Death and Society

“People have referred to death as a taboo subject, but I think it’s more that people have little knowledge of it so it becomes mysterious. Recently though, there has been a growing interest in the subject, a result of increased airtime in the media, not just in the news and documentaries, but in popular entertainment programmes such as Desperate Housewives and Six Feet Under. It is almost impossible to open a newspaper without seeing a story that relates to death and loss in some way. There is now an increasing awareness of risk, and concerns about dealing with it, particularly in light of 9/11 and 7/7, and natural disasters such as the tsunami and Katrina.

This growing interest is reflected in the number of people who attend our conference, which has increased four-fold since the early 1990s, along with the range of disciplines represented. Over 200 academics, professionals and practitioners came to Bath in 2005 for the 7th International Conference on the Social Context of Death, Dying and Disposal. More than 140 papers were presented on subjects ranging from archaeology to art to bereavement counselling and organ donation. Our basic purpose is to look at death in its social context, and it is important that we are able to support the work of this conference for the future.”

Glennys Howarth, Director, Centre for Death and Society (CDAS)

Conference presentations

Conference presentations in 2005 included:

• The black colours died and the happy colours won – drawings by children with cancer
• ‘Tucking in time’: a funeral director’s perspective
• I want to organise Granny’s funeral, how do I do it?
• The good, the bad and the problematic; nurses’ perceptions of death in hospital
• Resisting ‘dying’ in old age
• The third generation of hospice care
• Living and dying with cancer: sensitive methods for sensitive research
• Bog bodies: viewing the ancient dead
• ‘Hey dad, it’s me again’: visiting in the cyberspace cemetery
• Photography, loss and memory
• Obituaries of ordinary lives: a post 9/11 tradition
• ‘I wish I could have said goodbye’: involving children in funerals
• American baby boomers and personalised death trends
• Champagne & Shoelaces: the performance of death in the life and work of Sarah Kane and Dennis Potter

Delegates also had the opportunity to explore Bath with a tour of the Lost Burial Grounds of Widcombe and a visit to the Museum of East Asian Art. This year’s conference will take place in Bath City Centre, thereby allowing greater opportunity for delegates to experience the historic city and all it has to offer.
First UK solo exhibition by BARB HUNT *Transience*

The 2005 conference included a first showing of the exhibition *Transience*, an exhibition of grave flowers from Newfoundland. *Transience* was the first UK solo exhibition by Canadian artist Barb Hunt. The installation reflected the artist’s long term interest in the rituals that surround death and mourning. Barb’s work is a response to our fast-paced society, where mourning is not easily manifested and where there is little place for rituals that mark the healing of wounds during times of sorrow.

What delegates said about the conference

“I have really enjoyed the conference and got a lot from it. I was very impressed with the warmth and friendliness and the ‘tone’ of the conference. A really good balance between academics and practitioners from an impressive range of backgrounds.”

“Compared to other conferences, the social side is extremely important as (you are) networking not within your own speciality but across disciplines which is a unique opportunity to do so. Makes me feel less isolated ... It has re-energised me.”

“There was a good stimulation of ideas, new ways of approaching old topics and excellent exchanges regarding potential future topics. The best that any good conference can offer. There was an excellent mix of senior, well-established scholars, those beginning their careers and student input, in addition to a wonderful, multi-cultural mix.”

“Very inclusive and pioneering, which I do so very much value compared to any other conference I attend.”

“One of the best conferences I have ever attended.”

“This was a truly international stimulating conference which I enjoyed very much. One felt very welcome and able to freely express ideas and interact with colleagues.”

“This is the best conference I go to; intellectual content was interesting and varied. There is scope for discussions, debate and exploration.”

Conference host and organiser:
CDAS Centre for Death & Society at the University of Bath

Press coverage: Launch of CDAS at DDD7, Bath Chronicle

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