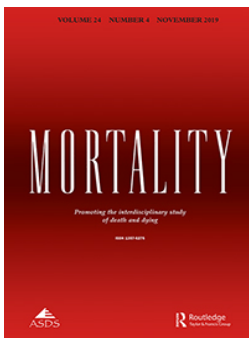

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The pervasive dead

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ABSTRACT
The sociological idea that modern societies sequestrate the dead is interrogated through Robert Hertz's anthropological lens in which the position of body, spirit and mourners mirror one another. Focusing on Britain, two discursive systems are thus identified. In 'the separated dead', 'letting go' characterised not only the mourner but also practices that separated the deceased's body and spirit from the living. This is now being challenged by a new body/spirit/mourner system – 'the pervasive dead' – in which bonds continue, the online dead can appear at any time, human remains sustain the everyday environment, and the dead become angels caring for the living. These elements have not hitherto been analysed together as contrasting body/spirit/mourner discursive systems.

KEYWORDS
Afterlife; continuing bonds; cemetery; ecology; *mentalité*; sequestration

The dominant sociological theory of death in contemporary society, classically articulated by Mellor and Shilling (1993), is that death is sequestrated – the organisation and experience of death have become increasingly private, separated from mainstream society. The sequestration thesis resonates with historian Ariès' (1981) notion that twentieth-century death and dying are forbidden or hidden, and with critiques – whether sophisticated or crude – of a 'death denying society' (Becker, 1973) in which death is 'taboo' (Gorer, 1955). Authors employing these concepts often lump together death, awareness of mortality, dying, the dead and the bereaved – all are marginalised by modern western societies. These different facets of death, however, are almost as broad as life itself, so key distinctions can easily get lost. This article focuses on the post-death period and the dead – specifically the ordinary dead encountered by British mourners, their families and friends, not the spectacular death represented in mass media that is 'at a safe distance, but hardly ever experienced upfront' (Jacobsen, 2016).

The article is one of several (Cann, 2014b; Howarth, 2007; Maddrell, 2016; Mitchell, 2007; Petersson, 2010; Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, & Pitsillides, 2011–2012) that question sequestration theory by suggesting that twenty-first-century western societies are witnessing a new integration of the dead into everyday life. What distinguishes the present article is that it interrogates the empirical evidence for sequestration through a simple but key insight from

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anthropologist Robert Hertz (1907/1960). In a classic essay written 110 years ago about Indonesian burial rites, Hertz argued that the mourner's social and psychological state does not exist in isolation from the state of the deceased's body and spirit. [1] In life, a person is constituted by body, spirit and social relationships, and these continue to be symbolically integrated after death in a triangular body–spirit–mourner system of practice and meaning. Hertz's insight has been applied by anthropologists to mourning in a wide range of traditional and even modern societies (Danforth, 1982; Metcalf & Huntington, 1991). Here, I apply it to contemporary Britain, taking care to analyse the three main post-mortem actors – the physical remains, the spirit, and those who grieve.

The article both develops and critiques sequestration theory. First, I show empirically how twentieth-century sequestration of the dead characterised each of the three post-mortem actors, adding up to a discursive formation, an integrated and largely taken-for-granted system of practice, talk and imagination, that I call 'the separated dead'. Sequestration thus has, or had, a hitherto undetected internal coherence in that the separation of body, spirit and mourners mirror one another. Second, I argue that, within just a few years of sequestration theory being announced in the early 1990s, empirical evidence was mounting that the dead's sequestration was no longer taken for granted by everyone; it was being challenged and to an extent superseded by a new discursive system, which I call 'the pervasive dead'. This might represent a welcome development for some of sequestration theory's fellow travellers, namely those who decry death's 'denial' and 'absence' in modern society.

To an extent, the argument has been foreshadowed by Howarth's (2000, 2007) analysis of the dissolving boundary between the living and the dead, and by Kellaher and Worpole's identification (2010) of a trend toward 'cenotaphisation' whereby memorialisation in roadside shrine, memorial tree, bench, etc. is removed from the location of the bodily remains; thus memorials to the dead are everywhere even if bodies remains sequestrated in the cemetery. These scholars identify a shift in contemporary Britain from the dead being separated to their 'increasingly coming to live alongside us' (Howarth, 2007, p. 19). This article updates these scholars' work by showing how developments since then, primarily in mobile phone technology but also in new vernacular appropriations of the idea of the dead as angels, are fast converting a 'coming to live alongside' into a pervasive presence. Howarth, Kellaher and Worpole, also identified some, but far from all, of the body/spirit/mourner intersections identified here. Howarth links the dead's everyday presence to a broadly secular understanding of their being here rather than in heaven, but I note that the currently popular idea that the dead become angels indicates the dead's presence is also being articulated through emergent spiritual discourses. Nor do Howarth, Kellaher and Worpole mention Hertz, so our analysis of contemporary body/spirit/mourner intersections as something like a Hertzian system is original. In sum, this article expands, updates and theorises what Howarth, Kellaher and Worpole identified.

I will provide evidence that each discursive system – the separated dead, and the pervasive dead – positions body, spirit and mourners symmetrically. I do not claim, however, that either system is symbolic as Hertz and other anthropologists have argued in more traditional societies. What I do argue, and here I am certainly indebted to Hertz, is that within each system what happens to each actor – body, spirit, mourner – represents and mirrors what happens to each of the other two actors. This, however, is as far as my debt to Hertz goes. His seminal article was largely about double burial which comprises a series of rites over time involving first the fresh corpse, and then later the dry bones; he showed how the position of body,

soul and mourners symbolise each other in each of these rites. Hertz considered that most modern western societies do not have this kind of double burial and restricted his analysis to more traditional societies, notably in Indonesia.

So what I draw from Hertz is not his analysis of double burial, but his more simple insight that what happens to body, spirit and mourners may mirror one another in a coherent 'collective representation'. This concept refers to a collectively held set of ideas that orders and makes sense of the world in general and social relationships in particular. For Hertz and also for Durkheim (1915), death rites were a key generator of collective representations, similar to the *mentalités* that Ariès was later to outline in his magisterial history of attitudes to death (1981). The conclusion to this article therefore discusses whether 'the pervasive dead' might comprise a new *mentalité*, a new collective attitude to, and representation of, the place of the dead. As used in this article, discursive formation/system, collective representation and *mentalité* refer both to practices and to how the collectivity imagines those practices.

My purpose therefore is to look at the modern British dead through Hertzian eyes, focussing – first separately and then together – on body, spirit, and mourners, to show how a new discursive formation of 'the pervasive dead' is emerging that challenges the dead's separation from living society. Though what follows may at first sight look like a literature review, it actually comprises a systematic analysis of body, spirit and mourners in each discursive system. The studies drawn on are necessarily selective but are sufficient to indicate both a discursive shift and how, within each discursive system, the position of body, spirit and mourners reflect each other in an integrated collective representation. I aim to show how analysis of burial practices, afterlife beliefs, and cultural attitudes to grief is greatly enhanced by considering them together as well as, as is much more common in academic research, separately. This inevitably entails summarising others' empirical findings and presenting less detail than more specialist readers might hope for.

The separated dead

I first sketch how twentieth-century corpses, mourners and souls each came to be separated from everyday life in Britain, showing how the three interact within a distinct system of talking and doing that I call 'the separated dead'.

The body

In the Catholic Middle Ages, elite bodies were buried under the floor of the parish church, everyone else in the churchyard. Either way, the dead lay at the heart of the community, reminding the living to pray for them each time they went to church. Though the Protestant Reformation anathematised praying for the dead, bodies continued to be buried under or around the church. This changed in the early nineteenth century when a health panic about overcrowded churchyards, together with the needs of non-Anglicans for burial, led to the development of secular out-of-town cemeteries where the dead could be buried in secure graves that would not imperil the living (Curl, 1993; Laquer, 2015). Howarth, following Foucault, argues that 'a modernist, scientific-rational approach to social problems demanded … segregation and classification'. Prisons protected the law-abiding from the criminal, hospitals the healthy from the sick, and out-of-town cemeteries the living from the dead. 'The

modernist desire to exercise control over mortality has been fundamental to its sequestration from life'. (Howarth, 2000, p. 128)

The dominant discourse became public health. Later in the century, cremation was advocated in part for reasons of hygiene, though it was for reasons of taste that British crematoria came to be separated from everyday space – at least 200 yards from the nearest public road and preferably not visible from it (Jupp, 2006). Since the late twentieth century, crematoria are being renovated to protect the living from airborne mercury emissions from the deceased's teeth fillings. With both burial and cremation, therefore, concerns about public health have driven the physical separation of the dead from the living.

This account of public health and separation simplifies. John Claudius Loudon's influential 1843 textbook for Victorian cemetery designers fully understood that a new cemetery on an industrial city's edge would within a couple of decades be incorporated into the expanding city; indeed, he intended the mature cemetery to become a place for Sunday recreation and for the admiration of fine trees and architecture, a place of life as well as of death (Loudon, 1981). But within a generation, new urban parks competed with cemeteries, eventually leaving the latter as places of death to be visited mainly by those tending graves. British cemeteries today are clearly bounded spaces of death (Kellaher & Worpole, 2010), surrounded by suburbs from whose everyday life they are largely insulated. New crematoria are typically exurban, surrounded by fields rather than houses, even more removed from everyday life (Grainger, 2005). All this combines to remove from everyday life all public traces and spatial reminders of the dead body. Sloane (2018) argues that the American lawn cemetery effected a similar removal.

The mourners

Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe (1992) distinguished two very different twentieth-century understandings of bereavement. The romantic view holds that love is eternal, transcending the grave; bonds of love continue, whether through memory or caring for the dead, for example by tending their grave (Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2005). The modernist view, articulated a century ago in Freud's (1984) classic article 'Mourning and Melancholia', argues that grief is a process whereby the bonds of attachment are ultimately broken, freeing the mourner to invest in new attachments. This latter view resonates with cultural modernism which values youth, progress and change, and came to form the 'conventional wisdom' of twentieth-century psychologists, counsellors and therapists on each side of the Atlantic (Wortman & Silver, 1989). Both views, however, held up strongly in twentieth-century popular culture. Romantic loss was expressed in pop songs, gravestone inscriptions and local newspaper *in memoriam* notices such as this third anniversary notice: 'Though absent you are always near/Still loved and missed and very dear'. Modernism was expressed in advice to 'let go and move on', supported by funeral readings such as Christina Rossetti's 'Better by far you should forget and smile/than that you should remember and be sad' (Walter, 1999).

In modernist bereavement, the dead have departed, and the living need to separate from them. Separation ('letting go') represents psychological health, leading to renewed social participation ('moving on'). Not separating from the dead is deemed pathological.

The spirit

McDannell and Lang's (2001) two thousand year history of the Christian afterlife identifies two main variations: either (i) the entire person (body and soul) is mortal but will be resurrected in its entirety, or (ii) an immortal soul goes to heaven while the mortal body rots in the ground or is destroyed by fire. Immortal souls may in turn be subdivided into those pictured as (a) residing eternally in the presence of God, or (b) more anthropocentrically enjoying the presence of other deceased family members. It is this latter version – soul reunion – that surveys indicate to have been the most popular afterlife belief in twentieth-century Britain. Only devout minority groups such as evangelicals and conservative Catholics continued to find bodily resurrection plausible (Walter, 1996). Lack of interest in the resurrected body, by both the public and the established Anglican church, opened the door to cremation (Jupp, 2006), while international statistics clearly show cremation to be associated with secularised Protestantism – both devalue the body. So there is a link between what happens to body and to soul.

It is not hard to see why soul reunion might be popular in Britain during a century of unprecedented longevity. Loss of spouse typically came in old age, with the remaining widow or widower expecting to live only a few years more. Looking forward to when they would be 'reunited' offered comfort for what time was left, especially to older widows whose chances of re-marriage suffered from a paucity of older males.

The Protestant soul goes straight to heaven, unlike the Catholic soul which goes on a longer journey assisted by saints, angels and the prayers of the living. The Protestant soul is immediately cut off from the living, inaccessible; only other deceased family members may enjoy its company. Without the assistance of a spiritualist medium (Walliss, 2001) or serendipitous sensing of its presence (Bennett, 1987), the soul in heaven is inaccessible to the living. The Protestant soul in heaven therefore 'fits' the modernist notion that the dead have to be let go of. The body has died, the soul is in heaven, and I must live without my beloved spouse, parent or child until I myself die. Yet soul re-union can also be combined with the romantic idea of love eternal. Fluidly fitting both modern and romantic ideas of grief enhanced its plausibility. That said, soul reunion embodies, for this life at least, separation from the dead.

Summary

Modernist separation encompasses a dead body separated from everyday life, a soul inaccessible in heaven, and mourners enjoined to let go and move on. This symmetry is particularly strong in historically Protestant countries. This system is neither entirely clear cut nor universal: in Britain, the rural dead may still rest in a churchyard at the heart of the community, eternal love competes with psychological separation from the dead, immigration and higher birth rates sustain the Catholic and non-Christian population, and a considerable minority of bereaved people – especially in the decade following World War One – have visited mediums to contact the spirits of their beloved (Walliss, 2001). My point is simply that separation of body, soul and mourners comprises a coherent system of talking and doing that dominated twentieth-century Britain. The dead are to be left behind; life is to proceed without them. Drivers of this system include: Protestantism, secularisation, public health, rationalist systems of classification and a modernist faith in youth, progress and change.

The pervasive dead

Since the late 1990s, however, a very different discourse has been emerging, picturing the dead as no longer separate from everyday life but pervading it. This has not gone unnoticed by the academy. Researchers have noted that mourners often retain their bonds with the dead (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996); that vernacular memorials evidence the dead as a dynamically negotiated 'absent presence' (Maddrell, 2013); that the dead have an uncanny presence in social media where online representations of the afterlife reflect the dead's active presence (Kasket, 2012); and that natural burial promises to dissolve 'sacred' human remains into the environment rather than separate 'polluting' remains from the environment (Davies & Rumble, 2012). No scholars to date, however, have linked all these developments to show how body, spirit and mourners are all being reconfigured into a new, Hertzian, system.

First I look at how mourners are psychologically reconfiguring their relationships with the dead, not least through pervasive social media; then how the online dead are spiritually pictured not as souls locked up in heaven but as angels who return to protect the living; and finally how new bodily discourses and practices disperse human remains throughout the environment. Since such phenomena cause us to question whether death is still sequestrated, the analysis is a bit more detailed than in the previous section.

The mourners

The seminal text that signalled a shift in how English-speaking bereavement professionals have come to think about grief in the past two decades is the edited collection *Continuing Bonds* (Klass et al., 1996). This amassed research evidence to legitimate the romantic concept of loss, showing how psychologically healthy mourners could move on in life with, rather than without, the deceased. This has subsequently led to a substantial 'continuing bonds' research industry that has re-written the counselling textbooks and integrated continuing bonds with earlier psychological concepts of cathexis and attachment. This resonates academically with the growth in the same period of memory studies, and culturally with the 'memory boom' and the turn from modernism toward a 'postmodern' rediscovery of the past, of old buildings, and 'heritage'. In this cultural formation, postmodern humans march into the future connected to and enriched by, not detached from, their (diverse) pasts and their dead.

Continuing bonds have not just been identified by researchers and practitioners, they are also celebrated online. The invention and development from the 2000s of user-generated content on social media accessed by smart phones and other mobile devices has enabled the dead to be present, even to participate, in everyday communication – possibly to the considerable surprise of this technology's inventors. A body of research now demonstrates how continuing bonds between the living and the dead are represented on Facebook posts (Brubaker, Hayes, & Dourish, 2013; Kasket, 2012). Though Westerners have throughout the twentieth-century talked to the dead, typically this has been in private and rarely mentioned to others (Bennett, 1987). But on Facebook, posts are often addressed to the dead, the writers aware their post will be read by scores or hundreds of their and the deceased's friends (Gustavsson, 2011; Jakoby & Reiser, 2013). Thus, behaviour that had only twenty years earlier been almost entirely private and to which most Britons were too embarrassed to admit is now expected of the youthful peers of youthful deceased. (Many young people have now

left Facebook for other platforms; research on how the dead are present there is as yet in its infancy, though see Cann (2014b)).

Addressing someone implies they can hear and/or read you:

> Even though it seems silly to talk through Facebook, I know u can see and understand every word I type. (Kasket, 2012, p. 65)

The language of Facebook thus imputes agency to the deceased. It implies they exist, somewhere. Even in rapidly secularising countries like England or Sweden, this somewhere is often 'heaven':

> See you in heaven!
>
> Say hello to the angels. (Jakoby & Reiser, 2013, p. 72)

The Facebook dead are, therefore, very much present and active. Users who live in and through social media encounter deceased acquaintances as well as intimates unannounced, at any time. And with smart phone technology, in any place. These dead belong to the user's own social networks (Walter, 2015b); tweeting grief and remembrance is even more public (Cann, 2014a).

As well as messages to the dead appearing unannounced on screen, messages from the dead may also appear. Currently, this is most likely when a family member who has the deceased's password continues to manage their Facebook page; messages from this living family member uncannily appear to others to come from the deceased. To fix this, Facebook introduced in 2015 a new 'legacy' setting (Brubaker & Callison-Burch, 2016). Other companies use software that, for a price, enables users to send messages to their friends, activated only when the user has died (or when the software deems non-response to mean non-existence).[2] Meanwhile, some entrepreneurs are developing artificial intelligence technology that they hope will in time get to know a person's online communications so well that it can impersonate them, sending the living autonomous – rather than pre-written – messages from beyond the grave.[3] Whether this technology will ever be good enough to be convincing, and if so when it will be developed, remains to be seen. But already LivesOn analyses the customer's tweets so it can generate new tweets post-mortem. It promises that when 'when your heart stops beating, you'll keep tweeting'.[4]

Little is known about who buys such services, why or how they may use them, nor how durable the technology and the companies that sell it will prove to be; by the time the playful 22-year old who signs up for eternal tweets eventually dies aged 92, both tweeting and the company who promised him a post-mortem avatar are likely to be even more dead and gone than he is (Kiel, 2016). (The url for the LivesOn promise quoted at the end of the previous paragraph, for example, is no longer accessible.) Nevertheless, there is potential here for the future dead to become ever more pervasive, and at least some people see this as something to look forward to.

This is the latest chapter in a long history of communication technologies enabling the physically distant, and hence the dead, to be present (Miller, 2016; Walter, 2015a). Photographs provided the dead a presence in nineteenth and twentieth-century family photo albums. By the late twentieth century, photography, film, colour printing, recorded sound and other media enabled humans to watch Humphrey Bogart movies on their home video, listen to Mozart on Classic FM or Elvis on their Sony Walkman as they drove to work, and eat in restaurants whose walls were decorated with posters of Che Guevara or Marilyn Monroe. Thus, both the family dead and the famous and artistic dead came to pervade everyday social life

(Jensen & Jones, 2005; Kearl, 2010; Kittler, 1999). Not until the twenty first century, however, have mobile social media enabled the known dead of friends and acquaintances to do likewise.

The spirit

Social media afford researchers a rich vein of vernacular culture. One example is the replacement online of third person references to the deceased's soul ('May her soul rest in peace') with second person messages to the dead-as-angel, researched in a series of articles by Walter (2011, 2016). The tabloid Sun newspaper's online memorial to English celebrity Jade Goody who died in 2009 of cervical cancer contained 1109 tributes; of these only 13 mentioned the word 'soul', while 167 referred to angels – either Jade being with the angels or becoming an angel in order to look after her two young sons left on earth (Walter, 2011). Likewise in many other online contexts the immortal soul that dominated late twentieth-century surveys has given way to the idea that the dead become angels. To give just two examples, a 51-year-old female is memorialised by a friend:

> You are in a better place, and I for one know I have the greatest guardian angel that a person could ask for.[5]

And a grandchild writes:

> See you in heaven Nana as I am sure you will be one of God's special angels.[6]

Angels, unlike souls, can exert agency, either in heaven or by returning to earth to care for the living – the dead become guardian angels. This idea may be expressed even without the word 'angel', as in 'I know that you're watching over me.' The dead becoming angels who continue to guide and care for the living expresses the romantic notion that the bond with the dead continues. If the eternal but agent-less soul represents the deceased's continuing identity, the post-mortem angel represents an active and continuing relationship. On social media, second-person address positioning the dead as listening has become normative; spiritually this is expressed through the dead-as-angel who has agency to receive messages from the living and to respond by caring for them.

Howarth (2007, p. 32) observes that in an increasingly secular society, meaning is increasingly

> sought in this life …. Continuing relationships with deceased family and friends … focus on activities and sentiments relevant to this life rather than a possible next one. Thus, the dead have come to reside with us in our everyday lives.

Howarth's explanation of the dead's increasingly pervasive presence in terms of secularisation is plausible, but what it could not acknowledge – because the deceased-as-angel phenomenon had not been analysed in 2007 – is that continuing bonds with the dead can also be expressed through a new religious discourse of the angelic dead, found online not only in the rather religious USA but also in more secular Europe. It has long been recognised that continuing bonds can be expressed through traditional religious practices such as Catholic prayers for the dead or offerings to the Japanese Buddhist household shrine (Smith, 1974). What was less expected – though photography and phonography's Victorian entanglement with spiritualism (Kittler, 1999) presaged it – was that twenty-first-century communication technologies would afford new vernacular religious expressions of continuing bonds.

The body

If modernity sequestered the dead's physical remains in the out-of-town cemetery, more recent practices disperse human remains throughout the environment. Two developments exemplify this: ash scattering, and innovative ways to dispose of the whole body. Here, I draw on Rumble, Troyer, Walter, and Woodthorpe (2014).

British crematoria offer a facility for strewing ashes in specific locations in their grounds, while many churchyards offer burial of ashes. UK law, however, does not restrict who may dispose of ashes, or where. More and more families are themselves disposing of ashes anywhere that has meaning to them and/or the deceased, whether that be a private garden public park, beach or mountain top (Hockey, Kellaher, & Prendergast, 2007) – places of life, not death (Kellaher & Worpole, 2010). Or they may disperse the ashes among different sections of the family, perhaps on different continents, so one portion of ashes may reside in the UK, another in Australia, and another in Canada. Another practice is scattering on water, either on the sea or on a river that flows into the sea. Even if the ashes descend gently to the river bed, the *image* is of them being carried downstream eventually to be dispersed into the vastness of globe's oceans.

Dispersal imagery can also frame scattering on land. While the reality of scattering is of ash falling onto the ground, the *image* of scattering 'to the winds' to become 'Part of all you see/The air you are breathing' (to quote Scottish folk singer Ewan McColl's *The Joy of Living*, sung at his 1989 funeral by his widow Peggy Seeger and their children) is of dispersal. MacColl's family inhaling micro-fragments of burnt bones as they breathe the bracing Scottish air is figuratively transformed from a health hazard into a comforting sense of MacColl melding into the natural environment that he, and those who mourn him, loved and love. Disposal is figuratively replaced by dispersal, pollution by a comforting pervasive presence.

Four years after Ewan MacColl's funeral, the UK's first natural burial ground opened, the first of now around 250. Other English speaking countries such as the USA, Canada and New Zealand have also developed natural burial grounds, modified to their own culture. Natural burial enables the body and any accoutrements to be quickly broken down by the elements to contribute to the wood, meadow or other landscape which the natural burial ground is intended to create or shape. This relies on an ecological understanding in which rubbish can never be disposed of, however out of sight it might be. Rubbish cannot but be transformed into something else, which in turn becomes part of the physical environment. In other words, humans can never get rid of their dead, only transform them in ways that nourish or damage the environment (Davies & Rumble, 2012).

As with natural burial, so too advertisements for more high-tech innovations for dealing with human remains such as alkaline-hydrolysis [7] and freeze drying [8] promise to release the processed remains into the everyday environment. The old 'job done!' disposal service offered by cemeteries and crematoria is replaced by an ongoing process of dispersal into the environment. Instead of protecting the community from polluting remains, these innovations offer the dead as a sacred gift to the planet.

Even crematoria are now embracing dispersal technologies. When the waste gases produced by cremation are cooled to extract their polluting mercury content as required by the 1990 Environmental Protection Act, heat may be re-claimed. Rather than just losing this heat, some British crematoria are using it to heat the crematorium chapel where the next

funeral service is taking place, while a few use it to heat nearby municipal facilities. Remarkably, using the heat produced by the dead to warm the living has led not to uproar, as sequestration theory would have predicted, but to widespread local acceptance (Rumble et al., 2014).

As illustrated by Ewan MacColl's song, the pervasive presence of human remains is largely symbolic, figurative, rather than literal. Indeed, Kellaher and Worpole (2010) in the UK and Cann (2014b) and Sloane (2018) in the USA note that memorialisation is located increasingly distant from the dead body itself. The dead are commemorated in a range of innovative new locations – ghost bikes, car rear windscreen stickers, tattoos, T-shirts, social media – that are part of everyday life but separated from where body or ashes lie. Some natural burial grounds in Britain ban any memorialisation at the grave. Many natural burial grounds, while promising dispersal into the everyday environment, are located deep in the countryside – geographically much further removed from everyday life than are traditional cemeteries. In these diverse ways, human remains are only *imagined* to pervade the everyday environment; *physically* they are even more removed, reminders of the physical body even more absent. Angels and continuing bonds are likewise constructs of the social imagination. So what is pervasive is the *idea* of the dead. That does not make the new discourse of the pervasive dead any less significant – rather, it raises the question why, when contemporary Britons spatially distance themselves yet further from human remains, at least some want to imagine the dead's pervasive presence – reflected not least in a new ubiquity of memorialisation.

Summary

This section has argued that in the twenty-first century a new discourse of the pervasive dead has arisen in which mourners express on social media their continuing bond with the dead who pop up on the screens of friends and acquaintances; the dead are addressed as angels with agency to hear and care; and the body's physical remains are pictured as an active part of the everyday environment. Language reflects this: media analysts refer to *pervasive* social media, grief counsellors refer to *continuing* bonds, social media posts depict guardian angels as ever *present*, while mourners talk of *scattering* ashes and Rumble et al. (2014) refer to the *dispersal* of remains. Meanwhile, new forms of memorialisation pervade both public and private everyday space.

I make no claim that these pervasive dead are Britain's only dead. In the same time period, the remains of the ancient dead have become more, not less, sequestrated. The Ministry of Justice has tightened its requirements for archaeologists to screen excavations from public view if human remains are found and to re-bury the remains within two years (Parker Pearson, Pitts, & Sayer, 2013); and museums are increasingly insisting human remains be displayed in special, demarcated areas (Jenkins, 2010). In a variety of ways, human remains are less available for display in Britain than in many other modern countries (Walter, 2013). And many Britons continue to separate themselves from the family dead – psychologically, spatially and spiritually. Rather, my argument is simply that within a mere two decades a new discourse has arisen in relation to the known (rather than the media, historic or pre-historic) dead and is being applied to each of Hertz's three post-mortem actors: body, spirit and mourners.

Concluding discussion

What does this new discourse signify? Almost certainly not deep belief. One does not need to be a card-carrying environmentalist to choose natural burial, and angel discourse in the UK rarely reflects doctrinal belief – people may 'like' rather than 'believe' the idea that the dead become angels. This is nothing new. The rural Greek villagers studied by Danforth (1982) could articulate the symbolism of secondary burial practices in which the decaying body represents the spirit's journey to heaven yet in the next breath admit that when you're dead, you're dead. They were, after all, farmers who knew the physical realities of death and decay. Young secular people posting on social media, managers of natural burial grounds, and psychologists writing about continuing bonds all know that the dead are both all around us, and nowhere. They are with us, and they are gone. Likewise while the twentieth-century separated the dead from the living, some (quite possibly many) twentieth-century Britons some of the time and in some contexts acted and felt as though the dead were still around, as Francis et al's (2005) graveside ethnography and Walliss's (2001) study of mediums demonstrates. Nevertheless, a systematic discourse of the pervasive dead did not become evident until the twenty-first century.

Each of the two discursive systems – the separated dead and the pervasive dead – is coherent in itself and distinct from the other. Philippe Ariès (1981), working within the *Annales* school, structured his seminal *longue durée* history of death in western Europe through four *mentalités* (psycho-cultural worldviews) characterising four epochs, culminating in a twentieth-century *mentalité* of hidden or forbidden death. Without subscribing to everything implied in the concept of *mentalité*, I proffer the pervasive dead as a fifth historical *mentalité*. As Ariès would be the first to point out, this does not replace previous *mentalités* but supplements and/or conflicts with them in death's evolving cultural, technological, institutional and discursive landscape. Nor is it the same as Jacobsen's (2016) suggestion of 'spectacular death' as a fifth *mentalité*; his spectacular death refers to mass mediated death at a distance, while I refer to discursive practices around the dead known either intimately or through social networks. If with time twenty-first-century people decide they would rather live without – or at least a distance from – the dead, at least some of the time, the new *mentalité* identified in this article may well prove unstable or at least contested (Kellaher & Worpole, 2010; Petersson, 2010).

Explanation

How might we explain the emergence of this new *mentalité* or discursive system? Secularisation, as Howarth argued, is surely implicated but so too are environmental awareness and the affordances of mobile social media. Before trying to explain, however, we should note two things.

First, because both the separated dead and the pervasive dead comprise all three post-mortem actors – body, spirit, mourners – in a coherent discursive system, any explanation must encompass all three actors. Stroebe et al's (1992) explanation of continuing bonds in terms of a postmodern cultural turn, or Kellaher and Worpole's (2010) explanation of memorialisation remote from the physical remains in terms of changes in disposal practices, have some validity, but fail to acknowledge – let alone explain – the body–spirit–mourner system as an integrated system.

Second, the evidence cited in this article comes mainly from empirical British studies. If similar evidence is found across contemporary western societies, or indeed across all modern societies, then we must seek a broad explanation in terms of contemporary modernity; one such might be posthumanism's dissolving of boundaries – male/female, human animals/other animals, living/dead. If, however, this is a specifically British, or north west European, or Anglo-American formation, then a narrower explanation must be sought in terms of specific countries or nexus of countries. Either way, the purportedly global 1990s sociological theory of the modern dead's sequestration needs to be challenged or revised.

There is space here to consider just one avenue of explanation: gender. Lutz (2015) notes that the Victorian sequestration of the dead in out-of-town cemeteries was driven by male reformers. Meanwhile, the women who cleaned and laid out the Victorian body before burial created 'hair jewellery and post-mortem photographs, which show a love for the body as corpse, and which intensified during the period that (buried) corpses were being distanced from the living'. And throughout the modern period, most spiritualist mediums linking the living and the dead have been women.

If modernist control of the uncanny and the unhealthy – separating the living from the dead – was promoted primarily by men, then the new pervasive dead have been introduced largely by women. Surveys show that British women are far more likely than men to experience the presence of the dead, to believe that mediums can contact the dead, and to believe in angels (Davies, 2015, pp. 71–77). Women are prominent in Britain's natural death movement which promotes home dying, family organised funerals, natural burial and the overall idea that death is a natural rather than a medical event; globally, the death awareness movement is in large measure a women's movement (Klass, 1981; Attig & Stillion, 2015). So women's experiences of the pervasive dead are now being widely promoted, undermining notions of the separate dead previously promoted by male theologians, clergy, undertakers, public health officials, cemetery designers and Sigmund Freud. The shift from the separate to the pervasive dead arguably represents a gender revolution.

Coda

My analysis (like Hertz's) concerns the dead. What, though, about the dying, or indeed death in general? The sequestration thesis applied as much to the dying and to death as to the dead. Modernity removed the dying to hospitals and other institutions, and culturally death may have become something of a taboo topic. Such was the wisdom of 1990s sequestration sociology. What though about twenty-first-century Britain – can we identify not only the pervasive dead, but also pervasive death?

At first sight it may seem so. The death awareness movement, in the UK (Walter, 1994) as in North America (Attig & Stillion, 2015), argues that death – like birth – is not a medical event but a natural part of life; citizens are urged to talk about death, not least in order to guarantee a 'good death' (Lofland, 1978). Dying people's experiences are pervasive in books, newspaper articles and blogs (Woodthorpe, 2010). Since the mid-2000s, 'compassionate community' initiatives in the UK aim to de-professionalise dying and return it to the community (Kellehear, 2005). These publications, initiatives and movements promote death as part of life.

Key to their agenda is that people should die at home rather than sequestrated in an institution. But though (unlike the American dead) the encoffined British dead are paraded

through the streets in glass sided hearses, Britons do not die in glass-sided homes, hospitals and hospices – despite the London Lighthouse (for those with AIDS) and then St Christopher's Hospice opening their central architectural space to the local community. The dying, especially the majority who are very old and the minority whose dying bodies are 'dirty' or physically repelling, continue to be sequestrated, not only in institutions but often within separate rooms within institutions – even in hospices otherwise committed to opening themselves up to the surrounding community (Lawton, 2000). Until dying at home becomes not only normal but public in the way Ariès characterised pre-modern dying, dying will not pervade British life to the extent the British dead now do and British death is beginning to. It is the dead, more than dying or even death that are set to pervade life.

Perhaps the dead can remain present in society (in ways that death and the dying cannot) because the emphasis – not least in contemporary 'life-centred' funerals – is placed on the dead 'living on' rather than being dead. The pervasive dead can therefore co-exist with death denial.[9] Moreover, ecological representations of human remains as dispersed throughout the environment are only representations – the corpse itself is remarkably absent from Britain's secular and/or Protestant funeral and mourning rites (including natural burial grounds) compared to, for example, Catholic Latin America's cult of the dead body (Cann, 2014b). Continuing bonds are often ambivalent; representing the dead as angels refers to their relationship to the living rather than creedal belief. The 'triangle' of the twenty-first-century pervasive dead, unlike the traditional rites analysed by Hertz in which both spiritual symbolism and physical decay are central, is primarily representational – a discourse. As such, it demonstrates the significant but limited mileage offered by Hertz in analysing contemporary change in how Britons collectively represent their dead. It also demonstrates the need for sociological analysis to disaggregate death, the dying, and the dead; it challenges any theory that posits the dead's sequestration as inherent in modernity; and it raises questions about how both global and more local forces may be shaping how the twenty-first-century lives with its dead.

Notes

1. Though Hertz's essay used the term 'l'âme' (soul) rather than 'l'esprit' (spirit), this article uses 'spirit' as the generic word for a person's spiritual being since my analysis identifies 'soul' as a historically and contextually specific understanding of spirit. When i use the word 'soul', i do so in this historically specific sense.
2. For example, SafeBeyond https://www.safebeyond.com/ Dead Man's Switch https://www.deadmansswitch.net/.
3. For example, Eter9 https://www.eter9.com.
4. http://liveson.org/connect.php.
5. Virtual Memorial Garden http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/vmg/ (Priscilla May Martinez).
6. Virtual Memorial Garden http://catless.ncl.ac.uk/vmg/ (Mary Marlow).
7. http://resomation.com/.
8. http://www.promessa.se/?lang=en.
9. Thanks to Christine Valentine for this observation.

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