

Jewellery as physical memory cue for commemoration

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Abstract:

As long as there is life, there will be death and humans will have to deal with the loss of loved ones. This chapter unravels how mourning jewellery, despite its humble volume, is capable of cueing memories that in several ways contribute to overcoming grief. We introduce four returning motifs in mourning jewellery: relic, imprinted, heirloom and black mourning jewellery. Each of these categories is illustrated with both historical and contemporary examples. We discuss how each of these categories is likely to cue a different kind of memories. We conclude the chapter by showing how mourning jewellery balances between past and future, between mourned and mourner and between private and public.

Keywords: Memory, Mourning, Jewellery

'Lost love is still love, Eddie. It just takes a different form, that's all. You can't see their smile or bring them food or tousle their hair or move them around a dance floor. But when those senses weaken another one heightens. Memory. Memory becomes your partner. You hold it. You dance with it.' (Albom 2003, p.106)

When people pass away, they leave their loved ones behind in a state of confusion. The bereaved go through a period of adjustment to the new situation. In the mourning process both memory and physical objects play an important role. This chapter concentrates on the way mourning jewellery functions as memory cue for commemoration.

Jewellery is not only a *specific* type of physical objects. Neither is commemoration merely a *specific* type of remembering. They can also be regarded as *intensifications*. Not many objects come as close to the human body, are used as continuously (up to 24 hours a day) and are worn for such long periods (sometimes even over several generation) as jewellery. Similarly, commemoration is an intense form of remembering that not only confronts us with the loss of a beloved one, but also with our own roots and transient nature (Ricoeur 2004, p.359).

Notwithstanding the fact that many cultures show rich rituals and material culture in relation to death, this chapter concentrates on European culture. Moreover the focus lies on individual mourning as opposed to mourning on a community level, which can for example be seen when a leader passes away or in the aftermath of a war.

We first take a closer look at autobiographical remembering and the process of mourning. The theories on autobiographical remembering and mourning are largely rooted in psychology. In the next section we introduce four returning motifs in mourning jewellery from a historical and material culture perspective. The final part ties the foregoing together by looking at the presented mourning jewellery as memory cues and addressing topics like the directness of cue medium, influence of the timeframe and the relation between wearer and the social environment.

Memory

Human memory is a complex field of study that is far from being fully unravelled. Literature does distinguish up to 256 types of memory (Tulving 2007) differing for instance in the type of information it captures and the duration that information is stored. In the context of this chapter we will focus on autobiographical memory: the *'memory for the events in one's life'*

(Conway & Rubin 1993). According to Cohen (1996 in (van den Hoven & Eggen 2008)) autobiographical memory supports the construction and maintenance of the self-concept, the regulation of our temper, the development of relationships, the capability to solve problems, the forming of opinions and the ability to anticipate the future. The loss of a beloved one challenges many of these things. For example, when parents pass away, the self-concept has to be adapted to the transition from 'child' into 'orphan', a new mental relationship with the deceased needs to be built and a future without the physical presence of the deceased needs to be envisioned. Memory plays an essential role in these processes.

In order to better understand the working of autobiographical memory we first need to be aware that memories are neither per se veridical, nor static (van den Hoven & Eggen 2008). Memory is '*an active information processing system that as well as storing information, also receives it, organises it, alters it and recovers it*' (Wilkinson and Campbell in (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.35)). The latter implies that memories are highly individual and subjected to change depending on the social-cultural context and personal experience. Referring to Freud and Hutton, Hallam and Hockey use the metaphor of 'shady depths' from which – often traumatic or painful – memories surface (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.35). The goal structure of the working self can either be constrained by this or be able to suppress memories that conflict with it (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce 2000). As we will describe in the next paragraph mourning can be seen as a process of reworking and reshaping memories of the deceased in order to return to mental well-being and continue one's life.

Secondly we need to better understand memory recollection processes. These can be totally internal mental processes. Yet, memory recollection can also be externally attributed by so called memory cues. A memory cue is an object of physical, digital or hybrid nature that triggers a certain memory (van den Hoven 2014). Memory cues are not necessarily designed as such: in principle everything can function as memory cue. Memory cues can be of visual nature as well as olfactory, tactile or auditory (see (Dib et al. 2010; Oleksik et al. n.d.; van den Hoven & Eggen 2014) for an elaborate description of cue media). This chapter focuses on mourning jewellery as a specific type of memory cue. Before identifying several types of mourning jewellery, we will address the mourning process and the role of autobiographical memory and physical objects within it.

Mourning

Freud described mourning as the withdrawal of all libido from its attachments to a lost object (Freud 1917). More recent theories are less definitive and do not aim for complete detachment, yet focus on the changing relation between the deceased and the mourner (Baker 2001). Moreover modern theories acknowledge mourning as a highly individual process without a pre-set duration or predictable stages (Hall 2014).

Most influential current theories are the Task-Based model by Worden (Worden 1991), the Dual Process Model of Grief by Stroebe and Schut (described in (Hall 2014)) and Walter's New Model of Grief (Walter 1996). Worden describes the mourning process in terms of four tasks which bereaved need to fulfil: accept the reality of loss, overcome emotional and physical pain, adopt to a world without the deceased and find an enduring connection with the deceased while living on (Worden 1991). Stroebe and Schut propose a model that oscillates between on the one hand learning to emotionally cope with the pain of loss and on the other hand to practically adjust one's on-going life to the new situation (Hall 2014) (Figure 1).

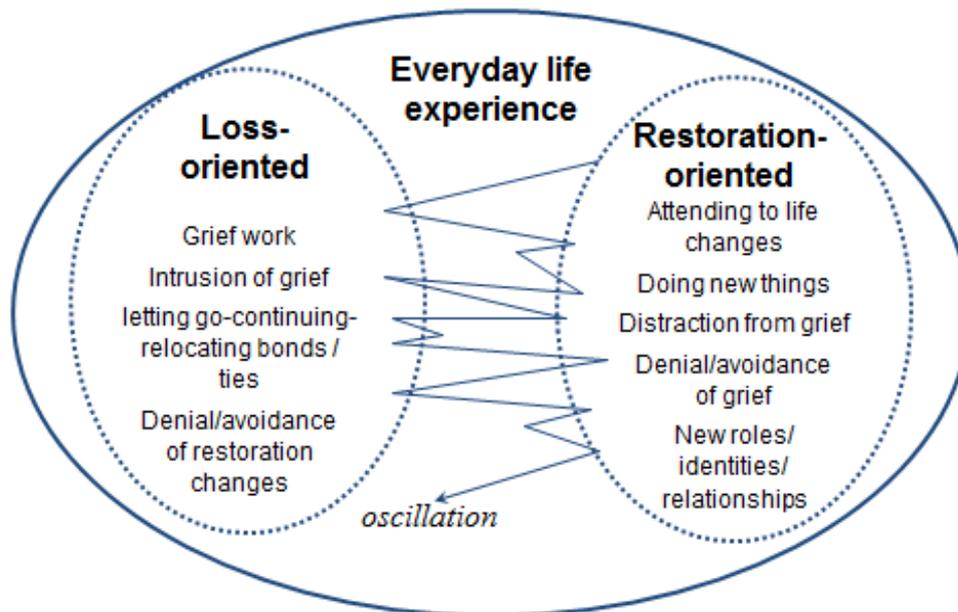


Figure 1 Stroebe, M.S. & Schut, H.A.W. (1999). The Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement - Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23 (3), 197-224

Walter advocates the creation of a durable biography of the deceased through sharing memories in a social context, which the bereaved can integrate into their ongoing lives (Stroebe 1997). As Stroebe notices, these theories are not mutually exclusive, yet could be regarded as complementary (Stroebe 1997). In all three we see that the bereaved have to come to terms with their loss and are challenged to build a new mental image of and relation with the deceased that enables them to continue with their own life. Memory and the reshaping of memories play an important role in this process. Several scholars (Parkes & Prigerson 2013, p.81; Lewis 1961, p.16) have found that it takes time for the bereaved to come to a full memory of the deceased. During the first period after a beloved one passed away, memory tends to be 'shattered, displaced and troubled' (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.108). The relation between memory and mourning is also etymologically visible: *mourning* stems from Proto-Germanic *murnan*, meaning 'to remember sorrowfully' and *commemorate* goes back to Latin *commemorare*, which means 'bring to remembrance'.

Now we have a better understanding of mourning and the role of memory in this process we can take a closer look at the role of physical objects in it. Lutz (Lutz 2011) mentions that 'not only does death bring the tragedy of turning people into things – of subject into object – but it might also start inanimate objects to life'. Hallam and Hockey (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.18) state that 'material objects bind the living and the dead, hold a fragile connection across temporal distance and preserve material presence in the face of an embodied absence'. How exactly does this work? Gibson (Gibson 2004) regards physical objects in the mourning process as *transitional objects*, whereas Volkan (Volkan 2007) writes about *linking objects*. The term *transitional object* was introduced by Winnicott (as referred to in (Gibson 2004)), who applies it to comforting objects used during childhood - like cuddles - that smoothen the psychic and bodily differentiation from the mother. Gibson (Gibson 2004) suggests that physical objects can have a comparable function during the mourning process. This implies that their meaning changes over time. During the mourning process, they have a comforting function; they support the bereaved in coming to terms with the loss and the shaping of a memory of the dead. After that first intense period, their comforting function is no longer needed. From a memory cue to the deceased, they transform into a memory cue to the mourning process itself.

Linking objects as described by Volkan (Volkan 2007) are indications of a troubled mourning process as opposed to *'keepsakes, which act merely as 'mementoes' or 'tokens of remembrance'* (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.19). During his extensive study of bereavement, he encountered – what he called – perennial mourners, who are stuck between 'killing' (letting go of the deceased) and 'bring back to life' (keeping the deceased close). These mourners struggle with an *introject*, a *'representation of the lost person or thing within their self-representation as a specific and unassimilated "foreign body"'* (Volkan 2007). Perennial mourners ultimately project the introject on a physical object, therewith externalising the mourning process. Linking objects are assigned magical qualities and grievers build an unhealthy relation with these objects: loss or misplacement of linking objects results *'in considerable anxiety or desperation – comparable to re-experiencing the death.'* (Massimi & Baecker 2011)

According to Hallam and Hockey (Hallam & Hockey 2001, pp.19–20), Volkan is not the only one to 'pathologize' physical objects. Also Parkes and Worden (cited in (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.20)) make notice of physical objects that hinder the mourning process. It is also argued though that this incrimination of physical objects in the mourning process is rooted in a general distrust of physical objects in certain areas of social sciences (Miller as referred to in (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.20)).

Summarizing, we have seen that - among other functions – autobiographical memory plays a role in the construction, maintenance and development of our self-concept and of social relations. Memories are not static yet develop over time. The process of reworking memories helps us to return to psychological well-being after the loss of a loved one by building a mental image of and a new relation with the dead. Physical objects that are in some way related to the deceased can function as cue to trigger remembering experiences. Their relevance can be temporary (transitional object) as well as enduring. They can be stimulating and comforting as well as complicating and hindering. In the next paragraph we will zoom in on mourning jewellery as a specific type of physical objects that function as memory cue in the mourning process.

Mourning Jewellery

Jewellery is often thought of as merely adornment. However, its personal and social-cultural relevance goes much broader. Unger (Unger-de Boer 2010, p.146) identified next to adornment 1) the need for protection against evil of whatever sort, 2) the wish to simultaneously show and guard ones prosperity, 3) the instinct to communicate identity and social status and 4) the urge to remember ones background and roots as the main motives to wear jewellery. Mourning jewellery is an example of the last motive, jewellery as memento. As far as we know, there is no comprehensive literature available on mourning jewellery as a category of products that has developed over time in relation culture. There are publications on the relation between death and material culture in general (for example (Hallam & Hockey 2001)), on the history of jewellery in general and on mourning jewellery in a specific culture or era. Especially the mourning jewellery of the Victorian era is extensively documented. From studying western mourning jewellery we were able to identify motifs that return in mourning jewellery during several eras. This has led to the formulation of 4 types of mourning jewellery, being: relic mourning jewellery, imprinted mourning jewellery, heirloom jewellery and black mourning jewellery. Relic mourning jewellery contains parts of the remains of the deceased. Imprinted mourning jewellery does not literally hold body-parts of the late person, but carries traces of his or her bodily existence. Heirloom jewellery are inherited pieces of jewellery that have been worn by the deceased. Lastly, black mourning jewellery, is - as the name suggests -black jewellery that communicates the grieved status of

its wearer. One piece of jewellery can hold several motifs: for example a ring that both contains hair of the deceased (relic) and has a fingerprint engraved (imprinted). In the following each motif will be as much as possible illustrated with both historical and contemporary examples. It might be good to mention that we do not pay attention to 'memento mori jewellery'. Although it is a returning death-related motif in jewellery, it is not mourning jewellery in the sense that it is not related to the loss of a specific person. Instead, memento mori jewellery reminds the wearer of the finiteness of our earthly life in general. (See (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.75) for an extensive description of memento mori jewellery).

Relic mourning jewellery

The oldest documented mourning jewellery dates back to the second half of the 17th century (Phillips 1996, p.102) and involves rings that display the initials of the deceased on a background of his or her woven hair (Figure 2). Interestingly enough this type of jewellery was also a common gift between living couples in love (Harmeyer 2013).



Figure 2 Enamelled and engraved gold with hair and pearls, England ca. 1780-1790, © Victoria & Albert museum

In the following centuries hairwork developed into miniature compositions with a rich iconography, displaying for example urns, broken pillars, willows, weeping maidens in classical dresses (see (Harmeyer 2013) for a more extensive description of these developments). These compositions were often placed behind glass or in a locket (Figure 3). Next to that, techniques were developed to weave tube-like structures from human hair, which could for example be worn as bracelet (Hallam & Hockey 2001, p.130). There were even printed instructions available for making hairwork (Harmeyer 2013).



Figure 3 Engraved golden ring containing a miniature painted with chopped hair and brown pigment on an ivory ground. © Victoria & Albert museum

The popularity of mourning jewellery culminated in 19th century Victorian England. Following the example of Queen Victoria, who life-long mourned the loss of her husband Albert, mourning became an openly expressed, primarily female, task. During this period a shift of attention can be seen from the mourned to the mourner. Moreover hairwork was democratised and commercialised, from a product for the elites in the 17th century to a commodity for all social classes in the 18th century (Holm 2004).

In early 20th century hairwork largely lost its popularity, yet relic jewellery did not. People started wearing small amounts of the ash of their loved ones in their jewellery. In recent times it even became possible to create synthetic diamonds from the carbon out of hair or the ash of a deceased beloved one. Dedicated firms industrially mimic the natural process of compression at high temperatures that creates diamonds of similar quality as natural ones. Just like the ancient relic jewellery these synthetic diamonds are marketed for diverse life-events: remembering the dead as well as expressing love¹.

Despite the fact that it is not explicitly meant as relic jewellery and that it is of more conceptual nature, the Biojewellery project by Thompson, Stott and Kerridge (Thompson et al. 2006) similarly uses modern technology to express a connection between people through wearing each other's tissue. In 2005 Thompson, Stott and Kerridge used bone-tissue from couple's wisdom teeth to create lab-grown rings out of bone-tissue.

Lastly contemporary art jewellers like Melany Bilenker and Evert Nijland reinterpret the use of human hair in their pieces. Bilenker's work (Figure 4) is no mourning jewellery, yet its technique is clearly inspired by 18th century cut work and its scenes bear a comparable intimate atmosphere (Simon 2009)².



Figure 4 Locket *Drying* by Melanie Bilenker mad of gold, ebony, resin, pigment and hair

Brooches *Adagio I* (Figure 5) and *II* are part of Nijland's Ornament-series in which he reinterprets the European ornamental tradition (Schrijver 2012), in these cases the Victorian hair jewellery. The spherical glass filled with hair seems to reinterpret the glass-covered rings we have seen before.



Figure 5 Brooch *Adagio I* (2012) by Evert Nijland, made of wood, glass, silver, textile and human hair, height 11 cm, private collection (photo: Eddo Hartmann)

Imprinted mourning jewellery

Imprinted mourning jewellery refers to a deceased in a graphical way. Early examples are late 18th century rings containing name, age and date of death (Figure 6) on a black enamelled background when married or on white when unmarried (Phillips 1996, p.120).



Figure 6 Enamelled and engraved gold. Inscribed 'Thos Gainsborough ESQ.OB AUG:1788, England 1788. © Victoria and Albert Museum

Contemporary examples of imprinted mourning jewellery are the pieces from the *Memory Breathes*-series by Sharon Portelance and *Codering* by Brech. While not referring to a specific person, the texts that Portelance uses clearly define it as mourning jewellery. In her own words:

'This work loosely references nineteenth-century mourning jewelry. Corsages, like mourning jewelry operate as personal mementos, reminding us of a person or marking a past event. [...] With this work I hope to create a relationship between the past and the present, reminding us of how memory changes over time and remains breathing in the present.' (Portelance n.d.) (Figure 7)



Figure 7 Brooch *Denied yet not forgotten* by Sharon Portelance - sterling silver, 22kt gold

The *Codering* designed by one of the authors for Brech (Figure 8) consists of seven separate rings that click together in such a way that the name of the deceased becomes readable. However the wearer can also decide to consciously wear the rings in a distorted manner. Interestingly, this design is also bought by couples as wedding bands, just like we previously saw with the 19th century hair jewellery that was also bought as token of love.



Figure 8 *Codering* by Brech in two positions, stainless steel and sterling silver.

So far we have just seen text as imprint: the name as reference to the person. Yet jewellery in this category can also be an imprint in a more literal way. The name on a *Codering*, for example, can also be a facsimile of the deceased's name in his or her own handwriting. In that case the imprint carries the traces of the deceased's motoric skills. Another example of imprinted mourning jewellery are those with an engraved fingerprint. In that case the fingerprint is taken post-mortem, scanned and transferred to the jewel by means of laser-engraving, which allows for a very high level of detailing.

Also lockets containing a picture of the deceased should be regarded as imprinted mourning jewellery.

Heirloom jewellery

Relic and imprinted mourning jewellery is newly made after the loss of a beloved one. Heirloom jewellery, on the contrary, belonged to the deceased and is passed on to the bereaved. As with all inherited objects, the question will raise 'do I want to keep these pieces?'. If so, the next questions pop up: 'if I keep them, am I going to wear them?' and 'will I then wear them as they are or should they be adjusted?'. In order to answer these questions one has to balance their emotional, esthetical and financial value. It might be good to make explicit two tacit aspects of jewellery that play an important role in this decision. The first is the inherent financial value of jewellery: whatever the emotional and esthetical values of a piece might be, precious metals and gemstones always represent a certain financial value due to their rarity and their physical and chemical qualities. Secondly - and contiguous with the latter - jewellery can be remodelled and adjusted to personal preferences or current esthetical norms.

Although the remodelling-options are endless, mainstream remodelled heirloom jewellery shows returning concepts like a pendant made from two interlocking wedding bands. The work of Pauline Barendse shows a radically different approach. She combines inherited jewellery with contemporary design (Figure 9). In this case the owner is the third generation wearing the ring and she did not want anything to be altered on the ring: Barendse was not even allowed to repair fragile parts. A solution was found in a contemporary addition, which reinforces the ring both visually and mechanically, yet can easily be taken off.



Figure 9 Ring *Dress Up* by Pauline Barendse (Dubbelop), titanium, 18kt gold (heirloom: gold, rose quartz and pearls)

Black mourning jewellery

The last category, black mourning jewellery, does not refer to a specific late person, but emphasizes the grieved status of the mourner. This illustrates the earlier mentioned shift of attention from the deceased to the mourner during the 19th century. Phillips describes that *‘the etiquette surrounding death became more complex and rigid in the course of the century, with strict periods of mourning observed following a bereavement. By the 1860s a widow was expected to dress in black for a year and a day after her husband’s death, wearing minimal matt black ornaments, usually of unpolished jet. Gradually she was allowed more elaborate mourning jewelry, then diamonds and pearls, and finally a return to coloured stones.’* (Phillips 1996, p.148)

This fashion led to a search for black materials suitable for application in jewellery. At different geographical locations, materials were found, including jet (light-weight fossilised driftwood) (Figure 10), cast iron (also referred to as ‘Silesian Wirework’ or ‘Berlin Iron’), bog oak (fossilised oak, fir, pine or yew), French jet (actually black or dark red glass) (Figure 11), Gutta Percha (a rubber-like gum made of resin derived from trees in Southeast Asia), Onyx (type of quartz) and vulcanite (vulcanized rubber). The popularity and changing fashions in black jewellery led to emerge of rich industries on several places (Segal 2017; Unknown n.d.; Phillips 1996, p.131).



Figure 10 Brooch made of jet from unknown maker, England ca. 1870 © Victoria & Albert museum



Figure 11 Brooch made of French jet and gilded copper from unknown maker, England 1830-40. A panel on the back holds plaited hair, most likely of the deceased. © Victoria & Albert museum

Today black mourning jewellery is still a rich source of inspiration for artists like Francis Willemstijn, Jonathan Wahl and Evert Nijland. Willemstijn uses in her work many materials used in traditional mourning jewellery such as hair, bog oak and jet in completely new ways (den Besten 2009)(Figure 12). Through this her work also becomes a reminder of almost forgotten materials, techniques and traditions (Leigh 2013).



Figure 12 *Hair Necklace* (2009) by Francis Willemstijn, hair, jet, glass, silver made for the exhibition 'Gejaagd door de Wind' (Gone with the wind) in Zuiderzee Museum, Enkhuizen, The Netherlands

Wahl not actually makes jewellery, yet draws it. His Jet drawing-series (**Figure 13**) explore the intriguing quality of traditional black mourning jewellery. In his own words:

'[i]n my charcoal drawings gems become eyes, apertures and mirrors, portals, reflecting pools and pieces of space. I am interested in how these small, shiny and translucent objects writ large and heroic in my drawings reveal on a grand scale what mesmerizes us on an intimate scale. Imbued with layers of history, magic, wealth, mysticism, romance and cliché, the gems I am rendering reveal glints of these qualities by their closer examination and magnification. In their portraiture they transcend what they are to become abstractions and kaleidoscopes; opaque reflections and lenses peeing into secret places.' (Wahl n.d.)



Figure 13 *Totem* by Jonathan Wahl, charcoal on paper, 2008. 48” x 32”

The glass in Nijland’s necklace *Rouw* (**Figure 14**) seems to refer to French jet. The partly flocked surface could be related to wearing off grief over time, while the holes might portray the void a deceased leaves in the lives of his/her beloved ones.



Figure 14 Necklace *Mourning* (2009) by Evert Nijland, glass, flock, silver, diameter 20 cm, private collection (photo: Eddo Hartmann)

Discussion

The aim of our research is to gain insight in the way mourning jewellery functions as memory cue for commemoration. In the second and third paragraph of this chapter we have seen how memory plays in many ways a role in mourning processes, for example when it comes to

building a new mental images of the deceased, in accepting the altered relation to the lost person, in adjusting to the mourner's new role in for example a family-structure and in anticipating a future live without the bereaved. We have also described how memories are cued by means of physical objects. In the previous paragraph we zoomed in on a specific type of physical object, mourning jewellery, of which we listed different categories. Although, principally everything can be a memory-cue, each of the categories has its own nature and might therefore be more likely to cue a specific kind of memories.

Relic jewellery and imprinted mourning jewellery have a strong focus on (the body of) the deceased and might therefore primarily cue memories of the deceased. Reworking this type of memories mainly contributes to the construction of a new mental image of the late beloved one. It could be argued that this type of remembering is focused on the past. Although new information and insights about the lost one are gathered, for example through exchanging memories in a social context or by going through the legacy, his or her life has ended and the temporal distance between the mourner and the bereaved will only grow.

The earlier described pieces of relic and imprinted mourning jewellery could be imagined as points on a scale of directness of cue-media. On the one extreme we find jewellery, containing hair - an unaltered remainder of the human body - as very direct reference to the deceased³. Ash containers and synthetic diamonds – transformed remainders of the human body - are slightly less direct cue media. Next we find jewellery holding fingerprints and handwriting as transferred unique characteristics of the deceased. Imprinted names and dates are the other extreme: they do still refer to a specific person, but both the medium and content are of a rather generic nature.

Building upon the medieval adoration of saint's relics, a demand for mourning jewellery with a reference to the body of the deceased sustained through the ages. New technologies allowed for new forms to emerge, such as the creation of synthetic diamonds. Next to that, the preferred directness of cue media varies over time. Hallam and Hockey (2001, p.130) explain this fluctuation as a result of the changing perspective on death and the role of the corpse (for example: the human body as merely a physical container for the spirit that lives on versus death as an absolute end). We experienced these different perspectives ourselves, when exhibiting several pieces of relic mourning jewellery during Dutch Design Week 2012. In informal conversations we were confronted both with visitors who expressed a strong appreciation and with others expressing fierce aversion of certain types of relic jewellery. It is interesting to notice that, despite the fact that relic and imprinted mourning jewellery contains very personal material and references, many pieces have become quite anonymous over time. Since they do not hold any written linkage to the deceased, nobody knows anymore who they refer to after being past over from generation to generation.

Heirloom jewellery is likely to cue a different kind of memories than relic and imprinted mourning jewellery. Before becoming *mourning* jewellery, these pieces have been around and are therefore 'loaded' with personal and social cultural meanings, both by the (now deceased) owner and by his or her environment (now heirs). These meanings can be very personal and do not necessarily overlap. When inheriting jewellery, it is a conscious consideration whether one can bear such a loaded object within close proximity to his or her body. This makes heirloom jewellery not only a reference to the deceased, but also to the roots and backgrounds of the heir: relating as much to the mourned as to the mourner. It could even be argued that, through adapting inherited jewellery to ones personal taste, it is made 'future-proof': acknowledging as much his or her background as anticipating a future without the bodily presence of deceased. The piece will merge with the life and identity of the bereaved and new meanings will be added through wearing.

Black mourning jewellery does not primarily seem to be a cue to autobiographical memory. Its function should be understood in a social context, as indication of the wearer's grieved state. As mentioned previously, mourning became strongly formalised throughout the 19th century. This is reflected in mourning jewellery in general, but might be the strongest in black mourning jewellery that almost can be seen as a fashion item: following trends without holding a unique reference to the deceased. It is exemplary for the social pressure that money was reserved in the death's will for the purchase of memorials (Phillips 1996, p.120). Compared to the other categories of mourning jewellery the focus is more on the mourner than on the mourned, imposing how she should express her grief. This practice goes against the contemporary account of mourning as a highly individual process without a pre-set duration. It is interesting that there are nevertheless quite some contemporary examples in this category (Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14). These should rather be interpreted as a romantic reference to or re-interpretation of the Victorian era, than as mourning jewellery supporting the individual mourner.

Also in general it can be said that the shown examples of contemporary art jewellery (e.g. Figure 5, Figure 7 and Figure 12) are unique and personal expressions of their makers. The quality of these pieces can best be understood in the context of their oeuvre or in relation to a collective understanding of mourning and grief. It should not primarily be sought in their function as memory cue, contributing to an individual mourning process. The more generic examples of contemporary relic (ash containers and synthetic diamonds), imprinted (laser-engraved fingerprints) and heirloom mourning jewellery are the ones that function as physical memory cue supporting the individual mourner.

When discussing mourning jewellery the antitheses of *showing* versus *hiding*, cannot remain unmentioned. When it comes to reading contemporary art jewellery Den Besten (2011, chap.IV. Reading Jewellery) distinguishes between meaning created by the maker, the wearer and the viewer. In mourning jewellery as memory cue in individual mourning processes, the maker usually stays relatively anonymous. Therefore our focus will be on the wearer and the viewer. Holm (2004) analyses the antitheses between showing and hiding extensively for mourning jewellery containing hair, which she refers to as 'exhibited secrets'. We would like to extend this notion to mourning jewellery in general. The wearer determines how much he or she wants to reveal, this can be an unaware process or an orchestrated one. The type of jewellery, the way of wearing and – in case of relic and imprinted mourning jewellery – the position of the reference influence the 'readability' of a piece. In a locket, for example, the content is hidden by definition, while a brooch is way more explicit. Moreover a locket or necklace can be worn underneath the wearer's cloths. Lastly adding a name or initials to imprinted mourning jewellery (Figure 2 and Figure 6) makes a piece way more readable, than for example placing a hair sample on the flipside of a brooch (Figure 11) or ash invisibly hidden inside a ring.

For a viewer mourning jewellery is not necessarily recognisable as such. And, if recognisable, it for example often stays unclear who the piece refers to, how long ago this person passed away and how well the wearer can cope with the loss. It is a delicate interplay between the expressiveness of the piece, the intimacy of the relation between the wearer and the viewer and cultural norms, that determine if and how the topic can be addressed. In this perspective mourning jewellery from all of the categories that we identified in the previous paragraph can in a social context trigger stories and thus cue memories.

In the forgoing we argued that the one type of mourning jewellery is likely to cue a different kind of memories than the other type of mourning jewellery. Could it also be argued that the

one type of mourning jewellery is more likely to become a *transitional object* – an object that temporarily supports the mourner in the transitional phase after the loss of a loved one – or a *linking object* – an object with which the mourner builds a complicated relation that hinders the mourning process?⁴ We could not find any object-related arguments for that and we therefore suppose that the arguments should be sought in personal circumstances of the mourner, like personality, previous mourning experiences, relation with the deceased and the circumstances of death.

Conclusion

Death is an inevitable part of life and during our lifetime we will have to deal with the loss of loved ones. In these highly individual mourning processes, memories and physical objects play an important role.

In this chapter we built upon knowledge from diverse academic fields, like memory- and griefstudies, jewellery theory and material culture studies, to gain insight in the way mourning jewellery functions as memory cue for commemoration. We described how memories support the mourning process and how physical objects in general and jewellery in particular can cue memories. The meaning that people assign to mourning jewellery is evident from its rich history. From studying both historical and contemporary examples of mourning jewellery we identified returning motifs, which led to the formulation of four categories of mourning jewellery: relic, imprinted, heirloom and black mourning jewellery. We discussed how each of these categories is likely to cue a different kind of memories.

Overlooking the different categories we see that mourning jewellery balances⁵:

- past and future: symbolising the lost life, while anticipating the future by giving shape to a new kind of physical presence.
- mourned and mourner: glorifying the death, while allowing the grief of the bereaved.
- private and public: acknowledging the intimate and highly individual mourning process, while adhering to social norms and rituals.

Through the course of history changing interpretations of life and death and altering perspectives on mourning processes resulted in changing social norms, which are reflected by shifts in the above-mentioned balances.

Though its appearance develops over time and depends on personal preferences, humans keep returning to jewellery in order to cue memories that support their mourning process: that is as certain as death itself.

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¹ See for example LifeGem, www.lifegem.eu

² See Den Besten (2011, p.101) for an elaborate interpretation of the work of Melanie Bilenker.

³ In line with Holm (2004) a distinction should be made between jewellery that holds a lock of hair and jewellery that contains a picture 'painted' with hair. In the first case the hair primarily refers to the mortal body, whereas the latter is more reminiscent of the immortal soul.

⁴ See the paragraph 'Mourning' for a more elaborate description of *transitional object* and *linking object*.

⁵ It could be argued that these are three *axes*. However that suggests that each piece of jewellery could be placed on a fixed point. We prefer the more dynamic *balance*, as that does more justice to the changing meaning of the piece throughout a mourning process.