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Post-Mortem Personalisation: An Ethnographic Study of Funeral Directors in New Zealand

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This thesis examines the personalisation of Pakeha (European) post-mortem practices in New Zealand. While much of the discourse surrounding funerary and disposal processes maintains that contemporary practices demonstrate a 'denial' of death and funeral director esurience, funeral directors themselves have argued that the austere Anglophone approach to death has been superseded by personalised practices. This transformation has become particularly evident in the last two decades and emphasises a historic shift to funeral services that encompass the heterogeneity of late-modern individuals. The aim of this thesis, however, is not to recapitulate funeral director rhetoric or reiterate the criticisms levelled at the industry, but rather to critically examine the implications and manifestations of personalisation, and explore the funeral directors' role in the provision of contemporary funeral services. In addition to archival research, this ethnographic endeavour includes in-depth interviews with funeral directors (and related occupational groups) and an extended period of participant observation. The theoretical issues explored in this thesis are grounded in this ethnographic data.

This study reveals that personalisation is integrally linked to constructions of grief, the pastoral role of funeral directors, and Foucault's concept of bio-power. Funeral director participants asseverated that funeral practices had 'evolved' to effect the 'healthy' resolution of grief. Personalised funerals represented a re-alignment of 'natural' human needs and cultural practices, and funeral director rhetoric amalgamated essentialist interpretations of grief with personalised memories and continuing bonds (Klass and Walter 2001). Funeral directors explicitly linked personalisation to secularisation, emphasising the perceived lack of 'guidance' and 'care' in contemporary society. Although 'impersonal' religious funerals provided funeral specialists with an important point of departure, many funeral directors emphasised the pastoral dimension of contemporary funeral directing. This dimension constitutes a key component of the funeral directors' role and permeated all facets of funeral service – particularly the increasing range of after-care funeral options.

Although the funeral director rhetoric emphasises the democratisation of funeral practices and the primacy of individuality, an examination of the discourse reveals that this personalisation also demonstrates the normalising technologies integral to Foucault's concept of 'pastoral power'. I argue that funeral directors play a significant role in articulating the boundaries of 'appropriate' funeral behaviour by accentuating the importance of 'authenticity', 'dignity' and 'healthy grief'. These concepts underline the expertise of funeral directors, define the acceptable parameters of post-mortem practices, and reify the integral involvement of funeral directors in the construction process. The specific subjectivity promoted by funeral directors constitute individuals that are not only 'honest' and 'real', but recognise the 'need' for a funeral service, emotional expression, and memorialisation. These individuals similarly realise the importance of integrating the deceased into their own biographies, while acknowledging the significance of guidance and control. This subjectivity clearly legitimises the role of the contemporary New Zealand funeral director. This thesis illustrates, therefore, that funeral directors play a salient role in articulating bio-power within New Zealand society, and that this endeavour is integrally linked to the occupations' continuing pursuit of professional identity.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Authors of contemporary literature contend that post-mortem practices have undergone a remarkable transformation in Western society.[1] Much of this literature proclaims that the late-modern treatment of death has been 'revolutionised', and that death and dying are no longer the rational and dispassionate phenomena of earlier decades. Instead, these processes are replete with postmodern references to personalisation, celebration, and idiosyncratic individuality. The bureaucratisation and medicalisation of dying so exemplarily expressed by authors such as Ariès (1981), Blauner (1966), Glaser and Strauss (1965), Illich (1976) and Sudnow (1967) have been contested in recent years by those advocating a more personal, patient-centred approach, providing an alternative 'script' for people confronted by fateful moments of ontological insecurity (Seale 1998). A similar transformation is evident in post-mortem practices. Although the 'denial of death' thesis (Gorer 1965) remains enduringly entrenched in the death discourse, and there are clear indications that death has been privatised and sequestered from public spaces (Ariès 1974a; Bauman 1992a, 1992b; Elias 1985; Mellor 1993; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Strange 2000; Walter 1991, 1994, 1996a), much of the contemporary New Zealand literature indicates that funerary ritual has undergone a process of 'personalisation'.

The vast anthropological literature focusing on death ritual highlights the diversity of post-mortem practices and the universal impact of death (Metcalf and Huntington 1991). These customs are not only culturally sanctioned methods of corpse disposal but socially constructed practices that embody and reflect broader societal values and institutions (Faunce and Fulton 1958: 205). Secularisation and bureaucratisation are particularly prominent features of post-mortem practices in Western society and permeate the procedures surrounding death. Death and dying are the realm of various experts, and disposal (and its accompanying rituals) is predominantly the

[1] It is clear that the terms 'West' and 'Western' are problematic. There is no absolute geographical definition of the 'West', and areas constituting the 'West' have varied historically. Both Western and non-Western societies are characterised by a significant degree of diversity and multivocality. Recognising this limitation, however, Western societies *do* share certain philosophical, colonial and genealogical attributes that differentiate them from non-Western societies.

domain of funeral directors. This occupational group prepare the corpse, facilitate funeral services, and provide a range of 'aftercare' services. These functionaries are therefore an intrinsic element of post-mortem processes and play a significant role in shaping mortuary behaviour and ritual.

The discourse mobilised by funeral directors in New Zealand emphasises the specialised role of the funeral functionary and the innate value of post-mortem practices. Funeral directors juxtapose contemporary funeral services with the 'autocratic', 'rational' and 'impersonal' productions of earlier decades, and emphasise the significance of enlightened psychological understanding, individuality, and the collective value of funerary ritual. Inherent in this discourse is a particular (and contested) reading of post-mortem practices that combines modernist metanarratives, late-modern notions of reflexivity, and post-modern rhetoric regarding consumer choice and control. These components of contemporary death practice constitute a particular form of Walter's (1994) 'revival of death' in the early twenty-first century. An elaboration of these themes, informed by a three-year period of ethnographic research, provides the basis of the present study, which is focussed specifically on funeral directors.

1.1 The 'personalisation' of death

My own anthropological interest in mortuary ritual was generated by the myriad discursive practices surrounding post-mortem ritual. My undergraduate anthropology courses included accounts of non-Western funerary practices emphasising the transformative nature of ritual. The structural-functionalist analyses of Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski and Hertz, for example, emphasised that rituals functioned to repair the 'social fabric' of society by reintegrating individuals and conferring new identities to the deceased and bereaved. Numerous representations of Western funerary practices, on the other hand, typically portrayed rituals as empty, bureaucratic and inconsequential (see for example Hockey 1996b; Littlewood 1993). Funeral industry literature emphasised the need to rationalise services (for example Parsons 1997), while consumer groups criticised the perceived edacity of funeral directors. Some community organisations espoused the need to rescue the ritual remnants of earlier epochs and infuse contemporary practices with 'meaning' (for example Hera 1993). Not only did clergy attempt to 'modernise' religious funeral

services (for example Nixon 1992), but funeral celebrants appropriated anthropological theory and constructed individualised, life-centred funerals (for example Schäfer 1998).

Clearly the processes surrounding human disposal incorporate an array of occupational groups, including medical specialists, legal professionals, council workers and monumental masons. My initial foray into the field of post-mortem practices and attendance at over 70 funerals (Schäfer 1998), however, identified the role of the funeral director as central. This occupational group liases with other specialists, retrieves the body after death, organises the requisite certification, prepares the corpse, facilitates funeral ritual, arranges disposal and increasingly offers after-care and memorial options. The limited success of 'alternative' funeral providers, the increasing prominence of funeral director organisations, and vertical expansion of funeral director services (see chapter three), highlight the fundamental significance of this functionary and the occupational augmentation of the functions associated with disposal.

Funeral directors also featured at the heart of contested discourses and ambivalence surrounding post-mortem practices. Many individuals (with no funeral industry association) I talked to during the writing of this thesis habitually recounted stories of funeral director callousness and incompetence, and, as the following chapters denote, funeral directors were frequently criticised for 'exploiting' the grief of bereaved families. Newspaper acknowledgement notices, on the other hand, frequently contained (often extended) public statements thanking the funeral directors for 'taking care of everything' and providing high standards of 'professional service'. Some clergy were indignant about perceived funeral director control and manipulation, while others praised the functionary for their compunction and competence. Celebrants similarly wavered between condemnation and commendation.

Although a few surveys and media representations have remarked on the general shift to personalised ritual proffered by funeral directors and the diversity of late-modern New Zealand funerals, very little literature has explored or elucidated the complexity of this post-mortem transformation or funeral director involvement in the

process. In fact, as the subsequent review of the literature illustrates, much of the current discourse surrounding death in New Zealand reproduces simplistic classifications focusing on dichotomous constructions of death ritual as 'healthy' or 'unhealthy', 'personal' or 'impersonal', and 'traditional' or 'modern'. One particularly pertinent example elucidating these themes is the frequent juxtaposition of 'traditional' Maori funerary ritual with perfunctory Pakeha[2] practices.

The following section begins with an overview of death-related literature in New Zealand and a discussion of Maori mortuary practices. The review then focuses more specifically on Pakeha funerary practices and the funeral industry. What is particularly evident in both the academic and popular literature is the pervasive influence of the death-denial thesis. The subsequent review of literature from North America, Britain, and Australia highlights a more critical examination of funerary practices. Funerals and the funeral industry have been explored from a number of theoretical positions and the dramaturgical perspective has proved enduringly popular. Recent studies have also adopted more critical social constructionist viewpoints. I then explore these theoretical perspectives in relation to two of the central themes of this dissertation: namely the social construction of grief and Foucault's concept of power.

1.2 Death and disposal in New Zealand

Even a cursory glance at the available literature suggests a significant level of contemporary interest in the areas of death and dying in New Zealand. The last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of death-related discourse encompassing a diverse range of topics and disciplines. Academic studies have investigated the legal status of cadavers (Schmidt 1997; Skegg 2003), the certification of death (McAllum 1998), and police attendance at post-mortems (Duignan 1988). Terminal illness, care of the dying, and hospice care have similarly received serious attention (for example Beddoe 1983; Carter et al. 2004; MacLeod and Martin 2000; Payne 2002; Sharp 1995), while a few authors have pondered theoretical notions of immortality (McIntosh 1995) and the relationship between clergy and funeral directors (Schafer 1998; Munro 1999). Historical studies have ranged from examinations of suicide (Luke 1982; see

[2] The term Pakeha refers to non-Maori New Zealanders – usually of European descent. See Bayard

also McManus 2003) and mourning behaviour (Arbury 2001), to war memorials (Wilkie 1983), and gravestones in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New Zealand (Edgar 1995).

The media, meanwhile, is replete with reports focusing on cot deaths (SIDS), stillbirths, and roadside fatalities. Organ donation, the removal of cadaver body parts, and arguments surrounding euthanasia also feature prominently, as do articles exploring the role of coroners and pathologists. There are scattered stories or 'pathographies' (Hawkins 1990, 1999; Seale 1998) of individuals who have struggled with terminal illness, together with accounts of bereaved family and friends who courageously confront the tragedy of death. Personal narratives have also been the focus of books such as Stevenson (1995) and D'Audney (2001), and a growing number of New Zealand publications centre on grief and bereavement (see for example Heaney 2002; Parker 1981; Tonkin 1997, 1998, 1999).

Books providing information for bereaved families wishing to organise the content and structure of funeral services have appeared in the last two decades (Barnes 1991; Hudson 1995; Malcouronne 2000), as have publications promoting alternative approaches to traditional funerary ritual (Hannah 2002a, 2002b). Several authors have documented 'attitudes' to death: McIntosh (2001), for example, notes that although we are surrounded by innumerable images of death, Ariès' (1981) 'invisible' or 'forbidden' death is the dominant attitude in contemporary New Zealand. As in other Western societies, death in Aotearoa has been medicalised and transformed into an unnatural phenomenon that requires interminable management and control (McIntosh 2001: 245-247). In a text examining the sociology of health in New Zealand, Dew and Kirkman (2001) contend that death has been progressively privatised in late modern society. The authors note that Maori death customs, however, exemplify communal ritual and that Maori practices have effected a positive change in Pakeha funeral traditions.

(1995: 151-162) for a discussion of this term.

Maori funerary practices

Maori funerary customs have received considerable attention over the past century, and this frequent scrutiny requires some elaboration. The rituals of the indigenous people of New Zealand have not only been the focus of significant historical interest, but the subject of numerous more recent studies (Dansey 1992; Davidson 1984; Hera 1995; Hiroa 1966; Mead 1991; Metge 1976; Ngata 1987; Oppenheim 1973; Salmond 1976; Sinclair 1990; Taylor 1966; Taurima and Cash 1999; Voykovic 1980).[3] Although the object of the present study is not to engage in a detailed examination of Maori funerary practices, a brief review of the literature will contextualise some current concerns about the function of contemporary funerary rituals.

Participants and individuals I talked to during the course of this research often presumed that any investigation of death ritual in New Zealand would logically centre on the Maori *tangihanga*. Maori ritual was believed to constitute a legitimate area of study and one that warranted serious anthropological attention. People outside the funeral industry, in particular, were frequently incredulous of my research intentions and suggested that a survey of Maori practices - or *at least* a cross-cultural comparison - would be a more productive and valuable avenue of investigation. Pakeha practices were somehow considered to be inconsequential and unworthy of serious study. More relevant to the present research, however, Maori funerary practices were often represented as 'authentic' and 'natural' – intrinsically linked to the primordial practices of an unchanged past. These Maori practices have become particularly relevant with the recent emphasis on expression of emotion and 'healthy' grief in popular psychology. As will be detailed in the following chapters, emotion has been privileged in Western and non-Western society and there is 'a consistent focus on the 'healthier' emotional experience of peoples who adhere to more traditional ritual forms' (Hockey 1996b: 11). Unlike Pakeha who are now 'distanced' and 'unfamiliar' with appropriate post-mortem behaviour as Dew and Kirkman (2001) suggest, Maori funerary practices are often portrayed as 'healthy', and an inextricable element of Maori culture. The *tangihanga* was held up by some to be the paragon of 'healthy grief' and an approach that Pakeha society could only ineffectually attempt to emulate. This understanding was epitomised by the response

of one participant: 'I think if you ever want to know anything about death, dying, and grieving, then you just go to a Maori *tangi*...and it's all there...[Maori] can only teach us of traditions that have been long lost' (Carlos).

The Tangihanga

The earliest funeral rituals in New Zealand were those of the Maori who arrived from Eastern Polynesia in the eleventh or twelfth century AD. Few details are known about the earliest beliefs and rituals surrounding death and disposal, and what is known comes from scant archaeological evidence. This evidence suggests that the dead were often buried close to settlements and that these burials were often in shallow graves with the bodies in extended or flexed positions (Davidson 1984: 173-174). Although there appears to have been considerable variation in the treatment of the dead before European contact, one trend that is apparent in the archaeological data is the increasing segregation of human remains in secluded locations. The earliest dated evidence suggests that this secondary deposition of bones was occurring in some areas by the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century (Davidson 1984: 173 -174). The two primary reasons for this shift in burial practice were an increased fear of desecration of remains by enemies (resulting from intensified warfare) and changing Maori beliefs about *tapu* and the dangers associated with the remains of the dead (Davidson 1984: 176-178).

More detailed information about Maori funerary practices is available after the arrival of Europeans. Numerous early visitors and residents commented on the Maori treatment of death, and although there were significant tribal variations expressed in these accounts, some common themes in early commentaries are apparent (Voykovic 1980: 110).[4] After death, the body was moved to a temporary shelter on the *marae* (*whare mare*) because it was considered polluting and dangerous (*tapu*). This *tapu* applied not only to the corpse, but to the principal mourners, who would remain with the dead until burial (Hiroa 1966: 416; Sinclair 1990: 226). The community was quickly notified of the death and the closest relatives of the deceased prepared the body[5] -

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[3] Allusions to Maori death customs also frequently appear in international publications (see for example Davies 2002; Leming and Dickinson 2002; Ter Blanche and Parkes 1997).
[4] For a discussion of Maori beliefs surrounding death see Mead (1991) and Oppenheim (1973).
[5] Hera (1995: 124) notes that traditional Maori society had its own experts who would care for the body for the duration of the *tangihana*.

some tribes using daily salt washes or shark oil to preserve the body for the duration of the *tangihanga* (Hiroa 1966: 416-417; Oppenheim 1973: 42-44). The body was placed on a flax mat, and bound in a foetal - or laid-out position. A cloak and valuable heirlooms were placed on the body, which was sometimes painted with red ochre (Hiroa 1966: 417; Voykovic 1981: 29).

Following such preparations, the closest female relatives would sit with the body amidst continuous weeping and wailing. The mourners sometimes practiced self-mutilation, including the cutting of hair and self-laceration with obsidian flakes or sharp shells (Oppenheim 1973: 52; Voykovic 1981: 30). The chief female mourners also observed fasting and kept a vigil over the body (Hera 1995: 125; Metge 1976: 28). The mourners in some tribes wore wreaths of green leaves, which were an expression of mourning, while some wore caps of dried seaweed, symbolic of the spiritual journey across the seas (Hiroa 1966: 417; Hera 1995: 125). The death of a chief was sometimes marked by the suicide of his wife (or one of his wives) and the killing of slaves. These slaves not only provided service to the person of rank in the afterlife but were also a way of expressing the *mana* of the dead individual (Hiroa 1966: 429; Oppenheim 1973: 52-56; Voykovic 1981: 35-39).

The local villagers were the first to pay their respects, followed by other visitors (*manuhiri*) who arrived in sub-tribal (*hapu*) and tribal (*iwi*) groups. After the arrival of Europeans, muskets were fired to signal the approaching visitors. The visitors were greeted by a wailing cry (*karanga*), and a dance (*haka*) performed by the men of the tribe (Oppenheim 1973: 49). With the arrival of each new group, the chief mourners renewed their wailing, and the local people and visitors made speeches addressing the deceased and the relationship between the groups. (Hiroa 1950: 418; Voykovic 1981: 30). Visitors sometimes brought gifts to the *tangihanga*. These gifts could be given to the tribe permanently or with the expectation that they would be returned at a future encounter (Hiroa 1966: 420; Metge 1976: 28).

The body remained unburied for a discretionary period until the last of the mourners had arrived - often two or three weeks after death (Metge 1976: 28). The visitors were accommodated and entertained by the home tribe during this period. Although it was a time of sadness and mourning, it was also a time of socialisation and

'competitive displays of singing, dancing and athletics' (Metge 1976: 28). In the evening people would assemble in the meeting house for speeches, singing, and discussion (Hiroa 1966: 422-423; Mead 1991: 44-45).

Before disposal, the corpse was wrapped in woven mats and a cloak. Mummification was occasionally practiced, and cremation also occasionally utilised when death occurred outside a tribal area, or where there were inadequate places for the deposition of remains (Best 1914; Hiroa 1966: 426; Taylor 1966: 154-156; Voykovic 1980: 84-94). Primary and secondary burial, however, remained the dominant forms of disposal (Oppenheim 1973: 60-63; Voykovic 1981: 53). With primary burial, the body was usually interred in a cave, swamp, sand dune, or earth grave. One important element of secondary burial was the 'display of bones' (*hahunga*), which involved the disinterment and treatment of remains after decomposition, a renewal of mourning, and the ultimate relocation of the bones to a secret burial place (Oppenheim 1973: 73; Voykovic 1981: 69). *Hahunga* involved the remains of one or more individuals and appears to have been connected primarily with chiefly families. It provided the opportunity for socialisation, political discussions, and feasting (Hiroa 1966: 425-426; Oppenheim 1973: 64-66; Voykovic 1981: 62-68). *Hahunga* also marked the end of death restrictions for the living and the transition of the dead individual to the status of a genealogical ancestor (Oppenheim 1973: 19-20).

A number of significant changes to these rituals occurred after European colonisation (Hera 1992, 1995; Mead 1991; Ngata 1987; Sinclair 1990; Voykovic 1980). The introduction of Christianity by missionaries, for example, had a significant impact on Maori beliefs, and processes such as urbanisation and modernisation 'eroded the fabric through which grieving, death and dying practices' were interwoven (Ngata 1987: 9). Certain features of the *tangihanga*, such as the killing of slaves and wife suicide, disappeared, while others, such as the disinterment of remains were transformed. Unveiling a headstone and displaying photographs of the dead, for example, became important elements of the *tangihanga*. Despite such changes, however, numerous elements of traditional death practices continue to be prominent in New Zealand (Dansey 1992: 110; Hera 1995; 128; McIntosh 2001: 238; Ngata 1987: 10; Sinclair 1990: 231), and funerary practices have become an important part of modern Maori identity (Sinclair 1990: 219).

The funeral director

While Maori funerary practices have been the subject of significant anthropological study and enthusiastic endorsement from those advocating a reversion to 'traditional' ritual, Pakeha funerals and funeral directors have generally been the subjects of less favourable scrutiny. Media reports in recent years, for example, have given particular prominence to 'back-stage' funeral activities, funeral costs, and the changing nature of funeral services. Funeral industry procedures involving preparation of bodies and disposal, have received extensive media attention over the past decade. One particularly high profile case involved a funeral director who claimed that the woman he attempted to embalm bled profusely after his initial incision (*Press* 13 February 1998: 3). Although the coroner later found that the woman had been 'irreversibly brain dead' when she was embalmed, the funeral worker maintained that she had been 'alive' (*Otago Daily Times* 26 November 1999: 30).[6] Another case related to the practice of embalming, involved a trainee funeral director who unsuccessfully sued his former employer for work-induced trauma, arising from his exposure to dead bodies (*Otago Daily Times* 26 November 2002: 18).[7] Recent media reports have also focussed on a funeral firm that 'swapped' coffins surreptitiously before disposal (*New Zealand Herald* 16 July 2004: A9), and a funeral business that established its premises in a busy urban shopping area amidst public opposition (*Press* 2 December 2004: A3).

Disposal issues have also been the subject of numerous feature stories in New Zealand newspapers and magazines. One prominent case involved a crematorium worker who was convicted of stealing jewellery from bodies before cremation (*Daily News* 21 September 2001: 1; *Daily News* 6 October 2001: 1, 17). Some articles have also examined the cremation procedure, and 'exposed' the 'mysteries' of the disposal process (*Dominion* 24 February 1996: 17; *Dominion* 13 April 2002: 1-2), while others have explored disposal options in urban centres (*Evening Post* 2 May 1998: 9-10; *Press* 27 April 2002: 1). The introduction of a lower-priced cremation service in Canterbury

[6] This case was also the subject of a *60 Minutes* television documentary ('Dead or Alive' 5 September 1999), and a *Women's Weekly* article (Noone 2001). See also *Sunday-Star Times* (15 February 1998: 4) and *Dominion* (4 March 1998: 3).

received significant media coverage and emphasised the tension between traditional, established businesses and the introduction of new, low-cost funeral firms (*Press*, 25 March 2000: Weekend 1-2; *Press* 27 April 2002: 1-2).

Funeral expenses have been a recurring theme in the popular literature: publications such as *Consumer Magazine*, for example, regularly investigate issues related to funeral cost (March 1987; November 1991; August 1996; April 2002). While funeral directors have frequently been portrayed as edacious individuals perpetuating procedures in the pursuit of profit, more recent emphasis has been on funeral industry developments. The arrival of a multinational corporation, for instance, resulted in media reports that represented the industry as an apathetic monolith increasingly dominated by commercialised North American funeral interests (for example Bone 2003; Heeringa 1997; Macdonald 1996; *Dominion* 23 July 1996: 1; *Waikato Times* 19 February 1998: 13). An *Assignment* television documentary (*Assignment* TV One 29 June 1997), for example, explored the potential impacts of this company entering the New Zealand funeral market, and featured interviews with prominent critics of North American death-care corporations. Although numerous funeral directors were ostensibly critical of this arrival, it also provided them with an opportunity to define and discuss the personalisation of New Zealand funeral services.[8] Similarly, it allowed 'alternative' funeral providers and funeral reform groups to promote their services and interpretations of funerary ritual, and expound their position in relation to established funeral firms.

Funeral reform movements such as the Funeral Choice Collective have regularly appeared in the media, with proponents of the group emphasising the need to 'reclaim' funerary ritual from funeral professionals (Ansley 1991; Consedine 1997; *The Press*, 13 June 1998: 14). Such groups have criticised the degree of control exerted by funeral directors and the fees associated with these services. The 'DIY' alternative has also received media attention (*New Zealand Herald* 3 June 1995: 8; *New Zealand Herald* 25 June 2005: sup. 12-16). While some eco-burial advocates have excoriated funeral director practices, others have focused their attention on the environmental impact of

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[7] His claims for compensatory damages were rejected by a High Court judge (*Otago Daily Times* 12 March 2003: 26), the Court of Appeal (*Otago Daily Times* 10 April 2004: 29), and the Supreme Court (*Dominion Post* 16 July 2004: 7).
[8] This will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

modern human disposal (Course 2002: 32-33; Hannah 2002a; *Nelson Mail* 17 October 2001: 4).

These ostensibly discordant approaches to disposal are highlighted in a recent *North and South* magazine article (Sperber 2003). The feature begins with an overview of 'conventional' funerary practices, with a significant amount of shrift devoted to embalming. The writer then proceeds to examine funeral industry 'innovators', citing eco-burial businesses in Christchurch and Motueka. The proprietors of both businesses emphasise the environmentally responsible nature of their disposal concepts, in contrast to the toxicity of embalmed bodies and mass-produced coffins. They emphasise 'natural' and 'healthy' disposition, epitomised by the quote of one eco-burial advocate: 'Death is a normal part of life. I'd like to see it reintegrated as such, and I think the way we employ professionals to deal with our dead helps us keep death at arm's length, which isn't healthy' (Sperber 2003: 57). The final section of the article examines an alternative association of funeral directors and an Auckland funeral director that emphasises 'natural death', lamenting the loss of this important communal event in modern society. This overview of funeral trends emphasises a rather familiar, but simplistic, representation of the funeral industry: a rationalised mainstream industry dominated by bureaucratic funeral functionaries, juxtaposed with the personal approach of alterative funeral providers harmonized with the 'needs' of the client and typically critical of mainstream practices.[9]

Another discernible area of media interest has been changes within the mainstream industry and the role of the funeral director. The US drama series *Six Feet Under* was frequently cited as being an unsentimental representation of the family funeral firm, and credited with realistically revealing the complexities of the occupation. Although funeral directors were careful to identify the differences between North American and New Zealand approaches to death (for example *Evening Post* 22 June 2002: 25-26; *Press* 7 September 2001: 1), funeral directors also set out to dispel the 'mysteries'

[9] This juxtaposition is particularly evident in the photographs used in the article. The president of the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand and the managing director of a large urban funeral firm is pictured in a corporate suit leaning against a large American hearse in front of elaborate funeral facilities. The proprietor of an eco-burial firm, on the other hand, is photographed in a garden setting, next to a cardboard coffin, a kitten in her arms and a dog at her feet.

surrounding death and disposal (for example *New Zealand Herald* 21 September 2002: A19; *Press* 26 February 2003: 16).

One theme evident in numerous media reports is the 'need' to re-establish a degree of personal control in relation to funerals. Articles in the *Evening Post* (28 March 2002: 34) and *Sunday Star Times* (15 October 2000: D3), for example, note that people are gaining greater control of funerals and that personalised options are an intrinsic component of contemporary funerals in New Zealand. Various funeral venues, coloured coffins, 'tributes', catering, and home viewing are some of the personalised alternatives presently available. One funeral director is quoted as saying that funeral participation and control are important elements of the 'grieving process' (*Sunday Star Times* 15 October 2000: D3). Although this 'grieving process' is rarely explored, there is a perceived incongruity between 'traditional' funerals offered by the 'traditional' funeral directors and the personalised needs of the late-modern consumer. An article in the *Otago Daily Times* (25 January 2003: B1), for example, notes that the intransigent and austere Anglophone approach to death is slowly changing and that this transformation is at least partly due to the influence of the Maori *tangi*. Interviewees are reported as stating that contemporary Western society often denies the reality of death but that New Zealanders were now more 'open' with their emotions. One important factor related to this expression of emotion is the increasing number of female funeral directors in the funeral industry. Females were typically portrayed as a source of emotional support, exuding 'a natural, instinctive compassion' (Redgrave 2002: 193).

In addition to the extensive literature on death-related issues in the media and Maori funerary practices, there are a few studies of Pakeha funerals that are particularly relevant to the present project. These studies have examined the early history of the funeral industry and explored changes in contemporary funerary ritual. Cleaver (1996) provides an apposite historical overview of funerary practices. He examines the Pakeha treatment of death between 1850 and 1910, and argues that Ariès model of attitudes towards death is applicable to New Zealand society. In particular, he stipulates that three of the five phases identified by Ariès - namely 'Tame Death', 'Death of the Other', and 'Invisible Death' - can be identified in Pakeha funeral practices. During the nineteenth century, for example, undertakers were primarily

concerned with constructing and transporting coffins (Cleaver 1996: 28). Increasingly in the twentieth century, however, undertakers took possession of the body, offered embalming services, and built mortuary chapels for funeral services. Undertakers also began to take increasing responsibility for the registration of deaths (Cleaver 1996: 29-34). This extension of the undertakers' role not only indicates a move away from 'the calm acceptance of death' (Cleaver 1996: 116) that typified Ariès' 'Tame Death', but also highlighted an increasing avoidance of the 'realities' of death. Thus the elaborate public funeral rituals of the nineteenth century were replaced by discreet funerals and privatised grief, emphasising the 'Invisible Death' observed by Ariès. The cult of tombs and cemeteries which characterised Ariès' 'Death of the Other' was also evident in nineteenth century New Zealand. A diversity of grave stone styles and shapes providing informative biographical inscriptions, was superseded by uniformity and lack of ostentation (Cleaver 1996: 90-102). Finally, the introduction of cremation in the twentieth century highlighted 'Invisible Death'. Cremation was not only promoted as an enlightened, sanitary, and economically sound alternative to burial, but a method of disposal that avoided the physical realities of decomposition (Cleaver 1996: 108-110).

Dickey (1980) provides another historical study that is particularly pertinent to the present project. Dickey (1980) contends that in the twentieth century traditional theodices competed with fragmented and individualistic cosmologies and that death rites have consequently become more flexible and informal. Dickey (1980: 11-12) contends that death has also become progressively privatised and rationalised during this period, and that this shift is particularly apparent in the prevalence of simple and functional funerary rites. Examples of these rites include abbreviated funeral services, efficient dispatch of the body, and the disappearance of traditions such as viewing (Dickey 1980: 49-50). These findings mark an interesting point of departure and engagement for the present study, which explores many of the changes that have occurred since the completion of Dickey's study.

Hera (1995) mobilises an eco-feminist theoretical framework to engage in a historical critique of after-death practices and policy, arguing that women need to reclaim the rites associated with post-mortem practices. Hera (1995) explores the rise of professions dealing with death and the 'market-model' approach to arranging

funerals, and contends that the stories she gathered for her doctoral research reveal that death has been medicalised and mystified in modern society. Hera (1995) draws parallels between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and propounds a model of after-death care that emphasises home and community. She also specifically stipulates that Maori funerary practices have had an important influence on Pakeha culture in New Zealand (Hera 1995).[10]

Calder (1998) offers another study incorporating an historical overview of post-mortem practices, and outlines changes in Pakeha funerals during the twentieth century. Her sources indicate that death was accepted 'naturally' in nineteenth century New Zealand and that in some rural areas death remained a home-centred event until the 1970s. Interviews with her participants, however, revealed that practices such as embalming became more prevalent with the promotion of the 'psychological benefits' of this procedure (Calder 1998: 50), and that practices such as viewing have witnessed a recent resurgence. Participants in her study also emphasised that funerals were more personalised and that families often asserted their desire for individuality and involvement. More venues were available for funerals and an increasing number of people employed the services of a funeral celebrant. Calder (1998: 60) also asserts that there has been an increasing public awareness of the Maori *tangihanga*. In her brief review of funeral directors, she notes that funeral directors emphasised their role in the grief process, and that urban centres had experienced a marked increase in the number of funeral businesses - including niche market establishments. She recounts criticism of the funeral industry, including publicity surrounding the arrival of North American funeral corporations and consumer groups who claim that funeral directors deskill and disempower consumers (Calder 1998: 66-71).

Pilbrow (1995) concurs with both Calder (1998) and Hera (1995) in asserting that elements of the Maori *tangihanga* have been incorporated into non-Maori funerary ritual. Pilbrow (1995) sets out to identify and discuss funerary ritual in New Zealand

[10] Hera (1992; 1995) was instrumental in establishing the Palmerston North Women's Homedeath Support Group, which is dedicated to understanding how and why death was removed from female control, and promoting practices which reverse this trend (Hera 1992: 263; 1995: 285). In 1993 this group published a book providing information for those who wanted to attend to the dead before disposal (Hera 1993).

and explores the purpose of post-mortem practices. She stipulates that disposal of the dead and support for the bereaved are two critical functions of funerary ritual. Ritual specifically allows survivors to honour the dead, to express emotion, and to acknowledge the reality of a death. She notes that these features of funerals provide evidence for 'certain universals of funeral ritual' and that ritual remains an important element of demystifying death in contemporary society (Pilbrow 1995: 44). Pilbrow (1995) briefly examines the practice of viewing and the organisation of funeral arrangements, asserting that personalisation of ritual and the provision of 'options' are intrinsic components of a 'successful' funeral.

Nixon (1992) also examines the function of funerary ritual in New Zealand. Nixon (1992: 6) stipulates that funerals are an important factor in effecting healthy grief resolution and that the primary function of contemporary funerals is, therefore, the 'personal function' - the potential of funerary ritual to assist mourners in adjusting to loss. Due to the significance of this personal function, Nixon (1992) argues that the clergy's principal funerary focus should be pastoral care. He asserts that participation by the bereaved is an intrinsic element of ritual and that this development needs to be encouraged by funeral officiants.[11] He also notes that funerals are a celebration of the life of the deceased, and that realistic representations of the deceased are instrumental in effectuating a 'positive outcome' for the bereaved. Funerals, according to this author, should also permit the expression of 'genuine emotion'. Nixon (1992), however, identifies what he perceives to be an incongruity in contemporary society: although the majority of funerals in New Zealand are for nominal (non-church-going) Christians[12], these funerals continue to utilise traditional Christian officiants, content, and structure. He believes that the existing Anglican liturgy fails to deal appropriately with the needs of nominal Christians and recommends that funerary rituals be expanded into effective and relevant rituals for the bereaved in New Zealand.

In my own study of funeral celebrants, however, I found that numerous clergy were indeed personalising funeral services in response to the introduction of secular

[11] Coster (2000: 19), in contrast, notes that the bereaved should not dictate the 'total tone and tenor of the funeral service', and that the minister 'should prescribe the content of the funeral service'.
[12] The correlation between secularisation, grief, and the role of the funeral director will be explored in chapter five.

funeral celebrants in the late 1970s (Schäfer 1998). These celebrants promoted life-centred funerals focusing on the biography of a particular individual, and effected a significant transformation in funerary ritual. Celebrants and numerous clergy propounded the potential of this personal approach and cited mourner involvement, 'tributes', and personalised symbolic rituals as examples of relevant and meaningful ritual for nominal Christians in New Zealand.

Lawrence (1995) provides an analysis of ritualised funeral behaviour, and argues that contemporary funerary practices intrinsically deny the 'realities' of death. She contends that the increasing number of funerals held in funeral director chapels clearly illustrate the separation of the living and the dead (Lawrence 1995: 28), and that ritual objects and actions have been replaced with euphemistic symbols that avoid the reality of death. Caskets, for example, symbolically separate the living and the dead, while attempts to create 'life-like' appearances with embalming, emphasises society's denial of death (Lawrence 1995: 47). Christian liturgy and non-religious liturgy are components of ritual language, which Lawrence (1995: 92) claims is also euphemistic, that is, the figurative rhetorical expressions and life-affirming themes evident in the language of the funeral highlight society's denial of death. Lawrence (1995: 122) also examines the role of the deceased, the mourners, and the funeral functionaries, arguing that the construction of these ritual identities 'illustrates the separation of the living and the dead in the social mind'. Lawrence (1995: 110-123) outlines the roles of the clergy, the secular funeral celebrant, and the funeral director. Although she briefly traces the history of funeral directing, she focuses primarily on the professionalisation and impression management of funeral directors, asserting that these elements of the occupation not only justify their existence, but simultaneously obscure death and deathwork (Lawrence 1995: 117-122).

Watson and Tolich (1998) also explore deathwork, in particular the strategies employed by deathworkers to protect themselves from the 'realities' of their occupation and the stigma associated with it. The authors briefly outline the treatment of the body before disposal and emphasise that funeral directors utilise 'emotion work' to distance themselves from the tasks involved with human disposal. Watson and Tolich (1998: 333-337) maintain that death and grief is hidden in modern society and that funeral workers often confront the 'spatial contradiction' of being

simultaneously sequestered from society and exposed to the bereaved. While the authors raise some interesting issues related to funeral work, they rely heavily on the death-denial thesis to inform their investigation and conclude with the extremely tenuous claim that funeral home workers are 'the most hidden occupation among death workers' (Watson and Tolich 1998: 341).[13]

Finally, I include an examination of the embalming process by Heath (2002). Heath's (2002) ethnography follows the passage of the body through preparation procedures, focusing on the bond between body and social identity. Employing the theoretical conceptualisations of Gadamer and Geertz, Heath (2002: 19) argues that the identity constructed at the site of a body is a fiction and a patchwork of interpretations. He contends that the identity and personhood of the deceased undergo numerous liminal phases during body preparation and that post-mortem identity arises from 'interpretations of a person constituted out of characteristics assembled at the site of their dead body, in conjunction with people who are capable of reading meaningfully from such an assemblage' (Heath 2002: 23). Heath (2002: 78) outlines the role of embalming in constructing a representation of the deceased and notes that embalming assuages the transition from life to death rather than 'denying' the reality of this phenomenon.

This brief review indicates that post-mortem practices have been the subject of some interest in New Zealand. While these studies provide relevant historical context and emphasise the recent shift to personalised ritual, few have critically explored this development or examined the role of the funeral director in particular.

1.3 Research on funerals and funeral directors

The following discussion provides an overview of the literature focusing on funerals and funeral directors in other Western societies. Specifically, numerous studies in North America, Britain, Europe and Australia have examined a diverse range of issues relevant to the ensuing exploration of post-mortem personalisation in New Zealand.

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[13] As the ensuing review of media representations (and chapter three) will elucidate, embalmers and other funeral home workers have not only been proactive in publicising their role, but regularly feature in media reports. Easterday (1983), Lesy (1987), and Sudnow (1967) also provide descriptions of death workers who could arguably be described as more 'hidden' than funeral home workers.

Research in North America

There exists a plethora of literature on death practices and the funeral industry in North America.[14] The following section briefly reviews some of the literature relevant to the present research, including studies that explore multifarious facets of the funeral directing occupation, transformations in the funeral industry, and concomitant changes in funerary practice. The ensuing chapters reveal that there are distinct similarities between developments in North America and New Zealand, and that New Zealand funeral directors have adopted innovations such as embalming, funeral chapels, and death education linked to professionalisation. It is also evident, however, that funerary practices in New Zealand deviate from those in North America, and that the funeral industry in New Zealand has played a salient role in highlighting these deviations, and contributed to a particular construction of post-mortem practices.

The economic element of funerals and a concern with 'efficient' and 'rational' ritual has been a recurring theme in the funeral literature. Authors such as Dowd (1921), Bowman (1959), Harmer (1963), and Mitford (1963) present critiques of the American funeral industry, excoriating what they perceive to be irrational, corrupt and excessive commercialisation of funerary practices. Other economic studies have examined funeral expenditure (Bern-Klug et al. 2000; Blackwell 1967; Pine and Phillips 1970) and the impact of funeral costs on US households (Banks 1998). Economic critiques continue to be prevalent (for example Mitford 1998; Roberts 1997), with authors such as Carlson (1997) and Morgan (1990) providing consumer guides for individuals wishing to circumvent funeral director involvement.

In response to some of these early critiques, authors such as Irion (1966) and Pine (1975) examine the role of funeral directors and ritual. Pine's (1975) sociological study, for example, asserts that funeral director presentation is intrinsically linked to organisational setting and that modern funeral functionaries manage a multiplicity of tasks, including professional, administrative, and business components. The literature

[14] The bibliographies compiled by Fulton (1981) and Southard (1991), the sociological overview presented by Owen et al. (1994), and the extensive bibliographies included in the textbooks of

also features dramaturgical studies drawing on the work of Kenneth Burke and Erving Goffman and highlight the performative nature of funeral directing (Turner and Edgley 1976). This theatrical analogy has become an enduringly popular interpretive framework in which to analyse funerals and the work of funeral directors in Western society (for example Charmaz 1980; Howarth 1996; Smale 1985). Hyland and Morse (1995) utilise the theatre analogy, but argue that funeral directors 'orchestrate' rather than 'direct' funerals, and that these functionaries can now be regarded as 'professional comforters' of the bereaved. Unruh (1979) also notes that funeral directors are integrally involved in the creation of experiences, and examines how funeral directors manage sources of risk to prevent 'spoiled' funeral performances.

Goffman's (1968) study on the management of spoiled identity and stigma has proved useful in the analysis of funeral directors, as it is this management that forms a central feature of occupational professionalisation.[15] In an ethnographic study of funeral directors, Thompson (1991), for example, found that funeral workers were acutely aware of the stigma associated with their occupation and utilised various strategies, including role redefinition and an emphasis on professionalism and service, to diminish any discrediting attributes.

The role of funeral functionaries and areas of role conflict have also been an important area of academic interest. The relationship between clergy and funeral directors, in particular, has received significant shrift (Bradfield and Myers 1980; French 1985; Fulton 1960, Irion 1991). Fulton (1960) found that there was widespread criticism of funeral directors and funerary practices by clergy, while French (1985) notes that concurrence of funeral director and clerical views depended to a significant degree on the denominational affiliation of the clergy. Bradfield and Myers (1980: 343) emphasise that the central issue involved in conflict between these functionaries is the opposition of religious and secular ideals, but the results of their research indicate that this conflict had abated with the professionalisation of the funeral

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DeSpelder and Strickland (2005), Kearl (1989), and Leming and Dickinson (2002) provide some indication of the extent of this literature.

[15] There has also been significant interest in the roles of other death-related occupations and stigmatisation. See for example Easterday (1983), Lesy (1987), Reynolds and Kalish (1974), and Sudnow (1967).

director, and a greater acceptance of the funeral directors' new status by religious leaders. Irion (1991) has also commented on the importance of co-operation between funeral functionaries in providing pastoral care for the bereaved.

The professionalisation of funeral directors has received considerable attention in the academic literature and will be explored in chapter three. Authors such as Barley (1983), Crouch (1975), Foreman (1974) and Torres (1988) provide theoretical perspectives on the professionalisation of the occupation, while Habenstein (1962), Habenstein and Lamers (1955), Farrel (1980), Laderman (1996, 2003) and Rundblad (1995) examine the historical development of the funeral profession. It is these latter studies that provide particularly illuminating perspectives for the exploration of the New Zealand funeral director.

In their voluminous history of funeral specialists, Habenstein and Lamers (1955) document the increasing control of the funeral director in the nineteenth century and the shift in funeral directing to service provision. They note that this development was closely linked to the advancement of arterial embalming and funeral directors' establishments associated with urbanisation (Habenstein and Lamers 1955: 440). Habenstein (1962: 230) notes that by 1850 undertakers had established themselves as entrepreneurs offering a set of services for a charge, and that the following century witnessed: 'the growth of a self conscious, aggressive body of secular, quasi-professionally orientated, personal service performers of mortuary tasks, carrying out their activities with a context of business enterprise'.

Rundblad (1995) explores the pre-market role of women and the subsequent commercialisation of the undertaking occupation, emphasising that the developing funeral industry submerged the knowledges and stories of shrouding women in their endeavour to construct an 'official' history of funeral directing. Farrel (1980) notes that funeral directors focused their attention on providing funeral services as well as funeral merchandise. There were subsequent changes in funeral procedures in the twentieth century as funeral directors attempted to simplify and abbreviate funerary rituals and make 'the funeral as painless for survivors as death was for the deceased' (Farrell 1980: 182). Earlier research by Foreman (1974) also noted the shift in funeral

director service during the first five decades of the twentieth century, in which an early emphasis on sanitation was superseded by a stress on sympathy.

More recently, Laderman (1996) provides a study of American attitudes to death and the funereal commodification of the corpse. In his study of death and the funeral industry in twentieth century America, Laderman (2003) emphasises the increasing estrangement of the living and the dead. He concurs with the aforementioned authors in highlighting the central significance of embalming, but stipulates that emphasis has progressively been placed on the funeral as an instrument of psychological healing, and the funeral director as a grief specialist and death educator (Laderman 2003: 104). Laderman (2003) explores funeral industry efforts to standardise and streamline funeral services and examines the homogeneity of American death ways.[16] Finally, this author examines the corporatisation of American funerals and the increasing significance of cremation, both of which have contributed to fundamental changes in the funeral industry.

Cremation in the United States has been explored by authors such as Irion (1968), Cronin (1996), and Dawson et al. (1990), but a particularly insightful study has been proffered by Prothero (2001). In his historical account of cremation, Prothero (2001) identifies conspicuous parallels between sanitary embalming and the 'purifying' process of incineration, but notes that this disposal method was increasingly represented as a point of personal preference rather than a public health measure. Despite initial funeral industry resistance to cremation – particularly its concomitance with low-cost disposal - a more accommodative approach prevailed in recent years. Prothero (2001) perhaps overstates the extent to which this change signals a 'democratisation' of funerary ritual, but he emphasises that this transformation contributed to a new style of ritual embraced by baby boomers. This ritual was increasingly 'characterized by simplicity, spontaneity, informality, flexibility, improvisation, participation, and (above all) personalization' (Prothero 2001: 200).[17]

Bergen and Williams (1981) provide an exploratory study of attitudes to 'alternative' funerals professed by an urban, Protestant congregation in the American Midwest.

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[16] See also Fulton (1994) and Metcalf and Huntington (1991: 191-214).

More recently, Gadberry (2000) asserts that body disposition is gradually changing in the United States, and that traditional funerals are being transformed. Not only is cremation currently less 'deviant', but life-centred and celebratory funerals are also increasing in frequency. Although such funerals continue to be uncommon, increasing diversity and mourner involvement are evident in final funeral arrangements (Dawson et al. 1990; Fulton 1994). Incorporating the individuality and identity of the deceased into funerary ritual has similarly become more prevalent and authors such as Heinz (1999) and Moller (1996) emphasise the centrality of individualism in contemporary funerals.[18] The secularisation of funerary ritual is intrinsically related to this development, as I will discuss in chapter five. In an ethnographic study of funerals for 'congregationally unaffiliated' Americans, Garces-Foley (2003) contends that such funerals are more informal, with significant emphasis on spontaneous sharing and mourner participation. She found, however, that these funerals continue to utilise a standardised ritual structure. Garces-Foley (2003: 300) also notes that although personalisation and self-expression are important elements of these funerals, the themes of belief in God, personal immortality, and the value of ethical living were persistently espoused during the course of her research.

A number of studies have examined the function of contemporary ritual in North America, particularly the correlation between participation in ritual and grief. As noted above, funeral directors have placed increasing emphasis on the psychological role of funerals and the role of ritual in effecting a positive grief 'process'. The objectification and medicalisation of grief - and concomitant role of ritual - will be discussed in the following section but the following studies provide insights into the psychological significance of funerals from the mourners' perspective. Doka (1984), for example, could not confirm the hypothesis that participation in funerary rites contributed to subsequent grief adjustment, while Bolton and Camp (1987) similarly assert that pre-funeral rituals (such as viewing), and the funeral service itself, had minimal impact on grief 'adaptation'.[19] Authors such as Bosley and Cook (1993),

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[17] Fulton and Owen (1994: 22), on the other hand, note that the increase in cremation and direct disposal can be interpreted as attempts to limit the social impact of death.

[18] Bellah et al. (1985), Baumeister (1986), and Kearl and Harris (1982) also provide important studies of individualism in North America.

[19] Doka (1984) did note, however, that expectation of death was an important consideration in the facilitation of grief, and Bolton and Camp (1987) found that post-funeral rituals (such as visiting the gravesite) had some impact on adaptation.

however, note the importance of active participation in the creation of meaningful ritual, and Gamino *et al* (2000) stipulate that their study provides empirical evidence for the claim that participation in funerary ritual contributes to the 'effective adjustment' of mourners. Castle and Phillips (2003) similarly state that post-funeral rituals have the potential to facilitate adjustment to bereavement.

One final relevant author is Emke (no date, 2002). Emke (no date) examines the historical negotiation of funeral worker identity in Newfoundland and notes that the processes of professionalisation parallel similar developments in other occupations. Emke (2002) explores recent changes in the funeral industry in Atlantic Canada, focusing on the combined effects of secularisation and professionalisation. Emke (2002) documents a shift in funerary focus from religion to psychology, and notes the increasing personalisation evident in funerary practices. Although practices such as funeral home viewing (rather than church viewing) and cremation provide some indication of secularisation, he emphasises that the main liturgical traditions continue to play a significant role in Newfoundland. While there are clear parallels here with the situation in New Zealand, Emke's observations related to the funeral director are particularly insightful. Emke (2002: 278) stipulates that 'part of the professional mission of deathwork is to infuse modern funeral rituals with meaning'. Not only did participants in his study underline the therapeutic function of funerals, but some saw their role as 'protectors of rituals' countering the 'detrimental' loss of these funerary rites.

Research in the United Kingdom and Europe

New Zealand was colonised by European settlers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An important source of these early settlers was the United Kingdom, and, as chapter three reveals, there are distinct historical similarities in the treatment of death between these geographically disparate regions. The early development of the funeral directing occupation in New Zealand paralleled the evolution of the industry in the UK, and, although the twentieth century witnessed the adoption of predominantly North American innovations, New Zealand continues to share characteristic commonalities with the UK. There are numerous historical studies of death and funerary ritual in the United Kingdom (for example Cox 1998; Cressy 1997; Curl 1972; Fritz 1994; Gittings 1984; Gorer 1965; Houlbrooke 1998; Jalland 1996; Jupp

1997a, Leaney 1989; Litten 1991, 1998; Richardson 1987, 1989; Rugg 1997, 1998; Whaley 1981a): the analyses relevant to the current study will be explored in chapter three. The following section, however, reviews studies of funeral directors and the funeral industry that are particularly appurtenant to my own ethnographic endeavour.

One of the earliest ethnographic studies of modern funeral directing in Britain is that of Smale (1985). Employing a dramaturgical theoretical framework, Smale (1985) reviews the social history and commercialisation of death in the United Kingdom, and presents a comparative study of funeral directing in Newfoundland. He evaluates the professionalisation of the funeral directing occupation, claiming that funeral directors have mystified the funeral process. Smale (1985: 476) contends that funeral directors are important agents of social control and that funerals proffered by these functionaries are frequently standardised productions with minimal individuality, spontaneity, or active mourner participation. In a more recent contribution, Smale (1997: 115-116) describes British funerary ritual as:

> [T]awdry, lacking in sensitivity to individual needs, unnecessarily routine in operation, excessively expensive and self-perpetuating ... funerals are staged performances in which a specific occupation acts as producer and director in order to maintain economic profit and occupational prestige.

Smale (1997) contends that this restrictive and inimical situation contrasts with funerals in North America, where consumers are assured a far greater degree of autonomy and control over funerary ritual.

Naylor (1989) also engages in a sociological study of funeral directors, examining the management of death and ritual in an urban context. She explores the augmentation of the funeral directors role, and stipulates that the processes of bureaucratisation, secularisation, and professionalisation have been evident in the twentieth century treatment of death. She critiques some of the predominant themes encountered in the literature, including the de-ritualisation and denial of death (see Gorer 1965), suggesting that death has been 'de-contextualised' rather than 'denied'. Naylor (1989) also found that privatisation and individualism had resulted in some personalisation of ritual, and that groups involved in the management of death propounded varying interpretive frameworks of death. In contrast to the majority of participants in the

present study, Naylor (1989: 355) also found that funeral directors had done little to educate the public about their role and, in failing to do so, had perpetuated the numerous misconceptions surrounding the funeral industry.

Prior (1989) explores the social organisation of death in Belfast and provides a Foucauldian analysis of the public and private discourses surrounding death. In the first part of his analysis Prior (1989) examines the state agencies responsible for the certification, registration, and explanation of deaths, and in the second he explores the private beliefs, attitudes and rituals surrounding death. It is this second section which is particularly pertinent to the present study, notably Prior's discussion of the body. Prior (1989: 201) traces the passage of the body from death to disposal, and emphasises the centrality of the body to funeral processes: 'Sentiment is expressed over the body, religious ritual circulates around the body, images of death are imposed on the body, and above all, death is individualised through the body'. I examine the significance of the body and its relationship to personalisation and identity more fully in chapter four.

Howarth (1992; 1996) conducted an ethnographic study of funeral directing in the East End of London, employing a dramaturgical analysis to examine the work of the modern funeral director. Howarth (1996) explores the historical transition from undertaking to funeral directing in Britain and traces the professionalisation of the occupation. She propounds that professionalisation is particularly evident in the increasing bureaucratisation of funerals during the twentieth century and in the control that funeral directors exert over the corpse (Howarth 1996: 97). These elements, she argues, not only distance the bereaved from death, but mystify and obscure deathwork procedures. Embalming was increasingly utilised by funeral directors who, like their counterparts in North America, appropriated the rhetoric of hygiene reformers and gradually presented 'hygienic treatment' - and the concomitant practice of viewing - as important elements of the grieving process (Howarth 1996: 147-169). Howarth (1996: 199) also emphasises the significant level of control exercised by funeral functionaries over the funeral ceremony, in contrast to the passive and restricted role of the bereaved. Howarth (1996: 206) states that funeral directors have been instrumental in transforming the British way of death and that

the transition to modern funerary customs has been rationalised in terms of benefits to clients.

In her social psychological study of death in Britain, Bradbury (1999) also argues that funeral directors achieved a dominant position in the disposal process through their possession of the commercially and symbolically powerful corpse. Her examination of the discourses surrounding death - particularly the manner in which deaths were described as 'good', 'bad', and 'natural' or 'unnatural' - is particularly important to the present study (see also Bradbury 1996). 'Good' deaths included those that conformed to an idealised conception of a medically controlled event, or conversely those that were seen to reject an increasingly over-interventionist medical approach. Although authors such as Illich (1976) argued that the medicalisation of death predominant in Western society signalled the end of 'natural' death, Bradbury (1999: 154) contends that 'natural' death has in some ways been transformed into a 'good' death because of critical attitudes to intrusive medical control. This development is reflected in the natural death movement, which focuses on the rights and needs of the dying.

Bradbury (1999: 155) asserts that the empowerment of the consumer extends to funeral practices and that 'natural' death not only rejects medical science, but attempts to free itself from funeral director control. As will be explored in this dissertation, however, funeral directors also emphasised the importance of 'natural' death and grief, and distanced contemporary funerary ritual from the rationalisation and bureaucratisation inherent in elements of modern life.[20] Bodies had to be restored to a 'natural' appearance so that the bereaved could experience 'natural' grief and begin the psychological process of recovery. This social construction of grief, in particular, will be elaborated below. Bradbury (1999: 182) notes that the social representations of 'good' death she observed were prescriptive and often continued to legitimise medical authority - and in the context of the present study - the legitimacy and authority of the funeral director.

[20] See also Walter (1994, 1995, 1999) and Hockey (1993, 1996a, 1996b). The studies of both these authors will be examined in the ensuing chapters.

Parsons (1997) also investigates organisational change in the British funeral industry during the twentieth century, with particular reference to the 1960-1994 period. He too explores funeral director control of the dead and argues that practices such as embalming and cremation have contributed to the rationalised environment of funeral performance (Parsons 1997: 105). Parsons (1997) also charts the rise of the large, centralised funeral organisation, contending that the practices of these firms have culminated in the depersonalisation of funerals, and thus contributed to a resurgence of small funeral businesses.

Bremborg (2002) and Vischer (1999) provide two European studies to consider briefly here. Bremborg (2002) examines the role of contemporary funeral directors in Sweden and assesses their influence over funerary rites. While it is clear that there are significant differences between the funeral industries of New Zealand and Sweden[21], it is also evident that there are noteworthy similarities. Bremborg (2002: 250) found, for example, that Swedish funeral directors had attempted to professionalise their occupation by de-emphasising their contact with corpses and funeral merchandise, focusing instead on offering high service standards to the bereaved. She also found that funeral directors had significant authority in relation to funerary practices such as viewing, and that funeral directors emphasised the importance of creating a personal funeral that accentuated the 'positive' elements of death.

A funeral home and crematorium in a Swiss-German town form the focus of Vischer's (1999) ethnographic study. Vischer (1999) examines the Swiss funeral industry and the professionalisation of the funeral director. There are identifiable parallels here between the stigma examined by North American and UK studies, and the polluting potential of corpses (*Leichengift*[22]) identified by Vischer (1999). Although there is limited risk of disease, Vischer (1999) found that funeral directors symbolically distanced themselves from the dead bodies, and had to deal with negative public images related to these tasks and the reality that funeral directors were engaged in a commercial enterprise centred on death. Vischer (1999: 103) notes that much of the funeral and disposal processes have been medicalised to distance

[21] Bremborg (2002: 252) predicts, for example, that funeral homes with viewing facilities, refreshment lounges, and chapels will become more common, and that secular funeral services with individualised content will become more prevalent in the future. Both of these developments are standard elements of the New Zealand funeral and will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

death workers from the contamination of the corpse. As will become clear in the ensuing chapters, death and disposal in New Zealand have also been medicalised but recent developments have subsumed this medicalisation within a discourse of personalisation.

Research in Australia

The last two decades have seen a proliferation of literature focusing on Australian post-mortem practices. Authors such as Fitzpatrick (1997) have explored Australian constructs of the 'good' death, while Kellehear and Anderson (1997) examine the gendered meanings and experiences surrounding death. Griffin and Tobin (1997) present a social history of death in Australia, and Kellehear (2000) outlines the formative historical and social influences shaping the Australian way of death. Nicol (1986, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2000) provides a comprehensive exploration of burial customs.

The funeral industry and funeral ritual have also been a focus of research attention. Pringle and Alley (1995) provide an overview of the funeral industry in Australia and highlight the changing role of women in post-mortem occupational roles. Similarly, Howarth (2000a: 89) comments on the increasing level of female involvement in the funeral industry, stipulating that this participation could contribute to a 'feminisation of ritual'. Howarth (2000a) notes, however, that the arrival of multinational funeral corporations during the 1990s could result in an eventual standardisation and Americanisation of ritual, decreasing the extant diversity of Australian funerals.[23] Doctoral research conducted by Carden (pers. comm.) also examines the practices of the funeral industry in South Australia, including the preparation of the body, ritual arrangement, and the gendered and ethnic emotion of funeral workers. Carden (2002) considers how funeral workers utilise space and time to construct the discourse of 'dead', arguing that the industry plays a prominent role in reinforcing the notion that the living and the dead occupy discrete domains with distinct boundaries. She argues, for example, that the specific utilisation of a coffin not only separates the living from the dead, but also enforces the way the bereaved should behave around the deceased. Similarly, funeral complexes and funeral services are constructed to

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[22] Literally translated, 'corpse poison'.

move mourners through space in a particular way, while funeral directors exert a considerable degree of control to ensure the efficient utilisation of both time and space. One particularly interesting observation made by Carden (2002), relates to the limited degree of mourner participation in the preparation and interaction with the corpse. In contrast, many participants in the present project cited the significance of contact with the corpse in personalising funerary ritual.

1.6 Theoretical perspectives

In one of my early forays into the study of funeral directing, I was presented with an information booklet produced by the largest funeral director association in New Zealand (FDANZ), entitled 'What you need to know about funerals'. This booklet contains rudimentary information regarding the organisation of a funeral and provides a brief overview of the value and function of a funeral:

> Over the centuries and all over the world, people have devised many different and varied funeral customs and rituals. Almost all pay tribute to and remember with fondness the life of the deceased. Time has helped evolve these customs and rituals and the ones that are with us today are those which have proven to offer the most comfort and support. The funeral is the final opportunity that family and friends have to publicly express their love and respect for the deceased. If it is arranged carefully and sensitively so that it expresses the feelings and fulfils the needs of everyone attending, then it can be enormously beneficial in helping people come to terms with their loss. It is the first and most important step towards working through one's grief and re-adjusting to life. The therapeutic value of the funeral is widely recognised. Finally, from a practical point of view, the funeral assures the legal, reverent and hygienic burial or cremation of the deceased.

This explanation elicits a number of important theoretical questions that will be addressed in the course of this research. One obvious element of funerary ritual emphasised in the funeral director publication is the relationship between the grief of the survivors and function of ritual. The pamphlet explicitly states that post-mortem practices have evolved to effect the resolution of grief in contemporary society, and it is this assertion that requires some explanation. The expression of emotion is also related to this endeavour, as is the concept of 'working through' one's grief and 're-adjusting to life'. All of these ideas are closely linked to a particularly modernist social construction of grief elucidated in the ensuing discussion.

Also implicit in the funeral director description is the notion that there are certain elements that constitute effective funerary practice: rituals '*can* be enormously

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[23] See also Kellehear (2000) and Nicol (2000).

beneficial' but only '*if* arranged carefully and sensitively'. Funeral directors in this study professed to possessing a specialised knowledge and understanding of these elements and the discourse mobilised by participants delineated the acceptable parameters of ritual and grief. One further issue evident in the above description is the secondary nature of other funeral functions. While funeral directors are clearly involved in the disposal of the dead, it is the life of the deceased individual that has gained particular precedence in recent years. I argue in this thesis that the focus on life and personalisation is not only a particular form of 'finishing' in late-modern society, but a theme that ostensibly challenges modernist assumptions of efficiency and rationality, and contributes to the creation of an ontological 'canopy' in a highly secular society. All of these features contribute to a unique form of 'death-revival' (Walter 1994) in late-modern society.

The social construction of grief

Funeral directors asseverated that funerary practices were inextricably linked to grief, and as the following chapters reveal, the primary function of contemporary ritual (according to these functionaries) was to initiate the 'resolution' of grief. The aforementioned pamphlet states that the funeral is: 'the first and most important step towards working through one's grief and re-adjusting to life'. Grief, in this regard, is treated as an essential, innate response to death. In the brief discussion above, Maori funerary practices were similarly described as 'natural', and females as exuding 'instinctive compassion'. Studies of social life in recent years have questioned the basis of such essentialist claims and dualisms, and emphasised that these concepts are socially constructed, the product of historically and culturally specific discourse (Seale 1998: 12).

In keeping with this idea, a number of authors examining bereavement and dying have employed a theoretical framework that can loosely be classified as 'social constructionism'. As the review below illustrates, these authors emphasise that ostensibly 'natural' phenomena (such as grief) are socially constructed through pre-existing social meaning and interaction rather than existing as essential or biological

states (Lupton 2000: 50).[24] Constructionists often draw on the writings of Berger and Luckmann (1967), arguing that social phenomena are produced, institutionalised and maintained through interpretive processes. Integrating the earlier theoretical expositions of Durkheim[25] and Weber, Berger and Luckmann (1967: 52) stipulate that social reality is not simply part of 'the nature of things' but exists as 'a product of human activity'. The authors assert that humans engage in a continuous 'dialectical' process with the social world in which they create an objective reality (the moment of 'objectification'), while at the same time internalising and reifying these realities (the moment of 'internalisation').

Particularly pertinent to this theoretical perspective is the work of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. Foucault has been categorised as a post-structuralist, arguing that the human condition cannot be explained by universal or hierarchical structures, or that it is possible to move beyond discourse[26] and objectively study this condition. Foucault's analyses of power provide a particularly useful theoretical position from which to explore social constructs such as grief and bereavement in contemporary society.[27] Unlike the Marxist macro-structures of power emphasised by theorists such as Althusser, Foucault asserts that power pervades human relations at the micro-level, and is diffused and dispersed through the entire social system.

Central to Foucault's articulation of power are normalising technologies exercised through modern social institutions such as family, education, medicine, and the penal system. In *The birth of the clinic* (1994 [1973]), for example, he traces the development of the 'clinical gaze', a form of surveillance exercised by medical practitioners, instrumental in the construction of a particular kind of body. Foucault argues that this 'gaze' also operates at a wider societal level and contributes to the creation of 'docile bodies', new forms of subjectivity, and the promulgation of behavioural

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[24] An extensive literature deals with social constructionism. See Gergen (2001) for an overview of recent debates in this theoretical field.
[25] Earlier Durkheimians, particularly Hertz and Mauss, also emphasised the significance of social and cultural influences on the body.
[26] The term 'discourse' is typically used by post-structuralists to: 'denote the patterns of ways of thinking, making sense of, talking or writing about, and visually portraying phenomena such as the human body, medical and nursing practices, sexuality and reproduction, illness, disease, and death' (Lupton 2000: 51). See also Abu-Lughod (1991: 147-148).
[27] For a brief overview of Foucault's other writings see Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) and McNay (1994).

norms.[28] This development is historically linked to the demands of capitalism and the need for 'productive' bodies. In his examination of penal regimes, Foucault (1977) examines what he terms the 'technologies of punishment' and identifies a historical shift from sovereign power to disciplinary power, asserting that the penal system has 'colonised' wider society (the 'carceral continuum'). He compares modern society to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, emphasising that disciplinary power is a covert 'theme of surveillance' internalised in every individual and social body (Foucault: 1980: 146-175). These forms of 'bio-power' are clearly explicated in Foucault's *History of sexuality*.

In the first of his three volumes of *History of sexuality*, Foucault (1990 [1978]: 139) emphasises that two 'poles' of bio-power discipline and manage individual human bodies ('anatomo-politics'), and regulate populations ('bio-politics'). Both of these poles of bio-power find expression in Foucault's theory of governmentality. Govermentality contextualises and elaborates Foucault's understanding of power, knowledge and discipline. He asserts that this form of governing emerged in sixteenth century Europe and included the 'technologies of the self' and internal disciplinary surveillance noted above. The governmental apparatus, however, also required a certain degree of reinforcement, and indeed achieved this through the creation of expert 'knowledges'. The development of disciplines, experts, and institutions could therefore be seen as extensions of power contributing to the surveillance and control of the population.

One integral component of self-discipline and self-monitoring is the Christian concept of confession. Foucault (1980, 1990) contends that confession and self-examination operate as the precursors to the contemporary practices of self-regulation. While confession originated with Catholicism, it was gradually secularised and 'scientised', and thus self-inspection replaced confession as the key method of self-regulation. Foucault (1990: 59-60) also asserts that Western individuals had not only become 'confessing animals', but that the obligation to confess was no longer perceived as the constraining effects of power. As Rose (1990: 219) explains:

[28] The generation of norms, by implication, create categories of deviance and resistance. Foucault (1983: 211) noted that any examination of power relations should view resistance as a 'chemical catalyst' to

> [C]onfession entailed a practice in which the obligation was to render oneself truthfully into discourse, and a power relation in which the confession was to be made under the authority of another who hears it, evaluates it, judges the soul, and prescribes the form of conduct appropriate.

As this thesis will demonstrate, funeral directors play an important role in articulating bio-power within New Zealand society, as well as the continuing construction and negotiation of power. This is particularly evident in the recent emphasis on 'grief support' and 'aftercare' services provided by funeral directors. As I will detail in the following chapters, this support and care exhibits features reminiscent of the normalising technologies exercised through a disciplinary technique Foucault terms 'pastoral power'.

Specifically, Foucault identified the lifelong pastoral care offered by the clergy and later by medicine (specifically through family practice) as a highly effective forum for the internalising of normalising technologies of self offered by 'experts' in the social institutions of religion and later, medicine. Here individuals are surveilled, measured, and classified according to standardised 'norms'; deviance from which is also identified and managed (the objective being to return individual to the 'norm') (Foucault 1983: 214). Power is constantly negotiated within each interaction; in the case of the medical consultation, the doctor exercises the clinical gaze upon a patient who at the same time engages with the subjectivities offered them within this interaction. In short, it is here that patients learn the 'truth' about themselves and take up, challenge, or resist this identity. Of particular interest is that pastoral power implies a detailed knowledge of the person who is the patient: their history and their social life. In the case of the bereaved - as the following chapters will demonstrate - pastoral power is exercised by funeral directors through their bereavement support services and intimate knowledge of death.

Although this epistemological approach has certain limitations (identified below), it has proved useful in problematising the 'naturalness' of phenomena like grief. As the ensuing discussion details, the contemporary concept of 'grief' has a particular history and reflects modernist ideas of progress, while incorporating late-modern

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'bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used'.

concerns about ontological security and reflexivity. While some studies have examined grief and the construction of subjects in relation to the development of bereavement care (Small and Hockey 2001), I will argue that funeral directors' perceptions and understandings of grief play a similar role in defining the parameters of 'normal' grief and in legitimising the authority of this funeral functionary in contemporary New Zealand society.

Grief is defined by Stroebe et al. (2001: 6) as the reaction to bereavement, incorporating both psychological and physical components. Numerous recent studies have explored the historical development of grief as a field of study and examined the various 'models' of grief (for example Archer 1999; Bradbury 1999; Davies 2002; Klass et al. 1996; Littlewood 1992; Parkes 2001; Small 2001; Stroebe et al. 2001; Walter 1999). Grief has been an important area of scientific investigation since the 1940s, and early studies (such as Lindemann's (1944) description of 'normal grief' and Anderson's (1949) examination of 'morbid grief reactions') examined the symptomatology of grief (Parkes 2001: 25-26). The predominant view of grief that emerged emphasised the disengagement of the mourners from the deceased, a view significantly influenced by the work of Freud and Bowlby. Freud's influential psychodynamic explanation of grief stipulated that emotional attachment (the libido) needed to be withdrawn from a loved 'object' if new attachments were to be formed (Archer 1999: 16; Davies 2002: 58; Littlewood 1992: 63; Small 2001: 24; Stroebe et al. 1996: 33). Bowlby's attachment theory of grief (1969-1980) also emphasised the need to sever the affectional bond with the deceased[29] (Silverman and Klass 1996: 9-10; Stroebe et al. 1996: 33), and predicated four phases of adult grief and the beginnings of a model of 'grief work'[30] (Archer 1999: 24; Small 2001: 27). Parkes and his colleagues also underline the importance of severing bonds and the resolution of grief, providing empirical evidence from their studies of widows in the 1970s (Silverman and Klass 1996: 11).

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[29] Shaver and Tancredy (2001: 81-83), however, criticise this reading of Bowlby. They note that some of Bowlby's later writings emphasised the continuing relationship between the living and the dead rather than Freud's decathexis. Shaver and Tancredy (2001: 83) stipulate that there has been a general tendency in bereavement research to shift uncritically from one theoretical paradigm to another 'by attacking previous landmark theories in an unnecessarily harsh and distorting way'. See Fraley and Shaver (1999) for an elaboration of these criticisms.

[30] A term originally coined by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholia* and subsequently adopted by bereavement theorists (Bonanno 2001: 496; Parkes 2001: 27).

Related to the model of detachment, and particularly relevant to the present study, is the 'stage' or 'phase' model of grief. The main 'stage' theories that had emerged by the 1970s included those of Bowlby and Parkes, as well as those of Averill and Kubler-Ross.[31] These stage models and 'task approaches' (Worden 1991), have numerous recognised limitations (Bradbury 1999; Corr 1993; Kastenbaum 1986; Klass et al. 1996; Shuchter and Zisook 1993; Small 2001; Walter 1999), and authors such as Parkes (2001) cautioned against the uncritical application of research findings. The clinical descriptions, however, were rapidly transformed into prescriptions by student practitioners (Walter 1999: 166) and authoritative statements about the nature of 'healthy' grief (Littlewood 1992: 17; Small 2001: 31).

One quintessential element of the 'healthy grief process' given particular prominence in bereavement literature is the expression and management of emotion.[32] This privileging of emotion has become an intrinsic element of contemporary responses to death (Hockey 1993, 1996b; Walter 1999) and, as noted above, a common theme in the literature focusing on funerary practices in New Zealand. As will be detailed in chapter four, the pre-modern body was presumed to be a permeable entity, 'open to the world in all its orifices, unbounded, abusive, devouring and nurturing' (Greenblat 1982 cited in Lupton 1998: 72). After the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, however, 'grotesque' bodies that transgressed their physical boundaries were increasingly viewed with horror and disgust (Bakhtin 1968: 26-27; Holliday and Hassard 2001: 9). 'Civilised' bodies, in contrast, were 'closed', 'dry', and 'autonomous', and demonstrated a significant degree of self-control (Elias 1978 [1939]; Shilling 1993). Emotions were conceptualised as fluids located within the 'container-body' (Sarbin 1986: 84), and like other fluids, predisposed to dissolving bodily boundaries and subject to social regulation. Lupton (1998: 104) contends that

[31] Although the model developed by Kübler-Ross (1969) was based on research conducted with terminally ill patients, it was later applied to the grief of the bereaved (Archer 1999: 25; Littlewood 1992: 53).

[32] Indeed, 'emotion' and 'grief' are often conflated. For a brief discussion of definitional issues see Bonanno (2001). The sociology of emotions has become an important area of academic interest, although definitions of 'emotion' continue to be the subject of significant debate. Social constructionists have been accused of representing disembodied views of emotion and obscuring the agency of the body (Lyon 1995: 256). See Williams and Bendelow (1998: 131-154) for a discussion of the emotionally expressive body.

there has been a continual oscillation between acknowledging both the importance of 'policing' these volatile emotions and the need to express them.

In more recent times, emotions have been represented as guides for knowledge and behaviour, rather than a source of transgression or misbehaviour (Wouters 1992: 245). Emotions have been represented in popular literature as having a 'universal, physical human essence' (Seale 1998: 194), while the 'emotional self' is seen as central to self-identity and self-authenticity (Lupton 1998: 89). As Anderson (2001: 138) notes in his discussion of counselling, the metaphors of depth and self-as-container are important in the contemporary discussions of grief and emotion:

> The suggestion is one of a receptacle of proper and improper selves, a platonic cave of 'illusionary' shadows, which the bereaved person is socialized to confront during their therapy precisely through its conversational method, and its allusion to 'real' and 'true' identities.

A collapse of emotional control in certain situations, therefore, is positive, and reveals a 'sensitive personality or someone who has strong affective ties with others' (Lupton 1998: 89). This position also challenges the modernist masculinity that appeared in the twentieth century and emphasised disciplined male bodies with 'hard' boundaries.[33] Not only have these rational bodies been represented as lacking self awareness but also as repressed and susceptible to poor health (Lupton 1998: 113). Participants in Lupton's (1998) study emphasised the notion that open expression of emotions was 'healthy' and 'natural' and that emotional containment was associated with repression and potential ill health. Sontag (1989: 21) similarly notes, for example, that repression of emotion has been causally linked to cancer, while Williams and Bendelow (1998: 148) assert that emotions have increasingly been associated with ideas of 'holistic health'. Lupton (1998: 103) argues that this relationship between emotion and health is intrinsically related to the notions of the self/body as 'unfinished project'. These projects require: 'careful management, the gathering and use of relevant information and behavioural regulation so as to maximize one's potential and health status' (Lupton 1998: 103). The notion of the reflexive self is a particularly significant component of the grief defined by funeral directors in the present project, and will be examined in more detail in the ensuing chapters.

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[33] Utilising a Foucauldian analysis, Shildrick (1997), for example, explores the construction of the human body and argues that gendered binaries developed during the Enlightenment. She notes that

There are obvious parallels here with the Romantic counter-discourse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which regarded the modern rationality and control of emotions as detrimental to 'natural' human impulses. At this time a tension emerged between the rationality of science and the natural emotionality of those who lived outside the confines of the industrialised Western world, both temporally and geographically (Hockey 1996b: 5; Walter 1995: 242). Romanticised readings of the past (for example Ariès 1981; Gorer 1965) emphasised that modern Western society had lost its abilities to deal with the 'realities' of death, and that technology and bureaucratic institutions had dehumanised death (Walter 1994: 113). 'Empty', 'artificial' rituals no longer fulfilled the essential psychological requirements of contemporary society:

> The concept of 'nature', as cultural icon, encompasses the notion that ritual, enacted within pre-twentieth century communities, effectively addresses the psychological needs which constitute human 'nature'. Such ritual forms are frequently opposed to the secularised deathways of rootless urban dwellers. Community-based ritual prefigures industrialisation and therefore, by association, lies closer to the more natural way of life beyond the urban conurbations (Hockey 1996b: 6).

Expressivists attempting to challenge private grief and impersonal ritual conflate 'emotion', 'nature' and 'healthy grief' (Walter 1999: 149). This conflation, however, is problematic. Even a perfunctory review of the anthropological literature reveals the critical importance of context when exploring death in other societies and the contested constitution of terms such as 'nature' and 'natural'.[34] While contemporary organisations such as the Natural Death Centre (Albery et al. 1997) and magazine reports such as the one outlined above (Sperber 2003) appropriate the 'natural' deaths of non-Western cultures (such as the Maori), Hertz (1960 [1907]: 77) noted a century ago that death was seldom a 'natural phenomenon' in these societies and that the death of an individual was 'always due to the action of spiritual powers'.

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women were closely identified with nature and consequently 'less able to rise above uncontrollable natural processes and passions' (Shildrick 1997: 26).

[34] The meanings attached to this word are diverse and vary temporally. See McLeod (2004: 16-24) for an overview of some of the difficulties encountered when conceptualising 'nature'. The concepts of 'nature' and 'natural' become even more blurred when considering 'natural' death in technologically advanced environments (Seymour 1999), together with the utilisation of scientific embalming techniques to create 'natural' representations of the dead and illicit the 'natural' emotions of the bereaved. Concepts of 'natural' (as detailed in chapter four) are therefore highly arbitrary.

Authors such as Charmaz (1980), Metcalf and Huntington (1991), and Bradbury (1999), have emphasised the importance of reflexivity when examining death cross-culturally and recent studies in the field of bereavement research have critically examined the universality of concepts such as 'grief' and 'emotion'. In an oft-cited study epitomising the scientistic tradition, Rosenblatt et al. (1976) examined 78 cultural groups and identified 'universal' components of grief. More recently, however, Rosenblatt (2001: 297) emphasises the significance of cultural 'scripts' and the absence of 'biological or developmental' processes that determine responses to death.[35] He reflects:

> Now I have very serious reservations about our finding that certain things are common in grief across cultures. What seems to be an objective reality of common experience and expression, may only be an artifact of the limitations of culture and language in our sources and ourselves (Rosenblatt 2001: 288).

The above discussion emphasises that medicalised, essentialist understandings of grief continue to be prevalent and inform the powerful prescriptive 'myths' present in Western discourse (Wortman and Silver 1989, 2001). These assumptions include the notion that people will enter a period of intense distress following a death (usually devoid of any positive emotions), and that failure to enter this phase is indicative of underlying complications. Another myth identified by Wortman and Silver (2001) is that successful adjustment to loss requires individuals to confront and 'work through' feelings and that continued attachment to the deceased is pathological. Finally, there is the assumption that people will recover and return to some level of normality in a relatively short period of time after death. Wortman and Silver (2001) examined numerous scientific studies to evaluate the validity and applicability of these assumptions, but found very little evidence to support any generalisations suggesting a universal grief process.[36]

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[35] Although researchers such as Parkes (2001: 35) maintain: 'there is something that all who suffer a major loss have in common and that the word "grief" does have a universal meaning that transcends culture'.

[36] Wortman and Silver (2001) note, for example, that a number of studies indicate that positive emotions are often experienced after death and that a failure to experience intense distress did not portend future problems. In their review of research findings, the authors also found little evidence to suggest that 'confrontative' grieving strategies resulted in more positive outcomes than avoidance or denial. Recent studies have also found that numerous forms of attachment exist after death and that these attachments take a variety of forms. Finally, the authors assert that scientific studies also indicate that assumptions regarding recovery simplify a complex situation and that distressing symptoms and painful memories often persist for numerous years following loss (Wortman and Silver 2001: 420).

Despite a shift from overarching metanarratives to an increasing recognition of diversity (Bradbury 1999: 177; Stroebe et al. 1996), Walter (1999: 157) stipulates that these prescriptive assumptions ('clinical lore') have remained remarkably resilient and continue to be utilised by individuals who work with bereaved people. The present research clearly indicates that funeral directors in New Zealand constitute one such group, and as the following chapters will detail, these assumptions inform the rhetoric mobilised by contemporary funeral directors.

'Clinical lore' is located in the framework of modernity, and Stroebe et al. (1996: 32) note that this modernist paradigm is one that emphasises 'goal directedness, efficiency and rationality' and that when applied to grief, this understanding suggests that people need to recover and return to normal functioning as quickly and efficiently as possible. Small (2001: 39) similarly states that:

> [A]n aspiration to understand by developing a metanarrative that offers a framework for answering everything and an approach that breaks things down into manageable (controllable) sections and arranges them sequentially are defining characteristics of modernity.

The concepts of 'grief work' and 'grief process' allow individuals to restore some measure of ontological security by providing a structure in which to contain 'disorderly experience and behaviour' (Seale 1998: 195). The 'rules' implicit in this paradigm replace the 'anxiety of cognitive bewilderment' with secure knowledge (Heinz 1999: 27), and as Wambach (1985: 207) found in her study of widow support groups, the concept of a 'grief process' allowed individuals to 'gauge' their progress through grief. This, as Walter (1999: 161) notes, provides people with some measure of control. In his examination of bereavement counselling, Anderson (2001: 139) notes that grief work is also linked to the Western (Protestant) concept of work involving the completion of certain tasks, which, although generally mundane and sometimes difficult, ultimately results in rewards. In this respect, grief could not only be seen as an unwelcome intrusion into everyday life, but also as an interruption that has the potential to contribute to self-development and personal growth. As the ensuing chapters elucidate, 'clinical lore' and modernist conceptualisation of grief are intrinsic components of the funeral directors' discourse surrounding personalisation.

They maintain, however, that a number of the aforementioned assumptions remain extremely influential in the field of bereavement.

Reimers' (2003) recent investigation of the discursive construction of grief is clearly relevant to this discussion. Reimers (2003) examines the Swedish media debate surrounding the fate of the corpses from the shipwrecked *M/S Estonia* and notes that these discourses contributed to the construction of a normative model of mourning with identifiable boundaries. In particular, she found that 'normal' grief was represented as a process that involved a progression from emotional reaction to rational reflection, and that rites and ritual were an intrinsic element of this transition. Terms utilised by the media such as 'grief work' indicated that the progression required a degree of effort and that it was possible to evaluate a successful transition. Expressions of grief that did not conform to this particular pattern indicated that individuals required some form of psychological intervention (Reimers 2003: 338). Although Reimers' (2003) study focuses specifically on media reports, the present study will illustrate that funeral directors also contribute to the normalisation of grief, and practices such as viewing, the funeral service, and memorialisation can also be represented as intrinsic elements of a 'healthy' grief process.

A number of recent studies exploring dying and bereavement in contemporary Western society are also relevant to the present discussion. Although both of these areas have been the focus of extensive research attention outside the parameters of the present project, a few authors have provided appurtenant studies that contextualise the themes explored in this introduction. One of these themes relates to the critique of modern dying and subsequent 'humanisation' intimated in the introduction. The twentieth century 'medicalisation' of dying and the 'good death' ideal, have been given significant shrift since the early work of individuals such as Colin Murray Parkes and the establishment of the first modern hospice by Cicely Saunders in 1967.[37] Individuals such as Kübler-Ross (1969), Sudnow (1967) and Glaser and Strauss (1965, 1968) also contributed to a growing awareness of patient isolation, prolonged dying trajectories, and the 'dehumanisation' associated with medicalised death (Elias 1985; Palgi and Abramovitch 1984). Ariès (1981) and Illich (1976) vividly describe these features of modern dying in their critiques of medicalisation and

[37] There exists a massive literature focussing on these developments. See Clark (1993, 1998, 1999a, 2002), Clark and Seymour (1999), Cook and Oltjenbruns (1998), DeSpelder and Strickland (2005), Field

emphasise that modern medicine has effectuated the demise of 'natural', 'tame' death.[38] These critical commentaries contributed to the quest for 'healthy dying' (Kastenbaum 1979) and the formulation of the 'good death' ideal; a concept that emphasised holistic, patient-centred care, and became an integral element of the emerging hospice movement.[39] In addition to addressing the alleviation of physical suffering, hospice emphasised the significance of psychological, spiritual, and existential human needs, and provided interdisciplinary care to the dying individual and their family (DeSpelder and Strickland 2005: 133).

The 'good death', however, is not solely a descriptive term but a behaviour-shaping concept that generates an 'appropriate' mode of behaviour (Small and Hockey 2001: 101-102), which contains and controls the experiences of the dying (Clark and Seymour 1999). Researchers such as Kellehear (1990) and McNamara (2004) have illustrated that the realisation of a 'good death' requires the fulfilment of certain expectations and exchanges.[40] McNamara (2004: 930) stipulates, for example, that the hospice 'good death' involves open awareness and communication, a gradual acceptance of death, and a completion of practical and interpersonal 'business'. Clark and Seymour (1999) and McNamara et al. (1994) note that the routinisation of the expression of this 'good death' - in the context of an increasingly institutionalised and rationalised professional environment - is one of the salient challenges facing hospice care.[41] These concerns contributed to emergence of the 'good enough' death, emphasising holistic patient care, autonomy, and choice. McNamara (2004) argues, however, that this palliative care approach masks a reversion to routine medical

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(1994), Mor et al. (1989) McNamara et al. (1994), Palgi and Abramovitch (1984), Seale (1995, 1998), Walter (2003), and Young and Cullen (1996) for an extended discussion.

[38] Seymour (1999) notes that medico-technological intervention in dying has become emblematic of 'unnatural' and 'inhumane' death in the predominant discourse and that 'demedicalisation' is correspondingly equated with 'natural' and 'dignified' death. Her case studies of patients in an intensive care setting, however, suggest that 'it is the perception of the *meaning of* technology, rather than its simple minimisation or absence that determines representations of death in highly technological environments' (Seymour 1999: 710, emphasis in the original).

[39] It is clear that the concept of 'good death' varies temporally and cross-culturally. See for example Firth (1996), Leichentritt and Rettig (2000), and Long (2001). Walter (2003) argues that cultural norms regarding 'good death' are particularly influenced by the level of secularisation, extent of individualisation, and length of dying trajectory in a society. For a discussion of this concept see Bradbury (1996, 1999).

[40] These expectations are also evident in the construct of 'anticipatory grief' explored by Fulton et al. (1996).

[41] For a discussion of the routinisation, bureaucratisation, and rationalisation of hospice care see Bradshaw (1996), Clark (1993), Clark and Seymour (1999), James and Field (1992), McNamara (2004) and McNamara et al. (1994).

practices and a hierarchy of care prioritising the alleviation of physical symptoms. Further, Clark (1999b: 734) has argued that the holistic care approach – incorporating a patient's social and personal context - is an extension of surveillance and disciplinary power. Implicit in the concept of 'total pain' - a term used by Cicely Saunders to describe the holistic patient approach - is a strategy of power: 'One in which subjecting human suffering to a new nosology, at the same time objectifies it and prescribes strategies for its relief. In this sense 'total pain' becomes a nomenclature of inscription, albeit unintended by its author' (Clark 1999b: 734).

Also relevant to the concept of 'good death' is Zimmerman's (2004) poststructuralist analysis of 'death denial' in hospice and palliative care literature. Although there has been a shift among clinicians and patients to an open awareness context, Zimmerman (2004) notes that representations of 'death denial' continue to be informed by Freudian psychoanalytical ideas. Following Charmaz (1980), Zimmerman (2004: 1777) argues that 'denial' is a socially constructed concept and that the use of this term in the palliative care literature is a form of disciplinary power focussed on the psyche of the individual:

> The construct of denial may be used in the palliative care settings to manipulate individual bodies through the labelling of their psyche. The impetus in society for a 'planned death' and the role of palliative care in supporting this idea of death planning, creates a structuring of possibilities for acceptable patient behaviour and patients outside the limits of this behaviour may be termed 'in denial'. While initially, denial might be tolerated and seen as 'normal' or even 'healthy', professional guidance in the form of professional counselling steers patients to death acceptance and persistent deniers are classified as manifesting 'maladaptive or intra-psychic' denial.

Zimmerman (2004) asserts that this utilisation of death denial reflects the broader societal discourse surrounding dying; a discourse that simultaneously invites patients to participate in the planning of death, and labels those who do not acquiesce (Zimmermann 2004: 1778). This assertion is also applicable to the discourse mobilised by funeral director participants in the present project and will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

Some of the prescriptive processes perceptible in the dying discourse are also evident in the discourse surrounding bereavement. In their overview of bereavement care, for example, Small and Hockey (2001) note that bereavement care discourse and practice are intrinsically related to the production of their own subjects. In a study of a major

bereavement counselling organisation in the UK, Arnason (2001) and Arnason and Hafsteinsson (2003) posit that bereavement counselling is an example of Foucault's 'technologies of the self' and governmentality. Examining the relationship between government funding and the provision of counselling services, they stipulate (following Rose (1996)) that bereavement counselling is a form of neo-liberal governmentality that exhorts its subjects to 'relate to themselves and others as particular kinds of subjects' (Arnason and Hafsteinsson 2003: 60).

These studies highlight the socially constructed nature of concepts such as 'grief', 'good death', and 'death denial', and reiterate the notion that no claim to knowledge is neutral (Lupton 2000: 61). The above discussion also emphasises that these concepts are not 'natural' phenomena but constructs that incorporate key components of modernity. I will argue in this thesis that these concepts have been appropriated by funeral directors in New Zealand to structure and substantiate funeral services. As intimated in the section examining emotional expression, however, this epistemological position has important limitations.

One of the major criticisms of Foucault's micro-level analysis of power is his undertheorisation of macroperspectives (Best and Kellner 1991: 71). Authors such as Fox (1997, 1998) have not only queried the ontological ambiguity of theorists such as Foucault, but have questioned the discursive construction of bodies. Social constructionists have been accused of presenting an overly deterministic model of human agency and conceptual relativism (Seale 1998). Williams and Bendelow (1998: 35), for example, stipulate that Foucault simply substitutes one form of essentialism (biological) for another (discursive) – with little scope for resistance or acknowledgement of the 'lived experience' of the body. Though Foucault saw power as productive and emphasised the significance of resistance, there is an incongruity between his concept of docile bodies and resistance (Lupton 2000). In response to these concerns, medical anthropologists called for an expanded study of the body and embodiment (Scheper-Hughes 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) that incorporates poststructuralist and phenomenological perspectives. While I acknowledge that grief is a potent and powerfully embodied experience, this is not

the focus of the current project.[42] The body is central to the praxis of the funeral industry (see chapter four) but my examination of funeral directors does not encompass the lived body of the dead or the bereaved.

What is particularly important to this discussion is that funeral director descriptions of grief demonstrated a particularly modernist understanding of bereavement. As I will argue in this thesis, however, funeral directors have synthesised this metanarrative with the process of personalisation and engaged in an active construction of grief that reifies their role in the process of construction. Personalisation constitutes a late-modern reflexivity and 'finishing' of bodies applicable to the dead and the mourners. It also includes a form of 'resolution' that varies from that envisaged by early grief theorists, encouraging a 'continuing bond' (Klass et al. 1996, Walter 1996b) or relationship with the dead. While this model has the tendency to become as prescriptive as earlier conceptualisations, this personalisation constitutes a particular form of ontological security for people confronted by 'fateful moments' in a highly secularised society. I will also argue, therefore, that funeral directors in New Zealand constitute a form of deathwork mediator (Walter 2005) functioning as arbiters between the living and the dead, helping bereaved individuals to interpret and construct the dead in a secularised society unfamiliar with death. These post-mortem practices in contemporary New Zealand are best understood in the context of Walter's death 'revival'.

The last few years have witnessed increased scrutiny of the 'death taboo' thesis and a concomitant interest or 'revival' of death (Hockey 1990; Walter 1991, 1994, 1996a, 1999; Seale 1998). This 'revival' provides a pertinent insight into post-mortem funeral practices and an excellent starting point from which to probe the role of the funeral director in New Zealand. In a seminal work entitled *The revival of death*, Walter (1994) examines the modern rationalisation and privatisation of death. Rationalisation, he argues, is clearly evident in the funeral, the disposal of the body, and the emotions of

[42] For a discussion of these theoretical perspectives see Csordas (1990, 1994), Jaye (2003), Scheper-Hughes (1994), Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), Shilling (1993), Turner (1996), and Williams and Bendelow (1998).

the bereaved.[43] This rationalisation has also been accompanied by an analogous privatisation of death. That is, the funeral has become a private family affair and funeral attendance and post-funeral rituals have been reduced to the passive involvement of a few intimate individuals. Collective community ritual has been superseded by an increasing emphasis on individualism (Mellor and Shilling 1993) and individuals communicating with trusted 'others' (Walter 1994: 21). Walter (1994) argues that the incongruity between rational bureaucracy and individualism, however, has resulted in the development of tension. While mortality has been 'contained' (Blauner 1966) and death 'tamed' (Ariès 1981), personally and emotionally death has become increasingly more difficult and painful (Walter 1994: 23).

As Prior (1989) clearly illustrates in his aforementioned study, while a public discourse of death exists in medicine, public policy, and bureaucratic practices, much of this discourse is impersonal and incongruous with individual experiences of death and dying. Walter (1991, 1994) emphasises that public discourse has failed to articulate private loss and grief, and when people refer to a 'death taboo', they in reality identify an absence of publicly-available language for discussing the private experiences and feelings surrounding death. These factors have contributed to the 'revival of death':

> Revival – the critique of the modern way of death – derives from this contradiction between private experience and public discourse, and intends to abolish it. Without losing the benefits of modern discourse and the welfare state, many now feel that dying, funerals and bereavement must be made more personal...Private experience must become part of public discourse (Walter 1994: 23-24).

Walter notes that attempts to incorporate private experience and feeling into public discourse take two forms: the late modern and postmodern revivals. The late modern strand remains essentially modernist because of its reliance on psychology and 'experts' to control the experiences of individuals. The postmodern strand, on the other hand, emphasises individual choice and combines elements of modern and traditional death without any sense of inconsistency (Walter 1994: 42). Both of these 'revivals' are reflexive and Walter stipulates that contemporary 'neo-modern death' incorporates components of both forms. The control exerted by specialists (including

[43] Dead and dying bodies and the bodies of the bereaved are located in a medicalised framework and

funeral directors) is distinctly late-modern, while the focus on individuality and the amalgamation of modern psychology and romantic readings of 'primitive' death, resembles the post-modern envisioned by numerous theorists (Walter 1994: 46).

1.5 The structure of the thesis

This thesis argues that funeral directors and personalised post-mortem practices in New Zealand constitute a particular form of 'death revival'. This revival amalgamates elements of modernity and post-modernity, and emphasises the role of funeral director as death 'expert' in contemporary society. The following chapters trace the progression of personalised funeral services temporally and elucidate the inextricable relations of power evident in the pre-disposal, disposal, and post-disposal phases of mortuary practice.

Chapter two provides an outline of the research methodology and includes a brief discussion detailing the development of my research focus. I consider the pragmatic and philosophical factors that shaped my research approach and identify some of the challenges encountered during contemporary anthropological fieldwork. I examine some of the ethical issues related to studying a small occupational group 'at home', and outline the various components of my ethnographic strategy.

Chapter three examines the historical development of the funeral directing occupation in New Zealand and reviews relevant international influences on the evolution of this industry. As I have suggested, New Zealand has strong historical links with Britain and thus the chapter begins with an overview of British undertaking and its emergence as a specialised occupation. While there were salient similarities between early New Zealand and British undertakers, British 'traditions' were superseded by the adoption of American innovations in the twentieth century. My discussion details the augmentation of funeral services by funeral specialists and provides an overview of embalming, the establishment of funeral homes, and the shift to psychological interpretations of grief. One significantly important development in the last decade has been the emergence of North American multinational funeral companies and this chapter therefore provides a brief overview

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subject to a new form of surveillance or 'policing' as noted above (Bradbury 1999; Walter 1999).

of the rise of these corporations and the significance of this development for the New Zealand funeral director. As well as assessing the influence of international changes, this analysis considers the professionalisation of the occupation in New Zealand. The final section of the historical overview examines the advent of funeral celebrants, the history of cremation, and the role of females in the funeral field. All of these developments are integrally linked to the professionalisation of the industry and the personalisation of mortuary practices in New Zealand.

Chapter four provides a critical examination of the pre-disposal phase of post-mortem practices and the personalisation rhetoric that pervades this process. This discussion draws extensively on data gathered during participant observation and in-depth interviews, and analyses the funeral arrangement procedure and the pre-funeral treatment of the dead. The investigation surveys the permutations of personalisation and explores the development of a pastoral relationship between the funeral director and the bereaved. The discussion also highlights the boundaries of personalisation evident in funeral director discourse and the forms of post-mortem practice that transgress these boundaries. The chapter goes on to explore the 'personalisation' of the body by the funeral director and the contemporary practice of embalming. This investigation considers the dialogic process of identity construction, the significance of symbolic boundaries, and the salience of biographical narratives in contemporary funerals. The last section of this chapter explores the practice of viewing and the normalising technologies inherent in this component of funeral service.

Chapter five investigates the funeral and disposal components of mortuary practice. The discussion reviews the concept of secularisation and its relevance to contemporary New Zealand post-mortem practices. Secularisation has been identified as an important catalyst for the development of personalised funerals, and this chapter explores funeral director responses to this societal 'shift'. One intrinsic element of personlisation has been the introduction of life-centred funerals, and the ensuing examination elaborates some of the concepts introduced in chapter four, specifically the relationship between the funeral director and the bereaved, and the essentialised notions of grief propounded by funeral directors. I go on to detail the production of personalised tributes and the construction of memories, which form a

fundamental component of contemporary funerals. Finally, this chapter considers funeral director discourse surrounding disposal and the subjectivities and normalising technologies subsumed in this discourse.

Chapter six details the post-funeral involvement of the funeral director and the range of memorial services currently offered by these specialists. The discussion examines how concepts of memory are linked to the management of grief, and the correlation between post-disposal ritual and the focus on personalisation. This investigation highlights the tension between privatised 'needs' and public funeral forms, as well as the role of funeral directors in articulating ontological meaning 'frameworks' for the bereaved. The last section of the chapter explores the range of 'after-care' services offered by funeral firms. These services clearly illustrate Foucault's concept of pastoral power and demonstrate the normalising technologies inherent in the funeral director discourse.

Chapter Two

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

> Things have not turned out quite as I had planned. After envisaging my role as immediate participant-observer fully engaged in the daily routines of funeral directing, I had been delegated the duties of transporting friends, buying alcohol, and walking the funeral directors' dog. Who would have thought that of these three obsequious domestic duties, dog-walking would prove to be a fieldwork hazard? After completing a few chores I drove to the local beach reserve with David's [the funeral director] dog and ran along the dunes for half an hour. When I reached an old wire fence that zigzagged down to the beach, I hurdled it but my left leg landed in a hole covered by tussock and I heard a loud 'cracking' noise. Everything went black...After nearly an hour I used my mobile phone to call the emergency services. The ambulance dispatcher asked me for my exact location but I was only able to describe the reserve setting. She requested my contact address and I provided her with the phone number of the local undertaker. A long pause...a few minutes later I was in a conference call with David (who was in another rural town arranging a funeral) and the ambulance dispatcher...Twenty minutes later the dispatcher rang to say that the ambulance officers could not find me. I decided to crawl to a house I had passed a few hundred metres earlier. I crawled through the back gate of the house and lay exhausted in the vegetable garden. An elderly man walked out and asked me what I was doing...the first response unit arrived and thirty minutes later the city ambulance service arrived and administered two doses of morphine...The rest of the day was spent in the Accident and Emergency and Orthopaedic units...David rang to say he was coming to pick me up from the hospital and take me to his house until I could see the surgeon and orthopaedic specialist a few days later...At 10.00pm he arrived in his hearse and parked it by the hospital entrance. He wheeled me to the waiting hearse and as we moved through the front door a funeral celebrant smoking outside exclaimed that business must be 'really bad' if David had to 'steal live ones from the hospital'. David quickly opened the back of the hearse and helped slide me inside, telling me quietly to 'lie very still' because any conspicuous movement would be 'really bad for business'...(Field notes, January 2002).

This fieldwork extract highlights some of the salient issues related to anthropological fieldwork, and identifies a few of the challenges encountered during my research. This chapter discusses these challenges and my research methodology, as well as the reasons for employing an ethnographic approach in my examination of funeral practices. I will begin, however, by briefly outlining the research setting.

2.1 New Zealand funeral directors

As intimated in the preceding chapter, funeral directors are commonly linked with the disposal of the dead in New Zealand society and, as the subsequent chapter elucidates, funeral directors have gradually augmented their range of goods and services during the past century. Although there are presently no legal requirements to utilise the services of a funeral director (or any other funeral

functionary)[44] in the event of death, and some community groups have attempted to promote alternative, DIY funeral options (for example Consedine 1997; Hera 1992, 1995), funeral directors continue to play a central role in post-mortem practices. Most small towns in New Zealand have access to at least one local funeral firm, and firms range in size from single owner-operators and small family businesses to large corporate establishments employing specialised staff.[45] More than 535 people were employed as funeral directors/embalmers in 2001: one quarter of these workers were female. A large percentage of funeral workers were located in urban areas (Auckland 19%, Canterbury 15% and Wellington 12%), corresponding with the urbanised character of the New Zealand population. (Kiwi Careers, no date).[46]

My earliest encounter with funeral directors was during Honours dissertation fieldwork in 1998. Although the scope of this research was restricted primarily to the role and development of the secular funeral celebrant in New Zealand (Schafer 1998), my presence at funeral services and interaction with funeral celebrants soon came to the attention of local funeral directors. These directors expressed significant interest in my research and a small number of relevant funeral director interviews were included in my project. These early interviews and observations highlighted the central role of the funeral director in the disposal process, and the interrelations and connections between various funeral functionaries. These observations played a significant role in shaping the current research project.

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[44] Any individual can organise the disposal of a body and registration of death. If a death is not under coroner countenance, a *medical certificate of causes of death* (BDM 50) is completed. A body must be placed in a 'suitable container' when moved from a mortuary, and buried or cremated in a location permitted by law. Cremation requires the consent of a medical referee and special permission must be sought from the appropriate City or District Council if disposal in an alternative location is required. If the body is to be transported overseas or used for medical research, additional certification must be obtained. A *notification of death for registration* form (BDM 28) must be completed within three days of burial or cremation (*New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs*). When a coroner is involved, a body cannot be buried or cremated until an *order for disposal of body* has been issued. See the Coroner's Act 1988 (No 111) and the Births, Death, and Marriage Registration Act 1995 (No 16). See also the Burial and Cremation Act 1964 (No 75), and Cremation Regulations 1973 (SR 1973/154) for legal requirements surrounding disposal. Transportation of the body also requires specialised treatment involving the services of a funeral director. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for example, states that New Zealand has stringent embalming and presentation standards and that families who wish to repatriate a body will need to 'engage the services of a Funeral Director in New Zealand at the earliest opportunity' (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, no date).

[45] A detailed overview of the New Zealand funeral industry is provided in the following chapter.

[46] Approximately 86 percent of New Zealand's 4 million inhabitants reside in urban areas (Statistics New Zealand 2002: 97-99). 'Urban' is defined in census statistics as settlements with more than 1000 inhabitants (Carter 1994: 57).

I accepted an invitation to present my dissertation findings at the annual Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand (FDANZ) convention in early 1999, and it was at this conference that I was introduced to funeral directors from around the country, as well as individuals from affiliated occupations. The convention provided a very productive forum in which to establish future research contacts and my presentation was noted in *The New Zealand Funeral Director* journal (Autumn 1999: 5) the following month. As numerous participants later explained, it was my attendance at this convention that provided my PhD research with a considerable degree of 'legitimacy' and encouraged them to respond positively to my subsequent interview and information requests.

My initial research ambitions included a detailed analysis of all New Zealand occupations involved in disposal, including an examination of the role of coroners, council workers, cremation technicians, doctors, police, and funeral directors. During this early phase of my research, for example, I explored the function of mortuary attendants in a public hospital. After spending two days observing post-mortem procedures and talking to the assistants and pathologists, however, I was told by the head mortuary technician that my presence was a distraction to the pathologists, disrupting the autopsy and prolonging the entire procedure. While this event essentially ended any fieldwork opportunities at this hospital, it also caused me to rethink my dissertation focus and the direction of my research.

My discussions with funeral workers (including the mortuary attendants) reiterated the centrality of the funeral director. This became particularly obvious when I was involved in an episode of (involuntary) participant observation following the sudden death of my father a few months after starting the present research. Funeral directors not only arranged the funeral in conjunction with the bereaved, but liased with numerous agencies to facilitate the disposal of the dead.

After my convention presentation in 1999, I attended several industry meetings and seminars around New Zealand. This 'ethnographic reconnaissance' (Wolcott 1999: 207) allowed me to further refine my research focus and articulate new research questions. One particular concern that emerged during early discussions with funeral workers was the influence of a North American multinational. This industry development had received significant media attention and numerous funeral directors felt that these (mis)representations simply revived the popular

economic critiques of earlier decades and stereotyped images of esurient funeral functionaries. Funeral directors and other funeral workers, however, also asserted that the rationalised funerals offered by the multinational were incongruous with New Zealand requirements. Independent funeral directors in particular, were enthusiastic about promoting local ownership and articulating the unique features of New Zealand post-mortem practices, together with the innovative responses of the New Zealand funeral industry.

I was aware from a very early stage that a certain degree of ambivalence surrounded my presence at funeral director meetings and seminars. On the one hand, funeral directors were concerned that any 'research' might generate further negative publicity or simply an 'inconvenient' representation that did not complement the public image they were attempting to create - particularly their continuing pursuit of professionalisation. Many funeral firms also operate in an increasingly competitive business environment and there were concerns that a researcher interviewing funeral directors from competing firms could transmit confidential information and reveal business secrets.[47] On the other hand, however, numerous funeral directors declared that they had waited for an opportunity to 'demystify death' and were enthusiastic about emending the image of their calumniated industry. The initial industry response to my research advances therefore differed from earlier studies of funeral directors in Britain and the United States. Unlike Gore (2001), Parsons (1997) or Pine (1975), for example, I did not have any previous professional connection with the funeral industry. At the same time, however, I did not encounter the level of resistance described by Howarth (1992), Naylor (1989) or Smale (1985).[48] It was clear from my early foray into the field of funeral directing that any research attempts would have to be sensitive to funeral director concerns, while simultaneously being aware of motivated accounts of funeral directing (Howarth 1993). These considerations made the multi-mode approach of ethnography a particularly effective method with which to examine post-mortem practices in New Zealand.

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[47] One particular area of concern was the total number of funerals completed by each firm annually. Like Parsons (1997: 16), I often found this information to be a carefully guarded secret.

[48] In his study of funeral directors in Britain and Newfoundland, for example, Smale (1985: 25-26) conceded that participant observation was not a feasible component of his study because every proprietor he approached refused him entry. This prompted him to modify his original research design and rely more on respondent interviewing (Smale 1985: 26). Howarth (1992: 97-111) and Naylor (1989: 34) also recount the difficulties they encountered in their attempts to access the funeral field.

One salient theme that I identified in the early stages of my research was the 'personalisation' of funerary practices. As noted in the introductory chapter, participants often noted that multinational corporations were unfamiliar with this essential New Zealand feature, and numerous publications commented on the significance of this development in recent years. Personalisation was often presented as a revolutionary shift, and one important research focus that emerged was the historical contextualisation of this change: when did religious funerals become 'impersonal' and 'irrelevant' as many participants claimed, and how was this change evident in post-mortem practices? As suggested in the opening chapter, however, there was very little literature exploring the historical development of the funeral directing occupation or the emergence of the 'personalised funeral'. One fundamental component of any research focusing on contemporary post-mortem practices, therefore, needed to examine this historical context. While industry journals and historical texts provided important information, a number of older participants were second or third generation funeral directors with family funeral firms going back several decades. Interviews with these funeral directors provided fascinating insights into the history of their funeral firms and identified important changes in the development of the occupation in New Zealand.

Personalisation rhetoric accentuating individuality and originality permeates all elements of funeral discourse. 'Ethnographic reconnaissance' and attendance at over 70 funerals for my Honours project (Schäfer 1998), however, revealed that contemporary 'personalised' funerals contained significant structural similarities. While the content of 'tributes' clearly varied, the organisation of life-centred funerals (like the religious funerals often critiqued by funeral workers) demonstrated a discernible degree of congruence. Participants and industry literature also identified an important correlation between personalisation and grief. What was particularly interesting about this correlation was the homogeneity of descriptions. While areas such as the parameters of professionalisation were contested (see chapter three), there was a significant degree of consistency surrounding descriptions of grief, funeral function, and the role of the funeral director. The interconnections between these concepts therefore emerged as salient research themes. An elucidation of these themes required a detailed elaboration of concepts such as 'personalisation' and 'grief' that went

beyond the available literature and representations discussed in chapter one. A critical appreciation of how funeral directors understood personalisation and their own role in the post-mortem process required an engaged ethnographic approach that utilised a number of research methods and was sensitive to the aforementioned funeral director concerns.

2.2 Fieldwork issues and methods

The last three decades have witnessed a profound period of critical introspection in social anthropology. A fundamental feature of this critique was the erosion of classic norms in anthropology (Rosaldo 1993: 24-45) and the concomitant disintegration of scientific ethnography (Grimshaw and Hart 1995). Conceptions of detached and objective observers providing scientific accounts of unified 'cultures' (epitomised in the writings of Malinowski (1961 [1922])) have been abandoned, along with increasing incredulity about the validity of meta-narratives.[49] Coupled with criticisms surrounding anthropology's neglect of historically interconnected processes (Wolf 1982: 19) and critiques of anthropology's complicity with imperialist agendas and construction of cultural difference (Fabian 1983; Said 1978)[50], the discipline increasingly faced a 'crisis of representation' (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Denzin and Lincoln 1998) in the mid-1980s. Rather than the realist accounts that 'objectively' reported 'factual' observations, writers such as Clifford Geertz asserted that fieldwork monographs inscribed social discourse. Clifford and Marcus (1986) went on to argue that anthropology was a cultural 'text' or literary production, and *not* an authoritative interpretation - anthropologists *constructed* textual versions of the social world (Atkinson 1992: 19). While the focus on 'ethnography as fiction' was criticised for disregarding the conditions of production of anthropological knowledge (Spencer 1989: 157)[51], anthropologists increasingly recognised the need to pay closer attention to the epistemological grounds of their representations and the

[49] Numerous authors have traced the historical development of social anthropology. For a more detailed overview see Grimshaw and Hart (1995), Kuper (1996), Macdonald (2001), and Stocking (1995).

[50] Abu-Lughod (1991) argues that the concept of 'culture' utilised by contemporary anthropologists continues to imply homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness, contributing to the spurious construction of cultural difference.

[51] Spencer (1989: 159), for example, argues that 'ethnographic writing is but one stage in a complex process of cultural production', and that an exclusive focus on the textual product disregards the social and historical context of production. See also Roth (1989).

asymmetrical power relations that were often inherent in these 'tales'[52] (James et al. 1997: 3). 'Natives' increasingly interrogated (and contested) the ethnographers' omnipotent accounts (Abu-Lughod 1991; Ahmed and Shore 1995; Brettel 1993; Rosaldo 1993), and anthropologists increasingly embraced reflexivity in their ethnographic fieldwork and ensuing representations.

Herzfeld (2001: 45-46) argues that reflexivity in anthropology is a form of self-examination that problematises the cultural assumptions of the researcher and 'clarifies the ethnographic encounter, and its limitations as predicated upon the imperfect meshing of two different codes, with its multiplicity of divergent identities and presuppositions'. Without necessarily reverting to self-indulgent solipsism (Herzfeld 2001: 46, Macdonald 2001: 70), 'vanity ethnography' (Van Maanen 1988: 93), or a position of extreme pessimism (Davies 1999: 5), reflexivity recognises the need to explore ethical, political, and epistemological elements of ethnographic research (Marcus 1998: 189). In contrast to 'traditional' ethnography, which often obscured the identity of the researcher, reflexive ethnography makes the ethnographer 'visible'.[53] The researcher thus constitutes an inextricable component of the context and culture he or she is attempting to comprehend and represent (Altheide and Johnson 1998: 285). Tedlock (2000: 464-466) describes this realisation as the 'observation of participation': 'ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic scene of encounter'.

This 'co-participation' is clearly evident in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. The particular incident recounted not only illustrates my involvement in the ethnographic setting, but demonstrates my own positioning in relation to research participants. The extract emphasises that I had certain preconceived ideas about what constituted 'proper' participant observation, and that purchasing alcohol or walking the funeral director's dog did not fulfil these expectations. It was particularly poignant, therefore, that the completion of these tasks resulted in a peculiar form of fieldwork 'immersion'. While having had some personal experience in organising funerals, the journey from the hospital to my temporary residence represented an entirely unexpected and intimate episode of participant

[52] Van Maanen (1988: 8) refers to ethnographic accounts as 'tales': a term that emphasises the 'story-like character of fieldwork accounts, as well as the inevitable choices made by an author when composing an ethnographic work'.

observation. By being pushed into the back of an open hearse and told to 'lie very still', I was temporarily transformed into a 'corpse', becoming the subject (rather than the observer) of funeral work and experiencing an element of the disposal process reserved for the dead. As well as highlighting the (awkward) 'visibility' of the researcher, this particular incident emphasises the role of 'unexpected turns' in fieldwork as well as the serendipitous nature of ethnographic research.

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of anthropological research techniques and significant ethnographic experimentation (Goodall Jr. 2000, Atkinson et al. 2001). My own approach to examining post-mortem practices in New Zealand was shaped by pragmatic and philosophical considerations (Amit 2000). Specifically, I adopted a multi-sited ethnographic approach that incorporated interviews, participant observation and archival research to reflect the realities of contemporary funeral directing in New Zealand.

Unbounded groups in contemporary society

Studying an occupational group with no specific spatial boundaries proved to be an important research challenge. While the archetype of anthropological observer scientifically describing bounded 'cultures' has been rejected (Grimshaw and Hart 1995), and recent years have witnessed a proliferation of anthropological approaches, a lingering sense of ambivalence nevertheless surrounds ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world. This ambivalence is particularly evident in relation to what constitutes a legitimate research 'field'. Clifford (1997: 192), for example, argues that the exotic exemplar retains significant anthropological authority, while Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 13) describe a 'hierarchy of purity of field sites'. They note that sites understood to be 'distant, exotic, and strange' are often considered more 'anthropological', and consequently 'legitimate' or 'valid' sites of investigation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). Caputo (2000), for instance, found that her research with Canadian children was often regarded as less 'authentic' than that of her colleagues who studied 'distant' ('exotic') groups. As I found in my own research, the aura of legitimacy applies not only to spatially 'isolated' or 'distinct' cultures[54], but to *any* group that was not of European descent. Any mention of anthropology and

[53] Davies (1999: 4) describes this as a turning back on one-self, 'a process of self-reference'. See also Hertz (1996) and Strathern (1987).

funeral practices in New Zealand was almost invariably followed by comments or questions relating to Maori funeral customs or other cultural minorities. Numerous individuals appeared sceptical and genuinely perplexed about my particular area of interest and what *exactly* there was to study in Pakeha New Zealand society. It was as if 'interesting' or 'legitimate' research 'discoveries' could only be made in other cultural groups.

Closely related to this anthropological archetype is the concept of 'immersion' in the 'field'. Malinowski (1961[1922]: 6) stated that the 'proper conditions of ethnographic work' included 'cutting oneself off from the company of white men' and remaining in 'close contact with the natives'. Even though prolonged immersion in a single field location and the conspicuous separation of 'work' and 'home' were characteristic features of the now repudiated scientific paradigm, they are features that retain a certain measure of authority. The separation of 'home' and 'field' is particularly problematic for anthropology at 'home' (Jackson 1987), and a few recent studies have outlined the difficulties of a spatialised concept of 'field' (McLeod 2004; Passaro 1997; Caputo 2000). Passaro's (2000) study of homeless people in New York City, for example, highlights the unbounded reality of much contemporary fieldwork. Caputo (2000) similarly emphasises that fieldwork at home is characterised by constant shifts in perspectives, people and identities. These shifts also apply to the persona of the researcher, which varies in relation to situational context. Fieldwork at 'home' also means, as Caputo argues (2000: 28), that 'one is never able to be completely 'in the field', nor is one ever completely able to 'leave the field''.

Contemporary ethnography is increasingly multi-sited (Marcus 1998: 79) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 37) describe it as a flexible and opportunistic research strategy.[55] This strategy often utilises a multi-method research approach:

> Even the most intense involvement in activities located at a specific site was unlikely, in and of itself, to provide direct information about influential but more distant processes and agents. The ethnographic 'field', therefore, has always been as much characterized by absences as by presences and hence necessitated a variety of corresponding methods – interviews, archival documents, census data, artefacts, media materials and more – to explore processes not immediately or appropriately accessible through participant observation (Amit 2000: 12).

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[54] Authors such as Wolf (1982: 3) have persuasively argued that there have never been 'isolated' cultures, and that 'the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes'. See also Abu-Lughod (1991).

[55] Authors such as Sanjek (2000) assert that this strategy offers a solution to the trend towards increasing reliance on interviews alone in social research.

These realisations informed my own ethnographic endeavour. As previously noted, a critical understanding of funeral directors and contemporary funeral practices required an approach that transcended the motivated and somewhat simplistic representations explored in chapter one. This approach also needed to correspond with the practical realities of funeral work. I decided, therefore, to utilise in-depth interviews that explored funeral director understandings of personalisation and grief, and supplement this research component with participant observation. After some consideration, I rejected a more 'traditional' approach involving extended participant observation at a single site (for example Howarth (1992)). While an analysis such as Howarth's (1992) may illuminate the occupational role of the funeral director, I do not believe that this strategy would have been as effective in elucidating the constructions of personalisation and grief (outlined in the introductory chapter), as a broad range of funeral director interviews.

An additional factor that precluded more intimate involvement in the work of funeral directors was a University of Otago Ethics Committee ruling that prevented any planned contact with bereaved individuals. Adopting an approach that included researcher involvement in numerous family arrangement sessions (Naylor 1989), for example, would have been a clear transgression of the Ethics Committee decision.[56] Engaging in certain elements of funeral work and participation in a variety of funeral director settings, however, was an integral component of understanding the work of funeral directors and the inter-occupational connections and movement that exist. Finally, the interviews and participant observation components of this study were contextualised and complemented by archival research and investigation.

Participants

Initial recruiting was carried out through attendance at the aforementioned FDANZ conferences. It became clear from an early stage in my research that the majority of participants at these conventions were male and of European or Pakeha descent. I also realised that many of the participants in attendance were company principals. A number of these funeral directors were linked to large, 'traditional', family firms with well documented histories and significant industry

involvement. While this group constituted an important component of my research, I was also aware that there were hundreds of funeral workers not represented at the formal convention, including company employees and individuals associated with funeral firms that were not members of the primary (FDANZ) association. One important method of establishing initial contact with these workers was through my attendance at the New Zealand Embalmers Association (NZEA)[57] conferences, together with a number of affiliated education sessions. These meetings not only included workers from a variety of firms around New Zealand but also a significantly higher percentage of female participants.

This encounter with various funeral director groups emphasised the problematic distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', highlighting Naples' (1996) assertion that insider/outsider status is a shifting and permeable social location. While I was an 'outsider' in the sense that I had no professional affiliation with the funeral directing occupation, the funeral directors themselves were far from a homogenous 'insider' group. As chapter three elaborates, there was obvious friction between FDANZ member and non-member firms, as well as discernible tension *within* the FDANZ itself. Some funeral directors operating smaller companies, for example, felt that the association catered primarily to the large, well-established firms, while others stated that the arrival of a multinational had changed the traditional dynamic of the industry.[58] Numerous participants felt, however, that the interconnected nature of the funeral industry prevented them from discussing their disquiet. It was precisely my 'outsiderness', therefore, that provided some participants with the impetus to voice their concerns and allowed me to gain an understanding of the alienation and frustration experienced by some funeral directors. That is to say, some participants clearly interpreted my presence as an opportunity to express their distrust of certain industry developments and represent their 'side of the story'.

My primary data collection strategy included interviews with funeral workers around New Zealand. The most efficient and practical way of conducting these interviews was through systematic travel to various regions around the country -

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[56] As the following section illustrates, however, it was sometimes extremely difficult to 'extract' myself from certain fieldwork situations.
[57] The function and role of these associations is explored in the following chapter.

from the south of the South Island, to Auckland in the north. During preliminary fieldwork planning I identified the funeral companies operating in each region using my conference contacts and the *Telecom Yellow Pages*. In some regions I sent introductory letters to all the funeral firms, while in a few of the larger urban areas (particularly Auckland) I was necessarily more selective. I used an element of purposive sampling in selecting participants, including a number of female funeral worker interviews (7 in total), as well as participants working for non-FDANZ funeral homes (8). As noted in the introductory chapter, the arrival of an American multinational had received significant media attention and I therefore included a number of interviews (8) with employees working for these establishments.

An introductory letter to the selected funeral companies included an outline of my research interests, an Information Sheet for Participants, and an interview request. These letters were followed by telephone contact approximately one to two weeks later determining a provisional interview time and date. An important element of research involving funeral directors is the realisation that funeral work is highly unpredictable and requires significant researcher flexibility. It was therefore important to confirm details a few hours before the scheduled interview. On several occasions it was necessary to reorganise the interview schedule to accommodate the participants' primary priorities.

As the chance encounter with another funeral worker in the chapter epigraph indicates, the New Zealand funeral industry is relatively small and there is significant social and professional intra- and inter-occupational intercourse. At the professional level, funeral firms frequently communicate with one other and funeral directors often meet at regional and national association events, conventions, and education sessions. Various social gatherings often accompany these meetings and national social networks exist. Funeral directors in most areas were acutely aware of local competitor developments, and, while participants carefully guarded business 'secrets', information was often exchanged through intermediaries (such as crematorium operators, council workers or celebrants), who frequently dealt with numerous funeral firms and were thus keenly aware of local developments. At my first national convention I was regaled with stories of

[58] This issue also emphasises the significance of internal differentiation and the contested natures of all discourses (Abu-Lughod 1991: 146).

particularly innovative funeral firms in one part of the country, and 'deviant' establishments that had abandoned the national Association in another. I was told about funeral directors who had been fined for professional misconduct and embalmers who had been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders. One crematorium worker I met in the course of my research recounted the extra-marital affairs of a local funeral director, while a celebrant provided her personal interpretation of the reasons behind a funeral firms' financial difficulties. In short, many individuals I talked to during the course of my research revealed (or at least alluded to) some form of 'confidential' personal or professional information regarding other funeral firms and/or workers.

While this network of 'connected people' is an interesting feature of funeral work, it also raises the issue of what Tolich (2004) refers to as 'internal confidentiality'. Tolich (2004: 101) defines this form of confidentiality as the ability of research participants 'to identify each other in the final publication of the research'. This type differs from traditional forms of confidentiality where researchers provide assurances of anonymity in the final research report. As Davis (1993) discovered in her study of women in a Newfoundland fishing village, issues surrounding anonymity in a small community can have significant ramifications for the research community and the researcher.[59]

An appreciation of the multifarious connections between funeral workers and the components of the death system therefore make confidentiality and anonymity imperative. To protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare of participants - in line with University of Otago research ethics and the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand Code of Ethics - I have not only used pseudonyms to protect anonymity but changed or expunged any identifying characteristics. I do not identify particular funeral homes or specific locations (except where this information is publicly available) and generally describe funeral firms only as rural or urban.

Interviews

Over a three-year period I conducted 50 in-depth, open-ended interviews with funeral directors and a smaller number (10) with affiliated occupations, including

monumental masons, crematorium workers, mortuary technicians, clergy, and council workers. All interviews were between 30-120 minute duration. The first five interviews in this project constituted a form of pilot study to gauge participant responses and refine research questions. I noted some respondent resistance to recording equipment in earlier research (Schafer 1998) and attempted to take extensive notes for the aforementioned five interviews. This proved to be distracting for the participants and frustrating for me as I attempted to adequately record the wealth of information elicited. I tape-recorded the remaining 55 interviews with little participant concern, and spent several months transcribing the interviews. This process not only made me very familiar with the interview material, but also allowed me to develop insights and ideas in the process and identify prominent research themes.

All participants were provided with information sheets outlining the areas of my research interest and asked to complete a consent form. Nearly all the funeral director interviews were conducted at funeral firm premises, and the interviews with associated occupations were also completed at sites closely linked to the place of employment.[60] I adopted a semi-structured interview approach and used a list of question zones - adapting interviews to elaborate the interests and experiences of the individual participants rather than utilising a standardised question format (Fontana and Frey 1998: 52). Interview questions focused on a variety of research areas, including the history of human disposal in New Zealand, embalming, professionalisation, cremation and burial, public relations, celebrants, life-centred funerals, DIY and eco-rituals, bereavement support, and memorialisation. I generally started interviews with questions relating to the participants' own history and involvement in funeral work and then developed the themes or ideas described. These questions usually led to further questions and only in a small number of cases did I repeatedly resort to my list of question zones. I usually ended the interview sessions with a short debriefing, reiterating my assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and asking participants if they had any questions or comments about the interview or the research project. All interviewed participants were offered the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and correct any errors or clarify areas of confusion or concern. I

[59] Concerns surrounding internal confidentiality became particularly clear to me when some of the participants in earlier research (Schäfer 1998) explained that they could clearly identify themselves and other participants in my research.

returned a copy of the transcript to most participants (a few declined this offer) and only one participant subsequently contacted me with questions and comments about the interview.

Participant Observation

As intimated in the preceding sections, observing and participating in a miscellany of funeral director settings constituted an important component of my research. The degree of participation and observation was dependent on the particular situation and varied significantly from location to location, with significant movement between 'frontstage' and 'backstage' areas (Howarth 1993). I attended funeral director and embalmer conventions, education sessions, and the social activities that generally accompanied these gatherings. I observed hospital autopsies, council cremations and burials, and spent several weeks 'working' for two funeral firms. One was a large urban establishment with extensive premises, specialised mortuary, staff and vehicles; the other a small rural company with two full time funeral directors, several part time workers, and modest facilities. During my time in these two locations I helped retrieve bodies from hospitals, prepare service sheets and caskets, 'hygienically treat' (or embalm) the dead, and deliver them to viewing, service and disposal locations. I also accompanied funeral directors to local social events and community group meetings. On one occasion, for example, I spent several hours talking to the residents of a local retirement village while the funeral director entertained prospective clients. During funeral fieldwork I was dressed in requisite suit and tie, and was generally introduced to other deathworkers as a 'researcher' studying New Zealand funerals. To members of the public I was often presented as a 'trainee funeral director'.

As noted in the chapter epigraph, some funeral director participants not only interpreted my interest and presence as an opportunity to enhance - or at least emend - the public image of the funeral functionary, but a convenient source of labour during hectic working periods. While prevented from engaging in planned contact with the bereaved by the University of Otago Ethics Committee decision, funeral director expectations sometimes made this research limitation impracticable. On one particular occasion, for example, I delivered a funeral director (who did not have a driver's license) to a family home for an arrangement

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[60] In the case of two funeral director interviews, the funeral firm was also the home of the particular participant.

interview and was greeted by the family at the front gate and invited inside. Efforts to limit contact in this situation would not only have been awkward, but would also have placed the funeral director in a difficult position. On another occasion I was asked to help carry a coffin into a family home after it became clear that no one in the family was willing to handle the casket. These incidents highlight a few of the complexities of engaging in anthropological fieldwork, including the expectations of the researcher and participants (or the 'research bargain' Berg (1995)), as well as the observance and limitations of ethical guidelines.

During fieldwork excursions I diligently recorded interactions, impressions, and observations in fieldwork diaries at the earliest practicable moment (Emerson et al. 1995: 30). These notes constituted an important resource that contributed to my understanding of funeral director concerns and perspectives.

Literature review and archival research

The introductory chapter emphasised the significance of historical context in examining funeral practices and the funeral industry in New Zealand. Any expedient examination of contemporary post-mortem practices requires at least an elementary understanding of relevant historical changes and the influence of international industry developments. An important component of the present project was therefore to explore the historical development of the funeral directing occupation in New Zealand by reviewing a variety of historical and contemporary sources. The industry journal constituted one importance source of information, with funeral firm publications and newspaper articles providing another productive source. My historical exploration also included an examination of international articles and research that detailed relevant industry developments in other parts of the world. My ethnographic survey included numerous contemporary media representations and discussions, including newspaper and magazine articles, as well as television and radio recordings.

Data analysis

After two years of interviews and fieldwork I began to review the data I had accumulated during my primary research period. The data included interview transcripts, as well as voluminous field notes, funeral firm literature, and industry journals. It also included the memos that were used to record insights and

reflections during my archival research, fieldwork, and interview transcription. The strategy I used to organise this data has clear parallels with the immersion/crystallisation method described by Borkan (1999). This organisation style includes prolonged periods of researcher immersion in the data, followed (ideally) by an emergence of intuitive insights. It is an approach, as Borkan (1999: 180) notes, that requires 'cognitive and emotional engagement of the self to get beyond the obvious interpretation to hear, see, and feel the data'. This immersion allowed me to identify and refine salient conceptual categories and inductively construct a theoretical framework. While descriptions provided by authors such as Borkan (1999) might suggest that these insights effortlessly 'manifest', it is frequently a formidable process, requiring intense engagement with the material, and significant mental and emotional labour.

One important consideration related to the analysis of data and the ethnographic endeavour is 'validity'. This concept itself is a contested one in qualitative research given that the traditional criteria of this term were formulated by the quantitative sciences.[61] Positivism relates 'validity' to notions of 'reliable' (repeatable, generalisable) methods and findings (Altheide and Johnson 1998: 288; Oakely 2000: 46-47). As noted above, however, anthropologists have rejected the notion of 'objective' ethnographic accounts, with authors such as Goodall, Jr. (2000: 55) emphasising that all representations are 'partial, partisan, and problematic'. Terms such as 'validity' and 'reliability' (or 'trustworthiness' (Oakely 2000: 53))[62], however, continue to be useful concepts for ethnographic research when removed from the frame of positivist research (Davies 1999: 92). Borkan (1999: 193) suggests that qualitative assertions of validity focus on factors such as rigour and intellectual honesty, accuracy, depth of description and reflexivity. As I outline in the following section, I embraced these factors in my study of funerary practices and contend that the multi-method approach of ethnography utilised in this study demonstrated a significant degree of data concordance.

I analysed my interview and field data using *Atlas.ti*; a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package. Like other CAQDAS, *Atlas*

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[61] For a detailed overview of 'validity' in qualitative research see Altheide and Johnson (1998), Atkinson (1992), Davies (1999), Hammersley (1987), Kvale (1996), and LeCompte and Goetz (1982).
[62] Oakely contends that one of the central concerns of any research is the credibility of research findings. She argues, however, for a rejection of the 'quantitative'/'qualitative' terminology, stating that this distinction is ideological and 'unhelpful as a technical guide to research methods' (Oakely 2000: 303).

offers code-and-retrieve functions, as well as theory building capabilities.[63] The programme allows user-defined codes to be attached to selections of text: I used a total of 215 codes (grouped into numerous 'code families') in my analysis. Initial coding was followed by an elaboration of analytically interesting themes (or 'focused coding') (Emerson et al. 1995: 160). The coding process involved the continual revision of code categories and the creation of memos to document code definitions, relationships between codes, and other insights generated during analysis. CAQDAS programmes such as *Atlas* have the potential to increase methodological rigour by allowing researchers to utilise multiple and overlapping codes and complete fast and comprehensive searches of the analysed data (Coffey et al. 1996; Welsh 2002). *Atlas* also allows researchers to graphically display the relationships between codes and contribute to the generation of theoretical perspectives. Having said that, however, it is important to note that CAQDAS programmes do not analyse the data and that the quality of the analysis is ultimately dependent on researcher ability (Carvajal 2002; Dohan and Sánchez-Jankowski 1998). While some critiques have charged that CAQDAS distances researchers from the data and signal a methodological homogenisation (Coffey et al. 1996), such 'problems' more accurately reflect the deficiencies or inexperience of particular researchers than the software packages themselves.[64]

During this research I was committed to obtaining the participants' perspectives on the social reality of the research setting (Altheide and Johnson 1998: 293) and provided detailed descriptions of the concepts and issues explored. I endeavoured to record the views, experiences, and ideas of participants as faithfully as possible, and included substantial sections of participant dialogue in my representation (Davies 1999 116) - highlighting the multi-vocal dimension of many contemporary ethnographic studies. During interviews and discussions, however, I clearly recognised the motivated accounts of funeral workers (Bradbury 1999; Howarth 1993) and the importance of impression management for the occupation.

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[63] See Fielding (2001) and Richards and Richards (1998) for an overview and history of CAQDAS. Mangabeira et al. (2004) provide an examination of the use and adoption of CAQDAS.

[64] Coffey et al. (1996) specifically raise concerns about the close equation of grounded theory, coding, and software. Lee and Fielding (1996), however, note that the link between CAQDAS and grounded theory is often uncritically emphasised and that researchers draw on a heterogeneous variety of methodological traditions. Kelle (1997) similarly states that concerns about an emerging orthodoxy founded on grounded theory or the alienation of the researcher from the data, is overstated. See also Bong (2002) and Welsh (2002).

Although I do not believe that I in any way 'betray' participants in my ethnographic study, and have assiduously avoided any sensationalist, unbalanced, or inaccurate claims, I also realise that my representation may not coincide with the expectations of some participants.[65] I continually cross-checked information sources during analysis, and interviews were complemented with extensive field notes and other research resources. Although I am not suggesting that the participants in this study are representative of the entire New Zealand funeral director population, I can claim with some confidence that the views presented are typical and demonstrate a significant degree of homogeneity. What I have also endeavoured to illustrate throughout the thesis is the 'fittingness' of my representation with previous research in the field.

While this brief discussion attempts to elucidate and render transparent the processes involved in the construction of the ethnographic study, I acknowledge that I retained complete control of the framing of the research data and that the resulting text is my ethnographic 'fiction' (Denzin 1998) and 'constructed version' of the social world (Atkinson 1992: 19), ineluctably influenced by my own personal history, positioning, and presence in the field (Abu-Lughod 1991: 142; Davies 1999: 7).

2.3 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my research strategy and highlighted some of the salient issues related to studying funeral directors and funerary practices in contemporary society. During early fieldwork excursions I noted the precarious public image of funeral directors and acknowledged the importance of deploying a sensitive research method that appreciated funeral director concerns. At the same time, however, I was aware of motivated funeral director accounts and recognised that a critical elucidation of 'personalisation' - and the role of the funeral director - would require a multi-method ethnographic approach. I briefly reviewed the shift from scientific ethnography to new forms of reflexive research, and outlined some of the challenges associated with contemporary, 'multi-sited' fieldwork. My own strategy was shaped by philosophical and pragmatic considerations, and I briefly discussed the components of my multi-method

[65] Bosk (2001), for example, problematises the concept of 'informed consent' in ethnographic research because of researcher inability to effectively gauge or predict eventual participant reactions to seeing particular words and ideas described and objectified. Such unexpected participant reactions are clearly evident in the account provided by Davis (1993).

approach. Finally, I considered the process of data analysis and issues related to the construction of an ethnographic representation.

One important element of my ethnographic study is the history of funeral directing in New Zealand. In this chapter I reiterated that an examination of personalisation in contemporary society requires some understanding of the historical development of the funeral industry and the concomitant transformation of post-mortem practices. As the following chapter clearly illustrates, the funeral industry has undergone a number of significant changes over the last century and the recent shift to personalisation of funeral services is integrally linked to the occupation's continuing pursuit of professionalisation.

Chapter Three

THE NEW ZEALAND FUNERAL INDUSTRY

If properly inspired, we can get the public to follow our lead practically anywhere
(*The New Zealand Funeral Director* Dec 1945: 45).

The [New Zealand] funeral directors do such a good job in education that any new concept or practice can become the national norm in a very short period of time
(Manning 1996b: 12).

This chapter traces the historical development of the funeral directing occupation, focusing specifically on the funeral industry in New Zealand. Although this industry has been the subject of significant media scrutiny and research attention overseas, few studies have directly examined the development of funeral directing in New Zealand. This chapter therefore begins with a general historical overview of undertaking in England, and outlines key North American industry developments relevant to the occupation in New Zealand. The chapter outlines the process of professionalisation clearly evident in the development of funeral directing in these geographical areas, and how funeral directors in New Zealand have aspired to achieve a similar occupational status.

An examination of the academic literature, industry information, and current research data reveals that the New Zealand funeral industry has witnessed two discernible historical shifts. The first historical shift involves the undertaker of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time undertaking remained a secondary occupation; that is, the role of the undertaker was limited to supplying a coffin and providing transport for the corpse. Secularisation, and the related features of medicalisation and privatisation, however, became important influences in changing funerary ritual in the twentieth century and undertakers concurrently augmented their involvement in death ritual. Attempts to professionalise the occupation - including the introduction of a professional association, embalming, and multi-facility funeral premises - parallel similar changes in the United States and Britain, and illustrate the increasing bureaucratisation and rationalisation of human disposal.

The second discernible shift in the funeral industry has occurred in the past three decades. During this period New Zealand funeral directors focused their attention primarily on grief management and emphasised the medical value of funerary ritual. More recently, however, funeral directors have also played a significant role in personalising funerals and offering a variety of service options to bereaved families. Cremation, the introduction of a multinational corporation, and the active recruitment of females in the funeral field, have been intrinsically involved with this development and will be discussed below.

Despite the influence of British and American developments, the industry in this country has purveyed and promoted innovative post-mortem practices, which have had a significant impact on the disposal of the dead. While personalisation is a fundamental component of funeral ritual in contemporary New Zealand, it also becomes clear that this personalisation is significantly influenced by industry developments, particularly by funeral director perceptions of grief and the value of ritual. An examination of 'personalisation' - and the varying manifestations of personalisation at the pre-disposal, disposal, and post-disposal stages - form the focus of the following three chapters.

3.1 The British funeral industry

Authors such as Gittings (1984) and Litten (1997) have traced the development of specialised funeral functionaries to the heraldic funerals of the later Middle Ages. The Heralds gained charge of aristocratic funerary rites in the fifteenth century and controlled the funeral ceremonial of the English elite during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[66] The strict regulations regarding funerary display and expenditure, and the stringent standards of propriety enforced by the heralds (Gittings 1984: 180), however, provoked some of the elite to evade heraldic control and prompted a number of tradesmen to solicit direct custom from the bereaved (Litten 1997: 50; Smale 1985: 93).[67] These early undertakers in many regards

[66] For a detailed history of the heraldic funeral see Gittings (1984).
[67] There were far reaching changes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: night burials, for example, became more prevalent after 1618. These expeditiously organised burials dispensed with the need for embalming, reduced the substantial financial cost of heraldic funerals, and reflected the general unpopularity of the governing College of Arms. Litten (1997: 53) notes that William Russell -

superseded the heralds as 'organisers and masters of ceremonies' at elite funerals (Gittings 1984: 207). Undertakers not only supplied the goods and services required for a funeral, but offered clients the opportunity to hire, rather than purchase, some of these goods and services.[68] The undertaking trade eventually developed funeral etiquette for each rank in society and clients surrendered control of the funeral requirements (and cost) to the undertakers (Litten 1998: 9). Undertakers stipulated what was desirable and 'customary' (Litten 1997: 59; Howarth 1997a: 122), and exerted considerable influence on those who availed themselves of this service (Gittings 1984: 96).[69]

During the eighteenth century, and despite early opposition to the emerging undertaker from other occupational groups such as the heralds and surgeons, who felt that undertakers were usurping their roles and divesting them of their requisite fees[70] (Fritz 1981, 1994; Litten 1997), undertakers increasingly controlled funeral rituals in London, extending their influence to major provincial centres by the end of that century.[71] Undertakers eventually usurped family control in smaller towns and villages, dominating 'the final rite of passage for most of British society during the course of the nineteenth century' (Fritz 1994: 250). Houlbrooke (1998: 293) notes that these funeral patterns diffused down the social scale, and that the emergence of the undertaker 'facilitated imitation and fostered emulation'. Undertakers emphasised the consensual conformity that affected all social groups, and invoked 'tradition' as a justification for commercial exploitation (Smale 1985: 100). Extravagance and

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one of the earliest undertakers in London - established an alliance with the College of Arms in 1689 'whereby, for an arranged fee, its members would attend certain funerals of persons of rank furnished by Russell'.

[68] For a modest fee undertakers supplied the use of mourning-garb, funeral coaches and hearses, and the services of attendants (Houlbrooke 1998: 286); goods such as coffins, grave clothes, and metal furnishings were usually purchased outright (Litten 1998: 8).

[69] The emergence of the undertaker also altered the traditional distribution of funeral expenditure and perceptions of a 'respectable' funeral. The communal funeral meal, for example, was supplanted by the display of decorative material commodities, which had a particular impact on the less affluent population: 'By the Victorian period, respectability was conferred by the quantity of material trappings...which could only be purchased from the undertaker for cash (Gittings 1984: 98). See also Strange (2002).

[70] Surgeons begrudged the undertakers' encroachment into the area of embalming. A number of influential individuals felt that the undertakers' policy of allowing mourners to rent, rather than purchase, funeral furnishings, would also have detrimental economic effects (Fritz 1994: 246).

[71] Authors including Gittings (1984), Howarth (1997), and Smale (1985), note that this development was often slow, with marked regional variation. See also Gore's (2001) account of funeral directing in east Kent, and Strange's (2002) account of death and mourning in working-class culture.

exploitation became particularly prominent themes during the Victorian period (Curl 1972; Jalland 1996; Morley 1971; Richardson 1989).[72]

Funeral cost and burial of the poor initially gained prominence among the socially conscious at the end of the eighteenth century, and the case for burial reform and simplification of funerary ritual was recognised by the 1840s (Morley 1971: 25).[73] Funeral reformers called for measures to curb excessive funeral expenditure and impetus for reform came from a number of sources. These sources included the Church of England and the Anglo-Catholic movement, which attempted to recapture the authority usurped by undertakers (Howarth 1997: 124-125). Undertakers were portrayed as edacious individuals who perpetuated prodigal post-mortem expenditure, particularly burdening the urban poor. Since the 1850s grand funerals had no longer been fashionable amongst the upper classes (Litten 1998: 15-16; Rowell 1970: 52), and many of the middle classes moderated funerary improvidence towards the end of the nineteenth century. Despite a general move away from ostentation and a decreasing mortality rate that rendered 'ordinary' death less important in everyday life (Cannadine 1981), the impecunious classes retained elements of the 'Victorian' funeral well into the twentieth century. Howarth (1997a: 127) stipulates that it was the abbreviated funeral ceremonies necessitated by the conditions of the Second World War that eventually led to a general 'low-key approach to funeral ritual', that remains an integral component of contemporary ceremonies in Britain.[74]

Numerous authors have explored the societal factors that contributed to the emergence of the undertaker. Ariès (1974b; 1981), Gittings (1984; 1992) and Gorer (1965), for example, argue that this development was closely related to the rise of

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[72] Litten (1991: 176) describes the 'golden age' of these practices towards the end of the nineteenth century: 'The horse drawn cortege, the flower-decked funeral car with its encased burden and subtle mourning coaches containing weeping ladies swathed in crape and black bombazine, supported in their grief by stiff lipped husbands, brothers and uncles...on the road, two dreaded mutes led the way, harbingers of death itself.' The Victorians, however, were continuing a cultural practice that could be traced back several centuries (Cressy 1997; Jalland 1996), and the archetypal 'Victorian funeral' was already well established among the higher income groups of the Georgian era (Richardson 1989: 106). Smale (1985: 123) warns, however, that these funerary practices have been represented with undiscriminating selectivity and that such views neglect the variation inherent in Victorian practices.

[73] Cressy (1997) notes, however, that the advantages and disadvantages of lavish funeral spending had been debated long before the Reformation.

[74] See also Cannadine (1981) and Gorer (1965). There have, though, been ostentatious 'mock ups' of classic 'East End' funerals in the last few years – duly reported in the mass media: the singer Iain Dury's was one, and a Kray twin's was another (Murcott pers.comm. 2005).

individualism during this period.[75] Other authors have explored the significance of religious vicissitudes. Protestant rejection of Purgatory generated increasing incredulity about the salvation of the soul, and placed greater emphasis on the grief of survivors (Cressy 1997; Howarth 1997a; Rowell 1997; Walter 1997). The Church's influence in relation to funeral rituals, however, gradually declined after the Reformation, diminishing the clergy's position in the death and dying process (Cressy 1997: 480-481). The role of the priest presiding at death-bed rituals was eventually superseded by the doctor as the dominant discourse shifted from theology to medicine (Walter 1996a), and more emphasis was placed on the care of the corpse (Howarth 1997: 121).

Fritz (1981; 1994) and Jalland (1996) argue that the aforementioned period witnessed significant economic and social change. The growth in trade and commerce during the late seventeenth century and concomitant rise of the middle class provided the undertaker with significant pecuniary potential (Fritz 1994: 241). Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation stimulated the demand for a specialist agency to supply the required ostentation, and the expansion of undertaking as a 'trade of convenience' was a fundamental development in the commercialisation of death (Howarth 1997a: 121)

The growth of the middle classes also affected traditional hierarchical structures. Funerals were no longer solely a signifier of rank but a proclamation of wealth, and a 'public manifestation of one's acumen' (Litten 1998: 16). Richardson (1987; 1989) similarly states that the funeral was increasingly used to assert status, but stipulates that the early development of undertaking was also related to the pervasive fear of body snatching for medical dissection from 1750 to 1832. The small number of executed criminals - who constituted the only legal source of corpses for dissection during this period - was entirely inadequate and the majority of corpses supplied to anatomists by 'resurrectionists' (or body-snatchers) were stolen from graves. A number of innovations, including 'mortsafes' (iron cages erected over graves), secure vaults, and strengthened coffins were developed to deter the body-snatchers. This

[75] A number of authors including Beaver (1992), Houlbrooke (1989), Naylor (1989); Smale (1985) and Whaley (1981), however, argue that the focus on individualism by authors such as Gittings (1984) and

desire to provide security for the dead was closely connected to the purveyance of funeral services. The early appeal of the funeral industry was fuelled by the endeavour to preserve the body's identity and integrity, and benefited from the close relationship of these to the commercialised and conspicuously 'respectable' funeral (Richardson 1989: 111).

The fear of body-snatchers diminished, however, with the passing of the 1832 Anatomy Act, which stipulated that anatomists would receive the more plentiful corpses requiring parish burial. Richardson (1989: 114) asserts that this legislation rendered the resurrectionists redundant but transferred the 'punishment' of dissection to poverty. She contends that the apprehension associated with protecting the corpse and the investment in securing sanctuary from the body-snatchers was transformed into a 'desire to display respectability in death' (Richardson 1989: 115). The parish funeral was considered the ultimate failure, and this fear contributed to the desire for 'decent' burial and the concomitant proliferation of death insurance after the 1830s (Scandura 1996). The emphasis on material commodities particularly affected the poor and resulted in the establishment of burial clubs and friendly societies that enabled working-class families to cover the cost of 'decent' burial.[76]

The establishment of extramural cemeteries in the nineteenth century was another development with significant consequences for the emerging funeral industry (Naylor 1989: 45). Existing exiguous parish graveyards were entirely inadequate for the industrialising urban centres, and burial reformers soon commented on unsanitary and overcrowded metropolitan graveyards. Cemeteries such as Green Ground in London were described as sites 'saturated with human putrescence' (Pinfold 1997: 80), and a transition to extramural burial was initially promoted by the cemetery companies that proliferated in the 1820-1853 period (Rugg 1997). Large extramural, municipal cemeteries followed, improving standards of public health and hygiene. Burial in these cemeteries was also indicative of a 'desire for burial

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Ariès (1974b; 1981) neglect the importance of complex social changes and simplify significant social context.

[76] Morley (1971: 25) asserts that these clubs were a 'frequent agent of fraud', but Howarth (1997: 124) emphasises that the survival of these clubs well into the twentieth century was an indication of their significance for the poor. Strange (2002: 156) notes that working-class funerals during this period were 'symptomatic of a burgeoning culture of consumerism: expenditure on extra-ordinary items acquired a symbolism beyond their intrinsic economic worth'.

independent from the Established Church' (Rugg 1998: 53); correspondingly, control of disposal was progressively transferred to secular authorities after the 1850s (Jupp 1997). The separation of the living and the dead, and the increased physical distance between the home and site of interment, also necessitated more efficient transportation for both the corpse and mourners.[77]

The early twentieth century was characterised by significant changes in the funeral industry. In response to the funeral reform movement of the nineteenth century, undertakers established protective trade associations and attempted to procure professional status (Howarth 1996; Naylor 1989; Parsons 1997; Smale 1985). The foundation of the British Undertakers Association (BUA) in 1905, together with the first code of ethics formulated in 1908, were concerted efforts to exclude other trades from encroaching on the provision of post-mortem services. Integrally related to this protection was a desire on the part of undertakers to augment, amalgamate, and professionalise these services.

The *British Undertakers Association Monthly*, first published in 1920, was preoccupied with securing higher status for the occupation. Undertakers emphasised the increasing complexity of their role and utilised euphemistic terminology that highlighted the service-orientated nature of their occupation (Naylor 1989: 69; Parsons 1997: 260-261). The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) replaced the British Undertakers Association in 1935, but, despite the continuing attempts of this organisation to introduce occupational registration, minimal progress was made in regard to this objective (Naylor 1989: 92; Parsons 1997: 251). The Association emphasised the importance of education and in 1955 introduced the first National Examination for funeral directors. In 1982 the British Institute of Funeral Directors was formed and membership limited to those who had acquired the requisite qualification.[78]

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[77] Undertakers initially entrusted the carriage-master with the provision of this service, but it was this reliance on an autonomous occupational group which contributed to the establishment of trade associations in the early twentieth century, as undertakers attempted to augment their control of funerary services (Howarth 1997: 128).

[78] Unlike the NAFD, which represents the owners of funeral directing businesses, the BIFD represents individual funeral directors. See Naylor (1989: 98), Parsons (1997: 250-251), and Smale (1985: 180).

Although funeral directors modelled their early professionalism predominantly on the religious vocation, the aspiring profession eventually appropriated powerful medical discourse that promoted funeral work as an essential public service associated with scientific rationality (Adams 1993: 164; Naylor 1989: 83). Particularly important to this approach was the 'science' of embalming, which allowed funeral directors to delay decomposition, maintain hygiene 'standards', and present the preserved body of the deceased to the bereaved (Howarth 1997: 127-130; Scandura 1996). Some serious attempts to establish embalming were made at the beginning of the twentieth century, with inspiration being drawn from the developments that had occurred in the United States.[79] The British Institute of Embalming was established in 1927 and in addition to awarding embalming qualifications, this body provided appropriately qualified practitioners with individual membership (Parsons 1997: 252). There was some initial opposition to embalming and the practice was relatively infrequent before the 1940s. After this period, however, embalming became increasingly significant and schools of embalming were established to provide a supply of trained embalmers (Parsons 1997: 102).

During the 1920s and 1930s concerns about health and hygiene, and an increasing shift in the location of death from home to institution, contributed to the development of funeral director premises. These premises accommodated the corpse and allowed funeral directors to take increasing control of funerary ritual (Adams 1993; Howarth 1997). Legislative changes and increasing bureaucratisation of the death system at this time also contributed to the elevation of funeral director status. Cremation, for example, fragmented control of the established disposal procedures and provided funeral directors with the opportunity to co-ordinate the activities of those involved in the management of disposal (Naylor 1989: 67-72). In addition to enhancing the funeral directors' control of post-mortem practices, the shift to cremation and concomitant proliferation of crematoria in the 1950s, contributed to the rationalisation of the funeral process.[80]

Naylor (1989), Parsons (1997), and Smale (1985) note that these technical and societal changes contributed to a rationalised environment of funeral performance and the

[79] See the history of the North American funeral industry below.

concurrent rise of the large specialist organisation managing funerals on a centralised basis. From the 1970s onwards, funeral organisations expanded through branch office acquisition, as larger organisations identified the pecuniary potential of economic resource centralisation, and appropriated the availability of independent firms. During the 1980s, large funeral organisations initiated an acquisition contest, with three organisations dominating the 1982-1994 period.[81] In 1994 Service Corporation International, a US-based funeral organisation, entered the British funeral market with the acquisition of one of these three major funeral organisations (the Great Southern Group).

Although bureaucratic principles allowed large funeral organisations to achieve economies of scale in the purchase of funeral supplies, and to utilise costly fixed overheads more efficiently, centralised management also had negative consequences for employees and consumers (Parsons 1997: 147).[82] In his study of a large, centrally-managed organisation, Parsons (1997: 218), for example, found that the bureaucratised funerals conducted by a large organisation resulted in a degree of deskilling and depersonalisation, and that the company was often unable to comply with client demands that were incongruous with the company's 'predetermined calculability of funeral performance'. Many traditional independent funeral establishments recognised this predicament and subsequently emphasised the personalised service offered by their own businesses. Although some of these independent firms were increasingly faced with problems of succession and uncertainties regarding economic viability (Hodgson 1992: 38; Parsons 1997: 119-121; Smale 1985: 183), the reduced size and complexity of the small funeral organisation (theoretically) minimised the possibilities of spoiled funeral performances and increased the level of flexibility available to meet client demands. In 1989 some of these independent firms founded the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF). Parsons (1999: 136) stipulates that the 'industry generated gulf', which developed between the large funeral companies and the independent firms

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[80] For a detailed history of cremation in England see Jupp (1993, 1997) and Leaney (1989).
[81] The Great Southern Group, Hodgson Holdings, and Kenyon Securities.
[82] For a more detailed description of centralisation see the following section on multinational funeral organisations.

during the 1980s, became a defining feature of the British funeral industry during the late twentieth century.[83]

This overview illustrates that funeral directors have had a significant impact on transforming the British way of death. The focus of funerary ritual gradually shifted from post-mortem extravagance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to hygiene, health, and 'protection' of the bereaved. Despite tenacious attempts to augment, amalgamate and professionalise post-mortem services, however, the funeral industry in Britain continued to be characterised by 'ambiguity' (Smale 1997: 120) and 'lack of agreed direction' (Naylor 1989: 85). Smale (1997: 119) stipulates that 'professionalisation', for example, was pursued at the expense of consumer choice. New reform movements[84] established at the end of the twentieth century, the growth of expressive individualism, and younger people inclined to influence funerary ritual, increasingly challenged this approach (Howarth 1996: 206; Smale 1997: 124), criticising the authority of the funeral expert. In response to these concerns, some funeral directors attenuated their focus on professionalisation, and adapted their occupation 'to complement the more caring and user-friendly approach to death demanded by their critics' (Howarth 1996: 206).

3.2 The America funeral industry

The delegation of mortuary tasks to post-mortem specialists is a central component of the American response to death, and funeral directors have become a fundamental feature of American funerals (Charmaz 1980; Habenstein 1962; Metcalf and Huntington 1991). The rise of the funeral director and the development of the funeral industry in America have been explored by a number of authors including Cole (1962), Farrel (1980), Foreman (1974), Habenstein (1962), Habenstein and Lamers (1955), Laderman (1996; 2003), Metcalf and Huntington (1991), Pine (1975), and Wells (2000).

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[83] The Co-operative movement constituted another major funeral organisation. After the First World War a number of these Co-operative Societies started introducing funeral services for their customers (Smale 1985: 154). Unlike the aforementioned organisations, however, the Co-ops expanded 'almost exclusively by establishing new branches' (Parsons 1999: 131). Naylor (1989: 97) also comments on the division between the Co-ops and the private sector.

[84] Smale (1997), for example, examines the Natural Death Centre (London) and emerging 'funeral supermarkets', which he believes will pose a significant threat to the established funeral directing occupation.

Early American settlers had little need for the services of a funeral specialist: members of the community coordinated the preparation of the body, transport of the corpse, and graveyard interment (McArthur Cole 1894: 217; Laderman 1996: 27; Paul 1997: 258; Pine 1975: 15). Religion was an intrinsic element of death and dying: Puritans, in particular, interpreted death as God's judgement, to be equivocally feared and embraced.[85] By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, societal and institutional developments had effected a transformation in American death practices, and the intimate bond between the living and the dead was superseded by a relationship of estrangement (Laderman 2003). Professionals were increasingly involved in the management of death and dying, and undertakers began to supplement their subsidiary role (Cole 1962: 538; Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 196; Pine 1975: 18).

Intellectual influences, including romanticism, sentimentalism, and liberal religion,[86] had a significant impact on attitudes to death in the nineteenth century, while the developing division between the living and the dead was accentuated by scientific naturalists who propounded a modern view of death focused on the biological dimension of this process. The corpse was 'devalued in the religious imagination' (Laderman 1996: 174), and represented as a scientific object subject to the calculable laws of nature (Kearl 1989: 42). As in England, the establishment of life insurance and extramural cemeteries intimated an increasing desire to order and control death during this period (Leming and Dickinson 2002: 413; Heinz 1999: 9; Rainville 1999: 559), while the medical profession and sanitary science emphasised the importance of segregating the living from the dead. These developments provided precedents for aspiring disposal specialists during the nineteenth century (Farrel 1980: 213).

The exile of the dead to rural cemeteries[87] together with the emerging complex of commercial activity within which the corpse was located, were also indicative of

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[85] Authors such as Geddes (1981) and Stannard (1977) provide extended accounts of the Puritan ambivalence towards death during the seventeenth century.
[86] For a detailed discussion of the impact of these changes see Farrel (1980), Heinz (1999), Kearl (1989), Leming and Dickinson (2002), McLoughlin (1977) and Rainville (1999).
[87] The first rural cemetery was Mount Auburn Cemetery, established in Boston in 1831. For a discussion of this institutional development see Leming and Dickinson (2002: 421-428) and Prothero

materialising middle class aspirations. Class distinctions became more prominent in urban areas during the nineteenth century and wealthier families arranged 'respectable' funerals that publicly demonstrated their bond to the deceased, and distinguished them from the common people (Farrel 1980: 149; Sappol 2002: 36-38). The entrepreneurial spirit that materialised in the period before the Civil War endeavoured to 'capitalise on middle class desires for respectability, refinement and order' (Laderman 1996: 45), and working class men and women began to devote substantial resources to decent disposal by the end of the nineteenth century.[88] The funeral was also increasingly used to assert individuality (Sappol 2002: 36). The provision of a coffin and hearse became key features of a respectable funeral, and undertakers amalgamated the services that had traditionally been provided by tradesmen and members of the community. Although this developing economic regime remained fragmented for the first half of the nineteenth century (Laderman 1996: 47), the period after 1850 was characterised by the expansion of a self-conscious and increasingly unified body of professionally orientated service providers (Habenstein 1962: 230).

The American Civil War (1861-1865) contributed to the development of embalming and the subsequent specialisation of the undertaker. The desire to view the body and bury the war dead in a space surrounded by family and friends created a demand for a practice of preservation that allowed repatriation. Embalming methods that had been the domain of European anatomists and medical specialists, were increasingly appropriated by American undertakers, some of whom were contracted by the army to return the dead from the battlefields (Habenstein 1962: 231; Laderman 1996: 114). Thomas Holmes, in particular, was credited with developing effective preservation techniques that enabled the dead to be returned to their homes during this period (Johnson et al. 1990; Mayer 1980; Spriggs 1963). The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865 and the ensuing passage of his prepared body from Washington D.C. to Springfield, Illinois, also contributed to a wider public acceptance

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(2001: 46-52). Walter (1993) argues that the cemetery has become a significant symbol of American culture.

[88] Sappol (2002: 322) argues that the treatment of a body after death, 'fixed one's moral, aesthetic, and social status', and that 'decent' burial was extremely important for many poor people. The alternative, which included, 'unattended death, death in the poor house, followed by burial in a bare pine box in Potter's Field, or by dissection in an anatomical theatre or display in an anatomical museum', was regarded as a form of punishment that reflected the life of the individual (Sappol 2002: 322).

of embalming. Large crowds viewed the transformed body of President Lincoln: a transformation that simultaneously concealed the violence of his death and publicly exhibited the expertise of the embalmer (Laderman 1996: 163; Pine 1995: 163).

Preparation of bodies continued after the war, when aesthetic and sanitary rationales were appended to the original principle of preservation (Foreman 1974: 233-235; Habenstein 1962: 231). The concern with sanitation, in particular, allowed the undertakers to represent their emerging occupation as an essential public service. Embalming 'schools' and 'institutes' appeared during this period. The Cincinnati School of Embalming, for example, was established in 1882, followed five years later by Auguste Renouard's United States School of Embalming (Spriggs 1963: 10). Formalised training appeared during this period, and innovative embalming ideas were rapidly disseminated by the movement of instructors (Wells 2000: 196), alongside the 'evangelical fervour of early embalmers' (Farrel 1980: 163).

Embalming was transformed from a peripheral practice to an established, 'highly visible and desired treatment for the dead' (Laderman 1996: 153). Despite the privatisation and medicalisation of death and increasing estrangement of the living and the dead, embalming allowed Americans to retain a degree of contact with the dead. Instead of viewing an undisciplined, decomposing body, therefore, the bereaved were able to observe a 'pleasantly reposed corpse, seemingly at rest and conveying order rather than chaos' (Laderman 1996: 174).[89] Metcalf and Huntington (1991: 199) stipulate that the practices of embalming and viewing also comply with a collective representation of death that emphasises the notion of fulfilment. Unlike C. Davies (1996), Farrell (1980), and Wells (2000), who suggest that the quest for control evident in the pursuit of embalming (and cremation[90]) were indicative of an American 'denial' of death, Laderman (2003: 22) contends that embalming 'domesticated death' and allowed friends and family to commune with the dead before final disposition. This private contact enabled the bereaved to formulate personal meanings and

[89] In a study of American and British funeral practices, C. Davies (1996: 70) notes that this representation conformed to a characteristically American image: 'clean, odourless, well formed and free of the blemishes of nature'. Walter (1993a: 48) asserts that embalming fluids are an element of the technology utilised in American funerals to construct a 'symbolic nature'.

[90] The arguments advanced by the cremation movement emphasised the economic, sanitary, and aesthetic benefits of cremation. Farrell (1980: 167) stipulates, however, that the cremation movement overestimated the rationality of the American public when confronted with death.

memories, which were becoming a more conventional component of funerary ritual. After the Civil War, for example, funeral sermons were increasingly superseded by shorter 'memorial biographies', while the focus of funeral services themselves shifted to the explication of personal attributes worthy of emulation (Wells 2000: 198).

As embalming became an intrinsic element of American post-mortem practices, established practitioners endeavoured to protect their economic interests and attain professional status. These concerns, together with an occupational self-consciousness, an ambition to create a positive public identity, and a desire to eliminate excessively competitive undertakers, contributed to the formation of occupational organisations after the Civil War (Habenstein 1962: 235-236; Torres 1988: 383). Professional societies and associations, including the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA)[91] established in 1882, focused their attention on standards of conduct, education, and economic stability. The literature produced by these groups, together with their affiliated trade journals, expounded the important role of the funeral director and contributed to the growth of undertaking as a specialist occupation.[92] Education in the field of funeral directing was predominantly regulated by the funeral industry, and the majority of states established self-regulation for the industry (Leming and Dickinson 2002: 463-464; Torres 1988: 383).

The specialisation of the funeral director, demographic change, and a shift to institutional dying accentuated the disjunction between the living and the dead. One development in accord with these changes - and critical to an examination of the American funeral industry - was the establishment of funeral 'homes' or 'chapels'. This innovation afforded funeral directors greater control of the body and concomitant ceremonies, and enabled funeral functionaries to direct mourner attention to the 'trappings of death' (Farrel 1980: 174). Smaller houses and living units were no longer appropriate for the process of embalming or the funeral service, and provided another impetus for the development of specialised funeral facilities (Cole 1962: 540; Pine 1975: 18). Despite upsetting conventional boundaries, these funeral establishments became an integral element of American funeral practices:

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[91] Torres (1988: 384) stipulates that the NFDA was the primary force promoting professionalisation in the industry.

> Although it was a confused and complicated space, intermingling religion, domesticity, economics and nostalgia, the chapel took on significant cultural value for the mourners as a place to experience communal ties, re-examine primary identifications, confront the sacred, remember the dead and, most importantly, take their leave of the body (Laderman 2003: 26).

By the 1920s, funeral homes had become the primary location for executing the tasks associated with disposal in larger towns and urban areas (Laderman 2003: 19).

In addition to the development of funeral homes, cemetery/mortuary combinations appeared in the 1930s. These operations combined two previously independent businesses and provided a more efficient funeral service. Although the early expansion of these enterprises was limited, the number of the operations increased significantly after the 1950s (Torres 1988: 387).

As in England, however, there was discernible resistance to the escalating enterprise of the funeral director, and concerns about funeral cost and the exploitation of vulnerable consumers became a recurring theme associated with the American funeral industry (Kearl 1989: 271; Wells 2000: 197). Early concerns can be traced to the 1840s, when burial reformers criticised the vulgarisation of death and funerary ostentation, with funeral reformers highlighting the impact of this ostentation on the poor (Prothero 2001: 89-90; Sappol 2002: 37). One of the primary motivations for early licensure of funeral specialists was to protect the public from such excesses (Leming and Dickinson 2002: 464): numerous calls for funeral industry reform thus emphasised the immoderate expenditure of irrational consumers and the edacity of funeral directors. The poor in particular were charged with succumbing to 'foolish consumer impulses and misplaced concern about social status' (Laderman 2003: 54).[93] In response to these concerns, funeral directors developed alternative ways of defining their role, focusing on the psychological dimension of funerary ritual (Laderman 2003: 100-118).[94]

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[92] For a more detailed discussion of these industry developments see Farrel (1980), Habenstein (1962), Laderman (1996), and Torres (1988).

[93] Laderman (2003: 64) notes that religious sources began to play an authoritative role in explicating American funerals and that these sources were critical of contemporary funerals, emphasising the need for 'simple' and 'dignified' ritual. Some early twentieth century authors, such as Puckle (1926: 32), were particularly critical of contemporary rituals that were perceived to be 'unworthy remnants of superstitious rites'.

[94] Torres (1988: 383) notes that this role redefinition was also the result of limited progress in embalming knowledge.

The augmented role of funeral director as grief specialist, ritual authority, and death educator was also emphasised to counter the allegations included in the exposés of Bowman (1959), Harmer (1963), Mitford (1963), and Sher (1963). These authors focussed their critiques on the cost of funerals, the perceived superficiality of post-mortem ritual, and the increasing dominance of the funeral functionary (Moller 1996: 96-101). The work of Jessica Mitford (1963) in particular, reiterated the charges of excessive post-mortem expenditure and funeral director exploitation of bereaved consumers, and was instrumental in initiating a Federal Trade Commission inquiry into the industry. One consequence of this investigation was the implementation of the 'Funeral Rule' in 1984, which required funeral directors to provide consumers with detailed and itemised information about funeral costs.[95] In light of this, Torres (1988: 382) argues that the adverse publicity generated during the 1960s and 1970s, and the ensuing investigations by federal agencies, negatively affected the momentum of funeral director professionalisation.

Although this emphasis on the economic element of funerary ritual has been challenged (Heinz 1999; Irion 1966; Long 1999; Laderman 1996, 2003; Paul 1997; Pine and Phillips 1970)[96], it had a significant impact on American funerary practices. A network of (lower-cost) memorial societies emerged and expanded rapidly after the 1950s (Leming and Dickinson 1997; Prothero 2001: 151-153; Wernick 1995: 284), while wary consumers engaged in comparison-shopping, pre-planning, and pre-payment of funerals (Laderman 2003: 139). Increasing industry regulation and political

[95] The 'Funeral Rule' (16 CFR Part 453 The Trade Regulation Rule on Funeral Industry Practices) is explained in more detail in *Funerals: a consumer guide* produced by the Federal Trade Commission (no date). Some authors, including Mitford (1998: 186-187), and The Funeral and Memorial Societies of America (www.funerals.org/famsa), have commented on what they perceive to be the ineffectual enforcement of the FTC Funeral Rule and the Funeral Rule Offenders Program that was introduced for funeral establishments that violated the Funeral Rule. Prothero (2001: 173-174) notes that the FTC was more involved in 'investigating than acting', and that 'enforcement even of the existing rules was unenthusiastic at best'.

[96] Irion (1966: 83), for example, argues that Bowman (1959), Harmer (1963), and Mitford (1963) focus almost exclusively on the economic element of funerals: 'By failing to give credence to the possibility of any values other than the sheer material trappings of the funeral and their costliness, the critics seem to yield to the very materialism which they so vociferously deny'. In their sociological analysis of funeral expenditure, Pine and Phillips (1970: 416) conclude that modern expenditure could be interpreted as a form of secular ritual superseding earlier religious customs and ceremonies. Long (1999: 499-501) similarly stipulates that the partial views advanced by Mitford (1963), including her appeal to rationality, had a detrimental effect on the ritual marking of death in American society. Heinz (1999: 133) is also concerned by critiques that portray the religious, emotional, and economic obligations of funerals as oppressive and inappropriate. See also Laderman (1996, 2003) and Paul (1997).

legislation, however, also provided a degree of legitimacy to the industry, inadvertently contributing to the professionalisation of the occupation (Moller 1996: 82). Laderman (2003: 140), for example, stipulates that the advent of AIDS and the ensuing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) embalming guidelines accentuated the hazardous and technologically 'sophisticated' nature of this procedure.[97]

The increasing prominence of cremation after the publication of Mitford's book also had a significant impact on the funeral industry.[98] Cremation was initially promoted as a cheaper, secular disposal option that often removed the funeral director from the disposal process.[99] Developments encompassing religious, demographic, and legal changes contributed to the increasing social acceptance of this practice (Laderman 2003: 197). The Second Vatican Council, for example, lifted its ban on cremation in 1963, while a change in immigration policy in 1965 saw an increasing number of migrants from South, Southeast, and East Asian countries entering the United States (Prothero 2001: 204). AIDS also generated new forms of ritual and a greater acceptance of cremation (Laderman 2003: 197-199). Although many funeral directors initially ignored cremation and then lobbied for restrictive regulations in the 1980s, these strategies of denial and resistance faded in the late 1980s (Prothero 2001: 192). By this time, funeral companies were exploring expanding merchandising and marketing opportunities specifically for cremation (Cronin 1994: 12-13).

Cremation was also closely associated with the increasing personalisation of funerary ritual (Prothero 2001: 200). Some in the funeral industry encouraged mourner involvement in the ceremonial aspects of disposition, and funeral functionaries contributed to the construction of ceremonies that reflected 'the idiosyncratic personality of the deceased' (Prothero 2001: 200). Personalisation and self-expression

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[97] Some recent evidence (Harrington and Krynski 2002) also suggests that stringent embalming regulations reduce the rate of cremation and consequently increase the overall amount spent on funerals.

[98] For a detailed history of cremation in America see Prothero (2001). Walter (1993) contends that the continued preference for burial in the United States is intrinsically related to American conceptualisations of nature and technology.

[99] Direct disposal firms were also a response to the increasing number of funeral chains and mortuary/cemetery combinations. These firms offered minimal-service and minimal-cost cremation services, typically bypassing both the mortuary and cemetery (Leming and Dickinson 1997; Torres 1988: 387).

became particularly significant elements of funerary ritual for the increasing number of 'congregationally unaffiliated' during the last two decades (Garces-Foley 2003; Haney et al. 1997: 168), and funeral directors began offering a variety of 'non-traditional' funeral products and services to an increasingly demanding American population (Takeuchi Cullen 2003): 'Baby boomers of all faiths were embracing a new style of ritual, characterized by simplicity, spontaneity, informality, flexibility, improvisation, participation, and (above all) personalization' (Prothero 2001: 200).

One final development that is relevant to this overview of the American funeral industry is the emergence of multinational funeral companies. In addition to having a significant international impact[100], these corporations effected important changes in the American funeral industry. The establishment of multiunit funeral firms during the 1960s and 1970s allowed some companies to achieve greater economies of scale and utilise costly fixed overheads more efficiently. Service Corporation International, the Loewen Group, and Stewart Enterprises Inc. were three companies that utilised the centralisation of resources and acquired funeral businesses throughout North America, embarking on an international acquisition campaign in the 1990s. Many independent establishments perceived this expansion of death care companies as a threat to 'traditional' American funerary practices, and began to contrast their post-mortem practices with those of the publicly traded corporations:

> Many funeral directors now take special care to differentiate themselves, their business practices, and their work ethic from corporate models in death care, and use these differences to bolster claims of vocational devotion to tending the dead, and consumer satisfaction with their production of ritual order when death occurs (Laderman 2003: 189).

Laderman (2003: 190) also notes that there was a distinct shift in the tone of press reports profiling the funeral industry. The insatiable merger and acquisition activity of death care corporations was condemned, and a distinct type of nostalgia emerged, celebrating early twentieth century funeral customs. Family funeral directors who had resisted the corporate allure of death were represented as 'traditional, humane, authentic, even humorous Americans', with a 'unique, often charming perspective on local history' (Laderman 2003: 191). These ethical, dependable, and familiar firms thus rapidly found themselves becoming 'death-care heroes' in the late twentieth century

[100] The history and international impact of these North American 'death-care' corporations will be examined in more detail below.

(see for example *Denver Post* 26 May 1998: C01, *Globe and Mail* 12 February 1999: B11, and *Newsday* 13 September 1998: F08).[101]

3.3 Multinational funeral corporations

As these outlines suggest, one important development in the death industry with important implications for the New Zealand funeral director was the rise of multinational funeral companies. During the 1990s, three of the largest North American corporations embarked on an international acquisition campaign, acquiring funeral establishments and cemetery operations in the UK, Europe, South America, Australia, and New Zealand. Through the rationalisation of services and consolidation, these corporations strove to reduce costs, increase efficiencies, and provide profits for investors. The expansion of the funeral corporations was accompanied by a great deal of media attention focusing on the effects of this expansion. Much of this attention has concentrated on the changing fortunes of the multinationals, and their impact on consumers and the funeral industry.

The rise of the multinationals is only the most recent development in the structural composition of the funeral industry. The establishment of multiunit funeral firms has been a way for groups of small funeral establishments to rationalise costs and achieve greater operational efficiency for a number of decades (Clark and Raether 1989; Torres 1988: 386).[102] The funeral industry has traditionally been a highly fragmented industry with high fixed costs and unpredictable demands.[103] Most funeral businesses, for example, maintain their own fleet of vehicles, embalming facilities, administrative offices, and staff. The centralisation of resources, however, allows multiunit groups to achieve greater economies of scale and utilise fixed overheads more cost-effectively (Parsons 1999: 131-132; Torres 1988: 387). This centralised management allows large-scale operations to maximise revenue and profitability (Parsons 1997: 147). Multiunit companies also give proprietors the opportunity to

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[101] See also the *Guardian* (26 February 1996: 4), *Insight Magazine* (30 December 1996: 42), *Washington Post* (29 August 1997: A01), Horn (1998), Newman (1997) and Tomsho (1996) for media representations of the large funeral corporations.

[102] Torres (1988: 386) notes that the first multiunit funeral businesses were established in the early 1900s.

[103] Saunders (1991: 216) states that fixed costs can be as high as 80 percent.

gain access to additional resources, or allow family firms to deal with succession difficulties (Clark and Raether 1989; Wernick 1995: 290-291).[104]

Despite these advantages for the multiunit and vendor, there are some disadvantages for consumers and employees of large companies. Multinational corporations have been particularly criticised for increasing funeral prices, and for their aggressive marketing strategies. Some authors (Mitford 1998: 191; Parsons 1997: 134; Roberts 1997: 140-41) have argued that few - if any - of the cost savings achieved by large corporations are passed onto the consumer. Others such as Banks (1998) contend that funeral prices are increasingly influenced by multinational corporations. The increasing influence of multinationals has also captured the attention of regulatory bodies and consumer groups. A *Monopolies and Merger Commission* (MMC) report (1995) on the merger of two publicly traded companies in Britain[105], for example, predicted that the multinational would raise prices excessively in certain areas and stipulated that the corporation reduce its market share in certain areas. One issue that appears to be of particular interest to the funeral industry is the multinational practice of retaining the original trading name of a funeral firm after acquisition (Parsons 1997: 135).[106] The MMC report (1995: 3) found that the failure of the multinational to disclose ownership of its branches would not enable consumers to make informed decisions. A report by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in the UK reiterates this concern, noting that some corporate-owned funeral homes fail to disclose ultimate

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[104] Parsons (1997: 121-124) describes some of the factors challenging the economic viability of small funeral establishments, including changes in consumer attitudes and funeral director business acumen. Together with the resources offered by a multiunit, these factors were often important reasons for acquisition by a larger company. As well as this, Saunders (1991) and Parsons (1997) detail some of the succession issues encountered in funeral directing. Saunders (1991: 204) comments on the stigma or 'adverse image' related to this career, while Parsons (1997:120) identifies the difficulties of managing a small business, the commitment of providing 24-hour service, and 'the increased opportunities of intra-generational social mobility', as disincentives for family members to continue with the family business. Succession complications arising from such issues may also make acquisition attractive.

[105] The largest North American multinational, Service Corporation International, and the Plantsbrook Group Plc, one of the largest publicly traded funeral firms in Great Britain.

[106] A number of authors (see for example Smale 1985; Parsons 1997, 1999; Roberts 1997; Kellar and O'Kane 1999) have emphasised the importance of the name and associated reputation of a funeral firm. Name and reputation are often established over a significant period of time, and may be an important motivation for consumers choosing to utilise the services of a particular company. Changing the name of a firm after acquisition 'would undermine – if not totally destroy – the reputation of the establishment, a reputation built precisely upon generations of a family firm serving the needs of client families in a given community' (Kellar and O'Kane 1999: 58). Retaining the original trading name also creates the illusion that the 'personality and individuality' of the smaller firm continues to exist, despite the fact that the firm is owned by a larger group (Parsons 1997: 135).

ownership. The report recommends that these firms publicise the details of ownership in a prominent place for consumers (OFT 2001: 16-17).

The bureaucratic principles used by large funeral corporations can also lead to the 'deskilling' of staff and depersonalisation of service (Parsons 1997: 147-156). Increased task fragmentation, for example, may mean that employees are no longer exposed to the diverse range of duties involved in funeral directing. Increased specialisation may also result in a lack of continuity between funeral functionaries, resulting in some degree of depersonalisation for consumers[107], and the greater possibility of a spoiled funeral performance.

In North America the multinational corporations have been criticised for their aggressive marketing strategies, higher funeral prices, and 'deceptive trade' practices. They have also been criticised outside North America for attempting to supplant 'traditional' funeral practices with American customs. A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 August 1997: 1) during a significant period of multinational expansion in Australasia warns that the 'US invasion' of funeral homes in Australia had gone largely unnoticed by consumers, and suggests that Australians could resist 'Wall Streets attempts to Americanise' Australian customs by refusing to buy tombstones, niches, plaques, or stainless steel urns. In his review of Australian burial customs, Nicol (2000: 103) notes that the multinationals have introduced American ideas that 'have long been resisted by Australian traditionalists', while Howarth (2000: 89-90) speculates that multinational expansion may result in the standardisation or 'McDonaldisation' of funerals, making funerals less personal and less culturally diverse.

The North American multinationals

The three largest North American 'death-care' corporations include Service Corporation International, the Loewen Group, and Stewart Enterprises Inc. While all of these multinationals embarked on an international acquisition campaign during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the only corporation to enter the New Zealand funeral market was Stewart Enterprises.

The origins of Stewart Enterprises can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century when Albert Stewart acquired three cemeteries and a marble shop in New Orleans. The Stewart family expanded into the area of mausoleums, vaults, and crypts and during the 1950s and 1960s were involved in the design and construction of cemeteries. In 1970 Stewart Enterprises Inc. was established, and in 1979 the company completed its first major acquisition in Dallas, Texas. Over the next twelve years the company expanded its operations in the United States, utilising a 'cluster concept', that allowed the company to centralise resources and increase operating efficiencies. In October 1991, SEI became a public company, listing on the stock exchange with 43 funeral homes and 29 cemeteries. The company continued to make acquisitions in the United States and in 1993 began its international acquisitions in Puerto Rico, following this with purchases in Australia, Canada, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Argentina, and New Zealand. By 2001 Stewart Enterprises had acquired 612 funeral homes and 161 cemeteries in North and South America, Europe, and the Pacific. As will be detailed in the following section, however, Stewart Enterprises eventually faced serious financial difficulties that contributed to their withdrawal from the Australasian funeral market. The legacy of multinational expansion, however, continues to have a lingering effect on the funeral industry in New Zealand (*Stewart Enterprises, Inc.*, no date: The Stewart Story).[108]

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[107] Consumers may have to deal with a number of employees. An 'arranger', for example, may help the bereaved to plan the funeral, while a 'conductor' will supervise the funeral after it has been organised.

[108] All three of the major multinationals faced significant budgetary problems during this period. SCI, the largest of the multinationals, lost a large percentage of its market value when its share prices plunged in 1999. This collapse was the result of a decreasing death rate in the countries where the company had acquired funeral homes and cemetery operations (*Economist* 5 August 2000: 61-62; *Press-Enterprise Riverside* 29 October 2000: G01). Rapid expansion in the 1990s had also required SCI to take on huge debt to finance acquisition, and fierce competition from other funeral corporations led all the companies to pay inflated prices for certain properties. In September 1999 SCI debt stood at over $US 4 billion (*SCI Annual Report* 2000: 1). Changes in attitudes to disposal, including increases in cremation (considered a lower cost alternative in the United States) and the increase of lower priced competitors also affected SCI profits (*Los Angeles Times* 7 December 1998: A1). Consequently, SCI de-emphasised acquisition and divested itself of some of its foreign operations (*Los Angeles Times* 24 October 1999: C1; *Times of London* 4 October 2000: 31). Continued acquisition for the Loewen Group also resulted in massive debt and contributed to huge stock price drops. In 1999 the company filed for bankruptcy protection in Canada and the US. In 2001 the United States courts approved the reorganisation of the company and in January 2002 it emerged as the Alderwoods Group Inc. (*Globe and Mail* 4 January 1999: B10).

3.4 Historical developments in New Zealand

The preceding review of British and North American funeral industry developments highlights significant changes that have clearly influenced the occupation in New Zealand. The following analysis reveals the early continuation of British post-mortem practices and the gradual appropriation of North American mortuary innovations. Particularly evident in this transformation is the pursuit of professionalisation, the adoption of embalming and funeral chapels, and an increasing focus on psychological elements of funerary ritual. The introduction of a North American multinational, however, has also allowed people in the industry to define what they perceived to be a distinctive New Zealand approach to funerals. This approach includes a personalised funeral production at the pre-disposal, disposal, and post-disposal phases. Two factors integrally related to this personalisation include cremation and the increased presence of women in the funeral industry: these developments will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Death in nineteenth century New Zealand and the undertaker

European whalers, traders and missionaries began arriving in New Zealand at the end of the eighteenth century. Early migration was limited and a 'census' conducted in 1839 recorded only 1300 Pakeha in New Zealand (Barber 1989: 36). The European population expanded more rapidly after this period, however, exceeding 250,000 people by the early 1870s (Graham 1992: 52). The European treatment of death during this period was similar in many ways to the treatment of death in Britain, North America, and Australia. Communities were usually small, with minimal legislative requirements for recording disposals (Ninness 1989). The causes and events surrounding death were publicly announced in newspapers, and a number of authors (Cleaver 1996; Dickey 1980; Hera 1995) note that death and dying were very much a part of everyday nineteenth century life.[109] Death usually occurred at home, which remained the centre of death until the 1970s in some rural areas (Calder 1998: 36). Even when deaths occurred in institutions, the body was usually returned home before the funeral service (Cleaver 1996: 26). Viewing of the dead was widespread, with many considering it a 'sacred obligation to attend the corpse' (Dickey 1980: 31).

The funeral service was held one to three days after death and was usually organised by family members with assistance from members of the community. While specialist undertakers certainly existed in some of the larger urban centres[110], in most cases undertaking remained a secondary occupation; usually limited to supplying the coffin and transporting the corpse to the graveyard (Hera 1995: 172; Ninness 1989; Porter and Macdonald 1996: 451-481). Many participants in the present study recalled the duties of the nineteenth and early twentieth century undertaker:

> [People] would die at home and the undertaker would come to the house with a coffin and he would do some rudimentary sort of preparation, dress you, put you in the coffin and put you in the front parlour. Then he'd go away...come back three days later and the cortege would go from the house, to the church, to the cemetery (Henry).

Participants also stressed the secondary role of the undertaker and reiterated the connection between carpentry and undertaking:

> In the eighteen hundreds and early nineteen hundreds, the undertaker was the local cabinet maker or carpenter who could knock together a box...if he could knock together this coffin thing, then he undertook the funeral and put the body in it and took it off to the church (Samuel).

> I was actually a carpenter by trade and a lot of the old builders were undertakers, and having said that, the building always came first and the funeral work was something you did after hours (Timothy).

Participants also noted that undertakers often utilised the services of other trades. One participant (Karl), for example, recalled that undertakers in his area hired horses and carriages for the mourners from the local stables during his youth.

At this time funerals were important public and social events, and a number of death 'fashions' and trends associated with the 'respectable' funeral filtered down from the upper classes and undertakers of Victorian England (Hera 1995: 174). A report in the *New Zealand Funeral Director* (1944: 54), for example, notes that the history of the undertakers during this period closely followed the history of the occupation in Great Britain.

One central element of the nineteenth century funeral was the procession, which would leave the residence where the remains had been displayed and move to the

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[109] It is important to note that familiarity with death does not imply ambivalence and/or fatalism. See for example Strange (2002: 145-147).

local graveyard. The mourners would follow the procession, while shop doors were closed and drapes pulled as the procession passed. The procession was thus not only a way of honouring the dead person, but also a very visible sign of death in a community (Arbury 2001; Cleaver 1996: 45). The employment of traditional religious spaces, symbols, and functionaries was almost universal. Ministers of religion were present at adult burials[111], where they read a brief burial service at the residence of the deceased before proceeding to the final site of disposal (Arbury 2001; Cleaver 1996: 49; Ninness 1988: 103; Porter and Macdonald 1996: 451-481). The Church remained prominent in death related practices in the early twentieth century, with denominational distinctions evident in the content of services, choice of undertaker, and place of burial (Dickey 1980: 36).

The duration and extravagance of mourning reflected the importance of the family, and demonstrated social and economic status (Dickey 1980: 37). Mourning customs were particularly pronounced for women at this time, whose lives were restricted by elaborate etiquette (Arbury 2001; Coney 1993: 86).[112] This 'cult of mourning', however, began to wane at the end of the nineteenth century, when overt expressions of mourning were increasingly considered morbid and excessive (Coney 1993: 87; Hera 1992: 261). Funeral reform movements were established in at least two urban centres (Dunedin and Christchurch) in the 1870s (Cleaver 1996). These reformers - like those in Britain and North America - believed that material elaborateness in funerals was unnecessary and that the financial expense associated with this elaboration created difficulties for poorer families (Cleaver 1996: 68). Public hygiene also became a prominent concern during this period and attempts to separate the living and the dead were evident in the cemetery legislation at the end of the nineteenth century (Hera 1992: 259; Wood 1997). A number of earlier mourning customs came to end with the outbreak of World War One, when it was considered bad for public morale to have masses of women in mourning dress. Many women also entered the

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[110] The first recorded undertaker was J. A. Langford who arrived in Wellington (from England) in 1840.
[111] Cleaver's research indicates, however, that it was less likely for a minister to be present at the funerals of young children (1996: 49). Arbury (2001) notes that there was often no minister at the funeral of a young child and that it was the sexton's responsibility to obtain the Registrar's Certificate of Death.
[112] Arbury (2001) notes, for example, that mourning clothes would have been particularly inconvenient in the summer months.

workforce at this point and had little time for mourning etiquette (Coney 1993: 87; Hera 1992: 261).

The emergence of the modern funeral director

The changes outlined above were an important indication of privatisation and significant societal changes occurring in New Zealand at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to accelerating urbanisation during this period (Hamer 1993: 139), occupational specialisation and division of labour also became more complex before the First World War (Cleaver 1996: 36; Dickey 1980: 92). Death in general became increasingly medicalised in the twentieth century and responsibility for dying and disposal progressively became the realm of the expert.[113] These changes were evident in the developing identity of the funeral director, as the traditional undertaker of the nineteenth century was superseded by the modern funeral director of the twentieth century. Funeral directors offered a variety of essential services, utilised specialised funeral premises, and possessed expert knowledge – all of which enabled them to provide greater comfort and service to the bereaved (*The New Zealand Funeral Director* June 1959: 1). These developments also provided the basis for the occupation's claim to professional status.

Professionalisation

One of the predominant themes clearly evident in the previous overview of the British and American funeral industries is the focus on professionalisation. Professionalisation in the funeral industry has been explored by a number of authors in Britain (Howarth 1992, 1997; Naylor 1989; Parsons 1997; Smale 1985), and North America (Bowman 1959; Charmaz 1980; Crouch 1975; Emke 2002; Farrell 1980; Foreman 1974; Habenstein and Lamers 1955; Habenstein 1962; Kearl 1989; Pine 1975; Thompson 1991; Torres 1988). Funeral directors in New Zealand have also aspired to attain a higher degree of status and prestige, and the history of funeral directing in this country is intrinsically bound to the pursuit of professional status.

The body of literature dealing with the sociology of professions is extensive, and much of the research focuses on definitional debates, the process of

professionalisation, and critical studies of market closure and professional dominance. Numerous early studies concentrate on the problems of defining professions and discerning processes of professionalisation (Caplow 1954; Goode 1957; Greenwood 1957; Millerson 1964; Wilensky 1964).[114] Caplow (1954: 139-140), for example, suggests a temporal sequence for the evolution of professional groups, which included the establishment of a professional association, followed by the development of a code of ethics and the institution of training facilities. In an examination of literature analysing professions, Millerson (1964: 5) identifies the most frequently reported traits, including skills based on theoretical knowledge, the provision of training, adherence to a code of conduct, and altruistic service. Wilensky (1964) examines the evolution of professions and provides a temporal sequence – significant elements of which were systematically developed by New Zealand funeral directors in pursuit of professional status. His sequence includes:

1) The emergence of a full time occupation.
2) Training as an important occupational concern.
3) The establishment of a professional association by those advocating training. Activists in the association self-consciously examine the occupation and may change the name of the occupation to distance it from the previous, less-professional occupation.
    a. The core tasks of the occupation are re-defined and 'dirty work' is delegated to others;
    b. Internal conflict may arise between those newcomers (who have completed the prescribed training) and those who have been in the occupation a long time;
    c. Fierce competition may arise with neighbouring occupations.
4) Persistent political agitation in order to win the support of law for the protection of the job territory and its sustaining code of ethics.
5) Rules to eliminate the unqualified and unscrupulous, rules to reduce internal competition, and rules to protect clients and emphasise the service ideal, will eventually be embodied in a formal code of ethics.

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[113] Hera (1992: 261) asserts that death, like birth, became increasingly medicalised, sanitised, and mystified in the first half of the twentieth century.
[114] Friedson (1986:30) notes that the definitional debate dates back to 1915.

Models such as this one have proved useful ways of summarising the characteristics attributed to professions (Elliot 1972: 114), and Coburn and Willis (2000) note that many of these early analyses emphasise the special skill and knowledge of those within a particular profession, their ethical attitude towards clients, and their altruistic service.

Some authors felt, however, that these 'trait theories' and definitional exercises were problematic and ultimately unproductive, and advocated instead a more critical approach to the study of professions (Friedson 1986: 28).[115] Johnson (1972: 23-27), for example, notes that trait models implicitly accept the assertion that there are 'true' professions that exhibit all the essential elements, and that these elements are themselves usually derived from the analysis of a small number of professional bodies. He also asserts that trait theories often uncritically accept the professionals' own definitions of themselves, and that the sequences delineated by individuals such as Caplow (1954) and Wilensky (1964) are historically static and culturally constrained (Johnson 1972: 25-29).[116] Trait theories and definitional exercises have also been rejected by authors such as Hughes (1958), who emphasises that an examination of the circumstances in which occupations attempted to attain professional status was more rewarding and constructive (Friedson 1986: 30).

Two recent studies that adopt Hughes' approach include Parsons' (1997) survey of historical developments in the British funeral industry and Emke's (no date) survey of professional identity in Newfoundland. Parsons (1997: 221) emphasises that the objective of his chapter on professionalisation is not to arbitrate on the occupations' status as a profession but to examine *how* and *why* the occupation embarked on this quest. In his examination, Parsons (1997: 230-247) identifies four areas that made the acquisition of professional status desirable for the occupation. The first of these involves the perceived need to distance the occupation from the unscrupulous behaviour and myths that had developed by the nineteenth century. Some undertakers, therefore, recognised the need to improve the public image of the funeral director and redefine the role of this functionary. This redefinition also needs

[115] For a detailed discussion of these criticisms see Friedson (1986) and Johnson (1972).

to encompass the increasing complexity of the disposal environment, including the multifarious legal requirements and preparation of the corpse before disposition. The funeral directors increasing involvement with allied occupations - namely medicine and the Church - as well as the stigmatisation associated with the undertaking occupation, provides further impetus for professionalisation.

Emke (no date: 3) asserts that occupational groups negotiate professional identity, and that claims to professional status are dynamic. His research explores *how* funeral workers substantiate claims to professionalism, and identifies nine occupational tasks related to this endeavour. These tasks include the legal, facilitative, and therapeutic elements of funeral organisation, as well as the provision of goods and services to the bereaved. Possession and care of the body, body restoration, and sanitation also constitute important components of funeral work similarly used to validate claims of professional status. Emke (no date) notes that funeral workers typically emphasised occupational stature and regulation, including the development of educational qualifications for the occupation. Finally, they also lamented the 'loss' of funerary ritual in an increasingly secular society, and presented themselves as 'protectors' of funerary ritual (Emke no date: 6).[117]

A number of authors have noted that these approaches, however, have the potential to produce a somewhat peripheral perusal of professionalisation. Authors such as Friedson (1986), Johnson (1972), Larson (1977), Rossides (1998), and Torstendahl and Burrage (1990) contend that any serious exploration of professionalism demands an analysis of the occupation that critically evaluates the inextricable power relations in society. Johnson (1972), for instance, considers the relationship of professions to economic elites and the state, while Larson (1977: xvi) sees professionalisation as: 'the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute and control a market for their expertise'. Authors such as Larson (1977), therefore, emphasise that occupations often professionalise to exclude competing interest groups and establish a monopolistic market for their services.[118] Some studies of professions (as a case in point see Neal and Morgan 2000) have examined this concept and investigated how

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[116] See also Neal and Morgan (2000).
[117] See also Emke (2002).

certain occupations maintain their professional status, while others (see for example Nelsen and Barley 1997) have explored how occupational mandates have been negotiated by nascent occupations.

Some of the aforementioned authors also influenced the more recent work of Light (2000), who notes that professions operate in an interdependent 'field force of countervailing powers'. These powers include a number of organisation networks and the state itself, which have cultures and interests that are often in tension with one another (Light 2000: 203). As the above discussion and ensuing examination of New Zealand funeral directors reveals, these 'countervailing powers' in the form of governmental organisations, consumer groups, and competing concerns have had a significant impact on the development of the funeral directing occupation in Britain, North America, and New Zealand.

A national association

One of the key developments in the history of the New Zealand funeral industry has been the establishment of a national association. Four Provincial Associations were established in 1936[119] in response to industrial legislation introduced by the first Labour government (Ninness 1987: 12; *The New Zealand Funeral Director* March 1957: 75)[120], and an inaugural national meeting of funeral directors was held in Wellington one year later. At this meeting it was resolved to form the New Zealand Federation of Funeral Directors. Annual conventions were held from that year forth, and the first issue of the quarterly journal - *The New Zealand Funeral Director* (*NZFD*) - was published in June 1939.[121] In addition to the pragmatic tasks of protecting their business interests (*NZFD* June 1939: 2), and dealing with war time exigencies

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[118] For a more detailed overview of these neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist 'power theories', and a brief discussion of recent theoretical writings on professions see Coburn and Willis (2000).

[119] One article in the *NZFD* (December 1947: 53) asserts that the first association of undertakers was established in Dunedin in 1928.

[120] See Olssen (1986) for an overview of the labour changes during this period.

[121] It is interesting to note that the Australian Funeral Directors Association (AFDA) was formed in 1935, and, like its New Zealand counterpart, focused on registration, education, and restricting competition in the industry (Griffin and Tobin 1997: 189). The *NZFD* reported many of these developments and kept readers informed of Australian industry advancements. During the writing of this thesis the Funeral Service Training Trust, New Zealand Embalmers Association, and Funeral Directors Association jointly launched the magazine *Funeralcare*. This publication replaced *The New Zealand Funeral Director* (*Funeralcare* December 2003: 4-5).

(Ninness 1987: 14; *NZFD* September 1943: 25), the early association was dedicated to promoting a new role, and a less stigmatised status, for the funeral director.

One of the initial aims of the Federation was to distance the modern funeral director from the undertaker of the past. Funeral reform movements in urban centres had condemned nineteenth century mourning customs as extravagant and excessive (Cleaver 1996:65-75), and Dickensian images of the undertaker remained enduringly entrenched during this period. Members of the new Federation were acutely aware of the disreputable and corrupt practices popularly associated with the undertaking occupation, and which evoked images of undertakers that emphasised the contemptible, outmoded, and abject character of these individuals. The funeral directors of the twentieth century, in contrast, were described as clean, proficient, and scientific. These new funeral directors were urged to turn their backs on 'old unsanitary methods' (*NZFD* September 1941: 23), and implored to 'cleanse' and 'revivify' the 'craft' of funeral directing to prevent it from regressing to old standards.

The term 'undertaker' was condemned as 'ambiguous' and 'objectionable', (*NZFD* December 1941: 45; *NZFD* March 1950: 68), and the Federation focussed on the presentational image of the 'funeral director' as a manifest way of distancing it from the undertaker of the past. Funeral directors were beseeched, for example, to monitor their speech to prevent any possibility of educing unsanitary undertaking images: 'When a careless slovenly voice answers the telephone the caller may mentally picture the funeral director's place of business as dirty, careless and ill kept' (*NZFD* June 1942: 2).

Similarly, funeral directors were warned against wearing old-fashioned frock coats and bell-topper hats used by the previous generation of undertakers, and urged to avoid the wearing of black when not engaged in professional duties. The *NZFD* (September 1941: 24) noted with some alarm that a significant number of funeral directors had 'fallen into the habit of wearing black in their leisure hours or when going about their social affairs', emphasising that this habit was a tactless proclamation of their employment. Black betrayed the image of the undertaker (Turner and Edgley 1976: 386) and was patently identified with the antiquated death

practices of the previous century.[122] Numerous participants in the present study referred to the undertaker preference for black as 'morbid', and noted that this association was slowly severed over the ensuing decades. One participant (Nigel), for example, stated that his company had been the first to introduce coloured hearses in New Zealand and that a majority of funeral directors had 'moved away from black'. Funeral directors asserted that dress continued to be an important way of countering death worker stereotypes and demonstrating the professional status of the occupation (*NZFD* Spring 1998: 5).

In addition to these peripheral presentational changes, the new Federation promoted registration of the occupation and education as two fundamental developments that would raise the status of the occupation.

Registration

From the inception of the Federation there were continuing attempts to achieve governmental registration for the occupation. As in Australia (Griffin and Tobin 1997: 199-202) and Britain (Parsons 1997; Smale 1985), the reasons for registration usually centred on the need to protect public health and maintain standards of funeral service. Dead and decomposing bodies were identified as sites of disorder and disease during the nineteenth century (Wood 1997: 260-283), and funeral directors appropriated discourse that emphasised the physical danger of the dead. The case for registration presented before the Health Bills Committee in 1939, for example, emphasised that funeral directors should be able to contain the 'offensive conditions' which arose after death, eliminating the risks of contagion and infection (*NZFD* December 1939: 15). Embalming was thus increasingly incorporated in the selection of services provided by funeral directors, allowing them to emphasise the indispensable and altruistic nature of their occupation. The Auckland Association Code of Ethics, for example, stated: 'No funeral director, in case of epidemic or contagious disease, should shirk his professional duties, even though his life may be in jeopardy' (*NZFD* September 1961: 25).

[122] The *NZFD* even suggested that the (*All Blacks*) national rugby team re-examine 'the least agreeable of all colour schemes' (*NZFD* June 1949: 16).

The New Zealand Embalmers Association, established in the early 1970s, also advanced the cause of registration, and together with the FDANZ, made a joint submission to the government in the early 1980s (*NZFD* March 1982: 21). Although unsuccessful, funeral directors continued to emphasise the necessity of sanitation and the protection of public health. One participant in this study (Timothy) noted that it would take 'a real outbreak of some infection' to highlight the need for national registration. Some participants also felt that the case for registration had been given some impetus by the well-publicised claims of one funeral worker who contended that the corpse he attempted to embalm was 'alive'.[123]

Registration was also seen as an effective method of eliminating undesirable competition, particularly 'cheap, ignorant adventurers' (*NZFD* June 1941: 1), 'backyarders' (*NZFD* September 1964: 24), Station Wagon And Telephone operators (SWATs), and 'cowboys', who were portrayed as having a complete disregard for service ethics and funeral standards. Association members lamented this perceived lack of 'ethical standards' and 'morality', and accused these recusants of providing exiguous, substandard service that generated an undiscerning, disreputable public image for funeral directors.

The early association was similarly extremely critical of operators that emphasised and advertised low-cost funeral alternatives. Members of the association felt that such approaches collectively discounted the dignity and value of the dead and reduced post-mortem ritual to an exclusively economic exercise. This was particularly evident in reactions to the Consumer Institutes recommendation that consumers be offered an alternative (inexpensive) style of funeral (*NZFD* December 1979: 15-17; *NZFD* September 1982: 25).

The occupational journal highlighted the advances achieved by the association, emphasising the unity of the profession and the degree of co-operation that increasingly characterised it. Numerous reports postulated the inevitability of registration, and despite the occasional lapse in enthusiasm for governmental

[123] Contrary to the contention of the embalmer, the coroner found that the woman had been 'irreversibly brain dead' before embalming began, but recommended minimal national training

regulation (*NZFD* March 1969: 65-66), some funeral directors fervidly advanced the cause. In 1973 the newly formed Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand (FDANZ)[124] established its own register of funeral directors. This development did not preclude the pursuit of regulation, and the quest for registration continued in the 1980s and 1990s. On the recommendations of a public relations audit[125], and the recognition that the occupation remained unregulated, the FDANZ launched its *Griefcare* quality assurance program in 2000. Although the FDANZ and *Griefcare* continue to maintain and promote disputes resolution procedures, membership in these associations remains voluntary.

It is important to note here that responses to the recent *Griefcare* development highlight the contested nature of professionalisation within the funeral industry, and the negotiated character of funeral worker identity per se (Emke, no date). Although industry literature might suggest a unified body of funeral practitioners, it is clear from the literature review and interviews with participants that there is a discernible degree of dissent within both the FDANZ and the wider funeral industry. Numerous association members felt that *Griefcare* was misdirected, expensive, and ineffective. Clifford, for example, emphasised that the FDANZ had paid a significant sum of money for the brand name and that the ultimate result was 'irrelevant': 'to the people on the street it means nothing. It's just another name, another trade affiliation'. Others, such as William, explained that the name '*Griefcare*' created confusion and erroneously implied that funeral directors offered professional grief-counselling services. William noted that some clients had consequently accused him of misrepresenting his role and function.[126] Participants such as Nigel felt that accreditation for FDANZ generally, and *Griefcare* specifically, favoured the larger urban funeral firms and penalised smaller rural businesses:

> What FDANZ have done now, is people like myself - and there's still quite a lot of us still in the country that operate, and have been operating for many, many years, very, very successfully, with very little complaint problems, you know - but because we don't have

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standards for embalming (*Otago Daily Times* 26 November 1999: 30). Some in the funeral industry, however, were also critical of excessive funeral service regulation (*NZFD* Autumn 2000: 2).

[124] The FDANZ was formed in 1970 and superseded the Federation.

[125] The report conducted by the WHAM Group Limited, a public relations and publishing consultancy in Wellington, emphasised the need for a brand name (*WHAM* Public Relations Audit: Report Summary 14 September 1999).

[126] As will be explored in the following chapters, few funeral directors believed that professional grief counselling constituted an element of funeral director service.

> letters behind our names, you know, they're slowly pushing you out of the system. And this even comes up with this *Griefcare* thing, you know, and I just turned around to the association myself, quite frankly, and said to them, I said 'What you're really doing is cutting out some of your older members, and if that's what you want to do, well that's fine. They [the rural funeral directors] don't have to pay to participate in it.'

Similarly, Marshall, Ruth, and Timothy noted that fulfilling the educational pre-requisites of membership was often problematic. Timothy explained:

> It is difficult for some of the smaller firms. See, a lot of businesses in small areas are one-man businesses, and it is difficult to get away because of the time to attend conferences. We have to attend seminars now. We have practicing certificates to earn our merit points. It is difficult sometimes to attend all these things.

On a more general level, participants stipulated that the *Griefcare* remonstrations were simply the most recent manifestation of underlying tensions within the association. Although the FDANZ was commonly credited with achieving significant advancements, there was a recurring theme of dissatisfaction, epitomised in Roger's response:

> I don't like the way that it has of late become rather dictatorial and self-serving. I believe that the committees and the personnel involved in FDANZ need to be aware that they are elected members. That they are not superior to us...And that just because they wear a rank of office, doesn't mean that um, they're the be-all and end-all of everything. And I believe that that's started to creep in, that very thing.

One area of concern highlighting the contested nature of professionalism within the industry focused on the issues of funeral director advertising and funeral prices noted above. From the very inception of the Federation there were debates about advertising standards and regulations. One article in the trade journal (*NZFD* September 1940: 17), for instance, stipulated that funeral director signage incorporating phrases such as 'Ceremony, Economy, Dignity', 'savour[ed] too much of the market'. An article two decades later (*NZFD* September 1961: 25) asserted that advertisements publicising price were 'derogatory to the dignity of the profession'. Some in the industry, however, continued to promote price in their advertising. When the Consumers Institute recommended that clients be offered an inexpensive funeral option, some members of the FDANZ felt that this advice 'promoted the claims of the telephone, cardboard coffin, station wagon operation, solely on the basis of the gimmick of advertised ridiculously low charges' (*NZFD* December 1979: 15), and that this recommendation would ensure 'a return to the simplicity of earlier

years' (September 1982: 25). One participant noted that advertising was a recent phenomenon in the funeral profession:

> Until probably twenty years ago, similar to solicitors and doctors, professional people, advertising was more or less a no-no. We relied on word-of-mouth, and the good will of the firm being spread that way. Now, with the arrival of new operators and people that are, perhaps I could say, less sensitive than we conservative people are, ah, television advertising and radio advertising is quite the thing. The firms' policy here is that we only, we only use newspaper advertising or perhaps advertising in some specialised magazines...We do neither radio or television advertising (Charles).

Others, such as Timothy, explained that advertising required 'a discreetness, a professionalism', and that some forms of advertising caused public offense. From the current level of internet, radio, and television advertising, however, it is clear that there is some level of disagreement about what constitutes 'discreetness and professionalism' in the funeral industry.

Non-FDANZ participants who advertised extensively described the association as pretentious and imperious. Some of the smaller funeral companies stipulated that the FDANZ not only restricted access to the association, but that member firms often dominated the funeral market and restricted access to funeral supplies. One participant (who had recently established his own funeral firm) asserted that the FDANZ had inadvertently created a situation where an unofficial network of funeral workers now existed:

> [T]here is sort of an underground network of rebels...although it's unofficial and there's no official organisation, there's a contact, a link up, that they've [FDANZ funeral directors] accidentally developed...So when you want gear, you get into that circle and then there's a whole new level, and I don't think the association realise that they've created that, because a lot of these people, companies, are professional, and they do the job themselves and the funeral association, they wouldn't need to be in this other undercurrent (David).

A more formal response to the perceived exclusivity of the FDANZ was the establishment of a new association in 1993. With twenty-six members from 'Whangerei through to Invercargill' (Margaret), the Funeral Services Council of New Zealand (FSCNZ) primarily includes smaller funeral firms, many of whom had been denied FDANZ membership (Sperber 2003: 58-59). While FDANZ members were often unreserved[127] in their criticism of the new association and its members, FSCNZ affiliates stated that membership simply gave them greater credibility and support:

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[127] Harvey, for example, stated: 'the Funeral Services Council, there's bankrupts in that, there's people that have been dissenters, they've been up for firearms charges. When I first joined FDANZ they

> [The FSCNZ is] for funeral companies that didn't fit the criteria for the Funeral Directors Association and that maybe...they didn't have a mortuary so therefore their embalming might have been done like at the hospital or something...they might not have had a chapel, or they might not have had the funeral directors qualification that you need. So they needed to create um, another organisation, so that we'd have an ethical standard...(George).

While both associations tenaciously stressed the importance of professional standards and ethical principles, it is clear that there was some level of variation in how these service ideals could be achieved. The notion of professional service envisioned and promoted by the FDANZ, therefore, did not necessarily coincide or define the concept of professional service recognised by others in the industry.[128]

Education

The introduction of formal education was seen by many as an integral element in the pursuit of registration and the development of a funeral profession. Early discussion emphasised that training would allow funeral directors to 'defeat the price-cutting adventurer' (*NZFD* September 1941: 23) and raise the standard of the occupation. An editorial in 1955 (*NZFD* September 1955: 118) noted that funeral directors would only be recognised as professionals through extended education, and readers of the journal were implored to complete the newly established Course for the Preservation and Presentation of Bodies (*NZFD* March 1957: 77). The presidential address to the Federation in 1967 similarly noted that professional status could only be justified when a standardised qualification was developed for the occupation (*NZFD* March 1967: 95-96). An Education Committee Report at the end of the 1960s declared its intention of establishing a dual course in funeral directing and embalming (*NZFD* September 1969: 115), and the president of the newly formed FDANZ cited the establishment of an educational program as a central consideration for the new association (*NZFD* March 1970: 144-145).

A national course for funeral directors focusing on aspects of business management, legal considerations, psychology, and public relations was developed in 1973 and conducted at the Central Institute of Technology (*NZFD* March 1973: 18; *NZFD* June

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investigated you, they checked you out to see that you were squeaky clean, that you had no criminal record. But in amongst the Funeral Service there's some pretty funny sort of people'. Funeral directors categorised as 'cowboys' or 'backyarders' by FDANZ members were often members of the FSCNZ.

1973: 10). The Funeral Service Training Committee (FSTC)[129] was established in 1981 to investigate educational requirements for funeral directors, and led to courses in embalming and funeral directing during the 1980s. Year long certificates in funeral directing and embalming were introduced in 1990, when the FSTC was superseded by the Funeral Service Training Trust of New Zealand (FSTT).[130] The formation of the FSTT was a direct response to new government training initiatives, which introduced new National Certificates in Embalming and Funeral Directing. A National Diploma in Funeral Services - for funeral directors who successfully completed the requirements of the two aforementioned qualifications - is currently available from a training institute in Wellington.[131] Although this formal training is available to all members of the occupation, numerous FDANZ funeral directors noted that *continuing* education was an equally essential element of quality funeral directing. Attendance at a specified number of approved seminars and training sessions was necessary to retain funeral director practicing certificates, while the new FDANZ quality assurance program not only emphasises the importance of tertiary education, but also requires accredited businesses to attend regular training courses to retain *Griefcare* status.[132] Most participants in the present study were extremely supportive of educational programs, stating that education consolidated their expertise, maintained a uniformity of standards, and satisfied consumer demand for formally qualified individuals.

Although education has clearly been a significant development in the field of funeral directing and embalming, all funeral service education remains voluntary. Numerous participants felt that this lack of apprenticeship, tertiary training, or other entrance qualification created widespread ambivalence about the professional status of the occupation. One funeral director participant explained:

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[128] Another group of funeral directors was established during the writing of this thesis. For more information about The New Zealand Independent Funeral Homes see http://nzifh.org.nz/.

[129] A discussion of the developments leading to the formation of The Funeral Service Training Committee is provided in a paper by the Vocational Training Council of New Zealand (1981).

[130] The FSTT became the Industry Training Organisation for funeral services in New Zealand. See Ninness (1987: 47-49), *NZFD The Last Ten Years* (1997: 10-15), and *NZFD* (September 1981: 15-21) for a more detailed discussion.

[131] For a detailed outline of the qualifications noted here see the Wellington Institute of Technology School of Funeral Services website (http://www.cit.ac.nz/schools/funeral/index.html).

[132] In 2004 the FDANZ also organised a training course for experienced funeral workers without formal qualifications and a minimum of ten years experience in the industry. In the same year the Funeral

> I don't think [funeral directing] is a profession...to me a profession has a much higher education qualification standard. To me professions are the medical, the law, the accounting. These are the professions and then you come down to industries and trades...how can you call it a profession if you can become a funeral director just by buying a piece of property, putting a building on it, and putting a sign up, and saying, 'I'm a funeral director'...Is that a profession? (Martin).

Role redefinition

One of the themes clearly identifiable in the discussion of British and American funeral directors is the focus on role redefinition. Numerous authors including Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), Bremborg (2002), Charmaz (1980), Farrell (1980), Foreman (1974), Howarth (1996), Laderman (2003), Parsons (1997), Prior (1989), Smale (1985), and Thompson (1991) have examined the stigmatisation of funeral directors and the strategies employed by these functionaries to minimise the effects of this stigma. The observations of Easterday (1983), Sudnow (1967), and Lesy (1987), suggest that death workers have become symbolic markers of death in modern Anglophone society, and that the close association of the funeral director with death and dead bodies has clearly contributed to the creation of a 'deeply discrediting' attribute (Goffman 1968: 13).[133] Thompson (1991) also identified the economic environment of funerals as a salient source of stigmatisation. Funeral directors in a number of geographical areas consequently de-emphasised or delegated their backstage 'dirty work' (Hughes 1958), focusing instead on the provision of services to the bereaved (Farrell 1980: 148; Pringle and Alley 1995: 116), and directing funerary ritual (Habenstein and Lamers 1955: 593; Turner and Edgley 1976: 384).

Similarly, New Zealand funeral workers shifted their focus from the dead, and explicitly concentrated their efforts on the needs of the living. In addition to furnishing a coffin, providing transport, and merely 'directing a funeral' (*NZFD* June 1942: 1), funeral directors helped and supported the mourners, advising them in what was 'desirable' (*NZFD* December 1953: 137). The funeral directors of the Federation era attempted to modernise funeral customs by providing services that no longer presented a 'hazard to the mental health of the bereaved' (*NZFD* September 1951: 25). To 'lessen the sorrow' (*NZFD* June 1943: 1) of the people they served, funeral

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Service Training Trust raised the issue of advanced diplomas and degrees for the funeral industry. See *Funeralcare* (September 2004: 24-25).

directors needed to eradicate the excessive and inefficient traditions of the undertaker. Families had to be afforded more privacy, for example, to avoid the 'maudlin sentimentality' that could potentially destroy the prescribed composure required for such situations (*NZFD* September 1951: 25). The body was increasingly transferred to specialised funeral director premises before disposal, and there were proposals to abandon old English style coffins because they were too 'funereal', and reminded mourners of the remains inside: 'Is there anything so poignantly futile as the present shaped coffin with its outline so carefully following the outlines of the body, shouting every moment what it is, and what it is enclosing?' (*NZFD* June 1946: 1).[134]

American-style lawn cemeteries with discrete bronze plaques were suggested as alternatives to 'cold', 'grim' graveyards (*NZFD* September 1948: 35), while comfortless words such as 'coffin' and 'body' needed to be replaced by more appropriate terms such as 'casket' and 'remains', which produced 'pleasant' memories. The term 'coffin' was particularly coarse because it implied 'simplicity', 'rough construction', and 'lack of ornamentation'. 'Casket', on the other hand, signified 'beauty', 'elegance', and 'expert finish' (*NZFD* March 1946: 73).

From the very first issue of the *NZFD*, emphasis was placed on the service nature of the occupation and the altruistic element of the industry: 'Members are now looking upon their calling as something more than a business, something greater than a method of money-making. They are prepared to regard it, and rightly so, as a career of useful service to the community' (*NZFD* June 1939: 2).

Funeral directors 'reframed' their occupation (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999: 421) and cloaked themselves in a 'shroud of service' (Thompson 1991: 421), describing themselves as 'servants of humanity' (*NZFD* September 1950: 111), carrying out a 'sacred social task' (*NZFD* March 1955: 75). The Code of Ethics adopted by the Association correspondingly emphasised the need to protect public interests (*NZFD* March 1973: 18), while articles and editorials in the Association journal outlined the

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[133] Howarth (1996: 15) notes, however, it is also 'custody of the corpse' which gives funeral directors control over the funeral service. This control and the significance of the corpse will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.
[134] See also *NZFD* (March 1946: 73).

personal sacrifices involved in the vocation of funeral directing. Funeral directors were portrayed as integral members of society and many joined philanthropic community organisations. In addition to elevating the status of the funeral director, this move was seen to signal the increasing acceptability of the occupation: 'The Funeral Director is no longer segregated from the public by reason of his work, and his society is actually sought after and the average successful Funeral Director is a leader either in church, civic or fraternal circles...'(*NZFD* September 1943: 24).

The emphasis on altruistic service became particularly evident in the discernible shift from rationalised funeral practices to psychology and grief in the second half of the twentieth century. At this time, grief was increasingly medicalised and transformed into a disease with a particular symptomology (Archer 1999; Bradbury 1999; Klass 1996). Following similar trends in the United States (Laderman 2003; Rando 1989) and Britain (Bradbury 1999; Davies 2002; Hockey 1996), funeral directors began to emphasise the therapeutic needs of the bereaved, prioritising their role as 'counsellors and comforters' (*NZFD* September 1968: 39-40). The emerging construct of grief reinforced a cultural notion 'that grief could be healthy or unhealthy, resolved or unresolved, transcended or forever present' (Laderman 2003: 118), and New Zealand funeral directors in keeping with this development, highlighted the positive psychological value of the funeral in an efficacious grief process. Funeral directors specifically underlined the significance of acknowledging the 'reality of death' and expressing emotion. In a shift clearly reminiscent of earlier twentieth century attempts to dissociate modern funeral directing practices from undertaking, late modern funeral directors endeavoured to highlight the progressive practices associated with a new understanding and treatment of grief. The rationalised funeral practices of the mid-twentieth century were therefore portrayed as detrimental to the health of the bereaved, while in contrast a more sensitive approach to bereavement and grief now informed the work of the funeral director. This new sensitivity was evident in the laconic history of funeral practices produced by one funeral home. This publication stated that expression of emotion was not an element of historic funerals and that death during this period was generally avoided and disguised:

> When death occurred, often the body of the deceased would be taken away from the house at night, so as to avoid the attention of the neighbours. The use of old and stilted language, harsh sounding terms, and the things that people said, although well-meaning, and

> intending to offer help, often did the reverse. The subjects of death and dying, grief and bereavement, and the direction of funeral services today, bear little resemblance to that of yesteryear. We have as a society learned a great deal, in fact, we are still learning, but we are now much more sensitive as to how we look after those who are suffering with the pain and loss of bereavement (Eastern Hills Funeral Home).

Elements of the grief process were included in funeral director education in the 1970s, and participants emphasised the importance of this development in their training:

> I went reluctantly to the first course [in the early 1970s] and it was the biggest change during my whole career, for me personally. From a person who was getting disgruntled with the job...and looked at my job as picking up a body, bringing it to our premises, embalming, dressing and placing it in a casket, going to a church and then burying or cremating it...After the course, I saw it as looking after people and I became much more satisfied with my work. None of us...had had anything to do with psychology...We were taught...some elementary psychology and behavioural science and that just made all the difference to me and I've loved my job ever since (Ian).

Some postulated that this pastoral role was particularly important in the secular New Zealand context because the established church played an increasingly inconsequential role in ministering to the bereaved (*NZFD* September 1974: 10).[135]

The obvious emphasis on service to the bereaved distanced the New Zealand funeral director from a key source of stigmatisation (Thompson 1991): few funeral firms, however, 'delegated' their 'dirty work' (Hughes 1958: 50-52) to the extent described by authors such as Foreman (1974: 241) or Parsons (1997: 265). Although funeral directors de-emphasised their contact with the corpse (*NZFD* June 1965: 2), and attempted to distance the occupation from other death workers and trades[136], many funeral directors continued to handle the dead, and few funeral firms experienced the degree of specialisation observed in Australia, Britain, and the United States. Indeed, participants emphasised the importance of versatility in the funeral field, and the need to employ 'multi-skilled' individuals.

Another recognisable area of augmentation and specialisation was the legislative requirements surrounding disposal (*NZFD* September/December 1965: 29). Funeral directors assumed increasing responsibility for the registration of deaths in the first half of the twentieth century and henceforth incorporated this function in their

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[135] This particular article, for example, noted that only 10-15 percent of the New Zealand population had any connection with the church. See chapter five for a more detailed discussion of religion in New Zealand and the increasing significance of psychological understandings of grief.

schedule of services (Cleaver 1996: 34-35; Hera 1992: 260). The 1951 Births and Deaths Registration Act indicates that funeral directors had by then appropriated the certification of death and thus supplanted family and friends, who had been responsible for this duty in earlier decades (Hera 1992: 260).

One final element of role redefinition concerns the economic environment of funerals. From the foundation of the Federation, funeral directors were eager to outline their selection of services, not only to raise the status of the occupation, but to legitimise the expenses associated with the provision of these services. Funeral directors proficient in all elements of mortuary science and legal requirements, for example, were considered to have an 'incontestable right to expect a remuneration in line with the quality of service' (*NZFD* December 1944: 46), or a 'fair reward for their labour, materials and facilities' (*NZFD* June 1945: 1). Funeral directors were acutely aware of criticisms concerning cost, and continuing efforts were made to inform the public of the significance and quality of funeral service - particularly after exposés of the American funeral industry in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Public relation campaigns including advertising, community seminars - and more recently - funeral home open days, have emphasised the specialised role of the funeral director and the importance of funerary ritual (see for instance *Press* 26 February 2003: 16). These public education campaigns can clearly be seen as implicit attempts to justify the cost of funeral services, but numerous participants maintained that few people outside the industry recognised the level of commitment (both financial and personal) required by funeral directors and regularly overestimated the profitability of funeral service providers.

Embalming in New Zealand

One of the most conspicuous changes in the role of the funeral director is evident in the introduction of embalming. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embalming was offered by a small number of urban funeral directors (Cleaver 1996: 32-33), and a few nineteenth century funeral workers even acquired international embalming training and certification (*Funeralcare* September 2004: 23). The practice

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[136] One article stated: 'We feel it would not be fair to our clients – the public – to let them feel we were arriving at their home with the same standing as a tradesman...they expect more from us' (*NZFD* September 1974: 10).

was limited before the second half of the century, however, and even in the 1960s was often reserved for bodies that required transportation between towns and cities in New Zealand (Morris 1968: 28). Funeral practitioners initially promoted arterial embalming as an important public health measure that prevented 'obnoxious odours' and 'gases', and allowed bodies to be presented in a 'wholesome' and 'beautiful' manner (*NZFD* June 1940: 1; *NZFD* March 1943: 84). Early accounts thus emphasised the importance of ameliorating death and *reducing* the effects of grief in survivors. One article, for example, stipulated that it was the 'instability' of dead human tissue that resulted in the retention of 'many pagan customs', and that the adoption of embalming would allow for a modernisation of funerary ritual (*NZFD* March 1953: 71). At this time the deceased were typically presented in night attire or shrouds (*NZFD* December 1944: 54)[137], and the benefits of creating mental images of 'peaceful sleep' (*NZFD* June 1953: 92; *NZFD* December 1953: 137) were expounded in the industry literature. By presenting remains in a natural repose, funeral directors were able to direct 'the mind away from grief' and aid the mental health of the survivors (*NZFD* June 1953: 91-92): 'Transform death, as a fact, to sleep as a similitude and a transformation is made that greatly tempers grief' (*NZFD* December 1944: 46).

Reports in the occupational journal during this period recognised the importance of embalming in the United States, with some funeral directors therefore predicting that the Second World War and arrival of American army personnel would revolutionise the practice of embalming in New Zealand (*NZFD* March 1943: 84). Republished articles from American trade journals emphasised the significance of sanitation, preservation, and cosmetic effect, while the benefits derived from the creation of a 'memory picture' were increasingly considered (*NZFD* December 1964: 53).

The embalming process was initially described as an uncomplicated procedure that required only an elementary knowledge of human anatomy: 'To embalm a body there are certain rules to be observed. They are simple in the extreme, and once knowing them, you will never forget them' (*NZFD* June 1940: 1). It was not long, however, before a number of New Zealand funeral directors became aware of international advancements in embalming technique, and recognised the significance of this

[137] There was some initial resistance to the American practice of dressing the body in 'walking out

procedure as a key development in the pursuit of professionalisation. One report in the *NZFD* (December 1947: 62), as a case in point, stated that embalming was the funeral directors' 'chief claim to recognition as a professional man', and increasing emphasis was placed on promoting embalming as a specialised *technical* skill. Reports in the trade journal reiterated the scientific nature of embalming, with practitioners progressively portrayed as individuals who possessed 'an extensive knowledge of anatomy, bacteriology, and the principles of hygiene and sanitary science' (*NZFD* September 1960: 27).

The promotion of embalming was given significant impetus by members of the industry who trained in the United States and Britain during the 1950s and 1960s, with numerous participants recalling the relevance of this early development:

> I am old enough to remember the days when you put the lid on the casket and didn't have any skills to counteract the decomposition of the body. And if a body became offensive, you just lifted it out and put it in a bigger coffin which was made water-proof by pouring pitch around all the joints inside...and that was your only method of doing anything. Then after the war, elementary embalming started in New Zealand and then later in the 1950s and early '60s, some of our people went over to the States and were trained properly and brought the knowledge to New Zealand (Ian).

> When I started, arterial embalming was very, very new and very few funeral homes in New Zealand practiced it. The funeral home that I was employed at...that was basically the home of modern embalming training in New Zealand. The fellow employing me...went to America and attended the San Francisco College of mortuary science. And when he came back, he eventually established the Embalming School of New Zealand and ran it upstairs in the boardroom. I was trained through that school and so were a lot of other embalmers and we were all taught to arterially embalm. So until that point there was some training...BIE, British Institute of Embalmers training, but they weren't really teaching them proper arterial embalming...so that was really in the early 70's when that was established. That was the beginning of it (John).

A course entitled 'Temporary Preservation and Presentation' was established under the Federation and the first Certificate of Proficiency was awarded to Alexander Irvine in 1955 (*NZFD* December 1975: 12). The College of Funeral Science was established in Auckland in the 1960s and began offering courses in embalming (*NZFD* September 1968: 31). It was not until after the formation of the New Zealand Embalmers Association (NZEA) in 1971, however, that embalming or 'hygienic treatment' became increasingly widespread. An embalming course was established at a technical institute (CIT) in the 1970s under the School of Health Sciences (*NZFD* December 1985: 27), while the formation of the FSTC and FSTT contributed

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clothes' (*NZFD* June 1964: 9).

significantly to the development of embalming qualifications. Despite some resistance to the routinised practise of this procedure[138], embalming was progressively utilised in New Zealand: by 1977 almost seventy percent of disposals handled by FDANZ funeral firms were embalmed (*NZFD* December 1978: 5), and most funeral director participants in this study estimated that they presently embalmed in excess of ninety percent of all cases.

Embalming has become intrinsically linked to the practice of viewing the dead before disposal. After the establishment of the Funeral Directors Federation in 1938, viewing was considered an irrational tradition, associated with undertakers, that would damage the mental health and fortitude of the survivors. Despite continuing ambivalence about the value of the practice in the 1970s, viewing was increasingly promoted by funeral directors as a practice with psychological benefits that would aid the 'grieving process'. This return to viewing was clearly influenced by the aforementioned changes in the understandings of grief, North American funerary practices, and a growing awareness of 'traditional' death customs (Calder 1998; Hera 1995). The Maori approach to death, in particular, was seen to represent a healthier, more 'honest' approach to death and one that contrasted with the increasing European 'denial' of death in the twentieth century. This development forms the focus of the following chapter.

Although a number of participants noted that home viewing was becoming a discernible trend in some areas – a trend they also attributed to an understanding of 'traditional' or historic funerary practices – most viewing of the dead occurred at the funeral director premises.

Funeral director premises

The utilisation of funeral director premises for practical and ritualistic purposes became increasingly important in the twentieth century. By 1910, the dead were increasingly stored at undertakers' premises before burial, particularly if the person

[138] An article in the *Dunedin Evening Star* (15 March 1976), for example, noted that routine embalming was to be 'deplored and resisted' (article reprinted in the *NZFD* March 1976: 23). There continues to be resistance to the practice of embalming, and a number of participants described embalming as an unnecessary, invasive procedure with detrimental environmental effects. This opposition again

had died in an institution (Cleaver 1996: 32-33). Removing the body to funeral director premises after death was regarded as efficient and sanitary. Taking the body home, in contrast, was portrayed as inconvenient, 'old-fashioned', and a threat to the mental well-being of the bereaved (*NZFD* December 1955: 136). This was particularly important with the increasing practice of embalming, where relatives of the deceased were 'well advised' to allow funeral directors to remove the deceased to the 'specially equipped preparation theatre at the funeral director's establishment' (*NZFD* September 1960: 27). The funeral director became the 'custodian of the body' with a duty to ensure that the corpse was 'maintained in a hygienic condition' until disposal (*NZFD* September 1966: 30). A few undertakers modified their premises to include small chapels that could be used for funeral services (Cleaver 1996: 33-34), and some funeral directors realised the pecuniary potential of providing a space for the body before burial:

> I would suggest that it would make for greater efficiency and also for greater sanitation, if all bodies were removed from the place of death to the funeral director premises. This would necessitate our each having a chapel, morgue or room set apart to hold a body for burial. Although this action would entail a little extra expense, I feel we would find it wise economy eventually (*NZFD* March 1944: 71).

Funeral director premises were periodically discussed in the trade journal and some funeral directors identified an intrinsic link between facilities and professional status (*NZFD* September 1964: 24), but until the 1970s most firms continued to use the local church. Many families, particularly those without church affiliation, however, were finding it increasingly difficult to find an 'appropriate' venue for the funeral and an individual to conduct the service. A declining number of New Zealanders belonged to the four main Christian denominations and an increasing number professed to having 'no religion' in the census statistics (see chapter five) A partial solution was offered by city councils around the country who built crematoria that included alternative funeral establishments. One participant interviewed for a research project in the late 1960s estimated that by 1967 one third of all funerals were held in crematorium chapels (Morris 1968: 28). The crematoria chapels also eliminated the need for a cortege and resulted in an increased number of single service funerals, where the committal was included in the service. These funerals were a sign of increasingly simplified and functional funerary rites, which in turn reflected

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highlights the contested nature of 'professional' funeral service and will be discussed in more detail in

rationalised approaches to death. The increasing number of private funerals[139], memorial services, a reluctance to prioritise attendance at funerals, or view the final disposal, were also indicative of this trend (Dickey 1980: 43-47).

These changes were of significant concern to funeral directors who felt that councils were 'dictating the format of funerals' (*NZFD The Last Ten Years Update* 1997: 5), and that with increased crematoria involvement, there would be no need for a funeral director. In response to these concerns a number of funeral directors began building multi-purpose funeral premises. These new funeral home chapels could be used for religious or non-religious funerals and were particularly well adapted to the emerging life-centred funeral conducted by funeral celebrants.

Most of the new premises also included catering facilities for refreshments after the service. Some funeral directors noted that social gatherings after the funeral service or disposal were important features of 'traditional' funerals but that modern houses were often inappropriate for the continuance of this tradition. Other participants felt that this development simply reflected increasing privatisation and the modern desire for 'one-stop-shopping'.

These new premises were promoted as 'reflecting the more enlightened practices surrounding death and the grieving process' (*NZFD The Last Ten Years* 1997: 9), and, as with viewing, this 'traditional' component of the funerary ritual became one particularly well suited to the emerging interpretation of the grief process. Despite busy modern life-styles, funeral directors noted that the funeral was an integral part of acknowledging death and helping the bereaved 'deal' with their grief. A number of funeral directors felt that having the funeral and social gathering at the funeral director establishment effectively fulfilled these needs. One participant noted, for instance, that the funeral director chapel and reception area allowed the mourners to gain 'maximum benefit' from the short time spent together (Anthony).

Numerous participants clearly conflated professional service with funeral premises, and noted that funeral directors often made substantial capital investments in these

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the following chapter.

facilities. This investment allowed them to provide services unavailable to smaller operators:

> We've put the investment into the whole facility. [The smaller establishments] only put the investment into the minimum facility they can get away with and get the rest of it done elsewhere. They pay, it costs them more to get it done, but in the total scheme of things it's cheaper for them to do it that way, than try and do the whole thing (Martin).

Michael noted that funeral director premises were therefore an essential component of professional service and the overall funeral 'experience':

> When it comes down to the final choice, the families come for the facilities you offer and the service that you give. And at the end of the day, the memory that you leave them with. That's what they come for and that's what we try and achieve in every case. If you're running with a low-cost person, they haven't got the facilities, they're a one-man band, so their service is not always up to scratch.

Funeral directors working in smaller establishments, however, expressed a dissentient view. Some felt that elaborate funeral facilities did not correspondingly constitute 'professional' service, and that such facilities simply attempted to substantiate 'excessive' funeral charges. Unlike many of the FDANZ members who assiduously avoided the economic element of funerals in their advertising, some participants noted that this was an important consideration in their service provision:

> We don't have um, the great palatial grounds that a lot of funeral companies have. Reason being, we like to keep the cost of our funerals low and somebody has to pay for the palatial grounds, and it's certainly not the funeral directors, it's the um, clients that go through the funeral home (Margaret).

Secular funeral celebrants

One recent development in the continuing evolution of the funeral industry in New Zealand is the presence of the funeral celebrant. During the last two decades, celebrants conducting life-centred funerals have become a fundamental feature of 'personalised' funeral practices. Funeral celebrants have been in existence for over two decades and currently conduct a significant number of funerals in urban areas. Celebrants are usually lay-people, with no formal institutionalised role like that of the clergy, and many see themselves as ritual specialists, fulfilling the sociological and psychological needs of an increasingly secular society (Schafer 1998). The life-centred ceremonies conducted by these individuals attempt to provide meaning at the death of a particular individual, as well as legitimisation for this life, in terms of secular

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[139] Often attended only by close friends and/or family.

values. Celebrants focus on the celebration of a life lived, rather than a commendation to a life to come, and many explore the meaning of life and death in more personalised terms than religious funerals (Walter 1990: 217-231). Life-centred funerals and celebrants form the focus of chapter five.

Nearly all the participants in this study regarded the development of the celebrant 'alternative' as an important service that they could offer their clients. A number of these participants stressed the importance of employing a competent celebrant, as the quality of a celebrant ceremony was often linked to the reputation of a particular funeral firm. Because most families were unfamiliar with celebrants in a particular area, the funeral directors played an important role in recommending celebrants to families. A few felt that it was their duty to 'match' a particular celebrant to a client family. This function, as well as the fact that many celebrant funerals were conducted in funeral director chapels, gave the funeral directors a significant degree of control. One manifestation of this control, was that some funeral directors recently developed a code of ethics that celebrants were required to sign before employment (*NZFD* Autumn 1999: 12-13).

Cremation

Cremation has also become a central component of the New Zealand funeral industry and is closely correlated with personalised ritual. Cremation was first intimated by the funeral reform movements in the nineteenth century that argued for simplicity of funerary ritual and moderate funeral expenditure (Cleaver 1996: 65-75). The first group promoting cremation in New Zealand was formed in Lawrence in 1875 (Cleaver 1996:103-104) and other cremation societies were formed in Napier (1894), Dunedin (1900), and Auckland (1905). These associations advanced arguments for the adoption of cremation, which paralleled similar developments in Australia, Europe, and North America (Nicol 1994: 173).

Cremation was promoted as a sanitary, cost effective, and aesthetically satisfying form of disposal. A publication by the Dunedin Cremation Society (1903), for example, emphasised that cremation was a scientific process that eliminated deadly diseases, utilised valuable land more effectively, and was generally cheaper than burial. The publication stated that it was only sentiment and tradition that motivated

people to choose the 'protracted and disgusting process of putrefaction' which burial entailed (Dunedin Cremation Society 1903: 12). Cremation was also promoted as a method of disposal that precluded the possibility of being buried alive, and the 'discomfort' associated with graveyard services. Feminists who considered nineteenth century mourning customs oppressive, also promoted cremation as a modern and hygienic method of disposal (Coney 1993: 87).

As in Australia, North America, and England, there were opponents to cremation. Some noted that crimes such as poisoning would go undetected, while others believed that cremation was a reversion to pagan practices that interfered with the doctrine of resurrection. The cremationists, however, argued that doctors would take more care in certifying causes of death, and that cremation merely resolved the body into its constituent elements. These debates, and overseas disposal developments, were widely reported in newspapers around the country.

The cremation movements received limited public support. The society in Dunedin, for example, made little progress in establishing a crematorium and went into a period of decline after 1905. Although cremation was legalised by the Cemeteries Act in 1882, and municipal cemeteries were permitted to make provision for cremation (1895 Cemeteries Act Amendment), the first crematorium in New Zealand was not erected until 1909 in Karori, Wellington. This was followed by the construction of crematoria in Auckland and Dunedin. Cremation, however, was slow to gain widespread public acceptance. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the rate of cremation increased significantly, accounting for approximately sixty percent of disposals by 1970 (Ninness 1990).

This development generated minimal opposition from the funeral industry. Funeral directors striving for professional status in the 1940s and 1950s utilised rhetoric in their trade journal that reflected the cremationists concern with hygiene and efficiency. New Zealand funeral directors promoted cremation as a convenient and rational form of disposal that would have little impact on the provision of other services. Unlike the situation in the United States, where cremation was initially promoted by the anti-traditional funeral lobby (see for instance Mitford 1963), there was little correlation between the type of funeral service and the method of disposal.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, municipal crematoria began to build funeral chapels (*NZFD* June 1961: 1; *FDANZ* 1997: 5-7). This development culminated in the proliferation of single-service funerals (*NZFD* June 1977: 9) and intimated the trend towards one-stop funeral shopping noted earlier. Some funeral directors realised the potential for cremation authorities to integrate vertically and include funeral directing services. A significant number of funeral directors during the 1960s and 1970s were also concerned at the time restrictions imposed by crematoria and the subsequent abbreviation of funeral ceremonies. It was partly in response to these concerns that a number of funeral directors constructed multi-facility funeral venues in the 1980s that included funeral chapels and reception lounges for refreshments after the funeral service (see above). Some funeral directors also installed their own cremator units during this period and began offering a wider range of disposal services.

Although incineration after the service is usually witnessed only by crematorium staff (and only occasionally by funeral directors), the final disposal of ashes has also undergone a recent transformation. The disposal of ashes was initially considered to be a 'regrettable' development that irrationally prolonged the 'grief of bereavement' by some funeral directors (*NZFD* March 1977: 6-7). In line with the general shift from functional and efficient funerary rites discussed above, however, monumental masons and funeral directors began to offer more personalised memorial options that allowed greater mourner involvement. Ashes can currently be scattered by crematorium staff or funeral directors, deposited in columbaria, or buried in cemetery ash plots with plaques or headstones. Alternatively, cremated remains can be taken by family members and buried or scattered in locations with personal significance. Burial and personal placement of ashes have superseded institutional scattering in the last two decades and some funeral directors and celebrants provide ceremonies for this final treatment. Disposal options and post-disposal funeral director involvement form the focus of chapter six.

Stewart Enterprises in New Zealand

One recent development in the New Zealand funeral industry has been the arrival of a North American multinational. Stewart Enterprises Inc. (SEI) executives speculated

that there was significant economic potential for the company in the Australasian funeral market. Company managers conducting market research in New Zealand (*Dominion* 23 July 1996: 1) were surprised at the willingness of some proprietors to sell their establishments (Michael). SEI thus entered the New Zealand funeral market in 1996 with acquisitions in Auckland, initially operating under the name National Care Services Ltd.[140] During their one year acquisition program, SEI acquired a total of 24 funeral establishments in New Zealand, from Christchurch in the south, to Orewa in the North.

The funeral directors interviewed during the course of this research advanced a number of reasons for selling their businesses to SEI.[141] Most of these reasons centred on succession difficulties. Ian, for example, noted that he had no family interested in continuing with his firm and that he had no desire to leave money in a company that he could not personally oversee. This participant also noted that SEI had enabled him to make improvements to his funeral home that he could not have afforded as a small family company. Nigel explained that family difficulties had resulted in his decision to sell, while Charles noted that it was very problematic for families (like his own) to move out of funeral directing because of the difficulties involved in selling that type of business.

Despite these personal justifications for dealing with SEI, the 1996 arrival of Stewart Enterprises was generally regarded by the media, funeral industry, and consumers, with varying degrees of suspicion and antagonism. Magazine articles, for example, described the arrival of the multinationals as 'mega-death merchants' (Macdonald 1996: 65). This particular article considered the changes SEI might instigate in the funeral industry, and the impact of such changes on the consumer (Macdonald 1996). One television documentary emphasised the increasing prices of funerals after the arrival of a multinational corporation in Australia (*Assignment* 29 June 1997). Newspaper articles primarily expressed the concerns of the funeral industry. One article in the *Dominion* noted that the arrival of SEI had been met with 'a mixture of alarm and acceptance' (23 July 1996: 1), while a report in *The Press* (29 May 1997: 20)

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[140] National Care Services Ltd. was owned by Funeral Services New Zealand. This in turn was owned by Stewart Enterprises Australia, Inc. The sole shareholder of Stewart Enterprises Australia was Stewart Enterprises Inc.

stated the traditional funeral industry was rapidly 'becoming an outpost of the global death business'. This view was reiterated by a report in the *Independent Business Weekly* (Heeringa 1997: 20), which asserted that SEI acquisitions had 'sent a shiver' through New Zealand's '200 or so, mainly family owned, undertaker businesses'. An article in the *Waikato Times* (19 February 1998: 13) expressed the concerns of some Hamilton funeral directors who believed that the arrival of Stewart Enterprises presented a disturbing 'force of change'.

The majority of participants in this study felt that the arrival of SEI was detrimental to the funeral industry. Most of the concerns expressed focused on the 'Americanisation' of funerals. For many participants 'Americanisation' was generally synonymous with higher funeral prices, extravagant merchandising, and decreased personalisation. One funeral director, for example, contended that American funerals focused on profit, while New Zealanders were generally a 'very friendly, very caring and appreciative race' (Bone 2003: 32). New Zealand attitudes were similarly described as 'understated' (William), 'money conscious' (Ian) and 'simple, middle-of-the-road' (Michael). One funeral director noted that the SEI approach was simply a sales pitch, going 'totally against the grain of the traditional New Zealand funeral' (Brian). Another funeral director (Anthony) was particularly concerned with the American emphasis on merchandising: 'In many cases I think funeral directors in America are more casket salesmen than funeral directors'. One funeral director (Margaret) emphatically expressed her belief that SEI was not going to be 'good for New Zealand families'. She believed that SEI was solely in New Zealand to increase profit. One Anglican minister (Karl) shared these concerns, stating that SEI simply commercialised funerals to an unprecedented extent and that this corporate approach neglected personalised service.

A number of participants in the industry also felt that the SEI strategy of keeping the family funeral home name was dishonest and deceitful. One participant (George), for example, stated that this practice constituted 'false advertising', while another participant (Margaret) felt it was her 'duty' to inform the public about this 'typical American façade'. In response to these concerns, a number of New Zealand owned

[141] One third (8) of the SEI funeral establishments in New Zealand were included in this study.

firms, especially those in areas where SEI had acquired funeral homes, emphasised local and/or family ownership: 'New Zealand Owned' and 'Family Owned' were thus features promoted by a number of firms who felt that such advertising would be advantageous in an increasingly competitive market. This advertising is particularly evident in the *Yellow Pages* telephone directories for Auckland and Canterbury. Although family firm heritage has always been promoted by some firms, the ownership of a company was not explicitly stated before the arrival of SEI in 1996. Starting in 1997, however, ownership became a much more prominent concern.[142]

Staff at all eight of the SEI funeral homes included in this study noticed some changes after acquisition. These changes were apparent in decreased funeral numbers, staff movement, and antagonism from New Zealand owned establishments. Some employees also noticed changes in administration and increases in funeral prices. One funeral director (Nigel) noted that his funeral numbers had decreased significantly after acquisition, and another (Gregory) explained that there had also been a noticeable decline in numbers after change of ownership. Both New Zealand funeral directors and SEI employees believed that this decrease was a consequence of marketing by New Zealand owned firms and media publicity. One SEI funeral director (Michael) stated that funeral colleagues 'took it upon themselves to let the world know' that a multinational had arrived on New Zealand shores, while another (Carmen) asserted that 'negativity and prejudice' had been generated by the industry. Some of the SEI funeral directors also felt that acquisition by SEI had affected their relationships with other funeral directors, transforming the dynamics of the industry. Although a degree of suspicion had always characterised the occupation, participants noted that funeral directors in the past had been more willing to share ideas and concerns with individuals in the industry from other areas, in the knowledge that this information would not affect their own market share. With the arrival of the multinationals, however, funeral directors no longer felt that they could openly discuss ideas because of the possibility that this information might be used to the advantage of competing firms who were owned by the multinationals.

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[142] One firm in Canterbury, for example, stated that it was 'proud to be Canterbury family owned and operated' while another announced that it was 'solely New Zealand owned (*Canterbury Telecom Yellow Pages* 1997: 462).

Administrative changes were also noted by Stewart employees. One SEI funeral director (Charles) noted that there had been increased efficiencies and another (Ian) stated that: 'Stewarts watch their income and watch their overheads...more business-like than I ever was as I had a family company'. Nearly all the participants noted some price increases after acquisition. One participant (Nigel) stated that SEI were 'pricing themselves off the market' with their strategy of completing 'fewer funerals at higher prices'. Most participants, however, felt that increases had been negligible and exaggerated by the media and competitors. One SEI funeral director (Toby) explained that funeral prices had increased marginally after acquisition because of increased casket prices, while another participant (Michael), explained that price increases resulted from the high prices that SEI had to pay to acquire certain funeral establishments around New Zealand. This participant also noted that some employees had not 'adjusted to the corporate way of funerals', resulting in some staff movement. Most of the funeral directors interviewed, however, felt that SEI gave them a considerable degree of managerial freedom, as well as allowing them to retain their funeral firm identity.

Many funeral directors in this study perceived there to be a significant level of consumer resistance to SEI, and most participants were able to cite examples of anti-American feeling from the public (see for instance the *Daily News* 17 June 1997: 3). One funeral director (Anthony) explained that:

> We get many phone calls where they [the consumer] clarify at a very early stage, 'Are you still owned by New Zealanders or are you owned by those horrible Americans?'...It's almost as bland as that. So you could be the best funeral director out, but if you're owned by Americans they will not touch you.

Another funeral director (Martin) stated that he promoted New Zealand ownership because of the 'widely held belief that American funerals are brash' and 'cost a lot of money', and felt that advertising New Zealand ownership was in some ways 'pandering to the fears of the people'.

In addition to this anti-American sentiment, many participants noted a public parochial disposition, which they felt was incongruent with the American approach to funerals. One SEI funeral director (Ian) stated, for example, that Stewart companies had 'taken a loss because of the parochialism against overseas companies owning

New Zealand businesses'. Dennis believed that New Zealanders were 'pretty loyal, pretty conservative', and that because of this individuals were not going to utilise the services of an American company.

Most participants noted, however, that anti-American and parochial sentiments were short lived, especially in urban areas. Although there had been some minor changes after acquisition, most participants felt that SEI firms continued to offer the same level of service, and that consumers soon disregarded ownership issues. Jacob stated that 'people have forgotten...and they move on to the next thing'. Louis, who promoted family and New Zealand ownership, believed it had not been particularly effective from a business point of view, while Ruth noted that the impact of SEI was not as profound as 'some of the New Zealand owned funeral homes would have hoped'. Gregory stated that people had accepted the American ownership issue, while Charles likewise asserted that despite media attention surrounding the arrival of SEI, people had quickly 'forgotten' about the multinational. Although most participants acknowledged that SEI and the American ownership issue had had a greater impact in rural areas, even here the influence of local ownership began to wane.

Ultimately, SEI sold its Australasian division to a Brisbane business consortium in August 2001 (*Herald-Sun* 25 August 2001: 95; *Manly Daily* 12 September 2001: 25). The legacy of this development, however, was that it helped elucidate the 'New Zealand funeral', allowing funeral directors to emphasise the significance of personalisation in New Zealand post-mortem practices. This distinction has similarly found recent expression in discussions of the television drama series *Six Feet Under*, which focuses on the fortunes of a Los Angeles funeral firm. While the popular HBO series was credited with portraying funeral workers as 'normal' people by funeral directors (*Otago Daily Times* September 14 2002: A9; *Press* 7 September 2003: 1), it was also reiterated that the New Zealand way of death was 'different', with significantly less emphasis on 'the slickness and sales orientated nature of dealing with death' (*Evening Post* June 22, 2002: 25-26).

Females in the funeral industry

One final historical development relevant to personalisation is the changing role of women in the funeral industry. Numerous authors including Adams (1993), Cline (1996), Hera (1995), Howarth (1996, 1997a, 1997b), Rundblad (1995), and Strange (2002) have examined the historic role of women in the social management of death. These authors note that traditionally, women took control of the corpse and performed the tasks associated with laying out the body.[143] Rundblad (1995: 177) stipulates that the pre-market role of 'shrouding women' was a specialised duty and one that accorded these individuals social approval. This was clearly the situation in New Zealand, where women were intrinsically involved in caring for the dead during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a related area Hera (1995: 304) notes that laying out bodies before burial was a duty that became associated with district nurses, and that as recently as the 1960s, these nurses were called by families to help lay out the dead before funeral director involvement.[144]

As I have shown, however, the social management of death and disposal was gradually transformed over the twentieth century, and the communal site of death was superseded by the funeral home – integrally linked to scientific male rationality (Adams 1993: 165). Rundblad (1995: 189) argues that early North American funeral trade journals attempted to legitimise this transition and that the developing industry had to 'submerge the knowledges and stories of shrouding women to construct its own history, a history in which men played the prominent part'. Commenting on the professionalisation of the funeral director in England, Howarth (1997a: 131) correspondingly notes:

> The increasing number of women working outside the home; legislation which effectively barred midwives from laying out; and the exclusion by professionalising funeral directors of women from body-handling culminated in the transference of these tasks to the male expert.

While females played a subordinate role in the emerging funeral profession - often engaged in duties that reflected the role of women as domestic workers and out of public view (Griffin and Tobin 1997: 198; Howarth 1997a) - Pringle and Alley (1995:

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[143] See Adams (1993: 156-163) for a discussion of the duties and rituals involved in laying out the dead. Strange (2002: 152) emphasises that laying out the dead not only fulfilled a pragmatic function but played a significant role in the negotiation of grief and condolence.

[144] Hera (1995) critically examines the professionalisation of the funeral director and stipulates that funeral alternatives such as district nurses should be offered to bereaved families.

113) note that technological changes related to the treatment and transport of the body played a prominent role in transforming this stereotypically male domain. Participants emphasised that the last three decades had signalled a fundamental shift in the occupational involvement of women, and an increasing number of women started to enter the funeral directing field and the educational programs outlined above. Tresnor Fountain, for example, was the first woman to complete the Certificate Course at the New Zealand College of Funeral Service, becoming the first 'registered' female funeral director in New Zealand (*NZFD* December 1975: 2-3). Three years later the first fully qualified female embalmer appeared in the trade publication (*NZFD* September 1978: 3).

There was some initial resistance to this development from members of the public who were unfamiliar with the concept of a female funeral director. Male and female participants recounted incidents involving families who had reacted adversely to the arrival of a female funeral employee. One funeral director interviewed for a profile of work in New Zealand during the 1980s asserted: 'there's a stigma attached to women. People just won't accept them. I don't know why, it's just the way it is' (McLennan and Gilberston 1984: 190). Similarly, some female participants in this study noted that people were occasionally unwilling to accept the services of a female funeral director. Public attitudes had gradually changed, however, and participants emphasised the steadily increasing number of female funeral directors, as well as the establishment of exclusively female firms.[145] Participants also highlighted the presence of females in executive positions, both within the funeral director associations and the Embalmers Association of New Zealand.

The majority of participants felt that female involvement in funeral directing had positively altered their provision of funeral service and given client families more choice in regard to funeral options. While a few participants stipulated that this 'feminist element' (Tony) could be interpreted as an attempt to 'feminise' the occupation and 'soften' the public image of funeral directing (Howarth 1996: 58;

[145] Despite increasing public acceptance of female directors, however, it was interesting to note that several female participants felt that there was continuing opposition from within the (male dominated) industry itself. Resistance to female involvement in the industry was indeed evident in the responses of some male participants who felt that females were unsuited to the physical requirements and

Pringle and Alley 1995: 117), others noted that certain members of the public simply preferred to employ a female director. Louis stated: 'There are members of the public who would prefer to deal with a lady, just as there members of the public who would prefer to deal with a man. So by having female staff you can give that choice'.

This was particularly the case with older clients or families that had lost a young child. Richard, for example, explained: 'Quite often a family, particularly where a husband has died, the wife will feel more comfortable talking to a female and that's the perfect niche market for a female to be in'. Conversely, Margaret stated that widowers also requested female staff:

> There's men that come to us [and] their wives have died, because ah, they're, you know, maybe in their late seventies and perhaps never undressed in front of a man before. So therefore they like to have the thought that their wife is going to be looked after and dressed by women.

Both male and female participants perceived female funeral directors to be innately more adept at overseeing funeral 'details' (Pringle and Alley 1995: 119), as well as dealing with emotions related to grief. Clifford stated that attention to detail was particularly beneficial in the presentation of bodies: 'there is definitely an advantage in having a woman's touch, as far as presentation. I've worked with women. Ah, they can leave us for dead in a lot of presentation aspects'. As chapter six will elaborate, participants also stressed the link between femininity and emotionality (Lupton 1998: 107), asserting that females were apparently more effective in dealing with other people's emotions.

3.5 Summary

The developments outlined above indicate a significant shift in funeral director focus and provision of services during the twentieth century. Although many in the industry acknowledged the historical link between Britain and New Zealand, English funeral customs were increasingly represented as antiquated undertaking practices no longer appropriate for the New Zealand situation. In contrast, American funeral practices were initially portrayed as progressive and modern. The replacement of British hearses by American built vehicles after the mid 1920s, for example, intimated

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standards of funeral directing. These responses again highlight some of the tensions evident within the occupation and the contested discourses surrounding funeral service.

this transition (*NZFD* 1944: 54). A funeral director reporting on a visit to London in 1950 noted that the Rolls-Royce and Daimler hearses which were used by the English, were 'far too old fashioned for New Zealand trade' (*NZFD* December 1950: 145), and that the English still conducted funerals in 'the old way'. American style lawn cemeteries with inscribed, ground-level, bronze plates (barely hinting at the bodies buried beneath) were considered a significant advancement over the old style cemeteries that apparently repulsed New Zealand individuals (*NZFD* December 1939: 11; *NZFD* September 1948: 35). Other significant innovations borrowed from the United States included arterial embalming and specialised funeral premises that incorporated viewing rooms and coffin display areas (*NZFD* December 1944: 54; *NZFD* June 1950: 98).

The *NZFD* also made many references to professionalisation and the high standards of funeral service in the United States, reprinting many of the articles that appeared in American trade publications. Despite this emphasis, however, the precise definition and manifestation of professionalisation remained contested. Many in the funeral industry felt that the implementation of modern American innovations was incongruous with New Zealand attitudes and 'national temperament'. Attempts to distinguish New Zealand funeral traditions from American practices became particularly apparent after the exposés of Bowman (1959), Harmer (1963), and Mitford (1963), and more recently with the arrival of an American multinational. Americans tended to 'glamorise' funeral customs (*NZFD* June 1964: 8), with funeral directors utilising 'high pressure salesmanship' (*NZFD* December 1964: 51) to sell numerous products and services. While New Zealand funeral directors apparently provided many of the 'less bizarre' American funeral services, they also realised that New Zealanders were not obsessed with prestige or class (*NZFD* December 1964: 51). The 'trappings of death' that had directed attention away from death in the United States (Farrell 1980: 172), experienced only limited success in New Zealand. One editorial in 1965 (*NZFD* March 1965: 77) emphasised the 'vast' differences in funerary practice between New Zealand and the United States: 'Hygiene and commonsense presentation is one thing; the American gospel of death therapy is another'.

Instead, the New Zealand way of death was characterised by a 'realistic acceptance of the fact of death' (*NZFD* June 1970: 3). One report appearing in the *NZFD* claimed:

'Erecting expensive mausoleums, expensive graveyard furniture, extended pre- and post-burial rituals, are all offset by the essentially pragmatic or utilitarian approach of the average New Zealander' (*NZFD* March 1971: 73).

This attitude was reiterated by numerous participants in the study, and marks an important phase of funeral directing in New Zealand: a phase characterised by a new understanding of the psychology of death and a concomitant personalisation of funerary ritual. The current chapter has contextualised this recent development in the provision of funeral services. The following chapters reveal that although this development was often represented as a 'progressive' and 'natural' advancement, it simultaneously highlights some of the key features of late-modernity and underscores the socially constructed nature of grief and post-mortem practices.

Chapter Four

PRE-DISPOSAL PERSONALISATION

> [People are] knowing what they want but needing to be helped to discover *what* they want. They know what they want but they can't push the right buttons, they can't put their finger on it, and so listening to them, you're able to advise, give them options – "Is this the sort of thing you want?" – and they discover what they want (Thomas).

The most recent development in New Zealand post-mortem practices identified in the previous chapter was the increasing personalisation of funeral services. Participant responses and industry literature both emphasised the significance of this shift and juxtaposed 'impersonal', mid-twentieth century productions with the individualised, autonomous creations of the late twentieth century. As intimated in the introduction, however, this personalisation is far from a simple 'reversal' or rejection of earlier attitudes associated with medicalisation and rationality, and incorporates seemingly contradictory, modern and post-modern elements. As will become clear in the following discussion, the personalisation espoused by participants also demonstrated the normalising technologies integral to Foucault's (1983) concept of pastoral power. I will argue that funeral directors play a central role in defining the boundaries of 'acceptable' and 'appropriate' mortuary behaviour by accentuating the primacy of 'authenticity', 'dignity', and 'healthy grief' during funeral arrangements. This rhetoric also reveals that participants in this study were subject to a disciplinary gaze exercised through the funeral directors themselves. The following three chapters critically examine the shift to personalised funerals and temporally trace the involvement of the funeral director in the pre-disposal, disposal, and post-disposal phases. This chapter focuses on the necessarily extensive pre-disposal phase of funerary ritual in New Zealand.

Two seemingly disparate elements of pre-disposal that will be examined in detail here are the arrangement procedure and preparation of the corpse. Both these components of funeral service are pervaded by personalisation rhetoric, but a close scrutiny of these components reveals that the pre-disposal phase is clearly framed and constrained by particular constructs of 'grief', together with funeral director perceptions of ritual function. My discussion begins with an overview of the

arrangements interview and an exploration of the salient issues related to this process. The chapter then proceeds to examine the role of the funeral director and the perceived significance of contemporary funerary practices. This significance is clearly elucidated in the ensuing discussion of funeral 'standards' and, in contrast, 'deviant' funerary practices. The subsequent section examines the preparation of the corpse and the completion of the 'self-project' by funeral directors. As I illustrate, funeral director discourse surrounding body preparation (and its related practices) demonstrates normalising technologies; that is, the construction of 'normal' and 'deviant' funeral categories, delimited by funeral director expertise and experience. The practice of viewing the dead before disposal - particularly the revival of 'home viewing' – not only exemplifies the significance of the link between personalised corpse and personalised funeral arrangements, but also that personalisation rhetoric is inextricably linked to funeral director constructs of 'healthy grief' and societal 'needs'.

4.1 Funeral arrangements

This section of the chapter briefly describes the initiation of a pastoral relationship between the bereaved and the funeral director during the arrangement procedure. It then explores the funeral directors' perceptions of their role, and how these functionaries influence negotiations concerning funerary arrangements. Funeral directors are acutely aware of criticisms that focus on the disparate relationship between the funeral functionary and the bereaved, and in response emphasise client contribution to the funeral and disposal of the body. Although personal front (Goffman 1959) and spatial organisation were not insignificant in structuring this interaction (Bradbury 1999; Howarth 1996), the funeral directors in this project specifically emphasised the importance of family participation in selecting funeral 'options' and the extent of public funeral education. Interviews with funeral directors and participant observation, however, revealed, that these options were clearly bounded, with funeral directors particularly concerned about the maintenance of 'dignity' and the related features of funeral timing and funeral firm reputation. Participants were also concerned when families failed to recognise the expertise of the funeral director and demanded 'unrealistic' funeral requirements. As the examples below illustrate, these 'unrealistic' or 'undignified' demands were typically

incongruous with the specific 'experience' funeral directors were attempting to facilitate.

As discussed in the previous chapter, funeral directors typically present themselves as professional individuals. Funeral directors are particularly intent on fostering this image through 'appearance' and 'manner' (Goffman 1959) during their interaction with the bereaved. The funeral interview is often the first physical encounter between the funeral director and the bereaved, and participants noted the importance of establishing the professional status of the funeral functionary at this stage. Funeral directors emphasised, for example, that dress was an essential element of professional service.[146] The manner of the funeral director has to be consistent with appearance, and participants noted that confidence and control were crucial qualities of contemporary funeral directors. The bereaved often rely extensively on the advice of funeral directors, and in response to this, participants promoted themselves as experts possessing specialised knowledge. This persona not only reassures the bereaved about the funeral directors' proficiency (Howarth 1996: 116), but also promotes the desired professional status of the funeral director (see chapter three). In addition to this professional competence, however, funeral directors have to create a personalised experience for the bereaved. Participants noted that it was essential for funeral directors to individualise the interview and focus on the unique 'needs' of the deceased and bereaved. As Howarth (1996: 119) notes, therefore, the role of the funeral director oscillates between that of adviser and inquirer.

As Samuel emphasised, funeral directors had to be 'good listeners' despite the tedious disposition of this task:

> You go in to carry out an interview and I just tell any of my guys, don't ever put your own opinion across. You just sit there and you take the notes and listen to it. You'll hear the same

[146] An article in *The New Zealand Funeral Director* notes that professional dress was not only a mark of respect for families and the deceased, but a component of the funeral directors professional service fee (*NZFD* Spring 1998: 5-6). Participants observed that there had been a shift from 'overpowering' suits (Arnold) and the black attire of predecessors (Howarth 1996: 115), to a more 'corporate style uniform' (Nancy). One female participant noted that the personality of the funeral director was now more important and that there had been a move away from the stereotypical representation of the sombre funeral director: 'I don't like how we're being depicted as tall, dark men in grey suits and top hats and, you know, the morbid type person, almost hunched up...I mean, that's wrong, you know...you've got to have a personality' (Ruth).

> old story again about the doctor and how useless he was...you'll hear the same old story about the same old things.

The trope of repetition used by this participant clearly establishes the experience and expertise of the funeral director. Nigel similarly noted that an efficacious funeral director was able to 'evaluate' clients and recognise their requirements: 'the mark of a good funeral director is to be able to key into the people and know what they want...you have to assess people within five minutes of sitting down and arranging a funeral'. Funeral directors carefully monitored the progress of the arrangements interview and mobilised their personal experience to gauge the 'needs' of the family: 'As the arrangements go on, you build other impressions of what's going on, on how to help them' (Nigel). As discussed below, the arrangements interview was temporally constrained and required both a certain level of client 'honesty', together with a form of personal 'disclosure' to allow funeral directors to effectively facilitate funeral preparations.

The personalisation of the funeral interview also extended to the spatial organisation of the funeral establishment. Unlike authors such as Howarth (1996: 116-117) and Bradbury (1999: 74-75) who note that the formal setting of the funeral home increased the efficiency of the arrangements interview and enhanced the power relationships evident in the interaction between funeral director and client, participants in this study emphasised the significance of creating a setting that resembled a family home. Funeral directors were aware of the power differential between funeral directors and the bereaved and attempted to decrease this disparity by familiarising the environment and encouraging active participation in the construction of the funeral service. One funeral director explained how he had modelled his arrangements room on a family home:

> We wanted it to be the same as anybody else's home. If we went to see them in their own home we would probably be in their lounge, and if they come to see us here, they don't want to sit on the other side of a desk...I mean that's why we have a few toys here for kids (Brian).

In many situations, as the case study below illustrates, the funeral director also visited the bereaved and conducted the arrangements interview in their own home.

Case study

An important component of the funeral arrangement is the negotiation which takes place between the next-of-kin and funeral director. During this interview the funeral directors provide the bereaved with funeral 'options' and advice, while the bereaved select 'appropriate' funeral and disposal preferences. Factual information required for the registration of death is also elicited from the bereaved. The information provided by the next-of-kin then allows the funeral director to proceed with funeral preparations, the registration of death, and the disposal certification. While participants and industry literature emphasised the extent and complexity of this 'paperwork', it was actually the permutations of participant involvement and the personalisation of the funeral experience that received extended consideration by study participants.

The following arrangement interview was observed during participant research at one funeral home and highlights similar experiences encountered during the duration of my participant observation. The wife of the deceased had called the funeral director (Samuel) soon after her husband's (Bruce) death at the local hospital. Samuel had agreed to meet the new widow at her home early in the afternoon. Samuel informed me that the body was being held in the hospital mortuary and that we would collect it after the arrangements interview. On our way to the family home Samuel explained that the deceased had been diagnosed with an aggressive and terminal form of cancer a few months earlier. After accepting – in Samuel's terms - 'the reality of death', Bruce had perused the *Yellow Pages* in the local telephone directory and made inquiries about funeral cost. Samuel's funeral firm advertises cheaper (or what funeral directors frequently call 'cost conscious' or 'cost sensitive') funeral options and had provided Bruce with a quote for a 'standard' funeral. Despite Bruce's initial intentions to pre-arrange his entire funeral, he had managed to organise few other details before his death. These 'details' were now Samuel's primary concern; the following field notes describe the meeting with Bruce's family a few hours after death and illustrate the establishment of a pastoral relationship with the bereaved:

> Samuel asked me to drive him to the family home since his usual driver was away arranging another funeral. With some difficulty we found the address on the outskirts of a small provincial

town and were greeted by family and friends standing at the gates of the family home. We pulled into the gravel driveway in the funeral firms' removal car and introduced ourselves to the congregated group who ushered us into the old, wooden house. There we were introduced to Wendy (a family friend), the widow, and her eighteen year old daughter...A man and his teenage son were also present. Everybody stood around and I could not help but feel they simply wanted us to 'make everything better', to bring some order to an entirely disorderly situation. Samuel sat at a table and slowly opened his large arrangements folder. I took the only other available chair, close to the widow, and quietly observed the interview.

Samuel started the interview by methodically requesting statistical information - age of death, occupation, occupation of father - and it soon became clear that Wendy (the family friend) had taken charge of all the arrangements. She asked Samuel questions and made all the funeral decisions, despite attempts by Samuel to include the widow in the process. There was only intermittent input from the widow and her daughter, and the two spent most of the interview in silence...

The people in the room made comments about Bruce's personality and told brief stories about his life. Bruce had been a forest worker all his life, and loved the feel of 'tussock beneath his feet'. He loved his bush shirt, beer, and woollen hat. Three rather ordinary objects that now became potent representations of his life. The assembled all mentioned that Bruce had been a 'real fighter', 'courageous' until 'the very end'. The family had decided before our arrival that burial was appropriate for Bruce, given his love of rural life and his ancestral connections to the small rural town nearby. Bruce had explored some of the local cemeteries before his death, but had not purchased a plot. Samuel encouraged the widow to inspect some of the cemeteries, but she appeared very reluctant. After some persuasion she agreed to go to the council and select a 'quiet' plot for Bruce. She repeatedly stressed that the place of burial could not be one of the larger urban cemeteries, as this would not have suited her husband's rather solitary, rural lifestyle...

The decision had also been made to have a service at a local church, with a minister from the nearby city. This minister had been involved in other family funerals, although Wendy had been unable to contact him. Wendy explained that the family had decided that Saturday should be the 'funeral day' [It was presently Wednesday afternoon]. Friday would not give them enough time to make any appropriate arrangements and Monday would 'prolong' the situation. Monday was also Bruce's daughter's birthday.

Samuel discussed newspaper notices with the family. There had apparently been some uncertainty about what should happen. The widow had suggested a family notice, with every member of the family included, but Bruce's extended family had organised their own notice.[147] The Free Mason's Lodge, of which Bruce was a member, was to place a notice, as well as a number of other relatives. They wanted all the notices to go into the local newspaper as well as the larger city newspaper. The immediate family only wanted one notice in the paper on the day before the funeral. The mother and daughter decided on a short poem that was to accompany their funeral notice. The two had completed the poem before our arrival and the widow passed a handwritten copy of the short poem to Samuel, who glanced at it before carefully filing it in his folder.

Viewing was to be held at a garden chapel that Samuel sometimes used. Wendy stated that the viewing should take place on the afternoon before the funeral and the widow acquiesced. Samuel told them that he would meet them at the chapel on Friday. He suggested that it would be pertinent for the family to arrive before the scheduled viewing time and Wendy agreed. The family and Samuel briefly discussed the service sheet and agreed that 'Abide with Me', be included. They did not want to include 'Amazing Grace' because no one in the family could

[147] This was the only indication of family conflict at this stage. At the post-funeral function, Samuel discovered that there had been dissension between Bruce and his wife, and that he had asked her to 'leave' on numerous occasions. A few weeks before his death he had altered his will, leaving his wife her legal entitlement, and leaving a significant proportion of his estate to relatives. His wife was unaware of this development during the arrangement and funeral. These situations were frequently encountered by funeral directors and will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.

> 'sing that high'. It was also decided that a scan of a beer mug with a drinking poem be included on the back page of the service sheet and a ceramic beer mug be placed on the coffin. The wife and daughter also wanted Bruce's personalised car number plates put on or in the coffin. Wendy suggested, however, that this was not such a good idea, because it 'would make everyone cry'.
>
> The family had chosen clothes for Bruce to wear and gave these to me. Catering had already been arranged with a local church group (this non-profit group of 'retired ladies' was usually contracted to provide catering for local funerals). The family did not want to do any catering themselves. No one was sure of how many people would be at the funeral. They anticipated, however, that it would be a 'big funeral' because Bruce had spent his whole life in the area and was a well-known local. Samuel suggested that they print 300 service sheets and Wendy agreed. Flowers were to be arranged by the family in collaboration with the local florist. That ended the arrangement session, which had lasted approximately one hour. Everyone in the group thanked us and the family friend and his son escorted us to our vehicle.

The funeral options

The method of disposal, service location, officiant, placement of newspaper notices, service sheet, viewing, clothing for the deceased, flowers, and catering were all discussed in the arrangements interview above. The cost of the funeral and the selection of a coffin had also been discussed at an earlier stage.[148] Howarth (1996: 113) notes that the arrangements discussed and the responses elicited from the family not only enabled the funeral director to proceed with funeral arrangements, but symbolically transformed death: 'The arrangements interview can be interpreted as a mechanism for transforming death from an unmanageable spectre into a collection of material goods and services'. The progression evident in the above account emphasises this transformation, together with the carefully structured content of the arrangement interview. Participant responses also revealed that the interview was an encounter that specifically needed to be structured and controlled, and that unpredictable elements complicated the procedure:

> Where there are a lot of people [present at the interview], um you know, perhaps with the family in and out or whatever, that creates stress for me. Um, trying to keep people on track when you're sitting down arranging a funeral and you have lots of people in and out, um, those

[148] The case study examined here also alludes to pre-arrangement and pre-payment. While participants posited that these two options had become increasingly prevalent during the last decade, pre-payment and pre-arrangement continued to constitute a small overall percentage of funerals conducted. Participants emphasised that the increase in pre-paid funerals was not due to any enlightened 'acceptance of death', or change in societal attitudes, but primarily a response to governmental asset-testing policies and institutional care. Participants noted that pre-payment and pre-arrangement reduced the financial and emotional 'burden' of organising a funeral for the bereaved and gave the individual instigating any pre-planning a significant degree of input into the personalisation of their funeral service. This would legitimately personalise the service, give the pre-deceased a certain degree of control, and ultimately contribute positively to the grief of the bereaved. Like the funeral arrangements discussed in this chapter, however, pre-arranged funerals were delimited by funeral director concerns regarding 'dignity' and the perceived 'needs' of the bereaved.

> sorts of things can be stressful. We have a certain amount of time that we can do, make arrangements, and meet other deadlines that we have, so that can be stressful (Louis).

As this particular response indicates, therefore, the interchange between funeral directors and the bereaved is typically circumscribed by a number of factors and these factors form the basis of the following examination. What will also become evident in this examination is that funeral directors frequently asserted their role as ritual arbiters and post-mortem authorities, integrally involved in the creation of 'meaningful experiences':

> From the wide range of services we offer, you can see there are many options to consider when planning a funeral. While we attend to every detail, we ask for your input to ensure the funeral reflects both yours and the deceased's wishes. We encourage you to discuss with us any ideas you may have so the funeral can be a meaningful experience for all concerned (Anderson Funeral Services).

One of the first options discussed by many funeral directors and families during the arrangements interview is the method of disposal. Although donation of the body to science and burial at sea certainly constituted two disposal options, cremation and burial actually constitute the predominant methods of disposal in New Zealand. Cremation, in particular, has become increasingly significant in the last few decades and now accounts for more than seventy percent of total disposals in urban areas. Participants believed that people generally preferred this disposal method because of concerns related to cost and environmental impact, as well as the poorly maintained state of some city cemeteries. Some participants also noted that there was greater versatility with the disposal of ashes and that this option allowed for greater personalisation of the remains.[149] Funeral directors had no preferred method of disposal, and the method selected had minimal impact on the funeral services selected by the bereaved. Both disposal options, however, were subject to certain funeral director-defined standards of 'dignity', which will be discussed in more detail in the ensuing chapter sections.

The coffin or casket was another important option discussed during the arrangements interview. Most funeral directors included in this study had casket selection rooms displaying a range of coffins and caskets. Some participants noted, however, that families were frequently uncomfortable or unwilling to arrange the funeral at the

[149] Disposal and memorialisation will be discussed in chapters five and six respectively.

funeral establishment. Funeral directors, therefore, often conducted the arrangements interview at a family home. Most funeral directors produced photo albums that displayed the available caskets and coffins. Some participants remarked that the range of funeral merchandise had increased in recent years, and that some families expended more time and effort in the selection process. Although many participants noted that the casket selection by the bereaved remained relatively predictable, the contemporary range of coffins and caskets was emphasised by participants:

> We're carrying a far greater range of caskets than we've ever carried before and urns. It's about choice today, isn't it? Giving people choice. Years ago - that's the biggest difference that I've really noticed - that people didn't have as much choice when I started 20 years ago (Timothy).

Flower arrangements, like the method of disposal and casket, could be personalised: funeral directors typically provided a range of suggestions to families during the interview. Participants noted that floral arrangements were important for the creation of memories and the expression of individuality, and some provided examples of unique arrangements that reflected the life of the deceased individual:

> I've had several occasions where a floral spray has not been appropriate and they've had a spray made of vegetables, because you know, the guy was a good gardener. And another occasion where it was flora from the bush, you know, all the ferns and grasses and things like that (Nancy).

Other participants asserted that clients were now more careful in their selection of flowers and that families often wanted to arrange their own flowers in collaboration with local florists. A number of funeral directors also noted that there had been a general decline in the number of floral tributes and that more people were offering friends and relatives the opportunity to donate money to a relevant charity. In many cases these charities were closely associated with the death of an individual (such as hospice, the Cancer Society, or the Heart Foundation) but an increasing number were also associated with hobbies or life-time interests of the deceased.

Service location, the type of service, and time of the funeral were also important considerations for the bereaved. Although an increasing number of funeral directors offered funeral chapels - and participants often emphasised the convenience of the single service funeral - funerals could be conducted in churches, chapels, or alternative locations such as public halls, sports clubs, graveside, or outdoor venues.

Participants emphasised that these arrangements not only needed to reflect the personality of the deceased but the practical needs of the mourners.

The type of funeral service was also discussed. Many funeral directors noted that most clients preferred to advertise the funeral publicly in local newspapers, while a smaller number preferred the private funeral, which typically involved only a select group of invited individuals. In the absence of a body (or by the specific request of the family or the deceased), a memorial service was sometimes held. An increasing trend in some areas was direct disposal, characterised by the absence of any formal funeral ceremony. While such alternatives have been the subject of significant media attention, funeral directors emphasised that such 'options' were often 'impractical' and failed to realise the needs of the bereaved and the ritual standards promoted by funeral directors. These concerns will be expounded in the ensuing discussion.

The funeral usually followed three or four days after death and most funeral directors emphasised that families could arrange a funeral time that suited their particular needs. Participants emphasised that many mourners were restricted by time and work commitments and that employers were sometimes reluctant to allow employees to attend funerals: 'We've got this terrible pattern of life where we're trying to fit things in all the time and certainly employers don't like you taking off three days to go to funerals - to take an afternoon off is a major thing really' (Samuel). Some participants offered evening and weekend funeral services and many funeral directors believed that these services would become more prevalent in future years.

The officiant was an individual that satisfied the perceived 'needs' of the family and the 'character' of the deceased: participants specifically stated that there was presently a diverse range of officiants in most urban areas. The majority of funeral directors emphasised that their role did not encompass the composition or content of the funeral ceremony. Although friends or family members occasionally conducted the ceremony, secular celebrants or clergy were usually assigned this responsibility. Funeral directors were ordinarily able to organise an officiant, and in many cases the bereaved relied exclusively on this recommendation. The contribution of other speakers was also discussed, with friends and relatives often asked to provide tributes or memories of the deceased. Most funeral directors noted that the number of

participants in the funeral service had increased significantly in the last two decades. The funeral service itself is examined in detail in chapter five.

Although the general format and content of the service were usually discussed with the officiant, families often discussed specific requests with the funeral director. The musical selection was one component of the funeral that had changed significantly in recent years. While most participants continued to offer the services of an organist, more families also chose music that 'reflected' attributes of the deceased individual. This individualised funerary development was fervently encouraged by funeral director participants. These participants typically stated that there was a trend away from singing hymns to listening to recorded music, and that people also invested more time in arranging a personalised musical selection. A similar investment of time was made with poems and readings, which often reflected the life and personality of the deceased.

The service sheet was another component of the funeral that has become increasingly significant in recent years. These service sheets usually contained information pertaining to the organisation of the funeral service, including the words to any hymns or readings, names of the pallbearers, readers, officiants, funeral director, together with details about the burial or cremation, and information regarding the reception. Participants noted that the service sheet had increasingly become a form of memorial or 'keepsake' (Henry), and that technology had also transformed the quality of the production: 'it's almost taken for granted that we will provide an order-of-service, almost for every funeral, and now, almost invariably, with...coloured printing and coloured photograph of the deceased person on the cover' (Charles).

Memorial registers or tribute books that mourners signed before or after the funeral service were another option discussed during the interview. Most participants noted that these had become the 'accepted' practice at funerals, and that people treated these books as a form of memorial. Funeral directors such as Nancy further observed that these memorial books were a tangible 'memory' that people often 'reflected on' in future years.

Another area of mourner participation frequently noted by participants was the identity of the pallbearers. One funeral director observed that this practice had changed significantly in his lifetime:

> Pallbearers were always friends and acquaintances and clubs...they were never family. The change...that I've noticed greatly is the change from having clubs and organisations being the bearer group, to family - almost at any cost - being the bearer group, and very grudgingly giving up their places (Roger).

Placement of newspaper notices was also discussed during the arrangements interview. The purpose of these notices was to inform friends and family about the death of an individual, and outline funeral details. As one establishment noted, newspaper notices also reduced the possibility 'of an embarrassing encounter with an uninformed friend or neighbour' (Dave McCormick Funerals). Most funeral establishments included in this study provided templates for the bereaved and assisted individuals in composing a 'personalised' notice, which was then placed in local, national, and/or international newspapers.

The preparation of the deceased was briefly discussed with the family. Funeral directors often stressed the significance of sanitation, preservation, and presentation, and euphemistically described embalming or 'hygienic treatment' procedures. The bereaved were usually given the opportunity of providing clothing for the deceased, and families occasionally sought involvement in the dressing of the body. Viewing was discussed in more detail, with most participants advocating the benefits of this practice when family members expressed any reservation. Most funeral establishments offered viewing facilities, although an increasing number of families took the body home before the funeral service.

Refreshments after the funeral were also a common occurrence and most funeral establishments offered reception lounges. Funeral directors, such as Jacob, asserted that these gatherings before or after disposal were particularly convenient for the family:

> It's very, very rare for us to have a funeral here [the funeral establishment] and not have catering afterwards...I think the reason behind that is, people are wanting a one-stop shop facility. They don't want to be bothered with a cup of tea, or worried about making sandwiches.

Participants often noted that the arrangement of funeral 'details' - such as catering - interfered with the 'grieving process' and that few families wanted to assume this responsibility themselves. A few funeral firms organised their own catering but a number contracted these services to professional catering companies. Some smaller funeral businesses, particularly those in rural areas, did not have reception lounges. The funeral directors in these areas usually hired public halls or other venues available for the congregation of mourners, and arranged 'ladies' groups' affiliated with various religious denominations to organise catering.

Additional details that were occasionally discussed during the interview included video or audio recording of the service; photo or memory boards to be displayed at the funeral; and personalised rituals such the placement of objects or flowers on the casket. All of these options were encouraged by the funeral directors and will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Some establishments in this study implemented client service agreements that were signed at the time of the initiation of arrangements by an individual who claimed responsibility for the funeral arrangements. Funeral cost, however, was one element of the arrangement interview characterised by a significant degree of funeral director ambivalence. While acknowledging the relevance of cost and the need for transparency, funeral directors also indicated that any fixation on financial factors was misguided and unnecessary. Funeral directors in this study observed that funeral cost had become a significant consumer concern, and many commented that families were more critical of the funeral directors' service fees.[150] Participants similarly often

[150] A *Consumers' Institute* survey (2002) of 78 funeral directors in New Zealand revealed that the average price for a funeral, including burial, was $5,165, while cremation was $4,590 (*Consumer* April 2002: 17). Funeral directors in this study acknowledged that funerals were often expensive but emphasised that there were three main components of the funeral fee. The first two components of the funeral cost included the coffin and funeral disbursements. Coffin prices ranged from a few hundred dollars for a cremation liner, to $1000 or more for a standard veneered coffin. Solid timber coffins and American style 'couch' caskets were also offered by most funeral directors and were usually available from $2000 - $3000. Disbursements represent payments made on behalf of the family by the funeral director and include flowers, celebrant and clergy fees, gratuities, medical fees, newspaper notices, purchase of cemetery plot from the local council, catering, and cremation costs. My research revealed that these costs ranged from a few hundred dollars to several thousand, depending on the options selected by the family. The last component was the professional service fee. This fee varied from approximately $800 for limited professional service, to over $3000 for more complex funeral arrangements. The average funeral director's fee was $2050, with significant variation between rural and urban areas (*Consumer* April 2002: 17). The fee included service and advice, the provision of funeral premises, liaison with local council, florist, minister or celebrant, as well as the arranging and

commented that people had generally become more price conscious and were expecting more services for their money. One factor that stimulated these expectations was education and transparency provided by funeral directors:

> It's like anything, people are becoming more educated. I mean, it's not just the question of money, but what they expect for their money. These days, with open homes for funerals, people can have a look around. There's a lot more competition, so people can ring up and start asking questions about embalming, about transfer fees, what does your professional service fee include (Richard).

> You have to be sort of price conscious actually. We often get calls from people wanting to know the price of the funeral and if they ring us, no doubt they ring everybody else too, and they'll probably go for the cheapest. So you have to sort of be conscious of your price, but by the same token you have to also be aware that you're in business to make a profit (Colin).

A few funeral directors found this focus on price frustrating, particularly when the bereaved perceived there to be little inherent value in the funeral, and their primary motivation in securing low cost disposal was 'selfish' economic interest:

> It agitates me quite often that people are only interested in getting the cheapest funeral they can and most times they don't even have to pay for it. All they're concerned about is that the estate might not leave them anything if the funeral's a bit expensive (Charles).

Participants emphasised, however, that most people were not influenced exclusively by price, and that the situation in New Zealand was unlike that described by Australian funeral directors, who found that they were receiving 'daily calls in regard to funeral cost' (Marcus): 'You don't tend to find that people want to question prices and things too much. I think if the perception is that they're getting value for money, they'll tend to be quite happy with the price' (Louis).

Funeral directors described the funeral expenditure of New Zealand consumers as 'sensible', with participants such as Clifford noting that New Zealanders were 'not ridiculous when it comes to consuming funeral services...they don't often let their hearts rule their wallet, they'll be sensible'. Funeral directors also observed that people were more 'open' and 'honest' about their financial resources and the funeral services they could afford. It was important for numerous participants that clients disclose the extent of their financial resources at an early stage in the arrangements process. Chris, for example, felt that clients were: 'prepared to ask how much a funeral will cost. The cost of a funeral is a threat to their standard of living later on,

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directing of the funeral. Embalming and transport of the body were also included, as well as company overheads, including vehicles, staff salaries, and the provision of twenty-four hour funeral service.

and they are now becoming more open'. This 'honesty' also allowed the funeral director to help their clients manage funeral expenses:

> But now, they're not worried what their next-door-neighbour thinks and their friends. They're doing what they want and what's best for them. So they're cutting down on the casket in a lot of cases. They can cut down on the flowers, notices in the paper, and they're more open with you...the ones that are honest with you, we can help them to make the funeral cheaper (Robert).

This emphasis on 'honesty' was a recurring theme in discussions with funeral directors and also applied to tributes and other funeral arrangements discussed in chapter five. Participants also noted that prudent funeral preparations were not necessarily correlated with low socio-economic status. In fact, it was often professionals who were concerned about funeral costs and requested cheaper funeral options:

> I found over the years, often solicitors and people who have the money - they have money because they're prudent with their investment - they don't overly spend. It's the poor old dustman's wife. She wants to give dad a decent send off because he's never had anything in his life (Tony).

Funeral directors were very aware of the historic criticisms associated with the cost of funerals, the vulnerability of the bereaved, and the perceived profits generated from the disposal of the dead (for example Bowman 1959; Harmer 1963, Miford 1963, 1998). In her study of funeral arrangements in the United States, for instance, Charmaz (1980: 194-199) found that families infrequently investigated arrangements and costs, had an impaired ability to negotiate because of their emotional reaction to loss, and possessed limited information about dealing with a particular funeral director. These three factors contributed to the disparate interaction between the funeral director and the bereaved, and allowed funeral directors to maximise monetary and efficiency objectives.[151] New Zealand funeral directors included in the current study acknowledged the importance of these objectives, but also attempted to minimise the manifest power differential between funeral directors and the bereaved.

In response to consumer concerns about cost and the sensitive status of the bereaved, participants stated that there was presently more information available to consumers. Some funeral directors, for example, offered voluntary funeral quotations and price

lists that described the various funeral charges. While a few participants made these lists available to the public, a significant number of establishments were reluctant to provide telephone quotes or detailed price information, citing the 'diversity' of options available. One participant stated that his firm did not provide price lists because there were too many variations (Peter), while another asserted that there were simply 'too many choices', and that it was inappropriate to overwhelm people with 'those sorts of things' at a time of death (Margaret). Funeral directors therefore continued to assert a significant degree of control over the dissemination of information related to funeral costs, and there also appeared to be a significant degree of reluctance to 'reduce' the funeral service to an exclusively economic issue.

Funeral directors also emphasised that they provided families with financial advice, locating alternative sources of financial aid if applicable. Funeral directors often alerted families to funeral grants available from Work and Income New Zealand, for example, for those unable to pay the full cost of the funeral. The Accident Compensation Corporation also provided a funeral grant for deaths that resulted from accidents or medical misadventure, and Returned Services Grants were available for those who had served in the military.

Similarly, a number of funeral directors involved in this research also provided 'basic' or 'modest' service alternatives that included a package of pre-set options at a fixed price. Unlike Howarth (1996: 144) who discovered a certain degree of funeral director opposition to these 'simple' alternatives[152], New Zealand funeral directors noted that these alternatives could still be personalised. Some participants asserted that funerals were about equality, and that it was the funeral director's task to provide a funeral irrespective of financial circumstances:

> We believe that the pauper has just as much right to ride in our hearse...as does the person who is prepared to pay $10,000 for their funeral. So we are into equality. The only difference, perhaps, is the type of casket. We will, number one, always recognise dignity first. Now, if a family wants to cut costs, we recommend that the funeral is not delayed any longer than it has to be, so therefore the hygienic services perhaps are minimal...the type of casket would still be fully

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[151] Despite the emphasis on efficiency, Charmaz (1980: 196) notes that some funeral directors during this period were beginning to offer innovative funeral options that accommodated clientele involvement and individualised funeral components that reflected the lives of the bereaved.

[152] Howarth (1996: 143) found during her research in London that the simple or basic funeral contradicted all the funeral director's attempts to 'present the service and the funeral as one which is unique to the individual and 'tailor-made' to their requirements'.

> lined, the same as we would offer to the top end of the clientele market. There would be similar fittings and we recommend cremation...as being the cheaper option to burial (Richard).

Another funeral director stated that everyone was entitled to dignity and respect, 'regardless of their status in life' (*Press* 26 February 2003: 16). It was the funeral director's 'pastoral responsibility', therefore, to provide 'dignified' funerals for all socio-economic groups.

Funeral directors also encouraged 'detached' friends or relatives to attend the arrangements interview with the bereaved to ensure that 'rational' decisions were made in regard to funeral expenditure: 'If the person arranging the funeral is quite distressed...we like for them to bring a very close friend who's detached enough to be still be thinking straight, but knows the person well enough to know what the husband or wife would want' (David). Participants also noted that such rational decisions were ultimately important for the funeral establishment, as ('irrational') overspending would predictably lead to unpaid accounts and time-consuming debt collection,[153] detrimentally impacting the reputation of the funeral firm (Charmaz 1980; Howarth 1996: 127).

Many of the larger funeral firms included in this study also noted that lower-cost funeral providers had emerged in recent years, catering to low-income families in urban areas. Despite disapproving of the practices of these firms (see chapter three), participants in FDANZ firms stated that these low-cost funeral firms dealt with families that were 'extremely demanding' but frequently refused to pay final accounts (Ivan).

As elucidated in the previous chapter, funeral directors were also careful to minimise the extent of funeral profits and direct discussion to the personal commitment of the funeral specialist. Participants stressed, for example, that few people appreciated the range of tasks and difficulties encountered in arranging a funeral:

> I think some people have no real appreciation of what the job involves and they expect that it's a very cruisey, well paid job...I think a lot of them see what they see at a funeral, which is somebody standing...discreetly at the back, and you know, they're driving away in the hearse - it can't be too hard! They don't see the calls at 4.00am. They don't see the hours at night or at the

[153] Bradbury (1999: 74) similarly found that it was not in the funeral director's interest to encourage clients to 'overextend' themselves financially, and that every funeral parlour had records of bad debt.

> weekend. They don't have any comprehension about the mundane tasks...washing the hearse and trimming the caskets, and some of them of course, don't want to know about what's going on in the mortuary (Tony).

As noted in chapter three, therefore, funeral directors were careful to define the altruistic element of their services and the plethora of philanthropic duties accompanying their pursuit of professionalism. Funeral directors also emphasised that funeral establishments were businesses that had to produce a profit to survive. Participants frequently underscored the significant overhead expenses associated with managing a quality funeral establishment:

> People think that we get heaps of money and it's a rip-off situation, but it's not...they get good value for money. But it's like everything else; if you put up premises this size and you have top quality vehicles, and you have top quality staff, it costs money to run it. So like any other business, it's got to be cost-effective (Nigel).

Although some funeral directors were financially successful, participants noted that few people recognised the dedication or commitment of these individuals. While pronounced display of material wealth might be considered a sign of success in other occupations, funeral directors were very vigilant about displaying any such discernable signs of wealth and similarly careful to avoid any conspicuous connection between financial success and funerals. Participants in this study carefully monitored the public behaviour of other funeral directors and derided those individuals who transgressed the acceptable boundaries. Samuel, for example, provided an example of a fellow funeral director who 'inappropriately' vaunted his wealth, and, in his view, proliferated the negative public image associated with funeral directors:

> There's old Bob and he drives around in a big Mercedes. He did an arrangement in ____, in the state housing area, and he turns up in his Mercedes and I thought, ah God, we get a bad enough name - people saying we're rogues and bloody vultures, you know...to show money off *like that* in an area *like that*...I thought, he's got the message wrong there.

What is particularly interesting about this case of impression management is that it is incongruous with the emphasis on financial 'honesty' and 'disclosure' funeral directors expected from client families. What this indicates is that not all aspects of funeral service were subject to the same level of 'demystification' and transparency, and that funeral directors carefully avoided any detailed discussion of funerary elements that detracted from the experience they were attempting to orchestrate. This selective demystification is particularly evident in the practice of embalming discussed in the second part of this chapter. As the following sections reveal, a

primary focus on cost was also incongruous with funeral director defined concepts of 'dignity'.

The pastoral role of the funeral director

As I have illustrated, funeral directors clearly saw themselves as protectors of the bereaved and providers of information and service. Both participants and industry literature emphasised the need to support the bereaved, while simultaneously empowering individuals with the funeral options to construct a 'meaningful' funeral ceremony. Both sources used the language of altruism (Howarth 1996: 97) and repeatedly reiterated their focus on care, compassion, and the grief of survivors. While acknowledging the vulnerable state of the bereaved, participants and industry literature also emphasised the dependability of the funeral director and the expertise of this funeral functionary.

The FDANZ, for instance, describes the funeral director as a caring professional who provides advice and support:

> The role of your funeral director is one of professional service. From the moment of death in home or hospital, in city or country, the funeral director is able to help and be entrusted with all the arrangements...the funeral director is the person who in conjunction with other family members, doctors and clergy, helps you to make the arrangements at a very trying time. The funeral director is also a caring, compassionate person from whom people derive great support (*FDANZ* no date: 'What you need to know about funerals').

Literature produced by the funeral establishments emphasised similar themes, underlining the importance of guidance, support, and informed choice, together with the broader societal role of the funeral director:

> Our role is varied and vast. Our main concern is with assisting a family through the funeral process – from the time of death to the funeral service and beyond...guidance and support are key roles we perform (Newman Funeral Home).

> We at Lakeside Funeral Home wish to set about demystifying the New Zealand system, and assist both those who are faced with a death, and those who are wishing to make future arrangements for themselves, make informed and appropriate choices (Lakeview Funeral Home).

This literature also explains the importance of relinquishing control and entrusting the funeral arrangements to the funeral professional:

> After the death of a family member or close friend, it is important to know that you can depend on professional people to make all the arrangements that will ensure the funeral flows smoothly. Johnson Funeral Home funeral directors will liase with clergy, celebrants, doctors, hospitals,

> government departments, coroners, and other officials, crematoriums and cemetery authorities so that you don't have to worry (Johnson Funeral Home).
>
> Regardless of the circumstances at the time of death, it is important that you contact us as soon as possible. We provide twenty-four hours a day service all year around. Once the cause of death has been confirmed we can begin making the funeral arrangements relieving you of the responsibility (Anderson Funeral Services).

Most participants described the role of the funeral director as arranging a funeral in accordance with the wishes of the family, and providing options and support that enable the bereaved to grieve in a 'natural' and 'healthy' way. As noted in chapter three and intimated in the above discussion, the contemporary role of the funeral director was clearly also a pastoral one. Robert, for example, felt that funeral directors were there to help the bereaved with their grieving: 'You're a support link for them, helping them in their time of need'. Ian similarly stressed that funeral directing was not just a 'logistical function', but a pastoral role that involved 'looking after people'. Brian likewise felt that the most significant role of the funeral director was: 'helping people through their different stages of grief...if you can't provide that, you're not doing your job properly'. Funeral directors such as Arnold felt their role was specifically to make people 'comfortable', and a difficult situation as 'easy as possible'. Funeral director participants also stressed that changing societal factors had evoked important funeral industry responses, and that their particular position allowed them to effectively gauge these changes. Participants stipulated, for example, that funeral directors frequently encountered family feuds and friction, and that a salient facet of contemporary funeral service included the temporary reconciliation of antagonistic factions:

> Generally there's an attitude out there and at the moment we are, I see there are a lot of unhappy people. I mean, we tend to find that there are more screwed up families that we're dealing with now, than what we were ten years ago. You know, where there are lots of marriage break-ups and real relationship difficulties and so a lot more time is spent dealing with those sorts of issues and helping families reconcile differences and come together at a service of their mother or their father (John).

Unlike the British funeral industry described by Naylor (1989: 355), which had done little to reduce the widespread suspicion that funeral directors perpetuated the isolation and docility of the bereaved, participants in the current study consistently acknowledged the influence and control of the client and emphasised the (ostensibly) subordinate status of the funeral director. Many participants also contrasted current

funerary practices with those of earlier decades, and considered the shifts that conferred control to the client:

> Today we don't dictate to people, people tell us what they want and we supply the service for them and that's really a major difference in the last 20 years. Consequently people are doing more of what they require, it's giving people more options (Nigel).

The provision of funeral options was also frequently discussed and one participant stated that the role of the funeral director was essentially a 'director of information'. Margaret stated that a key role of the funeral functionary was not only to supply the options demanded by the bereaved, but also to suggest and promote the options available. Funeral directors in the past, according to this participant, did not provide options and 'nobody knew' they existed. Funeral directors were therefore at least partially responsible for stimulating the current demand of funeral options. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, funeral directors frequently represented themselves as experts attuned to the pastoral needs of the bereaved; as Thomas noted, the bereaved:

> Needed to be helped to discover *what* they want. They know what they want but they can't push the right buttons, they can't put their finger on it, and so listening to them, you're able to advise, give them options – "Is this the sort of thing you want?" – and they discover what they want.

While contemporary New Zealand funeral directors stressed the importance of mourner involvement and client autonomy, they also encountered a significant degree of client passivity (Charmaz 1980, Howarth 1996; Naylor 1989). A number of participants stated that many families did not know what to do when confronted with a death and that the bereaved were often content with surrendering control to the funeral director. Nathan, for example, emphasised that most families wanted him to 'take care of everything', while John similarly stated that 'people want somebody to take control and ensure that everything is done right'. David stated that many families also acknowledged the expertise of the funeral director and relied on this individual to organise an 'appropriate' funeral: 'The families are really very dependent on you, as someone who knows what has to be done, and they put a lot of trust in you to go ahead and do what has to be done'. This participant also noted that families were frequently unaware of the available options and that the funeral director had to be careful to recognise the power differential between the funeral functionary and the bereaved: 'It's very easy to take control over a situation when someone contacts you and wants you to be their funeral director, you're the

professional, you're the person that knows all' (David). These statements highlight the image of funeral directors as professionals with an important pastoral role frequently proffered by participants in research interviews.

Clients who had not previously been involved in organising a funeral were particularly intent on entrusting the task of organising a 'normal' or 'average' funeral to the funeral director. Participants, however, emphasised that there was no such thing as a 'normal' or 'average' funeral, and that it was their duty to determine the specific needs of the family. Simon stated: 'People probably don't really know what they want, but they want more and more and more...Some people just want to do what everyone else does. Well, you can't sort of quite do that these days'. Anthony noted that he was often instructed to organise an 'uncomplicated' funeral: 'the instruction could simply be, "look we just want something very simple and straightforward, just an average service". But then we have to go through and then discuss with them, well, what is average?' Margaret similarly recalled that she was often asked for 'normal' funerals but stated that 'there is no normal' anymore. In striking contrast to these comments, however, as the following sections and ensuing chapter highlight, funeral director rhetoric clearly defined the boundaries of 'normal' and 'deviant' funerary practices.

The limits of personalisation

Most funeral directors contended that contemporary funerals were characterised by a higher level of family participation. Although participants believed that there were aspects of a funeral that 'people don't want to do themselves' (Clifford), most funeral directors reported family involvement in a number of areas. Some funeral directors regarded this involvement and personalisation as a particular form of Do-It-Yourself (DIY). Unlike the DIY funerals that excluded funeral director participation, however, these funerals specifically emphasised the 'collaborative' involvement of the bereaved and the funeral director:

> People choose to do some parts themselves and that Do-It-Yourself is the trend that we're going to follow. People want more and more control and it doesn't mean that...they are doing it because of the cost motivation, they just want to be participating (Geoffrey).

> We've got a man at the moment who is terminally ill...This man in particular, he wants to build his own casket, so we're helping him, helping him as far as advice on the specifications. We've shown him what a casket looks like and provided him with some of the hardware,

> and him and his son are building that - their own casket. It's quite a nice thing in a way, natural thing. But they're people that sort of do that...but that's not a cost generated thing, that's just because that's what him and his son want to do (Clifford).

Funeral directors like Geoffrey and Clifford felt that this should be a trend encouraged by the funeral industry because it had minimal affect on funeral profits and ensured greater client satisfaction, while countering criticisms of funeral director control. As the following section will illustrate, however, such client contribution was only encouraged if it conformed to funeral director concepts of dignity and did not challenge the post-mortem experiences emphasised by participants.

Although many participants actively encouraged the involvement of family and friends, and some referred to this involvement as a new style of DIY, the following discussion highlights the bounded nature of this participation and the highly influential role of the funeral director. DIY funerals that excluded the services of a funeral director were discussed with all the participants in this project. None of these participants saw the DIY 'movement' as a serious threat to New Zealand funeral directors, while most perceived there to be few people who were willing or able to organise a funeral without their services.

Although few participants were categorically opposed to the concept, most felt that DIY funerals were emotionally difficult and inconvenient for the bereaved:

> There's a lot of talk about it [DIY]. But when it comes to the reality...people's emotions change. You know, you've got no idea how you're going to handle, for example, your own parent's funeral or a close friend's funeral...there are a lot of emotions flying around in a person's head when a loved one dies, so they tend to leave it to the professionals (Richard).

> I don't think they emotionally can handle it...I think they still need to have somebody there (Dennis).

As well as being emotionally difficult, funerals were often logistically challenging, and presented the organiser with a range of practical problems. Some participants noted that people who attempted to arrange funerals without the services of a funeral functionary failed to recognise these factors and underestimated the expertise of the funeral director. Participants were particularly frustrated with families who attempted to organise a funeral themselves but gradually relinquished control to the funeral director. Gregory, for example, observed that some people endeavoured to exclude the funeral director but promptly discovered that organising a funeral was

complicated, and eventually sought the help of the funeral director. Anthony similarly noted that people who attempted to organise the disposal of their friend or relative were often: 'not quite aware of what they're getting into and...it isn't too long before they realise that there's actually a good reason why funeral directors exist'. Dennis provided a specific example of such a case:

> They [the family] wanted to bring him in a casket and they were going to do everything from there on...within 24 hours of the actual funeral time they wanted us involved more and more and more, and we ended up doing the whole thing.

As well as highlighting the difficulties of arranging a funeral, however, the comments made by funeral directors also emphasise the central role of this functionary and the extent of responsibilities assumed by funeral directors[154]:

> The more they do and the less we do, the less we charge. But then they ring up and say, 'Ah, listen, ah the hospital won't release the body to us. We need you to go and get the body'. Yeah, ok, so we go and do that. And they say, 'Now , we're not going to have the funeral for four days, what's going to happen to mum?' So we do the embalming...And the newspaper won't put a notice in, it's got to go through [the funeral director] and ah they say, 'Ah, look we're not sure about all the forms for the cemetery, can you help?' I say to people, 'Look, when you need a plumber, you get a plumber. When you need a lawyer you go to a lawyer. When you need a funeral director, go to your funeral director' (Henry).

While nearly all the New Zealand participants encouraged and promoted family participation and the selection of funeral 'options', there were implicit limits to what was 'acceptable' and 'appropriate': limits closely linked to constructs of 'dignity' and 'healthy grief'.[155] The FDANZ Code of Ethics alludes to such limits when it states members of the Association were committed to: 'Preserve *within the bounds of dignity and good taste, and practicability* the right of personal choice, decision-making for the families they serve, and due regard for the ethnic origin and spiritual beliefs of the deceased person' (emphasis added).

Participants and industry literature emphasised that it was important to make the 'right' choices and that these choices had profound and long-term consequences. Funeral service literature remarked that there were no rehearsals and there was only *one* chance to get it 'right':

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[154] Howarth (1996: 116) refers to this as a 'closed system'.

[155] As the ensuing discussion elucidates, there are some interesting parallels between the concept of 'dignity' used by funeral directors and medical specialists (see, for example, Chochinov et al. 2002 and Chochinov 2004). This concept is a contested one in medicine with one medical ethicist recently stating that 'dignity' is simply a restatement of other notions or a mere slogan and, as such, a useless concept in medical ethics (Macklin 2003).

> Through the funeral, the bereaved take that firm, first step toward adjusting to their loss. When a funeral service is curtailed either by choice or accident, the grieving person tends to become withdrawn...the decisions you make will affect you and your family for the rest of your lives (Samuel Butler Funeral Home).

Nathan, for example, remarked that people were now 'more aware of what they *can and cannot* do' (emphasis added), but many funeral directors stated that clients continued to entertain 'unrealistic' or 'impractical' funeral requests. One funeral home noted in its advertising brochure that part of the service provided by the establishment was 'an experienced opinion on the *practicalities of ideas* families put forward' (Roberston Funeral Home, emphasis added). According to this publication, an important element of funeral director service was to evaluate and assess the ideas of the bereaved by a funeral director-determined measure of 'practicality'. Louis stated that there were often times when client requests were 'simply not practical', while Geoffrey likewise asserted that it was important for the funeral director to explain to the family that some options were 'simply unrealistic'. John remarked that people were demanding but that they did not 'understand the issues': 'they demand something and it's either unrealistic or it would be better if they did it in a different way'. Participants were also frustrated by advice or information that they considered frivolous and incongruous with the dignified quality of the services they were attempting to create:

> They'll joke about it [the funeral] and comment but it's, it's silly comments. Classic example would be if people say, "Put me in plastic bag or rubbish bag or put a sticker on my forehead on a Monday with the rubbish collector". That's a stupid comment to make to the family, yet when he does eventually die, that's all the family can remember – "Ah dad said he just wanted a cardboard box". They're giving unwise advice instead of serious advice, but that's human nature you know (Clifford).

This quote illustrates that there are clear limitations to the personalisation of death and that certain practices were simply too 'undignified' and deviant to be considered realistic funeral options by funeral directors.

While personalisation was paramount and identified by participants as one of the salient elements of contemporary mortuary practices, this feature of New Zealand funerals was nevertheless bounded by concepts of 'dignity' and 'honesty', that applied not only to the ideas of the bereaved but the funeral directors themselves.

Both participants themselves and industry literature indicated that it was important to make choices that reflected the personality of the deceased, and that these choices were 'relevant' to the life of the deceased:

> We believe that a funeral should be arranged to reflect the personality of the deceased and we encourage the family to participate along with our assistance in order to accomplish this in a meaningful way (Hanson Funeral Home).

> As we are all unique and individual, a funeral should reflect the character and attributes of the person who has died. There are many ways in which a funeral service can be made more typical and we are here to try and help you create a memorable tribute to the one you love (Newman Funeral Home).

The 'narrative' or biography of the deceased was central to funeral arrangements: funeral directors consistently stressed the significance of organising a funeral that was 'honest' and accurately represented the life of the deceased. One theme clearly evident in the participant responses, therefore, was a concern with 'authenticity' and 'truth':

> I think people are more open and honest today, to have something that's going to meet their needs rather than have something that is false, or what they see as being false, or not relevant to the person who has died, not relevant to their lifestyle (Nancy).

> The funeral service should in some way portray the life of the person who has died...it is important that you go with your true feelings. We cannot stress strongly enough that the family has the type of service that best reflects the person who has died (Eastern Hills Funeral Home).

It is apparent in the funeral director discourse that funeral directors credited their occupation with 'demystifying' death in contemporary society and engaging in an 'honest' dialogue with consumers. Funeral directors enabled people to confront the uncomfortable, but inevitable, 'reality' of death:

> Death is a reality that many of us find hard to accept or to come to terms with. It is only human nature to not want to think about our own eventual death or that of a loved one. So we sometimes go through life trying to ignore death, in the hope that it will not happen. But, as we all know death does happen. Consequently, when it occurs most of us can't cope with the tremendous grief we experience and the finality of losing someone we care about. In trying to 'shut out' death from our lives, we become unprepared for the important decisions and arrangements that need to be made (Anderson Funeral Services).

This focus on establishing the 'reality' of death is particularly evident in funeral directors' discussions of embalming and the funeral service (discussed in chapter five). As noted earlier, the focus on 'honesty' was also something that applied (selectively) to funeral directors. Due to their inextricable link to death, funeral directors felt they needed to 'demystify' their occupation:

> We're trying to take the secrecy away from the profession. That's something that was very much apparent when I started off, so we've become more open and honest with people. People are a lot more aware of what goes on today, and we need to show them that we have nothing to hide (Timothy).

As noted in chapter three, a number of funeral directors felt that it was their duty to educate the public about death because of the typically euphemistic treatments and widespread 'denial' of death. Despite the tedious tautology of jokes and questions, Samuel stated that he occasionally had to remind himself that people '*need* to talk about death'. Margaret also felt that discussion about death was prosaic but that it was necessary to educate the public about funerals: 'the more education I can get out there about things, the healthier New Zealand is going to be'.

The focus on the deceased was specifically perceived to have beneficial outcomes for the bereaved, and thus helped fulfill the therapeutic function of the funeral:

> Through this exchange of information the family can personalise the funeral so it becomes the foundation for the sharing of memories, expressions of both grief and love, and creates a path of honour in recognition of the person's life and accomplishments. The introduction of more personal memories, tributes and involvement within the traditional funeral service is positive; and leaves an everlasting memorial in the hearts and minds of those attending (Meadowfield Funeral Services).

Private funeral services, which were usually unadvertised and attended only by a small, select number of mourners, were seen to be problematic in this regard. Funeral directors felt that private funerals did not fulfil the necessary functions of a funeral per se and resulted in potential long-term psychological complications. Although the decision to have a private funeral was often pre-arranged by a person before death, funeral directors often discouraged this practice and requested families to consider other funeral options. Funeral directors such as Louis and Toby noted that private funerals created significant and unnecessary confusion, and were clearly outside the boundaries of acceptable funerary practice:

> I think in a lot of cases people think they're making it easier for themselves, but in a lot of respects they're making it *harder* for themselves, because they then have to turn around and invite the people they want to attend (Toby).

> The person that has died stipulates that [a private service] is what they wanted before they die. And it's often for the totally wrong reasons. They think they don't want to cause any fuss or bother, but in actual fact that is precisely what they do cause...you see, it denies people the opportunity to say goodbye...it's most upsetting (Louis).

Private funerals were also considered 'selfish' because they disregarded the community's 'need' to grieve. Clifford, for example, stated that he never recommended private funerals:

> A death affects a lot of people and it doesn't give them a chance to grieve. It's a selfish sort of a thing - I always feel - because it doesn't consider the people's needs, that you come into contact with. And I always would like to know the reasons why they want it private...I think people should give them [people affected by a death] a chance to share their memories, which is the most therapeutic part of grief.

Ruth reiterated these sentiments, adding that private funerals were also problematic for the bereaved because mourners were unable to 'offer their condolences to the widow or to the family'. This formal recognition was important for the perceived resolution of grief. As will become clearly evident in the following chapters, the bereaved therefore needed to acknowledge their own personal needs and desires, while simultaneously recognising the needs of other 'community' members.

Immediate disposition or direct disposal was another option that failed to fulfil the perceived funeral function and was thus persistently located outside the margins of 'normalcy'. Participants explained that this option was occasionally requested by elderly individuals who had few friends or relatives, and involved the immediate disposal of the deceased. The absence of any ritual component, whatsoever, however, was a practice that did not sit comfortably with funeral directors such as Samuel:

> We did one last Monday. I mean it even shocked me after thirty years – God, this is not right – drove into the resthome, brought her out, put her straight into the old cardboard box, screwed it down, no embalming, no nothing, in the van, off to the crem[atorium].

Requests for direct disposal by the pre-deceased placed families in a quandary, and funeral directors often reiterated that these services neglected the 'needs' of the bereaved:

> The family sometimes find this a very difficult situation to resolve as they are torn between following the wishes of the deceased and their natural inclinations of following their hearts and saying their own farewells to a much loved family member in the accustomed manner. If our counsel is sought, we always suggest that the function of the service is to allocate a time for the living to honour the dead and that there is a very real human need for this to occur as part of the outpouring of grief and later healing of the loss that has occurred. Sometimes this realisation enables families to appreciate their own needs and those of friends (Meadowfield Funeral Services).

As this extract suggests, while funeral arrangements needed to recognise any requests by the deceased and emphasise the personality of the dead, funeral director discourse

prioritises the 'natural' needs of the living, and funeral directors clearly played a significant role in defining these needs.

The maintenance of 'dignity' was another salient factor influencing funeral arrangements. Although 'dignity' was never precisely defined by participants, it was usually associated with respect for the deceased and a social 'standard' that needed to be observed both by the bereaved *and* the funeral director. Examples that clearly illustrate the significance of maintaining a certain level of dignity came from interviews conducted in one New Zealand city that had witnessed the establishment of a lower-priced cremation facility. A number of funeral directors were asked if they would offer the services of this new crematorium to their clients. While a few participants felt that this development was positive and would result in cheaper funeral fees, others emphasised that the location, services, and image of the crematorium were inconsistent with the 'status' of the deceased and the level of service they were attempting to maintain:

> I don't think it's a very nice place at all. In the middle of an industrial hovel really, to me it's a ghetto. And it's a flat roofed place with a chimney sticking out the middle of it. I advertise dignity for the dead, integrity for the living, sensitivity in all our dealings. I don't believe it's dignified number one, nor sensitive to carry a dead person through an industrial estate like that...that's why we don't use them (Thomas).

> We notice that little things, even like the container that the ashes come in, are not as dignified as the containers the other ashes come in. Little things like that actually make quite a big difference (Anthony).

Clearly, the 'standard' of the disposal facility and dignity were closely correlated; indeed the emphasis on 'little things' became a recurring theme in interviews. Interestingly, however, the precise importance or calibre of these 'little things' was contested. A discussion with the manager (Steven) of the new cremation facility, for example, revealed that that he had himself attempted to 'personalise' the crematorium for visitors by strategically positioning floral arrangements and a large carpet at the facility entrance. Whether or not such 'details' were in fact important to the bereaved remains uncertain, but 'attention to detail' obviously constituted an important element of funeral service 'dignity' and a significant component of the image promoted by funeral service providers (see Hockey 1996b). 'Attention to detail', therefore, was often used as a self-conscious synecdoche to represent a proficient level of funeral director service.

Funeral 'choices', such as the casket style discussed during funeral arrangements, were also subject to funeral director-defined standards of dignity. Participants were often explicit about the maintenance of these funeral standards. If clients required lower cost funerals, for example, certain practices could be curtailed provided a minimum standard was still maintained. As noted earlier, Richard offered this explanation of lower cost funeral options:

> We will, number one, always recognise dignity first...The type of casket would still be fully lined, the same as we would offer to the top end of the clientele market, um, there would be similar fittings and we recommend cremation as being the cheaper option to burial (Richard).

As Richard suggests, 'fully lined' coffin with requisite 'fittings' is therefore an important element of 'dignified' funeral service. Ian's explanation of low-cost, cremation casket liners highlights similar themes:

> [Casket liners are] something that some firms promote where the outer shell that you see is being used over and over and over again and inside is a very basic, flimsy container which holds the body. We've never promoted them, but we have provided them for people in the past.
> Cyril: So do you still provide that now?
> Ian: Yes we do, yeah. The cost of it, by the time you've the charged the hireage of the outer shell and ah, then the cost of the container inside, you're getting very close to a very basic, proper coffin that people can buy. I was in a room once with a family, and they were arranging their father's funeral and the daughter had lost her husband, I mean the daughter was in her sixties, but she'd lost her husband about six months previously in _____ and she was saying, that you know, "We'd like one of these caskets that's recycled". That's a very popular term - '*recycling*' things. And the brother jumped in, he said, "No thanks. We'll have a proper casket for mum".

'Proper' caskets in this example were equated with dignified funeral service, as in much anecdotal evidence, which was frequently used to illustrate the funeral directors' understanding of client needs. Even in cases where was there were minimal financial resources, therefore, 'dignified' funerals could be achieved:

> For people in reduced circumstances, who may find it difficult to meet the costs of a funeral, Social Welfare assistance is available and additional special arrangements can be made to minimize cost while maintaining dignity (R. Thomson and Sons Funeral Services).

As noted in chapter three, a close correlation exists between 'dignity' and the image and reputation of the funeral director. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that funeral directors discouraged funerary arrangements that they believed reflected negatively on the occupation or their particular establishments. One funeral director (Marcus) recounted an incident where the pre-deceased had requested naked burial in a clear, plastic coffin. The funeral director, however, repudiated this request

because of his concern that the publicity and media attention surrounding the event would bring his firm into 'disrepute'. The sight of a naked man in a plastic coffin travelling to the cemetery, was also one that he felt 'many people would find offensive' and one that would transgress the required standards of dignity and good taste. So, while both the literature and participant responses emphasised unique and personal productions, it was also important that these contributions be not too deviant (Bremborg 2002) and remain within funeral director-defined realms of dignity.

Another important consideration related to funeral standards was the duration and structure of the funeral service. While funeral director discourse stressed the significance of personalisation and derided any talk of 'normal' or 'average' funerals, it became clear during the course of the present research that there were actually certain expectations that constituted appropriate and acceptable funerary ritual. Although most participants noted that they had limited involvement in the actual construction and content of the funeral service (and diligently observed occupational boundaries), many acknowledged the importance of organised structure and control. Martin noted, for example, that tributes to the deceased needed to be 'controlled properly': 'Too often it's open slather and I will always tell people if they're going to have eulogies, suggest that they work out beforehand who's going to do them and suggest to them how long they need to take.' Robert similarly noted that it was important to limit tributes and achieve a balance that reflected the life of the deceased: 'I think you can have too many tributes. I think three to four is ok...one from their business background, their sporting background, their family and just one other'. Tony recommended that speakers be appropriated specific spheres relating to the life of the deceased: 'Give them all portals, so they've all got different tangents, so that there's different perspectives, there's different interests, there's different layers.' Without this allocation of tributes, funerals had the tendency to become 'tedious', and in the absence of any balance and structure, funerals also tended to become 'hijacked' by certain speakers and lose 'direction' (Tony). Numerous participants remarked that these protracted and unfocussed funeral affairs prolonged the suffering of the bereaved and disrupted the routines of other mourners who had limited time to attend the funeral. Progress and direction were therefore important attributes of an

'effective' funeral, elements particularly evident in the arrangement interview and the service itself (see chapter five).

Another prevalent concern was the quality of personalised contributions. Although funeral director participants encouraged the personalisation of funerals and mourner involvement, some funeral directors felt that these personalised contributions were occasionally deficient and substandard, and reflected unfavourably on the funeral firm. Ivan, for example, felt that some contributions did not 'come up to the standard' provided by the funeral director. To illustrate this point, he cited a funeral he had organised where a family member had elected to design the service sheet. The resulting production, however, was not only 'absolutely appalling', but many of the mourners at the funeral service would have been unaware that the service sheet had actually been designed by a family member. For Ivan, it was particularly unsettling to think that these mourners would credit his funeral establishment with the creation of the service sheet. Although participants generally refuted Naylor's (1989: 283) finding that 'too much input into the decision making process of ritual production was discouraged', it was evident that participants were nevertheless concerned that the 'wrong' type of input would detract from the funeral production. The categorisation of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' input, however, was somewhat arbitrary and integrally linked to funeral director perceptions of 'effective' funerary practice. While the unpredictable and amateur productions noted above were recounted with a significant degree of dismay, this 'standard' did not apply to the contributions of children. Instead, these contributions were interpreted by participants as being particularly 'honest' and 'authentic':

> We see grandchildren putting photos and letters in their grandparents' coffin, and, the other month we had eight little children wheel their grandmother's coffin out to the hearse. It zig-zagged up the passage of the aisle of the chapel...real teary stuff, but it was lovely (Jack).

4.3 Control and preparation of the body

After the arrangements interview and establishing the funeral requirements of the bereaved, funeral directors became involved in the production and facilitation of funeral ritual. This production encompasses the management of logistical elements, including the placement of funeral notices, cemetery and crematoria bookings, catering, flowers, music, and contact with a religious minister or funeral celebrant. As

noted earlier, participants highlighted the sagacious significance of expending effort to manage 'details', minimise potential risks, and create a production that fulfilled the 'needs' of the bereaved. A central component of this production was also the preparation of the corpse before disposal. An examination of this preparation (and the concomitant practice of viewing) highlights funeral director concerns with maintaining standards of dignity, as well as delineating the boundaries of personalisation and mourner involvement. Funeral directors specifically prioritised the significance of personalising (or 'finishing') the body and its correlation with a 'healthy' grief process. As reiterated in my discussion of funeral arrangements, the funeral director discourse surrounding preparation and viewing demonstrates normalising technologies that construct categories of 'normalcy' and 'appropriateness' founded on the expertise and experience of the funeral director.

One of the initial tasks of the funeral director after contact with the bereaved is the removal of the corpse from the place of death to the funeral director's premises. Generally, the body is removed from a hospital mortuary, residential nursing home, private home, or hospice to the funeral establishment by the funeral directors themselves. In the removals I witnessed during the course of this research, the body was usually wrapped in white sheets, strapped onto a collapsible stretcher, concealed under a black plastic cover, and placed in the body removal vehicle. The body was typically transported directly to the funeral director mortuary for 'treatment'. From here it was transferred to the coffin preparation area, before progressing to the viewing room, the home of a family member, or the funeral venue.[156] Participants in this study noted that their clients were often 'uncomfortable' in the presence of the corpse and requested the immediate removal of the body if the death occurred at home. Literature produced by the funeral firms and participants in this study encouraged the bereaved to contact the funeral director as soon as practicable after death, and in keeping with this all establishments provided a twenty-four hour service:

[156] Authors such as Bradbury (1999) and Howarth (1996) have described the physical movement of the body from the 'backdoor' to the 'frontdoor' of the funeral establishment and the accompanying symbolic transformation of the corpse. While this is a useful observation, the ensuing discussion reveals that dead bodies in New Zealand often bypass the funeral home 'frontdoor' and instead are transferred to 'personalised' viewing venues before final disposal.

> The sooner they [the funeral directors] are called the better, as they will begin to take care of the multitude of details that are involved and you will find it comforting to know that their services have begun (Mountain Valley Funerals).

Funeral directors therefore frequently claimed possession of the corpse soon after death and subsequently began their 'preparation' of the deceased. Howarth (1996: 96) interprets these actions by the funeral director as the 'decontamination' of the family and home, allowing them to return to some semblance of 'normality'. As discussed below, the dead body not only represents a reservoir of disease, but constitutes a symbol of mortality contributing to the pollution of those closely associated with it. The 'profane' status of the body in death encourages the bereaved to surrender the corpse to the funeral functionaries, who in turn accept custody of the dead because it is this possession that contributes to their influence and control. The corpse, however, is also a potent representation of the social identity of the dead, and one of the central roles of the funeral director is to construct a representation of the individual that contributes positively to the grief process of the bereaved. As Prior (1989: 155) notes, funeral directors thus become: 'the directors of a complex social drama in which the body is the most important prop'.

The 'preparation' of the corpse

This section of the chapter emphasises the treatment of the body after death. In particular, it focuses on the control of the corpse by the funeral director and reconstruction of identity before the funeral service. As noted above, possession of the corpse is central to funeral director control, and I will argue that these funeral functionaries play a key role in creating a socially acceptable image of death specifically related to the 'grief process' of the bereaved. After taking possession of the corpse, funeral directors regulate the disintegrating boundaries of the deceased and transform the corpse from a contaminating, disorderly, organic object, to a visual representation of the deceased. The dead body becomes a site for the construction of identity, but an identity retrospectively mediated - and dialogically constructed - by the funeral director and bereaved. Embalming is integrally linked to the practice of 'viewing'. Because the body represents the material reality of death, viewing facilitates the construction of a positive 'memory picture' which participants believed psychologically benefited the bereaved. The recent revival of 'home viewing' can be seen as a further personalisation of death. This practice allows the bereaved to

complete the biographical narrative of the deceased, and enables these individuals to exert some form of temporary control by sanitising death. As will become clearly evident in the following discussion, however, this personalisation is carefully managed and regulated by funeral directors and constrained by funeral director concepts of 'grief' and 'dignity'. While the preparation and possession of the corpse are integral elements of funeral director service and control, funeral directors in this project continually emphasised the primacy of their pastoral role and noted that post-mortem preparation allowed them to respond effectively to the 'needs' of the living.

Embalming - or 'hygienic treatment' - was routinely practiced by nearly all funeral establishments included in this study, and most funeral directors are also experienced embalmers. The practice was often represented as a New Zealand 'custom' and standard feature of funerals: 'Embalming is an important custom for many communities and families. It has become common practice in New Zealand, with nearly all deceased persons are [sic] embalmed after death has occurred, particularly if a viewing is to take place' (Anderson Funeral Services). Embalming was often portrayed as a modern medical or scientific procedure, with many participants emphasising the dissimilarity between contemporary, scientific embalming and the 'cultural art' practiced by pre-modern people. Typically, participants linked pre-modern embalming to 'ancient' and 'primitive' cultural practices, asserting that clients might query the relevance of such practices in a modern, rational society. Despite increasing client involvement in the funeral and funeral director emphasis on public education (see chapter three), most funeral directors felt that the bereaved wanted limited information about this particular procedure, an attitude that is reflected in the superficial and euphemistic industry literature for the bereaved. Embalming was frequently defined as an essential public service provided by funeral directors, which sanitised and preserved the body until final disposal, restoring the 'natural' appearance of the deceased.[157]

[157] The embalming procedures observed at two funeral homes during the course of this research closely parallel the procedures described by British and American authors (Bradbury (1999), Howarth (1996), Iserson (1994), Naylor (1989), Pine (1975), and Prior (1989)), and also Heath's (2002: 34-46) recent exploration of embalming in New Zealand. See Appendix A for a fieldwork excerpt describing this procedure.

The personalisation of the corpse

Funeral directors take possession of the corpse, and in the backstage regions of the funeral establishment, transform the dead body from a dangerous object into a visual representation of the deceased, instrumental in eliciting emotions that funeral directors regarded as central to the resolution of grief. Critical to this treatment of the corpse by funeral workers is the status of the dead body as a site of disorder and 'repository of disease' (Prior 1999: 157), as well as the centrality of the body to self-identity.

Hallam et al. (1999: 125) note that the living body has the potential to be physically dangerous. The body became a public health issue in the nineteenth century and, as Armstrong (2002) emphasises, sanitary science played a significant role in defining the space of the body. Lupton (2000: 57) describes the ideal body in contemporary society as one that is: 'tightly contained, its boundaries stringently policed, its orifices shut, kept autonomous, private and separate from other things and other bodies'.

Elias discusses the development of this 'civilised body' in his volumes on the civilising process (1978 [1939], 1983 [1939]). He examines the rationalisation, individualisation, and socialisation of the body, arguing that the Renaissance initially marked a change in how people treated their bodies. The search for distinction among individuals in court society provided an impetus for detailed codes of body management, and bodily functions were thus made more intimate (Elias 1978: 189); meaning that in turn the body was increasingly privatised and distanced from other bodies (Synott 1992), while monitoring and control of the body became imperative (Goffman 1959; Mauss 1979 [1950]; Stallybrass and White 1986). Mary Douglas (1966) emphasises the significance of bodily control, asserting that the anxieties associated with the boundaries of the body politic also applied to the boundaries of the individual body. The appearance of fluids that breached bodily boundaries, therefore, demonstrate 'a frightening and disturbing loss of rational control' (Douglas 1966: 121). These fluids attest to the permeability of the human body and thus to 'the perilous divisions between the body's inside and outside' (Grosz 1994: 193). The control of bodily fluids requires continuous surveillance, while fluids that cross bodily boundaries often provoke feelings of abjection and horror (Longhurst 2001: 30). In death, the human body is no longer contained or controlled: most notably

'purge' exudes from the open orifices of the corpse. This leaking, 'uncontrolled' corpse is clearly entirely incongruous with the controlled and ordered funeral experience emphasised by funeral directors.

Pathology has also come to construct the body as the site of death and disease (Prior 1989). During the nineteenth century, death was gradually transformed from something that came from 'outside of life', to a pathological lesion located *inside* the body (Armstrong 2002: 18). The pathological cause of death can now be identified in each and every body (Bauman 1992a), and the decomposing body is consequently a dangerous threat to the health of the population, resulting in the physical separation of the living and the dead. Interestingly, this separation of the living and the dead was associated with a corresponding 'depersonalisation' of death by participants, and a critique of this rationalised treatment of the dead constituted a central component of the death 'revival' and personalisation of post-mortem practices promoted by funeral directors. Funeral director rhetoric surrounding embalming, however, is replete with references to scientific and rational procedures, illustrating a tension between the late modern personalisation of death (typically defined in opposition to 'modern', 'rational' practices) and the technical 'expertise' possessed by funeral directors.

The dead body is also symbolically polluting, as it represents mortality and bodily decay (Hallam et al. 1999: 128). This concept has become particularly problematic in contemporary society, where the body is central to the construction of self. Authors such as Binski (1996) and Finucane (1981) trace the historical significance of the dead body, and note that medieval representations of the decaying body and corpse depict human finitude and the importance of institutionalised religion. In his study of medieval death ritual, for example, Binski (1996: 9) argues that images of the dead reaffirm the significance of group identity and that Christianity thus systematises death. In a study of death rituals in the latter Middle Ages, Finucane (1981) similarly stipulates that the treatment of the corpse reaffirms both secular and spiritual order. At this time the body was believed to be a vehicle for the soul, and therefore comfort came from a religious functionary who preached a doctrine that celebrated Christ's resurrection, allowing pious people 'to look beyond death and to anticipate life hereafter' (Hallam et al. 1999: 127).

The secularisation of society (discussed in more detail in the following chapter) has transformed the status of the body and has inevitably had a significant impact on the rationale of post-mortem practices promoted by funeral directors. Specifically, a shift in emphasis from the social to the personal body has resulted in increasing individualisation and privatisation of beliefs (Ariès 1981; Elias 1985). The body has increasingly become central to the formation of self identity, and Shilling (1993: 3) notes that in high-modernity people tend to place significant importance 'on the body as constitutive of self'. With the decline of metanarratives, such as religion, bodies have increasingly become the only stable point of reference in the postmodern habitat (Bauman 1992b: 19-22). These bodies can be conceptualised as malleable entities in the process of 'becoming' (Shilling 1993) or alternatively as reflexively organised projects that involve the continual re-ordering of self-narratives (Giddens 1991: 80-88). Individuals consciously select practices to construct a particular narrative of self-identity: the body is a inescapably a central resource that contributes to this construction (Bauman 1992b; Berger and Luckmann 1967: 191; Giddens 1991). Bourdieu (1980) also emphasises the centrality of the body to identity, but unlike Giddens, who emphasises individual agency, Bourdieu describes the body as a social product that reflects an individual's interaction with social location, habitus, and taste.[158]

Given these constructions of the body, dying and death clearly present a particular problem to the body and self as entities in the process of 'becoming' or as 'unfinished projects'. Mellor and Shilling (1993: 427) point out that reflexively constructed 'self projects' will be incomplete at the point of death, and 'fragile attempts at personal meaning left shattered by the brute force of death'. Berger and Luckmann (1966) even describe death as the marginal situation *par excellence*, noting that it poses a terrifying threat to the realities of everyday life. With the reflexive deconstruction of religious orders and the absence of a 'sacred canopy' to provide a trans-personal meaning structure (Berger 1990 [1967]), modern individuals are 'exposed and unprotected in the face of their inevitable demise' (Mellor and Shilling 1993: 427). Mellor (1993: 20) notes that these difficulties have contributed to the sequestration of death and dying in modern society, while Bauman (1992a, 1992b) emphasises that individuals

[158] Bourdieu (1980: 190) argues that practices inscribed on the body are 'the most indisputable

increasingly focus on the specific limitations of the body to avoid confronting its ultimate limitation.[159] As the following sections (and chapter five) elucidate, however, funeral directors are consistently involved in the completion and representation of a personalised 'narrative' located in the individual body, which represents the source of memories for mourners. These memories constitute an integral element of an overarching framework of meaning, which funeral directors carefully linked to the pastoral 'needs' of the bereaved.

As Hallam et al. (1999: 127) emphasise, the dead body is often perceived to be 'the signifier of the loss of self and the loss of individuality'. The task of the funeral director is therefore not only to protect the public health of the population and reassert the physical boundaries of the body, but also to reconstruct (and temporally maintain) the individuality of the deceased before the funeral service. The status of the body is therefore ambiguous; a 'profane' object requiring sanitation and control by the embalming expert, and simultaneously a sacred body representing a loved friend or relative (Habenstein 1962; Turner and Edgley 1976).

As I have indicated above, the dead body possesses dangerous polluting potential, and this contaminating potential partially accounts for development of the deathworker specialisations, not to mention the stigmatisation of those who handle the dead.[160] In his discussion of 'John', the morgue worker, for example, Sudnow (1967: 51-60) argues that this individual was not only considered 'unclean' because of his actual duties, but also because people associated his presence with death. Similarly, an intrinsic element of the funeral directors' task is the handling of the corpse, and the preparation of the body. This association with dead bodies has resulted in the stigmatisation of the funeral worker (Watson and Tolich 1998), and the concomitant development of strategies that aim to neutralise or minimise this stigma

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materiality of class taste'.

[159] Shilling (1993: 190) notes that 'the self identities of individuals are often made insecure by the presence of death in other people's bodies', and Elias (1985: 23) states that the living feel a particular embarrassment when in the presence of the dying.

[160] Goffman (1968: 13) defines stigma as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' to a group or an individual. Discreditable or discredited groups or individuals subsequently implement techniques such as 'passing', 'dividing the social world', 'covering', and 'disclosure' to control information and obscure discrediting attributes (Goffman 1968). The polluting potential of corpses in other societies has been discussed by a number of authors. Watson (1982), for example, discusses the management of

(Bremborg 2002; Charmaz 1980; Howarth 1996; Thompson 1991).[161] The most significant strategy employed by participants in the present study was an emphasis on the pastoral role of the funeral director.

On the one hand, then, funeral directors emphasised the need to depersonalise and distance themselves from the corpse. Brian, for example, recounted his first experience of seeing a dead body: 'I thought...there's no life there...like a dead sheep...the soul has gone...the life of the person has gone'. Despite the attempts of other funeral directors working at the firm to unsettle Brain with graphic descriptions of the post-mortem case, his first encounter with an autopsy 'case' was marked by indifference: 'Didn't feel a thing. You know I had no emotion about it whatsoever'. Another technique adopted by funeral directors was simply to treat the bodies in their mortuaries as objects, without a 'soul' or 'spirit':

> I think it would be difficult for me, if I didn't have an idea that the spirit has gone from the body that I am working on. I would have problems with that...but I've never had a problem with that...Sometimes the embalmers work is pretty harrowing because after a post-mortem all your arteries are severed, so everything has to be removed and you have to get inside and do all the embalming and get it all back together again (Ian).

On the other hand, however, funeral directors also had to acknowledge the importance of the dead to the bereaved and treat the body with 'dignity'. Participants such as George emphasised the importance of treating the dead as people with emotional connections to the bereaved, and in some ways *pretending* that the dead

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death pollution in Cantonese society, while Oppenheim (1973) explores the control of ritual contamination (*tapu*) in Maori society.

[161] See chapter three for an overview of these strategies. In a study of morticians and funeral directors in the United States, Thompson (1991) found that these funeral functionaries were acutely aware of the stigma associated with their work and that most of this stigma could be attributed not only to their proximity to the dead, but also to the perception that this occupation profited from death and grief. Unlike the lone morgue attendant who found it difficult to counteract the stigma associated with his work (Sudnow 1967), however, this group had clearly developed strategies and ideologies that justified their work and minimised stigmatisation (Charmaz 1980: 182). A symbolic redefinition of their work, for example, emphasized the importance of caring for the living, rather than working with the dead, as well as an avoidance of a vocabulary which focused on death. Role distance, on the other hand, involved emotional detachment and the routinisation of work (Charmaz 1980: 182), as well as carefully controlled backstage humour. An accent on professionalism can also be seen as an attempt to minimise stigmatisation, along with the emphasis on scientific embalming, qualification standards, and funeral director associations. A shift from sales to service is another strategy employed to reduce stigma and rationalise the costs of a funeral. Finally, socio-economic status is seen as a way for some funeral directors to counter a deficit in occupational prestige (Thompson 1991: 414-425). Howarth (1996: 83) similarly argues that funeral directors have been stigmatised, and that the resulting stereotyped images of this occupation have focused on the 'sinister and money grasping disposition' of these individuals. Although some funeral directors nurtured this stereotype, others distorted their

were still living humans. In industry literature and media reports, likewise, funeral workers were particularly careful to emphasise the dignified treatment of the dead, which typically entailed treating the dead as if they were alive. One funeral director, for example, stated that corpses were 'treated as if they are still alive. There's a huge amount of dignity about the way people are treated' (*Sunday Star Times*, 15 October 2000: D3-4). At the time of writing, another funeral director was similarly quoted as saying: 'To wash someone for the last time is a privilege because it's someone's mum or son, not just a body. I talk to my deceased and always tell them what I'm doing' (*Otago Daily Times* Weekend Magazine April 30 2005: 17). This 'dignity' and reverence for the dead clearly demarked funeral directors from other occupational groups (such as medical specialists) who - according to funeral director participants - disregarded the value of the dead:

> Once the person is deceased, they [the doctors] seem to lose interest in them and I think that's sad. They are still a person, they're still somebody's loved one and we certainly make sure they're treated as such (George).

Minimising bodily exposure and the 'privacy' of the embalming procedure were particularly important for the maintenance of 'dignity'. One funeral home (Meadowfield Funeral Services), for example, highlighted the level of security surrounding the mortuary, while another (McNeil Funeral Services) emphasised that only contracted staff *directly* involved with the embalming and preparation would be allowed into the mortuary. One funeral establishment (Samuel Butler Funerals) included in this study even placed a clearly marked sign in the mortuary that reminded staff of the need to respect the dead. Anthony noted that although it was important to retain a sense of humour as a funeral director, this humour had to be controlled: 'there's that whole aspect of dignity, treating the deceased with honour, we don't laugh at them, we don't laugh in certain situations and in the mortuary...that's not a joke'. Ian similarly asserted that funeral workers always had to acknowledge the special status of the deceased:

> I've seen it happen to staff. Simple illustration. I'll come into the mortuary and there's a female woman, lying naked there, and I'll say to the staff, "If that was your mother or father, wouldn't you have a towel over them?" - just to jerk them back them into reality and why they're there.

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actual role or simply evaded potentially discrediting discussion in their attempts to manage stigmatisation.

As noted above in my discussion of funeral arrangements, the construct of 'dignity' was overtly integral to funeral service, and clearly delimited the potential practices of the bereaved and the funeral director.

While participants acknowledged the importance of dealing with the dead, none of these participants expatiated the technicalities of the preparation procedure, and many frequently reiterated the significance of their pastoral role. Discussions relating to embalming were therefore often re-directed to focus on the primacy of the 'living'. Arnold, for example, noted that: 'Ten percent of my time is spent dealing with the deceased. Ninety percent of my time is spent dealing with the living and they're the ones you've got to satisfy'. Anthony similarly and emphatically asserted that his interest in the funeral industry was instigated by his desire to work with the bereaved: 'I really enjoy working with people, so very definitely the attraction for me in working in the funeral industry is working with the living, not some morbid fascination with working with the dead'. Margaret, likewise, noted that funeral directors were 'dealing with people's lives, even though a person has died, we are dealing with the living'.

The rationalisation of embalming

Although no official statistics exist, most funeral directors included in this study noted that they embalmed in excess of ninety percent of cases. Most funeral directors stated that unless *specifically* instructed to the contrary, they would 'hygienically treat' bodies, while some stated that their establishments had 'strict policies' of embalming cases that would subsequently be viewed or would remain on funeral director premises for a set period of time. Although embalming is not legally required in the majority of cases (see chapter two), funeral directors overwhelmingly felt that it was an essential service implicitly demanded by bereaved families. These funeral directors felt that a 'well-maintained' body satisfied clients and simultaneously promoted the reputation and high service standards of the funeral firm.

Some funeral directors explicitly stated that embalming had become an accepted 'tradition' and that it was infrequently discussed during the family interview. If it was discussed with clients, the process was usually described as a medical or surgical procedure involving arterial and abdominal 'injections', 'incisions', and 'operations'.

Ruth, for example, would say to people that it was a 'small operation...it's like having your appendix removed'. At the same time, however, she felt that there was a considerable lack of knowledge about embalming and that it was important not to exaggerate the extensiveness or invasiveness of this 'operation'. Harvey noted, for instance, that the bereaved sometimes felt that embalming was a form of abuse or mutilation, while Richard specifically stated that people 'get visions of something they've seen on television, whereby there's a lot of instruments...and they don't really fancy that'.

Brian also explained that people were very curious about the embalming procedure when he gave public seminars, but that they did not want to know this type of information when they were arranging a funeral, particularly in family interview situations: 'They don't ask very many questions about embalming. Mainly because they don't really want to know the ins and outs of embalming. They don't want to know that you're going to inject a certain amount of fluid into mum'. He explained that he provided a general outline of embalming if required, but that he did not disclose specific details. People did not want to know that he was 'using femorals and brachials and all that sort of stuff'. Charles reiterated this idea, explaining to curious individuals that they only needed to think of the decomposition associated with 'any other animal body...after death it deteriorates fairly quickly'. According to this view, embalming was therefore necessary to delay this deterioration and improve a person's appearance. The industry literature for the bereaved is similarly sanitised. A pamphlet produced by the New Zealand Embalmers Association, for example, emphasises that embalming is a legitimate 'scientific' operation:

> Many people associate embalming with *ancient and primitive cultural practices* and have misgivings about its relevance, value and purpose today. Those with doubts can be assured that embalming is a *careful scientific procedure* performed by skilled members of the New Zealand Embalmers Association ('Embalming', *NZEA*, emphasis added).

Whether or not bereaved family actually wanted to 'discover' the details of embalming remains indeterminable, but it is evident from funeral director responses that this subject was one of limited interest to the bereaved. While funeral directors had therefore set about 'demystifying' death, the 'mysteries' and procedural details of embalming remained outside the realms of any educational emphasis, thus constituting an area of carefully controlled funeral director knowledge.

A small number of funeral directors offered refrigeration, but felt that it was a poor embalming substitute. Of particular concern was the 'poor appearance' of the refrigerated body.[162] One funeral director (Geoffrey) who offered both embalming and refrigeration, emphasised that not all cases needed to be embalmed but that 'It's a difficult call because the families really don't have the information or skills to make the call of judgment'. This statement clearly establishes the expertise of the funeral director and the salience of their role in determining 'appropriate' preparation and disposal procedures.

To summarise, while most funeral directors provided only perfunctory descriptions of the embalming process, all participants in this study emphasised the reasons for this practice. These justifications centred on the intrinsically linked features of sanitation, preservation, and presentation.

Sanitation, preservation, and presentation

Embalming textbooks and funeral industry literature extol the importance of preparing the body before viewing and the funeral service. Embalming is described as an 'essential' service that not only protects public health but also preserves and presents the deceased in a psychologically beneficial way. Although there is limited empirical evidence to support these claims (see for example Charmaz 1980; Metcalf and Huntington 1991), North American literature in particular focuses on the value of embalming and viewing. One embalming textbook utilised by numerous New Zealand funeral directors, for instance, notes that embalming and care of the dead form 'the foundation for the entire funeral service structure' (Strub and Frederick 1967: 4), and goes on to argue that the funeral directors' task is to create a 'memory picture' 'which will make the transition from life into death more majestic and easier for the family and friends to accept' (Strub and Frederick 1967: 20). Conversely, an 'unembalmed' body and closed casket will result in a permanent 'mental image of ugliness and shock' (Mayer 1980: 20). Although the participants in this study were

[162] Refrigeration was often associated with Australian funeral practices that were usually typified as archaic or simply 'inappropriate'. John noted, for example: 'Without modern embalming, I don't know where we would be – I guess still putting them in fridges like they do in Aussie'. Charles felt that Australian funeral directors were slowly moving towards 'advanced' New Zealand standards, but that they had initially discouraged embalming and relied on the outmoded practice of refrigeration.

often more critical about embalming and quite pragmatic in their approach to preparation, they too emphasised the necessity of sanitising, preserving, and presenting the body.

The funeral directors in this study utilised rhetoric similar to the burial reformers and cremationists in the nineteenth century (Nicol 1994), noting that the corpse was a repository of disease and disorder. Although there is little evidence to suggest that dead bodies pose a significant risk to the living (Lauzardo et al. 2001; Morgan 2004), nearly all the participants in this survey emphasised the danger of the decomposing corpse to the 'personal safety' of the bereaved (who could potentially view and touch the body), *and* the funeral workers who had to handle the corpse:

> There's a lot of diseases which we need to be aware of, and protect ourselves as industry workers and we're also...thinking very much of the families. Because in a lot of cases – where there's viewing - there's a lot of touching of the body, quite often kissing and so forth, so it's very important that we present a body that we know is hygienic (Anthony).

Another funeral director commented that he was only informed of infectious diseases such as Hepatitis A and B and Meningitis some time *after* a person had died. This made embalming imperative: 'you can't allow family to have that close connection with the deceased...unless the body is embalmed' (George). Participants often explained that micro-organisms existed in a symbiotic relationship with the body during life but that death destroyed this equilibrium. At this point, apparently, these harmless micro-organisms underwent a radical transformation and uncontrollably 'invaded' the dead body. Embalming, however, re-established some degree of temporary control, rendereding the corpse 'harmless', 'hygienic' and 'safe'.

As these comments indicate, the dangerous status of the corpse makes embalming a hazardous procedure. Many participants emphasised the importance of employing qualified embalmers and strictly adhering to the standards set by the New Zealand Embalmers Association. Participants also stressed the importance of maintaining mortuaries that met government-regulated health and hygiene standards. A number of participants even felt that these requirements were compelling reasons for registration (see chapter three). One funeral director went so far as to suggest that the government was ignoring the potentially catastrophic consequences of substandard

embalming and that it was 'going to take a real outbreak of some infection to make them sit up and take notice' (Anthony).

All the funeral directors in this study felt that it was important to preserve the body after death until the final committal, and all agreed that the issue of time was critical. Participants noted that pausing 'nature's' progress would reassert some degree of control over decomposition and allow the bereaved to prolong 'contact with the body of the deceased' (Hallam et al. 1999: 126) and engage in meaningful and therapeutic ritual. It is interesting that participants often stressed that ritual at this point should not be bounded by temporal restrictions related to the decomposition of the body at this stage, but that rituals should instead reflect the lifestyles and needs of the bereaved. Ivan stated that embalming 'gives you the flexibility to have the funeral at a time that suits everybody, rather than a time dictated by the deterioration of the body'. Unlike the funeral service itself that needed to be temporally controlled to prevent 'harm' or 'discomfort' for the survivors, the 'phase' between hygienic treatment and the funeral service was relatively free of temporal constraints. As John stated:

> [Embalming] allowed us to maintain our change of lifestyle. We're very much more mobile, we live all over the world. So there's not a problem now to hold bodies for a week until family can get back to New Zealand and have a time to grieve together and then bury or cremate their relative.

Funeral directors such as Martin and Henry also felt that the interval between death and the funeral had increased in recent years precisely because New Zealanders were mobile and geographically scattered. Families of the deceased wanted to give friends and relatives the opportunity to 'come home' and attend the funeral service, and Henry felt that 'embalming enhanced that opportunity'. Martin and Ian also explained that some clients did not want a death to interrupt other major life plans. Children of aged parents in residential care, for example, occasionally instructed funeral directors to keep the body and delay the funeral until they returned from an international holiday:

> We get people now who are contacting us and telling us they are going to be away for a period of time and if something happens before they come back, we are going to have to delay, we'll have to time the funeral for when they return (Martin).

What becomes clear in all these explanations is that the decomposition of the corpse has to be controlled during the interval between death and the final committal, and that the body has to be temporarily prevented from 'reverting' to nature in the interim. If there is no effective preservation and there are manifest signs of decomposition, there would not only be social 'embarrassment' for the bereaved but significant, long-term, psychological ramifications. Many funeral directors felt that people did not understand the realities of decomposition and that these realities were extremely unpleasant.

The odour of a decomposing corpse was considered particularly offensive by a number of funeral directors. Odour is in many ways a potent symbol of the undisciplined body threatening to transgress the boundary of the skin, and violate the linear, modern world view that prioritises privacy and discrete divisions (Classen et al. 1994: 5). Featherstone and Wernick (1995: 5) contend that smell becomes a particularly potent emotional force when associated with dirtiness and lack of bodily control, 'which connotes childhood dependence and even animality'.[163] Participants such as Thomas provided vivid descriptions of odour that emphasise this emotional force:

> Let me tell you, that a person whose been dying of cancer for seven or eight months, by the time they die, minutes after they die, their body can actually smell. In fact, *before* they die, there can be an odour in their body because parts of their body are rotting already...people have lost the significance of the fact that the bodies go off very quickly and without embalming we have an *indignity* of an odour, a very bad odour, discolouration, tissue gas, all the other horror things that are attached to death if we don't embalm (Thomas, emphasis added).

Even more profound than the '*risk* that a body was going to cause embarrassment' (Charles), however, was the visual image of a deteriorating corpse. Some funeral directors felt that such an image could have serious psychological consequences for the bereaved. One graphic example was provided by a funeral director who had ineffectually tried to persuade a client that his deceased wife needed to be embalmed:

> He [the client] had two young children and the last memories of those young children will be to see their mother, a decaying green mess of sludge in a casket and that's because of what their

[163] For a study illustrating the significance of smell see Lawton (1998). Lawton (1998) describes the smells and fluids seeping from the bodies of unbounded hospice patients, and contends that this 'seepage' extended the corporeality of the patient, resulting in further marginalisation within the hospice itself. See also C. Davies (1996).

> father had in his mind as what should or should not happen...that is very unhealthy and those children needed help (Louis).

Like Thomas, Louis felt that people had unrealistic ideas about death and decay, and that it was pertinent to consider the funeral director's judgement and experience. Some funeral directors remarked, however, that these 'dangers' were simply not realised by the bereaved and that they did not understand the 'risks' involved if a body was not embalmed. Such clients clearly failed to acknowledge the expert knowledge and proficiency of the funeral director, thus challenging the technical and pastoral expertise of these individuals.

Sanitation and preservation were important components of re-establishing the body's physical boundaries. Embalming was considered a public service that sanitised the body, protecting both the funeral workers and bereaved from the threats of disease. Embalming was also necessary to 'alleviate embarrassment' for the bereaved. As the description in Appendix A and participant comments emphasise, embalming is an invasive process that transgresses the very boundaries it is attempting to re-establish. Many participants felt, however, that this transgression was justified in the interests of public health, hygiene, and social etiquette. Like the medical post-mortem that endeavours to reassert order and attribute meaning to the death by locating the cause of death (Howarth 1996; Prior 1989), the preparation of the corpse by funeral directors paradoxically requires the violation of the body's boundaries. It is therefore the restoration of order on a symbolic level that is particularly significant (Hallam et al. 1999: 130).

Funeral worker responses also indicate that the preparation of the corpse and preservation of identity is a dialogic process. The bereaved apparently avoided the specific technicalities of the embalming procedure and did not want to discover the 'secrets' of body restoration when it involved the body of a friend or relative. As Hallam et al. (1999: 136) suggest, there is critical collusion between the bereaved and the funeral workers in this regard. The bereaved do not attempt to uncover the techniques used by the funeral director to 'hygienically treat' the dead and do not expect to see the body as it was in life, but rather expect a *representation* of the lived body. In his study of embalming, Heath (2002: 71) found that families exerted some degree of agency in the preparation of bodies but that this agency required funeral

worker collaboration: 'a body's presentation was a co-operative effort, the family's wishes could be facilitated but only in certain ways and within legal strictures'.

None of the participants felt that embalming denied the 'reality of death', but rather that it ameliorated the effects of death by preserving identity. Participants emphasised the importance of constructing a 'natural', 'peaceful', and 'lifelike' image for the bereaved: an image which represented the identity of the deceased. One funeral director (Anthony) emphasised that there was nothing worse than a family 'coming in and seeing mum or dad in a very bad situation'. Another funeral director provided a clear description of such 'a bad situation':

> Take an old man, dying at home, emaciated, hasn't eaten for a week...has been too sick to shave, hasn't had his dentures in and he dies, with the family all around, the young grandchildren there. His mouth's open, his eyes are open, he's unshaven and he looks absolutely ghastly sitting in bed (Ian).

This image is transformed by the practice of embalming, creating a better 'memory picture' for the bereaved. Of particular importance to this image was the facial expression of the deceased: 'Say, if the death occurs in hospital or something like this, or has been a terminally ill situation where they haven't been eating or have been off fluid for the last few days, they've lost a lot of facial expression' (Simon). In these cases, any signs of pain or suffering had to be erased, to be replaced with expressions of 'peace', and 'rest'. The transformation enacted by embalming was thus considered to be positive for the family, ensuring a degree of relief and 'peace of mind': 'if you can take away the look of pain off somebody's face who's suffered and present them to the family in a peaceful, restful manner, then that will do wonders for a family' (Louis).[164]

'Natural' colour was a significant consideration and this was achieved primarily with a selection of embalming fluids. Interestingly, participants often professed to minimal use of make-up or cosmetic products. Using such products was in some ways seen to destroy the personalisation of the corpse that the embalmers were attempting to

[164] Limited evidence for this claim is provided by a recent North American study (Eyetsemitan and Eggleston 2002). The authors suggest that the emotion discrete terms attributed to the face of the deceased individual by the viewer would affect their mourning trajectory. Specifically, Eyetsemitan and Eggleston (2002: 161) conclude that if the perceived emotion-expressive behaviour on the deceased's face is 'positive' then a 'healthy' mourning trajectory is likely. Conversely, a 'negative'

achieve, particularly if the person had not used cosmetic products during life. Similarly, although participants attempted to reduce signs of disease, very few participants attempted to recreate a more youthful appearance, in contrast to the North American funeral functionaries described by Charmaz (1980: 200) and Metcalf and Huntington (1991).

By personalising the corpse in this way, embalmers were engaged in a 'finishing' of the physical body (Shilling 1993); Hallam et al. (1999: 132) similarly note that 'The reconstruction of the body in death is a particularly stark form of finishing, as the body becomes an object to be rescued and returned to an imagined subjectivity'. This finishing is not completed by the individual but by funeral directors who, in the majority of cases, never knew the deceased in life.[165] As participants asserted, the dead body may look 'ghastly', lose facial expression, and lack the physical characteristics identified with the individual in life. The task of the funeral director is therefore to restore some of the features associated with the individual, and to personalise the impersonal and potentially contaminating corpse. 'Natural' colour is restored, expressions of pain erased, and other disfigurements concealed. Unlike Hallam et al. (1999) who discuss the 'humanisation' of the cadaver, embalming in New Zealand can be seen more as a 'personalisation' of the corpse that attempts to prevent the body from deteriorating before disposal. Only in a very small number of cases was it necessary for the funeral director to 'humanise' the corpse:

> In this firm we do not like to get carried away with make-up because we don't know what the person was like...Unless it's an extreme case – perhaps a crash victim or something like that, where we've just got to try and *bring them back to some sort of human look* – in this firm, very, very little make-up is used (Richard, my emphasis).

The final aspect of preparation is the dressing and encoffining of the deceased. Unlike the British example described by Howarth (1996) - where the majority of bodies were dressed in nightwear - most New Zealand funeral directors dressed the deceased in

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perceived emotion-expressive behaviour could result in an 'unhealthy mourning trajectory' (Eyetsemitan and Eggleston 2002: 161).

[165] As Howarth (1996) has pointed out, the reconstruction by the funeral director is precarious. In most cases the funeral directors did not know the deceased during life and there is always the risk that funeral workers might misrepresent the dead person, destroying the 'illusion of an embodied self' (Hallam et al. 1999: 135). Although the bereaved sometimes provide the funeral director with a photograph of the deceased, this does not ensure that the prepared body will be immediately recognisable to family and friends, and 'misrepresentation' remains a clear source of risk during preparation (Unruh 1979).

personal clothing. The family usually selected this clothing, and participants noted that an increasing number of families wanted to clothe the deceased themselves after appropriate 'treatment'. This allowed for greater client involvement and personalised the body in a powerful way. A favourite jacket, hat, or piece of jewellery worn by the person in life, made the body recognisable to the bereaved and contributed significantly to the personalised representation of the individual so frequently encouraged by funeral directors.

This visual representation constructed by the funeral director in complicity with the bereaved provides a focus for a process of retrospective identity construction involving informal talk and private ritual by the bereaved (Walter 1996). The practice of viewing, in particular, provided an opportunity for the bereaved to accept the 'reality' of death, conclude the narrative of the deceased, and construct memory pictures that transcended the temporary physical presence of the dead individual. These memory pictures constitute a form of individual immortality, even if they are not the images 'devoid of the scars of age' described by Howarth (1996: 22). Instead, embalming allows for a form of fulfilment – even if not necessarily the type of fulfilment envisioned by Metcalf and Huntington (1991). In their discussion of North American funerary practices, these authors note that:

> The life of the individual should rise in an arc through brassy youth to fruitful middle years and then gently towards a death that is acceptable as well as inevitable. The practices of embalming and viewing express these collective representations (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 210).

Participants in this study also stressed the importance of revealing the dead 'at peace' (Metcalf and Huntington 1991: 210), although this did not necessarily coincide with death after a long and fulfilling life.

4.3 Viewing the dead

Sanitation, preservation, and presentation are closely linked to the practice of 'viewing'. Viewing generally involves friends and relatives of the deceased, who spend time with the embalmed and encoffined corpse. This practice was strongly encouraged by nearly all the participants in the present research project. As with embalming, no official New Zealand 'viewing' statistics exist. Most participants, however, noted that viewing rates were between eighty and ninety-eight percent, while the *Griefcare* website suggests that viewing before the funeral 'has been adopted

as a customary practice by most New Zealand families' (*Griefcare* no date: New Zealand funerals). Some funeral directors felt that even if there was no planned viewing, the body had to be embalmed for this eventuality:

> [We] have a policy where every body is prepared and partially embalmed to the point, that if a family decide ten minutes before a funeral to have a viewing, we're comfortable with the fact that we can remove the lid of the coffin or open the casket and the body would be prepared in such a way as it would be for a person that had requested a viewing (James).

Unlike the situation described by Hallam et al. (1999: 137) where the body of the deceased was generally only reconstructed when people expected to continue their relationship with the dead, nearly all participants felt that it was their 'duty' to prepare the dead even when there was no scheduled viewing or anticipated physical continuation of bonds. Although the bodies of those who die without social contacts do disappear from view (Hallam et al. 1999: 137), funeral directors felt that it was their role to prepare the dead before disposal. Not only was it thus a 'health' and 'safety' issue, as noted earlier, but part of a broader pastoral role aiming to 'look after' those who had no surviving family or friends, and to 'acknowledge that somebody had lived' (Ruth).

Viewing was described as fulfilling two fundamental psychological functions: Firstly to help the bereaved accept the 'reality of death'; and secondly to aid people with the grief process. Viewing was recommended in most cases, particularly when there had been a sudden or unexpected death. In these situations, funeral directors felt that it was particularly important to 'validate' and accept the reality of death. Without viewing, friends and family did not have the opportunity to 'say goodbye', and funeral directors often felt that viewing helped establish 'closure'. As well as enforcing the 'reality of death', viewing was necessary for the creation of memories. These memories were important not only for the grief process and social integration of the bereaved, but also the integration of ancestors: 'It also helps people accept that, although life has left the body, there can be created a unique and individual way of remembering those that go before us' (FDANZ, 'What you need to know about viewing'). Funeral directors emphasised the salience of constructing a personalised memory (or 'living memorial'), and inextricably linked these memories to the ongoing 'needs' of the bereaved. 'Living memorials' will be further examined in the ensuing two chapters.

Although the FDANZ literature noted that viewing was also important when the deceased was 'visibly injured' (FDANZ, 'What you need to know about viewing'), some participants felt that viewing a disfigured or decomposed corpse was unhealthy and detrimental to the psychological well-being of the bereaved: 'If a person was well and happy and they had a terrible, tragic accident, where they couldn't be restored to their former glory or beauty...then that can be a bad thing. Viewing can be a bad thing' (Ian). When the remains of the dead did not conform to an acceptable image of death, therefore, they were not put on display: 'brutal death' was 'very much hidden from view' (Prior 1989: 161-162). Similarly, Bradbury (1999: 130) notes that the purpose of viewing - from the funeral directors' perspective - was to 'reassure the relatives that the mode of death was a good one, and not to register the fact of death'.

Viewing usually occurred at a funeral establishment in a viewing room, where viewing facilities were generally described as 'comfortable' and 'private'. Families typically made arrangements with the funeral director to view the deceased. On arrival at the funeral establishment, the funeral directors escorted the families to the viewing room and left them for a pre-determined period of time, reassuring them that a funeral director would be nearby if they needed help. The rooms observed during this research were usually decorated in light pastel colours, with strategically positioned floral arrangements. The lighting was subtle, while some establishments even had special lighting that enhanced the 'natural' appearance of the deceased. A few chairs were arranged around the room, with soft music often a standard feature of the viewing experience. A simple catafalque was used by some firms for displaying the casket, although one establishment provided a 'viewing bed' for those bereaved 'uncomfortable' with a casket. The time that families were able to spend in the viewing room depended on the number of viewing rooms and other scheduled viewings. Most participants were more than willing to allow the family as much time as they needed, while some of the rural funeral directors would even give the bereaved a key so that they could access the viewing room after-hours. Despite the flexibility of most funeral directors, however, some participants felt that temporal restrictions related to the operating hours of the funeral home were an impetus for the increasing practice of home viewing by Pakeha families.

Most funeral directors in this project estimated that ten to twenty percent of families were viewing at home, with some rural funeral directors stating that viewing rates exceeded twenty percent. Unlike the British situation, where 'inviting death into the house is generally avoided' (Howarth 1996: 20), participants in this study observed that home viewing had increased steadily over the last two decades. Despite the fact that compact modern homes were often 'unsuitable' for this practice, and that funeral directors offered funeral establishments with specifically-designed viewing facilities, more families were taking the body home - even if the person had died in an institution and thus 'escaped the contamination of death' (Howarth 1996: 20). Many funeral directors, such as Martin, suggested that clients were more aware of the options available, while Nancy, Carmen, and Ian felt that people had heard from friends and family that the practice of home viewing was 'psychologically beneficial'.

A number of bodies were returned home for viewing during the course of my fieldwork. One home viewing occurred in a city suburb where the family had hesitantly negotiated the return of the body with the funeral director. A woman in her mid-seventies had died after a brief illness and two of the woman's children were enthusiastic about 'bringing her home' for a few days before the funeral. Her husband and son, however, were slightly more ambivalent, and felt that they wanted to remember their wife and mother as she 'had been in life'. They were ultimately persuaded by the funeral director's reassurance that he would retrieve the body immediately if there was any 'discomfort'.

> The carefully prepared and encoffined corpse was placed into the hearse and we drove to the home of the deceased. Harry [the funeral director] slowly reversed down the driveway before stopping the vehicle and walking to the front door of the house. I stayed in the car unsure exactly of what to do. I saw a face peer out from behind a curtain. Harry walked into the house and inspected the room that had been prepared for the viewing. He returned to the car and asked me to help him 'transfer' the coffin. One young man, who I imagined to be the deceased's grandson, came out and stood awkwardly by the door. Harry and I took the coffin - which seemed remarkably heavy given its frail contents – and moved slowly inside...We inched our way into the house and I heard anxious conversation coming from a room nearby. We carried the coffin into a room that resembled a small lounge. It was relatively empty except for a large table in the centre. We carefully positioned the coffin on the table as four people slowly shuffled into the room. One was clearly the husband of the deceased and the others may have been her children. They whispered anxiously and Harry announced presciently that he would remove the coffin lid. All four hurriedly exited the room. Only the grandson stood reticently in the doorway. Harry and I removed the screws that fastened the lid and placed it carefully against the wall in the corner. After a quick inspection of the body, Harry walked along the corridor in search of the family. He explained that he would be back in two days to collect the body for the funeral but that they should not hesitate to call him if they had any concerns. The only audible

> response was muffled sobs. Harry came back to the 'viewing room' and we quietly made our way back to the front door...(Williams' Funeral Services field notes 2001).

The benefits of home viewing were expounded by numerous funeral directors and allowed participants to assert their abstruse and intimate understanding of the grief process. Robert, for example, emphasised that most families simply wanted to spend time with the deceased:

> They just want to spend more time with them. They accept death more and they find it helps them having their loved ones at home. They're not rushed...a lot of times they'll come to the funeral directors' premises. They're in and out in five minutes, but by taking them home they can spend time with them. They'll wake up in the middle of the night and they'll go and sit and have a chat beside them.

Spending time with the deceased was also correlated with acknowledging the 'reality of death':

> Taking the body home is a huge acknowledgement of the death of a person and it's a huge opportunity for people to actually spend some time coming to terms with the death, which is really what grieving is about. Grieving is not just about tears, it's about coming to terms with the death and um, and having a body at home for a night or two is a wonderful way of doing that (Carlos).

Some participants felt that home viewing allowed greater temporal flexibility and an enhanced, personalised experience. This experience was not necessarily easier or more convenient than the rationalised practices of earlier decades and indicated a particular level of 'honesty':

> They [friends and family] could sit beside the casket and have some drinks because that was appropriate and others were able to come in and tell stories. It was just that relaxed time of sharing. Individuals could spend time alone and get rid of some baggage, which hadn't been dealt with (Anthony).

> [A]s much as there are many, many people who want to have a funeral not interrupt their busy life schedule, lifestyle, um, we have those who are reacting against that and they're the ones who genuinely will celebrate life, take them home...(Thomas).

Relaxation and flexibility were considered particularly important when the person was young and/or died unexpectedly overseas:

> People are doing it particularly with younger deaths – children or teenagers – and to my mind...I think it's the best thing they can do...we've had some fantastic experiences with families that...sort of asked about it but are a bit tentative. So I say, 'What about we bring them home, and if you feel after a couple of hours, you're not comfortable, we'll just come and bring him back again'. And you know, their mates come around and they start putting the music on, and they start talking and having a few beers. And there's Fred over in the corner, and they talk to him, and the parents come down and they see it's just a natural thing (Martin).

Jane similarly felt that home viewing was 'much healthier for the grieving process' and that if the person was in the room next door it was much easier to 'get rid of that process'. Nigel likewise stated that the increase in home viewing was due to a healthier understanding of grief: 'this is really part of the grief cycle and it's much better for people'. Although funeral directors noted that transporting the body to the home was another organisational task, some felt it was also more convenient for the funeral workers:

> [If] it happens on a Friday and they take him [the deceased] home on a Friday - the funeral is a Monday - we don't get involved with people coming into the funeral home for viewings and that sort of thing over the weekend (Martin).

Some participants suggested that this 'healthier' approach to grieving was attributable to the influence of Maori funerary practices[166], while others noted that it was simply a return to earlier European funerary practices (Calder 1998). Robert felt that Pakeha had progressively distanced themselves from death, while Harvey asserted that:

> It's sort of a follow on from the Maori tradition in a way. They've [Pakeha] picked that up because, I think they get over their grieving a lot better. And ah, yeah, most people say 'It's the best thing we could have done – bring mum home for the last few days'.

Some participants also remarked that home viewing was a return to earlier funeral customs, when the body 'never left the house' before the funeral:

> [Home viewing] was a thing in the past and then it dropped away. Funeral directors' premises improved. They built or they provided rooms where families could come in, comfortable surroundings, and they decided that was better than taking them home. And then for some unknown reason...it sort of revolved around the other way again and people are now asking to have the body back home (Martin).

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[166] A number of authors (Dansey 1992; Hera 1995; Metge 1976; Sinclair 1990; Voykovic 1980) have explored Maori funerary ritual and emphasised the impact of the *tangihangi* on Pakeha funerary practices. Dansey (1992: 108-114) and Voykovic (1980 121-23), for example, emphasise that Maori have retained public grieving and expression of emotion, physical contact with the dead, and active community support. Europeans, on the other hand, are considered to have lost this contact and now treat death as a hidden or 'taboo' subject. Dansey (1992: 108) states that Europeans believe that the 'dead must be hurried away, hidden from sight', while Voykovic (1980: 121) states that Europeans need to return to a more 'honest and open acceptance of death'. In a comparison of Maori and Pakeha (non-Maori) funerals, Hera (1995: 140-48) notes that death is treated as the enemy by individualistic European society and that the dead body is seldom seen and frequently shrouded in euphemism. Maori, in contrast, have a strong bond with their dead and treat death and dying as part of life. As noted in the introduction, such accounts appropriate the therapeutic function of non-Western funerary ritual. This appropriation involves an elision between the world of nature and natural emotion, and an emphasis on those outside the 'West' who adhere to 'traditional' funerary ritual and display a healthier, 'natural' response to death (Hockey 1996b: 4).

Home viewing also contributed to the personalisation of the funeral and the construction of memories. If the person had died at home, it was considered appropriate by some funeral directors to have the body at home before the funeral:

> Mum might have died at home in bed. She's going back home. And that's what it means - *she's going back home*. She's not staying in that funeral director's parlour. That's a pretty cold thought for a lot of families (Richard).

At the same time, Richard felt that home viewing allowed greater privacy and gave the families greater control over the viewing experience. Privacy and control also created opportunities for the production of memories at this stage[167] of the funeral process:

> The best reason for [home viewing] is privacy - the privacy to grieve when and where and how a person wants. The family also have better control over things like lighting, heating, to enhance the memory. They've got the time to stroke, touch...play the deceased person's favourite music, as a memory booster (Richard).

As these comments suggest, environmental conditions and personal elements associated with the deceased (such as music) could therefore be re-enacted or recreated to reflect the life of the deceased and aid in the construction of memories:

> Two months ago, a well-known musician here died and they took him home. The band gathered and the day before the funeral, played all his old favourite tunes and you know, it was a meaningful experience (Ian).

Funeral director services were therefore an integral element in the creation of 'meaningful experiences'. Carlos also noted that home viewing encouraged the bereaved to 'conduct their own little rituals'. These rituals could be religious or secular and ranged from writing comments on the coffin to taking the prepared corpse to a personally significant location. What was particularly important with these personalised rituals - according to funeral directors - was that they reflected the life of the mourners and the deceased. One funeral director described the situation after he returned the embalmed body to the family:

> [They] took dad for a drive in the country. Down the beach, around the cliff tops, all of his old haunts. He was a fisherman and so they went and took him around all these places. That's not an uncommon occurrence (Roger).

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[167] As the aforementioned section on funeral arrangements indicated, however, funeral directors emphasised that the funeral service itself was usually a 'public' celebration of an individual's life and that a 'private' service had potentially detrimental consequences for the bereaved. This will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

In a way similar to the placement of ashes (discussed in chapter six), the body was transported to locations associated with the life of the deceased. By selecting these particular places, the bereaved were contributing to the final narrative of the deceased, and, retrospectively contributing to the late-modern 'project' noted earlier. The central significance of constructing this narrative was a recurring theme in funeral director discourse, incontrovertibly linked to the 'needs' of the bereaved. The potential of this narrative to fulfil perceived mourner needs is elucidated in the following chapter.

4.4 Summary

This chapter began by outlining the funeral options presented to bereaved families by the funeral director. The permutations of mourner involvement and range of personalised funeral 'options' received considerable attention by participants, who explicitly prioritised the significance of personalising funerary elements in the creation of 'meaningful experiences'. Funeral directors reiterated the extent of their expertise in evaluating the 'appropriateness' of various funeral options, while simultaneously emphasising the salience of their pastoral role. A discussion of funeral cost, however, highlighted the recurring ambivalence and tension evident in the perceived function of the funeral director. On the one hand, funeral directors emphasised the empowerment and autonomy of consumers and the pastoral responsibilities of the funeral director, yet on the other they stressed the significance of maintaining funeral standards (and structure) and fulfilling the innate (and often unrealised) psychological requirements of the bereaved. Indeed, the carefully controlled 'arrangements' session constituted a précis of the 'proper' post-mortem order facilitated by the funeral expert. Explicating their own experience and understanding of grief, funeral directors identified the boundaries of 'normal' and 'appropriate' funerary ritual, categorising acceptable arrangements as 'authentic', 'healthy', and 'dignified'. Conversely, funerary arrangements that did not fulfil the perceived needs of the bereaved (or wider 'community') or transgressed 'acceptable' boundaries - such as DIY, private funerals and direct disposals - were derided and discouraged by many study participants.

The discourse of embalming was similarly pervaded by a rhetoric of personalisation that implicitly (and often explicitly) privileged funeral director expertise and co-

constructed categories of normalcy and deviance. The possession and preparation of the corpse was central to funeral director control and an integral element of the professional aspirations of the occupation. Funeral directors appropriated public health discourse identifying the corpse as a source of disease, and highlighted the importance of sanitation and preservation. Participants emphasised the rationale of presentation and stipulated that bodies needed to be represented in an 'appropriate' and 'dignified' way to effect the 'reality of death', and initiate a 'healthy grieving process'. These requirements delimited the funeral options encouraged by funeral directors and the practices of funeral directors themselves. Funeral directors also linked the dialogic process of post-mortem identity construction to the personalised ritual of viewing and the late-modern completion of the 'self project'. These normalising technologies promoted by funeral director participants were clearly reminiscent of Foucault's concept of pastoral power, and found particular expression in the construction of the 'memory picture' and 'living memorial', which aimed to provide 'meaning' and 'significance' in a highly secularised society. These constructs will be elucidated in the ensuing chapter.

Chapter Five

THE FUNERAL SERVICE

> The funeral has become an important ceremonial custom designed to pay tribute to the life of the deceased and provide support for the bereaved. It is the final opportunity family and friends have to publicly express their love and respect for the deceased, while being able to share their grief with others. If the funeral is arranged so that everyone attending is comfortable in openly expressing their feelings, then it can be extremely beneficial in helping people come to terms with the death. While the funeral serves to honour the memory of the deceased, it can also help lessen the suffering and assist the bereaved in working through the grieving process (Anderson Funeral Services).

The previous chapter detailed pre-disposal funeral arrangements and preparation of the corpse by funeral directors. As my arguments showed, these two disparate elements of funeral director service were replete with references to personalisation and client autonomy, and yet simultaneously revealed features reminiscent of the normalising technologies exercised through Foucault's (1983) concept of 'pastoral power'. Foucault's concept is particularly relevant to the following discussion of the funeral service in contemporary New Zealand society. The funeral service typically takes place a few days after death and involves the mourners, an officiant (religious or secular), and the funeral director. The service is held at the funeral director chapel, a church, or other selected venue, and the prepared body is usually present. At the completion of the service the body is removed for disposal and the mourners generally gather for 'refreshments' or 'funeral tea'. In this study, participants reiterated that certain elements of the funeral service had become increasingly personalised in the last two decades, and cited the significance of mourner involvement, funeral celebrants, and 'tributes' in creating an individualised, 'life-centred' funeral. As the ensuing examination highlights, these 'life-centred' funerals have become the new orthodoxy in post-mortem practices in New Zealand.

As I discussed in my previous chapters, participants stipulated that this contemporary funeral service provided a marked contrast to 'impersonal' religious funerals of earlier decades. These traditional, 'impersonal' funerals became a point of distinction, and provided funeral directors with a form of origin 'myth' that marked the development of the late-modern funeral director and personalised funerals. This

chapter begins, therefore, by examining secularisation in New Zealand and the shift to non-religious funerary rituals. An integral feature of this recent shift is the secular funeral celebrant. These secular funeral officiants represent an augmentation of the funeral directors' control and pastoral function, and funeral director participants frequently emphasised the salience of selecting celebrants who satisfied the perceived 'needs' of client families. Celebrants have thus become intrinsic elements of the life-centred funeral, and an important influence in the creation of 'relevant' ritual and 'memories' emphasised by participants in this study.

In addition to the significance of late-modern self-reflexivity and biographical narratives, it is also clear that personalised rituals reflect funeral director perceptions of effective post-mortem practices. Although funeral directors overtly distanced contemporary funeral services from the rationalised treatment of death prevalent in the post-war period - emphasising instead the significance of idiosyncratic diversity - personalised rituals remained firmly bounded by innate notions of grief. Funeral director discussions of funeral service function clearly demonstrated the construction of 'normal' funerary practices, while simultaneously reifying their own involvement in the funeral process. Participants in this study, for example, consistently accentuated the correlation between 'appropriate' funeral services and 'healthy' and 'therapeutic' grief processes, and the significance of creating 'living memorials' in the absence of overarching religious frameworks. Participants thus emphasised the need to create 'meaningful' services for the living, while de-emphasising the precise method and process of disposition. As the final section of my chapter elucidates, however, even the practices surrounding disposal have nevertheless been subject to the same emphasis on prioritising the innate 'needs' of the living in contemporary society.

5.1 Secularisation theory

Nearly all the participants in this project recounted religious vicissitudes in New Zealand, emphasising the implications of secularisation in the second half of the twentieth century and the subsequent transformation of post mortem practices. Participants asserted that a significant proportion of the population had 'moved away' from institutionalised religion and now demanded more 'personalised' funerary ritual. Funeral directors, clergy, and celebrants included in this study

emphasised that this shift had become particularly discernable in the last two decades. This section begins, therefore, by providing an overview of secularisation and the perceived role of religion in New Zealand.

There is an extensive literature on secularisation theory and considerable debate about the definition and validity of this phenomenon. In his early writings, Peter Berger - a prominent proponent of secularisation theory – defined this phenomenon as 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols' (1967: 107).[167] Some academics attributed this religious decline to the fragmentation of the lifeworld, the decline of *Gemeinschaft*, and other features related to the rise of modernity. More recently, however, some of these researchers have rejected a unilinear, Weberian, rationalisation thesis and been cautious about proclaiming an inexorable link between secularisation and modernity (Berger 2000: 445). Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 430), for example, have stipulated that secularisation is a continuing process that takes place in all religious economies, and that sources of religion are constantly changing. In an article entitled 'Secularization, R.I.P.', Stark (1999) also claims that studies of religion emphasising the significance of secularisation often exaggerate accounts of historical religiosity.[168] Authors such as Bruce (1997) and Douglas (1983) have also questioned the caricature of a 'Golden Age of Faith', while others (for instance Chaves 1994; Lechner 1991) have called for a significant revision of the secularisation theory. Chaves (1994), for example, calls for a reformulation of secularisation, emphasising that secularisation is not a decline of religion, but a decline in the scope of religious authority. Bruce (2001) similarly stipulates that there has been an incontrovertible decline in the power and popularity of religion, evident in diminishing church membership and attendance in Britain.

What is less contested, is the fact that the role of the church in Western societies has been influenced by the features of modernity noted at the beginning of this thesis. Religion has become only one of a number of competing epistemologies, and traditional religious authority is now 'part of an indefinite pluralism of expertise' (Giddens 1991: 195). The weakening of local community ties, migration, and changing

[167] Prominent early proponents also included Bryan Wilson, Thomas Luckmann, and Karel Dobbelaere.

patterns of marriage and family life have also weakened and relativised the plausibility structures of particular beliefs. Additionally, religion has been located in the private realm: 'Modernity, with its pluralizing and privatizing tendencies, challenges absolutes of all kinds and relativizes the beliefs, values, and practices linked to every religion' (Roof 2003: 61).

The escalation of individualism is closely related to these changes. People have been increasingly enculturated into a more individualistic political economy (Baumeister 1986: 35; Collins 1982: 58), selectively and reflexively consuming fragments from numerous frameworks that were of benefit to their own lives and the constitution of self-identity (Giddens 1991: 5; Roof 2003: 66-67; Ward 2003: 28-31). As Mellor and Shilling (1993: 413) note, privatisation of meaning in high modernity has not only curtailed the scope of the sacred but also forced an increasing number of isolated individuals to establish and maintain 'values to guide them and make sense out of their daily lives'. In this regard, pluralism and individualism are also integrally related to the postmodern condition described by authors such as Beckford (1992) and Lyotard (1984). As relevant to my argument here, postmodernism rejects positivist metanarratives and rationalist knowledge as the sole standards of knowledge, combines symbols from disparate frames, and celebrates spontaneity and fragmentation. There are clear parallels between the postmodernism championed by individuals such as Lyotard (1984) and the discourse mobilised by funeral directors in New Zealand. Participants in this project emphasised the heterogeneity, plurality, and innovation of contemporary funerals, but, as will be reiterated in the following discussion, this discourse was located around a particular construction and understanding of grief. I will also argue that the current emphasis on 'relevant' and 'personalised' funeral services forms a new (grand) scheme of legitimisation that seeks to contain and control funeral experiences in a similar way to earlier religious post-mortem practices derided by funeral directors.[169]

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[168] For other relevant critiques of secularisation see Greeley (1995), Martin (1991), and Swatos and Christiano (1999).

[169] There are clear parallels here with some of the criticisms of postmodernism. While postmodernists such as Lyotard (1984) eschewed the grand schemes of legitimisation inherent in modern discourses, the terminology of 'post-' clearly involves a 'historical, sequential discourse that implies a master narrative, totalising periodizations, and historical, sequential thinking' (Best and Kellner 1991: 173).

Walter (1993c, 1994, 1997) examines secularisation in relation to death, arguing that death has become a largely secular affair in Western society. The demystification or *Entzauberung* of the Enlightenment allowed humans to uncover the laws that governed the physical universe, which in turn meant that many Judaeo-Christian groups found their supernatural teachings no longer plausible in an increasingly rational world. Religion thus gradually lost its monopoly over death meaning systems and ritual, and increasingly had to share 'its responsibilities for defining and managing death with medicine, science and technology (Kearl 1989: 170).[170] As Blauner (1966: 385) asserts: 'Hegemony in the affair of death has been transferred from the church to science and its representatives, the medical professional and the rationally organised hospital'. The minister was replaced by the medical expert and death reduced to a series of potentially curable afflictions (Bauman 1992a; Mellor and Shilling 1993: 425).

Death was also secularised within the Church itself. Protestant churches in particular de-emphasised the doctrine of hell and the prayers for the dead (Berger 1967; Walter 1999: 47), and focused instead on converting the sinner. In an overview of changing Christian beliefs surrounding death, Rowell (1997: 24) notes that 'the eternal torments of hell seemed to compromise the goodness of God and to make a nonsense of the Christian teaching that the nature and name of God was love'. The grief of survivors and death as emotional loss also became more salient concerns. The significance of the social body was superseded by an emphasis on the individual body (Ariès 1981), with forms of body management and dying a 'good death' given more prominence. Dying became an increasingly private event no longer supported by deathbed ritual (Elias 1985; Moller 1996; Walter 1993b), and individuals were left to construct their own meanings and scripts around death (Garces-Foley 2003; Heinz 1999; Walter 1993c: 129). Hawkins (1990: 303-4) notes that in a society that values individuality, relativism, and plurality, people are often expected to create their own pre- and post-mortem practices utilising a plethora of ideological fragments, creating a problematic situation for many people who eschew religious metanarratives. Heinz (1999: 81) states that the changes that began with the demystification of the Enlightenment, culminated in 'an exclusively individual preoccupation with the meaning of life' in the twentieth century.

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[170] See also Kellehear (2000).

The New Zealand situation

Authors such as Hill (1994:295) contend that a significant degree of secularity was already present in nineteenth century New Zealand, evident in the levels of church attendance, the acceptance of pluralism, and the secular stance of the state. Although there was an early increase in church attendance (between 1874 and 1886), the last decade of the nineteenth century marked the long-term decline of the Protestant churches (Belich 2001: 163; Davidson and Lineham 1989: 178-184; Jackson 1983: 51). Formal church-attendance became the occupation of women and children, and clergy bewailed the apparent loss of faith (Dalziel 1993: 120). Veitch (1996: 90) notes, however, that the influence of Christianity was extensive until the mid-1960s, and Belich (2001: 164) stipulates that 'a strong tradition of piety and family use of the Bible' were indicative of the continuing authority of the Christian church during this period.

The last four decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a marked decrease in church affiliation and attendance in New Zealand. Christian youth activity and Sunday School participation both declined, followed by an abatement in adult church attendance. Belich (2001: 488-519) argues that this period marked a significant transformation and breakdown of many traditional values. Not only was there a significant decline in allegiance to the major Christian denominations, but an increasing number of people who professed to having 'no religion' in the census statistics.[171]

Over the last four decades this group has increased from 12,651 individuals in 1956 (representing less than one percent of the population), to 1,028,052 in 2001, representing nearly thirty percent of the total population (*2001 Census Regional Summary*). This increase has been particularly marked in the last two decades (see Figure 1). In his study of four congregations in Christchurch, New Zealand, Ward (2003) found that church-going declined by about half during this period (from 20 percent to 10 percent weekly, and 40 percent to 20 percent monthly). Ward (2003: 268-69) stipulates that the decline in allegiance to the churches can be attributed to these

[171] While fewer people identified with the established Christian denominations, there were significant increases in those who identified with non-Christian religions. These religions, however, continue to constitute a small percentage of the total population.

social and cultural changes, as well as the liberal theological position of the established ecclesiastical institutions. People ceased going to church because attendance did not 'fit their social or cultural values' (Ward 2003: 334), and churches no longer encompassed the heterogeneous nature of private significance (Dickey 1980). This situation, however, did not indicate a general decline in religiosity or 'believing'. Authors such as Davie (1994) have stressed that people do not necessarily desist church attendance because they no longer profess any religious beliefs, and emphasises instead the importance of 'believing without belonging' in contemporary society. In her study of funerals in the United States, Garces-Foley (2003: 288) refers to these people as 'congregationally unaffiliated', and notes that many of these individuals continue to hold 'conventional' religious beliefs. This point was one re-iterated by numerous participants in the current project.

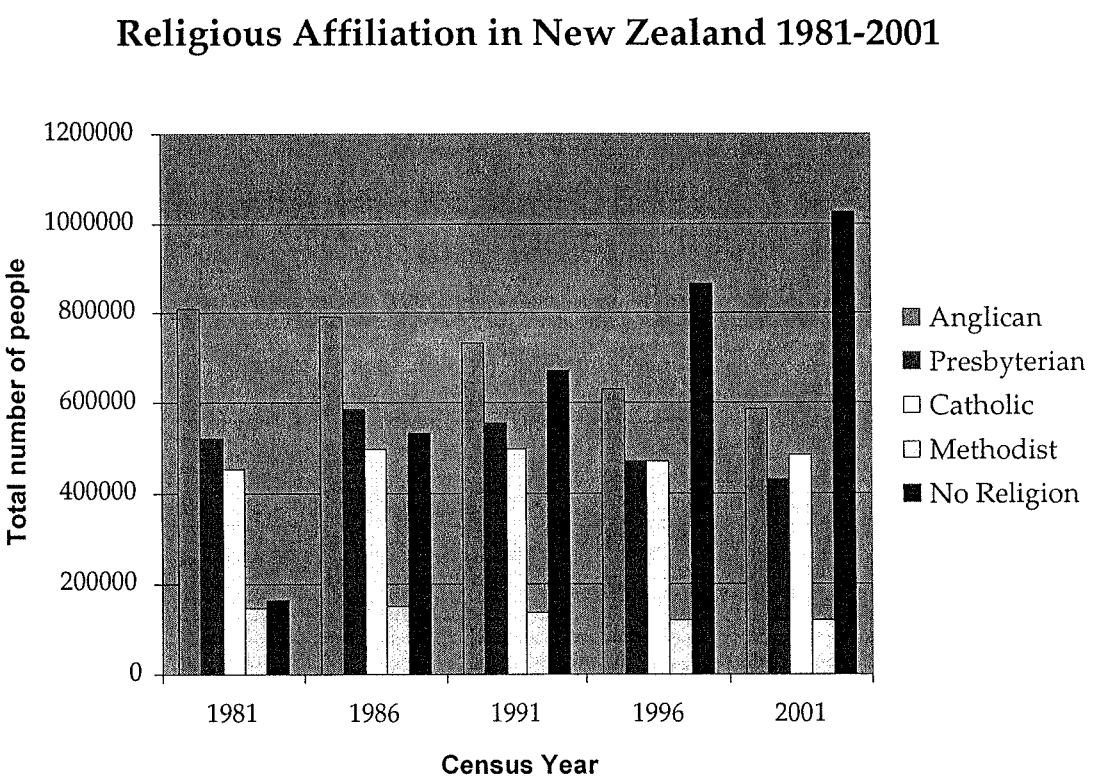

FIGURE 1. Religious affiliation in New Zealand 1981-2001.[172]

[172] The 'no religion' category does not include the significant number of individuals who 'objected' to answering the religious affiliation question.

As noted in chapter three, the church remained dominant in death related practices during the nineteenth (and much of the twentieth) century and traditional religious spaces, symbols, and functionaries were used for funerals. Participants noted, however, that this situation began to change slowly in the second half of the twentieth century, with a discernible shift in the last two decades. As Dickey (1980: 40) noted more than twenty years ago, funeral rites became only 'nominally associated with traditional institutionalised religion'. Standardised religious funerals were represented as impersonal and increasingly irrelevant to a population with tenuous church links. As this population began to lose its perceived connection to the Christian churches, it became increasingly 'uncomfortable' in utilising the services and facilities of the church:

> I don't believe as many people go to church regularly anymore, whereas even fifteen or maybe even only ten years ago, when there was a death in the family, they were comfortable about ringing up the parish priest or the vicar or the minister and using their services regardless, but they were beginning to be uncomfortable about it and maybe not in so many words, but the message we would get back quite often was, 'Ah God, now I suppose I'm going to have to start to go to church on Sunday,' or 'The bloody vicar might call around and try to get us back' (William).

> I think a lot of people don't belong to churches these days and they feel a bit hypocritical [having a church funeral]...it's socially more acceptable now to not use churches (David).

> People are attending church less, I'm not saying becoming less religious necessarily, but they're attending church less and they feel uncomfortable in church and because of that they feel more uncomfortable with a minister of religion officiating (Timothy).

One participant who left the funeral industry for a number of years in the 1980s, noted that this change in attitude became particularly conspicuous on his return to funeral directing in the 1990s:

> The difference was by 1990, there was a strong move, people were saying, 'I don't want a minister, I don't go to church. I might have gone to Sunday School but I haven't been to church for 30 years, 40 years...and I don't want a minister'. So society, you know, has changed a lot in the last ten years, fifteen, twenty years (John).

Participants noted that this situation contrasted with religious allegiance and church attendance in other countries (particularly the United States), and that traditional funeral director alliances with religious communities were declining. This was particularly evident for those funeral directors who had promoted themselves as 'religious' funeral directors specialising in Christian funerals:

> In America they say that about forty percent of folk still have a church attendance. Here in New Zealand it's about four to five percent. It's a diminishing number, so therefore the type of

> clientele that I have with [funeral establishment], I couldn't exist on it, but it's still a salient part of my business and um, the thing is that, it will diminish, it will diminish and it will always be a core segment of any um, percentage of work. But it's diminished even in my time. We used to have fifty percent of our work was always church work, but it's not like that now, it's not like that now. You know, people will use the church and they'll say, "We got married there. I think we'll use that one. The kids got married there. It's a nice church, it's a nice setting". But it's not because of faith commitment (Tony).

Participants suggested that the churches had not adapted adequately to the changing societal situation and continued to offer institutionalised funerals with a dispassionate, inapposite format that offered little or no personal insight:

> I think there's far more personal input into a funeral today. Gone is the straight jacket religious service that my father had, for example...Never having been a church-attender, yet his funeral was in a church, he was given a service fitting for St. Paul, but in fact the only time I ever heard him take the name of Jesus was ah, out on the farm with some expletives to the dogs and the cattle (Thomas).

Other funeral directors emphasised that the clergy did not 'get alongside the people' (Charles) and that the church was simply not 'meeting peoples' needs' (Toby). Another participant postulated that the mainstream religious denominations had no effective 'marketing strategy' and that some religious groups improperly used the funeral service as an opportunity to 'sell their religion' (Samuel). These concerns were highlighted by the response of one religious minister interviewed during the course of this research. While his response was atypical (and the minister himself acknowledged that he had received 'all sorts of criticism' for his dogmatic stance from other clergy), it clearly indicates the increasing influence of the funeral director:

> I'm horrified that people are so careless that they, they don't bring God into it. Whether you believe or not there must be some creator who has given us birth and it's rather sad, at the end of their term in life, that people don't recognise their creator and to me that's an affront of God. And the funeral directors say, "We don't need you clergy now. We can get these [celebrants]". And I'm almost tempted to say to these funeral directors, "You will have to answer to your Lord and your Maker some day, if you don't try and help these people to do it in the proper way" (Karl).

Participants often noted that they were 'the silent watchers of social change' (Michael), and that recent years had witnessed important societal transformations. Funeral directors frequently linked the changes in religious affiliation to broader societal issues, highlighting a general lack of 'guidance' and 'care'[173] in modern society:

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[173] The focus on 'care' is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the recent (2003) transformation of the FDANZ journal from *The New Zealand Funeral Director* into *Funeralcare*. The concept of 'care' also extended to the terminally ill who planned their own funerals: 'In these cases the funeral directors may

> People are tending away again from the traditional, um, practice of religion. Um, their personal daily beliefs, keep religion out of it. I think society in general has got too busy. The family unit has broken down, so there's no real role model within the family, to say "Hey, this is, this is how we practice in our family", you know. There's no, ah, I guess if you like to say, the 'godliness' out of family life has diminished and they look at other areas to worship. And unfortunately with no guidance, a lot of younger people worship drugs, alcohol, all the rest that goes with it (Richard).

> Families aren't as genuine towards their relatives, often, as they used to be, particularly if they lived apart. They don't seem to, there's not the same care, so we could see a change there, maybe we're already seeing it in a small way - that this is the reason that people are shopping around. To my way of thinking, it's a lack of care, or a lack of concern and that too, I suppose, indirectly, is tied up with religious significance, and their outlook, from the spiritual side of things. So, one thing usually is linked to the other (Charles).

Their position as silent social 'observers' also allowed funeral directors to recognise the limitations of religion and the perceived speciousness and insincerity associated with particular denominations:

> I think people have become bored, disillusioned, um, you know, I think the poor old Catholic Church has got a real problem, that the paedophilia went against it, the Anglicans can't make a decision, the Uniting Church is just full of corruption. I see it everywhere; we've got the hypocrisy of Seven Day Adventists and all these so-called Christian things. It's alright for people to have their faith, I don't mind, but we see the other side of it (Jack).

The response of one funeral director below highlights how some participants were themselves intrinsically involved in the production of standardised religious funerals during this period:

> When I started we would have what was known as a 'book funeral', because the clergy person did all the funerals whether they were religious or otherwise, atheists or agnostic. The minister was called in to do the funeral and you know in the early days too Cyril, you would sit and be talking to the clergy man and you would openly hear people say to the director at the time, "We won't be very long Michael because there's not much religious faith here". So we'd go through a book funeral and those people, we would go into the chapel and sit down and they'd have a ten-minute book funeral service...within twenty minutes - from the start of the funeral - we were driving away to the cemetery or crematorium. That's what used to happen...being part of that, I thought that was the norm (Michael).

A number of participants, including the aforementioned funeral director, noted that some individuals within the funeral industry eventually recognised the changing 'needs' of the bereaved and responded to these perceived needs by transforming the services they offered. As noted in chapter three, funeral directors began to shift their service focus: 'It used to be said that he [the funeral director] was there to care for the deceased and to ensure that a reverent...burial had taken place. Well, we've moved

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meet their client before they die and become an extension of the care-giving team' (*Sunday Star-Times* 15 October 2000: D3).

away from that now. We're there to attend to the needs and wants of the bereaved' (Michael). While earlier funeral rituals may have been 'swift, clean and simple' (Michael) as outlined in chapter four, participants emphasised that personalised funerals were necessarily difficult.[174] As the discussion below elucidates, these painful, necessarily reflexive experiences contributed to a contemporary form of 'salvation', including health and well-being (Foucault 1983: 215).

One of the fundamental ways in which funeral directors were able to attend to the 'needs' and 'wants' of the bereaved was to personalise the funeral by making it congruous with the life and beliefs of the deceased and their family. Contemporary services were, as one participant noted, 'a more appropriate reflection of reality' (Anthony). Malcouronne (2000: 2-3) notes that celebrants made the funeral service more relevant and meaningful, and transformed the impersonal religious service into a 'human' and 'life-affirming' ritual. Celebrants not only began officiating at an increasing number of funerals in the 1980s and 1990s, but were also credited by participants with effecting a significant change in the content of clergy-led funerals. While authors such as Davies (2002) and Walter (1990, 1997), and Garces-Foley (2003) and Prothero (2001), have examined the increasing personalisation of funerary rituals in Britain and the United States respectively, the concept of a secular funeral celebrant remains a relatively unfamiliar development.[175]

Funeral celebrants

Funeral celebrants are a fundamental component of personalisation in New Zealand and represent an extension of the funeral directors pastoral role. Many participants in this research emphasised the significance of the celebrant in transforming funerary

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[174] Funerals and funeral directors in this regard could be considered a form of therapy. Giddens (1991: 179-80) considers therapy in the context of secularisation and notes that while there is some validity in Rieff's assertion that therapy preserves a level of 'social functioning' in a secularised setting, he argues that therapy is a 'phenomenon of modernity's reflexivity'. Reflexivity is an important component of the life-centred funerals discussed below, but this reflexivity is clearly linked to specific constructions of grief by funeral directors.

[175] Some funeral industry commentators have, however, promoted the potential of this development. Doug Manning, a minister writing for the American funeral industry publication *The Dodge Magazine*, explored the celebrant alternative in New Zealand and stated: 'I do not know of anything we could do that would have a longer or more profound impact on the future of the funeral than starting a civil celebrant program here in the United States' (Manning 1998: 6). See also Manning (1996a, 1996b, and 1999). Garces-Foley (2003) notes that funerals for the 'congregationally' unaffiliated' in the United States are often conducted by clergy who specialise in this type of funeral. Young and Cullen (1996:

practices. Marian Barnes pioneered this development in New Zealand in the late 1970s.[176] Like many of the participants in this project, Barnes believed that funerals focused exclusively on religious interpretations of death and that these interpretations were often incongruous with the life and personality of the deceased. In response to these concerns, Barnes introduced the celebrant alternative. The establishment of this functionary followed similar developments in Australia.[177] Funeral director participants usually credited these individuals with constructing a funeral ceremony that focused on the life of the deceased and incorporated the requirements of the bereaved. Unlike humanist or rationalist funerals[178], however, these funerals did not specifically challenge religious beliefs, but instead provided an alternative for the increasing number of non-church-going individuals (Barnes 1991: 102; Malcouronne 2000: 3). Numerous participants emphasised, however, that celebrant funerals often included a significant religious component[179]:

> I think the biggest change has been...not so much the type of funeral, but the content of the actual funeral service itself. We're seeing a larger and larger percentage of funerals taken by a funeral celebrant now, rather than the local clergy person...it's really a celebration of the deceased's life, rather than a ceremony, a religious ceremony...The celebrant services aren't non-religious. It's always interesting to me, you know, we go to visit a family who have had a death and they say to us um, 'Dad wasn't religious and we don't want a religious service, we don't like a minister'. So we organise a celebrant for them. We then go along to the funeral and you still have a reading out of the Bible, we all recite the Lord's Prayer together, we sing a couple of hymns, um all of the components that they seem to be against initially and the only reason those things are in there is because they have specifically asked for them, because the celebrant provides whatever they want. And I think what a lot of people are saying, when they tell us they don't want a religious funeral, they're saying 'We want to pick and choose and we don't it rammed down our throat'. So it's not really that we're getting away from religion to any great extent. We're getting away from going to churches and people are...wanting to make the choices themselves now (Ivan).

The primary role of the celebrant is to compose the service and preside at the life-centred event. Malcouronne (2000: 3) describes celebrants as facilitators and resource providers: 'there for the family to offer guidance, to facilitate their requests and to oversee the kind of service the family wants'. Although these individuals fulfil a similar function to the clergy, they do not possess any institutionalised authority and

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184-88) lament the impersonal nature of many funerals in Britain and note the importance of personalised funerals and the potential of celebrants.

[176] For a detailed history of the funeral celebrant in New Zealand see Schäfer (1998).

[177] See Griffin and Tobin (1997: 148), Messenger (1992: 160), and Walter (1990: 218). Australia has a national association of celebrants, and a number of institutions offer educational programs for celebrants.

[178] See Walter (1990: 221-23) and Willson (1989) for a discussion of humanist funerals in Britain. See Gadberry (2000) and Garces-Foley (2003) for an overview of life-centred funerals in the United States.

their ritual identity is primarily limited to the funeral itself (Lawrence 1995: 114). Since the pioneering work of Barnes, professional celebrant training has been implemented in Auckland and a national celebrant association established.[180] Earlier research (Schäfer 1998) revealed that celebrants came from a variety of personal and educational backgrounds and that a significant number were retired clergy who emphasised the importance of continuing pastoral care. Very few of the ministers revealed any of the reservations expressed by some of the participants in Garces-Foley's study (2003: 296), who often felt that the reduction of religious content was difficult to reconcile with their call to ministry.

Secular funeral celebrants were typically dependent on funeral directors for 'funeral work' and thus represented an augmentation of this functionary's pastoral role. Although a few celebrants established independent reputations, advertising their services in varying publications, telephone directories, and the Internet, many individuals considered celebrant work a part-time occupation that supplemented other forms of income. Families that experienced bereavement were often unfamiliar with funeral celebrants in a particular area and usually relied exclusively on funeral director recommendations. Most funeral director establishments maintained lists of officiants that fulfilled the expectations of the funeral director, and celebrant fees constituted one of the 'disbursements' included in the funeral directors' fee. A few of the larger urban funeral firms also employed 'in house' celebrants who often worked in a dual capacity as funeral celebrant *and* grief support person (see chapter six). Participants were careful to emphasise that celebrants, like funeral directors, needed to fulfil the 'requirements' of the client family and maintain the reputation and quality of the funeral firm:

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[179] Garces-Foley (2003: 295) similarly found it extremely unusual for the 'congregationally unaffiliated' to request 'absolutely no mention of God' in the United States.

[180] There are interesting parallels between funeral director and celebrant professionalisation. There are at present no formal qualifications required to conduct funerals and no legal requirements concerning funeral ceremonies. Although marriage celebrants are registered with the Department of Internal Affairs, funeral celebrants do not need to be registered with the Department or any other regulatory body. This has led a number of celebrants to emphasise the significance of maintaining professional standards by prioritising educational qualifications and association membership. Malcouronne (2000: 31), for example, asserts that there needs to be a 'professional body of funeral celebrants who have been appropriately selected and trained, certified and authorised to conduct funeral services'. He goes on to emphasise that, 'the funeral service is far too sensitive, important and significant an occasion, to be led by unsuitable and untrained people' (Malcouronne 2000: 31).

> The good ones tend to be the ones that, they're recommended by funeral companies, because seldom does the family choose the celebrant. They discuss it with their funeral director and the funeral director may recommend two or three, who, who from our discussions with the family will be appropriate and provide what the family need. So the good ones don't need to advertise in the *Yellow Pages* because they're doing a good job, that their performance is um, is um valued by the funeral company and I mean in everything, in all of these extra people that we, that are involved in funerals um, they have to do a good service, provide a good service, or else it reflects poorly on the funeral company (Ivan).

The funeral directors in this project emphasised that after discussions with the client they usually recommended celebrants that were 'appropriate' and would be congruous with the perceived needs of the family:

> We probably use the range of about half a dozen celebrants. We like to use people that we know, um, and the sort of...work that they do. Because there's very few families that come, if they're looking for a celebrant, to come with somebody they've got in mind. Sometimes they do...but often they have nobody in mind. They want us to recommend somebody. So we like to recommend somebody that we know is going to honour the sorts of things that they want to do (Elizabeth).

One important consideration for some funeral directors was that celebrants provided a service that complemented their own pastoral function and extended beyond the immediate practical implications of the funeral:

> I think what we would normally do to choose a celebrant is we would look at the family and what they were like, and that's why you need to have a variety of celebrants. Because I mean, what would apply to one family, wouldn't apply to the other. We've got fairly traditional celebrants...some are more traditional in the way that they put over the service and some people, some families would go well with that...But um, I think celebrants, ah, yeah well that's why we have a pool of them. We have men and women, and a lot of them, believe it or not, are actually religious people anyway because they, they believe too, that there is another you know, side to caring for people, pastorally as well (Nathan).

> I look at the celebrants we use today and think well, for myself personally, I would use one of them probably in preference to any of the clergy I know, because they take a good service and they've moved the boundaries beyond just taking a funeral. Some of them are now providing counselling and follow-up. You know, they're almost like secular clergy I suppose (William).

Because a substandard celebrant was presumed to reflect poorly on the esteem of the establishment, funeral directors noted that it was crucial to make the appropriate selection. One participant noted that funeral directors 'know how it should be done - if it's not that way, then those celebrants have a pretty short shelf life' (Ivan). In response to a recent suggestion that funeral firms provide client families with a 'full list' of officiants in their area, funerals directors reportedly stated that funeral firms had to 'ensure the right celebrant was assigned to the bereaved family' and that providing a 'list' would not help families (*Otago Daily Times* 20 January 2003: 11). These responses clearly indicate that funeral directors played a salient role in

establishing the 'needs' of a particular family *and* controlling the facilitation of the funeral experience by selecting celebrants that complemented their particular funeral requirements.

After being contacted by the funeral director and provided with rudimentary details about the deceased and family situation, the celebrant usually communicated with the bereaved and organised an interview similar to the one outlined in chapter four. In most cases the celebrant will not know the deceased or the bereaved, and thus the interview provides the opportunity for the celebrant to obtain important information about each particular situation. In the interview the celebrant will attempt to ascertain the family's requirements and the type of funeral they desire. Readings, prayers, music, and tributes are usually discussed together with the degree of family involvement in the service considered. In addition to the general content and structure of the service, the celebrant is often charged with the construction and presentation of a tribute or eulogy. To perform this task effectively, the celebrant explores varying components of the deceased's life, including childhood, family, employment, character, interests, and achievements. The celebrant may speak to a number of people who knew the deceased to gain a more 'balanced' perspective. After acquiring the requisite information, the celebrant will proceed to construct a life-centred funeral.[181]

The celebrant often presents a draft of the service to the bereaved before the funeral. Although there is naturally variation in the content of life-centred funerals, some common characteristics are discernible.[182] The funeral usually begins with an introduction that states the expectation of the service, explicates the kinship associations, and outlines the components of the service. These opening statements are often followed by some general thoughts and reflections on death. Tributes in the form of pithy personal disquisitions and biographical narratives are presented, and these tributes often form the central focus of the funeral. Tributes are typically succeeded by a period of reflection and prayers, poetry, or music. Like the other

[181] This procedure is similar to the one employed by the individuals who organise non-religious funerals in the United States and Britain (Garces-Foley 2003: 294; Walter 1990: 221). As noted above, most of these individuals in the United States are clergy.
[182] A number of authors including Barnes (1991), Hudson (1995), Messenger (1992), and Malcouronne (2000) have presented varying funeral options and formats in their publications.

components of the funeral, these periods of reflection are commonly linked directly to the deceased or their family. The final part of the funeral is the closure and committal. Although this may take place at the graveside or crematorium, it is increasingly conducted in the funeral directors' chapel.

5.2 Life-centred funerals

Secular celebrants and funeral directors are actively engaged in the construction of life-centred funerals, although this construction is often rendered invisible in the reification process. Participant rhetoric, for example, emphasised that life-centred funerals simply 'reflected' a new 'reality', and enlightened understanding of grief that acknowledged the 'needs' of the bereaved. Discussions with funeral director participants highlighted that these personalised 'funerals' were the new orthodoxy in post-mortem practices. Life-centred funerals focus on the life of a particular person and aim to provide some meaning and legitimisation for this particular life in terms of secular values (Dickey 1980: 55). They are - as most participants noted - a *celebration* of an individual's life, rather than a commendation to a life to come (Walter 1990: 171). One participant, for example, stated that funeral directors clearly recognised this shift in focus:

> We're saying to families, we're *celebrating* the life. That doesn't mean to say we need to go to church to do that...and a funeral service can take any form at all. It's really a form of celebration and farewell, and that's where celebrants come into their own (Henry).

Participants emphasised that these diverse celebrations could take a variety of forms and did not have to conform to any prescribed religious format:

> A funeral can be anything you want it to be, whereas I come from a fairly traditional background myself, where it would have been a church funeral and burial. And I've come to see over time that, look, the funeral really is a celebration of a person's life and it's what the family want to make of it (Elizabeth).

> So I think because people were dictated to, in that respect and they had no input, and most, most of the service was out of the book anyway, um, ah that's where the role of the celebrant actually shone through because the celebrant then was able to provide families with, um, a very meaningful, life-centred type funeral service, and a celebration of that person's life (Nathan).

Unlike the impersonal and predictable religious funerals that could be conducted without ever mentioning the name of the deceased (Walter 1990: 171), celebrant funerals focussed on the life of one, unique individual. Participants particularly

stressed that individuality was obscured in earlier religious services, and that it was celebrants who initiated a transformation in the focus of funerary ritual:

> The advent of celebrants, who actually physically structure a funeral with the family as to exactly what they want and how it's going to go, rather than the probably 99.9 percent that I used to be involved in my early days, where it was either a church service or a chapel service with a minister. And whatever way it was, if you went to that minister for a funeral today, and you went to that minister for a funeral tomorrow for somebody else, [you] wouldn't be able to tell them apart. They would be identical because they were reading out of the same book and you wouldn't...even have known whose funeral you were at because they didn't even mention the person's name (Martin).

One recurring theme identified during the course of this research was the importance of constructing a 'relevant 'and 'meaningful' ritual that was congruous with the lifestyle and personality of the deceased. Contemporary funeral directors stressed that the uniform religious funerals were often inappropriate, dishonest, and even hypocritical. Instead, participants believed that funerals needed to be synchronised with the life of the deceased: 'People are starting to be a bit more honest, they're slowly starting to realise we shouldn't be using the church or the minister when we don't walk in the [church] door from one year to another' (Marshall).

It follows, therefore, that people who *had* attended church regularly or been actively involved in a religious organisation, should be given the option of an appropriate religious service. One participant asserted, for example, that the church where his mother had worshipped provided the correct context for her funeral:

> When my mother died six years ago...We had her funeral in the church in _____ because that's the church she attended, it was the right place for her, and that wouldn't have mattered whether it was six or seven years ago, or whether it was this year...that would be the right place for her. But when my father goes, I very much doubt that we'll have a church funeral. We'll probably have it in the funeral director or the crematorium chapel um, with a celebrant. Because that will be what will be right for him (William).

The literature produced by funeral firms often stressed the 'need' for personalised funeral services that incorporated the life of the deceased in some way. As noted by one firm in an advertising brochure: 'The funeral service should in some way portray the life of the person who has died' (Pine Hill Funerals), while another stated, 'We believe that a funeral should be arranged to reflect the personality of the deceased and we encourage the family to participate along with our assistance' (Hanson Funeral Services). Another firm emphatically stated that it was 'important to go with your true feelings. We cannot stress strongly enough that the family has the type of service that best reflects the person who has died' (Leith Valley Funerals). Some

participants strongly encouraged the concept of 'theme funerals' that were created entirely around the personality and life of the deceased. Louis, for example, stated that 'the entire service is created around the person and creating a memory'. One important element of these funerals was the unity of the various components:

> You might get a family, which is quite common these days, who look upon death, not as a tragedy or something to be sad or morbid about, but they reverse it and say, "Hey, this is a celebration of that person's life, so therefore let's create that picture, lets um, produce a theme, if you like, for the funeral". It may well have been a farmer, where...you put the casket on bales of hay. Might have been a fisherman or a golf man, golfer, and you put appropriate props, appropriate music, um, to accompany that sort of thing. Um, the type of casket even, can vary these days. The type of casket in respect to shape, the linings in it, the colour of it. It can be personalised a lot (Richard).

Although a few participants noted that personalised caskets were periodically demanded by families, and that mourners occasionally requested the opportunity to write or draw on caskets, personalisation usually took the form of the individualised service sheets, memorial booklets, music, flowers, and tributes outlined in chapter four. These funeral components were linked to the production of memories, which funeral directors consistently emphasised had become one of the primary purposes of contemporary post-mortem practices.

Service sheets have become a ubiquitous component of personalised funerals in New Zealand. Nearly all the clerical and celebrant funerals attended during the course of this research utilised service sheets to introduce the officiant, speakers and pallbearers, and outline the format of the funeral. In most cases the service sheets included poems, hymns, or songs incorporated in the service, as well as the method of disposition. Most funeral service sheets also included an invitation to mourners to partake in tea and refreshments after the funeral service. In most cases these sheets were folded, A4 size, pieces of paper with a photograph of the deceased on the front cover. Some service sheets contained a montage of photographs depicting the deceased at various stages of life. In many cases the photographs were several years old (and in some cases several decades), particularly where the individual had suffered a debilitating disease before death. The service sheets were often decorated with symbols or objects affiliated with the life of the deceased. Funeral directors noted that these service sheets were a relatively recent development that 'started off as a scrappy piece of A4 paper' and eventually became a 'full-scale, full-colour production' (Roger), particularly suited to the 'individualistic approach' (Charles) of

contemporary funerals. Some funeral directors noted that these service sheets had become memorials: 'They've become more a keepsake, more a remembrance of that person' (Henry). Many funeral director participants invested considerable resources in procuring the computer software and hardware required to produce the increasingly popular full colour service sheets. Funeral directors encouraged mourner involvement in the organisation of the service sheet and emphasised the variety of options available.

Memorial booklets or registers similarly allowed mourners to register their attendance at a funeral and, by extension, permitted the bereaved to gauge the level of support and the 'influence' of the deceased. Memorial booklets also allowed the bereaved to keep a tangible memory of the funeral, and, as participants asserted, they became 'memories' that could be reviewed in the days, months, and years following the funeral. The selection of music was also personalised, often expressing the preferences of the deceased and the bereaved, rather than the conventions of traditional Christian services. Readings - both religious and secular – were typically selected by family and friends with guidance from the celebrant or funeral director. Mourners were also increasingly involved in assembling photo- or memory-boards - displayed before or after the service – that documented the life of the deceased. One participant (Ian) noted that the creation of these memory boards was a therapeutic exercise for the family, and casually allowed the mourners to 'go over the life of the person' at the funeral tea. Funeral flowers were sometimes arranged by friends and/or family, and often represented flower varieties, colours, or scents favoured by the deceased during life. Occasionally these 'floral tributes' were directly related to an element of the deceased's life, as noted in chapter four.

Similarly, personal items such as a well-worn hat, fishing rod, or set of knitting needles became a type of synecdoche when placed on (or in) the coffin. Such items were instantly recognisable to many mourners and symbolised a particular element of the deceased's life. Unruh (1983: 344), drawing on Goffman (1959), argues that such artefacts became part of an 'identity kit', imbued with the personal identity and feelings of an individual: as Gonzalez (cited in Lupton 1998: 144) notes, they effectively become 'prosthetics' of the self. Such objects become the repositories of memory - imbued with a very personal significance (Kopytoff 1986: 83) - and are

likely 'to become charged with emotion' (Lupton 1998: 144). As Lupton (1998: 148) notes, personal possessions can function as a physical record of personal achievements, successes, relationships with others, and shared biographies. The 'personalised' objects often found at funerals, however, also represent both a form of presence and absence (Ash 1996). Hallam and Hockey (2001: 195) elaborate on this idea and the broader significance of such objects:

> Metonymically partaking of the body's substance, they remain as fragments that highlight the transience of human life. And yet, in their persistent presence, they stand for those who are 'gone' and thereby offer some resistance to the erasure of persons from memory over time. Thus, these materials, as mementoes of the dead, also retain a memento mori aspect, orientating survivors towards their own deaths, reminding them of the fate of their own possessions and raising questions about the meaning of memento or the heirloom for those who survive.

Although the personal meaning attributed to specifically selected material objects by the bereaved is outside the scope of the current project, funeral directors emphasised the importance of these objects in representing laconic elements of an individual's life. For some funeral directors it was a matter of finding and identifying objects that 'authentically' highlighted the individuality of the deceased, and research interviews often revealed the salience of personalised material objects:

> The most fascinating walking stick I saw was a piece of old boxthorn and it was about a metre long...two thirds of a metre, and it had a crook handle on it and the end was very shiny. I said to the family, 'Why is the end shiny?'
> And they said, 'Because dad never used it as walking stick, he only walked around the farm and he twisted it in his hands like that'. And that's what he did all the way around the farm. And so it was shiny. That meant an awful lot to that family. It didn't get buried or cremated I might add, it got retrieved (Roger).

As with these physical 'tributes', verbal tributes were not only a mark of respect for the dead, but an opportunity to reflect on the life of the deceased and complete the biographical narrative of this individual. These verbal tributes often formed the central focus of the funeral and were one of the most significant ways of personalising the service. Participants explained that tributes had historically been a nonexistent - or at least insignificant - part of traditional Christian funeral services. Contemporary tributes or eulogies, however, involved a significant level of mourner involvement. Although one person was sometimes charged with presenting an overarching eulogy, it more often constituted a collaborative effort involving a number of speakers:

> Eulogies are done more by families, um, people get up and say, and speak about the person from different clubs and organisations. Somebody in the family will jump up and do a poem,

> you know. You didn't see that a few years ago, and it's a good thing. It keeps them more personal (Brian).

> A big change that is, I've seen even in my time here, has been the importance of the eulogy. Now, traditionally church services particularly, the eulogy was not a big consideration. In the Anglican church, for instance, the New Zealand Prayer Book was used. Catholic church had their funeral rites, um and the deceased per se was almost like, was secondary to those things. But now the person's life, the person who has died, their life has become a more important part of the funeral (Louis).

It was interesting to note that numerous participants emphasised the importance of presenting coherent and concise tributes that provided a 'balanced' and 'accurate' representation of the deceased. As Young and Cullen (1996: 187) maintain, it is important to highlight the 'quirks and faults as well as virtues', to highlight an individual's 'rounded humanity'. Funeral directors and celebrants noted that such balance was required to avoid quixotic eulogising (Schäfer 1998: 38), but that it was nevertheless realistically only possible to focus on the principal experiences and events that captured 'the essence' of a person (Malcouronne 2000: 4). Participants specifically stated that humorous, idiosyncratic incidents often captured the 'essence' of an individual. These incidents also provide an example of a strategy Unruh (1983: 345-346) referred to as 'reinterpreting the mundane', where practices, habits, or events seemingly insignificant during life come to symbolise identities and stimulate reminiscences after death. One funeral home information brochure maintained that: 'many amusing and long forgotten anecdotes may be recounted. These have immediate relevancy both to The Deceased and to the Family and are treasured long after the Service is over' (Meadowfield Funeral Services).

It also became apparent during the course of this research that tributes were occasionally contested. This became particularly evident as antagonistic family factions presented juxtaposed messages about the deceased. Funeral directors, however, were particularly concerned with disorderly and desultory tributes that disrupted the coherence of the service. 'Direction' and control, therefore, were important not only for the overall structure of post-mortem practices but the individual elements that constituted these practices. This response was particularly apparent in the assessment of one participant who asserted that contemporary tributes were becoming more prosaic and repetitive:

> You didn't cover the whole spectrum of a person's life from A to Z [in earlier years], you might just take a facet - how Harry lived around home - and people had their own memories. But now

> everything's got to be hemmed out, exhausted, planned, you know, held out up to the light for all facets. And I don't think that...everything is to be gained by that. It tends to become tedious. A good barrister - point one, point two, point three, shut up and sit down. And we still get services like that, where they're nice and crisp. Not short- changed, but you know...the things that have been said have been said. And it tends to become railroaded; the more people that you get involved, the less direction. So therefore you've got to say to people, right, now, if you're going to take a facet about dad, talk about dad from home life. You talk about dad in concern with the company. You're... going to talk about the sporting aspect. Give them all portals, so they've all got different tangents, so that there's different perspectives, there's different interests, there's different layers, rather than everyone getting up, 'I like to say what Cyril said', and then someone else, 'I'd like to say what Cyril said and the speaker before him'. You know, here we go again...(Tony).

So, while it was important to present an 'honest' and 'relevant' tribute, it was also pertinent to provide concise and pithy portrayals, and avoid circumstantial accounts that detracted from the carefully managed productions described by funeral director participants. Although tributes were fraught with difficulties, particularly the unpredictable content and timing of spontaneous tributes, it was a development that all participants encouraged when appropriately controlled and presented. Tributes often conformed to a predictable pattern, focusing on chronologically presented biographical information and underscoring personal attributes that characterised the deceased. Unlike Garces-Foley (2003: 298-99) who found recurring religious themes[183] in the standardised tributes of the 'congregationally unaffiliated', religious themes seldom became a leitmotif that framed New Zealand funeral tributes *unless* religion played a significant role in the lives of the deceased and/or bereaved.[184] Two overarching themes evident in funeral tributes (and life-centred funerals generally), however, were the persistent allusion to memories and the continuing influence of the deceased. Both of these themes will be explored below.

The final component of the personalised funeral that needs to be discussed here is the funeral 'tea' after the committal, at the conclusion of the service. In many cases this event occurred at the funeral director's establishment and a number of funeral directors invested considerable resources in providing funeral 'lounges' and catering facilities. Funeral directors explained that this increasing trend was partly related to pragmatic considerations. Modern housing was often 'inappropriate' for

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[183] These themes included the celebration of life, hope of heaven, and the importance of leading a good life (Garces-Foley 2003: 298-99).

[184] That is not to say, however, that religion did not play an important role in life-centred funerals. As noted previously, life-centred funerals often included religious elements including prayers, hymns, and readings. As one participant (William) stated, such elements played a specific role: 'Whether

accommodating an after-funeral function, and most participants noted the tendency of people to 'disappear' if the mourners convened at another venue. Single service funerals and the advent of the 'one-stop' funeral facility also extirpated the necessity for a funeral cortege. Despite these difficulties, however, funeral directors asserted that people have 'always realised the importance of a gathering after the service', and the significance of 'refreshments and fellowship' (Charles). Participants stressed that this gathering permitted people to express their support for the bereaved and pay 'tribute' to the deceased:

> If the service is held in one venue, then at least if people do have to go back to work, they still have the opportunity to go through, perhaps have a very quick cup of tea, and tell the family they are there and they're thinking of them. So it provides, I guess, a way of, in today's practical, pressured world, um, of people still paying a tribute and marking their respect (Louis).

Some participants also noted that such arrangements reduced the level of stress and anxiety for clients, reiterating the pastoral dimension of service that framed late-modern funeral director praxis. Some of the larger firms provided a 'hostess' specifically for this function: 'A Hostess makes functions run smoothly relieving families of this burden and arranges everything to be provided for you' (Sanderson and Sons Funeral Services). Participants also asserted that it was pertinent not to prolong the duration of grief at this time. Instead, the bereaved often wanted to curtail funereal activities after the committal in the church or chapel. One participant, for example, stated that the bereaved wanted to:

> [S]ee the closure of the service in the environment where they have got mourner support. If they've got to leave the mourners and go to the crematorium or go to a private grave site at the cemetery...that could be hellish. And then when do you leave the crematorium, or when do you leave the cemetery? See, that's another decision. By continuing on to both, or either of those venues, it really does prolong um, the situation, beyond necessity really...(Richard).

A pamphlet providing 'answers' to commonly asked funeral 'questions', similarly points out the important considerations involved in organising funeral refreshments, and outlines two 'common scenarios':

> The first involves the service taking place followed immediately by the final committal. The refreshments are served thereafter. The second scenario involves the first part of the service being held (normally in a church) with the refreshments served prior to the final Committal. The second scenario should be considered carefully. An advantage may be that all attending the service are given the opportunity to partake in the refreshments. Conversely the entire funeral event is considerably lengthened. Another consideration is the location of the casket while the

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you're a really devout and sincere believer or not, some of the old traditional things are still quite nice because they're familiar, they're comfortable, and you can have them'.

> refreshments are being held. R. J. King Ltd advises against the casket remaining in a hearse during the refreshments. It is preferable for the hearse to drive away and return to the funeral venue...(R. J. King Ltd).

This explanation clearly highlights the salience of balancing the mourners' 'need' to congregate after the funeral service and the funeral director's concern with controlling temporal and organisational elements of the service.

The gathering after the committal was also necessary for the theme of memories and the elaboration of the story presented during the earlier part of the service (Walter 1999: 78). Participants asserted that post-service refreshments provided mourners with the opportunity to 'share', 'reminisce', and 'reflect' on the life of the deceased. As with the other parts of the life-centred funeral, this coda allowed mourners to express their memories of the deceased and engage in a 'dialogue of memories'. One participant noted that this dialogue was often fostered by the presence of photo-boards:

> I think this is one of the great events of funerals now that people now, after the emotion, the process of saying goodbye, they come into our lounge where they have a cup of tea. The majority of families have photo-boards up...the laughing...we hear out of that room while they have a cup of tea. I think photo-boards are one of the greatest things for memories and to assist them (Jack).

These photo-boards therefore provided a form of impetus for the initiation of dialogue and the 'sharing of memories'. These memories were an integral element of the biographical narrative created during the funeral experience.

Models of grief and the construction of biographical narratives

Participants in this project spent considerable time elucidating the function of funerals. While funerals resulted in the disposal of the dead, funeral directors emphasised the salience of practices that allowed people to 'honour' and 'remember' the dead, and to publicly demonstrate their support for the bereaved. Participants and the industry literature privileged the primacy of the therapeutic, and noted that 'tributes' and 'memories' were fundamental features of life-centred funerals, intrinsically related to the grief of survivors. These features of contemporary funerals clearly require some elaboration. Not only does the funeral director discourse surrounding funeral 'function' serve to illustrate the expertise of this functionary, but it also delimits the boundaries of 'normal' and 'appropriate' funerary practice. Life-

centred funerals also demonstrate a unique social construction that amalgamates two disparate 'models' of grief; on the one hand emphasising the importance of personalised memories and tributes, while simultaneously reiterating the innate notions of grief outlined in the introduction to this thesis.

The verbal and symbolic 'tributes' frequently discussed by participants are also reminiscent of Giddens' (1991: 74-88) notion of the reflexive self and the reordering of self-narratives. Although the pre-deceased occasionally pre-planned their funerals and specified the content of the service, this task was usually completed by the bereaved. Indeed, if the wishes of the deceased were 'incongruous' with the perceived 'needs' of the bereaved, funeral directors encouraged families to prioritise their own personal needs to create a 'relevant' and 'meaningful' funeral service. The funeral service thus provided friends and relatives with an opportunity to construct 'meaningful' narratives in the face of death (Seale 1995: 598)[185] and to retrospectively complete the biographical narrative of the deceased. Walter (1990: 220) notes that these narratives are closely linked to late-modern notions of individuality: 'With a secular religion of self-fulfilment there is something we can do for the departed: we can round off their process of self-actualisation by stating what that actualisation entailed'. Life-centred funerals validate and emphasise the person's individuality (Walter 1990: 221) and lifestyle, and, as one funeral director observed, such funerals helped 'finalise a person's life' (Margaret). Life-centred funerals can also provide a setting for the ritual of post-mortem self expression (Moller 1996: 90).

By completing the final chapter of a person's life, the survivors are also able to create and share particular memories that enable them to locate the deceased in their own biographies. This practice preserves the identity of the deceased and contributes to a particular form of collective immortality. As one participant (Carmen) emphasised, these memories were crucial in contemporary society: 'because that's all people have after someone dies. It's just the memory and the memory pictures'. Another funeral director noted that the creation of such memories had become the fundamental focus of the funeral service:

[185] In his paper entitled 'Heroic death', Seale (1995) refers specifically to the scripts available to the dying individual for the assertion of heroic self-identity.

> When it comes down to the final choice, the families come for the facilities you offer and the service that you give. And at the end of the day, the memory that you leave them with. That's what they come for and that's what we try and achieve in every case (Michael).

In his exploration of bereavement and biography, Walter (1996b: 20) asserts that it is often important for mourners to attain an 'accurate' picture of the deceased because this memory is often an integral element of the bereaved individual's own 'narrative':

> Bereavement is part of the never ending and reflexive conversation with self and others through which the late modern person makes sense of their existence. In other words, bereavement is part of the process of (auto) biography, and the biographical imperative – the need to make sense of self and others in a continuing narrative – is the motor that drives bereavement behaviour.

Walter (1996b: 17) notes that it is the absence of a sacred canopy and the 'lack of rootedness of the modern individual', that make reflexive monitoring important. But it is exactly these factors that contribute to the difficulty of finding the 'others' required for reflexive monitoring. The life-centred funeral, with its tributes and funeral tea, however, provides precisely this opportunity. As participants in this research repeatedly emphasised, the personalised funeral allowed mourners to 'come together' to reflect on the life of the deceased. The funeral service thus provided a setting in which people could 'gather' memories of the deceased and examine and evaluate the significance of these memories in their own lives. Moreover, the funeral venue provided by the funeral directors encouraged this endeavour by accommodating the mourners' 'need to share and the need to have that time of memory and reflection' (Anthony).

The privileging of memory in this regard has links to the concept of 'continuing bonds', explicated by researchers such as Klass et al. (1996), Walter (1996b), and Klass and Walter (2001). This 'model' of bereavement acknowledges the continuing association between the living and the dead and challenges the orthodoxy of disengagement that characterised the field of grief research until the 1980s (Small 2001: 33).[186] This new paradigm recognises that a continuing bond often exists between the bereaved and deceased, and that the survivors 'actively construct an inner representation of the deceased' (Silverman and Klass 1996: 16). Klass and Walter (2001) stipulate that 'bonds' are continued through sensing the presence of the dead, talking with the dead, and using the dead as moral guides. The latter is

[186] See chapter one for an outline of these theories.

particularly relevant to the present study, where the dead are identified as a 'valued part of the survivors' biography' (Klass and Walter 2001: 438), reflecting moral principles that can benefit the living (Davies 2002: 228). Conant's (1996) research, for example, found that past relationships with deceased husbands were incorporated into the personalities of the widows, while Marwit and Klass (1996: 305) found evidence for the existence of inner representational figures that provided role models or 'behavioural guides' for the living.[187]

There are interesting parallels here with the 'memories' and 'role' of the deceased as discussed by participants. Funeral directors often described continuing relationships between the living and the dead that were very similar to Klass and Walter's (2001) paradigm. These similarities were particularly evident in the concept of 'living memorials'. The living memorial was a way in which the mourners at a funeral were able to integrate the influence of the deceased into their own lives and, in so doing, preserve the identity of the deceased. Living memorials also allowed the bereaved to maintain the social presence of the deceased and 'reintegrate shifting memories of them into the flow of ongoing lives' (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 201). Mourners were actively encouraged to construct memories of the deceased that would become 'embodied' in the thoughts and lives of the survivors, and transformed into the 'role models or behavioural guides' noted by Marwit and Klass (1996). As one funeral home brochure states:

> The introduction of more personal memories, tributes and involvement within the traditional funeral service is positive; and leaves an *everlasting memorial in the hearts and minds of those attending* (Meadowfield Funeral Services, emphasis added).

The tributes encouraged by funeral directors usually emphasised that every individual had contributed something 'positive' to the community (or at least something 'notable'), and that such efficacious elements would not only be remembered by the survivors, but in some way incorporated into their own lives. The life-centred funeral therefore provided a formal setting for this 'transference' to occur.

On a more general level, 'living memorials' could also be interpreted as endeavours to stress the continuity and value of life by situating the life of the deceased and the

[187] See Klass (2001: 756) for an outline of the functions of the inner representations of the dead. See also

significance of that life in the future. As Young and Cullen (1996: 190) note, the conventional view of death is often instantaneous: 'A well-oiled hinge turns the living present instantaneously into the dead past'. Barnes (1991: 94) similarly states that after death, the deceased is often relegated solely to the past. While life-centred funerals examine the past life of the deceased and acknowledge the grief of survivors, they also stress the memory and influence of the deceased and the continuity of life, transforming that memory into an intrinsic part of the future (Barnes 1991: 130-150). Numerous metaphors such as 'a stitch in a tapestry' or 'a note in musical score' were frequently used to express the idea that every life contained *something* of value, and that this virtue, quality, or simple idiosyncrasy could be communicated and conveyed to other individuals who in turn, could incorporate this facet into their own lives and personality.[188] Although such assertions may be seen by some to 'substitute sentimentality for meaning and triteness for truth' (Griffin and Tobin 1997: 149), the living memorial often stressed that there was some inherent meaning in life, particularly for those individuals who found no comfort or meaning in traditional religious frameworks.

The current research indicates that life-centred funerals, with their emphasis on tributes and memories, have in certain ways become the prevalent funerary form. As noted earlier in the chapter, funeral directors elucidated the 'inappropriate' and 'irrelevant' nature of religious funeral services for non-religious individuals, and the 'need' to personalise funerary ritual. Personalisation in this regard includes incorporating religious elements or conducting a religious service if this was 'relevant' to the deceased. Although attendance at personalised funeral services revealed that there was a significant degree of uniformity in the structure of these services, funeral directors explained - in typical post-modern fashion - that funerals were relative and individualised, with an absence of prescribed formats. What is particularly interesting, therefore, is that the explanations of funeral function and value were pervaded by normalising psychological interpretations that focused on

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Schuchter and Zisook (1993: 34-35).

[188] A similar idea is emphasised by Young and Cullen (1996: 196), who note that 'everyone takes part in handing on the culture, not just the new bits of it and the parts that do not change, and which embody the experience of generations. This accumulated experience matters more than any current innovation. We would say that everyone's influence will be felt for 'ever''.

'healthy' grief resolution, stage theories of grief, and the expression of emotion. These notions of grief form the basis of the following examination.

As noted in the introduction, the predominant theory of grief that emerges in the twentieth century emphasises the disengagement of mourners from the deceased and the existence of a 'grief process' that includes various stages. Although the researchers credited with developing these 'stage' models of grief themselves cautioned against the uncritical application of these ideas (Corr 1993: 73-76; Walter 1999: 161-64), their findings have been transformed into the powerfully prescriptive 'myths' (Wortman and Silver 1989, 2001) and 'clinical lore' (Walter 1999) prevalent in Western bereavement discourse. As described in the introduction, these myths include the assumption that people will enter a period of intense distress following a death, that they need to 'work through' feelings to prevent future 'complications', and that there will be a form of resolution, that returns individuals to some level of 'normality' (Wortman and Silver 2001). Walter (1999: 156-157) also notes that the expression of emotion and the concept of 'normal' grief are components of these prescriptive assumptions. Despite the increasing recognition of diversity in the bereavement literature (Stroebe et al. 1996), the prescriptive assumptions and authoritative statements surrounding 'healthy' grief remain remarkably resilient (Walter 1999: 157) and clearly inform the New Zealand funeral directors' rhetoric.

As I noted in chapter three, the 'psychology' of grief was first included in funeral director training in the 1970s.[189] Funeral directors in the current project emphasised the importance of this training in their attitude to the occupation, with many participants explicitly outlining the significance of the grief 'process' in understanding the 'needs' of the client. This development not only reified their role in the construction of post-mortem practices, but explicitly emphasised the pastoral dimension of funeral director service. Funeral directors thus often stipulated that the funeral service was a fundamental feature of the grief process, and that the funeral 'initiated' or 'activated' this process:

[189] Laderman (2003: 100) notes that after Mitford's exposé, North American funeral directors increasingly focussed their attention on grief therapy and 'psychological theories to justify their traditional funerals'. See chapter three for an extended discussion of these developments and the influence of North American practices on the New Zealand industry.

> I suppose number one is to help in the grief process, to work their way through...we do a lot of grief seminars and stuff like that, and really, it has nothing to do with the funeral on the day, it has a lot to do with helping people through their different stages of grief and things like that. But the funeral on the day, I think, is the biggest thing to get you through that grief stage and that's probably, the main thing would be to give the people what they want on the day, and I see that as the biggest part of my job really (Brian).

> I think having a funeral service helps a person to accept the reality of what has happened and to start the grieving process. I think, well obviously the funeral takes place very early in a person's grieving process and it would seem from what you observe - from what we see - that where there's been a funeral service, the grieving process does start better. I mean, it's almost like there's a necessary process people have to go through, a process of grief and if it starts well, you know, that's a good thing. I think seeing it in that light is very helpful (Anthony).

Similarly, the literature produced by the funeral firms consistently emphasised a linear process involving steps and stages. A brochure produced by the FDANZ, for instance, states that the funeral 'is the first and most important step towards working through one's grief and re-adjusting to life...('What you need to know about funerals'). What is implicit in this assertion, and something emphasised by numerous participants, is that there is a 'natural', 'healthy', and 'normal' approach to grief resolution. One participant stated, for example: 'at the end of the day my aim is to have that family through that grieving process as healthy and unscathed as possible' (Margaret). Another participant noted: 'the purpose of a funeral, as far as I'm concerned...is for the family and friends to grieve because people get horribly tied up if they don't grieve' (Peter). As elucidated in the previous chapter, private funerals in particular, were seen as denying some people the opportunity of attending a funeral, and consequently contributed to 'complicated' or 'unresolved' grief. One funeral home brochure explicitly identified the links between the funeral service, the grief 'process', and standards of 'normal' behaviour:

> [The funeral] provides an outlet for grief that is naturally felt. It allows the community of friends to lend their support to the bereaved and to share the loss through the expression of love, respect and grief. It permits facing openly, realistically and with dignity – the crisis that death represents. Through the funeral, the bereaved take that firm, first step toward adjusting to their loss. When a funeral is curtailed either by choice or accident, the grieving person tends to become withdrawn. With a funeral service; particularly with the body present – most people more quickly work through their grief and are more readily restored to what might be called normal behaviour (Samuel Butler Funeral Services Ltd).

This explanation clearly establishes the existence of a 'natural' grief process and demonstrates the normalising technologies inherent in the funeral director discourse. One central element of the grief process conspicuously identified by most participants was the expression of emotion. Nearly all the participants felt that emotion was an innate response stimulated by bereavement and that the release of this emotion

during the funeral service was an essential expedient for the progression of the grief phenomenon. One participant stated the funeral provided an opportunity 'to let everything out...if there's not a funeral that they [the mourners] can go to and realise that the person is dead, then it's going to stay in there, it's not going to come out' (Peter). Others noted that funerals allowed people 'to express their feelings' (Charles), to 'relate and grieve and have a chance to express things' (Ian), and to release 'feelings of farewell and grief' (Thomas). Males and females were equally encouraged to express emotion, but it was often males that apparently had difficulty with this expression. A female funeral director therefore stated that one of the advantages of being a female in a male dominated field, was that men were more comfortable with emotional release: 'They don't have to put on this big stiff upper lip, um, which you know, often if it's a male funeral director there, that they often do, so they can show their emotions in front of us' (Margaret). The notion of expressing emotions 'in front' of the funeral director clearly suggests connotations of a confession, involving the proclamation of sincere and authentic sentiments to an authoritative and pastoral figure.

Industry literature reiterated the 'need' to express emotion, and that the funeral service provided an opportunity for public expression: 'At Murray James Funeral Services we know that the Funeral Service is the final opportunity that family and friends will have to publicly express their love and respect and feelings for the deceased' (Murray James Funeral Services). It became very clear during the course of this research that a failure to express emotion was related to a retardation of 'recovery'. Funeral home brochures frequently made authoritative statements about emotional experiences following bereavement. While these statements were sometimes prefaced by the assertion that grief was 'unique', emotional expression was represented as a universal human 'need'.[190] The pamphlets, below, for example, explicitly note that the release of emotions was not only 'healthy', but imperative for a beneficial resolution:

[190] Few participants considered the social context of emotional expression or the differential experience of grief. See, for example, Bradbury (1999), Davies (2002), and Gilbert (1996), who emphasise the significance of social context. The correlation between emotional expression and 'adaptation' has also been problematised. Cleiren (cited in Davies 2002: 49), for example, found that pronounced emotional behaviour did not necessarily effect better 'adaptation' to bereavement.

> The grief process is uniquely personal and will depend on the closeness, the relationship and whether the death was sudden or expected...it is healthy for us to cry and it is a natural release of emotions. Sometimes we may express relief, as the death may provide a 'release' for the one we love from pain and suffering. It is normal to feel relieved and you need not feel guilty. Suppressing your emotions may slow your recovery (Tasman Funerals Limited).

> When we speak of grief in relation to the death of someone we love we are speaking of the process of adjusting to that loss. It is very real, and for most people it involves pain. Some go through this adjustment by denial or sometimes with feelings of extreme anger, some feel crippled by guilt and despair. All these feelings can be most appropriate as long as they are not ignored or shelved, for when this happens depression results (Marsden Hill Funerals).

A booklet distributed to client families by one funeral director emphasised that emotions provided the motivation for all human activity and 'to bottle it up unnecessarily is to do ourselves harm. We ought to express the grief we feel' (Westberg 1992: 17). Likewise, one New Zealand publication frequently referred to by funeral directors stated that natural emotions had been sequestered in modern society, and that control and suppression contributed to 'new and more deep seated problems that may be much more difficult to deal with than the original' (Parker 1981: 11). There are clear links here with the funeral directors' role discussed earlier: as I have shown participants frequently stressed their role as public 'educators', engaging people in 'open' and 'honest' discussions about death in a 'death-denying' society. In rhetoric that clearly emphasised the pastoral component of their role, funeral directors also stressed the need for client honesty. Participants stipulated that people were emotionally 'real' during the funeral service and described this interaction with 'real' people as an important aspect of their occupation. One funeral director, for example, asserted that:

> You see the real person and I guess that's one of the real satisfying things about this job. You see the real person, [it is] not about the deceased, but the family. You see the people without their defence barriers up, it's interesting (Louis).

These responses are clearly reminiscent of the features of pastoral power described by Foucault (1983: 214), who asserts that this power could only be exercised through 'knowing the inside of people's minds' and making individuals 'reveal their innermost secrets'. According to Foucault (1983), individuals attain a measure of self-knowledge through self-examination and this self-knowledge is communicated to an authority figure through confession. In the case of the funeral director, this 'confession' ideally involved the expression of 'authentic' emotion and the revelation of the 'real person'. Foucault (1983) stipulated that these features of pastoral power were related to 'salvation', and, as the following section emphasises, the life-centred

funeral has thus been specifically linked to a particularly late-modern form of 'salvation', including 'health' and 'personal growth'.

The funeral is therefore an opportunity for mourners to release 'natural emotions' and disband (temporarily) their emotional defences. Like the participants in Lupton's (1998) study - who espoused an inextricable link between emotional expression and health - participants in the present study emphasised the notion that open expression of emotions during funerals was 'healthy' and 'natural' and that emotional containment was associated with repression and potential ill-health. The subjectivities offered by funeral directors therefore allowed the bereaved to become 'healthier' individuals. As with other elements of the funeral discussed in chapter three, the current practice of emotional release was viewed as a progressive development that reflected the 'evolution' of a more educated and 'advanced' approach to death. As one funeral establishment noted in an overview of funeral traditions:

> [The founder] was practising his profession in the era when blinds were drawn, mirrors were covered, children were packed off to another relative, superstitions abounded, and *the freedom to express feelings was not encouraged*...We have as a society learned a great deal, in fact we are still learning, but we are now much more sensitive as to how we look after those who are suffering with the pain and loss of bereavement (Eastern Hills Funeral Services, emphasis added).

As the above participant responses highlight, however, it was often more than just a new sense of 'freedom' to express emotion, but rather imperative for 'healthy' grieving and enlightened reflexivity.

While participants encouraged mourners to express emotion and advocated the advantages of this expression, they simultaneously linked emotion to a form of irrationality or unrestrained behaviour that required some form of control and 'looking after' - as the above explanation suggests. Funeral directors stipulated, for example, that it was prudent to pre-plan funeral arrangements when the mourners were 'not all emotional, and jammed up, and they're thinking clearly' (David). It was thus important to have someone 'objective' in control of the funeral service because a family's emotions were: 'absolutely shot and they don't know where to begin...and you can be empathetic with them and very sympathetic, but still be able to move on and get things going' (Elizabeth). It was important, therefore, for funeral directors to set clear boundaries so that the funeral could progress. Funeral directors needed to be

empathetic, yet also remain emotionally detached from clients. One funeral director (Margaret), declared, 'They don't want a grief counsellor, they want somebody that's outside their family, that's not emotionally tied', while another (Timothy) stated: 'You're either a mourner or director and I think a director needs to be in full control of his emotions'. Emotional reactions related to the grief process were also used to account for critical or hostile reactions to the funeral functionary, which under 'normal' circumstances would be considered irrational and unacceptable. One funeral director, for example, noted that some families were extremely critical:

> [T]hey'll find something wrong. I don't enjoy that because I'm a little impatient with people but on the other hand I do realise that most times - when there is criticism, or that attitude of knowing better than we know - is partly their reaction to grief, it's partly showing their anger (Phillip).

This response not only accentuates the expertise of the funeral director and reifies their role, but explicitly asserts that any challenge to this expertise is related to the progression of the grief process. According to funeral director participants, however, it was precisely this progression that was integral to contemporary post-mortem practices and the 'healthy' experience of grief.

This discussion of the funeral service and the grief process highlights funeral director concerns with structure and direction. Both of these features are clearly reminiscent of modernist frameworks emphasising efficiency, control, and goal directedness (Stroebe et al. 1996: 32). Some features of the model of grief propounded by participants also highlight late modern reflexivity and projects of the self. Emotional expression, for example, was a difficult and unwelcome intrusion into everyday life, but an event with the potential to contribute to self-awareness and self-development. As one funeral home brochure stated: 'It is often not made easy for us to grieve in our Society. We can however, grow and mature as human beings if we are allowed to grieve successfully' (David Greenberg Funerals). Another publication frequently referred to by funeral directors (Parker 1981) similarly stated, if 'experienced fully', grief offers individuals the possibility of personal growth. These possibilities clearly represent a distinctly late-modern form of 'salvation' described by Foucault (1983).

5.3 Disposal

Disposal usually occurs soon after the funeral service. In New Zealand, the predominant method of disposition is cremation. As outlined in chapter three, New Zealand funeral directors striving for professional status in the mid-twentieth century utilised rhetoric that reflected cremationist and public health concerns with hygiene and efficiency. Funeral directors thus promoted cremation as a rational form of disposal with little impact on the provision of other services. As the above discussion elucidates, however, 'rationalised' funeral services have also been represented as being incongruous with an enlightened understanding of grief in recent years. In fact, 'direct disposal' (or what some funeral directors described as the 'cash for ash' scenario) was detrimental to the well-being of the bereaved:

> [S]omeone has said they don't want a funeral, they don't to cause any problems, they don't want to cause any troubles, so they just want to taken away and cremated. You'll hear, as funeral directors...constantly, if you're in amongst the public and they know what you do, you will constantly hear people say, "Ah I just want to be put in a cardboard box and chucked off the pier". It's a very common thing and that in reality rarely happens - thank goodness - but that is the cash for ash scenario. Of course, what they don't think about when they say that sort of thing, is that the funeral isn't actually for the person that's died anyway, it's for the people that are left. It's too late for the person that's died, it's for those that are left. So by doing, making those sort of decisions, that there is to be no funeral or whatever, "put me in a cardboard box", what they're doing in reality, is simply denying all of the people that they have a relationship with the opportunity to pay their respects and say goodbye. And that actually is where you get grief counsellors coming in, because it's times like that, that their services are actually required (Louis).

As I have emphasised, practices such as viewing and the life-centred funeral are integral components of healthy grieving, and funeral directors reiterated their pastoral role and explicitly prioritised their focus on the living. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the actual process of disposal after the service receives little shrift in funeral industry literature. Most participants proffered no disposal predilection but did reiterate the importance of personal preference and community context. Participants did, however, state that few bereaved provided any explicit explanation for their chosen method of disposition and that families simply relied on established 'traditions'. These 'traditions' were particularly influential in rural areas with cemeteries containing family plots:

> I need to say that we're still a little bit traditional. We are a farming community and so earth burial seems to be the correct thing to do, yeah. Ask them why, you won't get anything much more than, "Ah, that's what we prefer". Yeah, they're not into ecological ground saving. They're not into emissions from the chimney causing damage to the environment. It's just the right thing to do (Roger).

Participants went on to note that small rural towns were often located some distance from cremators and that rural cemetery fees were nominal in comparison to the larger urban graveyards. Participants also stipulated that the decision to be cremated or buried was often very personal and motivated by individual concerns related to disposal:

> The choice between burial and cremation seems to me to be a very personal thing. Perhaps sometimes without any particular rationale at all. People just have a strong preference, one or the other. What I find is that people, in that category, people who say they definitely want to be cremated, what they don't like is they don't like the concept of rotting in the ground, um, they're very, you know, it's just an image. People who are strongly predisposed towards burial are equally, they don't like the concept of the burning process of cremation (Anthony).

While some rural areas continued to rely extensively on burial, urban areas have witnessed a sharp increase in cremation rates after the Second World War. This trend is illustrated in the disposal rates of one New Zealand city (see Figure 2). To give Dunedin as one example, its sole crematorium was constructed in 1927. By 1965 cremation accounted for 50 percent of disposals, and by 2000, 80 percent of all disposals were cremation.

Study participants espoused several explanations for this shift in urban disposal methods. Many cited pragmatic concerns about the effective utilisation of land resources, as well as the decay and neglect of many city cemeteries:

> There seems to be um, certainly I think, sort of the environmental factor, if you lump it all into one big label, environmental factor. It's significant. People I think are aware of reducing space in cemeteries, they don't want to take up um, waste a lot of land with lots of big cemeteries and so they're in favour of that [cremation] (Anthony).

> People sort of being a bit further away and not looking after graves as well as what they used to. I mean, I know personally, that's why I want to be cremated. Because I go around cemeteries now and there are graves there that haven't been tended to for the last ten years and over, headstones can be broken or whatever, it's really sad (Ruth).

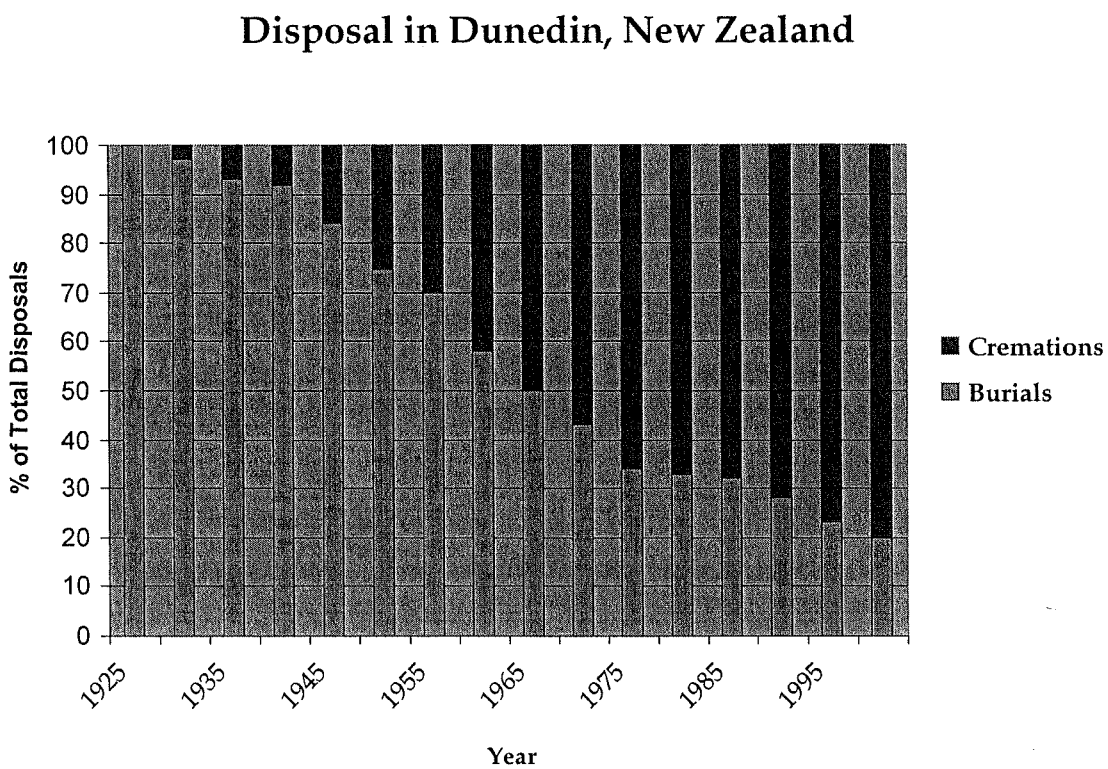

FIGURE 2. Disposal in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Another important consideration in the shift to cremation has been the change in religious allegiance and doctrine. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, traditional Christian religions began to lose control of post-mortem practices during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While funeral directors emphasised that certain ethnic and religious groups traditionally required burial, many Pakeha New Zealanders no longer had any formal religious connections and avoided 'stringent religious beliefs' related to disposal (Richard). Participants also frequently asserted that since the Catholic Church lifted its opposition to cremation an increasing number of Catholics were being cremated. The removal of this restriction tended to contribute to a growing general acceptance of cremation:

> I don't think it's cost. People can afford it. In this parish so to speak, it's not a cost aspect...I think it's just a predisposition you've got to be cremated. It's a culture. It's acceptable, it's culturally acceptable. We wouldn't have ethnic work like um...ethnic work like say Maori or Pacific Island, in which case the figures would be reversed (Clifford).

Numerous participants, however, did emphasise the significance of cost in the shift to cremation. Louis, for example, asserted that burial was slowly superseded by cremation as the cost for incineration decreased and the price of burial plots steadily increased. Participants such as Michael estimated that cremation was approximately one third the price of burial in urban areas and that the shift to cremation was therefore strongly influenced by economic considerations.

One important change related to this shift in disposal methods has been the proliferation of single-service funerals outlined in chapter three. In response to the construction of municipal crematoria in the 1960s, numerous funeral directors eventually erected their own multi-facility funeral venues, which effectively negated the need for a cortege and subsequent gathering at a separate location. Recently, some funeral directors have also extended this service augmentation by installing their own cremators or forming 'strategic alliances' with local councils, tactics which have also reduced the cost of cremation for funeral directors (William). While these developments certainly represent a form of rationalisation, funeral directors simultaneously emphasised the importance of funeral timing and control, and related these explicitly to the needs of the bereaved.[191] As has been evident throughout this thesis, funeral directors accentuated those elements of funeral service that conformed to their perception of professional service and pastoral care. In this instance, participants noted that few people had the time to attend a funeral service followed by a committal at the cemetery and that cremation afforded a more efficient method of disposal:

> I mean the other thing is distance to travel, even in the likes of _____, half an hour out to the cemetery, or three quarters of an hour to some cemeteries, well that's one of the reasons why most funerals there are cremation, because nobody wants to travel an hour and a half to get to the cemetery and back (Brian).

Funeral directors also asserted that it was important not to prolong the funeral service. The single service funeral, therefore, provided the ideal solution that incorporated the pragmatic and emotional needs of the bereaved: the departure of the coffin for private cremation clearly marked the end of the funeral service 'phase' and

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[191] In a study of business temporal norms and bereavement behaviour, Pratt (1994: 283) found that bereavement had 'come to reflect and reinforce a view of the social order as efficient, under control and based on businesslike management of time'.

thus freed the mourners to gather for fellowship, support, and the sharing of memories.

> Most of our cremations are followed by private services, like the whole funeral is held in the local town, and the casket is just delivered to the crematorium, and even that's creeping in the cities, where the crematorium is just around the corner basically. It's one type of service. The reason why this has started to creep in over the recent years, is because if they split into two services like the burial, by the time they get back from the crematorium all their friends and relations are gone and they only get a chance to see them for that brief time when they walk out the church (Marshall).

5.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the funeral service and disposal that followed the preparation and viewing of the body (described in chapter four). The chapter began by outlining the concept of secularisation and the development of secular funeral celebrants. While it is clear that considerable debate surrounds the definition of secularisation, it is also evident that religion now constitutes only one of a number of competing epistemologies, and that death has become a largely secular affair in contemporary New Zealand society. What is perhaps particularly pertinent to the present study is that traditional religious funerals provided funeral directors with a point of distinction and a unique 'origin myth', which allowed participants to identify the development of personalised, life-centred funerals. That is, standardised religious funerals were represented as impersonal and increasingly irrelevant to a population with tenuous ecclesiastical affiliations. This new 'reality', together with a more 'refined' understanding of grief, allowed funeral directors to emphasise the significance of 'authentic' and 'relevant' post-mortem practices attuned to the 'needs' of the bereaved. This development not only reflected the professional aspirations of the funeral functionary and the pastoral dimension of funeral service, but also reified their intrinsic involvement in the construction of post-mortem practices.

One important component of pastoral care was the secular funeral celebrant. Funeral directors typically selected celebrants that provided 'appropriate' service and recognised the 'needs' of the bereaved and the requirements of the funeral firm. Participants in this project specifically emphasised the significance of personalising life-centred funerals. Personalisation in this sense could be achieved by the creation of individualised service sheets and memorial booklets, and also by the construction of various tributes that 'authentically' represented the individuality of the deceased.

Life-centred funerals allowed friends and family to complete the biographical narrative of the dead, as well as providing the bereaved with a setting in which to 'gather' memories and locate these memories in their own biographies. While these 'memories' were clearly linked to the 'continuing bonds' hypothesis expounded by Klass and Walter (2001), funeral director explanations of funeral function were pervaded by normalising psychological interpretations, focusing on 'healthy' grief and stage theories of bereavement. Participants posited the existence of a 'natural' grief process and stressed the need for 'authentic' emotional expression and 'open' and 'honest' client interaction. This rhetoric was reminiscent of Foucault's (1983, 1990) description of confession, a procedure he saw as necessary for the salvation of the individual. In the case of life-centred funerals, this 'salvation' took the late-modern form of 'healthy grief' (together with deliverance from 'unhealthy' forms of grief) and personal growth. It is also evident from this discussion that the technologies of the self offered by funeral directors (and their associated functionaries) centred around bereavement subjectivities deemed 'normal', 'natural', and 'healthy'. The particular subjectivity encouraged by funeral directors constituted individuals that were not only 'honest' and 'real', but who recognised the 'need' for a funeral service and emotional expression. These individuals also realised the importance of integrating the deceased into their own biographies, while acknowledging the significance of guidance and control. Clearly this subjectivity validates the role of the contemporary New Zealand funeral director.

The last section of this chapter examined the disposal of the body following the funeral service. Funeral director discourse surrounding disposal reiterated the pastoral concerns of this functionary, together with the importance of control and direction. The discernible increase in the rate of cremation in recent decades contributed to the prevalence of single-service funerals conforming to funeral director notions of efficient and effective post-mortem practices in contemporary society. The increase in cremation has also contributed to new forms of personalisation and an extension of the funeral directors' pastoral role. These features of post-funeral service form the foundation of the following chapter.

Chapter Six

POST-DISPOSAL PERSONALISATION

> After a death, you may be faced with a whole range of feelings you'll be unfamiliar with, or feel unable to cope with. They're not strange feelings to us. They're things we know how to deal with. Indeed, as part of our philosophy of continuing care, our professional counsellor or director will contact you a little while after the funeral service (Smith and Peterson Funerals).

The previous chapter examined the funeral and disposal processes and the personalisation inherent in concomitant rituals. It revealed that funeral directors explicitly emphasised the psychological significance of personalised, life-centred funerals, and the role of these practices in effective grief management. While the focus of funerals was unequivocally on 'healthy' grief and the pastoral needs of survivors, it also became clear that life-centred funerals initiated a transformation in the identity of the deceased. As I have shown, mourners were encouraged to construct 'living memorials' that not only completed the biographical narrative of the deceased but also created 'continuing bonds' with the dead (Klass 1996; Klass and Walter 2001; Walter 1996b). Funeral directors therefore emphasised the enduring need for mourners to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives and this chapter continues the examination of memory and the extension of the funeral directors' pastoral role. The following sections explore the material manifestations of memory and how memorials have become inextricably linked to grief management. This discussion details the range of memorial services proffered by funeral providers and examines how the contemporary focus on personalisation influenced post-disposal ritual and funeral director perceptions of their role in the grief 'process'. It will also demonstrate the 'technologies of self' offered to the bereaved by funeral directors, and how the discourse surrounding post-disposal funeral services has been integral to the construction of a particular bereavement subjectivity.

This chapter begins with an overview of the treatment of ashes and memorialisation following cremation. As noted in the previous chapter, cremation has become the predominant method of disposal in New Zealand and a range of secondary disposal options are currently encouraged by funeral providers. An increasing number of

options are also presently offered for memorialisation following burial. Two recent forms of memorialisation considered here are eco-memorials and internet tributes. Both of these 'memorials' highlight current funeral director concerns with personalisation and 'continuing bonds' between the living and the dead, as well as more general notions of life and memory. The subsequent section examines the 'aftercare' services provided by funeral directors. As in other parts of the world (for instance Lensing 2001), this aftercare comprises a range of services including: referrals to grief counsellors, the organisation of bereavement support groups, cards to mark the anniversary of a death, and annual memorial services. Funeral directors also offered the bereaved various forms of literature on grief, as well as informational programs to community groups and clubs. This 'aftercare' discourse clearly emphasises the concept of a 'healthy' grief process and illustrates the 'technologies of self' inherent in the process of arranging and participating in a funeral that shape bereaved subjectivities. As will become evident in the ensuing discussion, funeral directors position themselves as important pastoral resources for the management of grief (Mastrogianis and Lumley 2002: 169; Paul 1997: 271), while persistently distancing themselves from formal grief counselling.

One underlying theme of funeral practice evident in this chapter, is the tension between personalisation and public funeral forms. As the previous chapters have underlined, one of the central themes of contemporary funeral practices identified by participants was the personalisation of funerary practices. Funeral directors emphasised that this trend had permeated all facets of funeral service and that it was important to make post-mortem practices 'meaningful' and 'relevant' to the dead and bereaved. But funeral directors also emphasised the innate human 'need' to engage in more public forms of funerary practice, and my previous sections demonstrated that personalisation has been circumscribed by particular social constructions of grief. While a trend towards privatised ritual - epitomised by the shift to personalisation and a focus on individuality – is clearly apparent, funeral directors noted that these private sentiments also needed to be accompanied by more public forms of expression. These assumptions were informed by expressivist models of grief (Walter 1999), and will be elucidated in the ensuing discussion.

6.1 Cremated remains and post-disposal ritual

While the incineration process remains an essentially invisible act, a number of options currently exist for the disposal of ashes themselves. Ashes may be committed in a cemetery by a religious functionary or scattered by crematorium staff. Alternatively, the cremated remains may be placed in a personalised location by the bereaved in what Davies (2002: 29) describes as an 'impromptu ritual in a radical invention of tradition'.

While some early commentators such as Grisbrooke (1970)[192] opposed the secondary treatment of ashes, Naylor (1989: 339) notes that it was precisely the limited legislative and church control surrounding post-disposal in Britain that predisposed it to new forms of ritualisation. Although ash disposal rituals remain largely undocumented (Davies 1990, 2002), authors such as Bradbury (2001: 220) assert that the contemporary disposal of ashes is creative and idiosyncratic, reflecting 'the tastes and emotions of the family involved'. More recently, Kellaher et al. (2005) found that the private disposal of ashes following cremation either demonstrated significant parallels with traditional burial or, conversely, resisted the practices associated with this form of disposal.[193] Similarly, researchers in Europe have explored evolving cremation rituals and critiqued accounts that equate cremation with a generalised 'denial of death' or a decline of ritual (Vandendorpe 2000). United States commentators such as Prothero (2001: 203) also refute claims of de-ritualisation, stipulating that cremation ritual is often informal and non-traditional, with minimal professional involvement.

Hertz ([1907] 1960: 42) noted almost a century ago that cremation was infrequently a final act and required a 'later and complementary rite'. Cremation, he argued, did not destroy the body but transformed the identity of the dead, recreating it and enabling it to enter a 'new life' (Hertz [1907] 1960: 43). Drawing on these ideas, Davies (2002: 32) argues that the contemporary disposal of ashes in Britain introduces an optional

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[192] Grisbrooke (1970: 79) notes that cremation is 'hardly appropriate as a Christian form of disposal of the dead' and that the committal must be a *final* act – not one that resulted in ash residues and the potential for secondary ritual or treatment.

[193] While some participants therefore emphasised the importance of physical containment and/or the need to maintain the 'integrity' of the cremated remains, others accentuated their dislike of earth burial and rejected the 'shadow of the traditional grave' (Kelleher et al. 2005: 245).

rite that can be interpreted as a 'form of 'fulfilment' of the social person within a retrospective view of their lives'. By placing the ashes of the dead in personally significant locations, the bereaved effectively contribute to the biographical narrative of the deceased. Hallam and Hockey (2001: 92-93) note that these private, personalised scatterings are 'visible' only to the bereaved, as sites remain unmarked by material monuments: 'their location exists for a limited rather than generalized category of 'survivors'. Links with the dead can even be confined to the privatised imaginations and memories of the bereaved'.[194] As the following discussion will detail, however, New Zealand funeral directors mobilised a discourse that highlights the significance of personalised cremation ritual, memory, *and* material memorialisation.

Participants in this project emphasised that numerous disposal options were currently available in New Zealand and that there was no prescribed format for the treatment of cremated remains. Richard, for example, emphasised that contemporary practices were characterised by versatility:

> There's nothing to stop you from splitting the ashes, ok, or portioning the ashes, and a family member who lives in the North Island might have a portion there, there might be a portion interred at the local crematorium, the rest might be scattered. So versatility when it comes to disposal of a person's remains (Richard).

A detailed review of crematorium records in one southern New Zealand city revealed an interesting transformation in the post-disposal treatment of ashes over the last fifty years (see Figure 3).

[194] Similarly, Ariès (1981: 577) asserts: 'to choose cremation is to reject the cult of tombs and cemeteries' and substituting 'a cult of memories'. Rather than being memorialised by headstones or plaques, then, the deceased remain 'alive' in the memories of the mourners.

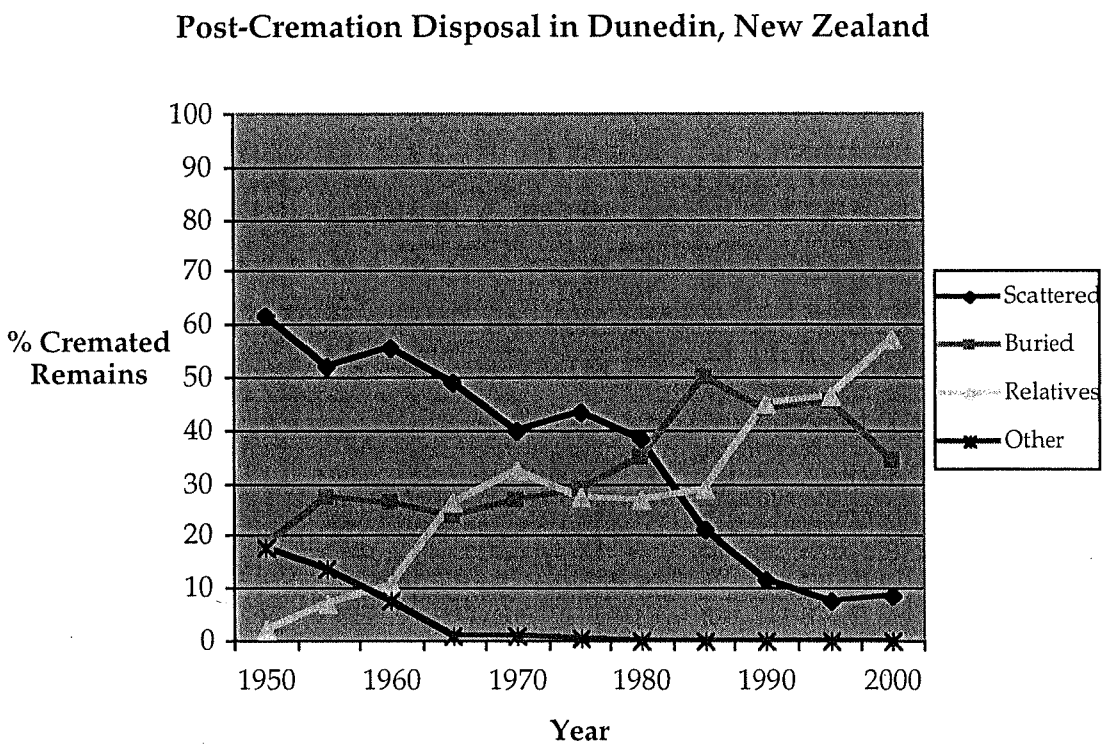

FIGURE 3. Post-cremation disposal in Dunedin, New Zealand.[195]

During the 1950s and early 1960s the majority of cremated remains were institutionally scattered in the crematorium grounds, accounting for 61.7 percent of all ash disposals in 1950. That year, the crematorium ledger reveals that just 2.2 percent of cremated remains were retrieved by relatives. Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, we see a conspicuous decline in the percentage of institutional scatterings and a corresponding increase in the number of ash burials in council cemeteries. Accompanying this increase was a significant rise in the percentage of ashes retrieved by relatives after incineration. By 2000, retrieval by relatives accounted for over 57 percent of disposals, while institutional scattering had dropped to around 8

[195] The categories of ash disposal utilised here were those found in the crematorium records. Cremated remains were usually scattered or buried by council crematorium workers or funeral directors. The records do not indicate whether friends or relatives were present at these disposals. The ledger entry 'relatives' denotes that the cremated remains were claimed by relatives of the deceased. The category 'other' included cremated remains that were delivered to funeral directors/crematoria/relatives in other cities, as well as medical school cadavers. This category also contains columbaria disposals.

percent.[196] Crematorium staff noted that cremated remains 'collected'[197] by relatives were typically scattered in a personalised location or subsequently interred in a city cemetery. Crematorium officials, however, recorded no official information concerning the ultimate disposition of these ashes.

Participants in this study noted that similar trends were evident in other parts of the country. The personal disposal of ashes was often described as the final, necessary step in the ritual process - one that ultimately acknowledged the 'reality' of death and completed the formal involvement of the funeral director. Participants were concerned, therefore, when clients were unable, or unwilling, to dispose of the cremated remains:

> The biggest problem that I've found with cremations is a lot of people tend to think after the cremation, that's it! And what happens is that we get the ashes back and I'm finding that we're having to contact people again afterwards saying, you know, "what do you want to do with the ashes now? It's not really finished yet". As far as we're concerned, it sort of goes on for longer if you like, because there's quite a time lapse between the time of the cremation or the funeral, and the time that people are ready to do something with the ashes (Timothy).

Despite the continuing efforts of some funeral directors to contact the bereaved and offer a variety of disposal options, some clients simply 'abandoned' the cremated remains:

> We've got ashes going back thirty years, of people who just haven't done anything with them. It's although that's the final part that, you know, that means that mum or dad *really* has gone. They don't want them at home but they don't want to make a decision on doing something with them (Ruth).

As these responses clearly intimate, disposition of the ashes completed the funeral process, and funeral directors encouraged this completion with family gatherings to mark the ultimate disposal. Unlike Walters's (1999: 175) earlier description of impersonal ash disposals in Britain, New Zealand funeral directors emphasised the importance of family involvement:

> I've got two [ash disposals] to do next week, which is a nice part, it sort of finishes it really, um because if the hearse drives away from the church or wherever you're having it, it's off to the crem[atorium] by itself. I always say to the people, "Look, you can still in a month of two, we

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[196] These statistics are very similar to those recorded in the UK. Kellaher et al. (2005: 239) note that private ash disposal in the UK increased from approximately 10 percent in the 1970s to around 56 percent by 2004.

[197] In the majority of cases the ashes were collected from the crematorium by the funeral director, who subsequently conveyed the cremated remains to the relatives of the deceased.

> can place the ashes somewhere, and you can as a family just do something private, so we can finish it" (Samuel).

While the scattering of ashes in personally significant locations remained an important method of ash disposal - and one clearly consistent with the focus on personalisation - it was also a practice that numerous funeral directors felt had been superseded by recent funerary innovations. One American funeral industry commentator approvingly noted that New Zealand families were 'discovering' additional ash disposal methods and that cemeteries and funeral homes were 'educating the families away from the practice' of singular ash scattering (Manning 1996b: 12). While a trend from institutional scattering was evident in the United States (Prothero 2001: 146), New Zealand funeral directors were perceived to have achieved a particularly effective solution to this situation. Funeral directors such as Ian declared that the shift to cremation had been motivated by cost and a desire for simplicity, but that this rationalisation of disposal neglected the fundamental, psychological requirements of the bereaved:

> Well I think ah, people went to cremation. It might have been a cost thing but it was simple and that was the finish. Now as we progress and know more about grief, we've advanced and ah, there's a real need to have a place to go to - or a spot to go to - and remember that person, and ah, yeah, they've, as you can see by the number of cremation plots in the cemetery, they're increasing all the time (Ian).

Some researchers noted that this trend signalled an increased understanding of the issues related to bereavement (Pilbrow 1995: 33), while participants such as Tony and Carmen similarly asserted that memorialisation was an important component of the grief experienced by the bereaved:

> People feel as though they've got a point of contact and they've got somewhere for visitation afterwards, whether it's ashes or a physical burial. They've got somewhere where they can do their, you know, work through their grieving process. It's a fulfilment of a grieving process (Tony).

> Back in the sixties, seventies, and perhaps eighties, it [scattering of ashes] was really um, it happened a lot. And I remember in the last few years, say late eighties um, very late eighties and nineties, we had a lot of people that came to us and said, 'Look', you know, 'Our mother's ashes', or 'Our father's ashes have been scattered and we've got nowhere to focus. Nowhere for our children to focus'. So they've purchased a plot in one of the areas and put up some sort of plaque or headstone where they can go and take their children and have something to focus. But I think that's important (Carmen).

The significance of memorials for children and their grief was underlined by a number of participants. Like the funeral directors who emphasised the detrimental impact of deteriorating ('untreated') bodies on the future psychological well-being of children, participants such as David similarly stipulated that the lack of tangible memorial had the potential to negatively impact the mental health of young people:

> [W]ith kids it's, you don't know the effect it has on them long-term and I was speaking to some grief counsellors, and just the fact they can go back to a funeral, a headstone, or a grave where they can spend time there and feel they're having some sort of contact or relationship with the deceased, with mum or dad or whatever, um, it can be very important for them...It's just a central point where they can focus (David).

Some funeral directors therefore argued that material memorialisation following cremation was directly related to the psychological well-being of the bereaved, and that a disregard for the significance of this 'development' had the potential to detrimentally impact the 'recovery' of the survivors. These sentiments echo the trenchant warning issued by the New Zealand Master Monumental Masons Association:

> Surprisingly, a large percentage of people deciding on cremation do not make provisions for disposal of ashes. This often leaves someone in the uncomfortable position of having to make a decision. Consider those left behind. People who say in jest or seriously 'just cremate me and throw my ashes away', do not realise the burden and even trauma this can place on many members of the wider family ('Benefits of memorialisation', no date).

There are clear links here to funeral directors' discussions of direct disposal (see chapter four) that emphasised the salience of funeral services and the psychological 'needs' of the bereaved. In addition to the correlation between grief and memorialisation identified by participants, funeral directors frequently asseverated the need to transcend the 'privatised imaginations and memories' associated with cremation (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 93). It was, as the above quotation illustrates, a *duty* that concerned and self-aware individuals considered before death. Memorials were a tangible form of evidence that 'authenticated' the existence of a particular individual. As Charles explained, it was important to have a 'focus' for family, but even more important to mark a specific location so that there was - in his words - 'some record somewhere'. Ivan proffered a similar explanation:

> When I first started, the standard disposal was for the family to tell the funeral director to have the ashes scattered and it was usually done at the crematorium, you know ____ Crematorium, or wherever the cremation had taken place. Now, seldom are ashes scattered and I think that

> families have a need, a requirement to have some sort of physical something, as a...a reminder of their forebears. It's becoming more and more important and I mean, I think it will be even more important for the unborn generations now. Granddad dies today, so they put up some sort of plaque somewhere for him, and in fifty or sixty years time, his great-great grandchildren will be visiting that plaque, and will be, 'Well this is, you know, your great-grandfather, who ah, lived in [city] in the twentieth century,' and so forth and that seems to be quite important to people (Ivan).

Funeral director pamphlets and websites also offered similar assessments:

> An important consideration when discussing the disposal of ashes is the need to provide a lasting memorial to the one who has died. This memorial is important in providing a focal point for memories and is tangible evidence of the deceased for future generations. Often the choice of a memorial is closely linked to the place or method of disposal of the ashes (Funeral-Link, no date: 'Cremation').

Memorialisation was thus intrinsically linked with 'forebears', 'ancestors', and 'unborn generations', which transcended the emphasis on personality and the idiosyncratic individuality of the deceased, implicitly acknowledging that the living memorials constructed during the life-centred funeral were temporally constrained. While funeral directors emphasised the importance of memory and memory-making during the funeral process and noted that these often static 'possessions' (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 3) needed to be integrated into the evolving biographies of the bereaved, something more tangible was ultimately required to mark the existence of an individual. While cremation may therefore express an 'anti-monumentalist impulse' (Warpole 2003: 177), participants entreated the bereaved to focus on ash disposal that expedited their own grief, but also acknowledged the historical significance of the dead. The realisation of these needs contributed to the current range of ash memorials offered by memorial masons, crematoria, and cemeteries:

> Years ago we used to scatter the ashes more because...there was only one or two sections where you could put the ashes in...but now there's four or five sections and they're all different prices, so people seem to go for what suits their means, cost-wise. Some people take the ashes away and scatter them at the beach, over their private land, farms, bushes, but ah, we don't scatter as many now in the rose garden as we did ten, twenty years ago. The Book of Memories out at the crematorium, people would scatter their ashes in the rose garden and then have their name recorded in the Book of Memories. That's not done as much now because they've got, you know, as I said, four or five sections to place the ashes (Robert).

> What has changed definitely is in the cremation memorial area. Whereas initially the only option at ____ was little plaques on a concrete beam, row after row, now they've got an area where you can have a headstone and they've got another area where it's a garden with paths meandering up the hillside, quite practical because they could never have used it for burials, so they put these paths that zig-zag up between garden beds and you can buy an ashes plot there with your plaque (William).

Cemetery and council workers stated that these developments had resulted in an augmentation of cremation memorial options available to consumers:

> They [the families] want to be individual, they want to desire their own. They want something that is definitely going to be theirs, and theirs forever. They want input, complete input into their selection I would think. Going back seven or eight, nine years, I suppose, there was a fairly decent sort of rulebook as far as what they could do and what they couldn't do, and it didn't do the company a lot of good. So we don't have a rulebook. We just say, 'Look, you tell us what you would like. Let's go for a walk around the gardens'. They usually find something that really appeals to them...So it's more choice and informality I believe (Brendan).

Choice and informality also characterised memorialisation following burial and funeral directors stressed the significance of marking the site of interment.

6.2 Burial and memorialisation

Numerous studies examine the historical and archaeological significance of cemeteries, burial, and memorialisation in Western society (for example Ariès 1981; Burgess 1979; Cox 1998; Farrel 1980; Jackson and Vergara 1989; Karkov et al. 1999; McGuire 1988; Nicol 1994, 1997; Parker Pearson 1999; Pinford 1997; Rugg 1997; Worpole 2003). Recent studies have also outlined the defining characteristics of cemeteries (Rugg 2000), and examined the role of graves in constructing cultural identity (Reimers 1999). Francis et al. (2000, 2001) explore the behaviour of people in cemeteries and evaluate the bonds that persist between the living and the dead. Similarly, Bradbury (2001: 223-24) asserts that contemporary memorialisation fulfils positive functions by providing a focus for emotional expression, and allowing mourners to reassert some level of control after extensive professional involvement. Although evaluating mourner behaviour is outside the realm of this current thesis, funeral directors similarly noted the importance of emotional expression and reiterated the need for personalised memorials that not only reflected the individuality of the deceased, but also *physically* validated the existence of that individual.

While most of the aforementioned studies focus on Western Europe and North America, a few recent studies have also explored cemeteries and memorialisation in New Zealand. In an archaeological study of one southern New Zealand cemetery, for example, Edgar (1995) contends that discernible memorial diversity during the nineteenth century reflected the attempts of wealthy families to differentiate

themselves through material culture. At the end of that century, and during the first decades of the twentieth century, however, grave markers became less conspicuous and ostentatious. The period after the 1930s, in particular, witnessed a greater degree of grave marker uniformity. Edgar (1995: 85-87) attributes this reduction in social stratification to the egalitarian policies implemented by the first Liberal government during the 1890s, noting that a diminution of grave markers was also indicative of a general Western trend towards 'death denial'. While this explanation for the changes in cemetery memorials is somewhat tenuous[198], they are nevertheless changes identified by other authors and participants.

In his examination of death between 1850 and 1910, Cleaver (1996: 86) notes that the 'cult of tombs and cemeteries' identified by Ariès' (1981) was clearly evident in nineteenth century New Zealand. Graveyard memorials during this period included a diversity of styles and shapes, as well as informative biographical inscriptions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this heterogeneity was superseded by increasing uniformity and lack of ostentation, which Cleaver (1996: 90-102) links to the increasing privatisation of death (and Ariès' 'invisible death').

One final study considered here is the dissertation by Ruthe (1996) examining memorial inscription and design in an Auckland cemetery. Ruthe (1996) analyses changes that occurred from 1888 to 1996 and identifies a gradual shift from autocratic religious citations, to more personalised, emotional expressions, incorporating both Latinate and popular, sentimental verse.

Participants in this study cited the increasing personalisation of monuments as positive developments that reflected an enhanced understanding of the grief process. Participants emphasised that funeral directors, monumental masons, and cemetery authorities had responded to this development with an increasing variety of memorial options. Council workers, such as Ronald, noted that councils acknowledged the 'community need' for memorialisation following death and were

[198] Despite identifying a 'general trend' to death denial in Western society, Edgar (1995) fails to include any of the significant European social histories of death, including Ariès (1974, 1981) and Gorer (1965). Similarly, Edgar (1995) does not consider the nature of the relationship between the dead and the living. See Lawrence (1995) and Walter (1990).

offering more 'individualised' options. Other participants reiterated this apparent trend:

> [People] want to establish their own individualism. Ah, we do that for funerals. We try and make it different and as individual as possible. Um, we do it in memorial work on the headstones. They design them themselves, put their own mark on them (Ian).

> Well here in [city] they have changed quite a bit. Up until probably ten years ago the headstones were very uniform. But ah, that has changed. They're bringing in different shapes, different types of headstones, different ideas with headstones and I think that's good (Toby).

> [Memorialisation] is becoming far more personalised um, people want to have more control over what goes on the stone and want to make theirs different than the others and things. So yeah, that's changing big time (Louis).

One independent memorial mason noted that headstones often not only included photographs of the dead, but increasingly incorporated symbols and artwork associated with their lives:

> The best clues about people - that we do on our work anyway - is the artwork that we incorporate into the headstone. It might be a guitar because the person loved playing the guitar or was a musician in a band, or whatever. It might be a saxophone, you know. Um, it might be some other symbol um, you know, Freemasonary or something like that. Yeah, there will be different symbols that are used now perhaps more so than in the past, that we would put on the stone that will reflect an important part of that person's life (Callum).

Funeral directors advertised similar services and stressed the significance of crafting personalised 'tributes' for the dead:

> Complimentary [sic] to our Funeral services we also offer a full monumental service. A memorial is an ideal way to pay a special tribute to your loved one, personalising their final place of rest, providing a place for family and friends to visit and remember. Haven Memorial Services provides a comprehensive, quality range, from traditional through to modern granite memorials, personalised with your choice of layout and design. One of our specialties is providing original artwork for headstones (Haven Funeral Services, no date 'Memorial services').

Memorialisation was thus one final, positive contribution that mourners could make both to their own personal well-being (by recognising the 'reality' of the death), and to the memory of the deceased. As with the cremation memorials, it was important to provide some material evidence that affirmed the existence of an individual. As one funeral director website asserted, a permanent memorial provided a focal point for memories *and* 'evidence for future generations of a life lived' (Lychgate Funeral Services, no date). Concepts of 'history' and 'nature' were explicitly linked to memorialisation. In the same way that viewing and the funeral service (discussed in previous chapters) were represented as fundamental components of 'healthy' grief,

memorialisation was represented by funeral directors as an 'ancient' tradition that fulfilled basic human 'needs'. Rather than being a socially constructed or influenced practice therefore, it was portrayed as an essential requisite that had evolved to efficiently satisfy the innate 'needs' of mourners. The core of these 'needs' centred on human emotions. While it was at certain times important to constrain the 'irrational' and 'injudicious' impulses frequently associated with emotions during the funeral process, it was also necessary for the bereaved to acknowledge and realise their emotional requirements. Take for example, the following explanation proffered by one funeral establishment:

> Memorialisation is a time-honoured tradition that has been practised by caring people through the centuries. A memorial serves a basic human need to remember and be remembered. It also fulfils the need to preserve our heritage. Regardless of the choice of burial or cremation, human emotions are the same, and feelings none the less intense. Natural stone or bronze memorials can be the most positive aid in the grieving process, forging an everlasting link with the past and providing a vital focal point - a place to visit and remember. Choosing a memorial can be an intensely personal and private matter (Grahams Funeral Services, no date).

Natural stone was described as being durable and resistant, and particularly suitable for long-term memorialisation:

> Granite memorials (plaques or headstones) are themselves made of a naturally occurring material. Their ability to endure the elements is hard to match. For this reason you should realize that the product you choose will be around for many, many years (R.J. King Ltd.).

Personalisation was therefore an important component of memorialisation after disposal. This personalisation, however, was not exclusively private and included a public dimension which funeral directors persistently stressed fulfilled innate human needs. Davies (2002: 208) interprets memorials as an example of 'words against death' that address death and assert life (see chapter one):

> What is interesting is that even private memorials often stand in public cemeteries where a kind of impersonal publicity is gained through a memorial. Written memorials afford the capacity to share with others who themselves are unknown. In so doing, people acknowledge the communal fact that death comes to all and that all may respond verbally to it. Few gravestones stand bare and silent.

This focus on life is particularly evident in the discussion of eco-memorials that follows.

Eco-memorials

One recent form of memorialisation that emphasises the themes of 'life' and 'nature' is the eco-memorial. A few funeral establishments have developed tree-planting programmes in conjunction with local community groups and government organisations. In most cases the funeral establishments provide financial support for the planting of trees and the development of 'memorial parks'. These parks or reserves differ from the 'natural', or 'woodland burials' promoted by New Zealand organisations such as Living Legacies and Natural Burials.[199] Unlike organisations that advocate the disposal of unembalmed ('eco-friendly') bodies in specially designated forest or bush burial sites, the memorial parks are not burial grounds per se and do not preclude other forms of memorialisation. Funeral directors were often critical of eco-burials, noting that few people seriously demanded this form of disposal. Numerous participants cited the example of an Auckland cemetery that had succeeded in selling only three eco-burial plots over a six-year period (*Funeralcare* June 2004: 3)[200] despite significant publicity. Some participants also felt that a lack of embalming specified by some eco-burial organisations was detrimental to the 'dignity' of the deceased (see chapter four). Memorial parks, however, offered an alternative that incorporated traditional funerary elements and reflected the environmental sensibilities of the deceased and bereaved.

One of the earliest memorial reserves established in New Zealand in 1992 was the 'Living Memorial Mau Mahara' programme, situated at Otukaikino, Christchurch (*NZFD* March 1992: 8). This programme constitutes a partnership between a local funeral company and the Department of Conversation, with support from the local Maori community. For every funeral arranged, the funeral company donates money to the Department, who in turn plant and maintain the trees in the reserve. The funeral firm then issue a certificate to the family recording the planting, although no trees are dedicated to specific individuals. The pamphlet outlining the programme states unequivocally that the 'Living Memorial' is: 'quite separate from, and not

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[199] There are many websites that offer information on eco-burials. See, for example, www.naturalburials.co.nz or www.livinglegacies.co.nz for information about forest or bush burials in New Zealand. For an overview of international developments see Albery et al. (1997), Wienrich et al. (2002) and www.naturaldeath.org.uk.

[200] In 1999 the Waikumete Cemetery in West Auckland developed 'forest burials'. Strict conditions govern casket/shroud materials and memorialisation, and many elements of the burial are conducted by cemetery personnel (*NZFD* Winter 1999: 6-7).

designed to replace, personal acknowledgements, such as headstones' (Living Memorial Mau Mahara, no date). Once a year an interdenominational service is held at the wetland reserve to dedicate new trees to those individuals who died during the year. One feature that was identified as making this site particularly significant (and 'authentic') was its historic link with early Maori embalming practices.

A concern with 'authenticity' is also evident in the explanations surrounding the ecological significance of memorial reserves and the discussions of 'nature' mobilised by some funeral directors. Both study participants and industry literature emphasised that the creation of memorial reserves represented attempts to 'restore' wetlands to their 'original state', by replacing introduced plant species with indigenous varieties.[201] The descriptions proffered by participants, however, highlight that the contemporary wetland reserves developed by funeral directors (and their associates) were not simply a reversion to 'primitive' or 'raw' forms of 'nature' (Giblett 1996: 16-21), but disciplined and carefully managed 'natural' spaces. Like the woodland burials in England with their 'judicious landscape planning' (Warpole 2003: 191), the memorial parks hint at a much more controlled form of nature; a form that effectively evoked memories and emphasised 'life' (*Funeralcare* June 2004: 6-7).

As the website of one recently developed (2004) Wellington memorial reserve notes, the individual life of the deceased is a fundamental feature of the memorial park: 'Planting a tree is a wonderful way to remember, honour, and celebrate the life of someone we love who has died' (Lychgate Funeral Services, no date). Eco-memorials were linked to the life of specific individuals by the bereaved, and could thus be interpreted as a form of 'ecological fulfilment of identity' (Davies pers comm.: 2002). By directly or indirectly engaging in the planting of a tree, the bereaved could contribute to the biographical narrative of the deceased, by realising the environmental sensibilities or concerns of this individual. Participants noted that these trees were a form of permanent memorial that marked a particular life and that

[201] This development is particularly interesting in the context of historic changes related to the status of wetlands in New Zealand. Wetlands (or swamps) were historically associated with death and disease in European society, linked to 'malaria, miasma and melancholia' (Giblett 1996: 4). Park (2002: 153) notes that early New Zealand settlers despised the dense wetlands they encountered on their arrival, systematically draining these areas and transforming them into economically productive land. The latter part of the twentieth century, however, witnessed the emergence of an international movement that aimed to preserve and develop 'natural' wetland areas.

the reserves provided people with a place to 'go and remember', and 'be at peace' (Richard). But unlike the sites for scattering of ashes, these memorials were not directly linked to a place connected with the deceased (Schwab 2004: 27).

On a more general level, however, eco-memorials were also a form of communal or public memorial, symbolically representing the natural cycles of birth and decay, and the place of humans in the environmental eco-system. While the actual processes of decomposition had been contained in cemeteries and crematoria, those individuals associated with memorial parks emphasised the significance of flora and fauna rejuvenation, and the abundance of 'life' inherent in this regeneration. This theme is particularly evident in the romanticised ruminations regarding one memorial park: 'maybe soon the ponds and trees will be teeming with the sights and sounds of birds and fish, and Otukaikino will be further transformed to a place of noise – and life' (*Funeralcare* June 2004: 7).

Memorial reserves, therefore, illuminate some of the wider funerary transformations explored in this thesis. Funeral directors continuously reiterated the significance of 'natural' post-mortem practices: the 'natural' representation of the deceased to elicit 'natural' emotions in the bereaved, and the therapeutic funeral service that represented an important step in the 'natural' progression of grief. The discourse mobilised by funeral directors emphasised that funeral practices had undergone an evolutionary process and current practices were portrayed as reverting to - or at least 'extracting' - a 'natural', organic form of funerary ritual that was congruous with the innate 'needs' of the bereaved. Like the memorial parks that represent a particularly manipulated and managed form of 'nature', however, the 'nature' envisioned by participants and encapsulated in the personalisation rhetoric represents a particular construction that simultaneously asseverates the expertise of the funeral director and reifies their integral involvement in this process.

Internet memorials

One final form of memorialisation considered here is the internet memorial. There are currently numerous international Internet sites that offer Web memorials[202], allowing

[202] See for example http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/vmg/index.html, http://www.cemetery.org/

individuals to construct memorials that commemorate the dead. Placing memorials in these 'virtual cemeteries' is typically free of charge or inexpensive, with few constraints on content or form (Roberts 1999).[203]

As the example below illustrates, memorials are often simple, text-based messages, with a significant number incorporating pictures of the deceased. In addition to having 'Guestbooks' that allow visitors to record their thoughts and comments, most of the cemeteries also allow people to leave virtual 'flowers' (usually brief messages) at the memorial. The [flowers] link at the foot of the Web memorial above, for example, allows visitors to compose a message. By clicking the [Visitors] link it is possible to see who has left 'flowers' at a particular memorial. These Internet memorials have been the subject of recent scrutiny by a number of researchers.

Michael James Smith
Name at birth: _____
Date of birth: _____
Place of birth: _____
Date of death: _____
Place of death: _____
Place of burial: _____

Submitted by: _____*(name and e-mail address)*

I do not know why you committed suicide Michael, you took the answer to that question to the grave. I do know that I love you and miss you little brother. I wish I could turn back the clock and change things but I can't.
I often go down to the beach where you said goodbye to the world it's a peacful spot. Mum and Dad miss you very much, C____ and S____ don't understand that you won't be comming home, they wait for you at the window.
Where ever you are think of me like I think of you.
Love K____

We would like to thank those visitors who have left flowers.

FIGURE 4. Web memorial
(Source: http://www.cemetery.org)

A study by Roberts and Vidal (2000), for example, examines memorials in 'virtual' cemeteries and analyses factors related to the demographics of the deceased, author attributes, and memorial content. While discovering considerable diversity in Web memorials, the authors also identify a number of significant trends, including the

http://www.gatesofremembrance.co.uk, http://www.legacyarchives.com/, http://www.withus4ever.com/home.asp, and http://www.worldgardens.com/.
[203] As Roberts and Vidal (2000) note, however, each virtual cemetery developed its own customs and conventions.

predominance of female authors and male subjects. Deaths commemorated on the Web were generally recent and memorials typically addressed the internet community (although one quarter were addressed to the deceased). Roberts and Vidal (2000) note that the memorials were frequently articulated as stories and often included themes of celebration. Roberts and Vidal (2000) assert that web memorials have become an important resource for the bereaved, providing an opportunity for individuals to publicly commemorate the dead, as well as researchers, who can explore the significance of personal writing during bereavement.

DeVries and Rutherford (2004) also examine the potential possibilities for post-disposal ritual offered by Web memorials. In their descriptive study the authors corroborate the key findings of Roberts and Vidal (2000) but note that most of the memorials they examined assume the form of letters to the deceased (De Vries and Rutherford 2004: 20). The authors conclude by stating that Web cemeteries mark private mourning in a public space and that this emerging postmodern ritual provides an insight into the 'scripts of grief' and the continuing relationship between the living and the dead (DeVries and Rutherford 2004: 24).

Roberts (2004) examines the way the bereavement 'community' utilise Web memorials in cyberspace. She found that memorialisation was a valued bereavement activity that contributed positively to the continuing relationship between the living and the dead, allowing the bereaved to 'collaborate in their understanding of the deceased' (Roberts 2004: 65). In addition to providing a socially acceptable way for the living to mark 'continuing bonds' with the dead, memorialisation also allowed for communication between those individuals who had suffered similar losses, creating a new sense of community or connection for the bereaved.

Two important themes evident in these studies – 'continuing bonds' with the dead and private rituals in public spaces (Moss 2004)[204] – are particularly relevant to the

[204] These themes are also discussed in other studies focusing on spontaneous memorialisation (Haney et al. 1997, Haney and Davis 1999), roadside memorials (for example Clark and Cheshire 2004; Reid and Reid 2001) and Internet mailing lists (Argyle 1996). The current study, however, focuses primarily on memorialisation offered and promoted by funeral directors.

present study. These themes were repeatedly emphasised by funeral directors in this project as intrinsic factors of contemporary funeral services.

The potential of Internet applications for funeral service has periodically been discussed in funeral industry publications. An article in the *NZFD* (Summer 1998: 15), for example, notes that memorialisation on the Internet provides an 'opportunity to unite families', while Bailey (1999: 21) asserts that the Internet might become an important 'forum for grief and memory'. Funeral directors in this study remained ambivalent about the potential of the Internet. with many feeling that contemporary applications were limited:

> At the moment I don't see it as being an absolute necessity. I've got an e-mail address. I still think by-and-large that most of our clients, when they need a funeral director, they wouldn't think of going to a computer. I know that most businesses have computers, but in fact not many homes really have computers, especially elderly people. It's certainly the last place that I would think of looking myself (Timothy).

Some of the concerns espoused by participants were also consistent with the notion of control expressed by funeral directors in relation to various elements of funeral service. Participants such as Anthony, therefore, stressed that funeral service was unlike other goods and services, and was thus subject to unique sales and advertising standards. He also emphasised that funeral providers could not accurately gauge or monitor how many Internet users were using the website information in an 'appropriate' manner:

> It's [the Internet] something which we're undecided on at the moment. It's very difficult to determine whether or not our kind of industry and our kind of services are the sort that people would purchase via internet...I recently had a salesman from the *Yellow Pages* here trying to sell me the concept of a web page. But it's very different from offering some other kinds of goods or services. It's a very personal and individual thing. And people like [those from the] *Yellow Pages*, they can quote you all sorts of statistics. They can show you how many hits people who have got web pages are getting um, but the other thing which really fogs that, is that I think the whole, the whole area of funerals, has a morbid fascination for a large sector of society. And I personally think that a lot of people out there who are surfing the net, look for the unusual and I suspect that funerals, death, dying, bodies, embalming – those sort of things – are the sort of things that people search for and find something weird and wonderful. So I think that, looking at the number of hits of a site doesn't actually tell us how many people are seriously looking for information (Anthony).

As noted in previous chapters, funeral directors often emphasised the public education component of their role, but it was clearly important that this information be used 'correctly'. What is also evident in this response is that while death education

and information were considered salient and 'healthy' in a 'death-denying' society, some forms of self-directed interest were inappropriate. The 'morbid fascination' identified in the aforementioned response clearly constituted one form of 'undignified' or 'unhealthy' interest in death. An increasing number of funeral directors did, however, develop websites during the course of this research, and in 2004 one company launched an Internet memorial website (www.tributes.co.nz).

This website allows for the publication of 'tributes' and the dissemination of information regarding funeral arrangements. Tributes are placed on the site by registered funeral directors at the request of the bereaved and typically contain information about the deceased, such as name, photograph, and date of death. Tributes could also contain links to florists, a map of the funeral service venue, and address details for charitable contributions. Tributes also contained a link to a 'Tribute Book' that allowed visitors to record thoughts and comments.[205] As noted earlier, these messages not only augmented the collaborative understanding of the deceased (Roberts 2004: 65), but also contributed to the retrospective narrative of the dead. The tributes can also be seen as a form of 'living memorial', much like those created during the funeral service itself:

> Our website allows you to place a photo of the person, along with their funeral notice, the details of the funeral service, and information for family and friends sending flowers or making donations. Family and friends can read and place messages in a specially designed tribute book - you can also add tributes that have been sent to you, or were contributed at the funeral service. Tributes.co.nz is a fitting way to remember those close to you who have died (http://www.tributes.co.nz/About.aspx).

The creators of the website also consider the significance of these memorials as resources that will 'assist' individuals in their grief and provide 'comfort'. After a thirteen month period, the tribute is removed, although an archived version of the memorial is retained on the website.

Although internet memorials provided by New Zealand funeral directors are still in the early stages of development they reinforce the constructions of grief repeatedly discussed in this thesis. In particular, they highlight funeral director concern with

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[205] All tribute information and comments entered in the 'Tribute Book' are 'checked' and 'approved' before posting (http://www.tributes.co.nz/faq.aspx#). Tributes Online Limited also note in their

public manifestations of grief and funeral service, and continuing bonds with the bereaved. Both these considerations were represented as essential elements of the contemporary grief process and were integral components of aftercare funeral services.

6.3 Funeral director after-care

'Aftercare' refers to the selection of services that funeral directors provide following the funeral and disposal. These services range from supportive correspondence or the provision of bereavement literature, to informal telephone calls and referrals to grief counsellors. Some funeral establishments also provide 'grief support staff', facilitate bereavement support groups, and offer annual memorial or remembrance services. Community education programmes exploring grief issues were also important elements of aftercare services developed by some funeral businesses. The following section highlights that the technologies of the self offered by funeral directors centred around bereavement subjectivities deemed 'normal', and 'healthy', and will also explore the pastoral dimension of the funeral director's role.

Participants explained that aftercare services had traditionally been provided by churches and community groups, but that secularisation and concomitant community needs had motivated an increasing number of funeral directors to develop aftercare services. Participants also stressed that aftercare services were an effective advertising and public relations tool:

> We do send out an acknowledgement card, um on the anniversary of the death, on the first anniversary and um, that tends to just let them know that we're thinking of them at that time. We have a Christmas service, remembrance service every year here, run in conjunction with um _____ company's in town, um, and...we were just talking the other week about maybe having a mother's day or father's day service, just something else to sort of, you know, target. Um, it's really, I guess to be quite clinical about it, it's more motivated by a need to be um, promoting ourselves rather than, I mean there's always, whatever we do, will be of benefit to the people that we do it for, but it's motivated by our need to be promoting our company (Ivan).

This innovation follows similar developments in the United States (Lensing 2001; Mastrogianis and Lumley 2002; Riordan and Allen 1989) and is clearly congruent with the historical shift to an emphasis on the needs of the living evident in the

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Tribute Provider Agreement that they reserve the right to reject any tribute that they consider 'offensive' or 'inappropriate' (http://www.tributes.co.nz/terms.aspx).

pursuit of professionalisation (see chapter three). Some authors have emphasised the 'diversity' of aftercare programmes proffered by individual funeral providers (Lensing 2001: 50), while participants in this project reiterated that aftercare services incorporated and reflected diverse individual needs. Similarly, the funeral home literature noted the individuality of the grief process:

> Bereavement is the name given to the feelings we experience when someone close to us dies. During this time, which may last for months or even years, we suffer all the pains of loss and grief. Our service gives you the opportunity to grieve naturally, each in your own different ways, and to express your feelings rather than bottling them up inside you. (Waimea Richmond Funeral Directors, no date).

As these assertions intimate - and an examination of the research data reveals - aftercare services offer a forum for the continuing operation of technologies of the self, allowing the bereaved to gauge and monitor their 'progress' in the grief process and engage in 'normal' and 'healthy' forms of 'griefwork'. Integral to the aftercare services provided by funeral directors is a social construction of grief that posits temporal progression, emotional expression and continuing bonds with the deceased. Participants explicated that these particular features constituted a 'healthy' and 'natural' grief process in contemporary New Zealand society.

Participants also stressed that contact with a family after a funeral was important. Funeral directors frequently used a number of opportunities to establish contact with client families:

> We, um, strongly go back to families with any correspondence that we may have. We are very active in the disposal of ashes and that gives us another avenue. We're very active in monumental work and that gives us another avenue and it's almost a case of us *trying* to get a reason to go and see them, or contact them (Henry).

Participants such as Anthony emphasised that a central component of funeral service was the 'concept of pastoral care and oversight', but that many funeral directors did not presently have the resources to provide counselling services:

> I know that people need support, but what we tend to do at the moment, is that if there are people that we feel are struggling and don't have the necessary support structures, at the time we would certainly be trying to steer them towards areas where they can get help (Anthony).

Similarly, William noted that his firm referred clients to 'professional counsellors' and that this practice would continue until his funeral firm could afford the services of a

'proper counsellor'. Other participants stressed that counselling was outside the realm of funeral director expertise and that inappropriate interference in the grief process was potentially damaging:

> We're not counsellors and that's something really important, that we all have to remember as funeral directors. We're not trained as counsellors. Which is, some people think that we are. But I firmly believe that you can do more damage than good by saying the wrong thing (Ruth).

While it became clear during the course of this research that participants were careful to distinguish the role of grief counsellors from funeral directors, most participants nevertheless offered various forms of 'grief support', with funeral director discourse emphasised that these services were now an integral element of New Zealand funeral service. As Lensing (2001: 54) notes in relation to the North American funeral industry, using labels such as 'grief therapist' or 'grief counsellor' potentially misrepresent the level and extent of funeral director expertise. Similarly, participants in the present study were ambivalent about the recent introduction of the *Griefcare* quality assurance programme, with some participants noting that the title was open to misinterpretation regarding the focus of funeral services. As Robert pointed out, funeral directors were there to 'help people in their grief', but that the *Griefcare* programme might give the public the 'wrong impression' about the occupation. Referral to counsellors was usually reserved for cases of 'problematic' grief and, as noted earlier, counselling was also represented as being characteristically 'American' and thus incongruous with the New Zealand way of life. As Jonathan stated, New Zealand was not a 'counselling society': 'we're not used to rushing off and having ourselves analysed every time something goes wrong'. Another participant emphasised that the term 'counselling' did not 'seem quite right' and that a competent funeral director was 'automatically doing counselling work, if he was doing his work well' (Charles). Funeral directors were often critical of 'professional counselling' and noted that such services were superfluous and redundant. This attitude extended to the funeral directors themselves, with some participants stating that funeral providers simply needed to 'deal with' a multitude of stressful situations. This attitude was epitomised by the response of one funeral director participant:

> You see some pretty gruesome sights at times, but ah, it's part of the job, you know. Yeah, it sort of surprises me when you hear these people have got to have counselling for this and counselling for that. What sort of job do they think they're in? ...like the police, saying that ah, such and such has happened and the police have had to be counselled for this and counselled

> for that. Well look, nobody has ever counselled funeral directors! Why don't we need it?...Personally, I think it's, it's - this counselling - a lot of it is bloody greed. They've put themselves forward as counsellors, um, when in fact, I've, I know a couple of counsellors, I wouldn't have them inside my bloody house personally. I don't know where they learnt counselling, or if they'd ever been to a counsellor themselves (Peter).

Many large urban funeral firms in particular provided a specialised grief or bereavement 'support person'. This individual was typically employed by the funeral establishments to provide a number of 'aftercare' services, including telephone contact with the bereaved, the provision of grief literature, and the organisation of support groups and remembrance services. Interestingly, all the support people included in this study were female. While Naylor (1989:163) argues that the male 'attitude' to funerals in Britain was 'paternalistic, mechanistic and protective', and that increased female involvement in funerals was perceived by some of her participants to be 'threatening to the male funeral community', I would argue that the predominance of females in the aftercare area represents a general extension of the essentialist arguments posited by funeral directors. As noted in chapter three, females were portrayed as an important dimension of contemporary funeral service that accentuated the 'caring', pastoral focus of late-modern funeral providers. Participants noted, therefore, that it was more 'natural' for women to give hugs (Harvey), and that females wanted to 'stand alongside and guide' the bereaved rather than 'control them' (Margaret). As Nathan asserted, women were 'naturally more sensitive' and possessed a 'great ability to be more caring'.

At the same time as distancing themselves from the formal role of grief counselling, however, participants often posited a very intimate and personal understanding of the grief process. This understanding and comprehension allowed participants to gauge the 'progress' of the bereaved and identify the manifestations of problematic grief:

> Our level of contact really is dependent on the family and um and their needs and once again if they need a higher level of support, if it's perceived by the funeral director that they need a higher level of support, well then he or she is able to visit them if appropriate or make phone contact (Louis).

This type of evaluation of bereaved individuals also explicitly demonstrated the expertise of the funeral director.

Like the secular funeral celebrants discussed in the previous chapter, bereavement support staff represented an extension of the funeral director's pastoral role. One of the key roles of the bereavement support people employed by funeral directors was to listen to the experiences and concerns of the bereaved and aid these individuals in understanding the grief process:

> Death strikes the family without any sympathy at all. This stress can affect both our bodies and our minds. Therefore we have councillors [sic] and support people to assist the bereaved with getting on with their lives. The support people are not always qualified councillors. But these people know exactly what you are going through because they have been in the same situation themselves and are able to share their experiences and listen to yours (Ryan Funerals).

> We don't really refer to the person that looks after our cases as a counsellor, ah, she's a person with a, a good listening ear. She's a listener ah, and ah, she won't intrude on people's thoughts. She really just wants to listen to their concerns (Charles).

Funeral firm literature describing their bereavement support staff was often candid and honest, revealing the personal tragedies confronted by these individuals themselves. Not only were these representations congruous with the funeral director focus on personal experience and honesty, but they were portrayed as providing the grief support staff with a particularly relevant insight into the experiences of other bereaved individuals:

> Jenna is available through Johnson Funeral Directors, as part of the service we offer, to support and assist families. Jenna herself has had to face the challenges of bereavement having both her parents die when she was 13 and her sister's death more recently. She brings to her role what many have referred to as the gift of empathy. "I understand the grieving process and how it can affect people, and I feel I can help others understand this process they are going through" Jenna says. "It helps to have someone who will listen, and let them talk it through" (Johnson Funeral Directors).

> "My own life was plunged into grief when our 16 year old daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumour. She was fast-tracked into an operation but two days following died. We began a journey we had not chosen, a journey of deep grief and major change and re-adjustment. I consider it a privilege that through my own experience of sudden bereavement, along with 25 years of pastoral care and counselling, I can support families in their time of grief" (Canterbury Christian Funeral Services, no date).

The funeral director discourse surrounding after-care services reiterates a number of important features of the grief process. One of the most explicit assertions made in the funeral director rhetoric, is the need to express emotion and discuss feelings for the successful resolution of grief. Participants and funeral firm literature often asseverated that all emotions were 'appropriate' and 'legitimate' as long as they were openly acknowledged. Being 'honest' and 'expressive' were therefore key

technologies of the self. A failure to engage in such honest discussion and expressivism was equated with various forms of ill health, including depression:

> It is very important to talk about the thoughts and feelings you might have as you grieve but as time passes sometimes family and friends are not always available to comfort you and allow you to talk about your loved one. Our free Bereavement Support Service is offered to help get you through the bereavement period and on the way to understanding and coping with your loss...When a family death develops into a crisis the problems may seem overwhelming to both the grieving person and their close friends and relatives. It is often easier to talk to an outsider about personal matters – someone who is trained to listen and help you explore and discuss ways of coping with your feelings. Sometimes people experience a delayed grief reaction many months or even years after a death. When grief is delayed or blocked counselling may sometimes be necessary (Waimea Richmond Funeral Directors, no date).

> When we speak of grief in relation to the death of someone we love we are speaking of the process of adjusting to that loss. It is very real, and for most people it involves pain. Some go through this adjustment by denial or sometimes with feelings of extreme anger, some feel crippled by guilt and despair. All these feelings can be most appropriate as long as they are not ignored or shelved, for when this happens depression results. It is most important to have someone to talk to following a death - and to talk not only about the person who has died, but also regarding your feelings in response to that (Canterbury Christian Funeral Services, no date).

The bereavement support services provided by funeral directors allowed the bereaved to express the requisite emotions in a situation clearly reminiscent of Foucault's description of confession (1983, 1990). Specifically, funeral director literature emphasises the 'friendship' and 'openness' that characterises the interaction between the grief support person and the bereaved:

> Sometimes it is hard to talk like this to those who are close to us, or it may be that they have returned to their homes some distance away after the funeral and you are not able to talk to them, and you are left with your own thoughts. This is a crucial time in the grief process and you should feel free to call someone in to talk with and to share your feelings with...A final note, don't be afraid to cry. We need to forget any thoughts we have that crying is a sign of weakness and let our emotions flow freely, thus receiving the benefit of one of nature's natural therapies (Canterbury Christian Funeral Services, no date).

> Pat's role includes helping people to experience the pain of grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding and to accept and adjust to their loss. She offers friendship in which thoughts and feelings can be expressed openly. People are helped to find strength and confidence within themselves as they grieve and are encouraged to find and use resources within their own local community. Three weeks after a family death Pat writes to a bereaved person or family offering support and friendship in which thoughts and feelings can be expressed openly. She follows this letter with a phone call and then develops a relationship in which families are helped to find strength and confidence within themselves as they grieve (Marsden House Funeral Services, no date).

One important (and particularly late-modern) element of this process is the reflexive monitoring of emotions. As the above statements intimate, the bereaved had to *recognise* their own emotional requirements. While the bereaved needed to

systematically 'work through' their emotions, they also needed to understand and identify these exact emotions:

> We must work through our feelings if the grief process is going to be successful. Repressing grief, failure to allow this natural healing process to take its course, can take toll of our continuing lives. It is very important to recognise and work through these feelings (*FDANZ* Pamphlet No.2).

Grief was frequently represented as an inner journey or quest that involved a significant degree of suffering and hardship. The rhetoric used by funeral directors noted that the bereaved not only needed to engage in 'challenging' emotional expression but reflexive monitoring of this expression. The bereaved needed to recognise these requirements and honestly confront these needs on their 'journey' to resolution. This 'journey' then, allowed the bereaved to find strength and confidence within themselves and led to a particularly late modern form of salvation in a secularised society, namely health and happiness:

> Loss is the feeling we experience when someone close to us dies and we miss their physical presence, their love and their friendship. To regain our health and happiness we have to acknowledge and accept this loss. We may not have the physical presence of the person who died but we generally do have memories, photos, letters and mementoes of times we shared together. These memories are often very painful at first but as time passes become a comfort to us (Sanderson and Sons).

It is only when individuals reached a level of 'acceptance' that memories were also transformed into a source of 'comfort'. As noted in previous chapters 'memories' were an integral element of contemporary funerals and the production of these memories was one of the primary aims of post-mortem practices. While authors such as Howarth (2000b) have argued that 'continuing bonds' between the living and the dead have been marginalised by the discourses of modernity, New Zealand funeral director discourse emphasises that 'memories' are indeed a significant facet of the grief process when 'appropriately' integrated into the lives of the bereaved:

> We remember with sadness, but also with joy and gratitude. Memories are no longer pathways to pain. Our lives move forward to new patterns. Old friendships are renewed and new ones begin (*FDANZ* Pamphlet No. 2).

In this discussion of grief and aftercare, the active role of the funeral director in constructing these practices and the concept of 'grief' utilised by participants is infrequently mentioned. The conflation of 'natural' and 'healthy' that frames much of the funeral director discourse is explicitly represented as being an approach that

challenges the unnatural 'denials and taboos that prevail in modern society' (Walter 1994: 113), as well as the 'impersonal' and 'irrelevant' religious funerals of earlier decades. Funeral director discourse, however, offers the bereaved a construction of grief that not only allows individuals to gauge their progress in typically modernist fashion, but accentuates the expertise of the funeral director themselves. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, the 'feelings' associated with bereavement, were 'feelings' that funeral directors knew 'how to deal with'. Resolution, therefore, required active involvement and a commitment from the bereaved, a commitment strongly encouraged by funeral directors.[206] The concept of control and progress were integral components of the grief process described by participants, and the trajectory of this process was one implicitly defined in the discourse. Funeral directors usually provided aftercare contact two to four weeks after the funeral, although no specific explanation for this time-frame was proffered by participants. Similarly, extended contact with families beyond this time-frame was discouraged by most participants and often described as being detrimental to the grief experience of the bereaved:

> It's like going to a shop and buying a mattress. You go in, you buy the mattress, you pay for it. If the shop rings you up the next week or the week after and says, "How is the mattress?", you say, "It's wonderful, thank you". But six months later down the track you really don't want them ringing you up and asking you again. Alright?...I think we've done our job (Melanie).

> We try and see families within a fortnight, after the funeral service takes place and that can be a pretty big workload for one person. Not always in person, either by telephone, or certainly a telephone call and a suggestion that our bereavement papers get mailed to them. Um, we do have a good follow-up service, but, funeral directors role perhaps is also to be seen and not seen and that, perhaps, in a way, applies to the funeral home after a service...not to remind them that death has occurred in the family too often (Richard).

> I think in some cases it [aftercare] can be overdone. People get the funeral behind them and they don't really want people coming and talking to them about it again, bringing it all up again (Toby).

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[206] There are some similarities here with Talcott Parsons' 'sick role' outlined in *The social system* (1951). Drawing on the work of Freud and Weber, Parsons notes that the sick role was a temporary, medically sanctioned form of deviant behaviour. Parsons' structural-functionalist position propounded that people who become sick in Western society have rights *and* obligations. The incumbent is excused from 'normal' social role expectations and is not responsible for his or her condition. The incumbent, however, is also obliged to recognise the need to 'get well' and seek 'technically competent' help (Parsons 1951: 437). Participants in the present project reiterated that the bereaved were 'excused' from their normal social role responsibilities but they also needed to recognise the salience of emotional expression, authenticity and 'grief work' for the healthy resolution of grief. Participants emphasised the importance of seeking 'professional' help in cases of 'problematic grief'. These explanations emphasised the expertise of the funeral director and the pastoral dimension of their role.

Clearly, there was continued ambivalence about the extent and temporal limits of aftercare services and, as the above responses indicate, a number of participants felt that funeral director involvement usually ended soon after the funeral service. As the previous sections exploring memorialisation indicate, however, some funeral firms have developed longer-term pastoral programmes. Not only were these programmes an attempt to 'become more open and honest with people' (Timothy) about funeral services, as some participants suggested, but they also constituted a targeted advertising campaign in an increasingly competitive funeral market. Some firms therefore sent cards to mark the first anniversary of a death, while a number of firms were exploring the possibility of introducing this service:

> We're looking at sending cards on the first anniversary of the death, although that's a bit of a sensitive issue because for some people after twelve months they will have...moved on, that's right. Yeah, some people may even be re- married in that time (Oliver).

Other funeral firms offered Christmas 'Remembrance Services' that had a strong pastoral focus:

> Every year before Christmas we have a Remembrance Service to which all families we have cared for during the year are personally invited. It focuses on a time of remembrance for your loved one. During the service practical advice is given on how to cope with the Christmas and holiday season. Opportunity is also given for a decoration to be placed on a Christmas tree as an act of Remembrance (Sanderson and Sons Funeral Services).

Like so many elements of the funeral service discussed in this thesis, the aftercare services – and particularly 'memorial' and 'remembrance' services – are strongly redolent of the pastoral services offered by clergy in earlier periods. While funeral directors often derided traditional religious funeral services - scrupulously avoiding language reminiscent of religious practices and defining 'relevant' and 'personalised' services directly in opposition to 'impersonal' religious services - they nevertheless utilised rhetoric emphasising the features of pastoral care associated with the ecclesiastical institutions identified by Foucault (1983; 1990).

As well as dealing directly with the bereaved and offering these individuals pastoral care and a bereavement subjectivity that emphasised the significance of 'healthy' grief, funeral directors also promoted this particular construction of grief at a wider community level. Nearly all the participants in this study, for instance, offered education programmes to community service groups, schools, and professional care

giving groups that outlined the role of the funeral director, post-mortem practices, and the management of grief. As outlined in chapter three, participants promulgated an authoritative model of grief that privileged their personal experiences of death and accentuated 'natural' human needs, while simultaneously reifying their own intrinsic involvement in the construction of post-mortem practices.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has explored the post-mortem practices associated with the post-disposal phase of funeral director involvement. One recent area of post-mortem innovation has been the secondary treatment of ashes following cremation. While scattering ashes in personally significant locations remains an important method of ash disposal, funeral directors typically noted that this practice potentially neglected the innate, psychological 'needs' of the bereaved. Participants thus emphasised that this practice had been superseded by a shift to memorialisation and a realisation that personalised disposal needed to be accompanied by a material marker, transcending privatisation and personality in late-modern society. Memorialisation following burial was also represented as an essential human requisite that had evolved to efficiently satisfy individual 'needs' and pan-human desires to be 'remembered'. Eco-memorials in this regard could be considered a form of public memorial, symbolically asserting the natural cycles of birth and decay, and the place of humans in the environmental eco-system. These eco-memorials - like the post mortem practices discussed in this thesis – however, do not represent a reversion to 'natural' forms or archetypes, but rather socially constructed practices contingent on funeral director-defined concepts of grief and bereavement. One technological variant of such memorialisation recently adopted by some New Zealand funeral directors has been the Internet memorial. These memorials not only constitute a 'postmodern' form of 'living memorial', but underscore two elements of the 'healthy' grief process emphasised by participants in this study; namely 'continuing bonds' with the dead, and private rituals in public spaces. The last section of this chapter examines the range of 'aftercare' services provided by funeral directors following disposal. The discourse surrounding these services not only demonstrates the normalising technologies that have been discussed throughout this thesis, but emphasise the pastoral dimension of funeral directing in New Zealand. While there was some

ambivalence about the precise post-disposal role of the funeral director, most funeral firms offered a range of 'grief support' services, including a grief support person. One of the key functions of this individual was to allow the bereaved to identify and express the requisite emotions for 'successful' grief resolution. The 'honest' expression of emotion was identified by funeral director discourse as a 'natural' component of 'healthy' grief, and the grief process itself as an experience or 'journey' that required personal commitment and suffering. While these features of aftercare were represented by funeral director participants as reflecting innate human needs – and rejecting 'irrelevant' religious conventions - they highlight the features of pastoral power that pervade the personalisation rhetoric of late-modern funeral service in New Zealand.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

I began this ethnographic study by examining the plethora of literature focusing on death and post-mortem practices. This review revealed that the last few decades have witnessed a proliferation of death related discourse, encompassing a broad range of topics and disciplines. Literature focusing on funerals often reproduced dichotomous representations of mortuary behaviour as 'personal' or 'impersonal', 'traditional' or 'modern', and wavered between condemnation and commendation of funeral directors. Recent discussions have also posited that death remains 'hidden' or 'forbidden' in contemporary New Zealand society (McIntosh 2001) and that Pakeha are 'distanced' from 'appropriate' post-mortem behaviour (Dew and Kirkman 2001). While Maori funerary practices were frequently represented as 'natural' and 'authentic', and considered a legitimate avenue of anthropological investigation, Pakeha customs were frequently described as 'empty' rituals perpetuating Western society's 'denial of death' (Lawrence 1995), and divorced from the 'needs' of contemporary individuals (Sperber 2003). Pakeha practices continue to be the subject of reports focusing on the 'back-stage mysteries' of human disposal and the esurience of funeral directors. These portrayals were frequently juxtaposed with the services of 'alternative' funeral providers, which were presented as being more congruous with the 'innate needs' of the bereaved.

The counter discourse mobilised by funeral directors, however, focused on the personalisation of funerals and the need to confront the realities of death and disposal honestly. Funeral directors argued that the austere and intransigent Anglophone approach to death had been superseded by practices such as home viewing, life-centred funeral services, and disposal 'options' which were becoming standard features of New Zealand funerals. This transformation of funerary ritual was not only represented as reflecting salient New Zealand values, but also as incorporating an 'enlightened' understanding of grief and bereavement.

One important research question that emerged from this overview of competing discourses concerned the exposition of personalisation: what precisely was 'personalisation'? Did personalisation of post-mortem practices represent a democratisation and illimitable, post-modern proliferation of funerary forms as some sources suggested? Or did this transformation more accurately represent a form of neo-modern death (Walter 1994), amalgamating expert control *and* a focus on individuality? While numerous international studies have examined the role of the funeral director (for example Bremborg 2002; Howarth 1992; Naylor 1989; Pine 1975; Smale 1985) - often relying on a dramaturgical theoretical framework - and a number of New Zealand studies have identified a shift to personalised funerals, few of these researchers critically scrutinised the implications of personalisation or its association with funeral 'experts'.

The personalisation of death is contextualised in the historical narrative presented in chapter three. The development of the undertaking occupation in nineteenth, and early twentieth century New Zealand followed similar developments in Britain. During this period undertaking remained a secondary occupation, with the role of the undertaker limited to supplying the coffin, funeral paraphernalia, and transport. The twentieth century, however, witnessed an augmentation of the undertakers' role and a general shift in direction, as the New Zealand funeral director industry appropriated modern North American funeral practices, including embalming and psychological interpretations of grief.

One of the salient developments in the history of the New Zealand funeral industry was the establishment of a national association in 1939. The New Zealand Federation of Funeral Directors attempted to distant funeral directors from the nineteenth century undertaker to emphasise instead the clean, proficient, and scientific nature of twentieth century funeral service. There were continuing efforts to achieve government registration for the occupation, while industry literature stressed the need to protect public health and eliminate undesirable, 'substandard' competition. One of the primary concerns of the early Federation was to accentuate and protect the 'dignity' of the occupation and introduce educational requirements for funeral directors. Funeral directors of the Federation era also began to concentrate their

efforts on the perceived 'needs' of the living, modernising funerary customs by rationalising the 'excessive' and 'ineffective' traditions associated with undertakers.

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, funeral directors began to underline the role of grief and psychology in funeral practices and prioritise the therapeutic needs of the bereaved. The 'rational' funeral practices of the earlier part of the twentieth century were therefore gradually replaced by a more sophisticated and sensitive approach to bereavement. Educational courses introduced funeral directors to psychological interpretations of grief and increasing emphasis was placed on the pastoral dimension of funeral directing. Embalming, for example, was initially described as a simple procedure that maintained standards of public health and reduced the effects of grief in survivors. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the industry journal revealed a growing recognition of North American embalming developments, emphasising the psychological importance of presentation and the role of embalming in the pursuit of professionalisation. While viewing the deceased before disposal had been derided as an archaic custom that potentially damaged the mental health and fortitude of the survivors in the early years of the Federation, this practice witnessed a revival in the 1970s and 1980s, and was linked to a psychological model of grief. Funeral chapels and catering facilities also reflected an emerging interpretation of the grief process that emphasised efficiency but recognised the human 'need' to communally 'celebrate' death. Embalming, viewing, and multi-facility funeral premises also demonstrated an augmentation of funeral services and expertise, and were intrinsically linked to the continuing pursuit of professional status. There are clear parallels here with the development of the American funeral directing occupation described by authors such as Habenstein (1962) and Pine (1975), while the recent funeral industry emphasis on grief and death education are reminiscent of the arguments mobilised by American funeral directors to counter the criticisms of the Mitford era (Laderman 2003).

New Zealand funeral director discourse, however, consistently demonstrated a degree of ambivalence about American practices and aimed to distance New Zealand funeral practices from American rituals that were often considered 'excessive' and 'extravagant'. Grief counselling and 'grief therapy', for example, were represented as being stereotypically North American, and incongruous with the New Zealand way

of life. This was particularly evident after exposés of the American industry, the recent arrival (and departure) of an American multinational, and the success of the HBO drama series *Six Feet Under*. In contrast, New Zealand funeral director rhetoric focused instead on the 'sincere' and 'honest' personalisation of post-mortem practices, together with the need to mark death and provide meaning in an increasingly secular society.

One of the most significant developments identified in the discourse, therefore, was the shift to personalised ritual. Industry literature and media reports were replete with references to personalisation and the significance of this development in contemporary society. The aim of the present thesis, however, was not to reiterate the criticisms levelled against the industry or to recapitulate funeral director rhetoric, but to critically examine the meaning and manifestations of personalisation and explore the funeral director's role in the provision of contemporary funeral service. In addition to archival research this ethnographic endeavour included in-depth, partially-structured interviews with funeral directors and related occupational groups. Interview questions focused on pre-disposal, disposal, and post-disposal services and funeral director involvement in these phases of funeral service. These interviews were complimented by a period of participant observation at two New Zealand funeral homes. This detailed analysis revealed three important themes related to the funeral director and post-mortem practices in New Zealand.

7.1 The management of grief

One of the salient shifts evident in funeral director discourse during the twentieth century was the increasing focus on grief management. Personalisation was integrally linked to the grief of the bereaved, with funeral directors asseverating that funeral practices had 'evolved' to effect the resolution of grief. This resolution required accepting the 'reality' of death, 'working through' one's grief, expressing emotion, and 're-adjusting to life'. According to participants, however, 'traditional' religious funerals had become incongruous with the 'innate' requirements of the bereaved and were therefore increasingly ineffectual. The personalised funeral was thus represented as a re-alignment of 'natural' human needs and cultural practices. Participants outlined the significance of the grief process in understanding the needs of the bereaved and posited an intimate understanding of this development.

Essentialist explanations of grief pervaded funeral director discourse and were linked to all elements of funeral practice. This not only accentuated their own expertise, but also reified their role in the construction of post-mortem practices.

One feature of the grief process identified by all the participants was the expression of emotion. This expression was seen as an essential expedient for the progression of the grief process and a healthy 'resolution'. Some female funeral directors emphasised that one of the advantages of being a female in a male dominated field was that their clients could express emotion in front of them without feeling self-conscious or inadequate. Failure to express emotions such as anger or despair, on the other hand, was explicitly linked to a retardation of recovery.

This concept of grief described by participants is clearly reminiscent of the modernist construction of grief that emerged in the twentieth century, emphasising the disengagement of mourners from the deceased and the importance of stages and phases. Wortman and Silver (2001) note that such medicalised and essentialist readings of grief continue to inform prescriptive myths present in Western bereavement discourse, despite limited empirical evidence to suggest a universal grief 'process'. These prescriptive myths (or 'clinical lore') have remained remarkably resilient because part of their appeal lies in their ability to provide the modernist elements of structure and control. Authors such as Seale (1998: 195), for example, have argued that prescriptive myths allow for the restoration of some measure of ontological security by providing a structure in which to contain disorderly experience and behaviour. New Zealand funeral directors amalgamated this reading of grief with personalised memories and continuing bonds with the dead. Klass' (1996) and Walter's (1996) concept of 'continuing bonds' challenged the orthodoxy of disengagement that characterised the field of grief research until recently (Small 2001), and refers to the continuation of the influence of the dead and the identification of the dead as valued components of the survivor's biography. This construction of grief forms the focus of the ensuing discussion.

7.2 The pastoral professional

As intimated in the historical overview, New Zealand funeral directors have augmented their range of services and increasingly emphasised their pastoral role.

One theme evident in both the literature and participant responses was the significance of secularisation in New Zealand society. The last four decades have witnessed a decline in allegiance to the major religious denominations, a concomitant rise in those who profess 'no religion' in the census statistics, and a significant decrease in church attendance. Participants therefore asserted that religion was no longer 'relevant' to life-style of many individuals and that people had become increasingly 'uncomfortable' in utilising the services of the established ecclesiastical institutions.

Funeral directors also asserted that the numerous Christian churches continued to offer dispassionate, inapposite funerals and that many ministers had failed to adapt to a changing societal situation. Funeral directors commented on the perceived lack of 'guidance' and 'care' in contemporary society and stipulated that their occupation had responded to these human 'needs' by recognising the salience of personalised funeral services. Religious funerals therefore provided funeral specialists with an important point of departure and became a leitmotif of late-modern funerals; not only had funeral directors responded to a perceived societal 'need' but they had also become 'defenders' of personalisation in the face of American multinational attempts to change and rationalise the contemporary New Zealand funeral.

Although deriding the impersonal practices of the main religious institutions, it became clear during the course of this research that many funeral directors perceived their role as proxy clergy fulfilling an important pastoral role. In addition to describing their occupation as a 'calling', participants stipulated the importance of 'looking after' and 'caring for' bereaved individuals at an extremely difficult time. This concern was demonstrated at a number of levels. The focus of funeral service was clearly on the well-being of the bereaved, with participants noting that providing care and guidance for people was one of the most satisfying elements of funeral service. Funeral directors were careful to prioritise the needs of the living and distance themselves from the stigmatised corpse. Hygienic treatment was therefore described predominantly in terms of psychological benefits to the bereaved, rather than the public health rhetoric that had characterised the funeral service of earlier decades. Embalming itself, however, was sometimes portrayed as the provision of pastoral care. While funeral directors generally prepared the body for those who

wanted to continue their relationship with the dead (Hallam et al. 1999), some stipulated that preparation was also part of their broader pastoral role, to 'look after' those with no surviving family or friends' and to 'acknowledge that somebody had lived'.

Participants also accentuated the need to provide funeral service irrespective of financial circumstances and proffered the availability of lower-cost alternatives that retained standards of 'dignity'. A concern for pastoral care also extended to the functionaries employed by the funeral director, including the celebrants charged with constructing and conducting the life-centred funeral. One similarly pronounced aspect of pastoral service was the range of after-care options offered by funeral directors. These services varied from supportive correspondence or the provision of bereavement literature to informal telephone calls and referrals to grief counsellors. In describing these services, funeral directors stated that their immediate and personal understanding of grief allowed them to gauge the progress of the bereaved and offer the appropriate form of 'care'.

Some funeral establishments also provided 'grief support' staff. The significant majority of these people were female, reflecting the participant-espoused view that women were innately more 'caring' and 'empathetic' than men. Some funeral firms also facilitated bereavement support groups and offered annual memorial or remembrance services. The Christmas remembrance services offered by some funeral firms, for example, were not just communal occasions to remember the dead, but encounters that allowed funeral directors to impart practical information on 'how to cope' with the holiday season. These services were distinctly reminiscent of the pastoral services provided by the Church and funeral directors specifically emphasised that community needs had motivated them to increase their provision of such services.

Participants were also concerned about promoting death education at a broader level and helping individuals understand the significance of funerals and grief. By demystifying the processes of death and disposal in 'revivalist' fashion (Walter 1994), funeral directors were fulfilling a pan-human need. While participants noted the tedious tautology of discussions surrounding these issues, they asserted that an

'honest' confrontation with death was particularly 'healthy'. Participants contended that earlier generations of funeral directors had 'disguised' the realities of death, but that contemporary practitioners recognised the genuine need to understand death and disposal. In response to this realisation, many funeral directors emphasised the significance of community education and some firms even started offering annual 'open days'.

As I have shown, pastoral care has become a distinct component of New Zealand funeral service and is an intrinsic element of the funeral director's continuing pursuit of professionalisation. The parallels with pastoral care, however, extend far beyond the mere augmentation of funeral director services.

7.3 Pastoral power and the funeral director

While the pastoral services of the funeral director and the grief of the bereaved form the two primary components of funeral service proffered by funeral directors, this thesis also explored Foucault's concept of pastoral power in relation to personalisation. This concept has proved particularly useful in elucidating the role of the contemporary funeral director.

Foucault was not only interested in the way in which people's experiences are controlled at the macro-level but also in how power pervades human relations at the micro-level. Foucault noted that normalising technologies are exercised through modern social institutions, emphasising that disciplinary power was a covert form of surveillance internalised in social and individual bodies. One of these technologies of power is the 'technologies of self' outlined in his *History of sexuality* (1990), in which individuals developed a sense of self (or 'ethics') through self-monitoring and self-discipline. Of particular relevance to this self-discipline are the Christian concepts of confession and self-examination, which Foucault (1990) contended were the precursors to contemporary self-regulation.

Foucault identified two poles of bio-power that managed and disciplined individual human bodies ('anatomo-politics') and populations ('bio-politics'), and brought these concepts together in his examination of the organising technologies of the modern state. Governmentality included the aforementioned internal disciplinary

surveillance and technologies of the self, as well the creation of disciplines, experts, and institutions which represented extensions of power involved in monitoring and controlling the population. As this thesis has illuminated, funeral directors played a central role in articulating bio-power, while the development of recent funeral services are also reminiscent of the disciplinary technique Foucault termed 'pastoral power'. The life-long care shifted from ecclesiastical institutions and spread to other areas of the social body, offering an effective forum for the internalising of normalising technologies of the self. Individuals are thus measured and classified according to standardised norms and individuals learn the 'truth' about themselves. This form of power implies a detailed knowledge of the individual and is also salvation orientated. As the discussion below will reiterate, notions of grief and reflexive engagement in the grieving process encouraged by funeral directors, thus contribute to a secularised form of salvation in contemporary society, namely health and well-being.

While funeral director rhetoric emphasised the democratisation of funeral practices and the primacy of individuality, an examination of the discourse reveals that this personalisation demonstrated the normalising technologies integral to Foucault's concept of pastoral power. That is, funeral directors play a significant role in articulating the boundaries of 'appropriate' funeral behaviour by accentuating the importance of 'authenticity', 'dignity', and 'healthy grief'. In the same way as the concepts of 'good death' (McNamara 2004) and 'death denial' (Zimmerman 2004) are social constructs constituting a form of disciplinary power, the concepts used by funeral directors emphasise their expertise, define the acceptable parameters of post-mortem practices, and reify their integral involvement in the construction process.

The boundaries of personalisation and normalising technologies

The preparation and presentation of the body before disposal were explicitly linked to the progression of a healthy grief process. According to funeral directors, bodies needed to be represented in an 'appropriate' and 'dignified' manner to effect the 'reality of death' and graphic descriptions of odour and decomposition were used to illustrate the consequences of disregarding funeral director proficiency in this area. 'Untreated' bodies not only created social 'embarrassment', but had potentially long-term psychological ramifications for the bereaved. The personalisation of the body

and subsequent 'viewing' also elicited 'natural' emotions and allowed the bereaved to engage in 'meaningful' and 'therapeutic' ritual. Viewing an adequately embalmed corpse thus permitted survivors to engage in a dialogic process of post-mortem identity construction, completing the biographical narrative of the deceased, and incorporating elements of this constructed memory into their own biographies. The recent revival of home-viewing was represented as being particularly effective in achieving this objective. The personalised setting aided the expression of emotion, the completion of the self-narrative, and the concomitant construction of memories, which participants reiterated were essential components of a 'healthy' grief process.

The arrangement of the funeral service demonstrated similar themes. While funeral directors acknowledged the influence of the bereaved, participants also emphasised the expertise of the funeral director and stressed the importance of a funeral service. They felt it was their personal experience and proficiency that helped them to guide families to 'discover' and 'identify' their precise 'needs'. These 'needs' were often not immediately recognised by the bereaved, and one of the tasks of the funeral director was to help individuals identify their personal needs.

Much of the funeral industry literature stated that it was critical to make the 'right' choices and that the decisions made by the family had profound, long-term consequences. Participants were frustrated by advice or information that they considered incongruous with the quality of the services they were attempting to construct, and that failed to acknowledge the inherent value of the funeral service. Private funeral services attended only by a small number of select mourners and direct disposals were both seen to be problematic in this regard. Participants felt that these disposals did not fulfil the functions of a funeral and presented the bereaved with potential long-term complications. Funeral directors therefore clearly prioritised the perceived needs of the living, even if the requests for private services or direct disposals had been pre-arranged by the pre-deceased.

The research data revealed that life-centred funerals have become the new orthodoxy in funerals, superseding the 'impersonal' productions of earlier decades. While earlier funeral services may have been 'swift, clean, and simple', life-centred funerals were relevant, painful, and difficult but crucially reflected the requirements of modern

individuals. Funeral director rhetoric stipulated that these funerals fulfilled innate psychological needs, creating 'living memorials' in the absence of overarching religious frameworks. Life-centred funerals celebrated the life of the dead person and accentuated the individuality of the deceased. One recurring theme evident in the funeral director discourse was the need to synchronise the funeral with the life of the dead and 'honestly' celebrate that life: participants described 'theme funerals' that were created entirely around the personality of the deceased: service sheets, memorial registers, music, flowers, and tributes all integrally related in some way to the life of the dead individual. Physical artefacts were often presented as repositories of memory and objects that recorded the life and achievements of a person (Hallam and Hockey 2001). Verbal tributes also reflected on the life of the dead, and funeral directors asserted the need to capture 'concise' and 'honest' representations of the deceased. Humorous, idiosyncratic incidents were seen to be particularly effective in capturing the 'essence' of an individual. Participants stressed the need for balance, direction, and structure and derided quixotic eulogising and incoherent speeches. Participants stated that such unfocussed affairs unnecessarily prolonged the suffering of the bereaved.

While the concept of participation pervaded the funeral director rhetoric, funeral directors were simultaneously very concerned about maintaining funeral standards. Client contributions that did not comply with these standards were discouraged, while contributions described as 'authentic' and 'natural' were succoured. Naked burial in a plastic coffin or poorly constructed 'home-made' service sheets, for example, not only reflected poorly on the funeral establishment, but transgressed the required levels of 'dignity'. The unpredictable contributions of small children, on the other hand, were described as particularly authentic and natural.

Many contemporary funerals consist of single service events, held entirely at funeral director venues. After the formal component of the life-centred funeral, the mourners were generally invited to attend the funeral 'tea'. Participants described this gathering as an 'efficient' and 'controlled' event that allowed mourners to express their memories and engage in a 'dialogue of memories', elaborating the biographical narrative of the dead outlined during the funeral. As I have argued, memories were fundamental features of life-centred funerals, intrinsically related to the grief of

survivors, and considered particularly important in secularised contemporary society. The funeral service therefore provided a setting in which people could 'gather' memories and evaluate and examine the significance of these memories in relation to their own lives.

The concept of 'healthy grief' pervaded disposal discourse, and material memorialisation following burial and cremation was identified as being particularly significant. In excess of sixty percent of all disposals in New Zealand are cremations, and recent years have witnessed a concomitant rise in the forms of ash disposal. Particularly salient has been the personalised scattering of ashes, which has been interpreted as a retrospective fulfilment of identity (Davies 1990, 2002). Participants noted, however, that simple scattering by a crematorium worker had been superseded by disposal methods that acknowledged the significance of the grieving process. While cremation may have been related to the rationalisation of disposal in earlier decades, funeral directors now 'realised' the significance of psychological requirements. Numerous participants thus felt that material memorialisation following disposal was positively correlated with the well-being of the bereaved, and that a disregard for this development had the potential to detrimentally impact the recovery and mental health of survivors. Funeral director discourse stated that people possessed innate human needs to remember and be remembered and that the bereaved (particularly children) needed a 'focal point' for their grief.

Projects of the self

As well as focusing on the narrative of the deceased, funeral services provided by funeral directors were integrally related to late-modern projects of the self (Giddens 1991). Particularly important to this project was the 'honest' expression of emotions, and the reflexive monitoring and management of these emotions. Emotional expression was described as a significant 'evolutionary' advance and a necessary component of any grief resolution. The bereaved were therefore required to recognise their individual needs and the importance of 'working through' their 'feelings'. 'Authentic' emotional disclosure and self-examination were salient elements of this social construction of grief and funeral directors often stated that these requirements were painful and difficult. In the same way as Foucault's (1990) concept of confession

contributed to salvation, however, reflexive engagement in the grief process was seen as contributing to personal growth and well-being. In addition to providing funeral services that effected the initiation of a healthy grief process, funeral directors therefore also offered the bereaved important opportunities to engage in 'honest' introspection, particularly by 'listening' and providing grief support services. Funeral directors frequently emphasised their familiarity with this process. It was also this immediate understanding that enabled funeral directors to recognise the ('irrational') behaviours that accompanied grief, including criticism of the funeral director.

While a death also revealed the 'real', 'authentic' individual, this very disclosure rendered people vulnerable. One of the principle roles of the funeral director was therefore to guide and listen to the bereaved.

A framework of meaning in late-modernity

In addition to focusing on the innate needs of the bereaved individual and accentuating the pastoral dimension of funeral service, funeral directors were also concerned about offering services that provided meaning and ontological security in a secularised society. As well as emphasising the importance of continuing bonds and the integration of memories into the grief process of the bereaved, life-centred funerals reiterated that there was something of value in every life. These ideas found particular expression in the rhetoric surrounding memorialisation. Although a trend towards privatised ritual is clearly apparent, funeral directors noted that these private sentiments needed to be accompanied by more public forms of expression. Material memorials were therefore not only important as intrinsic elements of 'healthy grief', but were also linked to concepts of ancestors and cycles of life and death, transcending the emphasis on personality and individuality. One form of memorialisation clearly illustrating these ideas is the eco-memorial. Unlike the forest or bush burials offered by some organisations, the eco-memorials offered by some of the largest New Zealand funeral directors are not burial grounds and constitute a *supplementary* form of memorialisation. Eco-memorials could be linked to the ecological sensibilities of the deceased, as well as constituting a form of communal or public memorial that emphasised the natural cycles of birth and decay, and the place of humans in the environmental eco-system.

This discussion began by outlining the historical development of funeral services in New Zealand. This overview highlighted the recent focus on personalisation and the augmentation of funeral director services. While funeral director discourse emphasised that contemporary services were characterised by individuality and autonomy, the research revealed that participant explanations were actually pervaded by normalising psychological interpretations focussing on healthy grief resolution. The specific subjectivity promoted by funeral directors constituted individuals that were not only 'honest' and 'real', but who also recognised the 'need' for a funeral service, emotional expression, and memorialisation. These individuals also realised the importance of integrating the deceased into their own biographies, while acknowledging the significance of guidance and control. This subjectivity clearly validated and legitimised the role of the contemporary New Zealand funeral director. What also became clear is that the concept of personalisation was circumscribed by particular social constructions of grief, and that descriptions of 'innate' and 'natural grief' reified the active role of the funeral director in this construction. This thesis has demonstrated that funeral directors therefore play a salient role in articulating bio-power within New Zealand society and that this endeavour is integrally linked to the occupations' continuing pursuit of professionalisation.

The future of funeral directing

I would argue that New Zealand funeral directors have been largely successful in promoting a professional standard and establishing their integral function in the disposal process. Funeral directors have augmented their range of funeral services and been proactive in developing (and publicising) their role as educational functionaries and grief experts in recent years. Although determining whether or not funeral directors have gained 'professional status' is perhaps unproductive and somewhat problematic (based on the criteria outlined in chapter three), it is evident that there is currently a level of internal ambivalence surrounding the adequacy of this categorisation. One identifiable area of vacillation concerned funeral director knowledge and practice relating to grief research and psychological counselling. While it is evident that few funeral directors possessed extensive knowledge of current developments in these fields, continuing debate surrounding the precise role

of funeral directors in bereavement care and counselling highlights some of the underlying challenges currently facing the occupation.

This study revealed a considerable level of internal dissension regarding the future role and direction of funeral directing. Although the historical review noted that competitiveness and debate were characteristic features of the evolving occupation, recent changes within the industry indicate the existence of discord and uncertainty concerning fundamental industry aims. While the New Zealand industry has not been characterised by the divisions described by authors such as Smale (1985) or Howarth (1996), recent developments certainly suggest some degree of fragmentation. New accreditation standards, educational requirements, and the emergence of new associations and organisations in the last decade underscore this apparent disunity. While change in the funeral industry is influenced by external factors such as governmental regulation (Parsons 1999), the biggest source of change in the future will undoubtedly be funeral service providers themselves. These changes constitute important areas of inquiry for future research. What, for example, will the emergence of new industry organisations and niche-market firms mean for funeral directors and consumers? What impact will the establishment of multi-unit funeral firms have on the future of personalisation, and will rationalisation and bureaucratisation result in a revival of small, independent funeral establishments promoting local 'heritage' (Parsons 1999)? What long-term influence will secular celebrants, DIY, and direct disposal options have in coming years and how will funeral directors attempt to deflect continuing concerns surrounding cost?

A clear limitation of the present research is its primary focus on funeral directors. While this focus has proved to be particularly effective in elucidating the shift to personalisation, one productive avenue of future research would examine the responses of bereaved individuals to the changes in funeral service. How, for example, do the bereaved appropriate the information provided by funeral directors? While funeral directors play a central role in the disposal process and bereaved individuals clearly constitute a group of vulnerable consumers (Charmaz 1980), further research could explore potential resistance to the forms of personalisation encouraged by funeral directors or the models of grief and memory expounded by these individuals. One particularly productive avenue of investigation would

examine the secondary treatment of ashes by the bereaved. Although participants in this study proffered limited averment (beyond anecdotal evidence and intimate involvement in the funeral process) to support their interpretation of the effectiveness of personalisation, future investigations could gauge the congruence of funeral director and client expectations.

What is clear is that there *does* exist a discernible degree of unfamiliarity surrounding death and disposal, and that people often seek and appreciate some measure of guidance and control when confronted with the reality of death. During the writing of this thesis I was repeatedly approached by individuals (familiar with my research interests) who had encountered death at a very personal level and were incognizant of 'what to do'. Finally, therefore, I wish to return to Walter's (1994) concept of death 'revival' outlined in the introductory chapter.

In this thesis I have illustrated that the personalised funeral promoted by contemporary New Zealand funeral directors represents a particular form of 'revival'. This revival provides a critique of modern ('impersonal') death and attempts to make post-mortem practices more personal. At the same time, however, this personalisation is inextricably bound to notions of (pastoral-) power and the status of the funeral director as death expert. This notwithstanding, funeral directors play a particularly important role in a highly secularised society which is largely unfamiliar with death and disposal and places significant value on the construction of personal narratives. Following Walter's (2005) study of deathworkers, I contend that New Zealand funeral directors not only regulate contact with the dead but function as mediators between the living and the dead, contributing to the creation of a 'story' concerning the life and death of a distinct individual. The telling of this 'tale' constitutes 'a particular kind of work that needs to be understood, and valued, in its own right' (Walter 2005: 409).

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Appendix A

Embalming ('Hygienic treatment')

The first embalming observed during the course of the present research took place in a mortuary belonging to a large city firm. Like a number of city establishments, this firm had centralised its services and conducted all body preparation at one small suburban location. The following account of embalming was typical of the preparation procedures observed during my research fieldwork:

> After collecting the body from a local hospital mortuary, the funeral director (Harry) and I drove to the funeral establishment, slipping down a discrete driveway beside the funeral home façade. The mortuary and adjoining coffin preparation area were located securely behind the chapel complex, shielded from commercial neighbours by a high corrugated iron fence. The funeral director manoeuvred the removal vehicle expertly in the small paved quadrangle in front of the preparation building, and slowly reversed the car to the open doorway. Harry stepped out of the car, briskly opened the boot and removed the concealed body on the collapsible, ambulance-style trolley. He wheeled the trolley through the entrance and opened a heavy sliding door to the right of the main entrance. I had assumed that this would be a storage area or hallway leading to the mortuary, but the open door exposed a large stainless steel preparation table in an otherwise clinically white, austere interior. The harsh fluorescent lighting provided a marked contrast to the afternoon sunlight a few steps behind.
>
> Behind the table at the back of the room was a bench with carefully arranged steel instruments and an embalming machine. Various reels of thread and a variety of multi-coloured fluids in cloudy white bottles lined the bench; in the left hand corner of the room was a toilet bowl, a stainless steel sink, and a crude looking hose attachment. My attention shifted slowly to the preparation table in the other corner of the room that revealed the distinctive profile of a human body under a crisp, white sheet. Another embalming machine balanced on a flimsy metal trolley was positioned next to the body. One side of the room was lined with high frosted windows and a soundless extractor fan. The temperature was slightly cooler than it had been outside. The most memorable feature of the mortuary on this first visit was its atmosphere of sterility and meticulous order.
>
> As we manoeuvred the trolley parallel to the unoccupied preparation table, Harry explained that Mrs Smith (under the white sheet in the corner) had been prepared earlier in the day. The dead were always referred to by surname in this funeral home. The family, however, had not yet selected any clothing for her and the preparation procedure could not be completed until they delivered 'appropriate' funeral attire. Mrs Smith was in a transitional phase. The physical procedure had been completed but the lack of clothing meant that she remained shrouded until the final transformation could be achieved, and she was ready for her brief re-appearance.
>
> Harry unzipped the black cover over the body on the trolley in front of us, exposing the white sheets that had been used to wrap the body. A nauseating smell started to seep through the wrapping and Harry noted that the body was 'messy' and had been 'leaking' since death. He asked me to help him transfer the body to the preparation table. I felt that I really needed gloves before engaging in any physical contact but tried not to signal my hesitation and promptly lifted one side of the wrapped bundle and positioned it as carefully as possible on the table. Harry wheeled the trolley out of the room, and placed it back inside the vehicle. He then stated that we could not proceed without the appropriate protective clothing, and handed me a white apron - which had been hanging on the back of the sliding door - and pointed to white gumboots carefully positioned against the side-wall. He removed his blazer and changed into his own embalming outfit. He solemnly slid the door shut and moved to the preparation table before passing me a pair of plastic gloves and a transparent, green, disposable apron.

Like many of the larger funeral firms in urban areas, Harry's employer utilised the services of a specialist embalmer. But Harry felt that it was important to maintain his embalming skills, and that funeral directors be proficient in *all* tasks related to funeral directing. This was particularly important when there were limited staff on-call after-hours, during weekends or public holidays.

Harry cautiously unwound the sheets around Mr Johnson, tilting the body to efficiently complete the procedure. Mr Johnson had died of a heart condition earlier the previous day, but had been ill and bedridden for some time. Of particular concern to Harry was the leakage of faecal material and bodily fluids that became markedly evident as the last sheet was removed. Harry asked me to help him remove Mr Johnson's singlet. Mr Johnson's hands had been positioned on his chest after death and rigor mortis had set in. Harry explained that the best way to deal with his condition was simply to extend the muscle with a reasonable degree of force and then manipulate the limb. I watched Harry expertly straighten Mr Johnson's arm and gently move it into various positions. As he waited for me to repeat the procedure on the other arm, he readily removed Mr Johnson's soiled pyjama pants and underwear.

Hesitantly, I took Mr Johnson's cold, bony, discoloured hand and started to pull it towards me. The sensation of straightening his limb was similar to that of tearing a thin sheet of plastic. I eventually extended the limb and proceeded to remove the singlet with Harry, awkwardly threading Mr Johnson's arm through the opening of the garment. The three items of clothing were placed in a plastic bag and Harry began to spray the body with disinfectant. He proceeded to wash the body with soap and water, the residue running down the angled preparation table towards a drainage hole located between Mr Johnson's feet.

Mr Johnson's head was positioned on a severely uncomfortable looking metal headrest. Harry massaged his face before removing his false teeth and washing them in disinfectant. Disinfectant was also sprayed into the nose and throat before the false teeth were replaced and the mouth stitched shut. The large needle and thread used to complete this task appeared to be as crude and callous as the plastic eye-caps which were inserted to keep Mr Johnson's eyes shut and reduce any 'sunken' appearance. It was difficult not to imagine the sensations experienced by Mr Johnson's inanimate body, as it lay exposed on the cold preparation table.

A small square piece of tissue paper was strategically positioned over Mr Johnson's genitals before arterial embalming began. Small incisions were made in the left carotid artery, and the corresponding vein was raised for drainage. Metal 'cannulae' were inserted into the vessels. The embalming machine hose was attached to the artery and the pulsating pressure of the Portiboy started to distribute the premixed pink fluid. After a few seconds blood started percolating from the exposed vein, trickling down the body to the preparation table. Small, dark blood clots were clearly visible, and Harry began to massage parts of the body to aid the movement of embalming fluid.

Eventually, Harry lifted Mr Johnson's hand and explained that 'the hands' were particularly important for presentation purposes. He noted that the fingers tips were a dark purple colour due to the accumulation of blood after death (*livor mortis*). Harry stated that he would attempt to restore a 'natural colour' by injecting embalming fluid into the brachial artery. He made the required incision, injected the fluid, and massaged Mr Johnson's limb. The discolouration slowly disappeared and the process was repeated on the other arm.

The second major stage of the embalming process was the cavity treatment phase. For this stage a long, hollow, metal tube - or trocar - attached by hose to an 'aspirator' - is used to suction fluid and gases from the body cavity. Harry retrieved the trocar from the workbench and proficiently inserted it into Mr Johnson's protruding abdomen, manipulating it to start the flow of waste material. Harry explained that decomposition often started in the intestinal region and that it was important to treat the abdominal area to prevent 'premature putrefaction'. Harry pushed the trocar up towards the thorax with sharps thrusts, moving the body on the table with every painful motion. He continued to aspirate the abdominal area, ensuring that he pierced the bladder and suctioned all remaining cavity fluid. The abdomen was then infused with preservation fluid, before the trocar wound (and earlier incisions) were sutured.

Before finally washing Mr Johnson, Harry placed Mr Johnson on his side and inserted cotton wool dipped in preservation fluid into his anus with a large pair of ferocious-looking tweezers. When I asked Harry why he did not use the 'orifice sealers' (which resembled large plastic screws) I had seen advertised at an embalming conference, he noted that his company felt that these were too 'undignified' for the deceased. Harry checked the 'packing' and was dismayed to find that there had already been some leakage. He replaced some of the soiled wool and decided to suture the orifice to prevent any further leakage. The suturing of an orifice was apparently more dignified than the insertion of an 'orifice sealer'...

The embalming had now taken over ninety minutes and Harry decided that it was time for a tea break. The body was covered with a crisp, clean, white sheet and Harry stated that Mr Johnson would be dressed and encoffined by the specialist female embalmer who was 'very good' at the final presentation component of preparation (Williams' Funeral Services field notes 2001).