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ABSTRACT

It is widely recognised that the rituals of a society represent the common and generally held beliefs and values of its members, and will especially reflect elements of stress and change. The period of change which modern Western Society has recently undergone, has necessarily resulted in a transformation of belief systems, but often at a slower rate than material change, causing conflict. The object of this thesis was to highlight the belief systems concerning death in New Zealand, by analysing ritualised funeral behaviour, and therefore illustrating what the underlying values are, and what social processes they reflect. The information for this research was obtained by fieldwork - through interviews, and observation - and literature reviews. A performative or dramatic framework was used to discuss elements of ritual time and place, objects and actions, language, and identity, and thereby highlight the behavioural mechanisms by which ritual meanings and symbols are transmitted. The conclusions drawn illustrate an intrinsic denial of death in modern Western and New Zealand society, which was reflected in all elements of funeral practices. These methods of denial, by representing life after death or life in death, also reflect factors of illusion, the ritual use of symbolism, and control by which society conceptualises death and manipulates reality. The analysis of funeral rituals in general, illustrated the ambiguity inherent in the conscious presentation of material illusions by the funeral industry, to cater for the emotional illusions demanded by society and the individual mourner.
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When I first decided to pursue this topic, I assumed that it was one that many would hesitate to approach, and so present a challenge. However, I soon found that there is a broadening acceptance of the discussion of death, and while many people may still regard the topic as "morbid", most are aware that at some point, being open about it is a necessary evil. However, the nature of the content of some interviews, and by the request of some informants, I have decided to keep all interviewees anonymous. Throughout the text, I have referred to them as Inf(s), and assigned each a number to give the information some continuity. A total of 28 people were interviewed, though only 23 of these are directly referenced. The group was made up of funeral directors, the clergy (priests and ministers), celebrants, city council employees, and members of the public. I also had correspondence with others related to the funeral industry, such as stone masons, genealogists, nursing tutors and members of the Funeral Choice Collective, and Palmerston North Women's Home Death Support Group. After observing the work of many of these people in the funeral rituals themselves, and by interviewing them and utilising their notes, an 'inside' look into the processes has been incorporated with my own external abstractions.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

... how is it that we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumour of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings.

"Moby Dick" Herman Melville

It is not that I am afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.

Woody Allen

Death, once a familiar, haunting presence, playing an integral part in the mysteries of life, has been forced into the glare of twentieth century Western society in a very different form. Though inherently accepted as part of the natural, biological processes of our world, we now engineer and manipulate death with military and medical technology, and find a morbid pleasure in watching the processes of killing and dying on screen. Yet the thought or open discussion of death itself, seems to be strongly avoided in Western culture today.

Inherent in the modern perception of death is contradiction. Society, as a system or structuring of social values, defines our death awareness at a distance, but in a heterogenous culture, individual experience may not be in harmony with the status-quo. The force of this conflict is very plain and intrinsic. The desired death of suicide, whether by the dying, dispirited, or cultist, is labelled by outside society as the result of psychosis or murder. The bereaved must deal with the reality of death while being forced to deny it. The child must come to terms with pain and mortality, while observing the apparent omnipotence of fantasy and cartoon characters. This dichotomy of ideas and values, must necessarily lead to perverse and ambiguous representations in the social rituals which focus on death.
Far-reaching analysis has been employed in the past to illustrate the importance of ritual in representing social values. Rituals may symbolise social order or morality, or become mechanisms to control chaos (Skorupski 1976 : 53-56). Durkheim (1915 : 41) characterised the rite as the expression of religious belief representing

... the nature of sacred things and the relations they sustain, either with each other or with profane things ... rites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects.

Skorupski (1976 : 71-73) explains that following from Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown distinguished ritual as incorporating “attitudes, beliefs and things as well as actions”. Skorupski goes on to suggest that elements of respect as well as formality characterise these definitions, and merely their performance will achieve some ‘instrumental’ ends, while ritual symbolism justifies the action.

Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969), both see the ritual as a medium for transformation, through stages or ‘rites of passage’, incorporating separation, transition and incorporation. Turner takes the second transitional phase further, speaking of the “liminal personae “ of the ritual subject. Many others have highlighted the significant role of ritual, both sacred and secular, in revealing social attitudes to human life, the relationship to the environment and the cosmos (Rappaport 1979 ; La Fontaine 1972 ; Grimes 1982 ; Moore and Myerhoff 1977 and Myerhoff 1977).

More importantly, the significance that death ritual and conceptions have in the social structure is well recorded. Malinowski (cited Stannard 1977 : 4) and Frazer and Tylor (cited Huntington and Metcalf 1979 : 6) were of the opinion that the dilemma caused by death and contemplation of the soul, and humans inability to reflect on their own mortality was the fundamental source of religion. Similarly, Geertz (cited Stannard 1977 : 9-10), suggested that the “world view” or belief system, which set the tone and character of life, developed from humans’ vision or conception of death, and the “ethos” or ritual was an expression of the way of dying. More recently, Bloch and Parry (1982) have discussed in detail the use of fertility and sexuality rites to “regenerate” the life of the group after death.
These texts, however, concentrate on small, tribal, pre-industrial groups, and though they may be important in illustrating the role of change, they have little association with modern Western society. In small close knit kinship based communities, the death of an individual will have a significant impact, and therefore mortuary rites are used to reinforce group ties, the changing role of survivors, and soften the disruption caused by death (Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 33). As Grof and Grof (1980: 7) suggest,

The individual dying in an ancient or pre-industrial culture is ... equipped with a religious or philosophical system that transcends death, and is likely to have had considerable experiential training in ... symbolic confrontations with death. The approach of death is faced in the nourishing context of the extended family, clan, or tribe, and with its support - sometimes even with specific and expert guidance through the successive stages of dying. The situation of an average Westerner facing death is in sharp contrast to the above in every respect ...

In the modern Western situation, complicating social, economic and cultural forces have meant that death is not integrated with life as part of the natural process. The Dukheimian distinction between the sacred and profane has less real significance, and movements or transformations of the ‘soul’ have become blurred.

The forces of population growth, and hence urbanisation, industrialisation, capitalism and commodification (linked by some to the Protestant Ethic) have focused, through the value placed on achievement and competition, on the individual. The rapid trend towards secularisation means that we are no longer connected or bonded as a community by the sacred and the spiritual, thus leaving the social group as an ego-centred network. Distance and mobility (De Spelder and Strickland 1983: 10-12) in effect, fragment the kinship group and again place emphasis on the individual.

These combined circumstances have placed enormous burden on what Firestone (1993) identifies as the inherent “death anxiety” of humans, and has resulted in the far-reaching and zealous “denial of death” (Becker 1973) in modern culture. Firestone (1993: 505) suggests that the fear of death relates to a very deep-seated fear of loss, and that
... our most profound terror centres on contemplation of the obliteration of the ego, the total loss of the self, a fear or dread that goes beyond the separation anxiety, The cessation of the ego’s existence in any recognisable form is terrifying.

As Firestone (1993: 501-502) explains, the slow process of social “individuation intensifies the fear of death”, but by denying or “displacing the fear of death onto other concerns” humans are able to cope in their everyday lives. So too, many funeral and mortuary rituals reflect an effort to deny the reality of death by transferring meanings to symbolic or quasi-real ideals.

Pioneering work by Gorer (1965), Mitford (1963), and Aries (1974, 1981 and 1985) in America, Britain and Europe, on the social meanings reflected in funeral rituals and their change over time, has been taken up by many others in attempts to open the subject up to wider social review. However in New Zealand, this type of exposé has not generally occurred.

In 1991 Marion Barnes, New Zealand’s first formal funeral celebrant, published a book in an attempt to illustrate the minimising attitude which this society has towards funerals, and therefore educate people in the choices available. By listing and discussing the necessary and traditional rituals of the funeral and incorporating elements of insight, Barnes forces the reader to think deeply about the funeral, so perhaps identifying what would be ‘right’ for them. Since then, initiatives by the Funeral Choice Collective (1992) and the Palmerston North Woman’s Home Death Support Group ([PNWHDSG] 1993) have followed this direction. By highlighting alternative approaches to the traditional funeral, and especially by advocating the reintegration of rituals back into the home or domestic sphere, these groups focus on changing the conceptions of death, so that it is more acceptable, and therefore facilitating the grieving process.

However, the New Zealand funeral, as it stands at the present, has not been analysed sufficiently to illustrate what the meanings and attitudes underlying it are, or where our values originated. By considering these aspects, we may be more easily able to understand why we act in certain ways when faced with death and accordingly adjust our views to achieve personally satisfying ends.
It is widely accepted that the functions of the funeral are to celebrate the life of the deceased, to formally mark his/her death, and most importantly, to allow mourners to grieve and come to terms with death. In an article in "The New Zealand Funeral Director", Lamers (1985: 22-23) states that formalised funerals give a finality to death, and the funeral setting helps people to resolve their feelings about death. However, a closer look at funeral rituals, I suggest, reveals a very different reality. The conflicting and ambiguous meanings of death in a heterogeneous society may have caused the rethink of our actions, as reflected in the recent literature discussed above, but it now seems necessary to understand how and why we think and act in these ways.

This paper therefore, seeks to identify what conceptions and rationalisations of death are reflected in the funeral, and what meanings and messages are pre-eminent; what are the traditional elements of the funeral and how did they originate, and what are modern; relating to this, what objectives are sacred and what secular, and how has the process of change between these affected the meanings transferred; do meanings and conceptions conflict or are they reconciled; and finally, do the funeral rituals achieve the functions of marking death and grief resolution satisfactorily?

In attempting to achieve these ends in the space provided, some elements must necessarily be taken as given. Firstly that New Zealand has, as in many parts of the Western world, undergone a period of rapid secularisation, so that now the sacred, religious elements of life are separated from the civic or secular. I will also assume that the reader is familiar with many of the common beliefs of Western Christianity. Secondly, that New Zealand society in general, is part of the Capitalist system, and therefore is subject to the forces of economic commodification, materialism and division of labour. Finally, in dealing particularly with the funeral rituals, there will be little discussion of the process of dying and the structures of grief that have been fully outlined by writers such as Kubler-Ross (1969) Gorer (1965) Austin and Lennings (1993) and many others.

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1 Infs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, and a great deal of literature suggest this.
2 A very useful discussion of this is provided by McDannell and Lang (1988).
The scope of this paper was necessarily bounded by the size and make up of the research area. Fieldwork was conducted in one, medium sized town (population of approximately 186,000), in the South Island of New Zealand, and therefore is limited to the values of this community. The town was one of the earliest settled in New Zealand, and has a Scottish heritage, therefore reflecting predominantly Paakehaa/European, middle class and industrial/urban attitudes, with a background of Christian tradition. I have consciously chosen not to deal with the Maaori Tangihanga rituals, as they have been well documented in the past (see Voykovic 1981), and therefore, I will not present a cross-cultural review. Fieldwork material was accumulated through interviews dealing with the rituals from death to body disposition, and by observing and participating in funeral services. Interviewees came from various areas associated with the topic; the funeral industry, Christian clergy, members of the public, council employees, and ‘interest groups’.

The wide range of people with whom I dealt in the course of this research, and the willingness with which information was given and conversation entered into, attests to the diversity and openness of those who deal with death, and greatly facilitated this work. However, the one gap which I readily acknowledge in this research, is the lack of conversation with those going through the funeral process. Though I talked widely with members of the funeral industry, who work daily with the results and implications of death, and others who had recently dealt with a death, it is still hard to gauge what the mourner is thinking during the process; motivations during the experience may be different from those before and after the actual experience.

Information and discussion in this thesis has been presented in a framework which reflects the dramatic or performative elements of the funeral. By taking this approach, I wished to reinforce the idea that the funeral has become a performance of social and personal attitudes, rather than the means toward any sacred or spiritual ends. I have taken this approach primarily from Grimes’ (1982) method of analysis, which uses a deconstruction of performative elements, such as ritual identity, space, time, language, objects and actions. Burke (1989 : 139) also identifies the five key elements of Dramatism as act, agency, scene, agent and purpose, while
Kastenbaum (1993 : 76) divides “society’s death system” into the elements of identity, places, times, objects, and symbolism. More importantly, as Rappaport (1979 : 190) suggests, it is the performance of the ritual which makes meanings “explicit” and “weighty”, and so an analysis of performative elements should make underlying messages more readily identifiable.

The following discussion presents an analysis of the death conceptions in a section of a small urban society. Therefore, it cannot fully reflect wider cultural rationalisations of death, and the most important point of all to respect, is that we can never truly understand the ritual process until we have been faced with death ourselves.
CHAPTER 2

RITUAL TIME AND PLACE

'Bury me on a Sunday', He said; so as to see Poor folk there. 'Tis their one day to spare, for following me'.

With forethought of that Sunday, He wrote while he was well, on ten rum-bottles one day, 'Drink for my funeral'.

They buried him on a Sunday, that folk should not be balked his wish, as 'twas their one day: And forty couple walked.

They said: 'To have it Sunday was always his concern; His meaning being that one day he'd do us a good turn.

'We must, had it been Monday, have got it over soon, but now we gain, being Sunday, A jolly afternoon'.

"Father Dunman's Funeral" Thomas Hardy

The scene in which any production occurs is a vital element in the portrayal of meanings. So too in ritual expression, the contexts of time and place provide relevant illustrations as to how social attitudes of life and subsequently death are conceptualised.

The primary consequence of death for the living is change. Society and the mourner must deal adequately with this change to maintain personal and cultural systems in equilibrium, yet the way that this is achieved can be inconsistent and contradictory. The conflicting values of separation or denial, and reintegration or acceptance, with which we cope with death are highlighted by spatial and temporal aspects within the funeral.
TIME

The very concepts of life and death in modern Western society are closely linked to the movements and perception of time. As Kenneth Burke (1961: 279) suggests,

... one can't create time without creating death; for the birth of each new moment is the death of the moment that proceeded it.

So too, life itself is controlled by the temporal boundaries of death. Kearl (1989: 34) suggests that, "orientations toward death reflect a people's orientation toward life"; accordingly the way that society and the individual places time classifications on life will illustrate the way death is conceived. The funeral ritual, as an expression of the social environment and psyche, reflects such attitudes and highlights the conflicting nature of these designs.

Western society is undergoing a period of rapid change and transformation. Technical and social rationalisation and emphasis on time efficiency have 'speed up' time, placing ever increasing value on life as a "sequence of events" rather than the completion of a "life-span" (Kearl 1989: 34). Death has subsequently been transformed or shifted into a disassociated time frame to that of life, and as will be shown, the resulting conflict in 'time-reality' is reflected in funeral rites.

Developments in technology and medicine are placing new emphasis on prolonging life (Kearl 1989: 34), and death is seen as failure of this and constraint on our 'right to live'. De Spelder and Strickland (1983: 8-13) and Stannard (1977: 189) illustrate how the growth of medical science and its resulting impact on mortality rates have changed our expectancies of life and death. Lower child mortality, increased life expectancy, and changing causes of illness have meant that death has become an old-age phenomenon, and therefore we are often not confronted with the process until latter in life. Similarly a great deal of social and economic emphasis is now placed on controlling time and death with procedures to inhibit the ageing process and promote 'eternal' youth, which marginalise the old and
place high value on social vitality. Again the shift of death\(^1\) into a
disengaged and quasi-real time frame has also been achieved through
desensitisation, especially in the media. Primarily violent, the portrayal of
death on screen is fast paced and devoid of personal meaning, and can be
switched off or ignored, and therefore separated from the reality of the
present. Ironically, we may only experience death for a large part of our lives
through the media.

This separation of death into a future disassociated time frame, and, as will
be shown, a corresponding spatial separation, results accordingly in the
separation of death from the 'present' mode of life and thinking. I suggest
that this temporal separation is a direct reflection of society's death-denying
attitude.

Such social attitudes and behaviour are in direct contrast to the aspects of
death which influence the primary mourners. This small group is suddenly
thrown into a situation where death is the reality of the present, they
undergo rapid temporal transformations, not only in their relationship with
the deceased and each other but also with wider social life. The funeral
ritual therefore represents an attempt to resolve the resulting conflicts of
this situation, and the way this affects and directs the mourners ritual
identity will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The rituals of the modern New Zealand\(^2\) funeral readily reflect the temporal
conceptions of death, and different "phases" (Grimes 1982: 25) of time
illustrate the way that this separation between social attitudes and the
experience of the mourners occurs. A separation of practical and more
metaphorical elements of ritual time will especially highlight this.

The pragmatics of timing in the funeral, though often taken for granted,
illustrate how we fit symbolic rituals into everyday secular life, and how or
how well, we deal and cope with the crisis and rupture of death. Practical
timing may also highlight control of ritual time by 'social forces' which
contradicts the role of the funeral for the primary mourner.

\(^1\) Aries (1974) explains that prior to the sixteenth century death was a familiar and
acceptable part of life.

\(^2\) Which also reflects the modern Western situation...
The ‘standard’ New Zealand funeral has a basically fixed time frame. In general there is a three day period between death and the funeral, time in which family and friends are notified, arrangements are made and mourners from other regions can travel\(^1\).

Inf. 12 suggests that the origin of this time frame may be linked to the three days that Christ spent in the tomb in the Christian account of Easter. In the past climate variables were important in the length of time a body could be kept, but now with modern preservation and refrigeration methods, this is not so much of an issue. Keeping the body for a short period of time, rather than immediate disposition, could in part be a continuance of the antiquated fear of being buried alive, and the ‘body-snatching’ epidemic of the 1750s (Richardson 1989 : 108 ; Puckle 1926 : 178); however in both cases the body was kept until decay had obviously begun, and this is not an underlying consideration of any modern practice.

The interval between death and the funeral is an important consideration in the way we cope with death, and is highlighted by those who work with ‘grief therapy’. This time is paramount for the mourners to enable them to deal with shock, accept the death, and to prepare for the funeral. Barnes (1991 : 42) argues that if the time period is not adequate, the service will not be personal, and therefore satisfying, and while still in shock, the mourner...

... will have come through one of their life’s most significant times of adjustment in a state of semi-consciousness.

Similarly, Inf. 8 tries to keep as much time between the death and the funeral as possible, for if things happen too quickly for the mourner, they tend not to think logically. However Barnes points out that if the time interval is too long, for example in the situation of a coroner’s inquest, the following ritual can become meaningless (1991 : 43).

In view of the legalities of the time period between death and burial, there are very few constraints. Under the Coroners Act 1951 and the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1951 (cited in Before Burial 1985), a medical

\(^1\) It is this last variable that is the most likely cause for a delay of longer than three days (Inf. 1).
certificate and burial order must be obtained before burial or cremation can proceed, and these are signed "in most cases ... within 24 hours of the death", though this will take longer if an inquest is necessary (Before Burial 1985: 4).

The "time of day" in which the funeral rituals\(^1\) occur, the "duration" of the service and the "coincidence and conflict" of the rituals with "ordinary social times" (Grimes 1982: 24-25) will highlight the ritual importance of the way we socially and formally mark death.

Regional bylaws state that a burial or cremation can only take place between the hours of eight and four during weekdays, and eight to one on Saturdays - neither are allowed on Sundays and statutory holidays (Inf. 21). In general funeral services will be in the hours between nine in the morning and four in the afternoon\(^2\), and will range in length from half an hour up to approximately two hours; The longer services are more often Christian, though non-religious funerals can be long depending primarily on the number of people who speak.

In light of the fact that the time phases of the funeral are important to the mourners coping and acceptance of death, it is interesting that the funeral rituals work to a civic time frame. While avoiding public holidays and operating in 'working hours' the funeral, in contrast, disrupts the lives of mourners drastically\(^3\). The primary mourners, usually the family, will obviously have had their daily routines altered dramatically, possibly before as well as after death, while others must suspend their work to travel to and attend the service.

The different phases of the funeral therefore affect the participants in different ways. For example, the interval between death and the funeral may be very rapid for the primary mourners while after this, time may stand still, as the loss impacts on them for prolonged periods - though 'normal'

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\(^1\) That is, the funeral service and burial or cremation procedures.

\(^2\) The Catholic funeral Mass may include a Rosary which is often held at night, and the only two Masses which have occurred in the evening in the last twenty-five years have been private family services (Inf. 21).

\(^3\) As Irion (1966: 186) notes, evening funeral services would be more convenient, as late morning and early afternoon restricts those who can come.
life may resume one or two days after the funeral. For the officiants, such as the funeral directors, celebrants and clergy on the other hand, the ritual is a part of their everyday working lives, and the death will only influence them while they are dealing with its organisation and application. It could therefore be suggested that the control of the death ritual by an 'industry' and by civic authorities has meant that ritual time has taken on a secular association, and has created this paradox.

The term 'industry' itself reflects another aspect of social change which has impacted on the way we view death and accordingly organise our death rituals. Death work which was once in the sphere of the family and the community (Aries 1974: 96; Mitford 1963: 199), through processes of urbanisation and increased population, industrialisation and economic determinism (or at least economic interdependence) has become controlled by forces of profit, division of labour and the like. This again has effectively separated death in time and space from the social mind.

This presents a paradox; on the one hand, society's civic time dictates how we organise the funeral rather than any individual or 'sacred' time, and yet the fact that we do interrupt daily time schedules illustrates the ritual importance of marking death. One of the arguments used by those who advocate memorial services is that there is much more flexibility in time and place (Barnes 1991: 35).

Reference to time is also used in the modern funeral to place a value on life and therefore death. As has been mentioned, developments in time measurement and efficiency have placed new emphasis on the length of life and the achievements, both material and social, over this time, and the constraints which death necessitates. Charmaz (1980: 13-14) links this to the idea of the Protestant Ethic, in that a good and appropriate death is gained after a life of hard work and achievement. The rituals of the funeral reflect this, with reference in the tribute to the achievements of the deceased in all spheres of life (see Chapters 4 and 5). However, in the case of a young

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1 Grief therapy for some funeral companies and church ministers may extend this slightly.
2 I am not inferring any sort of 'fault' here as it is clear that funeral directors would respect the wishes of anyone who wished to have a funeral outside of the common time frame, though burial and cremation, as has been said, are subject to law.
person, value is placed on the impact that his/her life had on others, rather than length of life and achievement over time.

Reference to extended, historical or generational time are used in the funeral to illustrate or to some extent symbolise the continuity and equilibrium of the social system. In an effort to close the gap in the social circle which the death of a member of society causes, mention of eternity and the influence of this life on the future, creates a sense of the flow of time (this will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4). The reinforcement of images of natural cycles and the continuance of society from one generation to the next produce images of death and renewal that conform to a cyclical flow of time. This may reflect a sense of the relation of social life to natural law and progression. Yet lineal time frames also arise in the service with emphasis, for example, on the chronological progression of a life from beginning to end. Therefore, especially in a Christian service, quantifiable time, within the boundaries of life is contrasted to eternity. This may give the impression of the importance, connection and influence of each individual to the wider community life, and so create meaning in death. Yet reference to eternity and the far-reaching direction of time may also be a reflection of the way we deny the temporality of life and the finality of death.

The past, present and future are all referred to in the funeral, and can be seen in either cyclical terms - the present and the future soon becoming the past - or as a linear progression from one to the other. The use of past, present and future tenses also illustrate how the state of the deceased changes in the funeral process. As Barnes (1991 : 94) suggests, at death the deceased,

... who was previously a part of time past, present and future, has instantly been withdrawn both from the present and the future, and relegated to the past only.

The deceased in this sense also moves from a secular human, to a sacred spiritual time frame. In effect after death, there is no 'time' as the living construct it, and in the words of Warner (1965 : 281),

The funeral symbolically removes the time-bound individual from control by the forward direction of human time. He [sic] no longer moves from the past towards
the future, for now (in the minds of the living) he [sic] is in the unmoving, sanctified stillness of an ever-present eternity.

The three day interval between the death and the funeral may be a type of liminal period in the context of this movement. Puckle (1926: 32) suggests that the desire to keep the body for as long as possible comes from the belief that the soul or spirit of the deceased is still present, and that death is not instantaneous. In a similar fashion, the modern way of dealing with the deceased in the first few days after death and in the funeral, is to speak and act towards him/her as if they were present in a living form; attributing feelings, emotions and needs in the present tense\(^1\), while the deceased may be perceived as 'present' in the spiritual sense for a long time afterwards. The affect of this on the way that the ritual identity of the deceased is constructed will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In conclusion, it is important to illustrate the way in which the rituals of the funeral, those beginning at death and ending at the service, switch between the values of society and the experience of the mourners; a conflict of interests which is not resolved by the ritual.

There seems to be three specific phases of time related to funeral rituals which can be separated out. Firstly the funeral has a civic aspect in which time frames are organised according to 'secular', industrial, or work based regimes. Such time progresses rapidly, and is controlled by the wider society in an effort to work death more efficiently into social life, and in this sense, to soften the harsh reality of the effect that death has on our attitudes towards time and mortality - attitudes which are death-denying.

Secondly there is the time frame in which the primary mourners must move. For them time may slow down, as dealing with the death requires that the new aspects of grief, emotional upheaval and acceptance be fitted in to their everyday lives, extending beyond the ritual time frame for a prolonged period.

The third element, that of the ritual-time, reflects the dichotomy between the previous two. In reflecting society's attitudes towards death, the funeral

\(^1\) By the end of this paper, this idea will be suitably bourn out.
service and its accompanying rituals (those occurring between death and the service, and burial or cremation after it) occur within a relatively short space of time, cutting the proceedings down to the finest efficiency. This however has an adverse affect on the primary mourners, as the ceremony will come as a form of 'surprise' due to the small amount of time allowed for practical and mental organisation, which does not allow them a great deal of control or coherency. The sense of disconnection that this may cause along with the necessity for the outward resumption of life soon after the funeral which is imposed by society, again reflects social attitudes of death that are life-affirming or death-denying. Promotion of rapid social reintegration so that the community can better cope with change contradicts the reality which the mourners are living.

The funeral service does, however, incorporate some of the aspects of time which reflect the mourners experiences. The tempo of the service itself is formal and 'ritualised' so creating an almost sacred mood implicitly different from the pace of everyday life. Reference is made to the slow progression of time through metaphor, reflection on the life of the deceased and the mourners, and in symbolic objects and actions so that a sense of direction and flow in a historical or generational sense is achieved within a short space of time.

Though the rituals of the funeral do not resolve the conflicts of time that varying values and experiences of death have caused, the mourners themselves will often achieve this, in time, after the service by rearranging their temporal world and creating new routines and practices. For example, visits to the cemetery, the organisation of memorials, planting trees and especially commemoration of the anniversary of death allows the survivors to ease themselves into new roles and relationships and so deal with the effects of change.

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1 For example in the case of the companies represented by Infs. 1 and 2, one service can take place while the 'cup of tea' of a previous funeral is still taking place in the same building.
2 These again may symbolise new life and reintegration by the slow passage of time and growth.
3 One funeral company in the research area has a special service each year recognising and commemorating the 'first Christmas' without the deceased.
PLACE

As humans rationalise their world, entities and phenomena may be categorised in familiar or spatial forms to allow greater depth of understanding. Accordingly, considering the “ritual space” (Grimes 1982: 21) within which the funeral occurs and how this place is organised and utilised, may highlight the way we conceptualise death in general. As will become apparent, the delineation of ritual place directly reflects the aspects of social value discussed with relation to ritual time, and I suggest that the spatial separation of the living and dead is a continuance, or an attempt to resolve temporal constructions of death denial.

The ritual space of the funeral which will be dealt with in this section, can be separated into two distinct areas; the place where the deceased body is ‘disposed’ of1, and the settings in which other funeral rituals and death work take place.

The scene of body disposition, though utilised last in the funeral sequence, is historically where the process of the separation of the living and the dead began, and so, requires initial discussion. Warner (cited Kearl 1989: 50) suggests that,

> The impetus to preserve the dead together undoubtedly derived from religious concerns, symbolizing hopes for immortality and reassuring the living that they, too, would not be forgotten.

Churchyard burials, as Puckle (1926: 142) and Kearl (1989: 50) explain, originated in the monastic orders, as importance was placed on the proximity of graves to the church. Aries (1974: 22) suggests that as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

> ... the exact destination of one’s bones was of little concern so long as they remained near the saints, or in the church ....

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1 I use this term for want of a better one; I however do not wish to infer images of irreverent ‘throwing away’ or ‘getting rid of’ which the word may conjure up.
The cemeteries themselves at this time, in contrast to later periods, having very few monuments, were used as meeting places, safe havens, and even as squatter sites (Aries 1974: 23; Kearl 1989: 50), and for "rough games, dancing, fighting and drinking" (Puckle 1926: 144). In this sense, the churchyard was infused with both secular and sacred roles. However the state of some of these church graveyards had become so bad due to overuse - one grave often accommodated up to ten bodies, and cadavers would float to the surface - sanitation problems and the "violation of the dignity of the dead" resulted (Aries 1974: 70; see also Kearl 1989: 50). In reaction to this graveyards were separated form the urban church and established in rural or "extramural" areas and reflected the "picturesque landscaping of death in the nineteenth century" (Richardson 1989: 113), incorporating secure walls, gates, a sextons cottage, and attractive design.

It was this style that was generally adopted by settlers to New Zealand and in the research area, though there are some small church graveyards outside of the area, and these are predominantly Anglican. Early laws regarding burial were a continuation from legislation in England, and the first formal ordinance governing cemeteries in 1908 stated that no cemetery or burial ground of any kind could be established within the limits of any borough or town district. The early cemeteries in the region, with the expansion of the town are now within urban areas, and emphasis is being placed on these as important historical sites by historical societies, and 'cemetry nuts' (Inf. 24, who is a self proclaimed member of both groups)\(^1\).

In contrast to this objective, direct examples of society's wish for the dead to be separated from the living in our modern social psyche can be found in abundance. Inf. 24 also mentioned that a previous cemeteries manager (the head of the Parks and Recreation Department of the council) had tried his best to obscure one of the older cemeteries from view by planting large numbers of tall growing trees. Such reactions are common, and can be seen in newspaper articles and council minutes throughout the towns history.

\(^1\) It is also interesting that all four early town cemeteries in the study area are on hills with various views over the sea and the city, creating an image of the dead watching over the living.
A huge and hotly contended debate raged in 1868\(^1\) over the apportioning of recreational land by the council for use as a cemetery. Similarly in 1975 the local newspaper published an article extolling the aesthetic virtues of the old “charming” cemeteries in the area, and in contrast, highlighting the attitude towards modern burial grounds;

... but the larger ‘working cemeteries’ can be somewhat distasteful. And distaste it seems, is one of the more common reactions ... Despite the fact that it is bright and attractive, the cemetery does not seem to be widely favoured - not so much because of its location, or its design, but simply because it is new. For some reason the very idea of reserving a new area of land specially for the burial of human bodies apparently is unacceptable to many people.

Interestingly, I observed the same reaction to a proposal for a new cemetery in the area in 1994. At a public meeting discussing one possible site, reaction against a cemetery in the area was extremely strong. Comments from the public clearly showed compulsion to separate the living and the dead, at least in the physical sense, in the social mind: for example, “we don’t want to build our dream homes on the backdoor of a cemetery”, “will there be compensation for falling land values?”, “we don’t want an endless stream of dead bodies past our back door”, a cemetery will mean “polluting the land and losing it forever” therefore doing a “disservice for years to come if we start putting dead bodies in possible recreation areas”, “who is more important, us or dead people?”.

The attitudes demonstrated above are, however, in contrast to the reverence and respect ritually shown towards the dead by mourners, and the necessity for a sacred place to inter and to ‘visit’ the deceased\(^2\). Here again can be seen the conflict between wider social values and conceptions of death, and those

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\(^1\) Information was obtained from a newspaper article within the research area circulating the minutes of a public meeting, August 22 1868. As with the article from the local newspaper mentioned below, I cannot make direct reference to the source, as this would identify the research area and therefore, though indirectly, my informants.

\(^2\) Many other council notes and newspaper articles from the research area strongly reprimanded the council if even small aspects of the cemeteries and gravesites were not ‘up to scratch’ in the minds of the public; lack of departmental concern and respect, and the distressing and disturbing affect on mourners are mentioned. It seems therefore that anything about a cemetery that is inconsistent with the attitude of the public towards death is “distasteful”.
experienced by primary mourners. Though the history of the community is reflected in the cemetery and a close association is felt by the mourners, the obvious spatial separation reflects the separation of ‘the past’ from the present.

The “ownership” (Grimes 1982: 22) associations of the cemetery as a ritual site, are also significant indicators of social attitudes towards death. In this, the cemetery presents a paradox, as it represents both the aggregate community, and the final resting place of the individual. Ownership, though once held by the various churches, is now held by civic authorities, and the running and maintenance is administered by these regulations. Each separate plot, however, is bought and ‘owned’ by the individual or family and is the final tangible marker of the life of the deceased. Here again ritual place reflects elements of ritual time. The plots, seen together, or as family units represent generational and historical passages of time and the continuance of the human community. Headstones, while directly illustrating past and present relationships in epitaphs, also symbolise the long term influence of the deceased after death, and *eternalise* the identity of the deceased with a permanent marker of his or her life.

A change in cultural mentality can be seen in relation to the ownership of cemetery land. The early cemeteries in the research area, reflect an (economic) individualism that is not seen to the same extent in the modern style; the fencing off or marking of the plot with iron and concrete, the partitioning of the cemetery into ‘socio-economic’ areas, and the ostentatious memorialisation of graves distinguishes the early cemeteries from the modern. As Stannard (1977: 181) observes, these distinctions marked exclusiveness and the idea of private property;

> There was, it seems, a contradictory pull being felt between the individualistic forces of commerce and acquisitiveness and the communitarian forces attempting

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1 There are no privately owned cemeteries in the corporate sense, but small private family cemeteries can be found in more rural outskirts of the research area.

2 Inf. 24 explained that the cemeteries had three basic levels, a paupers section for those who could not pay, and middle and upper priced sections. Apparently it was not uncommon to have a dead family member exhumed and shifted up a section when the family could better afford it.
to find in the graveyard the sense of fraternity and fellowship that had marked the past.

However the individualism expressed in older cemeteries may also reflect a deeper feeling of identity with the land. Walter (1990: 25) makes the interesting suggestion that the ostentation of American mortuary practices can in part be regarded as a need for "roots". In any young immigrant nation, there is little historical association with the place or land, and the struggle to define success, both individual and community, may be seen in the way that the dead are memorialised. Here again, the close link between time, or the sense of history, and place is illustrated. Obviously cost and relative wealth has been a major factor in the decline of these trends, yet the standardisation of plots and memorials today could be a representation of the change in the association felt towards dead as ancestors. As Walter explains (1990: 25) by the third and fourth generation, people have defined their sense of identity in a place, and so dispense with excessive memorialisation. In this sense the living may not have, or require, close association with ancestors, and due to the force of social values - such as economic and social individualism and achievement, and time efficiency - may concentrate more fully on present time and life. The standardisation of the modern New Zealand cemetery and headstone may be a reflection of this change and also suggests that achievement is viewed as an aspect of the living and is not related to the dead.

The cemetery of today has also become more secular or civic, as consecration does not seem to be an issue (no-one I asked could tell me if the cemeteries in the research area were consecrated or not) and as has been mentioned, they are now administered by regional civic authorities. Even with this in mind, the cemetery still has a ritualised value, as it is an ongoing association between the sacred and the secular, and links the past to the present and both to the future.

The crematorium as the other ritual site of body disposition, has a much less significant role as a ritual setting than the cemetery. The crematorium building in the research area was first put to use in 1927. The site, when viewed primarily as a cremation structure has very little ritual significance, as the process itself is not carried out as a formalised ritual, and it is not the site where remains are memorialised - the ritual action of cremation will be
discussed in detail latter. The crematorium also acts as a chapel, though since the 1960s few services have been conducted there\(^1\) (Inf. 2), and as the administration centre for the council cemeteries service unit.

The second ritual place distinguishable in the funeral is the setting in which ‘death work’ and the funeral service occurs, and this will again highlight the move towards the separation of the living and the dead in our modern society. In both these cases, the trend is exemplified in the move towards a ‘one-place’ funeral, and the increasing popularity of the funeral home.

Death work was historically carried out in the home, with either the family, or a mid-wife washing and laying out the body (Inf. 1); Mitford (1963 : 199) and Aries (1974 : 96), suggest that even into the late nineteenth century, the family, pastor, carpenter and gravedigger carried out all the funeral rituals. Similarly in Aotearoa, Maaori society had its own skilled people and methods for caring for the body (PNWHDSG 1993 : 2). Today however, even though there is a growing impetus towards reinstating these rituals in the domestic sphere (PNWHDSG 1993 : 2), the more specialised methods of death work, and as Charmaz (1980 : 188) mentions, its related equipment, has meant that these practices are almost universally carried out by funeral directors. Even hospitals now do not offer comprehensive services for presentation or storage - nursing staff will lay out, wash and place the body in a shroud, and the hospital morgue does have several fridges, but a body can only be stored for a maximum of twenty-four hours (Inf. 28). The hospital in the research area also has a viewing room for family who have arrived after the body has been removed from the ward, but interestingly, all visitors must be accompanied by a member of staff, and no body is ever left with visitors alone (Inf. 28).

Similarly, because in the past, death usually occurred at home\(^2\) the ‘watching’ and funeral service would take place in the house, often in the parlour (Inf. 1). Today, funerals in the home are very rare, and Infs. 1 and 2 suggest that this change occurred in the 1940s with the decrease of house

\(^1\) Inf. 2 also suggests that the community changed this (consciously or unconsciously?) as the atmosphere was disliked.

\(^2\) Or rather not in an institution of any sort - such as the hospital, or geriatric and nursing home - as is often the case today.
size, making such services inconvenient. The church and graveside service, which in the recent past had been the norm, has also undergone change - secularisation of society, and time and distance pressures have been contributing factors (Inf. 2). In a move by the 'church' twenty years ago, it was ruled that there was no special reason to go to the graveside for the committal (Inf. 2), so this subsequent part of the ritual was broken from the traditional service. This has given rise to the trend towards the one place funeral, and the predominance of the funeral directors chapel; Inf. 1 claimed that over fifty percent of funerals today are held in the funeral chapel.

It is this trend that seems to suggest a change in the social attitude towards death, the separation between the living and the dead, and a blurring of the sacred and the secular. The churches role as a centre for religious worship and as a sacred place devoted to God is indisputable, so why and in what ways has the funeral moved away from this context to a more civic or secular one? A detailed discussion of the funeral directors chapel may shed light on these issues.

In the research area there are three funeral firms, two of which could be classed as 'main stream' while the third provides a cheaper or simpler alternative. The premises of the latter, is designed primarily for operational requirements only - ie. preparation, administration, and to a small degree viewing1 - so therefore will not be discussed in the same way as the others. The former on the other hand reflect the style of funeral homes both nationally and, to a large extent, the developed West. It is however, important to note here that a lot of pragmatic, but seemingly also emblematic value is placed on the funeral chapel as a place, by the funeral directors themselves and the law. One of the stipulation's for admittance into the Funeral Directors Association Of New Zealand (FDANZ) is that the business premises must be of a certain standard (seemingly that of the 'main stream' type2), and the Health and Burial Regulations 1946 give detailed standards which mortuary areas must meet.

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1 Inf. 12 prefers to conduct interviews, viewing and the 'cup of tea' in the mourners home for familiarity (it is "their space"), to reduce overheads, and to maintain a personal element or privacy in the rituals.
2 Reference to this in Chapter Five will explain its relation to the funeral directors professional identity.
Though the increasing popularity of the funeral chapel as the ritual site is a relatively modern trend, there were chapels in the research area as early as the 1890s (Inf. 1), though it was not until 1973 when the crematorium chapel was closed for renovation that the funeral home gained precedence (Inf. 2). Therefore the chapel has over time developed specifically as the setting for both the practical and ritualised enactment of the funeral, and is "permanently ... set aside" (Grimes 1982 : 21) as the ceremonial place of death.

Because the ritual is a performance, and the setting for any performance is crucial in the portrayal of meanings, I will employ a dramaturgical analysis of the funeral chapel to show how the practical and formalised, or secular and sacred uses of the area are defined, and yet are flexible. In this sense, the funeral chapel can be separated into three different areas; the front stage, back stage, and intermediate regions.

Goffman (1971 : 109-110) defines the front stage or "front region" as "the place where the performance is given", and this can be applied to the chapel itself - i.e. the room in which the funeral service takes place. The enactment of the formalised part of the ritual in this area gives it its ritual and performative identity. The arrangement, and fittings of the front stage in the funeral serve to advance this image, and will be discussed further later in this section.

In contrast, the "back stage" region of a performance (Goffman 1971 : 114) seems to be defined as counter to the front stage in terms of association. Turner and Edgely (1975 : 380) define the back stage as "the space and the enclosed activities strategically hidden from the audience". Similarly Goffman (1971 : 114) characterises the backstage as where "the performance is contradicting the front stage action and behaviour", functioning as the place where the ritual performance and meanings can be fabricated, where "illusions and impressions are openly constructed".

This definition fits well with the funeral home. Back stage regions here include the garages, receiving rooms, mortuary, casket preparation room

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1 Both of the two large funeral companies have links to the early funeral industry in the area.
2 Though it has no impact on any 'ends' to which the ritual may aspire.
and casket store. In these areas the practical aspects of the funeral are dealt with.

When focusing on the use of these two areas, contradictions between the two are highlighted. The meanings represented in the front stage, images of solemnity spirituality and sacredness, are highly inconsistent with the methods employed in the back stage. As Goffman (1971: 116) suggests,

If the bereaved are to be given the illusion that the dead one is really in a deep and tranquil sleep, then the undertaker must be able to keep the bereaved from the workroom where the corpses are drained, stuffed, and painted in preparation for their final performance.

Similarly, Turner and Edgley (1975: 380) explain that if the ‘audience’ see the back stage preparations, they may find it harder to accept the front stage action as a sacred ritual, and the impressions fostered in the front region will be destroyed.

In relation to this, there can be identified in the funeral home an area which I have termed the ‘intermediary region’, which separates the front and back, and which often functions as administration or ‘reception’ areas, or to separate the primary mourners from the general audience. This region includes the entrance hall, offices, viewing room, casket display areas, interview rooms and the reception lounge. These are transitional areas which, while not ritualised, do have a more formal tone than the back stage.

The control of movement between these three regions is important in the maintenance of impression and atmosphere and therefore “social and physical boundaries” are set up (Turner and Edgley 1975: 380). Such boundaries separating the back regions from the public are subtle but very effective. In the two funeral homes under analysis, long corridors, and many doors block off mortuary and preparation areas from the front region, while reception halls and entrance ways lead directly to offices and offer no obvious signs as to the location of the back regions. Turner and Edgley (1975: 381) suggest that most people will avoid back stage areas. This may be especially so in the case of the funeral home, as the idea of what occurs in the mortuary is possibly a better social barrier than any physical barrier could be.
Other clues are given as to what areas of the funeral home are intended for public access, and the intentional design of the building and its fittings correspondingly define formal and informal areas.

As a theatrical performance has "fixed sign equipment" (Goffman 1971: 110), so too the funeral home utilises such elements to create and convey mood and atmosphere. Because the modern funeral chapel caters for both nominal/Christian and non-religious services, the interior design adopted produces a double effect.

Most people today are accustomed to the lofty and heightened ambience of a church, and with skilful use of "size", "shape" and "light" (Grimes 1982: 22), the funeral chapel itself can also simulate this effect. The large size of the modern chapel - the growth in popularity has meant the need for more and more seating - gives the open, airiness associated not only with churches but also other civic ceremonial sites.

The shape of the chapel, correspondingly, is important in the 'staging' of the performance. The contours in each building are rectangular with an angulated ceiling in one, and semi-triangular with a downward sloping ceiling in the other, both of which draw the eye down to the front stage area where the ritual action is set. As in the church setting, the ritual 'actors' or agents are subtly separated by a slight elevation or by small wooden rails, and church or stage-like lecterns formally set the point from which the liturgy is conducted.

Effective use of lighting is also made to give the impression of sublimity, and to highlight the front stage. Natural light from above, behind and the side, again gives the impression of loftiness, and in one case a stained glass window adds to the church-like atmosphere. In both chapels a cross is used on the front stage wall, and in at least one case is removable, though this was not done in any of the non-religious services I observed there.

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1 Of which the funeral directors themselves had a large input. Both chapels, interestingly, have been designed in such a way that one service can directly follow another, and the two groups can be in the building at the same time while not ever seeing each other. Goffman (1971: 138) mentions this strategic control of movement and impression.
In contrast to this, the rest of the funeral ‘home’, as the name suggests, is designed to give an informal, familiar, homely impression. The buildings, as Turner and Edgley (1975 : 386) describe, are never over-modern or ostentatious, but are rather traditional and “colonial”. In the research area one funeral home is constructed of red brick, and resembles an unpretentious modern home, and the other while having friendly modern interiors, is based on a historic building; something which is important in the company’s identity.

The interview and reception ‘lounges’ again reflect the character of a comfortable modern home with chairs, couches, lamps, ornaments and paintings which give rooms a sense of familiarity, cosiness and consolation.

“Colour” (Grimes 1982 : 22) is another aspect used to good effect in the modern funeral home. In an article in the ‘New Zealand Funeral Director’ Ketcham (1985: 16) provides a detailed analysis of the way colours should be utilised in the funeral chapel, suggesting that tones which engender “spiritual uplift and tranquillity” should be used to comfort and console. Colours such as pale gold, light ivory and rose beige, which Ketcham specifically suggests, are used in the two chapels in the area. Similarly pale blue/green with gold highlighting are used in the carpeting in both chapels and Ketcham (1985 : 16) explains that this colour is affective in accentuating the “altar” and casket. Subtle and warm tones are common, and black is not apparent in any form.

It is also interesting that a large number of the paintings and prints used to decorate the walls of both the chapel and the lounges of one firm, and the small motif on the back of the other firms order of service sheet are landscapes and more often than not depict a water scene. Such images of water and majestic panorama are symbolic, respectively, of life, and heaven, and also possibly reflect the idea of the ‘better life on the other side’.

The capacity of the funeral chapel to simulate the atmosphere of a church in order to cater for Christian and nominal services leads to interesting insights regarding the change in attitudes in society. Though there has been an obvious trend towards the secularisation of society in the last few
decades, the funeral is one of the previously Christian based ritualsɪ in Western society that has moved out of the church and into the secular ceremonial sphere. This highlights the fact that these, ‘rites of passage’ (Van Gennep 1960) are still important to our society, but that the mode of representation has changed. Accordingly, the chapel will switch in and out of the sacred depending on the identity of the ritual participants and hence the mood of the service. Varying from the church therefore, the chapel and its fittings reflect the solemn secular emotion of death, and if accommodating a ‘sacred’ Christian service will only represent a symbol of a symbol.

Irion (1966 : 188, 197) argues that the best environment in which to conduct the funeral is a place which, for the mourners, is related to the common elements of life. In this case a funeral with Christian themes should be held in a church where regular services of worship such as baptisms and marriages are held2; the place where “community ... existence comes into focus most clearly”, while the non-religious or humanist funeral should be held in the home of the deceased as the “logical ... means for bringing the life and death into conjunction”.

While these may be logical sentiments, the popularity of the funeral home illustrates a different reality. As I have mentioned, the funeral home incorporates both the symbolic sacred and the civic secular solemnity of atmosphere to cater for any ideology concerning death, yet the fact that this ritual place is “permanently ... set aside” (Grimes 1982 : 21) for funerals while the church or any other location would only be “temporarily set aside” (Grimes 1982 : 21) gives a clue as to the reason for its popularity. Irion (1966 : 49) explains that the funeral chapel has the functions of “convenience, accessibility and appropriateness”, but he more importantly links this back to an avoidance of the reality of death. The predominance of the chapel could, I suggest, stem from the same movement to separate the living and the dead that can be seen in the modern cemetery and on a wider scale of death’s separation from the ‘present’ and reality. Any associations of the death of an individual to a place seem to be avoided in our society;

1 Christening and marriage are two other examples.
2 Both Infs. 3 and 8 back this up.
hence the often negative feelings towards hospitals, and the 'giving up' of all responsibility of death to the professional. Yet in contrast the primary mourners must face the reality of death, and for them places associated with death and death ritual take on new meanings, especially in relation to memorialisation.

In an attempt to resolve the conflicts associated with the views and realities of death, death ritual has become privatised. The chapel may accordingly represent a more private place to conduct death rituals, where death can be closed off from the life of the greater community and where bad associations can be 'left at the door' so to speak. In this vein, Inf 2 suggested that many mourners do not want a funeral service in their regular church or place of worship, as they would be reminded of the death each Sunday. Similarly the decrease of the funeral cortege, though caused increasingly by the one place funeral, illustrates that death is being hidden from public view. In this way, while inherently reflecting death denial, the family may more easily deal with the immediacy of death without being hindered by negative social attitudes.

Economic or status aspects could also be an influencing factor behind the shift to the predominance of the funeral home. The trend towards package deals, and the purchase of all the associated services of the funeral have meant that even the normally personal aspects of the ritual have been cut off from the home and from everyday life.

The mere fact that the funeral ritual and all its machinations can be viewed as a performance, illustrates how death is separated in time and place from the modes of everyday life. While this may once have been done to define the sacred from the profane, more importantly now, it hides the reality of death from a death-denying society.
CHAPTER 3

RITUAL OBJECTS AND ACTIONS

What passing bells for those who die as cattle,
Only the monstrous anger of the guns,
Only the stuttering rifles rapid rattle,
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them: no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells.
What candles may be held to spread them all?

Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls brows shall be their pall,
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds.

"Anthem For Doomed Youth" Wilfred Owen

I am told he makes a handsome corpse and
becomes his coffin prodigiously.

"The Good Natured Man" Goldsmith 1768

It is widely recognised that humans take their behavioural and ontological references from their private and social surroundings\(^1\). The dressings of life lend a tone and context to behaviour, and can therefore reflect underlying attitudes. This is especially so in the ritual setting, as the objects used and the actions undertaken can provide symbolic reference to the cultural mind-set.

As in all social rituals, the funeral has and is undergoing change, and in the past twenty years this has become more rapid with the introduction of new, especially non-religious alternatives (Inf. 2). This being so, it is important to look at the use of, and the symbolism behind, the "act" and the "agency" (Burke 1989: 139) of the modern funeral ritual, and how and why these

\(^1\)I am here not only referring to Goffman's theory of Dramatism (1971) but to social psychology and cultural anthropology in general.
elements originated. This should highlight the meanings communicated and any possible ambiguities in these messages.

On the surface it would seem safe to assume that most of the conventional Western funeral trappings have derived from Christian tradition, but this is not so. Both Puckle (1926 : 33) and Mitford (1963 : 190) affirm that the early origins of many of our funeral practices have little to do with Christianity, though in some cases, as will be shown, they were adopted by Christendom.

There is of course a huge variety of objects and actions associated with the modern funeral, due to the range of religious and personal interpretations of the rituals and of death. Therefore I have chosen to limit my analysis to the more prominent elements of the funeral, and those which seem to have a more significant ritual role. They are: the casket; casket ornamentation and interment goods; flowers; presentation of the body; burial and cremation; and refreshments.

OBJECTS / AGENCY

THE CASKET:

The casket1, or coffin, as a prominent funeral object, seems to have two distinct characters; as a dramatic ‘prop’, and a sacrosanct receptacle for the deceased. It is both a performative and inviolable symbol. A look at the contrast between these two roles may highlight some of the social attitudes towards death and how we treat the dead.

Puckle (1926 : 44-45) suggests a link between the use of the casket in Christian countries as a method of preservation, and the belief in the material resurrection of the body. He then explains, however, that this is not a reliable interpretation as monasteries and the like did not use coffins.

The word ‘coffin’ comes primarily from the Greek Kaphinos which means basket (Shipley 1984 : 192). Similarly, ‘cof(f)in’ is found in middle English and old French, and signifies a small basket or case.

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1 I have chosen throughout this section to use the word ‘casket’, aware of the fact that it is the more modern term and is extremely euphemistic.
Though many other societies have 'coffins' in the form of houses for the deceased, Mitford (1963: 196) explains that the widespread use of any sort of burial receptacle is a fairly new development in Western culture, dating back less than two hundred years.

The first casket seems to have begun as a bier - a plain plank of wood on which the shrouded body was taken from the house to the graveside - and from which the body was tipped into the grave. Inf. 12 explained that approximately two hundred years ago, the undertakers of the time developed the personalised casket by selling the bier (which latter became a box) at each individual death in an effort to make money¹.

The use of coffins in New Zealand, and especially in the research area, began very early, as funeral directors took their cue from Scotland and England. In the records of one of the first funeral companies in the area (now held by Inf. 1), mention is made in 1886 of a body being "sent to the country in a shroud", but in the same year a "society" is recorded as putting a body in a casket for burial. Previous to 1889 only "plain coffins" are mentioned, but by 1889 linings and trimmings of high quality are noted.

When describing the secular aspect of the casket in the funeral ritual, emphasis must be drawn to its dramatic characteristics. The casket is a piece of "fixed sign equipment" in the "front region" of the ritual performance (Goffman 1971: 109-110), and it is the one material object which gives primary focus to the ritual occasion, and to death. In this sense it also draws attention to the front stage where the ritual action takes place, though it is not included in the action, remaining a passive marker.

A physical description of the modern casket will, I suggest, elucidate both performative and spiritually symbolic elements, and therefore highlight its ritual importance.

The "physical dimensions" (Grimes 1982: 23) of the modern casket are to a certain extent standardised. There are two shapes associated with the casket, the "coffin", which is widest at the shoulders and tapers to the head and feet,

¹ Whether this is hearsay or historical fact, it makes an interesting story!
and fits the popular image; and the "couch" which is rectangular (Inf. 2). Size is standardised, as except in special circumstances, caskets are not made to order but come in two lengths; 6' 1" and 5' 7" (Inf. 1).

The "weight" (Grimes 1982: 23), or apparent weight of the casket, seems to have a psychological importance in the fact that those which appear heavier also are assumed to be of higher grade thicker wood, so giving them the appearance of durability - they are of course more expensive.

The regulations dealing with the materials from which the casket is made have few requirements. Caskets must be made of an approved combustible material, and of a size acceptable to the cremator. There must be a casket of some sort, as burial in a shroud is not allowed. The only real requirement is that the casket holds together when lifted (Inf. 21). The more common casket is made of a cheaper wood, such as pine, and normally has a surface veneer.

The colour of the casket is interesting to note. There are three common colours, depending on the type of wood, or wood veneer used - rimu, oak and mahogany. Infs. 1 and 2 identified the lighter rimu as the most preferred colour, yet the more expensive caskets are in the darker woods. White and black lacquered caskets have been requested (Inf. 2), and most babies' caskets are in white.

The "making" and "custody" (Grimes 1982: 23) of the casket is not ritualised in the modern funeral. Caskets are manufactured by either the funeral companies themselves (Inf. 1) - many funeral businesses began as cabinet makers - or by specialised firms, and are bought in, 'pre-need', and held in stock. Custody seems also to be in the possession of the funeral director. The casket (and body) are either viewed at the funeral home, or 'taken home' for a short period of time before the service, the director keeping

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1 Television especially - shape can be a quick cue to the contents of the box, and this is reinforced by images in the media which we 'learn' from.

2 The casket 'display rooms' in funeral homes are consciously designed with marketing strategies in mind, and this artifice is included in the professional training of perspective funeral directors (Inf. 26).
control of place and movement at all times, even though payment and the contents theoretically gives the family ‘custody’.

In contrast, and possibly in reaction to this, there are now new initiatives from groups advocating the ritual reclaiming of the funeral by the family. Such groups suggest that the mourners make the casket, and keep the deceased at home until burial (PNWHDSG 1993 : 9 ; Barnes 1991 : 53). Ownership of the casket itself seems to be very important in the social psyche. Few people, I suggest, would dream of borrowing a casket for their own or another’s funeral, or to be cremated or buried in one made of cardboard or the like - though this is one of the new alternatives suggested by reform groups (Inf. 23; De Spelder and Strickland 1983 : 179). Walter (1990 : 84) argues that the basic necessity of a funeral for even the poorest person, is their own casket and grave. The casket may be the most expensive or ostentatious piece of furniture some people may own (Inf. 12) yet the thought of not having one is barely warrantable.

This leads to what could be described as the ‘coffin dilemma’. The casket’s importance to the funeral, and its basically universal form - both aspects which I feel are subtly maintained by the funeral industry - mean that it is one of the most expensive objects associated with the funeral; the other being the headstone. However, as Barnes (1991 : 52-53) suggests, people rarely remember what it looked like, and have trouble recalling it after the ceremony. Barnes also notes that many people are distressed by the fact that a well crafted piece of ‘furniture’ will be destroyed, while others reflect on the “immorality of throw-away packaging, of which the coffin must be the ultimate example”.

While the above discussion illustrates the practical nature of the casket in its use as a container to store and transport the body, and as a performative marker, the symbolic or ‘sacred’ associations of the casket also come to light.

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1 Though I did not study the Maaori Tangihanga in this paper, the feeling I get from reading about it is that the deceased and therefore the casket is truly in the family’s possession.
2 This view may be reinforced by popular media, with scenes of war and mass graves, or depersonalised death and burial. Even most pets buried in the back yard have a shoebox.
3 A title which conjures up images of the home, and of craftsmanship and permanence...
In this sense, the casket represents a sacred respect for the dead, especially in the images of rest, security and the preciousness of the body.

These images are reflected in the construction and trimmings of the casket, and the underlying symbolism highlights its association with the final receptacle and housing of the body, the place of final rest. The silk and satin linings, ruffles, pillows and coverings imply sleep, possibly eternal sleep in the Christian sense, and denote comfort and rest. The view of the casket as the ‘housing’ of the body and metaphors/euphemisms such as ‘furniture’ and ‘couch’, show the psychological need for security and familiar surroundings in the social construction of death. The stone vault or crypt, as Puckle (1926: 43) suggests, may once have represented the tomb or cave, however the modern manipulation of this into a ‘casket’ - the theoretical meaning of which is a small case for jewels - is symbolic of the reverence for, and the sanctity of the body inside; something which is ritually set apart from the everyday.

Our ritual treatment of the casket as the receptacle for the body - and possibly symbolising the body itself - also implies its sacrosanct nature. Although in the service, the casket holds the prominent position to direct attention towards the liturgy, it is the movement and behaviour towards it which are ritualised. The solemn and formalised procession of the hearse and pall bearers, and the obvious respect shown to it in the service illustrates this. In contrast, any different treatment of the casket would ‘profane’ it, and would be very inconsistent to the ritual context. This highlights the difference between front and backstage regions of the ritual setting, as behind the scenes, though not intentionally disrespectful, leaning and writing on the casket are commonplace.

Though I do not suggest that the casket takes on the identity of the deceased in any way, I do assume that in not being able to see the body of the deceased, the casket represents the person in the funeral; in this way it takes on a sacred aspect. The casket may accordingly represent the transformation of the deceased, via the symbol, into the spirit - that is, it is not the body but

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1 It is interesting that in the past, the deceased was often depicted by the sculptor lying on top of the tomb. The change seen in this representation of death may reflect the modern tendency to hide death.
the casket which is recognised as being burnt or buried. It is the casket which is the focus of the service, while the body is merely the inhabitant, and this may separate the deceased, in a symbolic way, from the reality of the situation.

This is indicated, for example, in the way funeral directors such as Inf. 2 would not have a casket at a funeral without the body present. Similarly, there has been a negative reaction by many funeral directors, officiants and grief counsellors to suggestions put forward by some groups that memorial services held after body disposition would be a cheaper alternative and focus on the life of the deceased rather than the body (Infs. 8 and 9; Walter 1990: 261; Barnes 1991: 35). As Inf. 15 explained, the casket is a tangible focus of the reality of the person’s death, and a hasty relinquishment of the body with no material focus at the service, may hinder the expression of grief and the acceptance of death. A poignant illustration of this is in tragic circumstances when the body can not be found. In the words of Kirsa Jensen’s mother,

The day was totally unreal. A memorial service was unreal. I wanted a funeral. I wanted something real, something concrete. Something that said Kirsa is DEAD ... We have no body, no coffin, no funeral service, and we do not have a grave (Jensen 1994: 272; 286).

It can be seen from this that the casket in the funeral context is “valued more for what it means” than “what it does” (Grimes 1982: 23). It is not the material item itself, but its use and representations that create its symbolic ritual character. Therefore, practical uses of the casket illustrate modern Western attitudes towards death, in that emphasis is placed on organised performative expression of values, values which are life-affirming and death-denying.

CASKET ORNAMENTATION AND INTERMENT GOODS:

Both the casket adornments and the objects placed with the deceased for burial are generally similar in nature, yet can reflect different meanings.

1 Which may be why the form of the casket is so life-affirming and euphemised.
The items placed on or around the casket are outward symbols to all the mourners, and represent the public persona of the deceased. Items such as sporting equipment, military effects, toys, and art work reflect his or her hobbies, attributes and external, social nature.

Interment goods, conversely, are more for the benefit of the primary mourners, and reflect the private, individual side of the deceased. Like the giving of flowers, interment goods are a final gift to the deceased from the family, and are also a way of saying goodbye. They may symbolise the loss that a death means, as the placing of a personal item for the deceased to ‘take’ with him/her signifies that part of the mourner has ‘gone with’ the deceased. Many in the funeral industry advise mourners, especially children, to write letters or draw pictures for the deceased, and include these in the casket (Infs. 1 and 15).

Personal, domestic items of the deceased may be chosen by the family for interment, and these again reflect the private side of the deceased, and epitomise his/her personality in the view of the family. For example, Inf. 16 explained that in her father’s casket she placed a picture drawn by the grandchildren, a photograph of the family, a peppermint tea bag, and his cigarettes.

The significance of these actions in showing the social attitude towards death is important. As outward and individualised representations of the life of the deceased, casket ornaments and interment goods are visual, material symbols of who the deceased was. Inherent in the action seems to be a sense of psychological comfort for the mourners, in that the identity of the deceased and their relationship to him/her remains intact after death. The familiar things which are placed in and around the casket in the funeral acknowledge this relationship. A third factor, one which is seen in the death ideologies of many societies, is the belief in the after-life, and that the inclusion of familiar goods will in some way ease the transition for the deceased. Casket ornamentation and interment goods also act as marks of status, and reflect the social, economic, and to some extent the political position of the deceased and the mourners in the wider community.

Interment goods are present in the graves of our prehistoric ancestors. In non-Western cultures they supply the deceased on their journey to ‘the
other side', and can be seen through to the present day as symbolic markers of how we view and conceptualise death.

FLOWERS:

Flowers have through time, shaped and expressed our sentimental values of social and personal life. They remain a poignant and visual symbol of emotion and reverence in every day life, and in religious and civic rituals. What then, can be elaborated from the historical and modern, symbolic and practical use of flowers in the funeral ritual?

In his extensive discussion of the cultural use of flowers through time, Goody (1993), finds only a tenuous link between modern floral funeral tributes, and the symbolic use of flowers in the past. Goody highlights the influence of the idea of purgatory in sixteenth and seventeenth century England as having a large influence on the ritual use of flowers; Luther's protest against indulgences, meant that flowers were banned from ceremonial occasions, only to return in the middle of the nineteenth century (1993 : 195) in the form of bouquets (1993 : 418). He however sees the ceremonial application of flowers today - in America - as a conscious mechanism in the commercialisation of death; florists and funeral directors have a "joint interest in memorialisation", which was justified as a "traditional American practice" (1993 : 280). Therefore, flowers are "today the major mourning symbol, and a huge item of public expenditure" (Mitford, cited Goody 1993 : 280), which has meant that,

... the pressures of profit, like the earlier pressures of puritanism, tenced to thin out the symbolic aspects of the culture of flowers. (Goody 1993: 281)

The use of flowers in the modern New Zealand funeral may or may not conform to this argument, however, practical and symbolic values do appear which lend expressive value to their ritual use.

Flowers are used in three main ways in connection to the funeral; as large free standing arrangements in the chapel or church, as casket ornamentation or for interment, and as gifts from others in the form of wreaths and bouquets. Though a local florist reported no distinct association of colour with funeral flowers, there seemed to be a trend towards reds,
pinks and yellows in the funerals I observed. However there seems to be no particular flower which represents death. Therefore, it seems to be the symbolism of using flora in general that applies to the funerals ritual nature.

The first symbolic meaning which can be identified in the ritual use of flowers, is as a representation of the personality of the deceased. As an example of this, Barnes (1991: 62) highlights, the way that favourite flowers or those taken from the garden of the deceased are used in the casket spray or the large arrangements.

Related to this is the gift made of flowers by secondary mourners to show respect and love for the deceased and for the close family. This aspect also correlates closely to the idea of interment goods as flowers for both primary and secondary mourners, may represent a final parting gift to the deceased (Barnes 1991: 63). A poignant example of this is when single stems are provided at the service for mourners to place in the casket itself or to throw into the grave. Similar to this is the ‘laying of the wreath’ at memorial services, which ritualises the physical giving of a token of esteem and possibly of sorrow at the loss. The gift of flowers is also as an act of comfort and support for the recipient and can express in material terms what may be hard to say in words.

The second underlying image of funeral flowers, is as a symbol of life or the natural flow of life and death. As the cycles of birth, maturity and death are highlighted in the language of the service, these images are reinforced by peripheral inclusion of flowers and foliage, which also “sprout, bud, bloom and die” (Inf. 1). Not only physical, but social continuity, is symbolised in this, and the use of evergreen foliage in arrangements, and by societies such as the Masons, represents continuing life (Inf. 1; Goody 1993: 181). More practically, flowers have a sensual appeal that gives a warmth and personality to a setting, so that the associations of life and nature in the funeral context may give comfort and a sense of familiarity in a situation which can potentially be desensitised.

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1 Goody (1993: 292) suggests that white pansies and chrysanthemums in Europe have an association with death, and historically, rosemary was a symbol of immortality (1993: 181).
A third role of funeral flowers, which is interesting to note but may not be applicable to the modern attitudes, is suggested by Puckle (1926: 171, 233). He links the giving of flowers at death to a form of ancestor worship as food offerings and the like were sacrificed in the belief in the comfort of the dead;

... the enlightened West continues the superstition as long as it is content to sacrifice "offerings" of costly exotic flowers to wither and perish within a few hours' exposure at the graveside.

Goody (1993: 83) also notes that early Christians made such offerings;

Romans had offered sacrifices and gifts, especially flowers, and had accompanied their departure with goods buried in the grave.¹

However,

Under Christianity all material offerings to the dead were forbidden ... to make such offerings was to treat the dead as if they could influence human affairs, whereas one should approach them only through God. (Goody 1993: 83)

The use of floral tributes carries through from the funeral service to the cemetery, where flowers are often planted or ceramic forms are used. The importance of these in the minds of mourners is illustrated in the conflict which often arises between mourners and council regulations². This again highlights a significant psychological aspect of the ritualisation of flowers, as those planted at the graveside reflect a love and cherishing of the memory of the deceased.

These aspects of the use of flowers in the funeral, illustrate the seeming necessity in the human consciousness and social psyche, to place some formal emphasis on life and the progression of this cycle in death. By

¹ Not only did Romans and Anglo-Saxons bury food and flowers with their dead, but also animals and tools and these occasions were public rather than private (Personal Communication - Professor Peter Wilson).

² This occurred a number of times in and around my study area in the period in which I conducted my research. Generally the conflict was concerned with the planting of shrubs or laying of a garden, which disrupted the council’s plot maintenance. Each case was quite well publicised.
making ritual use of symbols such as flowers, we infer life in death, and emphasise the sacred nature of life and death. As Goody (1993 : 299) states

What is more important is that flowers establish a link between the living and the dead, between the sacred and the profane.

However the ritualised use of flowers in the modern funeral is on the decline (Infs. 1 and 2), as more often funeral notices will ask for flowers to be omitted, or for a donation to be made in lieu of flowers to a specified organisation¹. Often these organisations are related to the deceased or his/her illness, for example the Cancer Society, the Aids or Heart Foundation. Such requests may possibly be due to the cost of flowers or to the family not wanting to inconvenience friends. This trend, coupled with many of our more recent funerary developments which tend to be inconsistent with the philosophy of Christian resurrection, has led Goody (1993 : 285) to remark that in our secular age, “flowers for the dead [are] less imperative than flowers for the living”.

**ACTIONS / ACT**

**PRESENTATION AND VIEWING OF THE BODY:**

Washing and dressing the deceased before burial has been the time honoured method of presenting the body, and it was not until the mid twentieth century that embalming as a means of preservation and restoration became apparent in the West; it does, however have a long tradition in places such as Egypt, China and South America.

The origin of embalming in the West seems to be very ancient. Puckle (1926 : 35) suggests that the origin of washing, anointing and dressing the corpse came from the “dim ages” where it was thought that the deceased needed to appear his/her best in the “future material state”; this was then assimilated by the Christian resurrection doctrine by “force of associated ideas”. Presenting the body in more recent times, in Puckle’s view, is a continuance of this tradition. However, it is Mitford’s (1963 : 192) contention that

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¹ Inf. 2 mentioned that this does not work so well as people will not donate as much as they would spend on a floral tribute.
embalming came solely from Egyptian origin, and did not have any associated Judeo-Christian antiquity. Irion (1966: 165) finds no link between preservation by embalming as practiced by the Egyptians, and the Christian hope of resurrection, though he does remark that the theme of continuity expressed in the resurrection "provides some rationale for the short term preservation of the corpse".

In later times, the practice of embalming seemed to be reinforced by other social circumstances. Charmaz (1980: 188) and Mitford (1963: 196) suggest that the American civil war provided a momentum for embalming, as many soldiers could be returned home without the showing results of decay. Mitford (1963: 195-196) also claims that French, English and British anatomists in the nineteenth century popularised the method for two reasons; "scientific inquiry, and the fascination and financial reward of turning cadavers into a sort of ornamental keepsake". More importantly, Leaney (1989: 134) argues that the early custom of embalming was intended

... by circumventing the stage of physical decomposition, to dispel the aura of horror surrounding death.

The early process of embalming in New Zealand, however, did not seem to have such colourful applications. The method was introduced to the country formally by the Siburn brothers of Auckland in the 1930s, where they set up a training centre after attending courses overseas. By the 1960s the procedure was becoming more commonplace, and after being taken over by a Wellington man in 1966, the company became the Embalmer's Association five years later (Inf. 25). The training of embalmers is now carried out by the Central Institute of Technology in Wellington and is run separately from the Funeral Directors course.

It seems necessary here to explain the procedure of embalming to some degree, as one member of the public I interviewed (Inf. 16), and many other casual enquires, mentioned that one of the biggest questions they had when a death occurred was what happened to the body of the deceased 'back stage'.

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1 This does not seem to have been the case in New Zealand in the first and second world wars, as most of the soldiers were buried in the field (Inf. 1)
2 I assume that the opposite will also be the case, that many people do not want to know.
at the Funeral home. The fact that the process is not widely known when many other surgical procedures are, is possibly due in part to impression management tactics used by Funeral Directors, relating to Goïman’s (1971: 117) observation that the professional must control access to knowledge and keep work out of sight so that procedures and fees do not require justification. Having said this though, the Funeral Directors I spoke to were quite open about the methods and procedures followed.

The task of embalming is to stabilise the body. Removing the blood from the body through the veins stops discolouration. Then the cavity is colaspirated to remove decomposing parts - making it anaerobic vs aerobic - and a formalin based preservative fluid is inserted through the veins. The body is then washed and natural colour and cosmetics are applied (Infs. 1 and 26).

The practical requirements of the law regarding embalming, and the popular and underlying perceptions of its use are quite opposed.

Legally in New Zealand, embalming is only necessary in the case of international transportation (PNWHDSG 1993: 5; Inf. 2) and technically no preservation is necessary, the body only needs to be kept cool; differing climates may mean this is more or less of an issue in certain areas (PNWHDSG 1993: 5).

It is however, very rare in New Zealand not to embalm after death (Infs. 1 and 2) and it is important to look at why this is so to once again illustrate the way we view death, and the dead.

The most obvious outward answer to this question would be tradition and a lack of knowledge. Most people when faced with death look to convention and the Funeral Directors for guidance. The arguments put forward by the funeral industry are, on the surface, very convincing, yet in light of the evidence to the contrary, can also be debated. The two main reasons put forward for the case of embalming by the funeral profession are, as a hygienic measure and for the psychological value of viewing.

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1 It was also made very clear that the two main Funeral companies in the area studied put a lot of emphasis on education programs dealing with such topics. However these are aimed at specific groups, so that the embalming process will only be discussed in detail with trainee doctors and nurses.
Mitford, in dealing with the American funeral industry, discredits the hygienic argument as a myth (1963: 81-83). On the basis of medical advice Mitford explains that "the body of a person who dies of a noncommunicable illness ... presents no danger whatsoever" and the "public-health virtues of embalming" can be viewed as inapplicable. Even in the case of preservation, rather than just for visual appeal, Mitford (1963: 84) states that embalming is not efficacious and bodies are really not 'preserved' at all. Inf. 2 did however mention to me that modern embalming methods are not employed for long term preservation, as the chemicals used for this do not provide nearly as good a colour or appearance. Therefore a body may 'last' well for only one or two weeks, but I am sure that mourners and members of the public are not widely aware of this. As an aside here, Mitford (1963: 173 ff) feels that the image of long-term preservation influences the public acceptance of embalming, as many people are 'sold' on this idea, when the reality is quite the opposite.

In New Zealand, the argument for embalming as a health measure is prevalent. This is made clear in the literature provided to the public by the funeral industry (FDANZ); for example

There [at the funeral home], dignified hygienic care and preparation will take place to ensure complete peace of mind for the duration of the funeral period. (From "The Caring Service: Your Funeral Director", FDANZ; my emphasis)

Modern embalming ensures hygienic preservation of the deceased for the duration of the funeral period and some funeral directors consider it necessary for this very reason. There is an added necessity if viewing of the deceased is to take place because embalming ensures a more natural appearance and removes any health hazard. If the deceased is to be transported any distance then the embalming process becomes essential to avoid any possibility of creating an embarrassment. (From "Bereavement", FDANZ; my emphasis)

The use of the term 'hygienic treatment' rather than 'embalming' by funeral directors (Inf. 1) and dealing with the process in terms of micro organisms and the spread of disease - for example in the funeral directors training

1 The term "a hell of a mess" appeared in her description (Mitford 1963: 180).
course - highlights a (possibly not unconscious) image of embalming as a necessary, professional, medical procedure; something which should not be omitted or questioned\textsuperscript{1}. The above quotes also subtly place emphasis on the processes of decay, which many people would find awkward, embarrassing and abhorrent, and wish to avoid at all costs, therefore reinforcing the aesthetic values of embalming through sensory images (or the imagination).\textsuperscript{2}

I also perceived a strong emphasis being placed on 'the good funeral director' who has done the one year training course in the 'health sciences', and who takes embalming as a given; leaving one to wonder, (I again feel not unconsciously), what the 'others' do.

The second case made by the funeral industry for embalming, which is also illustrated in the preceding extracts, is that of the psychological value of viewing the deceased. Advocated as part of the overall 'grief therapy' of the funeral, the positive role of viewing as a 'memory picture' is well documented (Charmaz 1980 : 199-200; Barnes 1991 : 56-58; Ir. on 1966 : 52; Infs. 14 and 15). Similarly, the significance of viewing the deceased in accepting the reality of death, is emphasised along with the sense of finality of saying a few last things and goodbyes to the deceased (FDANZ). As Irion (1966 : 48) suggests, improving the appearance of the deceased means that this is not so shocking, yet as he goes on to say,

\begin{quote}
... there is a difference between preparation of the body to improve appearance and preparation designed to create the illusion of life. The intention should be to make the dead body presentable, not to cover up death.
\end{quote}

This final idea is important in showing the way we conceive of death and will be discussed in detail latter.

\textsuperscript{1} In reaction to this, groups such as the PNWHDSG (1993 : 2) now advocate the redefining of many funeral practices, and the reclaiming of rituals from the male dominated professions of doctors, funeral directors and the clergy.

\textsuperscript{2} When I asked one of the Funeral Directors in my study area if interview to organise the funeral, the family was asked directly if embalming was required, the answer was "we listen and pick up wishes" (Inf. 1).
It was therefore very interesting to talk to a Funeral Director (Inf. 12) who did not carry out embalming as general procedure. In fact this informant seemed to view things from the opposite perspective than the majority in the industry and prided himself on this. Inf. 12 sees embalming as inconsistent with the reality of death, and feels that it is more valuable to view the deceased as they were when they died, in illness or health. He does not hurry people into embalming, as services such as this seem to him to be justifications of the overall cost and perpetuate the procedure themselves. He further held the belief that, contrary to the normal procedure, the body should be left for longer than the time period advocated by embalming texts¹, as death, both physical and spiritual is a gradual process.

As an alternative to embalming, Inf. 12 refrigerates, and will not use cosmetics as it runs contrary to the way he would treat a person in life. As he candidly explained, if you came at an old guy from the bush with a powder puff or an anal plug, he would deck you, so what makes you think you can do it to him once he is dead?

It is the philosophy behind this last idea, that in fact provides a great deal of insight into the wide or almost universal acceptance of the embalming process. The ritualisation of embalming in the modern Western funeral I suggest, has evolved from the respect towards and the sacredness of the human body, from the idea of ritual purity, and a psychological wish for the continuance of consciousness after death. These views seem to necessitate the illusion of life² - possibly an extension of the Christian hope of resurrection, and in general are very life-affirming and death-denying principles.

The dead body in itself an antagonism of two basic ideas. On the one hand it is respected as the “medium through which the individual has been known” (Irion 1966 : 166), a sacred object which held the soul/spirit of the person when alive. Yet there is also in the West an abhorrence of dead objects, decay, and other evils associated with this. The knowledge that one’s

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¹ These take a medical approach, and define death as occurring at final cell division.
² Is this ideology constructed and maintained by the funeral industry or by society itself? The funeral industry would say that they don’t do anything that the community does not want, yet it seems that both groups play their part.
beloved will soon putrefy, which is the obvious reality of death seen everyday in nature, seems to totally discredit the grander themes of the spirit world or the Christian hope of resurrection. Yet I also acknowledge that very few people honestly believe, or act on the belief, that embalming will preserve the deceased forever, or that it will in some way make death less uncomfortable. The relevance of this to how we dispose of our dead will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the use of embalming to ‘preserve’ the body, and of restoration to make the deceased appear more life-like, the modern funeral is extremely death-denying. Viewing the deceased as he or she was ‘in life’ tends to go against the assertion that the action helps to affirm the reality of death. In the ritual context, with its other symbols of both organic and community life, the presence of a ‘corpse’ that looks like death would be very inconsistent. People fear looking death in the face, and embalming seems to be continued to

... alleviate the disgust with decay [and has] shaped new responses to the troublesome confrontation with death. (Leaney 1989: 134)

Could our acceptance of embalming then, be also due to a reaction against the thought of the corruption of the body and its link to ritual impurity? Mary Douglas, in her discussion of pollution and taboo, suggest that, “the separation of the holy from the unclean marks a rise above savagery” and while “primitive rules of uncleanliness” (1966 : 11) concentrate on material contact and the danger of contagion, Christian rules have linked uncleanliness with spiritual unworthiness, therefore “holiness and impurity are at opposite poles”2 (1966 : 7).

Though water and blood are in some instances symbolically sacred, could the release of the bodily fluids by embalming, and therefore the forestalling of decomposition, be a sign of a release from the earthly impurity of the body to a more sacred state? As Douglas suggests (1966 : 8) modern Western

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1 Inf. 16 illustrated this when she told me that she saw her mother in the hospital after death, and her “haunted” look was upsetting, while after restoration her mother looked more “at rest” and this to her was far better to have as the last image.

2 I would suggest a circular movement between the two, possibly in relation to sin.
culture puts more emphasis on sanctity than a general meaning of prohibition, therefore a body is not taboo, but must in some way be sanctified to pass to the higher spiritual state.

**BURIAL AND CREMATION:**

How a society ritualises the physical disposition of its dead, can it seems, represent wider existential and metaphysical views surrounding death. On a more temporal level, however, it is clear (from general discussion with many people) that the method of disposition is one of the primary considerations when thinking about one's own death.

In the New Zealand context, there are only two methods of body disposition allowed by law, burial by sea or earth, and cremation\(^1\). I have chosen not to discuss sea burial in depth as it is rarely practiced - there has only been one case in the study area in the memory of Inf. 1 - and therefore is a very rare practice.

Earth burial is the traditional form of disposition in the West, being almost universal in Christian countries before the seventeen hundreds (Leaney 1989 : 118), and is most probably the oldest method of human body disposition (Irion 1966 : 204). At its most basic, a functionalistic view of burial would see it as a method of protecting the body from the natural elements, and animals, and protecting the living from contagion.

Irion (1966 : 204-206) explains the symbolic meanings of burial, aspects which seem to treat humans as part of the natural cycles of the earth. As the body lies in the ground, physical processes break it down again into its "elemental components "; a process which is given symbolic expression in phrases such as "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" and "return to mother earth". Irion also suggests that the site of burial is linked to an identity with the land, as it is this place of burial which becomes a material focus for

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\(^1\) There are two other forms of body disposition, exposure or desiccation and the cleaning of the bones by nature, especially animals; and while saying that only two forms are allowed by law, there is no mention in the law about any other methods, illegal or otherwise. My interest here is to highlight the fact that our Western based laws make little provision for other cultural practices. A more detailed discussion of the legalities of body disposition will follow.
rememembering the dead. In this way the headstone, as a durable memorial for the grave also assumes a ritual significance. Society's treatment of the body as a sacred object is born out again in the formal ritual of burial, as this is the final act which breaks the connection of the physical body of the deceased with the living and the community. However the emotional nature of this has meant that burial is only symbolised in the funeral ritual, as a handful of soil is sprinkled into the grave\(^2\), and the actual burial is not carried out until after the mourners have gone.

Similarly the emphasis placed on the 'decent burial' in the Western social mind, illustrates the sacred nature of the body after death. Richardson (1989 : 114-115) suggests that one reason for this has come from the practice of bodysnatching in the early eighteen hundreds to furnish anatomy lessons with suitable subjects. Legislation in 1872 meant that the bodies of paupers and criminals could legally be taken. Therefore as Richardson (1989 : 115) explains, safe burial became identified with respectable burial - if you could afford a proper burial you were saved from dissection and had a higher social status.

The psychological need for a proper burial may also arise from the wish to honour the dead, as to ignore the body in death is to have no respect for the life. The Christian practice of burial, in Anderson's (1994 : 5) opinion originates in the hope of resurrection; as Christ was interred and then rose from the dead, so Christians who are buried as a whole body, will also rise on Judgement Day.

During the early settlement of the research area, backyard burials and private family cemeteries were common, however early legislation, carried through to today, sets strict rules on interment of human remains. A burial is legally complete only when the body has been totally covered by soil (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 cited Inf. 22) and burial is not allowed under

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1 It is interesting that in contrast to past trends, the form of the headstone has become less individual and more standardised.

2 Puckle (1926 : 162) notes that this custom is "reminiscent" of the Roman observance of "covering a body found unburied with "at least three handfuls of earth" whilst saying the prescribed ceremonious farewell". 
a church, chapel or crematorium, or within five metres of the outer walls of such (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 9[i]). It is illegal to bury remains in land other than a cemetery if there is a burial ground within 32 km (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 46 [1]); however, if there is no burial ground within this distance (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 46 [2]) or if there is and you wish to inter a body on private land (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 46 [1]) then it is legal in both cases as long as sanction to do so is made by a high court judge and two councillors. Application for private burial in these situations can only be refused if “such burial would be prejudicial to public health or decency” (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 47 [3]). However in such circumstances, council permission is very hard to obtain, and it is clear that such action would be quickly vetoed (Infs. 21 and 22). It is also illegal to dig a grave yourself (Inf. 21), though you should be able to fill the grave in (PNWHDSG 1993: 10).

Since February 1994, all burials in the research area have been non-denominational - previously the cemetery in use was split between Catholics and Protestants - however Catholic priests, the Jewish faith, the Baha’i faith and three orders of Catholic nuns all still have plots set aside as do returned servicemen1. At the present time, council policy does not allow the pre-purchase of plots, due to ‘confusion’ which may arise2, however the cemetery advisory board (made up of city council staff and funeral directors) is reviewing this in an effort to make possible the purchase of the right to burial (Inf. 21) - something which is nationally legal (Burial and Cremation Act 1964 : 10 [1]). This reflects the increasing trend towards the pre-planning of funerals3 (Inf. 2).

The cost of burial is higher than that of cremation (burial, interment and maintenance together costing $1571.40 [1994] , Inf. 21) and the council “reluctantly provided ground for burial without charge” for paupers in the

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1 The older cemeteries in the area were split into Catholic, Chinese Jewish, and general areas, though small pockets of other groups such as plague victims and paupers can be found.

2 Though not a direct example of this, plots in one of the older cemeteries in the area were sold and used, in some cases, three times over due to ‘confusion’ with records (Inf. 24).

3 In some cases the purchase of an actual plot is preferable, as many people wish to choose the orientation of their grave for view and sun etc. (Inf. 21) The Chinese for example often wish to be placed on a rise or hill of some sort (Inf. 21), as geographic height often denotes social status (Inf. 1).
two last cases (Council notes ; Inf. 22) - the argument being that cremation is the cheaper alternative, and that the “council cannot be expected to consider personal preference” in relation to the method of disposition.

The practice of cremation as the second method of body disposition, is becoming an increasingly popular trend in modern Western funeral customs¹, and the origins and reasons for this may highlight a philosophical change in the values of wider society.

Puckle (1926 : 211) suggests that incineration or cremation was the “general practice of the ancient world”, and it appeared in Western history when the Greeks and Romans took up the practice for a time. Leaney (1989 : 118-120) explains that the process was reintroduced in the 1770s by an Italian scientist. Little consideration was given to cremation until overcrowding of graveyards and the threat to public health required new options, and early advocates of the practice used this argument to support their cause (Puckle 1926 : 210 ; Leaney 1989 : 118). The move towards cremation in England in the 1870s came at a time when reformation movements were challenging the materialism and ostentation of funeral rituals (Leaney 1989 : 118) and cremation was promoted as a scientific and practical alternative, in contrast to the persistence of “unreasoning sentiment” (Leaney 1989 : 120).

Today similar pragmatic arguments for cremation centre around the wastage of land in cemeteries², and that cremation poses less of a financial burden (Irion 1966 : 208) - at the present stage cremation charges in the research area are $316.70 on weekdays, and $378.15 on Saturdays and public holidays.

The arguments against cremation seem to be very deep seated in our society, and our Christian heritage possibly accounts for this. Cremation was heavily criticised by the church, as a ‘pagan’ practice (Puckle 1926 : 208), and because of its association with “modernists” and empirical science (Leaney 1989 : 123). Cremation similarly was inconsistent with the Christian philosophy of

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¹ The rate of adoption, however, is different in many countries, and while cremation is popular in New Zealand, it is only slowly increasing in Australia and America (Inf. 2).
² This attitude was very evident at a meeting I attended in the research area, concerning the development of a new cemetery. One person even suggested that burial should be phased out making cremation the only option.
the material resurrection of the body (Puckle 1926:224; Leaney 1989:124) for example,

The church did not condemn cremation because it was against divine or natural law ... [but] because cremation has been associated with the spirit of unbelievers who over the centuries have used cremation to ridicule the Christian teachings regarding the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. (Anderson 1994:6)

Linking this with the fact that the Jewish faith believed that the stages of decomposition in the grave were felt by the deceased as punishment for sins in life (Puckle 1926:46) and the briefly held Catholic conviction which linked fire with eternal pain and damnation in Hell, it was not surprising that cremation did not catch on fast in the Christian West. This association of the potent destructive force of fire runs deep in the social imagination; witches were burnt at the stake as spiritual punishment, though a similar fate also befell Christian martyrs, in effect making them martyrs, and Taylor (1989:179) notes that,

The cultural equation of decay with passage to another world reported from various ethnographic quarters ... suggests that the perceived incorruptibility of saints followed from their apparent hurtling into the sacred realm.

The above discussion alludes to an important aspect of the method of body disposition in the social imagination. When I asked members of the public (ie. people with no association to the funeral industry) what method of disposal they preferred for themselves, a large percentage of the motivations, apart from cost, were primarily based on physical, tactile sensations - a choice of being ‘burnt’ or rotting and being ‘worm food’. Attributing sensations and emotions of the living to the dead may illustrate the way we can only conceptualise of death in our own terms - within the boundaries of life. This in itself may be a method of avoiding or denying death.

1 For example, Romans burnt Christians at the stake.
2 Interestingly, the idea of the eternal fires of Hell, came from Biblical times as in Jerusalem the bodies of criminals were dumped in the refuse heap, which was always on fire (Inf. 3).
The inherent symbolism of cremation, as with burial, seems to reflect the image of humans as part of the natural law. Ashes may be scattered in a symbolic reunion with the earth, and places of particular importance to the deceased are often chosen to give a deeper personal meaning to the action. As Irion (1966: 206-207) suggests, cremation has various symbolic meanings;

To some it symbolised the fiery purification of the individual, the release of the pure spirit. To others it was a means of destroying the body to drive its spirit into oblivion. To still others it was a way of representing man’s [sic] ultimate solidarity with the whole of nature.

Whatever the motivation, it is clear that cremation is the most popular choice in New Zealand. Figure 1 illustrates the trend towards cremation in the research area since 1927 when the crematorium was built (Inf. 21).

Figure 1: Graph Plotting The Number Of Burials And Cremations Between 1920-1993.
Regarding national and regional laws, cremation is dealt with in a similar manner as burial. It is possible to cremate without the use of a crematorium - for example, in the case of particular religious rites - if consent and a place have been appointed by a medical officer (Burial and Cremation Regulations 1967 : 4). However it seems that this consent would be very difficult to obtain, and in a case early in 1994 in the research area, when such an application was made, religious wishes were able to be accommodated in the crematorium (Inf. 21). No private cremation is permitted if the death was suspicious (Burial and Cremation Regulations 1967 : 4), and only two people properly concerned with the cremation of the deceased may see the casket placed in the cremator, but no inspection of the process is permitted, and no casket can be opened after admission to the crematorium (Inf. 21).

The manner of body disposition, whether it is ritualised with a symbolic/sacred or practical/secular philosophy, seems to depend on the motivation of the individual in respect to factors of practicality, religion, tradition, conservational pragmatics, cost and emotion. In a general sense, it can be assumed that burial in our Western culture is based on a greater degree of sacred association than cremation. As has been shown, burial in this context, originated in Christian tradition, while cremation was introduced, in the words of Walter (1990 : 179) as a,

... technological solution to the disposal of bodies ... and to express the secular view that nothing remains after death.

The ritualisation of cremation does, however, seem to have taken on some of the sacred qualities associated with burial. The ashes of the deceased, for example, are treated in a similar way as the body in that they are placed in a specially built receptacle, and are often buried and memorialised, with either a headstone or plaque. Symbolic respect for the remains is also shown in the cases where the ashes are scattered, as mentioned above.

As with burial, the process itself is not witnessed by mourners; at the most someone will accompany the body from the service to the crematorium, but very rarely will they go past the chapel and into the cremator room itself.
(Inf. 2)\(^1\). As Walter (1990 : 50) suggests, the sight and clinical atmosphere of the cremator, as with the thought of damp earth, seems to detract from the reverence and solemnity that other ritual objects and actions exemplify. He also identifies this trend with the idea that the act of burial and cremation are a form of second death, so are very hard to deal with (1990 : 180). Related to this, Irion (1966 : 53, 208) suggests that cremation may be used as a method of controlling death, or if it is done within a short period of time it may be a means of avoiding the object of death.

The secularisation of society has also brought about a change in attitude towards methods of disposition. In 1965 the Catholic church allowed its members to cremate (Inf. 11), however acceptance varies between individual priests.

Finally, in discussing the secularisation of the method of disposition, it is important to note that the responsibility for the disposal of the dead has gained a very practical, secular association. Jupp (1993 : 169) suggests that a factor in the trend from burial towards cremation was the transference of this responsibility from the church to the local government. This change has highlighted aspects of cost\(^2\), and has also meant that the ritual implications of these procedures have become secularised. For example burials and gravesites are administered at the convenience of the council (see ‘Flowers’ section, pp. 40 footnote 2). During the period when the city council in the research area underwent a reorganisation, the cemetery services section - including the crematorium - became a business unit. This posed two problems; the sensitivity associated with the council making a profit from this sector, and the actual calculation of cost. However now this sector is operated as a service unit, making no profits, recognising that it has a “monopoly”, and emphasis is on dealing with interments with “reverence and respect” (Inf. 22).

\(^1\) This may also reflect the trend towards ‘one place’ funerals. Inf. 2 mentioned that only once in his memory has someone asked to view the cremation.

\(^2\) This is borne out in the research area, where a council note (Inf. 22) states that “the overall market strategy is one of quiet and unobtrusive encouragement for the bereaved to honour the dead by utilising the crematorium services”.
However, the ritual importance and sacredness associated with the body of the deceased, even in the new age of secularism, highlights the fact that cremation and burial are not merely methods of discarding what could be seen as an obsolete object. Yet the construction of these rituals also reflects conflicting ideas of finality and the life-affirming denial of death.

**REFRESHMENTS:**

The taking of refreshments is one final action associated with the funeral which has ritual significance, and deserves a brief mention.

At the end of most funeral services, food and drink are offered in some form, whether it be merely a cup of tea or a full meal and alcohol, provided for example in the 'wake'. This action is in contrast to the formality of the funeral service, and the venue has traditionally been a private home, but the trend towards the one place service and the popularity of the funeral chapel has changed this. Inf. 14 notes that there is a tendency to lose people if they have to travel to a different location.

The origins of the funeral feast possibly did have a deeper spiritual significance. Puckle (1926: 99-102) suggests an ancient link to cannibalism, in the idea that by eating the flesh of the deceased, some elements of his/her virtues would be transferred. Puckle also describes how offerings left at gravesides for the “sustenance of the dead in their spiritual state” was later distributed to priests.

Though it would be tempting to link the Christian communion to the use of food in the funeral ritual, in contrast Goody (1993: 84-85) suggests that offerings of any sort made to the deceased rather than to God were prohibited, though this was a difficult action for the early church to eliminate and

... those who claim they are offering a feast to those who they hold dear, devour it themselves; that which pleases their bellies they attribute to charity. (Migne cited Goody 1993: 85)

Therefore there is only a tenuous link with the modern use of food and any historical practice. It seems rather that the taking of a meal as a group has more association to the idea of communality or reaffirming social bonds and
the reintegration of the group. When seen in a secular light, food and drink are a prominent part of many ceremonial and informal social occasions, as a universal form of hospitality. However in the funeral context, serving food and especially the ‘cup of tea’ helps, as Walter (1990: 131) points out, to bring back a sense of reality and ordinary life. He goes on to suggest (1990: 152) that the sharing of food at the funeral expresses “human solidarity” and is a “supportive communal activity”, a notion which I suggest exemplifies the caring nature and reassertion of the group in a time of social rupture, yet also the necessity to quickly absolve ourselves of the mood of death. Walter (1990: 153) also suggests that this small action, after the emotion of the service, incorporates the idea of the loss into a community awareness as

When people eat together they talk. They may not know what to say, they may be embarrassed, but they talk. About the funeral, about the departed ... people begin to renegotiate their relationships with one another, they reconsider their own mortality.

Therefore the role of the funeral refreshment is as a marker of the communities passage back to normal life and interaction, with reinforced awareness of supportive ties, but also the acknowledgment - in a more personal and informal sense than the service - of the life and death of the deceased.

In conclusion to this chapter, two important things must be acknowledged. Firstly, that the underlying meanings ascribed here to ritual objects and actions may not be conscious in the minds of mourners, who will make decisions about the alternatives offered for many various reasons; cost, tradition, what they perceive the deceased’s wishes were, what they see as ‘right’, and sentiment to name but a few reasons. What I wish to highlight by giving the above analysis is that inherent and obvious, and secular and sacred images in the funeral may cause very contradictory messages.

This leads to the second point. The last twenty years have seen a rapid change in the funeral ritual (Inf. 2) and a lot of literature dealing with death and grief therapy has arisen which has opened up the subject and changed the way people cope with the loss. My contention is that the origin of many of our funeral customs was as a means of expressing sorrow and grief in an outward yet passive way. Now in our ‘enlightened’ and secular age where
we understand the process of grief on a psychological level, these rituals may have lost their meaning, or their meanings have become veiled. Our material, technical and medical developments may have overtaken the change in our social belief systems. It may also be that ritual actions and objects that were direct representations of death - such as the predominance of black and the prolonged mourning period - have been discarded in favour of euphemistic symbols to better avoid or deny death.

The actions and agency of the funeral when grouped and viewed in context, illustrate the whole sensory aspect of the ritual. Images of life and non-decay are associated with emotive and practical elements throughout the modern funeral, and the implications of this will be discussed in detail later in this paper.
CHAPTER 4

RITUAL LANGUAGE

Far beyond this world of changes, far beyond this world of care; we shall find our missing loved ones, in our mansions fair. Sleep Father sleep, thy task is o'er; Here all thy troubles cease; Upon a still and echoless shore, thou art enshrined in peace.

Sanderson family headstone 1867

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lords anointed temple, and stole thence
The life o' the building.

"Macbeth" William Shakespeare

Literal, orthodox and symbolic meanings are derived from the multitude of material media within the funeral ritual. However, the unequivocal messages imparted by the use of words in liturgy and their close relationship with the other ritual elements, creates a more explicit communication of ideas, social values and emotional mood.

The apparent authority given to the spoken word in the ritual setting can transgress the temporality and periphery of other actions and objects in the ritual, and in the words of Rappaport (1979: 200),

In their invariance the words of the liturgy implicitly assimilate the current event into an ancient or ageless category of events, something that speechless gesture, mortal substance, or expendable objects alone cannot.

In the case of the funeral, the importance of "language to the performance of the rite" (Grimes 1982: 27) is paramount\(^1\), and an analysis of the funeral liturgy, I suggest, will uncover many of the social meanings ascribed to death, both in the present and in the past.

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\(^1\) This can be shown practically in the funeral as Inf. 10 asserted that the hardest funeral to do is one where there is very little to say.
Language and the use of rhetorical devices, allows us to conceptualise and categorise the world and our experiences and behaviour in it, in the form of allegorical yet highly descriptive terms. These may then in turn influence our behaviour and our understanding of our behaviour - as Goffman (1971: 22) suggests

... it is on the basis of this initial information that the individual starts to define the situation and starts to build up lines of responsive action

and so will project a definition of the situation (1971:20). Word then can influence deed. Similarly, in a post-modern idiom, an image is made and then turned into an object, which can then influence the object or being that made it.

In this vein, the liturgy of the funeral and its images have a dramaturgical importance as well as a communicative role. As Austin (1962: 5) explains,

... the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as saying something...

and the application of saying a word or a phrase, which Austin labels "performatives" (1962: 12) can be different than the symbolic meaning of saying it.

The mechanism that imparts authority to the liturgy and makes it "explicit" and "weighty", however, is the ritual itself (Rappaport 1979:190), though

... the power is in the 'words' even though the words only become effective if uttered in a very special context of other action.

This is illustrated in the contemporary funeral ritual, as within the service proper, action and physical performance is minimal, while oral, spoken presentation is the focus. Performance of the liturgy outside of the ritual arena and the circumstances of death, would countermand its symbolic meaning. This does not explain, however, how ritual liturgy gains its power. The mere performance of a liturgy or the uttering of a statement does not inherently imbue the declaration with ceremonial or sacred importance. This will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.
It is especially the symbolic meanings and the sacred or ritualised images communicated in the funeral ritual which can give clues as to the underlying social values surrounding death, and a discussion of the differences between the rhetoric of religious and non-religious liturgy may show how these principles are changing.

Goffman's (1971) idea of the dramaturgical nature of ritual can also be seen in funeral language, shown in the implicit use of "front stage" language; for example, rhetorical and dramatic figures, and euphemisms. By discussing these elements of the contemporary New Zealand funeral, the influence of language on attitude, and alternately of social values on discourse and communication, can be ascertained.

It is important to note here that although rituals are inherently formalised and have distinct "liturgical orders" (Rappaport 1979: 175-176) - such general patterns of Christian and non-religious liturgy will be discussed later - there are many variables within these categories. A nominal Christian service for example uses both Christian and non-religious language forms. Other significant variables include the attitudes of the officiant, the congregation, and the officiant's perception of the values of the congregatior, plus the age, sex and gender of the deceased, all of which will affect the tone of the service. No two funerals correspond exactly, however as mentioned before, there are formulas and precepts which allow meaningful analysis.

The material for this section has come from actual funeral services kindly provided by both Christian ministers and celebrants, and from 'funeral kits' or 'funeral rituals' and other publications which give examples and advice on funeral liturgy. In the following examples, the names of the deceased have been changed.

**Christian Liturgy**

The form and style (Grimes 1982: 27) that the Christian funeral takes has interesting effects on the tone of the service and the messages communicated.

Of particular importance to the religious funeral service is the use of an "expository" (Grimes 1982: 27) language form. In this way the service
utilises extracts from biblical text, which explain or interpret the word of God, Christian messages and the meanings of death and life. The application of this can be seen in the following extracts.

'Blessed are those of a gentle spirit: for they shall have the Earth for their possession'. In life there are many who receive great honours and whose contribution to society is marked publicly. There are others whose contribution is just as significant but are seldom recognised until such times as this. I feel this is so sad. Mary was a gentle woman of her generation whose life was a service to her husband, to her family; and to the friends about her. (Inf. 9)

Out of love for the world God gave his only Son [so] that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Therefore, although we have been parted from Mary, for a time, none of us need ever be separated from the love of God. (Inf. 9)

Christian liturgy may also have a “narrative” (Grimes 1982 : 27) form and such language within the service tends to be less formal or doctrinal than other funeral and biblical vernacular, but in some senses is also expository. Narrative occurs more frequently now than in the past and forms a large part of the service in two distinct ways.

Sermons articulate and describe what death means for Christians, bearing witness to the Christian hope, and reminding the congregation of words of comfort. In this way the funeral sermon is not technically used as a teaching mechanism by most ministers, though it will become so if the ideas are unfamiliar (Inf. 3). This is possibly the reason why sermons are rarely used in nominal funerals1.

Eulogies (which in the Greek means ‘good words’ Inf. 3) tell the story of the deceased’s life incorporating a chronological life history, and the attributes, likes and dislikes of the person. Eulogies celebrate the deceased but also contain an element of the Christian hope. Expository forms are often tied to the end of the eulogy or sermon in the form of bible readings, which help to explain both the message behind the passage and also the relation of the

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1 A nominal service is one which is not strictly christian and not wholly non-religious, but an in-between mixture of both.
deceased to the church and Christian life (Inf. 3). These passages may also be used to give the impression that something positive can be seen in everything - that even to the appearance of the contrary, the deceased's life was 'good'.

Similarly, single incidents of a personal or biographical nature concerning the deceased give the funeral an "anecdotal" (Grimes 1982: 27) tone. Short incidents concerning the history and attributes of the deceased are included in services, and are again used to show how the person related to the wider church and Christian life (Inf. 9). Anecdotes can be found in biblical passages, as text, in the form of parables, can contain aspects of anecdotal language as underlying Christian messages are veiled within stories and the relation of events. For example Inf. 8 used the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in a service, to show how unconditional belief in Jesus will be rewarded, and to impress the message of the hope of the resurrection.

In terms of style, Christian funeral language has elements of "poetry", "creed", and "dialogue" (Grimes 1982: 27). There is no use made however, of styles such as "invective", or "incantation" (Grimes 1982: 27), though in the case of the latter, definitions and opinions of what constitutes the "magical power" of words and the importance of ritual recitation and repetition will vary (see Tambiah 1968: 182 ff). Invocation is used however, and is a form of apostrophe, or a direct address to an abstract or absent entity or person. In the case of the funeral, God and Jesus are addressed for guidance and on behalf of the deceased.\(^1\)

The use of poetry again can be seen in relation to biblical text, and in the personal account of the deceased. Psalms and prayers have a poetical and in some instances, song-like pattern, being composed in verse form using heightened language and words chosen for suggestive power. The elements of rhetoric within the Christian service as a whole, and the bible as a literary work, in unrhymed verse form, create an intensity of language and therefore images which have a poetic quality. A discussion of such imagery

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\(^1\) The fact that the deceased is addressed in the funeral as if present in life rather absent in death may also bear witness to our modern attitude to death. This relates to the 'liminal' period - for example, when do we finally mark the change in the status of the deceased from physical to a spiritual? - this will be discussed in Chapter Six.
will follow. An example of poetic style is Psalm 23 (Methodist Church Of New Zealand: 7) which is often used in funerals:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
and restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil,
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the
Lord forever.

The Nicene and Apostles creeds, are statements of Christian faith and principles, which used to be particularly important to the religious funeral. These creeds bear witness to the Christian hope and focus on the person of God, and will today only be found in a very religious funeral service; for example the Evangelical church uses creeds while the Liberal church does not (Inf. 3).

The principle behind the use of creeds to a large extent can exemplify the difference between the Christian and non-religious funeral. Using creeds and dogma, means that attitudes and doctrines are set out as rule or law which makes them explicit, and whether used to reinforce Christian values or merely as comfortable familiarity, they are very doctrinal.

“Dialogue” (Grimes 1982: 27) also plays a small part in the religious service. In Christian worship and especially in the Catholic Mass there is a dialogue
between the priest and the congregation; a set discourse of statement and response between the two which provides a sense of participation and inclusion for the mourners. The use of a fixed order of statement/question and response comes from a Jewish rather than New Testament custom. ‘Secular’ schooling and the rote learning of prayers, used to be carried out by a system of question and response or dialogue between teacher and pupil, and in church services in Old and New Testament times, there was more participation by lay people in this form of dialogue.

A third element which distinguishes religious from non-religious funeral liturgy is that it tends to “depend more on written texts” (Grimes 1982: 27). The Christian doctrine is fundamentally based on the Scripture of the bible, and all messages therefore, originate from this particular mode of expression. Does this, then, have any relevance to the sacredness or power of the Christian ‘word’?

Tambiah (1968: 182-184) has the belief that some characteristics of the Christian language have “brought about the elevation of the word as supremely endowed with mystical power”. Such an assertion is based on the divine creation of the word which gives ritual language a sacred element. Tambiah (1968: 183) outlines three basic principles to demonstrate this:

The first idea is that God created the world by assigning names. ‘And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night’ ... The bible also asserts the directly opposite idea that after God had created heaven and earth, man assumed the naming function through speech ... There is yet a third character assigned to the word: that it is an entity which is able to act and produce effects in its own right.

It is this final element, and the fact that God may make direct revelation through the use of words, that has particular application to the power of the Christian liturgy. Here the idea of word having a performative effect on action becomes readily apparent. The ‘word’ of God though less substantial, is more tangible than material symbols, and the fact that it has a symbolic and directional effect on human belief and behaviour itself shows the powerful weight of the Christian idiom. The use of liturgy by officiants of the church then is more than just the expression of pre-ordained phrases,
but is the transference of power and powerful messages from the ‘magical’ source, or God, to the congregation through words. For example,

The opening sentences of the gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”; John 1:14: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”; Revelation 19:12-13: “... And his name is called the Word of God” ... Psalm 33:9: “He spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast”... (Burke 1961 : 11)

Burke (1961 : 13) agrees with the Encyclopaedia Britannica in dealing with “Logos” or the incarnate form of the Divine Word, not as the “reason” of God, but as the “voice” with which the Father speaks in the revelation to mankind [sic]. This style of rhetoric can be contrasted to the more narrative and conversational language used, for example, in the sermon, where words are not canonised, so are less powerful. Scripture on the other hand, is deified or canonised (judged authentic) because it is seen to be guided by the holy spirit, and in this way makes human language ‘speak’ or carry God’s message and consciousness (Inf. 3).

Tambiah (1968 : 182) further reasons that “writing per se ... by giving a physical existence to words, may lend added veneration to written texts”. In this vein, though it may appear self-evident, it is important to note that the bible, as a prescription for all Christian ritual, including funerals, has been written as a ‘text’ and passed down through many generations in the same form as a material language. Therefore messages may remain relatively fixed, though interpretation of meaning will vary widely. The physical permanence of words and messages in the epitaph of the headstone may be seen in a similar light - the final word of a temporal life.

1 I have been advised by Inf. 3 that to get into a detailed discussion of the epistemology of funeral language and where the ‘power’ or divinity of the ‘word’ comes from would be as fraught with danger as it would be lengthy. However it seems necessary to say that in the theological view the ‘power’ can only come primarily from God and human language as with human behaviour and all other aspects of life are created and commanded by God to reveal God. Therefore language cannot be seen as a priori, the namer having ultimate control over the subject.

2 It seems both Tambiah and Burke here have fallen into the Greek school of thought which is based on a dualism that the Eastern school does not take and this is the subject of huge debate (Inf. 3).

3 It is also interesting to note here that the Ten Commandments were written in stone and venerated as sacred objects - showing again how the ‘word’ can be sacred.
The liturgical structure of the funeral service has an additional impact on its ritual and emotive quality. Structure to a ritual is important as a conditioning formula to give order and specific emphasis to meanings. In this way, separate parts gain a unity and flow which in itself perpetuates meaning. The funeral liturgy, though highly variable in separate performance, has a generally established structure which, if altered would make the performance non-sensical. This faculty which Rappaport (1979 : 179) calls “canonical” imparts messages with a “regularity, propriety, and apparent durability and immutability” which does not always reflect the immediate state of the participants.

The customary organisation of the Christian funeral is well set out in funeral handbooks and ‘funeral kits’ supplied by many church organisations. The following examples of funeral structure from the Catholic, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches are only those of the funeral itself not the rituals carried out at the time of death or blessings previous to the funeral proper (ie. vigil for the deceased or the blessing and re-hallowing of the deceased’s house Inf. 8).

The Catholic Mass for the dead proceeds as follows (Flynn 1976);

Rite at the entrance of the church
Greeting - opening sentences, for example, statement and response
Liturgy of the word - three readings from the gospel
Homily
Prayer of intercession / of the faithful
Celebration of the Eucharist
Commendation and final farewell - litany and prayer (this may be carried out at the grave side; in this case the funeral rites are concluded with the rite of commendation)
Psalm
At the grave or tomb;
Blessing the grave or tomb
Prayer
Reading from the Scripture
Responsorial psalm
Prayer
Lord’s prayer
There appears to be fewer alternatives in the structure of the Catholic service and all options are clearly set out. A homily in this sense is a brief sermon or explanation on the Catholic view of death, and no form of funeral eulogy is added. Catholic liturgy seems also to be more formalised and continues so throughout the rite.

The Presbyterian liturgy is generally be structured as follows (FCANZ);

Welcome
Opening sentences - Scripture passages
Hymn
Psalm
Prayer of comfort
Lord’s prayer
Reading(s)
Sermon or words of comfort
Creed
Prayers of thanksgiving / intercession
Hymn
Prayers before committal
Committal
Dismissal
Benediction

In most Protestant funerals now, a life history of the deceased is included and is often placed between the opening sentences and the first hymn, while aspects of the person’s life and character are often continued throughout the service, blending the whole rite together (Infs. 3 and 9). Often the prayer of comfort will be incorporated with the thanksgiving and intercessionary prayer and the first hymn is one which is most likely to be omitted.

The Anglican rite has a similar structure (Church of the Province of N.Z. 1989);

Greeting
The love of God - creed
Prayer of faith and hope - the Lord’s prayer
Ministry of the word
Psalms
As explained in the above ritual, "phrases which are inappropriate in particular circumstances may be omitted or varied at the discretion of the minister". The Anglican funeral may also use a "Liturgy of the Eucharist". The Anglican church seem to follow written liturgy more closely than other Protestant churches, which often develop their own styles - if not written then certainly unwritten (Inf. 3).

The arrangement of the standard elements of the Christian funeral as shown above are essential to the communication of meaning and understanding of the doctrine. Beyond this, there is a more expressive use of structure which gives the funeral liturgy a dramatic and emotionally directional flow. Burke (1961: 38), when speaking of linguistic "dramatism", notes the importance of "language as a species of action: 'symbolic action'". Such a notion of the physical movement of words and meanings is applicable to the Christian funeral.

This second, more indirect and internal structure of language, uses emotional sensation to create a pattern which is often similar to dramatic constructions such as myths, storylines and fictional accounts, and to heightened human experiences such as dreams. Tambiah (1979: 140-141) sees

... ritual as performative ... as a dramatic actualization whose distinctive structure ... has something to do with the production of a sense of heightened and intensified and fused communication.

Tambiah goes on to suggest the affect that this has on emotion - effects which seem relevant to the Christian ritual;
... transportation into a supra-normal, transcendental ... 'numinous', or altered state of consciousness, or as a euphoric communion with one's fellow beings.

The feeling of such spiritual uplift provoked by the symbolic and emotive language of the Christian funeral liturgy (and of course the entire ritual atmosphere and setting), I would suggest, is partly the result of this structuring of emotion in a dramatic and theatrical pattern\(^1\).

This structured flow, is created by the rise and fall of liturgical tension within the service. Episodes of high tension correspond to the use of ritualised sacred words such as creeds, psalms, Scripture and prayer, while low tension 'troughs' relate to more secular and narrative language such as the welcome, the life story or homily, the sermon, and hymns the role of which will be discussed later. Some of the elements of style and form discussed above, it seems, are contrasted in this sense with the formalised and powerful diction of the bible; for example invocation and incantation, poetry and creeds, are set off against narrative, anecdote and expository language.

The result looks something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening Sentences</th>
<th>Scripture Psalm Prayer</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Committal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Life Story</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 2: Structure Of Tension In Christian Funeral Liturgy.](image)

This construction is not necessarily unconscious. For example Inf. 9 puts practical messages first in his funeral service to soften primary emotional

\(^1\) I do not suggest that this will totally veil thoughts of one's own mortality - though the whole point of constructing the liturgy in this way, may be in some senses to achieve just that.
tension, and elements of high tension are included after the family have participated, to ease their involvement. The committal, though used as the formal marker of the conclusion of the service (Inf. 3 and 15), ends the ritual on a high emotional note. Though the life story or eulogy has been in this sense of language, regarded as low tension, the physical emotion of this time is high; Inf. 3 regards the welcome, eulogy and committal as the parts that often remain foremost in people’s minds, and he further contends that people ‘go deaf’ at funerals, taking little notice of the formal liturgy.

The words and images used in the Christian funeral fall into three sections. The deceased person is spoken of primarily at the beginning and at the end, while God and Christian doctrine are emphasised in the middle segment. Within this pattern, the beginning and end use less metaphoric language and deal with the practicalities of the situation, while in the middle section, more emotive terms are employed. For example, at the beginning, there is a reflection on expectations of the service, an explicit statement of who has died, explanations of why we are at the service, and the life history of the person (Inf. 9). For example

On behalf of ... [the] family, I would like to welcome you to this - the Church that Mary worshipped and served for many many years. In the final hymn we will take Mary’s body out to the hearse and proceed to the ... Cemetery for the committal. (Inf. 9)

The family of Christ welcome to this service where we have come together to remember before God the life of Sally Stuart. (Inf. 9)

We are here today to remember ____ , to express our grief at his/her loss, to comfort those who were close to him/her, and to rekindle our faith and hope. (Methodist Church of New Zealand)

Then secondly, more figurative biblical images heighten the emotional message. Reference to the love of God and His omnipotence, hope, peace, prayers for Gods help, commendation and forgiveness achieve this, and are often related to the spiritual attributes of the deceased. For example,

God our comforter, you are a refuge and strength for us, a helper close at hand in times of distress. Help us so to hear the words of our faith that our fear is
dispelled, our loneliness eased and our hope re-awakened. May your Holy Spirit
lift us above our natural sorrow, to the peace and light of your constant love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Inf. 9, my emphasis)

Lord, give us all we need for rejoicing; all we need for hope and peace. Be with us
here and everywhere; be present for us now and always fulfiller of our past,
strength of our present, and promise of our future, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen. (PCANZ, my emphasis)

And finally the tension descends back to a more physical description of
death, the end of life and the disposal of the body. For example,

In now committing the body of _____ to God (to this hallowed ground), we do so
with deep reverence, for that body during life was a temple of a unique and
beloved personality. That body now returns to the earth from which it came; but
that spirit lives on. (PCANZ, my emphasis).

Since the earthly life of Viv Collins Our Sister, Mother, Grandmother and friend
has come to an end, we commit her body to be buried, Earth to earth, ashes to
ashes, dust to dust... (Inf. 9; my emphasis)

The sense, shape, and flow lent to the service by the structure of liturgical
tension, and its relation to similar patterns in other rituals and in every day
social and biological life, may also give the ritual a sense of the interminable
passage of time. This could possibly reinforce the idea of the orderly passage
of history, of generations coming and going and how every life fits into this.
Therefore, in the case of both a long life fully lived, or a short life and tragic
death, some sense of order and social continuity may be brought back to the
situation.

The similarity of the emotional pattern of the funeral to other human social
events may also accord the ritual a sense of familiarity which is important to
the acceptance of ideas and images, as well as imparting a sense of well-being
to mourners.

Discussion of Christian liturgy so far, has centred on the way images and
meanings are portrayed by the use of structural and organisational
instruments. While these give important insights as to the attitudes
underlying the funeral ritual, a discussion of the actual images portrayed
will show how we conceptualise and categorise death, and therefore why we behave in a specific ritualised manner.

The ‘images’ and ‘meanings’ I wish to discuss are the indirect, invocative messages surrounding death that are transmitted and reinforced, not by open literal narration, but by figurative rhetorical expressions such as metaphors and figures of speech. These forms are important because though used in common secular language, they are employed in the funeral liturgy to produce special effects. This is achieved by specifically departing from literal language arrangements and changing the meanings in words. Such effects, consequently, influence how we think and act in the ritual setting, though this may differ to the actual opinion of the receiver, or from one context to another (Burke 1962: 578).

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, or the “systematisation of natural eloquence” (Vickers 1988: 1). Burke (1962: 567-570), identifies the function of rhetorical language “as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbol” (my emphasis). He sees the importance of rhetoric as such, as “essentially the realism of the act”. So it is not so much the words themselves but the meanings they give to the performance of the ritual - the messages of life and death in the case of the funeral - rather than meanings outside of this context, that are important. They then serve to conceptualise an unknown event such as death, and the abstract Christian meanings of life after death for example, by categorising them into behavioural experience; this will become more apparent later.

The following overview of the images within the Christian funeral, will include an analysis of figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, analogies, metonyms and euphemisms. However to save engaging in a heavily detailed literary analysis, I will refer to these inclusively as “metaphorical concepts” (from Johnson and Lakoff 1980: 7 ff). The important principle behind my use of this term is that a word or concept which denotes one thing or quality, is applied in the form of an identity to another (Abrams 1981: 63).

While some metaphorical concepts may merely conjure up images, others have multiple meanings, and accordingly, some are more direct than others. Many metaphors in the funeral are inter-related and share meanings. The
following discussion will identify the main metaphorical concepts in the
funeral liturgy, while the symbolism will be dealt with in a later comparison
of Christian and non-religious services.

The first image identifiable is that of celebration and honour for the dead
and for God. For example;

... we are here to give thanks ... and to pay our last respects ... (PCANZ : 2)

Bless the Lord, my soul, bless his holy name ... (Psalm 103; PCANZ : 6)

As we honour him/her ... (PCANZ : 15)

All honour and glory be given to you, Lord ... (PCANZ : 18)

The second image is that of time and beginnings and endings; this is also
relevant to the tense of the funeral.

... death will cease to exist; there will be an end to mourning ... (PCANZ : 18)

... that the grave is no end ... (PCANZ : 19)

... into your eternal presence ... (PCANZ : 19)

Spare us the selfishness of living in the past. Teach us to live our lives in the
present and for the future (PCANZ : 19)

The above concept also relates to the next which is of the temporal,
ephemeral nature of the human life;

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength
they be fourscore years, yet this is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon
cut off, and we fly away. (Ps. xc.; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 156)

Man that is born of woman is of few days ... (Job xiv. 1-13; Church Worship Ass.
1909 : 153)

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and
then vaniseth away. (James iv. 14; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 155)
Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. (Inf. 9).

Also related to time are the images of light, and the day and night; for example sun images from the Catholic Rites (Flynn 1976), "radiance of eternal light" "rising" and ...

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened ... (Eccl. xii. 1-7; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 157)

In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down ... (Ps. xc. Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 156)

Through the darkness of our sorrow ... (PCANZ : 9)

Next, the images of power and omnipotence can be identified;

Who knoweth the power of Thine anger ... (Ps. xc.; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 156)

The Lord, the everlasting God, creator of the wide world ... (Isiah 40; 28-31; Methodist Church NZ : 21)

... we reach into your immense greatness for the power that will strengthen us ...

(PCANZ : 9)

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. (The Lord's Prayer; PCANZ : 11)

... give us ... an assurance of your love and power ... (Inf. 9)

Related to this is the concept of kingship;

... crown of glory ... (Church Worship Ass. 1909 ; 153)

The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. (Ps. cii. 1-12; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 159)

... He shall have delivered up the kingdom of God ... (1 Cor. xv. 20-28; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 162)
The Lord has fixed his throne in the heavens, his empire is over all. (Psalm 103; PCANZ: 6)

... His servants will worship Him ... (Revelations 21: 3-5; Methodist Church NZ : 28)

To reinforce images of battle, words such as “triumphant” and “trespass” (PCANZ) “salvation” and repetition of the word “enemies” (The Church of the Provinces of NZ 1989)

His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. (Ps. xci; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 160)

... He is my refuge and my fortress ... (Ps. xci.; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 160)

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. xv. 20-28; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 162)

... you stretch out your hand against the fury of my enemies ... (Psalm 138; Methodist Church NZ : 17)

Also related to this image is the concept of stability;

For I am certain of this; neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 37-39; Methodist Church Of NZ: 28)

You are a refuge and strength for us. .... (PCANZ : 8)

Let your peace support us, here and everywhere ... (PCANZ : 9)

There is much use made of opposites in prayers (PCANZ);

Loneliness          Peace
Fears               Comfort
Death               Love
Trouble             Refuge
Doubt               Certainty
Darkness            Light
Sorrow              Power
Loss  Strength
Evil  Courage
Mourning  Hope
Pain  Triumphant
Despair  Joy

These are used to show the trials of this life as opposed to the better life after death - a transition or movement from bad to good;

Lord, help us to see death for what it really is; the end of poverty and the beginning of riches, the end of frustration and the beginning of fulfilment, the end of fear and the begging of tranquillity, the end of pain and the beginning of joy, the end of weakness and the beginning of strength. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (PCANZ: 24)

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption ... (1 Cor. xv. 42-58; Church Worship Ass. 1909: 163)

... he is more alive than he ever was before, because every tear is past, every infirmity of our fragile humanity ... (Inf. 8)

... in forgiving all your offences, in curing all your diseases, in redeeming your life from the pit, in crowning you with love and tenderness, in filling your years with prosperity ... (Psalm 103; PCANZ: 5)

... we thank you that for him/her death is past and pain is ended ... (PCANZ: 20)

... set us free from all that cripples so that the gift of life and love may heal and renew. (PCANZ: 21)

The message of the certainty of eternal life as opposed to death are reflected in passages such as;

What man is he that shall live and not see death ... it is appointed unto men once to die. (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 151)

Similarly, images of life after death make meanings explicit;
If we died with him, we shall live with him. (2 Timothy 2: 8-12; Methodist Church NZ: 23)

In truth, in very truth I tell you, the believer possesses eternal life. (Methodist Church NZ: 27)

... that in death we see life ... your love is life that no grave can destroy ... (PCANZ: 14)

Images of plants and animals also appear in text;

All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth ... (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 155)

He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down. (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 152)

He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 160)

... we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 168)

The Lord is my shepherd ... (PCANZ: 5)

... a grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies it bears a rich harvest. (Methodist Church NZ: 27)

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed ... (Inf. 9)

The body and bodily processes add meaning to images of death;

Man that is born of a woman ... (Job xiv. 1-13; Church Worship Ass. 1905: 153)

Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor. xv. 42-58; Church Worship Ass. 1909: 164)

If so that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (2 Cor. v. 1-10; Church Worship Ass. 1909: 165)

It is though who dist breathe into our bodies the breath of life. (Church Worship Ass. 1909: 169)
Make us know how frail we are ... (PCANZ : 28)

God will swallow up death forever. (Isaiah 25: 6-9; Methodist Church of NZ : 19)

Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. (Sirach 2:6; Flynn 1976 : 669)

Images of a house or physical place are apparent;

... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Ps. xxi.; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 159)

In my fathers house are many mansions ... (John xiv. 1-3; Church Worship Ass. 1909 : 168)

... grant us safe lodging ... (PCANZ : 27)

... today you shall be with me in Paradise. (Luke 23: 32-43; Methodist Church NZ : 26)

... the valley of the shadow of death ... (The Lord's Prayer; The Church Of The Provinces Of NZ 1989 : 813)

Finally, biblical text uses images of parental love;

God our Father, before whom generations rise and pass ... (PCANZ : 14)

Loving Father ... (PCANZ : 17)

Enfold him/her in the arms of your mercy. (The Church Of The Provinces Of NZ 1909 : 815)

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called Gods children. (Matthew 5; Inf. 9)

The opening quote of this chapter incorporates many of these images and concepts, and is an example of the way Christian funeral language has been used to communicate a particular family's view of death and its relation to life. A further analysis of these concepts will follow, however it is important
to highlight that in these metaphors, images of this world are used to describe the unknown world of 'life after death'.

From my experience, nominal funerals can have either a Christian or non-religious structure. Services include hymns and usually prayers, while the use of eulogy and life history as described above is more pronounced, and has a more central focus conforming to the modern non-religious style; for example, utilising anecdotal and narrative episodes relating to the deceased's life and attributes. Hymns and particularly the Lord's Prayer, are employed to convey the Christian meaning in a more subtle manner, and their use may in some cases be principally for familiarity and convention - thereby catering for those who are not regular churchgoers, but who feel the need for some Christian content.

Non-Religious Liturgy

The reference material used for this section comes again from actual funeral services provided by informants, and from Humanist Society literature on non-Christian services, though I will not deal with the latter in depth as I did not observe any such funerals in my field research. Again in each example names have been changed.

The "form" and "style" (Grimes 1982: 27) of the non-religious language is, by comparison to the Christian service, simplified and couched in fewer rhetorical figures.

Liturgy is very "narrative" and "anecdotal" and because there is no text to interpret or exclusive doctrine to explain, there is no use of "expository" language (Grimes 1982: 27). The entire focus of the service is on describing the deceased's life, his/her attributes, hobbies, accomplishments and the like. This is normally dealt with in the form of a narrative story with small, sometimes humorous anecdotes added. In both the nominal and non-religious cases, members of the congregation will contribute their memories of the deceased in this way.

Again in contrast to the Christian funeral, there is little use of mechanisms of style such as "creeds" "incantation" "dialogue" and "invective" (Grimes 1982: 27). There is, however, much use made of "poetry" (Grimes 1982: 27),
again often read by a member of the family or a friend, and this is in explicit poetic form. The committal can in most cases also be viewed as poetic; for example...

Andrew, today we say our last goodbyes to you. With sadness in our hearts we commit your body to be cremated, grateful for the life that you have lived and for all that your life has meant to us. We are glad that you lived. We are glad that we saw your face and felt the pressure of your hand. We cherish the memory of your words, your deeds and character. We cherish your friendship. We leave you in peace and bid you farewell. (Inf. 14)

And now that the time has come to part we commit the body of David Jackson to be buried here with his great-grandfather. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in grief at his death, but in gratitude for the life he shared with so many. May those who remain find comfort in your memories. May you find strength and support in your love for one another, and may you find peace in your hearts. (Inf. 10)

Poetry may be the only channel of emotive language in the non-religious funeral that is at all similar to Christian verse, as it uses figurative words and subtle inferences to convey emotions and values at the time of death. Poetry is also chosen to represent the deceased in the view of the reader, and so heightens not only the liturgy but the emotions in the form of memories. The following two examples may show how the former principle works, but can not fully represent the huge variety of poetry used in funerals today;

May the road rise to meet you; May the wind be always at your back; May the sun shine warm upon your face; May the rains fall softly upon your fields until we meet again; May God hold you in the hollow of his hand. (old Gaelic blessing; Inf. 14)

For what is death but to stand naked in the wind, and to melt in the sun? And what is it to cease breathing but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise to seek Nature unencumbered? Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance. (From “The Prophet” by Kahlil Gibran - Inf. 12)
In the non-religious funeral there is of course no dependency on "written text" (Grimes 1982: 27), or canonical doctrine that infers meaning simply in its use, which means that the service is less "formulaic" (Grimes 1982: 27). Where the Christian liturgy uses formalised images and doctrine, the non-religious service relies on secular vocabulary, and so there is a wider variety of language forms. Again rather than explaining or interpreting, the non-religious funeral tries to trigger memories and personal interpretation.

The structure therefore, is more open. Again, it must be emphasised that there is a huge range of variability between celebrants which closely corresponds to the individual situation; Infs. 10 and 15 both felt nervous about getting into a pattern and went into each situation with no preconceptions as to how to run the service, leaving it to the family to control; though it is often the case that people are not clear with what they want said (Inf. 10). On the other side of the coin, however, there are celebrants who have possibly three to four services organised for different circumstances, and will simply add names into the appropriate gaps in the liturgy, therefore shying away from personalised tributes and replacing these with meditations on life and death (Inf. 12). Notwithstanding this, there is a pattern which can be found in the non-religious funeral that again seems to conform to the flow of many ceremonial and dramatic performances.

Initially there is the welcome and introduction; this incorporates primarily the name of the deceased, and a statement that he/she has died, and the expectations of the funeral; for example,

We have met together today to remember with pleasure Hamish Denry's life; to mourn his recent ill health and his death; to support each other with our shared grief and sympathy; and finally to say farewell to Hamish. (Inf. 10)

Kinship associations are also important in this part of the service as are statements of love and respect for the deceased;

David Thomas was a loved husband and brother, the father and father-in-law of his four children, and loved by his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (Inf. 10)
Amy’s sudden death has shocked us deeply and demands that we pause and put aside our daily routine and unite in the common bond of love and respect for her. (Inf. 14)

Messages here deal more with the realities and emotions concerning death, its social impact, and imminence.

Secondly a reading, a poem or hymn/song may be included, though it is certainly not mandatory. This often lifts and heightens the tone of the language with slightly more figurative and emotive images.

Then comes the tribute to, or the life history of the deceased. Corresponding to the Christian service the non-religious eulogy is very “narrative” (Grimes 1982: 27) and though using literal language, it can be highly emotional. It reflects what sort of person the deceased was and acknowledges his/her attributes (Inf. 10). Often short anecdotes of the deceased’s life will be related by family and friends.

Thirdly there will be a reading, poem, song/hymn, or period of silent reflection, and this is often the point at which the audience are most likely to participate. Again language becomes slightly more figurative and rhetorical and lends an air of formality to the ritual.

Finally the celebrant will make concluding remarks summing up the theme of the funeral and will then give the committal. These phrases are very figurative and leave the service on a note of high tension. Again, words carry a sense of realism and finality, and emphasise the emotions surrounding death and the deceased’s relationship to the group of people mourning him/her, and to wider society.

At this moment let us grieve for Terry. Let us turn our eyes inward to ourselves and acknowledge the feelings and emotions that are with us ... As we accept life, so we shall accept death, as one of the unchanging laws of nature ... Each persons death is part of our own death, for we share in a common humanity ... We commit the body of Terry to the elements ... And we bid him farewell. (Inf. 15)

Above all, let us not dwell on what we have lost, but rather remember all we have enjoyed, all that has enriched our lives, all that we shared with Allen. (Inf. 14)
Eleanor Baxter, now that your life has come to an end, we say our last farewells to you and commit your body to be buried—earth to earth, dust to dust. Our memories will be a living memorial to you and the love we shared with you will live on, in our hearts, for as long as our lives last. (Inf. 10).

The linguistic tension then, in the non-religious service has a structure which looks something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcome</th>
<th>Hymn/song</th>
<th>Tribute</th>
<th>Hymn/Song</th>
<th>Closing</th>
<th>Committal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Poem, Reading</td>
<td>Eulogy</td>
<td>Poem, Reading</td>
<td>sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Structure Of Tension In Non-religious Funeral Liturgy.

The words used in the non-religious service do, however, follow a similar pattern to the Christian service in that realistic and literal terms are used at the beginning and end, while figurative language is concentrated in the middle. The tense of the liturgy seems to fit into this structure also, as in the beginning and end, predominantly present and future tenses are used, speaking of the immediate effect of the death and its future impacts; while the middle section deals with the past in the form of the deceased's life and past associations of the mourners to that life.

The images and meanings portrayed in the non-religious funeral are on the whole, less figurative than the Christian method of rhetoric. Apart from the Humanist services, outlined by Barnes (1991) and Lamont (1954) very few metaphorical concepts are used at all. The humanist funeral seems to be closer to the Christian service, and similar themes of light, time/seasons/cycles, and place are used. Differences do arise in meditations on the meaning of life and death, where metaphors and the symbolism of nature and natural law, and the kinship and unity of humankind in a non-Christian sense appear. It is interesting that the humanist funeral, though not being Christian in any theological sense utilises many quotes and
passages from the Bible, apparently because it is seen as a good, well written book (Inf. 3).

The non-religious services that I observed, however, used very few rhetorical figures. The themes in the main text, discounting the poetry, songs and committal, are in general very explicit and literal and deal directly with the ideas that Christian rhetoric veils. Such themes include:

**Celebrating and honouring the life of the deceased and his/her influence in the community;**

*We are here today to honour her ... (Inf. 14)*

*Amy Parker, we honour you today for the life you have lived so faithfully ... (Inf. 10)*

*You have asked me here to lead a brief family service toady to celebrate the life of Richard Henry Sutherland ... (Inf. 10).*

**Emotions are openly spoken of;**

*Let us accept that this is a time of many emotions, all right and proper at this time. Grief, sadness, a sense of great loss. Anger - how dare this happen. Guilt ... Accepting the need to talk, not only of happy things, the laughter, but of the difficulties, the struggles and the frustrations. Be aware of the weariness of spirit and take time to be still. (Inf. 5)*

**Related words such as: “grief ... comfort ... support ... pain ... joy... calmness ... delight” (Inf. 10) often appear. Similar to the Christian rhetoric is the movement from bad to good ...**

*... out of anguish and despair, love and trust come in new forms. (Inf. 10)*

*Above all, let us not dwell on what we have lost, but remember all we have enjoyed, all that has enriched our lives, all that we shared with Ian. (Inf. 14)*

*... and the contrast of good times and bad within the eulogy; wartime, suicide, illness and pain go along side good memories, love and happiness.*
Memories are used in the non-religious funeral to give a very secular view of life after death that is similar to the Humanist axiom, that “at death we are only survived by our genes and our lives influences” (Inf. 27).

May you find joy and comfort in your memories and peace in your heart ... grateful for the life that has been lived for all his life meant to us. (Inf. 15)

If we can profit from his example, if we can learn from his mistakes, if we can each try to live just a little better and more fully for having known him, this will give continuing purpose to his life and will be a living memorial. (Inf. 14)

If all of you keep in your hearts and minds forever your thoughts of Jack, and live a little better for having known him, then his life will not have been lived in vain. (Inf. 10)

The emphasis on kinship associations and the common bonds of the mourning group, give a sense of social unity to the non-religious funeral that is accomplished in the Christian observance, I would suggest, by reference to the family of the church, and the metaphor of parental love. Examples of kinship associations have been given above and other uses of this theme can be shown by;

Each person's death is part of our own death. For we share a common humanity, a common striving, a common life shared. (Inf. 15)

Death in a number of ways unites us all. Edward's death demands that we pause and put aside our daily routine and unite ourselves to share in the common bond of love and respect for him. (Inf. 14)

... to share pain, and sorrow and regret; and to gain strength from each other on this occasion which marks her death ... (Inf. 10)

Reference to time is also made in the non-religious service;

We are here today to mark the ending of a relationship ... (Inf. 14)

But while our time together will be short, its significance will not be lessened by the briefness of the occasion. (Inf. 10)
We in turn will build on the foundations she laid for those following now, and who will follow in the future. (Inf. 10)

... the short months that this family spent together, in time, can be transformed from today’s pain into a stage they can look back to with joy ... (Inf 10)

**Analysis Of Liturgy**

Now that the elements of the Christian and non-religious language have been identified, it will be interesting to show how these components are used to communicate social meanings of death, and to what extent each have influenced the other. What follows, therefore, is a comparison and contrast of the two forms and a description of how the language of each impacts on the integrated ritual.

The style and organisation of the funeral ritual in both forms of liturgy shows evidences of comparison and influence between the two. Christian liturgy has, in the last twenty years, taken a more relaxed form with respect to the eulogy and input of the mourners, which seems to have come from the influence of non-Christian alternatives (Inf. 2). Yet the non-religious service, while offering such new options, has maintained much of the ceremonial/ritual style of the traditional funeral, especially in the inclusion of a ‘committal’ and hymns/songs. There is still the emphasis on hope, peace and love in the modern lay-service, which could be seen as having roots in the Christian doctrine. These more traditional elements may also give the non-religious liturgy an air of authority, and therefore legitimacy (through familiarity). Rappaport (1979 : 211) suggests this in reference to liturgical invariance as,

> ... truthfulness, reliability, correctness, naturalness, and legitimacy are vested in conventions and conventional acts by their association with ultimate sacred postulates.

It is clear that the language forms, styles and images of the Christian and non-religious funerals are different, which will alter the manner of ritual disclosure - the Christian being more figurative and ‘sacred’ than the non-religious; however, difference in the transference of meaning goes beyond this. The non-religious language being more explicit, I would suggest, uses a
different channel of communication into the consciousness than the Christian. An idea suggested by Burke (1962: 608) seems to illustrate this: Burke differentiates between “image” and “poetic image”. The former in the “Kantian” sense as “perceived through the senses, and remembered or anticipated in the imagination”, and the latter which “stand for things that they never were or never will be” and are “built of identifications”.

I would characterise the non-religious vernacular as an “image” because meanings are explicit, and so require no interpretation, and are directed by obvious concepts into perception. This language is purposely constructed to stimulate the imagination; the exact words of the family are used to conjure concrete images of the deceased in the minds of the mourners (Infs. 10 and 14), and words and memories are used in a similar way to create the sense of awareness of the person in the mind. A clear example of this is:

I hope that the things you have told me about Regan will now be like a key that will unlock the door to your thoughts, and memories, and feelings for Regan and to what he meant to each of you. (Inf. 10)

Though the Christian liturgy could also be seen to work in the imagination, it seems to conform far more to the “poetic image”, as metaphorical concepts create analogies to literally unrelated things, which then require abstraction and to “discount it for the negative” (Burke 1961: 22), and so are simply identifying principles. The Christian liturgy in this sense, tends to articulate common emotions and images, in a veiled manner, expressing fixed meanings which are then identified with, rather than conjuring up these feelings in the imagination. The epitome of this may be that the Christian liturgy is derived from a theological doctrine which leads similar thinking people by example while the non-religious does not, and so must make the ritual apply to each individual on their own level.

How then, is death portrayed in the ritual language? There seems to be three main themes that emerge from the liturgy, of which both the
Christian and non-religious concepts conform to: themes of transition, life and security/assurance.¹

The first theme of transition has distinct links to Van Gennep’s theory of “rites of passage” (1960). This reflects the movement of not only the deceased, but the mourners into a more spiritual state (see Chapter Five), and also shows another aspect of the use of metaphors in the liturgy - especially Christian liturgy.

The term ‘transition’, as used here implies a form of movement which is revealed in both the use of metaphorical concepts and in the metaphors themselves. Fernandez (1977 : 104) suggests that,

... movement accomplished by metaphor is from the abstract, and inchoate in the subject to the more concrete, ostensive and easily graspable in the metaphoric predicate.

A common principle in many aspects of inquiry which Fernandez (1977 : 113) goes on to argue is that people undertake religious experience to achieve a better understanding of themselves and the world and to gain a better definition of their “inchoate selves”. Metaphor helps to achieve this because it

... is an image which when acted upon by ritual moves these feelings and object relationships in the desired direction. It provides apt definition. (Fernandez 1977:113)

Especially in the case of the funeral, something as abstract as death needs some form of concrete elucidation to provide understandable meaning. Therefore, we see this theme of movement or transition coming out in Christian language, and at a different level, the non-religious funeral service.

The Christian theme of transition basically highlights a movement from the body to the spirit. The application of metaphorical concepts such as plants

¹ It must be reiterated here that many of the concepts and images in the funeral language, especially in the Christian vernacular, are inter-related and have multiple meanings, therefore I acknowledge that this discussion may appear simplistic.
and time, implies the transition of the deceased to a spiritual form. For example the image of a plant growing to maturity and of the necessity of death before harvest, suggests such a spiritual movement. Similarly, the time is implied as finite in the physical body, and then changes to an eternal frame after death. The use of opposites within Biblical liturgy also shows movement from the body or earthly form, to the spirit by contrasting the imperfection of human life to the goodness and perfection of the life after death.

The non-religious liturgy also has themes of transition, but in a different form. The general pattern is to speak of a transition in the mourner’s lives from a physical relationship with the deceased in life, to interaction in the form of memories after death. Time is also used to show a movement from endings to beginnings, and kinship associations are used to identify the shift in the societal relationships following the death. Use is again made of opposites to show transition in the lives of the mourners especially in the form of emotions. The contrast between this and the Christian theme generally comes from the fact that the spiritual ‘state’ of the deceased is not alluded to, so there is very little reference to the ‘movement’ of the deceased except with respect to the mourners, (again, see Chapter Five).

The second theme of life is very clear in both the Christian and non-religious services, possibly to highlight death by way of contrast or euphemism, rather than speaking of it openly. The use of time images in the Christian funeral language can represent this idea, as time is a boundary that we have constructed to live within, and when spoken of in the context of the funeral, gives death a similar connection. This is especially true in the assertion of ‘eternal life’, an oxymoron which links both the image of life and time together, to give a concrete type of relationship to death.

Death in Christian metaphors is also referred to as sleep, a concept which gives the impression of life, or eternal consciousness. Similar to the idea of sleep are the images of the body and bodily processes which may be again assumed to give an impression of life to death. Light and sun images may also give death a more easily understandable form by alluding to life, as we live within this context, and it is light and warmth which is the origin of all life and growth. Here again the suggestion by Burke (1961 : 22) that
"metaphor, makes sense only in so far as we discount it for the negative" is applicable.

It is the theme of life which characterises the non-religious funeral, as most of the liturgy is based upon the deceased's life as well as the continuing life of the mourners and the wider community, rather than death or any other spiritual state. It must be reiterated that for the non-religious service primarily, and indirectly in the Christian funeral, the role is to celebrate the life of the deceased.

The third main theme of the modern funeral is that of security or assurance. The assurance of hope which is made explicit in the Christian liturgy is also present in the non-religious context with a different abstraction, and both give a sense of control at a time of crisis and instability.

The Christian image of security is transferred by the metaphors of parental care, and kinship analogies, the power and omnipotence of God, and the use of opposites to show the perfection of the life in God after death. The assurance of life after death, gives a security to mourners in the knowledge that the deceased is not lost to them completely, and that there is a future, better state for them. The images of a house or place relating to death creates a feeling of familiarity, enclosure and protection, which along with images of warmth and the sun are easily related to in terms of security. As Johnson and Lakoff (1980 : 25) suggest,

Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorise them, group them, and quantify them - and by this means, reason about them ... [which makes] phenomena discrete just as we are: entities bounded by a surface.

In this way the Christian liturgy seems to personify the event and context of death and put it in to human terms so that we can deal with the unknown better. The non-religious funeral, in contrast, uses kinship and community bonds in assurance of the support care and love for the deceased, and the mourners, to provide a sense of security. The assurance that the deceased is not lost, comes from reference to memories and to emotions such as peace, love, and that in time, pain will be replaced by calmness and acceptance.
It is also interesting that, as Burke (1961: 2) points out, Christian theology uses secular images to communicate spiritual meanings. It would be intriguing to explore this in detail, especially in the light of the modern trend towards secularism, however it may be generally practical, though possibly simplistic, to explain this by the fact that at the time when the original liturgy was written, there was no distinction between Christian and secular life, and God was seen in all aspects of nature, politics, and society. This may also explain the grouping of metaphorical concepts in the Christian liturgy into agricultural/rural, military and socio-political images as at the time, the population was not subject to the forces of urbanisation that are prevalent today.

The correlation of the funeral language to reality, may also give insights into the way we conceive of, and deal with death. The use of metaphors and metaphorical concepts, though only expressing ideas in different ways which may be easier to comprehend, will to some extent veil the reality of the situation and possibly result in conflicting or illogical images. As Johnson and Lakoff (1980: 10) argue

... a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.

In this way the metaphors and images surrounding death are “neutralising” and “euphemising” (Charmaz 1980: 78). This seems to be especially highlighted in the case of the Christian service by the use of figurative language. Christian ministers are now being trained to use everyday language and realistic terms rather than euphemisms - for example ‘passing on’ - and they use these early in the service (Infs. 5, 8 and 11). The non-religious service on the other hand, though stressing ‘life’ in its liturgy, is based on more direct language, and will purposely not gloss over the ‘bad bits’ (Infs. 10, 14 and 15). This trend towards more direct language in both cases seems to be more truthful and logical, and especially in mentioning the way the deceased died, highlights the reality of the death (Inf. 9).

Another way in which death is euphemised in modern funeral language, is in the terms and vernacular of the funeral director. In her scathing exposé of the death industry in America, Mitford (1963: 76-78) alludes to the use of these terms by the funeral industry as a method of avoiding the reality of
death and appealing to emotions, and so increase sales of non-essential trappings - or to at least stop people questioning their necessity.

This may not be the explicit mentality of funeral directors in my area of study - I would assume that the ornamentation of much of the terminology is inherited and goes with the business - however the euphemistic terms can still be seen, along with traces of the metaphors discussed above. The following examples are taken from pamphlets supplied by the FDANZ ("Viewing"; "The Caring Service: Your Funeral Director"; "Bereavement") to provide information to mourners, and illustrates how not only death but financial matters are softened;

- Life has left the body; saying goodbye; loss; grief; casket; embalming; preparation; bereavement; simple; peace of mind; adviser; supporter; caregiver; time of need; trauma; dignified hygienic care; assist; trained;

The words used by the funeral directors themselves also show this form of language use:

- Facilitators of the needs of people; inter (that is 'interment'); hygienically treated; bereavement support; removal; After care;

In this front stage language\(^1\), much emphasis seems to be given to the naming of things. So it is on this more subtle level that neutralizing terms tend to show up\(^2\) as funeral directors are very open in their dealings with death and their work, and will not smooth over reality in certain situations.

If then, the images and language of the funeral ritual are not in direct correlation to reality, are the meanings they transmit as important to the ritual meaning as they are to belief? In other words, is it the "realism of the act" (Burke 1962 : 568) which is symbolic rather than the literal meanings? It seems that this is so. As Rappaport (1979 : 194-195) states,

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\(^1\) Here again I refer to Goffman’s analysis (1971). In contrast to this I was not able to witness any ‘back stage’ language, however Howarth (1993 : 232) found that neutralising and dehumanising language was used behind the scenes, though in the opposite way - ie. to dissociate the body from the person in the minds of the deathworker.

\(^2\) Again I stress that it is not the individual funeral directors who began this style of language. Puckle (1926) had similar things as Mitford (1963) to say about the language of the death industry of his time.
Acceptance not only is not belief. It does not even imply belief ... It is the visible, explicit, public act of acceptance, and not the invisible, ambiguous, private sentiment that is socially and morally binding.

It would seem that symbolising a social act with words will in itself draw meaning away from reality for the individual. This movement, which Tambiah (1979: 124) calls “distancing”,

... separates the private emotions of the actors from their commitment to a public morality. In a positive sense, it enables the cultural elaboration of the symbolic; but in a negative sense it also contributes to hypocrisy, and the subversion of transparent honesty.

The ambiguity of this can be seen in the funeral language, as a paradox is created when, in Tambiah’s (1979: 126) sense the “personal relationship is minimized” because the ritual is communicating social aggregated images of death rather than individual ones; while conversely, the language uses images which are meant to be identified with in concrete terms, or stimulate the individual’s imagination.

When reviewing the funeral in view of this, and again taking into account that social meanings are communicated by the actions of ourselves and others and remain in most senses fixed\(^1\), it is not only possible, but probable that for the individual, the messages underlying the funeral will become vague and ambiguous.

Death is an unknown entity so our perceptions of it must be symbolic and based on conjecture. However, this does not answer the question of whether it is our perceptions of death and the role of the funeral ritual which coined the language, or conversely, the metaphorical concepts with which we communicate that has influenced our perception of death. It is tempting in light of the above discussion to answer ‘both’, but without detailed investigation into the influence of language and lexicon on social behaviour, this would seem simplistic.

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\(^1\) ... or are at least slow to change.
In conclusion, it can be said that the language of the funeral can characterise the trend towards a secularisation of society, in that the sacred and formalised style of the language is changing. This may in part be due to the "canonical" aspect of Christian text which means that messages are inconsistent with the contemporary situation (Rappaport 1979: 179) and so become contradictory or ambiguous. The language of the modern funeral ritual explicitly highlights the death-denying and life-affirming aspects of cultural conceptions of death, linking aspects of tradition and contemporary meaning, and seemingly ignoring group boundaries.

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1 By sacred, I refer to the application of emotive language to engender a heightened and intensified physical state, the use of rules and ritual authority/power, and the direct disclosure of sacredness - the invocation to God.
CHAPTER 5

RITUAL IDENTITY

The very fact of the death of an intimate acquaintance excited in everyone who heard of it, as such a fact always does, a feeling of relief that "it is he that is dead, and not I".

The so-called friends of Ivan Ilyitch, could not help thinking too that now they had the exceedingly tiresome social duties to perform of going to the funeral service and paying the widow a visit of condolence.

"The Death Of Ivan Ilyitch" Leo Tolstoy

Can they feel I wonder, those white silent people we call the dead?

"The Picture Of Dorian Grey" Oscar Wilde

As has been illustrated in previous chapters, many of the rituals and constructions of death in the modern funeral, in various ways, represent our views of life and death. Applying symbolic meanings of life and consciousness after death may be society's way of coping with not only the reality of our own and other's mortality, but also maintaining a sense of identity in the face of a solitary transition to the unknown. The strong sense of inter-related identity between the group of mourners and individual which is conveyed in the modern Western funeral, maintains the 'spirit' of the people involved, and therefore nullifies the possibility of life in vain or death without meaning.

The funeral ritual can accordingly be viewed as the formalisation of this "ritual recognition" (Grimes 1982 : 29) of the ego-centred network and its members, both past, present and future in symbolic and secular ways.

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1 As will be explained further, this is not a consolidated group but individuals who are brought together at the funeral by a relationship to the deceased. A whole society or community may only be affiliated in relation to death in the case of war, where national sentiment generally unites all members - though treatment of soldiers after war, as in the case of many Vietnam and Gulf war veterans again illustrates a cultural denial of death, and negative reaction to those who are willing to die.
However the identity of ritual participants also has a dramaturgical element, as varying performative roles and changes in these roles can infer social attitudes of death, and social responsibility towards the dead.

This section has been broken up into two main groups; the audience or the passive participants - those to whom the benefit of the ritual is aimed - including the deceased and the mourners, and the functionaries or agents, which groups the clergy, celebrants and funeral directors together.

**AUDIENCE**

As discussed in Chapter One, the funeral has two main roles, to celebrate the life of the deceased and to grant authority for mourners to express sorrow. The funeral while being about the deceased, is for the living, therefore the ritual must acknowledge both the deceased and the related social group who will mourn him or her. In this way, two very different forms of identity must be expressed, that of the individual and the social network. As Walter (1990: 135) suggests

> Every funeral must affirm both the universality and the uniqueness of death. We all die, but I only die once.

However social change brought about by the forces of commercialism, individualism, and rapid population growth has meant that the ‘community’ has become fragmented, and death privatised. The impact of this on the ritual identity of the deceased and the primary mourners is far-reaching.

**THE DECEASED:**

In the past, the role of the funeral was very different from that of today. No mention was made of the deceased’s life or attributes, or of the community’s relationship to the dead. The only inference to the deceased, in the Catholic Mass at least, was prayers of intercession on his/her behalf to ensure that the ‘right’ end was obtained. Similarly, The Westminster Directory of 1644 (Breward 1980: 28-29) advises that

> When any person departeth this life, let the dead body, upon the day of Buriall, be ... immediately interred, without any Ceremony. And because the customes of
kneeling down, and praying by, or towards the dead Corpse ... are Superstitious: and for that, praying reading, and singing both in going to, and at the grave, have been grossly abused, are no way beneficial to the dead, and have proved many wayes hurtfull to the living, therefore let all such things be laid aside.

Sprott (1882 : 162, 165) outlines the same idea in the 'Worship And Offices Of The Church Of Scotland',

... in latter times it has often been said that because the Pope prays for the dead, the Scot refuses, at Funerals, to pray for the living ... [and] that there was no religious service at all at funerals - even the address had disappeared; and this continued to be the case till a generation ago.

Puckle notes that many old funeral customs such as a cortège, drawing blinds, the ringing of bells, and burial, originated from a fear of the dead, and an “acute sensibility of the departed” (1926 : 173). This fear of the spirits, and attempts to keep them separated from the living - many customs were an attempt to confuse the dead so that they could not return to the house - suggest the salience of the deceased’s identity.

The development of a formalised ritual recognition of the deceased in our modern sense is a relatively new phenomenon, and it seems to be this very element which signifies a successful service. A ‘good’ funeral appears to be one in which the personality of the deceased is portrayed properly and effectively in the minds of the mourners. Inf. 15 explained that the most fulfilling part of being a celebrant is when people approach her to thank her for the personal touch of the funeral1. The sense of rightness, appropriateness and integrity which a personal service engenders, Inf. 15 suggests, means that the farewelling of the deceased is accomplished properly - reinforcing the idea that the funeral’s primary message is for the mourners. This may be no easy feat considering that each mourner knew the deceased in a different way; so how and why, then, is the identity of the deceased ritually represented in the funeral?

1 Often people will approach celebrants after the service to ask them if they knew the deceased personally, which again is very fulfilling to those in the industry.
The ritual customs of the funeral service reflect the transformation of the identity of the deceased by a continuity of relationship, through the past, present and future, and from the secular/body to the sacred/spirit. The important implication of this, I suggest, is to reinforce (or re-establish) meaning in life and death, and in social relationships, which may in part, be absent in our economic and individualist society, and originate in a fear of loss of the self (Firestone 1993 : 505).

The essence of who the deceased was and what he/she did in life, illustrates associations with the past in the modern funeral. Character and personality, as have been shown, are reflected in the ritual language, directly in the tribute and eulogy, and indirectly in poetry, songs and readings which may reflect attributes of the person. Similarly interment goods, casket decoration, the way the body is dressed, and the use of flowers and music, are material symbols of both the social network and personal nature of the individual. Embalming also adds a sense of the past in the identity of the deceased, as the ‘memory picture’ achieved by restoring the body represents the deceased before illness or accident1.

Ritual reference to the deceased in the present tense can itself be ambiguous. In life, the physical body and the mind may be viewed in a material way; the two being so closely related that consciousness is regarded as related primarily to physical function2. Yet after death the mind and body tend to become separated as the body decreases in status while the spirit takes on the salient ritual identity. Though the body could be viewed as the material focus of the funeral service, it is as a focus for the spirit of the deceased, bringing to mind memories and attributes of the persons life. It may be that the dead body which has now lost the close relationship to the soul, takes on the meanings and reality of death that we wish to deny, those of decomposition and corruption, and therefore danger. The fear of contact with this impurity, both physical and cognitive, and the realism of mortality that it represents, may be the cause for the physical relinquishment of the body to the funeral director and the funeral home.

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1 In body only, not spirit.
2 Religious and secular spiritual beliefs may view the body and mind as two distinct entities, yet again they may be viewed as more closely related in life than in death where this separation occurs.
Therefore the spirit, psyche, soul or ego of the deceased takes on the person's ritual identity, reflecting again the life-affirming or death-denying attitude of our culture. The 'essence' of the person is maintained after death and transferred from the state of the living to that of an ancestor, and having the body present reflects this transformation, representing what Irion (1966: 218) describes as "the conjunction of life and death". The process of transition from one state to the other can be effectively explored in terms of Van Gennep's theory of the "rites of passage", as the ritual subject moves through phases of separation, transition and incorporation (1960: 145-165).

Ideology and doctrine regarding the 'soul' vary widely, however a general change in the state of the deceased from the living to the dead is recognisable in modern Western funeral rituals. Though Van Gennep (1960: 146) argued that in the funeral "transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted some sort of autonomy", Irion (1966: 93-94) finds proof of separation, transition and incorporation rites in the modern funeral. Irion identifies ideas of separation in the destruction of the body by cremation or burial, and separating the living and the dead in cemeteries. Transitional rites include preservation, display and dissolution of the body, and incorporation rites "can be seen [in] incorporating the deceased into a new state of existence, a life after death" (Irion 1966: 94).

From what I have observed in the research area, the funeral and modern rites of death do conform to Van Gennep's three stage transition. At the time of death the body is 'separated' from the living by the formal statement of death and on being removed to the funeral chapel. At the funeral, the body then re-emerges in a liminal state as the 'transitional' rites of preservation and restoration give death a life-like tone. At this stage the deceased is still viewed as being present to some extent in a physical way as if in life - for example, talked about and acted towards as if present (Infs. 1, 3, 9, 10, 14), and has feelings and emotions attributed to him/her. The

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1 Van Gennep does not confine his analysis to Western society as Irion does, but to 'exotic' and tribal rites as well; possibly giving rise to the anomaly in their arguments.
2 Taking the deceased home before the funeral also to some extent reasserts their transitional state as it reinforces connections with the life, but also is the 'last trip home'.
3 This may be true of the soul as well and may be reflected in the fact that many people do not like to leave the body alone between the death and disposition. It used to be the custom in
committal and disposal - or in the case of the one-place funeral, the hearse driving away - are ritualised and formal markers of separation. Incorporation is achieved, as Irion suggests, through the idea of the after life, and also by memorialisation. After this the deceased may be referred to as present, but only in a spiritual way. This may also reflect a transformation of meaning - a focus on the essential identity of the life of the deceased gives meaning to life, both the deceased's, and also of the mourner's expectations of their own life and death, which then shifts to a spiritual influence in the future tense.

The incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead or ancestors in the minds of the living, is also the means by which the person is referred to in the future tense. In the modern Western funeral this occurs, as mentioned, by changing the state of the deceased relative to the mourners. This is achieved by cultivating a sense of history (and identity) by reference to forebears; for example genealogical research, and exploring family 'roots' or even more direct identification - "you remind me so much of your great-grandmother" - reinforce a relationship with the dead, which is different to that felt in life. This transformation of identity can also be seen in both Christian and non-religious funeral ideology.

In the Christian funeral, the transformation of the deceased into a spiritual state is highlighted by reference to an eternal time frame, by committing the person to 'God's care' and by shedding the sins of the physical world to be restored, unblemished in the sight of God (Inf. 3). However some ambiguity does arise in the Christian message as to the body/spirit identity of the deceased.

Greek or Eastern thought defines a viable distinction between the physical and the spiritual in a Kantian type dualism, and this has influenced Western culture and popular Christianity. Technically, however, the dualism is not accepted by Western Christian eschatology (Inf. 3) - the

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Europe to keep watch over the body (Puckle 1926: 61-62) and is still so in the case of the Maaori Tangihanga. Inf. 1 mentioned that he will not let a body leave the funeral home without some form of service, yet services are held when there is no body present reflecting that the 'spirit' and the body are not necessarily seen as a unity.

1 The Catholic faith in the past held the belief that the spirit stayed in the house for forty days after death.
spiritual is the physical. At the funeral the body and the spirit are not separated in any way, but emphasis is placed on the change in the spiritual relationship of the deceased (Inf. 8) and the ‘person’ is taken away from the body (Inf. 9). Ambiguity arises in the idea of the resurrection, as the resurrection is primarily viewed as physical - of the body. Therefore, the deceased does not change form or gain any power or divinity, but is in a better (the perfect) state (Inf. 3). Interestingly, the concept of heaven and hell, contrary to the popular soft clouds, and brimstone idea, is based on the fulfilment or loss of identity (Inf. 13).

The non-religious service recognises the change in the state of the deceased, and refers to him/her in the future tense by placing emphasis on memories living on, and the influence of the deceased’s life on the living now and in the future (Infs. 10, 14, 15). An eternal, or at least future time frame is also used, and there is often emphasis on meeting the deceased again.

Though society has become more secular, the influence of religion and the rise of a secular spiritualism means that there is still a wide spread belief in an after-life, or the continuity of consciousness after death (Charmaz 1980: 11-12). This may again come from the inability to conceptualise of another state except in terms of our own, and the fear of a total loss of identity that death may mean; both these ideas suggest an inability to actually conceive of the death of the self at all (Freud, cited Stannard 1977: 3; Kubler-Ross 1969: 2).

The fear of the loss of identity may stem from the phenomenon of ‘social death’ that has become more prevalent in Western society. In this sense, the “social existence” of the dying patient is reduced or lost (Mulkay 1993: 32) as their role and position in the community and the family changes with illness and impending death. “Rest, peace and dignity” are eliminated by the machines and regimes of the hospital (Kubler-Ross 1969: 8) and while this affects the dying person, friends and family also watch as the patient’s life is

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1 This is especially so as the body can become the focus for those who were not present at death (Inf. 9).
2 The only clue about the resurrection comes from Jesus, who was resurrected in the flesh - he could eat, talk and move through time and space - but gained an eternal state (Inf. 3).
3 The Humanist (Inf. 27) and atheist can be excluded from this.
slowly stripped of function and significance built up over a life time. The need to reassert identity in the funeral may be a wish on behalf of the mourners to ensure that some meaning will be left not only of the deceased’s life but also their own. Similarly, with a sudden or tragic death, the identity of the deceased must be emphasised to maintain a realism and again to reassert meaning into life which can be ephemeral and fragile. This phenomenon seems again to be the result of a social denial of death, as Stannard (1977: 192) and Charmaz (1980: 34) explain, the way to soften the impact of death is to reduce the real or perceived significance of the dying and the dead.

The emphasis on the ritual recognition of the deceased in the funeral service, may also have come about because the responsibility and administration of other aspects of death has been taken over by secular and civic authority. Death becomes more assimilated and anonymous due to regulations regarding the place and manner of disposition, so that the expression of the deceased’s kinship, geographical and religious identity may be limited. Similarly, regional bylaws have restricted, and to some extent standardised, graves and memorials. Laws such as the Burial and Cremation Act 1964 and the Health and Burial Regulations 1946 only refer to the deceased in terms of the physical body, and the Privacy Act 1993 does not include dead people. The Human Tissues Act 1964 does, however dictate that the utmost care and respect be given to the deceased human body during mortuary/preparation room procedure.

Ritual recognition of the deceased can also portray his/her social status, thereby illustrating wider social attitudes related to economic and accumulative forces. Though the level of ostentation may have been more higher or more obvious in the past (Charmaz 1980: 198; Jalland 1989:171) than today, as Dubisch suggests (1989:195),

Rather than leading to a neglect of ritual observances surrounding death, urbanisation and increased affluence seem to lead to an intensification of it, at least in the form of material consumption and display ... Death thus becomes a secular opportunity to display wealth and social accomplishments ... rather than being an occasion to express the equality of all members of the community in the face of a shared physical and spiritual destiny.
In the modern New Zealand funeral, evidence of wealth or social status is primarily conveyed by what is said about the individual, rather than material symbols - bodies are presented and services arranged in relatively equitable ways in most circumstances\(^1\) (Inf 3; Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 193). However caution must be taken when comparing the elements of economic display and status mentioned by the above authors with the New Zealand situation and especially the research area; relative wealth and the differentiation between class may be more marked in Europe and America and so alter their funeral expenditure in relation to ours.

Reflection of the social values attributed to the deceased can, however, be seen in the New Zealand funeral. Though the tribute and eulogy contain descriptions which primarily come from the family, they also illustrate many social factors, possibly to a greater extent than private reflections. Inf. 10 explained that care should be taken when putting more value or emphasis on the social life of the deceased as many people, especially women, did not play a large role in wider community life, as all their efforts went into the home. In such cases, Inf. 10 emphasises that this was the role which society dictated, and that their life was no less valuable. Similarly in the case of a small child or baby, Inf. 5 explains that it is important to establish the child's identity as a person and not put value on the length of life.

The relatively new and increasingly popular trend of pre-planning\(^2\) seems to be one method of reasserting ritual identity in the modern funeral. In this way, the yet-to-be deceased can participate to a greater extent in his/her service, by arranging what he or she wants, and the ritual will therefore more implicitly reflect their personality. This is not the only reason for pre-planning, as many people merely wish to create less trouble for their family (Inf. 19), or economic considerations may mean pre-paying saves

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\(^1\) Kephart (1950: 635-643) did, on the other hand, make some interesting findings reflecting class differences in the amount of money spent in the funeral industry and on specific services. His research, however was in America in the 1950s, so may not be relevant to the modern New Zealand funeral. The number of people who attend the funeral can also be a sign of the social position of the deceased - the fear that no one will come to the service is often a reason for having a private funeral (Infs. 1, 14).

\(^2\) Inf. 2 mentioned that in the case of his company there are, on average, five funerals planned a week.
themselves and others some cost. What ever the reason, pre-planned 
funerals seem to be very satisfactory for mourners, rather than leaving them 
with unresolved grief because of their inactive role in the organisation. Infs. 
17 and 18 had good memories of the funerals that their parents arranged for 
themselves, as the services seemed very personal, one woman had even 
gone to the extent of ordering milk, baking, and teaching her grandchildren 
small items to perform at the service.

Though the funeral is about the deceased, and the transformation into the 
state of the past and of the ‘dead’, the funeral actually achieves few ritual 
ends for him or her. Rather, ritual recognition is tied closely to the identity, 
roles and interests of the mourners.

MOURNERS:

The strong influence which cultural mechanisms of denial have on modern 
funeral rituals has meant that values and rites surrounding death have 
become hidden and privatised. The conflict between the family’s experiences 
and the attitudes of wider society seems to have forced a separation between 
the two groups, and this can be illustrated in the role played by mourners.

Charmaz (1980 : 12, 40) suggests that economic and social forces have caused 
the atomisation, competition and therefore “controlled individualism” of 
modern society, and personal values do not revolve around collective 
experience, but individual. Yet, as Charmaz (1980 : 31) goes on to explain,

If social integration is to be maintained, institutionalized ways of handling 
death would have to be consistent with the maintenance of the present social 
structure. From this perspective, the ways in which death is handled would 
necessarily have the consequence of providing continuity in the ongoing social 
structure.

This means that the development and control of death work is dictated by 
wider social ideals rather than by individual situations and mourners. Yet it 
seems that the ‘social structure’ has become fragmented through the above 
processes, coupled with urbanisation, population growth and secularisation, 
so that we are no longer united as a ‘community’ by social bonds or by the
spiritual and sacred aspects of religious beliefs. Kastenbaum (1993: 76) suggests that

As a society becomes “post modern” it also becomes vulnerable to the attenuation or loss of the beliefs, values, and communication patterns that had provided its sense of identity and continuity.

Therefore the wider community does not effectively communicate common or structured belief systems surrounding death, and will not sense or accept the impact of an individual death. The whole force of death is then, transferred to a small network of closely related individuals who are left to cope.

In response to social individualism and autonomy, and to reinforce meaning in social identity, the funeral has become an ‘ego-centred’ ceremony made up of people who feel they are obliged to go, or whose absence will be noted. Accordingly the funeral focuses on the deceased’s place in the close social network, with the participation of clubs, other affiliated church and social groups and members of the wider community and makes direct reference to the deceased’s participation in these. However this has also meant that the primary mourners have lost part of their ‘primacy’ status, and so their ritual recognition has changed. The effect of this is significant, and illustrates how social forces influence ritual and how the social network deals with the disruption caused by death.

Accordingly, though the ‘ends’ to which the funeral aims are primarily for the benefit of the mourner, these people as primary agents have lost control of the ritual meaning and action, to the social equilibrium and it’s values of commodification and denial; as a consequence the ritual to them may be less expressive and significant.

1 In this sense, Kastenbaum refers to ‘Post modernity’ as the social impetus for a shift in emphasis from control of “static and finite resources” such as property, to forms of information or images.

2 Infs. 1 and 2 advocate public versus private funerals as it is important to acknowledge all those who had some relationship with the deceased. Again many people, especially the very elderly, want private funerals so they do not put anyone out, and some families opt for the private alternative in case no one comes.

3 Especially in the form of grief therapy, and to allow them to socially express their grief and loss, as well as their social re-integration.
How and why mourners have lost ritual control and therefore recognition, is expressive of trends in funerary and social ritual as a whole. Primarily, control and organisation has gone to the funeral director/industry, and the social customs that they and civic authorities maintain (these are not ‘sold’ as compulsory, but when, in the case of death, most people do not know what to do, are soon accepted as required or obligatory).

In the past mourners identified themselves and their loss with outward, material trappings, a mourning period, and a cortege or procession. Now however, ritual identity of the mourner in the service itself is not formalised. There is an increasing trend towards the participation of friends and family in the service¹, yet this is not ritualised or formalised, and many funerals will not have this at all. The organisation of the funeral seems to be facilitated rather than controlled by the mourners, and any other participation - for example placing interment goods or picking and arranging flowers - is done out of public view. There is, of course, audience participation in the service in the form of singing and praying which is important in its own right as a group activity, yet it does not set the primary mourners apart.

It is widely agreed that the primary mourners are the essential focus of the service (Infs. 2, 3 and 10; Gorer, cited Walter 1990: 68), and that it is important that they be formally recognised by the social network². The achievement of this can also be reflected in Van Gennep’s (1960: 146-165) ‘rite of passage’ model.

I suggest that rites of separation and reintegration or incorporation are pre-eminent here, though the whole process is one of (rather rapid) transition. Immediately before the service the primary mourners are ‘separated’ from the audience in special rooms in the funeral home, or grouped together out of the public view³ and will enter the service after the rest of the audience

¹ This is possibly, due to a growing ability and necessity of public speaking. Inf. 3 mentioned that Christian services have always had this element in all services.

² Inf. 16 illustrated this point, as she said that it was harder after the funeral to talk to people who had not been at the service.

³ In a funeral that I participated in as a primary mourner, though waiting in ‘public view’, very few people actually came up and spoke to us, showing that the separation of the family before the service is not just spatial but also psychological.
has been seated. Inf. 9 explained that when the family enters, the audience is asked to stand so that the family is shielded to some extent, and thereby not 'on show'.

In the service the family normally sits at the front, so are set apart spatially. The only formal recognition of the family's identity, however, which separates them from the secondary mourners, is in their naming in the service, though this may not make their individual relationships to the deceased explicit. Though in New Zealand, pall bearers are members of the family or friends, again relationships are not explicit, though in this way those who first leave the ritual area, are obviously set apart as primary mourners.

After the service, rites of incorporation are operative. The greeting of other friends by the family begins, and the 'cup of tea', in contrast to the beginning of the service, is the socially and ritually accepted time of reintegration of the family into the ego-centred network. As Van Gennep (1960: 146-147) suggests, a formal mourning period is a transitional rite which is bounded by rites of separation and reintegration. In the modern New Zealand funeral, however, this has disappeared, and though there will be 'mourning' there are no rites beyond the funeral ritual itself which mark this off. Rituals of reintegration then, seem primarily to focus on the rapid reassertion of social roles rather than a spiritual incorporation more apparent in the kinship network. The fact that the secondary mourners disperse quickly after the service suggests that bonds to the social group are not close, again hinting at the attitude of privatisation in relation to death.

This may also give rise to a sense of dissatisfaction in many of the more secondary mourners, as Irion (1990: 165) suggests,

"Going to a funeral" can be very superficial, empty going-through-the-motions if one attends without a genuine sense of interrelatedness.

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1 In Australia there is a 'pall bearers union' and only rarely do mourners take on this ritual (Inf. 2). This was highlighted in 1994 when the union would not allow its members to carry the coffin of a man who died of Aids, forcing the family to do it.
This sense of interrelatedness may not be fully achieved in the ego-centred group, but as discussed above, by adequately representing the identity of the deceased to all the mourners present, a closer relationship to the deceased and the network will be more easily fostered.

It can be seen from this discussion that the ritual identity of the mourner is intricately tied in with that of the deceased, as the transition of the deceased occurs not only in the minds of the mourners, but also in parallel to their own changes.

The mourners themselves may not know what their own ritual identity or roles in the funeral rites are. With the increase in life expectancies, many people will not experience the loss of death until later in life (De Spelder and Strickland 1983: 8), so do not know what to do or how to act, and this confusion will be compounded with the emotions of grief, loss and crisis\(^1\). The way in which mourners express their own identity is in relation to the deceased, but is again culturally constructed. The placing of interment goods or flowers with the deceased as has been shown in Chapter 3, defines this relationship, and though not widely practiced in New Zealand any more, wearing formal or black clothing or armbands by all mourners was an outward sign of their own identity. Similarly, open expressions of grief such as wailing, crying or physical movement are inhibited or frowned upon by the social 'norm'. Except in the case of pre-planned services, organisation of the funeral and input into the eulogy are ways that the mourner can reflect their relationships to the deceased, and though participation is encouraged by some (Ins. 2, 3, 10, 14, 15) funeral directors maintain control, and not all mourners wish or are able to participate.

If, as Charmaz (1980: 17) suggests, meaning arises out of individual experience which is grounded in interaction - interaction which will be in the interests of the mourner in helping them to come to terms and cope with death - will limited and socially constructed\(^2\) participation in the service be satisfying? Related to this, the funeral ritual for the mourner as

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\(^1\) As Inf. 15 explained, many people especially in relation to the body of the deceased, do not know what to do, and so must be guided or told that they should do what they feel is right.

\(^2\) Primarily reflecting death denial.
for the deceased, in modern Western society, does not achieve any sacred or metaphysical ends, so that the mourner is principally a passive actor in a dramatic performance, over whose head the service may wash if the reality of the situation is not reinforced.

Even in view of this it is still important for the ritual identity of the bereaved to be recognised in the close social network, so that the group's care and support can begin to heal not only individual grief, but the gap in the family caused by death. New initiatives advocated by groups such as the PNWHDSG (1993) reflect a growing trend towards regaining family control of death with this very aim in mind.

FUNCTIONARIES

The primary role of the funeral functionary is to guide the deceased as well as the mourner, through the transformations of identity which death and funeral customs necessitate. However, in this sense, the function of the officiant and the funeral director has become less influential in an esoteric or spiritual manner and more secular and performative. These changes reflect elements of control, secularisation and socio-economics, and accordingly how society deals with death. The following discussion deals with the officiants of the funeral - the Christian clergy, and celebrants - and the funeral directors.

THE CLERGY:

The primary factor which differentiates the Christian clergy from celebrants in terms of ritual identity is that their roles in the funeral are "determined" by a calling, or "divine inspiration" (Grimes 1982: 29). This then gives them a canonical identity, which directs their task, as they have more influence on the spiritual or theological transition of the mourners and to a lesser extent the deceased.

Yet having identified this, the practical associations of the clergy to the funeral seem very different. It would be very difficult to generalise about the ways in which clerics define their own role, as different denominations, regions, groups and individuals see things from a variety of perspectives. The members of the clergy whom I spoke to, accordingly had differing views
as to their ritual role in the funeral; in general however, they see themselves as increasingly functioning in a pastoral rather than a theological capacity. Irion (1990: 164-165) suggests that this new “pastoral sensitivity” comes from psychology, sociology and an emphasis on “body, mind, senses, imagination, emotions and memory” rather than purely theological, rational or intellectual values.

Inf. 3 sees the funeral and its organisation as a healing experience, and his role in this as a facilitator for the family. The funeral service itself, in his view, is basically pastoral, identifying the welcome, invitation, hymns, bible readings, eulogy and committal as facilitating this task. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the ‘teaching’ function of the funeral has in the most part disappeared, as the more common nominal service has required a change in theological approach (Infs. 3, 11 and 13). Inf. 3 explained that the clergy’s part in the funeral is only a continuance of tradition, and that lay people make a better job of officiating the funeral due to the time periods involved.

This idea was reiterated by Inf. 5, who explained the importance of the ritual as serving the people not serving itself; therefore the funeral is not a ‘magical’ ends in itself, but must act on the minds and attitudes of the mourners and society. Inf. 5 sees a need to give a proper atmosphere in which goodbyes can be said, and the ritual and clergy must function within this framework.

Infs. 9, 11 and 13 suggested that the main role of the minister and priest, and the motive for many of the funeral customs is pastoral, to care for people and to help them to grieve. Inf. 9 also explained that in this sense the clergy are given a tremendous amount of trust which affects their identity; for this reason in a nominal service or in a situation where he does not know the deceased, he never fully identifies himself, as this takes away some of the ‘shaman’ role.

When asked if they will take nominal funerals, most members of the clergy had little reservations, though the colloquial phrase “hatch, match and dispatch” was used more than once to express the views of their own identity in modern culture.
The change in the role of the church cleric can primarily be viewed as the result of a secularisation of our culture, yet it seems that many people still wish to have the divine, canonical authority of the clergy at the funeral, possibly because it is a ritual of crisis where fear of the unknown reinforces the need for a sense of security and hope. So the identity of the clergy, and that by which, as individuals and a group, they are primarily recognised is still linked to a sacred value. As Walter (1990: 57) suggests,

The clergyman, unsure of his role in a literate and non-churchgoing society in which his small congregation may well be better educated and qualified than he [sic], may cling to the funeral as one of the few things that only he [sic] can do, or that people still want him [sic] to do.

From a dramaturgical perspective, the identity of the minister or priest is that of an officiant or narrator, and can be readily identified by their bearing, robes and to some extent gender roles. However, because they lead the service, and have a pastoral and spiritual view of how things should proceed, conflicting views to those of the secular role of the funeral director are common.

This could be seen to be a conflict in what Goffman (1971: 110) calls "decorum". The clergy in this sense have a "moral" decorum in their respect of the sacred, while the funeral director has an "instrumental" decorum which is a more pragmatic approach; Goffman (1971: 110) gives the example in this instance of an employer/employee relationship. This may then result in ideas which are at variance, and as Charmaz (1980: 202-203) suggests,

... a necessary function of the clergy is to validate the significance of the ongoing scene ... the ministers may seriously undermine the meanings the funeral director is trying to construct by overemphasising the supernatural aspects of the event ... [and] may construct a counter reality that "the body is a shell and the 'soul' has departed" which may result in questions about the ritual and the amount of money spent on it.

In the research area, a subtle antagonism between the church officials and the funeral directors was perceptible, possibly due to this modern dichotomy of roles. The clergy, in some senses, have lost much of their ritual authority,
hence the change in emphasis on being "theologically correct" (Walter 1990: 61), and a measure of this authority has been adopted or integrated into the funeral industry and into the identity of the funeral director. In what Goffman (1971: 204) would call a "faux pas" - or publicly criticising those with whom you would normally be in dramaturgical cooperation with, two ministers (Infs. 8 and 91) criticised the funeral industry in general for the way things are done. In their view, the profit motive of the funeral director overrides all else, and Inf. 9 would rather call members of the industry 'undertakers' as he feels they should not be 'directors', and sees them as a custom which we are unquestioningly brought up with. On the other hand, however, Inf. 8 would not advocate the 'simple' alternative offered by other funeral companies as he had heard 'horrendous stories'.

While Inf. 9 allowed that the local funeral industry had changed from a "you will" to a more communicative approach, he still believed that many funeral directors pushed the sale of services so that they could show off their handiwork. He also believed that people dislike funeral directors but are "scared not to love them". As Mitford (1963: 244 ff) found and I also observed, other ministers and priests are more tolerant of funeral directors, and may only go so far as to caution families as to expense and necessity of services, yet will respect a family's wishes.

The social role of the clergy also extends further than that of the funeral industry, so it can be suggested that the ritual identity of the clergy in the funeral comes basically from a wider scope than relation to death. This may cause some of the identity related antagonism discussed above, but also illustrates an important difference in personal identity and ritual recognition of the clergy.

CELEBRANTS:

The appearance of the funeral celebrant is a relatively new phenomenon in the funeral ritual. Inf. 2 explained that in the research area, it was not until

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1 Inf. 9 did not actually come from the research area, but from a rural region. His opinions were strong yet interesting, and reflective of much of the literature on the subject - for example Mitford 1963, Puckle 1926.
the late 1970s that people began to ‘declare’ that they were not embarrassed\(^1\) to have a service with no religious content. Before this time a few people took the service themselves, and Inf. 2, as a funeral director began taking non-religious rites in response to the growing trend. The initial work, and publication of a book on the subject by New Zealander Marion Barnes (1991) encouraged his company to cultivate the approach in the local area, and in this way Infs. 10, 14 and 15 began officiating at funerals in the late 1970s, mid 1980s and 1987 respectively.

Unlike their clerical counterparts, funeral celebrants are lay-people who do not have a formal role that “extends beyond the ritual arena” (Grimes 1982: 28). While celebrants have a similar performative function, they are secular officiants in that they take no divine authority, though they must be seen as having some ritual authority for the service to be formal and the liturgy ‘ritualised’ (Rappaport 1979: 190). This, however, is complicated by the fact that celebrants will often take nominal religious funerals, and that they may be Christian themselves\(^2\), though this does not influence the secular funerals they perform. The ritual identity of the celebrant, therefore stems from a role limited purely to the ritual rather than from a wider social function. In relation to this they often begin their relationship with the mourners as a stranger, something which occurs less often with the clergy.

Because of their secular function, the role of the celebrant though ritualised, is less formalised than the church cleric. Celebrants, as Inf. 14 suggested, do things differently; they will enter each new situation without any preconceived ideas or format so that the service is less ritualised and personally reflects the individual and the mourner. Accordingly, celebrants are less intellectually tied up with the messages underlying the funeral, or its meaning to the transformation of the deceased, than with facilitating the role, participation and therefore the transformation of the mourner.

While celebrants see their role as that of the facilitator of grief and emotional confusion of the family, a similar ‘pastoral’ type function as that of the clergy, they extend a more psychological and scientific approach to the

\(^{1}\) The use of the term ‘embarrassed’ shows that there may have been some social or status value placed on a religious ideology in the past.

\(^{2}\) Infs. 10 and 15 have positions in church administration.
impacts of death. Infs. 10, 14 and 15 are well read on the (non-theological) subject of grief counselling, and Inf. 14 works through one funeral company in this capacity.

The funeral celebrant, as in the case of marriages, has taken on the function of formal authority which was once predominantly held by the cleric, reflecting a change in social expectations of death and the trend towards secularisation. Yet the continuing necessity for the funeral officiant in a rite that does not by law require any authority, illustrates that the mourner still requires ritual guidance in the face of death. This notion is readily seen in the identity of the funeral director.

FUNERAL DIRECTORS:

Of the three groups of funeral functionaries, the identity of funeral directors is the most complex. While having only an organisational, ‘behind the scenes’ role in the service itself, their function is one which shapes the ritual profoundly. Funeral directors initiate\(^1\), plan and sustain funeral customs, and theirs is the only role related primarily to death, which extends beyond the ritual area (Grimes 1982 : 28-29). To complicate this further, the funeral industry is a secular business organisation which, through many social forces, has taken over sacred functions and customs and so therefore presents ambiguous ‘switching’ of identity.

The funeral industry had very pragmatic origins in death work. Richardson (1989 : 105 ff) suggests, along with the need for ‘proper burial’, the “professionalisation of undertaking” arose due to the phenomenon of grave robbery and bodysnatching in the late eighteen hundreds;

The desire for security in the grave went hand in hand with the growth in the commercial provision for funerary 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 commercialized - and conspicuously ‘respectable’- funeral. (Richardson 1989 : 111)

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\(^1\) By ‘initiate’ I do not mean ‘invent’, but ‘suggest’ and ‘develop’.
Charmaz (1980: 188) and Aries (1974: 97) link the emergence of the undertaker with the growth of cities as the industry began to take on a great deal of the death work previously done by the family and local medical practitioners. As Mitford (1963: 199) and Puckle (1926: 34) explain, the funeral industry grew from the services of trade guilds, such as livery stables, carpenters, and sextons, collectively owning articles of mourning such as the bier, candles and the pall.

The first funeral companies in the research area began in this way, as blacksmiths, livery stables and builders (Inf. 1). As early as 1884, not long after the area was settled, companies began providing many of the services available today1. As has been mentioned, the two 'main stream' funeral businesses in the area have links to these early companies, and their identity reflects these early roots.

Like any individual or group, funeral directors foster an identity among themselves which may parallel or be in contrast to the image of them held by the public. The funeral director's ritual identity and role is determined, by force of association, by both a caring and decorous attitude, and also by one of professionalism and economic management. This presents a paradox, which can be seen to be at once both accepted and resented by the public.

Because the funeral director deals with the emotion and fears of the mourner in a time of crisis, a caring and considerate identity must be maintained. This is achieved and fostered by the two 'main stream' companies with a tone of close and historical association with the area2. Emphasis is placed on the personal, family orientated business that implies an empathy with the community and the mourner. These funeral directors identify their role as facilitators for the needs of people, stressing that they are there to listen and do what the mourner wants, and also emphasising the skill which is necessary to do this, which takes a long time working in the industry to develop3. These two funeral companies also pride

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1 This information comes from records held by Inf. 1.
2 It must be remembered that the town is relatively small, so that the three companies are fairly well known and their identity is clearly marked. Interviews with Infs. 1 and 2 represent the two companies mentioned here and in the following discussion.
3 Inf. 2 emphasised this in contrast to the Christian minister or priest who will only do a few funerals a year, suggesting that the funeral director will therefore be more 'qualified'.

themselves on being educators and innovators, thereby facilitating their own identity and that of death work. In dealing with the family, they see themselves as being ‘in charge but unobtrusive’ so having a leadership role but not a decision making one (Inf. 2).

In this capacity, funeral directors deal with a very personal aspect of the social network and individual mourner, as the crisis caused by death uncovers raw feelings and emotions which are usually kept under strict control. Therefore the funeral director, as a relative stranger to the family, in some senses invades this privacy by witnessing not only the break down of emotional barriers, but possibly also family quarrels, secrets or feelings of guilt that can be painful and embarrassing.

In their work, funeral directors also deal with the often delicate aspects of handling and processing the dead body, a task which on the whole, ordinary people shun and find distasteful. Charmaz (1980: 189) explains that the funeral director takes over the “dirty work” of death which leaves the bereaved uncontaminated by death. Therefore the funeral director, must also foster a “personal front” and “manner” (Goffman 1971: 34-35) that is aloof and decorous, yet empathetic. This is achieved by the cultivation of a professional, business like identity.

The element of ‘professionalism’ seen in the funeral industry has been well documented (Charmaz 1980: 190-196; Mitford 1963; Kephart 1950: 635-643), but the underlying reason, rather than being economic as is often suggested, seems to be that of prestige. As Charmaz (1980: 190) explains

Like those in other occupations who wish to upgrade and dignify their work, funeral directors attempt to put forth a view of themselves as professionals who provide personal services to their clientele.

The professional front, then, helps funeral directors not only to distance themselves from the private grief of the mourner and to appear technically capable and business like when it comes to the body, but also to provide

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1 The funeral directors themselves may only be the ‘front people’ in this case, though it is interesting that the embalming staff are not only hidden from view ‘back stage’ but are not referred to at all. Only once in my contact with the funeral industry did I meet an ‘embalmist’ and that was because she also acted as an assistant at the service itself.
justification for the occupation as a whole. This is achieved in a number of different ways.

Impression management is a very important element of the funeral directors professional identity, and is maintained by the use of appearance, bearing and surroundings. The funeral directors training course\(^1\) instructs the student on how this is achieved; it suggests the ways in which the funeral director must read and deal with the mourner, and how their own personal demeanour must meet the standard of the public. Public expectations of the funeral industry relate to the building and premises, vehicles, the range of services and staffing. Mention is made of the fact the society is traditionally death-denying, requiring the public image of the funeral director to be conservative - possibly an important clue to why the funeral industries identity is constructed the way that it is. Accordingly, first impressions must be developed and maintained by use of clothing, grooming, posture, jewellery, attitude, body language, mannerisms, poise, language and behaviour. The training course also deals with the stresses in the life and work of the funeral director, emphasising the fact that this is not an easy job.

These impression management techniques are readily identifiable in the local funeral industry. As has been mentioned, the funeral home and the jargon of the trade both illustrate images of a benevolent, yet efficient and businesslike company. The use of medical and scientific terminology - ie ‘hygienic treatment’ vs embalming (see Chapter Four) - also gives the funeral director the air of “professional authority ... which means the licence to dictate what the client needs” (Charmaz 1980: 190), and possibly also helps to justify the procedures themselves. Similarly, funeral directors, to maintain professional identity and “audience tact”\(^2\) (Goffman 1971: 224) are highly organised to a set pattern and totally prepared for all contingencies. As Inf. 2 explained, in each case, funeral proceedings are arranged then checked extensively, and even cross checked by fellow directors. The ‘chain

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\(^1\) This information was gained from notes held by Inf. 26.

\(^2\) This is done in an effort to prevent a slip up or scene which will contradict or be inconsistent with the proceedings. This seems especially important in the funeral as any inconsistency stands out.
of command' within each company similarly strengthens the professional service of the funeral director.

Professional identity is accordingly fostered within the ranks of the funeral industry, primarily in New Zealand by the FDANZ. As Inf. 1 mentioned "good funeral directors are trained", and this attitude is exemplified in the 'code of ethics' created by the FDANZ as stipulations for membership (see Appendix). Rhetorical language is used by the organisation in public information brochures to create the sense of "professional integrity"; for example, "members create their own disciplines and impose upon themselves standards of high ethical conduct", "members are bound to a strict Code of Ethics ... to ensure a uniformly high standard of conduct". The Code of Ethics again explicates honourable and professional attitudes, but these can also be viewed merely as values of good business sense applicable to any company dealing directly with the public.

On a more individual level, the funeral director presents a "personal front" in which a "dramaturgical discipline" (Goffman 1971 : 34, 142) adds to the air of professionalism. In the research area all 'funeral directors' are male, though assistants and other staff were predominantly female, and all were well presented, wearing, for the most part formal suits in dark 'conservative' colours. In my view the local funeral directors can best be described as having a 'Clark Kent' persona - or Superman in a suit. All are confidently reserved yet friendly, not 'showy' in any way, yet there is the underlying feeling that they will make everything all right. The fact that the funeral director is the person who is looked to in the time of crisis, and who, by his/her services alleviates stress and facilitates the passage through the stressful time of death affects their ritual recognition. Here again, a businesslike manner means that this does not become too personal or invasive.

This highlights another function of the cultivation of a professional identity by the funeral director. As in many other spheres of life, society's dirty work, the troubling, inconvenient aspects of modern living, are often passed on to professionals to deal with. But here a question arises; has the funeral industry instigated this transference of death work from the family and community to themselves for their own gain, or has the attitude of society
towards death changed to such an extent that we have willingly passed all association with death to the funeral industry and pay for the privilege?

The very fact that the funeral director is a ‘business person’ will engender public hostility. People are very aware and possibly most dissatisfied with the fact that the funeral industry makes money from death and life crisis. This may be due to the ambiguity between the meaning ascribed to the funeral in the ritual itself, and the objective of its major functionary. The funeral is primarily a sacred ritual, while in contrast to this the funeral director is a secular business person in a competitive capitalist society. As Fulton and Geis (cited De Spelder and Strickland 1983 : 169) suggest, this also highlights the death denying attitude in modern Western society;

The funeral director is caught between ambivalent demands: On the one hand, he [sic] is encouraged to disguise the reality of death for the survivors who do not possess the emotional support once provided by theology to deal with it; on the other hand, he [sic] is impelled to call attention to the special services he [sic] is rendering. Thus, he [sic] both blunts and sharpens the reality of death.

Therefore the identity and ritual recognition of the funeral director is another ambiguity which the mourner must face when dealing with death. New initiatives by groups such as the PNWHDSG (1993 ; Inf. 23) which advocate the reclaiming of death rituals from professionals, aim also to change the spiritual aspect of the funeral in an effort to make the ritual more personal, and to change the attitude that these things must be given over to those in death work occupations.

In view of this, it was again interesting to talk to a funeral director who was not ‘main stream’ and who saw the ritual identity of his occupation in a very different light. Inf. 12 did maintain some similar functions in the application of his job as a funeral director - the necessity of properly finding out what the mourners wishes are, competently listening to and performing these, being necessarily in the line of fire of any complaints, and maintaining no preconceived ideas as to the social and financial status of the family so that each case remains individual. However, Inf. 12 felt that many of the services provided by the ‘main stream’ industry are unnecessary and illogical, and have been maintained merely by force of
tradition. He feels that funeral directors have taken away the important application of the rite of passage, and sanitised death.

Inf. 12 argues that his is not a profession but a trade. Though the others may set themselves up as experts on grief because they have experience with the outward manifestations of this, people's emotions and psyches are very delicate, so it is extremely important to take care, as you can't know how each individual feels. Accordingly he refers them to support groups which are especially set up for this purpose. Inf. 12's identity is different in that he caters for those who want the 'simple alternatives' without the extensive trappings of the customary funeral. Premises, and to some extent demeanour are not used to reflect any image, though advertising is used to a greater extent than the other companies.

However, it is the lack of a professional or formalised identity which causes a very different view in some members of the public. The immediate reaction against Inf. 12's approach was highlighted by Infs. 8 and 16, who found the 'simple' aspect distasteful. Rather than being associated with the company itself, rejection seemed to be due to socio-economic or status aspects in that the simple alternative was not so worthy - this may be related to the wish to show respect for the deceased as well as identifying the survivor's place in society.

Though it is clear that a community will hold varying views about all aspects of social life, the fact that on the one hand we complain about the cost and ostentation of our necessary rituals, yet on the other we react adversely to a different approach, illustrates the contradictory and ambiguous attitudes towards death and ritual identity of the living and the dead. Though the funeral director takes the burden and worry of organisation off the family's shoulders, absorbs the danger and impurity related to death, and deals with death's realities which society denies, it is the negative aspects of this which are reflected in their ritual identity.

The funeral director has a very ambiguous position in the modern funeral. As has been shown, there is an inherent conflict in funeral rites between social attitudes and the mourner's experiences. While the funeral acts as a 'rite of passage' for the mourner and must adequately meet the needs of the bereaved so they can cope with death (Hockey 1993 : 129), the various rituals
reflect values of death denial and fear. Therefore the funeral director is not only a mediator between these two elements, switching easily from one role to the other, but also consummates the conflict of attitudes by providing for both. While hiding death and death work in the funeral home, and absorbing the dangerous reality of death, the funeral director also fills the "gap in the social structure" (Charmaz 1980 : 193) by providing grief counselling - a gap caused by social denial. It is also important that though the mourner, and society in general, require reinforcement of the emotional values reflected in images of life after death or meaning in death, the funeral director can only provide material symbols of this. While funeral companies seem to be increasingly offering grief counselling services, and assume that material symbols will help grief resolution, mourners are emotionally vulnerable and will have to pay for these services later - something which may be resented when the emotional upheaval is over.

In conclusion to this chapter it is important to note how the construction and ritual recognition of identity affects and illustrates our views of death. As has been discussed, individuals elucidate meaning and behaviour from the actions and attitudes of society. If then, the identity of those who we look to are inconsistent with each other and also with the underlying meanings of the ritual objects and actions, confusion and dissatisfaction may result. The construction of the ritual identity of mourners, the deceased and functionaries also illustrates the separation of the living and the dead in the social mind, highlighting the death denying attitude prevalent in the modern Western funeral. The transformation of identity which was once a sacred rite of passage, though still observable, has become secularised and therefore may lack a spiritual and personal meaning.

Finally, it is interesting to note that as an aspect of ritual identity, the initiative for the funeral has also changed, to some extent travelling in a full circle. While once the dying person used to 'put his/her affairs in order' before death (Aries 1974 : 11), changes in medical technology and the cause of illness meant that the family, and to some extent the clergy (Aries 1974 : 96), took over the organisation of the funeral. The growth of the funeral industry over time changed this again, so that the undertaker began to maintain and organise death rituals. Now, ironically, due to steps made by
the funeral industry, the dying person has begun again to take the initiative for the funeral.
CHAPTER 6

TO CONCLUDE

I felt a funeral, in my Brain, and Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed that sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated, a service like a drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought my Mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box and creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again, then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell, and Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race wrecked solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke, and I dropped down and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge, and finished knowing - then -

Emily Dickinson 1896

“But”, I said, “surely you are not quite correct, for you start on the assumption that all the poor people or their spirits, will have to take their tombstones with them on the Day of Judgement. Do you think that will really be necessary?” “Well, what else be they tombstones for? Answer me that miss!” “To please their relatives, I suppose”.

“Dracula” Bram Stoker

The rituals of death are about the imagination. We cannot truly know death, so we must conceive of it through shadowy idealisation. In the struggle for meaning, we have created an answer to the riddle of death, and our dramatic performance of this masque establishes its reality.

By conceiving of the unknown in terms of the known, fear and danger are allied, and so, in the words of Kearl, “orientations towards death reflect a people’s orientation towards life” (1989 : 34). As has been illustrated, the common rituals of the modern Western, and specifically New Zealand funeral, reflect wider cultural rationalisations of death which are based on death-denying and life-affirming conceptions. Therefore we deal with death in terms of our planes of reality in this life. As the experience of those realities differ between groups and individuals in our heterogenous society,
so to, values of death will vary. The most significant feature manifested in this, is the conflict and ambiguity of meaning presented by the funeral.

To shed some light on the force of death conceptions reflected in funeral rituals, and the conflicts of meaning, three inter-related aspects will be discussed - the contrast between logic and illusion of death-cognition and ritual behaviour, the application and effect of symbolism in funeral rituals, and factors of control.

As Durkheim suggests, humans

... have a natural faculty for idealizing, that is to say of substituting for the real world another different one, to which they transport themselves by thought. (1915: 421)

So too, when faced with the reality of death, people are apt to substitute an ideal to better understand and cope. If this form of idealisation is believed to be true, then it becomes an illusion. By rationalising death in terms of life and denial in the funeral, especially by implication of a 'life after death', we create such an illusion. To begin to qualify this, it must first be acknowledged that for many small, homogeneous cultures with Durkheimian relationships of sacred and profane, and other religious ideologies, a form of consciousness after death is a reality. However, this being so, the fact that modern Western culture is now underlaid by scientific empirical analysis, and economic and instrumental rationality, means that the ritual construction of life in death as a means of denial is illusionary. Even if a particular ethos accepts life after death as logical, the illusions of life in death represented by embalming and restoration, fake grass, satin linings and pillows in the casket, the permanence of the headstone, lighting, flowers, and water images, belie death itself. The language of the funeral also conforms to the objects and actions to maintain illusion. Reference to nature, plants and human's place in the natural cycles, light, Christian ideology, sleep, preciousness, water and the sea, and the home reflect these ritual trappings.

The best example of conflict between logic and illusion in the modern Western funeral, is the contrast in the experiences of the mourners and the attitudes of society. While the primary mourners must deal with the
absolute reality of death and come to terms with the full logic of the situation, they are also wrung by the forces of cultural denial which create illusions to reject death. Similarly, the emotional illusions of life after, or in, death which some people require to create meaning out of loss, are not reconciled with the material illusions presented by the funeral industry.

Why, then, do we persist in these fallacious and inconsistent expressions? It seems clear that social, and especially ritual behaviour is itself perpetuated merely by its performance; as Rappaport (1979 : 185) suggests, we are the most significant receivers of what we ourselves transmit. Yet this does not explain how this dissonant behaviour is justified.

Mitford (1963) for example, would place a deal of blame on the funeral industry, as it is the illusionary rituals which are the bread and butter of the funeral director. However, again, this does not adequately explain the wide spread social acceptance of these practices.

In a discussion of death denial, Charmaz (1980 : 95) observes that people will accept death "on a rational, conscious level", yet "deny it on an emotional, unconscious level". Firestone (1993 : 499) also suggests that in response to death anxiety, defences are formed in the unconscious without our true awareness. This is obviously so, as logically death cannot reasonably be denied. Yet this idea appears more significant in light of Charmaz’s earlier discussion of the "Psychoanalytic Perspective" of death (1980 : 56). This approach assumes that it is the unconscious which "plays a dynamic role in human motivation, as it is assumed to give impetus to behaviour", and these unconscious impulses are then “rationalised with socially ‘acceptable’ motives”. Therefore, the funeral ritual becomes an avenue or outlet for the deep seated, emotional and instinctive conceptions of death, and it is these ideals which come into conflict with logical, conscious awareness.

The fine line between logic and illusion which is apparent in modern funeral rituals, may also have resulted from historical processes. Inf. 5 suggested that in situations of life crisis, people take a step back into the conservative and traditional. Similarly, Inf. 9 observed that there is a

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1 Feelings which are readily absorbed into the unconscious.
security in the familiar pattern of ritual, which if altered, may cause dissatisfaction. Therefore, the mix of traditional and modern customs in the funeral may seem acceptable. However, many of the meanings underlying the old rituals, which were logical to society at the time, have lost their relevance in the modern situation. The fast paced social changes of commodification, industrialisation, and especially secularisation have meant that many practices have been discarded, and others such as embalming, Christian symbolism and high cost objects, take on new and often illogical meanings. Material, and technological changes have overtaken the transformations in belief systems so that aims which were once religious, or spiritual (sacred), are now irrational, and as Irion (1966: 169) suggests, the resulting hypocrisy leaves the service feeling empty.

The logic of science in relation to death is not simple in its application, and at one level at least presents a paradox. Where in the past, Christianity absorbed the danger of death, creating a spiritual security in the hope of the resurrection, science has now assumed part of this function. Medical advancement and technology has given us the hope of a cure for most illnesses, and has developed products to inhibit the ageing process. This has meant that premature death is viewed as something which can be postponed and life expectancy increased, hinting at quasi-immortality - dying unnecessarily is seen as a failure of these processes and is becoming outmoded. This striving for prolonged life comes in conflict with our empirically rational approach to life which must see death as a natural termination, and shows that we find it hard to accept death for ourselves in the way that we see it in nature.

Because of the empirical nature of science, and through the ideas of the Enlightenment, secularisation has, as mentioned, taken away the spiritual hope in death. What we seem to be increasingly left with is a “civil religion” which, in the words of Huntington and Metcalf (1979: 209), “operates on every level between the state and the family” and may be one of the clearest reasons for the relative standardisation of funeral rituals, which transcend denominational differences. So, though many funeral rituals, especially in the funeral chapel, may represent Christianity in some way, they are only symbols of this, and therefore, are illusionary.
This leads to the second point of discussion - how is symbolism used in funeral rituals, and to what effect? As Skorupski (1976:116) explains, ritual itself is "pre-eminently symbolic action". The funeral symbolically ends a life and a system of relationships, and then reasserts new or ongoing ones. Ritual symbolism may be the vehicle for meanings whether logical or irrational, however, the nature of the meanings portrayed in the modern funeral tend to create illusionary messages.

As an observer in the ritual setting, it seemed that many of the objects, actions and linguistic messages of the funeral were symbolic or representative of life and continuity of consciousness after death. However in this way, the symbolism seemed to stand for or "denote" (Skorupski 1976:119) our social denial of death and mortality. This in itself presents a conflict. To deny something is to first acknowledge its existence, at least on an unconscious level. Therefore the symbolism of the funeral ritual is ambiguous, as it sends out unconscious messages of immortality and life in death - images of denial - which by force of association highlight the reality of death itself. The nature of symbolism, as a representation or embellished conception, will obviously not conform strictly to reality. Even given this, the symbolic representations of death in the modern funeral seem to take an unnecessarily large jump into illusion.

As has been discussed, symbolic representations of life stem from fear and death anxiety, which requires death to be made meaningful. Due to the processes of social individualism in modern society, symbolism inherent in death conceptions represents the wish for the maintenance of the soul; as Otto Rank (cited Firestone 1993:502) suggests,

... the individual is not just striving for survival but is reaching for some kind of 'beyond', be it in terms of another person, a group, a cause, a faith to which he [sic] can submit, because he [sic] thereby expands his [sic] Self.

While imparting death with an abstracted meaning may justify the event and the loss, it also seems to moderate and relieve irrational anxiety and fear of the unknown, leaving the mourner in a more secure cognitive position. Therefore, creating meaning in death by symbolising a continuity of life, death may become more real and acceptable. This can be applied to the group as well as the individual. The necessity for wider society to
maintain an equilibrium or social contract (in the tradition of Rousseau) when faced with conflict, war and economic alienation of its members, requires life to be sacred, and death meaningful. Similarly, the individual, when contemplating death, or dealing directly with the death of someone close, must find meaning to maintain order. These meanings in funeral rituals, except possibly in the case of the atheist, come from the symbolism of a continuity of life or consciousness after death.

Rappaport (1979: 215) suggests, that "... the existence of the nonmaterial is made conceptually possible by the symbolic ..." and this adequately explains the spiritual meanings underlying many funeral rituals. Yet in contrast, we seem to be increasingly dealing with a physical, material symbolism of death. By reflecting on the life of the deceased and his/her relationship to the ego-centred network, and by attributing aspects of material life to death, we tend to use symbols to emphasise the common bonds and experiences of the surviving group. This again relates to the idea of a civil religion, as Warner (1965: 231-232) suggests, "symbol systems" unite members and allow common sentiments to be expressed. Warner goes on to explain that this allows symbols to become stereotyped and gain common acceptance across very diverse groups. Therefore tying the mourners into conflicting attitudes of the wider death denying network.

As has been outlined, a prominent function of the funeral is to allow the survivors to grieve and express their emotions. Symbolism may be a safe and easy way to achieve this, but it serves also to soften the ambiguous relationship between logic and illusion, and does not resolve conflicts of expression which separate the primary mourners and wider society.

The third point which may help to rationalise death conceptions and conflict of meaning in funeral rituals, is the element of control. Moore and Myerhoff (1977: 3) suggest that

... ritual can be seen as an especially dramatic attempt to bring some particular part of life firmly and definitely into orderly control.

Accordingly, ritual symbols and other behaviours can be viewed as methods of cognitive control to reduce the danger of death. This danger stems from the fear of dealing with the dead, possibly linked with contagion and
pollution (see Durkheim 1915 and Douglas 1966), and the anxiety and pain of loss reflected in mortality.

Elements of control in the funeral rituals are exhibited in three main ways. Firstly, separation of the living and the dead, by mechanisms such as a dramaturgical division of the front and back stage, the designation of special death-work and ritual sites, the performative separation of most of the mourners from the ritual action, and elements of symbolism and illusion to control fear and emotional discomfort. This means that society, and to some extent the primary mourners, may go through the salient aspects of death without truly confronting underlying fears. By representing life in death, we can better comprehend and control what would have otherwise been a anomalous labyrinth of sensations and ideas. Social norms also play a part in this control of emotions as, especially in modern Western society, any breakdown is seen as a weakness or psychological disorder.

Control of the rituals themselves, illustrates the way we separate ourselves from the reality of death. Problematic or dangerous aspects of the funeral are handed over to the professional funeral director to deal with, and the element of control that is surrendered in this act, reflects our wish to be released from the physical burden of death. Funeral directors also maintain an element of control by price setting and development of services. The level of expenditure in the modern funeral, though not as excessive as previous times, also reflects an element of control for the mourners. Emphasis on economic wealth, and commodification, and the power that this has come to represent, is transferred to life-crisis and death. If we can purchase something, it means we can control it in our own way.

This ideology is gradually changing with the rise of a new secular spiritualism, and through the initiatives of many groups advocating the return of death ritual to the family. With more emphasis on the ‘do-it-yourself’ funeral and predominantly family control, cost and commercialism will also change, possibly allowing more spiritual messages to penetrate again.

Finally, many modern funeral rituals are illustrative of an attempt to control the physical processes of death. The custom of embalming, the permanence associated with the casket and headstone, and the illusion of,
and reference to life, all imply the concealment of decay. Cremation, due to its association with fire and destruction may challenge the illusion of life and non-death symbolised by embalming, yet cremation controls decomposition by thwarting it - it is also a very salient way of physically separating the living and the dead. The image of decay may be one of the hardest things to deal with in terms of death, and so controlling this will mean that fear and emotion can be more easily coped with.

The application of illusion, symbolism and control in the funeral, coupled with the secular, consumerist, materialistic and individualised nature of our society, means that the 'ego' is the focus of the modern death ritual. Yet it seems that the ego is not separated from the material or physical to a great extent. We may construct a group or kinship identity, and continuity of life for the ego after death, but it seems that we are ill motivated to break the bond with physical material life. The ritual emphasis on the material conceptions of this life does not allow a true liminal transformation to another state, and provides little spiritual focus. Death is separated from life, but we are unable to deal with the two as exclusively as would seem necessary for a true acceptance of the reality of death.
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Development And Mission Funeral Kit.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Informants: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28

Professor Peter Wilson
APPENDIX

CODE OF ETHICS

Members of the Funeral Directors’ Association of New Zealand (Inc) and the individual directors on its Register recognise the responsibilities entrusted to them in their relationships with:
- the bereaved they serve
- the public at large
- the profession of which they are a part

Specifically they have agreed:
* To accept as a duty the maintenance of truth, accuracy, dignity and good taste.
* To maintain in all matters the highest standard of business, professional and personal conduct.
* To respect, in all circumstances, the confidentiality and trust placed in them by reason of their function and their calling.
* To preserve, within the bounds of dignity, good taste and practicality, the right of personal choice and decision-making for the families they serve, and due regard for the ethnic origin and spiritual beliefs of the deceased person.
* To maintain qualified and competent personnel with facilities and equipment adequate to provide a comprehensive funeral service.
* To provide accurate information concerning the range of services and merchandise available, the prices of same and the functions and responsibilities accepted on behalf of clients.