



An Extra Place At The Table.

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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 a Project entitled *An Extra Place At The Table*
Subject Area: Communication Design

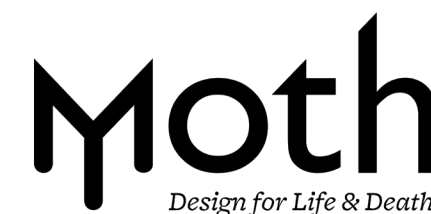
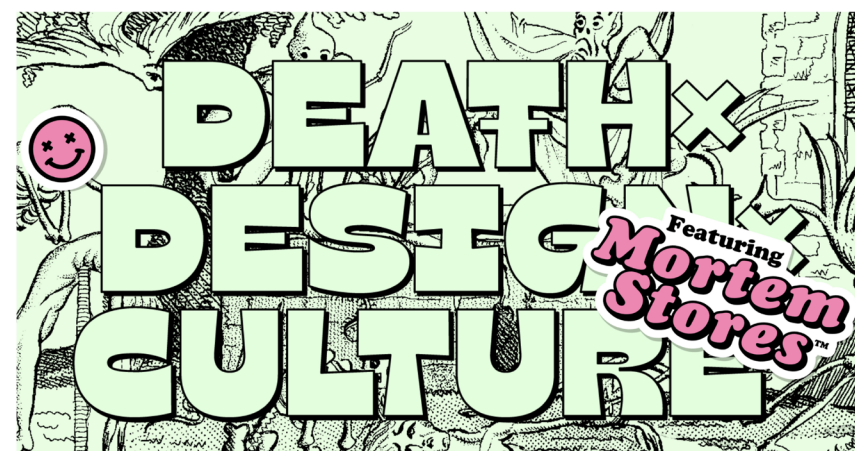
Description: This practice-led research project investigates the role of graphic design at the intersections of death studies (thanatology) and graphic design.

An Extra Place at the Table: Reclaiming the table as a physical and metaphorical place to break bread and boundaries with regard to our relationship with dying, death and grief. The project explores the funeral feast as commemoration, celebration, and communion, at the intersections of death studies (thanatology) and graphic design.

Personalised rites of passage can be reconciled with the collective needs of the bereaved, connecting the living and the dead through bereavement rituals and memorialisation. death.

The project has four outputs:

1. *An Extra Place at the Table: A choreographed dinner party [An Extra Place At The Table–Event/Experience Design]*
2. *An Extra Place at the Table. A 12-course menu of speculative questions, to encourage conversations regarding fears, hopes and attitudes to death. [Publication]*
3. *An Extra Place At The Table; Place setting. [Discursive Design Product].*
4. *A Symbols of Death. Table cloth. [Discursive Design Artifact]*



Question

How can we reclaim the table as a physical and metaphorical place to break bread and boundaries with regard to our relationship with dying, death and grief?

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.

How can setting an extra place at the table can bring comfort to those who wait for the safe return of family and friends. Bringing solace to those, whose loved ones can no longer return to them. Keeping their memory alive in hearts and minds, allowing loss to be absorbed and navigated over time.

Exploring how 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.

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. Examine formal conventions as well as future-thinking; how mourning, in (a largely secular) society can be made more visual (grief aesthetics).
3. Investigate bereavement rituals and memorialisation practices and how these might be adapted into domestic daily practice.
4. To reconcile individualised and personalised rites of passage with the collective needs of those left behind.

Research objectives:

1. To create discursive designed artifacts and products to provoke discourse and discussion about death, dying and afterlife.
3. To facilitate events how to approach arranging a special dinner with friends and family to share fears, hopes and attitudes to death
4. Creating platforms to discuss grief [the emotional response to loss], and mourning [the way in which loss is expressed].
5. Reduce healthcare consumption: From a healthcare perspective, studies suggest that advance care planning (ACP) results in improved quality of life and reduced healthcare consumption.

6. Improve post-bereavement adjustment. Bereavement research shows that planning for the end of life while people are well and able to consider and express their wishes is associated with better post-bereavement adjustment for those left behind.

Research design

Research methodology:

Moth employs a multi-method research approach, incorporating visual and material culture, phenomenology, semiotics, and applied research, using iterative testing and audience feedback. It is predicated on the idea that confidently expressing 'negative' emotions helps us navigate grief and sadness and communicate empathy and loss.

Research method[s]:

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

Output 1: An Extra Place At The Table. Dinner Event



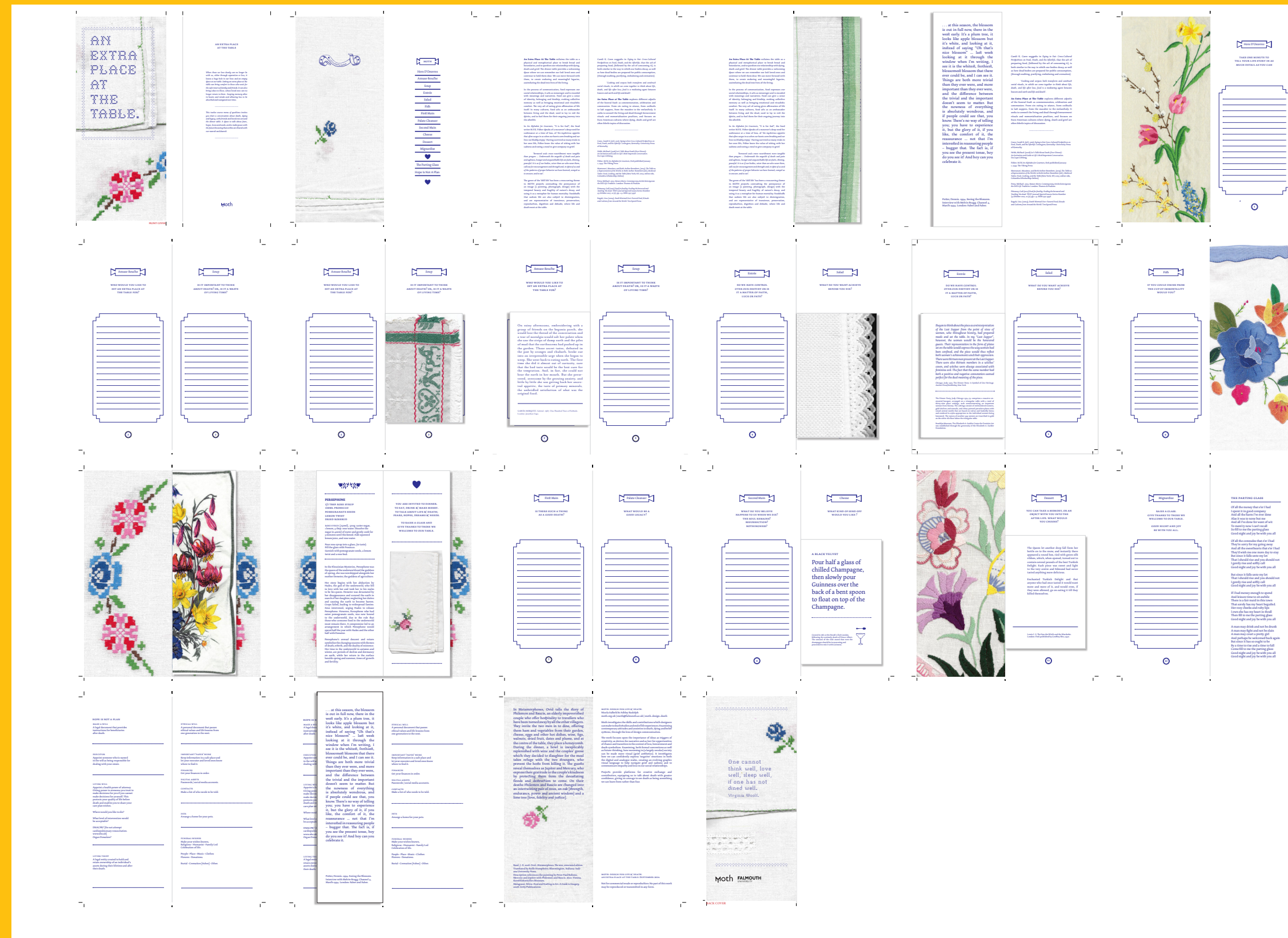
An Extra Place At The Table dinner event took place as part of the Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference at Falmouth University September 2024.

20 guests attended a formal dinner at the Greenbank Hotel in Falmouth, hosted and choreographed by MOTH. The table graphics were designed to provoke and stimulative conversation about fears, hopes and attitudes to death, dying and life after death. Supported by a publication - a 12-course menu of speculative questions, as well as a curated Death playlist, and a performance of *The Parting Glass* to end the evening.

Image above *An Extra Place At The Table*. Greenbank Hotel. Sept 24. Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference Dinner Event September 2024. Publication in situ.

Image above *An Extra Place At The Table*. Greenbank Hotel. Sept 24. Death x Design x Culture: Radical Re-imaginings For The End Of Life: Conference Dinner Event September 2024. Death Playlist / placemat

Output 2: An Extra Place At The Table: Publication



An Extra Place At The Table is 12-course menu [book] which invites conversation about dying, death and afterlife. It facilitates how to approach arranging a special dinner with friends and family to share fears, hopes and attitudes to death. It questions how we might reconcile individualised and personalised rites of passage with the collective needs of those left behind, seeking to connect the living and dead through bereavement rituals and memorialisation practices. Introducing opportunities to discuss grief [the emotional response to loss], and mourning [the way in which loss is expressed]. The introduction puts into context why it is important and helpful to discuss death provision. Throughout the book, a series of questions are served up with each 'course' with space to capture thoughts. The questions prompt collective discussion, as well as opportunity to reflect on personal perspectives and practical individual death provision. This is not a religious book, but rather a re-framing of contemporary rituals [functional & symbolic].

The 12 courses/question pages are interrupted with tip-ins to punctuate the journey through the book with death related recipes, literature [fiction/nonfiction], historical insights, songs... exploring aspects of the funeral feast as commemoration, celebration and communion. A visual aesthetic of table linen, for the text to sit upon creates a warm, domestic, visual vocabulary. The book ends with series of questions regarding practical provision for death, dying and disposal. As well as a dinner planning bookmark.

Image above left An Extra Place At The Table Publication Cover detail.
Image right An Extra Place At The Table Publication Spreads.

Output 3: An Extra Place At The Table: Place Setting

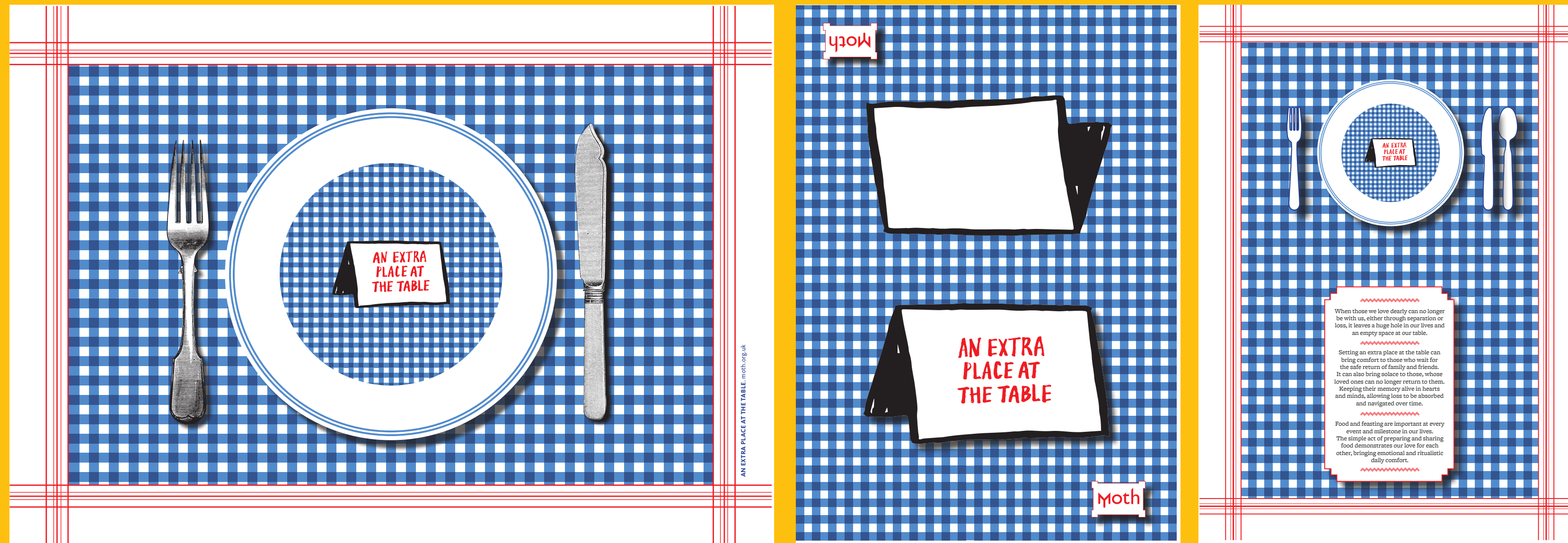


Image above An Extra Place at The Table. Table setting / product.
Print, paper

Place setting / Discursive Designed Aid to support the grieving process and navigate loss. 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: *A Symbols of Death Table cloth. [Discursive Design Artefact]*



A discursive aid: This hand-embroidered tablecloth, with china blue thread used to stitch symbols of death onto the cloth, each stitch representing the quiet conversations the table is designed to host. A patchwork of images capturing cinematic, fragmented moments from the dinner party where guests encounter discursive prompts at place settings. These question the macro; the collective vastness of the universality of death, alongside the micro; the intimate uniqueness of a single life; that is lived and lost. A place to learn from others, engage with personal values, and to develop a [more] death-positive attitude, for when the inevitable event that we plan for least, comes to visit us.

Image above *The symbols of Death Table Cloth. Detail*

Image above *The symbols of Death Table Cloth. Detail*

Image above *The symbols of Death Table Cloth. Detail*

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. Object-based, feminist, and historical analyses.

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.

Needlework as a transformative process to express political ideas, forge professional relationships, and document identities.

Womens Histories, created through the ephemeral moment of making: 'Needlework can carry their autobiographies and testimonies, registering their origin and fate. Using patterns as syntax, symbols and motifs as its vocabulary, the arrangement of both as its grammar, sewing is a graphic way to add information and meaning. But is not a monologue, it is part of a conversation, a dialogue, a correspondence only

fully realised once it is seen and its messages are read'
[HUNTER]

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:

• Tibbles, A., and Nickpour, F. (2022) Design meets death: A first systematic mapping review of design contributions to end of life field, in Lockton, D., Lenzi, S., Hekkert, P., Oak, A., Sádaba, J., Lloyd, P. (eds.), DRS2022: Bilbao, 25 June - 3 July, Bilbao, Spain. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2022.617>

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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