

DesignXDeathXCulture Moth Exhibition

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Project overview

Moth were Co_Organisers of Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference September 2024. | As part of that conference Moth exhibited an archive of projects from 2014 to 2025 [Moth Monograph], alongside an exhibition for Symbols of Death: [The Emotionalisation of Graphic Symbols]. and a range of designed products and discursive artefacts.

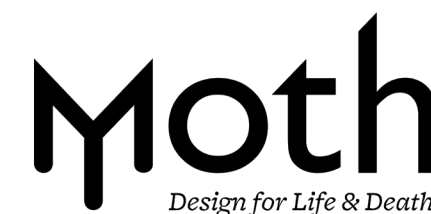
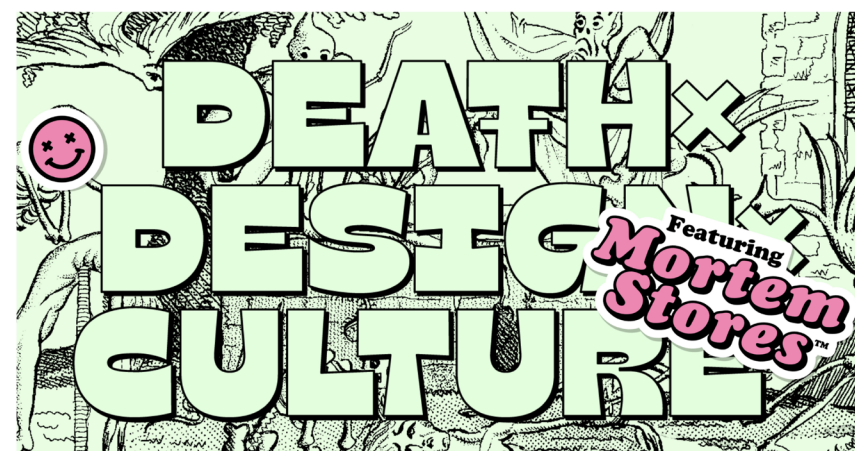
Subject Area: Communication Design

Description: This practice-led research project investigates the role of graphic design at the intersections of death studies (thanatology) and graphic design.

Partnerships and Funding: The project was conducted in collaboration with Dr Robyn Cook SL at Falmouth University, in partnership with the Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan (USA), the Glasgow End of Life Studies Group, University of Glasgow (UK), and Death and Culture Network, University of York (UK).

Research Outputs:

1. Symbols of Death.
2. Moth Monograph: Projects 2014/24
3. An Extra Place at the table: Artifact / Product
4. The Keeps Sake | Lets Lift them Up | Forget-Me-Not
5. Tactile Memory Objects



Question

How can Graphic Design help us to navigate how we approach, death, dying and grief. To communicate empathy and loss in our social relationships. Giving us courage to see death as being something we can learn from rather than fear. To not only change the way we die but can also help us to think about how we want to live.

The body of work covers a range of projects over 13 years: [pedagogic, discursive, speculative, collaborative]...

The conference aim was to provide a discursive space for 'traditional' as well as practice-based and practice-led research to critically reflect on the role of design as it relates to death, dying, and disposal at individual, community, and broader

cultural levels, and to suggest radical alternatives for the future. With a focus on interdisciplinarity, the conference aimed to support knowledge exchange between researchers within the social sciences, the humanities, and design. Design is positioned as an expanded field inviting contributions from subject areas including, but not limited to: graphic design; multidisciplinary design; architecture; digital design; fashion design; and product design. A multi-modal approach to expand the conventions of a conference format, incorporating experience design; exhibitions and pedagogic interventions; university-industry knowledge transfer; and opportunities for traditional academic papers. [See Appendix A. for press and media coverage / impact]

Aims and objectives

Research aims:

1. To Examine contemporary attitudes and anxieties to death, dying and belief systems, through the lens of design communication.
2. To focus on the importance of ideas as triggers of creativity, as devices for narrative and as loci for opportunities of chance and transition in the context of loss, bereavement and death symbolism.
3. Examine normal conventions as well as future-thinking how mourning, in (a largely secular) society can be made more visual (grief aesthetics).

Research objectives:

1. To catalogue and create an archive of research projects. That have challenged traditional/conventions associated with the visual landscape of death dying and bereavement.
3. To disseminate and share practice-based research with colleagues to build networks.
4. To create discursive designed artifacts and products to provoke discourse and discussion Death during and afterlife.
5. To create systems of evolved graphic visual language to help navigate grief and sadness and to communicate empathy and loss in our social relationships.

Research design

Research methodology:

Moth employs a multi-method research approach, incorporating visual and material culture, phenomenology, semiotics, and applied research.

Research method[s]:

Semiotic analysis, Iterative testing, interviews, ethnographic research and audience feedback.

Output 1: Symbols of Death: [The Emotionalisation of Graphic Symbols]



Image above Exhibition photographs from MOTH exhibition: Symbols of Death @ Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference September 2024.



Image above Exhibition photographs from MOTH exhibition: Symbols of Death @ Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference September 2024.

An Industry and International student Project. This project aimed to create a collective digital vocabulary of pictorial signs to articulate and communicate the nuances of death, dying and grief. Utilising the emotionalisation of graphic symbols to express our inner world of feelings to the outside world. To re-imagine how we talk about death, dying and grief in the digital realm. The project produced a diverse range of submissions which communicated both personal grief as well as collective solidarity and empathy in our social-cultural relationships.

The work consisted of 100 symbols submitted by design students and designers/industry from all over the world. To create a repository of both analogue and digital emoticons.

Lexicons and systems of pictorial signs represent *democratisation of knowledge through [cultural] participation*. Overcoming linguistic barriers and reflecting divergent socio-cultural influences which are constantly being re-negotiated. Helping us to navigate space and each other. Functioning or engaging as universal forms of communication [rejecting or reinforcing stereotypes?]. Or as personal expressions and poetic forms of visual language.

To re-imagine how we talk about death, dying and grief in the digital realm

Output 2: Moth Design for Life & Death: Monograph:

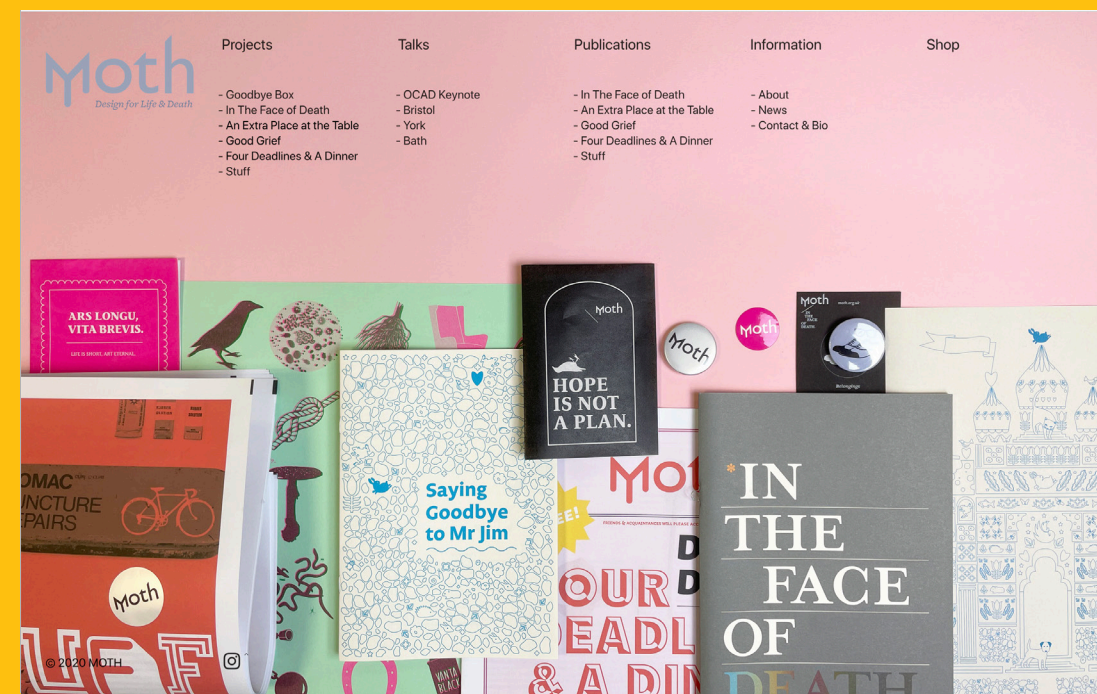


Image above Moth Website. Please visit for archive of all projects. moth.org.uk

Image right Moth Archive publication. Sample spreads.

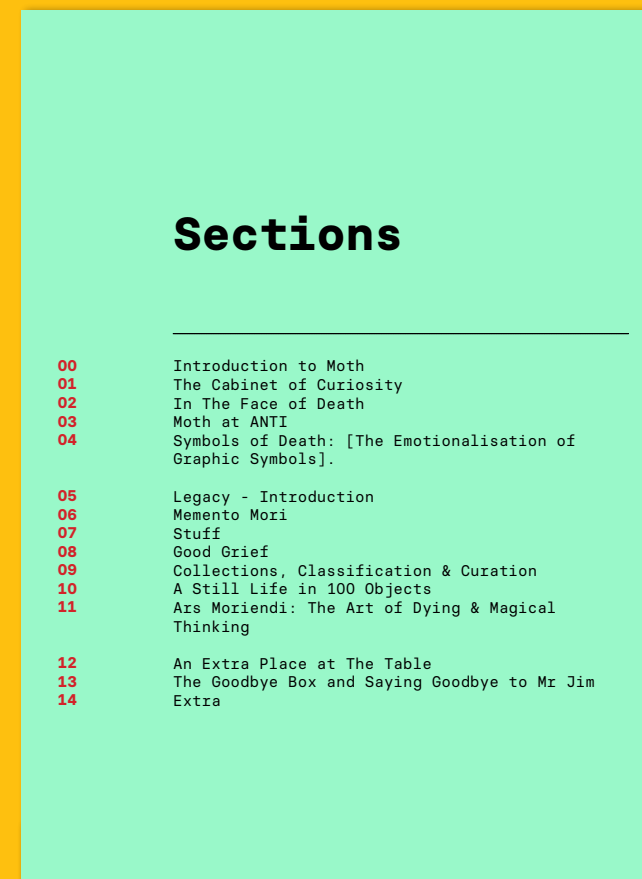
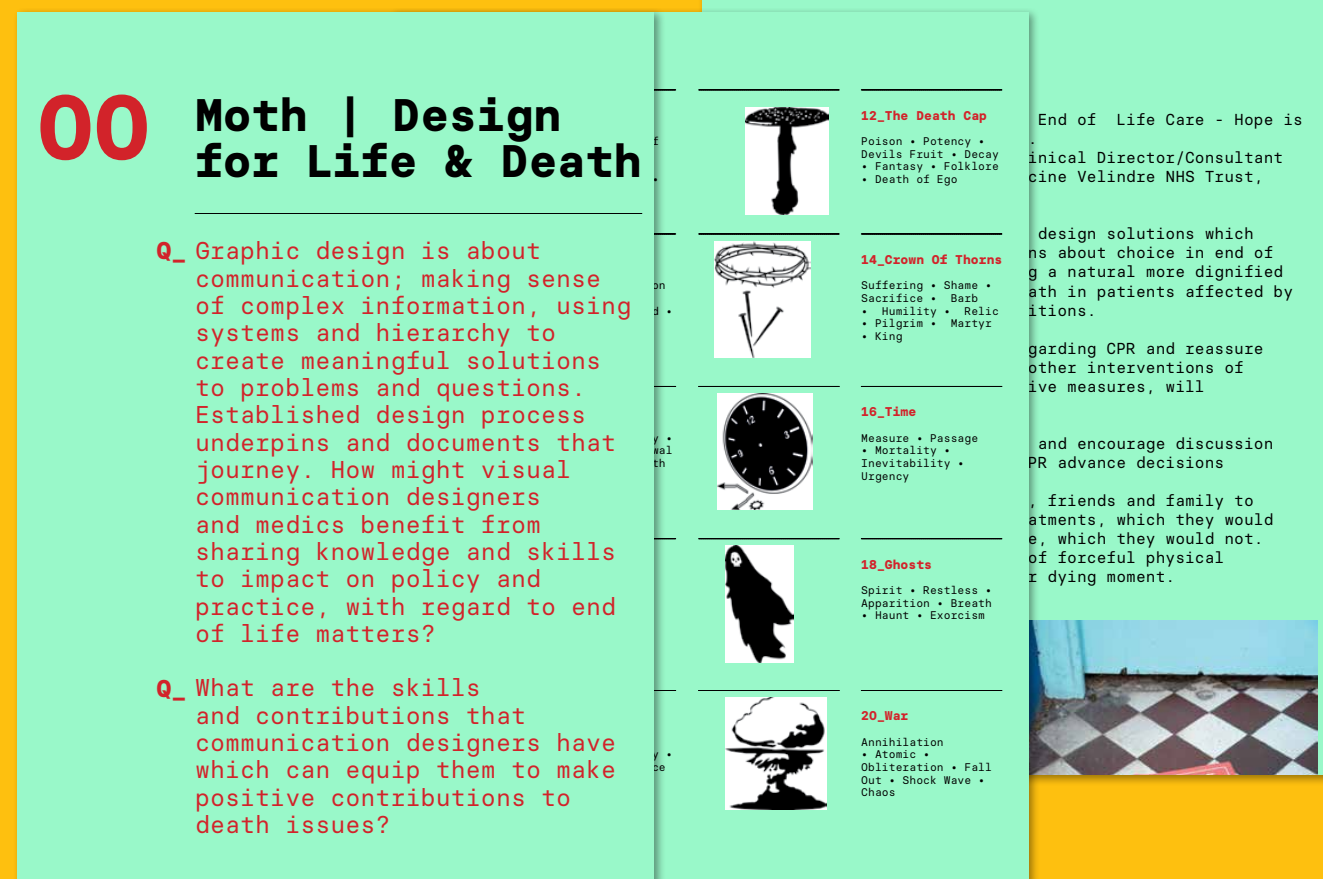


Image above Exhibition photographs from Moth Monograph: Moth Design for Life & Death: archive of work highlighting selected projects over a 12 year period. Exhibition: @ Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference September 2024.



Over the past 12 years Moth has grown a multidisciplinary practice engaging in both speculative academic research projects, as well as applied design solutions. It examines both formal conventions as well as future-thinking how death, dying and grief, in (a largely secular) society can be made more visual (grief aesthetics). Investigating how we can confidently express 'negative' emotions in both the digital and analogue realm, creating evolved graphic visual language to help navigate grief and sadness and to communicate empathy and loss in our social relationships.

Output 3: An Extra Place At The Table: Place setting. Discursive Designed Aid to support the grieving process and navigate loss.

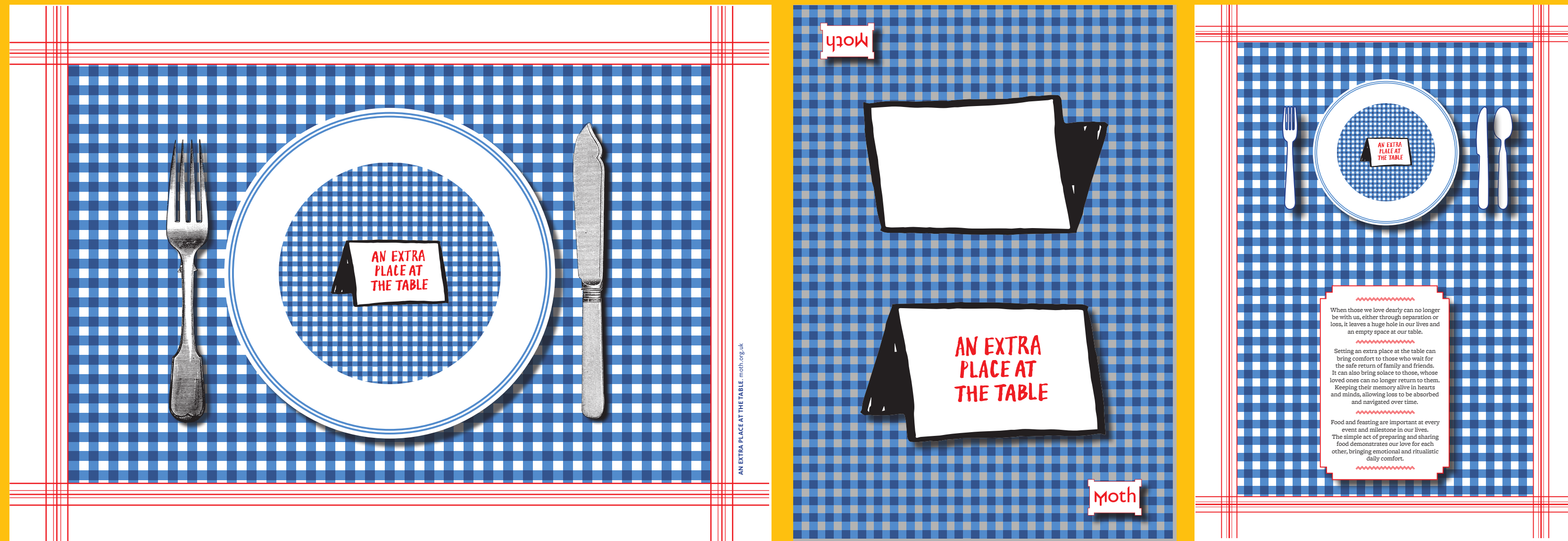


Image above An Extra Place at The Table. Table setting / product.
Print, paper

When those we love dearly can no longer be with us, either through separation or loss, it leaves a huge hole in our lives and an empty space at our table. Setting an extra place at the table can bring comfort to those who wait for the safe return of family and friends. It can also bring solace to those, whose loved ones can no longer return to them - keeping memory alive in hearts and minds and allowing loss to be absorbed and navigated over time. Food and feasting are important at every event and milestone in our lives. The simple act of preparing and sharing food demonstrates our love for each other, bringing emotional and ritualistic daily comfort.

Output 4: For Keeps Sake | Lets raise them up | Forget me not



Image above FOR KEEPS SAKE: THE MEMORY BOX. Product design label.



Image above LETS RAISE THEM UP. MOTH Plinth. Material memory project. Artefact.. Design label.



Image above FORGET ME NOT. Paper wreath. Memento mori. Artefact..

1. **FOR KEEPS SAKE:** THE LOVE BOX • THE TREASURE BOX • THE SAFE BOX • THE STUFF BOX • THE SECRETS BOX • THE HEIRLOOM BOX • THE RELIQUARY BOX • THE MUSEUM BOX • THE STORY BOX • THE LETTER BOX • THE DEATH BOX • THE TIME MACHINE BOX • THE MEMORY BOX. Product
2. **LETS RAISE THEM UP.** MOTH Plinth. Material memory project. Artefact.
3. **FORGET ME NOT.** Paper Wreath. Memento Mori Artefact: Remembrance.Hellebore, chrysanthemum, blossom: Artefact.

Tharp, Bruce M., and Stephanie M. Tharp. Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative, and Alternative Things. Design Thinking, Design Theory. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018

Output 4: Tactile Memory Objects.



Death + Craft & Material Practices. Tactile Memory Objects.

An experimental sculptural series that investigates the intersections between the human form, the natural landscape and the everyday objects that shape our lives.

Develop grief-support tools/objects which aim to honour presence, connection, and memory, making mourning an interactive, tangible, and deeply personal experience.

Investigate how objects, materials, and making practices influence human experiences of loss, remembrance, and emotional connection. Analyse the symbolic, emotional, and cultural significance of crafted artefacts in rituals surrounding death. Interpret grief as an ongoing dialogue between the living and the deceased, facilitated through objects, materials, and crafted experiences.

Image above Death + Craft & Material Practices. Tactile Memory Objects

Research context

The work is practice-based and practice-led research to critically reflect on the role of design as it relates to death, dying and mourning [on both the individual, community, and broader cultural levels]. With a focus on semiotics, object ontology and material culture Design is positioned as both discursive and speculative. A multi-modal approach to expand knowledge and understanding in an interdisciplinary way with: medics, philosophers, curators, artists writers, designers, historians, industry partners, vets and charities...

Thanatology, the scientific study of death, and its intersection with discursive design theory, grief aesthetics, and semiotics, to explore how cultural narratives and symbolic representations influence our understanding of mortality and the grieving

process. Thanatology focuses on the psychological, social, and cultural implications of death, studying its impact on individuals and societies.

Death studies, investigates how death is conceptualized across different cultures, emphasizing rituals, taboos, and the representation of death in media and literature.

Discursive design proposes a socially minded practice which provokes self-reflection engendering reflection and transforming thought and action and influence public discourse about grief and mortality. [Tharp].

Communication shapes meaning through visual, linguistic, and material artifacts. It explores how design mediates human experiences, offering a lens to analyse death narratives and Introducing

opportunities to discuss grief [the emotional response to loss], and mourning [the way in which loss is expressed].

Grief aesthetics refers to the study of the sensory and emotional expressions of grief, exploring how visual and auditory cues elicit emotional responses and create spaces for mourning for examining how people navigate the complex emotions associated with loss.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, as cultural codes embedded in death-related discourse to help decode how societies attribute meaning to mortality and loss. Both in material culture and social practices.

Research context

1. Symbols

Graphic design, words, imagery and communication

Design of symbolic and visual communications.

2. Artifacts

Material Culture. Designed/discursive objects, artifacts, product prototypes,

Design of material objects.

3. Experience

Design, events, audience interaction & participation.

Design of activities and organised events.
[Pedagogic | External audience]

4. Critical design practice.

Cultural systems/values/environments for living, working, playing and learning.

Adapted from, Buchanan's four orders of design (Buchanan, 2001), and re-appropriating:

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Appendix:

Links and articles

Falmouth University

<https://www.falmouth.ac.uk/research/centre-heritage-culture-society/moth>

Its Nice That: Article

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/features/death-and-design-creative-industry-301024>

The Death Studies Podcast Interview

<https://thedeathstudiespodcast.com/deathxdesignxculture-conference-episode/>

moth.org.uk