

# LOVE AFTER DEATH





## Deletion Ritual

A deletion ritual is when all or specific parts of a person's digital identity are deleted. This can be done using USB sticks that are then liquefied in acid or embalmed in plastic. Or through a technical tool/algorithm/virus that goes through all your accounts systematically deleting them.



Type of output:  
Collection of  
Creative and  
Critical Work  
2016-2020

DOUBLE WEIGHTED

by  
Stacey Pitsillides

Left: *Deletion Ritual* from  
*Tickets for the Afterlife* 2020 futures  
tickets collection. Re-designed for  
online workshops and social media  
during COVID-19. Online *Dying  
Matters* Week Programme as part  
of *The Death Positive Libraries*,  
11th – 17th May 2020.

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# SUPPORTING STATEMENT

*Love After Death* is a touring installation that questions how futuring technologies and aesthetics augment our relationship to end-of-life planning? It was commissioned by NESTA for their own flagship public engagement event: *FutureFest*, and was recommissioned by Redbridge Library for *Dying Matters Week* 2018. *Futurefest16* attracted over 4,000 international visitors and Redbridge Library receives an average of 3,000 visitors every weekend. Since its conception in 2016 it has been redesigned as a site-specific intervention for libraries called '*Tickets for the Afterlife*'. This explores how libraries can be used as death positive spaces that aid publics in exploring their physical and digital legacies.

By creating diegetic prototypes that tangibly explore the relationship between technology, creativity and death this project produces new knowledge in the fields of speculative design, death studies, human-computer interaction (HCI) and artistic research as an innovative model of public engagement. *FutureFest* established the baseline of the research within a highly knowledgeable and tech savvy audience. Working with libraries has expanded this research to explore diverse communities across the UK. *Tickets for the Afterlife* has been commissioned and installed during: London Design Week 2019, the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2019 at Newcastle City Library and during DesignTO festival, Toronto 2020, Dying. Dialogues series, with an online programme during COVID-19.

*Love After Death* has engaged 1,821 people deeply across six installations and live events online. It has been awarded funding from the Wellcome/Carnegie Trust and Wolfson Foundation's Engaging Libraries Award to be co-designed over 18 months 2020/2021 across three library commissions in the UK: Redbridge, Kirklees and Newcastle. The installation was covered by QUARTZ, Esquire and BBC Digital Planet. It was shortlisted for the 'Best Death Related Public Engagement Event' of 2017 by the Good Funeral Awards and Redbridge Library won the EDGE2019 Award for *The Final Party*, where *Love After Death* was a core partner.



Right: Studio Photography of *Tickets for the Afterlife*, installation detail. London.

# INTRODUCTION

*Love After Death* was initially commissioned for NESTA's *FutureFest* as part of *Future Love*. *FutureFest* aims to vision and creatively explore 10-30 years in the future. This initial commission included a performative installation, an exhibition of speculative design objects and a panel on *FutureFest's* Social Stage. The work was subsequently commissioned by Redbridge Library as part of the CarnegieUK Engaging Libraries Award, Phase 1. Funded by NESTA and CarnegieUK [£16K Pitsillides, PI].



Above: Signage and entrance of *Love After Death*, NESTA's FutureFest16, London. 17th-18th Sept 2016.

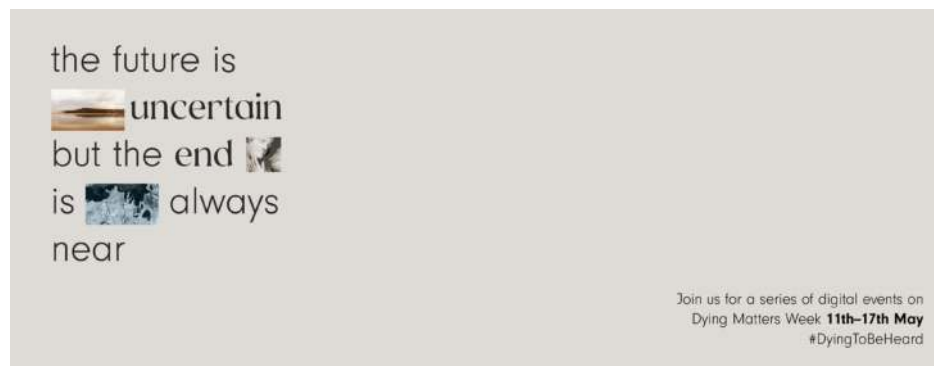
Photo credit: Giulia Brancati



Above: *Love After Death*, Redbridge Library as part of their *Dying Matters Festival*. 17th-18th May 2018.

As *Love After Death* situated itself more deeply within libraries it was redesigned to include a literary focus and the core experience focused on self-discovery, this subsequent installation was titled: *Tickets for the Afterlife*. *Tickets for the Afterlife* was featured in London Design Week and the DesignTO festival, Toronto, alongside the ESRC Festival of Social Science at Newcastle City Library and Redbridge Library's *Day of the Dead*. Commissioned by ESRC and The Cyprus High Commission, funded by Wellcome Trust/ CarnegieUK and Wolfson Foundation Engaging Libraries Award Phase 2 [£50K Pitsillides, CoI, Academic Lead].

During COVID-19 an active programme of live online *Love After Death* events and public engagement via social media have been used to sensitively approach the topic of death within the framework of #LibrariesFromHome.



Facebook Banner from the *Love After Death*. Online *Dying Matters* Week Programme as part of *The Death Positive Libraries*. 11th-17th May 2020.



Above top: *Tickets for the Afterlife*, Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London Design Week, 2nd-22nd Sept 2019.  
Photo credit: Valerio Trafeli

Above: *Tickets for the Afterlife*, Newcastle City Library, ESRC Festival of Social Science, 4th-9th Nov 2019.



Above top: *Tickets for the Afterlife*, *Day of the Dead*, Redbridge Library, 26th Oct 2019.  
Photo credit: Alice Bertazzi

Above: *Tickets for the Afterlife*. *Dying. Dialogues*. *Tickets for the Afterlife* film and installation. Design TO festival, Toronto. 24th-25th Jan 2020.

Below: *Love After Death*.  
Installation.  
NESTA's FutureFest, London.  
17th-18th September 2016.  
*Photo credit: Giulia Brancati.*



# TIMELINE

2016 - 2017	2018	2019	2019	2020	2020
<p>SEPTEMBER 2016 <b>Curator;</b> <i>Love After Death</i> installation. NESTA's <i>FutureFest16</i>, London. Live experience and panel discussion for <i>Future Love</i> at <i>FutureFest16</i>. Commissioned by NESTA.</p> <p>MARCH 2017 <b>Edited Special Issue;</b> K. Giaxoglou, K. Döveling and S. Pitsillides (2017) <i>Networked Emotions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sharing Loss Online</i>, Editors of the SI on Networked Emotions for the Journal of Broadcasting &amp; Electronic Media, 61:1</p> <p><b>Presenter;</b> Southbank Centre's <i>Beyond Belief</i> festival on <i>The Way to Immortality: Technology and Transcendence</i> panel. London.</p> <p>APRIL 2017 <b>Presenter;</b> Edinburgh International Science Festival. <i>A Death Online</i> panel. Summerhall, Edinburgh.</p>	<p>MAY 2018 <b>Curator;</b> <i>Love After Death</i> installation. Redbridge Library, London. Reinstallation of live experience from <i>FutureFest</i> for Redbridge Library as part of their <i>Dying Matters Festival</i> with the support of the Wellcome Trust / Carnegie Trust.</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER 2019 <b>Exhibitor;</b> <i>Diversity + inclusivity by Design. Tickets for the Afterlife</i>. Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London Design Festival 2019, London. The diversity + inclusivity by Design hub in partnership with The Cyprus High Commission in London and the Cypriot Minister of Culture has commissioned this exhibition.</p> <p><b>Conference;</b> 14th International Conference on the Social Context of Death, Dying and Disposal. University of Bath, UK. Pitsillides, S. <i>From Death Literacy to Speculative Inquiry: Exploring the use of Speculative Design in Death Education</i>.</p> <p>OCTOBER 2019 <b>Curator;</b> <i>Day of the Dead. Tickets for the Afterlife</i>. Redbridge Library.</p>	<p>OCTOBER 2019 <b>Conference;</b> AoIR2019, The Association of Internet Researchers. Brisbane, Australia. Nansen, B. Hjorth, L. Pitsillides, S. Gould, H. Panel: The Afterlives of Memorial Materials: Data, Hoax, Bot. Pitsillides, S. <i>Care Between Humans And Non-Humans: Material/Making/ Memorialisation</i>.</p> <p>NOVEMBER 2019 <b>Curator;</b> <i>ESRC Festival of Social Science. Tickets for the Afterlife</i>. Newcastle City Library. This installation included an exhibition of Design Artefacts from the <i>Ongoingness Project</i> and <i>Goodnight Sweetheart</i>. It hosted the public panel: <i>The Future of Death is Here – It's just not evenly distributed</i>.</p>	<p>JANUARY 2020 <b>Exhibit and Talk;</b> <i>Love After Death: Tickets for the Afterlife. Dying. Dialogues. Design TO</i> festival, Toronto.</p> <p>MAY 2020 <b>Event Series;</b> <i>Online Dying Matters Week</i> as part of the Carnegie UK Engaging Libraries Award. This induces: Death Café; Marie Curie Hospice Virtual Gallery; Collection of Death Positive Quotes, Reading Lists and our Death Reading Group (monthly author Q&amp;A the largest of which had an online audience of 357) hosted on <a href="https://www.facebook.com/DeathPositiveLibrary/">https://www.facebook.com/DeathPositiveLibrary/</a></p>	<p>JUNE 2020 <b>White Paper;</b> <i>Death, Grief and Funerals in the COVID Age. Optimal strategies for helping people develop new rituals to honor those who die during the COVID-19 era</i>. Collective of 80 interdisciplinary specialists collaborated on a twice weekly basis to develop this guidance document: <a href="https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ea741819616d93530f653b1/t/5ee3976f0995a44c639de12e/1591973749217/Death%2C+Grief+and+Funerals+in+the+COVID+Age+V4.pdf">https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ea741819616d93530f653b1/t/5ee3976f0995a44c639de12e/1591973749217/Death%2C+Grief+and+Funerals+in+the+COVID+Age+V4.pdf</a></p> <p>JULY 2020 <b>Workshop;</b> <i>Love After Death: Tickets for the Afterlife</i>. International Re-imagine End of Life festival.</p>



# RESEARCH CHALLENGE

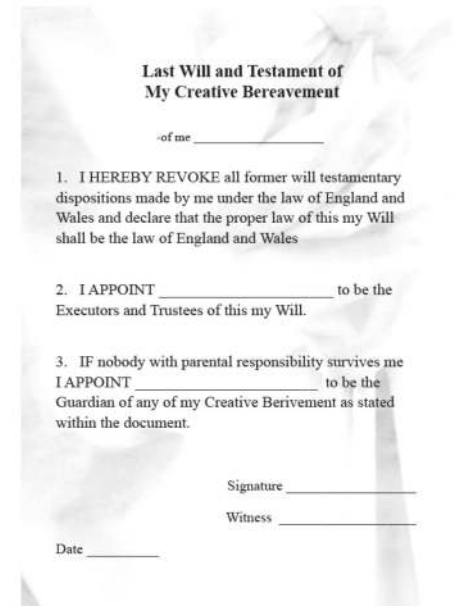
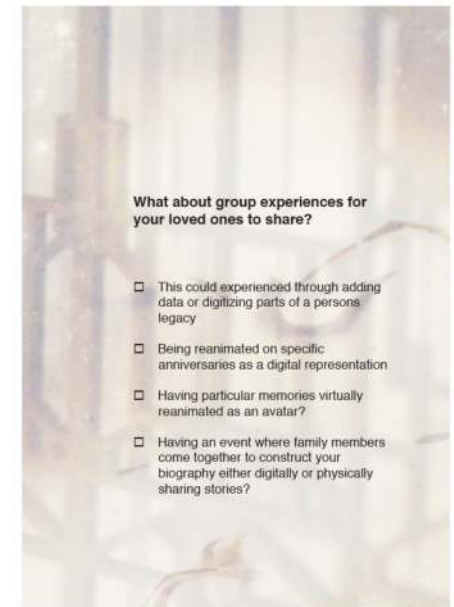
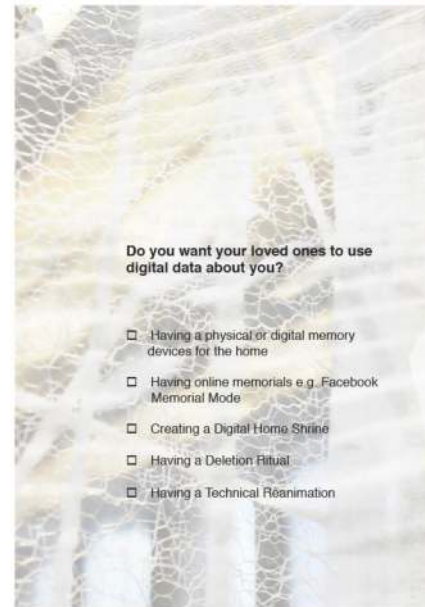
## Research Objective:

This research uses design communication to co-create tools that inspire more transparency around choices for the end of life. It challenges overused and unnecessary arguments about the taboo of talking about death (Wegleitner, 2015; Loftland, 2019) by demonstrating how discussions about human mortality are an everyday opportunity that promote citizen choice within their own legacies.

## Research Aims:

- 1) to investigate how speculative design can be democratised as a tool to engage diverse communities in conversations about death and dying.
- 2) to develop innovative ritual practices that question current top-down approaches to a legacy planning, giving people agency in conversations with funeral directors.
- 3) to integrate live public prototyping that draw the public into forming research questions.

Right: *Love After Death*.  
Legacy Agreement.  
Flat plan of design tool within  
the installation. NESTA's  
*FutureFest*, London.  
17th-18th September 2016.





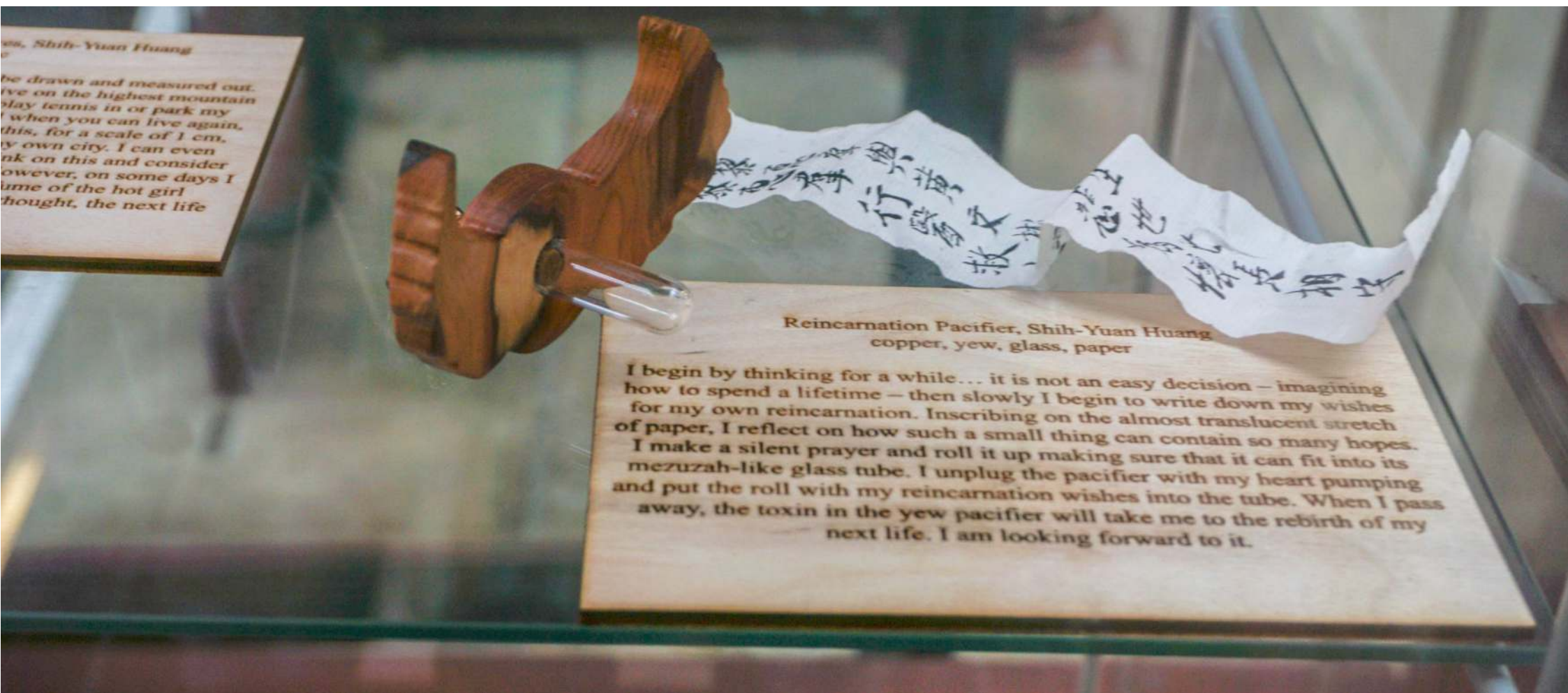
Above: *Love After Death*. Social Stage Panel. NESTA's FutureFest, London. 17th-18th September 2016. Photo credit: Giulia Brancati.



Right: *Love After Death*. Speculative design exhibition: Digital Access Keys, Transritual Tools for the Afterlife and Echoic Vessels. NESTA's FutureFest, London. 17th-18th September 2016. Photo credit: Giulia Brancati.



Below: *Love After Death*.  
Reincarnation Pacifier, artist:  
Shih-Yua Huang, Transritual Tools  
for the Afterlife. NESTA's FutureFest,  
London. 17th-18th September 2016.  
*Photo credit: Giulia Brancati.*



# CONTEXT

Choice at the end-of-life is an important issue to tackle as the UK is an increasingly diverse society with complex beliefs and multiple identities. In the 21st century technology is shifting perceptions of death and dying. Alongside this ecological concerns (Rumble et al, 2014) and cultural shifts (Davies, 2017) are driving new forms of dispersing human remains at the end of life. Our legacies are blended sites of on and offline identities, that come with questions of privacy, ownership and control (Edwards & Harbinja, 2013). Online environments also provide digital versions of honouring the dead (Gotved, 2014) stimulating ethical and practical questions about the nature of death and dying.

*Love After Death* explores how collaborations with libraries and festivals can help the public to re-imagine the future of death. It treats death and dying as a health and societal issue but expands this creatively to engage wider publics. By reflecting on a series of six installations and an online programme during COVID-19 as part of the #LibrariesFromHome offering, addressing the need for reflection on death and dying during the pandemic, the research questions how future technologies and aesthetics augment our relationship to end-of-life planning. It aims to build critical conversations around these themes by introducing participants and library staff at Redbridge, Kirklees and Newcastle City Libraries to a range of *Tickets for the Afterlife* events that cumulatively create a designated space and design tools for exploring legacy as an innovative model of public engagement.



Above: *Tickets for the Afterlife*. Public Interaction. *Day of the Dead*, Redbridge Library. 26th Oct 2019.  
Left: Redbridge Library Entrance.  
Photo credit: Alice Bertazzi

Contextually the practice is supported by two key pieces of writing: (1) a special issue for the Journal of *Broadcasting and Electronic Media* on *Networked Emotions* (2017) which draws together interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives on death online and supports the need to develop new practices of sharing and managing loss (2) a paper for AoIR conference (2019) *The afterlives of memorial materials: data, hoax, bot* that explores collectively how digital afterlives intersect with new technologies to create emergent forms of agency such as chatbots and robots that extend beyond the human.



Right: *Love After Death*, Poster, Redbridge Library as part of their *Dying Matters Festival*. 17th-18th May 2018.



Above: *Love After Death*, stills from documentary film. Redbridge Library as part of their *Dying Matters Festival*. 17th-18th May 2018.

<https://vimeo.com/312733465>

[Love after Death] explores social shifts in how death is represented within physical and digital environments, ritual practices, education and entertainment.



This page: Studio Photography of  
*Tickets for the Afterlife*. London.

# METHODS AND PROCESSES

Public interest in death, dying and end-of-life planning is growing. In today's rapidly changing society new end-of-life issues emerge quickly and these changes necessitate updating already extant equality and inclusivity concerns. *Love After Death* introduces people to planning end of life using Research through Design (RtD) and playful diegetic prototypes (Kirby, 2010) that position potential futures (DiSalvo, 2009: 58) as options to be chosen. Design workshops, live testing, co-creation and visual communication form the core of this experience – while speculative design is used to activate critical questions (Galloway and Caudwell, 2018) around the public's engagement with death, dying and the blending of future technologies with ritual practices.

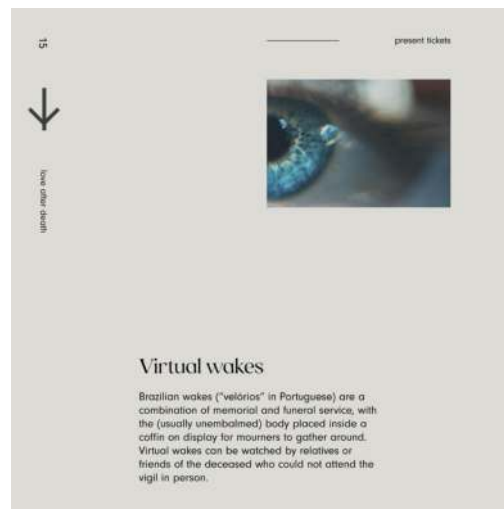
The public spaces that have been chosen such as festivals and libraries are also intrinsic to these end-of-life conversations developing bottom-up rather than top-down approaches. Using co-creation and public engagement as part of an iterative design cycle it provokes responses about people's relationship to their physical and digital legacies that are represented across a range of mediums and rituals (Nansen et al, 2019). By creating a geodesic pod the installation uses warm white, natural textures and light to construct a semi-private space of exploration, developing a portable and flexible space for the public to contemplate mortality. The pods also create a focal point within the recognisable spaces of the library for interacting with design objects, academics, funeral directors and design communication e.g. the *Tickets for the Afterlife*.



Above: *Tickets for the Afterlife*,  
Newcastle City Library, ESRC  
Festival of Social Science,  
4th-9th Nov 2019.



During COVID-19 this has shifted to creating online spaces such as the *Death Positive Library* (<https://www.facebook.com/DeathPositiveLibrary>) that uses graphic design to acknowledge the uncertainty of this moment of time and literary quotes to support people's desire to go beyond the public death count which dehumanises and flattens our relationship to death and dying (Raji, 2020). This is core to engaging with the research's goal to draw the public into forming research questions, by creating designed encounters in neutral spaces away from the immediacy of clinical settings and the rarefied confines of academia.



Above and left: Pre-Recorded Information and Virtual Wakes tickets from *Tickets for the Afterlife 2020* present tickets collection. Online *Dying Matters* Week Programme as part of *The Death Positive Libraries*. 11th-17th May 2020.



# Using co-creation and public engagement as part of an iterative design cycle.

Left: *Tickets for the Afterlife. Dying Dialogues. Tickets for the Afterlife* film and installation.  
Design TO festival,  
Toronto. 24th-25th Jan 2020

Right: *Tickets for the Afterlife*,  
Public Interaction.  
Stephen Lawrence Gallery, London  
Design Week, 2nd-22nd Sept 2019.  
Photo credit: Valerio Trafeli

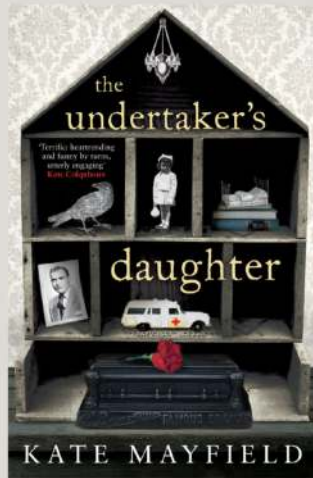




This page: *Tickets for the Afterlife*,  
Public Interaction. Day of the Dead,  
Redbride Library. 26th Oct 2019.  
*Photo credit: Alice Bertazzi.*



# death reading group



## Kate Mayfield The Undertaker's Daughter

The Covid-19 climate has prompted us all to think a bit more about death - whether it is concern for loved ones, for ourselves, or just the more general immediacy of mortality.

One way to navigate this environment and confront these concerns is through reading.

So Redbridge Libraries, Kirklees and Newcastle Libraries are teaming up to host a Online Death Reading Group - each [month] we will read a particular book themed around death, and offer our responses to the group.

This is not a bereavement counselling session, but it is an opportunity to reflect on, and think about, what mortality means for us all. Bring tea, cake and a comfy chair!

May 14, 2020 7:00 PM  
Join us on Eventbrite

Without our stories  
we are incomplete.



Neil Gaiman, Stardust

I couldn't imagine her  
leaving this world without  
ripping its fabric.



Zadie Smith, Swing Time

Your body's dying



pay no attention

Anne Rice, Interview with the Vampire

Flowers,



silence,



departure.

John Dorian, A Poison Tree

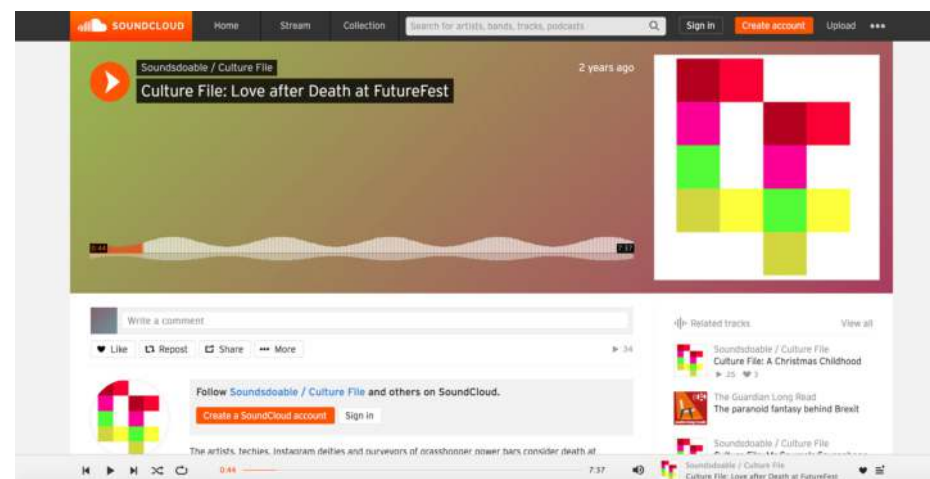


Above and left: Author Q&A poster and Literary Quotes from the *Love After Death*. Online Dying Matters Week Programme as part of *The Death Positive Libraries*. 11th-17th May 2020.

# DISSEMINATION

Participants across six installations and the online COVID-19 programme shared their views that the research helped them to think critically about their own end of life choices. As the public form a core focus of this research their response to the installations, events and dissemination (e.g. press) are central to narrativise how the research creates an increased sense of agency when thinking about the role of bodies and legacies at the end of life:

At *FutureFest16* these responses ranged from direct individual action “right now I am going to sprinkle some ashes which I have with me. I feel inspired now. I am interested in the things and objects you can make” to simple statements like “death can be beautiful.” Whereas at Redbridge Library, as documented (<https://vimeo.com/312733465>) the public valued the knowledge imparted through the installation stating “I think it’s important ... to learn more about the funerals and how you organise what options there are now the technical is advancing, new ideas, creative... something to share with the family and community” and explored “how technology may be able to preserve people’s stories so future generations.” Funeral directors also used the installation to think about their own practice stating that recycling “the energy from your cremation and [giving] it to a social cause... [is a] really good idea... you can donate any metals that’s left... so why couldn’t there be another box saying would you like to recycle the energy from cremation.”



Above: Recorded at *FutureFest16* within the *Love After Death* installation. Culture File *Love After Death* at *FutureFest 2016*: <https://soundcloud.com/soundsdoable/culture-file-love-after-death>

Above top: *What's On Edinburgh*. *A Death Online* panel. 7th April 2017. Edinburgh *International Science Festival*.

As the events and project moved online during COVID-19, Pitsillides was invited to be part of a core team of eighty interdisciplinary professionals and academics to develop a Global COVID-19 Relief Coalition white paper on death, grief, and virtual funerals (2020). There has also been a strong response to the COVID-19 online *Love After Death* (211 surveyed) with members of the public commenting that the “*sensitive topic of dying explored delicately and honestly as part of Death Postive Library*,” while others shared how the events helped them to consider their own bereavements “*I ... was a little apprehensive of the subject but knowing it was online and I could leave at any point enabled me to join the event. I found it positive and I would be more likely to attend other dying matters type events.*” It also enabled people to act in ways that supported their friends and communities by contacting “*2 friends who have both experienced the sudden death this week of their beloved dogs. The event made me realize how important people feel about having their experience of death acknowledged (even that of a pet) and it helps to validate the life of the deceased*” while others comments that the online programme supported accessibility “*as someone who is limited in their ability to attend events by physical condition (wheelchair user) it was liberating to be able to attend an event via zoom on same terms as everyone else.*”

Right: *FutureFest*  
 Highlights 2016.  
 11th October 2016. Trend Bible.  
<https://www.trendbible.com/futurefest-highlights-2016/>

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## FUTUREFEST HIGHLIGHTS 2016

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Brian Eno also touched upon this in his talk **'Remaining in Play'**. When discussing the importance of play in child development, Eno referenced the Finnish curriculum, where children in Finland aren't taught to read at a specific age, but instead it is up to them to approach the teacher to let them know they're ready to learn. Most school systems now revolve around grading systems and exams, but this learning model reflects how when children are interested and eager to learn, they actually take in more. For further insights on the **Future of Play**, visit our recent blog post [here](#).

are also 'talking to the dead' through the power of social media. Profile pages that have been left behind allow us to stay connected to our passed love ones, easing and controlling the grieving process.

Alternative realities were also a hot topic for discussion at **'The Future of Storytelling'** talk. The panel explored the concept of augmented reality and the way in which it can 'customise' real life, allowing us to pick and choose what reality we interact with. This is especially interesting in the world of gaming. Virtual reality allows a gamer to be in someone else's shoes and play that person's game but augmented reality is centred around the individual and their journey. When integrated into everyday life, it allows users to tell their own story.

With the popularity of fan fiction and crowd-sourced writing, the panel went on to analyse how consumers are more eager than ever to immerse themselves and be an integral part of a story. Through social media, readers can 'fight back' to an author with their opinion, making us question who in fact 'owns' the story.

Pitsillides has also reached out to publics through events at venues like the Southbank Centre's *Beyond Belief* festival *The Way to Immortality: Technology and Transcendence* panel and the Edinburgh International Science Festival, *A Death Online* panel and frequently works with the media to share the research with the public. *Love After Death* has been reported on by *Culture File: Love After Death at FutureFest* (Oct 2016), *Quartz: How I learned to live forever* (Oct 2016) and *Esquire: Do we ever really die online?* (4th May 2018). Pitsillides has been invited to speak on BBC Asian Network [radio]: *What Happens to Our Social Media When We Die?* (July 2018) and BBC Radio Newcastle: Lisa Shaw Show. Interview on *Tickets for the Afterlife* exhibition (November 2019).

As COVID-19 has created new challenges and opportunities for technology at the end-of-life this research was included in two key radio programmes [Inside China Tech \(South China Morning Post\) – How technology has changed the way we die and mourn](#) (May, 2020) and [Digital Planet \(BBC World Service Radio\) Digital Death](#) (June 2020) which sparked conversations on social media directly referencing this research e.g. “*Can you imagine a @PokemonGoApp like location based interactive AR parallel universe of the dead? (referencing that idea that we came up with AR apps for tombstones).*”

“[The] sensitive  
topic of dying  
explored delicately  
and honestly as  
part of Death  
Positive Library”

“Death can  
be beautiful”

DRB

# How I learned to live forever

By Alice Bonasio · October 7, 2016



Say goodbye to having to die.

Enjoy this content in the new Quartz app. Get the app.

When my grandmother passed away this year, I was devastated. She may have been in her late 80s, but her sunny personality and boundless energy made it seem like she'd would probably just live forever.

My grandma was what you'd call a "silver surfer." From the moment she inherited her daughter's old laptop, she embraced the internet like a digital native. It wasn't long before we were helping her set up a Facebook profile which she used to happily spend hours sharing cute animals videos and writing us sweet messages ALWAYS WRITTEN ENTIRELY IN CAPS. I gave up explaining to her that this amounted to constant shouting. She liked it that way.

A few months after she'd passed away, I was a bit shocked to see her picture pop up in my notifications, reminding me that it was her birthday. I hadn't forgotten, but it saddened me to imagine other family members whose grief was still very raw receiving similar messages. I had thought—perhaps naively—that since Facebook knew enough about my life and habits to bombard me with targeted advertisements it would also know my grandmother was no longer with us. But the bots didn't have a clue.

I looked up the procedure to report a death to Facebook, and requested that her account be "memorialized." This means that nobody can log in to the account again, but her posts remain visible to the people they were originally shared with, and friends and family can continue to share memories on her timeline. I wanted to digitally preserve the memory of my grandmother.

## Technology is currently challenging our conceptualization of what it means to live—and die.

After making my request I almost immediately received a response from someone in Facebook's community operations team asking me to send them her death certificate. Their response struck me as strange and insensitive—like I was making it up for some reason. Since I didn't have that document (my grandmother lived in Brazil and I didn't handle the funeral arrangements), I argued that they should be able to verify her passing through the evidence available on their own platform. Facebook eventually agreed, but I can't say it was a particularly pleasant process.

"The tech industry is not really up on death," says Stacey Pitsillides, a design lecturer at the University of Greenwich who is a PhD candidate in the field of data contextualization in digital death. Since starting her research several years ago, Pitsillides says she's witnessed a remarkable shift: People are becoming increasingly eager to immortalize personal experiences online, just as I had felt after my grandmother's passing.

This observation prompted her to set up *Love After Death*, a panel showcased at *FutureFest* in London to help people explore how technology is becoming integrated into new forms of creative expressions around death and dying. I met Pitsillides at *FutureFest*, a festival of ideas sponsored by innovation charity *NESTA*, to discuss the concept of digital legacies.

Technology is currently challenging our conceptualization of what it means to live—and die. Pitsillides believes that technology and design will play an increasingly important role in the process of mourning, which she calls "creative bereavement." "By creating a bespoke legacy agreement, it merges the concept of a design agency with funeral director," she said.

To illustrate this, Pitsillides started by taking me through a questionnaire that asked me things ranging from the practical (which loved ones should be informed of my death, and would I like to setup a database of music, art, or poetry to be used at my funeral?) to the weird and outlandish (would my friends like to do an online vigil through live webcasting where I could be present via hologram, and how about having a memorial implant or tattoo?)

But wait—holograms? Memorial implants? Was this for real?

In the future, yes.

## Death by Design

"You could have a *surface-level* or *below-skin* digital tattoo that could be matched to that of a loved one," Pitsillides explained. Using simple technologies, you could add content to these digital mementos throughout your life and then have them activated after your death. This activation could either be triggered by the executor of your will—over 19 US states have already *put forward laws to recognize the deceased's digital legacy as part of their estate*—or we could evolve AI systems to recognize cues when this should happen. At that point, certain content could become available to the people you'd predetermined, depending on the stipulations you left in your digital will.

It's basically the futuristic, high-tech version of wearing half of your lover's heart-shaped locket. These tattoos and implants could even be programmed to trigger only in the context of certain events. For example, when walking past the special spot where a now-passed husband proposed to his wife, his widow's digital tattoo could change color or bloom into the pattern of her favorite flower, and "their" song could start playing on her phone. Or a father could still "be there" to deliver the speech at his daughter's wedding via hologram, or greet the arrival of his first grandchild with a pre-recorded message.

While these memorialization usages are still conceptual, the technology itself is already fairly mature. For example, we already have technology that allows for smart *epidermal electronics* to collect and record information about users, reacting to this data in a wide variety of programmable ways: Think of IoT devices like *Devscom* that continuously monitor glucose levels for diabetes patients, allowing them to track their blood sugar via apps linked to wearables like the *Apple Watch*. Instead of being focused on what our minds and bodies are doing in the present moment, these tactile technologies could help us build and enhance connections with people both during life and after death.

As more people embrace the idea that death in the digital age is not just about looking back at the past, they will begin to realize that it's just as much about the future. We're already seeing people grapple with this concept in terms of what happens to our bodies after we die. Nowadays your ashes can be turned into building blocks for a coral reef or a beautiful fireworks display, but there's a whole other after-world emerging courtesy of technology. For example, an increasingly popular service is using 3D printing to create personalized mementos for your friends and family using human ashes.

## An increasingly popular service is using 3D printing to create personalized mementos for your friends and family using human ashes.

## The Talking Dead

Since such a large percentage of our lives and interactions are now conducted online, we are constantly forced to reassess our meaning of self and identity. Is our online identity the most accurate reflection of our true selves? And, if so, can it "live" independently from our physical bodies?

The answer is potentially yes. The connections we build and share can—now quite literally—take on a life of their own. For example, websites like *LifeNaut* offer services that allow you to create a "mind file" that supposedly enables future scenarios around reanimation through "downloading" your memories to a robot or clone vessel of some sort. We might not yet be at the stage where robotics and AI enable the *Black Mirror* scenario where life-like replicants of loved ones can be created from their social media profiles. But it's no exaggeration to say that, for better or for worse, our digital footprint already outlives our biological self.



"We are moving toward a society where the dead are not banished but remain present in our lives as sources of guidance, role models, and as an embodiment of particular values and life lessons," Pitsillides said.

But is that what we really want? The ability to live forever through technology raises difficult questions such as whether it is our memories that make us who we are, whether our loved ones would accept this "new" version of us, and who should control consent to make these kinds of decisions after death. This kind of permanence may be appealing for some, but for others the possibility of a digital presence continuously and independently evolving is quite disturbing.

Most of us avoid thinking about our own mortality until it stares us in the face. As someone who spends most of my time online, I'm unsettled by this idea of not being in control of my online persona once I die—even if I wouldn't be in a position to care, at that point. But having experienced the enduring joy that my grandmother's Facebook memories have brought to our family, it makes me think that my digital legacy is something worth preserving. And now I have the first steps to know how to do just that.

https://qz.com/803065/

Above: Alice Bonasio. Quartz: *How I learned to live forever*. 7th Oct 2016. <https://qz.com/803065/what-happens-to-our-digital-life-when-we-die-how-i-learned-to-live-forever/>



Networked Emotions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives  
on Sharing Loss Online:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08838151.2016.1273927>

Death, Grief and Funerals in the COVID Age:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ea741819616d93530f653b1/t/5ee3976f0995a44c639de12e/1591973749217/Death%2C+Grief+and+Funerals+in+the+COVID+Age\\_V4.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ea741819616d93530f653b1/t/5ee3976f0995a44c639de12e/1591973749217/Death%2C+Grief+and+Funerals+in+the+COVID+Age_V4.pdf)

Project Website: [www.loveafterdeath.co.uk](http://www.loveafterdeath.co.uk)

Redbridge Library: *Love After Death*: <https://vimeo.com/312733465>

*Love After Death - Tickets for the Afterlife*:

<https://vimeo.com/388195621>

Library Project Pages:

Kirklees Libraries:

<http://www.kirkleeslibraries.co.uk/dying-matters-week/>

Redbridge Libraries:

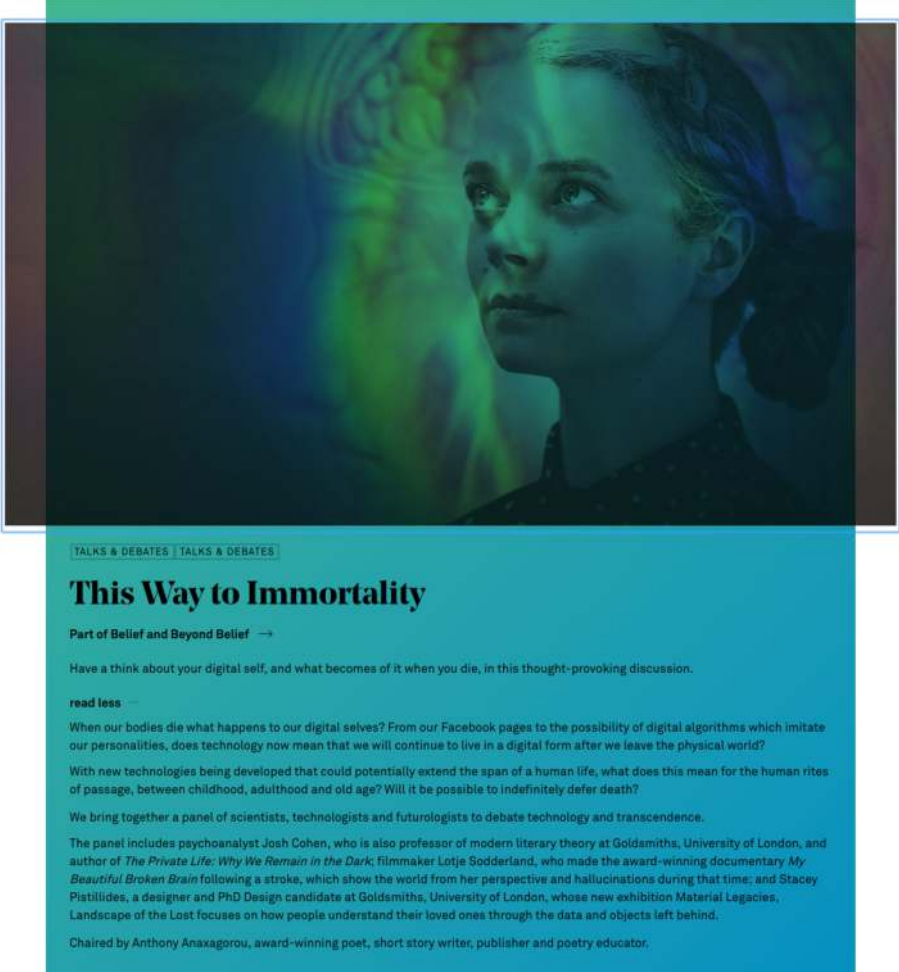
<https://visionrcl.org.uk/events/the-death-positive-library/>

Newcastle City Libraries: <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/libraries-culture/health-and-wellbeing/death-positive-library>

Death Positive Libraries:

<https://www.facebook.com/DeathPositiveLibrary>

(3,515 people reached, Last 28 days : Jun 24 - Jul 21)



The image shows a screenshot of a website for a Southbank Centre event. At the top right, the 'SOUTHBANK CENTRE' logo is visible. Below it, there are navigation links for 'Menu' and 'What's on'. The main content area features a large, artistic photograph of a woman's face in profile, looking upwards, with a blue and green color palette. Below the image, the event title 'This Way to Immortality' is displayed in a bold, serif font. Underneath the title, there is a sub-heading 'Part of Belief and Beyond Belief' followed by a right-pointing arrow. A short paragraph of text follows, starting with 'Have a think about your digital self...'. Below this, there is a 'read less' link. The main body of text discusses the event's focus on technology, digital selves, and the possibility of digital algorithms imitating personalities. It mentions a panel of scientists, technologists, and futurologists, and lists several speakers: psychoanalyst Josh Cohen, professor of modern literary theory at Goldsmiths, University of London, and author of *The Private Life: Why We Remain in the Dark*; filmmaker Lotje Sodderland, who made the award-winning documentary *My Beautiful Broken Brain* following a stroke; and Stacey Pistillides, a designer and PhD Design candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London. The event is chaired by Anthony Anaxagorou, an award-winning poet, short story writer, publisher, and poetry educator.

Above: Southbank Centre's Beyond Belief festival on *The Way to Immortality: Technology and Transcendence* panel. 5th May 2017. London.

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