer's ashes-necklace is concerned with subjective moments in Peter's and Jennifer's relationship where they "participate in a micro-history of small-scale sets of relationships" (Davies 2002 p32). This subjective turn towards material personalisation is evident in an ever-increasing number of practices associated with death, which have become reflective of relational identities (Tarlow 1999). As Wojtkowiak and Venbruxa (2009) found in their exploration of contemporary home memorials, personalised practices are: "…a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic)" (Wojtkowiak and Venbruxa 2009 p2).

The turn towards subjectification is a driver of innovation as an ever-increasing array of material culture and ritual practices associated with death are developed and enacted to capture the subjectivity immediacy of personal intimate relationships (Akesson 1997, Davies 2002). Entrepreneurs have embraced this turn towards subjectification by developing what Bradbury (2001) refers to as: "creative and highly idiosyncratic" (Bradbury 2001 p221) products and services. The ashes creation providers in this research are such entrepreneurs. Because ashes creation providers in this research come predominately from creative backgrounds and have developed ashes creations in relation to mortality experiences that affected their lives, these entrepreneurs currently operate in ways that distinguish their practices from the established death sector, since: *"…it was personal, it was not business" (Potter 1.*2).

Ashes creations are unregulated and emerging practices. They currently operate as a collection of practices that share a number of common features, without the unification of a collective identity. This creates flexibility for providers who are free to develop their own practices in terms of how they work; the relationships they have with commissioners and how they financially operate. A collective identity can bring protection and recognition, but can also bring regulation and homogenisation. This is evident in the development of Funeral Directors. As the profession developed from unregulated part-time workers, often the local carpenters, into a professional service with a shared identity, it became increasing regulated and homogenised (Gore 2001).

There is currently no indication if anything approaching a collective identity will emerge across ashes creation practices as providers strongly identify with their own creative practices. However, if ashes creations become more established in British practice and move further towards the established death sector, then it is likely that personal paths into practices and the ways in which providers operate will change as they become subject to the death sector's collective controls of regulation and homogenisation.

There is evidence of this process of regulation and homogenisation starting to emerge in other practices that demonstrate subjectification as they become increasingly established. For example, Prendergast et al. (2006) note how scattering cremation ashes at sites of personal resonance is likely to take on more formality over time as bereaved-

led scattering practices become increasingly regulated by the state or landowners and commercialised by the death sector. We can see these processes starting to emerge as landowners, from football clubs (Scattering Ashes 2009) to the Scottish Mountain Authority (B.B.C. 2006 a) seek to regulate and control the scattering of cremation ashes. In addition, the established death sector homogenises scattering practices by continually expanding its offer of mass produced 'personalised' scattering products (for example see Regal Rest 2015). As these controls become more formalised, Prendergast et al. (2006) argue, ashes scattering will become increasingly homogenised in rites and practices. Similarly, if ashes creations become further established in British practice, we may expect to see these practices become subject to regulation by the state and homogenised by the death sector.

Agency and the Material Dead

In this thesis I explored how the deceased are rarely intentional actors in ashes creation decision-making, as their stated or constructed approval is ether absent or inconstantly invoked: *"I know he will be looking at us, thinking, 'You daft buggers!" (Christine 20.9).* This distinguishes ashes creations from other cremation ashes practices in which commissioners engage with their loved ones remains, where the deceased's approval was a recurrent theme. This is in keeping with the prevalence of *"for me" (Barbara 14.4)* narratives in ashes creation practices, where, having satisfied kinship obligations with the reminder of their loved ones' cremation ashes, commissioners are free to privilege themselves in their ashes creation practices. If ashes creations become more established in British practices, this is likely to change over time as awareness increases and more people indicate their interest in ashes creation practices before their death.

In this thesis I conceptualised agency as an effect, as an outcome of practice, and as such agency is no longer the preserve of intentional agents, but is generated by networks of people, things, materials, and ideas (Gell 1998, Latour 2005). Utilising this conceptualisation of agency has enabled the acknowledgment and exploration of the material dead's capacity to shape the nuances of the practices they are subject to (Harper 2010). For example, in Chapter Three I explored the ways in which

commissioners' accounts brought cremation ashes into view as generators of agencies that influence decision-making processes. In Chapter Four, I explored how the inclusion of the material dead effects the making of ashes creations, generating obligations for providers to make temporal and embodied investments above and beyond those that they invest in their non-ashes practices. This led to explorations of how cremation ashes act as creative and as precious materials, generating obligations for providers to create and maintain connections between the singularity of each ashes creation, the personhood of the deceased, and their material remains, thereby ensuring: "*...every piece is so different..." (Jeweller 10.0).* In Chapter Five, I explored how the inclusion of cremation ashes in ashes creations gives tangibility and visibility to the deceased's presence, enabling performances of presence where the deceased is an active agent in commissioners' ongoing lives.

Therefore, the findings of this thesis contribute to death studies literature that views the material dead, be they corpses or cremation ashes, as powerful generators of agencies effecting the practices that they are subject to (Williams 2004 b, 2011, Harper 2010, Fernandz 2011, Young 2013). It illustrates how agencies generated by the presence of cremation ashes can be distributed into other things, places, and materials through transition processes, such as the mixing of cremation ashes with other matter. It demonstrates how the material dead generate obligations, effect creative outcomes, and manifest presences in ashes creation practices. From this perspective, the material dead are much more than conduits for the agencies of the living, as they manifest heterogeneous agencies that effect practice. These agencies are constituted not only through memories or bodies that have previously acted, but also in the present as they continue to influence action (Harper 2010, Williams 2011). The next section of this conclusion emphasises the importance of understanding the material dead as powerful generators of agencies in ashes creation practices by exploring in more depth the ways in which the deceased are active agents in commissioners' ongoing lives through experiences of presence.

Presences in the Present

This research discovered that experiencing the presence of the deceased in the ongoing lives of commissioners is a recurrent theme in accounts of ashes creations practices. Moreover, there are strong parallels in the way in which commissioners experience presences across materially diverse ashes creation practice. Distinct from supernatural manifestations, ashes creation presences are much more concerned with "being in touch" (Runia 2006 p5) with the everyday presence of a loved one in the present. Being embedded in relatedness, presence in ashes creation practices draws from notions of fractal and distributed personhoods, where the deceased and commissioners share identities and kinships ties entwine as personhood is generated in networks capable of being distributed across time and space (Gell 1998, Wagner 1991). The relational presences of ashes creation practices convey subjective immediacy between the bereaved and the deceased as they share propinquity in time and space (Sørensen 2010). This enables performances of presence that reincorporate the deceased into the lives of the living (Connor 1995, Hockey, et al. 2007). As presence is performed and re-performed, continuity and nearness are constantly enacted. Thus ashes creations enable the living and the dead to continue bonds in the present as the deceased returns to intimate shared places of homes and bodies in new material forms.

The homes and bodies where ashes creations reside are not the emotionally heightened spaces of reflective commemorative landscapes, such as those containing memorial benches (Maddrell 2009) or publicly located spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006). Because ashes creations are not primarily concerned with providing a space for reflection of relationships that are bound to the past, commissioners do not tend to use ashes creations as conduits of remembrance, as one might associate with reflective commemorative practices. Commissioners' experiences of their ashes creation practices are pre-reflective in this respect, as we experience being with a loved one in the present.

In this thesis, I have explored how agencies generated by the material dead are central to the manifestations of presence in ashes creation practices. I considered how the material qualities afforded by cremation ashes, specific there capacity to flow into other material forms, combines with their capacity to generate personhood in networks with

other people, places, and things (Gell 1998, Wagner 1991, Latour 2005). As cremation ashes are mixed with other matter, conceptual and physical distinctions between materials blur. As creative materials and fragments of bodies irreversibly combine, ashes creations emerge from this process able to act as both people and things, subjects and objects: "*'Oh I forgot Tom', so I will just go and get <u>him</u> and put <u>it</u> on"* (Ruth 1.5). This aspect of ashes creations distinguishes the practice from traditional urns or cremation jewellery that Kwint et al. (1999) refer to as a 'containment' of the deceased, as commissioners simultaneously relate to their ashes creation as loved ones and beloved things.

Continuing Bonds

Performances of presence in ashes creation practices are concerned with maintaining the immediacy of relationships as bonds continue between the living and the dead. Therefore, this research contributes to the thesis that it is not unusual, or indeed undesirable, for bonds to continue between the living and the dead (Klass et al. 1996). In the case of ashes creations, the continuation of bonds is realised in the performance of presence conveyed through continuity and nearness. With the exception of ashes tattoos, these performances of presence are materially realised and as such enable the continuation of bonds through encounters with praesentia, that is to say, they enable material encounters with the presence of an absence (Brown 1981, Hetherington 2003). Presence and absence reach beyond mere binary spatial terms in ashes creation practices and are better conceptualised as what Billie et al. (2010) refers to as "a continuous and ambiguous spectrum" (Billie et al. 2010 p10) of presence and absence as these concepts intersect and merge to convey the continuation of bonds in material practices.

The continuing bonds thesis has become increasingly influential in academia over the past few decades. However, as explored in the literature review, Howarth (2000) argues that this is indicative of a shift in academic gaze as much as it represents any real shift in how we relate to the dead. The continuation of bonds between the living and the dead is not a new phenomenon, Howarth (2000) reminds us, because the boundary

between the living and the dead has a history of demonstrating permeability. This is especially the case in our intimate personal relationships, where we have long since engaged in practices that continue bonds and proximities with dead loved ones (Howarth 2000).

Indeed, experiencing the presence of the deceased and the continuation of bonds when in close proximity to the bodily remains of loved ones is a well-documented phenomenon in a wide range of mortuary practices. Studies have found experiences of presence and the continuation of bonds to be important aspects of practices where bodily remains are located in landscapes of cemeteries, graveyards, and Gardens of Remembrance[54]. In addition, presence and the continuation of bonds have been documented in practices where remains are scattered, kept or buried in landscapes of personal mnemonic resonance, such as football grounds, local parks, natural landscapes, or homes and gardens[55]. Therefore, ashes creations are located as part of a continuum of practices where "…the relationship between the living and the dead plays out in the physical location of the deceased's remains" (Woodthorpe 2010 p127).

Although part of a general continuum of practices where bonds continue between the living and the dead, this thesis established that the continuation of bonds in ashes creation practices has certain specific recurrent characteristics. Ashes creation practices transform cremation ashes in ways that differ from more established ashes practices with the material dead, particularly in regards to the material form ashes creations take and the ways in which ashes creations perform as subjects and objects. Ashes creations enable particular performances of presence, characterised by narrative of nearness and continuity, in which presence is experienced as both everyday and special as the intimate ties of kinship commissioners shared with the deceased. It is the proximity and intimacy of these relationships that commissioners' experience in presences and absences in ashes creation practices. For example, ashes-jewellery that touches the skin replicates previously shared physical intimacy, or decorating an ashes-painting at Christmas as the deceased continues to participate in festivities.

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[54] for examples see Bradbury (1999), Francis et al. (2001), Thomas (2006), Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008), Woodthorpe (2010).

[55] For examples see Kellaher, Hockey et al. (2010), Walter and Gittings (2010), Williams (2011).

As discussed in the literature review, Kellaher et al.'s (2005) study of cremation ashes practices demonstrates an explicit preference for 'mundane' ashes strategies, such as storing cremation ashes domestically or scattering cremation ashes at sites of emotional resonance. Such strategies, argue Kellaher et al. (2010), reveal more about everyday life or life course transitions than 'exotica', such as ashes creations.

> While the media often flag the exotica of ash disposal – being smoked by a rock star, fired into space, made into a diamond, incorporated into a painting or a piece of sculpture - we frequently found mundane destinations for ashes that were anthropologically more revealing since they carried associations with lives previously lived – whether everyday life or key life course transitions such as weddings (Kellaher et al. 2010 p134).

However, this thesis has established that ashes creation practices are not 'exotic' in how they are experienced by people directly participating in these practices. Throughout the findings of this thesis, people who engage in ashes creation practices have demonstrated the same concern with familiar everyday relatedness as the cremation ashes practices considered by Kellaher et al. (2010). Presence in ashes creation practices is primarily concerned with everyday life or key life course transitions as it is performed in everyday spaces of homes and bodies or at special family events, such as weddings, or holidays. The materiality of paintings or teapots might be considered an 'exotic' place for cremation ashes to reside, which generates media stories, but the performance of presence in ashes creation practices is embedded in intimate relationality.

This study has demonstrated the importance of purposefully examining practices from the perspective of people who directly participate in them; taking our understanding of ashes creation practices beyond the gaze of the media to dispel myths of exotica and reveal connectivity and continuation. By exploring the experiences of people who are directly engaging in ashes creation practice, this thesis illustrates that ashes creation practices may differ in their material expression, but they share the same concern of maintaining connectivity with the dead through spatial and material practices as participants' in Kellaher et al.'s (2010) study. Indeed, Thomas (2006), notes how emerging material practices associated with death may differ from more established practices in patterns of consumption, but they continue to "frequently and clearly communicate an old and necessary human longing" (Thomas 2006 p39).

<u>Future areas of Research</u>

Exploring ashes creations from the perspective of people who participate in these practices has proven to be an interesting, rewarding, and academically revealing area of study. However, this thesis has only began this process of investigating ashes creation practices and this section outlines a number of noteworthy future areas of study.

First, this study is concerned with exploring the 'how' of ashes creation practices. Specifically it explores how ashes creations are experienced by people who directly participate in the practices. If subsequent studies focus upon exploring the 'why' of ashes creation practices by taking a different epistemological and academic approach than this research, such as psychological approaches to grief management, they will reveal different dimensions to the practices.

Second, a significant number of participants in this research highlighted their personal experiences with the media in relation to their ashes creation practices. These are accounts of negative and positive experiences and include: having stories reported in the media, having interviews with the media, reading stories, and being approached by the media. These accounts not been explored in this thesis in detail for a number of reasons. For example, these comments sometimes occurred outside of the research interview and in situations where elaboration was not always appropriate. In addition, on a number of occasions, I was asked to keep these details outside of the study for personal reasons. When considered collectively, these experiences suggest that studies that focus on exploring commissions' experiences of the media maybe an interesting area of ashes creation research, with particular regards to investigating how the media constructs narratives of ashes creations and how these stories are experienced by people directly participating in those practices. This includes exploring in more detail how media and online stories as well as social and personal networks communicate, influence, represent, and misrepresent emerging practices such as ashes creations.

Third, this thesis explored the ways in which experiences of ashes creations have a tendency to overlap across materially diverse practices. However, there are some

notable differences in ashes creation practices that would benefit from future exploratory study. For example, Bernard Junior's ashes mosaic was the only ashes creation in this research to be displayed in a public location depicting a known local figure, Bernard Senior. As a consequence, Bernard Junior's ashes mosaic demonstrated a number of differences explored in this research when compared to ashes creations designed for homes and bodies, which indicates that 'place' has significant effects on ashes creation practices. In addition, each ashes creation practices would also benefit from being considered in the context of their wider industry or practice. For example, a study locating ashes-tattoos within tattooing culture or locating ashes-painting within the study of art would bring new perspectives to these practices. This research would further develop our understating of ashes creations by developing an appreciation of how practices interconnect and the ways in which they differ.

Fourth, understandings of ashes creation practices would be aided by cross-cultural explorations of contemporary practices that incorporate cremation ashes into material culture. Research areas of particular interest include:

- Identifying countries where bereaved people participate in ashes creation practices and ascertaining key characteristics for their development.
- The identification and comparison of practices outside of the context of Westernised countries.
- The migration of ashes creation practices across countries. For example, this research identified a strong link between an American television show[56] and the appearance of ashes-tattoos into British practices.

This research would locate ashes creation practices within wider global contexts, developing understandings of the ways in which similar practices develop in different cultural contexts.

Fifth, the relationality of ashes creation practices would benefit from further research within kinship networks by interviewing several different families members. Particular areas of interest that have emerged from this study include:

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[56] 'Miami Ink', a U.S.A based documentary style show about a tattoo parlour.

- How different family members experience ashes creations and how these experiences change over the life course of the family.
- The experiences of family members where more than one member has an ashes creation incorporating the same individual's cremation ashes.
- How commissioners decide upon and communicate their inheritance plans for their ashes creations within kinship networks.

Sixth, an area of data that there was not the opportunity to explore in-depth in this thesis is concerned with the ways in which commissioners disclose their ashes creation practices to people outside of their immediate kinship networks. Ashes creations sit outside of traditional material culture associated with death; therefore, the incorporation of cremation ashes is not always apparent. Consequently, commissioners continually face decisions regarding disclosure. Commissioners in this research varied in their attitude towards disclosure, with some commissioners inviting disclosure on one end of the spectrum and other commissioners never disclosing at the other end of the spectrum. Although commissioners mentioned this aspect of their ashes creation practice, it was not an area of particular concern to them, hence why disclosure was not prioritised in this thesis. However, whenever disclosure was mentioned, the data generated was potentially revealing of wider social attitude towards ashes creations. Therefore, future research should include considerations of when, how, and why commissioners do and do not disclose their ashes creation practices and how they interpret and categorise these encounters.

Finally, if ashes creation practices continue to develop in British practice, they could potentially offer an interesting study of how entrepreneurial and emerging practices associated with death become regulated and homogenised as they become part of the mainstream offer. As noted in the Research Design chapter of this thesis, two participants were involved in legal disputes regarding ashes creation patents. However, other providers gave accounts that were remarkably unconcerned by any notion of commercial competition. Therefore, future studies examining how competition manifests between providers may potentially be revealing of the ways in which entrepreneurial practices associated with death emerge into commercial markets. Future research that locates ashes creation practice within the broader Death Sector

could establish how ashes creations are being offered alongside other goods and services, contributing to understandings of broader changes in practices associated with death. This will include consideration such as:

- Will the death sector increasingly commercialise and homogenise ashes creation choices as they become part of the mainstream offer or will they become even more diverse and bespoke in their material expression?

- Will ashes creations business increase in size and rationalise production?

- Will the storing and use of cremation ashes by ashes creation providers become subject to regulation?

- Will ashes creation providers develop mechanisms of professionalisation in their boundaries with bereaved people that are reflective of those that have been evidenced in the established death sector (Howarth 1992)?

- Will personal mortality experiences continue to be influential in providers' movements towards ashes creation practices or will more formalised pathways into practices develop as ashes creation shifts from an entrepreneurial to a mainstream practice?

- Will ashes-tattooing become subject to specific licencing and procedural regulation in line with the development of other body modifications?

Because ashes creations are kept in the intimate places of homes and bodies, the ways in which regulation and homogenisation are enacted will differ from practices that take place in publically accessible locations. For example practices such as, the scattering of cremation ashes in landscapes (Hockey et al. 2005), the creation of memorial benches (Maddrell 2009), the maintenance of spontaneous shrines (Santino 2006), and the leaving of objects on graves (Meyer and Woodthorpe 2008), are all in publically accessible spaces where notions of 'ownership' and 'appropriateness' differ from those of homes and bodies. Therefore, future research with ashes creations will provide an interesting comparison to other material and spatial practices associated with death.

Finial Thoughts

The aim of this study was:

To critically analyse the commissioning, production, and the lived experience of the incorporation of human cremation ashes into objects and tattoos in contemporary British practice.

To achieve this aim, I have focused upon exploring the 'how' of ashes creation practices with people who commission and people who provide ashes creations. Specifically this thesis has explored: how ashes creations are discovered, how they are decided upon, how they are commissioned, how they are made, how they are exchanged, and how they are lived with. By privileging the exploration of 'how', I have attempted to foreground participants' experiences and avoid obscuring these experiences behind reductionist theories that reach for causal explanations as to 'why' ashes creations have emerged in British practices. Exploring the 'how' of ashes creation practices has enabled the reaching beyond media headlines generated by minority practices associated with death to locate ashes creations as they are experienced in peoples' ongoing lives. Although diverse in their materiality and expression, I have established in this thesis that ashes creations do share some common features in how they are experienced by people who are directly participating in these practices.

First, ashes creations are practices that privilege commissioners' desires to maintain spatial proximities with their loved ones' cremation ashes. Consequently, ashes creation practices are less concerned with satisfying obligations towards deceased people and other kin than more established practices with the material dead. However, if we locate ashes creation as part of commissioners' wider ashes strategies, it becomes evident that people are able to satisfy obligations towards others whilst engaging in ashes creation practices. This brings into view how the materiality of cremation ashes enables the combination of continuity and change in practices with the material dead.

Second, ashes creations perform as subjects and objects as they are experienced as loved ones and beloved things. This ontological blurring of categories is made possible by the mixing of cremation ashes with other matter in ashes creation practices. As cremation ashes irreversibly intermingle with other matter during the making of ashes creations distinctions between materials are transcended. Ashes creations emerge as *'Arthur'* and 'painting' or *'Dad'* and 'teapot' simultaneously and without contradiction for those that engage in the practice.

Third, ashes creations are relational practices characterised by connectivity to people, places, and things. For example, decisions to commission ashes creations draw from stories about other people's ashes creation practices distributed by the media and personal networks. However, relationality is most clearly demonstrated in experiences of presence in ashes creation practices, which are concerned with performances of everyday presences. Specifically, ashes creation practices reaffirm intimate relatedness between commissioners and their deceased loved ones in the present by conveying subjective immediacy via concepts of nearness and continuity. In commissioners' experiences of presence in ashes creation practices, the deceased continues to participate in family life as relational bonds continue between the living and the dead. Consequently, as presence is performed in homes and on bodies, commissioners' evoke notions of loved ones returning through their ashes creations practices.

Appendix

<u>Appendix One - Letter of Invite to Provider Participants</u>

(letterhead – MMU)

Dear (insert name)

My name is Samantha McCormick and I am a researcher undertaking a PhD study at Manchester Metropolitan University. The study is investigating the ways in which we memorialise our loved ones in contemporary British society; specifically, it is examining the practice of incorporating cremation ashes into specially created objects or body modifications.

My study aims to understand the experiences of people who choose this form of memorialisation as well as the experiences of people who create, sell, or source ashes-memorials. I understand that you have professional experience of this form of memorialisation and I am sending you this letter to ask you to consider participating in the study. Participation would involve two different aspects:

1. An interview with you, or a member of your company, about experiences of working with this form of memorialisation. This would take the form of a conversation concerned with understanding your perspective. It would not involve sharing commercially sensitive information about people who have used your service.

2. I am also asking you to consider contacting people on my behalf who have chosen this form of memorialisation, so that they may be invited to participate in the study. This involves contacting people to enquire if they consent to receiving a letter inviting participation in the study.

Understandably, the privacy of the people who use your service and the reputation of your business are of the highest importance to you. I can assure you that information shared in the course of this study would be treated with the utmost sensitivity and confidentiality, with care taken to protect identities and commercially sensitive information.

I appreciate that participation in the study is something you will need to give careful consideration. I shall contact you in the next few weeks to establish if you are interested in participating in the study and to answer any questions you may have. If you are not interested

in participating in the study, you do not need to take any action, please just indicate this when you are contacted.

Enclosed you will find an information sheet giving more details about the study. In the meantime, if there is anything you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Samantha McCormick
PhD Researcher Manchester Metropolitan University
Tel: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

<u>Appendix Two - Information Sheet for Provider Participants</u>

What is the purpose of the research?

The interview you have been invited to participate in forms part of a PhD study into the experiences of families whose loved ones' cremation ashes have been irreversibly incorporated into specially created memorials. The study is also interested in the experiences of the professionals who sell, create and source the memorials. The study aims to contribute to current knowledge about the ways in which we memorialise in contemporary British society.

Who has approved the study?

This study has been approved by Manchester Metropolitan University. If you consent to participation all contact will be with the PhD Researcher (Samantha McCormick).

What does it involve?

Participation would involve two different aspects. If you consent to participation, you are under no obligation to participate in both aspects:

1. The study would involve an informal one-off interview, to be held at a time and a location of your convenience, regarding your experience of this form of memorialisation.
2. You would be asked to consider contacting customers who have used your service and have experience of this type of memorialisation, to request their consent to receive a letter inviting them to participate in the study. If they do not respond to the letter, no further contact would be made. You would only be asked to contact a small number of people that you deem suitable to participate.

What type of questions will be asked?

This research is attempting to understand *your* experience from *your* perspective; therefore, flexible and sensitive questions would be centred on this. You can talk about what you feel you want to share and focus on the aspects of the experience which matter most to you; there is no right or wrong answer. You can decline to respond to questions at any point in the interview.

What will happen to the experiences you share at the interview?

With your permission, the interview would be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in the transcript. The recording would be drafted into an interview transcript, which can be supplied you. If there is any part of the interview that you feel unsure or concerned about, this can be discussed. Once the transcripts have been completed, the recording will be destroyed. The full transcript of your interview will not be available to anyone other than the Researcher, although quotes (anonymised if you prefer) may appear in the final thesis.

How will my identity be protected?

You can choose to be identified by your real name or you can choose to be known by another name which will be used to refer to you in the study. However, as I am sure you will be aware, sometimes people and businesses can be identified by other details; for example, you may be the only person who provides a particular service. At the interview, Samantha will spend time discussing with you which details you may want to change to protect your identity in the study and which details you feel are important to keep. You would have the opportunity to agree the transcript of your interview, so sensitive information can be changed to protect your identity if required.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The transcript of your interview, along with the transcripts of other interviews, will be analysed by Samantha and included in the development of a PhD study. Once completed, the thesis will be publicly available. It may also be used to develop articles and presentations for academic publication. The research may generate interest from outside the academic community, for example the media or funeral industry. Every participant in the study will be offered a copy of the findings.

How will you look after my information?

Confidentiality relates to our duty to respect your privacy and personal information. The information you share at your interview is confidential and will not be shared inappropriately with other parties under any circumstance. Additional security measures include:

- All physical information (such as recordings and copies of transcripts) will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet to which only Samantha has access.
- Names, addresses and contact details will be kept separately from your interview transcript.

- All contact details will be kept on a secure data base separate from other research information.

- All electronic data will be kept on equipment to which only Samantha has access.

- The equipment will be kept at a secure location; it will not be networked to other computers or transported across locations.

- All systems will be protected by passwords, up-to-date virus protection and encryption software where appropriate.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the research is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw your involvement in the research at any time, as long as this is before the thesis is submitted to the University. After this time amendments to the thesis will not be possible, although you can still have your information removed from subsequent academic publications.

What do I need to think about?

Consider if you would like to participate in the study. Consider whether you are happy for interviews to be recorded and if you have the time for the interview. The interview may take several hours of your time, it may take less, but this is an informal interview so please allow for this flexibility. If you are interested in participating in the research, a time and place can be arranged at your convenience.

What next?

Samantha will contact you in the coming weeks to establish whether you are interested in further discussing the study and to answer any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact Samantha at any time to discuss any concerns or questions you may have or to indicate whether you would like to participate.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Samantha McCormick
PhD Researcher Manchester Metropolitan University
Tel: XXXXXXXXXX
Email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

(letterhead – MMU)

Dear *(insert name)*,

My name is Samantha McCormick and I am a researcher currently undertaking a PhD study at Manchester Metropolitan University. The study is concerning the experiences of bereaved people who have chosen to remember their loved ones by incorporating their cremation ashes into a specially created object or body modification. The study aims to contribute to current knowledge about the ways in which we have come to memorialise in contemporary British society. I am in contact with *(name of professional person and company)* who informs me that you have personal experience of this kind of memorial and that you have agreed for this letter to be sent.

I am sending you this letter to ask you to consider participating in the study. Participating in the study would involve a one-off interview about your experiences. The interview is an informal conversation concerned with understanding your perspective. It would be held at a time and location of your choosing. Should you choose to participate in the study, I can assure you that the experiences you share will be treated with the utmost sensitivity.

I have enclosed an information sheet containing more details about the study for your consideration. If you are interested in find out more about participating, there is no need to commit at this stage; please contact me using one of the methods outlined at the end of this letter and I will be in touch to further discuss the study and answer any questions you may have.

If you are not interested in participating in the study, you do not need to take any action to indicate this. I will not contact you again and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time.

If you would like more information about participating in the study, please note that you must indicate that this is the case by contacting the researcher; if you do not contact the researcher you will not be contacted in the future.

You can indicate your interest in the following ways:

1. You can return the reply slip attached using the self-addressed envelope provided.

2. You can email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

3. You can call: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

I have enclosed information about bereavement support available from (Name charity). Bereavement support information has been included with every letter sent to invite people to participate in the study. I understand it will not be relevant to everyone and its inclusion is certainly not meant to offend or be presumptuous.

I understand that bereavement is very sensitive and deeply personal. I hope that this letter is not an intrusion. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

Samantha McCormick
PhD Researcher Manchester Metropolitan University
Tel: XXXXXXXX
Email: XXXXXXXXX

<u>Appendix Four - Participant Information Sheet for Commissioner Participants</u>

What is the purpose of the research?

The interview you have been invited to participate in forms part of a PhD study into the experiences of people whose loved ones' cremation ashes have been incorporated into specially created objects and tattoos; this might be a piece of jewellery, a vase or a wide range of other objects. The study aims to contribute to current knowledge about the ways in which we memorialise in contemporary British society.

Who has approved the study?

This study has been approved by Manchester Metropolitan University. If you consent to participate in the study all contact will be with the researcher (Samantha McCormick).

What does it involve?

The study involves a one-off interview to talk about your experiences of this form of memorialisation. The researcher would arrange to visit you at a time and a location of your convenience.

What type of questions would I be asked?

The interview will be informal with flexible questions about different aspects of your loved one's memorial. This study is attempting to understand *your* experience from *your* perspective; therefore, sensitive questions would be centred on this. You can talk about what you feel you would like to share and focus on the aspects of the experience which matter most to you; there is no right or wrong answer. You can decline to respond to questions at any point in the interview.

What will happen to the experiences I share at the interview?

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. This helps to ensure accuracy in the transcript. The recording would be drafted into an interview transcript, which can be supplied to you. If there is any part of the transcript that you feel unsure or concerned about, this can be discussed. Once the transcripts have been completed, the recording will be destroyed. The full transcript of your interview will not be available to anyone other than Samantha, although quotes (anonymised if you prefer) may appear in the final thesis.

How will my identity be protected?

You can choose to use your real name in the study or you can choose to be known by another name which will be used to refer to you in the study. However, you should be aware that sometimes people can be identified in research from other details. At the interview, I will spend time discussing with you what details you may want to change to protect your identity and which details you feel are important to keep. You will have the opportunity to agree the transcript of your interview, so sensitive information can be changed to protect your identity.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The transcript of your interview, along with the transcripts of other interviews, will be analysed by the researcher (Samantha McCormick) and included in the development of a PhD study. The thesis resulting from this study will be publicly available. It may also be used to develop articles and presentations for academic publication. The study may generate interest from outside the academic community, for example the media or funeral industry. Every participant in the study will be offered a copy of the findings.

How will you look after my information?

Confidentiality relates to our duty to respect your privacy and personal information. The information you share at your interview is confidential and will not be shared inappropriately with other parties under any circumstance. Additional security measures include:

- All physical information (such as recordings and copies of transcripts) will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet to which only Samantha has access.
- Names, addresses and contact details will be kept separately from your interview transcript.
- Contact details will be kept on a secure data base which will be separate from all other research information.
- Electronic data will be kept on equipment to which only Samantha has access.
- The equipment will be kept at a secure location; it will not be networked to other computers or transported across locations.
- All systems will be protected by passwords, up-to-date virus protection and encryption software.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw your involvement in the study at any time, as long as this is before the thesis is submitted to the University. After this time amendments to the thesis will not be possible; however, you can still have your information removed from subsequent academic publications.

What do I need to think about?

Consider if you would like to participate in the study. Though many people find it beneficial to talk through bereavement experiences, some people may find it more upsetting than they anticipated. You may experience unexpected or intense feelings. You should consider this before you decide to participate. Please consider whether you are happy for interviews to be recorded and if you have the time for the interview. The interview could take several hours; this is an informal interview so please allow for some flexibility. The interview will be conducted at a time and place of your convenience. Interviews can be conducted on a one-to-one basis, or, if you prefer, a relative or friend can be present, please just indicate this when making meeting arrangements.

What next?

If you **do not** wish to participate in the study, you do not need to do anything. You will not be contacted again by the researcher.

If you are interested in participating in the study and would like to discuss it further, please contact the researcher to indicate this. If you do not contact the researcher you will not be contacted further. Please use the enclosed reply slip, call or email using the contact details given below.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part.

Sam McCormick

PhD Researcher Manchester Metropolitan University
Tel: xxxxxxxxx   Email: XXX

Appendix Five - Informed Consent Sheet

Name of Researchers: Sam McCormick.

Name of study: Cremation Ashes Memorialisation

1.   I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (insert date) for the above study.

2.   I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

3.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up to the submission of the thesis.

4.   I have been informed that the interview will be audio recorded and I give my consent for this recording to be made.

5.   I understand that information I provide will be treated as confidential and maybe anonymised.

6.   I understand that I have a right to wave anonymisation should I choose to do so.

7.   I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my interview in publications and presentations arising from this study.

8.   I understand that this research may generate interest from outside of the academic community, for example: in the media or funeral industry.

9.   I understand that in signing this form I am consenting to participate in the above study.

If you have any questions or require clarification on any issue please do not hesitate to contact Sam McCormick. Please read information above carefully before signing the form. If you are willing to participate in the study outlined above please sign below.

Signature: _____

Print name: _____

Date: _____

<u>Appendix Six – Risk Assessment</u>

This assessment does not include an analysis of the risks to the institution (Manchester Metropolitan University) because it is felt that, in the case of this research, institutional risks are implicit in the detailed risks to the researcher and participants. Unethical and unsafe research is a significant risk to the University; therefore, every attempt has been made to identify and counter such risks and promote best practice. The research, as with any demanding activity, increases exposure to risks of everyday life and social interaction, such as infectious illness, stress or accidents; these are potentially limitless and are not outlined on the risk assessment. The risk assessment focuses on risk relevant once research has commenced and makes the presumption that the choice of methods are appropriate and methodology is sound, having completed a comprehensive Research Outline that has been agreed by Manchester Metropolitan University and passed the relevant ethical requirements.

Risk	Who might be harmed and how	Action taken to reduce risk	Monitoring
Recruitment of unsuitable participants; e.g.: vulnerable people at greater risk from emotional harm	Participants – risk of emotional harm resulting from participation. Researcher – potential emotional or physical risks working with unsuitable participants and professional risks of conducting unethical research.	Recruitment via death work providers who have had previous contact with participants. A staged approach to recruitment of participants to assess suitability based on exploring the following: 1. Is the person able to express motivations for wanting to participate in the research? 2. Are they clear about the limits of the research and express realistic expectations? 3. Does the person demonstrate that they understand and can respond to informed consent? 4. Is there evidence of significant distress that may have negatively affected their capacity to make a decision on informed consent?	Ongoing monitoring on a case-by-case basis by the researcher with support from supervisory team.

		See Research Outline for further exploration of assessing suitability to participate.	
Risk to personal safety when travelling in the course of conducting research.	Researcher – increased exposure to physical and emotional risks of travel. Participant - exposure to physical and emotional risks of travel should research be conducted outside of the home.	1. Always carry a fully charged mobile phone with relevant telephone numbers. 2. Always inform a family member of travel details and contact family member to confirm interview has been completed safely. 3. Make alternative travel plans for each journey so that they are available should they be required. 4. Abide by relevant safety procedures for chosen method of travel. 5. Always carry details of journey, including a map of the interview location and participants contact details. 6. Clarify how to access the interview site. 7. Clarify any travel arrangements required for participants and ensure they are compliant with the points above.	Review of travel undertaken as part of field notes process after returning from each journey and relevant action taken if issues are identified.
Risks of participating in research that includes in-depth discussions of bereavement.	Participant – emotional risk of unexpected or intense feelings of grief, resulting in harm to emotional well-being. Researcher – emotional risk of unexpected or intense feelings, resulting in harm to	Participants: 1. Create a relationship in which participants can openly express emotionality and share concerns about their emotional state arising from the research. 2. In the process of ongoing informed consent, discuss the potential of emotional responses to the research. 3. Discuss emotional support available to participants outside of the research context. 4. Give relevant bereavement support information to everyone approached to participate in the research.	Journal kept reflecting on emotional impact on participants and on researcher - enabling the researcher to identify when additional support maybe required.

	emotional well-being.	5. Researcher has professional experience supporting people suffering mental distress, including bereavement. Researcher 1. Regular de-briefing sessions with research supervision team. 2. The researcher will have access to counselling support services at Manchester Metropolitan University if required.	
Failing to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.	Participants – being identified in the research or subsequent publicity and publications in such a manner that emotional or physical harm is suffered. Researcher - professional and emotional risks of failing to protect participants anonymity and confidentiality.	1. Anonymisation in the research negotiated with each participant as part of the ongoing informed consent process. 2. Anonymisation guidelines have been developed by the researcher (see Research Outline). 3. Make it clear to participants that there may be extreme circumstances where breaching confidentiality is reasonable, if, for example, someone is at risk from physical or emotional harm.	Ongoing monitoring on a case-by-case basis by the researcher with support from supervisory team.
Risk of data loss e.g.: Stolen equipment, unsecured data, computer virus	Participants – emotional risk from loss of anonymity and confidentiality and physical risk from the loss of identifying data	Take measure to reduce risk of data loss, including: 1. The use of passwords, encryption software and other security measures on computer and data storage systems.	Monthly checks on data security as part of data management system.

	Researcher – professional and ethical risk in breeching Data Protection Act and M.M.U's data policy	2. An up-to-date virus-scanning program installed on computer systems. 3. The use of locking manual filing systems. 4. Participants identifying details kept separately from data using a coding system that is securely kept.	

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