

# MATERIAL LEGACIES: IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE LOST





Type of output:  
Collection of  
Creative and  
Critical Work  
DOUBLE WEIGHTED

by  
Stacey Pitsillides

Cover:  
Installation shots of  
*Material Legacies* Exhibition.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery,  
London. 28<sup>th</sup> Feb – 24<sup>th</sup> March  
2017. Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš

Left: Above and Below.  
detail of installation from  
*Material Legacies* Exhibition.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery,  
London. 28<sup>th</sup> Feb – 24<sup>th</sup> March  
2017. Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš

# CONTENTS



**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE

SUMMARY	4-5
INTRODUCTION	6-7
PROJECT TIMELINE	8
RESEARCH CHALLENGE	9
CONTEXT	10-11
METHODS AND PROCESSES	12-17
DISSEMINATION	18-21
REFERENCES	22
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	23

# SUMMARY

*Material Legacies* is a five-year collaboration with The Hospice of St Francis that uses practice research methods to co-create a collection of experiential artifacts, four documentation films, a series of specialist talks and two public exhibitions with three bereaved makers. This research creates novel practices that redefine the role of artistic collaborations with the bereaved, creating alternative spaces for a person's physical and digital legacy. It expands continuing bonds theory by combining situated design methods and co-design methods that explore how crafting hybrid artifacts construct a new kind of durable biography for the deceased.

This portfolio includes the journal paper *Digital legacy: Designing with things*, published in *Death Studies*, which develops the theoretical counterpart to the practice by exploring how the agency of the dead is used to draw digital things into a material investigation. The locus of this design research incorporates the agency of the dead to connect people, things, stories, materials and making. Exhibiting co-designed artefacts also provides discursive knowledge for hospices and the healthcare sector to review their own artistic care structures. It proposes an approach to research governance that foregrounds transparency, personal choice and collaboration over confidentiality, anonymity and destruction of data.



Right: *Material Legacies* Exhibition.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London.  
28th Feb – 24th March 2017. Photo  
credit: Tadej Vindiš



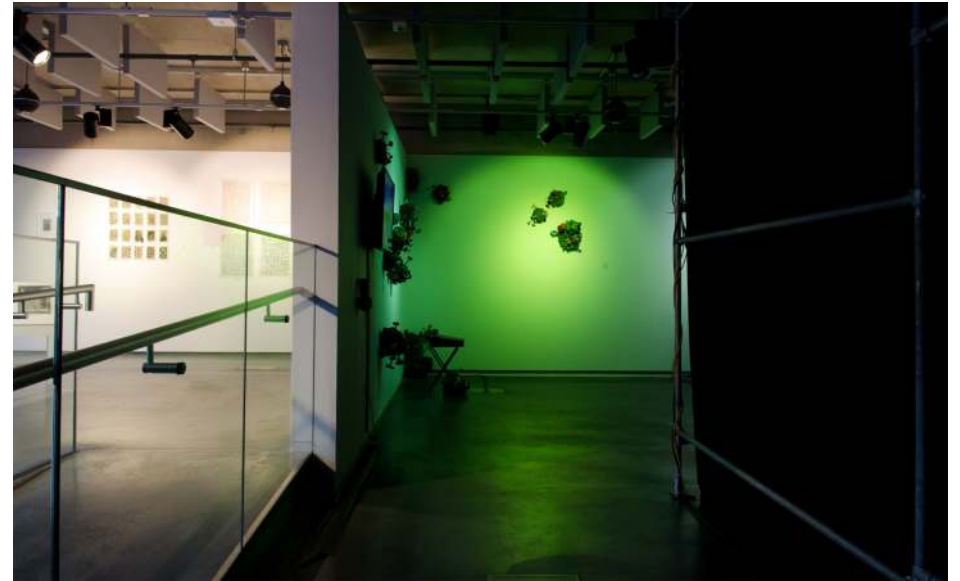
The exhibitions' reach was extended by integrating educational events and panels, with insights from Hospice UK, the Helix Centre and creative funeral directors. This resulted in a request to develop educational training sessions by the Macmillan palliative care team for the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust. The Hospice of St Francis presented their insights from the research at Hospice UK Conference: Transforming Palliative Care (2018) and one of the artists subsequently exhibited her work at the Corinne Burton Memorial Trust 25th Anniversary (2018). The exhibitions ran for three weeks each, was featured on BBC Three Counties Radio and covered by FuneralZone. Berkhamsted Town Council and Macmillan Grants funded the reinstallation in the hospices local community.

Right: Exhibition of Lark Ascending,  
*Material Legacy* installation detail.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London.  
28th Feb – 24th March 2017.  
*Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš*



# INTRODUCTION

*Material Legacies* forms a collection of creative and critical work 2013-2017. In collaboration with the Hospice of St Francis, it explores the role of digital legacies and the material agency of the dead through the objects and data left behind. It supports this investigation through three paired collaborations between a designer, an art therapist and three bereaved participants that through the process become collaborators and co-designers – exhibiting their work publicly to give people the chance to experientially encounter those they have lost.



Top right: Installation shots of *Material Legacies* Exhibition. Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London. 28<sup>th</sup> Feb – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš

Right: Exhibition Photography of Material Legacy installation, opening night at the Open Door Gallery, Berkhamsted. 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov – 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017  
Photo credit: The Hospice of St Francis



In addition to the two exhibitions, the research was documented and reflected on through four key films that explore the process of making and the meaning behind the artifacts constructed. In addition to this, two public panels: *Designing Death, Challenges and Aesthetics for the 21st Century* and *Diversifying Death, Perceptions for the 21st Century*, interweave critical responses to the challenges of this research exploring the role of design and technology in relation to death and dying. This is extended within the journal paper, *Digital Legacy: Designing with Things*, that argues how design can provide new forms of agency for the dead.

Below:  
Stills from three documentation films.

*Photo credit: Greenwich Bright*



Right:  
*Promotional graphic Designing Death Panel. Creative Conversations.*  
*Photo credit: University of Greenwich*



*“the Facebook page that continues to have a birthday after someone has died or the answerphone that still holds the person’s voice after death. These irregularities promote different modes of thinking through things and being through things (Henare et al., 2007) that construct new forms of agency that are activated in specific ways when a person dies and is missing from the network.”*

S. Pitsillides (2019) *Digital Legacy: Designing with Things*.  
[Special Issue] *Death Studies Journal*.

# TIMELINE

2013	2015	2016	2017 FEB – OCT	2017 NOV – DEC	2018	2020 JAN – MAY	2020 OCT
<p><b>OCT</b> <b>Presenter;</b> The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival. Re-Wired: Memory in the Digital Age panel. The Memory Network AHRC Project, Cheltenham.</p> <p><b>NOV</b> <b>Presenter;</b> Night of the Digital Dead, Internet Week Europe. Made by Many, London.</p>	<p><b>MAY</b> <b>Presenter;</b> V&amp;A Digital Futures. Self-Versioning: Exploring the potentials of the Digital Self panel. SPACE, London.</p> <p><b>OCT</b> <b>Conference Paper;</b> Digital Existence: Memory, Meaning, Vulnerability Conference. Sigtuna, Sweden. Pitsillides, S. Position Paper: Our Digital Possessions, In Life and Death.</p>	<p><b>JAN</b> <b>Invited Speaker;</b> Futures of the End of Life: Mobilities of Loss and Commemoration in the Digital Economy symposium. Lancaster, UK.</p> <p>Pitsillides, S. When Ethics Underestimates its Subjects: What to do when Designing with ‘Vulnerable’ Others.</p> <p><b>SEPT</b> <b>Book Chapter;</b> S. Pitsillides (2016) An Imagined Response: Death and Memory in the 21st Century. Memory in the Twenty-First Century New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences. Memory Network (Eds), Publisher: Palgrave.</p>	<p><b>FEB – MAR</b> <b>Curator;</b> <i>Material Legacies</i> exhibition. Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London.</p> <p><b>MAR</b> <b>Organiser &amp; Chair;</b> Designing Death: Challenges and Aesthetics for the 21st Century Panel.</p> <p><b>MAY</b> <b>Presenter;</b> <i>Material Legacies</i>: Death, Design and the Digital. Part of the Death and Dying Research Seminar Series. Open University, Milton Keynes.</p> <p><b>OCT</b> <b>Presenter;</b> Fabrica Gallery as part of The Interval and the Instant exhibition on Death in the Digital Age. Brighton.</p>	<p><b>NOV</b> <b>Conference Paper;</b> Digital Existence II: Precarious Media Life Conference. Sigtuna, Sweden. Pitsillides, S. Position Paper: Dance with Agency, the Things that Embody the Dead.</p> <p><b>Organiser;</b> Creative Therapies Education Day: Bridging the gap between mainstream society and those faced with illness, death and dying. Open Door Gallery, Berkhamsted.</p> <p><b>NOV – DEC</b> <b>Curator;</b> <i>Material Legacies</i> exhibition. Open Door Gallery, Berkhamsted.</p>	<p><b>APR</b> <b>Presenter;</b> How Artistic Research can Expand Public Perceptions of Death for the 21st Century. University of the Arts, Helsinki.</p> <p><b>MAY</b> <b>Training Facilitator;</b> Digital Death for the Palliative Care Team at the Royal Free London NHS Trust Foundation Trust. Hampstead, London.</p> <p><b>AUG</b> <b>Training Facilitator;</b> Digital Death. Palliative Care Team at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust Barnet/Chase Farm Hospital, London.</p> <p><b>Conference;</b> DORS4, The International Death Online Research Symposium. Hull, UK. Pitsillides, S. Designing Digital Legacy: A Durable Biography of Pixels.</p> <p>Annalie Ashwell (2018) <i>Material Legacies in the Landscape of the Lost</i>. Hospice of St Francis. Hospice UK Conference: Transforming Palliative Care 10.1136/bmjspcare-2018-hospiceabs.57</p>	<p><b>JAN</b> <b>Journal Paper;</b> S. Pitsillides (2019) Digital Legacy: Designing with Things. [Special Issue] Death Studies Journal.</p> <p><b>FEB</b> <b>Organiser &amp; Chair;</b> Diversifying Death: Shaping Perceptions for the 21st Century panel. University of Greenwich, London.</p> <p><b>MAY</b> <b>Presenter;</b> Digital Afterlives and Genealogy Industries panel. Birkbeck, University of London, London.</p>	<p><b>OCT</b> <b>Conference Paper;</b> AoIR2019, The Association of Internet Researchers. Dublin [online] Hård af Segerstad, Y. Bell, J. Giaxoglou, K. Pitsillides, S. Yeshua-Katz, D.</p> <p>Taboo Or Not Taboo: (In)Visibilities Of Death, Dying And Bereavement. Pitsillides, S. Life, Death And Taboo: Technological Futures Of Curiosity And Critique.</p>



# RESEARCH CHALLENGE

## Objective:

This research aims to mediate a translation, that locates a place for the dead, in the lives of the bereaved – using co-design, situated design and exhibition design. It acts within the bereaved home considering it simultaneously as an archive and design studio that layers and finds meaning in the deceased's physical and digital legacies.

## Aims:

1. to explore how collections of things (objects and data) can be used as material to embody the relationship between the living and the dead.
2. to use co-design, situated design and exhibition design to flatten hierarchies and provide a framework for studio making within these sensitive contexts.
3. to reflect on the context between palliative care, art therapy and design in relation to the bereaved and their archives.



*Material Legacies* Exhibition.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery.  
Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš

# CONTEXT

*Material Legacies* explores how collaborations with hospices and the bereaved create a curatorial and narrative approach to legacy that focuses on drawing digital and physical things into dialogue with craft, technology and design. This focus on materiality has informed a process that captures not only the relationship between the living and the dead – but also how the dead form us and prompt a particular experiential telling within this collaboration. The two exhibitions (March 2017, London and November 2017 within the hospice's local community) explore how the objects and data of the dead can be crafted to create three distinct experiences that together express a new materiality of death. The second exhibition is critical as it shows a commitment to bringing the works back to the local community and empowering collaborators to become local ambassadors, helping to shape continued debate about the role of compassionate communities in end of life care. It also opens up the research to dialogue with palliative care, art therapy and design, particularly in relation to how digital things will increasingly impact approaches to bereavement care and legacy.



Right:  
Stills from home visits to Freda Earl.  
Taken on mobile phone while  
discussing Victor's Digital Heritage.

*Photo credit: Stacey Pitsillides*

By engaging the public the research enables contemporary reflections on death and making in response to loss, questioning whether the separation of physical and digital legacies (Boomen, 2009) can be drawn together through crafting, narrative and curation. The use of exhibition as a mode of knowledge generation opens up the research without diminishing the individual approach to collaborations and relationships (Jungnickel, 2010). This is key as the research does not aim to create or test a service but rather to provide an exploration of how services could be grown or adapted in light of current developments within therapeutic and creative practices. By flipping the approach to enquiry and focusing on live action rather than documentation, this research learns from people rather than about them (Ingold, 2010) and invites them to be collaborators and co-creators of the research.

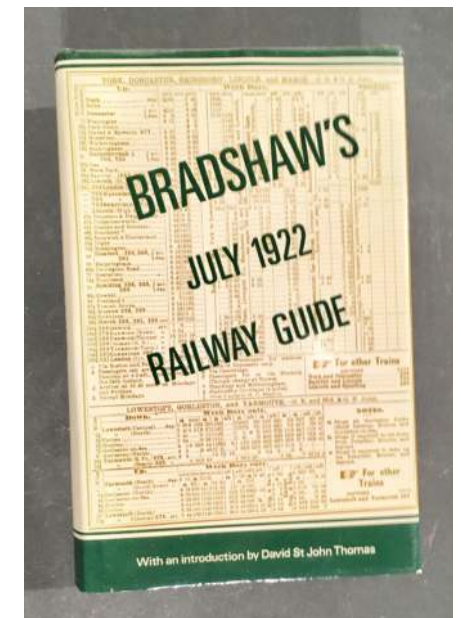
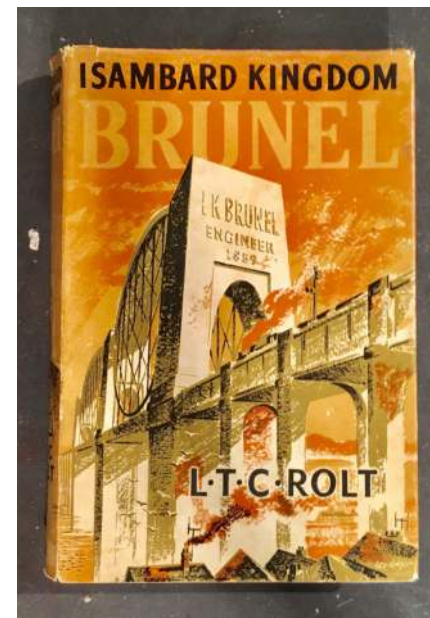
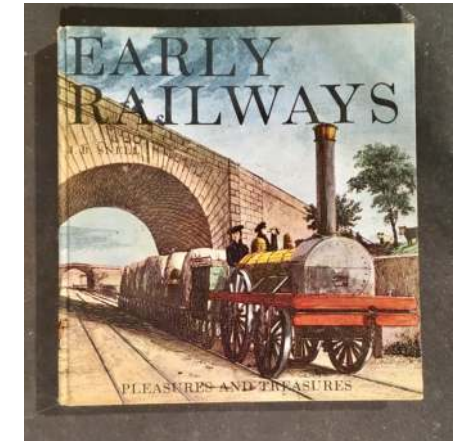
Contextually the practice is supported by two key pieces of writing (1) the paper *Digital Legacy: Designing with Things* (2019) for *Death Studies Journal* that explores how design methods can contribute to the development of new rituals and practices around death and bereavement, by focusing on various forms of agency through what is left behind or translated within the bereavement process (2) a chapter in *Memory in the Twenty-First Century New Critical Perspectives from the Arts, Humanities, and Sciences*, an accessible volume that contains contemporary perspectives on memory practices. In *An Imagined Response: Death and Memory in the 21st Century* (2016) Pitsillides expresses a position on the connection between material culture, communication skill and technological memory practices.

“Inside the floppy disks ... are a range of short stories and a book... These have also been printed and exist in the room in hard copy... [which we locate for comparison. Freda] is caressing the pages and says that she liked the story better before his edits, that he edited out the humour.”



# METHODS AND PROCESSES

“This biography through things forms a very different biography than is constructed ... [from] bereavement theorists (Neimeyer, 2001), narrative researchers (Gunaratnam and Oliviere, 2009) or even art therapists (Lister et al, 2008). The home office acts as a situated environment (Suchman et al, 2002) that affects the way we access [Victor’s] things and how we engage with them. Beginning with the obvious and reachable and then moving spatially through the files, boxes and books, pulled down from the highest shelves and examined for their contents. Once the process had started and we were in our flow nothing was safe from our enquiry and our discussions were rich and emotional.”



Right:  
Stills of Freda Earl's  
archive of Victor's things.  
Photo credit: Stacey Pitsillides

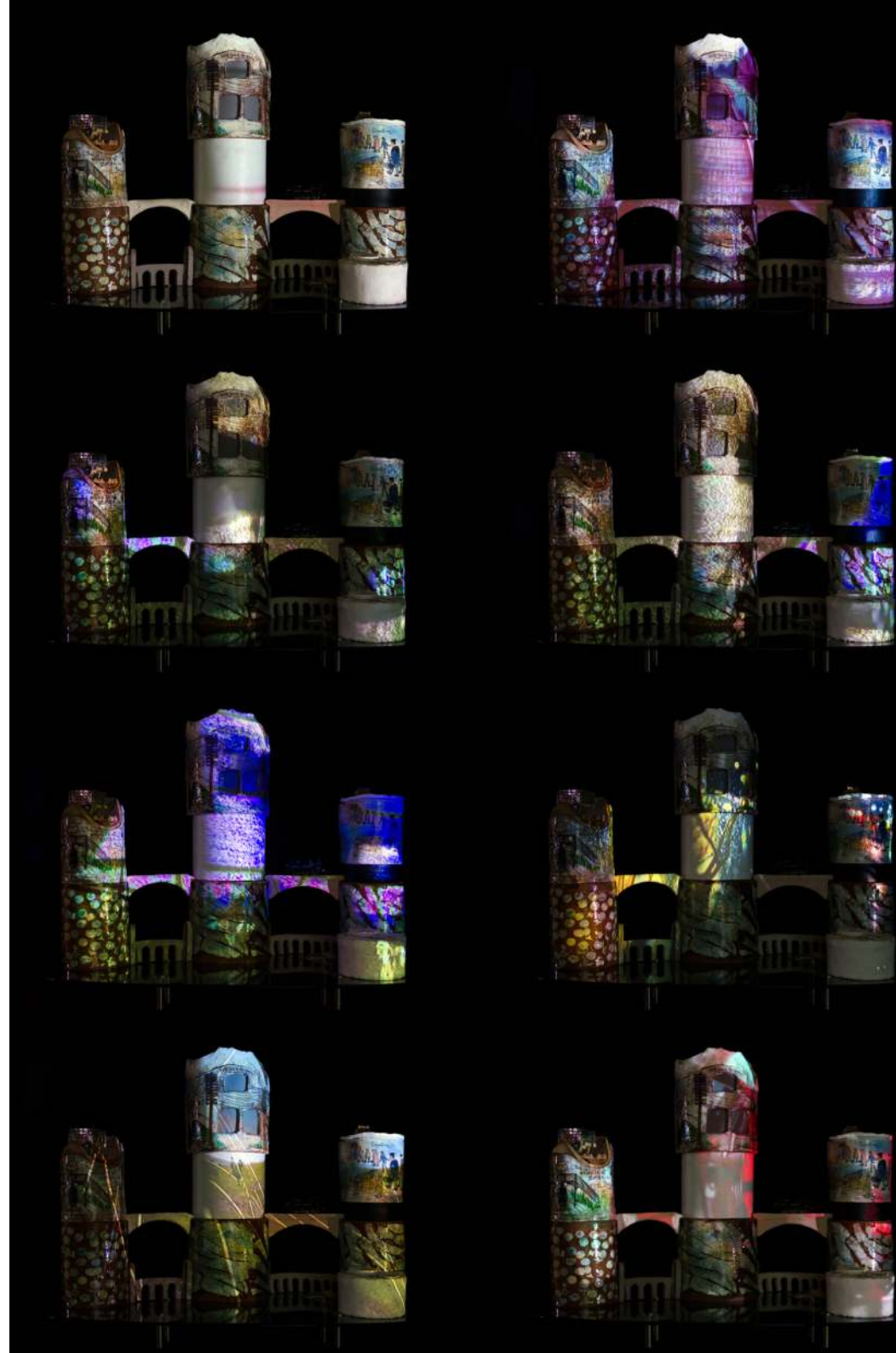


*Material Legacies* locates its approach to bereavement within continuing bonds theory, where the bereaved may explore a continued relationship with the dead (Walter, 1996). The narrative turn within hospice care (Gunaratnam and Oliviere, 2009) also has potential to readdress the balance between “psycho-dynamic and artistic methods” (p.2), which is explored materially in art therapy literature (Mahony, 2001; Moon, 2010; Moon, 2016). Within this research a narrative approach is used to create conceptual prompts within the process of making – layering stories within the material as artifacts form and through the addition of sound and projection mapping. Documentation films also reflect on the nature of the collaborations and their role in the ethical narration of the research.

*Material Legacies* Exhibition, Documentation Film:

<https://vimeo.com/222669034>

Right:  
detail of installation from  
*Material Legacies* Exhibition.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery,  
London. 28<sup>th</sup> Feb – 24<sup>th</sup> March  
2017. Photo credit: Tadej Vindiš



The research is also distinct from art therapy due to its collaborative approach to meaning making, mediated through artifacts and materials that transform the home into a studio and include the pre-defined goal of exhibiting the outcomes as a tangible ending. The way these things are translated into a final outcome uses design methods applied within studio practice such as: selecting, narrating, sketching, ordering, conceptualising, editing, translating, curating, making and framing in order to help participants move from collection to exhibition. Mahony (2010) states that art therapy has not developed enough of its own approaches to thinking through bereavement and instead uses many models from other disciplines e.g. psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, which inform the mode of art production. This is also emphasised within Glazzard et al (2015) and Lister et al (2008), where there is a focus on making instinctively in short bursts and with pre-chosen materials and processes. The making in these cases aims to serve a specific function or exists within a space that one accesses. By using a design process that works in a “meandering way”, with ‘floating concepts,’ while maintaining things at different stages of incompleteness” (Telier, 2011: 21) this research enacts a process of sensitively pulling at the entanglement of people with data, documents, traces, objects, collections and archives, in order to put them back together in new ways that support a critical consideration of their meaning.



Right:  
Still from three documentation films.  
*Photo credit: Greenwich Bright*

Using co-design acknowledges that the bereaved have a distinct and nuanced knowledge of their relationship to loss (Sanders and Stappers, 2008) and tackles traditional hierarchies around client-based therapy. By reflecting on a sustained two-year co-design process with the bereaved, this research advocates that in sensitive contexts collaborators must have agency at all stages of the design process, otherwise as solutions or products begin to form they impose design decisions on the community rather than activate collaborations with them (Bowen et al, 2013). In this way the research subverts the traditions of research governance which prioritise: protection, anonymity and rigidity – in favour of collaboration, ownership and flexibility. Therefore design is considered as a situated action (Simonsen et al, 2014) engaging specific communities with the aim of levelling interaction and power relations (Bradwell and Marr, 2008) focusing on how the actual design processes function to avoid tokenism (Lee, 2008: 31) and by forming a “relationship between researchers and community partners” (Goodyear-Smith et al, 2015).



Right:  
Stills from three documentation films.

*Photo credit: Greenwich Bright*



Using interviews the research explore's how the meaning of works produced changed across the collaboration and documents how participant's confidence increased in corrolation to this. The use of the co-designer's homes within the research provides strong support of familiar surroundings, establishing the home environment as an impromptu studio. Using the fluidity of a design process the research aims to share ownership and put trust in the collaborators to help guide discoveries about the research. The exhibition is a key focal point for this, as final interviews provide a reflection point for the co-curation and finalisation of artifacts. The interviews are used methodologically to collect and construct a design brief for the exhibitions and co-creation. Words used in these interviews such as: story, dark things, movement, fluid, surprising, physical, authentic, natural, organic, emotional, visceral, pure, grounding, capsule, snippets, contained, condensed, dynamic, therapeutic, exposing, powerful, sharing and celebratory give characteristics to the artifacts, processes and people that are reformed in the exhibitions.

“Labels like art and craft  
feel quite static and  
imbued whereas... more  
process, movement,  
fluid-based words...  
encapsulate something  
not being static and  
actually having room for  
it to be more” within the  
exhibition.





Stills from three documentation films.  
*Photo credit: Greenwich Bright*

# DISSEMINATION

Over a four year period, as part of the practice based research process, a number of public and educational events took place:

**Two exhibitions that focused on presenting the research to different audiences:**

The Stephen Lawrence Gallery is situated in the busy area of Greenwich with its 'shop window' style gallery and link to student communities within the university (<http://www.greenwichunigalleries.co.uk/material-legacies/>). The public panel *Designing Death: Challenges and Aesthetics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* ran alongside the exhibition and provided a critical context for the issues discussed drawing together audiences from death studies, palliative care, the funeral industry, design and education. A follow up panel *Diversifying Death: Shaping Perceptions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* ran in Feb 2019 to explore how design, technology and religious practices popularised in the 20th Century, prompted speculation on how new technologies and experiences will shift the boundaries of mortality.

Right: Exhibition Photography of  
Material Legacy installation, opening night  
at the Open Door Gallery, Berkhamsted.  
22nd Nov – 8th Dec 2017.

*Photo credit: The Hospice of St Francis*





In contrast, The Open Door Gallery is an all-volunteer run creative social enterprise whose profits go to support local charities. It is a place for the community to gather and runs a range of workshops to help the isolation e.g. grief/ young mums/ drop in centres/ elderly. They form part of the Hospice of St Francis's catchment area and play a part in their strategy to increase access into hospice by finding compassionate communities that encourage and educate people to support those who are unwell and dying. A Creative Therapies Education Day titled 'Bridging the gap between mainstream society and those faced with illness, death and dying' ran alongside the exhibition. As the gallery is frequented by many of the volunteers from the hospice, this exhibition supports how these practices could be applied within the hospice and how the works produced had impacted the makers. Overall the restaging of the exhibition aimed to help the collaborators take full ownership of the works and talk about their own experiences within the context of an education day. Visitors to the exhibition described their experience of engaging with the works as **inspiring, interesting, insightful, challenging, moving, thought provoking, peaceful, therapeutic, healthy and refreshing**. The guest book also provided some interesting thoughts about the role of exploring death and dying in the local community and its link to the hospice, for example, "**using the physical... sensory experiences to express/ validate thoughts and feelings... makes it feel more meaningful in a holistic way**" it provides an "**exploration into a subject that is too little explored in a research, scientific, emotional and spiritual way.**"

Cumulatively, the events attracted an audience of 735, which encompasses the general public alongside professionals in fields associated with death and dying and the hospices volunteer network.

Right:  
Annalie Ashwell,  
Head of Art Therapy,  
Hospice of St  
Francis at Hospice  
UK Conference:  
Transforming  
Palliative Care (2018).

**P-32 MATERIAL LEGACIES, IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE LOST, 2017**

Annalie Ashwell. *The Hospice of St Francis, Berkhamsted, UK*

10.1136/bmjspcare-2018-hospiceabs.57

An exhibition to engage the local community and enable conversations about death and dying.

**Background** The exhibition was the final re-staging of the artworks generated during a collaborative five-year PhD research project between the hospice, three bereaved stakeholders and designer, Dr. Stacey Pitsillides. The exhibition ran for two weeks in a local arts venue and provided research collaborators with the opportunity to become local ambassadors. Throughout the exhibition the hospice ran events including an outpatient centre 'taster day', a creative therapies education day and a life drawing class.

**Aims** To utilise the exhibition of artworks created by three bereaved women as a means of engaging the local community in discussions around death, dying and bereavement, and to raise awareness and visibility of hospice services.

**Methods** To install the exhibition in an easy-to-reach and accessible venue located on the high street of the local hospice town. To deliver events to engage the community and increase understanding of hospice services.

**Results** Results gathered from 21 visitor feedback forms:

- 19 people said that after visiting the exhibition they would feel more inclined to access hospice support services
- On a scale of 1 -10 (1 being not at all - 10 being very well), 17 people scored 8+ in how important it is to talk about death and dying in the local community
- Words captured describing the exhibition: 'inspiring, amazing, interesting, enlightening, necessary, thought provoking, clever, innovative, refreshing, insightful, challenging, sincere'

In addition 40 people attended the 'taster day' and 13 allied health professionals attended the creative therapies education day.

**Conclusion** The arts are a powerful vehicle to engage communities in difficult and challenging conversations about death and dying and taking services off-site can help to raise awareness and increase understanding of hospice services.

25

CORINNE BURTON  
MEMORIAL TRUST  
25TH ANNIVERSARY

Anne Marshall

Materiality of Loss



Left and above:

Brochure for the Corinne Burton Memorial Trust  
exhibition, Goldsmiths, University of London.

Catalogue page: Anne Marshall. July 2018.



### **Public and education events:**

The research also sparked interest and led to a range of invitations to share findings and produce educational programmes:

This included invitations to speak at the Futures of the End of Life: Mobilities of Loss and Commemoration in the Digital Economy symposium, hosted by the Lancaster University, on When Ethics Underestimates its Subjects: What to do when Designing with ‘Vulnerable’ Others, and at the Open University as Part of the Death and Dying Research Seminar Series on Material Legacies: Death, Design and the Digital.

Pitsillides was invited to deliver training on Digital Death to the Palliative Care Team at the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust at Barnet/Chase Farm Hospital, London and Hampstead Hospital, London. The session was well received and resulted in a request from the NHS Foundation Trust to contribute a section on Digital Death to their bereavement booklet. This was further presented in a stand during Dying Matters week in 2019 where staff could come and request further information on the topic.

Your education event was “very relevant to practice and advance care planning that we regularly conduct. I hope it will encourage me to incorporate Digital Death into my advance care planning discussions with patients. I intend to revamp our advance care planning paperwork and I wonder if we should incorporate Digital Death somehow the paperwork.”

Palliative Care Nurse – Royal Free London NHS Trust



Left:

Designing Death: Challenges And Aesthetics For The 21st Century. Panel 1, this served as an extension of debates explored through the Material Legacies exhibition.

<https://blogs.gre.ac.uk/creativeconversations/2019/01/16/designing-death-challenges-and-aesthetics-for-the-21st-century-panel-videos/>



**Ivor Williams**  
Design Associate  
Helix Centre



**Louise Winter**  
Founder  
Poetic Endings



**Dr John Troyer**  
Director  
Centre for Death  
and Society



**Dr Ros Taylor**  
Clinical Director  
Hospice UK



Left:  
 Diversifying Death: Shaping Perceptions For The 21st Century. Panel 2,  
 Drawing together expertise from psychology and privacy online.



**Prof Jayne Wallace**  
 School of Design  
 Northumbria  
 University



**Dr Panagiotis  
 Pentraris**  
 University of  
 Greenwich



**Hasina Zaman**  
 CEO  
 Compassionate  
 Funerals



**Dr Elaine Kasket**  
 Independent  
 Researcher and  
 Psychologist



## Online Articles and Press:

The article on Funeral Guide (formally FuneralZone) is a key touch point that extends the research from its hospice setting into the funeral sector, as the website receives over half a million page views per month. Alongside this the BBC Three Counties Radio interview (<https://clyp.it/1hevsn5m>) was core in presenting the research within the hospices region and wider press like BBC Asian Network [radio]: What Happens to Our Social Media When We Die? And Esquire: Do we ever really die online? presented the themes of the research to wide and diverse audiences.

Links to associated outputs:

Wellcome Collection [blog]. Death and our digital ghosts. 15th January 2020 <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XhWcOhAAACUAOnT>

BBC Asian Network [radio]: What Happens to Our Social Media When We Die? 24th July 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0bbypw2>

Esquire: Do we ever really die online? 4th May 2018 <https://www.esquire.com/uk/life/a20149352/digital-death-what-happens-when-you-die-online/>

BBC Three Counties Radio. *Material Legacies* Art Exhibition - The Hospice of St Francis. 27th Nov 2017 <https://clyp.it/1hevsn5m>

Material legacies and storytelling in grief <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/material-legacies> 17th March 2017. Funeral Guide.

The Herald: Digital legacy is changing finality of death, says internet expert to Edinburgh International Science Festival. 9th Mar 2017 <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15143009.digital-legacy-is-changing-finality-of-death-says-internet-expert-to-edinburgh-international-science-festival/>

Links to external video or other rich media, on institutional repository (Figshare) or other reliable platforms

Full Collection: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/4695580>

Collaborator Films:

Freda: <https://vimeo.com/202426667>

Sam: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/4695580/video/203303426>

Anne: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/4695580/video/202431957>

Exhibition: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/4695580/video/222669034>

Below: *Material Legacies* Exhibition on the Hospice of St Francis website.



Below: Presenterw; V&A Digital Futures. Self-Versioning: Exploring the potentials of the Digital Self panel. SPACE, London.



Below:Funeralzone article.  
(Funeralzone was renamed funeral guide)

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## Material legacies and storytelling in grief

Published: 17 March 2017




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Our memories of a person are a mosaic, made up of many different things. It might be a gift they gave to us, a particular smell that reminds you of them, a collection of their favourite books, and even digital legacies, like a recording of their voice. When that person dies, these objects take on new significance. How can they be used to tell the story of what they meant to us?

Stacey Pitsillides, a lecturer in design at the University of Greenwich in London, has helped bereaved people tell these stories in her new exhibition, Material Legacies. In collaboration with the Hospice of St. Francis in Berkhamsted, she spent two years working with three bereaved people, helping them explore and create exhibition pieces that tell the story of their loved ones. The result is three unique narratives: stories of love and loss told through the objects and installations they have created.

"It is about narrating the dead in a new way, creating that biography through the things and the data that they had," says Stacey.

It's a six-year journey that led Stacey to proudly open Material Legacies last month. She had been studying digital death for her PhD in design, exploring how new digital spaces, such as Facebook, Instagram and other social media, are being used to mourn and memorialise those who have died. Her research led her to the Hospice of St. Francis, where she was able to explore how we understand the people we love through the objects they leave behind, both physical and digital.




*'Lark Ascending', one of the pieces in the exhibition, was co-created with Anna, telling the story of her husband, Tim.*


Whereas many people may think of the internet as separate from 'normal life', Stacey suggests that digital and physical objects of remembrance are equally important and can be just as much a part of the story we tell about people who have died.

"That was my interest in this project," she says. "Seeing a floppy disk and the content on that floppy disk, or someone's voice captured on a Dictaphone, in the same way as we see a physical object like a book, or a mushroom in the forest."

In this way, each of the three pieces in the Material Legacies showcase incorporate physical and digital objects as materials to help the bereaved tell the story of their loved one. 'Above And Below', created by a lady called Freda, uses clay sculptures and digitally projected images to play with light and colour, to create a unique biography of her late husband, Victor.



*The real moss on the mushrooms gives an evocative smell of forests, telling the story of Sam and Charly's friendship.*



*'Above And Below' combines clay sculptures and projected images to tell Victor's story.*

Stacey explains the story behind another of the exhibition's pieces, entitled 'Chaz Was 'Ere', inspired by the grief of a teenage friend's death. The installation consists of multi-coloured felt mushrooms, real moss, and various sound recordings. It's a story that mingles physical, sensory experiences and digital data.

"Sam and Charly were at boarding school together and they used to go to the forest to smoke," explains Stacey. "Charly used to get really excited whenever she saw a mushroom."

"It tells the story of how they grew apart as they went into different universities. Charly died, and Sam got a notification of this friend's death through social media. She told people via Facebook that they should wear colour at the funeral."

For the piece, Sam crafted around 30 or 40 mushrooms through a process called dry letting, to create a series of about 15 clumps of colourful fungi.

"She talks about this very visceral experience of needle felling, where she pricks the material until it goes from something soft to something hard," says Stacey. "It's a process of repetition, which she describes as bringing memory into matter."

"It's this notion of making as a way of exploring, quite viscerally, what that person meant to you. She also talks about the fact that when you make them, you hold them at your chest, because you're holding them close to prick the needle in. It's like you're nurturing them into existence."

Alongside these lovingly-created mushrooms is a recording of Charly's voice.

"They had a Dictaphone which they would put by the washing machine and Charly used to leave her messages all the time," Stacey explains. "We've taken some of those messages and some of those in-jokes, little things that she said to her."

"The art installation also takes into account other environmental sounds that constituted that space for them, such as the flush of a toilet, the cars going by, also the sound of the actual dry felling."

"So we're trying to let the viewer walk into an experience where the mushrooms open themselves up to you, both through their position in the room, through the sound installations, through the smell of the mushrooms – because the moss actually smells of the forest – and through the documentary where Sam is explaining what the mushrooms mean to her."

"It's been an amazing opportunity to work with these people," Stacey says. "We worked over a period of two years together and we developed very close relationships and bonds."

"Ethically it was a very interesting challenge to mediate what it means to give people a voice in that space. It allowed them the opportunity to show a very curated artefact or work that expresses who the person was that they loved. For me, that links a bit to the way that celebrants work with people's narratives to design a funeral that narrates who that person was. There's a connection there."

[Material Legacies #](#) is on display at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London, until March 25.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Material Legacies* was created by Stacey Pitsillides. It was exhibited at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London and reinstalled at the Open Door Gallery, Berkhamsted in collaboration with Annalie Ashwell, Head of Art Therapy at the Hospice of St Francis.

This research was supported by the University of Greenwich (Creative Professions and Digital Art), The Hospice of St Francis and Goldsmiths, University of London and funded 3.9K by Berkhamsted Council, Macmillan Grants and the University of Greenwich.

The works exhibited have been produced by Freda Earl, Sam Durant and Anne Marshall, in collaboration with Elwin Harewood and Stacey Pitsillides. Sound design by Aiden Finden and projection design and mapping by Giulia Brancati. With thanks to Greenwich Bright for the filmed interviews.

Special thanks to staff from The Hospice of St Francis including but not limited to:

Dr Ros Taylor, the former Hospice Director

Dr Kimberley McLaughlin, the Director of Supportive Care

Tania Brocklehurst, the Clinical Bereavement Lead

Sarah Russell, the former Director of Education & Research.

